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Western Specialty:

Belding's Yellowthroat



Photo by © Roberto Carmona of La Paz, Baja California Sur, Mexico:

Belding's Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis beldingi beldingi*)

Estero San José, Baja California Sur, Mexico, 25 March 2024

In this issue of *Western Birds*, Roberto Carmona, Gerardo Marrón, Sergio Águila, Isabella Mata, Sofía Pérez, Sergio Alcalá, Selma Ávalos, Aranza Mendoza, Enrique Flores, Damián González, and Sergio Flores Ramírez report the results of the first thorough rangewide survey for Belding's Yellowthroat—an endangered species restricted to freshwater oases in arid Baja California Sur. Their surveys in 2024 encompassed all major sites and nearly all known sites in the ranges of both subspecies, *G. b. goldmani* in the northern section of the state and *G. b. beldingi* in the southern. They located Belding's Yellowthroat at 42 sites, of which eight are previously unreported. Their results raise the profile of Santa Águeda, San José de Magdalena, San Bartolo, and San Lázaro as important population centers, in addition to those previously known. But the species was evidently absent in 2024 at six sites where it previously occurred. Some sites are probably occupied only intermittently as their hydrography varies with the region's irregular rainfall. Cutting of marshes, excessive human water use, overgrazing, fires, and construction of tourist resorts continue to threaten Belding's Yellowthroat, even though some sewage-treatment ponds offer habitat. In this photo, note the golden halo around the black mask, distinguishing *G. b. beldingi* from *G. b. goldmani*.

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Front cover photo by © Patricia A. Isaacson of Emory, Texas: Wood Warbler (*Phylloscopus sibilatrix*), Willow Springs Park, Long Beach, California, 16 October 2022, representing the first record for California or anywhere in North America outside Alaska of this species that breeds in Europe and western Asia and winters in Africa. In spite of the remoteness of the species' known normal range from North America, there are 10 previous records for Alaska as well as now one for California. It is one of five new species for California summarized in this issue's report of the California Bird Records Committee.

Back cover photo by © Kenneth Z. Kurland of El Centro, California: Hutton's Vireo (*Vireo huttoni*), Riverview Cemetery, Brawley, California, 7 November 2004, representing a first record for Imperial County of this species rarely seen as a vagrant. Note the deep olive tones of the plumage, characteristic of the subspecies of coastal California, darker and greener than in the pale grayish Arizona subspecies *V. h. stephensi*, as yet unconfirmed west of the Colorado River. Hutton's Vireo is one of 40 species new to the Salton Sink since 2002, as Guy McCaskie summarizes in this issue of *Western Birds*.

Western Birds solicits papers that are both useful to and understandable by amateur field ornithologists and also contribute significantly to scientific literature. The journal welcomes contributions from both professionals and amateurs. Appropriate topics include distribution, migration, status, identification, geographic variation, conservation, behavior, ecology, population dynamics, habitat requirements, the effects of pollution, and techniques for censusing, sound recording, and photographing birds in the field. Papers of general interest will be considered regardless of their geographic origin, but particularly desired are reports of studies done in or bearing on North America west of the 100th meridian, including Alaska and Hawaii, northwestern Mexico, and the northeastern Pacific Ocean.

Send manuscripts to Daniel D. Gibson, P. O. Box 155, Ester, AK 99725; avesalaska@gmail.com. For matters of style consult the Suggestions to Contributors to *Western Birds* (at <http://westernfieldornithologists.org/publications/journal>).



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UPDATE ON THE BREEDING DISTRIBUTION OF BELDING'S YELLOWTHROAT (*GEOTHYLPIS BELDINGI*)

ROBERTO CARMONA and GERARDO MARRÓN, Laboratorio de Aves, Departamento Académico de Ciencias Marinas y Costeras, Universidad Autónoma de Baja California Sur, La Paz, Baja California Sur, México, 23080; Programa de Conservación de Ecosistemas Terrestres, Pronatura Noroeste, A. C., Calle Diez, No. 60, Colonia Centro, C. P. 22800, Ensenada, Baja California, México; beauty@uabcs.mx, atakamara@gmail.com

SERGIO ÁGUILA, ISABELLA MATA, SOFÍA PÉREZ, SERGIO ALCALÁ, SELMA ÁVALOS, ARANZA MENDOZA, ENRIQUE FLORES, and DAMIÁN GONZÁLEZ, Laboratorio de Aves, Departamento Académico de Ciencias Marinas y Costeras, Universidad Autónoma de Baja California Sur, La Paz, Baja California Sur, México, 23080

SERGIO FLORES RAMÍREZ, Laboratorio de Biología Molecular y Genética Aplicada a la Conservación, Departamento Académico de Ciencias Marinas y Costeras, Universidad Autónoma de Baja California Sur, La Paz, Baja California Sur, México, 23080

ABSTRACT: We update the list of locations occupied by Belding's Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis beldingi*), a species endemic to Baja California Sur, on the basis of surveys in June/July 2024, during which we visited most of the oases in the state. A total of 69 sites were surveyed: 25 in the north (San Ignacio to San Javier; *G. b. goldmani*), 30 in the south (La Paz to Cabo San Lucas; *G. b. beldingi*), and 14 in the central region. Of these, 13 oases lacked both suitable habitat and yellowthroats, while 14 had suitable habitat but no detection of the species. We documented both habitat and yellowthroats at 42 sites, grouped into 31 distinct locations. Among these, 17 had previous records, six had older records but no recent sightings, and eight had no previous records. Of the previously occupied locations where we found no yellowthroats in 2024, one was in the northern region, two were in the central region (the only central localities reported in the literature), and three were in the southern region. Of the newly identified locations, three were in the north, five were in the south, and none were in the central region. It is possible that other small oases, unmapped and difficult of access, were not included in this study. The lack of records in the central region suggests that the northern (*G. b. goldmani*) and southern (*G. b. beldingi*) populations remain isolated or were so in 2024.

RESUMEN: Para actualizar la lista de localidades con presencia de Mascarita peninsular (*Geothlypis beldingi*) en una misma temporada reproductiva, en junio/julio de 2024 realizamos un viaje a lo largo de Baja California Sur, visitando la may-

oría de los oasis. Visitamos 69 sitios, en el norte (*G. b. goldmani*) recorrimos 25; en la zona sur (*G. b. beldingi*), 30 y en la zona central 14. En 13 no encontramos hábitat ni aves, en 14 hubo hábitat, pero no detectamos la presencia de la especie. En total, documentamos tanto hábitat como Mascarita peninsular en 42 sitios. Estos sitios se integraron en 31 localidades, para 17 de las cuales existen registros previos. En contraste, en seis localidades existen registros, pero no se observaron ejemplares; además, se encontraron la mascarita en ocho localidades para las que no existen registros. De las localidades donde la especie fue erradicada, una está en la región norte, dos en la central (las únicas indicadas en la bibliografía) y tres en el sur. Referente a las localidades nuevas, tres se localizaron en la región norte, cinco en la sur y ninguna en la parte central. Innegablemente podrían existir otros oasis pequeños y de difícil acceso no considerados en el trabajo presente. La falta de registros en la región central implicó que las poblaciones norteñas (*G. b. goldmani*) y sureñas (*G. b. beldingi*) estuvieron aisladas, al menos en la temporada 2024.

Baja California Sur is Mexico's driest state, with an average annual rainfall that does not exceed 200 mm over most of its territory (Coria 1997). Consequently, the region is predominantly desert. Despite this, the state has freshwater oases, where denser vegetation supports greater species richness and abundance across various biological groups (Arriaga 1997). Because of the scarcity of water, wetlands are not only limited but also widely dispersed and distant from one another, hindering genetic exchange between populations of organisms dependent on them (Arriaga 1997). The surrounding desert serves as a natural barrier, promoting differentiation and speciation (Arriaga 1997). As a result, endemic species have evolved in these isolated habitats, such as the Baja California Killifish (*Fundulus lima*; Ruiz-Campos 2012) and Belding's Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis beldingi*; Rodríguez-Estrella et al. 1999), a member of the family Parulidae.

Belding's Yellowthroat is endemic to Baja California Sur (Howell and Webb 1995), with its northernmost breeding site at the San Ignacio oasis (27° 17' N) and its southernmost site at Estero Cascada near Cabo San Lucas (22° 53' N). The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) currently classifies Belding's Yellowthroat as a vulnerable species (BirdLife International 2021), while the Mexican government, through NOM-059, lists it as endangered (SEMARNAT 2010).

At these oases, the yellowthroat nests exclusively in emergent vegetation, characterized primarily by three species: Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*), Cattail (*Typha domingensis*), and the exotic Giant Reed (*Arundo donax*; Marrón and Carmona 2024). Thus suitable habitat for Belding's Yellowthroat must meet two requirements: the presence of fresh water and emergent vegetation (Marrón and Carmona 2024).

Since the early 20th century, two subspecies have been recognized (Oberholser 1917): the paler, duller *G. b. goldmani*, which inhabits the northern region from San Ignacio to San Javier (27° 17' to 25° 52' N), and the brighter and more extensively yellow *G. b. beldingi*, found in the south from La Paz to Cabo San Lucas (24° 06' to 22° 52' N; Erickson et al. 2008). However, in the central region of the state, between San Javier and La Paz, the subspecific affinity of Belding's Yellowthroat remains undetermined.

The IUCN recently estimated the population of Belding's Yellowthroat at between 650 and 1670 mature individuals (BirdLife International 2021).

Such a small population size reflects the natural scarcity of suitable habitat. Furthermore, most of these oases face both natural pressures (e.g., cyclones, drought) and human pressures (e.g., fires, reed cutting, overgrazing, excessive water use, pollution, habitat reduction, and unregulated tourism, among others; Rodríguez-Estrella et al. 1999, Córdova-Rojas et al. 2024), all of which threaten the viability of these sites and, therefore, the survival of Belding's Yellowthroat.

Despite its status as an endemic species, studies of Belding's Yellowthroat remain limited. For instance, regarding its distribution, aside from the documentation of a few breeding sites (e.g., Brewster 1902, Grinnell 1928, Wilbur 1987, Rodríguez-Estrella et al. 1999, Córdova-Rojas et al. 2024), there is only one comprehensive study listing all the locations where this species has been found: Erickson et al. (2008). Drawing on a mix of literature, field work, and personal observations, those authors identified 34 sites with records of the species: 14 in the northern part of its range, 3 in the central region, and 17 in the south, along with three records of wandering individuals. In the 16 years that have passed since this compilation, given the natural and anthropogenic pressures, changes may have occurred.

Therefore, the goal of our study was to provide a detailed description, through field work, of sites where Belding's Yellowthroat is currently present and to compare this information with data from at least 16 years ago. This comparison aims to establish a baseline for future research, conservation, and management.

METHODS

Study Area

González-Abraham et al. (2010) categorized Baja California Sur as comprising two regions and eight ecoregions. In the north, the desert region encompasses five ecoregions, with annual rainfall nearing 180 mm (INEGI 2021). In contrast, the southern region, known as the Cabo tropical region, receives an average annual precipitation of approximately 350 mm. This makes the Cabo deciduous forest and the Sierra de La Laguna forest the only non-desert ecoregions in the state (González-Abraham et al. 2010). As a result of the more frequent and abundant rainfall in the south, the oases there are closer together and more extensive.

Field Work

We surveyed a total of 69 sites (Table 1). In the northern region, in the range of *G. b. goldmani*, we visited 25 sites; in the southern region (*G. b. beldingi*), we examined 30 sites; and in the central region of uncertain subspecific affinity, we assessed an additional 14 sites. Most of these sites (24 out of 34) were already identified in the previous work by Erickson et al. (2008). Our field work from 9 June to 2 July 2024 comprised two survey teams: one focused on sites from La Paz southward, the other on sites between the San Ignacio oasis and San Javier in the north. Both teams also explored the central sites. Each team consisted of five observers.

Although many of these water bodies are physiographically distinct, they

often form part of a continuous riparian corridor, allowing birds to move between them. In this study, the term “site” refers to individual water bodies, while “locality” designates either interconnected sites linked by riparian corridors and isolated from other localities by desert zones, or isolated sites not connected to other localities, regardless of their size. For instance, the area that includes the towns of La Purísima, San Isidro, and Carambuche, although composed of five distinct water bodies (sites), is interconnected and contains patches of habitat suitable for the Belding's Yellowthroat; therefore, we group the five as a single locality (La Purísima). In contrast, a site like El Estribo, located 7 km southwest of San Ignacio, was classified as a separate locality because of its isolation from other sites, despite its small size (<0.5 ha of reed; for details, see Table 1).

The oases were surveyed on foot and by kayak, depending on the terrain. At each site, we typically formed two teams, each conducting as many five-minute point counts as the site's size allowed. We then compared the presence or absence of Belding's Yellowthroat with previous records, most of which were compiled by Erickson et al. (2008).

RESULTS

At 13 locations, we found neither suitable habitat nor Belding's Yellowthroats, while 14 sites had suitable habitat but no detections of the species. Overall, we documented both habitat and Belding's Yellowthroats at 42 sites (Figure 1).

At 20 sites, the observed abundance of the Belding's Yellowthroat ranged from 1 to 10 individuals (seven in the north and 13 in the south). At 15 sites, we recorded between 11 and 50 birds (eight in the north and seven in the south), while only seven sites had observations of 51 to 100 individuals (five in the north and two in the south; Table 1).

On the basis of the the previously outlined criteria, we grouped these 42 sites into 31 localities (Table 1). Seventeen of these localities have prior records of the species. We found no Belding's Yellowthroats at six historical localities from which we infer the species is extirpated, but we did find them at eight localities with no prior records in the literature (Table 1).

Regarding the new localities, we found three (37%) in the northern region, five (63%) in the south, and none in the central region. Of the localities where the species is extirpated, only one is in the north (17%), two (33%) are in the central region (the only ones documented in the literature), and three (50%) are in the south (Figure 1).

DISCUSSION

The dates of this survey fell within the period of Belding's Yellowthroat's breeding (Marrón and Carmona 2024). Additionally, we observed juveniles at various sites (Table 1), confirming breeding for these sites in 2024. This study represents the first comprehensive census based entirely on field work during a single year; the previous compilation (Erickson et al. 2008) combined field data from various years with information from literature, some of which dates to the early 20th century.

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TABLE 1 Status of Belding's Yellowthroat at Sites Surveyed in 2024

Region, locality, and site		Historical	2024 abundance range	Latitude	Longitude
North					
1	San Ignacio ^a	Yes ^b			
	San Ignacio		51–100	27.2977	–112.8974
	San Pablo		11–50	27.2863	–112.9045
	Santa Rosa		11–50	27.2832	–112.9081
	Poza larga		1–10	27.2720	–112.9161
2	El Estribo	No	1–10	27.2584	–112.9339
	Corralitos 1		0	27.2452	–112.9583
	Corralitos 2		0	27.2272	–112.9666
3	Las Casitas–San Sabas ^a	No			
	San Sabas		1–10	27.2174	–112.9882
	Las Casitas		1–10	27.2139	–112.9965
4	San Joaquín	Yes ^b	0	27.1806	–112.8622
5	Santa Águeda ^a	Yes ^b	11–50	27.2599	–112.3557
6	Ejido San Lucas	No	1–10	27.2180	–112.2213
	San Joaquín		0	27.1806	–112.8622
	San Zacarías		0	27.1377	–112.9046
7	San José de Magdalena ^a	Yes ^b	50–100	27.0628	–112.2346
8	Mulegé ^a	Yes ^b			
	Mulegé río		50–100	26.8887	–111.9827
	Mulegé presa		11–50	26.8868	–111.9868
9	La Purísima ^a	Yes ^b			
	Presa Carambuche (arriba)		1–10	26.2392	–112.0024
	Presa Carambuche (abajo)		11–50	26.2328	–112.0057
	Poza Carambuche		11–50	26.2158	–112.0245
	San Isidro		50–100	26.2013	–112.0531
	Poza El Cantil		11–50	26.1967	–112.0621
	Presa La Purísima		50–100	26.1910	–112.0752
10	Comondú ^a	Yes ^b	11–50	26.0370	–111.8327
	Nopoló		0	25.9439	–111.3541
11	San Javier ^a	Yes ^b	1–10	25.8670	–111.5457
Center					
	La Presa		0	24.8708	–111.0540
12	San Pedro de La Presa	Yes ^b	0	24.8487	–110.9905
	El Cajón		0	24.8457	–111.0129
13	El Bosque	Yes ^b	0	24.8388	–110.7708
	La Purificación		0	24.8325	–110.8068
	El Chicural		0	24.8292	–111.0638
	Tres Pozas		0	24.8224	–111.1243
	La Soledad		0	24.8127	–110.8143
	Corral de Piedra		0	24.7346	–110.9345
	El Pilar		0	24.4733	–111.0051
	Las Pilas		0	24.4732	–111.0267
	Las Pocitas		0	24.4030	–111.1042
	La Esperanza		0	24.3798	–111.1151
	San Hilario		0	24.3736	–110.9787

(continued)

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Region, locality, and site		Historical	2024 abundance range	Latitude	Longitude
South					
14	Lagunas de oxidación de La Paz ^a	Yes ^b	1–10	24.1097	–110.3457
15	El Rosario ^c	Yes ^b			
	El Oro		0	23.7492	–110.0952
	El Rosario		0	23.7425	–110.1110
16	San Bartolo ^a	Yes ^b	11–50	23.7378	–109.8392
17	El Coro	No	1–10	23.6391	–109.7723
	La Ribera				
	La Ribera norte		0	23.6189	–109.6106
	La Ribera sur		0	23.5963	–109.5664
18	Pozas Azules ^d	No	1–10	23.5984	–110.0390
19	Santiago ^a	Yes ^b	50–100	23.4852	–109.7180
20	Todos Santos ^a	Yes ^b			
	San Regis		11–50	23.4615	–110.2235
	Todos Santos pueblo		1–10	23.4522	–110.2273
	La Poza		11–50	23.4413	–110.2388
	Todos Santos laguna de oxidación		1–10	23.42932	–110.2247
21	Agua Caliente	Yes ^b	0	23.4395	–109.8085
22	San Pedro del Palmar ^a	Yes ^b	11–50	23.3907	–110.2112
23	Boca de la Sierra	No	1–10	23.3910	–109.8252
24	Miraflores	Yes ^b			
	Miraflores		1–10	23.3666	–109.7745
	Puente El Aguajito		1–10	23.3652	–109.7533
25	Pescadero	Yes ^b			
	Pozo Pescadero		1–10	23.3688	–110.1630
	Punta San Pedrito		1–10	23.3678	–110.2018
	Planta tratamiento Pescadero		1–10	23.3644	–110.1708
	La Trinidad		0	23.3425	–109.5607
26	Caduaño	Yes ^b	0	23.3347	–109.7771
	La Palma		0	23.2535	–109.8264
27	Plutarco Elías Calles	Yes ^b	1–10	23.2109	–110.1414
28	Presa San Lázaro ^a	No	11–50	23.1306	–109.8126
29	La Candelaria	No	1–10	23.0731	–110.0293
30	Estero de San José ^a	Yes ^b			
	Estero de San José norte		11–50	23.0618	–109.6916
	Estero de San José este		11–50	23.0554	–109.6807
	Estero de San José sur		50–100	23.0544	–109.6882
31	Estero Cascada ^e	Yes ^b	1–10	22.8927	–109.8995

^aLocations where breeding was confirmed through the presence of juveniles.

