

# The **SKIMMER**



Volume 38, Number 11—November 2011

## **SDFO NEWS**

### **Monthly Meeting**

Tuesday, November 15, at 7:00 p.m., at the Tecolote Nature Center, at the east end of Tecolote Road, off I-5.

Program: Paul Lehman will discuss “Rare Migrants and Vagrants in California, 1975-2010.” Our own SDFO President, Paul Lehman, will give our November talk, guiding us through 35 years of rare avian migrants and vagrants to California: their historical occurrence, geographical distribution, and trends. Come see what many of California’s famed migrant and vagrant traps (past and present) look like, and what some of their star avian attractions have been. Paul will take us on a visual flight that starts in the past century and ends in this one.

Paul Lehman, currently the SDFO President and Chair of the California Bird Records Committee (CBRC), was also the special editor for *Western Field Ornithologists’* and CBRC opus *Rare Birds of California*, edited by Robb Hamilton *et al.* Paul has a long east-west (New York to Santa Barbara, to Cape May, New Jersey, then back to California here in San Diego) and north-south (Gambell, Alaska to San Diego) migratory history of his own. With particular interests in weather, migration, distribution, vagrancy, geography, and mapping, Paul's work can be found in *The Sibley Field Guides to Birds of Eastern and Western North America*, Roger Tory Peterson's *Field Guide to Birds of North America*, *The National Wildlife Federation Field Guide to Birds of North America*, and the National Geographic Society's *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*, to name a few. A former lecturer at the University of California Santa Barbara in the geography and environmental studies departments, Paul also served as the editor of ABA's *Birding* magazine for nearly a decade.

Next month’s meeting: Tuesday, December 13, at 6:00 p.m. Our annual holiday party. *Note the different date and time!*

### **2012 Dues: First Notice**

SDFO Secretary Sara Mayers reminds us that we should pay our 2012 dues soon. See the back page of the newsletter for details.

## Christmas Bird Count Schedule

Saturday, Dec. 17. **San Diego**  
Phil Unitt [punitt@sdnhm.org](mailto:punitt@sdnhm.org)

Sunday, Dec. 18. **Anza-Borrego**  
Bob Theriault [roberttheriault@juno.com](mailto:roberttheriault@juno.com)

Monday, Dec. 19. **Lake Henshaw**  
Gretchen Cummings [gretchen.bc@sbcglobal.net](mailto:gretchen.bc@sbcglobal.net)

Tuesday, Dec. 20 (date tentative) **Salton Sea**  
Oscar Johnson [henicorhina@yahoo.com](mailto:henicorhina@yahoo.com)

Monday, Dec. 26. **Oceanside**  
Terry Hunefeld [thunefeld@gmail.com](mailto:thunefeld@gmail.com)

Saturday, Dec. 31 **Escondido**  
Ken Weaver [gnatcatcher@sbcglobal.net](mailto:gnatcatcher@sbcglobal.net)

Monday, Jan. 2 **Rancho Santa Fe**  
Robert Patton [rpatton@san.rr.com](mailto:rpatton@san.rr.com)



Black Skimmer at Oceanside Harbor, Oct. 31.  
Photo by Robert Harrington.

## MEET A MEMBER: SUE SMITH



Sue grew up in New Jersey but spent most of her life in California, working as a biologist with NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service. She retired in 2005, but still does contract work for NOAA. She spent many happy hours at sea, working on various projects, and owes some of the best seabirds on her list to pelagic experts like Larry Spear, David Ainley, Bob Pitman and others, who as she states, "lucky for me," sailed on some of those same research cruises.

*How long have you been birding?*

Started in the San Francisco Bay area, but began in earnest after moving to San Diego in the 1990s, and especially after I retired. Wish I'd started much earlier, when memories and sounds are hard-wired in!

