The SKIMMER

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SDFO NEWS

Monthly Meeting

Tuesday, January 16, 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: Eric Ripma will present "Raptor Migration in Costa Rica."

Costa Rica is well-known as one of the top birding countries in the world, but many birders don't realize that this wonderful country hosts an incredible raptor migration. Eric's presentation will take us to the amazing site of Kèköldi, where millions of raptors pass overhead each autumn as well as other Costa Rican hotspots in search of endemics.

Eric enjoys sharing his enthusiasm and knowledge, especially about identification, with birders of all ages and experience levels. After beginning bird ing at the age of ten in Indianapolis, Indians, he birded every chance he had throughout his childhood. Birding has led him from spectacular migratory hotspots in the Great Lakes region to the Pacific coast and beyond. Eric has also spent time birding in many tropical locations throughout Central and South America.

He has worked for numerous bird-related projects including bird banding in the United States and Belize, monitoring breeding Caspian Terns in Oregon counting migrating waterbirds at Whitefish Point, Michigan, and conducting shorebird surveys on Louisiana's barrier islands. He is currently living in Louisiana guiding birding tours throughout the Americas for Sabrewing Nature Tours, assisting on a Ph.D. project studying Royal Terns and Black Skimmers, conducting shorebird surveys in his spare time, and will once again be guiding field trips for the San Diego Birding Festival in February.

[continued]

SDFO NEWS *(continued)*

Next month's meeting: Tuesday, February 20, same time same place.

Program to be announced. See next month's *Skimmer* for details.

SAN DIEGO COUNTY BIRD OBSERVATIONS, DECEMBER 2023

Compiled by Paul E. Lehman

Top rarity honors for December 2023 go to the county's second- or third-ever Winter Wren photographed and tape recorded on private property along the San Luis Rey River near Pala Mesa from 8-10 Dec (JP). The unceasing mini-invasion of Broad-billed Hummingbirds included the female in the Golden Hill neighborhood of San Diego continuing from 9 Oct-31 Dec+ (LW), the male in Coronado continuing from 24 Nov-31 Dec+ (CK), a new male at Montrose Park in University City from 10-12 Dec (NT), a new female in residential Nestor from 14-16 Dec (PEL), and a male on private property in Golden Hill from 10-28 Dec (CMw), not far from where a male was present 28-29 Nov. This brings the September-December county total to a staggering *ten or eleven* individuals. The adult Sandhill Crane in the Tijuana River Valley since 11 Nov (DH) was last reported 23 Dec, and a new, immature bird was at Whelan Lake on 2 Dec (JH). A southbound Marbled Murrelet was photographed flying past La Jolla on 30 Dec (NT). A Crested Caracara was observed flying over Rohr Park in Bonita on 16 Dec (NC, HW). Coastal caracaras have been the subject of debate over possible captive origin, although most records have been accepted. A Thick-billed Longspur was along the Chula Vista bayfront 16 Dec (LS). Casual anywhere in the United States in winter, a Scarlet Tanager was at Buddy Todd Park in Oceanside from 20-25 Dec (P&DT) and *four* Blackburnian Warblers included singles at Lake Murray from 7 Nov-31 Dec+ (BSt) and in southeast Balboa Park on 16 Dec (AP), one even more unusual in the desert at Borrego Springs on 11 Dec (L&LL), and see below.

This immature Sandhill Crane at Whalen Lake on 2 Dec was the second in the county since early November. *Photo by Justin Hartsell*

The Red-necked Grebe at the mouth of San Diego Bay was back for its seventh winter, 9-16 Dec (PEL). A surprising December showing of three Franklin's Gulls included singles in the South San Diego Bay area from 30 Nov-2 Dec (DH), at Cardiff State Beach on 11 Dec (SBr), and at Sweetwater Reservoir on 31 Dec (PEL). Single Gray Catbirds were in Borrego Springs on 2 Dec (LRo) and at Jacumba from 6-10 Dec (PEL). Separate Rusty Blackbirds were in Tecolote Canyon from 20-22 Dec (MH) and at Discovery Lake

