

southern pacific coast region



GUY MCCASKIE

June and July were a little cooler than normal, but dry conditions prevailed throughout much of the Region, particularly so in the deserts in the eastern portion, which no doubt adversely effected breeding birds. However, reports such as that of Clapper Rails reoccupying a marsh near Santa Barbara and an increasing breeding population of Willow Flycatchers in Kern indicate some declining species will survive if given a little help.

Birders gathering information for Breeding Bird Atlases in Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego counties have made many discoveries of local significance (e.g. additional Gray Flycatcher nest sites in the San Gabriel Mountains and nesting sites for Swainson's Thrushes in the coastal lowlands of Los Angeles and Orange counties) that are better treated with the individual species' status and distribution accounts that will appear in their respective atlases when completed, so are not included in this report.

Abbreviations: C.L. (*China Lake Naval Air Weapons Station, extreme n.e. Kern Co.*); E.A.F.B. (*Edwards Air Force Base, s.e. Kern Co.*); F.C.R. (*Furnace Cr. Ranch, Death Valley N.M., Inyo*); N.E.S.S. (*north end of the Salton Sea, Riverside Co.*); S.B.C.M. (*San Bernardino County Museum*); S.C.R.E. (*Santa Clara R. Estuary near Ventura, Ventura Co.*); S.E.S.S. (*south end of the Salton Sea, Imperial Co.*); S.F.K.R.P. (*South Fork Kern R. Preserve near Weldon, Kern County*). Since virtually all rarities in s. California are seen by many observers, only the observer(s) initially finding and identifying the bird are included. Documentation for species on the California Bird Records Committee (CBRC) review list is forwarded to the CBRC Secretary and archived at the Western Foundation for Vertebrate Zoology in Camarillo.

LOONS THROUGH HAWKS

A few non-breeding Red-throated, Pacific, and Common loons regularly spend the summer along the coast of S. California, and the same is true for Com. Loons on the large deep freshwater lakes and reservoirs.

However, a Com. Loon at N.E.S.S. June 21 (GMcC) and another at S.E.S.S. Aug. 3 (DGS, BBr) were on the Salton Sea, where rarely found in summer.

Seven Cook's Petrels s. of Catalina I. (33°01.6'N 117°49.9'W to 33°11.8N 118°01.1W), with one only 16 nautical mi w. of La Jolla June 13 (MF), were unusually close to shore.

The presence of a fledgling Am. Bittern at Mojave Narrows Park near Victorville, *San Bernardo*, July 25 (SJM) substantiated nesting at that location, and the sighting of an adult at Finney L., *Imperial*, July 16 (AME) suggests possible nesting there. Single ad. Little Blue Herons at Bolsa Chica, *Orange*, June 23–July 3 (PKn), Ventura June 12–15 (WW), Carpinteria, *Santa Barbara*, June 11 (WF), and in Oceano, *San Luis Obispo*, June 17 (CG) fit an established pattern of northward dispersal by adults in June; a "calico" bird near Norco, *Riverside*, July 2–25 (JEP) was the first to be found in that area, and an adult on Upper Newport Bay July 31 (CO) may have been a post-breeding wander from the small *San Diego* population. For the first time White-faced Ibis successfully nested in the Prado Basin near Norco with one juvenile seen July 17 and 14 present at the end of the period (JEP).

Fulvous Whistling-Ducks appeared to be scarcer than in previous years around S.E.S.S., suggesting a decline in their population this summer. Virtually every species of goose and duck known to occur in S. California has been found here in summer, but two Ring-necked Ducks near Norco all summer (JEP), up to three Greater Scaup at N.E.S.S. through June 7 (GMcC), and two Black Scoters along the coast off s. Vandenberg Air Force Base June 7 (MAH) were somewhat noteworthy. At least a half-dozen Surf Scoters were inland around N.E.S.S. in early June, with one surviving to at least July 19 (GMcC).

The presence of an imm. Bald Eagle on L. Cachuma, *Santa Barbara*, July 11 (EM) and two adults there July 30 (EM) suggests nesting at that location. Two Sharp-shinned Hawks high in the San Gabriel Mts.

near Vincent Gap June 15 (DK), with one seen again on July 13 (DK), could have been nesting, but no evidence was found. Two Harris's Hawks were still present at Borrego Springs, *San Diego*, where a small population appears to have become established, July 22 (MCJ). An ad. Swainson's Hawk near Santa Maria June 25 (JMC) was along the coast where rare now. An imm. Zone-tailed Hawk reported near Escondido July 12 (DL) was unexpected since previous records from the coastal lowlands are in fall and winter.