^bLocalities included in the compilation by Erickson et al. (2008).

^cSite referred to as El Triunfo by Erickson et al. (2008).

^dSite visited in November 2020.

^eSite referred to as Cabo San Lucas by Erickson et al. (2008).

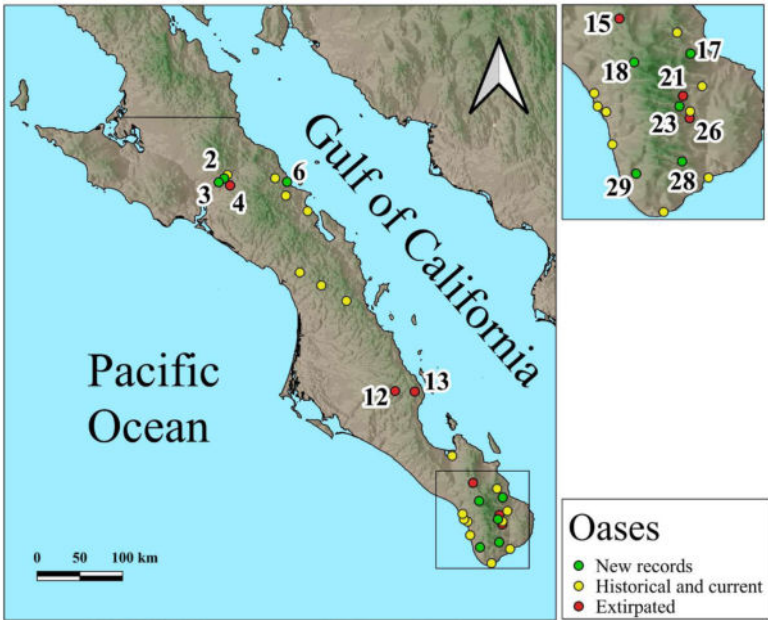


FIGURE 1. Localities surveyed for Belding's Yellowthroat in 2024. Yellow circles, sites with both previous and current records; green circles, sites without prior records but with sightings in 2024; red circles, sites with previous records but lacking yellowthroats in 2024. Sites of discoveries in 2024 and extirpations are identified by the corresponding numbers listed in Table 1.

Although Córdova-Rojas et al. (2024) published recently on the species' distribution (among other aspects), that study relied entirely on records from various online databases and included only nine localities, all of which we visited in 2024 and had been previously noted by Erickson et al. (2008). Thus the last compilation took place 16 years ago, since which time several anthropogenic and natural events, including fires, cyclones, and unregulated tourism (Córdova-Rojas et al. 2024), have altered the species' distribution. The southern oases face greater pressures due to unregulated tourism, as Los Cabos holds most of the state's yellowthroats, has the highest rate of human population growth (4% per year; INEGI 2023), and the most developed mass-tourism industry. Consequently, the southern subspecies faces more significant conservation challenges than the northern one.

We did not visit ten sites identified by Erickson et al. (2008). Five of these we excluded from consideration because of the lack of suitable habitat, as the records from these sites likely represent vagrant individuals rather than resident or breeding populations. For the remaining sites (El Mezquital and Cadejé in the north, and Las Cuevas and Santa Anita in the south), their numerical significance appears to be minimal, as Erickson et al. (2008) reported only one male in 2000, a pair in 2001, no more than three individuals between 2004 and 2007, and one male in 2006, respectively. In the case of El Sauzal, in

addition to the February 2004 record (Erickson et al. 2008), there is a more recent observation in June 2016 (Carmona pers. obs.).

In addition to the sites reported by Erickson et al. (2008), observations of the Belding's Yellowthroat have been documented at other locations (e.g., Loreto, El Centenario, La Ribera, etc.; <https://eBird.org>). Some of these sites were surveyed without success by us, while others we excluded because of the absence of suitable habitat. Like the five sites reported by Erickson et al. (2008), the numerical significance of these additional locations is minimal, as few individuals have been recorded, recent sightings are uncommon, and many lack the conditions necessary to support the establishment of breeding populations.

A recurring issue in studies of this nature, which involve sampling across different years and incorporate historical data, is the lack of uniformity in place names. For example, some of the discrepancies identified between Erickson et al. (2008) and our work include Playa Cerritos, Punta San Pedro, and Cabo San Lucas, which we refer to as Pescadero, San Pedro del Palmar, and Estero Cascada, respectively. Another problematic site is El Triunfo, which Erickson et al. (2008) hypothesized may have been misnamed and actually referred to as El Oro. In our study, we included El Oro as part of El Rosario (Table 1). The names we selected, evaluated individually, we believe to be more accurate.

Regarding localities where the birds have been extirpated, at San Joaquín, nesting was recorded in 1928 (Bancroft 1930), and a male was observed in 2020 (Carmona pers. obs.). Rodríguez-Estrella et al. (1999) reported a sighting at San Pedro de la Presa in 1995, and two birds were observed at Segundo Bosque in 2006 (Erickson et al. 2008). At El Triunfo (i.e., El Rosario), three pairs were recorded in 1902 (Erickson et al. 2008), with the most recent observation in August 2010 (<https://eBird.org/checklist/S66321242>). Agua Caliente had a pair observed in 1902 and a male sighted in 2006. Lastly, at least three birds were at Caduaño during the period from 2003 to 2007 (Erickson et al. 2008). Although Belding's Yellowthroats had been recorded there regularly up until March 2024, the number of individuals has never exceeded three (<https://eBird.org>).

The absence of the species in the central region is particularly striking, as we did not detect any Belding's Yellowthroats at the two sites where their presence had been recorded previously: Segundo Bosque and San Pedro de La Presa (Erickson et al. 2008). In the case of Segundo Bosque, we found no suitable habitat, while at San Pedro de La Presa, the habitat was very limited, measuring only 0.02 hectares. Additionally, we surveyed 12 more sites in this region. Out of the 14 sites assessed, seven had suitable habitat but no records of the species, while the remaining seven lacked habitat entirely. A common theme was the absence or scarcity of cattail and reeds; residents noted that this vegetation had been swept away by flooding caused by the cyclones in 2023. Thus it is reasonable to hypothesize that habitat availability in this region may fluctuate significantly over time, and habitat may reappear, potentially affecting the connectivity between the southern and northern populations of Belding's Yellowthroat.

Regarding the eight sites where we recorded Belding's Yellowthroat for the first time, it is important to emphasize that these are not necessarily newly

colonized areas. The lack of prior records is likely more related to the difficult access to these locations. This is particularly evident for El Estribo (Figure 2) and Las Casitas–San Sabas (Figure 3) in the north, and for Pozas Azules and El Coro in the south. Figure 4 shows La Candelaria, another newly revealed site in the south.

We recorded a total of 50 individuals at the eight new sites, with Boca de la Sierra having the lowest abundance at just one bird, while the San Lázaro dam had the highest count with 17 individuals. Both these sites are in the south. Although 50 Belding's Yellowthroats represent a considerable number—approximately 3% to 7.6% of the population estimated by BirdLife International (2021)—another important aspect of these sites is their role as part of corridors connecting different population groups. A notable example of this is Pozas Azules, a small site (less than 0.1 ha of habitat) located in the channel of a stream in the Sierra de La Laguna, situated between well-established populations at Santiago, La Poza in Todos Santos, and San Pedro del Palmar.

It is important to note that there may be other small, hard-to-access wetlands not included in this study. While these sites might serve as connectors between populations, they are unlikely to be numerically significant.

To the historically most significant localities (San Ignacio, Mulegé, and La Purísima in the north, and Santiago, Todos Santos, and Estero de San José in the south; Rodríguez-Estrella et al. 1999, BirdLife International 2021, Córdova-Rojas et al. 2024), we also include Santa Águeda and San José de Magdalena in the north, as well as San Bartolo and San Lázaro in the south.

In summary, most known localities for the Belding's Yellowthroat have remained stable, with 17 locations discussed by Erickson et al. (2008) still supporting the species. However, six locations of limited numerical signifi-



FIGURE 2. El Estribo, 7 km southwest of San Ignacio, Baja California Sur, first verified as a site for Belding's Yellowthroat in 2024.

Photo by Roberto Carmona



FIGURE 3. Las Casitas, 12 km southwest of San Ignacio, Baja California Sur, first verified as a site for Belding's Yellowthroat in 2024.

Photo by Roberto Carmona



FIGURE 4. La Candelaria, 25 km northwest of Cabo San Lucas, Baja California Sur, first verified as a site for Belding's Yellowthroat in 2024.

Photo by Gerardo Marrón

cance have seen the species extirpated, while eight previously undocumented localities were discovered. No birds were found in the central region, resulting in the northern (*G. b. goldmani*) and southern (*G. b. beldingi*) populations being isolated, at least during the 2024 season.

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THE YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO IN NORTHWESTERN CALIFORNIA

GARY FALXA, 1615 Swanson Lane, Eureka, California 95503; garyfalxa@gmail.com

SEAN McALLISTER, 6104 Beechwood Drive, Eureka, California 95503; whiteouters@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: Prior to 2000, the Yellow-billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*) had been recorded in northwestern California (defined here as Humboldt, Del Norte, Trinity, northern Mendocino, and western Siskiyou counties) on six occasions, all in Humboldt County. To better understand the species' status within this region, we surveyed for it during the breeding season in 20 of the 24 years from 2000 to 2023, primarily along the lower Eel River in Humboldt County and in suitable habitat elsewhere in Humboldt and Del Norte counties. We found the species to occur more frequently than previously known, detecting 1–3 individuals in 9 of the survey's 20 years. Also, we evaluated the 23 incidental Yellow-billed Cuckoo observations during the same period; these include the first known records for Del Norte County. Most detections were within riparian scrub or riparian forest dominated by willows (*Salix* spp.) and Red Alders (*Alnus rubra*), often with scattered Black Cottonwoods (*Populus trichocarpa*). Although no nests have been confirmed to date, observations imply occasional breeding in Humboldt County.

The distribution of the Yellow-billed Cuckoo in western North America has contracted substantially over the past century, largely as a result of the loss and degradation of riparian habitats (Hughes 2015). As a result of a decline in both numbers and range, in 2014 the species' western population was classified as threatened under the United States' Endangered Species Act (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2014). The state of California classified the cuckoo as threatened in 1971 and as endangered in 1988 under the California Endangered Species Act (CNDDB 2024).

The cuckoo is a neotropical migrant, breeding in North America and wintering in South America (Hughes 2015). Its breeding range formerly extended from Mexico north to western Washington and southwestern British Columbia (American Ornithologists' Union 1998, Hughes 2015) but was not known to include northwestern California (Bent 1940, Grinnell and Miller 1944, Hughes 2015). Grinnell and Miller (1944) described its distribution in California as including the larger valleys west of the Sierra Nevada, notably the Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys, and extending along the coast from San Diego County north to Sonoma County; they also listed scattered records east of the Sierra Nevada from the Colorado River north to Modoc County. In northern California, the species historically occurred at scattered locations from Sebastopol, Sonoma County, northeast to eastern Siskiyou County and Modoc County (Bent 1940, Grinnell and Miller 1944, Hughes 2015). The cuckoo was formerly common in riparian habitat along the Sacramento River (Gaines and Laymon 1984, Hughes 2015), where a small population persisted through 2000 (Gaines 1974, Halterman et al. 2001) but recent surveys, including in 2022, indicate a marked decline (Dettling et al. 2015, N. Clipperton pers. comm.).

In western North America, nesting is strongly associated with relatively large patches of lower-elevation riparian woodland dominated by willows (*Sa-*

lix spp.) and cottonwoods (*Populus* spp.) with a dense understory (Grinnell and Miller 1944, Hughes 2015, Stanek et al. 2021). Currently, cuckoos begin to arrive at western breeding areas from mid- to late May and nest primarily from mid-July to early August (Bent 1940, Gaines 1974, Hughes 2015).

No breeding has been recorded in northwestern California, and prior to 2000 there were few records there of any kind. Harris (1996, 2006) summarized the avifauna of northwestern California, which he defined as Del Norte, Humboldt, and Trinity counties, plus the northern half of Mendocino County (north of Highway 20 between Fort Bragg and Willits and north of a line from Willits east to Mount Sanhedrin and Hull Mountain) and western half of Siskiyou County (west of a line following Interstate 5 from Hornbrook to Gazelle, then southwest to the northernmost tip of Trinity County). We use the same definition here. Harris listed six records, all from Humboldt County, from 1947 to 1993 (Table 1). From 1995 to 1999, 1 February to 30 September each year, no cuckoos were detected during field work for the Humboldt County breeding bird atlas (Hunter et al. 2005). We are unaware of any pre-2000 records within the study area outside of Humboldt County (Harris 2006, Barron 2007).

STUDY SITES AND METHODS

Study Sites

Our survey focused on relatively wide riparian areas within alluvial floodplains and excluded narrow riparian areas along streams in rugged terrain. We identified potential cuckoo habitat through inspection of aerial imagery, on-the-ground reconnaissance, and knowledge of the region. Attributes identifying potential habitat included blocks or closely associated patches of riparian habitat of at least several hectares.

Vegetation in survey areas was dominated by a mix of native deciduous trees and shrubs of varying proportions and age classes. The overstory, when present, was typically dominated by willows (mainly *Salix lasiandra*, *S. lasiolepis*, and *S. sitchensis*), interspersed to varying degrees with Black Cottonwood, Red Alder, and occasional Sitka Spruce (*Picea sitchensis*). In more mature riparian habitat, Pacific willow (*S. lasiandra*) and Black Cottonwood reached heights of 20 m, over a mid-story stratum between 5 and 8 m in height that was composed mostly of the aforementioned willow species. The understory was frequently dense and nearly impenetrable, often dominated by California Blackberry (*Rubus ursinus*) or Himalayan Blackberry (*R. armeniacus*) brambles, with other plants including Twinberry (*Lonicera involucrata*), Stinging Nettle (*Urtica dioica*), currants (*Ribes* spp.), and saplings of overstory species. Gravel and sand bars near active river channels often supported patches of other, less arborescent willows (including *S. scouleriana* and *S. exigua*), as well as saplings of overstory species.

