



## **SDFO NEWS**

### **Monthly Meeting**

Tuesday, April 15, at 6:00 p.m., in the Hoffman Room of the San Diego Foundation Building, 2508 Historic Decatur Road. Going south on Rosecrans St. in the Midway area of town, turn left on Roosevelt Rd. into Liberty Station and proceed a couple of blocks to Decatur. Parking is available on the street or in the adjacent parking lots.

Program: “Genetic analyses reveal the number of species in the Clapper/King Rail complex.” By James Maley, Ph.D., Collections Manager, Moore Laboratory of Zoology, Occidental College, Los Angeles.

In the most recent American Ornithologists’ Union checklist, there is discussion of hybridization between Clapper and King rails in the eastern and southern United States, with a suggestion to merge the entire complex into one species. But genetic and detailed hybridization studies of the group have not been published until now. Taxonomy has always been difficult in this group given plumage variation, morphologically distinct allopatric populations, and uncertainty in the degree of hybridization between populations currently in contact. For example, King Rails of the eastern U.S. are bright rufous ventral-



Light-footed Clapper Rail at the Tijuana Estuary. Photo by Gary Nunn.

ly and breed in freshwater marshes, whereas Clapper Rails of the eastern U.S. are duller ventrally and breed in saltmarshes. Very similar allopatric birds of the southwestern US and northwestern Mexico are bright rufous ventrally and breed primarily in saltmarshes, making their classification into either species difficult. A phylogenetic study using mitochondrial and nuclear markers found discordance between genetic relationships and current classification. King Rails, as currently recognized, are paraphyletic with respect to Clapper Rails. Genetic lineages correspond roughly to geography instead of current species limits. The California Clapper Rail subspecies group found in California, Arizona, and northwestern Mexico was discovered to be sister to King Rails of the highlands of Mexico. Additionally, the Clapper and King Rails of eastern North America are more closely related to each other than to the California birds. Detailed investiga-

tions of hybridization using morphological, ecological, and genetic (mitochondrial and nuclear) characters in Louisiana reveal that strong selection against hybrids is likely preventing the fusion of these lineages. These results require an evaluation of the number of species in this complex.

James Maley grew up just outside of Rochester, New York. He left for college at 18 to attend the University of Alaska Fairbanks, where he earned a B.S. and M.S. in Biology. This is also where he started his career as an ornithologist and became an avid birder. His first research trip studying birds was a two week trip to Attu Island during the peak of spring migration. He earned his Ph.D. in 2012 from Louisiana State University working on hybridization and evolution of rails. James moved to Los Angeles in September of 2013 to begin working as the Collections Manager of the Moore Laboratory of Zoology, the largest collection of bird specimens from Mexico in the world.

Next month's meeting: Tuesday, May 27, same time, same place. Program to be announced. Watch the club web site [www.sandiegofieldornithologists.org](http://www.sandiegofieldornithologists.org) or next month's *Skimmer* for details.

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## SAN DIEGO COUNTY BIRD OBSERVATIONS, MARCH 2014

Compiled by Sara Baase Mayers and Guy McCaskie

The long staying Greater White-fronted Goose at Lindo Lake in Lakeside since 2007, and the Cackling Goose at the Scripps Ranch Library near Lake Miramar since 2008, were both still present at the end of March (BJS, JT). A flock of about twenty Brant over Tamarisk Grove Campground in Anza-Borrego Desert State Park 30 Mar (JTS) were no doubt migrating northward from wintering grounds in the Gulf of California to the Pacific by way of eastern San Diego County as depicted by Unitt (2004). The male Eurasian Wigeon that spent the winter at the San Diego River mouth was last reported on 9 March (BJS). An interesting hybrid was a scaup x Ring-necked Duck at Lake Murray 19-25 Mar (JRM). A Surf Scoter photographed on a small puddle in Julian 1 Mar (DS) and two more on Lake Murray the same day (JRS) were likely forced to land by the prevailing stormy conditions as they attempted to migrate northwestward from the Gulf of California to the Pacific coast. Reports of Brown Boobies included two in the area of the 9-Mile

Bank off Pt. Loma on 11 Mar (DP and BR) along with single birds in that same area on 20 Mar (DWA) and 31 Mar (MJB). There have been no reports of Reddish Egrets on south San Diego Bay since 3 Mar (SR)—birds wintering locally normally move south in the late winter/early spring to breeding locations in Baja California. Two pairs of Yellow-crowned Night-Herons, one present since June 2005, were at nest-sites at the Sports Park in Imperial Beach at the end of March (GMcC), and another Yellow-crowned Night-Heron was photographed on a nest at Sea World on Mission Bay 27 Mar (JP).

