The SKIMMER

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SDFO NEWS

Monthly Meeting

Tuesday, June18, 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: Our annual Business Meeting and Election of Officers for 2024-25. I've been assured that the Powers That Be are putting together a slate of officers for us to vote on, but there are still some vacancies on that slate. So here's your chance to pull off a coup! Take control of the SDFO machinery, poke into the sordid corners and rattle the skeletons! Who knows what you might find? In addition to whatever slate of officers appears, we also encourage nominations from the floor. Just bring your brass knuckles and lots of cash!

Following the election, if anyone is still sober, our speaker will be Tiffany Kersten, describing her "Birdie Big Year."

Tiffany Kersten is a Wisconsin native who now resides in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas. Hooked on birds since age 12, she graduated from Northland College with a B.S. in Wildlife Ecology. She has spent fifteen years working in conservation and environmental education with organizations including the US Forest Service, US Fish & Wildlife Service, and the Cape May Bird Observatory. After completing a Lower 48 states Big Year in 2021, she founded her own company, Nature Ninja Birding Tours.

Tiffany Kersten didn't set out to do a Big Year, but after a series of unanticipated and serendipitous events, she suddenly found herself amidst one. As a sexual assault survivor, she spent 2021 traveling to all corners of the country, tallying birds and gifting personal safety alarms to women she met along the way. Her goal was to see 700 species, and to raise awareness of women's safety in the outdoors. She ended up surpassing her goal and setting a new record, with 726 species. In her presentation, Tiffany will lead us through the fear, empowerment, struggles, and healing that all played vital roles in the personal growth she experienced on this wild adventure.

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

SAN DIEGO COUNTY BIRD OBSERVATIONS, MAY 2024

Compiled by Paul E. Lehman

The premier landbird rarity this month was the female Hepatic Tanager in the La Jolla Summit neighborhood on 29 May (PM), only the fourth county record of a late-spring vagrant. The previous three were all from Point Loma, on 28 May 1998, 11 Jun 2002, and 10 Jun 2021. Casual in spring, especially near the coast, a Zone-tailed Hawk was at San Elijo Lagoon on 12 May (RM). Also casual in spring, a Clay-colored Sparrow was in the desert at Vallecito from 29 Apr-3 May (BLS) and a female Orchard Oriole was inland in Rancho Bernardo, east of Lake Hodges, on 12 May (SL). An Ovenbird was at NAS North Island 7 May (BFl) and a Northern Waterthrush was at Vallecito on 14 May (BLS).

This female-type Hepatic Tanager in the La Jolla Summit neighborhood on 29 May established only the fourth county record of a spring vagrant. *Photo by Paul Mulholland*

A casual spring migrant, this Clay-colored Sparrow was in the desert at Vallecito from 29 Apr-3 May. *Photo by Britta Lee Shain*

A total of 16 Black Swifts passed over Mount Soledad in La Jolla between 20-24 May (PM, NT), four were nearby over Tecolote Canyon on 23 May (RB), and, more unusual, one was inland at Rangeland Road on 23 May (BM). This spring's total of Solitary Sandpipers climbed to an excellent *five* individuals with the addition of birds at Borrego Springs from 4-6 May and on 12 May (PA). An above-average *five* Tennessee Warblers were found, including at Buddy Todd Park 9 May (BFi), Point Loma Nazarene University 12-13 May (NT), the Bird & Butterfly Garden 14 May (S&MB), residential Point Loma 25 May-2 Jun (AA), and residential La Jolla 29 May (PM). Of almost annual occurrence during spring, a Black-and-white Warbler and an American Redstart were at Vallecito on 24 May (BLS), single Northern Parulas were in San Carlos on 12 May (EA) and along the Otay River in eastern Chula Vista on 24 May (JAt), and another

This apparent female Orchard Oriole in Rancho Bernardo, east of Lake Hodges, on 12 May was a casual spring migrant. The species likely to be confused is an early-fledging juvenile Hooded Oriole. *Photo by Steven Lima*

This Black Swift was one of 16 individuals seen flying past Mount Soledad during late May (here 23 May). This is the best site in San Diego County to look for this species. *Photo by Paul Mulholland*

