



## SDFO NEWS

### Monthly Meeting

Tuesday, February 16, 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: “Conservation Genetics of the Bell’s Vireo,” by Professor Kevin J. Burns, Department of Biology, San Diego State University.

Bell’s Vireo is a species of conservation concern throughout its U.S. range. In California, the subspecies known as Least Bell’s Vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*) is listed as state and federally endangered. In other parts of the Bell’s Vireo range, the species has also been listed by various state agencies, and it is identified as a high priority conservation target by the Audubon Society’s “Red Watchlist”. Despite the conservation concern surrounding the Bell’s Vireo, no previous study has assessed genetic variation within the species, and current subspecies designations are based on qualitative morphological descriptions made in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Therefore, we undertook a genetic study of the species, with a particular focus on the Least Bell’s Vireo. In this talk, results of this study (some expected and some surprising) will be presented. Some questions we addressed include: Is the Least Bell’s Vireo genetically distinct? Do the current subspecies correspond to genetic breaks? and How does the genetic history of the species correspond to past climate niche models? This study formed the M.S. thesis of former Burns lab student Luke Klicka and was done in collaboration with Barbara Kus of the USGS Western Ecology Research Center.



Kevin Burns grew up in Houston, Texas and began birding in when he was 11. After getting a B.S. in

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Biology at Texas A&M in 1988, he earned a M.S. from Louisiana State University. After LSU, he went to UC Berkeley for his Ph.D. where he focused primarily on tanagers for his dissertation. Following graduation, he undertook postdoctoral studies at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. He left that position in 1998 to come to San Diego State University where he has been a biology professor ever since. He teaches courses in ornithology and evolutionary biology and curates the bird collection at the SDSU Museum of Biodiversity. Research in his lab involves tanagers as well as a number of local species including Bell's Vireo, Summer Tanager, Wrentit, White-headed Woodpecker, California Thrasher, and birds of the Channel Islands. He is a Fellow of the American Ornithologists' Union and currently serves on the AOU's council and the AOU Checklist Committee. More information about Professor Burns' work can be found at his lab [webpage](#).

Next month's meeting: Tuesday, March 15, same time, same place. Program to be announced

### Renew Your SDFO Dues for 2016!

If you haven't done so already, see Membership Chair Mike Goldhamer at the meeting, or find information on the last page of this newsletter.

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## SAN DIEGO COUNTY BIRD OBSERVATIONS, JANUARY 2016

### Escondido Christmas Bird Count, Jan. 2

by Ken Weaver, coordinator

Seventy-one observers participated in the Escondido Christmas Bird Count, the last CBC of the season. Our total of 158 species breaks the previous high count by two species. Brennan Mulrooney and Matt Farley observed the rarest bird of the count, a Swamp Sparrow, which was an addition to the list of birds observed within the count circle. Unfortunately, the sparrow chose to inhabit a spot at the Safari Park that is not accessible to the public.

Species noted that are listed on the rare bird list for the county include a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker at Collier Park in Ramona, a Gray Flycatcher at Ramona County Park, a White-throated Sparrow near Highland Valley Rd., and three widely-separated Vermilion Flycatchers observed in south Escondido, Rangeland Rd., and Ramona Community Park. Scarce waterbirds noted were

two Least Bitterns at Lake Wohlford, a Eurasian Wigeon at the Vineyard Golf Course in south Escondido, and two Common

Goldeneyes, one at Lake Wohlford and one at the Vineyard Golf Course. Scarce geese (but fairly regular in this circle) included two Greater White-fronted Geese at the Safari Park/San Pasqual Valley, three Snow Geese near Rangeland Rd., and a total of six Cackling Geese recorded by teams at the Safari Park, Rangeland Rd., and the quarry pond in Ramona.

A single Black-throated Sparrow observed in the San Pasqual Valley was only the count's third record; they are not expected west of the mountains. Two Zone-tailed Hawks, one adult and one juvenile, soared over the Safari Park. An additional adult Zone-tail occurred over four miles to the south near Lake Ramona. Twenty Scaly-breasted Munias, an exotic species, occurred at three locations in south Escondido.

