

# *The* **SKIMMER**

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*Volume 41, Number 5—May 2014*

## **SDFO NEWS**

### **Monthly Meeting**

Tuesday, May 27, 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. **Note the changed date of the meeting!**

Program: “Cowbirds: Why are they so maligned and so interesting to biologists?” by Steve Rothstein. Steve grew up in New York City but developed a fondness for nature and the outdoors as a result of childhood summers spent in the Catskill Mountains catching frogs, salamanders and snakes. This developed into an early interest in herpetology that expanded when he worked as a reptile keeper at the Bronx Zoo while attending Brooklyn College, and while also keeping his own home menagerie of some 3 dozen turtles and assorted lizards, snakes and frogs (in a bedroom he shared with his brother).

While an undergraduate, he also became a bird watcher and studied bird behavior, ecology and evolution at Yale University, where he did his Ph.D. thesis on coevolutionary interactions between brood parasitic cowbirds and their hosts. After his Ph.D. and a two-year postdoctorate appointment at the Smithsonian Institution, he joined the faculty at UC Santa Barbara in 1972 and has been there ever since. His teaching has dealt with vertebrate biology, animal behavior and evolution, and his research has focused on cowbirds and their hosts, as well as occasionally on other bird species and also on cowbird song development and function. Although technically retired from UCSB, his wife keeps asking him when he is really going to retire and stop going to the University so much and start cleaning up his office at home.

Next month’s meeting: Tuesday, June 17, same time, same place. Annual business meeting and election of club officers. Program: “The Condor’s Shadow,” a film by Jeff McLoughlin.

### **Election of Club Officers at June Meeting**

As noted above, we will be electing club officers for the coming year at the June SDFO meeting. Currently, we have the following nominations:

President: Gary Nunn  
Vice President: Dave Povey  
Secretary: Conny Jamison  
Treasurer: Rich Breisch  
Membership Chair: Mike Goldhamer

We welcome additional nominations. If you are interested in running for any of these positions, please notify President Tom Blackman.

**SDFO NEWS (cont.)****New Members**

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**SAN DIEGO COUNTY BIRD OBSERVATIONS,  
1 APRIL-7 MAY, 2014**

Compiled by Sara Baase Mayers

Because of the fallout and the late date of the newsletter this month, this report includes some birds reported through the first week of May.

**The fallout**

Santa Ana winds—strong winds blowing hot desert air from the east—typically occur in San Diego County in late summer or early fall. For several days at the end of April and beginning of May, a rare springtime Santa Ana pushed many thousands of birds out over the ocean during their nighttime migration, away from their usual routes through the desert and mountains. For several days, we witnessed the return of those that survived.

Gary Nunn described “amazing numbers of migrants passing over and into Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery today [30 Apr]. An experience to match High Island, Texas or Happy Island, China! Birds were just coming continuously for hours. The big arrival started just after dawn and continued for several hours with most birds appearing straight from the west and hitting the pine trees at highest points. Because of the strong

easterly winds the west side was most sheltered and harbored the mass of birds really. Many birds continued within minutes, but a fair number amassed, resting and feeding.” Hundreds of *Empidonax* flycatchers (mostly Hammond’s), hundreds of Wilson’s Warblers, and hundreds of Swainson’s Thrushes came through FRNC. A hundred or more Hermit Warblers and Townsend’s Warblers passed through. Migrant Hermit Thrushes came in larger than normal numbers. Up to six Gray Flycatchers and five MacGillivray’s Warblers were at the cemetery 30 Apr-2 May (GN, MSa). Another six MacGillivray’s Warblers were at Point Loma Nazarene University (PLNU) 2 May (SES). Dozens of Black-headed Grosbeaks and Western Tanagers came through FRNC. Reports of similar fallouts and flows of migrants came from Camp Pendleton 29 Apr (PU); Marston Canyon 1 May (90 Western Tanagers, CA); Rose and San Clemente Canyons 2 May (JR); Torrey Pines 3 May (GGr); and the Tijuana River Valley 4 May (250 Western Tanagers, 300–400 warblers, MSt). Wilson’s Warblers dominated most reports, generally more than 100 a day at each site.

Several observers said birds were going by too fast to count, and their numbers are conservative underestimates. People who have birded in San Diego for decades commented that they had never seen such a phenomenon here before.

Several notable birds appeared during the days of the fallout. At least three Dusky Flycatchers, which are particularly rare in spring migration along the coastal slope, were reported: one at Camp Pendleton 29 Apr (PU), one at FRNC 30 Apr (GN), and another at FRNC 1-3 May (GN, MSa). A male Hooded Warbler (GN), a Townsend's Solitaire (GN), and a Swamp Sparrow (EAE and CKS) were at FRNC 1 May, all in the southwest section. A Green-tailed Towhee was in the same section 30 Apr-2 May (CKS, TP). Two male Baltimore Orioles appeared, one at the Dairy Mart Ponds in the Tijuana River Valley 3 May (GMcC) and one at FRNC 3-4 May (PU, MSa). On 4 May, a Prothonotary Warbler was at a creek bed on Saturn Blvd. in the Tijuana River Valley (MSt); a Clay-colored Sparrow was in Nestor, near the Tijuana River Valley (PEL) and another was at FRNC 4-5 May (MSa).

