The SKIMMER

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SDFO NEWS

Monthly Meeting

Tuesday, April 16, at 6:00 p.m., in the Hoffman Room of the San Diego Foundation Building, 2508 Historic Decatur Rd. 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: Matthew Binns will discuss "Birding The Gambia."

The Gambia has long been a favored country amongst European birdwatchers for finding West African birds. Interestingly, U.S. birders more often head to Ghana for this purpose. The regular influx of birders visiting the Gambia has led to the emergence of several excellent local professsional bird guides who can ensure a successful trip.

The Gambia is a small country which borders the Gambia River on the north and south banks, with a good highway that heads from the coastal capital, Banjul, inland to Georgetown, a distance of about 300km. The highway provides easy access to all the best birding spots, many of which are within easy reach of Banjul. The country, which has a bird list of around 550 species, sits in a transitional zone between tropical rain forest and semi desert and receives numerous wintering European migrants. The climate is pleasant in winter, the people are very friendly and costs are very reasonable. Good accommodation exists on the coast but gets more basic the further you move inland.

Many listers combine a trip birding in the Gambia and neighboring Senegal, which can increase the trip list considerably, but we concentrated on sites within the Gambia, focusing on the excellent opportunities available for bird photography.

[continued]

SDFO NEWS *[cont.]*

The talk will describe a recent visit in Nov/Dec 2018, the highlights of which included a great variety of birds of prey and the stunningly colorful bee-eaters, rollers, kingfishers and estrildids.

Matthew Binns is an English molecular biologist specializing in Thoroughbred racehorse performance who has made Southern California his home for the past ten years. He began birding at a very young age, identifying birds from his father's boat as they trawled for fish off the Yorkshire coast, then progressed through membership of the Young Ornithologists Club to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. He is a keen photographer and has travelled extensively to photograph more than 1600 bird species worldwide.

Next month's meeting: Tuesday, May 21, same time, same place. Program: John Martin will give his long-delayed talk on the San Diego National Wildlife Refuges.

SAN DIEGO COUNTY BIRD OBSERVATIONS, MARCH 2019

Compiled by Guy McCaskie

The first of our early passerine migrants and summer visitors arrive in March; they include Western Kingbirds, Pacific-slope Flycatchers, Cassin's Vireos, Hooded and Bullock's Orioles, and Nashville and Wilson's Warblers. However, with some of these species wintering locally, it is important to differentiate wintering birds from the earliest of the spring migrants and summer visitors. Note that the earliest spring migrants/summer visitors will invariably be adult males. Unfortunately, most *eBird* entries fail to differentiate early spring migrants/summer visitors from those overwintering. Thus, arrival dates are difficult, if not impossible, to determine for some. However, earliest arrivals appear to include Ash-throated Flycatchers at three locations on 25 Mar (*eBird*), a Bell's Vireo near Borrego Springs on 21 Mar (*eBird*), a Warbling Vireo at Tamarisk Grove Campground in Anza-Borrego Desert State Park on 2 Mar (*eBird*), a Black-throated Gray Warbler at Borrego Springs on 20 Mar (*eBird*),

This basic-plumage male Long-tailed Duck, photographed on 25 March, remained around Vacation Island on Mission Bay for four days—note the pink saddle in the bill shows it to be a male, and the badly worn condition of the tail explains the lack of the long central tail-feathers. *Photo by Joel Gilb.*

Black-chinned Sparrows at two locations on 19 Mar (*eBird*) and a Black-headed Grosbeak at Borrego Springs on 28 Mar (*eBird*). In addition, a somewhat early Hammond's Flycatcher was at Oriflamme Canyon near Borrego Springs on 24 Mar (JEP), and a male Purple Martin was photographed at Stonewall Mine in Cuyamaca Rancho State Park on 23 Mar (SMcG).

