The **SKIMMER**

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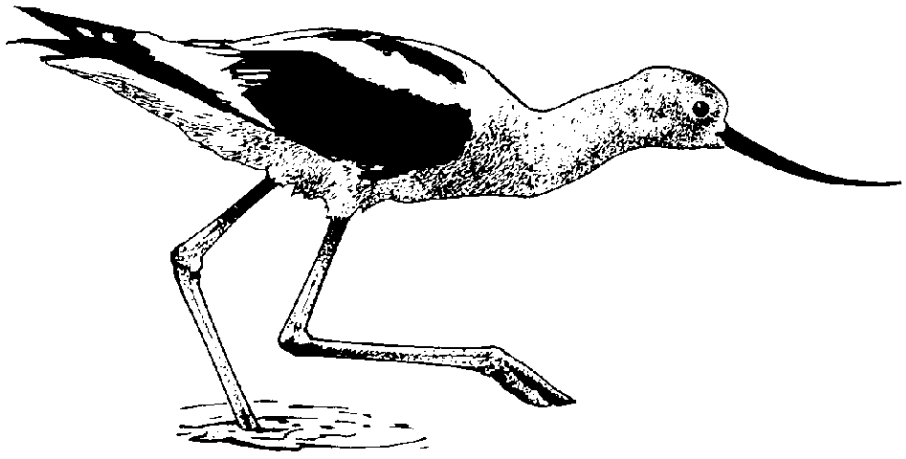
SDFO NEWS

Monthly Meeting

Tuesday, May 21, 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 assures us that there will be a program, but details are still up in the air. We will send out a supplemental email when they become available.

Next month's meeting: Tuesday, June 18, same time, same place. Our annual Business Meeting and Election of Club Officers for 2024-25. Program to follow; see next month's *Skimmer* for details.



SAN DIEGO COUNTY BIRD OBSERVATIONS, APRIL 2024

Compiled by Paul E. Lehman

A Wilson's Plover was found along the beach and bay sides of the southern Silver Strand on 8 Apr (KW). This casual visitor to California is most apt to turn up between late March and June, and most of the state's records are from San Diego County. A Semipalmated Sandpiper in the Tijuana River Valley on 19 Apr (PEL) establishes the fifth spring record in the county and probably the second-earliest spring record in the state, and this was followed by another bird at the South San Diego Bay Salt Works on 26 Apr (PEL). A new Harris's Hawk was seen near Carrizo Marsh in southeastern Anza-Borrego Desert State Park on 13 Apr (JP). A Gray Vireo at Agua Caliente County Park on 2 Apr (DP) provided one of relatively few records of a *migrant* anywhere in California. There are fewer than ten previous spring and fall records of migrant Gray Vireos in San Diego County, and some of those may be attributed to misidentified Bell's Vireos.

A casual visitor to California, primarily in spring, this Wilson's Plover (here at Emory Cove with a Semipalmated Plover and Least Sandpipers) was on the beach and bay sides of the lower Silver Strand on 8 Apr. *Photo by Dean Budd*

Another new find this month included a Palm Warbler well inland at San Vicente Reservoir, between Lakeside and Ramona, on 6 Apr (PEL). It is uncertain whether it was an early spring migrant or if it wintered somewhere locally. Some rare spring vagrant species found in April, rather than during the more typical May-early June timeframe, could be early migrants that wintered in northwest Mexico. Or they could be locally wintering birds that shifted slightly and were finally discovered. Six other examples—a Tennessee Warbler near Carrizo Marsh 13 Apr (MSa), an Orchard Oriole in Jacumba 21 Apr (PEL, BW), single Black-and-white Warblers on Point Loma 24 Apr (PEL), at Mission Trails Regional Park 28 Apr (NS), and at Scissors Crossing 28 Apr (BSp), and a Palm Warbler at the Bird & Butterfly Garden 27 Apr (LR)—were likely or certain migrants. Given the relatively early spring dates, most of these birds probably wintered in northwest Mexico.

