



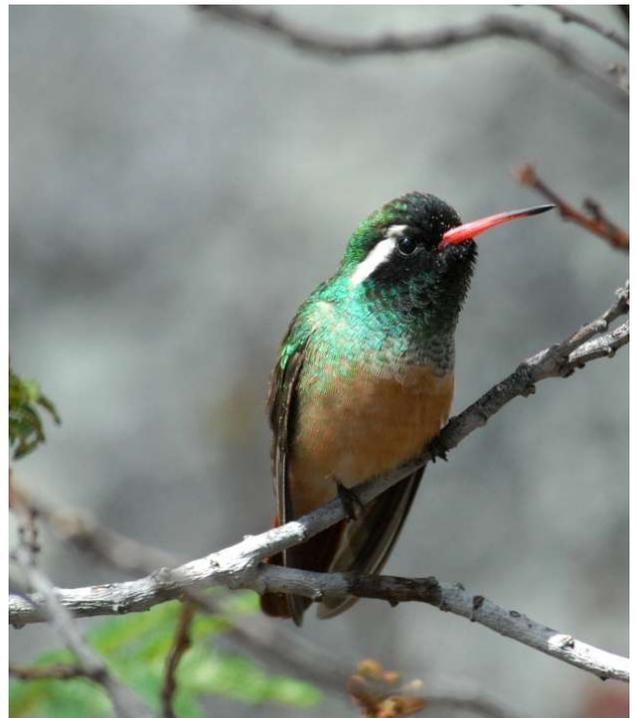
SDFO NEWS

Monthly Meeting

Tuesday, July 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: Phil Unitt will present “Mission to the Sierra Cacachilas: Birds and other Biota of the Cape Region of Baja California.”

In October 2013 the San Diego Natural History Museum initiated a biological inventory of the Sierra Cacachilas, the isolated range of mountains overlooking the city of La Paz, Baja California Sur. One goal of the survey is to search for new, outlying populations of organisms thought endemic to the Sierra de la Laguna, the “sky island” south of La Paz that supports a forest of pine, oak, and madrone trees and many endemic species and subspecies. Fifteen of these endemic taxa are birds, many of which differ strongly from their nearest relatives elsewhere. In this talk Phil will review the identification of these endemic birds and observations in the Sierra Cacachilas—90 species of birds so far, including the endemic subspecies of the Rufous-crowned Sparrow, Cassin’s Vireo, and Red-tailed Hawk. Other goals of the study are to assess variation in species’ abundance by elevation and, in winter, the use of the Sierra Cacachilas by the Gray Vireo. The Gray Vireo has not previously been studied in Baja California, but it appears to be relatively numerous in the Sierra Cacachilas, where its staple food, the fruit of the elephant tree (*Bursera microphylla*), is common.



Philip Unitt has served as collection manager for the Department of Birds and Mammals since 1988 and curator since 2005. His expertise includes the distribution, status, history, identification, subspecies, and conservation of the birds of California and Baja California. He has written over 50 scientific papers and reports, including the seminal paper on the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher (*Empidonax*

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traillii extimus) and taxonomic analyses of the Marsh Wren and Brown Creeper, with descriptions of one new subspecies of each. From 1997 to 2002 he organized the San Diego County bird atlas, published in 2004. He served on the technical advisory committee to the California Department of Fish and Game for revision of its list of bird species of special concern published in 2008, contributing six species accounts. Since 1986 Phil has served as the editor of *Western Birds*, the regional journal of ornithology for western North America, and from 2008 to 2013 served as managing editor of *The Condor*, an international journal of ornithology.

56th Supplement to the AOU Check List Makes Few Changes to San Diego County Bird Names

The American Ornithological Union is generally regarded as the ultimate authority on North American bird names and systematics. Each summer it publishes a revision of its *Check List of North American Birds* reflecting the current consensus. Often birders find wholesale carnage to their field guides, such as the renaming of warbler genera and rearrangement of the herons and pelicans of a few years ago. This year, not so much...

All the English common names stay put this time around. There are a few splits, mostly involving pelagic shearwaters and petrels, a few of which are of theoretical interest to you pelagic enthusiasts (Newell's and Townsend's Shearwaters, for example, or Herald and Trindade Petrels). Other species get new scientific names: the American Tree Sparrow gets its own genus, *Spizelloides arborea*; turns out that it isn't that closely related to the *Spizella* sparrows like Chipping and Brewer's Sparrows, but has more in common with Fox Sparrow and the juncos. White-tailed Hawk is no longer a *Buteo* but goes in the genus *Geranoaetus* with the Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle. The large parrot family is split into the Psittacidae, including the par-

rots of the Americas and Africa, and the Psittaculidae, including the Australasian parrots. The tectonic shifts in the tanager family continue, with the White-collared Seedeater of the Tijuana River Valley now included in the family, and a large number of tropical "tanagers" kicked out (the formal term is "*incertae sedis*," meaning they haven't decided what to do with them). Birders visiting Hawaii will discover that there are a bunch of changes in the scientific names of Hawaiian honeycreepers, mostly involving the many extinct species, sadly.

