The SKIMMER

Volume 51, Number 3—March 2024

SDFO NEWS

Monthly Meeting

Tuesday, March 19, 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: Karthik Sai will present "Vihagam: Birds of the Seshachalam Biosphere Reserve."

Also known as "Bird Man," Mr. Sai is a wildlife researcher, photographer, guide, and conservationist in Tirupati, India where he works as a wildlife consultant to the Tirupati Wildlife Management Division and a wildlife biologist at Sri Venkateswara National Park. Mr. Sai has been passionate about wildlife photography since childhood. As a Tirupati native, he always had a dream to photograph birds and animals in Seshachalam forest where there are 215 species of birds. Mr. Sai has photographed 179 of them and 574 bird species in India. He has a M.A. in Wildlife Sciences and a diploma in Ornithology.

Next month's meeting: Tuesday, April 16, same time, same place. Program to be announced; see next month's *Skimmer* for details.

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SAN DIEGO COUNTY BIRD OBSERVATIONS, FEBRUARY 2024

Compiled by Paul E. Lehman

The third county record of Rufous-backed Robin was established by a bird coming to a feeder to eat chicken feed in Shelter Valley from 9-27 Feb+ (SH). It fits the late fall and winter pattern of vagrancy to the southwestern United States. Unfortunately, the bird was present on private property and public access could not be arranged.

Other new top-notch birds during February included a Tundra Swan along Rangeland Road near Ramona from 6-29 Feb (JC). An immature Sandhill Crane in agricultural fields along the San Luis Rey River in Oceanside from 18-27 Feb+ (FR) was almost certainly the same youngster seen at nearby Whelan Lake on 2 Dec. A Laysan Albatross was enjoyed by a boatload of San Diego Bird Festival participants along the outer edge of the Nine-Mile Bank, some 13.7 miles WSW of Point Loma, on 25 Feb (SW, SDAS). A young Glaucous Gull was at the J Street mudflats in Chula Vista on 19-20 Feb (JP) and then at Lower Otay Lake on 23 Feb (MS). A Crested Caracara was found in Oceanside from 19-21 Feb (JdL). Based on the exact wear pattern to the flight feathers, it was probably the same bird seen in the Tijuana River Valley on 28 Jan and in Los Angeles County in early February. A Blue-headed Vireo at Stagecoach Park in Carlsbad from 17-21 Feb (BSw) was a very rare to casual visitor at any time of year. A great find was a Bendire's Thrasher at Jacumba from 20-29 Feb+

The third county record of Rufous-backed Robin was established by this bird on private property in Shelter Valley from 9-27 Feb+. *Photo by Sarah Hess*

This Tundra Swan was present along Rangeland Road near Ramona from 6-29 Feb. *Photo by Joey Cortez*

Left: This immature Sandhill Crane in Oceanside from 18-29 Feb+ was likely the same individual seen nearby at Whelan Lake in early December. *Photo by Terry Brashear*

Above: The clear highlight of the San Diego Bird Festival pelagic trips was this Laysan Albatross along the outer edge of the Nine-Mile Bank, some 13.7 miles WSW of Point Loma, on 25 Feb. *Photo by Dan Jehl*

It had been quite a few years since there was a chaseable Glaucous Gull in the county—until this immature bird showed up at the J Street mudflats in Chula Vista on 19-20 Feb. *Photo by Andrew Newmark*

(ED). It is uncertain whether this bird was an early spring migrant or if it wintered locally.

A very rare "Red" Fox Sparrow was in Los Peñasquitos Canyon on 23 Feb (SL), a Lark Bunting was present in Jacumba from 14-29 Feb+ (PEL), and another was at the Warner Valley grasslands on 16 Feb (CK). Single Hepatic Tanagers were in Wing Street Canyon near the north end of Point Loma from 6-27 Feb+ (MH), continuing near the San Diego Mission from 25 Jan-19 Feb (PEL), and in Tierrasanta for at least its sixth year from 18-28 Feb+ (RTP). This brings the two-month total of Hepatics in the county to *five* individuals. A Tennessee Warbler in Jacumba on 14 Feb (PEL) was a first in winter for the county's true interior and was especially unusual at 3000 feet in the upper desert.

