

Baja California Peninsula



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The severe drought conditions of 2002 abated in winter 2002–2003, and late-spring rains probably boosted the reproductive efforts of many species. Northeastern Baja California was again well covered, and summer saw the release by University of California Press of *Birds of the Salton Sea: Status, Biogeography, and Ecology*. This major work, by Michael A. Patten, Guy McCaskie, and Philip Unitt covers a portion of the Mexicali Valley and promises to contribute much toward our understanding of the Salton Sink region and its birdlife.

Abbreviation: S.S.P.M. (Sierra San Pedro Mártir).

LOONS THROUGH SKIMMERS

Common Loons at Cerro Prieto declined in number from 5 on 29 May to 2 on 7 Jul and one on 31 Aug (MJI et al.). Far up the Pacific coast of Baja California were a juv. Magnificent Frigatebird at Laguna Figueroa 14 Jul (†MJI) and an ad. Little Blue Heron at Estero Punta Banda 25 Jun (†KW). Also at Estero Punta Banda, 9 ad. Reddish Egrets 30 Jun (KW) represented a high count and presumably included birds from the nesting colony at Islas Todos Santos. Least Bitterns were again found on the Pacific coast of Baja California on the Maneadero Plain, with one or 2 observed 3–7 Jul (RAE, DSC). Despite their recent decline evident at the Salton Sea, Wood Storks were recorded in the Mexicali Valley for the 2nd consecutive year, with 2 over the Río Hardy 19 May (HI), followed by one there 8 Jul (RAE, MJI). Beginning in Oct 2002, captive-bred California Condors were released in the S.S.P.M. As of this writing, 6 free-flying birds are being closely monitored by a team of Mexican and American biologists (*vide* Horacio de la Cueva).

Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks now appear to be resident at Lagunas de Chametla near La Paz, but nesting has not been confirmed. Two were there 8 Jul (RC, LS, DS). A female Wood Duck at the Mexicali Zoo 8 Jul (†MJI, RAE) was the first to be found in the Colorado Desert portion of the Region and was present in an unexpected season. On the nw. coast, late spring rains apparently resulted in good conditions for nesting ducks. Gadwall was confirmed nesting at the Río Guadalupe estuary 3 Jul (RAE) and at Lagunita El Ciprés 3–14 Jul (4+ broods; RAE et al.); single Cinnamon Teal broods were at the same locations 3 Jul (RAE); and 4+ Redhead broods were at Lagunita El Ciprés 3–12 Jul (ph. GR-C et al.). Mallards nested at a minimum of six sites and Ruddy Ducks at five. Other rare summering ducks included an American Wigeon at Lagunita El Ciprés 21 May–3 Jul and 2 at Estero Punta Banda 12 Jul; up to 3 Northern Pintails at Estero Punta Banda 3–12 Jul; a male Ring-necked Duck on the Maneadero Plain 3 Jul–23 Sep; a male Lesser Scaup at Ensenada

3–14 Jul; and a female Red-breasted Merganser on the Río Hardy, Mexicali Valley 7 Jul (all RAE, MJI).

Although expected, given their status in the adjacent Imperial Valley, a pair of White-tailed Kites with 2 juvs. near Ejido Pachuca 13 Jun (AC, JJB) represented the first confirmed nesting in the Mexicali Valley. Also unprecedented in the Mexicali Valley in summer was a light ad. Swainson's Hawk w. of Algodones 7 Jul (†MJI, RAE); n. of the U.S. border there are several Jun/Jul records for the lower Colorado River Valley and the Imperial Valley.

