The SKIMMER

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SDFO NEWS

Monthly Meeting

Tuesday, October 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.

Program: Dr. Diego Sustaita will present "Predatory performance of the Loggerhead Shrike."

"Shrikes hold a particular fascination for anybody who has ever encountered them: something about their mysterious black mask, raptorial hooked beak, and of course, their unique impaling behavior. Here I cobble together bits and pieces of my research on shrikes, which is ultimately aimed at understanding how you get something that hunts like a hawk, kills like a falcon, and 'float[s] like a butterfly, sting[s] like a bee', all in the body of songbird. I combine data on beak form and function, foraging behavior, and genetics to examine the sources of variation in feeding morphology and performance of Loggerhead Shrikes."

Diego Sustaita is an organismal biologist who specializes in ecological morphology. His research is focused on feeding and locomotor mechanisms of birds and small mammals, to better understand specifically how and why they are adapted to their environments. His research integrates anatomy, biomechanics, ecology, and wildlife conservation and management. He is an Assistant Professor of Biology at California State University, San Marcos. Diego obtained B.S. and M.S. degrees in Biology from California State University, Northridge, and a Ph.D. in Ecology & Evolutionary Biology from the University of Connecticut.

Next month's meeting: Tuesday, November 16, same time, same place. Dr. John McCormack will describe "The Moore Lab Mexican Bird Resurvey Project."

SAN DIEGO COUNTY BIRD OBSERVATIONS, SEPTEMBER 2021

Compiled by Paul E. Lehman

The most watched rarity of the month was this stunning Red-faced Warbler at Smuggler's Gulch from 6-9 Sep. *Photo by Derek Hameister.*

September 2021 was an exciting, rarity-rich month in San Diego County, although the numbers of western landbird migrants were mediocre to rather poor overall. Probably the most appreciated and ogled bird of the period was the Red-faced Warbler in Smuggler's Gulch in the Tijuana River Valley (hereafter TRV) from 6-9 Sep (JP). This is the seventh county record, with prior records equally divided between the coast and mountains, and the first report in ten years. Other exceptional rarities during the month included a Craveri's Murrelet inside Mission Bay all day on 27 Sep (MH), one of very few ever seen "inside the beach" in California; a Tufted Puffin only about three mi. off Ocean Beach on 28 Sep (JMy, PAG), one of very few ever found in the county; and a Blue-footed Booby off Torrey Pines on 5 Sep (JDe).

This Craveri's Murrelet spent 27 Sep inside Mission Bay near Sea World, one of very few ever to be seen "on shore" in California. *Photo by Michelle Haglund.*

Not far behind, rarity-wise, were the returning Little Stint at the South San Diego Bay Salt Works throughout the month (MS), the returning Lesser Black-backed Gull in Coronado from 28 Sep+ (BSh), a Flesh-footed Shearwater at the 30-Mile Bank on 11 Sep (v.obs), single Least Flycatchers at Ft. Rosecrans National Cemetery on Pt. Loma (hereafter FRNC) on 27 Sep (GN) and in Del Mar on 30 Sep (SBu), a migrant Dusky Flycatcher at Harry Griffen Regional Park on 1-2 Sep (JP), an early Blue-headed Vireo at Doyle Community Park in University City on 12-13 Sep (JDu), a Prothonotary Warbler inland at Jamul on 11 Sep (CR), a Bay-breasted Warbler at Doyle

Community Park from 20-22 Sep (JDe), and a Black-throated Green Warbler in Allied Gardens on 26 Sep (CAr). A Canada Warbler at Pine Valley from 20-24 Sep (NS) was exceptional inland. A booby-rich month produced a Masked at the Nine-Mile Bank on 18 Sep (MS), two separate Nazcas, at the San Diego Trough (sub-adult) and 30-Mile Bank (adult), on 19 Sep (BVAS), a Masked/Nazca off the Tijuana R. mouth on 9 Sep (MS), and three separate Red-footeds, with a very unusual light-morph bird in the San Diego Trough on 6 Sep (Searcher) and more-expected dark morphs at the 30-Mile Bank on 11 Sep (v.obs) and in the San Diego Trough on 19 Sep (BVAS). Harris's Hawks staged a mini-invasion, with singles at Jamul on 10 Sep (JMa), in Borrego Springs on 15 Sep (NC), and in Boulevard on 17 Sep (CAm), and a group of up to nine birds in Jacumba from 21 Sep+ (PEL), the largest concentration ever in the state. A juvenile Indigo Bunting at the Bird & Butterfly Garden in the TRV on 9 Sep (AN) strongly suggests that this species successfully nested at this site for at least the second year in a row. A migrant Indigo was elsewhere in the TRV on 22-23 Sep (PEL).

