The SKIMMER

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SDFO NEWS

Monthly Meeting

Tuesday, March 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: "Which Oystercatcher Is That?" by Rick Grove. Recent sightings of "American-ish" Oystercatchers raise questions about how to apply the Jehl Scale and what characteristics eBird reviewers look for to indicate a "good" American Oystercatcher. Join Rick on a whirlwind tour of the family Haematopodidae, including a brief review of the literature on hybrid Black and American Oystercatchers and concluding with a review, evaluation, and discussion about recently-observed individuals. Other members with experience and expertise are encouraged to participate!

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 (SDFO), sits on the Board of Directors of the Buena Vista Audubon Society 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 La Verne.

Next month's meeting: Tuesday, April 15, same time, same place. Program to be announced—see the April *Skimmer* for details.

SDFO Dues Are Due

If you haven't paid up, see the back page for details.

SAN DIEGO COUNTY BIRD OBSERVATIONS, FEBRUARY 2025

Compiled by Paul E. Lehman

The clear highlight of February 2025 was the adult female Lesser Frigatebird seen at multiple sites between San Elijo Lagoon and Point Loma on 4-5 Feb. First reported as a Magnificent Frigatebird on 4 Feb at Cardiff State Beach/San Elijo Lagoon (MSc, TS) and then at Fletcher Cove Beach Park (JP) in Solana Beach, the following day it was seen by m.obs as the bird slowly worked its way south from Fletcher Cove to off the tip of Point Loma. This establishes the first San Diego County, second California, and fifth North American record of this species, which is native to the tropical western and central Pacific.

Other top-notch rarities included a reappearance of the Wood Stork over Lindo Lake on 24 Feb (eBird), five weeks after the last sighting there. An immature Broad-winged Hawk was over residential Encinitas on 18 Feb (GH), a returning Black-throated Green Warbler for its second winter was on private property in Sorrento Valley 22 Feb (AB), and another Black-throated Green, also on private property, was in Kearny Mesa 24 Feb (PEL). A Lark Bunting was unfortunately also frequenting private property, in Carlsbad, from 15-23 Feb+ (TGo). The Vega-type Gull continued sporadically at both Lower Otay Lake and along the Chula Vista bayshore through 26 Feb (MSa), and then, amazingly enough, it was found for the second time well offshore 6-8 miles west of Mission Bay on 28 Feb (SDBA). Also continuing from previous month(s), the Louisiana Waterthrush was still along Stevens Creek in Solana Beach through 25 Feb (JDe), the returning female Broad-billed Hummingbird remained in the Golden Hill neighborhood of San Diego through 24 Feb (LW), and the returning Little Stint continued to defend its island at the Salt Works through 9 Feb (MSa). A single continuing, returning Solitary Sandpiper near Whelan Lake through the month morphed into two birds together from 9-17 Feb

This adult female Lesser Frigatebird at San Elijo Lagoon on 4 Feb and then moving between Solana Beach and Point Loma on 5 Feb was a first county and second state record. Characters used to separate it from a Magnificent Frigatebird include the pinkish-red orbital ring, distinct white hind-collar, black hood cut straight across at the bottom, and white clearly extending into the axillars on the underwing. The pursuing crow provides some relative size assessment. *Photos (from 5 Feb at La Jolla) by Jonathan Casanova (left) and Haim Weizman (right)*

(PEL, SV). The Greater Pewee was still at Hilltop Park in Chula Vista on 27 Feb+ (BH), and the Ovenbird in Coronado continued through 12 Feb (PEL).