We focused most of our effort on the lower Eel River downstream of Rio Dell (Figures 1 and 2), where the gradient is low and the channel has meandered over time, creating dynamic and complex habitats, with islands and past channels interspersed with recently scoured areas with new riparian vegetation. In some areas levees, berms, and rock revetment now constrain

TABLE 1 Yellow-billed Cuckoo Records from Northwestern California^a

Type ^b	Date	Location	Latitude ^c	Longitude ^c	Observers	Observations and notes ^d
I	13 Jul 1947	N. spit of Humboldt Bay	40.7771	-124.2099	B. Anderson	Heard only, "calling repeatedly"
I	24 May 1958	Ferndale, Eel R.	40.5936	-124.2610	C. Crane	Single bird
I	9 Nov 1963	Arcata	40.8688	-124.0877	E. Taylor	Bird found dead
I	2 Sep 1975	Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park	41.2870	-124.0785	D. Winkler, P. Brown	Single bird seen
I	4 Jun 1992	Lanphere Dunes	40.8901	-124.1417	C. J. Ralph	Mist-netted bird with brood patch
I	27 May 1993	Rohnerville, near Eel R.	40.5566	-124.1060	W. and I. Crane	Seen and heard
S	25 Jun 2000	Cock Robin Island	40.6331	-124.2741	G. Falxa	Seen and heard (<i>kowlp</i>)
S	4 Jul 2000	Loleta Oxbow, Eel R.	40.6265	-124.2367	G. Falxa	Heard only (<i>coo</i>)
I	1 Jul 2001	Singley Bar, Eel R.	40.6162	-124.2350	S. McAllister, et al.	Seen and heard, first of multiple detections through 6 July
I	5 Jul 2002	Singley Bar, Eel R.	40.6173	-124.2221	S. McAllister	Heard only
S	23 Jul 2002	Cock Robin Island	40.6293	-124.2743	G. Falxa	Seen and heard (<i>coo</i>)
I	29 May 2003	Warswick Bar, Eel R.	40.6047	-124.1810	S. McAllister	Heard (<i>kowlp</i>)
I	24 Jun 2003	Holmes Flat, Eel R.	40.4135	-123.9318	T. McKee, G. Frankfurter	Seen and heard
I	6 Jun 2005	Sandy Prairie, Eel R.	40.5804	-124.1617	S. McAllister	Seen and heard; recorded
I	19 Jun 2005	Arcata Marsh Project	40.8604	-124.0907	E. Elias, G. Ziegler	Seen and heard; photos
S	6 Jul 2005	Sandy Prairie, Eel R.	40.5895	-124.1783	J. Tietz	Heard <i>kowlp</i> repeatedly; accounted for in the 6 June record
I	2 Jun 2006	Cock Robin Island	40.6342	-124.2815	L. Lawrence, J. Certiani, et al.	First of multiple records Jun–Jul at this location; accounted for in the 9 Jul survey detection
I	12 Jun 2006	Arcata Marsh Project	40.8604	-124.0907	Multiple	Seen and heard
S	9 Jul 2006	Cock Robin Island	40.6353	-124.2815	E. Elias	2 adults heard at the same time, described as countersinging
I	5 Aug 2006	Cock Robin Island	40.6336	-124.2816	C. Rognan	3 birds heard, 2 observed; counted as a single incidental; 2 accounted for in the 9 July survey
S	14–15 Jul 2007	Cock Robin Island	40.6336	-124.2856	E. Elias	Adult seen and heard (<i>kowlp</i>)

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Type ^b	Date	Location	Latitude ^c	Longitude ^c	Observers	Observations and notes ^d
S	25 Jul 2007	Cock Robin Island	40.6339	-124.2861	S. McAllister	Juvenile's call heard on follow-up visit
S	11–19 Jul 2008	Cock Robin Island	40.6320	-124.2869	S. McAllister, D. Coldren	2 adults observed on 19 Jul
S	19 Jul 2008	Cock Robin Island	40.6239	-124.2831	S. McAllister, K. Ross	2 adults plus apparent fledgling
S	12 Jul 2010	Cock Robin Island	40.6239	-124.2830	Kerry Ross	Adult seen and heard (<i>kowlp</i>); counted as one of 2 adults observed on 17 July
S	17 Jul 2010	Cock Robin Island	40.6321	-124.2903	K. Ross, G. Falxa, S. McAllister	Multiple detections, 2 adults seen and heard (<i>kowlp</i>)
I	23 Jul 2010	Singley Tract, Eel R.	40.6145	-124.2284	S. Peterson	Heard only
I	9 Jul 2012	Cock Robin Island	40.6381	-124.2836	T. Leskiw	Heard only
I	31 May 2013	Salt River, lower Eel R.	40.6199	-124.3167	S. McAllister	Heard only, 2 <i>knocker</i> calls; counted as one of 2 Salt River individuals in 2013
S	8 Jul 2013	Salt River, Lower Eel R.	40.6006	-124.3005	S. Scott, B. Lovelace	Survey detection of single bird; many subsequent incidental observations.
I	13 Jul 2013	Salt River, Lower Eel R.	40.5951	-124.2747	Many	2 individuals heard and seen. One of many Salt River observations in 2013, collectively counted as 2 individuals
I	3–4 Jun 2015	Smith River, downstream of Hwy. 101, Del Norte Co.	41.8927	-124.1536	T. Kurz, C. Ryan, et al.	Seen and heard; photos
I	27 Jul–4 Aug 2015	Arcata Marsh Project	40.8622	-124.0930	A. Lamb et al.	Seen and heard (<i>coo</i>)
I	4 Aug 2017	Cock Robin Island	40.6299	-124.2793	D. Barton	Multiple observers heard <i>kowlp</i>
I	24 Jun 2020	Klamath Glen boat ramp, Klamath River, Del Norte Co.	41.5159	-124.0004	L. Brug	Heard only; single <i>kowlp</i>
S	6 Jul 2023	Cock Robin Island	40.6307	-124.2826	G. Schmidt	Heard only (series of <i>coo</i> calls)

^aDetections are from Humboldt County and represent single birds unless otherwise noted.

^bS, detection on a survey; I, incidental detection.

^cCoordinates estimated where not provided, as was the case for most incidental detections.

^dVocalization types, where noted, are as described by Hughes (2015).

THE YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO IN NORTHWESTERN CALIFORNIA

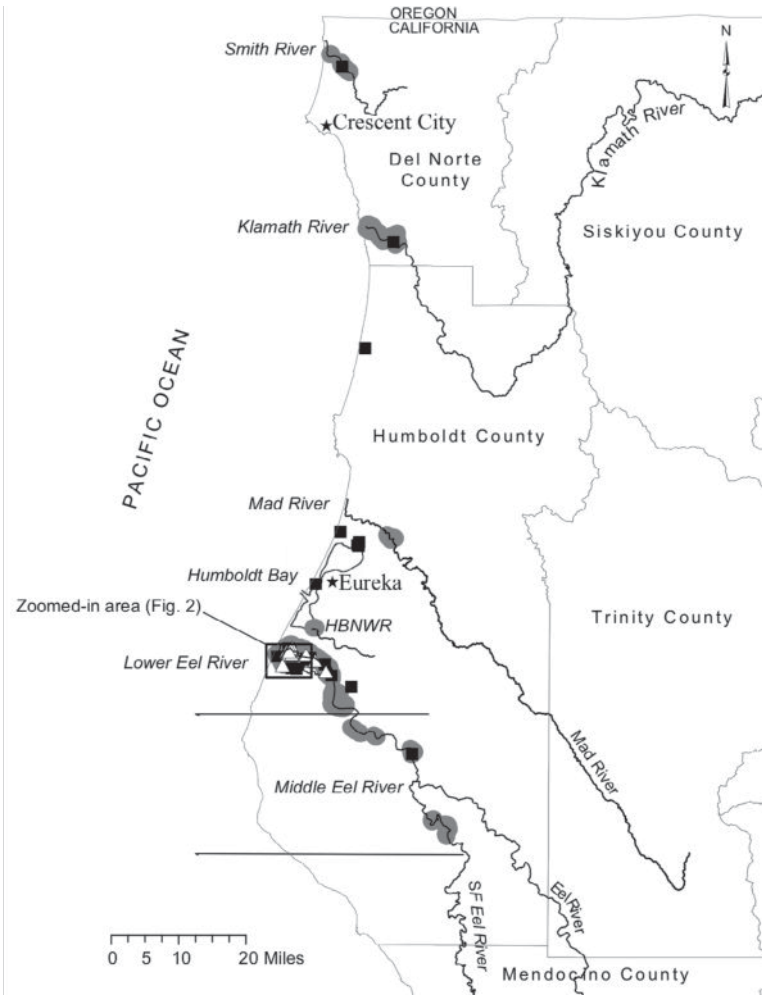


FIGURE 1. Areas surveyed (shaded gray) and records of the Yellow-billed Cuckoo northwest California, 1947–2023. (△), detections on surveys; (■), incidental observations; HBNWR, Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge.

the channel, but elsewhere, as at and near Cock Robin Island, the river remains dynamic with shifting channels and corresponding habitat diversity (Figure 2).

Focused Surveys

Surveys took place from 2000 to 2010, in 2012, 2013, 2016, and 2017, and from 2019 to 2023 (Figure 1, Table 2). They were exploratory, designed to

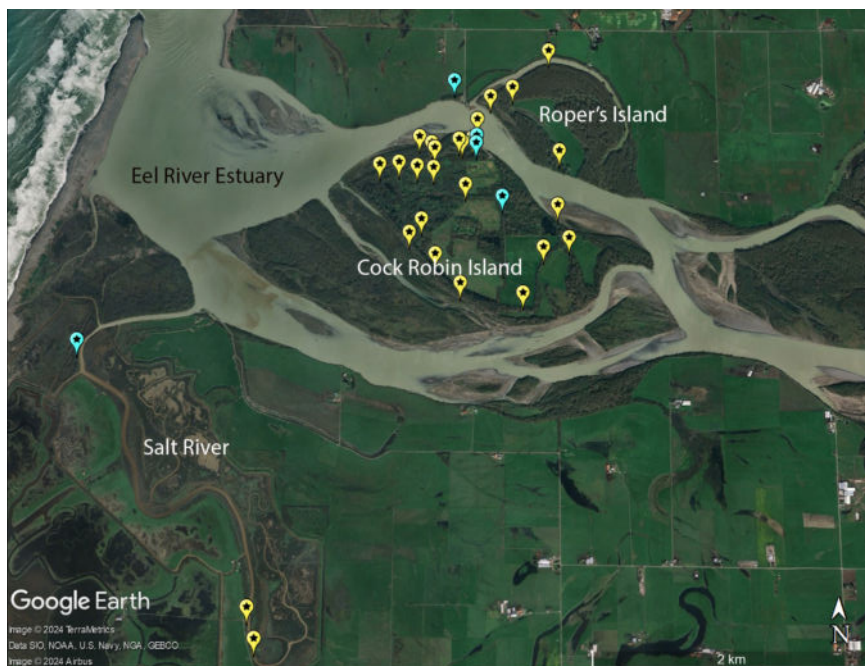


FIGURE 2. Cock Robin Island and vicinity on the lower Eel River, showing Yellow-billed Cuckoo detections from 2000 to 2023. Yellow symbols, detections on surveys; blue symbols, incidental observations.

cover more habitat with the available resources rather than to assess presence or absence rigorously, such as a regulatory agency might require before activities that could affect an endangered species—for which the protocol of Halterman et al. (2016) is designed. Nevertheless, our methods were similar to those of Halterman et al. (2016) except that the surveys involved visiting an area only once, occasionally twice, per year, in the peak breeding season, rather than the four times prescribed by Halterman et al. (2016). Exceptions are noted below.

Surveys used broadcast recordings of the “kowlp” call (Hughes 2015), following earlier protocols used in California and elsewhere in the West (Hamilton and Hamilton 1965, Gaines and Laymon 1984, Dettling et al. 2015). Broadcast points were located along edges of potential habitat, approximately 100 m apart, or occasionally within the interior of larger habitat patches where such habitat extended more than 100 m from an edge. Surveyors broadcast recorded calls five times at each point at one-minute intervals, then visually searched and listened for cuckoos before, during, and for at least one minute after the last broadcast at a point. Surveys generally took place between sunrise and noon. We refer to a single survey visit to a broadcast point as a “point survey.” Survey effort varied by location (Table 2) and year, and the number of surveyors ranged from one (2000–2002) to up to 20 in years with intensive

TABLE 2 Distribution of Survey Effort and Detections of the Yellow-billed Cuckoo in Northwestern California, 2000–2023

Area and years	No. of point surveys	No. of detections on surveys
Smith River	197	0
2012, 2016		
Klamath River	226	0
2001, 2016		
Salmon Creek	12	0
2016		
Mad River	34	0
2002, 2016		
Lower Eel River ^a		
2000–2004	251	3
2005–2010	1758	8
2013, 2016, 2017	244	1
2019–2023	1112	1
Middle Eel River		
2006, 2016, 2017	152	0

^aIncludes Salt River.

effort. Across the study, the number of points surveyed in a day ranged from 1 to 329 (median 20; mean 37.9, SD 56.1; $n = 104$). In areas surveyed multiple years, the exact locations of points varied.

Survey dates ranged from 17 May to 14 August, with effort greatest in July, considered the best time to detect cuckoos in California (Hughes 2015, Halterman et al. 2016). Of 3986 total point surveys, six were in May, 9.4% were in June, 79.2% were in July, and 11.2% were in August. Surveys prior to 2005 were done primarily by Falxa. With the exception of those along the Salt River in 2013, surveys from 2005 through 2016 were coordinated by McAllister and involved a team of individuals covering multiple areas on the same day or few consecutive days, to minimize multiple detections of an individual that might be on the move.

Surveys from 2000 to 2010 focused on the lower Eel River valley (Figures 1 and 2; Table 2). This focus was based on the valley's extensive riparian habitats and multiple detections early during this period (Table 1). The 275 point surveys from 2000 to 2004 comprised 251 along the lower Eel River, 19 on the lower Klamath River, and five on the Mad River (Table 2, Figure 2). From 2005 to 2010, our survey effort along the lower Eel River intensified (McAllister 2010), resulting in 1781 point surveys, including 1758 on the lower Eel and 23 on the middle Eel River, from Rio Dell upstream to Myers Flat.

In 2012, California Department of Transportation (CalTrans) staff covered the Smith River near the Highway 101 crossing, making 4 visits to each of 20 points. In 2013, J. B. Lovelace (pers. comm.) completed 35 point surveys along the Salt River (a tributary to the Eel River) on 8 and 9 July.

In 2016, our efforts expanded spatially so the cuckoo's distribution beyond the lower Eel River valley could be better understood (McAllister 2016). From 9 to 25 July we surveyed the lower sections of the Klamath River (207 point

surveys), Smith River (40), Mad River (29), and Salmon Creek (south end of Humboldt Bay; 12), plus the Eel River upstream of Rio Dell, near Miranda and at the mouth of Larabee Creek (73; Figure 1). The 2016 effort also included 150 point surveys along the lower Eel River (McAllister 2016).

In 2017, following the 2016 protocol (Halterman et al. 2016), McAllister completed 115 point surveys for two CalTrans bridge projects on the middle Eel River near Rio Dell and farther upstream at Myers Flat, making four visits to each site.

From 2019 to 2023, staff of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) surveyed the Cock Robin Island area of the lower Eel River. Each year, surveyors made four visits to each broadcast point, resulting in 149–187 point surveys per year (G. Schmidt pers. comm.).

Finally, from 23 June to 1 August 2022, as part of a multi-state study throughout the western United States, J. B. Lovelace (pers. comm.) completed 166 point surveys along the lower Eel River in the Salt River and Loleta Oxbow areas. This study involved three visits to each broadcast point.

Incidental Observations

We also compiled incidental records from the study area. A primary source was the records amassed by the late Stanley Harris of Humboldt State University (now Cal Poly Humboldt). Harris maintained a comprehensive database of bird observations for northwestern California from the scientific literature, museum specimens, field notebooks of bird collectors and others, and unpublished records by scientists and birdwatchers whom he judged to be reliable. While Harris (1996) had only six records of the cuckoo for northwestern California, a later edition of his book (Harris 2006) included 14 records through March 2006, all from Humboldt County. All but two records were from the May to August period, and eight were from the lower Eel River valley. While the 2006 edition did not include details for records added since the 1996 edition, we obtained details from Harris' database.

We also include incidental records from (1) eBird (<https://ebird.org/>), (2) the NWCALBIRD listserve (<https://groups.io/g/NWCALBIRD>), (3) a telephone hotline for northwestern California birds that was in operation from October 1995 through August 2019, (4) our own observations, and (5) observations provided directly to us that we judge to be reliable.

Record Evaluation

We considered both visual and auditory detections; the Yellow-billed Cuckoo has distinct vocalizations (Hughes 2015, Halterman et al. 2016) that trained observers are unlikely to confuse with other species. We accepted records Harris (1996, 2006) evaluated and included in his books and those available through eBird, whose regional reviewers assess the documentation required for observations of rare species. Other reports not supported by a photo or audio recording could be supported by multiple observers seeing or hearing a cuckoo. On multiple occasions, birders who had been alerted to the presence of a cuckoo by others made repeated incidental observations at one location over a period of days. For example, many reported a single cuckoo on Singley Bar of the lower Eel River from 1 to 6 July 2001, the first well-publicized cuckoo observation in Humboldt County.

For both incidental reports and detections during our surveys, we treated multiple observations at the same location on the same day or over a period of days as a single record of one bird, unless there was strong evidence for multiple cuckoos, such as simultaneous detections of multiple birds. We excluded a few incidental reports of an observer hearing distant calls that may have represented vocalizations of species other than the Yellow-billed Cuckoo.

We considered observations of juveniles, adults carrying prey, and/or multiple cuckoos near a single broadcast point simultaneously as representing a high likelihood of breeding.

RESULTS

Detections on Surveys

Thirty cuckoo detections were recorded during the surveys, all along the lower Eel River (Table 2, Figure 1). After adjusting for repeated detections that were close in time and space and likely represented multiple detections of the same birds, we concluded that these 30 detections represented at least 13 occurrences, including two of two cuckoos and one of two adults plus an apparent fledgling (Table 1). All but three of these detections were in a complex of dynamic river channels and adjacent riparian habitat on and near Cock Robin Island, encompassing about 400 ha located in the river's estuary, about 2 to 4 km inland from the Pacific Ocean (Figure 2).

Incidental Cuckoo Observations

After accounting for likely multiple observations of the same bird or birds, including individuals also detected during surveys, we inferred that the incidental observations represent 23 occurrences (Figure 3, Table 1). These include the six records prior to 2000 listed by Harris (1996, 2006) and 17 records since 2000. Two incidental records involved more than one bird noted simultaneously; one of these was of three birds at Cock Robin Island on 5 August 2006 (Table 1).

Taken together, the incidental observations and detections on surveys represented at least 35 individuals, if we ignore the possibility of an individual being observed in more than one year.

Temporal and Spatial Distribution of Records

Cuckoos were observed, either incidentally or during surveys, in 14 of the 24 years from 2000 to 2023, as compared to six of 53 years between 1947 and 1999 (Table 1). Detections were concentrated from 2000 to 2009, coinciding with the period of most intensive survey effort (Figure 4). There were only five detections in the 10 years from 2014 to 2023 (Table 1).