A Black Rail voice-recorded on the lower Río San Telmo 12 Jul (MJI) was encouraging, especially following negative survey results there in the spring. High Jun shorebird counts at El Centenario, near La Paz, included 20 Black-bellied Plovers 3 Jun; 33 Semipalmated Plovers 3 Jun, with 198 on 30 Jun; and 48 Western Sandpipers 30 Jun (RC, IMC, CV). As they have begun to do in recent years in coastal s. California, Western Gulls now frequent non-marine habitats along the coast. Examples this season included 5 at Camalú and 32 on the e. Maneadero Plain (both 14 Jul; MJI). Earlier examples included 5 on the Río Santo Domingo, e. of the mission, 21 Apr 2002 (RAH et al.), 100 at Parque de la Amistad in e. Tijuana 29 Jan 2003 (RAE), and 25 at a lake se. of Maneadero 19 May 2003 (RAE). Although Black Terns summer regularly at the Salton Sea, one at Campo Mosqueda 8 Jul (RAE, MJI) apparently represents the first summer record for ne. Baja California. Most nesting waterbirds at Cerro Prieto were present in average numbers, but a count of 240 ad. Black Skimmers there 7 Jul (MJI, RAE) nearly doubled the previous maximum.

OWLS THROUGH FINCHES

Northern Saw-whet Owl is presumed to breed in the S.S.P.M., at least sporadically, and one was voice-recorded there, just below Corona de Arriba 12 Jul (MJI). Anna's Hummingbird was presumed to breed in ne. Baja California (*Monographs in Field Ornithology* 3: 48), but first confirmation was provided by a female feeding a juv. at San Felipe 5–6 Mar (DSC) and 2 fledglings at the Mexicali Zoo 8 Jul (MJI, RAE). Belted Kingfishers are not known to nest in the Region, so a male at Estero Punta Banda 30 Jun was of interest (KW). An odd-looking juv. woodpecker at Rancho San José 14 Jul appeared to be a Hairy x Ladder-backed hybrid (†MJI). A pair of Pacific-slope Flycatchers at a park in Ensenada 21 May–3 Jul (RAE) was the first to be found nesting in the lowlands of Baja California, although with unknown success.

Loggerhead Shrike—recently considered a “fairly common resident throughout much of Baja California” (S.R. Wilbur, 1987, *Birds of Baja California*)—appears to be declining alarmingly in the lowlands of Baja California as in adjacent coastal s. California (e.g., P.

Unitt, in the *San Diego Bird Atlas* manuscript, reports sharp recent declines in both breeding and wintering populations and suggests that the species “could easily be extirpated from coastal southern California early in the twenty-first century”). No shrikes were recorded (a) in the Mexicali Valley 11–12 Apr (DSC), (b) in the Mexicali Valley and Río Colorado area 29 May (MJI et al.), or (c) between Tijuana and San Quintín 7–10 Jul (DSC). Observers are encouraged to pay particular attention to this species and to report their observations (or lack thereof).

Bell's Vireos were again reported at scattered locations, including an ad. at the Río Guadalupe estuary 3 Jul (RAE), 2 ads. along the lower Río San Telmo 12 Jul (MJI), and a juv. at La Cienega—at 1800–1900 m elevation in the S.S.P.M.—13 Jul 2003 (MJI). A high count of 17 Warbling Vireos, including fledglings, was tallied at La Cienega on 13 Jul (MJI). A Tree Swallow at Vado Carranza on the Río Colorado 8 Jul (MJI) was probably an early fall migrant (cf. *Monographs in Field Ornithology* 3: 51), whereas “several” Barn Swallows on the San Quintín Plain 8 Jul (DSC) probably nested s. of the known range in nw. Baja California. A White-breasted Nuthatch on the Río Colorado near Colonia Carranza 2 Jun (ph. HI) was probably a remnant of this species' unusual lowland dispersal in fall 2002; the species was previously unrecorded in ne. Baja California and was most unexpected in Jun. An American Robin at the Mexicali Zoo 8 Jul (MJI, RAE) provided the first summer record for ne. Baja California. A straggling flock of 35+ Cedar Waxwings was on the lower Río Santo Tomás 8 Jun (JEP).