in San Marcos from 29-31 Dec+ (JMa). Top-notch warblers included single Chestnut-sideds at Pantoja Park in downtown San Diego (where another Chestnut-sided wintered in the same trees between 2012 and 2018) from 16-31 Dec+ (P&MT) and at Hosp Grove Park in Carlsbad from 27-29 Dec (JT), as well as one inland at Jamul from 6-20 Dec (JMa). A new Grace's Warbler was at Las Palmas Park in National City on 16 Dec (MS), and single Black-throated Green Warblers were in Crest Canyon, Del Mar, from 9-12 Dec (DAK) and at Dairy Mart on 16 Dec (JTS). A new Hepatic Tanager was at Harry Griffen Park in La Mesa from 15-31 Dec+ (BW).

Better-than-average coverage of the mountains—or perhaps more accurate to say better coverage specifically of the Stonewall Mine/Lake Cuyamaca area—produced several real surprises for the location and date. Although not thought of as your typical vagrant trap, it was a veritable hotbed of rare and late warblers, including the county's first winter-season montane records of a Black-and-white Warbler on 3 Dec (DPr, OA), Blackburnian Warbler on 8 Dec (CB, CZ), and Grace's Warbler on 5 Dec (P&DT). Slightly more expected, a Hammond's Flycatcher there on 9 Dec (RB, BRe) was a month later than normal for this regular mountain migrant. The continuing Zone-tailed Hawk through 31 Dec (m.obs), up to four Evening Grosbeaks through 16 Dec (JA, BF), and up to 22 Red Crossbills during the month (m.obs) seemed positively pedestrian by comparison.

An incursion of Ancient Murrelets southwards to central and southern California brought a number of birds to San Diego County waters, including several flying past La Jolla and off Mission Bay (v.obs), one at Carlsbad on 9 Dec (JB), and up to three well-watched birds in Oceanside Harbor and Pier area from 19-29 Dec (KW). A small flight of Red Crossbills brought, in addition to the Lake Cuyamaca birds, up to two to Jacumba 7-10 Dec (DPr), up to 13 to Daley Ranch near Escondido 30 Dec-2 Jan (RG), and coastal groups of two at Encanto 16 Dec (TSw), 11 in Carlsbad 29 Dec+ (EMa), and up to 18 in Carmel Valley 29 Dec-1 Jan (DAK).

Miscellaneous new rarities included a total of at least four Lesser Black-backed Gulls: single first-cycles at Lake Murray on 1-2 Dec (JP) and at the

A casual visitor to San Diego County, this Marbled Murrelet flew past La Jolla on 30 Dec. *Photo by Nick Thorpe*

Casual anywhere in the United States in early winter, this immature male Scarlet Tanager was at Buddy Todd Park from 20-25 Dec. *Photo by David Theobald*

This bright Blackburnian Warbler at Borrego Springs on 11 Dec was a real shocker as to date and location. *Photo by Li Li*

South San Diego Bay Salt Works from 11-16 Dec (MS) and at least two adults at Lower Otay Lake/Chula Vista landfill between 4-22 Dec (NC, PEL, NT). White-winged Scoters were on San Diego Bay 1 Dec (RTP) and in Oceanside 22-26 Dec (BL), and at least two Black Scoters continued off the Silver Strand

Very rare at any season, this Gray Catbird was at Jacumba from 6-10 Dec, one of two individuals found this month. *Photo by Nick Thorpe*

This Rusty Blackbird in Tecolote Canyon was enjoyed by many observers from 20-22 Dec. *Photo by Michelle Haglund*

16 Dec (NB), with a single bird off Point Loma 26 Dec (MS). A Long-tailed Duck was at Oceanside from 26-29 Dec (BSw). A moribund Black-legged Kittiwake was on the beach in Encinitas on 25 Dec (MGa), and a Laughing Gull was at Oceanside from 23-27 Dec (JH). Rare boobies included two Maskeds together 4.2 miles off Imperial Beach on 16 Dec (DPo), a Masked/Nazca off La Jolla on 10 Dec (DJ), and a Red-footed a mile off NAS North Island on 16 Dec (DJ).

A Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was found at Santee Lakes 15 Dec (TH) and another was in Vista 26 Dec (AA). A lowland Golden-crowned Kinglet was in San Marcos 31 Dec (TG). Single Clay-colored Sparrows were at Los Penasquitos 9 Dec (EMo), at NAS North Island 16 Dec (ND), and in residential Carlsbad 18-29 Dec+ (BRa). Single dark-lored White-crowned Sparrows were in eastern Oceanside 4-19 Dec (P&DT), Imperial Beach 11 Dec (CH), and Carlsbad 15 Dec (JMy). Single Swamp Sparrows were in Balboa Park 13 Dec (PAG) and Wing Street Canyon on Point Loma 15 Dec (MH). Orchard Orioles included up to two (one an adult male) at NAS North Island/Coronado from 3-16 Dec (PEL, RTP) and another adult male at the San Diego Zoo on 16 Dec (TSt). A total of four returning Baltimore Orioles involved singles in central Balboa Park 23 Oct-16 Dec (PEL, SBu), Rohr Park 13 Nov-16 Dec (PEL), NAS North Island/Coronado 3 Dec (PEL), and the San Diego Zoo 16 Dec (TSt). A Tennessee Warbler was in Carlsbad on 28-29 Dec (TG), and a Lucy's Warbler was there on 28 Dec (TG). Single Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were in residential La Costa from 22-31 Dec+ (AH, RW) and Clairemont Mesa West on 25 Dec (MGe).

A new, female-plumaged Hepatic Tanager was found at Harry Griffen Regional Park from 15-31 Dec+ (here 30 Dec). *Photo by Barbara Wise*

The Blackburnian Warbler at Stonewall Mine on 8 Dec was exceptional on this date in the mountains. *Photo by Catherine Zinsky*

Unprecedented during the winter months in the San Diego mountains, this Grace's Warbler was at Stonewall Mine on 5 Dec. *Photo by David Theobald*

This Hammond's Flycatcher at Stonewall Mine on 9 Dec was unexpected, as there are few previous records of possibly wintering birds in the mountains. *Photo by Ruslan Balagansky*

The Little Stint at the Salt Works returned for its sixth year, from 16 Oct-31 Dec+ (MS). Additional species continuing from previous month(s) included four *minima* Cackling Geese at Sweetwater Reservoir through 1 Jan+ (PEL), the wayward Common Ground Dove at San Dieguito County Park still present 1 Jan (LRu, CMs), and a total of four wintering Pacific Golden-Plovers in the South San Diego Bay/Tijuana Estuary area through the month (PEL, MS). The last Neotropic Cormorant remaining in the county from the spring 2023 influx continued sporadically at the San Diego River mouth through 27 Dec (MH). Multiple Harris's Hawks continued at both Jacumba and Shelter Valley (m.obs). The Dusky-capped Flycatcher at Kate O. Sessions Park in Pacific Beach since 26 Nov was still present 29 Dec+ (GN), the Scissor-tailed Flycatcher returning for its *eighth* year was in the Poggi Canyon area of Chula Vista from 26 Nov-31 Dec+ (DTr), and the Eastern Phoebe returning for its fourth year continued in City Heights from 12 Nov-31 Dec (BW). As many as four Lapland Longspurs were still present at Fiesta Island through 31 Dec+ (PEL, PLa, SV), another was in the Tijuana River Valley through 12 Dec (PEL), and up to three Nelson's Sparrows continued during the highest tides at Crown Point, Mission Bay, through 28 Dec+ (BT). The returning Grace's Warbler was along Crest Drive in Encinitas for its sixth winter from 19 Nov-30 Dec+ (PGN) and the Tierrasanta Painted Redstart was back for its fifth winter from 9 Nov-30 Dec+ (PEL). A returning Townsend's X Hermit Warbler was in Coronado from 4 Oct-16 Dec (NF).