The sole Ancient Murrelet this month was seen from La Jolla on 9 Feb (SL). A small number of Black-legged Kittiwakes were seen at several sites, including onshore (m.obs). Single adult Lesser Black-backed Gulls in the Tijuana River Valley 17 Feb (DP), at J Street in Chula Vista 17-23 Feb+ (NC), and at the South San Diego Bay Salt Works 18-27 Feb (v.obs), as well as a third-cycle bird at the Salt Works from 20-22 Feb (MS), involved an unknown number of overlapping and continuing birds. Up to two dark-lored White-crowned Sparrows were in Jacumba 14-22 Feb

A (soggy) Crested Caracara in Oceanside from 19-21 Feb was probably the same individual seen in the Tijuana River Valley in late January. *Photo by Jonathan Casanova*

Casual in the state, this Blue-headed Vireo frequented Stagecoach Park in Carlsbad from 17-21 Feb. *Photo by Tito Gonzalez*

This Bendire's Thrasher was a great find at Jacumba from 20-29 Feb. *Photo by Ezekial Dobson*

(PEL), and singles were at Lake Hodges 17 Feb (CJ) and in central Balboa Park 26 Feb (PEL).

Continuing goodies from previous month(s) included the female Broad-billed Hummingbird in the Golden Hill neighborhood of San Diego from 9 Oct-13 Feb (LW) and the nearby male from 10 Dec-29 Feb (CMw), the male in Coronado from 24 Nov-2 Feb (CK), a male in residential Santee from 14 Jan-11 Feb (TA), and a new male visiting a feeder in Mission Valley from 28 Jan-24 Feb (MM). The September-February total of Broad-billeds in the county stands at a staggering *dozen* individuals. A White-winged Scoter continued in Coronado from 14 Jan-25 Feb+ (JP), and a new bird flew by La Jolla on 8 Feb (PMu). The returning Red-necked Grebe here for its seventh winter near the mouth of San Diego Bay since 9 Dec was still present 24 Feb (PEL), and a new bird was found at La Jolla on 24-25 Feb (SW). The American X Black Oystercatcher that ranges between Cabrillo National Monument and Ocean Beach was still present 25 Feb (SM), as was the individual at La Jolla through 25 Feb (PMu), and a total of four Pacific Golden-Plovers continued in the area between South San Diego Bay and the Tijuana River mouth (v.obs). A Neotropic Cormorant remained in the Famosa Slough/San Diego River mouth area through 29 Feb+ (m.obs), a new Neotropic was at Chollas Reservoir on 18 Feb (BW), and, slightly more surprising, two Neotropics turned up at Lake Henshaw on 3 Feb (TB), and a flock of eight at the Borrego Springs Resort on 25 Feb (PA) established a new record high count for the county. A young Laughing Gull in the Tijuana River Valley since 25 Jan (DH) was joined by a second immature during mid-Feb (LK), and at least one remained through 28 Feb+, with perhaps one of these same birds at the Salt Works on 25 Feb (RTP). An adult Laughing was found at the

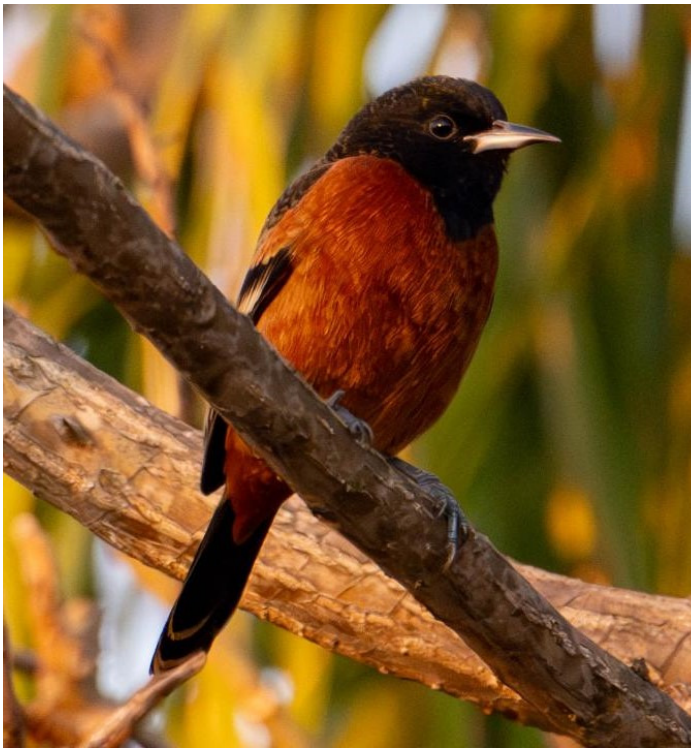
San Diego River mouth on 10 Feb (NG). At least three Harris's Hawks continued at both Shelter Valley and Jacumba (m.obs), with copulation and nest building observed at both sites.

