

# The **SKIMMER**



Volume 41, Number 7—July 2014

## SDFO NEWS

### Monthly Meeting

Tuesday, July 15 at 6:00 p.m., Hoffman Room of the San Diego Foundation Building located at 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 Historic Decatur Road. Parking is available on the street or in the adjacent parking lots. Click here for a [Map](#).

### Program

#### *A Tour of the Tanagers – an Evolutionary Burst of Beaks and Colors*

By Professor Kevin J. Burns, Department of Biology, San Diego State University.

No birding trip to a Neotropical rainforest is complete without experiencing a mixed-species flock of spectacularly colored tanagers. But what, exactly, is a tanager? This question has puzzled ornithologists for decades. Through the use of genetic data, we can finally answer this question. Our latest research shows that tanagers are the largest family of songbirds and the largest radiation of Neotropical birds. Species in the group display a range of colors, behaviors, beak shapes, and ecologies. For example, tanagers now include such divergent taxa as Darwin's Finches, nectar-feeding honeycreepers, multicolored cloud-forest species, and high altitude specialists. In this talk, I will review the major groups of tanagers and talk about aspects of their natural history. This talk will focus less on genetics, but more on the different groups of tanagers and their incredible diversity.



Kevin Burns grew up in Houston, Texas and began birding in when he was 11. After getting a B.S. in Biology at Texas A&M in 1988, he earned a M.S. from Louisiana State University. On an LSU expedition, he had his first field experience with tanagers and was hooked. After LSU, he went to UC Berkeley for his Ph.D. where he focused primarily on tanagers for his dissertation. Following graduation, he undertook postdoctoral studies at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. He left that position in 1998 to come to San Diego State University where he has been a biology professor ever since. He teaches courses in ornithology and evolutionary biology and curates the bird collection at the SDSU Museum of Biodiversity. Research in his lab involves tanagers as well as a number of local species including Bell's Vireo, Summer Tanager, Wrentit, White-headed Woodpecker, California Thrasher, and birds on the Channel Islands. He is a Fellow of the American Ornithologists' Union and currently serves on the AOU's council. More information about his work can be found by clicking here.

Next month in August we will be treated to a presentation by Neil Hayward about his ABA Big Year entitled "*An Accidental Big Year*". One year condensed into one hour – not to be missed!

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## San Diego County Bird Observations June 2014

Compiled by Guy McCaskie

A Black-footed Albatross over the San Diego Trough was one of the highlights during the 7 June (PEL) boat trip from San Diego Bay to the 30-Mile Bank aboard the GRANDE. Numbers of Black-vented Shearwaters off La Jolla have been increasing since the second week in June with an impressive 200 at Point La Jolla in La Jolla on 19 June (PEL). Numbers such as this in June unfortunately suggest nesting failures to the south. Two bedraggled looking Northern Fulmars off San Diego on 7 June (GMcC, PEL) and another there on 20 June (MS) were no doubt attempting to summer locally. Fifty-six Ashy Storm-Petrels counted off San Diego on 20 June (PEL) was far more than previously encountered in these waters. A sub-adult Masked/Nazca Booby was at Point La Jolla on 19 June (PEL) and what may have been the same bird was seen there again on 21 June (SW, DDiT). An adult Blue-footed Booby flew south past Point La Jolla 24 June (SW, PT) and another, or the same bird, was fishing off Border Field State Park on 26 June (MS) – young birds of this species sporadically move north in the summer, but adults are few and far between. Ten Brown Boobies were reported during June, with two photographed together at the 9-Mile Bank on

02 June (*fide* DWA), two seen during the 7 June boat trip from San Diego Bay to the 30-Mile Bank (JP), one on the Zuniga Jetty at the entrance to San Diego Bay on 07 June (KR), one off Point La Jolla on 11 June (PEL), one seen during a whale-watching trip off Point Loma on 16 June (CF), two 2.5 nautical miles south of Point Loma on 20 June (MS), and an adult 14.6 nautical miles west of Pacific Beach the same day (PEL) - all most likely from the nearby Los Coronado Islands. A South Polar Skua, rare but of annual occurrence off Southern California in June, was 20.4 nautical miles west of Pacific Beach on 20 June (PEL).

An adult Reddish Egret on south San Diego Bay after 3 June (GMcC, PEL) and two adults at the Tijuana River mouth on 21 June (HBK) were the only three known present this summer - this species has now expanded its area of regular occurrence northward from northern Baja California to include San Diego and Orange Counties. Despite losing their nest and the tree in which they were nesting at the end of May, the long-staying pair of Yellow-crowned Night-Herons at the Sports Park in Imperial Beach is now attending a new nest in the same area (SES,

GMcC); an immature was seen in Imperial Beach 19-22 June (SK, VW) and an adult was on the San Diego River near SeaWorld in San Diego on 27 and 30 June (CA, PEL).



