

Quick Overview – *Let's Go Birding* and the *Los Gatos Birdwatcher* planned this outdoor adventure around the many species of birds that winter in California's Central Valley. The ultimate destination was the Merced National Wildlife Refuge but, we stopped at several locations along the way. Our first stop south was "Coyote Valley". Located just off 101 and Bailey in south Santa Clara County this area is a magnet for wintering raptors and we were successful at finding our target birds including two Golden Eagles, a Prairie Falcon and a Ferruginous Hawk. We wanted to stay longer but we had places to go with a bathroom stop planned at the Romero Overlook off Pacheco Pass. While there it's always fun to take a moment and find one of the resident Greater Roadrunners. From here we were headed east to our next stop at Volta Ponds. We started with clear blue skies in the west only to find a cold, overcast winter's day in the Central Valley. Bird activity at the ponds was low but we added our first American Bittern to our day, a Common Merganser and Great Tailed Grackles. With the next stop to be the Merced NWR we pulled up to the entrance to find several hundred if not thousands of Snow / Ross's Geese in the field across the road. They were restless and moving about and great to watch as they'd lift and settle back down. The adult Bald Eagle that flew over contributed to their restlessness. Once inside the refuge we took our time at each pull out and found elusive Virginia Rails, Wilson's snipe and day roosting Great Horned Owls. A flock of Snow Geese numbering in the thousands was sitting in the water near the second platform and as the sunset we hundreds of Sandhill Cranes coming together to form one large flock settling in for the night.



At the Merced NWR we found several mixed flocks of Snow and Ross's Geese. Several thousand birds were sitting along Sandy Mush Road at the entrance to the refuge while the flock pictured above was at the second platform along the auto tour. Image take by trip leader Lisa Myers

Total Species Counted for the Day = 85 includes heard only (H)

List includes birds observed in four different locations – Coyote Valley, Romero Overlook, Volta Ponds & Merced NWR

Greater White-Fronted Goose	White Faced Ibis	Black-necked Stilt	Tree Swallow
Canada Goose	Turkey Vulture	American Avocets	Yellow Billed Magpie
Snow Goose	Osprey in route	Greater Yellowlegs	American Crow
Ross's Goose	Bald Eagle	Wilson's Snipe	Common Raven
Mallard	Golden Eagle	Killdeer	Marsh Wren
Gadwall	Northern Harrier	Black-bellied Plover	Ruby-crowned Kinglet (H)
American Wigeon	White-tail Kite	California Gull	American Robin
Northern Pintail	Red Shouldered Hawk	Rock Pigeon	Northern Mockingbird
Northern Shoveler	Red-tail Hawk	Mourning Dove	European Starling
Common Merganser	Ferruginous Hawk	Eurasian Collared Dove	American Pipit
Green-winged Teal	American Kestrel	Greater Roadrunner	Yellow Rumped Warbler
Cinnamon Teal	Prairie Falcon	Great Horned Owl	Orange Crowned Warbler
Ring Necked Pheasant	Peregrine Falcon	Anna's Hummingbird	Common Yellowthroat
California Quail	Cooper's Hawk	Nuttall's Woodpecker	Song Sparrow
Pied-billed Grebe	Sandhill Cranes	Northern Flicker	White-crowned Sparrow
American White Pelican	Virginia Rail	Nuttall's Woodpecker	Savannah Sparrow
Double-crested Cormorant	Sora (H)	Acorn Woodpecker	Red-winged Blackbird
American Bittern	American Coot	Black Phoebe	Brewer's Blackbird
Great Blue Heron	Marbled Godwit	Say's Phoebe	Western Meadowlark
Great Egret	Long-billed Dowitcher	Loggerhead-Shrike	House Finch
Snowy Egret	Least Sandpiper	Western Scrub-Jay	House Sparrow
		Great Tailed Grackle	



Memorable Observations!

- Finding the Ferruginous Hawk sitting in the field
- Getting great looks at the Greater Roadrunner
- Getting to see the Virginia Rails - finally
- Thousands of wintering geese & Sandhill Cranes



All pictures were taken during our trip. From top left to bottom –
Winter landscape at the Merced National Wildlife Refuge (there are thousands of geese sitting just out of view) image by Karin Bredfeldt
Two White Tailed Kites locking talons in an aerial display over Coyote Valley – image by Chris Kruger / Group shot taken at Coyote Valley – image by Chris Kruger / Trip Leader Lisa Myers talking about the differences between Ross's and Snow Geese! – image by Patty Brown
Romero Overlook resident Greater Roadrunner – image by Julie Bryson / Three out of the many hundreds of Sandhill Cranes observed flying into the refuge at sunset - image by Chris Kruger / One of the Dark Morph Snow Geese observed at Merced NWR – image by Chris Kruger