Totals for some of our more regular scarce and vagrant species included 8 Zone-tailed Hawks, 10 Gray Flycatchers west of the desert, 11 Plumbeous Vireos, 13 White-throated Sparrows, 3 Northern Waterthrushes, 11 Black-and-white Warblers, 5 American Redstarts, and a high 39 Summer Tanagers. An above-

A widespread incursion of Ancient Murrelets southwards to central and southern California included up to three birds at Oceanside Harbor and Pier from 19-29 Dec. *Photo by Beth Fife*

A surprising three Franklin's Gulls in December included this individual at South San Diego Bay from 30 Nov-2 Dec (left), and a single Laughing Gull was at Oceanside from 23-27 Dec (right). Note the differences in head pattern and bill size. *Photos by Dan Hayes (left) and Paul Lehman (right)*

average six Hooded Orioles included a bird well inland in Fallbrook from 30 Nov-6 Dec (KW). Five Palm Warblers included four coastal birds and a real surprise in the desert at Borrego Springs on 17-18 Dec (SM). The sole Hermit Warbler was in Carlsbad on 29 Dec (KA).

A Vaux's Swift monitoring project at roost site (s) in downtown San Diego found 21 birds still present through 16 Dec (NT). An additional individual was at Whelan Lake on 2 Dec (PAG). A casual-in-winter Solitary Sandpiper continued at Whelan Lake 15 Nov-2 Jan (EMa, CMs). One or two Lesser Yellowlegs winter every year in the South San Diego Bay/Tijuana River Valley area, but one at Sweetwater Reservoir on 2 Dec (PEL) was more unusual. Other unseasonal species included a duo of Oceanside terns: a casual-in-December Common on 27 Dec (PEL) and a late-lingering Elegant on 13 Dec (KW). Single Ash-throated Flycatchers were in Carlsbad on 6 Dec (GHa) and in Bonita on 16 Dec (GM), and a Western Kingbird was at Whelan Lake on 2 Dec (JMy). Very unusual in the eastern half of the county in winter, a Cassin's Kingbird lingered at Jacumba through 19 Dec (PEL), and a pair was present in Borrego Springs from 17 Dec-3 Jan+ (PEL). Single Cassin's Vireos were in Chula Vista from 20 Nov-2 Dec (PEL), in Carlsbad from 6-29 Dec (GHa), and at Harry Griffen Park from 30 Dec+ (BW). A Northern Rough-winged Swallow at Whelan Lake from 6-9 Dec (BF) was slightly unexpected, but more so were the up to two birds farther inland at Lake Hodges from 20-27 Dec (SL). Rare in winter, Yellow-headed Blackbirds included one at Sweetwater Reservoir through 31 Dec (PEL, PM), up to two in the Tijuana River Valley through 1 Jan+ (PEL), one at the Chula Vista landfill on 16 Dec (NT), and three in the mountains at Mesa Grande on 19 Dec (RS). A Black-headed Grosbeak was in residential La Costa from 9-29 Dec+ (AH, RW).

County-wide December totals for some of our scarce or rare-but-regular wintering species included 9 Western Flycatchers (including one well inland at Lake Wohlford 30 Dec (BM)), 14 Green-tailed Towhees, 20 Bullock's Orioles, 8 Nashville Warblers, 28 Yellow Warblers, 27 Black-throated Gray Warblers, 8 Wilson's Warblers, and a high 57 Western Tanagers. As expected, all (other than a couple Green-tailed Towhees) were found on the coastal slope.

The winter status of the stealthy Black-chinned Sparrow is poorly known, although very small numbers may winter locally on a somewhat regular basis. One was in the extreme northeast corner of the county at Travertine Wash on 18 Dec (GHe).

Rare near the coast, continuing (?) White-winged Doves were at Wing Street Canyon 1 Dec (MH) and at Poinsettia Park in Carlsbad 14 Dec (TG), and two were near El Arbol in Carlsbad 29 Dec (GHa). Single Bald Eagles were near the coast at Sweetwater Reservoir through the month (PEL), at Lake Murray 3-29 Dec+ (PEL), and at Agua Hedionda and Batiquitos Lagoon on 29 Dec (ML, SL). A low-

land Brown Creeper was in Normal Heights 20-31 Dec+ (BSt). Other species that are rare near the coast included Single Sage Thrashers at Crown Point (returning) 13-31 Dec+ (DH) and at Cabrillo National Monument 16 Dec (SDCBC), four Mountain Bluebirds in Nestor/Tijuana River Valley 16 Dec (PEL), and a Brewer's Sparrow in Fairbanks Ranch 6 Dec (SBu).

