The SKIMMER

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SDFO NEWS

Monthly Meeting

Because of the current covid-19 pandemic, our April meeting is cancelled.

Next month's meeting: Scheduled for Tuesday, May 19, but unlikely to be held. See next month's *Skimmer* for updates.

SDFO Bird of the Year for 2019, by Dave Povey, photos provided by Nancy Christensen

Fifty-two members voted for the San Diego Field Ornithologists' 2019 San Diego County Bird of the Year. Thirty-eight different species received votes. Some members gave only a single species, a few voted for six or more, including such things as a category, *i.e.* "Mountain invasion." I assigned a first-place vote a score of five, second a four, and so on down to 5th. or lower, at a one. A total of 374 points were assigned. Just a reminder that while this is a fun exercise; none of these have yet been vetted by the California Birds Record Committee, and may or may not be officially accepted by the CBRC at a future date.

1. HUDSONIAN GODWIT Score: **95**

First county record, No surprise here. This bird was well seen by many. Found by out-of-town birder Daniel Hite at the San Diego River Flood Control Channel, 27 May to 2 Jun. This would be the 56th state record.

2. GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLER Score: **53**

Fourth for the county plus one hybrid. Found by Matt Brady, on 4 Jun, again an out-of-town birder. Would be 82nd for California.

3. EVENING GROSBEAK Score: **48**

This I thought a surprise, perhaps a combination of numbers seen, mix of sexes and ages, and the overall "Mountain invasion" with Red Crossbills, Pinyon Jays, Clark's Nutcrackers, Townsend's Solitaries, etc. in the winters of 2018-19 and 2019-20. The Evening Grosbeaks were found by Matthew Binns on 5 Nov. Phil Unitt's *San Diego County Bird Atlas* (2004) lists Evening Grosbeak as irregular sporadic, with a number of invasion winters, eight records from the desert, and one from the Tijuana River valley in Oct. 1966. Last county record was from Jacumba in 2013.

SDFO NEWS *[cont.]*

4. TUFTED PUFFIN Score: **37**

Found by Paul Lehman on the 1 Mar SDAS Bird Festival pelagic trip. Five county records or fewer, two were dead beached birds.

5. RUSTY BLACKBIRD Score: **31**

Found by out-of-town birder Karl Garrett. Eight previous records for the county, last in Oceanside, in the winter of 2008-09.

Honorable mention: **"THE MOUNTAIN INVASION"**

If all mountain species votes (including Evening Grosbeak) were added together plus comments on "Mountain Invasion," the score would have been 60 and in second place overall. Since that vote was so overwhelmingly in favor of Evening Grosbeak, I chose to leave that vote (48) standing alone, making the score of **22** here: Red Crossbill 13, Pinyon Jay 7, "Mountain Invasion" 2, Clark's Nutcracker did not receive a vote.

These six spots accounted for **76%** of the total votes, leaving 36 species to divide the remaining 24%.

Thanks to Guy McCaskie for state, county records and observer information.

Thanks to Gary Nunn for providing the photos.

Phil Unitt's *San Diego Bird Atlas* (2004) was my other reference.

Thanks to all of you for taking a moment to give thoughtful consideration to your votes.

Stay safe out there, so we can start working on 2020's Best Bird when this is done!

SAN DIEGO COUNTY BIRD OBSERVATIONS, MARCH 2020

Compiled by Guy McCaskie

Five Eurasian Wigeons were reported this month: The male frequenting Famosa Slough/San Diego River mouth since October was still present 29 Mar (PEL). The male at Rose Creek/Kendall-Frost Marsh at the north end of Mission Bay since December was still present 17 Mar (JBr). The male at San Elijo Lagoon since December was still there on 2 Mar (JBa). A male was present at Lake Henshaw 3 Feb-25 Mar (TL), and a female was at the Sweetwater Marsh National Wildlife Refuge in Chula Vista on 4 Mar (MSa). The male Eurasian Green-winged Teal found at Marina View Park in Chula Vista on 14 January was last reported there on 4 Mar (MSa). A tight flock of seven Surf Scoters inland at Lake Murray on 14 Mar (EA) were likely migrants moving northwest after wintering in the Gulf of California rather than birds flying inland from the coast. Up to four White-winged Scoters were regularly reported with a flock of Surf Scoters off Camp Surf in Imperial Beach 20 Feb-25 Mar (PEL). In addition, two Black Scoters, a male and female, were with

