

Notes based on Joe Morlan's Ornithology class lecture March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

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

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**Eared and Horned grebes** are equally likely around the Bay Area during the winter and migration periods. Both species start to get into breeding plumage now, some are already in full breeding plumage. The Eared Grebe may average a little bit earlier than the Horned, but that is not a usable as a way to identify them.

In breeding plumage both have golden ear tufts. In the Horned Grebe they form plumes that head straight back behind the eye. The whole head is relatively flat. The Eared Grebe has what looks like a gold fan extending behind the eye, spreading up and down. It also has a crest that comes to a point on the top of the head.

There are other differences, particularly the color of the neck, which is all black on Eared Grebe, Horned Grebe has a bright rufous foreneck. In Britain the Eared Grebe is called the Black-necked Grebe. (Horned Grebe is called Slavonian Grebe in Britain.)

The Eared Grebe is pretty widespread throughout a variety of habitats. The Horned Grebe tends to prefer coastal areas. When it occurs inland it is usually on deeper water.

Horned breeds far to the north while Eared occasionally has nested in the Bay Area.

The only cormorant with white flank patches during the breeding season that is found in CA is the **Pelagic Cormorant**. Pelagic Cormorants nest on the rocks by the Golden Gate Bridge. They can quite frequently be seen in the bay all the way to the Albany Bulb and Berkeley Marina. They get more into the south bay than Brandt's Cormorant does..

Pelagic is smaller in body size by a noticeable amount compared to the Double-crested Cormorant, but it has a longer tail. Immature Double-crested Cormorants have white bellies and they are brown in color rather than black.

**Pigeon Guillemots** have short necks but they are not as short-necked as most other alcids. Here they are usually seen in breeding plumage, all black with huge oval white patches on the top of the wing, on the wing coverts. They often call back and forth and you can see their bright red mouth linings. Their feet are scarlet red. They have nested on the cliffs around SF, particularly where there are earthen cliffs with vines growing on them. They nest in tunnels behind the vegetation. The numbers of breeding Pigeon Guillemots in the city has declined. There is some thought that it might have to do with predation by Common Ravens which are much more common now than they used to be. Most of the Pigeon Guillemots migrate out of here in the wintertime, they become very, very scarce. They start coming back about now, or a little later.

**Orange-crowned Warblers** arrived in the last couple of weeks. They arrive in the interior a little bit earlier than along the coast.

It is a general rule among wrens that the males build multiple nests and the females do not use all of them. For a breeding bird atlas you need more breeding evidence than a bird building a nest for wrens, for other birds that is usually enough. Joe does not know how many nests the **Winter Wren** builds. They build a fairly elaborate domed over nest with a hole in the side. Wrens generally either build a domed nest or nest in a tree cavity.

The Winter Wren is going to be split. The bird we have here is the Pacific Winter Wren. It is quite small and dark and has a different song and different call notes from the eastern birds. There are a few records of eastern Winter Wrens from California, they'll need to be looked at once the split is final which should be in July. You can see on the range map where the split is going to be, there is a gap between the western and the eastern populations.

The **Great Blue Herons** are all busy with their nests by Stow Lake.

Joe would like everybody to get an **eBird** identity. When you go on his field trips he can share the trip list with you. It is a good way to get started without having to do any work.

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## **Ring-necked Pheasant**

### **OCCURRENCE**

Native from extreme southeastern Europe (Caucasus) to China.

Widely introduced to NA as a game species. Also to Europe since at least medieval times.

Quite common around farm yards where they feed on waste corn, also in any kind of weedy area that will support them. Many of the populations are maintained by continuous release. There is a vigorous trade in this bird by game breeders.

There are no native pheasants in the Americas. This is the species that is pretty well established. Big populations in the Central Valley. They do show up in odd places, such as Lake Merced where a couple of tame birds was seen for a while. A similar situation to the Chukars that show up in SF from time to time. These birds are either escaped or released from market and generally not thought of as wild birds, even though the introduced population in the rest of CA is acceptable. There is a small population in Coyote Hills Regional Park. Quite a few of them in the south bay and in the Central Valley and foothill regions. Grizzly Island.

In areas where they are hunted they can be reasonably secretive.

These birds are quite hardy and have little difficulty surviving snow storms.

### **FIELD MARKS**

Really long spiky tail, a characteristic of most pheasant species.

The males are quite variable with different subspecies recognized, the introduced ones are usually a mixture of different subspecies.

Ring around the neck in most of the introduced birds.

Red wattle of bare skin on the face that hangs down on either side, similar to the wattles that you find on a rooster.

Legs short and sturdy like in all of these game birds.

A spur on the rear of the leg is used in combat and for defense.

Short chicken-like bill.

Some spotting on the back.

Females blend in, buffy with dark barring and spotting.

Plain face with an eye ring or broken eye ring.

Pretty big, about the size of a grouse.

Long, pointy tail.

