

Southern Pacific Coast—Baja California Peninsula

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Baja California Peninsula

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We received reports this season from throughout the peninsula, but only for the months of December and February. Notable birds were nonetheless recorded, including a Downy Woodpecker, Prothonotary Warbler, a record-northerly Belding's Yellowthroat, Common Grackle, and first state records of White Ibis (BC) and Swamp Sparrow (BCS).

Abbreviations: Baja California (BC); Baja California Sur (BCS).



Loons Through Terns

Brown Boobies have increased dramatically off s. California and n. Baja California since the late 1980s and recently have been recorded annually at Islas Los Coronados. This year, one was there 17 Jan (ph. REW), with 4 there 11 Feb (GLR, PAG et al.). An imm. **White Ibis** on Estero San José 15 Dec (SNGH, vt. RAH) and two imm. there 24 Dec (AH, VH) were in

Baja California, where previously unrecorded; the nearest population is 150+ km s. in the Estero La Bocana/Laguna San Ignacio area.

Small numbers of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks have been recorded in the s. Cape District since the early 1990s, but 8 at the La Paz sewage ponds 29 Dec (AH, VH) was a record count. Interesting geese included 3 Greater White-fronteds at Guerrero Negro 15

Dec (SNGH, RAH) and an imm. *minima* Canada near Ensenada Harbor 18 Dec (SNGH, vt. RAH). A female Greater Scaup, rare anywhere on the peninsula, was far south at Guerrero Negro 16 Dec († vt. RAH, SNGH). On 28 Dec, Ensenada Harbor held an imm. female Long-tailed Duck and a White-winged Scoter (both SNGH, vt. RAH), while 5 Hooded Mergansers were nearby on the Maneadero Plain (vt. RAH, SNGH).

An impressive group of raptors observed from a boat at s. island, Islas Los Coronados 11 Feb included singles of Northern Harrier, Sharp-shinned Hawk, and Red-tailed Hawk, 2 American Kestrels, and 2 Peregrine Falcons (GLR, PAG et al.). A female Merlin near Ojos Negros 8 Feb showed characters of the "Prairie" race *F. c. richardsonii* (†CGE). Pacific Golden-Plovers are not known to winter regularly anywhere on the peninsula (except possibly at Isla Guadalupe), and one at the Guerrero Negro sewage ponds 15 Dec (SNGH, vt. †RAH) may have been a late-moving migrant. Eight Wilson's Plovers were at Laguna Manuela 16 Dec (RAH, SNGH); the species is not known to be regular north of there on the Pacific coast of Baja California. At least 20 Lesser Yellowlegs were at Guerrero Negro 15-16 Dec (RAH, SNGH), where as many as 206 were reported on the saltworks in November 1996 (R. Carmona and G. Danemann. 1998. *Ciencias Marinas* 24:389-408). A Red Phalarope at Presa El Carizo, sw. of Tecate, 28 Feb (RAH, RAE) was presumably storm-driven, and furnished the peninsula's first inland record. Juv. Thayer's Gulls were scattered at least halfway down the peninsula, with 3-4 at Guerrero Negro 15-16 Dec (SNGH, vt. RAH) and up to 2-3 at Ensenada Harbor 18 Dec-27 Feb (SNGH et al.). More unusual was a juv. Glaucous Gull at Ensenada Harbor 18 Dec (SNGH, vt. RAH). Black-legged Kittiwakes were reported s. to Estero Punta Banda in Feb (CGE et al.), with a maximum of 5 at Islas Los Coronados 11 Feb (GLR, PAG et al.). Black Skimmers continue to increase in numbers; the highest count ever for the cen. peninsula was 250 at Laguna Manuela 16 Dec (RAH, SNGH).

Doves Through Blackbirds

Although unrecorded prior to 1990, the Ruddy Ground-Dove is now expected in the s. Cape District; a pair was at San José del Cabo 26 Dec (AH, VH). An imm Yellow-bellied Sapsucker at Cataviña 15-17 Dec (vt. RAH, SNGH) was as far south as this vagrant has been recorded on the peninsula. Although expanding in adjacent *San Diego* and now to be expected in extreme nw. Baja California female **Downy**



This female Downy Woodpecker was photographed 27 February at Parque Morelos, Tijuana, only the third or fourth recorded in Mexico. Photograph from video by Robert A Hamilton.

