

The *SKIMMER*



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SDFO NEWS

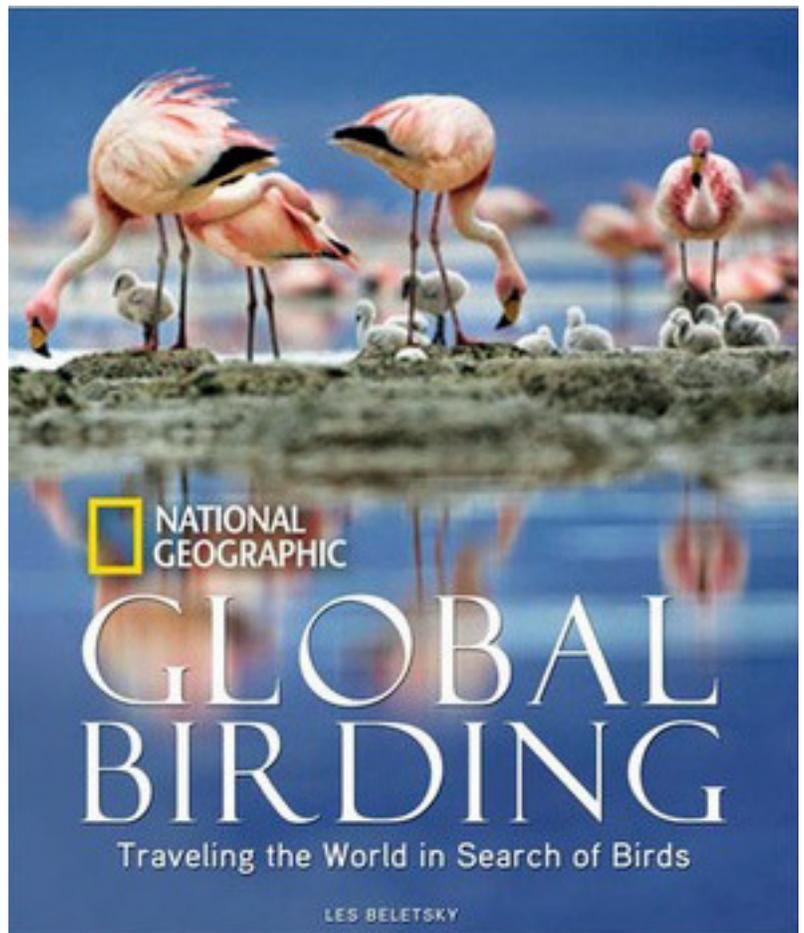
Monthly Meeting

Tuesday, February 19, 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. Park in the lot to the left or find street parking.

Program: Dave Pearson will describe “My Favorite Birding Areas in the World.”

Although Dave Pearson is a professional biologist and ornithologist, his interest in birds goes back to basic bird watching skills begun as a teenager in Minnesota. He now is paid to travel the world and watch birds. National Geographic Society and his long time co-author, Les Beletsky, invited him to contribute a series of narratives from his favorite birding sites and experiences from around the world. These narratives and general information about traveling the world in search of birds were published in 2010, *Global Birding*. Dave will share some of his experiences birding around the world and his favorite birding sites on each continent.

Next month’s meeting: Tuesday, March 19, same time, same place. Program to be announced.



SAN DIEGO COUNTY BIRD OBSERVATIONS, JANUARY 2013

Compiled by Guy McCaskie

Every year winter birding activity in San Diego County appears to drop after the last of the local Christmas Bird Counts are completed. However, thanks to a number of local hard-core birders, a few rarities are discovered, and the continued presence of known rarities is confirmed. Most unusual was the **Curlew Sandpiper** found on south San Diego Bay from the north end of 7th Street in Imperial Beach 22 Jan (BM) and known present there through 27 Jan (BLC) but most likely wintering locally so still there. None have been recorded in California between 9 April and 24 November, and I know of no mid-winter record from elsewhere in the United States.

