

Notes based on Joe Morlan's Ornithology class lecture February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

Joe Morlan is not responsible for these notes, any errors or omissions in them are mine.

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There has been at least one **Northern Shrike** in Napa and Sonoma Cos.

Dave described the bird he saw. It looked similar to the immature in Nat Geo, with perhaps some more apparent brownish tone on the cheek and slightly less obviously brownish on the chest and belly. The brown feather edgings forming neat bars across the entire underparts from the bottom of the pearl white throat all the way down were clearly visible.

Other features to look for that distinguish Northern Shrike from Loggerhead Shrike:

- The longer bill that is pale at the base (Loggerhead's shorter, blunter, stubbier).
- The faint mask. On some photos of the species it is barely evident that it has a mask at all, especially some of the juveniles. Compare to the broader black mask on Loggerhead Shrike.
- White forehead on Northern Shrike and black across the bridge of the bill on Loggerhead Shrike can be very difficult to see since the top of the bill is black.
- Also supposedly a difference in the color of the nasal tufts: blackish on Loggerhead Shrike, paler on Northern.
- Behaviorwise the Northern is much more likely to perch high compared to Loggerhead which usually perches on low fences and short weed stocks. Northern Shrike more often high on poles or more likely on tops of trees.
- It is claimed that Kestrels will share a territory with the Loggerhead Shrike, but not with the Northern Shrike. Kestrel and Northern Shrike eat big grasshoppers, both wag their tails and sit up high, ecological competitors in a way.

**Prevalence of dark morphs in some raptors:** they are more common in some areas than in other areas. In most of the hawks the light morphs predominate. In the Broad-winged Hawk and the Ferruginous Hawk the dark morph is extremely rare. In Rough-legged and Red-tailed hawks in general there is a higher percentage of dark morphs in the west than in the east.

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## ***Fringillidae* finch family**

A very large family of seed-eating birds. Most of the species are found in Eurasia. Relatively few species have reached NA.

Undulating flight.

### **Oriental Greenfinch**

Asiatic species, records in the outer Aleutians, extraordinary rare and accidental.

One CA record in the Arcata Marsh area, no other connecting records to Joe's knowledge.

The northern subspecies *kawarahiba* is migratory. It ranges up into northeast Asia and migrates down into Japan and China. The bird is quite common as a cage bird in Japan and China, but those are mostly a different, non-migratory subspecies. On the adult female *kawarahiba* there is a dark mark on the side of the face that comes down below the eye. This was fairly evident on the CA bird which seemed to support that it might be a wild bird. But it was then re-found in July, it had never migrated out of the area. This led to the rejection of the record on the ground of questionable natural occurrence since it did not behave like a migratory bird. It is on the

supplemental list of birds in California. That is a short list of species of which there is at least one record where the identification has been accepted but the natural occurrence has been questioned.

## **Brambling**

Ranges from Europe all the way through Asia and has an extensive pattern of occurrence in Alaska and the Pacific Northwest, records from clear across the US. Very few records in CA.

Orange-brownish body, dark head, fairly large bill, short stubby tail, complex pattern of orange and white wing bars.

## **Common Chaffinch**

European bird, not an Asiatic species.

A number of CA occurrences, all assumed to be escaped cage birds. Most of the sightings are from feeders. Some of the birds in the Maritime Provinces and the Northeast may be wild.

## **Rosy-Finches**

Three species.

Brownish colored birds with pink sometimes on the belly, but usually in the wing coverts, especially in the males.

All three species winter in good numbers in Sandia Crest near Albuquerque in New Mexico. They keep the road open all winter long and there is a banding operation up there. You don't have to hike, you can drive to the spot. There is a restaurant with feeders.

They do hybridize, some people think that there really only is one Rosy-Finch.

## **Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch**

### **OCCURRENCE**

The species that is most likely to be seen in CA.

There is a population which breeds in the high Sierra Nevada, way above the tree line. In order to find them you have to do some serious hiking for the most part, there are relatively few places where they come down to the road. One is about three miles east of Tioga Pass. Pullout, green bridge alongside the cliff. There are blasting holes in the side of the cliff. In the summertime Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches are seen going in and out of those blasting holes. This is a bird that does not like any vegetation on the ground, the rockier it is the more they like it. The higher the elevation the more likely you will be able to find them in CA. Aspendell in the eastern Sierra in the winter is also a place you could try if you don't like to climb that much.

A place in Nevada where Joe saw them in the early 70s: mine shafts east of Hallelujah Junction. Black Rosy-Finches are said to occur there, too. It is where Beckwourth Pass Road (70) comes into 395. Across to the east of that you can see mine tailings coming down from the mountains and there appeared to be an opening and sort of a road (jeep track) that went out there. Drove the jeep track down into a creek bed, out the creek bed, up the other side, continued on to the mine shafts that are on the Nevada side. In the late afternoon the Rosy-Finches started to fly in and land right at their feet and then flew down into the pitch black shafts. This was April. Did not see Black Rosy-Finch, but there exist 2 specimens from the place collected in the 1940s.

In Alaska the birds are at sea level. On the Pribilof Islands for example they act like House Sparrows. Are right around buildings, go into the buildings, nest in abandoned buildings. Occurrence has more to do with life zones than with elevation.

#### **FIELD MARKS**

Brownish bird, pink in the wings and various amounts of gray on the head.  
Bill dark in the breeding season, yellow in the non-breeding season.  
Immature no gray and no pink markings.

#### **SUBSPECIES**

Those that breed in the Sierra Nevada are *dawsoni*. Gray on the head only above eye level. This population has the smallest bill of any Rosy-Finch.  
Similar birds breed from northwestern Alaska south into Idaho ("interior" in Sibley), but they have bigger bills, bigger than the Brown-capped Rosy-Finches with which they overlap.  
Another group, "Hepburn's type" breed from coastal Alaska south to Mt Shasta in CA. They have the whole head gray. Quite a few Hepburn's type birds show up in the winter in CA.  
Birds from the Aleutians are larger than others, otherwise similar to Hepburn's, slightly darker.

### **Brown-capped Rosy-Finch**

#### **OCCURRENCE**

Extremely narrow distribution, primarily the Rocky Mountains of Colorado. In that area it is the most common Rosy-Finch.  
No record for CA. Some birds that resemble Brown-capped Rosy-Finches have occasionally been seen in CA but all eventually turned out to be Gray-crowned.

#### **FIELD MARKS**

A lot of pink on the belly and on the wings.  
Sometimes show a little bit of grayish coloration on the crown.  
Smaller bill than most Gray-crowneds, including the Gray-crowneds that come to Colorado and New Mexico (where both species overlap). But bigger bill than the Gray-crowneds *dawsoni* that breed in the Sierra Nevada.

### **Black Rosy-Finch**

No photos.  
Do show up at feeders in the wintertime in Nevada.  
Status in CA still not entirely clear. There are people who think they are probably regular in Rosy-Finch flocks in the east side of the Sierra Nevada. Apparently a record from Mt Pinos in the transverse ranges in southern CA.

Identical to Gray-crowned, only much darker. There will be an article in Western Birds about the color variation.