

RECENT ADDITIONS TO THE AVIFAUNA OF THE SALTON SINK

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ABSTRACT: In spite of many environmental changes that disfavor birds, from 2002 through 2024 the list of bird species recorded within the Salton Sink in south-eastern California and adjacent Baja California increased from 413 to 459 species. Four additions are the result of taxonomic changes in which one species was split into two, but the others are the addition of 40 native and two non-native species, the result of continued coverage of the Salton Sink by professional biologists and knowledgeable birders.

The *Birds of the Salton Sea* (Patten et al. 2003) listed 413 species recorded below sea level in the Salton Sink in Imperial and Riverside counties, California, and adjacent Baja California as of 2002. Since then the reduction of Colorado River water deliveries to the Imperial Valley has not only reduced the level of the Salton Sea but also resulted in changes to agricultural practices that include the use of sprinkler irrigation instead of the traditional flooding of the fields. Many agricultural fields for which water is insufficient to irrigate have been fallowed or, increasingly, have seen the installation of arrays of solar panels. Continuing evaporation of the Salton Sea itself has increased the salinity of the water to the point where most fish are unable to persist, and those that do are confined to the limited areas around the mouths of the rivers and major drains. These changes have limited food sources for some species of birds and habitat for others, resulting in some population reductions, and even the elimination of the Fulvous Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna bicolor*) and the Wood Stork (*Mycteria americana*). On the positive side, several efforts at habitat restoration and mitigation of water pollution in the Imperial Valley have established new wetlands and patches of riparian vegetation. In any case, taxonomic changes and the documentation of additional species during the following 22 years have increased the Salton Sink's total of bird species by 46, to 459. Here I provide the details of and context for these additions.

SPECIES ACCOUNTS

TUNDRA BEAN-GOOSE *Anser serrirostris*. One late fall record. The Tundra Bean-Goose is one of two species of bean-geese nesting in northeast Asia, the other being the Taiga Bean-Goose (*Anser fabalis*). Both species have been recorded on islands in extreme western Alaska, with substantially more records of the Tundra than of the Taiga, and as accidental stragglers elsewhere in Canada and the United States (Howell et al. 2014). One Tundra photographed with Snow Geese (*Anser caerulescens*) at Unit 1 of the Sonny Bono Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) on 19 October 2013 (Rottenborn et al. 2016) was the first to be identified in California. Another bean-goose at Unit 1 of the Salton Sea NWR 9 November 2010–12 January 2011 was seen and photographed by hundreds of observers, but it was never identified to species conclusively (Nelson et al. 2013).

CANADA GOOSE *Branta canadensis* and **CAKCLING GOOSE** *Branta hutchinsii*. The Canada Goose predominates; the Cackling a rare winter visitor from late

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October through February); two records for April and early May; one record of a bird that remained through two summers. The American Ornithologists' Union (AOU; Banks et al. 2004) recognized the splitting of the Canada Goose into two species, medium to large forms as *B. canadensis*, and small to medium forms as *B. hutchinsii*. The latter includes four subspecies, nominate *B. h. hutchinsii*, *B. h. taverneri*, *B. h. minima*, and *B. h. leucopareia*, with at least the last two recorded at the Salton Sink. Records for *leucopareia* extend from 23 October (2007, four at Fig Lagoon; pers. obs.) through 24 March (2008, one at Unit 1 of the Salton Sea NWR; Mike Sanders) and 2 April (2017, six at Ramer Lake; pers. obs.). Records for *minima* extend from 25 October (2023, one at Obsidian Butte; pers. obs.) and 4 November (1949, two at the Salton Sea NWR; *Audubon Field Notes* 4:34) to 16–30 April (1967, one near Westmorland; pers. obs.) and 10 May 1986 (one at the Whitewater River mouth; pers. obs.). The only record for summer is of a *leucopareia* that remained with a Greater White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons*) and domestic geese at Sunbeam Lake 1 November 2007–21 May 2010 (pers. obs.).

TRUMPETER SWAN *Cygnus buccinator*. One record in winter. An immature photographed at Unit 1 of the Salton Sea NWR 12 January–16 February 2013 (*North American Birds* [NAB] 67:338) represents the only record for the Salton Sink. California reports of this swan have increased in recent years, a change likely due in part to reintroduction efforts in the southern part of its breeding range, and it is now of annual occurrence in northern California. Away from the Salton Sink, California's southernmost records are from El Monte (an adult at Legg Lake 1 January–15 March 1975) and Pico Rivera (an adult and immature at the Rio Honda Spreading Grounds 27 December 2019–9 January 2020) in Los Angeles County and on the Colorado River near Blythe (a neck-collared adult at the Palo Verde Ecological Reserve 15–24 April 2012) in Riverside County.

GARGANEY *Spatula querquedula*. One record of a wintering bird. The Garganey breeds across northern Eurasia and is a long-distance migrant, wintering in Africa, India, and southeast Asia. It is a rare to casual straggler to North America, with most recorded in Alaska, but far fewer since 2005, coincident with declines in Asian populations (Howell et al. 2014). Nevertheless, since 2017 the rate of reports in California has been accelerating (Benson et al. 2021). The Garganey occurs casually in fall, winter, and spring in British Columbia and the Pacific states (Howell et al. 2014), with 32 recorded in California as of 2024 (Tietz and McCaskie 2025). A female photographed at the Salton Sea State Recreation Area 10 November 2019–30 March 2020 (Benson et al. 2021), returning 19 October 2020–10 March 2021 (Benson et al. 2022) and 24 November–15 December (NAB <https://wp.me/p8iY2g-f07>), represents the only record for the Salton Sink.