Looking down the road, stand by for future actions involving the hummingbirds; a recent taxonomic study suggests that Anna's and Costa's Hummingbirds (genus *Calypte*) should probably be included in the genus *Selasphorus*, and there may be large-scale rearrangements among the other hummingbird genera. There's a proposal being considered to split the Painted Bunting into two species, and the Northern Cardinal into six species. No word yet on splitting the White-breasted Nuthatch or the Warbling Vireo. Just wait 'til next year...

SAN DIEGO COUNTY BIRD OBSERVATIONS, JUNE 2015

Compiled by Guy McCaskie

The open ocean off San Diego proved interesting. A Flesh-footed Shearwater, rare in Southern California waters, was reported 8 miles off La Jolla on 28 June (SW). A Buller's Shearwater, unrecorded in San Diego County waters earlier in the year than 23 July (Unitt 2003), off San Diego on 10 June (PEL) was followed by an unprecedented 17 there on 14 June (DP). An estimated 15,000 Black-vented Shearwaters seen from Pt. La Jolla in La Jolla on 7 and 8 June (PEL & SES) unfortunately indicates extensive nesting failures to the south—successful breeders would not be expected off San Diego before late August. A Wilson's Storm-Petrel off San Diego on 14 June (PEL) was one of the highlights of the organized boat-trip from San Diego to the 30-Mile Bank aboard the *Grande* in mid-June. Ashy Storm-Petrels appear to be more numerous than expected off San Diego as indicated by a record count of 45 there on 18 June (DP). Least Storm-Petrels are not normally expected in Southern California waters until late July, with 19 July being the earliest recorded in San Diego County, so two encountered off San Diego on 14 June



Buller's Shearwater off San Diego.
Photo by BJ Stacey.

(GN & PEL), and five more there on 18 June (DP), were unexpected.

An immature Magnificent Frigatebird was well photographed on the coast at Batiquitos Lagoon on 15 June (TR), what may have been the same bird was reported at the Scripps Institute of Oceanography in La Jolla the next day (AP), and another was photographed a short distance inland over Lake Murray on 16 June (JM). Brown Boobies continue to be seen offshore through June (DP), and one was roosting with the cormorants and pelicans on the cliffs in La Jolla on and off between 7 June and the end of the month (PEL, SW). A sub-adult Reddish Egret on south San Diego Bay, present since at least 19 February, was joined by an adult on 22 June (PEL), with both still present 25 June (GMcC) and the sub-adult there through 30 June (GMcC). Yellow-crowned Night-Herons continue to be seen around the Sports Park and adjacent marshes in Imperial Beach (GMcC) and in the area of Famosa Slough/Sea World through June (TM).



Immature Magnificent Frigatebird at Lake Murray.
Photo by Aaron Polichar..

Every year a number of the more northerly breeding shorebirds spend the summer on south San Diego Bay. The larger species, such as Willets and Godwits, do not breed when one year old, so remain away from the nesting grounds in summer.

However, most of the smaller ones, such as

Western Sandpipers, are believed to nest when one year old, so are unexpected in numbers away from the breeding grounds. A shorebird survey of south San Diego Bay on 9 June (PEL) revealed the presence of about expected numbers of Black-bellied Plover (40), Greater Yellowlegs (5), Willet (65), Whimbrel (7), Long-billed Curlew (4), Marbled Godwit (55) and Short-billed Dowitcher (73), along with a noteworthy number of Semipalmated Plovers (60), and the much scarcer Ruddy Turnstones (3) and Red Knots (13), as well as an unexpectedly high number of Western Sandpipers (55). A Wandering Tattler in La Jolla on 22 June (JTS) had probably summered locally, but was possibly an exceptionally early fall migrant.

A South Polar Skua off San Diego on 14 June (DP) was the second encountered in San Diego County waters this year. A Common



Craveri's Murrelet off San Diego.
Photo by BJ Stacey.

Murre at Pt. La Jolla on 15 June (SW) provides one of a few June-August records for San Diego County. A Pigeon Guillemot at Pt. La Jolla on 5 June (JTS) was surprisingly the only one reported there as of the end of June this year, since two or three have been seen here at this time

in recent years. Last year we were taken aback when we encountered two Craveri's Murrelets off San Diego on the unprecedented date of 7 June. However, during the organized boat-trip from San Diego to the 30-Mile Bank aboard the *Grande* on 14 June a total of twelve were counted (PEL), and four more were seen there on 18 June (DP)—do numbers of these southern alcids move north into California waters much earlier than expected when nesting fails? Four Rhinoceros Auklets encountered off San Diego on 24 June (BR)

were no doubt attempting to summer locally as they do occasionally—this species is not known to nest any farther south than the northernmost of the Channel Islands. An immature Laughing Gull, rare in San Diego County, was on the beach at San Elijo State Beach on 28 June (GCH).

