The SKIMMER

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SDFO NEWS

Monthly Meeting

Tuesday, April 20, 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: Our Speaker will be Ed Pandolfino, discussing "Bird Migration: The more we learn, the less we know."

Ever since Aristotle wondered where the swallows went in winter (and likely well before that), humans have been curious about the movements of birds. Even given the very basic methods available in the 19th and most of the 20th centuries, what we learned was astounding. However, in the past couple decades new technologies have allowed us to uncover secrets of bird migration that are simply mind-boggling, confirming that birds are capable of feats that seem to belong more the realm of science fiction than science fact. Ed will tell us about how these new technologies are turning upside down much of what we thought we knew about bird movements.

After a checkered and inconsistent college experience that included dropping-out and touring Europe as a drummer for a Rock & Roll band, Ed finally settled down and earned a Ph.D. in Biochemistry from Washington State University and spent over twenty years working in various management positions in the medical device industry. Since retiring in 1999 he has devoted his life to birds, working on habitat conservation and avian research. Ed has served as president of Western Field Ornithologists, vice-president of San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory, conservation chair for Sierra Foothills Audubon Society, and Regional Editor for Northern California for North American Birds and is currently on the

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boards of Institute for Bird Populations and Western Field Ornithologists. He has published more than four dozen articles on status, distribution, behavior of western birds. He co-authored with Ted Beedy, Birds of the Sierra Nevada: Their Natural History, Status, and Distribution, illustrated by Keith Hansen and published by U.C. Press in May 2013.

Next month's meeting: Tuesday, May 18. Lauryn Benedict will be presenting: "She Sings Too! Female bird Songs in North America and Beyond."

SAN DIEGO COUNTY BIRD OBSERVATIONS, MARCH 2021

Compiled by Paul E. Lehman

This Neotropic Cormorant (with Double-crested, right) in Borrego Springs during March brings the county total to as many as 15 individuals. *Photo by Bridget Spencer.*

As the very productive winter season of 2020-2021 drew to a close, new rarities of note found during March included a Glossy Ibis well photographed at Safari Park near Escondido 25 Mar- 5 Apr+ (JL). The bird's appearance matches that of the individual present in the same area last year. A "Eurasian" Green-winged Teal was at Chula Vista Bayfront Park (J St.) in Chula Vista on 15 Mar (DJ) and a Neotropic Cormorant was at Borrego Springs from 17-29 Mar (CG, MM). A Solitary Sandpiper, very rare but recently found almost annually in spring, was in Encinitas on 31 Mar (MT). Single Black-legged Kittiwakes turned up on the tarmac at Lindbergh Field (!) on 23 Mar (fide RTP) and at La Jolla on 24-25 Mar (K&JC), and new, immature Lesser Black-backed Gulls totaled three individuals at Chula Vista Bayfront Park (J St.) between 11-14 Mar (JP, MS). A Lapland Longspur at Fiesta Island, Mission Bay, 26 Mar (RS) was presumably an exceptional spring migrant rather than a very rare locally wintering bird that had escaped prior detection. Probably the most-watched new bird this month was the Bronzed Cowbird, likely an immature female, at 4S Ranch, near Rancho Bernardo, from 11-30 Mar (SB); there are only three previous coastal-slope records in the county: Whelan Lake Feb-Apr 1987, Tijuana River Valley Dec 1998, and Dehesa May 1999 (Unitt 2004).

An excellent winter for Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers in the county was augmented by this March individual at Wilderness Gardens Preserve near Pala. *Photo by David Theobald.*

ter 20-21 Mar (JB). A Plumbeous Vireo was in residential Chula Vista from 26 Mar-2 Apr+ (AN). A Purple Martin near Sweetwater Reservoir 16 Mar (JS) was not only a rare spring migrant but was also very early; additional martins flew by Mt. Soledad on 31 Mar (two) and 1 Apr (one) (PEL, JD). A much-enjoyed coastal Sage Thrasher was at San Elijo Lagoon 20 Mar-2 Apr (DAK); it may be the same individual that was present there on 12 -13 Oct 2020 but then escaped detection in the interim. Lowland Townsend's Solitaires were discovered at Wilderness Gardens Preserve from 7-23 Mar (P&DT) and at Ft. Rosecrans

Both Chestnut-collared Longspur (left) and Thick-billed (McCown's) Longspur (right) remained throughout the winter at Fiesta Island, the adult male Chestnut-collared acquiring some additional breeding plumage during March. *Photos by Alison Davies.*

New Grace's Warblers were found at La Jolla Colony Park from 3 Mar-1 Apr (JD) and at Vacation Isle, Mission Bay, from 6-16 Mar (JB). Yet another Hepatic Tanager was discovered, at Cliffridge Park in La Jolla from 9-16 Mar (JP).