MEXICAN DUCK *Anas diazi*. Three records. Chesser et al. (2020) recognized *A. platyrhynchos diazi* as a full species, separate from the Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*). As of February 2025 the three Salton Sink records the California Bird Records Committee (CBRC) had endorsed were of a male photographed at the mouth of the Whitewater River on 11 August 2018 (Terrill et al. 2024), a male at Unit 1 of the Salton Sea N.W.R. on 10 August 2022 (Benson et al. 2025), and a male photographed at the Wister Unit of the Imperial Wildlife Area on 27 September 2023 (Tietz and McCaskie 2025). The CBRC did not endorse a report of an adult male seen with Mallards on the south shore of the Salton Sea near the west end of Young Road on 22 August 2018 (pers. obs.). However, there are multiple reports of the Mexican Duck from the Colorado River between Parker Dam and Yuma (Tietz and McCaskie 2025, <https://eBird.org>), with some supported by photographs, including one of a male on the Arizona side of the Colorado River in Yuma on 10 September 2016 (eBird.org/checklist/S31622784). It is likely this duck has been overlooked, and the Mexican Duck is more numerous at the Salton Sink than the three records suggest.

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RED-NECKED GREBE *Podiceps grisegena*. Eight fall records and one spring record. Although occurring annually, albeit rarely, in coastal southern California in winter, this large grebe reaches southeastern California much less often. One well described at ponds in the Torres–Martinez Indian Reservation near the Whitewater River mouth 24 November 2007 (NAB 62:150) was the first recorded in the Salton Sink. One at North Shore 20 November 2014 (NAB 69:153), one photographed on Fig Lagoon 20–21 October 2012 (NAB 67:159), another there on 27 November 2021 (NAB <https://wp.me/p8iY2g-cxY>), and single birds at the south end of the Salton Sea near Obsidian Butte on 23 October 2015 (NAB 70:117), Unit 1 of the Salton Sea N.W.R. on 8 November 2022 (NAB <https://wp.me/p8iY2g-f07>), on Wiley Reservoir northwest of Westmorland on 11 November 2023 (NAB <https://wp.me/p8iY2g-hfi>), and on Young Reservoir near Calipatria on 12 November 2023 (NAB <https://wp.me/p8iY2g-hfi>) constitute the remaining fall records. The lone spring record is of one at North Shore 13–24 March 2012 (NAB 66:555). Elsewhere, this grebe has also been recorded as close to the Salton Sink as Lake Perris, western Riverside County, and along the Colorado River at Senator Wash Reservoir on 14 December 2006 (NAB 61:326) and Imperial Dam 16–27 December 2023.

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE *Streptopelia decaocto*. Common resident. This non-native dove apparently reached southeastern California as a result of the species expanding its North American range west from the Bahamas and Florida (Romagosa and Mlodinow 2022). The first reported at the Salton Sink was a male paired with a domestic Ringed Turtle-Dove (*Streptopelia roseogrisea*) in Brawley during July and August 1999 (Curtis A. Marantz pers. comm.), but the first endorsed by the CBRC were up to 50 near Calipatria 4 May–28 December 2002 (Cole and McCaskie 2004). This dove is now common and widespread at the Salton Sink, breeding widely in the Mexicali, Imperial, and Coachella valleys.

RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD *Archilochus colubris*. One fall record. Photos of a hatch-year male photographed at a feeder 3 km southeast of El Centro 11–14 September 2023 (Tietz and McCaskie 2025) support the only record. However, there are 30 previous records for California, all but one (Nevada County, 15 May 1975) in the fall, extending from 29 July and 9 August to 29 September, 16–25 October and 10–13 November. Most of California's Ruby-throated Hummingbirds have been found along the coast, but two of the four recorded well inland were close to the Salton Sink, one at the Cactus City Rest Stop, Riverside County, 9 September 2013 (Rottenborn et al. 2016) and an adult male at Desert Center, Riverside County, 10–13 November 2017 (Singer et al. 2020).

BROAD-BILLED HUMMINGBIRD *Cynanthus latirostris*. One spring record. An adult male photographed at a feeder 3 km southeast of El Centro 20–21 April 2006 (Heindel and Garrett 2008) was the only Broad-billed Hummingbird yet recorded in the Salton Sink, but over 125 have been recorded elsewhere in California, most in the fall and winter along the coast of southern California. The CBRC has accepted seven records for the deserts of eastern San Diego County and Riverside County near the Salton Sink. The Broad-billed Hummingbird at El Centro was one of only about five recorded in California in spring.

PIPING PLOVER *Charadrius melodus*. One fall/winter record. Breeding along the Atlantic coast from Newfoundland south through North Carolina, and inland west to southeastern Alberta and southeastern Colorado (Paulson 2005), this species has been recorded west to the coasts of British Columbia (Delta, 24–25 August 2017; Toochin 2018), Washington (Reardan, 13–16 July 1990; Wahl et al. 2005), Oregon (Tillamook, 6–8 September 1986; AB 41:134; near Florence, 20 August 2012; NAB 67:148) and along the coast of California (South San Francisco Bay, Morro Bay, Goleta, and Malibu; CBRC 2007, Tietz and McCaskie 2025). Most Piping Plovers

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winter along the coasts of the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico. An adult that remained around Red Hill at the south end of the Salton Sea 7 August–19 December 2006 (Heindel and Garrett 2008) was well photographed. Of the five Piping Plovers recorded in California, it was the only one inland.