The adult Pacific Golden-Plover first seen in Del Mar on 21 Oct was still present 19 Mar (BM). Up to three Black Oystercatchers at the tide pools on Pt. Loma 16-29 Mar (LM, JE) and one or two around Pt. La Jolla in La Jolla 17-31 Mar (RPS, PEL) were at locations known to attract this species in the past, but one flying past the pier in Oceanside 12 Mar (AR) and another at the San Diego River mouth 18 Mar (BW) were unex-

pected. An impressive 113 Scripps's Murrelets were counted off Pt. Loma during a whale-watching trip on 20 Mar (DWA). An adult Heermann's Gull, a bird confined to the coast that rarely if ever ventures any distance inland, was at Sweetwater Reservoir on 24 Mar (PEL). A second-winter Mew Gull, very rare any distance inland in San Diego County, was on Lake Murray 1-14 Mar (JRM). Of extreme note, but unfortunately inaccessible to the public, was a third-winter Lesser Black-backed Gull photographed on south San Diego Bay on 23 Mar (MSa) providing the 6th record for the County. The first -winter Glaucous Gull found at the San Luis Rey River mouth in Oceanside 17 Dec (KW) was still present 27 Mar (MM), and another first-winter bird was at the J St. Marina in Chula Vista on 23 Mar (DG). A Gull-billed Tern on south San Diego Bay 12 Mar (LS) was the earliest of the small number returning this year; as expected, following the death of most adults and hatch-year birds last summer, the majority are birds hatched locally in 2012 (red "flag" on one leg) that had remained elsewhere until ready to breed at two years of age. A Sandwich-Tern-like bird was well seen with Elegant Terns on south San Diego Bay 24 Mar (MSa) – the bill was over 50% black with a small yellow tip and some yellow along the cutting edge. It is not known if these birds are Sandwich x Elegant Tern hybrids, aberrant Elegant Terns, or in fact Sandwich Terns.

A White-winged Dove reported near Sunset Cliffs on Pt. Loma 20 Mar (GO) was the only one on the coast of this County since the fall. The Inca Dove found at the Roadrunner Club in Borrego Springs on 15 Dec (PEL) appears settled and was still present 31 Mar (TH). A Lesser Nighthawk at Borrego Springs 22 Mar (RT) was the earliest this year. An exceptionally early San Diego County Black-chinned Hummingbird was in Jacumba 2 Mar (EGK); however, this species was first seen near El Centro in adjacent Imperial County

on 24 Mar (KZK); one on Pt. Loma 29 Mar (GN) was at a more expected time for the first arrivals on the coast. An exceptionally early male Calliope Hummingbird was well photographed in Jacumba 8 Mar (EGK), and multiple birds were reported along the coast during the last days of March. The Lewis's Woodpecker first seen at Laguna Meadow in the Laguna Mountains 16 Feb (MSa) was still present 24 Mar (DG). A Williamson's Sapsucker found at Paso Picacho Campground in Cuyamaca Rancho State Park



Tropical Kingbird at Famosa Slough.

Photo by Gary Nunn.

10 Feb (PP) was still present 20 Mar (RG), and another remained at Laguna Meadow 16 Feb-23 Mar (MSa, TRS). The first-winter Yellow-bellied Sapsucker found at Western Hills Park in Clairemont on 18 Feb (JBr) was still present 11 Mar (RNort). A Crested Carracara was well described with migrant Swainson's Hawks at Borrego Springs on 11 Mar (WH).

In March many of our wintering passerines are leaving, and spring migrants begin to arrive. In the rest of this report, we will describe the wintering birds first, then the new arrivals.

### Wintering Passerines

A Hammond's Flycatcher at Cibbets Flat in the Laguna Mountains 2 Mar (SR) probably wintered local-

ly, as migrants begin arriving in April or rarely, late March. A Gray Flycatcher continued at Upper Otay Lake near Chula Vista 9 Feb-9 Mar (MSa, TF), and a Tropical Kingbird continued at Famosa Slough in San Diego 23 Feb-30 Mar (CAn, GNu). The Thick-billed Kingbird near Poggi Canyon in Chula Vista stayed 18 Oct-29 Mar (RNorg, RA); for the past four winters this bird gave birders the opportunity to see an A-rated rarity. The beautiful Scissor-tailed Flycatcher found at Crest Dr. and Cardiff Dr. in Encinitas 4 Jan (SES) was last reported 7 Mar (GNe). A Plumbeous Vireo spent its second winter at Greenwood Cemetery in San Diego 12 Nov-16 Mar (JZ, LR); another in Mission Valley 10-11 Mar (MP) and a third at the Bird and Butterfly Garden in the Tijuana River Valley 28-29 Mar (JTS, CC) both probably wintered locally. A Cassin's Vireo was at Famosa Slough 17 Feb-9 Mar (PEL, MSt). The often-elusive Blue-headed Vireo spent its fourth winter at San Geronimo and McCall Sts. in Pt. Loma 16 Nov-12 Mar (JK, RNort).

