The SKIMMER

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SDFO NEWS

Monthly Meeting

Tuesday, February 18, 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: Rick Grove will present "San Diego: The Next Ten Species?"

Which species will make its first appearance in San Diego County next? Rick Grove will present the results of polling the San Diego birding community. If you haven't voted yet, please send your prediction to Rick at rpgrove@gmail.com for inclusion in this presentation.

Retired from a career in education where he most recently served as the Assistant Superintendent of Personnel Services for the Carlsbad Unified School District, Rick enjoys sharing natural history with others. In addition to leading field trips at the San Diego Bird Festival, he serves as the President of the San Diego Field Ornithologists, sits on the Board of Directors of Buena Vista Audubon and is their Birding Chair, and leads monthly bird walks at Agua Hedionda Lagoon and the San Diego Botanical Garden. He studied at the Moore Laboratory of Zoology and earned his Bachelor's degrees in Biology and Economics from Occidental College and his Master's Degree in Educational Leadership from the University of LaVerne.

Next month's meeting: Tuesday, March 18, same time, same place. Program to be announced; see next month's *Skimmer* for details.

SDFO NEWS (cont.)

ANZA-BORREGO DESERT CBC, 15 DECEMBER 2024, by Robert Theriault

[*Ed. Note:* This Christmas Bird Count report was somehow overlooked last month, so here it is—better late than never.]

San Diego County's desert CBC yielded a total of 115 species with 8,885 birds counted by 84 participants in 24 count areas. This may be compared to the 1984 count, which had 88 species (5,598 birds) tallied by 38 birders, and the 2010 count reaching a high of 134 species (11,990 birds) observed by 74 volunteers.

Birds rare for the count were SNOW GOOSE, CACKLING GOOSE, YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER, CASSIN'S KINGBIRD, BARN SWALLOW, WHITE-THROATED SPARROW, HARRIS'S SPARROW, and PURPLE FINCH. The Cackling Goose was a first, while the Purple Finch was reported from the count area with the highest elevation, so perhaps not so unexpected.

Shannon McNeil has ably run our CBC for the last few years, but alas, she has moved on to greener pastures up north–Shannon, thank you so very much for your efforts!

SAN DIEGO COUNTY BIRD OBSERVATIONS, JANUARY 2025

Compiled by Paul E. Lehman

A good candidate for a second-cycle "Vega" Gull was present sporadically at a variety of sites over the past four months. First seen at the South San Diego Bay Salt Works on 9-10 Oct (MSa), then at J Street in Chula Vista 1 Nov (MSa), and then on numerous dates at Lower Otay Lake between 24 Dec and 31 Jan+ (GHe, m.obs), it also amazingly was seen by a boatload of birders some 14.4 miles WSW of the tip of Point Loma on 1 Jan (TK, GN, SDFO). This East Asian taxon has been split from Herring Gull by a number of Old World gull authorities and by eBird, but it is still treated as a subspecies of Herring Gull by the American Ornithological Society (formerly AOU). This would establish the first record for San Diego County. Its status away from western Alaska, where regular, is clouded by difficult identification issues, but it is currently thought to be a very rare or casual visitor in the Lower 48 States. This individual has been endorsed or semi-endorsed by several world gull experts, including Peter Adriaens, Amar Ayyash, and Alvaro Jaramillo.

Vying for this month's top honors with the gull was the wintering Louisiana Waterthrush along Stevens Creek in Solana Beach from 4-28 Jan (JD). Enjoyed by many, this shy bird could also prove to be very frustrating to see well. It establishes the third record for San Diego County, with previous records at UCSD in La Jolla during February-March 1990 and at the Santa Ysabel Preserve East near Julian in November 2023.

Other top-notch rarities included the reappearing Wood Stork at Lindo Lake on 12 Jan (TP), then at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park from 16-18 Jan (AH), and then flying over Sweetwater Reservoir on 21 Jan (JSh). Single Broad-billed Hummingbirds continued in the Golden Hill neighborhood of San Diego through 28 Jan+ (LW) and at a private residence in Normal Heights through 17 Jan (AB), and a new bird's discovery bordering the Poggi Greenbelt in Chula Vista on 28 Dec (MWn) came to light. The returning Little Stint at South San Diego Bay Salt Works was seen

The same second-cycle gull that is a good candidate for a "Vega" Gull has been present since October at several mainland sites as well as offshore. Characters that, in combination, help distinguish this bird from an American Herring Gull include the medium-gray scapulars; the long, dense, sharp neck streaking; frosty-pale upperwing panel; broad white tips to the tertials; and amber eye. Photographed at Lower Otay Lake on 10 Jan (left, with first-cycle Herring Gull) and 14.4 miles WSW of Point Loma on 1 Jan (right). *Photos by Matt Sadowski (left) and Ted Keyel (right)*