Fairly different from the pattern of any of the possible grouse. There are no grouse in the Bay Area, other than the Sooty Grouse that is found as far south as Sonoma County. Those birds are up in the mountains. When you go to look for Sage Grouse in the Great Basin region, there are plenty of pheasants out there. Sage Grouse also have long, pointed tails. They are bigger and they have a different facial pattern and a black belly.

## **Other subspecies**

### **White-winged Pheasant**

Sibley p141. They are one of the more common subspecies that has been introduced successfully into CA. Wing coverts white. Reduced or absent ring around the neck. Many around the Central Valley. Very easy to breed in captivity.

### **Green Pheasant**

In NatGeo listed as a race of Ring-necked, Sibley says it is often considered a separate species. According to the AOU it is a subspecies of the Ring-necked Pheasant. They are reportedly introduced onto Brook's Island off of the city of Richmond in Contra Costa County. Access to Brook's Island has always been a bit of an issue, there is no regular ferry service. It is now part of the East Bay Regional Parks Department's properties. They used to offer weekend visits out there.

There are other species of pheasants around the world. Many of them are kept in captivity or are found in zoos or possibly raised for the table, but not usually.

Joe had once on a field trip in the Rhododendron Dell a female Lady Amherst Pheasant.

### **VOCALIZATIONS**

The males give a loud "ra-ga" that sounds like an old model T auto horn and carries a very long way.

They make quite a racket when they flush. Sometimes you don't see them until they are close and then they burst out of the grass in front of you flapping very rapidly making a clapping sound with their wings as they fly off.

## **Wild Turkey**

### **OCCURRENCE**

Pretty well established throughout much of the US.

Through introductions it's been established beyond its former known range. It's also been heavily managed for game purposes throughout much of its range.

The Spanish originally encountered the bird in Mexico and brought it back to Spain. When it was introduced in England the English thought it came from Turkey, hence the English name. The early settlers of Virginia and New England brought turkeys with them to have livestock and were surprised to find the same bird in the wild.

Not native to CA. The native range is from the east coast as far west as Arizona. In Arizona a subspecies called *merriami* occurs mostly in lower elevation foothill regions in Savannah type habitat where there are grasslands with scattered oak trees. They can be locally common in some of those areas. These birds and other races have been introduced into CA. The original introductions were only mildly successful. Only recently they have become more and more common. Released turkeys from domestic stock that did not act like wild birds became established also. They are all over the place now. In Marin County Joe sees them about 80% of the time he goes towards Pt Reyes. Mostly underneath spreading acorn trees, they feed on the acorns that are on the ground. Then they started to show up in the east bay and would come into people's yards. They are really common down in the south bay now, especially in the Milpitas area, Ed Levin Park.

A highly social bird. They have precocial young, stay in family groups.

#### **FIELD MARKS**

There are about 5 named subspecies. There is racial difference in the color of the tips of the tail feathers. In the east they are of a deep cinnamon color. In the west they are light buff or whitish, the *merriami* type.

The ones that we have here in CA are a mixture. Some of them may be pretty pale, others intermediate. We don't usually see the ones with the really deep cinnamon brown. Those are the ones that are found in the eastern US and a smaller version in Florida. The ones in Mexico are the intermediate ones, brown but not a deep chestnut color. Those are the ones that were brought back to the east coast by early English settlers.

In the east, if you see a Turkey that has white tips to the tail feathers, that is probably a domestic bird. Domestic birds look either all white or they look like wild birds except the tips of their tails are white. Domestic birds average larger and heavier. Many of them are too heavy to fly.

Females don't have the red wattles, they are gray on the head. The males have a beard of feathers that hangs down from the chest. (Some females may also have it.) The males have a flap of skin that goes over the top of the bill and hangs down on the other side, called a snood. They frequently lock their snoods together in combat.

## **Himalayan Snowcock**

#### **OCCURRENCE**

Above the tree line in the Himalayas. It was successfully introduced into the Ruby Mountains of northeastern Nevada. Even though the location is quite isolated the ABA decided that the species was established. It is an all day hike to get to the area where they are. You have to camp out because it is another all day hike out of there. Very beautiful country. Other cool birds such as Black Rosy-Finches. The snowcocks are often seen at considerable distance. They roost up at the mountain tops. In the early morning they fly downslope and spend the rest of the day walking uphill very, very slowly. Not easy to see. There was an easier way. A business was built up around it. You could charter a helicopter. Apparently they don't do that any more.

#### **FIELD MARKS**

A large partridge-like bird.

White primaries conspicuous in flight.

## **Black Frankolin**

Sibley p. 135

It was added to the ABA checklist based on an established population in Louisiana. They disappeared and were removed from the checklist.

There is a rules committee that dealt with the question if you could still count them if you had seen them while they were on the list. (Don't we take ourselves seriously!) The committee decided that their disappearing showed that the birds never were really established and that they had been on the checklist in error, you cannot count them.