The **SKIMMER**

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SDFO NEWS

Monthly Meeting

Tuesday, January 20, 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. Parking is available on the street or in the adjacent parking lots.

Program: Tom Ryan, of Ryan Ecological Consulting, will attempt to answer the question, "Where do the Least Terns go?"

Ryan notes,"When this question was first discussed, just after the Least Tern was listed as endangered in the 1970′s, there were no good answers. This question was placed on the list of research priorities, where it has remained unanswered for the past 40 years. Tantalizing bits of information have come from West Mexico, Guatemala and the Gulf of Panama. Several attempts to travel down the coast of Mexico have found very little that cannot also be attributed to the Least Terns that breed there. In 2012 we began a study using a new technology called light-level geolocation to attempt to track the terns along their migratory route. I will present on how this was done and our progress to date."

Tom Ryan is a wildlife biologist and avian ecologist with a strong scientific research and regulatory background in California. He has worked professionally as a biologist in California since 1992 and has extensive experience with threatened and endangered species with permits to survey western Snowy Plover, California Least Tern, Clapper Rail, Black Rail, Least Bell's Vireo, California Gnatcatcher, Southwestern Willow Flycatcher, and Yellow-billed Cuckoo. Tom also worked on Migratory Bird Treaty Act issues, conducted nesting bird surveys and enjoyed working on solutions to complex nesting bird issues.

Tom Ryan's current research projects include: investigating taste aversion to minimize depredation of Least Tern eggs by American Crows, tracking the migration movements and wintering sites of the California Least Tern using light-level geolocators, and tracking seasonal movements, nesting sites, and wintering areas of the Peruvian Tern in Chile.

Next month's meeting: Tuesday, February 17, same time, same place. Program: "Yellow-billed Cuckoo response to riparian habitat restoration: We built it, did they come?" A presentation by wildlife biologist Jenna Stanek, Southern Sierra Research Station.

2015 Dues are Due!

SAN DIEGO COUNTY BIRD OBSERVATIONS, DECEMBER 2014

Compiled by Sara Baase Mayers

Anza-Borrego Christmas Bird Count, Dec. 14 (by Bob Theriault, coordinator)

Very nice weather greeted 83 birders on count day. Unofficial total number of species reported is 125—still waiting on one rare bird report. Birds requiring documentation were Greater White-fronted Goose, Eurasian Wigeon, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Brown Creeper, Summer Tanager, Bell's Sparrow, Sagebrush Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Purple Finch and Pine Siskin.

California x Gambel's hybridization continues to make quail reporting difficult.

Interesting birds in the desert included eleven duck species found at golf courses, Townsend's Solitaire, and local specialties such as Costa's Hummingbird, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Crissal Thrasher, Le Conte's Thrasher (remains quite difficult to find—barely had one this year), and Scott's Oriole.

We had record-breaking numbers of American Robins and Cedar Waxwings, while the resurgence of the Gray Flycatcher on recent CBCs dwindled to one individual found this year.

The rise to dominance of the White-winged Dove continues. This bird first surpassed the Mourning Dove in abundance during the count in 2007, and while Eurasian Collared-Dove numbers peaked in 2010, they are now as numerous as Mourning Dove.

Tundra Swan at the Tijuana Estuary.

Photo by Bill Mittendorff.

Overall most common bird was White-crowned Sparrow, though its total dropped by 38% from last year. Perennial competitor for most numerous bird, House Finch, dropped to 3rd in the overall standings after falling 53% from last year, allowing Yellow-rumped Warblers into second, though their numbers have remained constant.

Lake Henshaw CBC, Dec. 15 (by Gretchen Cummings, coordinator)

A total of 27 participants covered 11 survey areas and found 114 species. Four of the species were rare and required documentation. Those four species were White-throated Swift, Peregrine Falcon, Vermilion Flycatcher, and Evening Grosbeak. Two White

MacGillivray's Warbler at the San Diego Zoo.

Photo by Trent Stanley.

-throated Swifts were noted in Santa Ysabel. One Peregrine Falcon was seen perched in a dead tree near Lake Henshaw. A male Vermilion Flycatcher was seen perched in a tree on Vista Irrigation District lands. Lastly, the Evening Grosbeak was heard at Mataguay Boy Scout Camp.

