

The **SKIMMER**



Volume 39, Number 8—August 2012

SDFO NEWS

Monthly Meeting

Wednesday, August 22, 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: Alvaro Jaramillo will answer “Everything you’ve ever wanted to know about gulls but were afraid to ask!”

“Oh, gawd...not another boring talk about gulls,” is what you may be thinking, and you know, it’s perfectly understandable. For many a birder, gulls are about as appealing as watching paint dry. Then quite unexpectedly there are other birders who are fanatical about them. What gives, how can gulls be more polarizing than health care reform? Also why would anyone ever become fanatical about them? Is there something you are missing? Finally, who cares? Why fill valuable memory banks with gulls when you could be using this brain space for much more appealing warblers, orioles and owls! Well, the answers may be more interesting than you might think. Gull watchers may be using a different identification process than warbler watchers, and this may be why they appeal to some folks. Also the reality is that most gull identifications are relatively easy, if you let go of the fear of gulls and learn to actually ignore details! They in fact can be some of the easiest birds to study closely and really get to know well. Gulls, unlike many birds, do very well in human-inhabited areas, so they are always available to watch. Furthermore they appear to be becoming more common? Should we be worried? Are they bringing in disease? Come and find answers to many of these questions as Alvaro gives you an introduction to our West Coast gulls and their identification while dealing with aspects of biology, taxonomy, and conservation. But the real story is about how much fun and excitement there is to gull watching in California and how you might be missing on something that is actually kind of a good time!

Alvaro Jaramillo was born in Chile but began birding in Toronto, where he lived as a youth. He was trained in ecology and evolution with a particular interest in bird behavior. Research forays and backpacking trips introduced Alvaro to the riches of the Neotropics, where he has traveled extensively. He is the author of *The Birds of Chile*, an authoritative yet portable field guide to Chile’s birds, he also authored the “Helm” guide to New World Blackbirds. Alvaro writes the “Identify

SDFO News (cont.)

Yourself' column in *Bird Watcher's Digest*. Among various projects he has written part of the Emberizid sparrow chapter for the *Handbook of Birds of the World*, and is writing a photo guide to the birds and wildlife of Patagonia. He runs a birding and nature tour company "Alvaro's Adventures," where the focus is to have fun, learn a thing or two, and truly enjoy nature. Trips are international and include a schedule of Northern California pelagic trips. Alvaro lives with his family in Half Moon Bay, California where he loves the gull watching!

53rd SUPPLEMENT TO THE AOU CHECKLIST

MOVES THINGS AROUND

OK, birders—it's time to pencil in the newest series of revisions to the ol' field guide. The American Ornithological Union, the ultimate authority on bird names, has issued its 53rd Supplement to its *Checklist of North American Birds*. This year's changes aren't as traumatic as last year's, but there are some eye-openers, nevertheless.

Not much in the way of changes to common names. Most interesting to local birders will be the official splitting of Xantus's Murrelet (*Synthliborhamphus hypoleucus*), where the well-marked races *hypoleucus* and *scrippsi* become respectively, Guadalupe and Scripps's Murrelets. (John Xantus gets to hang on to his hummingbird). Also added to the list is the recently-described Bryan's Shearwater (*Puffinus bryani*), which was discussed in a recent *Skimmer* article. Two familiar exotic species are renamed: Common Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) becomes Indian Peafowl, and Common Canary (*Serinus canaria*) becomes Island Canary

Last year's supplement made wholesale changes to the major orders of birds, including the Pelicaniformes (pelicans, cormorants, tropicbirds, etc.) and the Ardeiformes (herons, egrets, etc.). The most dras-

tic shakeup this year is the realization that the Falconiformes and Psittaciformes (falcons and parrots) are much more closely related to the Passeriformes (perching birds) than to the raptors, so these groups are now listed just ahead of the dickey-birds. At the family level, we get some changes in genus names: the New World nightjars are moved to the resurrected genus *Antrostomus*. Similarly, the House Finch and its New World friends are separated from the Old World rosefinches in the genus *Carpodacus*; our finches are now placed in the genus *Haemorhous*. The hummingbirds get rearranged—most changes affect tropical species, but the Calliope Hummingbird is now placed in the genus *Selasphorus*.

What else?-- Sage Sparrow moves from *Amphispiza* to the new genus *Artemisiospiza* (*Artemisia* is the genus of sages). The Gray Hawk (*Buteo nitidus*) is split into the Gray-lined Hawk of Central America and the Gray Hawk of Mexico and the U.S. border; confusingly, Gray-lined Hawk retains the old scientific name *B. nitidus*, while the Gray Hawk in its new, restricted sense becomes *B. plagiatus*. As usual, many changes affect tropical species you'll need a passport to see, but this should cover most of the changes that affect San Diego birding.

CLEVELAND NATIONAL FOREST BREEDING BIRD SURVEY

By Hank Ingersoll

Claude Edwards and I completed the Cleveland National Forest Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) this year on June 2.

