Notes based on Joe Morlan's Ornithology class lecture September 15th, 2010.
Joe Morlan is not responsible for these notes, any errors or omissions in them are mine.

In July the **51st supplement of the AOU checklist** was published:
http://www.aou.org/checklist/suppl/AOU_checklist_suppl_51.pdf
This happens annually, with changes in names and classification. Changes this year to English names that effect our field guide:

- p. 88: **Great Shearwater** now instead of Greater Shearwater
- p. 268: The Whip-poor-will has been split into two species:
  Eastern Whip-poor-will *Caprimulgus vociferus*
  Mexican Whip-poor-will *Caprimulgus arizonae*
  Arizonae was formerly a subspecies which now has been elevated into a full species based on differences in vocalizations and some publications on genetics.
  No overlap in the ranges of these birds. The Eastern one is found in the east, the western here in the southwestern US and down into Mexico. The isolated red patches in southern CA are Mexican Whip-poor-wills. The species breeds in extremely tiny numbers in the San Bernardino Mountains. On the top of Clark Mountain there is an isolated grove of Rocky Mountain type fir and whip-poor-wills are apparently present during the summer months. Possibly also elsewhere in southern CA.
  Recorded in northern CA as a rare vagrant. As yet no accepted records of Eastern Whip-poor-will in CA. However, a bird trapped in a mist net in San Diego in November 1970 was measured and photographed in color and compared directly with specimens and was thought to be an eastern (http://elibrary.unm.edu/sora/wb/v02n01/p0037-p0040.pdf). In a subsequent paper on birds of Sonora (Hubbard, J.P. and R. S. Crossin. 1974. Notes on northern Mexican birds. Nemouria 14:1-41) the authors disagreed with the identification of the San Diego bird. One reason for that was that the article that was published on the San Diego bird suggested that there was a difference in the color of the rictal bristles between the two forms. The curator of birds at the San Diego Museum of Natural History, Joseph Jehl, Jr., found that the Eastern Whip-poor-will had all black bristles while the Mexican birds had brown bases to those feathers. Hubbard and Crossin found a specimen of a bird from Mexico that had all black bristles. Another reason were the measurements. The San Diego bird was very small and measured outside the range of Mexican and well within the published range of Eastern, but looking at specimens from the Smithsonian, Hubbard and Crossin found a number of Mexican that were considerably smaller and approached the size of the San Diego bird. They did not list those specimens though and they did not provide any measurements.
  The record has been prepared and is circulating but it has been poisoned by the publication of the doubts. Joe does not see a reason why it should not be an Eastern.
  A photo of the bird is on the CBRC Rare Bird Photos page
  http://www.californiabirds.org/photos/index.html
  There is a difference in plumage, the Eastern Whip-poor-will is gray on the top of the head and on the back. The Mexican Whip-poor-will is much browner, more tawny in coloration. Also some differences in the width of the streaks on the back.
- p.342: Two North American species have been split off from the former circumpolar Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*:
  Winter Wren *Troglodytes hiemalis*
  Pacific Wren *Troglodytes pacificus*
  The birds found in the far west from CA to Alaska are now called the Pacific Wren. It includes the Aleutian subspecies group (each island has its own).

The eastern more migratory species, which ranges almost into the Yukon and then all the way east to the east coast and the Appalachians and winters in the southeast, retains the name Winter Wren.
David Sibley has an essay on his website that has brand new range maps and he recommends that people use the modifier (Eastern) when they talk about Winter Wren, just for clarity.
In their infinite wisdom the AOU kept the name Winter Wren for the eastern population. The consequences of this were probably not thoroughly thought out. What they did violates their own published policy on English names which say that when there is a split they need two unique names. Having the same phrase being used to describe two different things invites confusion. It is tragic to keep the name Winter Wren for just a part of what used to be the Winter Wren. Most people using standard field guides will continue to report Winter Wren in CA, when in fact Winter Wren is now one of the rarest birds that ever occurred in CA.
There have already been post-split reports of Winter Wren in CA by competent birders who did mean the old Winter Wren, what they now should be calling the Pacific Wren.
There are claims of the new Winter Wren, the eastern bird, for CA. The best of those is a bird which was photographed and voice recorded in Santa Barbara last winter, it is very likely to be accepted. A photo of the bird is on the CBRC Rare Bird Photos page
http://www.californiabirds.org/photos/index.html
The call notes are different, that is the easiest way to tell them apart. A suspected Winter Wren should be voice recorded. They are also paler, not as tawny and richly colored as the Pacific Wrens are. Pacific are very tawny, particularly in the throat (the Aleutian populations are paler).
The scientific name of the old Winter Wren was *Troglodytes troglodytes*. That name is now reserved for the bird that is found in Eurasia. Since it is found in Eurasia and there are no records in NA the AOU did not have an opinion on what its English name should be. In international lists it is called the Winter Wren. One more source of confusion!