Of special note are three species with high counts this year: Varied Thrush, Band-tailed Pigeon and Lewis's Woodpecker. Twenty-one Varied Thrushes were noted on Volcan Mountain and at Mataguay Boy Scout Camp. Nine hundred thirty-four Band-tailed Pigeons were seen in large flocks in eight of the eleven survey areas. Thirty-five Lewis's Woodpeckers were noted in four of the eleven survey areas: Santa Ysabel Preserve East, Ranchita, Vista Irrigation District lands by Warner Springs, and Warner Springs.

San Diego CBC, Dec. 20 (by Steve Ritt, coordinator)

Two of the most surprising birds found on count day were a juvenile Tundra Swan and a MacGillivray's Warbler. The Tundra Swan was first found and identified at the Tijuana River mouth in the morning (TB, MG, BM, CS & JS). Nicole Perretta, famous for her bird imitations, called it in to the Tijuana River Valley, and it was last seen flying over the Sweetwater Marsh National Wildlife Refuge at 3:00 p.m. (JD). The last and only other record of this species on the San Diego CBC was when two birds were seen in 1956! The MacGillivray's Warbler was found at the Bus Depot within the San Diego Zoo (PAG & TRS). This species has been recorded on five previous counts, with a high-count of two in 1967, and the last seen in 1992.

Two Acorn Woodpeckers found south of the Marston House in Balboa Park during scouting on Dec 18 continued on count day (CA). This species has been seen on only five previous counts as well, with the last record being in 1977! The only Red-breasted Sapsucker of the count, which was missed last year, was also seen nearby. On the opposite side of the park, the most humorous surprise of the count was an immature, male Orchard Oriole found at the west end of the Grape Street dog park (JA), exactly where another immature male Orchard Oriole was last year! This species has been seen on seven previous counts.

Orchard Oriole at Balboa Park.

Photo by Jeanie Anderson

An Ancient Murrelet seen on the ocean (DPo & WTH) makes for the sixth year this species has been seen on the San Diego CBC. This appears to be a good year for this species in Southern California. Also seen by the pelagic team were 18 Brown Boobies (DPo & WTH), while 8 were seen from Imperial Beach (PEL), which surely involve some double-counted birds. This is the third year this species has

been seen on the count; it is following a currently increasing trend since the booby incursion began in Southern California in fall of 2013.

A Tennessee Warbler found at Nestor Community Park during scouting continued on count day, making the seventh year this species has been recorded on the count (PEL). Nestor Park also held a Vermilion Flycatcher and Baltimore Oriole, while another Baltimore Oriole was found along Leon Ave., and yet another returned for its fourth winter at Sunnyslope Park. The Vermilion Flycatcher at the Sunset Ave. ball fields returned for its fourth winter. Five Black-and-white Warblers sets a new high count for the circle, with one each at Nestor Park, Mission Hills, the Bird and Butterfly Garden, southeast Balboa Park, and an Imperial Beach residential area.

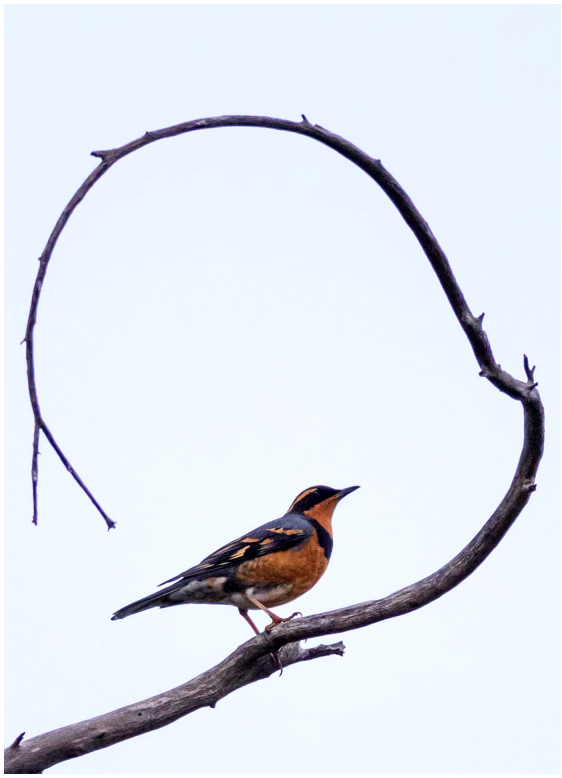
Chula Vista had numerous highlights, including the Thick-billed Kingbird along Main St. returning for its fifth year, a Hermit Warbler along F St., a White-throated Sparrow at Chula Vista Presbyterian Church, a Hooded Oriole at Eucalyptus Park, a Glaucous-winged Gull at the J St. mudflats, and a Western Flycatcher returning to Hilltop Park for its second winter. Another Western Flycatcher was found along the edge of the North Island Naval Golf Course, which also held two American Redstarts, a Nashville Warbler, and a returning Tropical Kingbird. Residential Coronado also had a returning Tropical Kingbird, six Mew Gulls, and two Costa's Hummingbirds, which are just barely persisting along the coast.

