Notes based on Joe Morlan's Ornithology class lecture September 22nd, 2010.
Joe Morlan is not responsible for these notes, any errors or omissions in them are mine.

Angie found a **Chestnut-sided Warbler** at the south end of Lake Merced on Saturday: It did not have any chestnut color on it. Joe and Robbie saw another one at the same place on Monday which did have a narrow streak of chestnut on both sides, a little bit more than is usual on fall birds. Most fall Chestnut-sided Warblers either have just a touch of chestnut or none at all. In the fall it is hard to say if the birds with chestnut on their sides are adult females or immature males. We do know that most of the vagrant eastern warblers that get to the coast of CA are immatures. Assuming they were immature, the Monday bird was probably an immature male. The one without the chestnut could be either one.
There was no Chestnut-sided Warbler seen there on Sunday. The Monday bird stayed a couple of days.
It is an eastern species that occurs as a rare vagrant to the coast of CA and also to the desert oases. It is weird that two birds show up in the same place.
The immatures that we see in the fall are usually just lime-green on the back with yellow wing bars, very plain gray underparts and a gray face with a white circular eye ring. They frequently cock their tails in the air and they have white tail spots, a characteristic of the genus *Dendroica*.

The **peak arrival time** of the Chestnut-sided Warbler on the Farallon Islands is predictable. Compare the distance from the center of the Chestnut-sided Warbler's breeding range to Long Point Observatory, where they band a lot of them, with the distance between the center of the birds' distribution and the Farallon Islands. It is a longer distance to the Farallones, it takes them longer. The peak arrival time in CA it is the last week of September, at Long Point it is earlier in September.

A **Blackburnian Warbler** has seen in the flowering eucalyptus at Vista Grande Canal last week. Vista Grande Canal is the most overnamed place in the world, a ditch that runs along the edge of the Olympic Golf Club across from Lake Merced.

There is a trail that runs under the willows to the north of the penguin statue. It is usually overgrown but had been cleared out. There Joe found a **Northern Waterthrush**.

There were also quite a few **Western Tanagers** attracted by the Myoporum berries in the area. Quite a few **Yellow Warblers** were in the area, too.

Vagrant warblers that show up at the coast in the fall are unlikely to continue migrating if there is a **wet marine layer**, a lot of fog and drizzle. These are also the conditions under which you are most likely to get them in the first place. These birds migrate at night, if you have clear weather and they see the stars they are much more likely to move on.
Birds that show up in the spring as vagrants tend to stay shorter times than those in the fall because they are more in a hurry to try to find a place to breed.

One of the hypotheses how birds like the Chestnut-sided Warbler end up in CA is something called **mirror-image-misorientation**. Birds breeding in NA that winter in South America have a migration route that takes them on a south-easterly path. If they have right-left (west-east) dyslexia, they may be migrating to the west and south instead. There is some evidence to support that these birds will continue in a southwesterly direction. These are nocturnal migrants. What a

nocturnal migrant does, especially a young bird that has never done it before, is to continue to fly along a trajectory that is inherited. The bird has encoded in its brain to fly in this direction at this time of year based on length of day and where the sun is setting, When they get out over the ocean and it starts to become daylight (they don't migrate during the daytime), they turn around and look for a place to land and to tank up. Turning around 180° to find land is called **reverse migration**. It happens all the time in all birds. By going on a reverse migration course you are guaranteed to reach land. You come back. You are not happy because it is daytime. You really don't want to be eaten by any hawk. You see land. You fly down to the land and you land in the first thing that looks like a tree. A lot of places along the outer coast in the east have large numbers of migrating warblers in the fall doing exactly that. They are not heading for the coast, the coast is not where they want to be. They want to be in South America, but they decided they are not going to make it without stopping over and getting tanked up. These places like Cape May, Long Point, Cape Cod, are called migrant traps. The same thing happens when they get to the west coast instead. They first point to land they can see here is probably the Farallon Islands, Point Reyes. Birdwatchers know this and they spend a lot of time at Point Reyes looking for these vagrants.

Some of these birds may stop migrating and may **overwinter**, especially if they arrive very late in the season. We have had some overwintering Chestnut-sided Warblers.
We have had a number of overwintering Northern Waterthrushes.
Some of the birds like the Northern Waterthrush and maybe the Black-and-White Warbler and the American Redstart may actually not be true vagrants. They may just be rare migrants, birds that migrate along a route that is in fact a small part of their normal migration pattern. Those birds have a better chance of long-term survival.

