

The **SKIMMER**



Volume 38, Number 8—August 2011

SDFO NEWS

Monthly Meeting

Tuesday, August 16, at 7:00 p.m., at the Tecolote Nature Center, at the east end of Tecolote Road, off I-5.

Program: Peter Pyle will discuss “Transpacific Migrations.” Discover the amazing movement patterns of the Albatross and other open ocean creatures as Peter Pyle, Institute for Bird Populations wildlife biologist, presents his research on transpacific migration. Find out how Pacific Ocean migrants overcome the hardships and risks of long-distance travel through and over the inhospitable and food-deprived central Pacific ocean. The great flights of the Albatross, which come 4000 miles to California to get food for their chicks, will be a primary focus. In addition, he will discuss the fasting of whales, tuna, white sharks and other marine animals, as well as the surprising over-water journeys of various shorebirds, land birds, insects, and bats. Peter worked as a Farallon Island Biologist for 24 years, studying bird, bat, and butterfly migration as well as the habits of the white shark. Peter currently works for the Institute for Bird Populations where he conducts research on changes in the abundance, distribution, and ecology of North and Latin American bird populations. In addition, he is a Research Associate for the California Academy of Sciences, San Francisco, and B.P. Bishop Museum, Honolulu. He has also published or co-authored over 120 papers in the scientific literature including *Identification Guide to North American Birds*, Parts 1 and 2 and is an expert on the molt of birds.

Next month’s meeting: Tuesday, September 20, same time, same place. Program to be announced.

Treasurer’s Report, July 2010 – June 2011

Our two sources of income are member dues and the January 1 pelagic trip. This year we took in \$2737.50 in dues and netted \$710 from the pelagic trip. Thus our income was \$3447.50.

Most of our budget goes to programs at our monthly meetings. This year we spent \$2566.82 on speakers (honoraria, travel expenses, and dinners) and \$395.18 on meeting room rent and refreshments. We spent \$314.89 for The Skimmer and the SDFO website. The total for expenses is \$3276.89. Thus we added \$170.61 to our reserves.

[more]

SDFO NEWS (cont.)

Our bank balance is \$4428.54. That's good for several reasons. We need cash to pay expenses for the next several months, before 2012 dues begin coming in. The pelagic trip income this year was significantly higher than in the past. We can't assume it will be the same each year. We currently pay a very small rental fee for our meeting room. If we had to find a new meeting location, our annual costs could easily go up by \$1000 or more.

If you have any questions about this report or would like to see more detail, please feel free to ask me.

Sara Mayers, Treasurer

AMERICA'S BIRDIEST CITY/COUNTY CONTEST: TIME TO RE-INVENT IT!

by Phil Pryde

The America's Birdiest City/County ("ABC/C") competition is celebrating its 10th anniversary! If your first thought was "so what?", please keep reading!

The ABC/C was initially originated in 2001 as a two-way challenge between a colleague at Los Angeles Audubon and myself, and has been run annually ever since. Initially just a competition between cities, it was soon expanded to also include a similar competition among counties. At its peak, about 30 cities and counties were entering each year. I was the coordinator for the first seven years, and for the last three it has been organized by folks at the Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuaries, who I thank for their help.

But now, on its tenth birthday, it seems like the time may be right to re-invent the event. Participation has been declining in recent years, perhaps (just guessing) because one city seems to have a lock on the city event (yeah, you da man, Corpus Christi!), and the county event seems to be dominated by a handful of counties in southern Califor-

nia and southern Texas. You're probably thinking, "Well, that could have been predicted", and you're right. To help spread the appeal, regional winners were also selected for each of the major flyway areas, but participation continued to inch downward.

Somewhat ironically, my real goal was not to have a contest, but to create an event for the spring migration-breeding season that would provide regular, credible, vetted, bird data that would be as useful and universal as are the results of the annual Christmas Bird Counts (CBC). (And produce a lot more bird numbers in Billings, Bismarck, and Barrow!) Also, it was meant to be a vehicle to engage more activists at the local level and maybe even to stimulate local media interest. But the PR part of my brain said "Make it a competition!", and so it was.

But the competition idea has grown old, and the concept of compiling nationwide time-series data on spring migrants is so much more compelling in the long run, that it

seems appropriate to reinvent the concept more along the latter lines.

