

The *SKIMMER*



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SDFO NEWS

Monthly Meeting

Tuesday, July 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: Kevin Burns will present "What's happening to my life list?: Potential taxonomic changes coming for North American birds"

Every year, the North American Committee on Classification and Nomenclature (known more informally as “the checklist committee”) reviews proposals on potential changes in the taxonomy and species status of birds in North and Middle America (defined as regions from Panama north). The decisions are typically published in August of each year and often result in changes that are accepted in other official lists of birds (like the ABA checklist and eBird). In this talk, I will try to de-mystify the process of how these decisions are made and what they are based on. I will talk about what kinds of proposals are submitted, how they are reviewed, and how the committee approaches the challenging question of “what is a species?”. I will also talk about specific proposals that the committee reviewed this past year. Some of the proposals we



voted on included splitting the Mew Gull into two species, splitting the Swainson’s Thrush into two species, and lumping McKay’s and Snow Bunting. I plan to talk about the outcome of these and other votes and thus give a little preview of what changes may or may not be coming to our life lists. In addition, we can talk about the emerging issue of what to do with eponyms – birds named in honor of particular people throughout history.

Kevin Burns is a biology professor at San Diego State University. He grew up in Houston, Texas where he first began birding. He studied Biology at Texas A&M and then earned a M.S. degree at Louisiana State University. After LSU, he went to UC Berkeley for his Ph.D. where he focused primarily on tanagers for his dissertation. Following graduation, he undertook postdoctoral studies at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. He left that position in 1998 to come to SDSU where he teaches courses in ornithology and evolutionary biology and curates the bird collection at the SDSU Museum of Biodiversity. Research in his lab involves tanagers as well as a number of local species including Bell's Vireo, Allen's Hummingbird, Summer Tanager, Wrentit, and California Thrasher. He is a Fellow of the American Ornithological Society and currently serves on the AOS Checklist Committee. He has also been a member of SDFO for many years. More information about Kevin's work can be found at his lab webpage <http://kevinburnslab.com/>

Next month's meeting will be held August 17th, same place, same time. The program has not yet been chosen.

Elections

Last month the membership elected officers for the coming year. The officers elected were Nancy Christensen, President; Rick Grove, VP/Programs; Char Glacy, Secretary; Conny Jamison, Treasurer; and Barbara Carlson. Contact info for each of the officers is on the last page of the newsletter.



One of the rarest birds of the month was this one-year-old Mississippi Kite in the Tijuana River Valley on 19 Jun, here with butterfly prey. Photo by Nancy Christensen.

San Diego County Bird Observations June 2021

Compiled by Paul E. Lehman



This Laysan Albatross put on a good show for the small number of birders present at “the Corner,” at the extreme southwest corner of San Diego County offshore waters, on 6 Jun. Photos by Brennan Mulrooney (left) and Nicole Desnoyers (right).

A one-year-old Mississippi Kite in the Tijuana River Valley on 19 Jun (DT) was a one-day crowd-pleaser and fits the California pattern of wandering one-year-olds in summer. A Laysan Albatross at “the Corner,” the extreme southwest corner of San Diego County offshore waters some 33 miles west of Point Loma, on 6 Jun (ND, PEL) is one of only several individuals seen in San Diego County waters. An alternate-plumaged Black Tern some 23 miles west of Point Loma during the 13 Jun pelagic trip (JTS) was not totally unexpected well offshore, but it is a species now quite rare in the county and it occurred on an unusual date. A Masked/Nazca Booby was off La Jolla on 18 Jun (MSa) and a Red-footed Booby was 4.5 miles off Point Loma on 20 Jun (TS). An adult Neotropic Cormorant at Morrison Pond in Bonita on 20-21 Jun (MSa) may be a returning bird from one

year earlier. The returning adult Wood Stork at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park near Escondido (FL) continued through 28 June



The adult Wood Stork at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park continued from early May throughout much of June. Photo by James Morris.