## The rest

Two Brant in the desert, one at Agua Caliente Hot Springs 13 Apr (VW) and one at Borrego Springs 16 Apr (TH), were probably resting after being grounded by bad weather on their way northwest from the Gulf of California. The same is likely true of a Common Loon in Borrego Springs 17 Apr (PA), as the loons usually follow the same migration route as the Brant. A Hooded Merganser at the Dairy Mart Ponds 21 Apr-4 May (PEL) stayed later than all but one other noted in the *San Diego County Bird Atlas*.

A boat trip on 20 Apr produced an adult male Brown Booby 17.3 nautical miles west of Ocean Beach, a Common Murre off Imperial Beach, and 125 Scripps's Murrelets, including one chick, off San Diego (PEL). Although the 17 Sabine's Gulls seen on this trip were earlier than the earliest noted in the Atlas (23 Apr),

one at the 30-Mile Bank off San Diego 13 Apr (DPo) was even earlier.

An immature Reddish Egret was in the San Diego Bay near J St. in Chula Vista 6 Apr (GMcC). Yellow-crowned Night-Herons hatched at SeaWorld in Mission Bay 28 Apr (JP, DS). An adult Zone-tailed Hawk was at Jacumba 3 Apr (EGK). Up to three Black Oystercatchers were seen at Pt. Loma 16 Mar-27 Apr (LM, DP), and three at Pt. La Jolla 26 Apr (BJS). Solitary Sandpipers are an uncommon fall migrant in San Diego County; spring reports are even less common, but this year we had four: one in Borrego Springs 13-15 Apr (LD, TH), one in Jacumba 28 Apr (BLSu), one at Camp Pendleton 1 May (JMCM), and one at Dairy Mart Pond 1 May (CW). Red Phalaropes are rarely seen away from the ocean, but one was at the Salt Works in South San Diego Bay 7 May (MSa). Single Franklin's Gulls were seen at the mouth of the San Luis Rey River in Oceanside 11 Apr (KW) and at Del Mar Beach in Camp Pendleton 1 May (JBo). A Heermann's Gull (adult) at Lake Henshaw 11 Apr (GN) and a Mew Gull (second winter) at Lake Murray 1 Mar-8 Apr (JRM) are species uncommon inland. A first-year Lesser Black-backed Gull at Emory Cove on South San Diego Bay 27 Apr (CW) is an A-rated rarity for the county and might have been the same bird photographed on south San Diego Bay 3 Jan (MSa).

We rarely see Band-tailed Pigeons away from the mountains, but they sometimes show up along the coast; one was at Point Loma Nazarene University 19 Apr (PAG). The Inca Dove found at the Roadrunner Club in Borrego Springs 15 Dec was still present 8 Apr (PEL, TH). Three young Long-eared Owls left their nest near Boulevard 2 May (DdiT). Two Vaux's Swifts in Leucadia 4 Apr (JMCM) arrived one day earlier than the earliest date noted in the Atlas. The Lewis's Woodpecker near Laguna Meadow in the Laguna Mountains since 17 Feb was still there 20 Apr (MSa, PW); up to two more were at Santa Ysabel 6-13 Apr (PT, CKS). An Acorn Woodpecker in Jacumba 6 Apr (SD) was noteworthy because of the location; very few are seen east of the mountains. A Crested Caracara (another A-rated rarity in the county) flew low over the San Diego Botanic Garden in Encinitas 21 Apr (SES).

A Western Wood-Pewee at Camp Pendleton 8 Apr (PU) was earlier than all but one mentioned in the Atlas. The first Willow Flycatcher of the year was at FRNC 5 May (MSa). A wintering Gray Flycatcher at



Hammond's Flycatcher – loud calling "*pip*" or "*beep*" calls repeated once or twice, long saber-shaped primary projection, pale gray throat little contrasting with the neck sides, and the weaker, usually all dark, bill with mandible tips closely meeting, separates this species from Dusky Flycatcher.