Other new records of interest during March included a White-winged Scoter near Pepper Park on South San Diego Bay from 2 Mar-2 Apr+ (MS), a coastal Bald Eagle over Whelan Lake and then over Batiquitos Lagoon on 12 Mar (KA, GV), and a Zone-tailed Hawk in Fallbrook on 9 Mar (eBird). Yet two more Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers turned up, at the Wilderness Gardens Preserve near Pala from 7 -16 Mar (P&DT) and at South Clairemont Rec Cen-

This photo of the female Chestnut-collared (left) and Thick-billed (right) Longspurs provides a nice comparison of their relative bill sizes and colors. *Photo by Larry Sansone.*

National Cemetery on 27 Mar (eBird). A Cassin's Finch near Ranchita 22 Mar (EA) and another in the Anza-Borrego Desert at Vallecito from 29 Mar-3 Apr (BLS) were away from typical areas of occurrence, and 5-6 Red Crossbills were in Jacumba 29 Mar-1 Apr+ (PEL). White-throated Sparrows were discovered at San Elijo Lagoon on 29 Mar (CB) and at Pt. Loma 29 Mar-2 Apr (PC). An Orchard Oriole was in residential Encinitas 19-28 Mar (GH), a Northern Waterthrush was in Sorrento Valley 7-21 Mar (JP), a Black-and-white Warbler was at Robb Field 14 Mar-3 Apr+ (CM), a new Summer Tanager was in southern Balboa Park 20 Mar-3 Apr+ (NF), and a presumed -wintering Black-headed Grosbeak was in University City 8 Mar (CH).

This Bronzed Cowbird at 4S Ranch was a real crowd pleaser. Casual anywhere in the county, it is especially unusual near the coast and in winter. *Photos by Tito Gonzalez (left) and Nicole Desnoyers (right).*

"Myrtle" X "Audubon's" Yellow-rumped Warbler intergrades are thought to be somewhat regular winter visitors in San Diego County. Such birds are known to breed primarily in the Anchorage region in Alaska. Note the tinge of clear yellow to the mostly whitish throat and the intermediate throat shape and supercilium boldness. *Photo by Jane Mygatt.*

It was a record spring migration period for Violet-green Swallows in San Diego County and elsewhere in Southern California during February-March, with several single-site counts of up to 100+ birds, and an all-time record of about 500 birds in the Lake O'Neill area on Camp Pendleton 16 Mar (JM, PAG). Record numbers of lowland Purple Finches continued through the month, and the final winter tally likely exceeded 105 individuals; the largest single flock was 11 birds in San Carlos during early March (CA). Record numbers of wintering Clay-colored

This wintering Chestnut-sided Warbler near the UCSD medical center showed very different patterns of chestnut on its right versus left sides. It may be an example of a bilateral gynandromorph. *Photo by Emily Davis.*

Sparrows and Green-tailed Towhees continued as well, with the final season totals at 12 and 20+, respectively.

A Black-chinned Sparrow at the Wilderness Gardens Preserve on 8 Mar (AL) was probably an early spring arrival, although it conceivably wintered somewhere locally. A Western Kingbird in University City 7 Mar (BS) was just a few days early.

A White-winged Dove photographed on a nest at Wilderness Gardens Preserve 12 Mar (CJ) establishes the first definite coastal-slope breeding record. Vermilion Flycatchers continue their increase and spread in many parts of the county (and elsewhere in southern California) at all seasons. Presumed spring migrants (although local breeding is possible at some sites) were seen along the coast at Tecolote Canyon 19 Mar (DT) and in Del Mar 28 Mar (SP), while inland birds turned up at Safari Park 26 Mar (EL), Lake Morena 26 Mar (PLa), and Santa Ysabel 27 Mar (DT). A California Thrasher has been frequenting the old Borrego Springs Water Treatment Plant area for some time, which is somewhat east of the typical range limit along the west edge of Borrego Springs. At least one Crissal and a possible hybrid California X Crissal Thrasher have been noted at that site as well (MS). There is definite potential for thrasher confusion!