Parula was in the mountains at the Santa Ysabel Preserve East on 25 May (PM). Migrant Summer Tanagers were reported in Wing Street Canyon 16 May (MH), Vallecito 24 May (BLS), the Tijuana River Valley 26 May (MS), Liberty Station 29 May (JAi), and La Jolla 31 May-1 Jun (AA). An above-average *fourteen* Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were at the Bird & Butterfly Garden 8-11 May (MH), Coronado 12 May (PEL), residential Point Loma 19 May (AA), Coronado 18-20 May (RY), residential Oceanside 22-24 May (DRi), Mount Soledad 25 May (PEL), Wing Street Canyon 26 May (MH), NAS North Island 27 May (CN), Point Loma 28 May (PEL), residential Bay Park 30 May (BT), University City 31 May (CH), and inland at Vallecito 24-29 May (BLS), in Japatul Valley 27 May (KR), and near Ramona 27 May (CW).

Rare-but-regular migrants included single Bank Swallows at Sweetwater Reservoir 13 May (DP) and Batiquitos Lagoon 15 May (TG); three Purple Martins at Point Loma 12 May (NT) and one at Batiquitos Lagoon 14 May (TG); and single dark-lored White-crowned Sparrows at the Bird & Butterfly Garden 1-2 May (AN), at Vallecito 3 & 9 May (BLS), and at Mission Trails Regional Park 15 May (M&PT).

A Red-billed Tropicbird was just three miles off Oceanside on 16 May (CD, NT). Rare in May, a Black-legged Kittiwake was four miles off Sunset Cliffs on 7 May (SL). Two Common Murres and a total of 115 Scripps's Murrelets between Mission Bay and the Nine-Mile Bank on 18 May (BVAS) were notable. On 31 May, a Northern Fulmar in the San Diego Trough was getting late, and a pair of Craveri's Murrelets 6-1/4 miles west of Point Loma were somewhat early (v.obs).

A few Pine Siskins lingered well into the month, with one in Vallecito on 23 May (BLS) and up to two at El Cajon feeders through 31 May+ (CKS) being particularly late. A new, third bird at the El Cajon feeders on 31 May+ was a recently-fledged juvenile from an uncertain nesting locality. It would be unprecedented if from a local, lowland breeding site, exceptional if related to casual nesting in the local San Diego County mountains, or quite unexpected if

An above-average total of *five* Tennessee Warblers during May included this individual at the Bird & Butterfly Garden on 14 May. *Photo by Sonja Beevé*

hatched from even farther away within its regular montane breeding range well to the north.

Small numbers of Red-breasted Nuthatches also tarried at multiple sites into late May, with a late high count of eight in residential Carlsbad on 26 May (JM). Up to seven Red Crossbills continued at Stonewall Mine/Paso Picacho through 31 May+ (v.obs), up to twelve wintering birds (Type 2) were still in residential Carlsbad through 29 May (JM), two wintering birds (Type 2) in Carmel Valley tarried to 23 May (DAK), a new flock of five (Type 2) flew over Mount Soledad on 6 May (BMT) and seven were there 20 May (PM), and two were at Buddy Todd Park on 25 May (LC).

The wintering Rufous-backed Robin on private property in Shelter Valley was last seen on 3 May (SH). The pair of Abert's Towhees near Travertine Palms Wash in extreme northeastern San Diego County were still present 3 May (m.obs). A Laughing Gull continued at the Tijuana River mouth from 11 Apr-3 May (v.obs), and a different individual was in the Tijuana River Valley from 6-15 May (BMT). One of the celebrities of the month was the fairly tame Franklin's Gull that frequented the beach at La Jolla Shores from late April through 6 May (AA), to be enjoyed and photographed by countless observers. Another Franklin's was over Pacific Beach on 20 May (GN).

This Craveri's Murrelet some 6-1/4 miles off Point Loma was one of an early pair seen 31 May. Note the bill shape, blackish-brown upperparts, dark extending under the chin, dark 'spur' on the breast side, and the mostly dusky underwing. *Photo by Nancy Christensen*

The only Black-and-white Warbler found this month was in Vallecito on 24 May. *Photo by Britta Lee Shain*

This pigmentally-challenged Sooty Shearwater was an eye-catching treat several miles off Mission Bay during the 18 May pelagic trip. *Photo by Sally Veach*