Other more subtle features include the head size and shape, more confiding behavior, preference for low, often open, perches, and the agitated burry calling when interacting with other *Empidonax* species. Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery, Point Loma, San Diego County 30 April 2014. Photo by Gary Nunn.

a San Diego residence since November remained through 24 Apr (RA). In addition to the Gray Flycatchers that arrived in the big fallout, individual migrants appeared at Crown Point in Mission Bay 17-18 Apr (JBr, GN), at FRNC 23 Apr (GN), and at San Elijo Lagoon 7 May (JBr). Few Vermilion Flycatchers show up near the coast; a male was at the Tijuana Estuary 19 Apr (MA). The Tropical Kingbird at Famosa Slough in Ocean Beach since 23 Feb was last reported 5 Apr (CA, RG). The A-rarity Thick-billed Kingbird in Chula Vista since 18 Oct for its fourth winter was

last reported 7 Apr (RN, DPe). Another one made a brief stop near the San Pasqual Valley 6 May (EH).

Five Plumbeous Vireos were present in the county in April, at least four of which had wintered here: one at



Dusky Flycatcher – fast repeated calling "*whit*", short primary projection, white throat contrasting with neck sides, and the stronger bill, with prominent hooked tip to upper mandible, separate this species from the closely similar Hammond's Flycatcher.

Other more subtle features include rounder head shape, extent of pale coloration on the lower mandible underside, bill shape, tail length, perching behavior, and occasionally heard loud calls "*dreer-hic*", and ripple "*greeerp*". Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery, Point Loma, San Diego County 30 April 2014. Photo by Gary Nunn.

Greenwood Cemetery for its second winter 12 Nov-6 Apr (JZ, JR), one at the Educational Cultural Complex south of Greenwood Cemetery 26 Nov-12 Apr (PEL), one at Kate Sessions Park in Pacific Beach 1 Jan-19 Apr (HI), one at the Bird & Butterfly Garden in the Tijuana River Valley 28 Mar-19 Apr (JTS, CA), and one at Santee Lakes in Santee 12 Apr (JR). The three Clark's Nutcrackers found at Laguna Meadow 16 Feb were still present 20 Apr (DK, PW). Single Bank Swallows were seen at Dairy Mart Pond 4 Apr (PEL) and at San Dieguito Lagoon 26 Apr (PEL). The

Townsend's Solitaire found wintering at the Roadrunner Club 5 Feb was last reported 2 Apr (SBM, LH). Two more on Hot Springs Mountain 13 Apr (GGi) raise the question of breeding. There are no records of Townsend's Solitaires breeding in San Diego County (our highest mountains are below their preferred elevation), but the habitat is suitable and solitaires breed a few miles to the north on Santa Rosa Mountain in Riverside County.

A vagrant Lapland Longspur was at Silver Strand State Beach in Coronado 2 May (KR). Only one of our wintering Northern Waterthrushes was seen this month, the one at San Elijo Lagoon Nature Center 11 Nov-9 Apr (SB, JQ). A Black-and-white Warbler wintered at the Bird & Butterfly Garden 6 Dec-19 Apr (GGr, RW). Two (or possibly three) others were seen in April: one at PLNU 15 Apr (CHa), one at PLNU 19 Apr (PAG), and a singing male at Dairy Mart 19 Apr (JMcM). The Tennessee Warbler known wintering in the northwest section of FRNC since 15 Dec was last reported 5 Apr (GN). Though not the earliest known, three MacGillivray's Warblers at Agua Caliente Hot Springs 5 Apr (MSt) were ahead of the species' main spring migration period beginning mid-April. A male American Redstart spent its fourth winter near Nestor Park 2 Oct-4 Apr (SBM, PEL). A male Northern Parula was at Big Rock Park in Santee 26 Apr (BJS and JK). A female Black-throated Blue Warbler spent its second winter in the San Carlos neighborhood of San Diego 28 Oct-11 Apr (JRM). Two Palm Warblers were near the Tijuana Estuary 3 Apr (BMi). A Hermit Warbler wintered at a residence in Leucadia 6 Jan-4 Apr (JMcM); four at William Heise Park near Julian 12 Apr (TG) tied the earliest spring arrival date in the Atlas. The Black-throated Green Warbler found at Greenwood Cemetery 13 Nov stayed through 19 Apr (MSa, RG), and the Painted Redstart in Balboa Park since 20 Dec stayed through 5 Apr (JBa, TSI).

The Green-tailed Towhee that wintered at a residence in Imperial Beach since 27 Oct was last seen 14 Apr (SY). Two more, presumably migrants, stopped to

