The SKIMMER

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SDFO NEWS

Monthly Meeting

Tuesday, April 21, 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: Barbara Kus will discuss "Recovery of Southwestern Willow Flycatchers in southern California: Challenges, needs, and opportunities."

The Southwestern Willow Flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*) is an endangered riparian obligate that continues to decline in California. Although sympatric with the endangered Least Bell's Vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*), flycatchers have not responded to management that has produced a 10-fold increase in vireo numbers over the last 25 years. This suggests that factors limiting the two species are different, and a closer look at habitat requirements of flycatchers is warranted to guide preservation and restoration actions. This presentation will discuss habitat use by flycatchers at multiple spatial scales and summarize our knowledge of patterns in territory and nest site selection. Factors such as association with surface water and use of various plant species for nest support will be considered, and integrated into recommendations for creating and prioritizing opportunities to restore habitat to benefit willow flycatchers.

Barbara Kus is a Research Ecologist with the U.S. Geological Survey Western Ecological Research Center, and an Adjunct Professor of Biology at San Diego State University, where she supervises graduate students conducting studies in avian ecology. Her research focuses on the conservation

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ecology of songbirds in southern California and Mexico, and addresses the interrelated themes of endangered species management and recovery, habitat restoration, post-fire recovery of species and habitats, and genetic diversity and connectivity of populations in fragmented landscapes. For the last three decades, Dr. Kus has conducted long-term studies of riparian bird communities, with an emphasis on the demography of the Least Bell's Vireo and Southwestern Willow Flycatcher. More recently, her work has expanded to include coastal sage scrub habitats, focusing on local and regional scale protection of California Gnatcatchers and Coastal Cactus Wrens. Dr. Kus has been a member of several USFWS Recovery Teams, and currently works closely with the San Diego Management and Monitoring Program to provide science support for species and habitat protection under the San Diego Multiple Species Conservation Program. Dr. Kus received a B.S. in Anthropology and a B.A. in Zoology in 1977, a M.S. in Ecology in 1980, and a Ph.D. in Ecology in 1985, all from the University of California, Davis.

Next month's meeting: Tuesday, May 19, same time, same place. "How Coffee helps Bird Conservation," by John Sterling.

SAN DIEGO COUNTY BIRD OBSERVATIONS, MARCH 2015

Compiled by Guy McCaskie

A flock of 15 Brant on Lake Henshaw 21 March (RA), along with single birds at four widely separated locations around Borrego Springs on 28 and 29 March (SBi, LH, M & PT), were no doubt migrating northward from wintering grounds in the Gulf of California to the Pacific by way of eastern San Diego County as depicted by Unitt (2004). The male Eurasian Wigeon that spent the winter at the San Diego River mouth was last reported on 7 March (JP), and the other at San Dieguito Lagoon in Del Mar was still present on 9 March (EC). Most unusual was a female Black Scoter photographed in Borrego Springs on 8 March (PA), adding a new species to the list of birds recorded in Anza-Borrego Desert State Park (Jorgensen and Theriault 2012). A Red-breasted Merganser on El Capitan Reservoir on 26 March (SR) was inland where scarce.

A Black-footed Albatross, now rare in San Diego County waters, was 14 nm west of Pt. Loma on 29 March (PEL). Four Black Storm-Petrels over the waters near the 30-Mile Bank off San Diego on 29 March (PEL & DP) were early; this species is not normally expected in California much before mid-April. One or two Brown Boobies continue to be seen from shore at the Tijuana River mouth and Imperial Beach (MSa, GMcC), and up to 16 were around the channel-marker buoys at the entrance to San Diego Bay (DP, PEL), along with single birds farther offshore (DP, PEL) through March. A sub-adult Reddish Egret, present since at least 19 February, was still present on south San Diego Bay 30 March (GMcC)—adult birds wintering locally normally move south in the late winter/early spring to breeding locations in Baja California. Two pairs of Yellow-crowned Night-Herons were at

nest sites in the Sports Park of Imperial Beach at the end of March (GMcC), and a different adult Yellow-crowned Night-Heron was seen at Famosa Slough 29-31 March (TM).