Escondido is an inland count so it lacks many of the waterbirds and overwintering songbirds of the coastal counts. It does, though, produce a number of birds that are infrequently noted on the coast. Some birds, for example, that are not typical of the San Diego CBC that observers found include: Common Merganser (36), Ferruginous Hawk (17), Bald Eagle (2), Western Screech-Owl (4), Cattle Egret (65), White-faced Ibis (64), Lewis's Woodpecker (2), Acorn Woodpecker (274), Prairie Falcon (4), White-breasted Nuthatch (45), Mountain Bluebird (77), Purple Finch (27), and Pine Siskin (95).

## County Report

Compiled by Guy McCaskie and Sara B. Mayers

A female Eurasian Wigeon continues for its second winter in the desert, where very rare, near the Roadrunner Club in Borrego Springs 20 Dec–3 Feb (PEL, RT). A female Black Scoter was seen off Grand Caribe Cswy. at Coronado Cays 14 Jan (PEL), and the Red-necked Grebe found in the Oceanside Harbor on 30 Dec (PAG) was still present on 28 Jan (DM). Northern Fulmars were more numerous than expected off the coast as indicated by such numbers as 100+ off



This Short-tailed Shearwater at the 9-Mile Bank on 1 January 2016 was one of only two seen over San Diego County waters this month – note the rounded head, relatively short bill, and pale chin that can be used in part to separate this species from the very similar Sooty Shearwater. Photo by Greg Gillson.

San Diego on 21 Jan (DP). On the other hand, Short-tailed Shearwaters were unusually scarce in Southern California waters, with one well photographed over the 9-Mile Bank on 1 Jan (DP) and another off the entrance to San Diego Bay on 21 Jan (DP) being the only two known in San Diego County waters. Twenty-three Brown Boobies were on harbor buoys, with more offshore, 28 Jan (DP).

In addition to the three Zone-tailed Hawks noted in the Escondido CBC report, a first-winter bird was soaring over Rancho Bernardo on 9 Jan (JJ), an adult was at Lake Wohlford on 16 Jan (JR) and another adult was farther inland near Santa Ysabel on 26 Jan (AM), documenting the presence of at least six wintering in the County. Two returning wintering Pacific Golden-Plovers continue, one at the Tijuana River mouth 27 Aug–20 Jan (RTP, MSa) and one at the mouth of the San Dieguito Lagoon in Del Mar 9 Sep–25 Jan (SB, BM).



Unexpected was this basic-plumage Marbled Murrelet in the sport fishing boat basin at the north end of San Diego Bay on 1 January 2016. The similar looking but unrecorded in Southern California Long-billed Murrelet has more black on the head, with a head pattern resembling that of a Scripps's Murrelet. Photo by Thomas A. Blackman.

A Marbled Murrelet well photographed in the sport fishing boat basin of San Diego Bay 1–18 Jan (CKS, DP) provides only the fifth record for San Diego County. The earliest of the Scripps's Murrelets to reach San Diego County waters this year

were two off San Diego on 22 Jan (M & PT) and 16 there five days later (DP). Following the minor influx of Black-legged Kittiwakes in late November, the only ones reported this month were single birds at Pt. La Jolla in La Jolla on 8 Jan (JB), 10 Jan (GN) and 30 Jan (JP). The adult Laughing Gull found at Bayside Park in Chula Vista on 17 Nov (JMcM) was present



This Lesser Black-backed Gull at Lower Otay Lake on 18 January 2016 shows the somewhat dark coloration on the mantle, a mostly pale head with dark markings around the eye, and the somewhat slender all black bill typically seen on first-winter birds. *Photo by Jim Pawlicki.*

through January (NC). A first-winter Lesser Black-backed Gull was with other gulls at the boat dock on Lower Otay Lake on 18-19 Jan (JP, CKS), and an obvious first-winter Glaucous Gull was at the same place on 30 Jan (JK). In Live Oak Park in Fallbrook, 120 Band-tailed Pigeons—an unusually large flock—were sunning themselves in the tree tops 9 Jan (KW).