Dairy Mart Pond had the third Tropical Kingbird of the count, another American Redstart returning for its second winter, and a Northern Waterthrush returning for its fifth winter. One returning Palm Warbler continued along Beyer Way in San Ysidro for its second winter. Farther west in the Tijuana River Valley, one Mountain Bluebird was seen on top of Spooner's Mesa (where 27 were found last year), one Green-tailed Towhee each returned to Tijuana Slough NWR Visitors Center and Monument Road, and a Rufous-crowned Sparrow continued near Spooner's Mesa.

The Black-throated Green Warbler returned for its second winter at Greenwood Cemetery, where there was also the count's only returning White-breasted Nuthatch. A second Nashville Warbler was found at the Rohr Park basketball court. Five Black Oystercatchers seen at the middle Cabrillo National Monument tide pool were luckily just within the count circle, and a Pine Siskin was seen flying overhead. The Otay Valley Landfill again produced a Thayer's Gull and 35 Tricolored Blackbirds, but this is a dramatic and continuing decrease from a seemingly-promising 400 Tricoloreds present in 2011.

It was deciphered through the timing of multiple individual sightings that there are two Reddish Egrets continuing in southeast San Diego Bay, with one at Sweetwater Marsh National Wildlife Refuge and another bird at the J St. mudflats. The continuing Yellow-crowned Night-Herons by the Imperial Beach Sports Park are still holding strong with a healthy total of six, including two juveniles, which are now the first juveniles known to overwinter in San Diego County.

Multiple species of waterfowl were likely returning and continuing individuals again this year, including a Ross's Goose seen in Pond 10 in southwest San Diego Bay, a Eurasian Wigeon at Sweetwater



Varied Thrush at the San Diego Zoo.

Photo by Trent Stanley.

Brown Booby off Oceanside.

Photo by Bruce Rideout.

Ream Field, and another was seen at dusk along the Chula Vista bayfront. Sweetwater Dam also had the only other Rufous-crowned Sparrow of the count.

Last but not least, a total of 14 Varied Thrushes far exceeds the previous high count of four in 1972! Nine birds were feeding on camphor fruit at the SD Zoo with another near-by; one each were at Mt. Hope Cemetery and Spreckels Park in Coronado, and two were at Nestor Park.

The current total stands at 209 species.

Oceanside CBC, Dec. 27 (by Andy Mauro, coordinator)

The Oceanside CBC tallied 189 species, down six species from last year's total but still a little above average for this count. Several species seldom encountered on the Oceanside count showed up, including a Lewis's Woodpecker, 62 Band-tailed Pigeons, a Gray Flycatcher, and a Swainson's Hawk. Dave Povey's pelagic team recorded two Brown Boobies, an

Common Murre off Oceanside.

Photo by Matthew Binns.

River near 4th Ave., a Canvasback at Sweetwater Reservoir, two Hooded Mergansers at Sweetwater Marsh National Wildlife Refuge, and an adult male Black Scoter in San Diego Bay at Grand Caribe, Coronado Cays. Two White-winged Scoters seen flying from Zuniga Jetty into San Diego Bay were a nice surprise.

