

Quick Overview – This was a new venue for *Let's Go Birding* as we combined two very different wintering habitats into one weekend adventure. The concept proved popular and the trip filled fast. The carpool came together at the Romero Overlook and our birding began with scoped views of the San Luis Reservoir. Volpa Ponds was our next stop. With the duck hunting season in full swing we birded only a portion of this habitat open to birders. Great Tailed Grackles, a flushed American Bittern & large flocks of White Faced Ibis caught the most attention. A fast moving Common Gallinule was also here, but we soon moved on to the San Luis National Wildlife Refuge. We were eager to see the new visitor center but first we drove the Tule Elk auto tour. The elk were easy to see but we had to work harder to find the birds. Raptors were throughout with the Red Tailed Hawk as the most abundant for our two days. We also had the first of many Great Horned Owls. With their breeding season underway we found pairs together throughout our weekend. Lunch allowed us the time to check out the green, state of the art visitor center which is now the headquarters for the refuge complex. Interactive displays are open to the public. They have done an excellent job providing Central Valley history and information to the public. This is a location we could have spent a lot more time but we had to continue onward to the Merced National Wildlife Refuge. The platform located at the beginning of the Merced NWR auto tour is always a great spot to look for shorebirds, rails, ducks and....**Continued on page 2**



Mammals for the weekend included

Bobcat
Bush Bunnies
Coyote
Deer
Muskrat
Raccoon
Tule Elk



Final trip list

Greater White-Fronted Goose	Wilson's Snipe
Canada Goose – Common	Ring Billed Gull
Snow Goose	Rock Pigeon
Ross's Goose	Mourning Dove
Mallard	Eurasian Collared Dove
Gadwall	Greater Roadrunner
Northern Pintail	Great Horned Owl
Northern Shoveler	White Throated Swift
Bufflehead	Nuttall's Woodpecker
Canvasback	Northern Flicker
Distant Scaup sp.	Acorn Woodpecker
Ring-necked Duck	Downy Woodpecker
Green-winged Teal	Black Phoebe
Cinnamon Teal	Say's Phoebe
Blue-winged Teal	Loggerhead Shrike
Ruddy Duck	Western Scrub-Jay
Pied-billed Grebe	Yellow-billed Magpie
Eared Grebe	American Crow
Double-crested Cormorant	Common Raven
American White Pelican	Tree Swallow
American Bittern	Horned Lark
Great Blue Heron	Bush-tit
Great Egret	Bewick's Wren
Snowy Egret	Marsh Wren
Green Heron	Rock Wren
White Faced Ibis	Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Turkey Vulture	Western Bluebird
Bald Eagle	American Robin
Golden Eagle	Hermit Thrush
Northern Harrier	Northern Mockingbird
White-tail Kite	European Starling
Red-tail Hawk	American Pipit
Ferruginous Hawk	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Cooper's Hawk	Common Yellowthroat
American Kestrel	Townsend's Warbler
Prairie Falcon	Spotted Towhee
Merlin	California Towhee
Sandhill Crane	Song Sparrow
Sora	White-crowned Sparrow
American Coot	Golden-crowned Sparrow
Common Gallinule	Lincoln's Sparrow
Black-necked Stilt	Lark Sparrow
American Avocet	Savannah Sparrow
Greater Yellowlegs	Red-winged Blackbird
Long-billed Curlew	Brewer's Blackbird
Long-billed Dowitcher	Great Tailed Grackle
Dunlin	Western Meadowlark
Least Sandpipers	House Finch
Mountain Plovers	House Sparrow
Killdeer	