The adult Red-necked Grebe in colorful alternate plumage was at the fishing pier on San Diego Bay's Shelter Island on 14 March 2020. *Photo by Rodney Gast.*

the same flock of Surf Scoters 27 Feb-25 Mar (PEL, DP), and two more males off the Sweetwater Marsh National Wildlife Refuge on south San Diego Bay on 4 Mar (MSa) were no doubt some of the six present in February. At least one of the two wintering Hooded Mergansers at Famosa Slough remained through 31 Mar+ (MuC) and, as indicated by Unitt (2004), is staying a little later than expected.

This well marked first-cycle Lesser Black-backed Gull, with Royal Terns, was within the South San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge on 22 March 2020. Note the entirely black bill, mostly white head and underparts and the dark feathering on the upperparts. *Photo by Matt Sadowski.*

A Red-necked Grebe, present for a third winter, remained on San Diego Bay at Shelter Island 13-31 Mar (KR, MSc).

A Calliope Hummingbird in residential Pt. Loma on 29 Mar (PEL) was the earliest of the spring migrants reported locally this year.

The Pacific Golden-Plover present at the Tijuana River mouth since 1 August was still there on 24 Mar (MSa). A flock of about 90 Surfbirds, along with some Red Knots and about 200 Sanderlings, at the waterline of the beach in Coronado on 27 Mar (LH) suggests the possible buildup in numbers similar to those witnessed in early April of last year. Two Red-necked Phalaropes off Pt. La Jolla in La Jolla on 26 Mar (AG) were the earliest of the spring migrants reported this year. Single Black-legged Kittiwakes, scarce in southern California waters this winter, were seen off Pt. La Jolla on 1 Mar (JP) and 23 Mar (PEL). A Sabine's Gull in alternate plumage at Lake Murray on 18 Mar (JP) was not only inland but also exceptionally early for a spring migrant. An adult Lesser Black-backed Gull at Lower Otay Lake on 2 Mar (MSa) may have been the same bird seen there and in the Tijuana River Valley in December; a first-cycle bird was photographed within the South San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge on 22 Mar (MSa). The first of this year's summering Gull-billed Terns were eight around south San Diego Bay on 22 Mar (RTP).

The sub-adult Neotropic Cormorant photographed at the Springs Golf Course and Resort in Borrego Springs on 28 February was still present on 3 Mar (PA).

A Bald Eagle, rare on the immediate coast, was over the mouth of the Sweetwater River in National City/Chula Vista on 4 Mar (PEL). The long-staying Harris's Hawk of unknown origin, first reported in Ramona in December 2018, was still present on 25 Mar (TL). Some 270 migrant Swainson's Hawks at Borrego Springs on 4 Mar (HC), followed by about 300 there on 6 Mar (HC), are the largest numbers reported so far this spring. The continuing adult and immature Zone-tailed Hawks were reported at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park and over areas of nearby Escondido and vicinity through 9 Mar (GC), and an adult was at El Capitan Reservoir on 6 Mar (MMat).

The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker at the North Clairemont Community Park in Clairemont since January was last reported on 19 Mar (LK). The Red-breasted Sapsucker of the nominate subspecies *ruber* found at Harry Griffen Regional Park in La Mesa in February was last reported on 8 Mar (JTS).

