

The **SKIMMER**



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SDFO NEWS

Monthly Meeting

Tuesday, February 21, at 7:00 p.m., at the Tecolote Nature Center, at the east end of Tecolote Road, off I-5.

Program: “California Condor Recovery: Slow but Steady Progress Toward Self-Sustaining Populations in Its Former Range,” by Michael Wallace.

Mike Wallace has served as a wildlife scientist for the San Diego Zoo Institute for Conservation Research Applied Animal Ecology Division since 1989. He coordinates the reintroduction program of the endangered California condor in Baja California, Mexico. He is the California condor species coordinator for the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) and Served as the California Condor Recovery Program team leader for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for over a decade.

Next month’s meeting: Tuesday, March 20, same time, same place. Program to be announced.

Paid Your Dues Yet?

If not, Membership Chair BJ Stacey can take your money at the meeting, or stick a check in the mail. See the back page for details.

SDAS Bird Festival Seeks Book Donations

The SDAS Bird Festival will again be holding a used book sale and would appreciate any donations of birding, nature, or travel books. The Bird Festival sale is a great way to get old and unused books into appreciative new homes and raise a few dollars for SDAS programs. SDAS can give you a receipt for tax purposes. And please come shop the Bird Festival for hard-to-find books (Birds of Israel? 11000+ pages of Sibley's bird taxonomy?) at impossible-to-beat prices.

For more info, contact SDAS volunteer Lisa Heinz at lis_heinz@hotmail.com.

SAN DIEGO COUNTY BIRD OBSERVATIONS, JANUARY 2012

Compiled by Guy McCaskie

January's observations are eclipsed by the **Common Redpoll** found and photographed at the wild-bird supply store in Julian by Mike Goldhamer, William Mitten-dorff, Colleen Southern and John Spain on 4 February. This is the 505th species recorded in San Diego County, and ties us with Los Angeles County. This is the 4th Common Redpoll known in California this winter, following one in Shasta County and two in Mono County in December and January. This record is also the southernmost in California, with the previous southernmost being that of one in Fresno on 12 March 2009.

A Tundra Swan in Ramona first reported 2 Jan (MMi) was still present 28 Jan (MSt)—San Diego County is at the southern extreme of this species' winter range, so it is rare and not of annual occurrence. A Black Scoter, rare this far south, was seen flying southward off Cardiff 16 Jan (JMCM) and two more were with Surf Scoters on south San Diego Bay (Coronado Cays) 17 Jan (MSa). At least two Yellow-crowned Night-Herons, believed to be the two first reported in June 2005, were still roosting in a pine tree adjacent to the Imperial Beach Sports Park in Imperial Beach at the end of the month (GMcC).

Five Harris's Hawks were still in Jacumba 6 Jan (GMcC) with at least one through the end of the month (EGK), these five are believed to include the pair that nested locally along with the one young they fledged in July, and two additional adults that joined them in October. A Swainson's Hawk over El Cajon 8 Jan (MSa) was surely wintering locally; however, spring migrants



Common Redpoll in Julian.
Photo by Mike Goldhamer.

now reach California early as evidenced by over **50** seen in the southern San Joaquin Valley 29 Jan (Kelli Heindel-Levinson pers. comm.). An adult Zone-tailed Hawk has been present at the eastern edge of El Cajon

25-31 Jan (YT).

The wintering Pacific Golden-Plover at the Tijuana River mouth since August, but not seen on the day of the San Diego Christmas Bird Count, was still present 20 Jan (MSa), and a second was frequenting the San Dieguito River mouth/Penasquitos Lagoon beach 20 Dec-19 Jan (SH, DA). The S.D.F.O. 1 Jan boat trip produced two Xantus's Murrelets—rare in California waters in winter.

The well documented Dusky Flycatcher found at Dos Picos Park in Ramona 16 Nov (SES) was still present 14 Jan (GN)—one in Santee 17 Dec 1999 (Unitt 2004) provides the only other record for San Diego County in winter. Five “Western” Flycatchers in January is certainly far more than expected, with single birds at Maxton Brown Park in Carlsbad 25 Dec-31 Jan + (RN, PEL), near Forest and 15th in Del Mar 30 Dec-2 Jan (EC), in Kate Sessions Park in Pacific Beach 7 Jan (JK), Mission Hills 10 Jan (EA), Sweetwater Summit Park in Bonita 17 Jan (JPS) and along Silvergate on Pt. Loma 28 Jan (GN). The Eastern Phoebe found in extreme northwestern Rancho Santa Fe near the intersection of Manchester Ave. and Rancho Santa Fe Rd. 27 Dec (PEL) was still present 31 Jan (PEL), and the Dusky-capped Flycatcher found on Kingfisher Ln. at the Aviara Resort in Carlsbad 11 Dec (SB) was still there 24 Jan (MMA), both no doubt wintering at these locations. An Ash-throated Flycatcher, very rare in winter in the coastal lowlands, was at Dairy Mart Pond in the Tijuana River valley 28-31 Jan + (BR, JP). A Tropical Kingbird in the Golden Hill section of Balboa Park 22 Jan (PU) was no doubt the same one photographed here 27 Nov (M & PT), and the only one known present in the County after December. The Thick-billed Kingbird, present for its second winter at the lower end of Poggi Canyon in Chula Vista, is evidently moving through a larger area than last winter, but still findable at the end of the