The sporadic, returning Thick-billed Kingbird along Monument Road in the Tijuana River Valley since 29 Oct (PMa) reappeared from 18-29 Feb (DH, DT). The eight-years-returning Scissor-tailed Flycatcher near Poggi Canyon in Chula Vista since 26 Nov proved reliable through 18 Feb (DT), as did the four-years-returning Eastern Phoebe in the City Heights neighborhood of San Diego from 14 Nov-24 Feb (BW). The Thick-billed Longspur in off-limits bayshore Chula Vista continued from 16 Dec-26 Feb (LS, RTP), and it was joined by a Lapland Longspur from 16-26 Feb (RTP), whereas a wintering Lapland at Fiesta Island was still present on 24 Feb (v.obs). A Clay-colored Sparrow tarried in Los Peñasquitos Canyon from 9 Dec-22 Feb (EMo, MG), and high tides continued to produce at least two Nelson's Sparrows at Crown Point on Mission Bay through 25 Feb (BT) and a single bird at San Elijo Lagoon from 13 Jan-27 Feb+ (DT). Single Orchard Orioles soldiered on at Kimball Park in National City 26 Nov-23 Feb (PEL), at the San Diego Zoo 16 Dec-3 Feb (adult male; TS), and in residential La Mesa mid-Dec-27 Feb+ (RR); and new birds were in Oceanside from 14-16 Feb (SV) and on 20 Feb (SC). Baltimore Orioles continued at the San Diego Zoo from 16 Dec-10 Feb (TS) and at Harry Griffen Regional Park from 2 Jan-27 Feb (MS), and a new individual was in Del Mar on 16 Feb (CMs, EMa).

A new Neotropic Cormorant was a one-day wonder at Chollas Reservoir on 18 Feb. *Photo by Barbara Wise*

This bright Lapland Longspur was along the Chula Vista Bayshore from 16-26 Feb. *Photo by Robert T. Patton*

Continuing rare warblers were headlined by single Blackburnians at Lake Murray from 7 Nov-10 Feb (BSt) and in Torrey Hills near Sorrento Valley from 5 Jan-11 Feb+ (PEL). Separate Lucy's Warblers were in Carlsbad from 28 Dec-10 Feb and 20 Jan-11 Feb (TG). A returning Northern Parula was in University City from 14 Jan-11 Feb+ (PEL), and up to *two* new Parulas were along the San Luis Rey River in Oceanside from 19-29 Feb (SA, ML, SV). The inland Chestnut-sided Warbler in Jamul remained from 6 Dec -10 Feb+ (JMa), while coastal birds continued in Encinitas from 12 Nov-27 Feb (KF, JP), downtown at Pantoja Park from 16 Dec-1 Mar+ (P&MT), and in San Ysidro from 10 Jan-26 Feb (PEL), and a new bird was in Mira Mesa from 25-27 Feb (L&K). A total of *seven* Chestnut-sideds were found this winter between December-February. Single Palm Warblers were at Mission Bay from 27 Dec-28 Feb+ (JB) and at Lower Otay Lake on 16 Feb (MS). A Grace's Warbler returned for its sixth year along Crest Drive in Encinitas from 19 Nov-23 Feb (PGN), and a new Grace's was at Las Palmas Park in National City from 16 Dec-29 Feb+ (MS, PEL). The Painted Redstart in Tierrasanta



Two rare orioles during February included this adult male Orchard Oriole (left) at the San Diego Zoo from 16 Dec-3 Feb and this immature male Baltimore Oriole (right) at Harry Griffen Regional Park from 2 Jan-27 Feb. *Photos by Nancy Christensen (left) and Barbara Wise (right)*

One of two Blackburnian Warblers continuing into February, this individual was present in Torrey Hills, near Sorrento Valley, from 5 Jan-11 Feb+. *Photo by Mel Senac*

returning for its fifth year tarried from 9 Nov-22 Feb (PEL).

