The **SKIMMER**

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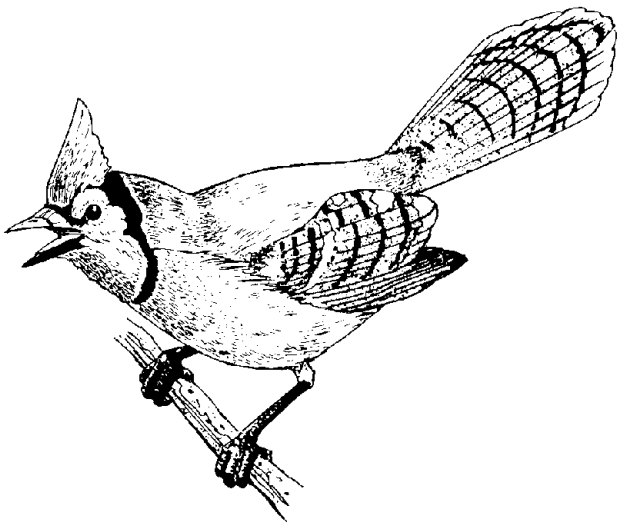
SDFO NEWS

Monthly Meeting

Tuesday, May 19, at 6:00 p.m. This will be a virtual meeting, using the Zoom app, which you can download beforehand. Members will receive an email invitation with directions to click on a link, which will open a window in the Zoom app, and you can join the meeting. If you have never used Zoom before, you will be asked to download the application for Zoom. You do NOT need to "sign up" for Zoom, just download the application. It is best to use a desktop or laptop computer, as their larger screen is preferable to a phone or notepad device. We are planning a practice session on May 14 to work out any bugs in the procedure.

Program: John Bruin will show some photos from his recent trip to Uganda and Kenya. Time allowing, Nancy Christensen will show photos from her trip to Argentina in 2019. This meeting will be casual but will be an important step to learning how to manage a remote meeting, for all of us! We will also try to form a nominating committee for next month's business meeting.

Next month's meeting: Tuesday, June 16, at 6:00 p.m., also on Zoom. This is our annual business meeting at which we elect new officers. The Board will be having discussions about how this is to be managed remotely. If you have any interest in holding an office, please contact any of your officers.



SAN DIEGO COUNTY BIRD OBSERVATIONS, APRIL 2020

Compiled by Guy McCaskie

Impressive numbers of migrant landbirds streamed through the county in mid-April. More than 800 warblers (Orange-crowned, Nashville, Yellow-rumped, Black-throated Gray, Townsend's, Hermit and Wilson's) were on the move during the morning of 17 April in the mountains at McCain Valley, fighting a headwind from the desert (AH)—a spectacle witnessed more often along the eastern base of the mountains than in the mountains themselves. On the coast, San Diego witnessed an even more impressive flight on 22 April, with over 1500 nocturnal migrants identified passing low over La Jolla's Mt. Soledad during the first three hours of daylight (PEL). Birds counted included 260 Warbling Vireos, 150 Black-throated Gray, 225 Townsend's, 90 Hermit and 220 Wilson's Warblers, and 190 Lazuli Buntings. In addition, larger than normal numbers were found foraging in residential areas such as Pt. Loma that same day. Numbers passing over Mt. Soledad the following day were far less and declined even farther on 24 April.

Based on published information on migrant passerines departing Yucatan to cross the Gulf of Mexico, I believe most, if not all, landbirds are stimulated to migrate by conditions at their starting point. The mix of species seen at Mt. Soledad on 22 April are those wintering in Central and Southern Mexico, so conditions there, rather than locally, likely stimulated the movement. Those species must fly in a northwesterly direction to reach their breeding grounds in the western United States and Canada. Mild Santa Ana conditions developing in northwestern Mexico and locally on 21 April may have pushed many of these nocturnal migrants westward over the open water of the Pacific. At dawn on 22 April, those over the ocean likely changed direction and headed to the coast. The result could be a large number of migrants, possibly ten or more miles westward from the coast, concentrating in a narrow strip on the immediate coast. From past experience, we have learned that the first day of such flights includes the largest numbers of migrants, whereas the following days, even with similar weather conditions, produce fewer migrants. I suspect this is what we witnessed locally on 22 April and the two days following. However, not all migrant waves are the same, with many migrants continuing to move for two or more hours first thing in the morning on some days, while on other days most land to forage quickly after dawn.