Records were concentrated in the months of June and July (Figure 4), with the earliest record on 24 May and only one after early September—of a bird found dead in Arcata on 9 November 1963 (Harris 2006; Table 1). Twenty of the 23 incidental records were concentrated from 1 July to 7 August (Table 1), which approximates the cuckoo's peak breeding period in the western United States (Hughes 2015). Outside of the Eel River valley, the only two detections during this peak period were of a "cooing" bird observed at the

THE YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO IN NORTHWESTERN CALIFORNIA

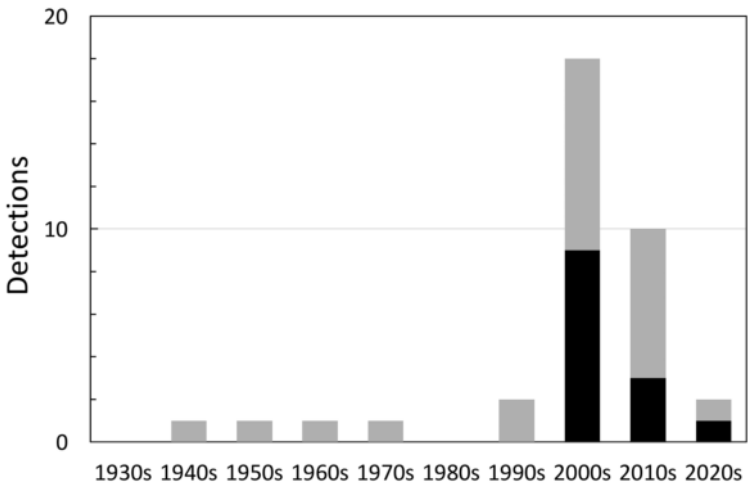


FIGURE 3. Temporal distribution of Yellow-billed Cuckoo detections in northwest California. Black bars, detections on surveys; gray bars, incidental observations. The “2020s” bar includes records through 2023.

Arcata Marsh near the north end of Humboldt Bay from 27 July to 5 August 2015 and a cuckoo “calling repeatedly” from the north spit of Humboldt Bay on 13 July 1947 (Harris 2006, Table 1).

Away from the lower Eel River, the only other geographic cluster of records

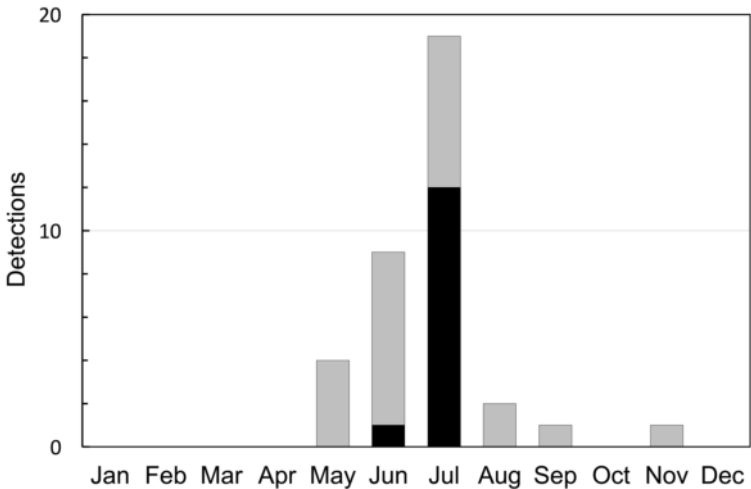


FIGURE 4. Seasonal distribution of Yellow-billed Cuckoo detections in northwest California, 1947–2023. Black bars, detections on surveys; gray bars, incidental observations.

is of six incidental observations around Humboldt Bay (Figure 1, Table 1). The three records from outside the Eel River and Humboldt Bay areas are one from Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park (Humboldt County) and two from Del Norte County (Table 1).

Breeding Status

No cuckoo nests have been found in northwest California to date, but evidence implying breeding included detections during the breeding season in nine of the survey's 20 years (Figure 5). In July of four of these years (2006, 2008, 2010, and 2013), two to three birds were detected simultaneously; three of these observations were around Cock Robin Island, and the fourth was nearby along the Salt River.

On 25 July 2007, when following up a preceding cuckoo detection, McAllister heard a soft knocking or purring sound where an adult cuckoo had been observed repeatedly disappearing in dense vegetation. He saw a raccoon departing and assumed it was likely the source of the sound but later learned that the call very much resembled that of a begging juvenile cuckoo.

On 19 July 2008, on Cock Robin Island, K. Ross (pers. comm.) observed an apparent fledgling near two adults, one of which carried prey. He described the apparent fledgling as having a tuft of downy feathers on the crown, relatively dingy plumage, and only a small amount of yellow on the lower mandible (McAllister 2008). The lower mandible of a juvenile cuckoo is mostly light gray, while that of an adult is mostly yellow with a black tip, and the juvenile plumage is "generally duller" than that of adults (Hughes 2015). Finally, C. J. Ralph mist-netted a cuckoo with a brood patch at Lanphere Dunes, north of Humboldt Bay, on 4 June 1992 (Bailey et al. 1992, Harris 1996).

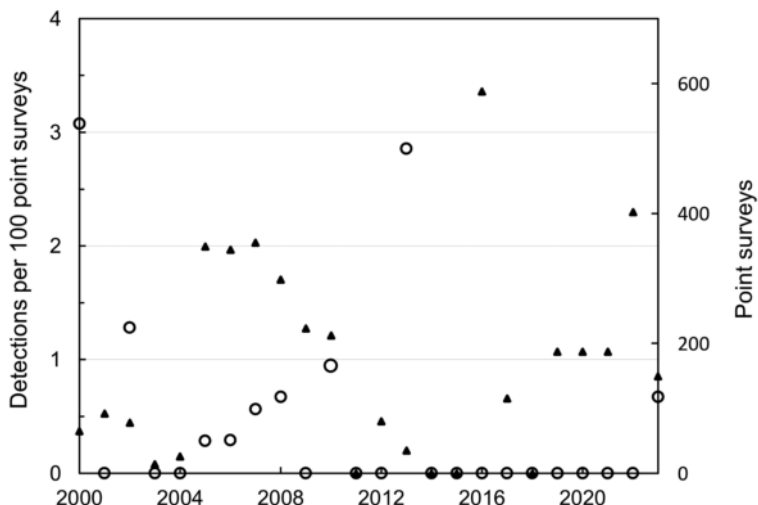


FIGURE 5. Numbers of points surveyed (triangles) and detections per 100 point surveys (circles) for the Yellow-billed Cuckoo by year, Humboldt and Del Norte counties, California, 2000–2023.

Number of Birds Represented by Detections

During surveys, two surveyors occasionally heard the same bird from different broadcast points, or a surveyor detected cuckoos from adjacent broadcast points on the same day (cuckoos sometimes follow a surveyor from one broadcast point to another). Taking into account the timing and location of the various detections and of the survey effort, we estimate that as few as one to two adults could account for all the detections in any single year, with three exceptions: (1) in 2005, three separate records of distinct individuals, including two on the lower Eel (Figure 6) and one at the Arcata Marsh; (2) in 2006 three cuckoos were observed simultaneously on Cock Robin Island; and (3) in 2008 an observation of two adults with a juvenile (Table 1). Apart from that fledgling and the begging of a suspected juvenile heard in 2007, we concluded from behavior and other observed characteristics that the other detections were likely of adult birds, even though not all birds could be definitively identified as adults. If our method of estimating cuckoo numbers errs, it is on the conservative side. Given the cuckoo's often cryptic behavior, more birds could easily have been present regionally.

Habitat

With few exceptions, cuckoos were detected in riparian habitats near major watercourses. Most were along current and former channels of the lower Eel River. The area where cuckoos were observed remains dynamic and includes portions of the Eel River estuary influenced by the tide, though the waters are sufficiently fresh to support diverse riparian forest and shrubs.



FIGURE 6. Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Eel River near Fortuna, Humboldt County, California, 6 June 2005.

Photo by Sean McAllister

While we do not have habitat information for the pre-2000 records, all post-2000 occurrences were in riparian habitats. At least some of the cuckoos recorded incidentally around Humboldt Bay were not near watercourses but were in riparian habitat such as around the ponds and wetlands of the Arcata Marsh Project and along the eastern edge of Lanphere Dunes.

While most cuckoos were detected where riparian habitat was relatively extensive, from 31 May to 18 July 2013 at least two occurred in narrow strips or “stringers” (approximately 30–90 m wide at the time of detections, as measured from aerial imagery on Google Earth Pro (<https://earth.google.com/web/>)). These were along the channel of the Salt River, a tributary in the Eel River estuary. These riparian stringers were remnants of a wider riparian forest that had been partly cleared for grazing. The initial detection, made during cuckoo surveys for a habitat-restoration project, was followed by incidental sightings by multiple observers (Table 1). The site lies about 2 to 3 km from the large patch of riparian habitat around Cock Robin Island.

DISCUSSION

Our results show that the Yellow-billed Cuckoo has occurred, at least intermittently, in low numbers in northwest California during the breeding season, with detections in nine of 20 survey years between 2000 and 2023. These include detections during seven breeding seasons around Cock Robin Island in the lower Eel River. While most of the detections and survey effort were along the lower Eel River and in Humboldt County, incidental observations at two locations in Del Norte County, including photo documentation at one location, represent that county's first known records of the cuckoo. During surveys, cuckoos were detected almost exclusively in July, likely reflecting, at least in part, the timing of survey efforts.

Incidental observations increased concurrently with initiation of focused surveys in 2000. We lack pre-2000 survey data to evaluate population trends over time, but believe that the increase in incidental observations was, at least in part, a result of the initiation of surveys and ensuing detections. These increased the local birdwatching community's awareness of the species and its habits and sparked effort to observe the species. By comparison, eBird records from nearby areas without a comparable survey do not show an increase for this period. Nearby in southwest Oregon, we know of three records between 1980 and 1993, and two records since 2000; these include four from Jackson County and one from Klamath County (<https://ebird.org/>). Similarly, we are aware of only one record (eBird) from Mendocino County, of a single bird on 5 and 6 August 1997 along the Navarro River estuary, south of our study area.

While cuckoo records from northwest California increased with the inception of our survey in 2000, both incidental and survey detections appear to have decreased after about 2015 (Figure 3). The detection rate on surveys since 2015 (0.06 per 100 point surveys) was very low compared to the rate for the 2000–2013 period (0.55; Figure 5). After 2013, only one cuckoo was detected in 1815 point surveys, of which 75 percent were along the lower Eel River.

The reasons for the more recent decline in detections are unclear, but the decline mirrors a similar decline in cuckoo detections in California's Sacramento Valley (Dettling et al. 2015). As in the Sacramento Valley (Dettling et al.

2015), the habitat in our study area does not appear to have changed markedly. One notable change since the early 2000s elsewhere within the species' range is the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program, initiated in 2005 to maintain and create wildlife habitat within the historical floodplain of the lower Colorado River for federally endangered and threatened species, including the Yellow-billed Cuckoo (U.S. Bureau of Reclamation 2004, Stanek et al. 2021, Tracy and Squibb 2022). This program has restored large areas of habitat where cuckoos have nested in increasing numbers since 2008 (Stanek et al. 2021), with 56 confirmed and 18 probable nesting territories in 2016 (Parametrix, Inc., and Southern Sierra Research Station 2016). One potential explanation for the decrease in cuckoo detections in northwest California and the Sacramento Valley could be that cuckoos are stopping to breed in the increased habitat along the lower Colorado River rather than continuing north into northern California. Such a long-distance distributional shift to newly created habitat has been observed for waterbirds in central California (Stenzel and Page 2018).

The role of fluctuations of prey populations in determining when and where cuckoos nest in California may warrant attention. Elsewhere in its range, during outbreaks of caterpillars, the cuckoo consumes them in large numbers (Hamilton and Hamilton 1965, Hughes 2015). While we did not document prey abundance, on occasion we noted large numbers of the Western Tent Caterpillar (*Malacosoma californicum*) in survey areas; others have noted the cuckoo consuming caterpillars of this genus during outbreaks (Bent 1940, Hughes 2015). Notably, during the expanded survey effort in 2016, when no cuckoos were detected despite 511 point surveys, observers were asked to note tent caterpillars; none were reported.

MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

We suggest that the cuckoo's regularity and occasional breeding along the lower Eel River warrant annual monitoring of this area, especially the riparian woodland on and near Cock Robin Island (Figure 2). This could be accomplished with the current survey protocol modified for a more rigorous statistical evaluation. The use of autonomous recording units might also be explored as a potentially cost-effective alternative.

Our findings suggest that focused surveys may be warranted in other areas with potentially suitable habitat away from known cuckoo populations. In view of the cuckoo's status under both the California and federal endangered species acts, we recommend that any proposed disruption of the cuckoo's habitat in northwest California be preceded by surveys for the species, according to the current protocol.

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from surveys conducted by CalTrans. Neil Clipperton (CDFW) provided data from the 2022 multi-state survey effort. David Imper helped untangle willow and other botanical identifications. Michael Harris provided the database of incidental cuckoo observations compiled by Stanley Harris through 2005. Finally, we are grateful to the many observers who assisted with the surveys: Bryan Acord, Dominic Bachman, Laura Bradley, Kevin Brindock, Jason Brooks, Adam Brown, Heather Brown, Melissa Bukosky, Noah Burrell, Ken Burton, Madeleine Cameron, Brent Campos, Scott Carey, Daryl Coldren, Elias Elias, Brad Elvert, Lizzie Feucht, David Fix, Rob Fowler, Jason Frederickson, Gayle Garman, Will Goldenberg, Hannah Harrell, Rob Hewitt, John Hunter, Deven Kammerichs-Berke, Tony Kurz, Dave Lancaster, Lisa LaVelle, Tom Leskiw, Gary Lester, Lauren Lester, Ron LeValley, Brett Lovelace, Larry Maurin, MJ Mazurek, Brett McAllister, Rob Meade, Mark Morrisette, Stephanie Morrisette Frederickson, Eric Nelson, Courtney Nicks, William O'Brien, Chet Ogan, Jennifer Olson, Sara Peterson, Jude Power, Krysta Rogers, Kerry Ross, Paul Roush, Casey Ryan, Greg Schmidt, Chloe Scott, Sam Scott, Rachel Smith, Jessica Stauffer, Jim Tietz, Amber Transou, Steve Tucker, Matt Wachs, Carol Wilson, Jeff Wright, and Gretchen Ziegler. This paper benefited greatly from review comments by Mark Colwell and Brett Lovelace on an early draft, and by Chris Swarth, Lynne Stenzel, John Harris, and Philip Unitt.

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THE 48TH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CALIFORNIA BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE: 2022 RECORDS

THOMAS A. BENSON, California State University San Bernardino, 5500 University Parkway, San Bernardino, California 92407; secretary@californiabirds.org

JONATHAN S. FEENSTRA, 345 E. Altadena Drive, Altadena, California 91001; feenstra@alumni.caltech.edu

DEBORAH J. HOUSE, 172 Summit Road, Bishop, California 93514; roadkill23@earthlink.net

JUSTYN T. STAHL, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1080 Gunpowder Point Drive, Chula Vista, California 91910; justyn.stahl@gmail.com

RYAN S. TERRILL, Klamath Bird Observatory, P.O. Box 758, Ashland, Oregon 97520; rst@klamathbird.org

ABSTRACT: From its last report through 2022, the California Bird Records Committee reached decisions on 161 records of 70 species, endorsing 129 records. The first accepted records for California of Ainley's Storm-Petrel (*Hydrobates cheimomnestes*), Small-billed Elaenia (*Elaenia parvirostris*), Willow Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilus*), Wood Warbler (*P. sibilatrix*), and Siberian Rubythroat (*Calliope calliope*) are outlined in this report. These additions bring California's total list of accepted bird species to 685, of which 17 represent established introductions. Other notable records in this report include California's second Gray-tailed Tattler (*Tringa brevipes*) and fourth Oriental Turtle-Dove (*Streptopelia orientalis*), Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*), and Swallow-tailed Gull (*Creagrus furcatus*).

This 48th report of the California Bird Records Committee (CBRC), a committee of Western Field Ornithologists, summarizes evaluations of 161 records involving 171 individuals of 70 species. The CBRC accepted 129 of the 161 records, involving 128 individuals of 56 species, for an acceptance rate of 80.1%. A record is considered accepted if it received no more than one "not accept" vote from the nine voting members on the grounds of questionable identification, or no more than two "not accept" votes on the grounds of questionable natural occurrence. We considered 17 records of 15 individuals to represent returning or continuing birds that were accepted previously. Twenty-nine records, involving 39 individuals of 25 species, were not accepted because of questionable identification, and three records of two species were not accepted because of questionable natural occurrence. Reports of multiple individuals together were given the same record number; we therefore report the total number of accepted individuals as well, which may be different from the number of accepted records. Most of the records in this report were of birds first documented in 2022.

At its January 2023 meeting, the CBRC removed the Slaty-backed Gull (*Larus schistisagus*) and Great Crested Flycatcher (*Myiarchus crinitus*) from the review list. At the same time, it added the Yellow Grosbeak (*Pheucticus chrysopheplus*) to the supplemental list on the basis of a record not accepted because of questionable natural occurrence at Keough Hot Springs, Inyo County, 31 Jul–2 Aug 2006 (2006-093; Singer and Terrill 2009). Since the period covered by this report, the committee has accepted the first California records of the White-tailed Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*), Blue Rock-thrush

(*Monticola solitarius*), Siberian Pipit (*Anthus japonicus*), and Slate-throated Redstart (*Myioborus miniatus*), the details of which will be published in the 50th report. These additions bring the California list to 689 species. The committee is currently evaluating a record of the Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*), representing another potential addition to the state list.

Species account headings are organized with English and scientific names first, followed in parentheses by the total number of individuals accepted for California (this report included) and the number of new individuals accepted in this report. Accounts summarize records accepted (as applicable), followed by records not accepted because the identification was not established, the date or location was uncertain, or the natural occurrence was questionable (as applicable). A double asterisk (**) following the number of accepted individuals indicates that the species has been reviewed for a restricted period, so the number of accepted individuals does not represent the total number known for the state. When the observer(s) who originally discovered the bird provided documentation, their initials are listed first in italics, followed by the initials of subsequent observers supplying documentation. A symbol following an observer's initials indicates that he or she submitted a photograph (†), sketch (\$), audio recording (§), and/or video (‡). The absence of a symbol following the observer's initials indicates the submission of written documentation only. Following the initials of the observer(s) is the identifying number assigned by the CBRC's secretary.