This Louisiana Waterthrush along "Stevens Creek" in Solana Beach from 4-28 Jan (here 4 Jan) was a quest (both successful and unsuccessful) for many birders and is a third county record. *Photo by Jay Desgrosellier*

through 26 Jan (MSa). A Dusky-capped Flycatcher continued at a Carlsbad business park from 29 Dec-30 Jan (GHa), the Greater Pewee at Hilltop Park in Chula Vista remained through 31 Jan+ (BH), and the Scissor-tailed Flycatcher returned for its ninth year near the Poggi Creek Greenbelt in Chula Vista through 27 Jan (PEL). The wintering Gray Catbird in the Tijuana River Valley was still present 26 Jan (PMa), the wintering Ovenbird in Coronado was still present 30 Jan (PEL), and the returning Chestnut-sided Warbler at Lake Murray remained through 17 Jan (PC).

Additional newly discovered rarities of note included a midwinter Swainson's Hawk at Lower Otay Lake 7-9 Jan (JP). Three Swainson's Hawks at the Safari Park on 19 Jan (AA) and a single bird at Borrego Springs also on 19 Jan (CHs) may well have been record-early northbound arrivals. A Short-tailed Shearwater was 10 miles off Point Loma on 1 Jan (SDFO). A Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was in residential eastern Point Loma from 5-31 Jan+ (SBM), a "Black" Merlin (*F. c. suckleyi*) was at Lake Morena 29 Jan (MSa), and a Western Kingbird was in southeast Carlsbad on 3-4 Jan (JAs, KO). Single Northern Parulas were in Vista 11 Jan (AA) and Oceanside 16 Jan+ (SV). A new Clay-colored Sparrow was at Colina del Sol Park in San Diego 9-23 Jan+ (PEL), in addition to a continuing bird in Coronado through 30 Jan (MWd).

Also continuing from previous month(s) were the blue-morph Snow Goose at Fairbanks Ranch through 30 Jan (MSe) and a *minima* Cackling Goose at Embarcadero Marina Park on San Diego Bay from 16 Nov-24 Jan (v.obs). The latter is a very rare visitor to San Diego County. Most Cacklings in Southern

Back for its second winter, this Chestnut-sided Warbler was at Lake Murray from 28 Nov-17 Jan (here 3 Jan). *Photo by Peter Thomas*

Very rare in winter, this Western Kingbird was in residential southeast Carlsbad on 3-4 Jan. *Photo by Jenna Asperslag*

One of two Northern Parulas present this winter was this individual near Vista on 11 Jan. *Photo by Alex Abela*

This Clay-colored Sparrow (with a Chipping for comparison) was at Colina del Sol Park south of SDSU from 9-23 Jan (here 23 Jan). *Photo by Rick Grove*

This very tame Cackling Goose of the subspecies *minima* was present at Embarcadero Marina Park in San Diego from 16 Nov-24 Jan (here 20 Jan). Note the very small size, dark purplish-brown breast, and lack of a white neck ring. *Photo by Haim Weizman*

Casual in winter, this Solitary Sandpiper has been present at Whelan Lake since October (here 5 Jan) and is returning for its second year. *Photo by Jane Mygatt*

California are of the subspecies *leucopareia* ("Aleutian"). The returning Solitary Sandpiper was still at Whelan Lake 1 Feb (P&DT). Two continuing Neotropic Cormorants at Famosa Slough (m.obs) were augmented by new individuals at Lake Murray 13-25 Jan+ (JP), Chollas Reservoir 16-25 Jan (MH), Lake Henshaw 16 Jan (AL), the Safari Park 25 Jan (CM), and San Dieguito Lagoon 31 Jan+ (DAK), and by up to two at Lower/Upper Otay Lakes 25 Jan-1 Feb (MSa). Up to two Tricolored Herons continued at Famosa Slough/San Diego River mouth through 31 Jan+ (m.obs) and along the Chula Vista bayshore and Salt Works through 15 Jan (JTS). Up to four Harris's Hawks were refound in Shelter Valley (PLa), and at least one bird continued at Jacumba (PEL). An Eastern Phoebe was at El Monte County Park east of Lakeside through 11 Jan (MD), ten coastal Mountain Bluebirds remained in the Tijuana River Valley through 29 Jan (PEL), the *pugetensis* White-crowned Sparrow was last seen at Lake Murray 4 Jan (MSa), and single Swamp Sparrows soldiered on at Famosa Slough through 13 Jan (MSa) and at Kimball Park in National City through 24 Jan (JP). Single Baltimore Orioles remained at the San Diego Zoo through 30 Jan (TS, JTS) and at Harry Griffen Regional Park through 1 Feb (BW).