A total of seven Rock Wrens is completely unexpected for the count, as this species has been hanging on by a shoestring within the count circle since 2000; it was missed on the count last year, and the only higher count was an exceptional 14 in 1968. Three were at Sweetwater Reservoir, two at Cabrillo National Monument, and one each at Goat Canyon and Pier 32 Marina by Pepper Park. Sweetwater Reservoir has also significantly helped Burrowing Owls persist within the count circle, as three birds appear to have taken well to artificial nesting burrows installed there. One Burrowing Owl continued at

especially scarce species for North County waters. They also added scores of Cassin's Auklets, eight Ancient Murrelets, a Thayer's Gull, and trifectas in loons and cormorants to the list. A notable Zone-tailed Hawk reported by teams in two adjoining territories was presumed to be a single individual. Paul Lehman worked his usual magic with four species of orioles, including Hooded, Orchard, and Baltimore in the same apartment complex. This winter's thrush invasion was evident, with five different teams reporting a total of 12 Varied Thrushes, and a robust total of 231 Hermit Thrushes. In what has become an Oceanside CBC tradition, Paula Theobald and her team recorded Vermilion Flycatchers at the recently shut down San Luis Rey Downs golf course, but the nine-bird total was a new high.

A big thanks to all the participants!

Tufted Duck at Upper Otay Lake.

Photo by Gary Nunn.

Escondido CBC, Dec. 28 (by Ken Weaver, coordinator)

The results for the Escondido CBC are still preliminary with three teams yet to provide full details. The total species will almost certainly break our previous high count of 157. Actual rarities were, well, rare. I am only listing the top highlights known at this time. Some observations haven't been verified yet and there may be some additional corrections.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: one at Collier Park in Ramona (JD). *Selasphorus* hummingbird: three at Dixon Lake (PU & SP), three in the Kit Carson Park area in Escondido (PEL & BLC). These birds are still scarce east of I-15. Gray Flycatcher: one in Ramona (JD). Vermilion Flycatcher: one at the Ramona Water District pond near Rangeland Rd. (PVH). Townsend's Solitaire: one on Woods Valley Rd. in Valley Center (LR). Varied Thrush: ten along Canyon Rd. near Kit Carson Park (PEL & BLC), one at Old Coach Trail in Poway (KW). Orchard Oriole: one at the San Diego Safari Park (SW & NC).

We also had unusually high numbers of Hermit Thrush, American Robin, Purple Finch, and Pine Siskin, as some other counts have noted. Observers recorded Band-tailed Pigeons at several unusually low elevations. Scaly-breasted Munia continues to spread, with records from Kit Carson Park, near Mule Hill in Escondido, and in far north Poway. As usual, we had a wide variety of raptors but missed Zone-tailed Hawk this year.

Rancho Santa Fe CBC, Jan. 3 (Robert Patton, coordinator)

Preliminary results indicate 199 species, close to the highest total in the 33 years of this count.

A Few More San Diego County Highlights

San Diegans got a holiday treat when a male Tufted Duck was found in a flock of hundreds of Ring-necked Ducks and scaup on Upper Otay Lake on Dec

24 (LS & MS). Tufted Ducks are common across Eurasia, and a few reach the Aleutian and Pribilof Islands, but they are very rare elsewhere in the ABA area. This is the fourth record for San Diego County. The most recent previous record was at Famosa Slough in 1998. The current bird was still present Jan 4 (CG).

An adult Blue-footed Booby was seen from Pt. La Jolla Dec 13 (PEL). The Neotropical Cormorant found Oct 12 at Lake O'Neill on Camp Pendleton (TH)—the newest addition to the county list—was last reported Dec 6 (SB). The other bird added to the county list in October was a Blue-throated Hummingbird that had been photographed at Palomar Mountain in July. Astonishingly, another Blue-throated Hummingbird, a male, hit a window in La Mesa in December. It was taken to a rehab center and was discovered to be the same bird photographed in San Bernardino County Sept 18, originally banded in Portal AZ on July 14, 2013, then a hatch-year bird. Thus, of only three Blue-throated Hummingbirds known to have visited California, two were in San Diego County in 2014. (The first California record was at Three Rivers, Tulare County, in the winter and spring of 1977/78.)

A Marbled Murrelet spent several days amongst the boats docked in the Quivera Basin marina in Mission Bay, sometimes eluding birders and sometimes appearing very close, Dec 1–5 (LH, SB). Only four were previously recorded in the county, which is south of the southernmost end of its range; the most recent was off Coronado in 2001.

The five species just mentioned, along with the Thick-billed Kingbird seen on the San Diego CBC, are A and A+ rarities in San Diego County.

A Western Kingbird, rare in winter, was photographed in Fallbrook Dec 7 (RS). A Verdin at Border Field State Park Dec 29 CR) was far from its desert range; a very small number of vagrants have reached the coast in the past, with one at Border Field State Park a few years ago.

