The **SKIMMER**

Volume 48, Number 2—February 2021

SDFO NEWS

Monthly Meeting

Tuesday, February 16, 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: Rob Williams will present: "The Andean Condor: The demise and fall of a deity."

The Andean Condor is one of the largest flying land birds. It evolved to feed on the carcasses of the Pleistocene megafauna. Revered by peoples throughout the Americas as a deity, it has suffered a catastrophic decline over the last century. This illustrated lecture examines its ecology, cultural significance to ancient peoples and in the modern world, the causes of its decline and hopes for its future survival. Rob has worked on Andean Condors in Ecuador and Peru over the last 15 years and is writing a book on the species.

Rob has been interested (some might say obsessed!) in birds and mammals since he was a child, but is generally fascinated with all aspects of the natural world. He read zoology and went on to obtain a Ph.D. in conservation ecology, working on Long-eared Owl population dynamics in Europe. Since 1997 he has worked for conservation organizations including RSPB International, BirdLife International, Wildlife Conservation Society and Frankfurt Zoological Society, and has written 4 books on birds and birding as well as many scientific articles. He is currently involved in research projects on Andean Condor, White-winged Guan, Andean Bear, Maned Wolf and Giant Otter and is also the scientific director of the award-winning Chaparri Reserve, the first community-owned private conservation area in Peru.

Next month's meeting: Tuesday, March 16, same time, same place. Program: Phil Unitt will discuss the history of his Department of Birds and Mammals collection: 145 years condensed into one hour!

Time to renew your SDFO membership!

If you haven't already done so, now is the time. Mail a check to Membership Chair Barbara Carlson. Details are on the last page of the newsletter.

SAN DIEGO COUNTY BIRD OBSERVATIONS, JANUARY 2021

Compiled by Paul E. Lehman

January 2021 was a rarity-filled month in San Diego County. Not only did almost all of the December goodies remain, but birders discovered a number of high-quality new additions. Two Lesser Nighthawks at the Dairy Mart Ponds on 27 Jan (CV) were exceptional for this time of year and had presumably been present since late fall. Two Mountain Plovers on Naval Outlying Field in Imperial Beach 26-30 Jan+ (DJ) could be the same birds present at the sod farm in November. A sub-adult Masked Booby flew by and then roosted the night at La Jolla on 25-26 Jan (GN).

This celebrity Red-necked Grebe continued through January 2021 in the Shelter Island area on San Diego Bay, its fourth winter at this location. *Photo by Catherine Zinsky*.

An immature Broad-winged Hawk was photographed in San Ysidro 22 Jan (EM), one of the very few winter records in the county. This species formerly wintered somewhat regularly in California, perhaps one bird every year, but has become even rarer in recent decades. Very rare in winter, single Western Kingbirds were at Poggi Greenbelt in Chula Vista (probably returning) from 1-5 Jan (RG) and at the Dairy Mart Ponds from 3-26 Jan+ (DT). Exceptional in winter, an Olive-sided Flycatcher was in Rose Canyon and La Jolla Colony Park from 1 Jan-3 Feb+ (CH, JD). Casual in mid-winter, a Warbling Vireo was found in Hillcrest on 8 Jan (TR). Verdins along the coast, where casual, were near Poggi Greenbelt 13 Jan (MH) and at Martin Luther King Jr. Community Park in San Diego 24 Jan (JTS). Two mid-winter Lapland Longspurs made an appearance at Fiesta Island from 16-18 Jan (NB). A Harris's Sparrow was found at Jacumba 8 Jan (PEL). A Rusty Blackbird was well-watched at Lake Murray from 1-5 Jan (JP). And a dull Pine Warbler was in residential Mission Hills on 21 Jan (PEL).