This Blue-headed Vireo at Doyle Park on 12-13 Sep was not only a casual visitor but was also quite early. *Photo by Nancy Christensen.*

This charismatic Canada Warbler was especially noteworthy well inland at Pine Valley from 20-24 Sep. *Photo by Catherine Zinsky.*

One of the most unusual aspects of the good rarity showing was the sheer numbers of individuals of several species. As many as four Tricolored Herons were headlined by an inland bird at Lower Otay Lake from 31 Aug-15 Sep (BLC), with more "typical" coastal birds at the Tijuana R. Estuary from 4-18 Sep (MN), at San Elijo Lagoon on 13 Sep (SP), and flying north past Torrey Pines on 19 Sep (JDe). A total of seven Broad-winged Hawks in coastal South County during just the last three days of the month (v.obs) were more than usual. Twelve Clay-colored Sparrows

The 19 Sep pelagic trip was highlighted by three species of boobies, including this adult Nazca on the 30-Mile Bank. *Photo by Herb Fechter.*

This juvenile Indigo Bunting at the Bird & Butterfly Garden on 9 Sep strongly suggests successful nesting again at this locality. *Photo by Andrew Newmark.*

An unprecedented 10 Blackburnian Warblers were discovered during September, including this real surprise well inland on Palomar Mt. on 21 Sep. *Photo by Eve Martin.*

A very surprising run of six Prairie Warblers during September was initiated by this individual at the Bird & Butterfly Garden on 3 Sep. *Photo by Rodney Gast.*

were found from 17 Sep+ (m.obs), including one in the desert at Vallecito on 29 Sep (BLS). Two warbler species logged especially impressive numbers. A total of 10 Blackburnian Warblers between 18-30 Sep (v.obs) was unprecedented and included three especially unusual individuals well inland: Palomar Mt. 21 Sep (EM), Vallecito County Park in Anza-Borrego 23 Sep (JDu), and Tamarisk Grove Campground, also in Anza-Borrego, 29 Sep (GN). Six Prairie Warblers along the coast between 3-18 Sep (NS, JP, MSr, SV, AA) were also exceptional. Six Tennessee Warblers was an excellent showing in recent years and included one individual in the desert at Borrego Springs on 29 Sep (JP). A total of four Painted Buntings involved singles at FRNC on 5 Sep (RO), in the TRV on 22 Sep (PEL), at Doyle Park on 30 Sep (BSp), and in Del Mar on 30 Sep (LR). A staggering 31 White-winged Doves were found along the coastal slope between 13 Aug-10 Sep (m.obs), an unexpectedly high count even for this species increasing farther inland. It was another very good fall season for migrant Bank Swallows (12) and Purple Martins (8). Several scarce-but-annual sandpipers were in above-average numbers, with August-September totals of 25 Baird's (high count 11 birds at Salt Works 13 Sep (MS)), 22 Pectorals, and 17 Solitaries.

Miscellaneous rarities included up to two Pacific Golden-Plovers in the Tijuana River Estuary area through the period (returning; MS) and one at the Salt Works on 18 Sep (PP), up to two Stilt Sandpipers at the Salt Works from 5-7 Sep (PEL), an adult Long-tailed Jaeger seen from shore at La Jolla on 19 Sep (JDe), a Laughing Gull at San Elijo Lagoon on 8 Sep (SBr), a well-watched Arctic Tern inside Mission Bay on 27 Sep (JTS), a Buller's Shearwater off Mission Bay on 17 Sep (ML), a Neotropic Cormorant at the Dairy Mart Ponds in the TRV on 2 Sep (DJ), a coastal Bald Eagle in Carlsbad on 26 Sep (JMc), and early-arriving Lewis's Woodpeckers in the desert at Agua Caliente County Park on 28 Sep (DH) and in the mountains along Sunrise Hwy. on 29 Sep (NC). Several

Zone-tailed Hawks were seen in the county's inland valleys and mountains (v.obs), as usual, and one bird was passed around from observer to observer to observer in the La Mesa/Highwood Park/ Rolando area on 23 Sep (RG, KW, BW, BR, NT). Single Eastern Kingbirds were in the TRV from 5-8 Sep (JA, PEL) and 6-7 Sep (MA), and a Yellow-green Vireo was at FRNC from 4-10 Sep (JP). A Sage Thrasher at FRNC on 1 Sep (PEL) was record early by 12 days, and a Pine Siskin in the TRV on 15 Sep (PEL) was also very early. A Red-throated Pipit at Robb Field on 20 Sep (JP) was slightly early. Single Bobolinks were at Morley Field in Balboa Park on 10 Sep (ND) and at Borrego Springs on 22 Sep (JP), single Orchard Orioles were in the TRV on 15 Sep (PEL) and at Fiesta Island from 28-30 Sep (MS), and a Baltimore Oriole was in the desert at Agua Caliente County Park on 25 Sep (NC). Single Virginia's Warblers were in Mission Hills on 18 Sep (NF) and inland at Jacumba on 22 Sep (JP), a Northern Parula was in La Jolla from 25-29 Sep (TS), single Magnolia Warblers were coastal at FRNC from 27 Sep-1 Oct (JP) and, more unexpected, inland at Vallecito County Park on 22-23 Sep (JP), and a much-enjoyed Black-throated Blue Warbler was in Oceanside from 27-29 Sep (TG). Totals for some of our more expected vagrant warblers included two Northern Waterthrushes, eight Black-and-whites (including one in the desert at Butterfield Ranch 28 Sep (DH)), nine American Redstarts, two Blackpolls, and one Palm. Also, three Tropical Kingbirds, five Plumbeous Vireos, and four Summer Tanagers. The only migrant Lesser Nighthawks noted were at the Salt Works on 4 Sep (MS) and Dairy Mart Ponds from 23-29 Sep (PEL). Single Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were at FRNC from 4-6 Sep (JA) and inland in Escondido on 28-29 Sep (MW). Rare in the county, a dark-lored White-crowned Sparrow was in the TRV 26-27 Sep (PEL) and a *pugetensis* White-crowned was there 29 Sep (PEL), the latter also an early arrival.