Notable vagrant warblers included a hatch-year Lucy's Warbler at Santo Tomás 14 Jul (†MJI), a singing male Northern Parula on the lower Río Santo Tomás 7–8 Jun 2003 (JEP), and female Hooded Warblers at La Salina 20 Jul into the fall period (†DSC et al.) and at La Cienega in the S.S.P.M. 13 Jul (†MJI). A male Yellow Warbler singing in an isolated cottonwood in an agricultural area w. of Algodones 7 Jul (RAE, MJI) provided the first modern summer record for ne. Baja California (see *Monographs in Field Ornithology* 3: 53–54). Two or 3 male Summer Tanagers at La Cienega 13 Jul (MJI) did not exhibit evidence of breeding, but this warrants future monitoring. At least 3 Chipping Sparrows, including singing males and a pair carrying food, were in an olive grove on the Maneadero Plain 3–14 Jul (RAE, MJI), away from previously known breeding areas in the S.S.P.M. and on Isla Coronado Sur (Wilbur 1987). A male Indigo Bunting at La Salina 10 Jul (DSC) was singing there 12 Jul (†MJI). Yellow-headed Blackbirds are not known to breed in coastal Baja California, so 2 singing males on the Maneadero Plain 3 Jul (RAE) and an agitated male with a female at the same location 14 Jul (MJI) warrant mention. American Goldfinches are rare

SA The following item on bird survey efforts in the Río Colorado floodplain is contributed by Osvel Hinojosa-Huerta:

“After approximately 20 years of continuous desiccation, the floodplain of the Río Colorado experienced pulse floods during the periods 1983–1986, 1993–1994, and 1997–1999. The result has been reestablishment of nearly 3000 ha of cottonwood-willow association in the 20,000-ha floodplain. A team of six observers coordinated by the Mexican conservation organization Pronatura Noroeste-Mar de Cortes has visited the area since March 2002 to assess bird populations. This has included monthly point counts at 240 stations, a MAPS constant-effort banding station, and call-response surveys for bitterns, rails, Yellow-billed Cuckoos, and Willow Flycatchers. We have detected 169 species, banded 322 birds, and counted 79,023 individuals during point counts. Species of interest that now apparently breed regularly include Cinnamon Teal, Least Bittern, Osprey, Clapper Rail, Vermilion Flycatcher, Crissal Thrasher, Yellow-breasted Chat, Blue Grosbeak, and Lesser Goldfinch. Most significantly, Yellow-billed Cuckoos have been recorded, with 8 singing males detected in 2003 (15 May–8 Jul). We have detected a few Bell's Vireos, but their status remains unclear. Elf Owl, Gilded Flicker, Willow Flycatcher, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Lucy's Warbler, and Summer Tanager breed on the Colorado R. n. of the border but have not been detected breeding in the Mexican floodplain. A 15-year drought predicted by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation for the Colorado River basin would undoubtedly result in the loss of many restored cottonwood-willow areas that our investigations have shown to be vitally important in maintaining the abundance, stability, and regeneration of the region's native bird populations. A binational coalition of organizations is working toward the conservation of the Río Colorado floodplain. Target actions include the allocation of a modest continuous instream flow (2–3 m³/s) and a larger pulse flood every four or five years (100 m³/s) to facilitate the propagation of new trees and to maintain floodplain dynamics. The Pronatura team plans to continue assessing the responses of vegetation and bird populations to the varying flow of water through the Río Colorado in Mexico.”

in nw. Baja California, particularly in summer; one on the Maneadero Plain 28 Jun (KW) and 4 at Punta Bandera 3 Jul (RAE) were the only ones reported.

OVERDUE CONFIRMED NESTING SPECIES

To our knowledge, the following represent the first confirmed Regional nesting records for these species (cf. Howell et al. 2001, *Monographs in Field Ornithology* 3: 171–203): ca. 75 Gambel's Quail w. of Algodones 7 Jul included numerous fledglings (MJI, RAE); 32 Inca Doves at the Mexicali Zoo 8 Jul included fledglings (MJI, RAE); and 6 Blue Grosbeaks on the Maneadero Plain 3 Jul included fledglings (RAE).

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