The SKIMMER

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SDFO NEWS

Monthly Meeting

Tuesday, September 21, 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. Allison Shultz will present "In the eye of the beholder: Evolution of feather color in the tanagers."

Plumage coloration is an ideal system for studying how natural and sexual selection shape trait evolution. Allison's research has focused on the evolution of tanager plumage coloration from the avian visual perspective, by comparing how plumage evolution evolves differently in males and females, how light environment has shaped the evolution of plumage coloration, and how competition has affected trait diversification. Her work explores the evolution of plumage patterning; that is, incorporating the spatial location of a color on a bird's body and how the under lying coloration mechanisms (pigments, feather nano– and microstructure) evolve to produce the observed plumage coloration.

Allison Shultz is an ornithologist who seeks to understand how and why birds are so diverse. Her research broadly focuses on feather coloration, host-pathogen co-evolution, and evolution in urban environments. She is Assistant Curator of Ornithology at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. Allison obtained a B.A. from the University of California, Berkeley, M. S. from San Diego State University, and Ph. D. from Harvard University.

Next month's meeting: Tuesday, October 19, same time, same place. Program to be announced.

SAN DIEGO COUNTY BIRD OBSERVATIONS, AUGUST 2021

Compiled by Paul E. Lehman

This alternate-plumaged male Blackpoll Warbler in Mira Mesa on 5 Aug was a huge surprise for the date. *Photo by Barbara Swanson.*

Probably the most unexpected bird of August 2021 was the male Blackpoll Warbler in alternate plumage in Mira Mesa on 5 Aug (BS). Late spring vagrants may occur into late June, and early fall migrants (in basic plumage) may occur beginning in September. Whether this bird summered locally somewhere nearby or was randomly wandering widely is unknown. There is also a record of an alternate-plumaged male in La Jolla on 16-17 Jul 1998. A lowland Pygmy Nuthatch was in Tierrasanta on 24 Aug (M&PT). Whether or not this bird is a harbinger of a fall/winter movement to come remains to be seen. There have also been several reports of Red-breasted Nuthatches; and small numbers of White-breasted Nuthatches continued at a few atypical sites through much of the month, such as at Ft. Rosecrans National Cemetery (up to four), the Bird & Butterfly Garden, Pacific Beach (up to two), and Jacumba (up to four) (PEL, MWd, GN). A Least Storm-Petrel on South San Diego Bay on 10 Aug (MS) was a shocker. There is one previous onshore record, also on San Diego Bay, of a bird picked up on 11 Aug 1996 (*SDNHM). An immature Tricolored Heron at Lower Otay Lake on 31 Aug-4 Sep+ (JD) was especially unusual inland. A Baltimore Oriole at Ft. Rosecrans National Cemetery on 30 Aug (PEL) was not only quite rare but also very early, as the previous earliest fall arrival in the county was on 4 Sep 2009, also at FRNC.

Shorebirds are one of the highlights of every August, and this year's stars included the returning Little Stint at the South San Diego Bay Salt Works from 11 Aug+ (MS) and two adult Stilt Sandpipers there on 12 Aug (JP). An adult Pacific Golden-Plover had returned for yet another winter to the Tijuana River Estuary area on 12 Aug, and the continuing American or American x Black Oyster-

Juvenile Semipalmated Sandpipers occurred in approximately average numbers—four birds—during August, the best month of the year in which to find this species. This individual was at Lower Otay Lake. *Photo by Dean DiTommaso.*

catcher continued in La Jolla through at least 9 Aug (JD). Our rare-but-annual fall species occurred on cue, with Semipalmated Sandpipers at the Salt Works (total two, 27 Jul-9 Aug; MS) and on Lower Otay Lake (total two, 18-24 Aug; DP, PEL), and totals of 19 Baird's, 16 Pectoral, and 12 Solitary Sandpipers county-wide through the first few days of September. Careful scrutiny of shorebirds to establish accurate arrival dates of *juvenile* shorebirds produced a number of early arrivals, with two Ruddy Turnstones at the Salt Works on 10 Aug (MS), a Surfbird there 19 Aug (MS), two Sanderlings at Border Field State Park 19 Aug (MS), and Pectoral Sandpipers at both Sweetwater Reservoir (two; MS) and Lower Otay Lake (DJ) on 20 Aug. Other shorebird records of interest included a family group of Spotted Sandpipers at Lake Henshaw on 7 Aug (MS), a very rare local nesting, and a rare inland Willet at Ramona also on 7 Aug (MS).