So here is the proposal, and a request.

Let's say "adios" to the ABC/C.

Let's devise a new concept and name, maybe something like the "AB/MC" - the Annual Breeding and Migration Compilation. (The name is still a work-in-progress, so feel free to suggest something more imaginative.) We'd eliminate the "competition" aspect entirely. The only competition would be that each entrant tries to produce a more complete list each year than they did the year before.

The ABC/C asked participants only to list species identified, not to count numbers as do the Christmas Counts. The AB/MC could do it either way, or perhaps just count species to start with, and then get into counting numbers as it grows, and more volunteers are out in the field tabulating. I'd enjoy having your thoughts on this point.

Indeed, the organizational aspects could perhaps be simplified by just utilizing the existing CBC circles, and maybe adding some new ones. Maybe cities and counties are too amorphous and differ too much in terms of size and habitats; maybe permanent circles, CBC style, would be better.

One other difference as compared to the CBCs would also have to be decided upon: a CBC is a one-day event, but the ABC/C compilation has used a 72-hour count period. ABC/C participants seemed to like this as it helps to eliminate (or at least reduce) the "bad weather" factor that can produce disappointing results, it accommodates participants' personal schedules better, and it produces a larger and more inclusive list (which is the whole idea). It works well if you're just counting species. However, it could produce problems if you're counting numbers, in which case counting on just one day might be more workable. Again, input is invited.

Now, here's the request. The new AB/MC would need an institutional home. I

kept the records for the old ABC/C, which wasn't a hard job at all, especially with only 20-30 entrants. But I also have been organizing the San Diego County spring ABC/C count, which is fairly time consuming. Eventually, trying to do both by myself got to be a bit much, and that's when the Dauphin Island folks stepped in (again, thanks). But they've indicated they can't do it in 2012, and so the re-invented compilation, if it is to take root and grow, needs a new home, preferably in an institution where a committee could be involved, rather than just one person. (and I ain't no spring chicken any more!)

So I'm sending this message around to several organizations, a couple of magazines, and various individuals who have participated in the ABC/C, to see who might think the AB/MC is a good idea, and would be willing to take it on. I hope someone will.

And why shouldn't SDFO be one of the organizations that considers providing the AB/MC with a home? We have the talent, credibility, and organizational ability to do so. And within our diverse membership, perhaps someone who might consider this a worthy challenge and opportunity.

It actually isn't all that time consuming, at least not in its present ABC/C format. You just maintain a mailing list, send out a notice in January, and then a couple of follow-up e-mails, collect the results as they come in, and some time in June send out a list of all the participants and how they did. The event could also use an attractive web site, which I think might help a great deal.

So, what do you think? It goes without saying that I would be more than willing to assist the new volunteer leadership in any way I could. If you wanted, I'd be happy to be a consultant to your new steering committee. The new organizational leadership should be up and running by the first of the year, or very shortly afterwards (yeah, I know what Decembers are like!), so that

publicity can go out in January for the Spring 2012 event. Hopefully, including an eye-catching new web site.

If you'd to talk about the concept, or think you might be interested, please send me an e-mail or give me a call. I'd hate to see the idea of a spring compilation, like an old soldier, just fade away, but it does need new and energetic leadership, hopefully in a long-term relationship.

Let me know what you think, and please forward this message to anyone you think might be interested. Thanks.

Best regards,
Phil Pryde
philpinds@cox.net
(619) 465-9492



This Curlew Sandpiper was photographed in Imperial Beach by Jan Nordenberg. For another photo of this bird, see p. 5.

SAN DIEGO COUNTY BIRD OBSERVATIONS, JULY 2011

Compiled by Guy McCaskie

The now resident Greater White-fronted Goose at Lake Miramar and the Cackling Goose at the nearby Scripps Ranch Library were still present 10 Jul (JK). Six Black-vented Shearwaters off Pt. La Jolla 1 Jul (BM) and 15 there 8 Jul (PEL) were the earliest in S. California waters this fall—not normally expected before mid-August. A count of 131 Black Storm-Petrels off Pt. La Jolla 12 Jul (PEL) was a large number to be seen from shore.