The BBS is a long term national survey started in 1966 and repeated each year during the breeding season. Approximately 4000 randomly distributed roadside routes are surveyed in the United States and Canada, using a standardized protocol. The survey entails 50 three-minute point counts of all birds seen and heard. The point counts are spaced ½ mile apart. The protocol is strict, starting ½ hour before dawn, and ending 4 to 5 hours later. About 450 scientific papers have been published analyzing the results.

This particular survey begins at Pioneer Mail Picnic Area in Cleveland National Forest, goes S. on Sunrise Highway, S. on Kitchen Creek Rd., crosses under I-8 and ends at Cameron Valley. The habitat is varied. The habitat is coniferous and oak woodlands along the crest of Mt. Laguna, turning into chaparral along upper Kitchen Creek Rd. There is grassland along lower Kitchen Creek Rd., and riparian areas along Kitchen Creek and La Posta Creek at the end of the route.

This particular route was first surveyed in 1995 and has been surveyed every year since 2005. Mary Beth Stowe did the route from 2005 to 2007, and Claude Edwards and I since 2008. The first five stops were impacted by the Cedar fire in October 2003. The Border Patrol station has been expanded at La Posta. The rest of the habitat is virtually unchanged over the years since 1995.

The Patuxent Wildlife Research Center has published route specific data for all the BBS routes on their webpage (<http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/>) for the years 1969 to 2010 including statistical analysis. Us-

ing their data and our own surveys, I reviewed in more depth 30 of the more common species we see. I defined common species as those whose average count is >5 per survey since 1995. I looked at two time intervals: 1995 to 2012 (18 years) and more recently 2005 to 2012 (8 years). Some trends may not be noted because of the small numbers of birds on this one route. The BBS methodology measures relative numbers of bird species, not absolute numbers.

We typically find 45 to 50 breeding species along this route. Of the 30 bird species I studied in more depth, 21 had no discernible population trend in the time frames of 1995 to 2012, and 2005 to 2012.

The commonest bird species on the route is Acorn Woodpecker, with about 70 seen (or heard) per year, with numbers stable. Resident species that have seemed to decrease in recent years include: Red-tailed Hawk, Common Raven and Oak Titmouse. Mourning Dove numbers have been down the last 3 years, going from 36 birds in 2003 to 1 this year. Western Bluebird numbers have increased since 2003. House Wrens have increased since 2005. The migratory species that breed along the route showed no trends. No species showed a statistically significant increase from 1995 to the present.

Brewer's Blackbirds have declined significantly since 1995. The average count from 1995 to 2005 was 11 individuals with a high count of 21 in 1996. Since 2006 a maximum only 3 or 4 birds were seen, and the last three years we have seen none. There is also a decreasing trend of Brewer's Blackbirds in the State of California in the same time frame.

Aerial insectivore numbers have decreased dramatically in the eastern United States and in Canada since 1980 (p.4 <http://www.stateofcanadasbirds.org/>) ,

down about 70 % in that time frame and down about 15 % since 1995. There is a longitudinal geographical gradient of the decline, with western aerial insectivores not declining (Nebel *et al.* figure 1. <http://www.ace-eco.org/vol5/iss2/art1/>) . Consistent with that data, the three aerial insectivores on our route, Western Wood-Pewee, Violet-Green Swallow, and Cliff Swallow have had stable numbers since 1995. Grassland species have also been declining on a national level. (p.8 <http://www.stateofthebirds.org/State%20of%20the%20Birds%202011.pdf>) Our one grassland species, Western Meadowlark, has been stable, with too few birds to detect any trend.

The BBS protocol is not a good format for surveying uncommon birds. We missed both Gray Vireo and Sage Sparrow this year, although they have been seen previously in the same area. . This route is the only BBS route in proper habitat for the Gray Vireo in the

state of California. Too few birds are heard for any statistical analysis.

Biases in the BBS database include roadside sampling and observer variability that could cause an apparent trend that is not real. For example, Mary Beth may have better ears than Claude and I, and hear more birds (a distinct possibility!). The BBS tries to reduce this variable by standardizing the protocol , and asking each observer to commit 3 or more years for a specific route, but inter-observer bias cannot be totally eliminated by this protocol. The fact that for two-thirds of the common species Claude and I found similar number of individuals as Mary Beth argues against significant inter-observer bias for this route.

In summary, since 1995 over this particular BBS route with stable habitat, the majority of commonly heard and seen sedentary and migratory species have had stable numbers. The numbers of Brewer's Blackbirds have declined.