Complete dates for a select group of winter birds in 2020-2021 which remained into March are as follows:

Cackling Goose (*B. h. minima*): Santee Lakes Nov- 20 Mar, then Lake Murray through 6 Apr+ (eBird)

Red-necked Grebe: Shelter Island 28 Nov- 2 Mar (NC), returning

Pacific Golden-Plover: Tijuana R. Estuary Aug 2 Apr+ (eBird) (up to 2), returning

Lesser Black-backed Gull: Coronado 24 Oct- 4 Mar (DJ), returning

One of two new Grace's Warblers found during March was this bird on Vacation Isle at Mission Bay. *Photo by Nathan French.*

Tricolored Heron: San Diego River mouth / Mission Bay 14 Oct- 5 Apr+ (DB); Chula Vista bayfront 12 Nov- 30 Mar (MS)

Zone-tailed Hawk: Safari Park/Escondido/ Valley Center/Rancho Bernardo Oct- 27 Mar (eBird) (at least 2)

Tropical Kingbird: Dairy Mart 22 Oct- 28 Mar (PEL), returning (up to 2)

Thick-billed Kingbird: Poggi Greenbelt 27 Oct - 4 Apr+ (DJ), returning

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher: Poggi Greenbelt 24 Nov- 13 Mar (WA), returning; Tijuana R. Valley 1 Jan- 22 Mar (DB), returning

Olive-sided Flycatcher: Rose Canyon then La Jolla Colony Park 1 Jan- 1 Apr+ (CH, JD)

Chestnut-collared Longspur: Fiesta Island 7 Dec- 6 Apr+ (GN) (2)

Thick-billed (McCown's) Longspur: Fiesta Island 10 Nov- 6 Apr+ (GN)

Brewer's Sparrow (coastal): Carmel Valley 19 Nov- 27 Mar (EM)

White-crowned Sparrow (dark-lored): Camp Surf 9 Dec- 22 Mar (PEL); Rangeland Road 1 Feb- 17 Mar (DB)

Vesper Sparrow: Mission Trails Regional Park Oct- 6 Apr+ (CA) (up to 3)

Virginia's Warbler: Rolando Park, La Mesa 8 Feb- 29 Mar (BW)

American Redstart: Kit Carson Park, Escondi do, 12 Dec- 26 Mar (RA)

Cape May Warbler: Lake Murray 29 Nov- 2 Apr+ (JP)

Chestnut-sided Warbler: UCSD, University City 16 Feb- 6 Apr+ (ED)

"Yellow" Palm Warbler: Tijuana R. Valley 10 Nov- 11 Mar (PEL)

Grace's Warbler: Crest Canyon, Del Mar, 8 Oct- 31 Mar (AA), returning; Crest Drive, Encinitas, 17 Oct- 21 Mar (SES), returning

Painted Redstart: Standley School, University City, 20 Nov- 22 Mar (DH)

Hepatic Tanager: North Clairemont Community Park, 17 Dec- 20 Mar (MH, JRK), returning

Literature Cited:

Unitt, P. 2004. *San Diego County Bird Atlas.* Proceedings San Diego Society Natural History 39. San Diego Natural History Museum, San Diego.

Acknowledgments:

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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, Christopher Adler, Kathy Aldern, Emily Allen, Will Anderson, Ryan Andrews, John Bruin, Sean Buchanan, Dean Budd, Cathy Burgess, Paul Chad, Nancy Christensen, Katherine & Jeff Clemens, Emily Davis, Jay Desgrosellier, Nathan French, Peter A. Ginsburg, Char Glacy, Michelle Haglund, Gjon Hazard, Charley Herzfeld, Dave Holway, Charlie Jackson, Dan Jehl, J. R. Kinander, Dan A. King, Patricia Langen (PLa), Paul E. Lehman, Josh Lietzow, Aedyn Loefke, Eric Lutomski, Eve Martin, Marcie Mason, Charlotte Morris, Jane Mygatt, Andrew Newmark, Gary Nunn, Robert T. Patton, Jim Pawlicki, Stephen Perry, Lisa Ruby, Matt Sadowski, Robert Shafer, Britta Lee Shain, Susan E. Smith, Bridget Spencer, Jonny Sperling, Paula & Dave Theobald, David Trissel, Manolo Turner, Geoff Veith, Barbara Wise.

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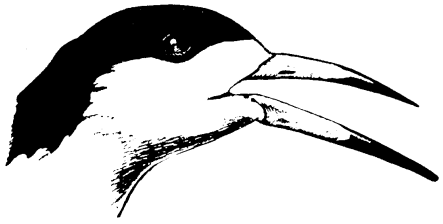
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