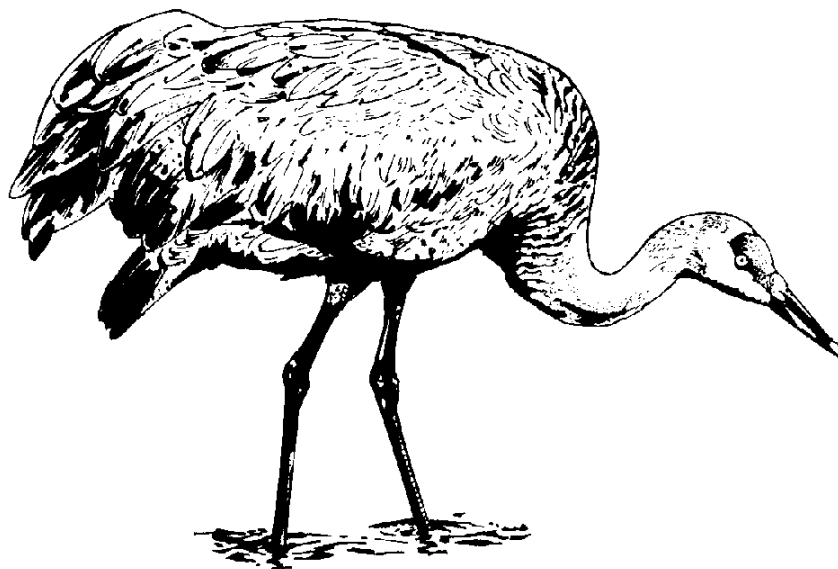
feed at residential yards, one in the Clairemont neighborhood of San Diego 5 May (MM) and one on Pt. Loma 6-7 May (HK). A Brewer's Sparrow, rare in the coastal lowlands, was at Lake Murray 2 May (JRM). Only one of at least three wintering Swamp Sparrows stayed into April, at Tecolote Canyon 11 Jan-6 Apr (JS, ND). Up to two White-throated Sparrows wintered at FRNC 3 Dec-11 Apr (GN, JBr), and one was in San Diego 17 Apr (BMu). A male Summer Tanager wintered at Buddy Todd Park in Oceanside 8 Dec-12 Apr for the fourth time (TR, DM); a female in the Pt. Loma residential area of Dudley and Albion Sts. 29 Mar-4 Apr (GN, GGr) probably wintered locally also. Before hundreds of Western Tanagers poured into the county, an adult male was photographed at Vallecito 1 Apr (BLSH), earlier than any reported in the Atlas. A male Rose-breasted Grosbeak showed up in University City 5 May (CHe). Small numbers of Yellow-headed Blackbirds migrate through San Diego County in spring in scattered locations; this month two were seen at San Dieguito Lagoon 6 Apr (JBr), one at Lindo Lake in Lakeside 26 Apr (MI), and eight at the Tijuana Estuary 4 May (PEL). A third male Baltimore Oriole (in addition to the two during the fallout) was at PLNU 13 Apr (DDiT). A singing male Purple Finch at Lake O'Neill on Camp Pendleton for at least several days up to 7 May (PAG, SBM) was at a much lower elevation than they are known to breed, although singing males have been seen there a few times in the past. The flock of about 50 Cassin's Finches found at Laguna Meadow 15 Feb dwindled to about half a dozen by 12 Apr (MSa, TRS).

*Observers:* Paulette Acre, Caron Andregg, Ryan Andrews, Marc Arndt, Jennifer Baldwin (JBa), Justin Bosler (JBo), Steve Brad, John Bruin (JBr), Nicole Desnoyers, Dean DiTommaso, Suzanne Detwiler, LeRoy Dorman, Elias A. Elias, Greg Gillson (GGi), Peter A. Ginsburg, Tito Gonzalez, Gary Grantham (GGr), Rick Grove, Ed Hall, Charley Herzfeld (CHe), Christine Harvey (CHa), Lena Hayashi, Terry Hunefeld, Marshall Iliff, T. S. Imfeld, Henry Ingersoll, Eric G. Kallen, Dan King, Howard Knight, Paul E. Lehman, Marcie Mason, David Mathis, Sara Baase May-

ers, Guy McCaskie, Jimmy McMorran, Brandon Miller (BMi), Leo Miller, James R. Morris, Brennan Mulrooney (BMu), Richard Norgaard, Gary Nunn, Jim Pea, David Pettee (DPe), Tim Plunkett, Dave Povey (DPo), Jo Quinn, Tom Rinks, Jim Roberts, Kerry Ross, Matt Sadowski (MSa), Britta Lee Shain (BLSh), Chris K. Smith, James Smith (JS), Susan E. Smith, David Sonneborn, BJ Stacey, Justyn T. Stahl (JTS), Trent R. Stanley, Mark Stratton (MSt), Brian L. Sullivan (BLSu), Peter Thomas, Phil Unitt, Vic Warren, Kenneth Weaver, Robb Welch, Phil White, Chris Wood, Susan Yamagata, Jim Zimmer.

*Reference:* Philip Unitt, *San Diego County Bird Atlas*, San Diego Natural History Museum, 2004.

*Acknowledgments:* Thank you to Guy McCaskie for his extensive notes and answers to numerous questions. Thank you to Gary Nunn for permission to quote his description of the fallout and for writing the captions for his photos.



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