

The **SKIMMER**



Volume 39, Number 1—January 2012

SDFO NEWS

Monthly Meeting

Tuesday, January 17, at 7:00 p.m., at the Tecolote Nature Center, at the east end of Tecolote Road, off I-5.

Program: "In Search of Seabirds: Remote Oceanic Islands of the Southern Oceans," by Gary Nunn.

Originally from England, Gary Nunn grew up birdwatching on the North Norfolk coast chasing rarities from east and west. After completing his degree and Ph.D. in Biology and Genetics respectively he moved to the University of Copenhagen, Denmark for a year and then finally settled in the Ornithology Department of the American Museum of Natural History in New York City where he worked for five years as a Frank Chapman Postdoctoral Fellow. His research there explored evolutionary genetics of procellariiform seabirds and birds of paradise. In 1996 he completed a revision of albatross taxonomy based on genetic evidence. Following this he moved to the Smithsonian Institution Zoological Park Conservation Genetics Lab where he worked on *Pterodroma* evolution. Since then Gary has moved to California, where he has continued working in the field of genetics at several life sciences companies and is now located here in San Diego with his family.

Next month's meeting: Tuesday, February 21, same time, same place. Program to be announced.

2012 Dues Now Payable

If you haven't already paid your dues for this year, see Membership Chair BJ Stacey at the meeting, or see the back page for further information.

SDFO NEWS (cont.)

Marjorie Hastings

Our good friend and one of the pillars of birding in San Diego, Marjorie Hastings, died on December 10, 2011, after a long illness. As Doug Aguiard wrote on SDBirds, Marjorie was the heart of San Diego's birding community for over 30 years. Marjorie's love for birding was infectious, and she shared it equally with everyone. She was kind and generous in a rare and unique way, and had an immense network of birding friends. She didn't care if you were a jerk—one of the reasons she and I were friends—just so long as you loved birds. Although I am writing this from a personal perspective while thinking of what a good friend she was to me, any member of SDFO could fill pages with stories of birding adventures they shared with her and Don and of ways in which Marjorie influenced their own birding lives.

Marjorie and Don were inseparable and completely devoted to one another. In 30 years of knowing them, I never once saw them apart. They shared a love of birds, of gardening, of travel, of friends. They made it a quest to see every bird that breeds in North America, and I believe that they accomplished that; but they never played one-upsmanship. When they told about their birding adventures, it was to share with others the excitement of the adventures they went on and the beauty of the rare birds they had seen.

Marjorie's influence on the San Diego birding community is incalculable. When I first came to San Diego in 1982, the birding community was fragmented and insular. I attended four meetings of SDFO before anyone even spoke to me—and it was Marjorie. You would find out about a rare bird being in town weeks or months later, or only when the record was published in *American Birds*. In those antediluvian days before texting and computers, Don and Marjorie selflessly, and at their own expense, began a phone tree that they continued for over 20 years. They asked anyone who found a rare bird to call them; then they would call everyone on that phone tree. They kept immense printed charts of who wanted to see what bird and would go through those charts every time a rare bird was called in to them. And they wouldn't go to see a bird themselves until their phone calls were finished. The community began sharing birds, instead of hoarding them.

They were inveterate chasers, and through their network of birding companions kept tabs on rare birds throughout California and Arizona [and Texas and Florida]. And they never chased a bird without asking other people along to share the experience. I, too, am an inveterate chaser, and the many, many trips I took with them in pursuit of vagrant, casual and accidental birds are among my fondest memories of Don and Marjorie. I was glad to reciprocate, and whenever I was about to go off on some crazed trip to the antipodes in search of some LBJ, they were the first people I called.

Many of you will also remember that Don and Marjorie became fixtures on the annual SDFO New Year's Day pelagic trip. Marjorie liked to be on the stern, throwing out popcorn to attract birds to the boat, and tirelessly explaining for the umpteenth time how to tell this gull from the other. She and Don kept year lists, and the New Year's Day

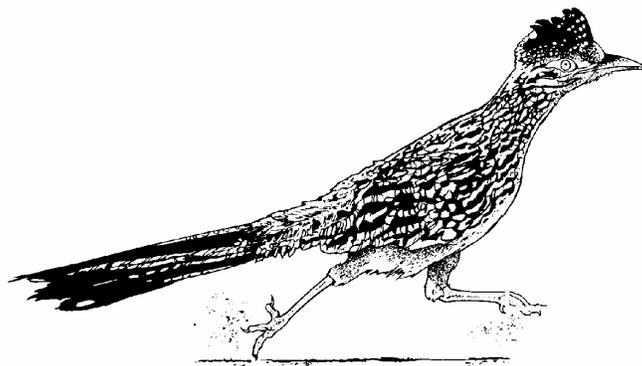
SDFO NEWS**Marjorie Hastings (cont.)**

pelagic trip became a way to start their year lists off with a bang.