As of 31 March about 5250 Swainson's Hawks had moved northward through Borrego Springs, with peak numbers of about 600 on 12 March and over 1000 on 17 March (HC). A wintering Zone-tailed Hawk remained near Ramona through 7 March (TJ). A Ferruginous Hawk at the Ramona Grasslands on 16 March (NC) was the latest staying this winter—in the past the occasional individual remained well into April (Unitt 2004).

Lesser Black-backed Gull at south San Diego Bay salt works. Photo by Matt Sadowski.

Two of the wintering Black Oystercatchers, along with a hybrid American x Black Oystercatcher, were still at the entrance to San Diego Bay (Pt. Loma and the Zuniga Jetty) 28 March (MSt), and another Black Oystercatcher was on San Mateo Pt. at the extreme northwestern corner of San Diego County on 14 March (AG). The adult Pacific Golden-Plover, first seen in Del Mar on 31 August, was still present 21 March (LR), and the other, first seen at the Tijuana River mouth on 26 December, was last reported on 12 March (MSa). Three Red-necked Phalaropes over the San Diego Trough off San Diego on 29 March (PEL) were a few days earlier than the spring arrival dates published by Unitt (2004). An adult Lesser Black-backed Gull photographed on south San Diego Bay 4-12 March (MSa) provides the 9th record for the County. Two Gull-billed Terns on south San Diego Bay 15 March (MSa) were the earliest of the small number returning this year.

Crested Caracara at Lake Henshaw. Photo by Gary Nunn.

A Lesser Nighthawk at San Elijo Lagoon 9 March (RTP) was not only exceptionally early for a spring migrant, but was on the immediate coast where rare. A female Williamson's Sapsucker, rare in San Diego County, was at Stonewall Mine in the Cuyamaca Mts. on 21 March (CAd). An adult Crested Caracara photographed at Lake Henshaw on 18 March (GN) was the first to be found away from the heavily populated area along the immediate coast.

The Eastern Phoebe found near the Bird & Butterfly Garden in the Tijuana River Valley on 1 January was last seen on 8 March (SR). An Ash-throated Flycatcher in Jacumba on 13

Inca Doves in Borrego Springs.
Photo by Tom Blackman.

March (MSa) probably wintered locally, as spring migrants are not normally expected before the last few days in March, with one along Kitchen Creek Road on 29 March (SBr) being the first reported this spring. The Tropical Kingbird continued at Liberty Station on Pt. Loma through at least 9 March (MSa), and the Thick-billed Kingbird at the lower end of Poggi Canyon in Chula Vista was still present on 25 March (SR); based on the past five winters, it should stay well into April. The first of the summering Bell's Vireos was found singing in the Tijuana River Valley on 11 March (EH); interesting is the fact that the one that spent the winter at Nestor Park in Nestor was still present and photographed on 28 March (CZ). The first of the summering Gray Vireos were singing along Kitchen Creek Road on 27 March (BA). Three wintering Plumbeous Vireos remained into March, with the latest staying in Kate Sessions Park in La Jolla to at least 28 March (NC). A Cassin's Vireo near Liberty Station on 11 March (PAG) likely wintered locally, while one photographed in Nestor Park on 21 March (PN) and another in Jacumba on 23 March (EGK), along with a Warbling Vireo at San Elijo Lagoon on 8 March (SES), were the earliest of the spring migrants reported this year. The Gray Catbird discovered coming to roost in the yard of Paulette Ache in Borrego Springs in mid-January was last seen on 25 March (JCS), and a Brown Thrasher frequenting feeders at the home of Cynthia Burnham in Descanso since mid-November remained through 31 March (CB).

Lingering wintering wood-warblers included the Northern Waterthrush at Cottonwood Creek Park in Encinitas still present on 3 March (SBr). The Black-and-white Warbler at Nestor Park in Nestor was last reported on 7 March (CZ), and one found near Liberty Station on 11 March (PAG) probably wintered locally. The Northern Parula in La Jolla was still present on 5 March (LeRD). A Chestnut-sided Warbler in Del Mar 7-14 March (SES) no doubt spent the winter in that area. A Palm Warbler known present in Greenwood Cemetery since 23 February was still there on 29 March (JBru), and another was seen near the Dairy Mart Ponds in the Tijuana River Valley on 21 March (SL). A Grace's Warbler photographed in Greenwood Cemetery 15-18 March (NC) was undoubtedly the same bird known present here during the past three winters. The far more cooperative Black-throated Green Warbler in Greenwood Cemetery was still present on 31 March (CAM), and the other in Del Mar was last reported on 19 March (TM). A singing Lucy's Warbler at Agua Caliente County Park on 6 March (EP) was probably an early migrant, and the first to arrive at the known nesting area in the Borrego Sink were present 15 March (RT). The first reported

Black-throated Green Warbler in Del Mar.
Photo by Tito Gonzalez.