The wintering Ash-throated Flycatcher first seen in Borrego Springs in February remained through 21 Mar (PA), while the earliest of the spring migrants was seen in the Tijuana River Valley on 29 Mar (DJ). A Tropical Kingbird photographed at the Coastal Roots Farm in Encinitas on 18 Mar (EM) likely spent the winter undetected in that general area. The Thick-billed Kingbird spending its 10th winter at the Poggi Creek Greenbelt in Chula Vista was still present 7 Mar (JS). The first of the spring migrant Western Kingbirds was one at Lake Murray on 8 Mar (KW). The adult Scissor-tailed Flycatcher spending its fourth winter at the Poggi Creek Greenbelt was last reported on 1 Mar (SSo), and another spending its second winter in Coronado, first seen this winter in December, was still present 26 Mar (BCF). An adult photographed near the Bird and Butterfly Garden in the Tijuana River Valley on 23 and 30 Mar (DJ and JRK) was possibly the same bird present in December at the nearby ball fields on Sunset Ave. The Gray Flycatcher at Lindo Lake in Lakeside since December was still present 21 Mar (JS), another at Harry Griffen Regional Park since February was still there on 31 Mar (EA), and a third at Whelan Lake near Oceanside since February remained through at least 16 Mar (MT). One photographed along Rangeland Rd. near Ramona on 28 Mar (BVA) probably spent the winter in that area, since the first of the spring migrants are not expected before April (Unitt 2004). The Eastern Phoebe found along the Sweetwater River in Rancho San Diego in February was last reported on 21 Mar (BR).

The adult male Orchard Oriole, found near the southeast corner of Balboa Park on 29 February 2020, showed well to photographers on 7 March 2020. *Photo by Charles Jackson.*

The first of the summering Bell's Vireos was a singing male along the Sweetwater River in Bonita on the early date of 6 Mar (PF). The Plumbeous Vireo at Villa La Jolla Park in La Jolla since November was still there on 7 Mar (JD). One in Big Rock Park near Santee on 22 Mar (THu) was believed to be the same bird found there on 18 Jan (EA). One at Stagecoach Park in Carlsbad on 8 Mar (TG) and another at Kate Sessions Park in La Jolla on 12 Mar (RC) both likely wintered locally. The earliest of the spring migrant Warbling Vireos was one in Tecolote Canyon on 4 Mar (SBM).

A Brown Creeper, rare in the coastal lowlands, particularly so this winter when few if any mountain species were found in the lowlands, was at Lake O'Neill in Camp Pendleton 20-28 Mar (PAG). A Varied Thrush on Palomar Mountain on 8 Mar (TB) and another at Cuyamaca Rancho State Park on 6 Mar (CKS) appear to be the only two reported in San Diego County this winter. The Gray Catbird found adjacent to Marina Village at Mission Bay in February was last reported on 7 Mar (DP).

Evening Grosbeaks were still to be seen near Big Laguna Lake in the Laguna Mts. through 29 Mar (MaC), with 28 counted there on 18 Mar (LK). Cassin's Finches still persist in the Laguna Mts. in small numbers through 29 Mar (MaC), with a high count of four near Big Laguna Lake on 14 Mar (PK). Red Crossbills also remained near Big Laguna Lake through 30 Mar (SSh), with an impressive 25 there on 18 Mar (LK).

A Black-throated Sparrow photographed at a residence at North Peak in the Cuyamaca Mts. on 6 Mar (RW) was out of place. A molting male Lark Bunting seen along the southern part of the Silver Strand in Coronado on 8 Mar (PEL) was likely an ear-

This male Lucy's Warbler at the Mesquite Bosque in Borrego Springs on 28 March 2020 is doing its best to attract a mate. *Photo by Nancy Christensen.*

ly spring migrant. Single White-throated Sparrows were frequenting feeders at Mussey Grade in Ramona 11 Nov-31 Mar (NC), adjacent to Tecolote Canyon in Bay Park 17 Nov-31 Mar (MMas) and along Lyons Valley Rd. in Jamul 12 Dec-28 Mar (JM), and one was found along Leon Ave. in Nestor on 14 Mar (PEL).

