

The **SKIMMER**



Volume 38, Number 4—April 2011

SDFO NEWS

Monthly Meeting

Tuesday, April 19, at 7:00 p.m., at the Tecolote Nature Center, at the east end of Tecolote Road, off I-5.

Program: “ECUADOR: Incredible Bird Diversity in a Small Country,” by Gary H. Rosenberg. Ecuador is one of the smallest countries in South America, yet its bird species list of greater than 1500 species is amazing. Many factors contribute to this high species diversity, including its location along the equator, its areas of high endemism in the northwest (Choco), and southwest (Tumbesian), and the high Andes separating Amazonia from the rich west slope. Gary Rosenberg's visit to Ecuador will cover most of the country, from areas near Mindo in the northwest, to southern Ecuador and the desert southwest where many species extend across the border from northwest Peru, to the very rich east slope of the Andes, to the Amazonian lowlands where individual lodges boast bird lists of more than 500 species! Ecuador is also home to an amazing number of fancy tropical species, including more than 100 species of hummingbirds, and amazing birds such as Andean Cock-of-the-Rock and Long-wattled Umbrellabird. Gary's photography is compiled from more than 50 birdwatching tours to Ecuador during the past 20 years.

Next month's meeting: Tuesday, May 17, same time, same place. Program to be announced.

We're requesting your help once again for:

America's Birdiest County compilation, April 23-25, 2011 !

First, thanks and appreciation to all of you who participated in the America's Birdiest City/County competition last year, and helped us to identify 256 species. Barring unfavorable weather, we should be able to top that this year.

The rules for 2011 will be the same as last year. We'll again be counting during a Sat.-Sun.-Mon. 72-hour window, April 23-25, a week earlier than last year. The Fri.-Mon. format is to permit a quick preliminary total on Sunday evening after the initial two days of birding, so that anyone who is able and willing can go out on Monday to look for

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missing species. You can do your ABC/C birding anytime you're free during the 72-hour period (all 72 hours, if you want!). Note: for ABC/C purposes, all birding (including pelagic searches) must be done from land.

We hope that most people can cover the same areas that they did last year. If you did a critical area, or went after difficult species last year, and you won't be able to cover those areas/species this year, it would be very helpful if you could let Phil know as soon as possible, so he can beg for someone else to check them out. This is particularly important for the key desert and mountain locales.

We'll also enter the Birdiest City competition again this year. If you bird both within and outside the city limits of San Diego, please remember to submit two lists (or at least two columns of check marks), so I'll know which backcountry birds are "County only". The city limits are clearly shown in the Thomas Bros. Guide. All birds seen in the city will, of course, also count in the S.D. County total.

Remember, we're operating near the end of the migration season for many north-bound birds, so please report all migratory birds that winter, breed, or pass through here. "Common" species like Pintail, Hermit Thrush, and even White-crowned Sparrow can be hard to find after mid-April. If it isn't a common resident bird, please report it! Thanks.

If anyone would be willing to coordinate searches for owls, or coordinate explorations in the desert or in the mountains, that would be much appreciated. That will help assure that no key areas are missed. Some areas like Kitchen Creek Road, the Borrego Sink, Doane Pond, Lower Otay Lake, etc. have been overlooked in some years.

Please remember to e-mail your Sat.-Sun. lists to me early Sunday evening on the 26th, if possible, so I can do a missing species check, which I'll try to have tabulated and e-mailed out by 9:30 p.m. on Sunday. Then the Monday chasers will have a target list to work from. Submit your Monday species, or your final list, as soon after Monday evening as possible.

Unfortunately, I'll be away April 12-22, which means that I won't be at the April SDFO meeting. In addition to this issue of *The Skimmer*, check for further info about the 2011 ABC/C compilation via the SDBirds listserv.

Let's see if we can hit 260 again, as we have in several previous years. Our total is proportional to the number of birders who report their results to me for the weekend, so thanks very much for your help!

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SAN DIEGO COUNTY BIRD OBSERVATIONS, MARCH 2011

Compiled by Guy McCaskie

A Brown Booby 1 mile southwest of Pt. Loma 4 Mar (PEL) and a second 6.5 miles west of Pt. Loma the same day (TH) add to the increasing number found in San Diego County waters. Twelve Common Murres at Pt. La Jolla 13 Mar (PEL) suggested the start of a northbound “echo flight” following the major southbound movement in November. A count of **212** Rhinoceros Auklets flying north at Pt. La Jolla 19 Mar (PEL) was an exceptional number from shore—much more than anything cited by Unitt (2004).