Casual in winter, this immature Broad-winged Hawk fortuitously flew right over the observer's home in Encinitas on 18 Feb. *Photo by Gjon Hazard*

This male Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was present in residential eastern Point Loma from 5 Jan-26 Feb (here 22 Feb). Note the lack of red on the nape, a solid black frame bordering the red throat, and the messy, buff-tinged back pattern. *Photo by Roee Astor*

Additional newly discovered rarities of note included a White-winged Scoter off Zuniga Jetty 15 Feb (KS) and single Long-tailed Ducks at San Elijo Lagoon from 14-24 Feb (EM), in the ocean at Imperial Beach 17 Feb (CJ), and on San Diego Bay in Coronado on 27 Feb (KB, ME). A new Yellow-bellied Sapsucker in Ramona on 19 Feb (NC) can be added to the continuing birds at Lindo Lake through 28 Feb (WR) and in residential Point Loma through 26 Feb (SBM). Single dull female Baltimore Orioles were at Montgomery Waller Park in Otay Mesa 4 Feb (PEL) and at La Jolla Shores 22 Feb (PEL), in stark contrast to the glowing adult male continuing at Harry Griffen Regional Park through 14 Feb (JDu, BW). A Tennessee Warbler was discovered in Kearny Mesa on 24 Feb (PEL) and a Lucy's Warbler was in Balboa Park from 19-27 Feb (PEL). A Rose-breasted Grosbeak visited a feeder in residential Mount Helix on 20 Feb (eBird).

Also continuing from previous month(s) were the intermediate blue-morph Snow Goose at Fairbanks Ranch through 17 Feb (MSe) and two Tricolored Herons at the San Diego River mouth/Famosa Slough through 28 Feb+ (m.obs). One or two continuing black-and-white oystercatchers in the La Jolla area (v.obs) included an individual that is a borderline "acceptable" American Oystercatcher on 25 Feb (PEL). As many as five Harris's Hawks continued at Jacumba (v.obs), as did up to three birds in Shelter Valley (v.obs). An Eastern Phoebe initially found 25 Dec at El Monte County Park (MD) was re-found from 27-28 Feb+. Single Clay-colored Sparrows remained in Coronado through 22 Feb (MW) and at Colina del Sol Park near SDSU through 23 Feb (PEL). Wintering Hooded Orioles at the San Diego Zoo were last seen 2 Feb (v.obs), one or two male Orchards there were last reported on 4 Feb (m.obs), and the pair of Orchards at a Carlsbad feeder remained through 27 Feb (PLa). The pair of Hepatic Tanagers in Tierrasanta were still present 24 Feb (PEL), as was the single bird in Wing Street Canyon through 28 Feb+ (MH).

Ongoing warblers included a Northern Parula in Oceanside through 10 Feb (SV), a Palm at Liberty Station through 20 Feb (PEL), returning Grace's in Encinitas though 7 Feb (SES) and in National City through 22 Feb (PEL), and single Painted Redstarts in

Tierrasanta through 1 Feb (RTP) and in residential Point Loma through 27 Feb+ (PEL).

Casual in winter, a Warbling Vireo was in National City from 18-22 Feb (MH). Other unseasonal finds included a Black-headed Grosbeak in Balboa Park on 7 Feb (MH). A returning Hammond's Flycatcher continued in UTC through 4 Mar (v.obs), and a new bird was in Nestor on 20 Feb (SBe). The only Cassin's Vireo seen this month was at Famosa Slough 26 Feb (DG). Returning Swainson's Hawks are appearing earlier and earlier each decade, with one at Warner Springs on 1 Feb (HP), 18 at Borrego Springs on 3 Feb (TGe), and two at the Safari Park on a more typical date of 20 Feb (ML).

This dull Baltimore Oriole at Montgomery Waller Park in Otay Mesa on 4 Feb might be passed off as a Bullock's. But note the rather plain face (with only a dark "crease" behind the eye), the richest color being on the upper breast and lower throat rather than on the lower face, and the smooth edge to the upper wingbar. *Photo by Paul Lehman*

The second Tennessee Warbler found this winter was at Kearny Mesa on 24 Feb. *Photo by Paul Lehman*

