

The **SKIMMER**



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SDFO NEWS

Monthly Meeting

Tuesday, April 17. at 6:00 p.m. *Note the changed time.*

SDFO will be meeting at a new location starting with the April 17 gathering. Note that our meeting location is on a month-to-month basis, so watch for any changes that will be posted on SDBirds and in the *eSkimmer*. The meeting room is in the San Diego Foundation Building, 2508 Historic Decatur Road, 1st floor Hoffman room. This building is across the street and south of our old meeting location at Liberty Station.



Going south on Rosecrans St. (in the Midway area of town), turn left on Roosevelt Rd. into Liberty Station and then left again on Decatur. Park in the first parking lot, or on the street.

SDFO NEWS

Monthly Meeting (cont.)

Program: Frank Todd will speak on “East Antarctica and Beyond.”



Frank S. Todd was born and raised in Panama, where he commenced his lifelong passion with tropical wildlife. While curator of birds at the Los Angeles Zoo, he established one of the finest bird collections in the world, including the only California Condor at the time. Frank left the zoo in 1972 to become corporate vice-president of aviculture and research at Sea World, Inc. Internationally known for his extensive work with waterfowl, Frank put together one of the most comprehensive exotic duck, goose and swan collections in San Diego. Frank was also responsible for numerous first captive breedings, including the initial toucan species, as well as the Harpy Eagle and Emperor Penguin.

A biologist and recognized authority on penguins, Frank has been working in Antarctica and the sub-Antarctic every year since 1972. At the request of the National Science Foundation he established a breeding colony of Adelie and Emperor Penguins in San Diego to facilitate long-term, year-round research. Frank also spent many seasons in the Arctic working on waterfowl and alcids (puffins and auks, etc.); an important component of the Penguin Encounters was a major alcid complex.

The author of seven books and over 100 technical and popular articles, Frank is also a noted wildlife photographer. Currently the executive director of EcoCepts International, Frank resides in San Diego, California, but travels the world over as a zoological consultant.

Next month's meeting: Probably Tuesday, May 15, same time, same place, but check the newsletter or the SDFO website in case the meeting is moved. Program to be announced.

SAN DIEGO COUNTY BIRD OBSERVATIONS MARCH 2012

Compiled by Guy McCaskie

The Eurasian Wigeon in the San Diego River Flood Control Channel was last seen 1 Mar (JP), and another at Cottonwood Golf Course in Jamacha 18 Mar (KK) was lingering a little later than expected. A female Black Scoter, rare in San Diego County, was with Surf Scoters on south San Diego Bay 21-31 Mar (BM, PEL).

Noteworthy “pelagics” included a Manx Shearwater photographed two miles off Mission Beach 4 Mar (JSF)—only the 5th documented occurring in San Diego County waters. A Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel at Pt. La Jolla in La Jolla 18 Mar (SW) remained in view for an extended period of time and provides one of only a few records for the County. An immature Brown Booby well photographed 12 miles west of Pt. Loma 4 Mar (TJ), one at the Tijuana River mouth 6 Mar (JP) and two together off the pier in Imperial Beach 16 Mar (BM) all probably originated from the nesting colony on Los Coronados Islands. Unprecedented numbers of Common Murres were along the coast, as indicated by 500-1000 on the water off Beacons Beach in Leucadia 5 Mar (SB) and 2176 counted flying past Pt. La Jolla in just over two hours on 7 Mar (SW); more than the expected number of Xantus’s Murrelets were in the offshore waters through March as illustrated by 34 off San Diego 4 Mar (PEL) and 48 there 30 Mar (DP), along with well-above-average numbers of Rhinoceros Auklets as suggested by 150-175 at Pt. La Jolla 24 Mar (SW) and 170 off San Diego 30 Mar (PEL).

The Reddish Egret at the San Diego River Flood Control Channel remained through 20 Mar (PEL), and at least three

more continued on south San Diego Bay through the end of the month (RTP)—coastal San Diego and Orange Counties now appear to be within the regular winter range of this species. Two pairs of Yellow-crowned Night-Herons were attending nests at the Imperial Beach Sports Park as of 31 Mar (GMcC). Three Harris’s Hawks remain in Jacumba through March (EGK)—probably the pair that successfully fledged one young last summer along with that young. An impressive 4147 Swainson’s Hawks passed through Borrego Springs in March (HC).