Ongoing warblers included single Lucy's in Nestor through 11 Jan (PEL) and San Ysidro through 18 Jan (PEL); the returning Grace's for its seventh year along Crest Drive in Encinitas through 1 Feb (SES) and the returning Grace's for its second year at Las Palmas Park in National City through 29 Jan (PEL); the single Painted Redstarts in Tierrasanta (for its fifth year) through 1 Feb (RTP), residential eastern Point Loma through 31 Jan+ (PEL), and Mission Valley through 18 Jan (DJ); and a Townsend's X Hermit Warbler hybrid in Del Mar through 4 Jan (PEL).

Rarities in substantially greater than normal numbers this winter included Lesser Black-backed Gull, Sage Thrasher, Orchard Oriole, and Hepatic Tanager. An exact total of Lesser Black-backeds is impossible to determine due to some of the same birds likely occurring at multiple sites, such as at Lower Otay Lake, the Salt Works, and J street mudflats. The minimum count is probably nine individuals (four adults, three second-cycles, and two first-cycles), all

Three Tricolored Herons in the county during January included two continuing birds at the San Diego River mouth and Famosa Slough (here 1 Jan). *Photo by Lisa Ruby*

of which were seen at some point at Lower Otay Lake (m.obs). Sage Thrashers totaled some 15 birds, one involving a returning, clearly over-wintering bird at Cabrillo National Monument through 1 Feb (SL) and another continuing at Dos Picos County Park 30 Dec-31 Jan (NC), but all the others occurring after early January and thus possibly or probably being very early northbound migrants: Questhaven in western Escondido 10 Jan (JMy), Sweetwater Reservoir 10-25 Jan+ (PEL), Chula Vista bayshore 13-14 Jan (MSa), Ramona 15-17 Jan (NC),

This sneaky Swamp Sparrow at Kimball Park in National City was enjoyed by many observers between 14 Dec-24 Jan (here 16 Jan). *Photo by Kris McMillan*

This new Painted Redstart in residential eastern Point Loma from 13 Nov-29 Jan (here 9 Jan) was one of three individuals present this month. *Photo by Mel Senac*

Rangeland Road 16-28 Jan (RG), near Upper Otay Lake 19 Jan (MSa), eastern Encinitas 21-22 Jan (TG), a total of three on Otay Mesa 21 Jan-3 Feb (AJ, DJ), at least two at Mission Trails Regional Park 24-27 Jan (C&PB), and Naval Base Point Loma 25 Jan (M&TR). The nine Orchard Orioles, including a surprising five adult males, involved continuing duos in residential Carlsbad (PLa), at the San Diego Zoo (TS, PEL), and at Kimball Park (JP), as well as a new pair along Leon Avenue in Nestor (PEL) and a single in Tierrasanta (PEL). The six Hepatic Tanagers included the continuing pairs in both Tierrasanta through 31 Jan (PEL) and Fallbrook through 6 Jan (JH), a continuing single in Wing Street Canyon through 31 Jan+ (MH), and a new bird at Presidio Park from 2-16 Jan (WR).

January totals for some of our scarce and rare-but-regular rarities included 2 Ross's Geese, 5 Black

Scoters, 4 American X Black Oystercatchers, 2 Pacific Golden-Plovers, 7 Zone-tailed Hawks (including one near the coast in Fairbanks Ranch 5 Jan (CHd)), 2 Tropical Kingbirds, 9 Plumbeous Vireos, 5 White-throated Sparrows, 3 Yellow-headed Blackbirds, 3 Northern Waterthrushes, 6 Black-and-white Warblers, 8 American Redstarts, and 30 Summer Tanagers.

This Hammond's Flycatcher in the Questhaven area of western Escondido from 25 Dec-10 Jan was one of four individuals present countywide during January. *Photo by Scott Aldern*