February totals for some of our scarce and rare-but-regular rarities included 2 Ross's Geese, 5 Black Scoters, 2 American X Black Oystercatchers, 2 Pacific Golden-Plovers, 6 Lesser Black-backed Gulls [including one away from regular sites at the San Diego River mouth 3 Feb (NF)], 8 Zone-tailed Hawks [including one near the coast in Carlsbad 14 Feb (DS)], 9 Plumbeous Vireos, 3 White-throated Sparrows, 1 Northern Waterthrush, 5 Black-and-white Warblers, 6 American Redstarts, and 16 Summer Tanagers. The four Tropical Kingbirds this month included two together at the Dairy Mart ponds on 21 Feb (RTP) cavorting with each other followed by a bout of copulation! The surge of Sage Thrashers continued, with eight individuals during the month, including new birds at Pamo Valley 2 Feb (NC), Torrey Pines 5 Feb (NF), Lake Morena 10 Feb (TW), near Ramona 18 Feb (eBird), and 4S Ranch 22 Feb+ (SBu). And to answer the question, "How far have they fallen?"—Neotropic Cormorants totaled 12 individuals, too many to mention individually! Five continuing birds were augmented by seven new individuals (DAK, NF, CM, JMc, CZ), with the most interesting being one in saltwater at Oceanside Harbor on 11-12 Feb (SV).

December-early March totals for some of our other scarce or rare-but-regular wintering species, all on the coastal slope, included 13 Gray Flycatchers, a record 20 Western Flycatchers, a record 86+ Vermilion Flycatchers, a record-high 28 "Slate-colored" (including *cismontanus*) Dark-eyed Juncos, 21 Green-tailed Towhees, a record 60 Bullock's Ori-

oles, 27 Nashville Warblers, a record 56 Yellow Warblers, a record 62 Black-throated Gray Warblers, 3 Hermit Warblers, 33 Wilson's Warblers, and a record-high 111 Western Tanagers.

Exceptional where found, single apparent Ladder-backed Woodpeckers photographed at West Sycamore near Poway on 4 Feb (male; M&PT) and near Silverwood Lake on 8 Feb (female; iNaturalist) were far to the west of their normal range. Rare near the coast, a Common Merganser was in National City from 11-24 Feb (JS), a Bald Eagle continued in the San Dieguito Lagoon area through 17 Feb (DAK), a few Mountain Bluebirds continued in the Tijuana River Valley through 19 Feb (v.obs) and 30 were at Upper Otay Lake on 2 Feb (MSa), and a Brewer's Sparrow was at Harry Griffen Regional Park from 25-28 Feb (PEL). Up to four Scott's Orioles in El Cajon from 16-20 Feb (ER) were at the western edge of their quasi-regular winter range.

"Intermediate" and true "Blue-morph" Snow Geese are very rare or casual visitors in San Diego County. This intermediate bird, with extensive whitish on the belly, was present at Fairbanks Ranch from 13 Nov-17 Feb. Here on 10 Feb with a typical white-morph Snow Goose (left) and a Ross's Goose (right). *Photo by Mel Senac*

Very rare even a short distance inland, a Red-throated Loon was at Lower Otay Lake 21-22 Feb (LR). Lowland Townsend's Solitaires were in Rancho Peñasquitos on 4 Feb (EM) and near Jamul on 17 Feb (JMa). A Black-legged Kittiwake was onshore at Oceanside Harbor on 12 Feb (BF). Very rare in winter in the desert, a Western Sandpiper was at Borrego Springs on 3 Feb (RG) and a Bonaparte's Gull was there on 14 Feb (MSp). Migrant Allen's Hummingbirds were also unusual in the desert at Vallecito 13 Feb (BLS) and at Shelter Valley 14 Feb (TP), as were two American Crows at Borrego Springs 22 Feb (TGe).

Returning for its second winter, this Hepatic Tanager in Wing Street Canyon (here 14 Feb) was enjoyed by many birders throughout the season, October-February. *Photo by Michelle Haglund*

February's Northern Parula was a continuing bird in Oceanside from 16 Jan-10 Feb (here 3 Feb). *Photo by Sally Veach*

Miscellaneous high counts included 680 Double-crested Cormorants on Lake Henshaw 16 Feb (SL), up to 10 Lesser Yellowlegs at the Salt Works during the period (MSa, NT), 160 Violet-green Swallows at Lake Murray 12 Feb (PEL), and up to 22 Yellow-headed Blackbirds at Jacumba from 3-16 Feb (PEL, JC).

