The **SKIMMER**

Volume 50, Number 1a—January 2023

SDFO NEWS

Monthly Meeting

Tuesday, January 17, 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: Program Chair Rick Grove is still working on January's program as this is published. Join us on Tuesday and find out!

Next month's meeting: Tuesday, February 21, same time, same place. Program to be determined.

SDFO Dues for 2023 are due

Support our organization by renewing your membership in SDFO. See the last page of the newsletter for information.

Special Christmas Bird Count Summary Issue coming soon!

Several of the CBC compilers are still completing their reports. We will publish them in a few days.

SAN DIEGO COUNTY BIRD OBSERVATIONS, DECEMBER 2022

Compiled by Paul E. Lehman

Top rarity honors for December 2022 go to the much-ogled juvenile Yellow-billed Loon present on Mission Bay from 22 Dec-2 Jan+. Discovered by two out-of-state birders (M&BP), it establishes the first county record, albeit somewhat overdue. There are several previous records from nearby counties and one from just across the border in northern Baja (November 1968). Other top-notch goodies discovered this month included an immature Tundra Swan at Borrego Springs from 31 Dec-2 Jan+ (MP, SE, RT), an Inca Dove there from 18 Dec-2 Jan+ (PEL), a Stilt Sandpiper at the South San Diego Bay Salt Works from 13-17 Dec (OM), and a Red-footed Booby at the San Diego Bay bait barge beginning around 12 Dec+ (DPo). True Rufous Hummingbird records in winter are exceedingly few. Thus, of much interest was the adult male at Rohr Park in Bonita on 17 Dec (NC). Casual in winter, a Swainson's Hawk was in Carmel Valley on 27 Dec (DAK), and another was at Camp Pendleton on 29 Dec (LW). A Bank Swallow at Lake Murray from 30 Dec-2 Jan (MS) establishes only the fourth winter record for the county. Up to a dozen Evening Grosbeaks at Agua Dulce in the

The top rarity of December 2022 was this county-first Yellow-billed Loon on Mission Bay from 22 Dec-2 Jan+, photographed here by the finders on the first day. Note the overall light brown color, blocky head with dark post-ocular spot, and the angled yellowish bill with a mostly pale culmen. The distinct pale edges to the feathering signifies that it is a young bird. *Photos by Matthew & Brennan Pendleton*

Following a five-year hiatus, Inca Dove again was found in Borrego Springs, this bird at the De Anza Country Club from 18 Dec-2 Jan+. *Photo by Barbara Wise*

Casual in winter, this Stilt Sandpiper frequented the South San Diego Bay Salt Works from at least 13-17 Dec. *Photo by Jorge Ayon*

Laguna Mts. from 4-8 Dec (SD) was surprising given that it does not appear to be an invasion year for this species in the state. Up to 30 Red Crossbills were there as well to late Dec (NC). Casual in winter, a MacGillivray's Warbler was in Chula Vista on 17 Dec (TF-H), and a Magnolia Warbler was at Live Oak County Park in Fallbrook on 25 Dec (KW). Continuing from the previous month, the Wood Thrush along the Doane Valley Nature Trail on Palomar Mt. since 25 Nov (BT) was last reported 10 Dec, just before cold and snow set in. A wild Lazuli Bunting at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park near Escondido has been entering an aviary to get free mealworms since summer through 29 Dec+ (EL), establishing the first-ever winter record for San Diego County. Indigo Bunting is much more likely to occur at this season.

Also continuing was the Red-necked Grebe at Agua Hedionda through 7 Dec (MS) and then off southern Oceanside on 30 Dec (DPo), as well as the bird returning to San Diego Bay at Shelter Is. through 26 Dec (PEL). So were the male Broad-billed Hummingbird in Carmel Valley through 13 Dec+ (SBe); the returning Little Stint at the Salt Works through 21 Dec+ (MS); multiple Harris's Hawks at both Shelter Valley and Jacumba through 24 Dec+ and 30 Dec+, respectively (v.obs); the returning Greater Pewee in Balboa Park through 30 Dec+ (PEL); single returning Grace's Warblers in Encinitas through 29 Dec+ (PGN) and in residential Pt. Loma through 1 Dec+ (JSp); a Black-throated Green Warbler at Santee Lakes since 17 Oct through 2 Jan+ (JSk, BM); and the returning Hepatic Tanager (PEL) and Painted Redstart (RTP) in Tierrasanta, through 24 Dec+ and 27 Dec+ respectively. The hybrid American X Black Oystercatcher (since March) was still in the Zuniga Jetty/Cabrillo National Monument area through 23 Dec (v.obs), and the hybrid at La Jolla (since July) was seen again 28 Dec (PEL). Pacific Golden-Plovers continued in the Tijuana Estuary area (two birds; m.obs) and sporadically at the Salt Works (v.obs). And an unseasonal (and possibly returning) Wilson's Phalarope and up to two Lesser Yellowlegs also continued at the Salt Works (v.obs). A boat ride off Carlsbad on 30 Dec produced a seasonally surprising five Pink-footed Shearwaters (JMc) and an early Scripps's Murrelet (BM).