Continuing male Eurasian Wigeons included two found on the lower Sweetwater River 12 Oct still present 31 Jan + (JS), and another first seen at Fairbanks Ranch 23 Dec still present 16 Jan (SES). A Eurasian x American Wigeon, a somewhat regularly encountered hybrid, was identified at Eastlake 23 Jan (DT). An impressive **1180** Greater Scaup were counted on south San Diego Bay 16 Jan (MSa)—formerly considered “uncommon to rare” in San Diego County (Unitt 2004), but now the expected scaup on San Diego Bay. Three ducks considered very rare as far south as San Diego County were a female White-winged Scoter on Glorietta Bay 27-29 Jan (M & PT, BLC), an adult male Black Scoter photographed flying south past Pt. La Jolla in La Jolla 27 Jan (GN), and a male Long-tailed Duck within the salt works ponds at the south end of San Diego Bay 23-31 Jan + (MSa). The Red-necked Grebe found at the Embarcadero 4 Dec was still in that area 27 Jan (BLC), so expected to remain through the winter. An Ashy Storm-Petrel at Pt. La

Jolla during the strong westerly winds on 10 Jan (MSa) is one of only a few seen from shore locally in mid-winter. Two Brown Boobies with a feeding flock of waterbirds at the mouth of the Tijuana R. mouth 13 Jan (JK) had likely come from the nearby Los Coronados Islands. An immature Magnificent Frigatebird photographed near the harbor in Oceanside 26 Jan (JL) provides one of a very few mid-winter records for California.

At least one Reddish Egret remained on south San Diego Bay through 19 Jan (BJS), and two Yellow-crowned Night-Herons, present since the summer of 2005, were still at the Sports Park in Imperial Beach 31 Jan + (GMcC). Three Harris’s Hawks around Jacumba since 2011 were still present 31 Jan + (EGK)—it appears that Harris’s Hawk has now expanded its range northward on the Baja California Peninsula to include extreme southern San Diego County. The only Zone-tailed Hawk reported was an adult near Ramona 20 Jan (DH), but I suspect two or three more unreported are wintering elsewhere in the coastal slope. The wintering Pacific Golden-Plover at San Dieguito Lagoon in Del Mar was still present 12 Jan (PEL). Most interesting was a Solitary Sandpiper near the polo field in Del Mar 21-31 Jan + (DH, SB), this being only the third ever known wintering in San Diego County (see Unit 2004). Most unexpected was a Short-billed Dowitcher at San Dieguito Lagoon 13 Jan (PEL) - although common on the three or four large bays in California, including San Diego Bay, this dowitcher is very rarely found on the smaller bays and lagoons, and virtually never inland at this time of the year. Single first-winter Black-legged Kittiwakes, a

species exceptionally scarce in Southern California waters this winter, were seen at Pt. La Jolla on 3 and 10 Jan (MSa). At least three Short-eared Owls were still at the salt works ponds on south San Diego Bay 19 Jan (BJS) and another was in the San Pasqual Valley 16 Jan (P & MT). A Vaux's Swift first seen at Sweetwater Reservoir 31 Dec was still present 13 Jan (PEL) so no doubt wintering locally—large numbers of this swift formerly wintered in San Diego County, especially so along the lower Santa Margarita and San Luis Rey river valleys (Unitt 2004), but those numbers are now apparently gone. One of the two Lewis's Woodpeckers found near Julian 13 Jan (JSF) was still present 31 Jan + (BJS).

Wintering *Empidonax* flycatchers along the coast included a Hammond's Flycatcher near the Marston House in Balboa Park 3-7 Jan (GCH, BLC), a Gray Flycatcher at Morley Field in Balboa Park 14-18 Jan (LS, BLC) and single Pacific-slope Flycatchers in Presidio Park 12 Jan (PU) and at Sun Vista Park in Encinitas 14 Jan (GCH). Three Eastern Phoebes were known present around San Diego this month, with the one in Mission Valley near the San Diego Mission 28 Dec-31 Jan + (PEL), another at Collier Park in Ocean Beach 19-31 Jan + (MSt) and the third photographed at the Dairy Mart Ponds in the Tijuana River Valley 28 Jan (JP)—all are likely to remain into early March. Numbers of wintering Vermilion Flycatchers present close to the coast, and away from known nesting locations, appear to be increasing every year, with a male at the Sunset Ave. ball fields in the Tijuana River Valley, a female at Nestor Park in Nestor, a male and female together at Crown Point on Mission Bay, and a female at the horse farms near Del Mar known present this month. The Tropical Kingbird found at the polo field near Del Mar 22 Dec (PU) was last seen 12 Jan (PEL). However, the Thick-billed Kingbird found at the polo field 22 Dec (PU) was still present 31 Jan + (SB), and the one at the lower end of Poggi Canyon in Chula Vista since 14 Oct (RN) was still present at the end of the month (GMcC). Even though six Plumbeous Vireos were reported on the San Diego County Christmas Bird Counts, the only one known present

into January was at Greenwood Cemetery in south San Diego 31 Oct-31 Jan + (BM, GMcC). A Verdin photographed in the Tijuana River Valley 13 Jan (JK) was on the immediate coast where at best considered a casual visitor. Single Brown Creepers were in the coastal lowlands, where considered very rare, at the Southwest Fisheries Science Center in La Jolla 17 Dec-24 Jan (WP) and at Lindo Lake in Lakeside 6 Jan (PW).