A tattered **Black Vulture** well photographed in flight near the San Diego Wild Animal Park 6 Mar (EGK & TRS) will be an addition to the San Diego County bird list if endorsed by the California Bird Records Committee. Noteworthy were reports of two Harris’s Hawks, with one near Jamul 22-30 Mar (*fide* SBM) and the other flying north near Boulevard 30 Mar (EAE). Impressive numbers of Swainson’s Hawks clearly moved north through the County in March, as evident by over 5,750 at Borrego Springs (**3,763** 28-30 March alone) (HC), 646 between Lake Henshaw and Warner Springs, and 25 at Culp Valley on 30 Mar (Steve Bier *fide* PJ), along with about 200 were at Fallbrook 8 Mar (DN), and 30-35 at the San Diego Wild Animal Park 9 Mar (SBM). The adult Zone-tailed Hawk wintering at the San Diego Wild Animal Park remained through 9 Mar (PEL) was accompanied by an immature on 8 Mar (PEL).

A Wilson’s Plover at the Tijuana River mouth 24 Mar (MS) is the first recorded in California in March, and the 11th

in San Diego County. The Pacific Golden-Plover present at the Tijuana River mouth since 26 Aug was still present 25 Mar (RTP, SWa). A Red-necked Phalarope on the open ocean off Pt. Loma 29 Mar (DWP) establishes the earliest date for a spring migrant in San Diego County—Unitt (2004) lists 5 April as the earliest. The first of the summering Elegant Terns were two on south San Diego Bay 2 Mar (MS) and the first of the Gull-billed Terns were four along the Silver Strand 23 Mar (SWo).

Noteworthy “finds” this month included a Tropical Kingbird photographed along the San Diego River in west Mission Valley 11 Mar (JP) that had probably wintered in the area. A pair of Cactus Wrens building a nest in an area of cactus adjacent to the Tijuana River estuary 27 Mar (GT)—remarkably the one first seen here 7 Nov 2009 (JK) was clearly successful in attracting a mate. An exceptionally late staying Large-billed Savannah Sparrow was at the Tijuana River mouth 18 Mar (LS)—most have gone from the County by mid- February with Unitt (2004) citing one on 23 Feb 1930 as being the latest. The male Evening Grosbeak at Tamarisk Grove Campground 18 Mar (DR) matches other spring records in that it was at a desert or desert-edge location.

The wintering Gray Flycatcher in Balboa Park since 15 Dec was still present 3 Mar (CA), the Eastern Phoebe at the Rosicrucian Fellowship in Oceanside found 13 Jan remained through 16 Mar (SB), and the Thick-billed Kingbird known present since 16 Dec (RN) was still in Chula Vista 31 Mar (PEL). An elusive Plumbeous Vireo, seen on

an average of once each month since 10 Nov, remained at Famosa Slough through 31 Mar (JP), while the Blue-headed Vireo on Pt. Loma since 30 Dec (DB) continued through 24 Mar (SBM). A Brown Creeper, rare in the lowlands, first reported at Lake O'Neill on Camp Pendleton 24 Feb (MB) was still there 26 Mar (GN), and our Winter Wren discovered on Pt. Loma 3 Nov (PEL) was last seen in full song 6 Mar (TJ). Wintering wood-warblers remaining into March included one of the two Tennessee Warblers and the male Black-throated Blue Warbler along San Geronio on Pt. Loma still present 12 Mar (PEL), along with the Black-throated Green Warbler nearby to 24 Mar (SBM). The Hermit Warbler at Viewpoint Park in Encinitas since 24 Oct (JMCM) was still there 23 Mar (SB). The Palm Warbler found at Lower Otay Lake 9 Jan (JK) was still present 14 Mar (DWP), and the Ovenbird discovered in West Hills Park 20 Feb (TRS) remained through 26 Mar (EGK). As expected, some of the wintering tanagers stayed with us well into March, with the male Hepatic Tanager in Imperial Beach since 10 Nov (JS) still there 9 Mar (SR) and the other found near the Marston House in Balboa Park 10 Feb (PEL) remaining through 3 Mar (CA). Seven Summer Tanagers, including a male and female present all winter in Balboa Park (Florida and Upas) still present 30 Mar (WL) and a male in Presidio Park since 2 Dec (PEL) there through the end of the month (BLC), and an equal number of Western Tanagers, with the latest being one remaining in Chula Vista 3-26 Mar (TJ, PEL) and two

together in North Claremont Park on 26 Mar (EGK).