As of the CBRC's 43rd report (Singer et al. 2020), age terminology follows that of Humphrey and Parkes (1959) as modified by Howell et al. (2003) and Howell and Pyle (2015). Age determinations largely follow the criteria of Pyle (1997, 2008). If, in the species accounts, we do not specify a bird's age or sex, those characteristics could not be assessed from the information available. Definitions of abbreviations (including counties) and additional details regarding minutiae of formatting may be found in the CBRC's previous annual reports and in CBRC (2007), both available via the CBRC's website, www.californiabirds.org. Also available through this website are the California bird list, the review list, an online form for submitting documentation of review species, committee news, the CBRC's bylaws, and a form for querying the CBRC's database. Observers are encouraged to submit documentation for all species on the CBRC's review list to the secretary via e-mail (secretary@californiabirds.org) or the website. Documentation of all records is archived at the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology (www.wfvz.org) and is available for public review by appointment or by contacting the CBRC's secretary.

SPECIES ACCOUNTS

EMPEROR GOOSE *Anser canagicus* (104, 2). Two birds—one in definitive basic plumage and the other of unknown age but probably in formative plumage—were at the South Spit of Humboldt Bay, HUM, 19–20 Dec 1996 (GSL†, JCP; 1996-180).

GARGANEY *Anas querquedula* (30, 0). IDENTIFICATION NOT ESTABLISHED: The photos of a supposed Garganey at Virgin Creek Beach, MEN, 11 Dec 2022 (2022-119) showed a female-plumaged Green-winged Teal (*A. crecca*).

MEXICAN DUCK *Anas diazi* (17, 8). The CBRC recently reviewed 13 records of 10 individual Mexican Ducks (including two returning in subsequent years) and

endorsed 11 records of eight individuals, all males. The three older records were of one apparently in definitive basic plumage at the San Gabriel Coastal Basin Spreading Grounds in Pico Rivera, LA, 23–26 Dec 2014 (JFG†, MP†; 2014-189); one in formative plumage at Santa Fe Dam Recreation Area, LA, 1 May 2016 (CS†; 2016-152); and one at Lindo Lake, Lakeside, SD, 2 Dec 2019 (AN†; 2019-215). One shot at the Santura Duck Club near Wasco, KER, 8 Jan 2021 (KN†; 2021-092) made the 5 March edition of the *Bakersfield Californian*—yet we do not know if the specimen was preserved. One at Carr Park, ORA, 25 Jan–8 Mar 2021 (TABe†, CC†, CJ†, JJ†, JL†, GMcC, NJO†, NSalt, ES†, RSc†, MASi†; 2021-012) was in formative plumage when found, then returned the two following winters, 19 Nov 2021–20 Feb 2022 (DH†, CC†, PEL†; 2021-144) and 19 Oct 2022–20 Feb 2023 (AMR†; 2022-082). One in definitive alternate plumage at Lower Otay Reservoir, SD, 15 Aug 2021 (JPa†; 2021-170) presumably returned 29 Jul–23 Sep 2022 (JPa, MSa†, RF†, GMcC; 2022-038); another was at the Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), IMP, 10 Aug 2022 (GMcC; 2022-043); and one in formative plumage was at Bishop City Park, INY, 2 Nov 2022 (CBH†, RH†, JLD†; 2022-095). Of the 17 Mexican Ducks accepted for California, all have come from southern California and 12 have occurred in fall or winter (late July to early March). IDENTIFICATION NOT ESTABLISHED: One along San Luis Obispo Creek, SLO, 15 Dec 2018 (2018-258) and another at Lower Otay Lake, SD, 29 Dec 2018–11 Feb 2019 (2018-259) showed multiple characters suggesting hybridization with the Mallard (*A. platyrhynchos*).

COMMON POCHARD *Aythya ferina* (5, 0). IDENTIFICATION NOT ESTABLISHED: The brief written descriptions of two males seen on the Mattole River near Whitethorn, HUM, 15 Nov 2021 (2021-178) and 13 Feb 2022 (2022-012), did not eliminate the Redhead (*A. americana*) or Canvasback (*A. valisineria*).

KING EIDER *Somateria spectabilis* (49, 2). Two females—one in definitive basic and the other in formative plumage—first seen at Rincon Island, VEN, 17–20 Dec 2022 spent the remainder of their stay to 5 Feb 2023 at the Ventura pier, VEN (HPR†, TABe†, AlH†, CBH†, RH†, DVP†; 2022-124). These same individuals were later discovered at Crissy Field, SF, 10 Feb 2023 (DA†; 2023-005) and Asilomar State Beach, MTY, 16 Feb–13 Apr 2023 (DR†, MAC†; 2023-008). Interestingly, two female-plumaged King Eiders, one in definitive basic and the other in formative plumage, were at Lake Hattie Reservoir, Albany County, Wyoming, 12–18 Nov 2022 (Rudd 2023); photos of these birds were of a resolution insufficient to determine if they were the same individuals that reached California, but it seems possible.

ORIENTAL TURTLE-DOVE *Streptopelia orientalis* (3, 1). An adult wintered in Palo Alto, SCL, 2 Feb–16 Mar 2022 (AnB†, MFr†, LK†, KCK†, GMcC, EGM, JM†, MJR†, SCR, SBT†, ANW†; 2022-007; Figure 1). It had gray rather than white tips to the rectrices, a characteristic of the *orientalis* subspecies group, and was likely of the northeasternmost subspecies, *S. o. orientalis*, which is partly migratory and breeds from central Siberia east to Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands (Baptista et al. 2020). Records of the Oriental Turtle-Dove from Alaska have also been tentatively assigned to this subspecies (Gibson and Withrow 2015).

GROOVE-BILLED ANI *Crotophaga sulcirostris* (14, 1). One in formative plumage, following an incomplete preformative molt, was at the Palo Verde Ecological Reserve, RIV, 11–13 Nov 2022 (TABe†§; 2022-103).

CHUCK-WILL'S-WIDOW *Antrostomus carolinensis* (4, 0). IDENTIFICATION NOT ESTABLISHED: The written description of an unseen bird singing at Lava Beds National Monument, SIS, 26–27 Oct 2022 (2022-098) failed to garner support from the committee. This species is not known to sing during fall migration (Straight and Cooper 2020), and at least one committee member thought the description of the song matched the Common Poorwill (*Phalaenoptilus nuttallii*). It is worth



FIGURE 1. This adult Oriental Turtle-Dove wintered in Palo Alto, Santa Clara County, 2 February–16 March 2022 (photographed here 4 February; 2022-007), furnishing the third record for California. The gray tips to the rectrices visible in this photo indicate this bird is of the *orientalis* subspecies group.

Photo by Joseph Morlan

noting, however, that California's four accepted Chuck-will's-widows occurred 16 October–4 January.

RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD *Archilochus colubris* (27, 4). A female in definitive basic plumage captured and measured at the Palomarin Field Station in Bolinas, MRN, 29 Jul 2022 (*MDet*†; 2022-041) establishes the earliest record of a fall migrant Ruby-throated Hummingbird in California. Three additional records fit a more typical pattern of early September occurrence: juvenile males that may have begun preformative molt were at Goleta, SBA, 8–11 Sep 2022 (*BH*†, *NL*; 2022-061) and Bernal Hill, SF, 8–9 Sep 2022 (*RR*†§; 2022-053), and a juvenile female undergoing preformative molt was at the DeAnza Mobile Home Park, Santa Cruz, SCZ, 7–11 Sep 2022 (*PH*†, *GMA*†, *ST*, *NU*†; 2022-052).

XANTUS'S HUMMINGBIRD *Basilinna xantusii* (1, 0). **IDENTIFICATION NOT ESTABLISHED:** The committee voted to re-evaluate this record of a male reported at Yaqui Well, SD, 27 Dec 1986 (1987-174B). The record was initially accepted (1987-174; Pyle and McCaskie 1992), and upon re-evaluation in 2000 a majority of the CBRC voted not to reverse this decision (1987-174A; McKee and Erickson 2002). During the most recent re-evaluation, eight members ultimately voted against acceptance. The single-observer sight record, of what would constitute the first record of a Xantus's Hummingbird in North America away from the Baja California peninsula, contained no first-hand written documentation from the day of the encounter, and there were numerous inconsistencies between the second-hand account submitted in 1987 and the six-page manuscript the observer provided over two years later.

SIBERIAN SAND-PLOVER *Anarhynchus mongolus* (17, 1). An adult male in alternate plumage was at San Pablo Bay NWR, SOL, 28 Jun 2022 (*EGM*; 2022-031). This species was recently split from the Tibetan Sand-Plover (*A. atrifrons*; Chesser et al. 2024). All California (and North American) records pertain to *A. mongolus*.

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CURLEW SANDPIPER *Calidris ferruginea* (58, 1). An adult in definitive basic plumage wintered at the Palo Alto Baylands, SCL, 4 Dec 2022–18 Feb 2023 (MMR†; 2022-114), where presumably the same bird had spent the previous winter (2021-165; Terrill et al. 2024). A juvenile was at Bodega Bay, SON, 27 Aug 2022 (LS†, MSt†; 2022-049). IDENTIFICATION NOT ESTABLISHED: The descriptions of a supposed Curlew Sandpiper seen at the Elsie Roemer Bird Sanctuary, ALA, and Alameda Reserve, SF, 11–13 Oct 2022 (2022-074), were inadequate.

RED-NECKED STINT *Calidris ruficollis* (28, 0). IDENTIFICATION NOT ESTABLISHED: A written description of an adult at the Elsie Roemer Bird Sanctuary, ALA, 28 Jul 2022 (2022-039) was not endorsed by the majority of the committee.

LITTLE STINT *Calidris minuta* (38, 2). An adult, presumably back for its fifth winter (2018-219 et seq.; Benson et al. 2020), was at the salt works within the San Diego Bay NWR, San Diego Bay, SD, 18 Jul 2022–19 Apr 2023 (RTP†, AN†; 2022-036). Additional adults in alternate plumage were at Alexandre Dairy, 4 km northwest of Fort Dick, DN, 8 Aug 2022 (LB†; 2022-042) and the Tulare Lake Drainage District's Hacienda Basin, 28 km south-southwest of Corcoran, KIN, 31 Jul 2022 (MES†; 2022-045). IDENTIFICATION NOT ESTABLISHED: Nearly the entire committee thought that the photos of a bird at the Arcata Bottoms, HUM, 17 Apr 2002 (2022-017), showed a bright Least Sandpiper (*C. minutilla*).

WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPER *Calidris fuscicollis* (37, 2). An adult, well-studied in flight after a brief encounter on the ground, was at Lake Tolowa, DN, 19 Aug 2022 (LB; 2022-047). Another adult, well-studied on the ground at Bolinas Lagoon, MRN, 2 Oct 2022 (MDet; 2022-064), showed the characteristic white rump in flight.

GRAY-TAILED TATTLER *Tringa brevipes* (2, 1). One in definitive alternate plumage was at the Chula Vista Wildlife Reserve, San Diego Bay, SD, 12–16 Jul 2022 (MSa†S, GMcC, EGM, KR†; 2022-034; Figure 2). California's only previously accepted Gray-tailed Tattler was an adult in alternate plumage at the Lancaster sewage ponds, LA, 23 Jul 1981 (1981-043; Binford 1983).

WOOD SANDPIPER *Tringa glareola* (4, 1). Found on the San Jacinto Lake Christmas Bird Count, an adult was at the San Jacinto Wildlife Area, RIV, 20 Dec 2022–13 Apr 2023, during which time it underwent its definitive prealternate molt (TABe†, TABl†, CC†, MAG†, AIH†, GMcC; 2022-126; Figure 3). This is the first winter record of the Wood Sandpiper for California (and the United States); California's previous records were two in fall and one in spring. Thus the four records show neither a clear seasonal pattern nor a strong geographic pattern, as there are two each from coastal and inland sites and three from southern California and one from northern California.

THICK-BILLED MURRE *Uria lomvia* (51, 0). IDENTIFICATION NOT ESTABLISHED: Photos of a murre flock taken at MacKerricher State Park, MEN, 20 Jan 2022 (2022-004) purporting to show four Thick-billed Murres were, in the majority opinion, overexposed images of alternate-plumaged Common Murres (*U. aalge*). The CBRC has accepted only three records of the Thick-billed Murre involving more than one bird, none since 2002.

SWALLOW-TAILED GULL *Creagrus furcatus* (4, 1). An adult was photographed at Saint Malo Beach at the mouth of Buena Vista Lagoon, SD, 25 Oct 2022 (JCav†; 2022-089). It represents the southernmost record for California and the first for San Diego County; the three previous California records extend from Monterey County north to Sonoma County. This species breeds almost exclusively on the Galapagos Islands.

BLACK-HEADED GULL *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* (35, 1). The committee treated an adult in definitive basic plumage at the Modesto wastewater-treatment



FIGURE 2. This adult Gray-tailed Tattler in definitive alternate plumage, 12 July 2022, at the Chula Vista Wildlife Reserve, San Diego County (2022-034), shows the finer barring, white vent and underparts, and supercilium extending behind the eye distinguishing it from an alternate-plumaged Wandering Tattler (*Tringa incana*).

Photo by Matt Sadowski

plant, STA, 18 Dec 2022 (HMR†; 2022-125) as the same bird seen at this location 21 Nov–11 Dec 2021 (2021-145; Terrill et al. 2024). Most of California's Black-headed Gulls have been along the coast, associating with Bonaparte's Gulls (*C. philadelphia*), but an adult in definitive basic plumage was found inland among a large flock of Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*) at San Jacinto, RIV, 20–22 Dec 2022 (LW†;

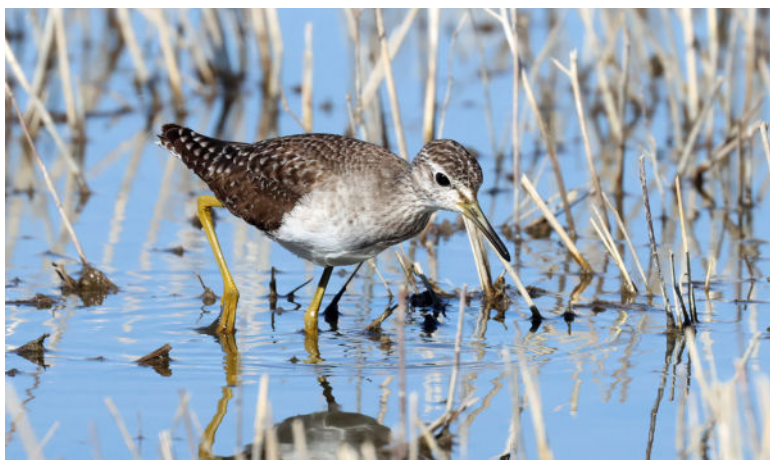


FIGURE 3. This cooperative adult Wood Sandpiper, photographed here on 20 December 2022 at the San Jacinto Wildlife Area, Riverside County (2022-126), might recall a smaller, browner Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*) with a more distinct supercilium.

Photo by Matthew A. Grube

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2022-127). IDENTIFICATION NOT ESTABLISHED: A report from Hayward Regional Shoreline, ALA, 21 Aug 2022 (2022-048) lacked sufficient documentation.

ROSS'S GULL *Rhodostethia rosea* (3, 0). IDENTIFICATION NOT ESTABLISHED: An adult reported from the Klamath River mouth, DN, 20 May 2022 (2022-023) was seen under difficult viewing conditions, and the documentation provided was inconclusive.

SLATY-BACKED GULL *Larus schistisagus* (89, 5). Adults in definitive basic plumage were at Half Moon Bay State Beach, SM, 31 Jan 2022 (AJ†; 2022-006) and along both the San Gabriel River in Pico Rivera and the Los Angeles River in Vernon, LA, 5–11 Feb 2022 (SK†; 2022-009). Two birds seen at the Landfill Loop East Bay Regional Park, CC, included one in its second cycle, 15–16 Mar 2022 (EGM†; 2022-013), and an adult in definitive basic plumage, 16–24 Dec 2022 (EGM†; 2022-123). From similarities of markings on the rectrices, the committee considers a second-cycle Slaty-backed Gull at Moss Landing, MTY, 24 Apr 2022 (ST†; 2022-018) to be the same individual seen almost a month later at MacArthur Park, LA, 19–21 May 2022 (ARB†; 2022-022; Figure 4), by which time it had begun its third prebasic molt. IDENTIFICATION NOT ESTABLISHED: The report of an adult photographed at Half Moon Bay State Beach, SM, 23 Dec 2021 (2021-166) failed to receive sufficient support from the committee because of concerns about hybridization with the Glaucous-winged Gull (*L. glaucescens*). The committee discontinued review of records of the Slaty-backed Gull after 2022.

SANDWICH TERN *Thalasseus sandvicensis* (3, 0). IDENTIFICATION NOT ESTABLISHED: Written descriptions and poor photos of a tern at the Limantour Estuary, MRN, 5 Aug 2021 (2021-070) were suggestive of the Sandwich Tern, but the committee ultimately concluded that the East Asian subspecies of the Common



FIGURE 4. This worn, second-cycle Slaty-backed Gull was at MacArthur Park, Los Angeles County, on the unexpectedly late dates of 19 (when this photo was taken) to 21 May 2022 (2022-022). With 89 accepted records for California through 2022, the committee removed the Slaty-backed Gull from its review list in January 2023.

Photo by Andrew R. Birch



FIGURE 5. This adult Arctic Loon in definitive alternate plumage on 12 May 2022 (2022-028) off San Mateo County shows the white on the flanks extending upward along the sides and thick white lines along the throat distinguishing it from the Pacific Loon (*Gavia pacifica*).

Photo by Alvaro Jaramillo

Tern (*Sterna hirundo longipennis*) could not be eliminated given the bird's having a full black cap in August. California's only three accepted records of the Sandwich Tern have come from Los Angeles County south.