The most unexpected species seen on the 13 Jun pelagic trip was this alternate-plumaged Black Tern in the San Diego Trough. Photo by John Dumlao

and was also seen nearby at Lake Hodges on several dates. Also at the Safari Park was the presumed continuing, exceptional-in-summer, immature Zone-tailed Hawk, probably a lingering over-wintering bird, “first” seen 27-28 May (MW) and seen again on 22 Jun (ML). A Harris’s Hawk was seen at the desert edge at Scissors Crossing on 3 Jun (WM). A Yellow-billed Cuckoo was at Scissors Crossing, by far the most consistent site for this species in the county, on 26 Jun (TS). A female Hepatic Tanager in residential Point Loma on 10 Jun (AA) established just the second coastal record in the state of a late-



This very rare Harris's Hawk at Scissors Crossing on 3 Jun might have been the same individual seen farther south at Agua Caliente County Park on 26 Apr. Photo by Wendy Miller.

spring vagrant, the previous record also coming from Point Loma, on 28 May 1998.

It was a rather slow late-spring period for eastern vagrants in the county and along the entire California coast. Local highlights this month were a Gray Catbird at Canebrake in the Anza-Borrego Desert on 16 Jun (KS), a Tennessee Warbler at Point Loma Nazarene University on 6 Jun (JP), a Rose-breasted Grosbeak in Pacific Beach on 18-19 Jun (MSi), and an Indigo Bunting at Vallecito on 2 Jun (BLS). The returning, territorial male (2) and female (1) Indigos continued through much of the month in the Bird & Butterfly Garden area in the Tijuana River Valley (AN).

One theme of the late spring in 2021 was the continued presence of very late western migrants still passing through. This heady list includes all-time or near-all-time late records for Black Swift at San Elijo Lagoon on 10 Jun (ML), Hammond’s Flycatcher at Coronado Cays on 5 Jun (PEL), Cedar Waxwing at Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery on 13 Jun (JP), Hermit Warbler (or hybrid) in residential Point Loma on 5 Jun (AA), single Townsend’s Warblers on Mount Laguna on 7 Jun (JP) and in residential Point Loma on 10 Jun (AA), and a lingering Yellow-headed Blackbird at Sweetwater



This female Hepatic Tanager in residential Point Loma on 10 Jun established only the second record of a spring vagrant anywhere in coastal California. Photo by Alex Abela.



Following the occurrence of six Rose-breasted Grosbeaks in the county during May, this male in Pacific Beach on 18-19 Jun was the first this year to remain long enough to be enjoyed by many birders. Photo by Alison Davies.

Reservoir through 12 Jun (KW). Other late records included single Olive-sided Flycatchers in Encinitas on 5 Jun (TG) and at Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery on 6 Jun (JP), a good count of 18-19 Western Wood-Pewees on Point Loma from 3-5 Jun (PEL), a Warbling Vireo in the Tijuana River Valley on 14 Jun (CAM), a Cedar Waxwing in the desert at Vallecito from 2-4 Jun (BLS), a Pine Siskin at Mount Laguna on 14 Jun (JP), a MacGillivray's Warbler at Vallecito on 2 Jun (BLS), and a Western Tanager in the Tijuana River Valley on 20 Jun (AN). Three Northern Fulmars were still offshore on 13 Jun (m.obs).

In contrast, a Least Sandpiper at San Elijo Lagoon on 27 Jun (KB) sets a new all-time early arrival date by one day, an alternate-plumaged Wandering Tattler at La Jolla on 30 Jun+ (MM) would be an early arrival date by 10 days, and a Bank Swallow at the South San Diego Bay salt works on 30 Jun (MSa) set a new all-time early "fall" arrival date also by 10 days. Single Orange-crowned Warblers at Vallecito on 6 & 9 Jun (BLS) and over 30 miles offshore at "the Corner" on 13 Jun (m.obs) were presumably early post-breeding dispersers; as were up to

two Yellow-headed Blackbirds in Borrego Springs from 21-23 Jun, increasing to 15 birds on 28 Jun (RT), and one in the mountains at Big Laguna Lake on 29 Jun (NT). A Belted Kingfisher along Rose Creek near Mission Bay on 19 Jun (RBr) might also have been an early post-breeding disperser. Two southbound Common Murres at La Jolla on 10 Jun (PEL) were slightly early and the first of the summer dispersers this year. The first southbound Lesser Yellowlegs was at the South San Diego Bay salt works on 29 Jun (MSa). A very high total of 1400+ Wilson's Phalaropes were there also on 29 Jun (MS, RTP).