Images from Saturday's birding - The group at Volta Ponds – Joe Diandrea / A flock of Sandhill Cranes along the Merced NWR auto tour & a White Faced Ibis – Cadao Do / Bronze Tule Elk statue – Lisa Myers / Lisa & Karl checking out a Lincoln Sparrow from the comfort of the new San Luis NWR visitor center – Joe Diandrea / A Killdeer stirring up food below the viewing platform at the Merced NWR – Cadao Do / The San Luis NWR official greeter – Lisa Myers
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(continued from page 1) we soon had fantastic views of a Sora, Wilson's Snipe, Killdeer, Dunlins, Least Sandpipers and a hunting Hermit Thrush. The auto tour took us past more Great Horned Owls, Sandhill Cranes and waterfowl. We stopped at the second viewing platform in time to watch the sunset. This pond had both Ross's & Snow Geese in addition to one of the largest flocks of White Faced Ibis anyone had seen. As we watched a most beautiful sunset we found two courting Great Horned Owls before us in a tree. Soon these two nocturnal raptors were calling back and forth to each other. As the group became quiet we could hear this courting behavior and soon watched what appeared to be nest building. We stayed as long as we could see and as the temperatures dropped to 30 we headed to our hotel for the night. The Best Western Apricot Inn was ready for the group and after a quick dinner next door we were out for the night. Sunday would have us heading home via Panoche Valley.



Images represent Saturday's birding - A very cooperative Sora came out under the viewing platform – Cadao Do / With no leaves on the trees its easier to find the roosting Great Horned Owls – Lisa Myers / A view from the platform at the Merced NWR, White Faced Ibis in the foreground with Ross's & Snow Geese behind – Cadao Do / The group watching and listening to the interaction between a pair of Great Horned Owls – Lisa Myers / Merced NWR Sandhill Cranes at sunset – Tony Woo - **More photos page 3**

Continued from page 2 – We awoke Sunday morning to an incredibly clear, crisp day with temperatures in the mid 20's! We were prepared for this with hats, gloves and plenty of layers. Our first stop was the Panoche Reservoir west of I-5. Scoping the waters below we added distant waterfowl to our list, but the excitement came in the form of our first of several Greater Roadrunners - Beep-beep! It too was distant but we observed this bird as it sunned itself and avoided a harassing Raven. It was here we also found a coyote sitting in the shadows. This was a great way to start the day! With roadside puddles covered over with ice, we slowly worked our way west scanning the landscape. Species appeared to be hunkered down. Mercey Hot Springs is no longer an affordable option so we headed up the BLM road. Reaching 2200 feet we had incredible views including the snow covered sierras. We also found flocks of Horned Larks & House Finches before heading back down. Passing Savannah Sparrows, American Kestrels, Loggerhead Shrikes & Say's Phoebes we then stopped at Shotgun Pass to look for the invisible chukars to no avail. By now everyone was ready for lunch. We made it to the Panoche Inn and found Larry & his wife waiting for us. Having placed our order days in advance they knew when we would arrive and had our 20 sandwiches ready to go! But the visit was short lived as we had more birds to find and only a few hours of sunshine. So we headed up Panoche Road toward Recalde to look for the illusive Mountain Plovers. We turned up a few curious Rock Wrens and were about to give up when we found the plovers moving about underneath a circling Ferruginous Hawk. SCORE! This was a much wanted target bird and a lifer for most on the trip. Now we had to get to the Paicines Reservoir before dark. This meant we could not stop for some of the birds found in route, but we did add a Golden Eagle and Acorn Woodpeckers to our day. When we got to the reservoir we found a preening Prairie Falcon sitting in a tree and had our first Nuttall's of the weekend. Although no Bald Eagle appeared, we did have two the day before. As the weekend now came to an end and folks were saying good-bye, a Merlin flew over in the twilight. I thank everyone who joined in this *Let's Go Birding* adventure. Two very different California habitats in one weekend; I think we'll do it again next year.



Images represent Sunday's birding and most were taken by trip participants - First stop Sunday morning at the Panoche Reservoir – Lisa Myers / One of the first birds of our Sunday, the Greater Roadrunner avoiding a Raven – Joe Diandrea / Our group shot of the weekend taken by Al Lowder / Owner Larry at the bar at the Panoche Inn – Joe Diandrea / A stop for Yellow Billed Magpies, tumbleweed and zucchini bread – Kjersti Leret / Stanford photographer Tom Grey provided this picture of a Mountain Plover, we saw this species, just not this close! The group parked along Panoche Road observing a scope view of the flock of the Mountain Plovers we worked hard to find – Lisa Myers