

# Summer bird records from Sonora, Mexico

*Additions to our knowledge of the occurrence of  
38 species at this little-studied season*

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RUSSELL AND LAMM (1978) recently pointed out the dearth of bird distribution data for the state of Sonora on the Mexican Gulf of California. Despite their contribution, and some information to be gleaned elsewhere, there is yet an almost complete lack of July and early August records for coastal birds. Van Rossem's (1945) opus on Sonoran birds provided records for many land bird species during these months. As the aquatic species, however, are more subject to wandering the few data on their occurrence in Sonora must be related to the paucity of observers in the region.

I conducted field investigations during July and August of 1979 along the coast of Sonora. This field work revealed the presence of several species undocumented in late summer in Sonora. Included are birds that were predicted for the area by Friedmann *et al.* (1950), Miller *et al.* (1957) and Blake (1953). Many of these species have been documented during July and August in the Colorado River Valley of California and Arizona but had not yet been found in Sonora during the late summer (Phillips *et al.* 1964, Small 1974).

Some species, while previously recorded during the summer, were observed at new localities and are so reported here. Other species were found in unusual numbers such that they warranted inclusion in this report.

Field studies were conducted from July 24 to August 2, 1979. Points of observation along the coast ranged from Bahía Cholla, just north of Puerto Peñasco, to Empalme, just south of Guaymas. A few land birds are reported from inland localities along the routes traveled from Arizona to the coast and back (Fig. 1)

In determining the significance of the records included here, Russell and Lamm (1978) and van Rossem (1945) proved most helpful. Alden (1969) pro-

vided some locality records not available elsewhere although most were winter data. The regional reports of *American Birds* (1975-80; Russell and Lamm 1978, also cited some recent records from *American Birds*) and the regional reports of Mexican Birds Newsletter (1976-78) were searched for recent records.

The works of Blake (1953), Davis (1972), Edwards (1972), and Peterson and Chalif (1973) provided generalized distribution information. Works covering southwestern United States states and Mexican states were valuable in the

determination of trends. Most helpful were Grinnell (1928) and Huey (1927) for Baja California, Phillips *et al.* (1964) for Arizona, Small (1974) for California, and Hubbard (1978) for New Mexico.

## WATERBIRDS

### *Common Loon (Gavia immer)*

Once reported as a single mid-winter occurrence ("fairly common about Tiburón Island", van Rossem 1945), its status was revised by Zimmerman and

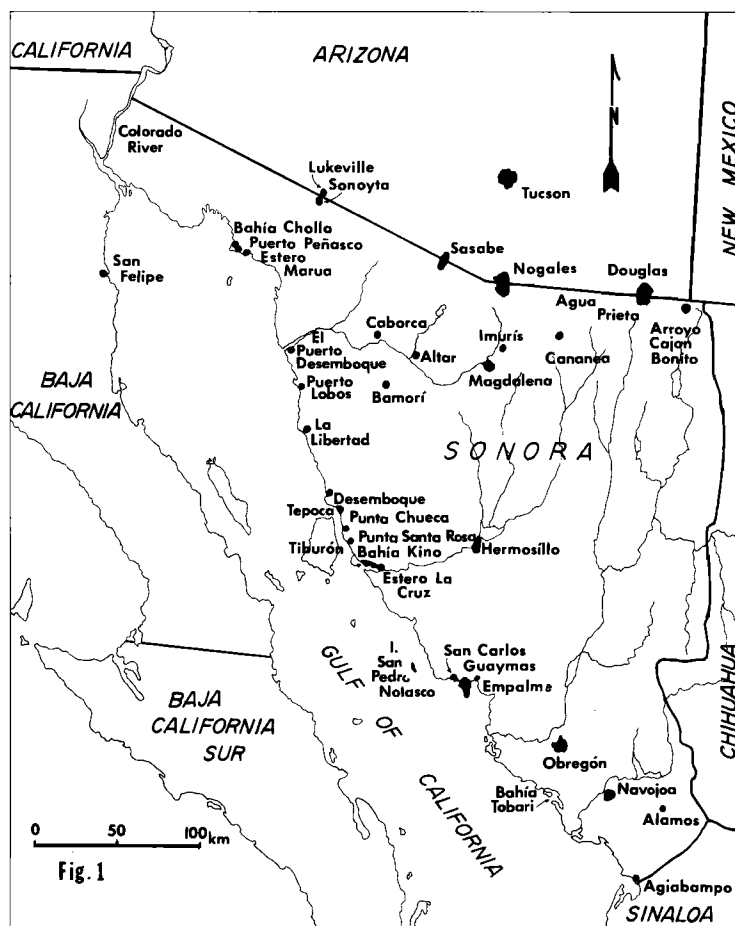


Fig. 1. Map of the state of Sonora, Mexico, showing localities mentioned in text.