An intermediate-morph "Blue" Snow Goose was along Rangeland Rd. near Ramona from 25 Nov-2 Jan+ (JW, NC). There are only a few county records of "Blue Geese." An above-average four White-winged and eight Black Scoters were tallied along the

coast (m.obs). Single Long-tailed Ducks were off Silver Strand State Beach 29 Nov-17 Dec+ (NT), at La Jolla 13 Dec (eBird), and on Mission Bay 14 Dec-2 Jan+ (DHa). A second-cycle Lesser Black-backed Gull was at Lower Otay Lake 9 Dec (MS). Single adults there 16 Dec (PEL), at J St. in Chula Vista 17 Dec (JDg), and at the Tijuana R. mouth 28 Dec (A&TL) may be the same bird. A very late Elegant Tern was photographed in Oceanside on 24 Dec (CC), where one was seen in late December a year ago as well. American Bitterns continued in the San Elijo Lagoon area (PEL) and at Mission Trails Regional Park (JA), and a new bird was at Whelan Lake in Oceanside on 13 Dec (SV). Up to three Zone-tailed Hawks were at their county stronghold in the Safari Park/Escondido area (EL), singles were at other favored sites in Poway (v.obs), Fallbrook (GS), and Ramona (JZ), and one bird continued at Pine Valley through 14 Dec (EM). Exceptional for the lowlands and establishing a San Diego County desert first, a male Williamson's Sapsucker was in Borrego Springs from 29 Nov-4 Dec (MG). A Yellow-bellied Sapsucker continued at Harry Griffen Regional Park through 25 Dec+ (EA). A rare "Prairie" Merlin (*F. c. richardsonii*) was in Carlsbad on 14 Dec (PEL).

An Ash-throated Flycatcher at Harry Griffen Regional Park on 6 Dec (NT) was very rare in winter, as was a Western Kingbird in the Tijuana R. Valley from 10 Nov-26 Dec (PEL, BW). Casual in the desert in winter, a Cassin's Kingbird was near Borrego Springs on 18 Dec (JDg) and a Townsend's Warbler was in Borrego Palm Canyon from 18-31 Dec (LN). An American Goldfinch in Borrego Springs on 8 Dec (DHa) was casual in the desert at any season. Along the coast, Tropical Kingbirds continued in the Dairy Mart/San Ysidro area (m.obs), in Nestor (PEL), and at NAS North Island/Coronado (PEL); and a new (and possibly returning) bird was at Famosa Slough from 12 Dec-1 Jan+ (MH). Single Hammond's Flycatchers were in University City from 29 Nov-21 Dec (BS) and in Balboa Park from 2-14 Dec (MH). Other *Empidonax* included three Gray Flycatchers in the Escondido and Ramona area (JR, BC, BM) and five coastal Pacific-slope Flycatchers (EC, EM, SWa, MH, PK). Single Cassin's Vireos were in residential Pt. Loma on 1 Dec (PEL) and in Balboa Park on 15 Dec (CT). Rare

This Red-footed Booby was discovered by birders at the San Diego Bay bait barge 17 Dec+. At that time, barge workers stated that it had been present for about a week. *Photo by Bruce Rideout*

A surprise flock of Evening Grosbeaks took up brief residence in the Agua Dulce area of the Laguna Mts. from 4-8 Dec. *Photo by Barbara Wise*

in early winter, up to two Northern Rough-winged Swallows were at Sorrento Valley/Los Penasquitos from 27 Dec-1 Jan (GG), and singles were at Santee Lakes from 28 Dec-1 Jan (JSk) and at Lake Murray on 31 Dec (JP). Two Pacific Wrens continued along the Doane Valley Nature Trail (m.obs) and another was at Agua Dulce on 14 Dec (BS). The Sage Thrasher at Crown Pt., Mission Bay, since October was still present 2 Jan (MO) and a new individual was found along the Silver Strand from 12-14 Dec (SWo).