MARSH SANDPIPER *Tringa stagnatilis*. One late fall record. This Palearctic sandpiper breeds in the southern boreal forest and steppe from eastern Europe east to just east of Lake Baikal and winters in sub-Saharan Africa, India, and southeast Asia, sparingly in Australia (Paulson 2005). One photographed at a hunting club's pond 2 km south of Mecca on 26 October 2013 (Rottenborn et al. 2016) provided the first record for California and the only one for the Salton Sink. Away from Alaska, the only records in North America are of one photographed at the Estero de Punta Banda, Baja California, 12–16 October 2011 (NAB 66:173–174, 195), one near Dixon, Solano County, 9–13 April 2014 (Singer et al. 2017) and at the Vic Fazio Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area, Yolo County, 16–23 April 2016 and 15–21 April 2018 (Benson et al. 2020), and one at the Kern NWR on 29 March 2020 (Benson et al. 2022).

PURPLE SANDPIPER *Calidris maritima*. Two winter records. This sandpiper breeds in the Arctic from central Canada east across Greenland and Europe to western Siberia and winters primarily on the Atlantic coast from Newfoundland to Georgia, casually west to the coast of Texas and along the coasts of western Europe (Paulson 2005). It is rare inland around the Great Lakes and has wandered accidentally west to the Pacific coast. One at Salt Creek Beach 25 March–17 April 2016 (McCaskie et al. 2018; Figure 1) and another at North Shore 30 December 2020–2 February 2021 (Terrill et al. 2024) are the only two recorded in California and two of the very few recorded anywhere in western North America.

SHARP-TAILED SANDPIPER *Calidris acuminata*. One spring and two fall records. This Asiatic shorebird breeds on the arctic coastal plain of the Russian Far



FIGURE 1. Purple Sandpiper (*Calidris maritima*), Salt Creek Beach, northeast shore of the Salton Sea, Riverside Co., 14 April 2016, representing a first record for the Salton Sink and California.

Photo by Kenneth Z. Kurland

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East and northern Siberia and winters primarily in Australia (Paulson 2005). Juveniles migrate regularly to western Alaska (Handel and Gill 2010). The Sharp-tailed Sandpiper is a rare fall and casual spring migrant farther south along the Pacific coast, and casual to accidental elsewhere in North America. One well photographed at the Whitewater River mouth 19–22 May 2005 (NAB 59:494–495) established one of only six spring records for this species in California. A juvenile at the east end of 68th Avenue southwest of Mecca 24 October 2016 (NAB <https://wp.me/p8iY2g-aae>) and a juvenile photographed 1 km west of Westmorland 11 October 2019 (NAB <https://wp.me/p8iY2g-90n>) constitute the Salton Sink's two records in fall.

BUFF-BREASTED SANDPIPER *Calidris subruficollis*. Two fall records. This long-distance migrant breeds in extreme northern Alaska and the Canadian Arctic and winters in southern South America (Paulson 2005). Two individuals with other shorebirds attracted to an irrigated field 6.5 km north of Calipatria on 15 September 2007 (NAB 62:152) and one photographed on the south shore of the Salton Sea near the New River mouth on the unusually late date of 17 November 2014 (NAB 69:154) provided the only two records for the Salton Sink.

BLACK-HEADED GULL *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*. Two records for winter. This widespread Eurasian gull regularly wanders west to the Atlantic coast of Canada and the United States and east to Alaska, as well as less regularly elsewhere across North America. As of 2024, 37 had been found in California, mostly along the coast in fall and winter (Tietz and McCaskie 2025). One in Orange County during the winters of 1980–1981 and 1981–1982 (CBRC 2007) was the southernmost. In the Salton Sink, a first-cycle Black-headed Gull associating with Bonaparte's Gulls was photographed near the Whitewater River mouth 15 January–9 February 2007 (Singer and Terrill 2009). An adult in the same general area 8–14 January 2014 (Singer et al. 2017) evidently returned 30 December 2016–3 March 2017, 5–9 December 2017 (Singer et al. 2020), 3 January–16 March 2019 (Benson et al. 2021), 2 January–3 March 2020 (Benson et al. 2022), and 8 December 2021–9 March 2022 (Terrill et al. 2024).

ROSS'S GULL *Rhodostethia rosea*. One fall record. The main nesting range of this small gull is along the arctic coast of Russia, but the species also nests in small numbers very locally in arctic Canada and Greenland. It is believed to winter mostly in the western Bering Sea and the extreme northern Pacific and Atlantic oceans (Howell and Dunn 2007). Vagrants have been recorded well to the south in the United States, Europe, and Asia. The first Ross's Gull to reach California was an adult photographed at Red Hill 17–19 November 2006 (McCaskie 2007). At that time it established the southernmost record of Ross's Gull, but one at Kure Atoll in the Hawaiian archipelago on 1 January 2020 was even farther south (VanderWerf et al. 2025).

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL *Larus marinus*. One spring record. This large North Atlantic gull nests along Atlantic coasts from northern Labrador in eastern Canada east to Greenland, Iceland, and northern Norway, and south to North Carolina, the British Isles, northern France, and Denmark. It also nests inland on the Great Lakes. It is exceedingly rare to casual elsewhere in the interior of the United States west to Colorado, and accidental on the Pacific coast of Alaska and Washington (Howell and Dunn 2007). An adult photographed on the northwest shore of the Salton Sea at the east end of 84th Avenue on 1 and 5 May 2013 (Rottenborn et al. 2016) represents the only record for California.