Boettcher (1967) and Russell and Lamm (1978). They considered the bird common in winter from September 23 to April 28. Zimmerman and Boettcher (1967) reported the first Sonoran specimen from Bahía Cholla, November 24, 1965, and Russell and Lamm (1978) report two additional specimens, from Puerto Peñasco, December 4, 1965.

David Stejskal (*in* Witzeman *et al.* 1976) reported a winter-plumaged Common Loon off Puerto Peñasco July 2-5, 1976. Witzeman *et al.* (1976) further commented that, in summer, southward loons tend to be in winter plumage.

In light of these records it is interesting to note the following. At least six individual Common Loons were present in the surf zone off Station Beach, Puerto Peñasco, July 25-26, 1979, and a single bird was at Bahía Kino on July 29, 1979. Four of the Peñasco birds were in breeding plumage. One of the birds, an individual in breeding plumage, was plucked from the rocks of Puerto Peñasco (Rocky Point) proper, apparently having been washed among the boulders by heavy surf. It was examined, judged to be uninjured and released.

The wing of yet another breeding-plumaged bird was recovered at the base of a giant cactus (*Carnegeia* sp.) used as an Osprey's feeding perch. The wing was located about 2 km north of Bahía Kino on July 29, 1979 by James F. Scudday.

#### *Arctic Loon (Gavia arctica)*

Virtually all references refer to the Arctic Loon as a common winter visitor and spring migrant on the Sonoran coast with extreme recorded dates of December 28 and April 2. Records were limited to the area between Guaymas and Bahía Kino. August and September records from Arizona (Phillips *et al.* 1964) suggest that either fall migration is early or

oversummering occurs and that birds of this species may have been overlooked farther south. One breeding-plumaged bird was seen in the surf along Station Beach, Puerto Peñasco, July 26, 1979.

#### *Red-throated Loon (Gavia stellata)*

Van Rossem (1945) listed but two records for this bird. Russell and Lamm (1978) added three more. Extreme dates of occurrence are November 27 and March 18. Huey (1927) reported finding several at San Felipe, Baja California, including one recently dead on the late date of April 2. Phillips *et al.* (1964) reported two sight records from Arizona, both outside the extreme dates noted above; November 21 and June 8 and 15. An adult, in breeding plumage, just beyond the surf zone at Puerto Peñasco, July 24, 1979 was therefore unexpected.

In addition to the loons reported above, another unidentifiable half-dozen were seen at Puerto Peñasco between July 24 and 27, 1979. The loons, as well as some of the species reported below, were seen close to shore during turbulent weather from July 24-27, 1979. Hurricane *Dolores* had met her demise in the Pacific off Baja California on July 23 and her remnants were apparently responsible (Gunther 1980, Wagner 1979).

#### *Eared Grebe (Podiceps nigricollis)*

Friedmann *et al.* (1950), Grinnell (1928), and van Rossem (1945) listed this grebe as common in winter in the northern Gulf of California with extreme dates of December 23 and April 25 listed, both at Guaymas. Phillips *et al.* (1964) noted that these birds are occasionally found on the Colorado River

from late August and early September through early December. They also noted the usual presence of a few Eared Grebes on Imperial and Havasu lakes from mid-May to late August. Thus records exist for the vicinity of the northern Gulf for all months of the year, although actual Gulf records are lacking for the span May to November. Three individuals in various plumages were at Puerto Peñasco July 24-25, 1979. The birds were first seen singly July 24, but as winds and the surf picked up were seen swimming together.