*Do you have a favorite birding experience that you would like to share?*

I'm hooked on the rush you get when you stumble across an unexpected bird. The biggest thrill locally was in 2001 finding (with fellow birder Dave Au) a Northern Wheatear on the cliffs of La Jolla, during

my lunch break. Had no cell phone or guide, no pencil or paper to jot things down—I just repeated the field marks to myself as I hot-footed it back to a phone!

*Do you have a favorite bird species? If so, what is it and why?*

There's always a current favorite. This summer, in Brazil, I fell for the Banded Antbird, a tiny, shy bird that creeps quietly over the jungle floor, like a field mouse.

*Are you a lister?? If so, care to share your numbers?*

Haven't entered some recent trips or updated to current taxonomy because I'm waiting to get a new computer and Avisys program. But think I'm 430 for San Diego County, and 3 shy of 500 for California (which I just discovered after checking for this interview!). Not sure what my ABA area numbers are, or how my world list stands right now.

*What is your favorite San Diego birding location and why?*

It's a toss-up between Kitchen Creek Road

and the Anza-Borrego Desert. Both have a special glow in the early morning, and a stillness that seems to magnify the presence of the birds there. I also like birding San Diego Botanic Gardens in Encinitas.

*What is the best advice that you can give to a beginning birder?*

There's not much I can add to what's already been said. I've always liked, "Look at the bird--not the book!" (The book's always there, not the bird!) And the advice about learning from experienced birders, and putting in the time (actual birding experience is so important). For reference, Phil Unitt's

"San Diego County Bird Atlas" is the definitive work for our area.

*What is the craziest thing that you have done to see a bird?* I got VERY close to falling asleep at the wheel on the Grapevine in 1995, returning from a sleepless, three-day rare-bird run to Northern California. Then there was the 2006 Streak-backed Oriole trip to Zzyzx and beyond with Guy McCaskie and Pete Ginsburg, where half-way there, realized I'd left my binoculars on the kitchen table! Someone lent me an extra pair of binoculars at the oriole spot, and Guy lent me his scope for the rest of the trip, so I squeaked by OK.

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## BRYAN'S SHEARWATER: A NEW SPECIES OF SEABIRD

Pyle, P., A. J. Welch, and R. C. Fleischer (2011). A new species of shearwater (*Puffinus*) recorded from Midway Atoll, Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. *Condor* 118 (3): 518-527.

Researchers examining bird specimens collected in 1963 on Midway Atoll in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands noticed a small shearwater originally identified as a Little Shearwater that didn't look quite right. Turns out that the mystery bird is a new species, smaller than any other shearwater species, and quite distinct from all previously described shearwaters. The new species has been named "Bryan's Shearwater" (*Puffinus bryani*) in honor of E. H. Bryan, the former director of the Bishop Museum in Honolulu. Its closest relative appears to be Boyd's Shearwater (*P. boydi*) of the Atlantic, a poorly-known species in its own right. The Midway specimen of Bryan's Shearwater is an obvious vagrant, as no other specimens

have turned up there in nearly fifty years. So the question becomes: where does Bryan's Shearwater normally occur? Observers on Terry Hunefeld's pelagic cruises have another candidate to look for—check out those small shearwaters *very* carefully!

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### Bird Observations [cont. from p. 7]

Literature Cited:

Jehl, J. R. Jr. 1985. Hybridization and evolution of oystercatchers on the Pacific coast of Baja California. *Ornithol. Monogr.* 36:484-504.

Unitt, Philip. 2004. San Diego County Bird Atlas. *Proc. San Diego Soc. Nat. Hist.* 39. San Diego Nat. Hist. Mus., San Diego.

## SAN DIEGO COUNTY BIRD OBSERVATIONS, OCTOBER 2011

Compiled by Guy McCaskie

A White-fronted Goose at Pt. La Jolla in La Jolla 2 Oct (VM) was the earliest this fall, and numbers at Fairbanks Ranch increased to five after three were found there 5 Oct (PEL, SES). A Wood Duck at Dairy Mart Pond in the Tijuana River Valley 7 Oct (TL) was somewhat out of place. A Surf Scoter at Pt. La Jolla 1 Oct (SW) and a White-winged Scoter there 26 Oct (SW) were the first of each to be seen this fall.