- There are also numerous changes in scientific names, mostly genera, in the updated checklist. The warbler genus *Vermivora* for example is now restricted to very few species
- Also some changes in list sequence. For example, the longspurs and Snow Bunting are lifted out of the finches and sparrows and put in front of the warblers.

The California Bird Records Committee maintains an **official CA check list** which Joe updated in July, all of the names are now compliant. Now there is only the Pacific Wren on the checklist, but Winter Wren will be on the checklist once the Santa Barbara bird gets accepted.
http://www.californiabirds.org/ca_list.asp

Somebody observed a Common Raven catch and eventually kill a gopher. Joe has observed something similar on a class field trip in Golden Gate Park. Joe posted photos of that event here:
http://outdoors.webshots.com/photo/2630383130040004820ODjSVR
http://outdoors.webshots.com/photo/2634608690040004820tVcoPy
http://outdoors.webshots.com/photo/2868620450040004820BozbbB

Carol and Steve saw and photographed a Common Raven with a light brown back. They read that when ravens molt out of juvenal plumage they retain some of it which gets pretty worn.

There have been some interesting migrating shorebirds in Half Moon Bay by a little pond where Pilarcitos Creek empties out onto the beach. Semipalmated Sandpipers, Baird Sandpiper and other more regular migrants. Joe has photographed shorebirds there recently and posted some of those photos in theBirds and Wildlife photo gallery on his website:
http://fog.ccsf.cc.ca.us/~jmorlan/newgallery.htm

Last Sunday Hugh Cotter had organized a **pelagic trip out of Half Moon Bay**, announced on the SFBirds mailing list. Spent a lot of time in deep water off the shelf, in both SF and San Mateo counties. A pretty successful trip. It had been cancelled once, they only go if the conditions are favorable. Really nice close views of Laysan Albatrosses, lots of Black-footed Albatrosses, Wilson's Storm-Petrel close to the boat, lots of Black and Ashy Storm-Petrels, some people saw Fork-tailed Storm-Petrels. Not too many alcids, but Rhinoceros Auklets and two Tufted Puffins in winter plumage.

Joe went to **Cape Cod** this summer and took a pelagic **whale watching trip out of Province Town**. Nice huge boats with an upper deck and benches. Not intended for bird watching, but you see Wilson's Storm-Petrels and Great Shearwaters (a name change this July, it used to be the Greater Shearwater). Lots of Minke Whales which were really close (usually they are shy) and Humpbacks.

Tyrannus kingbirds

This genus is the namesake of the whole family of American Flycatchers, Tyrannidae.
They are restricted to the Americas.

There are several species of kingbirds, which are medium to large size flycatchers.
In all of the kingbirds, the males have a red or sometimes yellow patch on the crown which is concealed, similar to the red patch on the Ruby-crowned Kinglet. It is much harder to see these patches than those on a Ruby-crowned Kinglet. Ruby-crowned Kinglets at least occasionally get excited and raise their crests. Very, very rarely do kingbirds raise their crests and show the colored patch of feathers. This makes you wonder what the purpose of those feathers is.
There is a bird called the Royal Flycatcher in the tropics of Middle America. It is a kingbird-like bird that has long crown feathers that are bright scarlet or yellow with big black dots on them. But when you see it in the wild the crest is never raised. It does raise its crest though when handled during banding sessions.
Video: http://www.neomorphus.com/flycatcher-mov.htm

Four of the kingbirds that occur in NA have pretty bright yellow bellies.
They an sometimes be confused with flycatchers in the genus *Myiarchus* such as the Ash-throated Flycatcher. Those birds typically have reddish on the tail or on the wings while kingbirds do not. Kingbirds tend to be grayish looking.

Kingbirds are in-your-face type birds, they tend to sit out in the open on wires, posts or tree tops, in exposed positions. Most species of kingbirds are found in open country.

When people see a kingbird, often they concentrate on bright colors like the yellow. That is not going to help you identify kingbirds. You need to concentrate on the details, not the overall bright color. The wings are particularly important in identifying kingbirds.
There is a lot to say about the tail, and there are indeed differences in the tail. But the tail can be misleading.