Marjorie and Don were also the go-to people for out-of-town birders. They took hundreds of birders out to see San Diego specialties and created a network of birding friends around the country. Often they would bring those birders to the Cove, and we would look for seabirds together. Again and again I heard these birders say that they wished that their own birding communities could be as friendly as San Diego's, and they would go home determined to be as kind to other birders as Don and Marjorie had been to them. When I would travel to other places in the U.S., I would call Marjorie and say "who do you know in ...?" and she would know some birder there who having been treated so nicely during their trips to San Diego, would be happy to share the local birds with an out-of-towner.

Marjorie's health deteriorated over the course of the last decade, and it was many years before the doctors diagnosed the palsy that gradually robbed her of the ability to walk, move, speak, and eventually, even breathe. But even as she became more and more infirm, Don and I took her to see birds as often as we could. For the last several years, she was bedridden, but Don placed her bed so that she could watch hummingbirds come to the feeders at the window. To the end only three things mattered to her: Don, her family and friends...and birds.

—Stan Walens



DECEMBER BIRD NEWS

Compiled by Paul Lehman, Guy McCaskie, and
Barbara Carlson

This month, Guy McCaskie is extra busy with work and requested a temporary vacation from writing the monthly summary of notable San Diego County bird sightings. So here is a shorter version of said summary plus recaps from each of the county's five Christmas Bird Counts.

DECEMBER 2011 SIGHTINGS SUMMARY, SAN DIEGO COUNTY

by Paul Lehman

Probably the most widely seen rarities in San Diego County during December 2011 in-



Dusky-capped Flycatcher
Photo by Tom Blackman

cluded a Dusky-capped Flycatcher at the Aviara Resort in Carlsbad 11 Dec+ (S. Brad), a Painted Redstart at Rohr Park in Bonita 19 Nov+ (R. Phillips), a Grace's Warbler at Evergreen Cemetery in San Diego 16 Dec+ (D. Batzler), a Black-throated Green Warbler near Mission Bay in San Diego 05-10 Dec (P. Lehman), a Northern Parula at Rohr Park 19 Nov+ (P. Lehman), and a Harris's Sparrow around the Tijuana River Estuary Reserve visitor center 07 Dec+ (D. Touret). Less-watched goodies included a Prothonotary Warbler in San Diego 5-21 Dec (P. Lehman) and a 2nd Painted Redstart bordering Coronado 17 Dec (R. Patton). But perhaps two of the most unusual birds of the month gained only brief moments of fame: a very-unusual-in-winter Dusky Flycatcher near Ramona 16 Nov+ (S. Smith) and an *inland*, one-day-wonder Nelson's Sparrow at Lake Hodges 9 Dec (D. Johnson). But top billing for unseasonable, winter-season brow-raising was provided by the well documented Swainson's Thrush 17-18 Dec in Chula Vista (M. Sadowski). Returning rarities included the Thick-billed Kingbird in Chula Vista (unfortunately going AWOL during the CBC period), Blue-headed Vireo on Pt. Loma, and Hepatic Tanager in northwest Balboa Park—all for their second winters. A Baltimore Oriole returned for its third winter near Nestor. But these were all outdone by the Hepatic Tanager in Imperial Beach for winter No. 6. High counts were established by the *four* adult Yellow-crowned Night-Herons together in Imperial Beach and by the continuing *five* Harris's Hawks

in Jacumba.

Honorable mentions go to a couple December fly-by Swainson's Hawks, the annual couple of North County wintering Zone-tailed Hawks, Hammond's Flycatcher in Coronado, three Tropical Kingbirds and a very late Western Kingbird, an Eastern Phoebe bordering Rancho Santa Fe, a late Warbling Vireo in San Diego, two Tennessee Warblers (Bonita, Carlsbad), three Clay-colored Sparrows, Rose-breasted and Black-headed Grosbeaks, and Orchard and some *five* Baltimore Orioles.

San Diego CBC (17 December)

by Phil Unitt

216 species!

19 species exceeded their previous high for the 58-year history of the count, including: Yellow-crowned Night Heron (all 4 at Imperial Beach), Turkey Vulture (21 well distributed around the count circle, blew away the previous high of 10 in 1996), Greater White-fronted Goose (20 at Sweet-water Reservoir for a month, bested the previous high of 17), Red-shouldered Hawk (48 well distributed around the count circle, bested the previous high of 38 in 2010), Virginia Rail (20, 11 of them in Rice Canyon, Chula Vista, blew away the previous high of 11 in 2008), Eurasian Collared Dove (116, bested the previous high of 89 in 2010), Anna's Hummingbird (1280, bested the previous high of 1131 in 2009), Allen's Hummingbird (64, including *Selasphorus* sp., bested the previous high of 43 in 2010), Nuttall's Woodpecker (98, bested the previous high of 76 in 2010), Say's Phoebe (193, bested the previous high of 162 in 2010), Western Bluebird (153, bested the previous high of 139 in 2010), Orange-crowned Warbler (335, bested the previous high of 267 in 2009), Black-throated Gray Warbler (9, bested the previous high of 8 in 1999, 2008,

and 2010), Townsend's Warbler (109, bested the previous high of 106 in 2007), Hermit Warbler (6, 1 in western Balboa Park, 2 in Coronado, 1 in Greenwood Cemetery, 1 in Chula Vista, and 1 in Nestor/Imperial Beach blew away the previous high of 2 in 2009), and Grace's Warbler (1 in Greenwood Cemetery, a species new to the count).