Casual onshore, this Arctic Tern was next to the Craveri's Murrelet at Mission Bay on 27 Sep. Note the entirely reddish bill, extensive grayish wash below, and short legs. *Photo by Jim Morris.*

Yellow-green Vireos have become annual fall visitors in the county, this bird taking up residence at Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery from 4-10 Sep. *Photo by Nathan French.*

Rare west of the desert, single Black-throated Sparrows were in Coronado on 2 Sep (PEL) and in Escondido on 24 Sep (EW), whereas a total of at least five Acorn Woodpeckers and 10 White-breasted Nuthatches turned up at unexpected locations along the immediate coast, and several additional White-

breasteds were found east of their regular range, in the desert, as were single Oak Titmice in Vallecito on 19 Sep (BLS) and in Borrego Springs on 29 Sep (JP). A wandering Cactus Wren turned up at Crown Point on Mission Bay 6 Sep (JR). Unusual inland, five Common Terns were at Lake Murray on 9 Sep (JP). Some 300-575 Red-necked Phalaropes at Whelan Lake between 7-13 Sep (JMy) was a record inland count.

Early arrival dates were recorded for Ring-necked Duck at Borrego Springs on 7-8 Sep (RT), Dunlin at the Salt Works on 4 Sep (TM), two Common Murres on Nine-Mile Bank on 18 Sep (MS), two adult Glaucous-winged Gulls on the Silver Strand on 18 Sep (NB), Ruby-crowned Kinglet in Tierrasanta on 10 Sep (PEL), an adult "Gambel's" White-crowned Sparrow at Lake Hodges on 5 Sep (AP), Green-tailed Towhee in TRV on 6 Sep (MS), and two Yellow-rumped Warblers at FRNC on 6 Sep (JP). The first Greater White-fronted Goose was at Lake O'Neill on 22 Sep (PAG), and large flocks (for San Diego County) of 44 birds and 22 birds were at Lake Morena on 24-25 Sep (PC) and at Lake O'Neill on 30 Sep+ (PAG), respectively. In contrast, a Least Tern remained late on South San Diego Bay through 21 Sep (RTP).

A Hooded Merganser at Bonsall on 15 Sep (BB) had probably summered somewhere locally, and known summering waterfowl continuing through much of the month included the Canvasback and Greater Scaup at Santee Lakes (BM).

And last but not least, certainly one of the most unexpected finds of the month was the **California Towhee** on the central Coronado/ North Island boundary on 26 Sep (ND, JTS), the first record of this normally totally resident species ever for the Coronado peninsula north of the southernmost Silver Strand.

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Cited 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. Alex Abela, Carl Adams (CAm), Chris Adler (CAr), Joe Alsadi, Nick Barber, Bruce Barnhart, Steve Brad (SBr), Sean Buchanan (SBu), Buena Vista Audubon Society pelagic trip, Barbara L. Carlson, Paul Chad, Nancy Christensen, Jay Desgrosellier (JDe), Nicole Desnoyers, John Dumlao (JDu), Nathan French, Rodney Gast, Peter A. Ginsburg, Tito Gonzalez, Michelle Haglund, Derek Hameister, Dan Jehl, Matt Lawing, Paul E. Lehman, Eve Martin, John Martin (JMa),Todd McGrath, Jimmy McMorran (JMc), Brennan Mulrooney, Jane Mygatt (JMy), Mark Navarro, Andrew Newmark, Gary Nunn, Ryan O'Donnell, Robert T. Patton, Jim Pawlicki, Steve Perry, Paul Pisano, Aaron Polichar, Bruce Rideout, Jim Roberts, Carleton Rochester, Lisa Ruby, Matt Sadowski, Norka Saldana, Mike Sanders (MSr), Britta Lee Shain, Bill Sharkey (BSh), Bridget Spencer (BSp), Justyn T. Stahl, Tim Swain, Robert Theriault, Nick Thorpe, Sally Veach, Kat Wendel, Emily Williams, Barbara Wise, and Mike Wittmer.

v.obs = various observers

m.obs = many observers

This Eastern Kingbird at the Dairy Mart Ponds from 5-8 Sep was typical in its early September timing. *Photo by Rodney Gast.*

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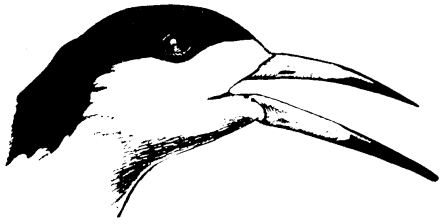
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