An impressive number of wood-warblers were known present this month, including an adult male MacGillivray's Warbler at a private residence in Claremont 25 Dec-5 Jan (TB), a drab female Bay-breasted Warbler and a brightly coloured male Prairie Warbler together at the boat launch ramp in Otay Lakes County Park 30 Dec-31 Jan + (JS, GMcC) and 31 Dec-31 Jan + (BJS, GMcC), and the Painted Redstart at Rohr Park in Chula Vista 29 Oct-20 Jan (DWA, JP). Additional rarities included a Chestnut-sided Warbler at Pantoja Park in downtown San Diego 7 Dec-31 Jan + (PAG, PM); four Palm Warblers, with one near the southwest corner of Montgomery Field in Kearny Mesa 4 Dec-31 Jan + (PEL), two together at the Bali Hai Restaurant on Shelter Island 9-14 Jan (KR, JZ) and another at the entrance to Border Field State Park in the Tijuana River Valley 13 Jan (JK); the brightly coloured male Pine Warbler on Margarita Avenue in Coronado 25 Nov-31 Jan + (EC, GMcC) along with the very drab female at Greenwood Cemetery in south San Diego 1-13 Jan (MSa, EE), and single Grace's Warblers in Greenwood Cemetery 31 Oct-31 Jan + (BM, GMcC) and in Spring Valley 24 Dec-5 Jan (RN, SK). Of more regular occurrence in winter were a Northern Waterthrush at the Dairy Mart Ponds in the Tijuana River Valley 9 Sep-7 Jan (BJS, BLC); single Black-and-white Warblers at Nestor Park in Nestor 10 Oct-5 Jan (PEL, JN), at the northern end of Mission Bay 13 Nov-13 Jan (PEL, SR), in residential Pt. Loma 27 Nov-6 Jan (SBM) and at Pantoja Park 9 Dec-31 Jan + (PEL, PM); Nashville Warblers on Hollister St. in Nestor 5 Jan (BLC), north Mission Bay 13 Jan (SR), at the horse park near Del Mar 16 Jan (SES) and at the train depot in downtown San Diego 24 Jan (JMCM); an adult male American Redstart at Nestor Park 4 Nov-

31 Jan + (PEL) and a young male at the Dairy Mart Ponds 15 Dec-3 Jan (GMcC, GCH), and Hermit Warblers in Pantoja Park 7 Dec-27 Jan (PAG, BJS) and along El Camino del Teatro in La Jolla 13 Jan (GN).

The only Green-tailed Towhee this month was one in residential Pt. Loma 11 Dec-1 Jan (SBM). Four wintering Nelson's Sparrows were still present at Crown Point on Mission Bay 13 Jan (MSa), but it takes a very high tide to force them into view. The single Swamp Sparrows found at Famosa Slough 31 Oct (PEL) in Jacumba 17 Nov (GN) and at Crown Point 27 Nov (VM) and still present 8 Jan (BLC), 13 Jan (SBM) and 13 Jan (MSa), were augmented by one at Mast Park in Santee 11 Jan (BJS) and at the horse park near Del Mar 17 Jan (FW), for a total of five. Only two of the four White-throated Sparrows reported on the Christmas Bird Counts were known present into January, those being one at the KOA campground in Chula Vista 3 Dec-13 Jan (PEL, BLC) and the other at Pantoja Park 17 Dec-31 Jan + (DN, PM), but one at Famosa Slough 8 Jan (BLC) and another at a private residence near Tecolote Canyon 25-27 Jan (MM) were "new". The Hepatic Tanager spending its 7th winter at the Sports Park in Imperial Beach was still present 31 Jan (GMcC), and the other spending its 3rd winter near the Marston House in Balboa Park was still present 18 Jan (JP). An impressive 13 Summer Tanagers were reported in January, but more than 20 were known present in the coastal areas of the County in December. The only Hooded Oriole was one found in the southern part of Carlsbad 23 Dec that was still present 12 Jan (PEL). Only a handful of Bullock's Orioles were reported, but included a female well inland at a high elevation in Jacumba 22 Dec-19 Jan (EGK). Although five Baltimore Orioles were known present at the end of December, none have been reported this month. Noteworthy was the wintering male Scott's

Oriole in Jacumba through 19 Jan (EGK) – one or two regularly winter at the lower elevations of the Anza-Borrego Desert, but Jacumba is at 3000 feet. The Evening Grosbeak first seen in Jacumba on 4 Dec was still present at the end of the month (EGK).