ARCTIC LOON *Gavia arctica* (18, 2). An adult in definitive alternate plumage was beautifully photographed 5 km offshore from Miramontes, SM, 12 May 2022 (AJ†; 2022-028; Figure 5). An individual in worn formative plumage was at the Huntington Beach pier, ORA, 18 Jun 2022 (RSc†; 2022-030). IDENTIFICATION NOT ESTABLISHED: Photographs of a loon near Cavern Point, Santa Cruz Island, SBA, 13 Jan 2022 (2022-003) did not provide detail sufficient to eliminate the Pacific Loon (*G. pacifica*).

SHORT-TAILED ALBATROSS *Phoebastria albatrus* (51, 6). A juvenile photographed at the Nine Mile Bank, SD, 1 Jan 2022 (SGB†, CKS; 2022-002) was the first Short-tailed Albatross documented in San Diego County since 1896 (Unitt 2004). A juvenile observed four times at Monterey Bay, MTY, 18 Jan–11 Jun 2022 (CT†; 2022-005) was found dead on the beach 30 Jun 2022 (specimen not collected, *vide* D. Roberson); the CBRC considered it the same as the Short-tailed Albatross in Monterey Bay 8 Nov–3 Dec 2021 (2021-157; Terrill et al. 2024). A banded Short-tailed Albatross in its third prebasic molt was observed on Monterey Bay, MTY/SCZ, on 30 Mar and 9 Jul 2022 (DL†, CO†; 2022-033). Because of its age, wing injury, and band, the committee considered it the same individual initially seen in southern California 5–7 Jun 2021, then sporadically on Monterey Bay from July 2021 onward (2021-046 et seq.; Terrill et al. 2024). Two additional Short-tailed Albatrosses (for a total of four) in Monterey County in 2022 included one in worn second basic plumage on Monterey Bay 17 Apr 2022 (FH†; 2022-021), and a juvenile 93 km west-southwest of Cypress Point 24 Apr 2022 (MFO†; 2022-040). A bird in worn, second basic plumage was 42.5 km east-southeast of Mussel Point, SON, 7 Nov 2022 (MR†; 2022-099).

AINLEY'S STORM-PETREL *Hydrobates cheimomnestes* (1, 1). California's first accepted record of this cryptic species, of one 73.2 km south of San Nicolas Island, VEN, 11 Dec 2021 (FM; 2021-179), was based not on a visual encounter but from an individual fitted with a GPS logger on its breeding grounds on Isote Negro off Guadalupe Island between December 2021 and February 2022, then recovered on the islet later that same breeding season. The Ainley's Storm-Petrel breeds on the islets off Guadalupe Island, Mexico, from October through April,



FIGURE 6. This Stejneger's Petrel at the San Diego Zoo's Safari Park, San Diego County, 10 June 2022 (2022-135), was identified by the small bill, broad white forehead, lack of a white supercilium, upward extension of white behind the dark patch around the eye, and partial gray breast band (A), plus the dark nape contrasting with the paler back and strong "M" pattern on the upper surface of the wings (B). Both Cook's Petrel and the Masatierra Petrel have larger or longer bills, an obvious white supercilium, and a more evenly colored upper wing.

Photos by Kris McMillan

but its nonbreeding distribution is poorly understood (Ainley 1980, Medrano et al. 2023). Ainley's and Townsend's (*H. socorroensis*) Storm-Petrels were split from the Leach's Storm-Petrel (*H. leucorhous sensu lato*) in 2016 (Ainley 1980, Howell et al. 2010, Chesser et al. 2016). On the basis of current knowledge Ainley's and Leach's cannot be distinguished from one another at sea, although differences in stage of molt and feather wear may prove useful for identifying some individuals in the field (Sieburth et al. 2023).

The committee received documentation only for one individual at one specific location; up to ten additional individuals were tracked into California waters (Medrano et al. 2022), and we may receive additional details. This is the CBRC's first acceptance of any species based solely on remote-tracking technology.

WEDGE-RUMPED STORM-PETREL *Hydrobates tethys* (15, 1). One seen 250 km west-southwest of San Miguel Island, SBA, 31 July 2021 (CW†; 2021-067) differed from the similar Townsend's Storm-Petrel in having a shorter and thicker bill and a more extensive white rump patch covering more than half of the tail.

STEJNEGER'S PETREL *Pterodroma longirostris* (11, 1). California's first inland Stejneger's Petrel was a first-year bird photographed 28 km from the coast at the San Diego Zoo's Safari Park, San Pasqual, SD, 10 Jun 2022 (KM†, GWV†; 2022-135; Figure 6). This highly pelagic species breeds in the Juan Fernández Islands off Chile and spends its nonbreeding season in subtropical waters of the northwest Pacific Ocean (Carboneras et al. 2020). This unprecedented inland occurrence was not associated with any unusual weather in California.

This bird was originally assumed to be a Cook's Petrel (*P. cookii*) before Oscar Thomas, a birder from New Zealand, identified it as a Stejneger's Petrel. With additional expert analysis, the committee unanimously endorsed the identification



FIGURE 7. The Wedge-tailed Shearwater is polymorphic with light-morph individuals, such as this adult photographed 11 September 2022 near Point Loma, San Diego County (2022-054), predominating in the North Pacific part of its range.

Photo by Victor Stoll

as Stejneger's. See Figure 6 for field marks distinguishing this bird from the similar Cook's Petrel and Masatierra Petrel (*P. defilippiana*).

STREAKED SHEARWATER *Calonectris leucomelas* (20, 1). One completing definitive prebasic molt was near Santa Rosa Island, SBA, 1 Oct 2022 (SBT†; 2022-065). The first and only other Streaked Shearwater known from southern California was also around the Channel Islands, near Santa Cruz Island, SBA, 7 Sep 2002 (2002-156; Cole and McCaskie 2004).

WEDGE-TAILED SHEARWATER *Ardenna pacifica* (12, 1). A light-morph adult, 34.6 km west of Point Loma, SD, 11 Sep 2022 (GN†, DM†, TM†, AN†, VSt†; 2022-054; Figure 7), was the third Wedge-tailed Shearwater recorded for San Diego County.

MASKED BOOBY *Sula dactylatra* (53, 1). One in its second prebasic molt photographed 18.2 km west of Point Loma, SD, 3 Oct 2021 (TABl†; 2021-108) required four rounds of review before being accepted. With the species now reaching California annually, the committee discontinued review of records of the Masked Booby after 2021.

WOOD STORK *Mycteria americana* (1**, 0). The adult observed at the San Diego Zoo's Safari Park, San Pasqual, SD, 27 Mar 2022 (EL; 2022-014) and at the Prado Basin, RIV, 29 Mar–20 Oct 2022 (JEP†; 2022-015) is considered the same individual returning to these locations since May 2020 (2020-043 et seq.; Benson et al. 2022). It has demonstrated a seasonal pattern of movement that has included visits to the Safari Park in spring and fall, and various locations in Riverside County, including Perris, Lake Elsinore, Mystic Lake and the Prado Basin, in summer. The Safari Park, with its collection of captive water birds, has long proven a magnet for wild water birds.

GLOSSY IBIS *Plegadis falcinellus* (48, 2). Adults in alternate plumage were at Durham, BUT, 26 May 2022 (LH†; 2022-025) and Olivehurst, YUB, 3 June 2022 (APe†; 2022-026). IDENTIFICATION NOT ESTABLISHED: The written documentation and low-resolution photos of a purported Glossy Ibis at the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area, YOL, 12 June 2022 (2022-113) did not eliminate a hybrid with a White-faced

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Ibis (*P. chihii*), and a written description of six at Susanville, LAS, 16–20 Aug 1993 (1993-214) almost certainly pertained to juveniles of the White-faced Ibis. High-quality photos are needed for assessment of facial skin pattern and color, and eye, bill, and leg color, the features distinguishing these species.

ROSEATE SPOONBILL *Platalea ajaja* (154, 2). Two juveniles were at the south end of the Salton Sea, IMP, 20 Aug–14 Sep 2022 (GMcC, NKot; 2022-046).

BLACK VULTURE *Coragyps atratus* (13, 0). The committee treats an adult in Inverness, MRN, 21 May 2022 (AM; 2022-024) as the same individual that has frequented the general area since March 2014 (2014-027 et seq.; Singer et al. 2016).

MISSISSIPPI KITE *Ictinia mississippiensis* (63, 4). Three early-summer reports from coastal locations were of one-year-old birds in formative plumage at Kit Carson Park, Escondido, SD, 26 Jun 2022 (ID†; 2022-029); Cornucopia Community Garden in Ventura, VEN, 16 Jul 2022 (FD†; 2022-035); and La Mesa, SD, 26 Jul 2022 (PEL; 2022-037). A fall migrant in juvenile plumage was in Bolinas, MRN, 6 Oct 2022 (MDett; 2022-068).

COMMON BLACK HAWK *Buteogallus anthracinus* (15, 1). The committee considers an adult at the Palo Verde Ecological Reserve, RIV, 13 Apr 2022 (BoW†; 2022-011) and 17 Jun–10 Aug 2022 (LW†, CAD†; 2022-027) to be the same individual, having gone undetected for the two intervening months. IDENTIFICATION NOT ESTABLISHED: A brief written description of a supposed Common Black Hawk from Modjeska Canyon, ORA, 15 Apr 2022 (2022-016) did not provide detail sufficient to establish the identification or eliminate the Zone-tailed Hawk (*Buteo albonotatus*).

SNOWY OWL *Bubo scandiacus* (62, 0). NATURAL OCCURRENCE QUESTIONABLE: From similarities of plumage and molt stage, the committee treats a female in formative plumage in San Pedro, LA, 12 Nov 2022 (PC†, THi†, KK, JSu†; 2022-107) as the same bird as in Cypress, ORA, 5 Dec 2022–16 Jan 2023 (unknown†, JLD, HH†, CBH†, RH†, NKa†, BAL†, GMcC, TGM†; 2022-131; Figure 8). Members who questioned the owl's natural occurrence pointed to its proximity to the port of Los Angeles, increasing the likelihood of ship assistance, its presence in a highly urbanized area, and its occurrence in a year with no irruption of this irruptive species. Committee members' opinions on whether ship-assisted birds should be considered naturally occurring vagrants differed, but in this case a majority of members took a conservative approach, especially given that acceptance would have established the southernmost record in California. The CBRC has accepted only four records of the Snowy Owl, all from northern California, since 1978. DATE AND/OR LOCATION UNCERTAIN: The committee reviewed a record of a Snowy Owl from Big Horn Mine (2100 m elevation) in the San Gabriel Mountains, May 1913 (1913-101), based on a privately held mounted specimen (Bond 1945, including photo). The specimen was not appropriately labeled, and the reported provenance of the specimen was based on collector William G. Ritter's recollection of events 32 years prior. Lacking more definitive documentation, the committee did not accept this record because it would have been the first for southern California, the latest in spring, and the highest in elevation. Most accepted California records of the Snowy Owl are from open coastal locations in northern California, and all fall between 1 November and 1 April.

SMALL-BILLED ELAENIA *Elaenia parvirostris* (1, 1). One in formative plumage on Southeast Farallon Island, SF, 4 Sep 2022 (NC†, JRT†; 2022-051; Clements and Tietz 2023, which see for photo) furnished the first record for California of this austral migrant flycatcher that breeds in southeastern South America and winters in northwestern Amazonia. The Small-billed and the austral migratory Chilean



FIGURE 8. This female Snowy Owl in formative plumage, photographed 27 Dec 2022, was seen by hundreds, if not thousands, as it roosted on rooftops in Cypress, Orange County, during its stay from 5 December 2022 to 16 January 2023 (2022-131). While its identification is not in question, the committee did not accept this record because of questionable natural occurrence.

Photo by Braxton A. Landsman

population of the White-crested Elaenia (*E. albiceps*) have both been recorded as vagrants in North America, and discrimination of these two species is notoriously difficult (Gorleri and Areta 2022). This bird's presence in California in fall likely represents inverse migration with the bird traveling northwest instead of southeast to its intended summering grounds (D. DeSante pers. comm.). This is the fourth record of the Small-billed Elaenia north of Mexico and the first for the western United States (Clements and Tietz 2023).

GREAT CRESTED FLYCATCHER *Myiarchus crinitus* (79, 7). First-fall individuals, most undergoing preformative molt, were in Atascadero, SLO, 26 Sep 2022 (DB†; 2022-059); Del Rey Park, Del Rey Oaks, MTY, 1 Oct 2022 (MK, MFr†, DR†, CR†; 2022-062); Golden Gate Park, SF, 1 Oct 2022 (SB†, 2022-063); Booker T. Anderson Jr. Park, Richmond, CC, 10–11 Oct 2022 (BF†‡, EGM†; 2022-072); Bodega Bay, SON, 17 Oct 2022 (PBC†; 2022-083); and Los Osos, SLO, 20–24 Oct 2022 (JSR, TME†; 2022-084). An adult in definitive prebasic molt was at Point Loma, SD, 26 Oct 2022 (KR†; 2022-087). These records fit the species' typical pattern of occurrence in California, where 75 of the 79 accepted records are from September or October and 70 are from coastal counties. The committee discontinued review of records of the Great Crested Flycatcher after 2022.

THICK-BILLED KINGBIRD *Tyrannus crassirostris* (34, 5). An adult at Big Morongo Canyon Preserve, SBE, 29 Apr 2022 (AEM†; 2022-019) and one at Mayflower County Park, RIV, 1 May 2022 (KH; 2022-020) represent the first spring migrant Thick-billed Kingbirds recorded in California; the former was the first recorded for San Bernardino County. More typical for this species in California were a wintering adult at Bellevue Memorial Park in Ontario, SBE, 11 Nov 2022–4 Apr 2023 (TABe†\$, JLD†, DJH†\$; 2022-102) and one in formative plumage at Griffith Park, LA, 31 Oct 2022–1 Apr 2023 (CAM†; 2022-129). The first California record of two Thick-billed

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Kingbirds together came from the Tijuana River valley, SD, 7–13 November 2022 (PEL†, BaW†; 2022-100), with one in formative plumage continuing through the winter at nearby Nestor Park, SD, 7 Jan 18–Mar 2023 (MCl†; 2023-003).

GREATER PEWEE *Contopus pertinax* (47, 0). An adult in Pacific Palisades, LA, 1–2 Jan 2022 (NSat\$, MASc†\$; 2022-001) was returning for its fifth winter at this location. Similarly, an adult in Balboa Park, SD, 18 Oct 2022–13 Mar 2023 (CBH†, RH†; 2022-081) had returned for at least its fifth winter. Most Greater Pewees recorded in California are known to have wintered for at least a month, and of those, ten have returned for multiple winters.

EASTERN WOOD-PEWEE *Contopus virens* (18, 0). IDENTIFICATION NOT ESTABLISHED: Photographs of a suspected Eastern Wood-Pewee reported from California City Central Park, KER, 2 Jun 2022 (2022-032) did not eliminate the Western Wood-Pewee (*C. sordidulus*). The call was heard only twice and believed to be from an Eastern Wood-Pewee, but observers' accounts were inconsistent, and it was unclear if the pewee seen was indeed the calling bird. Though the date of occurrence would be consistent with the majority of state records, which are mostly of calling or singing birds, the committee decided that the documentation was insufficient to endorse this record.

YELLOW-BELLIED FLYCATCHER *Empidonax flaviventris* (36, 6). One at Smith River National Recreation Area, DN, 11 Jun 2012 (LB\$; 2012-257) was reviewed from a recently submitted description and recording of the song. Accepted, this represents California's first spring record and Del Norte County's first record of the Yellow-bellied Flycatcher. Other individuals were at Scorpion Ranch on Santa Cruz Island, SBA, 14 Sep 2022 (HPR†; 2022-056); Pine Lake Park, SF, 16 Sep 2022 (LK\$, HCS, EGM†; 2022-057); Southeast Farallon Island, SF, 20–21 Sep 2022 (JMB†, JRT, NC†; 2022-058); and Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery, Point Loma, SD, 6–7 Oct 2022 (GBN†, KR†; 2022-067). One at Avalon on Santa Catalina Island, LA, 16–17 Oct 2022 (AdH†, CH†, MBa\$; 2022-078) was the first recorded for Los Angeles County. Except for the one in June, these birds fit the species' pattern of reaching California in juvenile plumage in September or October. IDENTIFICATION NOT ESTABLISHED: A supposed Yellow-bellied Flycatcher photographed along the Smith River near Fort Dick, DN, 26 Jul 2018 (2018-260) was well outside of the species' typical period of occurrence in California. The photographs showed characters inconsistent with the Yellow-bellied Flycatcher and most committee members thought the bird was a Western Flycatcher (*E. difficilis*).

ALDER FLYCATCHER *Empidonax alnorum* (12, 1). One in juvenile plumage was seen, then netted and banded on Southeast Farallon Island, SF, 9 Oct 2022 (JMB†; 2022-070; Figure 9). It was silent but the overall appearance and wing and tail measurements confirmed its identity. It was the latest Alder Flycatcher recorded in California by nine days (2018-165; Benson et al. 2020) and the fourth recorded in fall on Southeast Farallon Island.

WILLOW WARBLER *Phylloscopus trochilus* (1, 1). One in formative plumage at Rodeo Lagoon, MRN, 18–23 Oct 2022 (WL†, TABe†, JLD†, MFr†, GMcC, MJR†, ANW†; 2022-080; Figure 10) was the first recorded not only in California but on the North American mainland, as previous Alaska records are from islands in the Bering Sea. The plain wings without wingbars, overall gray-brown color with a yellowish wash to the upperparts and off-white underparts, long primary extension, grayish cheeks, and pale legs distinguished this bird from other similar *Phylloscopus* warblers. Its vocalizations, a two-syllable call, were also consistent with a Willow Warbler.

The Willow Warbler breeds across northern Eurasia from northern Europe to northeastern Russia and winters in sub-Saharan Africa (Clement 2020a). It is a casual



FIGURE 9. This Alder Flycatcher on Southeast Farallon Island, San Francisco County, 9 October 2022 (2022-070), was the twelfth for California and the fourth for the island.