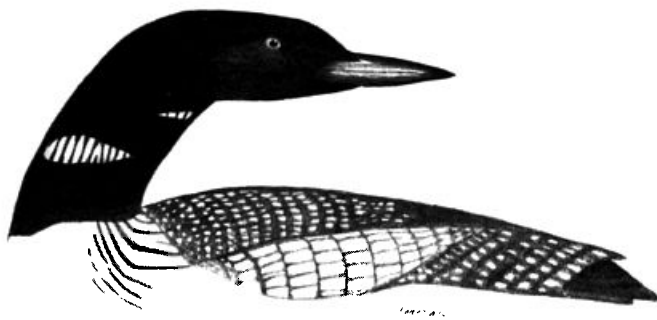
#### *Sooty Shearwater (Puffinus griseus)*

Although listed as an uncommon spring and summer visitant in the Gulf of California by some authors (Friedmann *et al.* 1950, Huey 1927, van Rossem 1945) with dates ranging from April to August, there seem to be only two definite Sonoran records. Van Rossem (1945) cited these as April 19, 1925 and June 2, 1928 near Tiburón Island off Punta Chueca.

Eighteen Sooty Shearwaters were seen off the surf of Station Beach, Puerto Peñasco July 25-27, 1979. These birds were among 180 shearwaters flying in small groups. Of the remainder, some smaller individuals with solid dark underwing linings, dark bills and feet, and faster, more frequent wingbeats were thought to be Short-tailed (Slender-billed) Shearwaters (*Puffinus tenuirostris*) Short-tailed Shearwaters are known from Mexico based on a single record off Baja California.

#### *Blue-footed Booby (Sula nebouxii)*

Common about Bahía Kino and Guaymas during the summer months, it was encountered only once north of Kino during 1979. An adult was seen at Puerto Peñasco July 26, 1979. Alden (1969) called the bird rare at Puerto Peñasco during the winter. Though van Rossem (1945) stated the bird is a common resident of the gulf with concentrations about the more precipitous islands, he gave no indication of its abundance at Puerto Peñasco where the nearest "booby rocks" are at least 27 km distant. Phillips *et al.* (1964) reported stragglers to Lake Havasu September 19, 1953 and Phoenix July 29, 1953; dates that are in line with my single observation. This suggests northward wandering in the fall, and similarly, the presence of winter birds at Puerto Peñasco is not



Common Loon, *Gavia immer*. All drawings by Tony Gallucci.

unexpected. Van Rossem (1945) contends the species breeds throughout the year, and this would not preclude a tendency toward fall dispersal of some individuals.

#### **Brandt's Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax penicillatus*)**

A single bird observed at Puerto Peñasco, July 25, 1979, probably represents a northward summer occurrence. Alden (1969) listed this cormorant as a rare winter bird and migrant at that location. No other reference declares the status of Brandt's Cormorant at Puerto Peñasco or intimates that it might occur there.

#### **Green Heron (*Butorides striatus*)**

Inclusive dates published for the Green Heron are from September to June 12 (van Rossem 1945 and Russell and Lamm 1978). Observations of single birds at Punta Chueca July 30, 1979 and Bahía Kino July 31, 1979 indicate occurrence throughout the summer.

#### **Little Blue Heron (*Florida caerulea*)**

Listed by van Rossem (1945) as a summer visitor north to Guaymas, the Little Blue Heron is occasionally found north to Tiburón Island and Punta Santa Rosa in winter (Russell and Lamm 1978, van Rossem 1945). A single adult bird was at Bahía Cholla July 26, 1979; a northern occurrence and a first summer record north of Guaymas.

#### **Least Bittern (*Ixobrychus exilis*)**

Russell and Lamm (1978) report the taking of two specimens of *I.e. pullus* (van Rossem 1930) at Punta Santa Rosa, September 8, 1973 and September 17, 1974. Another individual was banded there August 18, 1975. The specimens were the first from Sonora since the subspecies was first collected and described. Van Rossem records the species (*I.e. pullus* and *I.e. hesperis*) only during April and May. I found three Least Bitterns in marsh grass at Estero La Cruz, Bahía Kino July 29, 1979, a date intermediate between the previous reports.

#### **Roseate Spoonbill (*Ajaia ajaja*)**

The northernmost record for the

spoonbill is of three individuals at Bamori on September 9, 1973 (Russell and Lamm 1978). There are, however, only two published records from the coast north of Guaymas. Van Rossem (1945) noted a September record at Bahía Kino and Russell and Lamm (1978) reported a Punta Santa Rosa observation of a single bird, July 26-27, 1973. Interesting, for the number, is an observation of 12 at Estero La Cruz, Bahía Kino July 31, 1979.