Two species in notably low numbers this year were Costa's Hummingbird (just 1; average over the count's history is 11), and Lesser Scaup (if the 500 "scaup sp." are pooled with the Lessers, the total of 1046 is still far below the average of 3700).

Two species whose trend over the years has been strongly negative were actually seen in surprisingly high numbers this year: 6 Greater Roadrunners make a total that hasn't been equaled or exceeded since 1977, and 17 Loggerhead Shrikes make a total not equaled or exceeded since 1997.

Anza-Borrego CBC (18 December)

by Bob Theriault

A first-ever for the count Downy Woodpecker was recorded on the Los Coyotes Indian Reservation (the extreme western edge of the count circle). Birds of interest included Harris's Hawk, Cassin's Kingbird (very rare for the desert), Scott's Oriole, and Lawrence's Goldfinch. Concerning Gray Flycatcher, this species continues to be a reliable winter resident, with 10 found scattered around Borrego Valley. Tentative count total stands at 125; not a record, but a high number.

Oceanside CBC (26 December)

by Terry Hunefeld

A perfect Southern California day greeted nearly 100 birders. We recorded a

record 197 or 198 species. Rarities recorded included: Dusky-capped Flycatcher, Vermilion Flycatcher (3!), Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Gray Flycatcher (2), Tennessee Warbler, Palm Warbler, American Redstart, Clay-colored Sparrow (2), and Green-tailed Towhee. Fifteen White-breasted Nuthatches in the eastern section of the count circle were a surprise total but apparently part of a larger-scale slow spread of this and several other interior species westward.

Escondido CBC (30 December)

By Ken Weaver

Preliminary results for the Escondido CBC indicate that the total will be about 152. "Write-up" birds included the following: Eurasian Wigeon, Horned Grebe (a first record for the count), Least Bittern, Zone-tailed Hawk, Peregrine Falcon, *Selasphorus* hummingbird, Vermilion Flycatcher, Gray Flycatcher, Ash-throated Flycatcher (a first record for the count), Cassin's Vireo, Black & White Warbler, Wilson's Warbler, Green-tailed Towhee, and Yellow-headed Blackbird.

Rancho Santa Fe CBC (2 January)

By Robert Patton

Preliminary species total is 191. This makes it the second highest total in the 30 years of this CBC, surpassed only by 193 in 2008 (and tied at 191 in 2009). Birding conditions varied widely between locations within the count circle. Those along the eastern edge reported skies clear with heavy frost at dawn, giving way to warm temperatures with dry easterly winds. Those along the coast faced limited visibility with dense fog, giving way to moderate temperatures and lingering haze with a cool onshore breeze. The notable species and numbers reported were: 18 Hooded Mergansers, Little Blue Heron, Pacific Golden-Plover, 2 Pacific-slope Flycatchers, 2 Vermilion Flycatchers, Eastern Phoebe, 2 Plumbeous Vireos, Pacific Wren, Painted Redstart, 3 Summer Tanagers, Clay-colored Sparrow, and 2 Hooded Orioles .

10,001 TITILLATING TIDBITS OF AVIAN TRIVIA

By Frank S. Todd

837. What is a "calico heron?"

1438. Do birds eat golf balls?

2378. Do cormorants soar?

5253. Do spoonbills have large, functional tongues?

5729. How did the name "goshawk" originate?

7823. Which bird was described by a biologist as "This loud and messy bird shares with two other species, *Rattus rattus* and *Homo sapiens*, traits which make the three of them a blight upon the earth: omnivorous food habits, ability to colonize every corner of the globe, and an inordinate ability to procreate in geometric progression?"

[answers on p. 7]

ANSWERS TO “10,001 TITILLATING BITS OF AVIAN TRIVIA”

[see p. 6]

837. A molting, blotched blue-and-white, year-old Little Blue Heron.

1438. Yes, crows swallow golf balls but later regurgitate them. Ostriches commonly pick up and ingest foreign objects, including golf balls, and often perish as a result. An Ostrich cock in the London Zoo had in its stomach an alarm clock, three feet of rope, a pencil, three gloves, a roll of film, a cycle valve, a handkerchief, a comb, a collar stud and assorted coins of various nations. Another bird at a South African Ostrich farm ingested 484 coins weighing 8.25 pounds in its stomach.

2378. Very rarely, but the closely-related Anhingas and darters commonly soar.

5253. No, the birds have rudimentary tongues.

5729. The name is European and means *goose hawk*.

7823. The House (English) Sparrow.



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