***Brown Booby – offshore pelagic in San Diego County waters 7<sup>th</sup> June 2014. Photograph by Gary Nunn.***

Summering waterbirds were almost non-existent as indicated by the only Brant being one at Agua Hedionda in Del Mar, and exceptionally few diving ducks and scoters and loons anywhere. Summering shorebirds (all in basic, or at best in first-alternate plumage) on south San Diego Bay in mid-June included about 30 Black-bellied Plovers, 80 Semipalmated Plovers, 25 Willets, 85 Marbled Godwits, 15 Ruddy Turnstones, 20 Red Knots, an impressive 75 Western Sandpipers, and 110 Short-billed Dowitchers, along with 7 Greater Yellowlegs and 6 Red-necked Phalaropes. A Black Oystercatcher, unexpected in summer, was at the entrance to San Diego Bay (Point Loma Tide Pools/Zuniga Jetty) 02-07 June (TP, DP), another flew past Point La Jolla on 19 June (PEL) and two flew past there on 21 June (SW). A Wilson's Plover was associating with nesting Least Terns at the Sweetwater Marsh National Wildlife Refuge in Chula Vista on 10 June (RTP) – one or two are now found in San Diego County most years. A Lesser Yellowlegs in alternate-plumage on south San Diego Bay 09 June (MS) was certainly unexpected, as was an alternate-plumage Dunlin in the same general area on 21 Jun (PEL). Five Western Sandpipers on South San Diego Bay on 21 June (PEL), two Least Sandpipers near Oceanside on 30 June (JB), and 26 Wilson's Phalaropes on one of the south San Diego Bay saltworks ponds on 21 June (PEL) were the first of the fall migrants.

Of note was a single Pigeon Guillemot at Point La Jolla on 05 June (PEL) as San Diego County is south of this species' normal range, although Pigeon Guillemot has been recorded south to the Los Coronados Islands in Mexico. Totally unexpected were two Craveri's Murrelets over the San Diego Trench off San Diego during the 7 June boat trip to the 30-Mile Bank that were correctly identified from photographs by one of the trip participants, Louis Hoeniger, after disembarking. Craveri's Murrelets have been recorded off Southern California on dates ranging from 11 July (2 off San Diego on 11 July 1972) to 16 October (two off San Diego on 16 Oct 2013). However, one found dead on the beach in Coronado, San Diego County, on 19 May 2006 (SDNHM 50824) suggests that a few occasionally arrive in Southern California waters much earlier than expected. An adult Heermann's Gull on Lake Miramar 10 June (PEL) was inland where unexpected. Three first-summer Common Terns on south San Diego Bay 21 June (MS) were the earliest of the late summer birds that gather in this area every year.



***Craveri's Murrelet – San Diego Trench, San Diego County 7<sup>th</sup> June 2014. Photograph by Gary Nunn.***

The lone Inca Dove at the Roadrunner Club in Borrego Springs was still present 26 June (RT) and at least one pair of Brown-crested Flycatchers is believed to be nesting at this same location (RT). At least two of the three Clark's Nutcrackers known present around Laguna Meadows in the Laguna Mountains since 16 February were still there on 29 June (JS) – Unitt (2004) lists eight records for late May and June, with 24 June 1967 being the previous latest date. A singing Wilson's Warbler at the upper end of Agua Dulce Creek in the Laguna Mountains 19-25 June (JW, SES) was

in suitable nesting habitat, but at the extreme southern limit of the species' known breeding range. A lone male Summer Tanager soliciting a mate in an area of suitable nesting habitat in Jacumba 27 May-27 June (EGK, JS) appears to be having no luck attracting a female.

A Willow Flycatcher that lingered in the residential area of Point Loma to 20 June (SBM) establishes one of the latest dates for a spring migrant in San Diego County as indicated by Unitt (2004). A singing MacGillivray's Warbler in University City (Rose Canyon) 08 June (JR) is also one of the latest spring migrants recorded in San Diego County, if not the latest – see Unitt (2004), and a Yellow-rumped Warbler in Encinitas on 05 June (GCH) comes close to being the latest – 09 June 1995 is the latest date for a spring migrant listed by Unitt (2004). A Yellow-rumped Warbler at Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery on Point Loma on 30 June (GN) was surely lost – too late for a spring migrant and too early for a fall migrant. A White-crowned Sparrow (white-lored) along the Otay River below Lower Otay Lake 15 June (TC) was exceptionally late, especially so for a bird with white lores. A Golden-crowned Sparrow with a callus on one leg lingered at Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery on Point Loma to the late date of 11 June (GN) and a Fox Sparrow with a tumor on its head remained there to the late date of 08 June (GN).



***Yellow-throated Warbler – University City, San Diego County 18<sup>th</sup> June 2014. Photograph by Gary Nunn.***

A Scissor-tailed Flycatcher photographed in Jacumba on 20 June (EGK) appeared to be a lost bird wandering through the area, and same could be said for the singing male Black-and-white Warbler at Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery on Point Loma on 16 June (GN). However, a singing male Yellow-throated Warbler first noted in University City on 09 June (EE) evidently gave up hope of attracting a mate on 25 June (SBM). We will never know how long the singing Clay-colored Sparrow had been present at Lake Hodges when found on 06 June (JTS), but we do know that it was not there two days later (PEL), and a late vagrant at Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery on Point Loma on 08 June (GN) suggests one or two were still on the move this late in the spring.

Listed observers: Douglas W. Aguillard, Caron Andregg, Justin Bosler, Travis Cooper, Dean DiTommaso, Ed Ervin, Caleb From, Gjon C. Hazard, Eric G. Kallen, Howard B. King, Sandy Koonce, Paul E. Lehman, Sara B. Mayers, Guy McCaskie, Gary Nunn, Jason Pietrzak, Tim Plunkett, David Povey, Jim Roberts, Kerry Ross, Matt Sadowski, Susan E. Smith, Justyn T. Stahl, Julie Szabo, Robert Theriault, Peter Thomas, Stanley Walens, John Walters, Vic Warren.

#### Literature Cited:

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

Guy McCaskie  
4 July 2014

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