

# Baja California Peninsula



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The winter's exceptional aridity continued through spring, conditions that apparently concentrated passage of western migrants through the coastal lowlands both in Baja California and in adjacent southern California. Observer coverage was again sparse this season, although Mexican biologists working in various wetlands made numerous notable contributions. Black Rails were found in Baja California Sur, Clapper Rails were found inland on the Pacific slope, and both species

were found at other new locations (see S.A.). Numbers of eastern vagrants were disappointing, with the main passerine highlights being the first Blue-headed Vireo for B.C.S. and a Cape May Warbler in each of the states—all three likely or certainly wintered in the Region. We welcome Michael Patten as a guest editor this season.

## LOONS THROUGH ALCIDS

Two Least Grebes at Todos Santos, B.C.S. 24 Mar (vt. SGM) were at a previously unknown location. A Masked Booby at the Islas Los Coronados 6 Apr (GS, *vide* GMcC) may have been the same bird present there 20 Jan. A juv. booby off Cabo San Lucas 2 Mar (†SFB) was considered very likely a Nazca, although Masked was not ruled out entirely. An American Bittern at Bahía de San Quintín 21 Apr (EDZH et al.) provided one of few spring or summer records for the Peninsula; breeding remains unknown.

Two Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks at Lagunas de Chametla, B.C.S. 26 Mar (vt. SGM) were probably from the small group that wintered there. The continuing imm. Lesser Canada Goose (*B. c. taverneri/parvipes*) at Lagunas de Chametla showed a prominent neck-ring on 26 Mar (vt. SGM); such rings generally become well developed after a bird's first winter (Paul F. Springer, in litt.). Lessers occasionally develop a neck-ring, and this bird's sloping forehead, relatively large bill, and lack of a dark lower border to the neck-ring were inconsistent with an Aleutian bird (*B. c. leucopareia*). Late American Wigeons were at the Río del Rosario estuary 31 May (RAE) and

on the Maneadero Plain 1 Jun (RAH et al), and an unexpectedly late concentration of 100+ Northern Pintails was at the Río del Rosario estuary 31 May (RAE et al.). A late Common Merganser was on the Colorado River 24 Apr (OHH).

Bald Eagles are rare throughout the Region, particularly in B.C.; a subad. was on the El Mayor River 11 Mar (OHH). A Solitary Sandpiper on the Colorado R. 29 Apr (OHH) furnished the third spring record for ne. B.C and the first since 1894 (see Patten et al. 2001 *Monographs in Field Ornithology* 3: 42).

## DOVES THROUGH FLYCATCHERS

A Spotted Dove at Cantamar, B.C. 19 Apr (RAE, RAH) was one of the southernmost recorded. Beginning in the mid-1980s, the Ruddy Ground-Dove expanded its range northward in w. Mexico (see Russell and Monson 1998, *Birds of Sonora*, Univ. of Arizona Press). It now occurs regularly as a vagrant in the Southwest: Arizona and California have amassed nearly 100 records each. A similar trend has been documented on the Baja California Peninsula: it first was recorded in 1990, but dozens have been recorded since, especially in southern B.C.S. (Llinas G. 2001, *Anales Inst. Biol. Univ. Nac. Autón. México, Ser. Zool.* 72: 163-166). This species might now be resident at San José del Cabo, where another 4-5 were recorded 23-26 Mar (vt. SGM).

One of few recent records of the Short-eared Owl was furnished by a bird at Bahía de San Quintín 21 Apr (RAE, RAH). The late date hints at the possibility of local breeding. A Lesser Nighthawk over the n. island 18 May (RAE et al.) was only the 2nd recorded on Islas los Coronados, following one on 6 Aug 1973 (see Jehl 1977, *Western Birds* 8: 91-101). A Black-chinned Hummingbird at San José del Cabo 29 Mar (SGM) furnished the first record of an apparent spring migrant for B.C.S. The Calliope Hummingbird migration through s. California was perhaps the best on record (P Unitt, pers. comm.); transients at Laguna Hanson, B.C. 21 Apr (MAP, BDSP) and at Parque Morelos in Tijuana 9 May (RAE) fit nicely into the broader pattern.

An early Olive-sided Flycatcher, seldom recorded during migration, was at Real del Mar, B.C. 19 Apr (RAH); more seasonal was one on the Maneadero Plain 5 May (MAP) Despite breeding in the Sierra San Pedro Mártir and adjacent s. California, migrant Dusky Flycatchers had been recorded only twice on the Peninsula, both in fall; the first record of a spring migrant was of a carefully studied bird at Valle de la Trinidad, B.C. 21 Apr (†MAP, BDSP). A Tropical Kingbird was at



This female Cape May Warbler on the Maneadero Plain 20 April 2002 was one of two Cape Mays that wintered on the Peninsula this year. Photograph from digital video by Robert A. Hamilton.