At least one American Bittern was still "booming" at Dairy Mart Pond in the Tijuana River Valley 9 Jul (JK). The number of Reddish Egrets around San Diego increased to four with one at the Tijuana River mouth 2-16 Jul (JK, PEL); the two on south San Diego Bay remained through July (GMcC), but the one at the San Diego River mouth disappeared after 13 Jul (PEL). The

pair of Yellow-crowned Night-Herons in Imperial Beach hatched two young, but fledged only one, remnants of the other found on the ground below the nest (PEL: SDNHM) (JP); four adults were present at Famosa Slough/Sea World at the end of the month (JP), but with no young visible at the Sea World nest, and the subadult in Del Mar was still present 10 Jul (JP). The Wood Stork present at the San Diego Wild Animal Park near Escondido since 1980 was still present 10 Jul (KR).

The pair of Harris's Hawks at Jacumba were attending a young bird in a nest there in late July (DDiT), and one in Borrego Springs 11 Apr was still present 29 Jul (SB, RT). An adult Zone-tailed Hawk at the San Diego Wild Animal Park 22 Jul (FL) was probably one present last winter, but returning exceptionally early.

An adult Semipalmated Sandpiper,

one of a very few recorded in San Diego County, on south San Diego Bay 25-31 Jul (PEL, RAP), and an adult Curlew Sandpiper in the same area 24-30 Jul (GMcC), being the 6th recorded in the County, provided the highlights amongst the shorebirds. Juvenile "peeps" and dowitchers are late reaching Southern California this fall, probably due to late nesting on the breeding grounds, with a juvenile Western Sandpiper on south San Diego Bay 31 Jul (GMcC), a juvenile Least Sandpiper at the San Dieguito Lagoon the same day (PEL), and no juvenile Short-billed Dowitchers by the end of the month. A Heermann's Gull hit by a vehicle near Scissors Crossing 5 Jul (PJ: SDNHM) provides the 3rd record for the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. Two Black Terns, much scarcer in the County today than 20 years ago, were at Sweetwater Reservoir 23 Jul (JK, CA). A Parasitic Jaeger, exceptional in June and July, at Pt. La Jolla 10 Jul (PEL) was probably summering locally. Unexpected were Common Murres flying south at Pt. La Jolla 8-16 Jul (PEL, PAG), with two on 14 Jul (PEL, BM) and three the following day (PEL, SW), along with one off Del Mar 20 Jul (SES). Even more noteworthy was a Pigeon Guillemot at Pt. La Jolla 11 Jul (BM). However, the most unexpected and noteworthy sighting was that of a healthy breeding-plumage **Tufted Puffin** flying south past Point La Jolla 14 Jul (PEL, JK)—the two previous County records were of dead birds on beaches in July and September (Unitt 2004).

Exciting was the presence of up to two Yellow-billed Cuckoos in suitable nesting habitat at Scissors Crossing 11-14 Jul

(PJ)—single birds have been found here most years since 2001, but this is the first record of an apparent pair. A calling Yellow-billed Cuckoo near Bonsall 7 Jul (BM) and another seen at Lake Hodges 25 Jul (A & GB) were in suitable breeding habitat, but one on Pt. Loma 6 Jul (SS) was clearly a lost migrant.



Curlew Sandpiper at Imperial Beach
Photo by Mike Goldhamer

A pair of Vermilion Flycatchers successfully fledged at least one young at the Admiral Baker Golf Course in Mission Valley 15 Jul (JK), and the lone male at Oak Hill Cemetery in Escondido 15 May was still present 17 Jul (DF). The presence of five singing Swainson's Thrushes in the Tijuana River Valley 9 Jul (JK) suggests nesting, and a pair successfully

fledged at least two young near the San Diego Mission in Mission Valley 10-21 Jul (CGE, EGK). A first-summer male Summer Tanager in La Jolla 9 Jul (SMG) was surely lost, while a Western Tanager in La Jolla the same day (JK) was an early fall migrant. Single male Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were at San Elijo Lagoon 6-7 Jul (JN, PAG) and in Mission Valley 11 Jul (DH). A territorial male Indigo Bunting was at Scissors Crossing 4-16 Jul (JK, JS), and a wandering male was in Encanto 4 Jul (BMack).