The 8 October pelagic trip to explore San Diego County pelagic waters was most successful with a Buller's Shearwater 26 nm west of La Jolla (PEL), about 20 Least Storm-Petrels at the 30-Mile Bank [many more in adjacent Los Angeles County waters], two Red-billed Tropicbirds 24 nm west of La Jolla (TAB) and a third only 13 nm west of Pt. Loma (ZB), and a South Polar Skua 14 nm west of Pt. Loma (TL). A Brown Booby 16 nm west of Pt. Loma 17 Oct (PEL) was the only one reported in San Diego County waters since one at the Tijuana River mouth on 5 June. Totally unexpected was a frigatebird photographed over the entrance to San Diego Bay 30 Oct (PW)--the bird appears to be an adult female Magnificent Frigatebird, but both Greater and Lesser Frigatebirds have been photographed in California. Up to two adult Reddish Egrets were known present on south San Diego Bay through 31 Oct (PEL), and one was farther north at the San Luis Rey River mouth 17 Oct (KW). There have been no reports of Yellow-crowned Night-Herons in Imperial Beach since 3 Oct (JP).

A "flock" of five Harris's Hawks in Jacumba 26 Oct (PEL) included the pair present since 18 Apr, the hatch-year bird

fledged on 1 Aug and two adults recently arrived from elsewhere--will a small population of Harris's Hawks become established as permanent residents in this area? Totally unexpected was a hatch-year Harris's Hawk photographed flying northward high over Pt. Loma 29 Oct (TRS). An immature Broad-winged Hawk over Imperial Beach 7 October (TL) was followed by three moving south at Pt. Loma 15 Oct (TRS, GMcC). An impressive 245 migrant Swainson's Hawks was at Borrego Springs 14 Oct (MJ), and 25-30 at Safari Park near Escondido 31 Oct (NB) was a large number for this late date. A presumed wintering Zone-tailed Hawk was noted at Safari Park through 10 Oct (BJS), and one drifted over Fallbrook 7 Oct (KW).

Three black and white oystercatchers associating with up to seven Black Oystercatchers (7 counted on 8 Oct: PEL) on Pt. Loma through 15 Oct (PEL) included at least one, and probably two American Oystercatchers--Jehl (1985) discusses in detail hybridization of American and Black Oystercatchers on the Pacific coast of Baja California. A Baird's Sandpiper at south San Diego Bay 7 Oct (RTP) was the latest this fall. A Pectoral Sandpiper was at the Sorrento Valley Pump Station 2-8 Oct (BJS, SBM) and another at the San Dieguito Wetlands in Del Mar 5-14 Oct (PEL, CAM). Small numbers of Common Murres have been noted flying south past Pt. La Jolla all month, with 18 there 6 Oct (SW) being the highest single day count. A Band-tailed Pigeon in Cardiff 2 Oct (JMCM) was on the coast where rare. A Short-eared Owl seen flying in from over the ocean at Ft. Rosecrans National Cemetery on Pt. Loma 30 Oct (GN) was clearly a migrant.

An Olive-sided Flycatcher at the Nazarene University on Pt. Loma 28 Oct (PEL) was exceptionally late for a migrant--Unitt (2004) lists 25 October as the latest date for a migrant. An Eastern Phoebe, a rare to casual visitor to San Diego County, was at Ft. Rosecrans National Cemetery 31 Oct (JN). At least three Vermilion Flycatchers appear present in the Tijuana River Valley, with a male present for its 5<sup>th</sup> winter at the ball field at the east end of Sunset Ave. since 16 Oct (JTS), a female there since 20 Oct (JRM) and a second male farther to the west on Sunset Ave. 24 Oct (RN). A Gray Flycatcher at the Santee Campground 30 Oct (JS) is probably wintering locally. A Tropical Kingbird at Ft. Rosecrans National Cemetery 10 Oct (TL) and another at the ball field in the Tijuana River valley 24 Oct (DP) were the only two reported this month. However, the Thick-billed Kingbird that spent last winter in Chula Vista returned 25 Oct (RN) and can be expected present through March.