February totals for some of our more regularly occurring rare and vagrant species included 4 Zone-tailed Hawks, 4 or 5 Tropical Kingbirds, 5 Gray Flycatchers west of the desert, 8 Plumbeous Vireos, 4 White-throated Sparrows, 2 Northern Waterthrushes, 10 Black-and-white Warblers, 4 American Redstarts, and 22 Summer Tanagers.

Vaux's Swifts associated with a downtown San Diego roost site continued, with at least a single bird noted on 18 Feb (NT). An Ash-throated Flycatcher was in Solana Beach from 23 Nov-26 Feb (CMs). The wintering Hammond's Flycatcher remained at Dos Picos County Park from 13 Jan-17 Feb (NF, MW). A Grasshopper Sparrow at Mission Trails Regional Park 12 Feb (BW) was at a site where this species likely winters annually. Another was at Rancho Jamul 17-25 Feb (JMa). The sole Hooded Oriole continued in western Balboa Park from 16 Dec-20 Feb (AN, MH). A Black-headed Grosbeak remained at a La Costa feeder from 9 December-2 Mar (AH, RW), and a new individual was in Fallbrook on 3 Feb (KW). December-through-early-March totals for some of our other seasonally scarce or rare-but-regular winter species will be given in the March report.

Small groups of Red Crossbills continued scattered about the county, with February flocks at Stonewall Mine (v.obs), Pine Valley (KO), Fallbrook (KW), Carlsbad (EMa, JMy), Carmel Valley (DAK), and La Jolla (MR). A few Cassin's Finches were reported in the mountains during late February (v.obs).

One of three Northern Parulas found this winter was a returning female in University City from 14 Jan-11 Feb+. *Photo by Mel Senac*

This Chestnut-sided Warbler at Pantoja Park in downtown San Diego from 16 Dec-1 Mar+ was one of *seven* individuals found in the county during winter 2023-2024. *Photo by Millie Basden Thomas*

Up to 26 Yellow-headed Blackbirds on Otay Mesa between Nov-29 Feb+, with the high on 15 Feb (DJ), is one of the largest concentrations recorded in the county. Other miscellaneous high counts this month included six Black Scoters on San Diego Bay 11 Feb (MS), eight Short-billed Gulls in a flooded Tijuana River channel 9 Feb (PEL), and three Scott's Orioles at Rancho San Diego near El Cajon 16 Feb (LG).

Rare in the lowlands, single Golden-crowned Kinglets continued in San Marcos from 31 Dec-29 Feb (TG) and at Torrey Pines State Reserve from 31 Jan-17 Feb (PMu), and a Brown Creeper remained at Ward Canyon Neighborhood Park in Normal Heights from 20 Dec-24 Feb (BSt). Rare near the coast, a White-winged Dove continued at Poinsettia Park in Carlsbad from 14 Dec-22 Feb (TG), a migrant Swainson's Hawk was over Santee on 12 Feb (BM), an Oak Titmouse was at Mission Trails Regional Park on 23 Feb (KB), and a returning Sage Thrasher was at Crown Point from 13 Dec-16 Feb (DH). Three Mountain Bluebirds bordering the Tijuana River Valley continued from 16 Dec-12 Feb (PEL), and up to seven were at Upper Otay Lake from 7-18 Feb (DH). Rare inland, a Heermann's Gull was at Lake Murray on 2 Feb (MS). Very rare in the desert, up to two Cassin's Kingbirds remained at both Jacumba through 29 Feb+ and at Borrego Springs through 29 Feb+ (PEL, RT), and two American Crows flew by the Borrego Springs hawkwatch on 26 Feb (HC).