The male Eurasian Wigeon frequenting Famosa Slough/San Diego River mouth since October was last seen on 16 Apr (PEL). Two White-winged Scoters off Camp Surf in Imperial Beach on 3 Apr (PEL) were the latest of up to four present there with the flock of Surf Scoters since 20 Feb. At least one of the two wintering Hooded Mergansers at Famosa Slough remained through 3 Apr (CM), and two photographed at a sand quarry in Ramona on 18 Apr (NC) were unusually late as indicated by Unitt (2004).

This young male was one of the two Hooded Mergansers staying late at a sand quarry in Ramona on 18 April 2020. *Photo by Nancy Christensen.*

A Vaux's Swift over Jacumba on 3 Apr (DS) was the earliest of the migrants this year. The male

Broad-tailed Hummingbird spending its second winter at a private residence in Chula Vista remained to 9 Apr (EH). After the first Calliope Hummingbird of the spring was reported in residential Point Loma on 29 Mar (PEL), at least 15 more were reported —this being a little more than expected.

One of more than twenty Calliope Hummingbirds reported locally in April, this male was frequenting a feeder close to Tecolote Canyon in Bay Park on 12 April 2020. *Photo by Marcie Mason.*

The Pacific Golden-Plover present at the Tijuana River mouth since 1 Aug was still there on 9 Apr (MS). Some 410 Red Knots at the South San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge 3-30 Apr+ (PEL) was a high number for spring (see Unitt 2004). An adult Little Stint in alternate plumage at the South San Diego National Wildlife Refuge on 3 Apr (PEL) was believed to be the same adult here 2 Aug-28 Nov 2019, having spent the winter undetected. Solitary Sandpipers are unreported in spring most years (Unitt 2004), so the presence of four in April is unprecedented. Single birds were at the Ramona Community Park in Ramona on 13 Apr (NC), at the Horse Ranch Creek Open Space near Pala Mesa 13-26 Apr (CA), at the Jesmond Dene Park in Escondido on 25 Apr (GG) and at Lake O'Neill on Camp Pendleton on 26 Apr (PAG). Eight Wilson's Phalaropes at the South San Diego National Wildlife Refuge on 3 Apr (PEL) were the earliest migrants this spring.

This Solitary Sandpiper at Jesmond Dene Park in Escondido on 25 April 2020 was one of an unprecedented four this spring in San Diego County in April. *Photo by Greg Gillson.*

A Black Storm-Petrel visible from Pt. La Jolla in La Jolla on 6 Apr (MS) was the earliest in San Diego County waters this year. An injured Nazca Booby near the base of the San Diego-Coronado Bay Bridge in Coronado on 12 Apr was captured by Project Wildlife personnel, but it died. (The San Diego Museum of Natural History has the specimen.)

Little Blue Herons occasionally wander northward along the coast from the species' stronghold around San Die-

go and Mission Bays to as far north as Oceanside, but an immature photographed at Los Penasquitos Lagoon 18 Mar-19 Apr (PR) appears to be only one of three such records in more than 15 years. A high-flying adult Little Blue Heron photographed over the Horse Ranch Creek Open Space near Pala Mesa on 13 Apr (CA) was certainly out of place. An immature Reddish Egret at the San Diego River mouth on 12 Apr (PEL) was the only one reported this month.

The long-staying Harris's Hawk of unknown origin, first reported in Ramona in December 2017, was still present on 21 Apr (*eBird*). A Broad-winged Hawk flew high over the Horse Ranch Creek Open Space 19 Apr (GA), providing one of very few records in spring. A somewhat late-staying Short-eared Owl was still present at the South San Diego National Wildlife Refuge on 4 Apr (MS).

A pure male Yellow-shafted Flicker at the Horse Ranch Creek Open Space 13 Apr (CA) was unusually late for any form of migrant Northern Flicker, which this bird clearly was; Unitt (2004) lists the latest date for a Yellow-shafted Flicker as 4 April.