Photo by Jonah M. Benningfield



FIGURE 10. The first Willow Warbler for California and mainland North America, photographed here 19 October 2022, was at Rodeo Lagoon, Marin County, 18–23 October 2022 (2022-080). The distinct supercilium, plain wings, long primary projection, and pale legs and feet visible here were important in distinguishing this species from other *Phylloscopus* warblers.

Photo by Alan N. Wight

fall migrant to North America from late August to mid-September, with over two dozen records from Alaska's islands (Lehman 2019, Gibson et al. 2023) and a single specimen record from northeast Greenland (Bird and Bird 1941). Though subspecies of the Willow Warbler are somewhat unclear, the individual at Rodeo Lagoon was consistent with those populations in eastern Russia (*P. t. yakutensis*) that are drabber than the western subspecies *P. t. trochilus* and *P. t. acredula* (Svensson et al. 2009, Howell et al. 2014, Shirihai and Svensson 2018). The records from Alaska are also tentatively assigned to this subspecies (Gibson and Withrow 2015).

WOOD WARBLER *Phylloscopus sibilatrix* (1, 1). One in formative plumage at Willow Springs Park, Long Beach, LA, 15–24 Oct 2022 (DJB†, TABe†, ARB†, JLD†, PAI†, BAL†, GMcC, EGM, KR†; 2022-077; see this issue's front cover) represented the first record for California and mainland North America. This bird was originally reported as a Tennessee Warbler (*Leiothlypis peregrina*) but was quickly correctly reidentified because of its bright yellow throat contrasting with white belly, long primary projection and undertail coverts, and pale bill and legs. Its bright green upper parts and yellow supercilium and face further distinguish this species from other species of *Phylloscopus*.

The Wood Warbler is a monotypic species that breeds in temperate forests from western Europe east only to Kazakhstan and winters in sub-Saharan Africa (Clement 2020b). Despite its known breeding range being over 5000 km distant, this species is a casual fall migrant to Alaska in late September and early October, with nine records from the western Aleutian Islands and Bering Sea islands and one from Middleton Island in the Gulf of Alaska (Gibson and Withrow 2015, Lehman 2019, D. D. Gibson pers. comm.). The timing of the California record fits well within the pattern of fall migrants to Alaska.

WINTER WREN *Troglodytes hiemalis* (34, 5). Wintering individuals were at Lake Solano County Park, SOL/YOL, 15 Nov 2022–13 Feb 2023 (KCK†, EGM, KR†; 2022-108); Arroyo Burro Creek, SBA, 19 Nov 2022–20 Mar 2023 (HPR†§; 2022-110; Figure 11); Carson Creek in the El Dorado Hills, ED, 26 Nov 2022–3 Jan 2023 (AiB†§, LG†; 2022-111); Putah Creek State Wildlife Area, YOL/SOL, 11 Nov 2022–5 Feb 2023 (EGM†§; 2022-120); and the Presidio of San Francisco, SF, 27–29 December 2022 (JMB§; 2022-132). IDENTIFICATION NOT ESTABLISHED: The report of one photographed and recorded in Point Mugu State Park, VEN, 15–23 Nov 2021 (2021-146) went through four rounds of committee voting, but in the end, members found that too many characteristics in the recording were not diagnostic of either the Winter Wren or Pacific Wren (*T. pacificus*). Likewise, the calls of a wren at Palomar Mountain State Park, SD, 10 Dec 2022 (2022-117) were intermediate between these two species.

SEDGE WREN *Cistothorus stellaris* (13, 2). Two Sedge Wrens, representing the first and second records for Los Angeles County, were at Griffith Park, LA, 29–31 October 2022 (KL†, DJB†, TABe†, KR†; 2022-092; Figure 12) and the Piute Ponds on Edwards Air Force Base, LA, 14 Nov 2022–7 Jan 2023 (KLG†; 2022-106).

CURVE-BILLED THRASHER *Toxostoma curvirostre* (42, 0). IDENTIFICATION NOT ESTABLISHED: The brief description of a reported Curve-billed Thrasher from Black Meadow Landing, SBE, 3 Feb 2022 (2022-008) did not rule out Bendire's Thrasher (*T. bendirei*). Nevertheless, Black Meadow Landing was the location of six records of the Curve-billed Thrasher between 2004 and 2015, suggesting a single long-lived individual or a small nearby population.

WOOD THRUSH *Hylocichla mustelina* (42, 6). A remarkable six Wood Thrushes, all in formative plumage, occurred in California in the fall of 2022. One was banded at the Palomarin Field Station, MRN, 12 Oct 2022 (MDet†; 2022-075). Others were photographed at Scorpion Ranch on Santa Cruz Island, SBA, 16–17 Oct

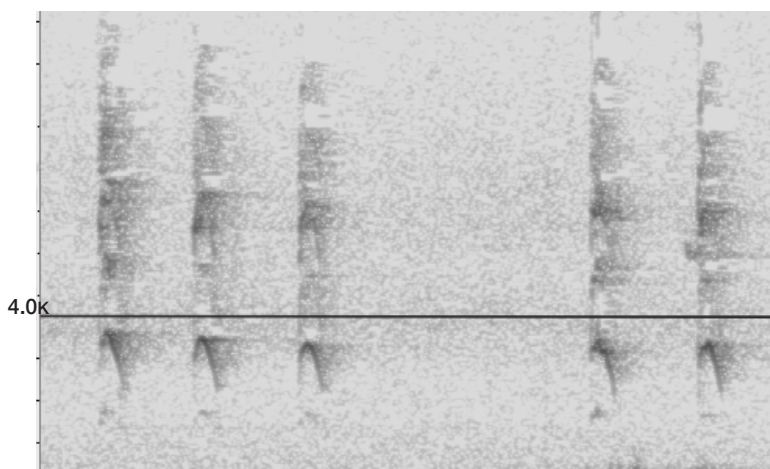


FIGURE 11. Winter Wrens were reported from various locations around California during October and November 2022 with some remaining through the winter. Accepted records were supported by audio recordings of calls more musical than the drier calls of the Pacific Wren. These calls of a Winter Wren along Arroyo Burro Creek, Santa Barbara County, were recorded on 19 November 2022; the bird remained through 20 March 2023 (2022-110). Note the distinct harmonic bands with the most intense element lower than 4 kHz.

Recording by Hugh P. Ranson



FIGURE 12. The two Sedge Wrens found in California during the fall of 2022 were the first and second recorded for Los Angeles County. The first was at Griffith Park, Los Angeles County, 29 (date of this photo) to 31 October 2022 (2022-092).

Photo by Kevin Lapp

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2022 (HPR†; 2022-076); in Cerritos, LA, 28 Sep–4 Oct 2022 (CAD†; 2022-079); at Luckie Park, Twentynine Palms, SBE, 22–25 Oct 2022 (TABe†; 2022-085); at Furnace Creek Ranch, INY, 5–6 Nov 2022 (CHag†; 2022-097); and at Palomar Mountain State Park, SD, 25 Nov–10 Dec 2022 (BT†; 2022-112).

RUFIOUS-BACKED ROBIN *Turdus rufopalliat* (30, 2). One in formative plumage was in Calipatria, IMP, 20–24 Dec 2022 (PEL†; 2022-128), following the species' pattern of late fall and winter occurrence in the southeastern California. At its January 2024 meeting, the committee voted to re-evaluate a report from Parker Dam, SBE, 4 Jan 1983 (1990-039; Roberson 1993) after the observer found and submitted original field notes and a sketch. The main reason this record was not originally accepted was that the observer had previously specified the date as 4 Jan 1982, contradicting the claim that it had occurred during an irruptive winter for this species. With the date corrected and coinciding with other records, and the accompanying notes and sketch, the committee unanimously endorsed this record (FT\$; 1990-039A).

SIBERIAN RUBYTHROAT *Calliope calliope* (1, 1). A male, apparently in formative plumage, was photographed by an automated trail camera on a Google campus in Mountain View, SCL, 19 Nov 2022 (JC-V†; 2022-134), representing the first record of the Siberian Rubythroat for California and the contiguous United States (Sowa et al. 2023, which see for the photo). This distinctive species was identified by the red throat, a white malar stripe, and a dull gray breast, which in combination distinguish it from the four other species in the genus *Calliope*.

The Siberian Rubythroat breeds across much of north Asia with an isolated population in central China, and winters in southern and southeastern Asia (Collar 2020). It is a rare to casual migrant on the Aleutian and Bering Sea islands (Gibson and Withrow 2015, Lehman 2019); Sowa et al. (2023) summarized the five records from the Alaska mainland. The only other record from North America is of a male found dead near Hornby, Ontario, Canada, 26 Dec 1983 (Brewer et al. 1983). The California record is noteworthy for representing the only species on the California list to be supported only by a photograph taken by an unmanned, automated camera.

RED-FLANKED BLUETAIL *Tarsiger cyanurus* (6, 1). More than 22 years elapsed between California's first record in 1989 (Patten and Erickson 1994) and its second in 2011 (Nelson et al. 2013), but there have now been four additional records within four years (CBRC 2024). One in formative plumage was at Lighthouse Field State Beach, SCZ, 28 Dec 2022–26 Mar 2023 (MLB, MFr†, CHay†, EGM, DR†, SBT, ANW†; 2022-133). Like California's only other Red-flanked Bluetail recorded on the mainland (2018-239; Benson et al. 2020) this individual spent the winter and was seen by many observers.

WHITE WAGTAIL *Motacilla alba* (55, 4). Females in formative plumage were on Haskell's Beach, Goleta, SBA, 27 Sep 2022 (PAG†; 2022-060) and at the Baker sewage ponds, SBE, 8 Oct 2022 (TABe†; 2022-069), and a male in formative plumage was at Las Gallinas Valley Sanitary District and nearby (~8 km) Petaluma Marsh Wildlife Area, MRN, 24 Oct–3 Dec 2022 (MJR†, ANW†; 2022-086); all three were consistent with *M. a. ocularis*. An adult female of *M. a. lugens* in basic plumage was on Struve Slough, Watsonville, SCZ, 9–14 Oct 2022 (PH†; 2022-071).

BRAMBLING *Fringilla montifringilla* (10, 1). A male Brambling in formative plumage banded on Southeast Farallon Island, SF, 2–3 Nov 2022 (JMB†, JRT; 2022-094) was a long-awaited first for this migrant trap.

SMITH'S LONGSPUR *Calcarius pictus* (13, 2). The two Smith's Longspurs observed in California in 2022 both had two generations of secondary coverts so were in formative plumage: one at Abbotts Lagoon, MRN, 10–14 Oct 2022 (TF† MDet†; 2022-073), the other on the Tejon Ranch, KER, 21 Dec 2022 (DS†; 2022-130).

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CASSIN'S SPARROW *Peucaea cassinii* (102, 2). One, likely in formative plumage, was along the Chah-GAH-Cho Trail in McKinleyville, HUM, 4–6 Oct 2022 (GG†, RF†; 2022-066). Another in formative plumage was at the mouth of Villa Creek, Estero Bluffs State Park, SLO, 4–9 Dec 2022 (MLS†; 2022-115).

FIELD SPARROW *Spizella pusilla* (21, 1). An adult at the Piute Ponds, Antelope Valley, LA, 27 Oct 2022 (CAD†; 2022-090) showed the indistinct postocular stripe, broad central crown stripe, and narrow back streaks of the subspecies breeding on the Great Plains, *S. p. arenacea*.

LECONTE'S SPARROW *Ammospiza lecontei* (47, 2). LeConte's Sparrows in formative plumage were photographed on Southeast Farallon Island, SF, 13 Nov 2022 (JRT†; 2022-104) and at the Palo Verde Ecological Reserve, RIV, 25 Nov 2022 (SL†; 2022-109).

EASTERN TOWHEE *Pipilo erythrophthalmus* (0, 0). IDENTIFICATION NOT ESTABLISHED: An apparent male Eastern Towhee in formative plumage photographed and audio-recorded at Jacumba, SD, 6–8 Nov 2021 (2021-138; Figure 13) generated much discussion within the committee and with outside experts. The bird's plumage matched the Eastern Towhee, but some of its recorded vocalizations better matched calls of the Spotted Towhee (*P. maculatus*). Since these calls could represent a trait inherited through hybridization between these two species that have a known hybrid zone in the Great Plains, the majority of committee members were unwilling to accept this potential first state record. An apparent female was well described from Terwer Valley, DN, 23 Oct 2022 (2022-088) but not photographed or audio-recorded. Most committee members were hesitant to endorse a potential first state record of a species with a known hybrid zone with the Spotted Towhee without recordings and analyses of vocalizations. Additionally, females of the subspecies *P. m. oregonus*, of which some individuals winter south to California, have reduced white spotting on the upperparts and wing coverts (Bartos Smith and Greenlaw 2020).

STREAK-BACKED ORIOLE *Icterus pustulatus* (11, 1). A male in formative plumage spent the winter in a private yard in Lone Pine, INY, 10 Dec 2022–19 April 2023 (RKO†, AIH†, CBH†, RH†; 2022-116).

GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLER *Vermivora chrysoptera* (86, 1). One was in Tus-tin, ORA, 27 Sep 2020 (CB†; 2020-209). IDENTIFICATION NOT ESTABLISHED: The description of one reported at Foothill Technology High School in Ventura, VEN, 8–9 Nov 2022 (2022-101) did not garner enough support to be accepted.

BLUE-WINGED WARBLER *Vermivora cyanoptera* (57, 1). A male in formative plumage was photographed in Sycamore Canyon, VEN, 30 Aug 2022 (DS†; 2022-050). IDENTIFICATION NOT ESTABLISHED: The committee did not endorse a report of a poorly seen, singing Blue-winged Warbler in Terwer Valley, DN, 14 Jun 2017 (2017-179); several members noted that a hybrid with a Golden-winged Warbler could not be ruled out from the written description.

CERULEAN WARBLER *Setophaga cerulea* (20, 1). A male in formative plumage at Avalon on Santa Catalina Island, LA, 27–28 Oct 2022 (LV†; 2022-091; Figure 14) was the first for Los Angeles County and the Channel Islands. Thirteen of California's 14 fall Cerulean Warblers have occurred in the relatively narrow interval 1–28 October, the dates of the early outlier being 2–5 Sep 1976 (1977-031; Luther 1980).

BAY-BREASTED WARBLER *Setophaga castanea* (10**, 1). The committee endorsed a written description of a male in alternate plumage from Westmorland, IMP, 13 Jun 1953 (EAC; 1953-101), antedating California's previous earliest record by a little over three years (6 Oct 1956; CBRC 2007). The committee reviews records of the Bay-breasted Warbler through 1975 only.



FIGURE 13. In this photo taken 8 November, this male towhee in formative plumage at Jacumba, San Diego County, 6–8 November 2021 (2021-138) appears identical in plumage to an Eastern Towhee. It uttered vocalizations typical of both the Eastern and Spotted towhees, however, leading the committee to not accept this record because of the possibility of hybridization.

Photo by Andrew Newmark



FIGURE 14. The Cerulean Warbler is among the rarest of eastern wood-warblers to reach California. This confiding male in formative plumage, photographed on the last day of its 27–28 October 2022 stay on Santa Catalina Island, Los Angeles County (2022-091), spent much of its time foraging on the ground.

Photo by Laura Vandezande

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RED-FACED WARBLER *Cardellina rubrifrons* (29, 1). One was photographed in the Laguna Mountains, SD, 12 Aug 2022 (RSt, VS†; 2022-044).

PYRRHULOXIA *Cardinalis sinuatus* (33, 1). A male in formative plumage remained at Lake Cahuilla Veterans Regional Park, Coachella Valley, RIV, 3 Nov 2022–18 Apr 2023 (JLD, TABe†, SJM†; 2022-096; Figure 15). At its January 2023 meeting, the committee voted to re-evaluate the report of a Pyrrhuloxia at Westminster, ORA, 1–7 May 2013 that was originally not accepted because of concerns about natural occurrence (2013-106; Rottenborn et al. 2016). Upon re-evaluation, the committee endorsed this record (MC†, RC†; 2013-106A) on the basis of a pattern of spring records in California, including the coastal slope, and to strive for consistency with its treatment of similar records.

PARROT-BILLED SEEDEATER *Sporophila peruviana* (0, 0). IDENTIFICATION ESTABLISHED, NATURAL OCCURRENCE QUESTIONABLE: The committee unanimously considered a male photographed at Lake Hodges, SD, 7 Apr 2015 (TW†; 2015-181) to be a likely escapee. This generally sedentary species is endemic to coastal Ecuador and Peru (Jaramillo 2020), making it an extremely unlikely candidate for natural vagrancy to California.

MISCELLANEOUS

The long-staying Northern Gannet (*Morus bassanus*; 2012-058) first seen at Southeast Farallon Island, SF, 25 Apr 2012 (Pike et al. 2014) was still present at the time of the preparation of this report in February 2025.

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FIGURE 15. This male Pyrrhuloxia in formative plumage, photographed here 15 January 2023, wintered at Lake Cahuilla Veterans Regional Park, La Quinta, Riverside County, 3 November 2022–18 April 2023 (2022-096).

Photo by Thomas A. Benson

lished in *Rare Birds of California* (CBRC 2024; www.californiabirds.org/cbrc_book/update.pdf) and to Joseph Morlan for maintaining the CBRC's website. Peter Pyle reviewed and provided input on the age and sex determinations of the birds covered in this report. Andrew Engilis, David Vander Pluym, and Richard Webster provided expert opinions on multiple Mexican Duck records. Alvaro Jaramillo provided expert opinion on the Stejneger's Petrel record. Lauryn Benedict, Louis Bevier, Lucas DeCicco, and Van Remsen provided expert opinions on the 2021 Eastern Towhee record. The following past and present CBRC members commented on drafts of the manuscript: Andrew Birch, Jon Dunn, Kimball Garrett, and Peter Pyle. We also thank Lucas H. DeCicco, Daniel D. Gibson, and Philip Unitt for their review and comments on the draft report.