Continuing rarities of note remaining through much of the month, since November and/or December, were many: returning Red-necked Grebe in the Shelter Island area (NC); returning Little Stint at the South San Diego Bay salt works (PEL); adult Lesser Black-backed Gulls at both Lower Otay Lake (MSa) and returning to Coronado (DJ); the tame Red-footed Booby at the San Diego Bay bait barge (at least through 9 Jan; eBird); Tricolored Heron roaming between the San Diego River mouth, Famosa Slough, and Mission Bay (DB); the returning Red-breasted Sapsucker of the northern race

This immature Broad-winged Hawk in San Ysidro on 22 January represents approximately the tenth winter record in San Diego County. *Photo by Eve Martin.*

S. r. ruber at Harry Griffen Park (CA); single Dusky-capped Flycatchers at both North Clairemont Community Park (MSa) and in western Balboa Park (RN, MSt); the grand-daddy Thick-billed Kingbird at Poggi Greenbelt (DJ); returning Scissor-tailed Flycatchers at both Poggi Greenbelt (WA) and in the Tijuana River Valley (up to two; DJ, DB); continuing Eastern Phoebes at San Miguel Ranch (JS) and in City Heights (KT) and a new bird at southeast Mission Bay from 22 Jan+ (JB); the Thick-billed (McCown's) and two Chestnut-collared Longspurs at Fiesta Island (GN); Swamp Sparrow in National City (MSa); Lucy's Warbler at San Dieguito County Park in Rancho Santa Fe (PEL); "Yellow" Palm Warbler at the Tijuana River Valley community gardens (PEL); returning Grace's Warblers in both Del Mar (DAK) and Encinitas (SES); the well-watched Cape May Warbler at Lake Murray (JP); the single Painted Redstarts in Tierrasanta (returning; PEL) and University City (DH); and all three of the returning Hepatic Tanagers, in Tierrasanta (PEL), North Clairemont Community Park (MH) and residential Del Mar (DAK). *Phew*!! Also, the Greater Pewee in Balboa Park (JP) that was M.I.A. since late November was found again from 1 Feb (PEL).

Additional unseasonal rarities included a Lesser Yellowlegs at the salt works from 7 Dec-17 Jan (CAM), a Pink-footed Shearwater offshore on 2 Jan (DP), an Ash-throated Flycatcher in Imperial Beach from 9 Dec-24 Jan+ (PEL), three separate Hammond's Flycatchers (JC, PC, JD), and single Cassin's Vireos at Wing Street Canyon (MH), residential Pt. Loma (SM), and Famosa Slough (CP). An Evening Grosbeak was in the mountains at Agua Dulce from 1-3 Jan (CKS), where also 5 Golden-crowned Kinglets on 21 Jan (NC). Up to two Yellow-headed Blackbirds were in Rancho Santa Fe 27 Dec-11 Jan (PEL), and a very high winter count of 24-30 birds were along Rangeland Road from 2-30 Jan+ (RF). A Grasshopper Sparrow at Mission Trails Regional Park 28 Jan (EA) was at a breeding site where a very small number of birds are probably resident. Single Hermit Warblers continued in Carmel Valley (DAK) and in northwest Balboa Park (PEL), and single Black-headed Grosbeaks were discovered near Tecolote Canyon 9 Jan (AB) and in Tierrasanta 19-22 Jan (NB).

Of only casual occurrence anywhere in the United States in winter, this Olive-sided Flycatcher was present during January in Rose Canyon. *Photo by Charlie Jackson.*

Three Hammond's Flycatchers were found during January, including this bird in Carmel Valley. Note the grayish throat, olivaceous breast, thin bill, and distinct gap in the primary spacing. *Photo by Jonathan Casanova.*

A major wind storm on 25 Jan produced some good seawatching at La Jolla, with from-shore sightings of three Sooty Shearwaters (PEL), one Short-tailed Shearwater (GN), and at least three Black-legged Kittiwakes (GN, m.obs).

Unusually high winter numbers of several species continued through January: up to nine Black Scoters on South San Diego Bay (GN, MSa); 17 Hooded Mergansers on Camp Pendleton 19 Jan (JMcM); six Zone-tailed Hawks at scattered locations in the interior valleys and mountains; five Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, nine Gray Flycatchers, and seven Pacific-slope Flycatchers along the coast and in inland valleys; an almost-incalculable number of coastal Purple Finches (about 47!); eight Clay-colored (five continuing, three new) and eight White-throated Sparrows; four coastal "Pink-sided" Dark-eyed Juncos; a record twelve Green-tailed Towhees; six Hooded Orioles; five Black-and-white and eight Nashville Warblers; and six American Redstarts.