This alternate-plumaged Semipalmated Sandpiper in the Tijuana River Valley on 19 Apr established the fifth spring record in the county and the second-earliest spring record for the state. *Photo by Andrew Newmark*

A breeding-plumaged Red-necked Grebe was on the ocean side of the Silver Strand 25 Apr (BSp). Spring Solitary Sandpipers are rarer than fall birds; singles were at Borrego Springs 14 Apr (MSa) and 21 Apr (PA), Del Mar 15-16 Apr (SB), and Otay Mesa 26 Apr (DJ). Two hybrid American X Black Oystercatchers were between Imperial Beach and Ocean Beach 15 Apr-1 May (MA). Single Black-legged Kittiwakes were at La Jolla 5 Apr (PEL) and at the Tijuana River mouth 7 Apr (SU). A much-above-average showing of Franklin's Gulls produced singles on the beach at Torrey Pines 15 Apr (SHu) and the same or different bird at several sites between Los Peñasquitos Lagoon and northern La Jolla 26 Apr-1 May+ (AA), an unprecedented four together at Lower Otay Lake 27 Apr (MSa), with two remaining the next day, and one at South San Diego Bay 28 Apr (TE). Black Terns are a rare but somewhat regular migrant offshore, where one was found 14 miles WSW of Point Loma on 23 Apr (m.obs). An immature Zone-tailed Hawk was over Pine Valley on 28 Apr (KR).

This new, immature Harris's Hawk was seen near Carrizo Marsh in southeastern Anza-Borrego Desert State Park on 13 Apr. *Photo by Matt Sadowski*

A Bell's Vireo in western Balboa Park 14 Apr (NF) was a very rare migrant away from nesting areas. A Plumbeous Vireo at Jacumba on 29 Apr (PEL) was probably a very rare spring migrant. A Bank Swallow was at Sweetwater Reservoir on 26 Apr (PEL), and another was in Escondido 28 Apr (MJH). Although 2022-2023 was a record year for lowland Townsend's Solitaires, 2023-2024 was extremely poor; thus, a presumed migrant in Alpine on 4 Apr (ANy) was unexpected. A singing White-throated Sparrow in Pine Valley 14 Apr (MWd) probably wintered locally, although it may have been an actual spring migrant. Single young male Orchard Orioles at the San Diego Zoo from 12-26 Apr (PEL) and at Doyle Community Park in University City from 14-22 Apr (BSp) were new and presumed to be wintering birds, which brings the season's total to a record 12 individuals. The singing Baltimore Oriole at La Jolla Colony on 19 Apr (PM) was also presumably a locally wintering bird. An Indigo Bunting returned for yet another year to the Bird & Butterfly Garden area, with a male present from 24 Apr-1 May+ (AP). Another male was in residential Point Loma on 29-30 Apr (S&KM).

The two or three Abert's Towhees found just barely inside the county's northeast border near Travertine Palms Wash on 29 Mar (TF-H, MSt) were, no surprise for a non-migratory resident species, still present on 3 May (m.obs). And the Rufous-backed Robin on private property in Shelter Valley since 9 Feb was still present 21 Apr (SHe).

There are few records of migrant Gray Vireos anywhere in California. Thus, this bird at Agua Caliente County Park on 2 Apr was a great find. *Photo by Davis Provan*

A fair number of our known wintering rarities each year remain into April, some into late April. Such goodies continuing from previous month(s) in 2024 included a worn Long-tailed Duck at the Salt Works

This Palm Warbler well inland at San Vicente Reservoir on 6 Apr was a surprise. It could either have been an early migrant or have wintered locally. *Photo by Paul Lehman*