The Rusty Blackbird found at Robb Field in Ocean Beach on 30 November was last reported foraging with Brewer's Blackbirds on a parking lot at the San Diego Sports Arena on 1 Mar (MH). The adult male Orchard Oriole found near the southeast corner of Balboa Park in February was still present 25 Mar (MaC). An adult male Bullock's Oriole at Harry Griffen Regional Park on 5 Mar (KW) appeared to be the earliest of the spring migrants this year.

Three known wintering Black-and-white Warblers remained into March, with one spending its fourth winter near the southeast corner of Balboa Park last reported on 13 Mar (CZ), another along Crest Dr. in Encinitas still there on 31 Mar (SC) and the third found in southwestern Carlsbad on 21 Dec still present on 24 Mar (PGN). A fourth was found within the San Diego Zoo in Balboa Park on 4 Mar (CM). A Nashville Warbler found at the North Clairemont Community Park in Clairemont in January was still present on 14 Mar (JD). Another, present since February, was photographed near the southeast corner of Balboa Park on 24 Mar (KK), and a third, at Kimball Park in National City on 11 Mar (PEL), most likely spent the winter locally, since the first of the spring migrants do not normally arrive until the first of April (Unitt 2004). A singing male Lucy's Warbler at the Mesquite Bosque in Borrego Springs after 21 Mar (RT) was at the only breeding location known in San Diego County. The

The wintering Grace's Warbler was at Villa La Jolla Park in La Jolla on 6 March 2020. *Photo by Allen Bond.*

adult male American Redstart found along the Bessemer Path in the La Playa neighborhood of Pt. Loma in February was last reported there on 3 Mar (PEL). A Northern Parula found near the southeastern corner of Balboa Park in February was still present on 12 Mar (ML). Singing Yellow Warblers had returned to known nesting locations in Sorrento Valley on 27 Mar (SES). The Palm Warbler on Fleet St. in Carlsbad since 20 December was still present on 30 Mar (PAG) and now in more colorful alternate plumage. The Grace's Warbler spending its third winter at Villa La Jolla Park in La Jolla was still present 21 Mar (JD), and the other, spending its second winter along Crest Dr. in Encinitas, was still there on 6 Mar (SES). A drab female Hermit Warbler near the southeast corner of Balboa Park on 11 Mar (BLC) no doubt spent the winter in that general area. A male Wilson's Warbler at Tamarisk Grove Campground in Anza-Borrego Desert State Park on 11 Mar (THi) was the first of the spring migrants moving northward through San Diego County. The Painted Redstart spending its second winter along the Allen Road Nature Trail in Mission Hills was still present on 11 Mar (NF), and one found in Tierrasanta on 25 December was last reported on 20 Mar (PEL).

This male Black-headed Grosbeak competing for food with two Hooded Orioles at a private residence in Vallecito on 17 March 2020 was quite early in the year for a spring migrant, but none the less an obvious migrant. *Photo by Britta Lee Shain.*

The female Hepatic Tanager found at the North Clairemont Community Park in Clairemont in January was still present on 14 Mar (JD), and an elusive male, the same bird present during February 2019, was in Tierrasanta 13-16 Mar (PEL). Six Summer Tanagers were reported during March, with a first-year male in residential Pt. Loma since 1 Dec still present on 30 Mar (SBM); a female at the Old Trolley Barn Park in North Park since December still present on 18 Mar (AG); a female in south Carlsbad since 21 Dec still there on 21 Mar (TG); an adult male, presumed to be the same male present earlier this winter in nearby Nestor Park and found along Leon Ave. in Nestor in February was still there on 14 Mar (PEL); a female near the southeast corner of Balboa Park 2-24 Mar (NF and AN); and the most recent being one in residential Vista on 30 Mar (SL). The first of the spring migrant Western Tanagers was a brightly colored adult male at Rams Hill in Borrego Springs on 30 Mar (WTH)—Unitt (2004) lists 3 April as the earliest date for the arrival of a spring migrant. An adult male Black-headed Grosbeak photographed in Vallecito on 17 Mar (BLS) establishes one of the earliest dates ever for a spring migrant in San Diego County (Unitt 2004).

Listed observers: Observers listed are limited to those finding, identifying and/or last reporting each species. Some sightings reported to *eBird* are included without specific attribution.