A Tropical Kingbird photographed at North Island Naval Air Station on 28 Apr (BCF) was probably the same bird there in February. The Scissor-tailed Flycatcher spending its third winter in Coronado/North Island Naval Air Station, first seen this past winter in December, was photographed at North Island Naval Air Station on 15 Apr (BCF). The female Scissor-tailed Flycatcher first found paired with a Western Kingbird at Twin Trails Neighborhood Park in Rancho Penasquitos in June 2016 returned to that park on 29 Apr (EM) for its fifth summer. An Olive-sided Flycatcher at Mt. Soledad on 15 Apr (PEL) and single Western Wood-Pewees in residential La Jolla and Lake O'Neill at Camp Pendleton on 11 Apr (GN and PAG) were the earliest of each this spring. The Gray Flycatcher at Harry Griffen Regional Park in La Mesa since February was still there on 11 Apr (EA), and one at Mt. Soledad on 14 Apr (PEL) was the earliest of the spring migrants. The earliest Hammond's Flycatcher this spring was photographed in Borrego Springs on 29 Mar (RT), missed in the March report; an excellent number followed during April. A Dusky Flycatcher, a rare migrant anywhere away from its limited nesting locations at the highest elevations in the Cuyamaca Mts., was photographed at Wing St. Canyon in the Loma Portal neighborhood of San Diego on 23 Apr (NF).

This singing Yellow-throated Vireo in Dulzura on 25 April 2020 was exceptionally early in the year for a spring vagrant, but individuals have been found as early as 13 and 22 April elsewhere in Southern California. *Photo by Nancy Christensen.*

A singing Yellow-throated Vireo in Dulzura on the early date of 25 Apr (DP) was unexpected—it was one of the earliest spring vagrants of this species recorded in California. The earliest was one at Galileo Hill in Kern County on 13 Apr 2002 (California Bird Records Committee, 2007), but most spring vagrants are found in late May. A Plumbeous Vireo at Wing St. Canyon in San Diego on 23 Apr (NF) could have been the same bird here 22 Dec-26 Jan, and another at Kate Sessions Park in La Jolla on 22 Apr (KF) was

probably the same bird found there in March. Additional birds along Monument Rd. in the Tijuana River Valley on 5 Apr (PEL), at the Los Jilgueros Preserve in Fallbrook on 13 Apr (KW), in residential La Mesa on 18 Apr (BR) and along Willowhaven Rd. in Encinitas on 18 Apr (SB) are best considered birds that spent the winter locally rather than spring migrants.

These two female Cassin's Finches at the Horse Ranch Creek Open Space near Pala Mesa on 4 April were the only ones reported away from the higher elevations in the mountains this year. Note that the streaking on the underparts is less diffuse than that on Purple Finches, the whitish eye ring is typical of females and young males, and that the culmen is straight rather than slightly curved as on Purple Finches. *Photo by Chris Aquila*.

Since the Bank Swallow is considered a rare migrant in this county, one over Dairy Mart Pond in the Tijuana River Valley on 20 Apr (PEL) and another photographed at the Horse Ranch Creek Open Space near Pala Mesa on 26 Apr (CA) were of note. Purple Martins are now close to being extirpated as a nesting species in the county, and reports of migrants are declining. Thus, single birds at Rams Hill in Borrego Springs on 12 Apr (TH), at Scissors Crossing in Anza-Borrego Desert State Park on 20 Apr (DHa) and on the coast at Mt. Soledad on 23 Apr (DHo) were noteworthy.

A Cactus Wren at the Tijuana Slough National Wildlife Refuge on 9 Apr (PM) was on the immediate coast and far from the closest known nesting locations. A Townsend's Solitaire, rare at any time of the year in the coastal lowlands, was one of the migrants reported at Mt. Soledad on 23 Apr (ND). A Swainson's Thrush at San Dieguito County Park on 15 Apr (DB) was the earliest reported this year.

A few Evening Grosbeaks were still to be seen near Big Laguna Lake in the Laguna Mts. through 4 Apr, with 12 counted there that day (AN). Cassin's Finches still persist in the Laguna Mts. in small numbers through 4 Apr, with four near Big Laguna Lake that day (AN). Two photographed far from the mountains at the Horse Ranch Creek Open Space on 4 Apr (CA) were exceptional. Red Crossbills also remained near Big Laguna Lake through 30 Apr, with 10 there that day (PM). Two Pine Siskins, a species virtually absent in the coastal lowlands during this past winter, were amongst the migrants at Mt. Soledad on 22 Apr (JD).

Three White-throated Sparrows frequenting feeders remained into April, with one at Mussey Grade in Ramona through 16 Apr (NC), one adjacent to Tecolote Canyon in Bay Park through 7 Apr (MM) and one along Lyons Valley Rd. in Jamul through 7 Apr (JM). Another was found in Anza-Borrego Desert State Park at Scissors Crossing on 16 Apr (AM).