Several species that formerly did not arrive until early March are now appearing somewhat regularly already in late February. This month's examples were the several Elegant Terns at the Salt Works beginning 22 Feb (eBird), increasing further over the following several days, and an adult male Hooded Oriole in La Jolla on 22 Feb+ (PEL).

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

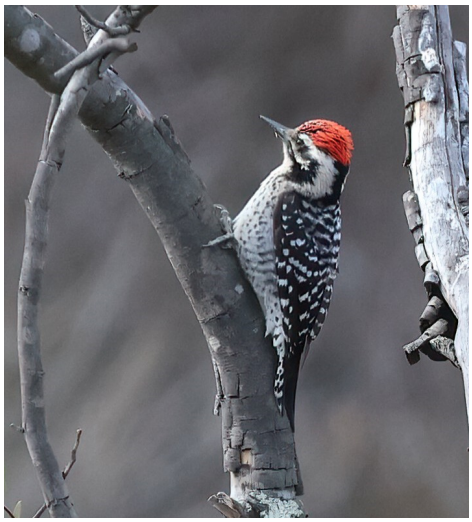
Cited observers: Observers listed are limited to those finding and identifying each species. Some sightings reported to *eBird* are included without specific attribution. Sonja Beeve (SBe), Anonymous Birders, Karen Barela, Sean Buchanan (SBu), Nancy Christensen, Jim Colby, Mark Dayton, Jay Desgrosellier (JDe), John Dumlao (JDu), Michael Evans, Beth Fife, Nathan French, Tracee Geernaert (TGe), Doug Gochfeld, Tito Gonzalez (TGo), Rick Grove, Michelle Haglund, Gjon Hazard, Bonnie Henson, Charlie Jackson, Dan A. King, Patti Langen (PLa), Paul E. Lehman, Max Leibowitz, Steven Lima, Eve Martin, John Martin (JMa), Sara B. Mayers, Chris McCreedy, Jimmy McMorran (JMc), Jane Mygatt (JMy), Julie Parker, Robert T. Patton, Hans Petermann, Torrey Pillsbury, William Rockey, Emily Routman, Lisa Ruby, Matt Sadowski (MSa), San Diego Bird Alliance pelagic trip, Michael Schramm (MSc), Mel Senac (MSe), Britta Lee Shain, Joanne Sherif, Susan E. Smith, Mark Spencer (MSp), Diane Stinson, Kit Struthers, Trinity Swan, Millie & Peter Thomas, Nick Thorpe, Sally Veach, Tim Ward, Martha Wild, Lindsey Willrick, Barbara Wise, and Catherine Zinsky.

m.obs = many observers

v.obs = various observers

Probably an early northbound migrant, this immature Swainson's Hawk was at Warner Springs on 1 Feb. *Photo by Hans Petermann*

This first-cycle Lesser Black-backed Gull (with Herring, Western, and "Thayer's" Gulls) at Lower Otay Lake was one of a record nine individuals seen at that site over the winter season. *Photo by Joe Alsadi*



This apparent male Ladder-backed Woodpecker (or possibly a Ladder-backed X Nuttall's hybrid) was at West Sycamore near Poway on 4 Feb, well west of this species' normal range. Not too far away, a female Ladder-backed was photographed near Silverwood Lake on 8 Feb. *Photo by Millie Thomas*

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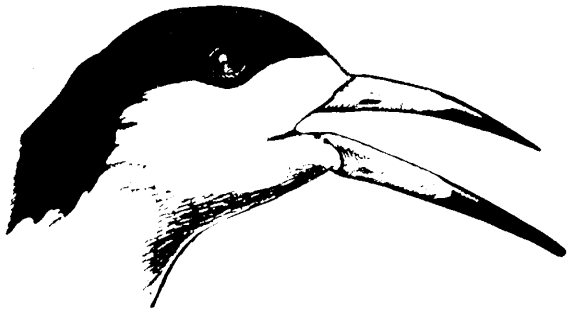
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