Cassin's Kingbird

OCCURRENCE

Much more common in southern CA than in northern CA.
In northern CA the bird occurs marginally as far north as the Tracy golf course near Stockton in San Joaquin County where it has nested. It has nested as close to SF as Livermore in Alameda County, but it does not normally do that.
Seen a little bit more regularly in Panoche Valley, a wild area in San Benito County. It is possible that they breed there but they seem to be found there more often in the wintertime or in the early spring than in the summer. Their status there is a little bit unclear. Probably the northernmost nesting was in Solano County north of Valejo. Also nested in Bolinas in the 1960s.
Joe has never seen a Cassin's Kingbird in SF, Marin or San Mateo counties. He has seen them in Santa Clara County on the San Benito County line where they have occurred in Eucalyptus trees, also rarely in Alameda county. This is an exceptionally rare bird for right around the Bay Area.
In southern CA it tends to prefer riparian areas with tall sycamores. During the non-breeding season they often move into residential areas and parks. They form winter roosts which may comprise dozens of birds sitting in the same grove of trees each evening. Some large roosts have upwards of 200 birds.
In southern CA the Cassin's Kingbird is the only kingbird you are likely to see in the wintertime. In northern CA no kingbird is likely to be seen in the wintertime.

FIELD MARKS

Dark gray head. Tends not to have a masked effect, mostly because the entire crown and face is such a dark gray that the slightly darker area around the eye does not contrast.
Contrasting white on the chin area and the malar region just below the eye.
The throat itself as well as the chest is essentially dark gray. In good light that gray sometimes has a slaty or bluish cast to it.
It is the darkest gray on the head and has the best defined and cleanest small white chin patch of any of the similar species.
The Western Kingbird has the white area similar to Cassin's (or slightly more extensive), but it is more blending with the paler gray throat and chest area.
In Couch's and Tropical Kingbirds the white extends further down onto the throat.

Bill fairly short.

The wing feathers typically have pale fringes.
The ground color of the wing is about the same color as the back or even slightly paler, but not decidedly darker than the back.
Overall effect of a decently patterned, relatively pale wing panel.
On Western Kingbird typically the wings are noticeably darker than the back and more solidly colored.

Back gray, never gets really greenish as often seen in Tropical.

Pale tips to the tail feathers, at least in fresh plumage.
Only Cassin's Kingbird has that. Western has a blacker tail and has white edges to the outer webs of the outer tail feathers.
But notice that any bird can show pale edges as well as pale tips if it is backlit.

The outer tail feathers' outer webs are in fact a paler gray on Cassin's Kingbird. Do not expect that Cassin's Kingbirds cannot have white fringes on the side of the tail, they often do show that.
The tail is substantially darker than the rest of the bird in pretty much all the kingbirds. Tropical Kingbird has a slightly browner or lighter colored tail.

VOCALIZATION
This is usually what gives away its presence.
A nasal, rather loud far crying "chipp-Ear".

Many of these flycatchers have dawn songs which are different from the vocalizations that you hear during the daytime.
One of the dawn songs of the Cassin's has been attributed to claims of Buff-colored Nightjars in Arizona. Nathan Pieplow has a webpage called Earbirding which Joe highly recommends. He has an article about this. He disagrees and says it is the Vermilion Flycatcher that is similar. David Sibley has some counterpoints. Links on Joe's class web page.

Western Kingbird

OCCURRENCE
The most common kingbird in CA.
An abundant breeding bird in the Great Basin, the Central Valley and in the foothill regions. Scarce to uncommon along the immediate coast. Do show up occasionally in SF or at Point Reyes but mostly tend to stick to the interior.
Usually arrive in March, not really before that.
Migrate during the daytime, like many species of kingbird. You may see flocks of birds moving through. In the breeding season they become territorial.
Large numbers migrate through the deserts each spring. The fall migration is a little bit more circumspect. No big flocks. They tend to leave early. Abandon the breeding grounds by mid-August. A lot of them are probably already out of the country in September. A few stragglers come through in September. Joe once saw a very late straggler near Stockton in November.
Absent from CA in the wintertime. There may be a record or two from southern CA, possibly one from northern CA. They winter in South America. Their occurrence in the wintertime, especially on Christmas Bird Counts, will raise eyebrows. Most claims of Western Kingbirds in the wintertime are based on misidentified Say's Phoebes. Those are widespread and relatively common in the wintertime and have a kingbird-like aspect to them. They are larger than the other phoebes and they have color underneath, orangey or almost butterscotch, not really yellow, but the light can play tricks on you. They have a black tail which they tend to pump, unlike kingbirds.

FIELD MARKS
Head and breast a paler gray than on Cassin's.
Mask stands out more than it would on a Cassin's.
Gray extending far down the breast.
The distribution of white on the chin and malar is similar to Cassins, but it tends to blend more with the pale gray, not as contrasting as on Cassin's.