More than the usual number of Lapland Longspurs were present in December, with one remaining

at Robb Field in Ocean Beach through 2 Dec (JB), one in University City on 4 Dec (DHo), one in Imperial Beach on 17 Dec (MS), and up to two at Fiesta Is. from 17 Dec-2 Jan+ (SBu). The sole Clay-colored Sparrow found this month was in Rohr Park on 28-30 Dec (MO). A Nelson's Sparrow continued at Crown Pt. from October through 24 Dec (NC), and new individuals were found also during especially high tides at the extreme southwest corner of San Diego Bay on 23 Dec (DBe) and at San Elijo Lagoon on 24 Dec (DAK). The Swamp Sparrow along the Sweetwater River in Chula Vista was last seen 4 Dec (PEL), but a new, very cooperative one or two set up shop at Famosa Slough from 9 Dec-2 Jan+ (IS), and another was at San Elijo Lagoon on 15 Dec (JMc).

The only Yellow-headed Blackbird reported during the month was at Rangeland Rd. from 1-9 Dec (NC), the one Orchard Oriole was in Rancho Santa Fe on 31 Dec (DAK), and single Hooded Orioles were in Carlsbad on 30 Dec (PEL) and in Rancho Santa Fe on 31 Dec (DBu). A Baltimore Oriole continued at Rohr Park through 21 Dec+ (PEL), and another put in a brief appearance in Balboa Park on 14 Dec (MH, LR). The sole Northern Waterthrush was at Dairy Mart from 17-31 Dec+ (JTS). In contrast, four Tennessee Warblers were found, with singles in Carlsbad from 13 Nov-30 Dec+ (TG), in La Jolla on 13 Dec (AA), at Dairy Mart on 17 Dec (JTS), and at San Diego City College on 30 Dec (MH). A Northern Parula was in Encinitas from 27-29 Dec (SES). Rare but annual in winter, single Hermit Warblers were in Chula Vista on 14 Dec (CM), returning to near Serra Mesa through 21 Dec+ (PEL), and in Santee on 28 Dec (BM). Single Rose-breasted Grosbeaks in Rancho Bernardo on 8 Dec (JSg), Chula Vista on 16 Dec (AJ), and San Pasqual Valley on 31 Dec-1 Jan (DKt) were rare, but rarer still in winter was one in the desert at Borrego Springs from 8-10 Dec (DHa).

Red Crossbills were present in moderate numbers in the Agua Dulce area between mid-Nov and late Dec. *Photo by Cynthia Case*

This Grace's Warbler in residential Pt. Loma from early November into early December was one of three returning individuals in the county this season. *Photo by John Dumlao*

Exceptional numbers of several species continued from November. White-throated Sparrows totaled a record-high *37* countywide for the month, including up to three together in a single-species flock at La Jolla Farms from 1-17 Dec (AA). Summer Tanagers totaled *42*. Greater White-fronted Geese continued widespread in small to moderate-sized flocks, with high counts of 124 at Fairbanks Ranch (SES, DAK), 126 in the Lake Murray area (MS), and 170 at Sweetwater Reservoir (PEL, SL). Lowland Townsend's Solitaires this month numbered a record seven near the coast, eight in inland valleys, and ten in the desert (m.obs). Mountain Bluebirds were present in impressive numbers, with notable highs of 55 on Spooner's Mesa bordering the Tijuana River Valley on 17 Dec (v.obs) and approximately 250 on the Anza-Borrego CBC on 18 Dec (m.obs). Many observers noted especially large numbers of American Robins present throughout the county, even in the desert. A goodly number of single-site counts were over 100 birds, a

few were as high as up to 500, but the grand prize went to the total of 1750 flying over the Del Dios area near Lake Hodges on 27 Dec (MS), as well as the 2500 on the Oceanside CBC on 30 Dec (m.obs). A count of 36-45 Surfbirds at Pacific Beach from 9-11 Dec (DHa, KM) is the largest on record in winter.

This Long-tailed Duck on Mission Bay from 14 Dec-2 Jan+ proved very cooperative with photographers. *Photo by Derek Hameister*

December totals for some of our scarce or rare-but-regular winter species included 7 Plumbeous Vireos, 8 Green-tailed Towhees, 15 Bullock's Orioles, 9 Black-and-white Warblers, 11 Nashville Warblers, 9 American Redstarts, 19 Yellow Warblers, 26 Black-throated Gray Warblers, 18 Wilson's Warblers, and 25 Western Tanagers.