Estero San José del Cabo 25 Mar (vt. SGM)  
Two Thick-billed Kingbirds near Miraflores,  
B.C.S. 23 & 25 Mar (vt. SGM) may have been  
returning birds from previous winters (see  
Erickson et al. 2001, *Monographs in Field  
Ornithology* 3: 133; *N. A. B.* 55: 231).

### VIREOS THROUGH FINCHES

A singing **Blue-headed Vireo** at Boca de la Sierra, B.C.S. 25 Mar (audio, †SGM) provided the first unequivocal record for the peninsula (see Howell et al. 2001, *Monographs in Field Ornithology* 3: 191). In typical range, the species is a very early (Mar) migrant; nevertheless, this bird could have wintered at Boca de la Sierra. California claims a few winter records, but Blue-headed Vireos have not been found wintering in Mexico nearer than Oaxaca. Cedar Waxwings at El Rosario 31 May (RAH) and on the lower Río Santo Tomás 1 Jun (ERL, RAE) were late.

A Tennessee Warbler was at San José del Cabo 25 Mar (SGM), and a Northern Parula was at Real del Mar 19 Apr (vt. RAH, RAE). An ad. Mangrove Warbler was out of habitat

**SA** After the unexpected rediscovery of Black Rails, and possible sighting of a Clapper Rail, along the Río San Telmo in summer 2001 (*N. A. B.* 55: 485), EP and OHH led six other observers (JAC, RAE, SGG, RAH, EDZH, and HIR) on a focused search for rails in wetlands from Cantamar to El Rosario 20–23 April and 1 May 2002. These standardized surveys included playback of Black Rail and Clapper Rail tapes. In May and June, EA, MG, and EP found additional rails south to Ensenada de La Paz. The records reported below are on dates when rails are expected to be on breeding territories, and pertain to birds in apparently suitable nesting habitat. Previously unknown breeding locations for Black and Clapper Rails are boldfaced.

Location (north to south)	Date	Observers	Black Rail	Clapper Rail	Virginia Rail	Sora
<b>Baja California</b>						
Lagunita El Ciprés	23 April	EP, JAC	—	<b>9</b>	1	—
Estero de Punta Banda	20 April	EP, OHH et al.	—	28	1	—
Estero Río Santo Tomás	23 April	EP, JAC	—	—	1	1
Valle San Telmo	20–21 April	RAH, RAE et al.	2	<b>2 (pair)</b>	4	2
Valle San Telmo	4–5 May	MAP, BDSP	1	2	3	—
Valle San Telmo	19 May	EP, JAC	—	2	—	—
Bahía de San Quintín	21–23 April	EP, OHH et al.	4	63	—	—
Lower Río del Rosario	22 April	EP, OHH	1	2	—	2
Laguna Guerrero Negro	9 May	MG <i>fide</i> EP	—	5	—	—
<b>Baja California Sur</b>						
Estero la Bocana	31 May	EP, EA	4	14	—	—
Estero el Coyote	1 June	EP, EA	—	3+	—	—
Bahía Almejas (Bahía Magdalena)	30 April	EP	—	4	—	—
Canal Santo Domingo (Bahía Magdalena)	3–4 June	EP, EA	—	6	—	—
El Conchalito (Ensenada de La Paz)	7 June	EP	—	1	—	—

Rails were not detected at San Antonio del Mar, La Misión, El Descanso, or Arroyo San Miguel. Thus, marshes in Valle San Telmo are confirmed as supporting the only known inland population of the Clapper Rail on the Peninsula's Pacific slope (the site is over 10 km from the ocean), two new coastal locations were found, and it seems likely that Laguna Guerrero Negro, together with the vast salt marshes of Laguna Ojo de Liebre, hosts an important Clapper Rail population. Three new breeding-season locations were identified for Black Rails, including the first record for B.C.S. Clearly, much remains to be learned about the status and distribution of rails on the Baja California Peninsula.