An Eastern Phoebe found at Lake Cuyamaca on 24 Nov (DB) was photographed there on 30 Jan (CJ), and another was photographed in the San Pasqual Valley (Bandy Canyon & San Pasqual Valley Rds.) on 4 Jan (LH). Two continuing Tropical Kingbirds were reported this month: one on Woodworth Way at Liberty Station 14 Oct–30 Jan (PEL) and one at Dairy Mart Pond 5 Dec–2 Jan (TF, GMcC). The Thick-billed Kingbird in its 6<sup>th</sup> winter in Poggi Canyon in Chula Vista was present through 22 Jan (NC). The Scissor-tailed Flycatcher at San Elijo Lagoon since 12 Oct (RTP) was seen on 17 Jan (SB). A Cassin's Vireo, much scarcer locally in the coastal lowlands than the

Plumbeous Vireo in winter, was in Del Mar (Klish Way) 10 Jan–3 Feb (EC, SES) and another was found in Coronado (7<sup>th</sup> & Adella) on 24 Jan (PEL), but a third photographed at Stonewall Mine in Cuyamaca Rancho State Park on 24 Jan (M & PT) was in the mountains where previously unrecorded at this time of the year.

The Townsend's Solitaire found at City College in downtown San Diego on 27 Nov (M & PT) was still present on 21 Jan (GDeL), and another was in the coastal lowlands at the Park Headquarters in the Tijuana River Valley on 4 Jan (GM). A Varied Thrush in Balboa Park (near Florida & Upas) 22–30 Jan (PEL, JP) was the only one found close to the coast. A Sage Thrasher photographed at San Elijo Lagoon on 28 Jan (SB) was likely a spring migrant since Sage Thrashers are known to be on the move this early in the year (Unitt 2004).

Noteworthy wood-warblers include a Tennessee Warbler feeding in flowering eucalyptus near the Faculty Club at UCSD in La Jolla 22-31 Jan (DH, ML). Palm Warblers are much scarcer than expected throughout Southern California this winter. One found near Pantoja Park in downtown San Diego on 16 Dec (SC) and still present on 30 Jan (BC) and another at San Dieguito Lagoon in Del Mar on 28 Jan (BS) are the only two known in the County this month. The Northern Waterthrush on the north side



Note the black on the face of this Tennessee Warbler at UCSD in La Jolla on 26 January 2016. This is a mixture of dirt and nectar from eucalyptus blossoms, obtained when feeding at the blossoms over an extended period of time. *Photo by Tito Gonzalez.*

of San Elijo Lagoon continues 12 Nov–30 Jan (PAG, RA). A Hermit Warbler was frequenting a Monterey Pine on Rimini Rd. in Del Mar 11 Jan–3 Feb (PEL, SES). Two Black-throated Green Warblers continued, one at Greenwood Cemetery in San Diego 16 Oct–9 Jan (MSa, RA) and one in Friendship Park in Chula Vista 1 Nov–20 Jan (PEL). The Painted Redstart found in West Shepherd Canyon in Tierrasanta 28



This Purple Finch at the Bird & Butterfly Garden in the Tijuana River Valley on 1 January 2016 was one of a small number scattered throughout the coastal lowlands this winter. *Photo by Joe Leek.*

Nov continued throughout January (PEL). Of the dozen Black-and-White Warblers reported in December, three plus a new one were seen in January: one at Cottonwood Creek Park in Encinitas 17 Oct–26 Jan (GH, DB), one on the north side of San Elijo Lagoon 9 Nov–3 Feb (SB, JN), one in Solana Beach 29 Dec–1 Jan (JD, AB), and one on Rimini Rd. in Del Mar 15 Jan (PEL).

Two of the Nelson's Sparrows in the Tijuana Estuary seen from Seacoast Blvd. since late November contin-

ued through late January. A White-throated Sparrow was in Las Verdes Park in Encinitas 17 Jan (TG). The male Hepatic Tanager in its 5<sup>th</sup> winter near the Marston House in Balboa Park was seen through 19 Jan (RU). Approximately ten Summer Tanagers were reported, mostly in the coastal lowlands; one was in the foothills in Crest 5 Jan (CZ). A male Rose-breasted Grosbeak visited a feeder in City Heights for a few

weeks up to at least 11 Jan (RE), and another in Jamul 20 Dec–1 Feb (JM) fed on a sunflower. Two Orchard Orioles were present: a female at the Seascapes Apartments in Carlsbad for its second winter 17 Oct–28 Jan (TG, MSe) and an adult male favoring a blooming coral tree on Arden Dr. in Encinitas for a third winter 29 Dec–3 Feb (PEL, SBM).

