

# The **SKIMMER**



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## **SDFO NEWS**

### **Monthly Meeting**

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

Program: Nicholas Mason will discuss “Understanding Avian Vocalizations and Their Evolutionary Patterns.” Nick Mason is currently a Master's candidate in Dr. Kevin Burns' lab at SDSU where he studies the evolution of vocalizations in tanagers. He writes, “Any birder will tell you that a discerning ear is an invaluable asset in identifying birds in the field. In this talk, I'll briefly cover how to interpret spectrograms and also describe a standardized way of transcribing song in the field. Vocalizations play a role in many taxonomic splits, and I will examine recent amendments to the AOU checklist in light of differences in song or call. Finally, I will briefly discuss my own research interests regarding how song is correlated to other aspects of avian biology, including habitat acoustics, morphology and plumage elaboration.”

### **One Last Call**

If you still haven't paid your 2011 SDFO dues, see Membership Chair BJ Stacey. Details are on the back page of the newsletter. We will publish a current membership list in next month's *Skimmer*.

### **Jim Smith**

Long-time SDFO member Jim Smith died of cancer on February 6th. For many years, Jim had the job of getting the *Skimmer* into the mail for us (a big job back before we went to the e-*Skimmer*). In addition to being a talented birder, he spent many years volunteering at the San Diego Natural History Museum library. The following appreciation was written by the librarian, Margaret Dykens:

Jim Smith is in the library shelving books and processing serials, so it must be Thursday morning. As regular as clockwork, he is at his post with his usual greeting, “Hi-ho,” and off to complete his tasks, working quickly and efficiently, but still with time to exchange a comment or two about a recent noteworthy bird sighting in San Diego, or an interesting book he read, or the latest ball game scores. Except that *this* Thursday morning, unbeknownst to us, will be Jim's last Thursday working in the library where he has faithfully volunteered for so many years, starting long before I first came to the San Diego Natural History Museum 13 years ago. Thursday, February 3, he was exactly his

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## SAN DIEGO COUNTY BIRD OBSERVATIONS, FEBRUARY 2011

Compiled by Guy McCaskie

Many of our wintering “rarities” disappear in March, possibly moving to new locations before migrating, so enjoy them while they are still present. The very earliest of our spring migrants such as Rufous Hummingbirds and most of the swallows are already here, while March is the month when the first of our summer visitors, such as Pacific-slope Flycatchers, Bell’s Vireos, Wilson’s Warblers and Hooded and Bullock’s Orioles arrive. Keep in mind that the earliest arrivals are virtually always adult males in full breeding plumage, whereas lingering wintering birds are most often drab-colored young males or females.

The most noteworthy birds found this month were the **Lesser Black-backed Gull** at Lower Otay Lake 5-8 Feb (PEL) and the **Ovenbird** in West Hills Community Park in San Diego 20-24 Feb (TRS). Although more than 80 Lesser Black-backed Gulls have been found in California since the first was photographed near Monterey in January 1978, and the number found each winter increases, the one at Lower Otay Lake is only the second in San Diego County—the first was an adult at the San Luis Rey River mouth in Oceanside 22 Feb-2 Mar 1996 (Unitt 2004). The Lower Otay Lake bird was a first-winter bird, probably the most challenging plumage for most birders. With over a thousand Ovenbirds re-

corded in California, with the great majority of them in spring and fall in the southern two-thirds of the state, it is somewhat surprising that the West Hills Community Park bird is the first known to winter in the County. The two December records cited by Unitt (2004) could have been late-lingering fall migrants, but the one on 26 December 2001 was also in West Hills Community Park, leading some to speculate that this bird may have spent the last nine winters undetected at this location.

A male Long-tailed Duck on Mission Bay 8-23 Feb (JS) had likely been present undetected through most of the winter rather than having just arrived. The pair of Yellow-crowned Night-Herons in Imperial Beach since July 2005 was still present 28 Feb (GMcC). This pair has started nest building in March each of the past five years, so nesting activity can be anticipated soon. The



1st-year Lesser Black-backed Gull (center) at Lower Otay Lake.  
Photo by Lea Squires.

third adult present in January has not been seen since 5 Feb (GMcC). In addition, observers should watch for the two or more Yellow-crowned Night-Herons present at Famosa Slough and in the adjacent San Diego River Flood Control Channel during April-July of the past five years.

