



Panoche Valley – A day for owls

A Groundhog Day celebration – February 2, 2008

Quick Overview – Panoche Valley is an incredible winter hot spot starting roughly 60 miles south of the San Francisco Bay area. It is an area forgotten by time, but used by many wintering species. Our goal today was to be in the valley after dark so we could experience the many owls that winter here. We started our day later than any normal and respectable birding adventure and found our way to the Paicines Reservoir at 1:00 PM. But starting this late did not seem to minimize our observations as other than some sparrows, we found all the great target birds of the area. We stopped in at the Panoche Inn to pick up our dinner which was ordered ahead of time and waiting for our arrival. We took our sandwiches with us to be eaten later. Larry & his wife always take great care of birders! From here we headed to the area around Mercey Hot Springs and also ran into several other birding groups lead by Clay Kempf, Ted Chandik and Matthew Dodder & all helped each other with our findings. We drove the BLM road but things were quiet, so we headed for Mercey Hot Springs. We found three species of owls and watched them in the trees and flying about as the sun went down. We stayed afterward to experience the night-time activities and found the frogs here to be so loud it made it difficult to listen for the owls! After dinner & some walking around in the dark we headed home.



The group of courageous “owlers” at Mercey Hot Springs.

OK, we're a little out of focus and we have our eyes closed, but you get the idea!



Tiles above taken at Mercey Hot Springs by trip participant Debbi Brusco

Memorable Observations!

- The Greater Roadrunner, Mountain Bluebirds and Phainopeplas were life birds for some!
- Talking on the radio and everyone in the valley talked back!
- Enjoying the song of the California Thrasher and FINALLY locating the bird.
- Watching the owls flying over head
- Listening to noises that go bump in the dark – *Don't go in there!*

Total Species Counted for the Day = 64 includes heard only (H)
Birds are listed in the taxonomic order currently recognized by the AOU

Canada Goose	Golden Eagle	Barn Owl	Hermit Thrush
Mallard	Northern Harrier	Great Horned Owl	Western Bluebird
American Wigeon	Red-tail Hawks	Long Eared Owl	Mountain Bluebird
Bufflehead	Ferruginous Hawk	Northern Flicker	California Thrasher
Lesser Scaup	Prairie Falcon	Acorn Woodpecker	Wrentit (H)
Canvasback	Merlin	Lewis's Woodpecker <i>flyby</i>	European Starling
Common Merganser <i>female</i>	Peregrine Falcon	Says Phoebe	Phainopepla
Ruddy Duck	American Kestrel	Loggerhead Shrike	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Western Grebe	American Coot	Western Scrub-Jay	California Towhee (H)
American White Pelican	Greater Yellowlegs	Yellow-billed Magpie	White-crowned Sparrow
Double Crested Cormorant	Sandpiper Sp.	American Crow	Red-winged Blackbird
Great Blue Heron	Mountain Plover	Common Raven	Tri-colored Blackbird
Snowy Egret	California Gull	Horned Lark	Brewer's Blackbird
Great Egret	Rock Pigeon	Oak Titmouse	Brown Headed Blackbird
Turkey Vulture	Mourning Dove	White Breasted Nuthatch (H)	Western Meadowlark
Bald Eagle	Greater Roadrunner	American Robin	House Finch