Two Hooded Orioles were near the intersection of Richmond and Robinson in San Diego 2 Jan (MSt). A flock of six Bullock's Orioles, a large flock for winter, appeared on Coronado Ave. in Coronado 24 Jan (PEL). Five Baltimore Orioles were observed: up to two continuing at Liberty Station on Pt. Loma 15 Oct–30 Jan (GMcC, ML, PEL), another continuing at the Seascapes Apartments in Carlsbad 24 Oct–9 Jan (TG, GH), one on Coronado Ave. in Coronado 24 Jan (PEL), and one in the Grape St. Dog Park in Balboa Park 25 Jan–4 Feb (NC, PEL). A Bullock's Oriole along with three Scott's Orioles has been braving the cold at Jacumba since 9 Jan (EGK).

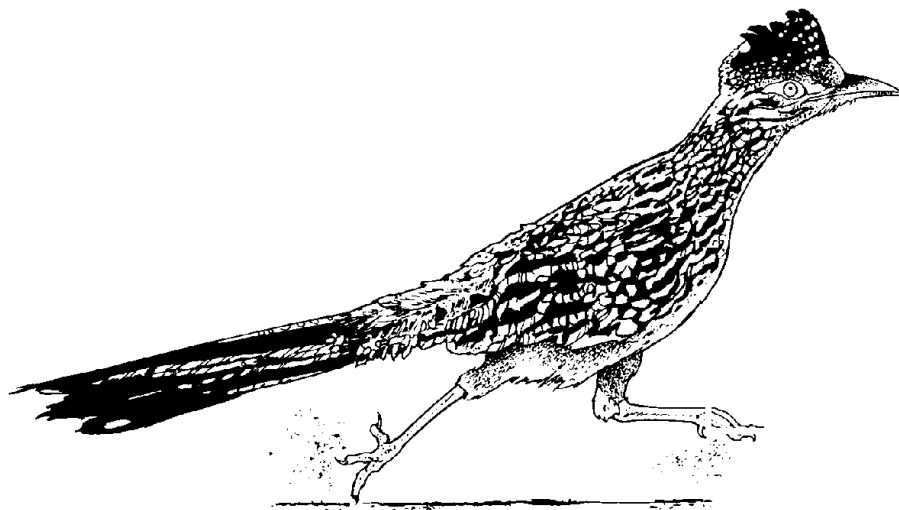
Small numbers of Purple Finches were still to be found in much of the coastal lowlands through January, and Red Crossbills were seen in Jacumba, Del Mar, and Solana Beach. Numbers of Pine Siskins throughout the county may be increasing as suggested by about 20 at a feeder in residential Pt. Loma on 31 Jan (SBM) and at least 40 at a feeder in Jacumba on the same day (EGK). About 50 Lawrence's Goldfinches on the ball fields at the east end of Sunset Ave. in the Tijuana River Valley since 21 Jan (JS) is an impressive flock to be on the immediate coast.

Listed observers: Ryan Andrews, Alex Bairstow, Dave Theriault, Millie and Peter Thomas, Roger Uzun, Ken Batzler, Steve Brad, John Bruin, Barbara Carlson, Weaver, Catherine Zinsky.

Nancy Christensen, Scott Clark, Elizabeth Copper,  
Gail DeLalla, Jay Desgrosellier, Richard Englehart,  
Tom Frankenberger, Peter A. Ginsburg, Tito Gonzalez,  
Gjon Hazard, David Holway, Laura Hunter, Charlie Jackson,  
Joshua Jaeger, Eric G. Kallen, Jay Keller, Paul E. Lehman,  
Max Leibowitz, John Martin, David Mathis, Sara B. Mayers,  
Jimmy McMorran, Alan Miller, Greg Miller, Brennan Mulrooney,  
Jan Nordenberg, Gary Nunn, Robert T. Patton, Jim Pawlicki,  
Dave Povey, Jim Roberts, Matt Sadowski (MSa), Mel Senac (MSe),  
Christopher K. Smith, Susan E. Smith, Jeff Spalding,  
Mark Stratton (MSt), Byron Swift, Robert

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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