A Plumbeous Vireo photographed at the ball field in the Tijuana River Valley 30 Oct (VM) is likely wintering locally. A Blue-headed Vireo was in Ocean Beach near Famosa Slough 24 Oct (PEL). Following three reports of Pinyon Jays in September, an impressive flock of up to about **180** was located in the Laguna Mts. 03-31 Oct (PM, PEL, JLD). Pinyon Jay is known to have wandered into San Diego County on only ten previous occasions since 1877 (Unitt 2004). It is not known if these jays originated from the San Jacinto Mts. to the north, or from the Sierra Juarez to the south, but the size of the population in the San Jacinto Mts. would appear to me to be too small to account for the 180 birds present in our mountains.

The presence of single Mountain Chickadees in Oceanside (1-30 Oct: JC), Tierrasanta (28 Oct: JK) and Mission Hills (28 Oct: EA), along with up to five in Jacumba through October (JK) indicates a movement of these birds out of the moun-

tains. A Brown Creeper at Ft. Rosecrans National Cemetery 21 Oct (JTS) may have been associated with the chickadee movement. A Townsend's Solitaire, unusual on the immediate coast, was at Cabrillo National Monument on Pt. Loma 7 Oct (TP). A Sage Thrasher, scarce in fall, was in the McCain Valley 9 Oct (EE) and another was at Mission Bay 27 Oct (GN). A hatch-year Red-throated Pipit was associating with a flock of American Pipits at the east end of Sunset Ave. in the Tijuana River Valley 18-30 Oct (PM, GMcC) and a second was at the nearby sod farm 30 Oct (GMcC). A Chestnut-collared Longspur was at Mission Bay 27-28 Oct (PEL) and two more were at Morley Field in Balboa Park 27-30 Oct + (TRS, EGK, TC).

Only two Tennessee Warblers were found, with one in Jacumba 2 Oct (PEL) and the other near the *Star of India* in San Diego 13 Oct (JMCM). A cooperative Virginia's Warbler in Del Mar 2-6 Oct (CH) was an addition to many local birders' "County List", and was followed by another in Nestor 3 Oct (PEL). A Lucy's Warbler was at Cottonwood Creek in Encinitas 10 Oct (GCH), and another was along the bay-shore of Pt. Loma 24 Oct (PEL)--one or two of these wood-warblers are found along the coast most years in fall. A Northern Parula, more numerous in spring than in fall, was at Cabrillo National Monument 8 Oct (SES). The Chestnut-sided Warbler found at Ft. Rosecrans National Cemetery 27 Sep (EGK) remained through 8 Oct (DWA), and another was seen at Viewpoint Park in Encinitas 17 Oct (JMCM). A male Black-throated Blue Warbler was at the Bird and Butterfly Garden in the Tijuana River Valley 13 Oct (TP). Two Blackburnian Warblers were at the Bird and Butterfly Garden, with a male there 12-14 Oct (RJN, DWA) and a female there 14-16 Oct (RN, EB). Up to four Palm Warblers were at Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery 22-30 Oct (JK, GN) and another was in

Nestor 26 Oct (PEL). A Blackpoll Warbler at the San Diego Botanical Garden in Encinitas 10 Oct (SES) brings the total in the County this fall to four. Nine Black-and-white Warblers scattered along the coast from Cardiff south to the Tijuana River Valley this month probably included individuals attempting to winter locally. At least three American Redstarts seen on Pt. Loma between 1 and 16 Oct (EGK, SES, TL), two together at the Bird and Butterfly Garden 3 Oct (PEL) and an adult male in Borrego Springs 2-4 Oct (RT) were obvious migrants, while one in Presidio Park 29 Oct (JR) could be a migrant, but one each at Viewpoint Park in Encinitas 9 Oct (EGK) and at the San Diego Zoo 26 Oct (TRS) were adult males returning for their 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> winters.