RAILS THROUGH SKIMMER

Four pairs of Clapper Rails, along with two unmated males, were at Carpinteria all summer (DZ), and this species now appears reestablished there after disappearing in 1988. A Sandhill Crane at the Santa Maria R. mouth July 7 through the end of the period (KF) is the first known to have summered in S. California.

It is anyone's guess as to which way an alternate-plumaged Pacific Golden-Plover at N.E.S.S. June 21 (GMcC) was going, but single adults at the Santa Maria R. mouth July 12-13 (BH) and at the Santa Ynez R. mouth July 29 (BH) were undoubtedly southbound fall migrants. Two Black Oystercatchers at the entrance to Anaheim Bay July 5 (JF) provided *Orange* with only its 2nd record for this time of year. The earliest southbound Solitary Sandpipers this

fall were one near Bishop July 16 (T&JH) and another near Lancaster July 17 (MSM), followed by only two more by the period's end. A Black Turnstone, rare to casual inland, was at S.E.S.S. July 19 (GMcC). A flock of 15 ad. Red Knots at S.E.S.S. June 28 (GMcC) illustrated just how early some fall migrants reach S. California. An ad. Semipalmated Sandpiper was on Tinnemaha Res. near Big Pine, *Inyo*, July 5 (MTH), and a juvenile in Long Beach July 26 (SS) was the earliest of four reported by the period's end. A juv. W. Sandpiper at the Santa Maria R. mouth July 21 (CAM), two in Goleta July 22 (DDJ), and another at the S.C.R.E. the same day (ST) were early and may indicate early nesting in the Arctic. An ad. Stilt Sandpiper at S.C.R.E. July 16 (WW) was the only one found away from S.E.S.S. The presence of a copulating pair of Wilson's Phalaropes at C.L. May 30 (MTH) provided the first suggestion of nesting in *Kern*, and six females on the Salton Sea June 7 (GMcC) illustrate just how early this species moves south.

A sub-ad. Long-tailed Jaeger at Crystal Cove S.P., *Orange*, July 19 (BED) is one of a very few identified from shore in S. California. Two South Polar Skuas were seen in the Santa Barbara Channel July 3 (MAH).

An ad. Laughing Gull at S.E.S.S. June 14 (GMcC) was the earliest of the post-breeding visitors from the Gulf of California to reach this area this year; an adult in Anaheim July 16-24 (KG, GLT), and *Kern's* 2nd

at E.A.F.B. July 19 (JCW), coincided with an influx into the area of the Salton Sea. At least 15 Franklin's Gulls (all 2nd-summer) were still present on the Salton Sea in early June, with six remaining around N.E.S.S. through June 21 (GMcC); two adults on Tinnemaha Res. near Big Pine June 2 (T&JH) were probably late spring migrants, but an adult at N.E.S.S. June 28 (GMcC) and two adults on Tinnemaha Res. June 29 (T&JH) were believed to be new arrivals from the north.

A Little Gull found at S.E.S.S. May 31 (GMcC) had molted from 2nd-summer to ad. winter plumage by the end of July and was still present Aug. 24. Since Heermann's Gulls rarely wander inland, the presence of up to at least two adults around S.E.S.S. May 4 through the end of the period (KCM, GMcC) was of note. An ad. **Black-tailed Gull** photographed at the mouth of the Colorado R. at El Golfo de Santa Clara, Sonora, Mexico, June 7 (KLG, KCM) was close enough to this Region to be included in this report. A basic-plumaged **Belcher's (Band-tailed) Gull** (*Larus belcheri*) photographed in Imperial Beach, *San Diego*, Aug. 3-25 (BBR, DGS) was the 2nd to be reported in California, the first having been present on San Nicolas I. during the winter of 1987-1988 (*American Birds* 42:321, 1988), and was considered by many to be a genuine vagrant from South America.

Twenty-two pairs of California Gulls fledged young at S.E.S.S. in July (KCM) to



Belcher's (Band-tailed) Gull at Imperial Beach, California, on August 10, 1997. Quite possibly a genuine stray from South America, this bird attracted much attention. (See also Pictorial Highlights.) Photograph/Larry Sansone



First-year Glaucous Gull at the Santa Maria River mouth, California, on August 2, 1997. The dark eyes show it to be in its first year, and the black-tipped pink bill shows it to be a Glaucous rather than a Glaucous-winged Gull. The bird was present all summer, and this August photo reveals how worn and bleached such gulls can become when summering this far south. Photograph/Larry Sansone

provide us with the first record of successful nesting s. of Mono Lake. Only one juv. Yellow-footed Gull was reported among the many adults arriving at the Salton Sea in June and July, suggesting unsuccessful nesting in the Gulf of California. A first-year Glaucous Gull found at the Santa Maria R. mouth, *Santa Barbara*, June 3 (WW) remained through the period to provide us with one of very few summer records of this species in California.