The Brown Thrasher that has been visiting a private residence in Descanso since about Nov 15 (the second individual of this scarce vagrant species in the county this fall) continues as of Jan 4 (CB). A Sage Thrasher, rare in December, was in Jacumba Dec 19 (EGK). The Nelson's Sparrow found at San Elijo Lagoon Nov 5 was present through at least Dec 24 (SB, RTP). The male Hepatic Tanager continues, Nov 9–Jan 4 (CA, NC), in its fifth year at the Marston House near Balboa Park.

Nelson's Sparrow at San Elijo Lagoon.

Photo by Steve Brad.

As the CBC reports suggest, numbers for a few species are substantially higher than usual. Varied Thrushes, which began showing up in late October, continue to appear throughout the county, with approximately 70 reported this month. (More than 100 were counted on the Santa Barbara CBC.) A likely explanation is a shortage of food in their normal winter range, but this has not yet been determined. Though fewer than the Varied Thrushes, Purple Finches strayed from the mountains and showed up at locations from the coast to El Cajon (Dec 31, CKS) and in the desert. The numbers of Band-tailed Pigeons, Lewis's Woodpeckers, and Hermit Thrushes are quite higher than usual, and the number of Baltimore Orioles is also high.

The San Diego Natural History Museum acquired its first specimen of Red-necked Grebe for the county, the southernmost collected on the Pacific

coast. It was found dead on the beach at the mouth of the Tijuana River Dec 25 (DPa).

Listed observers: Christopher Adler, Jeanie Anderson, Tom Blackman, Steve Brad, Cynthia Burnham, Barbara L. Carlson, Nancy Christiansen, Jay Desgrosellier, Peter A. Ginsburg, Char Glacy, Mike Goldhamer, Lesley Handa, W. Terry Hunefeld, Theresa Hyde, Eric G. Kallen, Paul E. Lehman, Bill Mittendorff, Daniel Palmer (DPa), Robert T. Patton, Stephen Perry, Dave Povey (DPo), Casey Richart, Lisa Ruby, Matt Sadowski, Roger Schoedl, Chris K. Smith, Colleen Southern, John Spain, Lea Squires, Trent R. Stanley, Phil Unitt, Phoenix Von Hendy, Stan Walens, Ken Weaver.

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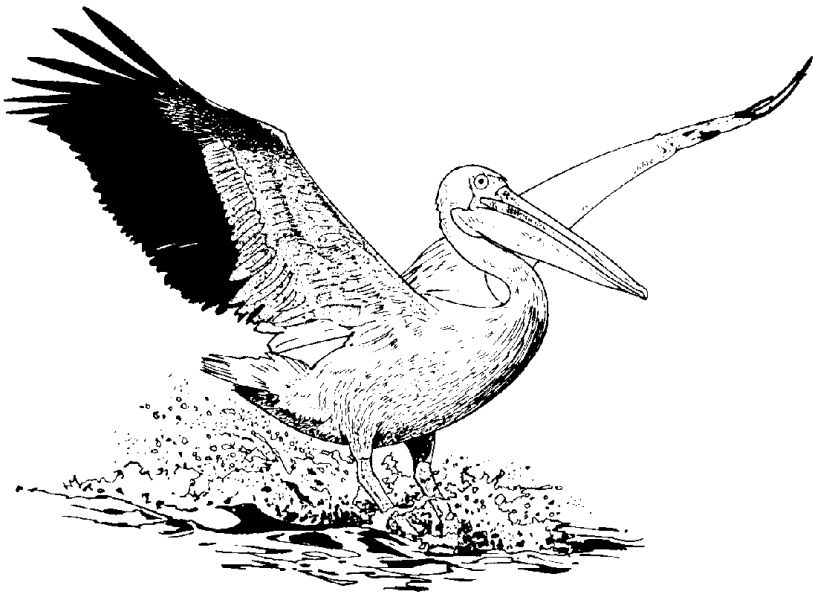

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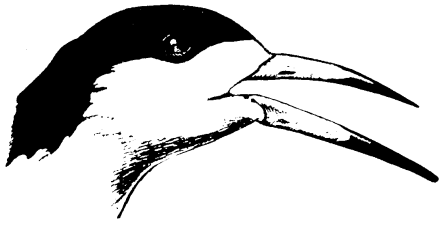
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