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RECENT ADDITIONS TO THE AVIFAUNA OF THE SALTON SINK

GUY McCASKIE, 954 Grove Ave., Imperial Beach, California 91932;
guymcc@pacbell.net

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

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

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 rufopalliatu*s. 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-BREASTED 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

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

RECENT ADDITIONS TO THE AVIFAUNA OF THE SALTON SINK

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=)

qsa-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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NOTES

SPOTTED TOWHEE MIMICRY OF A BLUE JAY

SCOTT G. SOMERSHOE, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Migratory Bird Program, Mountain–Prairie Region, 1 Denver Federal Center, Building 53—Room FW100, Denver, Colorado 80225; ssomershoe@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: On 27 March 2024 I video- and audio-recorded a Spotted Towhee (*Pipilo maculatus*) mimicking the “jay” call of the Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*) at Centennial, Colorado. Although the closely related Eastern Towhee (*P. erythrophthalmus*) has been noted imitating other birds a few times, the only previous report of the Spotted Towhee mimicking dates to the 19th century.

Avian vocal mimicry has been well studied globally with over 300 songbirds documented as mimics (Goller and Shizuka 2018). Mimicry in North America is limited to a relatively small number of species (<10% considered “flexible” mimics; see Goller and Shizuka 2018), notably within the families Mimidae (e.g., Northern Mockingbird, *Mimus polyglottos*), Corvidae (e.g., Blue Jay, *Cyanocitta cristata*), plus the Yellow-breasted Chat (*Icteria virens*) and various other unrelated species such as the Lesser (*Spinus psaltria*) and Lawrence’s (*S. lawrencei*) Goldfinches. The Eastern (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*) and Spotted (*P. maculatus*) towhees, formerly taxonomically lumped as the Rufous-sided Towhee (*P. erythrophthalmus*), are generally not thought of as mimics despite having diverse regional dialects and wide variation in song and call repertoires (Borror 1959, 1975, 1977). There is evidence of both towhee species mimicking other bird species, although Borror (1975) suggested that heterospecific songs and calls do not greatly influence song patterns in the Eastern Towhee. The Eastern Towhee has been documented mimicking the Carolina Wren (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*), Field Sparrow (*Spizella pusilla*), Blue Jay, Brown Thrasher (*Toxostoma rufum*), and American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) on a limited number of occasions, with calls being incorporated into songs and call series with more typical Eastern Towhee vocalizations (Borror 1975, 1977, Greenlaw et al. 1998). In contrast, the Spotted Towhee has been reported mimicking another bird species only once: Cohen (1899) reported a single instance of a Spotted Towhee mimicking a California Scrub Jay (*Aphelocoma californica*) in winter in Alameda, Alameda County, California.

On 27 March 2024, I observed a male Spotted Towhee mimicking a Blue Jay at Writers Vista Park in Centennial, Arapahoe County, Colorado (39.5730° N, 105.0131° W). I initially heard characteristic Blue Jay “jay” or “jeer” calls (Smith et al. 2020) and a Spotted Towhee making typical “mew” call notes (Bartos Smith and Greenlaw 2020) in the backyard of a home abutting the park. The jay call sounded slightly weaker than usual, but it was relatively loud and suggested the bird was close by. Upon investigation, I was unable to find a Blue Jay despite hearing loud, nearby calls, but I then observed a Spotted Towhee sitting on top of a shrub approximately 4 m away. The towhee was generally alternating “jay” calls with towhee “mew” calls and did not appear to be disturbed or responding to any activity or threat. I obtained audiovisual recordings of the Spotted Towhee making both jay and towhee calls with a hand-held iPhone 7 through Swarovski binoculars (8 × 42) and uploaded a 12-second segment to <https://ebird.org/checklist/S166200823>. I was unable to locate any towhees at the location on 3 April 2024 or on subsequent visits. Presumably, the male towhee moved through the area during the single encounter.

This observation represents only the second report and first audio and video documentation that the Spotted Towhee is capable of mimicking other bird species.

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Greenlaw et al. (1998) documented four Eastern Towhees incorporating towhee “mew” calls and Blue Jay “jeer” calls into both song and call repertoires and using those calls in various contexts (e.g., mobbing, singing). Although I do not know whether the towhee I recorded was a winter visitant or resident, the Blue Jay is regular at the site and in the greater Denver metropolitan area, so there was potential for a towhee’s repeated exposure to the jay’s vocalizations.

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LOGS USED AS NEST SITES BY THE AMERICAN DIPPER

PAUL HENDRICKS, Montana Bird Advocacy, 909 Locust Street, Missoula, Montana 59802; pipitpaul@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: During spring and summer 2024 I followed activities at an American Dipper (*Cinclus mexicanus*) nest built in an exposed site on the end of a horizontal log overhanging Rattlesnake Creek, Missoula County, Montana—the first log reported as a dipper nest site on this creek, which has been the focus of prior studies of the American Dipper's breeding biology. Logs are rarely reported as nest sites in interior western North America (~1% of 452 dipper nests) but are used more frequently near the coast (~13% of 319 nests); use of logs also varies among sites within the coastal region. Reasons for regional differences in log use are not clear but could include the abundance of logs in surveyed streams, specific attributes of available logs or log jams, the availability of other nest substrates, and differences in the sizes of dipper territories, which could preclude occupancy of otherwise suitable nest sites.

The availability of favored nest sites can affect breeding birds' population densities, especially for those species that rely on special habitat features, such as tree cavities or cliff ledges; breeding pairs may be absent from otherwise suitable areas that lack appropriate nest sites (Newton 1998). The five species of dippers (Cinclidae) are an example. Dippers' typical natural nest sites include cliffs, rock outcrops, and boulders in streams. Nests are often built as well on human-created structures such as bridges, stone walls, houses, wooden buildings, and culverts, all adjacent to or overhanging rapidly flowing water (Marti and Everett 1978, Tyler and Ormerod 1994, 2005, Kingery and Willson 2020). Evidence that nest-site availability may limit breeding populations of the American (*Cinclus mexicanus*) and White-throated (*C. cinclus*) Dippers includes the frequent use of bridges in areas where stream-side cliffs or other natural sites are absent and use of artificial nest platforms along previously unoccupied streams (Hawthorne 1979, Tyler and Ormerod 1994, Osborn 1999, Loegering and Anthony 2006).

Dippers sometimes nest in unusual locations, such as large woodpecker cavities (Campbell and Ryder 2013), atop flood debris caught in tree branches overhanging streams (Tyler and Ormerod 1994), and among bankside or overhanging tree roots (Hann 1950, Campbell et al. 1997). Logs and log jams are also potential natural nest sites that the American Dipper uses infrequently (Kingery and Willson 2020). Reasons for this infrequent use are not clear but may include greater accessibility of logs or log jams to nest predators, greater vulnerability of logs and log jams to flooding, a lack of logs or woody debris along streams where dippers breed, or structural features that make nesting in logs or log jams undesirable.

Here I describe an American Dipper nest built atop a log overhanging a creek in western Montana where Bakus (1959a, b) and Sullivan (1973) had studied the dipper previously. Most accounts mentioning dippers nesting on logs provide few details of the nest's location or the substrate's characteristics.

On 25 March 2024 I noticed an apparently completed dipper nest built at the tip of a log overhanging Rattlesnake Creek in the Rattlesnake National Recreation Area north of Missoula, Missoula County, Montana, adjacent to a campsite near the upstream end of Poe Meadow (46.9520° N, 113.9228° W; elevation 1155 m; Figure 1). An adult dipper was singing from a nearby log in the creek. The nest log, a spruce lacking bark, was ~17 m long and lying horizontally and diagonally over the creek. It was 38.6 cm in diameter ~7 m from the nest, and was about this diameter at the



FIGURE 1. American Dipper nest (arrow) on a log overhanging Rattlesnake Creek, Missoula County, Montana, 9 August 2024; view upstream.

Photo by Paul Hendricks

nest. It was one of four downed trees of roughly the same diameter that had fallen from the bank toward the creek, but it was the only log extending far into the channel that would not be flooded during high water. The nest was ~ 1.5 m above the creek when found on 25 March and 1 m above high water on 14 May (Figures 2A and 2C, respectively). I used a laser range finder to determine the nest's position in the stream. The stream's width was 16 m, the distance from bank to nest was 11 m (Figure 1), and the log extended over the channel ~ 15 m to the nest.

The nearby vegetation was dominated by a canopy of Engelmann Spruce (*Picea engelmannii*), Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), Ponderosa Pine (*Pinus ponderosa*), and Western Larch (*Larix occidentalis*), with a shrub layer including Thin-leaved Alder (*Alnus incana*), willow (*Salix* sp.), and Red-osier Dogwood (*Cornus sericea*). Canopy cover at the nest-site itself, however, was 0% (Figure 1), and the nest was completely exposed to the weather and potential predators (Figure 2), especially aerial predators such as the Common Raven (*Corvus corax* Willson et al. 2009).

I observed adults nearby during all five of my visits from 25 March to 13 June. On 14 May both adults were collecting wet pine needles along the creek bank and adding them to the interior of the nest; the nest structure remained intact, undisturbed by a predator. By this date four other dipper nests downstream had fledged first broods or adults at them were still feeding nestlings. A first brood could have fledged from the log nest prior to mid-May (construction of nests downstream was underway or completed by the first week of March), so the dipper pair may have been preparing the log nest for a second attempt. Dippers sometimes raise second broods on this creek (pers. obs.). However, I never saw food delivered to the log nest, and given the infrequency of my visits (about every three to four weeks) do not know if any nesting at the log site was successful. After mid-July I did not observe adult dippers near any nest I was following until late September, by which time I

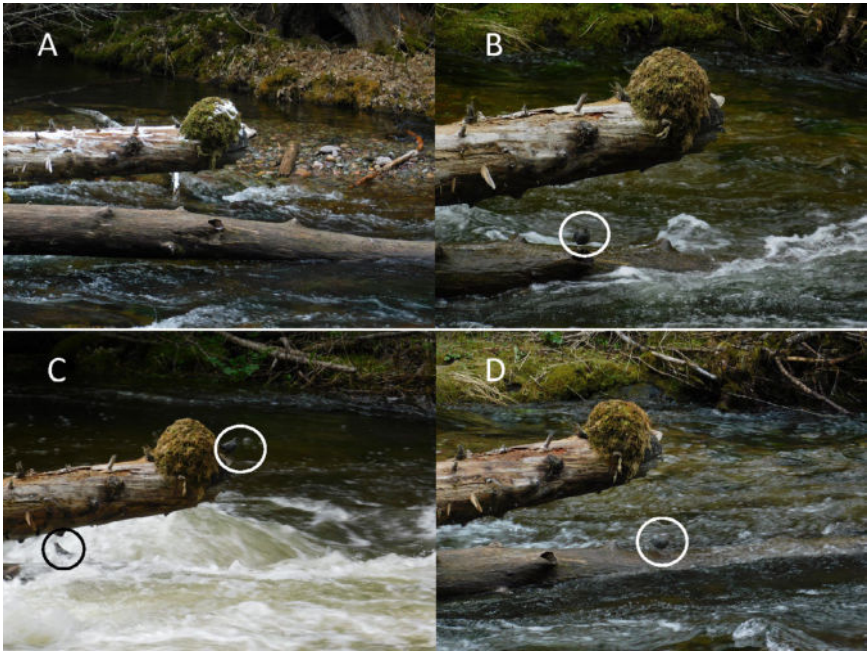


FIGURE 2. American Dipper nest on Rattlesnake Creek: (A) 25 March, (B) 29 April, (C) 14 May, D) 26 May. Note changes in the water level. Adult dippers at the nest site are indicated by white or black circles.

Photos by Paul Hendricks

noted singing adults near each. The log nest appeared unused and undisturbed until sometime between 12 August and 2 September when the nest structure was removed, apparently by people visiting the adjacent camp site, and for some reason placed on the log partially submerged in the creek below the nest site (Figure 2). By 19 September the nest structure was completely missing and no dipper was present, but on 30 September an adult was singing from the partially submerged log where the nesting adults often perched (Figure 2B–D).

Use of this log allowed a pair of dippers to nest in an otherwise unoccupied segment of creek. This segment of Rattlesnake Creek, along which I have hiked several times from March to December each year for the past decade, was between sites where dippers nested in prior years. The nest log was also between nests on bridges and rock outcrops noted in earlier studies of the dipper's breeding biology on Rattlesnake Creek (Bakus 1959a, b, Sullivan 1973). Nests built on logs were not reported in either of those studies, a further indication that dippers rarely nest on logs along Rattlesnake Creek, even though logs and log jams are currently present in at least a dozen locations along 11 km of creek (pers. obs.). This is the only dipper nest that I have found on Rattlesnake Creek that was built atop a downed log; all others (at 7 locations) were on rock outcrops or under bridges. Dippers nested on the same log in 2025, a pair adding moss to the interior of a completely domed nest at the tip of the log on 3 March.

Nesting on logs has rarely been mentioned in other studies of the American Dipper in the Rocky Mountains (Table 1). Reports include a case from western Montana

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TABLE 1 Studies Reporting the Prevalence of the American Dipper Nesting on Logs

Locality	Number of nests ^a	Percent in/on logs	Source
Interior			
Alberta	74	0	Ealey 1977
Montana	17	0	Bakus 1959a
Montana	98	0	Sullivan 1973
Montana	77	3 ^b	Osborn 1999
Idaho	41	7 ^c	Strickler 2008
Wyoming	32	0	Fleck and Hall 2004
South Dakota	13	0	Backlund 1994
Utah	13	0	Sullivan 1973
Colorado	11	0	Hann 1950
Colorado	76	0	Price and Bock 1983
Coastal			
Alaska	64	2	Willson et al. 2009
British Columbia	158	4; 22 ^d	Morrissey 2004
Oregon	17	0	Sullivan 1973
Oregon	80	31 ^e	Loeagering 1997, 2003
Oregon	51	33 ^f	Loeagering and Anthony 2006

^aUsually the total number of nesting attempts. When just nest sites, such as Alaska, the number is probably an undercount of nesting attempts.

^bIncludes a second nest on the same log after first nest failed.

^cEstimate, dividing equally a pooled 39% of nests in logs, root wads, fish weirs, culverts, behind waterfalls, and small pour-overs.

^dResident (65%) and migrant (35%) dippers, respectively, presented separately with logs and woody debris combined as a single category of substrate.

^ePacific coast, Coast Range, and Cascade Range pooled.

^fCoast Range only; included in Loeagering (1997, 2003).

of renesting on the same log after a first attempt failed (Osborn 1999) and mention of logs as a minor category of nest sites in eastern Idaho (Strickler 2008), but neither of these described the sites, nor did Strickler (2008) mention the number of nests found on logs. Orr (1951) reported a nest in eastern Idaho that was attached to a log overhanging a turbulent part of a stream. Of 89 dipper nests recorded in the Montana Natural Heritage Program's [MTNHP] Map Viewer database (<https://mtnhp.org/mapviewer/>) and for which the substrate was specified, only one was on a log—on the end of a burned snag suspended over a creek in Yellowstone National Park.

In the Cascade Range and coastal regions of western North America, American Dippers nest on logs more frequently than in the Rocky Mountains (Table 1, two-sample proportion test: $Z = 6.89$, $P < 0.001$), although logs remain a minority of sites. I restricted this analysis to focused studies only because the methods for locating nests were similar, usually walking along or in rivers and creeks looking for birds and nests, unlike the opportunistic records submitted to databases or included in regional bird books (e.g., MTNHP, Campbell et al. 1997).

The dipper's use of logs may also vary substantially within the coastal region. In Oregon, 3 of 19 nests in the central Cascades and 6 of 11 nests on coastal streams described by Loeagering (1997, 2003) were on logs (Fisher's exact test, $P = 0.042$); log use in the Coast Range falling in between (Table 1). In the Cascades of southwestern British Columbia, resident dippers studied by Morrissey (2004) nested on logs much less often than did migrants; residents tended to nest on lower-elevation rivers while

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migrants tended to nest on higher-elevation tributary streams. Factors contributing to apparent regional differences in log use are not clear but could include the numbers of logs and log jams in surveyed rivers and streams, specific attributes of available logs or log jams, the availability of other nest substrates, and the size of dipper territories which could preclude occupancy of otherwise suitable nest sites.

How American Dippers use logs for nesting may also vary geographically. In the Rocky Mountains, reported nests were constructed on top of logs overhanging creeks (Figures 1 and 2, MTNHP, Orr 1951, Osborn 1999, Strickler 2008). In Oregon, however, nests were built in hollows or platforms within the broken ends of overhanging logs (Loefering 1997, Loefering and Anthony 2006). In California, Gaines (1992) reported nests in log jams; in British Columbia, Campbell et al. (1997) reported them in cavities of streamside logs, and in southeastern Alaska Willson et al. (2009) reported one in a stream-side log atop a retaining wall. Also in British Columbia, Morrissey (2004) reported nesting in hollows in logs and log jams (or other woody debris) but without further details. More detailed descriptions of log nests are necessary for identifying the features that make logs suitable for nesting, and for assessing the importance of geographical variation in log use, especially in the absence of other natural nest sites. Finally, the fates of nests in logs should be followed whenever possible to determine if they are as successful as those on other substrates.

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Photo by © Paul Hendricks of Missoula, Montana:

American Dipper (*Cinclus mexicanus*)

Rattlesnake Creek, Missoula County, Montana, 24 March 2024

The American Dipper is well known for nesting in rock crevices and under artificial structures overlooking the rushing torrents in which it forages. Other nest sites are uncommon, but their use may vary regionally. In this issue of *Western Birds*, Paul Hendricks reports an exposed dipper nest built atop a log fallen across a creek and explores regional variation in the dipper's use of logs as nest sites.