#### **Raptors**

#### **Black Hawk (*Buteogallus anthracinus*)**

Van Rossem (1945) reported residence



Least Bittern, *Ixobrychus exilis*.

along permanent streams but absence from the northwestern desert. Two were seen soaring over the Rio Magdalena, July 28, 1979, just south of Caborca. Because the area appeared, at best, marginal for the nesting of this species, these birds may have been migrants.

#### **Aplomado Falcon (*Falco femoralis*)**

An immature bird was seen about 45 km east of Imurís along Highway 2 on August 2, 1979. The sighting was in an area of high-elevation grassland bordered by wide draws and riparian cottonwood stands. Van Rossem (1945) and Friedmann *et al.* (1950) do not record the Aplomado Falcon from Sonora. It has nested historically a few km to the north of the sighting in the grasslands of southeastern Arizona (Phillips *et al.* 1964). Continued sporadic observations in Arizona, New Mexico, and west Texas, interestingly, are of immature birds in areas the species once inhabited (Witzeman *et al.* 1979a, Williams 1977, 1979).

#### **SHOREBIRDS**

**M**OST OF THE following shorebirds are reported here for the first time in July in Sonora. Such occurrence was predicted by Blake (1953), Friedmann *et al.* (1950) and van Rossem (1945). All but one of the species has been reported previously for Sonora; in winter and migration. There is little known, however, about the oversummering tendencies and migration initiation dates of these species in Mexico. Only recently have summer records of shorebirds in the United States been assimilated and analyzed for patterns (Hubbard 1978, Phillips *et al.* 1964, Oberholser 1974). Based on known migration dates of some of these species in Arizona, New Mexico and Texas many of the records presented here are not surprising. Their listing may help clarify the various species' status in Mexico and help interpretation of recent records of seasonal and locational stragglers. (e.g., see Witzeman *et al.* 1979b).

#### **Semipalmated Plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*)**

Two were seen at Puerto Peñasco July 25-27, 1979, one was at Bahía Kino, July 29 and 31, 1979, and two were found at San Carlos August 1, 1979.

#### **Snowy Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*)**

Friedmann *et al.* (1950) stated "its apparent summer absence from the coast of Sonora is rather surprising," based on its abundance as a breeding bird in northern Baja California. Six were at Puerto Peñasco July 26-27, 1979.

**Wilson's Plover (*Charadrius wilsonia*)**

This species was abundant at Puerto Peñasco where downy young were present as late as July 27, 1979. Also noted sparingly south to San Carlos.

**Black-bellied Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*)**

At least 58 individuals were counted in the span July 24 to August 1, 1979. The species was widespread from Puerto Peñasco to Empalme.

**Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*)**

Six were at Puerto Peñasco July 24-26, 1979, 50 were at Estero La Cruz, Bahía Kino July 31, 1979, and four were at San Carlos July 31, 1979.

**Black Turnstone (*Arenaria melanocephala*)**

Twelve were at Puerto Peñasco July 25-27, 1979 and two were at Bahía Kino July 29, 1979.

**Long-billed Curlew (*Numenius americanus*)**

Thirty-eight were seen as single birds or in small groups from Puerto Peñasco south to Empalme between July 24 and August 1, 1979. A flock of 300 was at Estero La Cruz, Bahía Kino July 31, 1979.

**Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*)**

Four were at Puerto Peñasco July 24-26, 1979, one was at Bahía Kino July 29, 1979, and one was at San Carlos July 31, 1979.

**Greater Yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca*)**

Thirteen were seen at Puerto Peñasco, July 26-27, 1979, and a single bird was at Bahía Kino July 29, 1979.

**Wandering Tattler (*Heteroscelus incanus*)**

There are only three definite records published for this species in Sonora. All records are from April: April 21, 1930 (van Rossem 1945), April 22, 1966 and April 23, 1974 (Russell and Lamm 1978). Those sightings were at San Pedro



Little Blue Heron, *Florida caerulea*.

Nolasco Island, just north of Guaymas (1930) and Puerto Peñasco (1966,1974). Two individuals, one in breeding plumage, were at San Carlos on August 1, 1979.

**Red Knot (*Calidris canutus*)**

One bird was found at San Carlos July 31, 1979, and two were there August 1, 1979.