Four Clay-colored Sparrows were found this month, with single birds on Pt. Loma 23-25 Oct (GN), at the Community Gardens in the Tijuana River Valley 15 Oct (BED), adjacent to Sunset Ave. in the Tijuana River Valley 26 Oct (PEL) and in Jacumba 29 Oct (JK). A Black-throated Sparrow, a rare straggler to the coast, was in Carlsbad 15-17 Oct (KC). A most cooperative Lark Bunting remained at Ft. Rosecrans National Cemetery 18-19 Oct (GN, SBM). Most unusual was a Grasshopper Sparrow at Ft. Rosecrans National Cemetery 14-25 Oct (GN, JN)--I don't know of any prior records for Pt. Loma. A Swamp Sparrow, much scarcer in the County today than 20 years ago, was at Lower Otay Lake boat landing 19-22 Oct (PM, JK). An adult White-throated Sparrow at Ft. Rosecrans National Cemetery 29-30 Oct (GN) was the earliest this fall.

A male Hepatic Tanager near the Marston House in Balboa Park 30 Oct (SES) was undoubtedly the same male present here last winter. About 15 Summer Tanagers were seen along the coast in October, with at least five suspected to be birds returning from last winter, including a male in Ocean Beach near

Famosa Slough 20 Oct + (PEL). Unexpected were four Scarlet Tanagers, with a hatch-year male at Ft. Rosecrans National Cemetery 15-16 Oct (GLR, EGK), a hatch-year female there 24-29 Oct (GN), a hatch-year male on Leon Street in Nestor 26-27 Oct (PEL, GMcC), and a hatch-year male well inland at Jacumba 22 Oct (HBK). Single Rose-breasted Grosbeaks at Ft. Rosecrans National Cemetery 8 Oct (MF) and 27 Oct (CZ) were remarkably the only two reported this fall. A short-staying Dickcissel was at Ft. Rosecrans National Cemetery 14 Oct (GN). Much to many observers' pleasure, a most cooperative Bobolink was at Liberty Station 10-11 Oct (TL) and another was adjacent to the east end of Sunset Ave. in the Tijuana River valley 14-15 Oct (PEL, GMcC). A male Yellow-headed Blackbird at Ft. Rosecrans National Cemetery 24 Oct (GN) adds another to the number found along the coast this fall. An Orchard Oriole was present in Del Mar 2-9 Oct (JMCM, EGK) and a Baltimore Oriole was at Ft. Rosecrans National Cemetery 15 Oct (CAM).

Listed observers: Douglas W. Aguillard, Eitan Altman, Nick Basinski, Zach Bear, Thomas A. Blackman, Eric Brooks, Jeff Coker, Tim Cooper, Ken Corey, Brian E. Daniels, Jon L. Dunn, Elias Elias, Mary Freeman, Christine Harvey, Gjon C. Hazard, Mark Jorgensen, Eric G. Kallen, Jay Keller, Howard B. King, Paul E. Lehman, Tony Leukering, Paul Marvin, Curtis A. Marantz, Guy McCaskie, Jimmy McMorrان, James R. Morris, Vic Murayama, Sara B. Myers, Jan Nordenberg, Richard Norgaard, Richard J. Norton, Gary Nunn, Robert T. Patton, Jim Pea, Tim Plunket, David Povey, Jim Roberts, Geoffrey L. Rogers, Susan E. Smith, BJ Stacy, Justyn T. Stahl, Trent R. Stanley, Jeremiah Stock, Robert Theriault, Stanley Walens, Kenneth Weaver, Phillip White, Catherine Zinsky.

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