BRIDLED TERN *Onychoprion anaethetus*. One summer record. An adult at Unit 1 of the Salton Sea NWR 7 July–24 August 2008 was photographed (Pike and Compton 2010; Figure 2). This highly pelagic tern normally gets no closer to California than the tropical Pacific Ocean off Nayarit in west Mexico. One seen on the coast at Bolsa Chica in Orange County 17 July 1998 and 10 July 1999 (CBRC

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2007), another photographed there 23 June 2015 (Searcy et al. 2018), and an adult at the Santa Margarita River mouth in San Diego County 14–23 August 2007 and 13 May–17 June 2008 (Pyle et al. 2011) are the only others recorded along the Pacific Coast north of Nayarit. Thus the appearance of one inland at the Salton Sea was totally unexpected. Photographs of the Salton Sea bird show white in the outer rectrices, a grayish cast to the underparts, a sooty brown mantle, and extensively dark undersides to the primaries, indicating it was of the east Pacific subspecies *nelsoni*.

WEDGE-RUMPED STORM-PETREL *Hydrobates tethys*. One late summer record involving at least five individuals. At least five, probably more, were deposited on the Salton Sea by the remnants of Hurricane Hilary, which moved north through the Salton Sink as a tropical storm on 20 August 2023. One of two reported was photographed at North Shore on 20 August, one of at least two was photographed from the north end of Lack Road on 21 August 2023, and one was photographed from the west edge of Obsidian Butte on the same day. Multiple Wedge-rumped Storm-Petrels were carried northward by the storm's remnants into the interior of southern California from San Diego County (Lower Otay Reservoir) north through Riverside (Lake Elsinore), Los Angeles (multiple locations in and near the Antelope Valley), and San Bernardino (multiple locations) counties, as far as Kern (Lake Isabella), Kings (near Tulare Lake), and Inyo (Panamint Springs and Stovepipe Wells) counties, as well as western Arizona and southern Nevada (McCaskie and Garrett 2024). With wing chords of 121–124 mm, the specimens obtained at Stovepipe Wells, near Victorville, and on the Arizona side of Lake Havasu are of the small Peruvian subspecies *kelsalli* rather than the larger nominate subspecies from the Galapagos Islands (P. Unitt pers. comm.).

BLACK-VENTED SHEARWATER *Puffinus opisthomelas*. One winter record. Nesting on islands off the Pacific coast of Baja California, the Black-vented Shearwater ranges over the Pacific Ocean from central California south to Central America, including the Gulf of California (Howell and Zufelt 2019); it is accidental inland. One was well studied and described as it sat on the Salton Sea close to Obsidian Butte for nearly an hour on 5 February 2014 (NAB 68:275). The only other record



FIGURE 2. Bridled Tern (*Onychoprion anaethetus*), Unit 1, Sonny Bono Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge, Imperial Co., 11 July 2008, representing a first record for the Salton Sink and the third for California.

Photo by Kenneth Z. Kurland

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of this species in the interior is of one along the Colorado River at the north end of Lake Havasu in Arizona on 26 September 1997 following Tropical Storm Nora (Jones 1999, Rosenberg et al. 2011).

ANHINGA *Anhinga anhinga*. One spring and one winter record. The Anhinga breeds no closer to the Salton Sea than southern Sonora (Russell and Monson 1998), with one vagrant recorded in Arizona (Tucson, 12 September 1893; Brown 1906), and three more in California (San Francisco, 2 June–16 July 1939, Sweetwater Reservoir, San Diego Co., 4 February 1977–20 January 1979, and near Corona, Riverside Co., 27 November 1983–9 June 1984; CBRC 2007). In the Imperial Valley, an adult male was at a large heron rookery at Ramer Lake 5 April–12 June 2003 (San Miguel and McGrath 2005) and again 19 March–6 May 2004 (Cole et al. 2006), a subadult male was at Fig Lagoon 8 November 2003–18 January 2004 (San Miguel and McGrath 2005), and perhaps the same bird was reported soaring high over that lagoon 25 October 2004 (*NAB* 59:147); the last sighting was not endorsed by the CBRC.

MISSISSIPPI KITE *Ictinia mississippiensis*. One fall record. Highly migratory, wintering in South America, the Mississippi Kite breeds across the southern United States, primarily east of the Rocky Mountains. Farther west, isolated colonies are known west to the San Pedro River near Winkelman in southeastern Arizona. The species is a casual vagrant to California with most recorded in spring and early summer. A juvenile photographed at the Salton Sea NWR headquarters on 17 September 2021 (Terrill et al. 2024) represents the only record for the Salton Sink. An adult photographed at Palm Springs on 7 August 2020 (Benson et al. 2022) was only a short distance to the northwest of the Salton Sink, and a yearling photographed at the East Yuma Wetlands in extreme southwestern Arizona on 31 May 2016 (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S30010997>) was only 60 km to the east of the Salton Sink.

HAIRY WOODPECKER *Dryobates villosus*. One winter record. This woodpecker is resident at the higher elevations of the mountains west of the Salton Sink. An occasional individual moves down-mountain into the coastal lowlands, very rarely to as far south as San Diego County, in fall and winter. One photographed along 81st Avenue in Oasis west of the northwest shore of the Salton Sea on 2 January 2012 (*NAB* 66:345) provides the only record for the Salton Sink and anywhere in the lowlands of southeastern California. It was ~30 km from the nearest point where the species is resident in the Santa Rosa Mountains.