The Red-necked Grebe present at Shelter Island since November had acquired its more colorful alternate-plumage when photographed on 25 March. *Photo by Joel Gilb.*

A Brant on Lake Hodges 13 Mar (BA) had likely been forced to land by inclement weather when migrating northwestward from the Gulf of California, although such landings forced by weather often involve larger numbers of birds. A Tundra Swan photographed near Leo Carrillo Park in Carlsbad on 5 Mar (*fide* GCH) and what may have been the same swan at Batiquitos Lagoon on 8 Mar (MG) was unexpected as this species is rare in San Diego County, particularly so in March (Unitt 2004). Three of the wintering Eurasian Wigeon were present this month, with long-staying males at San Elijo Lagoon since 3 Nov last reported on 11 Mar (RTP), at the San Diego River mouth since 29 Dec last seen on 3 Mar (*eBird*) and at the Roadrunner Club in Borrego Springs since 3 Jan last seen on 8 March (*eBird*). A Surf Scoter at the Roadrunner Club in Borrego Springs on 8 Mar (RT) and two on Lake Hodges 13 Mar (BA) were, like the Brant, probably forced to land by inclement weather when migrating northwestward from the Gulf of California. The only Black Scoters were up to four, three males and a female, on south San Diego Bay seen from Grand Caribe Park 12 Feb-10 Mar (MaS, *eBird*) and a male photographed off Border Field State Park, present 27 Feb-7 Mar (BC). A Long-tailed Duck at Vacation Island in Mission Bay 25-28 Mar (JG, *eBird*) appears to be the only one known in San Diego County this winter. The Red-necked Grebe at Shelter Island since 11 Nov (DL) was still there through 26 Mar (*eBird*) and is now in alternate plumage.

A Vaux's Swift photographed over Balboa Park on 22 Mar (NF) was substantially earlier than the known dates for the arrival of the first spring migrants (Unitt 2004), so probably wintered locally.

The Pacific Golden-Plover at the Tijuana River mouth since 2 Aug (RTP) was last reported on 10 Mar (*eBird*). An adult Tufted Puffin in basic plumage 10 miles west of La Jolla on 1 Mar (PEL) provides one of fewer than half a dozen valid records for San Diego County. A first-winter Laughing Gull, rare anywhere along the coast of California, was found with Ring-billed and California Gulls attracted to the flooded area along the Tijuana River at Dairy Mart Rd. on 16 Feb (MaS). It was last reported on 3 Mar (*eBird*). The adult Lesser Black-backed Gull known present around

By far the most unexpected bird seen during the San Diego Bird Festival pelagic bird trips was this adult Tufted Puffin 10 nm west of La Jolla on 1 March. *Photo by Mathew Binns.*

the Hotel del Coronado in Coronado since 23 Nov (SM) was still there 30 Mar (*eBird*), having acquired alternate plumage. A first-winter Glaucous Gull, rare as far south as San Diego County, was around south San Diego Bay and at the Tijuana River mouth 2-16 Mar (IO'B, *eBird*). The first of the summering Gull-billed Terns had returned to south San Diego Bay on 23 Mar (RTP), and the earliest Elegant Terns were at the Tijuana River mouth on 14 Mar (LS).

The adult Tricolored Heron found at Famosa Slough in Ocean Beach on 19 Nov (SBM) was last reported in the San Diego River mouth/Famosa Slough area on 21 Mar (*eBird*). The long-staying Harris's Hawk of unknown origin in Ramona was still present on 31 Mar (*eBird*). The adult Zone-tailed Hawk well photographed over the Ramona Grasslands Preserve near Ramona on 22 Jan (DC) was seen and photographed sporadically through 9 Mar (*eBird*). The female Yellow-bellied Sapsucker found at Lindo Lake in Lakeside on 15 Feb (TH) was last reported on 17 Mar (*eBird*), and the male found there on 26 Feb (EGK) was last reported on 3 Mar (*eBird*).

The Thick-billed Kingbird spending its ninth winter at the Poggi Creek Greenbelt in Chula Vista was still present 27 Mar (*eBird*) and, based on previous years, is likely to stay well into April. The Scissor-tailed Flycatcher first seen at the east end of Sunset Ave. in the Tijuana River Valley on 19 Nov (KW) was last reported there on 9 Mar (*eBird*). A pair of Vermilion Flycatchers at the Mission Bay Golf Course since 20 Mar (KR) could well stay and nest, given the late date and suitable breeding habitat. A wintering Plumbeous Vireo was known present in Presidio Park 13-31 Mar (MH, *eBird*), and other presumed wintering birds were photographed at Harry Griffith Regional Park in La Mesa on 21 Mar (EGK) and near Mast Park in Santee on 29 Mar (JB).

