Notes based on Joe Morlan's Ornithology class lecture October 20th, 2010.
Joe Morlan is not responsible for these notes, any errors or omissions in them are mine.

William Leon Dawson's "Birds of California" from 1923 is the poet's ornithology.
A detailed account from 1939 of all the different editions is here:
http://elibrary.unm.edu/sora/Condor/files/issues/v041n06/p0231-p0243.pdf
Dawson had field experience and knew all of those birds. He was an egg collector and knew a lot about their nesting. A biography is here:
http://elibrary.unm.edu/sora/Condor/files/issues/v015n02/p0062-p0069.pdf
Many of the plates were done by **Major Allan Brooks**. Brooks was an ornithologist of a considerable talent and also a very accomplished artist.
He also illustrated Ralph Hoffmann's "Birds of the Pacific States". Hoffmann is one of the first modern field guides to the birds that ever was published. Hoffmann was a master of conciseness, he had a much more modern style. A contemporary review is here:
http://elibrary.unm.edu/sora/Auk/v044n03/p0444-p0445.pdf
Phil Unitt's "Birds of San Diego County" contains art work by Allan Brooks. It is arguably the finest county bird book in modern times. It is based mostly on atlas data and has maps for all of the birds. It includes data from the breeding season and the non-breeding season. It also has color photographs of pretty much every bird. It is available online as a set of kmz files that plug into Google Earth. Here are instructions:
http://www.sdnhm.org/ge_files/birdatlasguide.pdf

This is the peak time for **Palm Warblers** to occur along our coast. It is one of the most regular vagrants to CA. It does seem like this might be a pretty good year. There are several possible explanations. One is a good nesting season: lots of young Palm Warblers are produced. Another thing that affects the numbers we see here are local weather conditions. Certain conditions tend to ground migrants along the immediate coast, including calm winds or light southerly winds and a high marine layer that is stable for a period of days. If it's clear and blustery the birds are less likely to land and be seen by birders.

Some of us may remember the good old days when we saw **Cape May Warblers** and **Bay-breasted Warblers**. Those species are specialists on the **Spruce Bud Worm** which ravages timber forests in Canada and erupts regularly every few years on a cycle. There are apparently some new chemical treatments, they are trying to eradicate the Spruce Bud Worm. That is having a big impact on the numbers of Bay-breasted Warblers and Cape May Warblers.

The **Evening Grosbeak** is an eruptive species. It has been quite a few years since we've had an eruption. This year they are being reported throughout CA, not just in the mountains but also in the lowlands. They have been reported at Pt Reyes, in San Mateo County and flyover flocks are reported in SF reported by people who know the call. There are even small numbers of them in southern CA. It remains to be seen how this eruption will play out. Sometimes they start out strong and then they fizzle, other times flocks of birds will settle in for the winter. You think of them as mountain birds and you expect them to be in conifers, but Joe often sees them in broad leaf trees like alders, where they forage on alder buds. Also eruptive in the east.

Parrots are very social. Some species are famous for duetting. There are even species in which there is a single song, part of which is sung by the male and part of which is sung by the female, they fill in each other.

Point Reyes class field trip last weekend. Three new species added to the cumulative list.
Great Egret: not seen at any of the stops, but there were plenty of them out in the farm fields eating gophers and voles. There is a rodent outbreak this year at Pt Reyes, which also accounted for the large number of raptors seen.
Pigeon Guillemot: distant views of two birds in their rather cryptic looking winter plumage off the Fish Docks. That is a plumage we seldom see. The Pigeon Guillemot is normally seen here in the spring and summer in breeding plumage, by this time most of them are gone.
Chestnut-backed Chickadees: are actually there all the time, but in a place where Joe does not usually go, the former RCA station. There is a double row of cyprus trees that runs down a paved road just as you are approaching the outer point. It is a ranger station now. Some participants went there after lunch to look for reported White-tailed Kites. It is as far out at Pt Reyes as the Chestnut-backed Chickadee gets. They are non-migratory and would have to fly over some inhospitable open country with no trees to get to the other islands of trees out there.
Other birds of interest included **Lapland Longspurs** calling and flying around, **Barn Owls** and **Moorhens** at the meeting site, **Great Horned Owls** at the outer point. Good views of **Ferruginous Hawk**, including one that flew right over. **Great photos** from the trip by Peter Seubert are on Joe's website at
http://fog.ccsf.cc.ca.us/~jmorlan/PtReyesPhotos10Oct10Seubert.htm