GILDED FLICKER *Colaptes chrysoides*. One winter record. The population of the Gilded Flicker formerly nesting along the lower Colorado River was extirpated after the river was dammed; the species now reaches the Colorado River only as a rare visitor. The only resident population west of the river is in the Mojave National Preserve of eastern San Bernardino County. A male flicker photographed at Cattle Call Park in Brawley on 20 January 2013 by Linda LeRoy showed the features of a Gilded Flicker listed by Kaufman (1979). It had perhaps been present with Northern Flickers (*C. auratus*) there since 28 December 2012 (pers. obs.) and was last reported on 17 February 2013 (Todd McGrath pers comm.).

CRESTED CARACARA *Caracara cheriway*. Four winter records. The Crested Caracara formerly ranged, at least occasionally in winter, west to the Río Colorado delta in northeastern Baja California and the lower Colorado River valley in southwestern Arizona. There were no acceptable records for southeastern California until 1993, even though Grinnell and Miller (1944) inferred that the species occurred “with very little doubt from time to time as a vagrant from southward.” The report of one near Westmorland 14 December 1993, initially not accepted by the CBRC, was later reevaluated and endorsed (Heindel and Garrett 2008). An apparent immature was well seen at Finney Lake 1 January 2006 (Iliff et al. 2007). Two occurred in the winter of 2014–2015, with what was believed to be the same adult first near North

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Shore 9 November, then at Rock Hill on the south shore of the Salton Sea 25–26 November, and near Signal Mountain on 9 December (Singer et al. 2017). It was followed by an immature frequenting an area along Highway 115 east of Brawley and Calipatria 19 January–28 February (Searcy et al. 2018).

GREAT CRESTED FLYCATCHER *Myiarchus crinitus*. One late spring/summer record. The Great Crested Flycatcher breeds throughout the eastern half of the United States and winters in Central and South America. It has been recorded more than 80 times in California (Tietz and McCaskie 2025), with all reports but one (Point Loma, San Diego Co., 20 May 2009; Pyle et al. 2011) being in fall between 6 September and 31 October. The first and only record for the Salton Sink was of one photographed at the Imperial Irrigation District Wetlands near Niland on the unexpected date of 23 June 2021 (Terrill et al. 2024).

YELLOW-BELLIED FLYCATCHER *Empidonax flaviventris*. One fall record. The Yellow-bellied Flycatcher has been recorded in California 38 times since the first was identified 16 September 1976 at Southeast Farallon Island (DeSante et al. 1985). Reports in California are increasing, with eight since Baumann et al. (2014) reported a simple criterion of wing pattern for the species' identification. The single record of the Yellow-bellied Flycatcher for the Salton Sink, of one photographed at the headquarters of the Wister Unit of the Imperial Wildlife Area 3–5 September 2004 (Cole et al. 2006; Figure 3), falls within the date range (27 August–16 October) established by others confirmed in California.

HUTTON'S VIREO *Vireo huttoni*. Two records for late fall and winter. Within California, Hutton's Vireo is resident west of the Sierra Nevada, south of the Transverse Ranges, and west of the Peninsular Ranges. It is a casual vagrant east to the Mojave Desert and the desert edge in San Diego County. One, an example of one of the California subspecies by its deep olive plumage, was well studied and photographed at Riverview Cemetery in Brawley 30 October–15 December 2004 (NAB 59:150; see this issue's back cover). The second was at Cattle Call Park in Brawley 8 February–4 March 2017 (pers. obs.). Earlier attributions to the Imperial Valley (California Department of Fish and Game 1979, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1993) are best judged erroneous.

The pale grayish subspecies *V. h. stephensi*, resident from Arizona and adjacent New Mexico south to central mainland Mexico, has been collected on the Arizona side of the lower Colorado River (Rosenberg et al. 1991).

YELLOW-THROATED VIREO *Vireo flavifrons*. One fall record and two spring records. The Yellow-throated Vireo breeds widely in the eastern United States and winters in southern Central America and northern South America. It is a rare to casual vagrant west of the Rocky Mountains, with most occurring in late spring; over 200 have been recorded in California, with about one third in fall. One seen 7 km east-southeast of Mecca on 11 October 2010 (NAB 65:164) was the first to be recorded in the Salton Sink. The two recorded in spring, both photographed 3 km southeast of El Centro, occurred 18–19 May 2011 (NAB 65:519; Figure 4) and 22 May 2019 (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S56673800>).

PHILADELPHIA VIREO *Vireo philadelphicus*. One late fall record. The Philadelphia Vireo nests across the boreal forest of Canada east of the Rocky Mountains and winters largely in the southern half of Central America. It is a rare but annual vagrant to the western United States, mostly in fall. The only one recorded within the Salton Sink was 1 km west of Calipatria on 15 December 2015 (NAB 70:233). I can attest that it was well photographed, having seen photos seen on the camera's screen, but the camera's memory card was corrupted and the photos were lost. One Philadelphia Vireo north of the Salton Sink at Desert Hot Springs on 9 October 2011



FIGURE 3. Yellow-bellied Flycatcher (*Empidonax flaviventris*), Wister Unit, Imperial Wildlife Area, Imperial Co., 5 September 2004, representing a first record for the Salton Sink. Note the broad zone of black between the lower wingbar and the proximal ends of the whitish edges on the secondaries, a feature distinguishing the Yellow-bellied from the Western Flycatcher (*E. difficilis*) (Baumann et al. 2014).