Migration can be learned or innate, depending on the species. Geese learn to migrate. At least some song birds have their migration pattern imprinted genetically. Indigo Bunting and certain European species have been tested. There are certain birds that may not necessarily fit that pattern, like the Dickcissel. Birds whose migratory instincts appear to be erratic, birds that don't winter in the same place two years in a row, that don't breed in the same place, that are constantly moving around, perhaps more following food sources. Certain species are much more predictable than others, but most species are relatively predictable.

Vaux's Swifts roost in elevator shafts and chimneys in urban or suburban areas. They are known to roost by the thousands in abandoned urban chimneys along their migratory path. There are roostsites in many places along the coast, at some of them they even have festivals in September. Steve and Carol watched the Vaux's Swifts flying in at their roost site at McNear Brickyard in San Rafael. Started coming in at 6, had stopped at 7, it's about a half hour deal.
Somebody posted a video clip http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6wGNnhPlV8
Take Second Street to the east towards the bay, pass the yacht club until you see these three tall chimneys. Just park in front of the gate.

Fork-tailed Flycatcher

OCCURRENCE

A South American species.

A good number of NA records in the east (which is straight north of South America) and very, very few in the west.

The nominate subspecies of the Fork-tailed Flycatcher is an austral migrant, it breeds in southern South America in its summer, the austral summer (when we have winter) and migrates north into the Amazon Basin and northern South America in its winter (when we have summer). A reverse kind of situation from the NA birds.

Austral migration is relatively uncommon. There is not a lot of room for many species to breed in temperate in South America. The continent is sort of funneling into a temperate climate from the tropics which have a lot of room.

There are three other subspecies. Two of them are non-migratory.

One, *monachus*, breeds as far north as southern Mexico and is partly migratory, the northernmost birds migrate somewhat south . Some question as to which subspecies are being seen in Texas, but most of the records are believed to be nominate *savana*.

Most NA records of Fork-tailed Flycatcher are from the Northeast in the fall. It is believed that the occurrence in the fall is a consequence of reverse migration A lot of them are young birds that have made a navigational error. Instead of migrating south to its southern South American breeding grounds in what is our fall, it goes in the wrong direction.

Spring and summer records in NA are probably of birds that are overshooting their wintering grounds in extreme northern South America on their northward fall migration.

There are only two CA records:

Bridgehaven, Sonoma County, near the mouth of the Russian River, 4-8 Sept 1992.

In September 2005, a farmer in Sutter County who knew something abut birds photographed one. A month later the photos reached the birding community. The record was eventually accepted.

Sibley's green dot in southern CA is based on a specimen that was allegedly taken in Santa Monica in 1883. The specimen was destroyed and Grinnell questioned the report.

Fork-tailed Flycatchers get reported relatively often. When the observers are asked what the bird looked like, they say: dark cap, gray back, really long tail. Bill? Short and pink. Size? Like a House Finch. These are Pin-tailed Whydahs, common cage birds from Africa that sometimes escape.

FIELD MARKS

As the birds fly about, the tail feathers are not stiff but ripple like ribbons.

(Compare to Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, which has much stiffer tail feathers. These birds are not each other's closest relatives.)

When the birds are perched, frequently the sides of the tail connect together so you don't see the fork

Basically an Eastern Kingbird with a long tail. In fact, some of the immature birds that are seen in the East may be overlooked because they look so much like an Eastern kingbird. Young birds do not have quite as long a tail.

Black cap well defined from the white throat.

Gray back.

Gleaming white underparts.

Eastern Kingbird

OCCURRENCE

The one species of kingbird which is widespread throughout much of the eastern US. It also occurs fairly far to the west, it breeds all the way into Oregon, Washington and British Columbia. Also occurs as a rare breeder in extreme northern CA, has nested in Siskiyou County and possibly Modoc and Lassen counties as well.

It is a long distance migrant with virtually the entire population wintering in the western Amazon Basin in South America. Like most species of kingbirds they migrate during the daytime when large flocks may be seen. Joe has encountered flocks of them in Texas, exhausted after trying to fight cold fronts over the gulf, sitting on the ground trying to find food.

Most of the CA records are from the late spring and early summer. They occur as much in the desert oases as they do along the immediate coast. A decidedly rare vagrant to CA in the fall. One was seen in SF in August 2008. At least one is right now in Santa Barbara. Fall birds most often show up early, in early September, while the peak of the vagrant migration season is at the end of September. They do not remain into the late fall or through the winter. There are probably no valid winter records in NA.

They generally do not hang around, especially the ones that show up in June. A couple of reasons. Most of the warblers out at Pt Reyes are in the trees. There are just acres and acres of pasture land and the only trees are these clumps of cypresses that are planted as windbreaks for the different ranches and that's where the birds go. The habitat of the Eastern Kingbird is open country with fence lines. That is everywhere at Pt Reyes, there is nothing that keeps them in one particular spot. They move all over the place and tend not to stick around in one spot. In the fall, if there is a pond or a water attraction with flying insects, that may keep them around a little bit longer.