The show of Cook's Petrels in county waters for much of the summer continued during the 14 Aug pelagic trip, to the delight of the many aboard. *Photo by Larry Sansone.*

Pelagic species offshore continued to make news via several outings during the month. Cook's Petrels were seen on multiple dates between about 18 and (mostly) 25-33 mi. offshore (30-Mile Bank and The Corner), with one on 8 Aug (TS), two on 11 Aug (BM), and six on 14 Aug (AA, m.obs). Townsend's Storm-Petrels were seen on multiple dates at the 30-Mile Bank and The Corner, with as many as eight birds on 14 Aug (m.obs). The status of this recently split species in San Diego County waters is still being worked out. Single Scripps's Murrelets on 8 and14 Aug (m.obs) were rare for late summer, as was a summer Rhinoceros Auklet off Mission Bay on 8 Aug (CP). Small numbers of Long-tailed Jaegers and Craveri's Murrelets were found, including one adult Long-tailed closer to shore than usual only about 10 mi. off San Diego on 1 Sep (BC). A juvenile Sabine's Gull at the Nine-Mile Bank on 11 Aug (PEL) was early for that age. Single Black and Arctic Terns were at the 30-Mile Bank on 14 Aug (m.obs). A Black-footed Albatross was seen during a whale-watching trip some 13 mi. offshore on 22 Aug (*Privateer*). Summering Northern Fulmars were noted on 8 Aug (three; GN, CP) and 14 Aug (two; m.obs). An adult Masked Booby was reported 3.5

Red-necked Phalaropes continued to be found at inland sites in greater than normal numbers, including this bird in Tierrasanta, one of two birds found this season on backyard swimming pools! *Photo by Ed de la Fuente.*

mi. off Imperial Beach on 31 Jul (DP), and single Masked/ Nazca Boobies were 5.5 mi. off Oceanside on 6 Aug (probably Nazca; BL) and off Mission Bay on 17 Aug (DS).

Miscellaneous rarities included a high count of up to 12 Black Terns at the Salt Works from 19-21 Aug (MS), a Pigeon Guillemot at Oceanside Harbor 6-7 Aug (BL), a frigatebird sp. off Batiquitos Lagoon 18 Aug (GA), Zone-tailed Hawks at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park 1-12 Aug+ (continuing from early summer?; NB) and near Poway 13 Aug (RU), apparent hybrid Nuttall's x Downy Woodpeckers in Mission Valley 3 Aug (JB) and at Santee Lakes 25 Aug (BM), a much-above-average 11 Bank Swallows countywide, a Purple Martin at Jacumba 3 Aug (MWr), an adult male Rose-breasted Grosbeak at Ft. Rosecrans National Cemetery 16-17 Aug (PEL), and a continuing Indigo Bunting in the Bird & Butterfly Garden area through 13 Aug (AN). Coastal-slope White-winged Doves occurred in substantially larger numbers than normal, with at least 27 individuals noted between 7 Aug and 5 Sep (m.obs).

The 14 Aug pelagic trip also provided for good views of multiple Townsend's Storm-Petrels. This recently split species is very similar to Leach's Storm-Petrel. *Photo by Naresh Satyan.*

This juvenile Sabine's Gull at the Nine-Mile Bank on 11 Aug was an early arrival for this age-class. *Photo by Brennan Mulrooney.*

Rare to very rare so close to the coast, two Acorn Woodpeckers were at UC San Diego 23 Aug (ED), and one was in Pacific Beach 24 Aug (GN), and a Black-chinned Sparrow was in the Tijuana River Valley 6 Aug (PEL). Rare west of the desert were single Black-throated Sparrows near Sea World 16-17 Aug (BT), at Lower Otay Lake 23 Aug (NF), and at the Safari Park 24 Aug (ML). Two Violet-green Swallows at Sweetwater Reservoir on 22-23 Aug (PEL) had probably summered locally and follow a sighting there in June 2020. Conversely, coastal birds found only casually inland included an Elegant Tern at Chollas Reservoir 7-8 Aug (PU), a Black Skimmer at Lower Otay Lake 12 Aug (DP), and single immature Little Blue Herons at Sweetwater Reservoir 2 Aug (JA) and at Dos Picos County Park near Ramona 8-15 Aug (JW). A Brown Booby was inside San Diego Bay near Harbor Island on 30 Aug (PP).

Early or presumed early arrival dates of fall migrants were set for a good number of species, including Wood Duck at Lower Otay Lake from 19-21 Aug (two; DP), a Vaux's Swift at Point Loma on 30 Aug (PEL), a Nuttall's Woodpecker at Borrego Springs on 13 Aug (JP), Willow Flycatcher at Dairy Mart Ponds on 3 Aug (TO), Warbling Vireo in San Carlos on 1 Aug (two; JP), Cedar Waxwing at Jacumba on 28 Aug (two; PEL), juvenile American Robin at Ft. Rosecrans National Cemetery on 13 Aug (PEL), Chipping Sparrow at Harry Griffen Regional Park from 2 Aug+ (JN), Lark Sparrow near Montgomery Field on 6 Aug (two; PEL), Bell's Sparrow at Vallecito in the Anza-Borrego Desert on 28 Aug (BLS), Savannah Sparrow at Sweetwater Reservoir on 14 Aug (JP), Nashville Warbler at Guajome Regional Park on 15 Aug (two; P&DT), Yellow-breasted Chat at Ft. Rosecrans National Cemetery on 5 Aug (PEL), and Blue Grosbeak at Famosa Slough on 5 Aug (PEL).