Arrival dates for regular occurring spring migrant and summer visitor passerines: Pacific-slope Flycatcher 18 Mar (Balboa Park, JW), Bell's Vireo 29 Mar (San Luis Rey River, KW), Cassin's Vireo 19 Mar (Tamarisk Grove Campground, KS), Warbling Vireo 4 Mar (Borrego Springs, BM), Lucy's Warbler 15 Mar (Borrego Sink, BT), Black-throated Gray Warbler 12 Mar (Tamarisk Grove Campground, HD), Black-chinned Sparrow 10 Mar (near Boulevard, BM), Black-headed Grosbeak 27 Mar (University Heights, DR), Bullock's Oriole 3 Mar (Lower Otay Lake, TJ) and Scott's Oriole 11 Mar (Dulzura, DWP).

Listed observers: Christopher Adler, Maryanne Bache, Steve Brad, Dan Brown, Barbara L. Carlson, Hal Cohen, Henry Detwiler, Elias A. Elias, Terry Hunefeld, Tom Johnson, Eric G. Kallen, Jay Keller, Paul E. Lehman, Wendy Lemlin, Sara B. Mayers, Bob Miller, Brennan Mulroony, Douglas Nail, Gretchen Nell, Rick Norgaard, Robert T. Patton, Jim Pea, David W. Povey, Dennis Richards, Matt Sadowski, Keerthan Sastra, Lea Squires, Trent R. Stanley, Glen Tepeke, Bob Theriault, Stanley Walens (SWa), John Walters, Ken Weaver, Shauna Wolf (SWo).

Literature Cited

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

AVIAN TRIVIA

from *10,001 Titillating Tidbits of Avian Trivia*, by Frank S. Todd

90. What bird was completely eliminated by a single cat in less than a year?

2126. What is the name of the largest-known butterfly, and how much more does it weigh than the smallest bird?

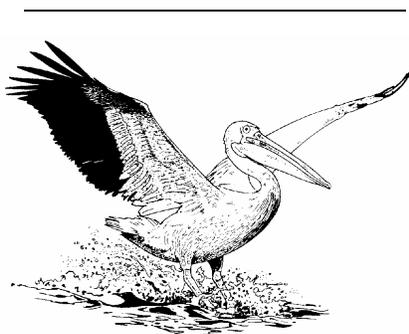
3331. An American Robin has how many feathers?

3655. How many species of birds did the American ornithologist Frank M. Chapman record on hats while walking about on a single day in New York City, in 1896?

4766. How heavy a fish can an Osprey carry?

5545. What are halcyon days?

Answers below.]



Answers to Avian Trivia [see above]

90. The Stephen Island Wren of New Zealand. Living wrens were only observed twice at twilight, and within a year of the semi-nocturnal bird's discovery in 1894, the lighthouse keeper's cat killed every one. The cat brought in the remains of about 20 wrens.

2126. The rare Queen Alexandria birdwing, a butterfly restricted to the lowland forests of Papua New Guinea. The larger, less colorful females average 8.27 inches (21 cm) across the wings, and possibly up to 11 inches (28 cm). Females are also the heaviest known butterflies, weighing up to 0.42 of an ounce (12 gms), or 7.5 times heavier than a male Cuban Bee Hummingbird.

3331. Based on feather count, nearly 3,000.

3655. Chapman's survey of 700 hats disclosed that 542 were decorated with feathers or whole birds, of at least 40 species.

4766. Reportedly up to 4 pounds (1.8 kg), and possibly more.

5545. According to Greek legend, Alcyone's husband drowned in a storm and so great was her grief, the gods permitted him to live again as a kingfisher. The gods provided that every year there should be from 7-14 days when the sea lies still and calm so that Alcyone might tend her floating nest. This calm period has become known as the halcyon days, the days of peace and tranquility. Many kingfishers are in the genus *Halcyon*.

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