Photo by Kenneth Z. Kurland

(NAB 66:170) and another east of the Salton Sink at Gordon's Well on 12 October 2011 (NAB 66:170) are the only others recorded in southeastern California.

CALIFORNIA SCRUB-JAY *Aphelocoma californica* and WOODHOUSE'S SCRUB-JAY *Aphelocoma woodhouseii*. Two records of the California, one in early fall and one in winter; Woodhouse's casual in winter. Patten et al. (2003) cited records of two taxa of the scrub-jays that the AOU (Chesser et al. 2016) later recognized as distinct species. Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay is fairly common in the southern half of the Great Basin east of the Sierra Nevada and strays irregularly into the southwestern deserts; it is a casual straggler to the Salton Sink in winter (Patten et al. 2003). The California Scrub-Jay is common in California west of the Sierra Nevada and south through the Transverse and Peninsular ranges; it is resident as close to the Salton Sink as In-Ko-Pah in extreme southwestern Imperial County. A California Scrub-



FIGURE 4. Yellow-throated Vireo (*Vireo flavifrons*), 3 km southeast of El Centro, Imperial Co., 19 May 2011, representing a second record for the Salton Sink.

Photo by Kenneth Z. Kurland

Jay in El Centro on 10 August 1989 (specimen San Diego Natural History Museum 45999) and another near Holtville 27 August 2005–9 March 2006 (*NAB* 60:141 and 285) are the only two recorded within the Salton Sink. One in Yuma, Arizona, 22 August 2016–16 May 2017 (Rosenberg et al. 2019) perhaps passed through the Salton Sink undetected.

WINTER WREN *Troglodytes hiemalis* and PACIFIC WREN *Troglodytes pacificus*. The Pacific Wren is a casual winter visitor; one winter record of the Winter Wren. The AOU (Chesser et al. 2010) followed the splitting of the Winter Wren into two species, the Winter Wren breeding in eastern North America, the Pacific Wren along the Pacific coast and in western mountains. The Winter Wren is a rare to casual fall vagrant and winter visitor to the southwestern United States. Probably both species are casual late fall and winter vagrants to the Salton Sink, but few were identified to species prior to 2010. Reports of the Winter Wren *sensu lato* range from 20 November (1988, Finney Lake, B. E. Daniels) in the fall to 7 March (2015, Finney Lake, Matthew Grube, photo) in late winter. Daniels identified one vocal individual well seen along the New River west of Calipatria on 19 December 2000 (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S51766742>) as a Pacific Wren, and several other winter records likely pertain to that taxon. The CBRC did not endorse reports of Winter Wrens heard and seen in the Wister Unit near the intersection of Beach Road and Highway 111 from 5 to 22 December 1998 (*NAB* 53:210) and at Finney Lake 4 January–7 March 2015 (*NAB* 69:295). But it did accept a report from Cattle Call Park in Brawley 20 December 2023–22 March 2024 (Tietz and McCaskie 2025), thus confirming the Winter Wren for the Salton Sink.

WRENTIT *Chamaea fasciata*. One fall record. One seen in a stand of dense desert scrub along Buchanan Street immediately south of 72nd Avenue near the northwest

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corner of the Salton Sea on 11 November 2020 (NAB <https://wp.me/p8iY2g-bfC>) provided the only record for the Salton Sink. This location is about 30 km east of the closest known range of the Wrentit in the Santa Rosa Wilderness. The only other report for the Coachella Valley is of two near Palm Springs on 1 April 1980 (AB 34:816).

RUFOUS-BACKED ROBIN *Turdus rufopalliatus*. Three records, one in fall and two in winter. One photographed at the Wister Unit's headquarters during its stay from 21 December 2004 to 20 January 2005 (Iliff et al. 2007) was followed less than two years later by another photographed just north of the Imperial–Riverside County line on the east side of the Salton Sea, 11 km east of Durmid, on 23 October 2006 (Heindel and Garrett 2008). A third was photographed near Calipatria (intersection of Sperry and Eddins roads) 20 December 2022–4 January 2023 (Benson et al. 2025). Native to western mainland Mexico, this species had been found as close to the Salton Sink as Borrego Springs in eastern San Diego County (13 March–16 April 1996), Chiriaco Summit in Riverside County (29 October–9 December 2012), Cactus City in Riverside County (23 November 2003), and at Imperial and Laguna dams on the Colorado River (17 December 1973–6 April 1974, and two birds 21–24 December 2002).

SCALY-BREADED MUNIA *Lonchura punctulata*. Four records, three in fall and one in winter. This species introduced from the Indian subcontinent is now well established in the coastal lowlands of southern California east to Riverside. Two photographed at North Shore on 24 October 2018 (R. L. McKernan and C. McGaugh), six photographed at the intersection of Davis and Schrimpf roads on 19 January 2018 (R. Reed), one calling at Red Hill on 4 November 2018 (D. S. Cooper), and one photographed at the Salton Sea NWR headquarters on 26 Nov 2019 (<https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/36165593>) are the only ones reported to date in the Salton Sink. Nevertheless, this small finch has now reached Borrego Springs in eastern San Diego County and much of the Coachella Valley in Riverside County. One at Desert Center in eastern Riverside County 9 October 2019 (NAB <https://wp.me/p8iY2g-90n>) is the easternmost, so this species can be expected again at the Salton Sink and may ultimately colonize.