The Pinyon Jay found at Eastlake on 1 Dec (MJB) was still present 16 Mar (PEL). Clark's Nutcrackers are still present in the area of Big Laguna Lake in the Laguna Mts., with as many as four in mid-March (NC) and one still there on 31 Mar (BLC). A Townsend's Solitaire on Dudley St. in residential Pt. Loma on 1 Mar (SBM) was unexpected as the location is on the immediate coast. A Varied Thrush, a scarce winter visitor to San Diego County, particularly so this winter, was photographed at the Observatory Campground on Mt. Palomar on 26 Mar (NC). A Sage Thrasher at Mission Trails Regional Park on 22 Mar (PH) was the only migrant so far reported west of the mountains this spring. A California Thrasher at the Borrego Springs High School on 17 Mar (RT) was well east of the species' known range and encroaching on the only known Crissal Thrasher habitat in San Diego County. A male Red Crossbill, a sporadic visitor to San Diego County (Unitt 2004), was at Stonewall

Mine in Cuyamaca Rancho State Park 16-24 Mar (MiS, *eBird*).

This adult male Red Crossbill photographed at Stonewall Mine in Cuyamaca Rancho State Park on 16 March was the only one reported in San Diego County this winter. With as many as ten types of Red Crossbill in North America, each identified by its unique call, it would be of interest to know the type of this individual. *Photo by Mike Sanders.*

The wintering Clay-colored Sparrow found in Carmel Valley's Torrey Hills Park on 27 Jan (JD) was last reported on 5 Mar (*eBird*). A Lark Bunting, rare at any time of the year in San Diego County, was photographed near the San Mateo Creek mouth at the northern border of the county on 9 Mar (TC). At least four White-throated Sparrows were present, with three single birds at private residences close to the coast in Leucadia to 24 Mar (KA), on Pt. Loma through 31 Mar (SBM) and adjacent to Tecolote Canyon 10-12 Mar (MM), and one farther inland near Ramona through 31 Mar (NC). The Harris's Sparrow at a private residence in Sabre Springs since 22 Nov was still present 30 Mar (LR), so will stay well into April. Three Orchard Orioles, two young males and a female, confirmed present at the San Diego Botanic Garden in Encinitas on 30 Mar (MT and SES), likely included one found there on 22 Dec and undetected through the winter. In addition, one found on Leon Ave. in Nestor on 10 Feb was still present 31 Mar (PEL), and another was at the North Clairemont Recreation Center 3-23 Mar (JD, *eBird*).

The only Black-and-white Warblers reported this month were one found at San Elijo Lagoon 16 Feb (TG) and still present on 29 Mar (*eBird*), perhaps the same bird wintering there the previous three years; one found at Famosa Slough in Ocean Beach on 18 Feb (GDeL) and also still present on 31 Mar (*eBird*); and another at Legoland in Carlsbad on 30 Mar (BJD).

The wintering Chestnut-sided Warbler found at Batiquitos Lagoon on 23 Nov (NC) was still present 25 Mar (*eBird*). A Palm Warbler found on private property near the San Diego Botanic Garden in Encinitas on 8 Nov (SES) was still present on 26 Mar when accompanied by a second (SES). One found in the southeastern part of the Tijuana River Valley on 22 Jan (MaS) was last reported on 12 Mar (*eBird*), and another found on Shelter Island 19 Feb (JN) was still present 26 Mar (*eBird*). The Grace's Warbler found in the area of Crest and Torrey Drs. in Encinitas on 7 Dec (SES) was still present 26 Mar (*eBird*). The Hermit Warbler found close to the Grace's Warbler on Crest Dr. on 18 Dec (SES) was still present 16 Mar (*eBird*), and another wintering bird was known present in Presidio Park 5-26 Mar (NF, *eBird*). The female Black-throated Green Warbler spending its sixth winter in San Diego's Greenwood Cemetery since 23 Nov (PEL), but not seen since 18 Dec, was photographed 1 Apr (TR). A Painted Redstart found in Mission Hills on 11 Mar (NF) was still there on 20 Mar (*eBird*) and is likely the same bird at this location during the winter of 2016-2017.