At least 170 pairs of Gull-billed Terns at the Salton Sea fledged young in July (KCM), but the success of 20 pairs on s. San Diego Bay is unknown—this constitutes the entire California and w. U.S. population of this species. Numbers of Caspian Terns nesting around S.E.S.S. increased to at least 1200 pairs this summer (KCM), but remained close to normal at colonies at s. San Diego Bay and Bolsa Chica. At least one pair of Royal Terns nested with Caspian Terns on s. San Diego Bay (EC) and another 15–20 pairs nested with Caspian and Elegant terns at Bolsa Chica (CTC). Nesting Elegant Terns now number about 4000 pairs at Bolsa Chica, but appeared absent as a nesting bird on s. San Diego Bay.

A **Sandwich Tern**, first seen with the nesting terns at Bolsa Chica May 9, appeared mated with an Elegant Tern and was present through at least July 17 (CTC)—what is believed to be this same individual has previously fledged a hybrid at this colony (*W. Birds* 28:169–173, 1997). An ad. Least Tern at S.E.S.S. July 19 (GMcC) and a first-summer bird there July 19–27 (GMcC) were inland, where unexpected. The ad. **Sooty Tern** first noted at Bolsa Chica Mar. 26 remained through July 26 (CTC); a pair found attending an egg on s. San Diego Bay June 3 (MG) provided the first evidence of nesting in California, but the adults were found recently killed, probably by a Peregrine Falcon, on June 6 & 10, and their remains, along with the single egg, are now preserved at the San Diego Natural History Museum. Numbers of Black Skimmers nesting at the Salton Sea and in coastal *San Diego* and *Orange* appear to be increasing; one far inland near Corona, *Riverside*, July 24–25 (JEP) appeared at the same time unprecedented numbers were a little closer to the ocean along the Anaheim portion of the Santa Ana R. in *Orange*.

DOVES THROUGH WOODPECKERS

At least three wandering Band-tailed Pigeons reached San Nicolas I. in June (WW), and another was out of place in S.F.K.R.P.

July 10 (SAL). Nesting Eur. Collared-Doves were found at 2 locations in Carpinteria, *Santa Barbara*, and another in downtown Santa Barbara (LRB), and are believed to have spread from an established population in nearby Ventura. A White-winged Dove at Hearst Castle, *San Luis Obispo*, July 23 (GPS) was along the coast, where rare. The northernmost population of Com. Ground-Doves along the coast in Nipomo is still extant as indicated by the presence of two–three there July 20 (CAM).

Five pairs (at least 35 unmated males!) of Yellow-billed Cuckoos at S.F.K.R.P. in June and July (SAL), one along the Owen's R. near Tinnemaha Res. June 29 (T&JH), another along this same river near Independence June 16–July 3 (A&LK), and one near Escondido, *San Diego*, June 1–4 (EH) were in areas of suitable breeding habitat. But one at S.C.R.E. June 12 (WW) and another along the Santa Clara R. e. of the Bouquet Canyon bridge, *Los Angeles*, June 19 (DG) were probably migrants.

A pair of N. Pygmy-Owls that fledged at least one juvenile at Glacier Lodge above Big Pine June 24–July 13 (T & JH) were in an area from which few have been recorded. The presence of about half a dozen calling Elf Owls along the Colorado R. at the Picacho State Recreation Area, *Imperial*, June 18–July 19 (RMcK) indicated a few still persist as breeding birds in California.

A calling Com. Nighthawk over Pacific Palisades July 16 (DK) provided one of a very few reports of this species along the coast of S. California. Two calling Whippoor-wills present near Big Pines in the San Gabriel Mts. June 12–30 (KLG, NBB), and up to three more around Heart Bar Campground in the San Bernardino Mts. in June and July (EAC) suggest breeding at these 2 locations, but nesting has yet to be documented in California.

Up to three Chimney Swifts were around downtown Los Angeles all summer (KLG), and another was over Arcadia, *Los Angeles*, during this same period (MSM). A male Allen's Hummingbird in the Laguna Mts., *San Diego*, June 3 (RAH) and another in that same area June 5 (PU) illustrate just how early the males of this species move south.