Three Clark's Nutcrackers remained active and often easy to find at Laguna Meadow 16 Feb-29 Mar (DK, MSa, CS). Up to two Brown Creepers wintered at Ft. Rosecrans National Cemetery on Pt. Loma 23 Nov-28 Mar (JB, SR). Up to two Golden-crowned Kinglets were there as well 25 Oct-4 Mar (GNu); another two were on Crest Dr. in Encinitas 25 Dec-8 Mar (GNe, TG). A Townsend's Solitaire, a species rare in the desert, continued at the Roadrunner Club in Borrego Springs 5 Feb-30 Mar (SBM, JTS). All three of the Lapland Longspurs that arrived in October to winter on Fiesta Island in Mission Bay remained at least until 19 Mar (PEL), with two seen 23 Mar (PEL); toward the end of their stay, local birders could see a male in breeding plumage.

Wintering warblers of more than a dozen notable species continued into March. Two Northern Waterthrushes at the Dairy Mart Ponds in the Tijuana River Valley remained at least until 4 Mar (JK, MSa). Individual Black-and-white Warblers continued at the Bird and Butterfly Garden, also in the Tijuana River Valley, 6 Dec-26 Mar (GGr, DW), at the Imperial

Beach Sports Park 14 Dec-3 Mar (CH, SR), and at Beyer Way and Del Sol Blvd. in San Ysidro 23 Feb-22 Mar (SR, TF); a fourth in Colina del Sol Park in San Diego 11-12 Mar (PN) might have wintered or recently arrived. A Tennessee Warbler wintering in Ft. Rosecrans National Cemetery since 15 Dec (GNu) was last reported 17 Mar (MSa). An American Redstart was at the south pond at Dairy Mart Pond 8 Dec-4 Mar (JF, MSa). The Northern Parula in Rohr Park in Bonita continued 27 Oct-23 Mar (DDiT, JSz). A Bay-breasted Warbler regularly in a small group of trees at an office building in University City 28 Nov-8 Mar (PEL, TM) gave birders a close look at another A-rated rarity in the county. A Chestnut-sided Warbler spent its second winter at Pantoja Park in San Diego 31 Dec-11 Mar (PEL, CK). The female Black-throated Blue Warbler present at a private residence in San Carlos since 28 Oct was still present 31 Mar (JRM). Individual Palm Warblers remained at Beyer Way and Picador Blvd. in San Ysidro 14 Dec-7 Mar (SR, PEL) and at Border Field State Park 25 Feb-2 Mar (CR, EB). The Palm Warbler seen at Greenwood Cemetery in November and February was not seen in March, but the other three warblers at the cemetery remained: the Pine Warbler for its second winter 16 Nov-11 Mar (MSt, RNort), the Grace's Warbler for its third winter 6 Oct-15 Mar (TRS, BS), and the Black-throated Green Warbler 13 Nov-28 Mar (MSa, JTS). A Hermit Warbler at a residence in Leucadia since 6 Jan stayed until 21 Mar (JMCM). The bright and lively Painted Redstart found on Park Blvd. in Balboa Park 20 Dec (JBa) was last reported 2 Mar (TE).

Green-tailed Towhees stayed into March at the Tijuana Estuary Visitor Center 28 Sep-28 Mar (JB, JTS), at Lake Murray 27 Oct-31 Mar (SWa, DL), and at a residence in Imperial Beach 27 Oct-31 Mar (SY). Two Clay-colored Sparrows were present: one at Beyer Way and Del Sol Blvd. in Nestor 9 Jan-22 Mar (PEL, TF) and one (possibly for its third winter) near the Hall of Champions in Balboa Park 5-25 Mar (PEL, PN). A Black-chinned Sparrow near Borrego Springs 2 Mar (SWh, TS) probably wintered locally. The

three Nelson's Sparrows at the San Elijo Lagoon since 1 Jan (GGi) were last reported 2 Mar (MSt). Three of the wintering Swamp Sparrows remained, one at the Aviara Resort in Carlsbad 21 Dec-31 Mar (SB) and two in Tecolote Canyon in San Diego 11 Jan-31 Mar (JSm, MTS, JTS). Four White-throated Sparrows



Female Summer Tanager at Point Loma.  
Photo by Gary Nunn.

were seen in March: one at the Episcopal Church in University City since 28 Nov stayed through 4 Mar (PEL); two first seen at Ft. Rosecrans National Cemetery on 3 Dec (GNu) remained 9 Mar (JR), with one still there 31 Mar (JTS); and one, not previously reported, was in San Marcos 19 Mar (GGi).