Eight Swainson's Hawks at Borrego Springs on 30 Jan (HC) were the earliest migrants this spring, and up to 51 have been seen most days since monitoring started there on 15 Feb (HC); a dark-morph bird in the Tijuana River Valley 2 Feb (TC) was either the wintering bird seen there on 7 Dec (GLR) and 2 Jan (TRS), or an early spring migrant moving northward along the coast. An immature Zone-tailed Hawk photographed near Borrego Springs 14 Feb (SN) was likely a migrant. The Pacific Golden-Plover present at the Tijuana River mouth since 26 Aug was still there 24 Feb (RTP, MSa). The adult male Broad-billed Hummingbird at Sunnyslope Park in Nestor since 17 Dec was last reported on 17 Feb (MSa). Although intergrade Red-shafted x Yellow-shafted Flickers are often seen in fall and winter, what appeared to be a pure male Yellow-shafted Flicker with a warm brown face, along with black malars and a red nape, was in Balboa Park 10-14 Feb (PEL, MSt).

A Gray Flycatcher, the only one known wintering locally, found in Balboa Park 15 Dec (CA) was still present 27 Feb (ME). Single Pacific-slope Flycatchers in Pottery Canyon in La Jolla 13-18 Feb (HI) and along Rose Creek in Pacific Beach 20 Feb (SR) were most likely wintering locally, the dates being too early for spring migrants. The Eastern Phoebe at the Rosicrucian Fellowship in Oceanside was still there 3 Feb (PM) and another was at Sweetwater Reservoir 15-22 Feb (JM). The Thick-billed Kingbird found 16 Dec (RN) remained along the stretch of Poggi Canyon south of Main Street in Chula Vista through 27 Feb (GMcC).

A Plumbeous Vireo at Famosa

Slough 10 Nov-11 Feb (JP) and another in Guajome Regional Park 15 Nov-20 Feb (DM), along with one in Mission Valley 1 Feb (EGK), brings the total found along the coast this winter to eleven. However, these are the only three known present after early January, suggesting at least some of the earlier birds may have been late-lingering fall migrants. The Blue-headed Vireo found on Pt. Loma 30 Dec (DB, DWA) was known present through 28 Feb (PAG). This is only the 4<sup>th</sup> documented wintering in California, but two of the previous three were also on Pt. Loma—one during the winter of 1986-1987 and the other during the winter of 2008-2009.

Unexpected wood-warblers continue to draw observers' attention. The two Tennessee Warblers on Pt. Loma since late December remained well into February, with both present 18 Feb (MSt) and one still there 24 Feb (MSt). The two Northern Parulas found in Coronado in December were both present through 17 Feb (PEL) with the one on Alder St. still there 27 Feb (BJS). A Chestnut-sided Warbler found in Mission Valley 7 Oct was still present 23 Feb (PEL), and the one at Lower Otay Lake 9 Jan continued through 19 Feb (JS). The male Black-throated Blue Warbler found on Pt. Loma 26 Dec (PEL) was still there 28 Feb (PAG), and the Black-throated Green Warbler found in the same area 5 Jan (JK) was also still there 24 Feb (MSt). The drab female Pine Warbler found in Bonita-Rancho Del Rey 11 Dec (PEL) continued through 6 Feb (GMcC). The Palm Warbler at Lower Otay Lake 9 Jan (JK) could not be found after 11 Feb (MSa), but additional birds were seen on Pt. Loma 11 Feb (a nameless birder) and in National City 12 Feb (MSa). Wintering Black-and-white Warblers included one in Balboa Park 14 Nov-20 Feb (PEL, CGE) and another at Eastlake 25 Nov-5 Feb (RP, BJS), but only four of the additional nine known in December have been reported this year. The wintering

adult male American Redstart at Viewpoint Park in Encinitas was still present 8 Feb (PAG), and the other at the San Diego Zoo in Balboa Park was still there 16 Feb (TRS), both being birds known present each of the past two winters.

Nashville Warblers have been scarcer than expected this winter with only nine reported since the end of November—one in Coronado 27 Jan-25 Feb (EC) and another in Tierrasanta 25 Feb (PEL) being the only two known this month. Although 22 Yellow Warblers had been reported along the coast since November, with most in December, none were known present this month.