Western Field Ornithologists (WFO) is an organization joining the talents of amateurs and professionals to advance field ornithology throughout the West. They publish the journal Western Birds.
Joe was at the WFO conference in Palm Desert last week. Photos from the conference are on the WFO website: http://www.westernfieldornithologists.org/gallery/thumbnails.php?album=12

There is **a great documentary** on the Salton Sea, narrated by John Waters: **Plagues & Pleasures on the Salton Sea**. It is hysterical. They talk a little bit about the history of the Salton Sea. They also focus on the people that live there and there is a little bit about the natural history. It's quite a quirky documentary.

Good birding areas in northeastern CA with good chances of seeing Northern Shrike:
The **Honey Lake area** frequently gets Northern Shrike on the Christmas Bird Count.
Many birdwatchers like to make a trip to the **Tule Lake Basin and Klamath National Wildlife Refuge areas** in northern Siskiyou County after the hunting season. In addition of a good chance to see a Northen Shrike you have the opportunity to see fifty Bald Eagles, lots and lots of Rough-legged Hawks, Prairie Falcons. You might get lucky and see a Gyrfalcon. Thousands of Snow Geese. A very exciting trip to do in the wintertime. Some of the places are actually better during hunting season, because they have loop roads for the public where there is no hunting allowed. Guess where all the birds are!

Shrikes

Three species in NA.
All have the bill hooked at the tip.
It is often said that these birds are songbirds that are convergent on being raptors.
Indeed their behavior is raptor-like.

Their flight is quite similar to that of a Pygmy Owl. Low, swooping with very rapid wing beats. They all have a larder. They kill insects or small rodents or birds and impale them on the thorns of for example a Blackberry bush or on the barbs of a barb wire. This behavior has given them a reputation for particular bloodthirstiness. The reason they have these larders is to attract females. Males are showing that they are good providers if they have a large larder.
All shrikes set up territories in both the winter and in the summer.
Both males and females will set up their own territories separate from each other in the wintertime. In the breeding season they will have a territory as a pair. Independent territories are routine for all of these shrikes. They are never seen in flocks.
There are many different species of shrikes in Europe, Asia and Africa. We have only two species here. The Northern Shrike is the hardiest one. It probably evolved in Asia and then came across the Beringian land bridge into northern Canada. It did not have to compete with other shrikes, so it spread and adapted fairly well. The Loggerhead Shrike, which is endemic to North America, is probably an offshoot from it. The glaciers ten to twelve thousand years ago could have fragmented the population and the Loggerhead Shrike could evolve in geographic isolation.

Brown Shrike

OCCURRENCE
An Asian species. Has been recorded three times in CA, twice on the Farallon Islands and once in Olema in Marin County. Also once in Nova Scotia and a handful of records from Alaska.
The Olema bird has an interesting history. It was first found by visiting birders in late November 1986 and correctly identified. That information did not reach the California birding community for a long time. It was found by Californian birders at the CBC and identified as a Northern Shrike, because unlike the gray and black Loggerhead Shrike, the Northern Shrike often retains a brownish plumage through the entire first winter.
The only NA specimen of Brown Shrike had been collected in the fall on Shemya Island, Alaska, and was assigned to the subspecies *lucionensis* of Korea and northern China. The nominate subspecies *cristatus* breeds in the Russian Far East. *Cristatus* migrates all the way down to the Malaysian peninsula, a subspecies far more likely to reach NA. Adult *lucionensis* has a gray head rather than a brown head, it is in general a paler, less brown colored bird. The NA specimen was an immature bird. It has been found that immatures are not identifiable to subspecies. The Olema bird stayed to April 1987 and molted into an adult *cristatus* with a rusty brown crown.

There is a suite of other shrikes found in the Old World. Species like Tiger Shrike, Isabelline Shrike and several other species that need to be considered whenever a Brown Shrike is encountered. None of those have reached NA yet.

FIELD MARKS
The total lack of any white in the wings distinguishes it from both Northern and Loggerhead shrikes which have big white patches in the wings and also white in the tail. Decidedly smaller than Loggerhead or Northern.