month (PEL).

The Blue-headed Vireo known present near the intersection of Gorgonio and McCall Sts. on Pt. Loma since 20 Nov (PEL) was still present 28 Jan (MSt) for its second winter. The large number of Pinyon Jays present in the Laguna Mts. in October has evidently moved on, but a flock of about 25 has been somewhat consistent in the area of Stonewall Mine in Cuyamaca Rancho State Park 10 Nov-29 Jan (SJ, GN). The Swainson's Thrush photographed behind the Pep Boys' in Chula Vista 17 Dec (MSa) was still present 6 Jan (PEL, SR)—a Swainson's Thrush with an injured wing in Coronado 15-16 Dec 1979 (Unitt 2004) provides the only other winter record for San Diego County, and one that struck a window in Studio City, Los Angeles County, on 24 Feb 2011 (*North American Birds* 65:342) provides the only other record in January-February in California. A Sage Thrasher at Borrego Springs 18 Jan (JSF) was most likely a spring migrant—Sage Thrashers are early migrants in spring, with the first passing through Southern California in mid-January (Patten et al. 2003).

Along with the expected scattering of wintering Yellow, Black-throated Gray and Wilson's Warblers, a Nashville Warbler in Chula Vista 18 Dec-31 Jan + (PEL) and another in Tierrasanta 3-12 Jan (PEL), and single Hermit Warblers at the Aviara Resort in Carlsbad 14 Dec-24 Jan (PAG, MMA) and on Saturn Blvd. in Nestor 17 Dec-10 Jan (PEL, SR) were of note. A Black-and-white Warbler in residential Pt. Loma 26 Nov-12 Jan (SBM) and another in Mission Bay Park in Pacific Beach 5 Dec-5 Jan (GN, PEL), along with an American Redstart near Nestor Park in Nestor 14 Dec-10 Jan (PEL, SR), a Palm Warbler along the San Diego River adjacent to Sea World Dr. 11 Nov-7 Jan (JK, GMcC) and another at Rohr Park in Chula Vista 10 Dec-8 Jan (JP, PP) added an Eastern flavor to the mix. However, a Northern Parula and Painted Redstart at Rohr Park in Chula Vista

19 Nov-16 Jan (PEL, RP, JK), along with a Grace's Warbler at Greenwood Cemetery in San Diego 16 Dec-3 Jan (DB, JStJ) naturally drew the most attention from local and out-of-town birders.

In addition to the three Clay-colored Sparrows found in late December—two together in Carlsbad 25-30 Dec (PEL) and one at Fairbanks Ranch 27 Dec-2 Jan (PEL)—three were together at Heritage Park in Chula Vista 17-31 Jan + (MJB, PEL) and an unprecedented seventh was near 28th and Ash Streets in Balboa Park 18-22 Jan (PEL, PU). This is equal to the 7 listed for all previous winters by Unitt (2004). A White-throated Sparrow at Ft. Rosecrans National Cemetery 29 Oct-15 Jan (GN) is the only one reported this month. The imm. Harris's Sparrow found at the Tijuana River Estuary Visitor Center in Imperial Beach 7 Dec (DT) was still present 11 Jan (TB).