Lark Bunting near Ramona. Photo by Jimmy McMorran.

spring migrant Black-throated Gray Warblers were five along Kitchen Creek Road on 31 March (SR), and the earliest Wilson's Warbler was in Balboa Park on 9 March (CAn). An unusually early Yellow-breasted Chat was photographed in Los Penasquitos Canyon on 28 March (SBr).

The first reported Black-chinned Sparrow was singing along the Cameron Truck Trail on 14 March (NC). A Black-throated Sparrow, rare on the coast, was at a feeder in Leucadia on 15 March (PGN). A female Lark Bunting, rare in San Diego County, was near the Ramona Grasslands on 30 March (JMcM). A White-throated Sparrow found near Liberty Station on Pt. Loma on 11 March (PAG) probably wintered locally, and the wintering Harris's Sparrow at the west end of Leon Ave. in south San Diego was still present 23 March (SBr). The wintering Hepatic Tanager at the Marston House in Balboa Park was still present on 23 March (JBro). At least five Summer Tanagers were known present in March, with the male at the Marston House still present on 22 March (JR), two near the mouth of Rose Creek at the north end of Mission Bay on 27 March (SR), a male at Kate Sessions Park in La Jolla through 21 March (CH), and a female in Del Mar on 21 March (LR).

Black-headed Grosbeaks usually arrive in the last few days of March (Unitt, 2004), so one seen near Sweetwater Reservoir on 22 March (RN) was a little early. However, the first Lazuli Buntings in Ramona and Jamul on 29 March (NC and JM) were right on time. An Orchard Oriole in Coronado on 16 March (PEL) undoubtedly wintered locally The female Baltimore Orioles wintering in Carlsbad and Nestor Park were still present on 31 March (SBr) and 13 March (PEL), and a male at Famosa Slough 26-31 March (CH, SBM) likely spent the winter nearby. The first arriving male Bullock's Oriole was seen in the Tijuana River Valley on 7 March (GMcC).

Observers: Paulette Ache, Christopher Adler (CAd), Bruce Aird, Caron Andregg (CAn), Ryan Andrews, Steve Bier (SBi), Steve Brad (SBr), Joshua Brown (JBro), John Bruin (JBru), Cynthia Burnham, Nancy Christensen, Hal Cohen, Elizabeth Copper, LeRoy Dorman, Peter A. Ginsburg, Anthony Gliozzo, Christine Harvey, Lena Hayashi, Eric Hough, Tim Johnson, Eric G. Kallen, Paul E. Lehman, Scott Loss, Curtis A. Marantz, John Martin, Sara B. Mayers, Guy McCaskie, Jimmy McMorran, Thomas Myers, P. Gretchen Nell, Peter Nguyen, Richard Norgaard, Gary Nunn, Ed Pandolfino, Robert T. Patton, Jim Pea, Dave Povey, Jeff Rash, Steve Ritt, Lisa Ruby, Matt Sadowski (MSa), Susan E. Smith, Mark Stratton (MSt), John C. Sterling, Robert Theriault, Millie and Peter Thomas, Catherine Zinsky.

Literature Cited:

Jorgensen, Paul and Theriault, Robert. 2012. *Birds of Anza-Borrego Desert State Park*. California State Parks, Sacramento.

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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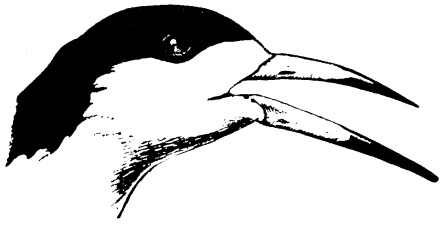
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