Woodpecker at Parque Morelos, Tijuana, 27 Feb (RAE, vt. RAH et al.) was only the third or fourth confirmed record for the peninsula, and all of Mexico. South of all previous peninsular records were 2 Red-shafted Flickers at Arroyo San Javier, north of Villa Jesus María, BC 15 Dec; 2-3 more were at Cataviña the same day (all RAH, SNGH). Guerrero Negro was a new winter locale for the Western Flycatcher; one was there 15 Dec (SNGH). Thick-billed Kingbirds have been recorded fairly regularly in the Cape District in winter since the mid 1980s, but 2 at Santiago and one at Miraflores 26 Dec (AH, VH) provided a record seasonal total. Scarce and irregular rainfall on the peninsula is known to wreak havoc with the orderly nesting season experienced on most of the continent; a stub-tailed juv. Horned Lark at Guerrero Negro 15 Dec (RAH, SNGH) was but the latest example.

Indicative of the higher-than-average numbers of northern/montane landbirds in n. Baja California and s. California this winter were a Mountain Chickadee and Golden-crowned Kinglet in Ensenada 22 Dec (AH, VH) and a Brown Creeper at Parque Morelos, Tijuana 27 Feb (vt. RAH et al.). This was the first coastal record of the chickadee for the Region, and there are fewer than 10 peninsular records each for the other two species. Perhaps related, American Robins of the northern *migratorius* group of subspecies reached Baja California Sur, with one in Guerrero Negro 15-16 Dec (RAH, SNGH) and up to 2 with San Lucas Robins in the Sierra de La Laguna near San Antonio de la Laguna 4 Feb (PM). A female Varied Thrush was at El Rosario 17 Dec (RAH, SNGH).

The park and residential areas of Guerrero Negro hosted quite a collection of warblers 15-16 Dec (RAH, SNGH): 4 Yellows, 2 Townsend's, a Black-and-white, 10 American Redstarts, an imm. female Prothonotary (†, first Regional winter record, and possibly one of 2 there in

early Oct), 6-7 Northern Waterthrushes, one Wilson's, and best of all, a male **Belding's Yellowthroat** (†) that frequented a freshwater marsh on the s. edge of town. The yellowthroat had not been recorded previously n. of the San Ignacio area, ca. 140 km to the southeast. Another notable Belding's Yellowthroat was a male at Santiago 27 Dec (AH, VH), where the species was feared extirpated (Rodríguez E. et al. 1999. *Animal Conservation* 2:77-84; Birdlife International. *Threatened Birds of the World*) Western Tanagers winter in numbers in coastal s. California (and the Cape District), but surprisingly enough a female in Punta Banda 18 Dec (SNGH) appears to have represented the first winter record for Baja California. However, note that unlike its n. neighbor, Baja California has not yet undergone the extensive transformation of habitat (forests of ornamental plantings in what were once near-desert conditions) that makes s. California so attractive in winter to Neotropical migratory species like this.

A male Spotted Towhee at Cataviña 15 Dec (SNGH) may have been the same individual as one in similar plumage at almost the exact same spot 4 Sep. About 15 Song Sparrows at Arroyo San Javier, BC 15 Dec (RAH, SNGH) were at a previously unreported location; the subspecific identity of mid-peninsular birds remains unresolved. A **Swamp Sparrow** at Guerrero Negro 16 Dec (†SNGH, †RAH) represented the first documented state record. In typical fashion, Tricolored Blackbirds were recorded s. to Rancho El Descanso (8-10 on 17 Dec; RAH, SNGH) and a maximum of 200+ was at Ojos Negros 8 Feb (CGE et al.). Also at Rancho El Descanso 17 Dec was a female **Common Grackle** (SNGH, vt. †RAH), Mexico's only previous record was nearby at El Rosario 9-21 Jan 1996.

Exotics

A free-flying Rufous-bellied Chachalaca in the e. Sierra de La Laguna 26 Dec (AH, VH) startled the observers, before it returned to a chicken coop. It serves to highlight the degree of commerce between the Cape District and the west Mexican mainland and potential mischief for avian biogeographers.

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