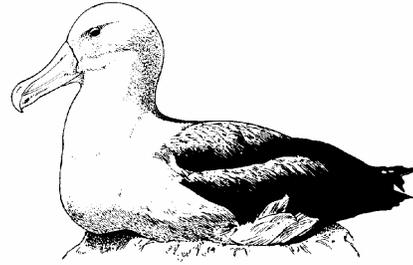
Listed observers: Christopher Adler, Steve Bier, Allen and Gloria Bond, Dean DiTommaso, Claude G. Edwards, David Furseth, Sally M. Gall, Peter A. Ginsburg, David Holway, Paul Jorgensen, Eric G. Kallen, Jay Keller, Paul E. Lehman, Fatima Lujan, Bonni MacKintosh, Sara B. Mayers, Guy McCaskie, Brennan Mulrooney, Jan Nordenberg, Robert T. Patton, Jim Pea, Steve Ritt, Kim Roth, Matt Sadowski, Susan E. Smith,

Jeremiah Stock, Sally Symanski, Robert Theriault, Stan Walens.

San Diego Natural History Museum
(SDNHM).

Literature Cited

Unitt, Philip. 2004. *San Diego County Bird Atlas*. Proc. San Diego Soc. Nat. Hist. 39.
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52nd SUPPLEMENT TO AOU CHECKLIST MAKES MINOR CHANGES IN ENGLISH BIRD NAMES

The American Ornithological Union's recently released 52nd supplement to the *Check-list of North American Birds* makes only one minor change to the English names of our North American birds, and that change is a reversion to an older name that will sound familiar: The Common Gallinule (*Gallinula galeata*) is back! It is now split from the Old World Common Moorhen (*G. chloropus*).

Other changes affect other parts of the world. Snowy Plover (*Charadrius nivosus*) stays the same, but it is split from the Old World Kentish Plover (*C. alexandrinus*). Conversely, Mexican Jay (*Aphelocoma wollweberi*) retains its English name, but its old scientific name, *A. ultramarina*, is now applied to the Transvolcanic Jay, formerly regarded as a southern Mexican race of the Mexican Jay but now considered a separate species.

The most significant change in this revision is the continuing bloodbath in the wood-warblers of the family Parulidae. Here is the complete list, including the tropical species that don't occur in the U.S. (you might want to paste this into your field guide,

if you care about such things):

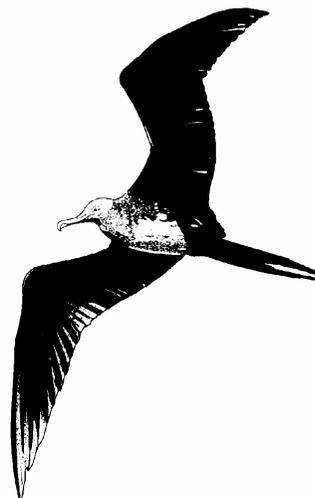
Seiurus aurocapilla Ovenbird.
Helmitheros vermivorum Worm-eating Warbler.
Parkesia motacilla Louisiana Waterthrush.
Parkesia noveboracensis Northern Waterthrush.
 † *Vermivora bachmanii* Bachman's Warbler.
Vermivora chrysoptera Golden-winged Warbler.
Vermivora cyanoptera Blue-winged Warbler.
Mniotilta varia Black-and-white Warbler.
Protonotaria citrea Prothonotary Warbler.
Limnothlypis swainsonii Swainson's Warbler.
Oreothlypis superciliosa Crescent-chested Warbler.
Oreothlypis gutturalis Flame-throated Warbler.
Oreothlypis peregrina Tennessee Warbler.
Oreothlypis celata Orange-crowned Warbler.
Oreothlypis crissalis Colima Warbler.
Oreothlypis luciae Lucy's Warbler.
Oreothlypis ruficapilla Nashville Warbler.
Oreothlypis virginiae Virginia's Warbler.
Leucopezia semperi Semper's Warbler.
Oporornis agilis Connecticut Warbler.
Geothlypis poliocephala Gray-crowned Yellowthroat.
Geothlypis aequinoctialis Masked Yellowthroat.
Geothlypis tolmiei MacGillivray's Warbler.
Geothlypis philadelphia Mourning Warbler.
Geothlypis formosa Kentucky Warbler.
Geothlypis semiflava Olive-crowned Yellowthroat.
Geothlypis speciosa Black-polled Yellowthroat.
Geothlypis beldingi Belding's Yellowthroat.
Geothlypis rostrata Bahama Yellowthroat.
Geothlypis flavovelata Altamira Yellowthroat.
Geothlypis trichas Common Yellowthroat.
Geothlypis nelsoni Hooded Yellowthroat.
Catharopeza bishopi Whistling Warbler.
Setophaga plumbea Plumbeous Warbler.
Setophaga angelae Elfin-woods Warbler.
Setophaga pharetra Arrowhead Warbler.
Setophaga citrina Hooded Warbler.
Setophaga ruticilla American Redstart.