A male Summer Tanager found in Presidio Park 23 Feb (CS) was still present 31 Mar (*eBird*), and another male on Leon Ave. on 24 Mar (PEL) was believed to be the same bird present at nearby Nestor Park earlier this winter. Although small numbers of Western Tanagers regularly winter in the San Diego County coastal lowlands, and the first of the spring migrants are not expected until mid-April, one at Tam-

arisk Grove Campground in Anza-Borrego Desert State Park on 7 Mar (BB) was most unusual. The male Rose-breasted Grosbeak spending its second winter in Tierrasanta's West Shepherd Canyon was still present on 21 Mar (PEL).

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Listed observers: Observers listed are limited to those finding, identifying and/or last reporting each species, these mostly reported on our local listserve **SanDiegoRegionBirding@groups.io**. Observers reporting additional sightings to *eBird* are not listed but acknowledged.

Kathy Aldern, Bob Anderson, Bob Battagin, Mark J. Billings, John Bruin, Barbara L. Carlson, Nancy Christensen, David Clark, Brad Collard, Travis Cooper, Gail DeLalla, Jay Desgrosellier, B.J. Dooley, Nathan French, Joel Gilb, Mike Golong, Tommy Goodwin, Michelle Haglund, Gjon C. Hazard, Patrick Horn, Terry Hurst, Eric G. Kallen, Darrell Lee, Paul E. Lehman, Marcie Mason, Sara B. Mayers, Sia McGown, Shawn Miller, June Newmann, Isoo O'Brien, Robert T. Patton, James E. Pike, Kerry Ross, Lisa Ruby, Tuck Russell, Matt Sadowski (MaS), Mike Sanders (MiS), Susan E. Smith, Lea Squires, Caleb Strand, Robert Theriault, Manolo Turner, Kristina Wolf.

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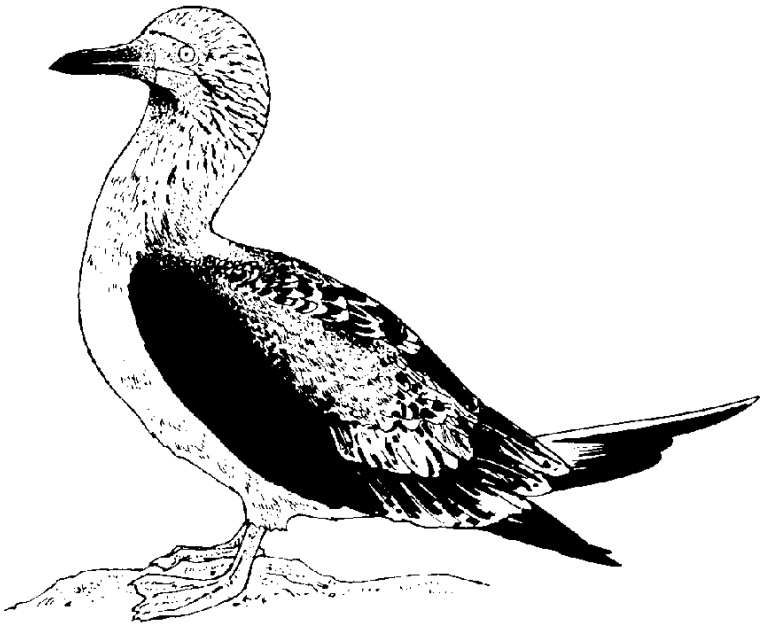

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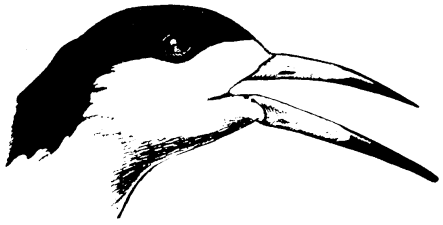
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