An unseasonal Vaux's Swift was at Sweetwater Reservoir, where there are several previous winter records, on 25 Jan (JSk). An above-average four Hammond's Flycatchers included singles in University City (OK), La Jolla (PMu), eastern Chula Vista (TF-H), and Questhaven (KA). December-January totals for some of our other scarce or rare-but-regular wintering species, all on the coastal slope, included a record 18 Western Flycatchers (inland to Poway), 12 Gray Flycatchers, a record 83+ Vermilion Flycatchers, a record-high 26 "Slate-colored" Dark-eyed Juncos, 18 Green-tailed Towhees, a record 56 Bullock's Orioles (inland to Poway), 24 Nashville Warblers, a record 52 Yellow Warblers, a record 57 Black-throated Gray Warblers, 3 Hermit Warblers, 29 Wilson's Warblers, and a record-high 98 Western Tanagers (including a few inland to Fallbrook, Escondido, and Poway). These high totals are all the result of better and better observer coverage. Somewhat rarer species included a Cassin's Vireo at Sweetwater Reservoir 13-27 Jan (BW) and four Hooded Orioles. A Palm Warbler remained in Carlsbad through 21 Jan (TG), and new individuals were in eastern Carlsbad from 4-17 Jan (JAs, KO) and at Liberty Station on 25 Jan (PEL). Up to two Grasshopper Sparrows at Mission Trails Regional Park 22-23 Jan (MSa) and three near Ramona 30 Jan (HP) were at expected winter sites where the species breeds. Six Northern Rough-winged Swallows at Eastlake on 8 Jan (JSp) was a large concentration before mid-January when "spring" migrants may begin to arrive.

Casual inland, an adult Little Blue Heron was at Lower Otay Lake on 6 Jan (JAl). A Caspian Tern at Sweetwater Reservoir on 10 Jan (BW) may be only the second winter record inland in the past decade. Casual on the coast, a Verdin was along the Chula Vista bayshore on 14-15 Jan (MSa). Somewhat more expected were the single coastal Bald Eagles in the San Dieguito Lagoon area 18-21 Jan+ (DAK) and at Batiquitos Lagoon 23 Jan (JMc), as was the continuing Scott's Oriole at the San Diego Zoo through 28 Jan (TS)—with additional inland birds at Crest, east of El Cajon (CZ), and at Rancho San Diego (LG) being near the western limit of their "scarce-but-regular" range.

This eye-catching leucistic Red-tailed Hawk has been present multiple winters in the Carlsbad area, here on 15 Jan. *Photo by Sally Veach*

Irruptive species have been few and far between this winter, although a few Purple Finches were found near the coast.

Miscellaneous high counts included 700 American White Pelicans at Lake Henshaw on 11 Jan (SL), 120 mid-winter Barn Swallows at Sweetwater Reservoir on 10 Jan (PEL), and 160-190 Lesser Goldfinches at a set of Escondido feeders from 16-30 Jan (MJH).

A color-banded Caspian Tern on South San Diego Bay 26 Jan (MSa) had been banded as a youngster at a colony at the Columbia River mouth in northwest Oregon in 2008—almost 17 years old!

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, Kathy Aldern, Joe Alsadi (JAl), Jenna Asperslag (JAs), Christine & Peter Beck, Anonymous Birder, Paul Chad, Nancy Christensen, Mark Dayton, Jay Desgrosellier, Thomas Ford-Hutchinson, Lauren Glevanik, Tito Gonzalez, Richard Griebe, Michelle Haglund, Justin Hartsell, Mary Jo Hayes, Gjon Hazard (GHa), Grigory Heaton (GHe), Bonnie Henson, Charley Herzfeld (CHd), Candace Hess (CHs), Alison Hiers, Dan Jehl, Angela Johnson, Ted Keyel, Dan A. King, Olivia Koziel, Alex Lamoreaux, Patti Langen (PLa), Paul E. Lehman, Steven Lima, Paul Marvin (PMa), Sara B. Mayers, Chris McCreedy, Jimmy McMorran (JMc), Paul Mulholland (PMu), Jane Mygatt (JMy), Gary Nunn, Kasia Obrzut, Robert T. Patton, Jim Pawlicki (JP), Hans Petermann, Tony Provenzano, Michael & Tara Ray, William Rockey, Matt Sadowski (MSa), San Diego Field Ornithologists pelagic trip, Mel Senac (MSe), Joanne Sherif (JSh), Susan E. Smith, Jonny Sperling (JSp), Justyn T. Stahl, Trent Stanley, Jeremiah Stock (JSk), Paula & David Theobald, Sally Veach, Martha Wild (MWd) Michael Willison (MWn), Lindsey Willrick, Barbara Wise, and Catherine Zinsky.

m.obs = many observers

v.obs = various observers

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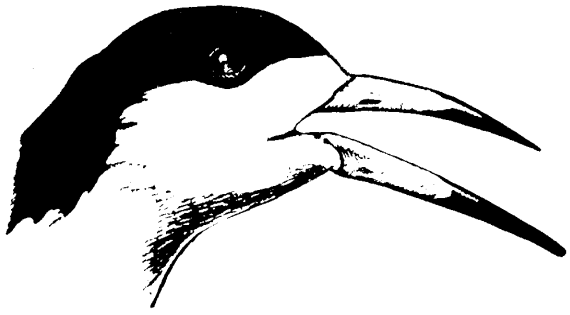
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