Overall brown coloration.
A relatively little mask, quite faint in juvenals.
A little pale patch on the lower mandible.
Faint barring in juvenals.

Loggerhead Shrike

OCCURRENCE
The most common Shrike in most of NA.
Partly migratory. Ranges south of the breeding range of the Northern Shrike.
Declining on the periphery of its range.
Has almost disappeared from most of the eastern US although it is still common in Florida, the Gulf States and in Texas.
In CA it used to be reasonably common throughout the Bay Area. It is now pretty much restricted to the Central Valley and foothill regions. In the interior of southern CA it is quite common.
In general found in open areas.
Tends to perch on fencelines and tends to perch fairly low.
They do not get into higher elevations. Any shrike you see in the Sierra in the wintertime will be a Northern Shrike.

FIELD MARKS
A mockingbird-sized gray bird.
Black mask. The black usually extends over the forehead, the nasal tufts are black.
The eye is encased in the black mask.
Stubby bill which always is all black.
There are several subspecies. They vary in the amount of white that they show on the rump (white to dark gray) and the color of the underparts. Some of them are quite gray on the underparts, others are quite white.
All have white patches in the wings. In many cases you will be able to see those patches on the folded wing at the base of the primaries.
Quite a lot of white in the corners of the tail.

Juvenal
Tends not to be brown. A gray bird with some barring.
You see that when the young are out of the nest in summer or early fall. There are no Northern Shrikes in CA then.

The San Clemente Island subspecies

Considered to be endangered.
A great deal of money has been available to researchers on San Clemente Island as part of the recovery plan.
The bird biologists out there are also finding other unexpected species like Bluethroat and Stonechat, similar to the situation on the Farallon Islands.
There are still shrikes on San Clemente Island. The birds that are there now look very little like the type specimen of the San Clemente Island Loggerhead Shrike, which has extensive black on the forehead and looks like quite a different bird. They look much more like mainland Loggerhead Shrikes. The birds that are on San Clemente Island now are likely intergrades, probably with more genes from the mainland population than from the original island population.
Here is a paper by Michael Patten and Kurt Campbell:
http://www.biosurvey.ou.edu/patten/DiversDistrib2000.pdf

Northern Shrike

OCCURRENCE

Also found in Eurasia. The British name is **Great Grey Shrike**.
There is a range connection through the Aleutian Islands to the Russian Far East. From there it extends across Asia into northern Europe. There are also populations in some of the high deserts of Mongolia and China as well as in southern Europe and in northern Africa. There are a number of different subspecies.
Breeds in NA from Alaska across Canada into the Maritime Provinces. The breeding range does not overlap the Loggerhead Shrike.
Winters in southern Canada and the northern tier of the US.
Tends to prefer colder climates. The shrike you are most likely to see if there is snow on the ground and the one that gets into higher elevations.
Winter visitor to CA. The earliest are usually here by late October/November. Most of the records are in mid-winter. About 25% of the Northern Shrikes in CA in the winter are adults.
In northeastern CA in the wintertime they are about equally common or uncommon as the Loggerhead Shrike.
Tends to perch on the tops of trees, often very high. Rarely perches on wires.
American Kestrels are known to be able to share a nesting territory with a Loggerhead Shrike but not with a Northern Shrike.

FIELD MARKS

Usually a rather rangy looking bird with a longer tail than Loggerhead, a more expressive tail that they frequently pump up and down when they land.
They tend to sit more horizontally.
Adults distinguishable from Loggerhead Shrike in subtle ways.
Little bits of gray barring or scaling on the entire underparts.
The base of the lower mandible is normally pale, visible at close range in good light.
The bill is longer than in Loggerhead Shrike, but can be foreshortened by perspective if the bird is facing towards you.
Stronger hook on the bill than in Loggerhead.
Mask narrower, the eye tends to extend above the mask.
The mask does not extend across the forehead, but that can be very difficult to see.
Rump always white.

Juvenal

Many Northern Shrikes will retain the juvenal plumage through much of the first winter.
Brown or grayish with lots of barring on the underparts.
According to Nat Geo they are really brown in the early fall but then by spring those same birds are grayer.
Sibley's view is that there are two color morphs. Joe does not know which is correct.
Mask less evident. Some Northern Shrikes have very little in the way of a mask at all, especially the young ones.