SAN DIEGO COUNTY BIRD OBSERVATIONS, JULY 2012

Compiled by Guy McCaskie

A Red-throated Loon at the Tijuana River mouth in Imperial Beach 28 Jul (JP) undoubtedly summered locally, the only loon reported in the County this month--all three species of loon are known to occasionally summer locally. The presence of "hundreds" of Black-vented Shearwaters off Point La Jolla in La Jolla 20 Jul (SW) was the first indication of the start of the annual northward post-breeding movement of this species--somewhat earlier in the year than expected so suggests failed nesting. A young Brown Booby off Torrey Pines State Preserve 1 Jul (JK) and another immediately to the south of Pt. Loma 22 Jul (JP) were the only two reported. A Brown Pelican photographed on the highway in Borrego Springs 3 Jul (RW) was clear-

ly in trouble—each year large numbers of these birds move northward from the Gulf of California after breeding, with many ending up in similar situations throughout the deserts of southeastern California.

A Reddish Egret was at the San Diego River mouth 9 Jul (JP), and another was frequenting south San Diego Bay through the month (JK, PEL). Each of the two pairs of Yellow-crowned Night-Herons at the Sports Park in Imperial Beach fledged three young in July (JP, GMcC), and a pair was still around a nest at Sea-World at the end of the month (JP)—no verification of young in the nest. Harris's Hawks continue to be seen in Jacumba through July (EGK). A Zone-tailed Hawk in flight along San Luis Rey River near Bonsall on the

early date of 24 Jul (AA) was likely returning to winter in the coastal lowlands after nesting elsewhere.

A Solitary Sandpiper near Lake O'Neill on Camp Pendleton on 13 Jul (JMCM, BM) followed by two at Lindo Lake in Lakeview 31 Jul (GN) were the earliest locally this fall. What was determined to be the same Great Knot x Surfbird hybrid present on San Diego Bay in late August 2009, was present, and well photographed, at the extreme southern end of San Diego Bay (north end of 7th Street in Imperial Beach) 14-18 Jul (PEL). The Curlew Sandpiper found on south San Diego Bay 16 Jun was last seen 15 Jul (PEL, GN). A male Ruff, still retaining some of its breeding "plumes", was present with Greater Yellowlegs on Famosa Slough 13 Jul (JD). Two juvenile Red-necked Phalaropes on south San Diego Bay 29 Jul (PEL) were early--no juvenile "peeps" had been seen by the end of the month. One or two Common Murres continued to be seen flying south past Pt. La Jolla in La Jolla most days through 14 Jul (SW, PEL). After the first Pigeon Guillemot at Pt. La Jolla on 18 Jun, up to two a day were reported there sporadically through 28 Jul (GN, SW, BJS, BLC)--the nearby cliffs appear suitable for nesting, but breeding has yet to be established. A Scripps's Murrelet at Pt. La Jolla 13 Jul (PEL) appears late for close to shore, but we need to learn more about the status of this and the recently "split" Guadalupe Murrelet in our waters.

A Yellow-billed Cuckoo photographed along San Luis Rey River near Bonsall 11 Jul (JMCM, BM) was in suitable breeding habitat--no indication of nesting so likely a lone bird. Two or three Band-tailed Pigeons were west of the mountains in the Fallbrook area (550-350 ft elevation) throughout the summer (KW), and one was as close to the coast as near Mount Soledad in La Jolla 20 Jul (JV). A singing White-eyed Vireo in Ft. Rosecrans National Cemetery on Pt. Loma 19 Jul

(GN) was apparently a "one-day wonder". Remarkable was an American Pipit photographed at Lake Henshaw 28 Jul (GN)--American Pipit is known to nest sparingly at high elevations in the Sierra Nevada and has nested at the summit of Mount San Gorgonio in San Bernardino County, but is previously unrecorded anywhere in the lowlands of California in summer. Single Black-and-white Warblers near the west end of Sorrento Valley 3 Jul (JK) and close to the San Diego Mission in Mission Valley 25 Jul (SBM) were evidently lost wanderers well to the west of this species' breeding range. The presence of single Yellow-rumped Warblers in the Laguna Mountains 20 and 29 Jul (CZ, BR) suggests local breeding--in San Diego County nesting is confirmed in the Cuyamaca Mountains, suspected on Hot Springs Mountain, and possible on Palomar Mountain (Unitt 2004), but not in the Laguna Mountains. A male Summer Tanager on the grounds of the San Diego Zoo in Balboa Park 3 Jul (TRS) and another in Sorrento Valley the same day (SES) were well to the west of the closest breeding locations in the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. A Pine Siskin photographed at a feeder in Poway 22 Jul (JD) provides the first record for this species in the coastal lowlands of this County in July.

Listed observers: Armando Aispuro, Barbara L. Carlson, Jack Daynes, Eric G. Kallen, Jay Keller, Paul E. Lehman, Sara B. Mayers, Guy McCaskie, Gary Nunn, James Pawlicki, Jim Pea, Bruce Rideout, Trent R. Stanley, Susan E. Smith, Judy Vacquire, Robyn Waayers, Stanley Walens, Kenneth Weaver, Catherine Zinsky.

Literature Cited:

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

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