Since there are less than half-a-dozen reports of Common Nighthawks in San



Red-eyed Vireo at Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery.
Photo by Tito Gonzalez.

Diego County, one seen calling in flight over Vista on 22 June (TB) is of extreme interest – Common Nighthawk is a remarkably late migrant in the West, with the earliest in California not expected before the last few days of May, so the Vista bird was likely a late spring migrant. A presumed territorial pair of Brown-crested Flycatchers, a species first recorded in San Diego County in 2000, was still at the Road-runner Club in Borrego Springs on 5 June (PA). The Yellow-throated Vireo found at Ft. Rosecrans National Cemetery on Pt. Loma on 30 May (GN) remained through 3 June (SB), and another, evidently attempting to attract a mate, found at the Bird & Butterfly Garden in the Tijuana River Valley on 12 June (MSa) was still present and singing on 30 June (MA). An exceptionally late migrant Warbling Vireo was at the Bird & Butterfly Garden on 14 June (SES). A Red-eyed Vireo, now very rare anywhere in California, was photographed at Ft. Rosecrans National Cemetery on 3 June (TG). A suspected Townsend's Solitaire was reported in University City's Marcy Park on 20 June (CH)—if correct, this would be the only one ever found in San Diego's coastal lowlands in June. A singing Swainson's Thrush, a species that formerly nested in most of the riparian lowlands of San Diego County (Unitt 2004) was along the San Diego River near Qualcomm Stadium on 21 June (PU).

Several Wood-Warblers considered rare in California were reported. The Black-and-white Warbler found at Ft. Rosecrans National Cemetery on 31

May remained to 1 June (RN), and a second was there on 1 June (JMCM). Single American Redstarts were near Gilman Dr. in La Jolla on 5 June (BM) and at Ft. Rosecrans National Cemetery on 6 June (MSt). A Northern Parula was singing around the intersection of Dudley St. and Catalina Blvd. on Point Loma 1-6 June (MSa & GN); another was at the San Diego Zoo in



Canada Warbler on Point Loma.
Photo by Catherine Zinsky.

Balboa Park on 5 June (TRS), a third in the mountains at William Heise County Park near Julian on 15 June (MW), and a fourth at an office complex at Torrey Pines 22-24 June (BJS). A much scarcer Canada Warbler at Ft. Rosecrans National Cemetery on 4 June (RN) was the second in San Diego County this spring. An "Audubon's" Yellow-rumped Warbler on 5 June (MSa) was late for a wintering bird or spring migrant; however stragglers have previously been recorded away from the local mountains into the first week of June (Unitt 2004).

Most unusual was a singing White-crowned Sparrow at William Heise County Park near Julian on 15 June (MW) since this sparrow is not known to nest any closer to San Diego County than in the mountains

of the southern Sierra Nevada and along the coast at Pt. Conception. The first-summer male Summer Tanager at Mt. Soledad in La Jolla on 11 and 12 June (EP) was evidently a late straggling spring vagrant, but one along the lower San Felipe Creek near Scissors Crossing on 18 June (RT) was probably nesting locally. A male Rose-breasted Grosbeak at a private residence on Pt. Loma on 1 June (SBM) and up to two males together at Ft. Rosecrans National Cemetery 9-11 June (GN) were believed to be late spring vagrants, but an adult male at a private residence in San Diego on 30 June (RG) may be summering locally. A male Indigo Bunting was photographed along the Big Laguna Trail in the Laguna Mountains on 1 June (TW), and another male was seen in Jacumba on 5 June (EGK). The adult male Baltimore Oriole found at Lake Murray on 13 May (MM) was last reported on 9 June (CKS).

Observers: Paulette Ache, Marc Arndt, Steve Brad, Terry Brashear, Tito Gonzalez, Richard Griebe,

Gjon C. Hazard, Charley Herzfeld, Eric G. Kallen, Paul E. Lehman, Michael Matherly, Sara B. Mayers, Guy McCaskie, Jimmy McMorran, Jeffrey Miner, Brennan Mulrooney, Thomas Myers, Richard Norgaard, Gary Nunn, Ethan Piazza, Aaron Polichar, Dave Povey, Bruce Rideout, Thomas Ryan, Matt Sadowski (MSa), Christopher K. Smith, Susan E. Smith, BJ Stacey, Justyn T. Stahl, Trent R. Stanley, Mark Stratton (MSt), Robert Theriault, Philip Unitt, Stanley Walens, Torin Waters, Michael Wienholt.

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