The Hepatic Tanager present for its 2nd winter at the Marston House in Balboa Park since 30 Oct (SES), and the other present for its 6th winter at the Sports Park in Imperial Beach since 12 Dec (MSt) were both still here 10 Jan (PEL, SR). At least seven of the 21 Summer Tanagers, and the same number of the 24 Western Tanagers known present in December, remained into January, with six "new" Western Tanager found this month. The male Black-headed Grosbeak spending its 3rd winter on Leon Ave. in Nestor was seen 15 Dec-10 Jan (EGK, SR). A female Orchard Oriole on Leon Ave. 19 Nov-2 Jan (JK, GMcC) is the only one known in the County this winter, and is probably the same female present at this location during the past two winters. Two Hooded Orioles at the Botanic Garden in Encinitas 10 Dec-31 Jan + (EGK, SES) along with single birds on Leon Ave. 2 Jan (GMcC), near 28th and Ash Sts. in Balboa Park 18 Jan (PEL) and at the "Lily Pond" in Balboa Park 28 Jan (PU) was a greater-than-normal five reported this month, along with

the additional five known present in December. Eleven of the 16 Bullock's Orioles known in December remained into January, with three "new" birds found this month. Of the five Baltimore Orioles reported in December only the female spending its 3rd winter at Sunnyslope Park in Nestor 26 Nov-8 Jan (MSt, TAB) and another at Mission Bay Park in Pacific Beach 5 Dec-21 Jan (PEL, SR) remained into January, but were augmented by two females together in Tierrasanta 3 Jan (PEL) with one remaining through the end of the month (PEL), and a second female in Mission Bay Park 5 Jan (PEL) and an adult male in the southeast corner of Balboa Park late Jan (KRE)—nine this winter must be a single-season record. A male Scott's Oriole at the San Pasqual State Park near Escondido 14 Jan (PAG) was west of the mountains where noteworthy, and gives us five species of oriole locally this month.

Listed observers: Don Adams, Eitan Altman, David Batzler, Thomas A. Benson, Mark J. Billings, Steve Brad, Tim Burr, Elizabeth Copper, Kim R. Eckert, Jon S. Feenstra, Peter A. Ginsburg, Scott Hampton, Steve Jorgensen, Eric G. Kallen, Jay Keller, Paul E. Lehman, Michael Martin (MMa), Sara B. Mayers, Guy McCaskie, Jimmy McMoran, Michael Mifsud (MMi), Richard Norton, Gary Nunn, Robert T. Patton, Jim Pea, Rick Phillips, Phil Pryde, Bruce Rideout, Steve Ritt, Matt Sadowski, Jonathan St John, James P. Smith, Susan E. Smith, Mark Stratton, Millie & Peter Thomas, Diane Touret, Yvonne Trahan, Philip Unitt.

Literature Cited

Patten, Michael A., Guy McCaskie, and Philip Unitt. 2003. *Birds of the Salton Sea*. University of California press, Los Angeles.

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

AMERICA'S BIRDIEST CITY/COUNTY COMPETITION: ADIOS, AMIGOS!

By Phil Pryde

As most readers of *The Skimmer* know, about ten years ago an informal birding competition called the America's Birdiest City/County ("ABC/C") competition was born. At its peak, about 30 cities and counties were entering each year. But participation has been declining in recent years, perhaps because the results had become somewhat predictable. One city (congratulations, Corpus Christi!) has had a lock on the city contest, and a handful of counties in southern California and southern Texas have dominated the county competition. To try to spread the appeal, regional winners were also selected for each of the major coastal and flyway areas, but participation continued to inch downward.

Then, last year the Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuaries, who had coordinated the event for the past four years (I had done so for the first six) said they could no longer do so in 2012. Reorganization of the event was needed.

In the hopes of reviving interest, last summer I sent around to the participating city and county coordinators, and to several birding organizations, a letter in which I suggested re-inventing the ABC/C as a springtime bird count event similar to the annual Christmas Bird Counts, but timed to take place at the peak of spring migration. I suggested calling it the "AB/MC" - the Annual Breeding and Migration Compilation. The letter asked, hopefully, for a volunteer or-

ganization to take on running the new event.

The results were a bit south of encouraging. I quickly received one or two brief e-mails with some comments but no volunteers, and after that no further input. The AB/MC was, apparently, not quite an idea whose time had come.

So, it is time to take the ABC/C off the race course and put it out to pasture. It was a fun (and instructional) event for a decade, but it's time to bid it *adios*. If those cities and counties that participated now have five or ten years of comparable springtime bird data that can be of use to their region, then I will be happy that the event has had some positive results. And I know the Corpus Christi Chamber of Commerce, which enjoys promoting America's Birdiest City, is happy!

My thanks to all the cities and counties that participated in the ABC/C events (around fifty in all), and especially to Mike Wilson at the Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuaries for his help.

Maybe at some point in the future the idea of a spring count, to compliment the winter bird data produced by the venerable Christmas counts, will take root and blossom. I do continue to think this would be a good idea, and will cling to the hope that some day we'll see it happen.

And my sincerest thanks to all those who participated in the San Diego ABC/C compilations.

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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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