An above-average four Solitary Sandpipers found during April included this bird in Del Mar on 15-16 Apr. *Photo by Sean Buchanan*

through 3 May (LS, MSa), an American X Black Oystercatcher still present at La Jolla on 3 Apr (v.obs), single Pacific Golden-Plovers at the Tijuana River mouth through 28 Apr (m.obs) and on South San Diego Bay through 20 Apr (MSa), and the 6th-year Little Stint at the Salt Works through 24 Apr (MSa). A long-staying immature Laughing Gull in the Dairy Mart area of the Tijuana River Valley was last seen 6 Apr (m.obs), but perhaps the same bird was later at the Tijuana River mouth 18 Apr-3 May (MWr), and presumably a new bird was at Batiquitos Lagoon 23 Apr (JMc). Neotropic Cormorants soldiered on at Famosa Slough/San Diego River mouth through 30 Apr (m.obs), Lake Murray through 17 Apr (up to two, MSa), and Santee Lakes through 2 May (up to three, TH), with there being likely overlap between some of the Lake Murray and Santee Lakes birds. New Neotropics were at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park from 17 -25 Apr (MP) and in the mountains at Lake Cuyamaca from 1-4 Apr (JP). Single pairs of Harris's Hawks were likely nesting at both Jacumba and Shelter Valley (m.obs). The last Zone-tailed Hawk sighting of the season at the Safari Park was on 11 Apr (TL). A Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was still in Ramona on 5 Apr (NC), and a hybrid Downy X Nuttall's Woodpecker continued in Mission Valley through 5 May (BSp).

The returning Thick-billed Kingbird along Monument Road in the Tijuana River Valley was last reported 8 Apr (m.obs). Ten wintering Red Crossbills were still in Carmel Valley through 28 Apr (DAK), up to two were lingering in Pine Valley 20-21 Apr (MDa), up to four were at Stonewall Mine 21 Apr-3 May (NC, GH), and one was at Torrey Pines 28 Apr (JY). The wintering Lapland Longspur continued quite late along the Chula Vista bayshore through 16 Apr (RTP), single wintering Clay-colored Sparrows remained at NAS North Island through 28 Apr (ND) and in a Carlsbad yard through 24 Apr (BR), and the popular Harris's Sparrow was still in residential Carmel Valley on 29 Apr (ML). A dark-lored White-crowned Sparrow remained in Borrego Springs through 27 Apr (CD), with a new dark-lored there from 22-27 Apr, three others together nearby on 25 Apr (RT), and singles at Vallecito 7 Apr (BLS), Agua Caliente County Park 27 Apr (NC) and Jacumba 27 Apr (NT). A young male Orchard Oriole was in southwest La Mesa through 29 Apr (RR), the adult male continued sporadically at the San Diego Zoo through 14 Apr (TS, MM), and single Baltimore Orioles remained at Harry Griffen Regional Park to 8 Apr (MSa) and at Rohr Park until 13 Apr (BH).

Wintering warblers included a Northern Parula in University City through 16 Apr (PEL), single Blackburnians in Torrey Hills through 6 Apr (PEL) and in Linda Vista through 9 Apr (MR), single Chestnut-sideds at Pantoja Park to 15 Apr (P&MT) and at Lake Murray through 19 Apr (JP), up to two Palms

along the Chula Vista bayshore through 9 Apr (MSa, RTP), and Grace's at Las Palmas Park in National City through 2 Apr (m.obs). Two of this winter's bumper crop of Hepatic Tanagers made it well into April (later than expected), with the female-type in Wing Street Canyon through 24 Apr (MH) and the returning adult male in Tierrasanta to 17 Apr (RTP, PEL).

Totals for some of our more regular scarce and vagrant wintering birds that lingered into April included 3 coastal Gray Flycatchers (latest to 27 Apr), 7 Plumbeous Vireos (latest to 25 Apr), 5 White-throated Sparrows (latest to 1 May), 8 Green-tailed Towhees (latest to 2 May, late, McCain Valley, SL), 3 Northern Waterthrushes (latest to 17 Apr), 2 Black-and-white Warblers (latest to 17 Apr), 3 American Redstarts (latest to 15 Apr), and 13 Summer Tanagers (latest to 16 Apr). A new record winter-season (December-April) total for coastal San Diego County was set with 22 Plumbeous Vireos (previous high 18) and the second-highest totals were reached with 19 Black-and-white Warblers (highest 21) and 65 Summer Tanagers (highest 71).