On the other hand six Black-throated Gray Warblers were known present in February, including one in Balboa Park 11 Feb (EGK), another at Santee Lakes 20 Feb (JS) and a third on Pt. Loma 28 Feb (PAG), bringing the winter total in the County to 23. The only Hermit Warbler known present is the one at Viewpoint Park in Encinitas 24 Oct-25 Feb (JMcM, HC). The only “new” Wilson’s Warblers this month were one in Mission Valley 1 Feb (EGK) and another in Pacific Beach 20 Feb (SR), bringing the number reported in the County since the end of November to 14.

The Clay-colored Sparrow found at Lower Otay Lake 9 Jan (PEL) was still there 6 Feb (MSa). The Hepatic Tanager in Imperial Beach for its 5<sup>th</sup> winter was still present 24 Feb (CH), and a second male was in Balboa Park 10-18 Feb (PEL, BLC). The finding of single Summer Tanagers in Solana Beach 6 Feb (PEL), Coronado 7 Feb (PEL), Balboa Park 10 Feb (PEL), Pacific Beach 20 Feb (SR) and in San Dieguito County Park 23 Feb (SB), along with two together in West Hills Community Park 20-23 Feb (TRS, JR),



Ovenbird at West Hills Community Park, San Diego.  
Photo by Tom Blackman.

brings the total reported in San Diego County since the end of November to an impressive **43**. A flock of **12** Western Tanagers at Greenwood/Mt Hope Cemetery in southeast San Diego 20 Feb (PEL) along with “new” birds in Coronado 7 Feb (PEL), Balboa Park 18 Feb (PEL) and at West Hills Community Park 20-27 Feb (DWP, BJS) brings the total found in the County this winter to 52. A female Hooded Oriole in Balboa Park 10 Feb (PEL) was only the 3<sup>rd</sup> reported in San Diego County this winter—an adult male in Spring Valley 23 Feb (RN) was likely an exceptionally early spring migrant, though the previous early date for a spring migrant is 26 Feb (Unitt 2004). A flock of 7 Bullock’s Orioles near the Spreckels Organ Pavilion in Balboa Park 18 Feb (PEL) along with single birds at widely separated locations in the same park 18 Feb (PEL) and 24 Feb (MSt) were believed additions to the list of wintering birds, bringing the total since the end of November to 32. The Baltimore Oriole found at Sunnyslope Park in Nestor 11 Dec (JK) was still present 5 Feb (GMcC).

Listed observers: Christopher Adler, Douglas W. Aguillard, Steve Brad, Dan Brown, Barbara L. Carlson, Hal Cohen, Tim Cooper, Elizabeth Copper, Claude G. Edwards, Michael Evans, Peter A. Ginsburg, Christine Harvey, Hank Ingersoll, Eric G. Kallen, Jay Keller, Paul E. Lehman, Paul Marvin, John Martin, Guy McCaskie, Jimmy McMorran, Dominik Mosur, Susan Nishio, Rick Norgaard, Robert T. Patton, Jim Pea, Rick Phillips, Steve Ritt, Jim Roberts, Geoffrey L. Rogers, Matt Sadowski (MSa), BJ Stacy, Justyn Stahl, Trent R. Stanley, Jeremiah Stock, Mark Stratton (MSt),



#### Literature Cited

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

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#### **Jim Smith** [continued from p. 1]

usual self, climbing ladders to shelve books and making the rounds as always, exchanging comments and as always, breezing out the door with a farewell so quick you would barely have time to answer. Jim was not one for prolonged goodbyes. But on Sunday Feb. 6, those many, many days of volunteering in the library came to an end, when Jim passed away.

Often Jim had a tidbit to pass along to others on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor; a question about an insect he saw for Michael Wall, a newspaper article, a recommendation about a lecture he attended and enjoyed, or something he heard on the news to share with Phil Unitt, or Tom Demere. His curiosity and desire to learn never ceased, and his active mind was like a sponge, always eagerly seeking something new to find out about.

The Research Library will not be the same without Jim Smith. Thursdays will no longer be Jim Smith days, and his surprisingly infectious laughter no longer heard as he shared an ironic comment with us during our morning hours. But we can rest assured that Jim died in full command of all his formidable faculties, in exactly the fashion he would have desired to make his exit--adroitly, quickly, with little fuss--and with those left behind being thankful for having known him.

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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 e-mail to [john-walters@cox.net](mailto:john-walters@cox.net)

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