The outer web of the outermost tailfeather is white. Seeing the white in a kingbird is much harder than it is in a junco or a longspur or a meadowlark where the whole outer

tail feathers are all white. The Western Kingbird has to be in flight and has to be flying away from you. You will not see the white on the folded tail from above. You will see it on the folded tail from below. Typically the kingbirds have the outer tail feathers (R6) folded inside the nextmost tail feathers (R5). The consequence is that you see this white line with black outwards.
On a backlit bird you can easily imagine white tips to the tail feathers, even though it is just translucence.
When the tail is spread it can look a little bit like it is forked.
The forked tail is supposed to be a field mark for the Tropical or the Couch's, but it can be caused buy a number of things if individual feathers are overlying each other, it needs to be assessed with a certain amount of care.

The wings are slightly blacker and darker than the back. They contrast to the pale gray back and are much more solid in appearance than on Cassin's, just a little bit of fringing is outlining the feathers.

A picture of fledglings:
Short tail, quite pale yellow underparts, fairly dark wings with nice white fringes to the tertials only, contrasting with a very pale gray back and crown.

VOCALIZATION
A high pitched twitter.
(Usually does not attract Joe's attention, he usually locates Western Kingbirds by simply seeing them, Cassin's by hearing them first and then tracking them down.)

Couch's Kingbird

Was considered to be a race of the Tropical Kingbird for many years.
Tropical overlaps Couch's from southern Texas down the east coast of Mexico.

OCCURRENCE
Breeds in southern Texas and winters in extreme southern Texas and along the east coast of Mexico. It occurs down as far as Yucatan but not much further.
First and only CA record: One found on a CBC in Orange County and originally reported as a Tropical. When somebody went there to see it, it gave the loud peck note of Couch's. Joe went to see it, account on his website.

FIELD MARKS
Really, really similar to the Tropical Kingbird.
Both have quite a bit more white on the throat than either Western or Cassin's.
Both have yellow extending much higher up onto the chest. It mixes with a wash of gray across the chest. The combination of a slight bluish cast to the gray and the yellow pigment often produces a greenish band across the chest.
Couch's has a thicker, more massive base to the bill. Tropical has a longer bill with a thinner, weaker base to it, which contributes to it looking longer.
Greener on the back than Tropical, but how well you see this depends on light conditions.
Tail brownish gray, not contrastingly black. Notched at the tip.

VOCALIZATION
Completely different from Tropical, which is probably what prevents them from hybridizing. Vocalizations are often key features in species recognition and mate recognition. Vocalizations in flycatchers are innate, not learned.
Typically a fairly loud single note, a loud "pik", almost like a Downy Woodpecker.
For confirmation of a CA record you preferably record it.

Tropical Kingbird

OCCURRENCE
Tropical overlaps Couch's from extreme southern Texas down the east coast of Mexico.
In addition there is a population in the far west, a different subspecies which breeds as far north as Arizona. It occurs primarily in lowlands. There is a golf course near Sonoya Creek where small numbers of Tropical Kingbirds nest, one of the very few places where they breed in the US.
As you proceed south through Middle America, Tropical Kingbirds are abundant. All through South America they are very common and continuing to increase. The reason is that they are birds of open country and are very fond of cattle. As forests continue to be destroyed, Tropical Kingbirds move in. As ranching continues on open grassland areas, Tropical Kingbirds continue to move in.
Occur regularly in small numbers in the winter in southern CA.
If you find a kingbird in the wintertime in northern CA, it is much more likely to be a Tropical Kingbird than it is to be a Western. If it is along the coast it is also far more likely to be a Tropical than a Cassin's. Kingbirds seen along our coast from mid-October on are much more likely to be Tropical than anything else. In Panoche Valley it probably is a Cassin's.
It was just in the 1950s when the first Tropical Kingbirds noted in CA. They showed up at Point Lobos in Monterey County. We now know a little bit more about the pattern of these birds.
There have been multiple records for Lake Merced in SF, all in the winter.

FIELD MARKS
Before Couch's was split from Tropical, the field guides showed pictures of Couch's as Tropical. There was only one species and you were most likely to see it in southern Texas.

Big long bill.
Tropical and Couch's have bigger bills than either Western or Cassin's. Cassin's has the smallest.
A lot of pale fringing on the wings, seems to be true pretty much year round.
Wings somewhat similar to Cassin's, they do not contrast as darker than the back. Can be confused with Cassin's.
Head pale gray with a darker mask through the eye.
The whole throat is white and contrasts with the chest.
More extensive yellow underparts than Western or Cassin's. On Western or Cassin's the breast is gray and just the belly yellow. On these birds the entire underparts are yellow all the way up through the breast. In addition to yellow there is a gray wash across the chest. It looks kind of dingy olive gray or sometimes green. Often looks grayer from the side; from the front, especially in sunlight, greenish.

VOCALIZATION
High, thin trill. Tititititititi. Never a loud single high note as Couch's.