Franklin's Gulls average about one record per spring. The first of six or seven birds found this month was on the beach at Torrey Pines 15 Apr (here with a Bonaparte's). *Photo by Shouqin Huo*

This long-staying immature Laughing Gull was present during wetter conditions in the Tijuana River channel near Dairy Mart between 25 Jan and 6 Apr (here 1 Apr). *Photo by Paul Lehman*

A hybrid Downy X Nuttall's Woodpecker is recorded perhaps every other year. This bird continued along the San Diego River in Mission Valley from March through 5 May. Note the mixed plumage characters visible on its sides, crown, and back. *Photo by Bridget Spencer*

Very rarely detected as a migrant, a Grasshopper Sparrow was at the Bird & Butterfly Garden on 11 Apr (ANe). A Wood Duck in the Tijuana River Valley from 13 Apr-3 May (PEL) was probably a rare migrant and fit a limited pattern of spring records away from sites hosting feral resident populations. Other scarce migrants included totals of eight Calliope Hummingbirds, three Gray Flycatchers, and three Purple Martins, including one martin in the desert at Borrego Springs 14 Apr (HZ). Not often seen in active migration, a Belted Kingfisher flew north past Mount Soledad at a high altitude on 16 Apr (PEL).

Unusual inland, single Elegant Terns were at Lake Murray 12 Apr (MWd) and at Sweetwater Reservoir 22 & 26 Apr (PEL). Brant occur regularly in

non-stop spring flight over the desert and mountains, traveling between the Gulf of California and the coast, with a few birds occasionally putting down en route. Singles were at Lake Cuyamaca 13 Apr (AH), at Jacumba 13 Apr (QN) and 26-27 Apr (HD), and standing along the side of Highway 78 in woodland east of Julian on 14 Aug (MDo, SS). Whimbrels are known to occur inland regularly during spring migration, but one at the Santa Ysabel East Preserve near Julian on 6 Apr (AM) was nevertheless at an unexpected location. Brown Pelicans occur regularly inland on the coastal plain only at Sweetwater Reservoir, less often on Lower Otay Lake; elsewhere they are very rare. Thus, one at Lake Murray on 20 Apr and two there on 28 Apr (JP) were of note. Up to four American Crows were in Shelter Valley (eBird). One or two pairs of Cassin's Kingbirds continued in the Borrego Springs area into late April (v.obs), as did one pair at Shelter Valley (JS). Cassin's has recently increased in numbers elsewhere along the western margins of the desert in Southern California. Pioneering California Thrashers continue to move east in the desert, with a new bird near Carrizo Marsh on 13 Apr (MSa).

West of normal, a White-winged Dove was in the Tijuana River Valley 25 Apr (PEL), a Bald Eagle was at Batiquitos Lagoon 26 Apr (TK), a Swainson's Hawk was near Mission Bay 28 Apr (TF-H), three Acorn Woodpeckers were in the Eastgate area of University City 14 Apr (BSp), and a Canyon Wren was in the same area one was seen in April 2023 at Torrey Pines State Reserve 15-24 Apr (BSt, EL).

An evening survey of roosting Vaux's Swifts at downtown San Diego chimneys produced 1600 birds on 15 Apr, 3000 on 25 Apr, and a record 4240 birds on 26 Apr (NT). Some 22 Bell's Sparrows along the Gower Truck Trail, southeast of Ramona, on 2 Apr (SL) was a very high count for the nominate race *belli*. Other high counts included 170-200 Pine Siskins at Pine Valley feeders 11 Apr (PEL, PLa, SV) and 12-26 wintering Yellow-headed Blackbirds continuing at Otay Mesa through 3 May (DJ).

Late-lingering species included a Common Goldeneye at the San Diego River mouth through 24 Apr (m.obs), single Merlins at Chollas Reservoir on 25 Apr (BW) and at Lake Hodges on 26-27 Apr (SC), a "Slate-colored" Dark-eyed Junco in Escondido on 8 Apr (MWr), a "Gray-headed" Dark-eyed Junco at Cibbets Flat Campground along Kitchen Creek Road on 11-12 Apr (PEL), and a Vesper Sparrow at Jacumba on 21 Apr (PEL). The injured Common Merganser first found at Lake Cuyamaca in July 2023 was still present 28 Apr (TH).