A surprising three Scissor-tailed Flycatchers were found during January along the coast, including this well-watched bird at the Dairy Mart Ponds. *Photo by Andrew Newmark.*

Other miscellanea included a White-winged Scoter in Imperial Beach 28 Jan (MSa), two continuing Pacific Golden-Plovers in the Tijuana River Estuary area (eBird), a Short-eared Owl there from 19 Dec-3 Jan (PEL) and another continuing at Fiesta Island (eBird), up to two Tropical Kingbirds continuing in the Dairy Mart Pond area (PEL), three Red Crossbills at Pine Valley on 8 Jan (PEL), single dark-lored White-crowned Sparrows in residential Pt. Loma from late Dec-1 Feb+ (SM), at Mission Trails Regional Park on 23 Jan (JP), and along Rangeland Rd. on 1 Feb (DB), two *pugetensis* (coastal Pacific Northwest) White-crowned Sparrows at Whelan Lake on 27 Jan (MT), and two separate Northern Waterthrushes in the Dairy Mart/San Ysidro area (PM, DAK). An apparent hybrid Hermit X Townsend's Warbler was in the Stonecrest neighborhood of San Diego between 3-16 Jan+ (BLC). "Spring-arrival" Violet-green Swallows arrived record-early this year, with multiple, widespread individuals and small groups along the coast beginning 19 Jan+ (JP). Two Scripps's Murrelets offshore on 2 Jan (DP) were slightly early but not unprecedented. A Swainson's Hawk over the Tijuana River Valley on 31 Jan (BJS) was probably a very early "spring" migrant.

Records of note from sub-regions of the county, where the given species are unexpected at this time of year, included Lake Henshaw sightings of a continuing Eurasian Wigeon during the period (NC), a Vermilion Flycatcher through 1 Jan (CKS), and a Barn Swallow (spring arrival?) on 26 Jan (KR). Also unusual inland in winter were a Red-breasted Merganser at

Two Chestnut-collared Longspurs continued at Fiesta Island in Mission Bay during January, including the colorful adult male (left) and more typical female/immature (right). *Photos by James Morris*.

Also continuing at Fiesta Island during the month was this popular Thick-billed (McCown's) Longspur, a casual visitor to the county. *Photo by James Morris*.

A record total of Clay-colored Sparrows was found during winter 2020-2021 in the county, including this bird at Guajome Regional Park. *Photo by Dave Theobald*.

Lake Sutherland on 22 Jan (JP) and a Common Loon on Dixon Lake 2 Jan (TH). In contrast, farther west than usual, near the coast, were the total of five Common Mergansers in or over saltwater (DP, KF, NB), a White-breasted Nuthatch at southeast Mission Bay on 26 Jan (MW), duos of Mountain Bluebirds continuing at both Batiquitos Lagoon (TG) and in Santee (JS), separate Brewer's Sparrows in Carmel Valley from 19 Nov-19 Jan+ (EM) and at southeast Balboa Park 3-4 Jan (PEL), and coastal Vesper Sparrows at Mission Trails Regional Park since Oct (two birds, CA) and at Fiesta Island since mid-Dec (JTS). Also out of normal range was a Brown Creeper in Escondido from 4-8 Jan (MW). Becoming somewhat more expected, although still north of "normal," were up to four Yellow-crowned Night-Herons near the mouth of San Dieguito Lagoon in Del Mar during the period (PEL) and one individual at San Elijo Lagoon on 11 Jan (EM).

Abbreviations used: m.obs = many observers

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. Christopher Adler, Eitan Altman, Will Anderson, Nick Barber, Anthony Bautista, John Bruin, Dean Budd, Barbara L. Carlson, Jonathan Casanova, Paul Chad, Nancy Christensen, Jay Desgrosellier, Kyle Fischer, Richard Fowler, Tito Gonzalez, Rick Grove, Michelle Haglund, Charley Herzfeld, Dave Holway, Terry Hurst, Dan Jehl, Dan A. King, Paul E. Lehman, Curtis A. Marantz, Eve Martin, Paul Marvin, Sara Mayers, Jimmy McMorran, Rich Norgaard, Gary Nunn, Cindy P., Jim Pawlicki, Dave Povey, Kerry Ross, Tuck Russell, Matt Sadowski (MSa),

Susan E. Smith, Jonny Sperling, B. J. Stacey, Justyn T. Stahl, C. K. Staurovsky, Jeremiah Stock, Mark Stratton (MSt), Knut Tjelmeland, David Trissel, Manolo Turner, Caleb Villar, Mike Wittmer.