WHITE WAGTAIL *Motacilla alba*. One late spring record. The White Wagtail breeds widely across Eurasia, wintering to the south into Africa, India, and southeast Asia (Alström and Mild 2003). Small numbers reach extreme western Alaska. Farther south, vagrants are recorded virtually annually along the west coast of North America in fall, winter, and spring, with 59 recorded in California through 2024 (Tietz and McCaskie 2025). One adult male of the black-backed subspecies *lugens* photographed near the west end of 84th Avenue at the northwest corner of the Salton Sea on 2 June 2021 (Terrill et al. 2024) is the only one yet recorded for the Salton Sink. The White Wagtail was previously unrecorded in Riverside County, with the closest to the Salton Sea being ones in Anaheim, Orange County, 1–17 February 2017 and Camp Pendleton, San Diego County, 18 April 2017 (Singer et al. 2020).

BELL'S SPARROW *Artemisiospiza belli* and SAGEBRUSH SPARROW *Artemisiospiza nevadensis*. Both species are winter visitors. The AOU (Chesser et al. 2013) followed Cicero and Johnson (2007) and Cicero and Koo (2012) in the division of the Sage Sparrow into two species. The Sagebrush Sparrow nests widely in the Great Basin and winters in the deserts of the southwestern United States and northern Mexico. The Bell's Sparrow is mostly resident in California and the Baja California Peninsula, but the partially migratory subspecies *canescens* nests in the Mojave Desert and arid valleys of central California and in winter disperses to some extent to southeastern California and extreme southwestern Arizona. Dates of occurrence for the Sage Sparrow complex within the Salton Sink range from 27 August (2000, Salton City, pers. obs.) to 27 April (1999, Wister Unit headquarters, S. Guers). The

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characteristics (e.g., back streaking and malar stripe) proposed for distinguishing the two in the field remain questionable, and mensural differences (overlapping in any case; Patten and Unitt 2002) are not useful for field observations. C. McCreedy (pers. comm.) suggests that in southeastern California Bell's is more common, particularly where *Atriplex* predominates, and that the Sagebrush is more restricted to well-drained xeric habitats, as in the Algodones dunes. However, photos from Corvina Beach on 15 December 2018 (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S50723779>) suggest both species may occur together.

RUSTY BLACKBIRD *Euphagus carolinus*. One winter record. Nesting in the wet boreal woodlands of Alaska and Canada, the Rusty Blackbird winters largely in the eastern United States. With records from as close as the California side of Colorado River in Imperial County (26 February 1959; Rosenberg et al. 1991), at Borrego Springs in San Diego County (27 November 1964; Unitt 2004), and Thousand Palms Oasis in Riverside County (7 December 2011–26 February 2012; Nelson et al. 2013), the Rusty Blackbird could be anticipated to reach the Salton Sink. However, perhaps because of a major decline in the species' overall population (e.g., Niven et al. 2004, Greenberg and Matsuoka 2010), the rate of California occurrences decreased from more than six per year in the 1970s to an average of between one and two per year in the 2020s. Therefore, a female photographed with other blackbirds near the Calipatria State Prison 15–26 December 2008 (Pike and Compton 2010) was not expected, and is the only one recorded at the Salton Sink.

COMMON GRACKLE *Quiscalus quiscula*. Two records, one each for spring and fall/winter. This grackle is common through most of North America east of the Rocky Mountains and increasing in the West. After California's first record on 20 November 1967, approximately ten had been recorded by the end of the 1970s, nearly 25 by the end of the 1980s, and about 50 by the end of the 1990s. One photographed at the Wister Unit's headquarters on 27 March 2004 (Cole et al. 2006) and another seen 5.5 km west of Seeley 1–2 November 2006 and again on 20 January 2007 (Heindel and Garrett 2008) are the only two recorded at the Salton Sink. Both were Bronzed Grackles (*Q. q. versicolor*) the only subspecies of the Common Grackle recorded in western North America.

WORM-EATING WARBLER *Helmitheros vermivorus*. One spring and one fall record. This distinctive parulid breeds in the eastern United States and winters in the West Indies and Central America. One was photographed at Salton Sea State Park 24 April 2010 (Johnson et al. 2012). This was early for a spring vagrant anywhere in California, so conceivably the bird may have wintered locally—previous records of presumed spring vagrant Worm-eating Warblers range between 22 April and 5 July. Another was photographed at Ramer Lake 26–27 November 2011 (Nelson et al. 2013). One, presumably wintering locally, was just outside the Salton Sink near Ejido Jiquilpan in the Mexicali Valley on 3 March 2003 (*NAB* 57:261), and a fall vagrant photographed at Tamarisk Grove Campground near Borrego Springs 18–19 October 2007 (*NAB* 62:154) was ~48 km to the west of the Salton Sink.

GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLER *Vermivora chrysoptera*. One spring and one fall record. The uncommon and declining Golden-winged Warbler nests in the northeastern United States and south locally along the Appalachian Mountains; it winters in Central America and northwestern South America. It is a casual vagrant to California, mainly in spring and fall. A male photographed at Dos Palmas Preserve on 11 September 2019 (Benson et al. 2021) and a female 3 km southeast of El Centro 24 May 2023 (Tietz and McCaskie 2025) represent the only two records for the Salton Sink. A fall vagrant at Thousand Palms Oasis 3 October 1980 (CBRC 2007) was only a short distance to the north of the Salton Sink and the only other Golden-winged Warbler recorded in Riverside County.