A few Scott's Orioles can be found along the western slope of the mountains to as far west as Ramona and Dulzura, with occasional birds found farther west such as the one in Crest on 3 Apr (CZ). A male along Gage Dr. and nearby in residential Pt. Loma 19-21 Apr (PEL, SBM) was on the immediate coast where considered downright rare. The earliest Yellow-breasted Chats this year were two singing near the

This Northern Waterthrush at the Horse Ranch Creek Open Space near Pala Mesa on 13 April was either an exceptionally early spring vagrant or, more likely, spent the winter undetected locally. *Photo by Chris Aquila*.

This Northern Parula adjacent to Santee Lakes in Santee on 11 April 2020 had evidently spent the winter locally, having gone undetected since December. *Photo by Brennan Mulrooney*.

Bird and Butterfly Garden in the Tijuana River Valley on 3 Apr (PEL).

A singing Northern Waterthrush along Carmel Creek at El Camino Real in Carmel Valley on 11 Apr (DK) and another singing at the Horse Ranch Creek Open Space on 13 Apr (CA) were either exceptionally early spring vagrants or, more likely, birds that had wintered locally. The wintering Black-and-white Warbler along Crest Dr. in Encinitas was last reported on 7 Apr (SC), and the one at Harry Griffen Regional Park was still there on 11 Apr (*eBird*). One at San Elijo Lagoon on 9 Apr (BM) was likely the same bird found there on 23 January, and another in southwestern Carlsbad on 17 Apr (TG) may have been the same bird known near there in December and January. One in San Diego's Greenwood Cemetery on 12 Apr (TR) could have been an early spring vagrant or could have spent the winter undetected locally. A Northern Parula at Santee Lakes in Santee on 11 Apr (BM) was believed to be the same bird found there in December. A male Hooded Warbler trapped and banded near the west end of Sunset Ave. in the Tijuana River Valley on 24 Apr (SM) was clearly an early spring vagrant. Likewise, a Northern Parula that stopped briefly at Mt. Soledad on 22 Apr (PEL) and a Chestnut-sided Warbler at the Ecological Preserve in Crest on 26 Apr (CZ) were spring vagrants. A Hermit Warbler at the Bird and Butterfly Garden on 11 Apr (AF) was the earliest migrant this year.

The only Summer Tanager reported was a male photographed near the intersection of Florida and Upas Sts. in Balboa Park on 21 Apr (AA). A Blue Grosbeak near the Community Gardens in the Tijuana River Valley on 17 April (PEL) was the earliest this spring. Single male Indigo Buntings, rare anywhere in California, were photographed at the

This male Chestnut-sided Warbler at the Ecological Preserve in Crest on 26 April 2020 was obviously wet, so had just bathed. *Photo by Catherine Zinsky*.

Horse Ranch Creek Open Space on 26 Apr (CA) and at Marston Canyon in Balboa Park 27-30 Apr+ (RC, *eBird*).

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.

Eitan Altman, Aaron Anderson, Chris Aquila, Gavin Aquila, Dave Batzler, Steve Brad, Steve Cameron, Nancy Christensen, Richard Cuthbertson, Jay Desgrosellier, Nicole Desnoyers, Anthony Fife, Kyle Fischer, Brian C. Flick, Nathan French, Greg Gillson, Peter A. Ginsburg, Tito Gonzalez, Derek Hameister (DHa), Alexander Harper, Erin Hart, Dave Holway (DHo), Terry Hunefeld, Dan King, Paul E. Lehman, Eve Martin, John Martin, Paul Marvin, Marcie Mason, Sara B. Mayers, Shannon Mendia, Cia Morrow, Alan Moss, Brennan Mulrooney, Andrew Newmark, Gary Nunn, David Povey, Bruce Rideout, Peter Roberts, Tuck Russell, Matt Sadowski, Diana Saucedo, Robert Theriault, Kenneth Weaver and Catherine Zinsky.

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Unitt, P. 2004. *San Diego County Bird Atlas.* Proc. San Diego Soc. Nat. Hist. 39. San Diego Nat. Hist. Mus., San Diego.

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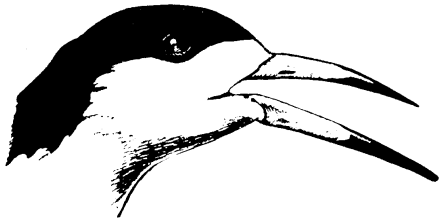
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