Setophaga kirtlandii Kirtland's Warbler.
Setophaga tigrina Cape May Warbler.
Setophaga cerulea Cerulean Warbler.
Setophaga americana Northern Parula.
Setophaga pitiayumi Tropical Parula.
Setophaga magnolia Magnolia Warbler.
Setophaga castanea Bay-breasted Warbler.
Setophaga fusca Blackburnian Warbler.
Setophaga petechia Yellow Warbler.
Setophaga pensylvanica Chestnut-sided Warbler.
Setophaga striata Blackpoll Warbler.
Setophaga caerulescens Black-throated Blue Warbler.
Setophaga palmarum Palm Warbler.
Setophaga pityophila Olive-capped Warbler.
Setophaga pinus Pine Warbler.
Setophaga coronata Yellow-rumped Warbler.
Setophaga dominica Yellow-throated Warbler.
Setophaga flavescens Bahama Warbler.
Setophaga vitellina Vitelline Warbler.
Setophaga discolor Prairie Warbler.
Setophaga adelaidae Adelaide's Warbler.
Setophaga subita Barbuda Warbler.
Setophaga delicata St. Lucia Warbler.
Setophaga graciae Grace's Warbler.
Setophaga nigrescens Black-throated Gray Warbler.
Setophaga townsendi Townsend's Warbler.
Setophaga occidentalis Hermit Warbler.
Setophaga chrysoparia Golden-cheeked Warbler.
Setophaga virens Black-throated Green Warbler.
Myiothlypis fulvicauda Buff-rumped Warbler.
Basileuterus lachrymosus Fan-tailed Warbler.
Basileuterus rufifrons Rufous-capped Warbler.
Basileuterus melanogenys Black-cheeked Warbler.
Basileuterus ignotus Pirre Warbler.
Basileuterus belli Golden-browed Warbler.
Basileuterus culicivorus Golden-crowned Warbler.
Basileuterus tristriatus Three-striped Warbler.
Cardellina canadensis Canada Warbler.
Cardellina pusilla Wilson's Warbler.
Cardellina rubrifrons Red-faced Warbler.
Cardellina rubra Red Warbler.
Cardellina versicolor Pink-headed Warbler.
Myioborus pictus Painted Redstart.
Myioborus miniatus Slate-throated Redstart.
Myioborus torquatus Collared Redstart.
****Zeledonia coronata*** Wrenthrush.
****Icteria virens*** Yellow-breasted Chat.
****Xenoligea montana*** White-winged Warbler.
****Microligea palustris*** Green-tailed Warbler.
****Teretistris fernandinae*** Yellow-headed Warbler.
****Teretistris fornsi*** Oriente Warbler.

The asterisks in front of the last half-dozen species, including the Yellow-breasted Chat, indicate species of doubtful placement. We still don't know whether the chat is a proper warbler or not! Note also that the type genus of the family Parulidae, *Parula*, is no more, but under the arcane rules of biological nomenclature, it doesn't change the name of the family.

Another change of minor interest to North American birders is the removal of several Old-World species that sometimes occur here from the Thrushes (Turdidae) to the Old-World Flycatchers (Muscicapidae), including the Bluethroat, Northern Wheatear, and Siberian Rubythroat. Of more potential interest to those of you who bird in Latin America, there has been a rearrangement of the suboscine families such as the Ovenbirds (Furnariidae) and their relatives. None of these moves affect the English or Latin names of the individual species.

So the average birder shouldn't lose any sleep over the latest AOU revision. Just call them gallinules, not moorhens!



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