Other species of interest continuing from previous month(s) included the presumed migrant Wood Duck in the Tijuana River Valley through 3 May (PEL) and a worn and tattered Long-tailed Duck at the South San Diego Bay Salt Works from March through 29 May (MS, JTS), which began to show signs of fresh molt into alternate plumage. Up to two hybrid American X Black Oystercatchers were between Cabrillo National Monument and the mouth of Mission Bay through 28 May (m.obs). A wintering Pacific Golden-Plover at the Tijuana River mouth remained slightly later than usual and was last noted on 2 May (MS). Up to four Neotropic Cormorants continued to appear sporadically at Lake Murray through 1 Jun+

This juvenile Pine Siskin, aged by its overall fresh plumage and buffy tips to the median and greater wing-coverts, was a total surprise at El Cajon feeders from 31 May+. *Photo by Chris Staurovsky*

(MS), up to two birds continued at Santee Lakes through 23 May (TH), one was at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park through 21 May (MP), and a high count of five or six were at Lake Morena from 19 May+ (MS). There is likely some overlap between the Lake Murray and Santee Lakes birds. Single pairs of Harris's Hawks continued at both Shelter Valley (v.obs) and Jacumba (PEL). A hybrid Downy X Nuttall's Woodpecker remained in Mission Valley from February to 29 May (BSp).

A wintering Tropical Kingbird at Whelan Lake lingered late and was still present 14 May (KM). This is likely the same individual that wintered there the previous year and remained exceptionally to 3 Jun 2023. A wintering White-throated Sparrow at Santee Lakes remained through 1 May (JSt, TH). This species regularly remains later than our locally wintering White-crowned Sparrows. Up to three wintering Yellow-headed Blackbirds on Otay Mesa were still present somewhat late on 21 May (DJ). The territorial male Indigo Bunting continued in the Bird & Butterfly Garden area through 2 Jun (AP), and a new male was a one-day wonder at Wing Street Canyon on 4 May (MH).

A Brewer's Sparrow at Old Vallecito Ranch on 27 May (MS) was very late. Other lingering and late species included a Greater Scaup along the Chula Vista Bayshore 20 May (BSt), two Buffleheads at the San Diego River mouth through 25 May (JPe), a Golden-crowned Sparrow in San Marcos 9 May (GA), a Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow in Vallecito 15-17 May (BLS), a Chipping Sparrow at Mount Soledad 21 May (PM), a Black-throated Gray Warbler at Torrey Pines State Reserve 28 May (PM), and a Lark Sparrow in Wing Street Canyon 31 May-2 Jun (DRu). Some 360 Vaux's Swifts at a downtown San Diego roost on 17 May (NT) was a good count for so late in the season. In contrast, a migrant Willow Flycatcher at Vallecito on 7 May (BLS) was slightly early.

Exceptional away from salt water, two Royal Terns were appreciably inland at Lake Murray on 5 May (JPa). The only previous inland record for the county is of two birds at Lower Otay Lake on 31 May 2021. Positively pedestrian by comparison, single Elegant Terns were inland at Sweetwater Reservoir 11 May (PEL) and near Dairy Mart 24 May (PEL). Also rare inland, and getting slightly late, a Greater Scaup was on a small golf course pond in Bonita on 12 May (JSp). Perhaps associated with the occurrence of weak

A record total of approximately seven Laughing Gulls during 2024 through May included this immature in the Tijuana River Valley from 6-15 May (here 11 May). *Photo by John Dumlao*

This extremely cooperative, long-staying Franklin's Gull was at La Jolla Shores for more than eight days (through 6 May), here on 3 May with a crop-full of sand crabs and being harassed by a young Heermann's Gull. A mere 104 eBird reports of this bird were submitted! *Photo by Barbara Swanson*

Wintering White-throated Sparrows often remain later than our wintering White-crowned Sparrows, as this individual did at Santee Lakes through 1 May (here). *Photo by Terry Hurst*

California Quail do not typically wander appreciable distances from their normal range and habitat. But this male was calling from rooftops in residential Point Loma from 7 May-1 Jun. *Photo by Paul Lehman*

and starving Brown Pelicans along parts of the California coast, more than the usual number of individuals were found inland. This species is found regularly in very small numbers on Sweetwater Reservoir (where up to nine birds), is rare at Lake Murray (where up to five) and Lower Otay Lake, and is very rare elsewhere. Thus, singles at Lake Hodges 4-7 May and 16-19 May (SL), at Lake Sutherland 6 May (SL), and up to two at Lake Morena 19-20 May (MS) were unexpected.