The Pacific Golden-Plover at the Tijuana River mouth since 14 Aug was still present 10 Mar (MS), and the other at the San Dieguito River mouth/Penasquitos Lagoon since 20 Dec remained through March (SES). Thirty-two Red-necked Phalaropes, with some in bright breeding plumage, off San Diego 30 Mar (DP) were early spring migrants. Two Lesser Black-backed Gulls, a second-cycle bird and an adult, were found on s. San Diego Bay 21 Mar (MS), with the second-cycle bird remaining through 23 Mar, and the adult through 24 Mar—this now increases the number recorded in San Diego County to four. What may have been the same basic-plumaged Common Tern was photographed a couple of miles off Ocean Beach on 3 and 4 Mar (BW and TJ)—The bird undoubtedly wintered locally and provides one of a very few recent records for California at this time of the year.

Single Short-eared Owls at Fiesta Island in Mission Bay 9 Mar (GMcC) and at the Tijuana River Estuary 21 Mar (SBM) were probably the same birds seen at these locations in November and December. A

Lesser Nighthawk at Tierrasanta 21 Mar (JK) was right on time for the first of the spring migrants. About twelve Pinyon Jays were still present at Stonewall Mine in Cuyamaca Rancho State Park on 15 Mar (PM).

Amongst the Passerines, continuing wintering “rarities” included the Eastern Phoebe in extreme northwestern Rancho Santa Fe present through 21 Mar (JZ), with another at Dairy Mart Pond in the Tijuana River Valley 9 Mar (JP) possibly being the same bird present 28-29 Nov but not found thereafter. The Thick-billed Kingbird at the lower end of Poggi Canyon in Chula Vista was present through 31 Mar (BJS) and can be anticipated to stay into mid-April. The Pacific Wren at the Botanic Garden in Encinitas was last seen 12 Mar (SES), the American Redstart in Nestor since 14 Dec was still present 22 Mar (PEL) and the Palm Warbler at Westminster Park on Pt. Loma since 20 Nov continues through 28 Mar (JP), but it is difficult to categorize one at the south end of Seacoast Dr. in Imperial Beach on 17 Mar (JTS). The latest staying of the wintering Clay-colored Sparrows was the one near the Golden Hill section of Balboa Park, last seen 2 Mar (CC). The Hepatic Tanager at the Marston House in Balboa Park was last reported on 8 Mar (RC) and the other at the Sports Park in Imperial Beach appears to have disappeared after 1 Mar (BJS). Four known wintering Summer Tanagers were augmented by single males at Westminster Park 2-17 Mar (SS, TAB), at Rose Canyon in University City 7-9 Mar (GN) and at Glen Abby Cemetery in Bonita 10 Mar (JK), and an adult male Baltimore Oriole at the San Diego Zoo in Balboa Park 27-28 Mar (TRS, EGK) was believed to be the same one seen here 19 December.

A Black-and-white Warbler near the Bird and Butterfly Garden in the Tijuana River Valley 25-27 Mar (EGK, LM) likely wintered locally, as spring vagrants don't normally reach California much before early

May. A Hermit Warbler near the Old Globe Theater in Balboa Park 27 Mar (TRS) would be unbelievably early if a spring migrant so is best considered a bird that wintered undetected locally.

A Plumbeous Vireo along the San Diego River in Mission Valley 23 Mar (PEL), and another in Santee 24 Mar (JS), both likely wintered undetected at those locations, as late March would be exceptional for a spring migrant. It would be easy to “pigeonhole” the Cassin's Vireo in the dense riparian near the Bird and Butterfly Garden 25-27 Mar (EGK, LM) as a spring migrant, but two were found nearby in December 2011 (two at Dairy Mart Pond on the day of the San Diego CBC), the species is known occasionally to winter, and spring migrants are not normally expected until early April. Single Nashville Warblers in Imperial Beach 21 Mar (SY) and Nestor 22 Mar (PEL) were other than brightly colored adult males, so are believed to have wintered undetected in those neighborhoods, but one in Balboa Park 30 Mar (MJE) was an obvious brightly-colored spring arrival. Since Black-chinned Sparrow has wintered in this County (Unitt 2004), it is difficult to determine if an adult male at Palm Canyon in Anza-Borrego Desert State Park on 7 Mar (SES) was an exceptionally early spring migrant or wintering locally, but singing birds along Kitchen Creek Road 25 Mar (MS) were obvious recent arrivals. With the number of Hooded Orioles known wintering around San Diego, it is difficult to be sure that an adult male in Balboa Park on the exceptionally early date of 25 Feb (EGK) was a spring arrival, but we can be much more comfortable with an adult male in Oceanside on the more typical arrival date of 9 Mar (PT)