A Downy X Nuttall's Woodpecker hybrid was photographed in Mission Valley on 25 Feb (BSp).

Early-arriving migrants included two Elegant Terns at the Salt Works from 20-22+ Feb increasing to six on 23 Feb+ (MS), as well as one at the San Diego River mouth on 23 Feb (RG), with 80 birds already present at the Salt Works by 27 Feb (RTP). Record-early arriving (rather than locally wintering) Warbling Vireos were in Borrego Springs on 22 Feb (MS) and at Clark Dry Lake on 26 Feb (eBird).

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

Cited observers: Observers listed are limited to those finding and identifying each species. Some sightings reported to *eBird* are included without specific attribution. Paulette Ache, Sylvia Afable, Tom Applegate, Tom Baxter, John Bruin, Kevin Burns, Sophie Cameron, Nancy Christensen, Hal Cohen, Joey Cortez, Justin de Leon, Ezekiel Dobson, Kyle Fischer, Nathan French, Lauren Glevanik, Nathan Goldberg, Tito Gonzalez, Matt Gould, Rick Grove, Michelle Haglund, Dan Hayes, Sarah Hess, Alison Hiers, Charles Jackson, Dan Jehl, Logan Kahle, Christina Kidd, Dan A. King, Paul E. Lehman, Max Leibowitz, Steven Lima, Liz & Kev (L&K), Eve Martin (EMa), John Martin (JMa), Paul Marvin (PMa), Sara Mayers, Mike McClintock, Elizabeth Morgan (EMo), Charlotte Morris (CMs), Caitlin Morrow (CMw), Paul Mulholland (PMu), Brennan Mulrooney, Jane Mygatt (JMy), P. Gretchen Nell, Andrew Newmark, Kevin O'Connor, Robert T. Patton, Jim Pawlicki, Dave Povey, Robin Rivet, Fred Roberts, Matthew Rozin, Matt Sadowski, San Diego Audubon Society Bird Festival, Bridget Spencer (BSp), Lea Squires, Trent Stanley, Brandon Stidum (BSt), Barbara Swanson (BSw), Robert Theriault, Peter & Millie Thomas, Nick Thorpe, David Trissel, Bill Tweet, Sally Veach, Stan Walens, Ken Weaver, Martha Wild, Lindsay Willrick, Ron Wilson, and Barbara Wise.

m.obs = many observers

v.obs = various observers

Small groups of Red Crossbills continued at several sites, including a "Type 2" flock in residential Carlsbad from 29 Dec-10 Feb.
Photo by Jane Mygatt

SAN DIEGO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

President Nancy Christensen (760) 415-1744
president@sandiegofieldornithologists.org
Vice-president Rick Grove (661) 609-7910
vicepresident@sandiegofieldornithologists.org
Secretary Charlene Glacy (619) 851-1917
secretary@sandiegofieldornithologists.org
Treasurer Conny Jamison (619) 269-3264
connyjamison@gmail.com
Program Chair Rick Grove (661) 609-7910
vicepresident@sandiegofieldornithologists.org
Membership Chair Eve Martin
membership@sandiegofieldornithologists.org

Publishing
Skimmer Editor John Walters (619) 267-1821
johnfwalters5552@gmail.com
Webmaster Russ Christensen (858) 344-2290
webmaster@sandiegofieldornithologists.org

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 **johnfwalters5552@gmail.com**

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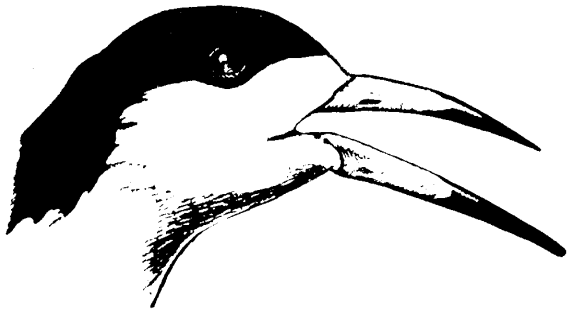
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