Unusual east of the beach, up to two Red Phalaropes were at the Salt Works from 1 Dec-4 Jan (MS) and a Parasitic Jaeger was on San Diego Bay in Coronado on 16 Dec (AA). Inland Short-billed Gulls were at Lower Otay Lake on 12 Dec (DH) and Lake Murray from 14-30 Dec+ (JP), a Red-throated Loon was at the latter site from 7-10 Dec (JP), and a Pacific Loon was at Miramar Lake on 12 Dec (LRu).

Two Scripps's Murrelets off Mission Bay on 17 Dec (NK) were slightly early arrivals.

This Gray Flycatcher in northeastern Balboa Park from 20 Nov-1 Dec was one of ten seen this month west of the mountains. *Photo by Barbara Wise*

Solitary Sandpipers are casual in late fall and winter. This individual was at Whalen Lake from 15 Nov-2 Jan. *Photo by Jane Mygatt*

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Cited observers: Observers listed are limited to those finding and identifying each species. Some sightings reported to *eBird* are included without specific attribution. Alex Abela, Kathy Aldern, Omar Alui, Jenna Asperslag, Ruslan Balagansky, Nick Barber, Christine Beck, Jeff Birek, Steve Brad (SBr), Sean Buchanan (SBu), Nancy Christensen, Nicole Desnoyers, Beth Fife, Nathan French, Marc Gathmann (MGa), Michael Gehrisch (MGe), Rowan Gibson, Peter A. Ginsburg, Tito Gonzalez, Michelle Haglund, Clive Harris, Justin Hartsell, Dan Hayes, Gjon Hazard (GHa), Grigory Heaton (GHe), Alison Hiers, Terry Hurst, Dan Jehl, Christina Kidd, Dan A. King, Nicole Koeltzow, Braxton Landsman, Patti Langen (PLa), Paul E. Lehman, Max Leibowitz, Lisa & Li Li, Steven Lima, Eve Martin (EMa), John Martin (JMa), Shannon McNeill, Elizabeth Morgan (EMo), Charlotte Morris (CMs), Caitlin Morrow (CMw), Garrett Moss, Paul Mulholland, Brennan Mulrooney, Jane Mygatt (JMy), P. Gretchen Nell, Gary Nunn, Robert T. Patton, Jim Pawlicki, Aaron Polichar, Dave Povey (DPo), Davis Provan (DPr), Blanche Ramswick (BRa), Beverly Reynolds (BRe), Leah Rottke (LRo), Lisa Ruby (LRu), Matt Sadowski, Rebecca Sharp, Lea Squires, Justyn T. Stahl, Trent Stanley (TSt), Brandon Stidum (BSt), Tim Swain (TSw), Barbara Swanson (BSw), Paula & David Theobald, Peter & Millie Thomas, Jake Thompson, Nick Thorpe, David Trissel (DTr), Bill Tweet, Sally Veach, Ken Weaver, Haim Weizman, Lindsay Willrick, Ron Wilson, Barbara Wise, and Catherine Zinsky.

m.obs = many observers

v.obs = various observers

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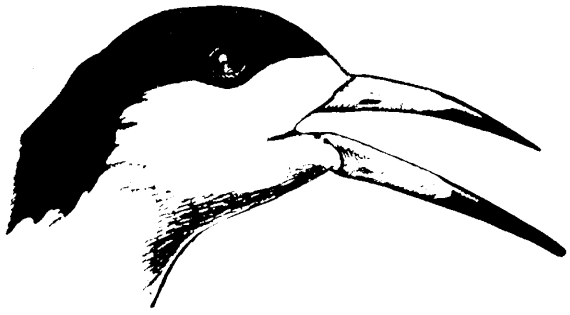
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