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KENTUCKY WARBLER *Geothlypis formosa*. One spring record. This rather secretive warbler nests in the eastern United States and winters principally in eastern Mexico and Central America. Since 1980 it has been recorded in California annually, with most in spring and early summer. One 3 km southeast of El Centro 9 May 2018 (K. Z. Kurland; Figure 5) represents the only record within the Salton Sink. One at Tamarisk Grove Campground in Anza-Borrego Desert State Park on 8 September 2013 (NAB 68:151) and another in Borrego Springs on 24 September 2014 (NAB 69:156) were only ~40–50 km to the west of the Salton Sink.

HOODED WARBLER *Setophaga citrina*. Two spring and one winter records. Breeding in the eastern United States and wintering mainly in southeastern Mexico and Central America, the Hooded Warbler has been recorded in California well over 400 times, with most in spring and early summer; the occasional pair nests. One at the zoo in Mexicali on 1 December 2007 (NAB 62:308), a female at Ramer Lake on 3 May 2005 (D. A. Easterla), and a male photographed 3 km southeast of El Centro 13 May 2010 (NAB 64:500) are the only three reported within the Salton Sink. Just ~40 km west of the Salton Sink, but still in Imperial County, one was seen at In-ko-pah on 28 May 2000 (M. A. Patten), and a male was photographed along the Colorado River at Laguna Dam on 21 December 2009 (NAB 63:500).

BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER *Setophaga virens*. One winter and one spring record. The Black-throated Green Warbler breeds in coniferous and mixed forests east of the Rocky Mountains in southern Canada and the northeastern United States. It winters in the Caribbean, southern Mexico, and Central America and is a casual spring vagrant and rare fall vagrant and winter visitor to California. One photographed 3 km southeast of El Centro 19–20 April 2008 (NAB 62:480) and another photographed in Brawley 13 December 2010–7 January 2011 (NAB 65:342) are the only two recorded within the Salton Sink. Otherwise the closest records to the Salton Sink are at Cuyamaca Rancho State Park and in the San Jacinto Mountains to the west, and at Desert Center and Cibola NWR to the east.



FIGURE 5. Kentucky Warbler (*Geothlypis formosa*), 3 km southeast of El Centro, Imperial Co., 9 May 2018, representing a first record for the Salton Sink.

Photo by Kenneth Z. Kurland

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HEPATIC Tanager *Piranga flava*. One winter record. A bird primarily associated with the mountains of Mexico and Central America, the Hepatic Tanager reaches the mountain forests of Arizona, New Mexico, and southeastern California in summer. In winter it reaches the coastal lowlands of California rarely but annually. A male photographed at the Mexicali Country Club in Mexicali 9–22 January 2005 (NAB 59:330) is the only one recorded within the Salton Sink. With other records from as close as Agua Caliente Springs in Anza Borrego Desert State Park (27 March 1974, AB 28:694), 9-Mile Canyon in the Chocolate Mountains (24 May 1995; specimen San Bernardino County Museum 54767), and Imperial Dam on the Colorado River (19 December 1973, AB 28:694), additional occurrences of this species can be expected.

SCARLET Tanager *Piranga olivacea*. One fall record. The Scarlet Tanager breeds in southeastern Canada and the eastern United States; it winters largely in South America. A rare vagrant to the western United States, it reaches California annually in small numbers, mainly in fall. It has been recorded as close to the Salton Sink as Jacumba (22 October 2011, NAB 66:172) to the west, northwestern Sonora at El Doctor (9 December 2001, <https://ebird.org/checklist/S4776149>) to the south, and at Desert Center (8 October 2019, NAB <https://wp.me/p8iY2g-9On>) and Bard in the Colorado River Valley (11 October 2011, NAB 66:172) to the east. But an adult male photographed at Dos Palmas Preserve 12–13 October 2019 (NAB <https://wp.me/p8iY2g-9On>) is the only one recorded within the Salton Sink.

DISCUSSION

Of these 46 additions to the Salton Sink's avifauna, three involve the splitting of one species into two (Canada/Cackling Goose, California/Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay, and Bell's/Sagebrush Sparrow). In these three cases both daughter species had already been recorded prior to their elevation to species level. In another case of taxonomic splitting (Winter/Pacific Wren) Patten et al. (2003) considered only one taxon to have been documented for the Salton Sink, but subsequently the other species has been recorded. Another two additions (Eurasian Collared-Dove and Scaly-breasted Munia) involve naturalized non-native species that have spread into the Salton Sink. The remaining 40 are newly recorded native species-level taxa.

It is interesting to note that of the 16 species-level taxa Patten et al. (2003) suggested as the "next twenty" taxa to be found in the Salton Sink, 11 (69%) are indeed included in the list of additions above.

Most of the added species are residents or annual visitors elsewhere in North America, known as vagrants to California but with no previous records within the Salton Sink. Virtually all of these were photographed by biologists and birders. Twenty-eight of the added species are landbirds (mostly passerines) not closely tied to wetlands, irrigated agriculture, shorelines, or the Salton Sea itself. The well-vegetated property of K. Z. Kurland, near the southeast corner of El Centro, with bird feeders and water features, alone has hosted seven of the listed species. Another 18 added species were associated with wetland habitats, including the Salton Sea and its shoreline. The various restoration and mitigation sites around the Imperial Valley are providing significant habitat for birds, and one, the Imperial Irrigation District's Managed Marsh Complex 3 km south of Niland ([139](https://www.iid.com/water/library/qs-a-water-transfer/mitigation-implementation/managed-marsh-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

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gsa-related-documents), is the site of one of the added species, the Great Crested Flycatcher. The occurrence of Wedge-rumped Storm-Petrels was clearly associated with a hurricane, but the occurrence of the Black-vented Shearwater and Bridled Tern may also have been storm related.

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