FIELD MARKS

The smallest of all of the kingbirds.
Black cap strongly contrasting.
May have some gray across the chest.
Gray on the back.
White tip to the tail. Wear, viewing angle and light conditions are critical as to how well you will be able to see this mark. It is often more easily seen from the back.
Narrow white tertial fringes which can become worn.
In fresh plumage faint wing bars formed by buff tips to the wing coverts.

The juvenal plumage lasts through November, the birds migrate in it. Not a huge difference, more likely to have gray across the breast, buff tips to the wing coverts and some of the secondaries.

Can sometimes be confused with Eastern Phoebes, which are gray above, white below and have a white face. But the face of an Eastern Phoebe is more blended and extends a little further down onto the cheeks. The phoebe lacks the white band on the tip of the tail. The tail is longer and has a rounded tip on the phoebe. The phoebe also acts like a phoebe, pumping its tail up and down.

There is a picture on Joe's website of what looks like an Eastern Kingbird with a lot of yellow on the underparts, maybe a hybrid with a Western Kingbird.

VOCALIZATIONS

Call very scratchy, high-pitched and rising slightly. Harsh and rapid.

Loggerhead Kingbird

Included in earlier editions of the Nat Geo but out of the fifth edition.

OCCURRENCE

Found on the Bahamas. There were a number of claims from Florida. The one bird that was photographed was identified by James Bond as a Giant Kingbird, which is endemic to Cuba. (James Bond was the author of the field guide Birds of the West Indies. Fleming was a birdwatcher and owned a copy of the book. He borrowed the author's name for the character.) Most people did not think the bird on the photo was identifiable. The Florida committee did a complete review of Loggerhead Kingbird records and decided that none of them was adequate. After that the AOU removed the Loggerhead Kingbird from the list in 2002 and the ABA in 2003.

In 2007 a Loggerhead Kingbird showed up in Florida and was well photographed and seen by hundreds of observers.

FIELD MARKS

Similar to Eastern Kingbird in a lot of ways.
White underneath, dark cap, pale tips to the tail feathers.
The bill is much thicker than in an Eastern Kingbird.
The back has an olive wash and contrasts from the black cap.
Undulating flight with noisy flaps unlike other kingbirds.

Gray Kingbird

OCCURRENCE

A Caribbean species which ranges into Florida, particularly common in the Florida Keys.
In Florida in the summer, withdraws to the Caribbean islands during the winter season.
Different subspecies on different islands, some more migratory than others, they differ only slightly.
In Florida they often come out in the evening and perch along the wires where they catch insects from the street lights. In the yellow street lights they look like Tropical Kingbirds.
There are records from Texas.
It has apparently occurred as a vagrant as far north as the Maritime Provinces.
There is an old specimen (19th century) from British Columbia which has been questioned. People used to buy birds from bird dealers for their private collections and the providence of a lot of the specimens was fabricated.
No CA records.

FIELD MARKS

Big bill.
Notched tail.
All white underneath.
Gray on the back.
Pale patterning on the wing coverts as on Tropical Kingbird.
Shape of the bird identical to that of a Tropical Kingbird.
But no yellow on the underparts, no green on the back, a Tropical Kingbird with all yellow pigment removed.
Young birds may be tinged slightly with brown particularly on the wing coverts.

Thick-billed Kingbird

OCCURRENCE
Found in western Mexico.
In NA in Patagonia in southeastern Arizona, Guadalupe Canyon in New Mexico.
It is a lowland bird breeding primarily in sycamores along water courses.
Typically the bird perches at the top of a tall sycamore and can be detected by its call.
Casual fall and winter vagrant to CA, most often along the southern coast.
Mc Laren Park in SF 27 Oct -19 Dec 1974, the same winter one showed up in British Columbia, there was a movement of Thick-billed Kingbirds.
Half Moon Bay, found on the 1998 CBC, came back for another two winters (Dec - March).

Tropical and Thick-billed kingbirds are probably able to survive the winters here because of their thick bills, they are not so dependent on flying insects, can forage on the ground and eat things like grasshoppers.

FIELD MARKS
A robust kingbird.
Very large bill, similar to Tropical.
White throat.
Much darker above than Tropical. Dark brown cap which a Tropical does not have. Back also dark brown.
In the breeding season relatively pale underneath with a pale yellow wash throughout the lower belly.
In the wintertime both adults and immature birds are extensively yellow on the underparts extending up onto the chest. This is shown too pale in Sibley.

VOCALIZATIONS
Call rising prrr-weet which carries a long distance and does attract your attention.
Very distinctive and quite different from anything given by Tropical or Cassin's.