A Lewis's Woodpecker that remained in La Canada Flintridge, *Los Angeles*, from the winter through July 21 (GH) was the first to spend the summer in S. California. The presence of an ad. Hairy Woodpecker accompanied by a juvenile at the Mojave Narrows near Victorville, *San Bernardino*, in mid-June (BD, SJM) documented nesting

at that desert location. A juv. White-headed Woodpecker following a female at Whitney Portal above Lone Pine, *Inyo*, July 27 (JW) was in an area where this species is marginal as a breeder.

FLYCATCHERS THROUGH FINCHES

The presence of at least 40 pairs of Willow Flycatchers at S.F.K.R.P. this summer (MHa) illustrated the positive effects of the cowbird removal program in this area, but elsewhere in the Region this species is struggling to remain a breeding bird. The only breeding Brown-crested Flycatchers known w. of the Colorado R. were 7–8 pairs at S.F.K.R.P. (SAL), 3 pairs at the Mojave Narrows near Victorville (SJM), 2 pairs at Morongo Valley (EAC), and another pair near N.E.S.S. (GMcC). A late-spring E Kingbird was at the Santa Maria R. mouth June 16 (DR).

A Clark's Nutcracker in the Laguna Mts of *San Diego* June 8 (CGE) was probably a lingering individual from last fall's invasion. A pair of Red-breasted Nuthatches was seen excavating a nest hole, far from any known breeding locality, on n. Vandenberg A.F.B. March 9 (CF); another in Goleta July 31 (PKe) may have been present since last winter. A Brown Creeper in California City, *Kern*, July 19 (JCW) was at a most unusual location considering the time of the year. A Varied Thrush on Pt. Loma in San Diego June 6 (PM) was remarkably late for anywhere in S. California. A Cedar Waxwing on San Nicolas I. June 21 (WW) was evidently lost.

A pair of Hutton's Vireos fledged two young at the Mojave Narrows near Victorville in July (BD, SJM) to provide us with the first confirmed record of nesting at this desert location. Single Red-eyed Vireos were at S.F.K.R.P. June 14 (SAL) & 20 (SAL), on San Nicolas I. July 12 (WW), and near Nipomo July 20 (BBo, CAM).

A female **Blue-winged Warbler** was carefully identified along Big Rock Cr on the n. side of the San Gabriel Mts. June 21 (KLG), but another reported at the Switzer Picnic Area on the coastal slope of these same mountains the following day (AB) lacked documentation. A Nashville Warbler on Mt. Palomar, *San Diego*, June 24 (PJ) suggested the possibility of nesting in this area. An imm. Lucy's Warbler in California City July 19 (MTH) is the 4th to be found in *Kern* at this time of year, and another at S.E.S.S. July 27 (KLG) was in an area where few have been found. Reports of N. Parulas included a male at S.F.K.R.P. June 16–17 (SR), another male at Nojoqui Falls near

Solvang June 13 (NS), a female near Pomona June 30 (RAH), and another male near Orange June 25 (RH). A male Magnolia Warbler in Goleta June 16 (JS), a male Cape May Warbler on San Nicolas I. June 20 (RAH, WW), and a male Black-throated Blue Warbler near Chilao in the San Gabriel Mts. June 16 (MCW, BM) were all exceptionally late spring vagrants.

An Audubon's (Yellow-rumped) Warbler on San Nicolas I. June 21 (RAH, WW) was clearly lost. Four late spring Black-and-white Warblers were found in June, with one in the San Gabriel Mts. June 21 (KLG), another at Butterbredt Springs in the foothills of the s. Sierra Nevada, *Kern*, June 14 (MTH), and single birds on San Nicolas I. June 21 & 22 (WW). Six Am. Redstarts were found at various locations in the e. part of the Region June 7-21 (CB, BD, MTH, DGS) and an additional eight on San Nicolas I. June 15-25 (WW). An Ovenbird at Butterbredt Springs June 14 (MTH), a singing N. Waterthrush in Westchester, *Los Angeles*, June 14 (RS), and a male Hooded Warbler in Culp Valley above Borrego Springs June 15-16 (RT) are all best treated as late spring vagrants.

The presence of at least 12 pairs of Summer Tanagers at the Mojave Narrows near Victorville (SJM) places this area, along with S.F.K.R.P. and Morongo Valley, as one of a very few important breeding localities w. of the Colorado R. In addition, two Summer Tanager nests were found along the Santa Clara R. in Soledad Canyon, *Los Angeles*, June 18-19 (DC); two more pairs were along Big Rock Cr. in Valyermo, *Los Angeles*, in June (KLG); and a territorial male was in Lone Pine May 10-June 7 (T&JH). Single Summer Tanagers in Goleta July 21 (MAH), Santa Barbara July 16 (MA), on the Palos Verdes Pen. July 13-Aug. 8 (VA), and in Huntington Beach June 3 & 7 (JEP) were felt to be late spring vagrants or lost summer wanderers.