Unseasonal waterfowl included the continuing Canvasback at Santee Lakes through 5 Sep+ (BM), the long-staying Greater Scaup there through 5 Sep+ (m.obs), and a Ring-necked Duck in Ramona on 13 Aug (JP).

Arctic Terns are scarce migrants in San Diego County waters, so this immature seen at the 30-Mile Bank on the Buena Vista Audubon pelagic trip on 14 Aug was enjoyed by many. Note the weak dusky carpal bar, the thin, sharp, dark trailing edge to primaries, and the distinct white tips to the secondaries. *Photo by Curtis A. Marantz.*

Elegant Terns are casual visitors inland. This bird was photographed at Chollas Reservoir on 8 Aug. *Photo by Barbara Wise.*

Both Caspian Terns (four chicks) and Black Skimmers (six+ chicks, many nesting pairs) established a new nesting site on a small island in Mission Bay (JJ, PEL, GH, RTP).

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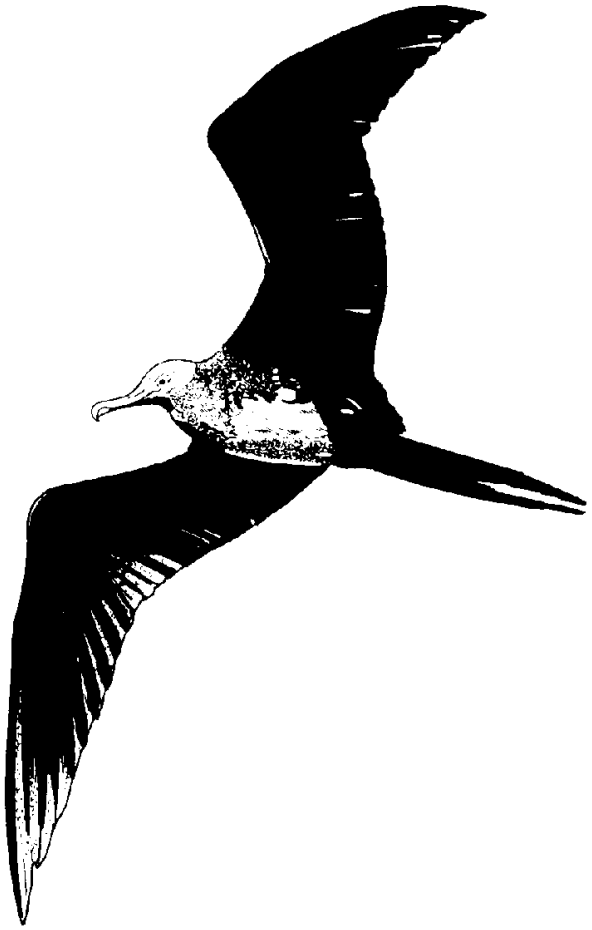
Cited observers: Observers listed are limited to those finding, identifying, and/or last reporting each species. Some sightings reported to *eBird* are included without specific attribution. Alex Abela, Joe Alsadi, Gavin Aquila, Nick Barber, John Bruin, Sean Buchanan, Barbara Coll, Emily Davis, John Dumlao, Nathan French, Gjon Hazard, Jennifer Jackson, Dan Jehl, Brendan Leddy, Paul E. Lehman, Max Leibowitz, Brennan Mulrooney, Jane Mygatt, Judy Neave, Andrew Newmark, Gary Nunn, Tsaiwei Olee, Robert T. Patton, Jim Pawlicki, Dave Povey, Phil Pryde, Caleb Putnam, Matt Sadowski, Britta Lee Shain, Dave Slager, Trent Stanley, Barbara Swanson, Paula & Dave Theobald, Millie & Peter Thomas, Bob Toleno, Phil Unitt, Roger Uzun, Martha Wild (MWd), Judy Winn, and Mike Wittmer (MWr).

m.obs = many observers

*SDNHM = specimen, San Diego Natural History Museum



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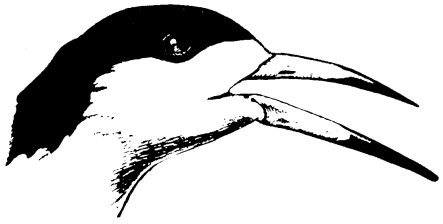
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