This wintering Lapland Longspur along the Chula Vista bayshore remained very late, through 16 Apr (here 15 Apr). *Photo by Robert T. Patton*

A calling Ridgway's Rail at the upper end of Sweetwater Reservoir on 28 Apr (PEL) added another inland locale to the growing list of such freshwater sites. At least one vocal American Bittern was present into early April at the upper end of San Elijo Lagoon (v.obs), the only known breeding site in recent years.

Two wintering Chestnut-sided Warblers remained well into April, including this bird downtown at Pantoja Park through 15 Apr (here 7 Apr). *Photo by Haim Weizman*

Of the *six* Hepatic Tanagers present during the winter season, these birds at Wing Street Canyon (left) between 6 Feb-24 Apr and in Tierrasanta (right) from 18 Feb-17 Apr were the two individuals remaining late. *Photos by Michelle Haglund (left) and Mel Senac (right)*

Migrant Purple Martins are especially rare in the desert where this bird was found at Borrego Springs on 14 Apr. *Photo by Hanna Zhao*

This Summer Tanager in the Clairemont neighborhood on 2 Apr was one of a near-record 65 presumed wintering individuals found in the county during 2023-2024. *Photo by Marcie Mason*

This grounded migrant Brant was standing along the side of Highway 78 in the woods just east of Julian on 14 Apr. Another Brant was found at exactly this same site on 8 Apr 2000. *Photo by Mike Dow*

A nesting pair of Long-eared Owls with young were at an undisclosed site in southeastern San Diego County 29 Apr-3 May (PEL). A Brown-crested Flycatcher at Scissors Crossing on 29 Apr (SL) is as early an arrival as any at our local breeding sites.

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. Alex Abela, Paulette Ache, Maggie Avants, Sean Buchanan, Sean Cathey, Nancy Christensen, Mark Dayton (MDa), Chris Dean, Nicole Desnoyers, Heidi Doman, Mike Dow (MDo), Todd Easterla, Thomas Ford-Hutchinson, Nathan French, Michelle Haglund, Mary Jo Hayes, Gjon Hazard, Bonnie Henson, Sarah Hess (SHe), Andrew Howe, Shouqin Huo (SHu), Terry Hurst, Dan Jehl, Ted Keyel, Dan A. King, Ethan Lai, Patti Langen, Paul E. Lehman, Max Leibowitz, Steven Lima, Trysten Loefke, Marcie Mason, Sara & Keith Mayers, Jimmy McMorran (JMc), Adrian Mlodzianowski, Paul Mulholland, Jane Mygatt (JMy), Andrew Newmark (ANe), Quinn Nial, Ali Nygaard (ANy), Robert T. Patton, Jim Pawlicki, Melissa Petullo, Aaron Polichar, Davis Provan, Kurt Radamaker, Blanche Ramswick, Robin Rivet, Leah Rottke, Mitch Ruibal, Matt Sadowski (MSa), Britta Lee Shain, Susan Sherwood, Bridget Spencer (BSp), Lea Squires, Joshua Stacy, Nancy Stalnaker, Trent Stanley, Barbara Stollsteimer (BSt), Mark Stratton (MSt), Robert Theriault, Peter & Millie Thomas, Nick Thorpe, Sharif Uddin, Sally Veach, Martha Wild (MWd), Barbara Wise, Mike Wittmer (MWr), Kristina Wolf, Jeffrey Yang, and Hanna Zhao.

m.obs = many observers

v.obs = various observers

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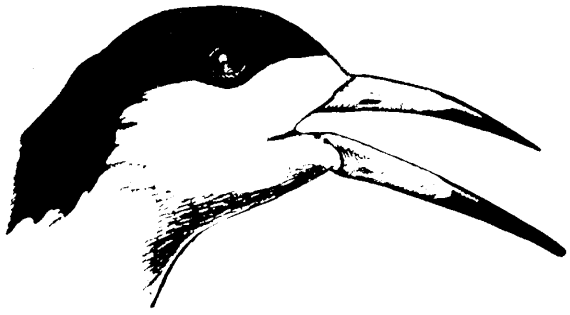
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