Obvious spring migrants and local summer visitors that arrived in March included exceptionally early Pacific-slope Flycatchers in Balboa Park 3 Mar (PU) and Presidio Park 4 Mar (JK); single Ash-throated

Flycatchers at Mission Trails Regional Park and Vallecito 31 Mar (EGK, JK); a Western Kingbird at Borrego Springs on the early date of 5 Mar (HC); a presumed migrant Bell's Vireo in Coronado 16 Mar (BM), with the first on breeding territories at Dairy Mart Pond 25 Mar (EGK); two singing Gray Vireos along Kitchen Creek Road in the Laguna Mountains on 25 Mar (MS); a Purple Martin over Julian 31 Mar (JK); a singing Lucy's Warbler at the Borrego Sink 27 Mar (BT); a Black-throated Gray Warbler in Jacumba 25 Mar (JK); a Wilson's Warbler in Tierrasanta 13 Mar (JK); a Black-headed Grosbeak in Tierrasanta 24 Mar (RTP); a Lazuli Bunting at Mission Trails Regional Park 28 Mar (ST); a Bullock's Oriole at Scripps Ranch 14 Mar (GG), and a Scott's Oriole at Lake Morena 21 Mar (EGK).

Listed observers: Thomas A. Blackman, Steve Brad, Hal Cohen, Cameron Cox, Ross Christie, Michael J. Evans, Jon S. Feenstra, Gary Grantham, Tom Johnson, Eric G. Kallen, Jay Keller, Kenny Kimbrough, Paul E. Lehman, Paul Marvin, Sara B. Mayers, Guy McCaskie, Leo Miller, Brennan Mulrooney, Gretchen Nell, Robert T. Patton, Jim Pawlick, Jim Pea, David Povey, Matt Sadowski, Susan E. Smith, Steve Sosensky, BJ Stacy, Justyn T. Stahl, Trent R. Stanley, Jeremiah Stock, Paula Theobald, Bob Theriault; Steve Tucker, Philip Unitt, Stan Walens, Bruce Webb, Susan Yamagata, Jim Zimmerman.

Literature Cited

Unitt, Philip. 2004. San Diego County Bird Atlas. *Proc. San Diego Soc. Nat. Hist.* 39. San Diego Nat. Hist. Mus., San Diego.

A POSSIBLE SPLIT OF XANTUS'S MURRELET

Tim P. Birt, Harry R. Carter, Darrell L. Whitworth, Anne McDonald, Scott H. Newman, Franklin Gress, Eduardo Palacios, Josh S. Koepke, and Vicki L. Friesen (2012). Rangewide Population Genetic Structure of Xantus's Murrelet (*Synthliboramphus hypoleucus*). *The Auk* 129: 44-55.

The authors have examined DNA from the two recognized subspecies of Xantus's Murrelet (*S. h. hypoleucus* and *S. h. scrippsi*) from breeding colonies in southern California and northwestern Baja California and found that they behave as good species; that is, they interbreed freely within their own group, but not at all with the other group. Both are also distinct from the closely-related Craveri's Murrelet (*S. craveri*).

SAN DIEGO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

President	Paul Lehman (858) 268-1937 lehman.paul@verizon.net
Vice-president	Tom Blackman (619) 222-2630 obeach@cox.net
Treasurer	Sara Mayers (619) 225-1217 mayerss@cox.net
Program Chair	Tom Blackman (619) 222-2630 obeach@cox.net
Membership Chair	BJ Stacey (619) 596-8133 bjjnsd@yahoo.com
Skimmer Publishing Editor	John Walters (619) 267-1821 john-walters@cox.net Herb Young (858) 622-0337 coulterpine@juno.com BJ Stacey

Your contributions to *The Skimmer* are appreciated. Submit articles and notices by the first of the month of publication by mail to John Walters, 5552 Horse Ridge Way, Bonita, CA 91902, or by e-mail to john-walters@cox.net

San Diego Field Ornithologists
c/o BJ Stacey
9407 Domer Rd.
Santee, CA 92071

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