A recently-surfaced photo of a Snow Bunting was reported taken at Sweetwater Reservoir in mid January. This would be the second in San Diego County, and the southernmost in California if confirmed. Unfortunately, the date that the photo was taken and the name of the photographer are unknown at this time, and the fact that the photo was indeed taken in San Diego County has yet to be confirmed.

Listed observers: Douglas W. Aguillard, Steve Brad, Terry Brashear, Barbara L. Carlson, Elizabeth Copper, Elias Elias, Jonathan S. Feenstra, Peter A. Ginsburg, Gjon C. Hazard, David Holway, Eric G. Kallen, Jay Keller, Sandy Koonce, Paul E. Lehman, Josh Lietzow, Paul Marvin, Marcie Mason, Sara B. Mayers, Guy McCaskie, Jimmy McMorrin, Brennan Mulrooney, Vic Murayama, Jan Nordenberg, Richard Norgaard, Dick Norton, Gary Nunn, Jim Pea, William Perrin, Steve Ritt, Kim Roth, Matt Sadowski (MSa), Susan E. Smith, BJ Stacy, Jeremiah Stock, Mark Stratton (MSt), Lea Squires, Millie and Peter Thomas, Don Thomson, Philip Unitt, Phil White, Frank Wong, Jim Zimmer.

Literature Cited

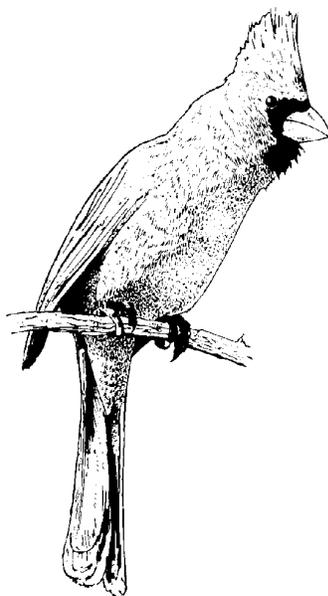
Unitt, Philip. 2004. San Diego County Bird Atlas. *Proc. San Diego Soc. Nat. Hist.* 39. San Diego Nat. Hist. Mus., San Diego.

DISTINGUISHING STINTS AND PEEPS: A NEW FIELD MARK

The small sandpipers of the genus *Calidris*, known to birders in the New World as “peeps” and in the Old World as “stints,” provide a host of thorny identification problems. Once the diligent birder has learned to tell Western from Semipalmated from Least Sandpiper, the next step in accomplishment is to sort through flocks of thousands of peeps looking for rare vagrant stints from across the pond. In particular, Red-necked and Little Stints have black legs like our Western and Semipalmated Sandpipers, so birders often resort to looking for the presence or absence of tiny partial webbings or semipalmations between the bases of the toes: present in the peeps, absent in the stints. Good luck on this one!

Now an accomplished birder and artist, Catherine Hamilton, has published a potentially useful new field mark for distinguishing these dark-legged stints and peeps. See her blog at <http://blog.aba.org/2013/02/open-mic-a-new-field-mark-for-differentiating-stints-and-peeps.html> for a discussion and some ex-

cellent sketches. What she has noticed is that there is a “gape notch” on the stints that is absent on the peeps. The feathering on the head at the base of the bill pulls away a bit at the gape (where the lower mandible meets the upper mandible—this is especially noticeable in fledgling songbirds), forming a small notch on Red-necked Stint and Little Stint, while the bill meets the feathering of the head in a straight vertical line on Western and Semipalmated Sandpipers. This seems to be a reliable difference even in basic (winter) plumaged birds. She is uncertain whether this feature can be used in the light-legged peeps and stints such as Least Sandpiper or Long-toed Stint. But if this pans out, it should greatly simplify the task of finding those rare stints (or peeps, if you’re birding Across the Water).



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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

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