Acknowledgments: Many thanks to Sara B. Mayers and Guy McCaskie for their careful editing.

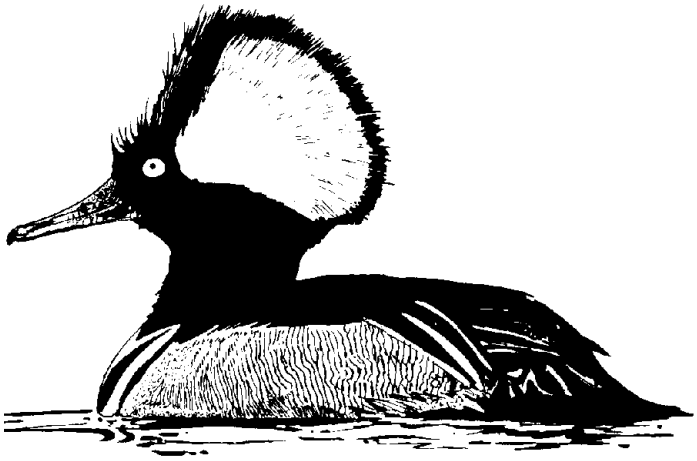
Although this Rusty Blackbird remained at Lake Murray from only 1-5 January 2021, it was enjoyed by many birders. *Photo by Larry M. Edwards.*

This “Yellow” Palm Warbler, a subspecies casual anywhere in the West, continued since November 2020 through January at the Tijuana River Valley community gardens. *Photo by Mel Senac.*

Lake Henshaw CBC

Gretchen Cummings was unable to deliver her report in time for publication in the January, 2021 issue of *The Skimmer*. She has provided this short summary:

The Lake Henshaw CBC was held on Monday, December 21, 2020. Bird numbers were up from 6,444 individuals in 2019 to 8,711 individuals in 2020. This increase in numbers could simply be a result of some of the best weather we have had in quite a few years, as number of participants and overall effort remained about the same. Interestingly, some teams reported unusually quiet bird activity, such as on the Volcan Mountain Foundation property, while others had some of the only documentations of spe cies during the count, such as on the Vista Irrigation District lands east of Lake Henshaw. A total of 125 species were observed during the count, including Bald Eagle, Golden Eagle, Northern Saw-whet Owl, Ferruginous Hawk, Lewis's Woodpecker, Mountain Bluebird, and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was seen on Volcan Mountain by long-time participant and professional birder Robert Patton. This is only the fourth time this species has been documented during the 41 years of this count.



SAN DIEGO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

President	Nancy Christensen (760) 788-8180 nancy.r.christensen@gmail.com
Vice-president	John Bruin (505) 401-3022 johnrbruin@gmail.com
Secretary	Charlene Glacy (619) 851-1917 cglacy@yahoo.com
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Program Chair	John Bruin (505) 401-3022 johnrbruin@gmail.com
Membership Chair	Barbara Carlson (858) 268-1937 barbarac2003@yahoo.com
Publishing *Skimmer* Editor	John Walters (619) 267-1821 johnfwalters5552@gmail.com
Webmaster	Gary Nunn (650) 305-0029 garybnunn@gmail.com

Your contributions to *The Skimmer* are appreciated. Submit articles and notices by the first of the month of publication by mail to John Walters, 5552 Horse Ridge Way, Bonita, CA 91902, or by e-mail to **johnfwalters5552@gmail.com**

Dues for Calendar year: $25.00, including all renewals. Add $10.00 for each additional member in same household. **MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO SDFO** and mail or give check to Membership Chair: Barbara Carlson, 11192 Portobelo Dr., San Diego 92124. For membership information, call Barbara at (858) 268-1937.

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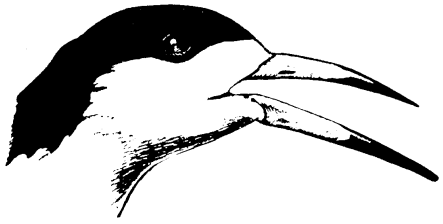
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