Three Rose-breasted Grosbeaks reported between June 2 & 21 (MB, CGE, DGS) were lost spring vagrants. Reports of territorial male Indigo Buntings continue to increase as this species expands its breeding range westward, and included multiple birds at some locations, such as two near Big Pine June 9 (T&JH) and three in the Prado Basin, *Riverside/San Bernardino*, through the summer (JEP). A lost female Dickcissel was at E.C.R. June 16 (DRo, RC).

A Chipping Sparrow near Victorville June 29 (BD) was far from any known breeding locality. A Black-throated Sparrow in San Diego July 10 (RS) was along the

coast, where unexpected. A male Lark Bunting near Los Osos June 30 (JP) was certainly unexpected. A White-crowned Sparrow (*gambelii*) banded on San Nicolas I. June 20 (RAH) was remarkably late for a migrant.

A male Bobolink on San Nicolas I. June 22 (RAH) was a late spring vagrant, but up to two singing males and a female near Independence June 15-25 (A&LK) were in an area of suitable nesting habitat. Great-tailed Grackles bred in Oceano, where juveniles were successfully fledged (TME); we can expect the population to continue spreading northward into Central California.

Red Crossbills were common at the higher elevations of the San Gabriel Mts. throughout the summer (KLG, MSM), suspected to be birds that moved up from planted conifers in the desert lowlands where many spent the winter/spring; two were still present along the coast near Santa Barbara June 3 (DRY) and in Morro Bay June 16-24 (GPS), and a pair was seen with a recently fledged juvenile in Redondo Beach, *Los Angeles*, May 16 (MHe).

Contributors (county coordinators in bold-face):

M. Adams, Valerie Anderson, Catherine Balian, Larry R. Ballard, **David V. Blue** (C.B.R.C. secretary), Andrew Birch, Bill Boulton (BBo), Bob Brandriff (BBr), N. Bruce Broadbooks, Mike Buff, **Eugene A. Cardiff** (*San Bernardino*), Rita Carratello, Jamie M. Chavez, Charles T. Collins, Daniel Cooper, **Elizabeth Copper** (*San Diego*), Brian E. Daniels, Bill Deppe, **Don Desjardin** (*Ventura*), **Tom M. Edell** (*San Luis Obispo*), Claude G. Edwards, Alan M. Eisner, Krista Fahy, C. Farmer, W. Ferren, John Fitch, Michael Force, **Kimball L. Garrett** (*Los Angeles*), Karen Gilbert, Carrol Green, Michael Green, Dan Guthrie, Edward Hall, Murrelet Haltermann (MHa), Robb A. Hamilton, **Matthew T. Heindel** (*Kern*), Mitch Heindel (MHe), **Tom & Jo Heindel** (*Inyo*), Gale Hightower, Brad Hines, Robb Hirsch, Mark A. Holmgren, Mark C. Jorgensen, Paul Jorgensen, Paul Keller (PKe), Andrew and Lier Kirk (A & LK), Peter Knap (PKn), David Koeppel, Dan Langhoff, Steven A. Laymon, **Joan E. Lentz** (*Santa Barbara*), Curtis A. Marantz, Paul Marvin, Barbara Massey, Elizabeth Mason, **Robert McKernan** (*Riverside*), Kathy C. Molina, Stephen J. Myers, Christopher Obaditch, John Perkins, James E. Pike, Don Roberson (DRo), Sean Rowe, Donald Ryan (DRY), Mike San Miguel, Rusty Scalf, Douglas G. Shaw, Gregory P. Smith, Steven Sosensky, Nancy States, Russell Stone, J.

Storror, Robert Theriault, Gerald L. Tolman, Steven Tucker, Philip Unitt, Walter Wehtje, Judy Wickman, **Douglas R. Willick** (*Orange*), John C. Wilson, Mark C. Wimer, D. Zembal. An additional 50+ observers who could not be individually acknowledged submitted reports this season.

Guy McCaskie, San Diego Natural History Museum, Balboa Park, P.O.Box 1390, San Diego, CA 92112.



Place names that are frequently mentioned, but very long, may be abbreviated in a form such as "C.B.B.T." or "W.P.B.O." Such local abbreviations will be explained in a key at the beginning of the particular regional report in which they are used. Standard abbreviations that are used throughout *Field Notes* are keyed on page 965.

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