Bonaparte's Gulls were found in larger numbers than is typical of recent decades, including small numbers at scattered inland sites. The most notable were two lingering birds at Borrego Springs on 26 May (SL) and one there 29 May (PA).

California Quail are very rarely noted outside their normal range and habitat. Thus, a calling male in residential Point Loma from 7 May-1 Jun (PEL) was of interest. West of normal, a White-winged Dove in the Tijuana River Valley from 25 Apr-14 May was joined by a second bird on the 14th (PEL), and singles were at Cabrillo National Monument 2 May (DE), San Dieguito Lagoon in Del Mar 5 May (GD), University City 6-7 May (CH), residential Point Loma 13 May (PEL), and Mission Trails Regional Park 27 May (DAK). Rare near the immediate coast, single Acorn Woodpeckers were in the Scripps area of La Jolla on 2 May (RC) and at Point Loma Nazarene University from 11-13 May (DB), and singles were east of normal at Jacumba on 3 May (PEL) and 23 May (TR). A juvenile White-tailed Kite at Jacumba on 26 May (PEL) was a rare eastward disperser.

Given its stealth behavior, the status of nesting Long-eared Owls is far from clear. A family group was present in southeastern San Diego County between 29 Apr-4 Jun (PEL). One of the county's few remaining pairs of White-headed Woodpeckers was presumed nesting for at least the second year in the same grove of trees on Hot Springs Mountain 12-26 May (JD). A displaying American Bittern continued through the month at the upper end of San Elijo Lagoon (v.obs). Newly discovered Double-crested Cormorant colonies came to light at Naval Base Point Loma (12+ nests, since 2021, PEL, BSt), Santee Lakes (four nests, BM), and Oceanside harbor (14+ nests, KW) are three of only about six known sites in the county. Yet another coastal nesting site for Vermilion Flycatchers was established by a family group at the Riverwalk Golf Course in Mission Valley on 28 May (PEL).

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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, Paulette Ache, Johanna Alpert (JAt), Joe Alsadi (JAi), Eitan Altman, Gavin Aquila, Sonja & Michael Beevé, Richard Breisch, Dean Budd, Buena Vista Audubon Society sponsored pelagic trip, Ross Christie, Luca Cinus, Gail DeLalla, Chris Duffy,

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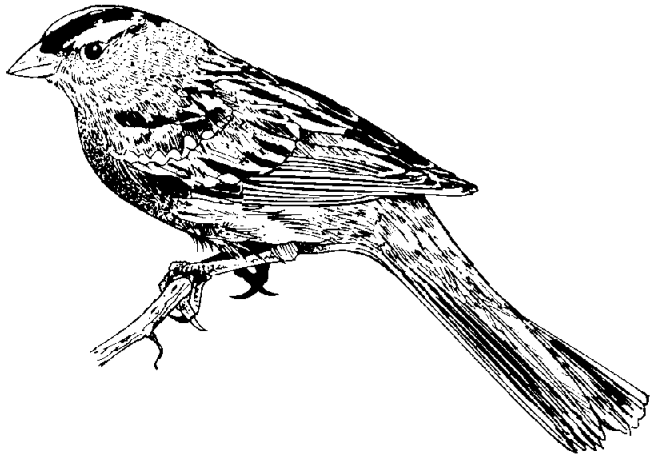
m.obs = many observers

v.obs = various observers

Long-eared Owl is a sensitive, stealthy species with a relatively small number of confirmed county breeding records away from Tamarisk Grove Campground. These two juveniles (with two adults nearby) were in southeastern San Diego County between 29 Apr-4 Jun (here 8 May). *Photo by Barbara Wise*



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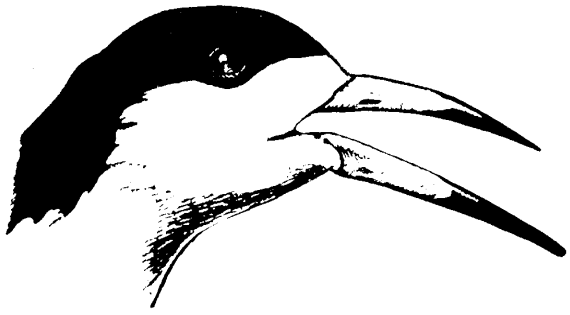
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