

Birdwatching Highlight: The Cuckoo craze in Watsonville



The Wetlands of Watsonville became quite famous in the fall of 2012. What happened then rocketed our wetland habitat into the spotlight of the bird watching world overnight!

A bird known as the Common Cuckoo, normally seen in parts of Europe, Asia and Africa spent five days eating and resting in our wetlands.

Although a rare visitor to western Alaska during its summer migration, this was a first-ever sighting in California by a local birder who had herself seen such a bird in numerous Old World countries. It is speculated that the Cuckoo most likely found itself in Alaska at the end of the summer. Once migration cues hit it began to fly south as it normally would. But south from Alaska had landed it on the Pacific Migratory Flyway which goes down the Pacific Coast of the Americas, unfamiliar territory. The lost cuckoo needed to find an appropriate resting spot to find food and prepare for the next leg of its journey.

As luck would have it, the willows found around Watsonville slough were teeming with caterpillars. If you recall, during the cuckoo's stay in Watsonville, temperatures were hovering around 100 degrees. This likely sparked the huge activity of caterpillars – a favorite food of the cuckoo. Although the birdwatchers had to suffer the heat, the Cuckoo seemed content with all the necessities a migrating bird needs to survive. Watsonville's wetlands offered some really good habitat with an irresistible menu!

After about five days, relief from the heat wave in the form of fog, dropped the temperature 40 degrees overnight along the Central Coast and once again, pressure to migrate sent the Cuckoo on its way south. There were no other recorded sightings of the bird. The hundreds of birders that came from at least 40 states in the country, as well as a few international visitors are very grateful for that cuckoo....as well as many local businesses and City officials!