**Pectoral Sandpiper (*Calidris melanotos*)**

One at Puerto Peñasco appears to be the first report for Sonora. The bird was seen along Station Beach July 24-25, 1979. It is reported to be an uncommon fall migrant along the lower Colorado River in Arizona (Phillips *et al.* 1964) and Hubbard (1978) noted that fall migration in New Mexico begins in July. Blake (1953) predicted its occurrence along the west Mexican coast in late July.

**Western Sandpiper (*Calidris mauri*)**

Five at Puerto Peñasco July 25-26, 1979 were topped by 50 at Estero La Cruz, Bahía Kino July 29, 1979 through July 31, 1979. A single bird was found at

San Carlos August 1, 1979.

**Long-billed Dowitcher (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*)**

Two were at Puerto Peñasco July 25-26, 1979, six were at Estero La Cruz, Bahía Kino and two were at Punta Chueca July 29, 1979, and one was at Estero La Cruz July 31, 1979.

**Marbled Godwit (*Limosa fedoa*)**

Van Rossem (1945) stated "it seems probable that some individuals may remain throughout the summer." Four were at Estero Maruá, Puerto Peñasco, July 26, 1979, ten were at Estero La Cruz, Bahía Kino July 29, 1979, two were at Punta Chueca July 30, 1979 and 60 were at Estero La Cruz by July 31, 1979.

**Black-necked Stilt (*Himantopus mexicanus*)**

A single bird was found in a roadside pond near Station Beach, Puerto Peñasco July 25, 1979. Van Rossem (1945) lists a single August record; August 27, 1892 along the San Bernardino River on the Arizona border.

**Wilson's Phalarope (*Steganopus tricolor*)**

A record of July 31, 1892 on the San Bernardino River (van Rossem 1945) is eclipsed slightly by the observation of 40 on July 26, 1979 at Estero Maruá, Puerto Peñasco. A July 2 record from Zacatecas (Friedmann *et al.* 1950) indicates oversummering or unseasonable migration.

**LANDBIRDS**

**Horned Lark (*Eremophila alpestris*)**

Russell and Lamm (1978) gave a new southernmost record for Horned Lark; that of birds at Tepoca April 14, 1973 (with young), July 16, 1975 and August 18, 1975. Phillips and Amadon (1952) collected non-breeding birds as far south as Altar. A single individual was at Punta Chueca July 30, 1979.

**Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*)**

A singing male was found 65 km south of Sasabe May 25, 1975 and another was at Arroyo Cajon Bonito-Ju-

ly 15, 1976 (Russell and Lamm 1978). On August 2, 1979 I found a male, in mottled plumage, in a desert-scrub occupied canyon near Cananea.

## LARIDS

### *California Gull (Larus californicus)*

Friedmann *et al.* (1950) report the taking of this species "as late as June 16 (1934) in Sonora". A single bird was at Puerto Peñasco July 23-24, 1979.

### *Gull-billed Tern (Gelocheidon nilotica)*

Van Rossem (1945) noted only a single record, that of birds readying to nest in Tobari Bay, April 26 to May 1, 1930. Alden (1969) regards the bird as regular in occurrence although no other records can be found. A single bird was at Puerto Peñasco July 24, 1979.

### *Common Tern (Sterna hirundo)*

Russell and Lamm (1978) presented the first six records for Sonora, five of them at Puerto Peñasco. Two birds at Puerto Peñasco July 25, 1979 furnish an additional record.

### *Least Tern (Sterna albifrons)*

Russell and Lamm (1978) appended van Rossem (1945) to include recent knowledge of a breeding colony of unknown race at Puerto Peñasco. They noted the birds had left Peñasco by July 13. They also listed records at other coastal localities for April, August and September. Four individuals remained or were migrant at Puerto Peñasco July 24, 1979. A single individual was at Estero La Cruz, Bahía Kino July 31, 1979.

### *Black Tern (Chlidonias niger)*

Russell and Lamm (1978) reported many observations of this species between July 13 and October 31 in coastal Sonora, although there is only a single specimen (Phillips and Amadon 1952). A flock of about 2000 birds feeding behind fishing boats off San Carlos August

1, 1979 is of interest because of the large number of individuals.

### *Black Skimmer (Rynchops niger)*

Russell and Lamm (1978) noted the first occurrence of this species north of Guaymas. They was a single individual at Puerto Peñasco April 24, 1974. I observed a single bird July 27, 1979, also at Puerto Peñasco.



Aplomado Falcon, *Falco femoralis*.

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