Odd records for the season included single Swainson's Hawks in Valley Center on 16 Jun (JC-D) and in the Tijuana River Valley on 19 Jun (ML) and a very unusual "Gambel's" White-crowned Sparrow at Santee Lakes on 5 Jun (TH). Four Craveri's Murrelets offshore on 13 Jun (PEL) have become more expected in June during recent years. Four Red Crossbills at Desert View Road in the Laguna Mountains 8 Jun (BT) were the only ones reported. Two singing Wilson's Warblers in the Tijuana



Long-billed Dowitcher is of only casual occurrence in June, being much, much rarer than the expected Short-billed Dowitcher which summers regularly in numbers. This Long-billed in alternate plumage was present much of the month at upper San Elijo Lagoon. Photo by Jonathan Casanova.

River Valley on 13 Jun (BM), another along the San Diego River in Mission Valley on 26 Jun (MG), one singing at Torrey Pines State Reserve on 28 Jun (JMc), and 2 singing at San Luis Rey River Park near Bonsall on 1 Jul (JMc) were south of their normal breeding range.



This adult gambelii White-crowned Sparrow was a big surprise at Santee Lakes on the unseasonal date of 5 Jun. Photo by Terry Hurst.

Summering diving ducks included the long-staying (since at least June 2020) Greater Scaup at Santee Lakes through the month (m.obs), a Lesser Scaup at Dairy Mart Ponds 11-14 Jun (PEL), a Redhead there 18-24 Jun (PEL), a Ring-necked Duck at Santee Lakes through 9 Jun (TH), and, even more unusual, a Canvasback there from 23-29 Jun (BM). A flock of 40-66 Surf Scoters off Torrey Pines from 16 Jun-2 Jul+ (DAK) was a large summer concentration. Very rare in summer was a Blue-winged Teal at Dairy Mart on 24 Jun (PEL). The rarest over-summering shorebird this year was an alternate-plumaged Long-billed Dowitcher at the east end of San Elijo Lagoon from at least 2-20 Jun (NS). This species is of only casual occurrence in June, whereas numbers of non-breeding Short-billed Dowitchers are expected (on tidal mudflats) every summer. Also at San Elijo was one or two continuing American Bitterns (m.obs). Rare or very rare

in summer, a Red-throated Loon was off Coronado on 15 Jun (PEL).

West of normal range were single White-winged Doves at Poway on 12 Jun (AB) and near downtown San Diego from 16-18 Jun (EH). East of normal was an inland Heermann's Gull at Lower Otay Lake on 27 Jun (RBa) and an American Robin at Scissors Crossing from 22 Jun-2 Jul (NC). A Brown Booby was inside South San Diego Bay at the salt works on 29-30 Jun (MSa).

Increasing numbers of Vermilion Flycatchers were further evidenced by as many as eight pairs at Bonsall (P&DT) and a new nesting site at Rohr Park in Bonita during May-July (m.obs).

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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, Rod Bardo (RBa), Allen Bond, K. Bosko, Richard Breisch (RBr), Jackie Catino-Davenport, Nancy Christensen, Nicole Desnoyers, Matt Gill, Tito Gonzalez, Eleya Halleck, Terry Hurst, Dan A. King, Paul E. Lehman, Max Leibowitz, Fatima Lujan, Curtis A. Marantz, Marcie Mason, Jimmy McMorran (JMc), Wendy Miller, Brennan Mulrooney, Jane Mygatt (JMy), Andrew Newmark, Robert T. Patton, Jim Pawlicki, Matt Sadowski (MSa), Norka Saldana, Karyn Sauber, Britta Lee Shain, Matt Silvia (MSi), Trent Stanley, Paula & Dave Theobald, Robert Theriault, Nick Thorpe, Bob Toleno, David Trissel, Kathryn Wendel, Mike Wittmer.

m.obs = many observers

Paul E. Lehman
3 July 2021

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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 email to johnfwalters5552@gmail.com

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