

Napa-Solano Audubon's Rare Bird Alert #1 Least Flycatcher 1-11-2021

Greetings Napa Solano Audubon Members, Family & Friends:

Periodically, we will send out Birding Alerts of uncommon or rare species that have been seen in our area. Recently, we have been treated to 2 species that are extremely uncommon in our counties: the Least Flycatcher and the Clay-colored Sparrow.

Location: The first is a Least Flycatcher, originally located by Eric Pilotte on December 12th at Lake Herman Recreation Area in Benicia. This bird was later refound by Emmett Iverson on December 26th and by Eric, Lucas, and I on December 27th. Eric originally heard an Empidonax Flycatcher making a typical “whit” call similar to a Least and/or Dusky Flycatcher. He saw the bird briefly but did not have sufficient views to identify it. Emmett refound the flycatcher 2 weeks later behind the Caretaker’s House near the Lake Herman Parking Lot which is an indication that it is overwintering in the area. He was able to again hear the “whit” call and obtained great photos. Of course, the best way to ID our small Empidonax flycatchers (seemingly just larger than a Ruby-crowned Kinglet) is to hear their songs on their breeding grounds, but given the time of the year, their call is very helpful.

Following up on Emmett’s eBird and North Bay Birds Report, Lucas and I met Eric at Lake Herman the next day. After exploring the Riparian Area below the house with Eric and Lucas as well as the willows to the West of the parking lot, I waited by the Caretaker’s House while Lucas and Eric hiked back down to the riparian area below the house. Lucas thought he heard the bird making it’s “whit” call, but they could not locate the bird. Within a few minutes the bird appeared next to me in a stalky weed adjacent to the house. It then flew west where Lucas and Eric searched but then reappeared on the North side of the Caretaker’s House on the porch railing and in a nearby Oak where it sat for several minutes while we photographed it. It appears that this rare flycatcher makes a circular feeding route in the Riparian and Willow areas and then visits the Caretaker’s House. With patience you may be rewarded by seeing it! This is a 3rd Solano County record!

Identification: A few field marks that assist in the identification. First, it’s unmistakable whit call (shared with the Dusky Flycatcher which has a similar call), second, it’s small size, very short bill, and complete eye-ring (shared by the Hammond’s Flycatcher), finally, it’s white throat, bold white wing bars contrasting with very dark black wings, and short primary projection ruling out Hammonds and tiny bill ruling out the Dusky’s longer bill and longer intermediate primary projection all helped to identify this remarkable overwintering bird. Here are a couple of photos we were able to take. You may find more at Emmett Iverson’s eBird Checklist located at: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S78038165> or our eBird checklist located at <https://ebird.org/checklist/S78095180> .

