


**From:** Barry Langdon-Lassagne via Groups.io wilmot=me.com@groups.io   
**Subject:** [southbaybirds] SCVAS Birdathon: The Piratical Flycatchers 24-hour Big Day  
**Date:** April 25, 2019 at 3:01 PM  
**To:** South Bay Birds southbaybirds@groups.io  
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Ginger and I (The Piratical Flycatchers) began our Big Day by camping Sunday night beside Coyote Lake east of Gilroy. We had never started in the south county before and were curious how well we could do with a route from south to north. We'd also never started a Big Day by camping, so this was a grand experiment in multiple ways.

Soon after midnight on Earth Day (Monday, 4/22) we were rewarded with GREAT HORNED OWLS and later a BARN OWL calling. Our alarm went off at 4:30am and of course we hit "snooze" after being kept up all night by owls, but then a WESTERN SCREECH-OWL called above our camp and we were infused with energy to start our day. The thermos of hot coffee we'd made the night before helped out a bit as well.

Downing our morning beverage, we drove to Coyote Dam where we stood on the east side and listened as the birds began calling. COMMON POORWILL, BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAK, ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER and CALIFORNIA THRASHER started off the dawn chorus. At 6am we heard two CANYON WRENS calling, one from the pump house right next to us! As it grew light, we were able to see our first birds, starting with COMMON MERGANSERS on the lake and a flyover WOOD DUCK. Before leaving the dam, a young BALD EAGLE soared over us and across the lake.

Oak Flat Picnic Area gave us a WESTERN Tanager, HOUSE WREN, PURPLE FINCH, CASPIAN TERN and WESTERN & CLARK'S GREBES among others. A second BALD EAGLE, this one an adult, flew over the lake. We stopped at our campsite where we heard a WARBLING VIREO and picked up a few more forest birds.

Our side trip up Gilroy Hot Springs Road gave us YELLOW-BILLED MAGPIES, PACIFIC-SLOPE FLYCATCHER, WILSON'S WARBLER and the first of many EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVES, but no Wood Ducks, which made us really appreciate the early-morning flyover.

It was now 8:30am and we needed to head north. Wary of rush-hour traffic, we took the freeway only a few exits before switching to the Monterey Highway and making our way to Coyote Valley Open Space Preserve. In that area we found WESTERN KINGBIRDS, BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHERS, WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCHes, more YELLOW-BILLED MAGPIES and a WHITE-TAILED KITE. From the parking lot as we were leaving, we saw a ROCK WREN singing atop the hill.

A quick dash out Laguna Avenue was not productive and we didn't get another new bird until we reached Calero Reservoir around 10:15am, where all we picked up was COMMON YELLOWTHROAT and CLIFF SWALLOW. We stopped at the San Vicente Parking Area, but didn't hike there and got no new birds. I was surprised to see a flock of peeps fly over the field though, and wondered where they might be hanging out, but never saw them after that.

Hiking up Stile Ranch Trail from the Fortini Trailhead gave us nine new species for the day, including a RUFIOUS HUMMINGBIRD, BAND-TAILED PIGEONS, RUFIOUS-CROWNED SPARROWS, LARK SPARROWS, HORNED LARKs (over 25!) and a GRASSHOPPER SPARROW. We also heard then saw a HOODED ORIOLE in the palm and ironwood trees on the opposite side of San Vicente Avenue.

It was now well after rush hour. In fact, it was noon, so we drove to Almaden Lake City Park and made a little picnic lunch while picking up GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE, CEDAR WAXWING and a few lake regulars. There were zero munias hanging about.

We made it to the baylands at 1:40pm and started with the Gold Street Bridge where we were surprised to find a pair of COMMON GOLDENEYES resting under the railroad trestle on the west side. A BURROWING OWL cooperated on a mound by Disk Drive, and Grand & Spreckles gave us the hoped-for SNOWY PLOVERS along with many SEMIPALMATED PLOVER and DUNLIN.

The EEC's gate was open so we drove in and scoped pond A16 which had FORSTER'S TERNS, three NORTHERN PINTAIL and a pair of REDHEADS along with more common wetland birds. A single WESTERN GULL rested on one of the islands with many CALIFORNIA GULLS. A small flock of BONAPARTE'S GULLS flew over us on their way toward Zanker Recycling.

At the Alviso Marina we sat on the L-shaped boardwalk and enjoyed a few minutes of rest and solitude, undisturbed by any rails. We then trotted out to Salt Pond A12 and found a few EARED GREBES and 19 RED-NECKED PHALAROPE, some close enough for good binocular views.

The Sunnyvale Water Pollution Control Plant had its reliable BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD, but no Green Heron and no other new birds for the day.

Shoreline Lake at Charleston Slough had seven BLACK SKIMMERS — only a few were visible at first, but some disturbance briefly flushed them from the island. We were surprised to find another COMMON GOLDENEYE at Charleston Slough in the pond by the restrooms at the west end of Terminal Blvd. All in all we had 8 new species at this stop.

Next was the Palo Alto Baylands, where we found a pair of BLUE-WINGED TEAL in the water on the southeast side of the road as we were pulling in to the parking lot near the visitor center. We walked on the new boardwalk for our first time: the boardwalk was very nice, but not very birdy, and the wind was kicking up so we saw nothing out on the greater bay. The waterway by the visitor's center did have one CANVASBACK however, and we found several WHIMBREL there as well.

The day was getting on and we were getting weary. Sunset was still an hour out. We parked in the lot by the entrance to Palo Alto

Baylands and strolled toward Byxbee Park from there. We sat on a bench to look out over the marsh and there we saw a male NORTHERN HARRIER fly across the wetlands, swoop down and catch something. We then watched in awe as the female Harrier approached the male and they performed an incredible, acrobatic mid-air transfer of prey. I managed to photograph the pair performing this maneuver:



Following that, we couldn't ask for any more from our day. But Byxbee Park rewarded us with dozens of flyover BONAPARTE'S GULLS and a calling RIDGWAY'S RAIL anyway.

After a nice dinner out, we returned well after dark to our lakeside campsite, where two WESTERN SCREECH-OWLS bid us goodnight.

Our total for the day was 135 species, beating by six our previous high count back in 2008. Notable misses on this glorious day were: Peregrine Falcon, White-throated Swift, Ring-billed Gull, Cooper's/Sharp-shinned Hawk and American Goldfinch. New-for-the-year birds were: Common Poorwill, Canyon Wren and Snowy Plover.

Barry & Ginger  
The Piratical Flycatchers

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