Two of the three wintering male Hepatic Tanagers stayed into March: one at the Sports Park in Imperial Beach for its very impressive eighth winter 1 Dec-24 Mar (DK, DW) and one on Creelman Ln. in Ramona 26 Feb-12 Mar (TC, AH). (The Hepatic Tanager at the Marston House was last reported in early February.) Four Summer Tanagers were reported, a male at a residence in Encinitas 20 Mar (SC) and another male at a UCSD apartment complex in La Jolla 28 Mar (SES), along with two females at widely separated locations in residential Pt. Loma on 29 Mar (GNu); Unitt (2004) indicates that breeders usually arrive late

April. Part of the large flock of up to 50 Cassin's Finches found at Laguna Meadow 15 Feb (MSa) continued through 16 Mar (PT).

### Spring arrivals

The dates for most of the newly arriving species this month are generally early, though not the earliest

known for the species. An exception is the Nashville Warbler at Famosa Slough 19 Mar (AR); Unitt (2004) indicates the previous earliest date as 21 Mar, in 1970, and no earlier ones are known since publication of the Atlas.

The first migrant Western Kingbirds were reported on 9 Mar by several observers. Bell's Vireos were at Dairy Mart Pond as of 14 Mar (CB). A Hammond's Flycatcher was at Borrego Springs 31 Mar (TH). A singing Gray Vireo along Kitchen Creek Road 29 Mar (JTS) was right on time. A Cassin's Vireo was found at Tamarisk Grove Campground in Anza-

Borrego Desert State Park 20 Mar (JW), and a Warbling Vireo was at the Roadrunner Club 2 Mar (SWh). A Lucy's Warbler arrived at the Borrego Sink by 15 Mar (RT). The first reported Black-throated Gray Warbler was in Mission Trails Regional Park 21 Mar (CAd), the first singing Yellow Warblers at Dairy Mart Ponds 29 Mar (GMcC), and the first Wilson's Warbler was in Dos Picos County Park 14 Mar (HI).

The first likely migrating Black-chinned Sparrow appeared near Jacumba 16 Mar (PEL). Black-headed Grosbeaks usually arrive in the last few days of March (Unitt, 2004), but two were seen 21 Mar, one at Torrey Pines (BJS) and one in Hillcrest (ME). The first Lazuli Bunting was at Mission Trails Regional Park on 29 Mar (CH). Several observers reported the first arriving male Bullock's Orioles 7 Mar. (Hooded Orioles, which usually arrive in the first half of March,

were already being seen in late February.)

Observers: Christopher Adler (CAAd), Douglas W. Aguillard, Caron Andregg (CAN), Ryan Andrews, Charles Baker, Jennifer Baldwin (JBa), Eddie Bartley, Mark J. Billings, John Bruin (JBr), Steve Cameron, Travis Cooper, Catherine Craig, Dean DiTommaso, Jeff Ebright, Terence Edwards, Michael Evans, Jim Frankenberger, Tom Frankenberger, Greg Gillson (GGi), Doug Gochfeld, Tito Gonzales, Gary Grantham (GGr), Richard Griebe, Christine Harvey, Wes Hetrick, Terry Hunefeld, Alicia Hill, Henry Ingersoll, Eric G. Kallen, Jay Keller, Chad King, Dan King, Kenneth Z. Kurland, David Lawrence, Paul E. Lehman, Michael Martin, Sara B. Mayers, Guy McCaskie, Jimmy McMorran, Thomas Miko, Leo Miller, James R. Morris, Brennan Mulrooney, Gretchen Nell (GNe), Peter Nguyen, Richard Norgaard (RNorg), Richard

Norton (RNort), Gary Nunn (GNu), Glenn Ousset, Jim Pea, Molly Pollock, Dave Povey, Phil Pryde, Andy Rathbone, Casey Richart, Bruce Rideout, Steve Ritt, Jim Roberts, Lisa Ruby, Matt Sadowski (MSa), Ben Sandstrom, James Smith (JSm), Susan E. Smith, Colleen Southern, Lea Squires, BJ Stacey (BJS), Justyn T. Stahl (JTS), Trent R. Stanley, Tom Stephenson, Robert P. Stewart, Don Strampfer, Mark Stratton (MSt), Julie Szabo (JSz), Robert Theriault, Peter Thomas, John Top, Shannon Walsh (SWa), Kenneth Weaver, Scott Whittle (SWh), Bret Wilmore, Jan Wilson, David Wimpfheimer, Susan Yamagata, Jim Zimmer.

Literature Cited:

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



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