Paulette Ache, Ben Van Allen, Eitan Altman, Jeff Baker (JBa), Tom Baxter, John Bruin (JBr), Steve Cameron, Barbara L. Carlson, Nancy Christensen, Ross Christie, Muffy Coco (MaC), Hal Cohen, Mauro Colabianchi (MaC), Greg Cross, Jay Desgrosellier, Pete Famolaro, Brian C. Flick, Nathan French, Peter A. Ginsburg, Tito Gonzalez, Aaron Gyllenhaal, Lisa

Heinz, Troy Hibbitts (THi), Michael Hilchey, Willian Terry Hunefeld, Terry Hurst (THu), Dan Jehl, Logan Kahle, Peter Kennedy, Kenny Kimbrough, J. R. Kinander, Paul E. Lehman, Max Leibowitz, Trysten Loefke, Sonja Lunaskye, Eve Martin, John Martin, Marcie Mason (MMas), Mandy Mathews (MMat), Sara B. Mayers, Cia Morrow, P. G. Nell, Andrew Newmark, Robert T. Patton, Jim Pawlicki, Dave Povey, Bruce Rideout, Kerry Ross, Matt Sadowski (MSa), Michael Schulte (MSc), Britta Lee Shain, Steve Shields (SSh), Susan E. Smith, Steve Sosensky (SSo), Justyn T. Stahl, C. K. Staurovsky, Jeremiah Stock, Robert Theriault, Manolo Turner, Robyn Waayers, Kathryn Wendel and Catherine Zinsky.

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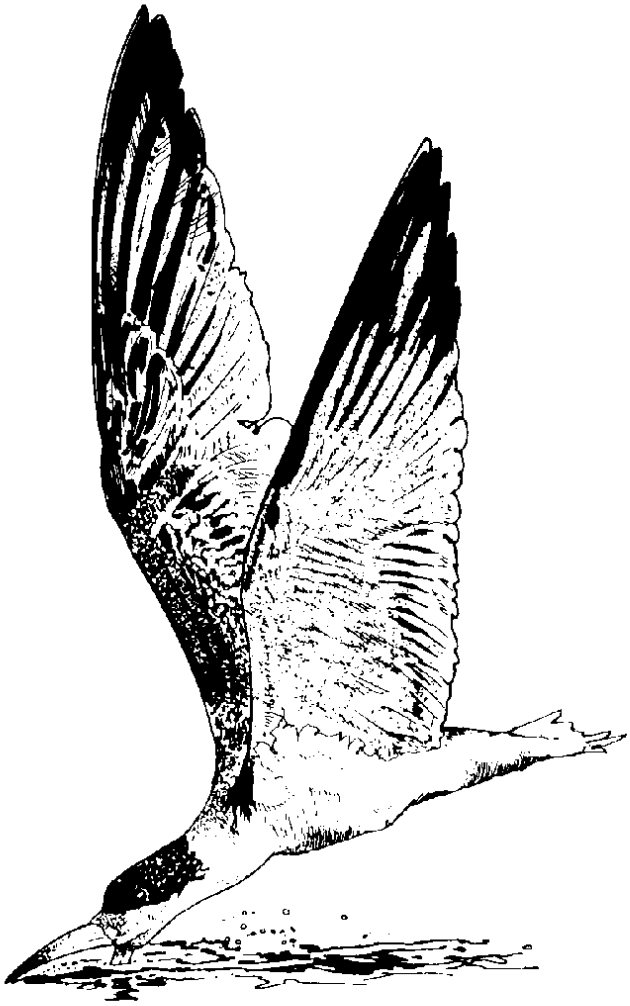

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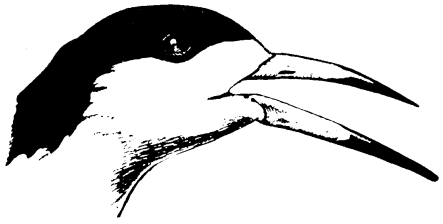
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