Rare near the coast, up to three White-winged Doves were at Poinsettia Park in Carlsbad from 27 Nov-30 Dec+ (SV), and one was at NAS North Island/ Coronado on 10 Dec (PEL). A Lewis's Woodpecker continued through the month at Santee Lakes (m.obs), a long-staying (multi-year) Cactus Wren continued at the Tijuana R. mouth through 30 Dec+ (GV), and a "Gray-headed" Dark-eyed Junco was in Balboa Park on 17 Dec (CA). An Acorn Woodpecker at Crown Pt., Mission Bay, on 2 Dec (MW) was west of normal, whereas up to four at the San Felipe Valley Wildlife Area from Nov-19 Dec (TK) were east of usual. A Brown Pelican at San Vicente Reservoir on 15 Dec (SL) was well inland. Very rare in the desert were up to five Common Mergansers in Borrego Springs from 4 Dec-2 Jan+ (TK, RT). Rare in the lowlands, a Golden-crowned Kinglet was at UCSD on 3 Dec (JP), two were nearby at La Jolla Farms from 6 Dec-2 Jan+ (BS), one was in Carmel Valley on 27 Dec (DPa), and another was at Buddy Todd Park in Oceanside on 30 Dec (DT); and single Brown Creepers were in Encinitas from 2-27 Dec (JDt) and in Balboa Park on 20 Dec (NS). A Cassin's Finch on the Los Coyotes Indian Reservation on 18 Dec (HP) was at a lower elevation than is typical. In contrast, four Vermilion Flycatchers

One of two Hammond's Flycatchers found this month, this individual was in Balboa Park from 2-14 Dec. *Photo by Michelle Haglund*

at Lake Henshaw on 19 Dec (PJF) and one at Jacumba on 20 Dec (PEL) were perhaps at somewhat higher elevations than expected in winter. Very unusual for the date in the mountains was the Western Tanager near Doane Pond, Palomar Mt., on 9-10 Dec (RTP), the second year in a row this species was recorded there in early December.

A pair of Bald Eagles with a nest at Sweetwater Reservoir (PEL) will establish the westernmost

breeding site in the county if they continue their canoodling.

Acknowledgments: Many thanks to Sara B. Mayers and Guy McCaskie for their careful review.

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, Chris Adler, Joe Alsadi, Eitan Altman, Dave Beeke (DBe), Stacy Bermingham (SBe), John Bruin, Sean Buchanan (SBu), Dean Budd (DBu), Butch Carter, Nancy Christensen, Elizabeth Copper, Chris Curwen, Jay Desgrosellier (JDg), Jim Determan (JDt) Scott Dietrich, Steve Ellis, P. J. Falatek, Thomas Ford-Hutchinson, Michael Getty, Tito Gonzalez, Gary Grantham, Michelle Haglund, Derek Hameister (DHa), David Holway (DHo), Angela Johnson, Tom Keffer, Dan A. King, Don Kirtland (DKt), Patti Koger, Paul E. Lehman, Steven Lima, Aedyn & Trysten Loefke, Eric Lutomski, Eve Martin, Otto Mayer, Kris McMillan, Jimmy McMorran (JMc), Charlotte Morris, Brennan Mulrooney, Jane Mygatt (JMy), P. G. Nell, Larry Nigro, Miko Olsen, Debbie Parker (DPa), Robert T. Patton, Jim Pawlicki, Matthew & Brennan Pendleton, Hans Petermann, Dave Povey (DPo), Mar Pu, Jim Roberts, Lisa Ruby, Matt Sadowski, Norka Saldana, Susan E. Smith, Bridget Spencer, Jonny Sperling (JSp), Ginger Spinelli, Justyn T. Stahl, John Steigerwalt (JSg), Jeremiah Stock (JSk), Ian Swirka, Cameron Tescher, Robert Theriault, Nick Thorpe, David Trissel, Bill Tweet, Sally Veach, Geoff Veith, Stan Walens (SWa), Justin Watts, Ken Weaver, Martha Wild, Barbara Wise, Sam Woods (SWo), Loren Wright, and Jim Zimmer.

m.obs = many observers

v.obs = various observers

Multiple Pacific Wrens were present at *the* favored county site for this species along the Doane Valley Nature Trail on Palomar Mt. during November and December. *Photo by Chris McCreedy*

This long-staying Sage Thrasher at Crown Point on Mission Bay was present from 11 Nov-2 Jan+. *Photo by Miko Olsen*

In recent years, Kendall-Frost Marsh on Mission Bay has been the most consistent site for Nelson's Sparrow in San Diego County. This individual was seen there during a number of especially high tides in November and December. *Photo by John Bruin*

Two coastal, tipu-loving Golden-crowned Kinglets in La Jolla during the month proved very popular amongst birders, perhaps in part because the birds were not just barely detectable high in conifers! *Photo by Marcie Mason*

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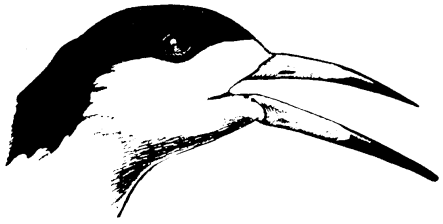

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