# Mexico

at Miraflores 23 Mar (vt. SGM). A **Cape May Warbler** wintering on the Maneadero Plain lingered until 22 Apr (vt. RAH et al.). Remarkably, another wintering bird (an ad.) was at San José del Cabo 28 Mar (vt. SGM). There are only five records of this species for the Peninsula, and it is extremely rare anywhere in Mexico. A Western Palm Warbler in breeding plumage at Estero de Punta Banda, B.C. 4 May (†MAP, BDSP) furnished only the 2nd record of a definite spring migrant for the Peninsula, following one at Isla San Benito Oeste 28 Mar 2001. The Palm is an early migrant in spring, so whether a nominate bird at Estero San José del Cabo 24 Mar (SGM) had wintered locally or was an early transient is anyone's guess. An American Redstart at Middle Island 18 May (RAE) was the first reported from the Islas Los Coronados. A MacGillivray's Warbler on the Maneadero Plain 20 Apr (RAE, RAH) and 4 May (MAP) was in precisely the spot where a presumably wintering bird (the first for B.C.) was observed on 4-5 Jan.

Migrant Green-tailed Towhees were found near Algodones 17 Apr and on the lower Río Santo Tomás 22 Apr (RAE). A Slate-colored Fox Sparrow (*P. i. schistacea*) on the lower Río Santo Tomás 5 May (MAP, BDSP) furnished the latest record of the species for the Peninsula away from sites where *P. i. stephensi* breeds in the Sierra San Pedro Mártir. An imm. Rose-breasted Grosbeak at Misión Santo Domingo, B.C. 31 May (RAE et al.) was only the 4th recorded in spring. An ad. Orchard Oriole was at San José del Cabo 29 Mar (vt. SGM); although a notoriously early migrant, this bird may well have wintered.

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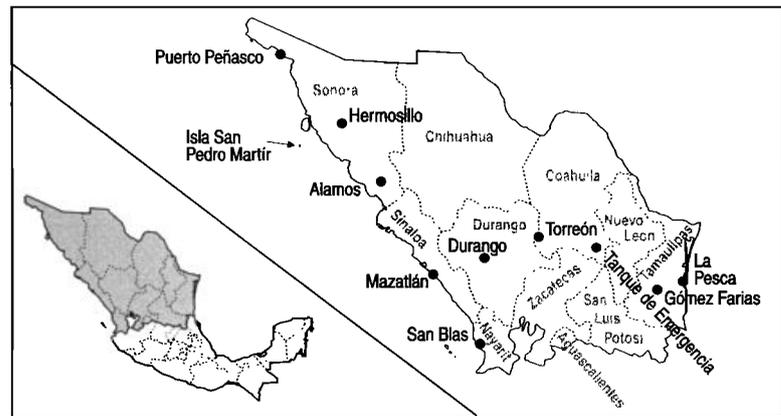
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**S**ubregional coverage in this spring's report is very uneven, with an extra-large contribution from Southern Mexico. The abundant reports from Oaxaca (mainly the central part) are for the first time complemented with a large number of reports from Chiapas, particularly from the very special El Triunfo area, where a string of four tours provided coverage spanning practically the whole season. This spring produced a few reports of Eurasian Collared-Doves from northern Mexico and the Yucatan Peninsula (plus a few prior ones that came to light while researching them).

## NORTHERN MEXICO



Our subregional editors from Torreón, Coahuila report that this spring was warmer than usual, with temperatures near 30°C in early March (mean March temperature is 20.9° C). Arvin reports that in the first half of March, Tamaulipas experienced an infrequent climatic phenomenon he calls "the dry westerlies," in which warm and dry west and southwest winds descend over the normally humid eastern slope of the Sierra Madre Oriental, bringing the highest temperatures of the year and low relative humidities. However, the usual tropical maritime air mass had reestablished itself by 17 March, providing cooler humid conditions in the Sierra. Peak blooming by many species of plants occurred in March, providing a rich food source for hummingbirds, orioles, and some tanagers. Many species of birds began to sing in March, as usual, though few species breed at this time of year (euphonias being an exception), most waiting until the return of the rains in May and June. As usual, the flocks of small insecti-

vores that form between late summer and February dispersed in March, and the Golden-browed Warbler that dominated them returned to the higher pine-oak forests. In early May, Tamaulipas was still suffering from the extended drought and strong southeasterly winds that also plagued southern Texas, with the thorn forest appearing partly defoliated. The tropical deciduous and lower cloud forests on the eastern slopes of the Sierra Madre Oriental were comparatively lush and mostly leafed out after the first showers fell around Gómez Farias in early May.

**Abbreviations:** B.V.C. (Bosque Venustiano Carranza, Torreón, Coah.), E.C.B.S. (El Cielo Biological Station).

## GREBES THROUGH NIGHTJARS

There were 300 Eared Grebes at the Estero Marúa, s. of Puerto Peñasco, Son. 31 Mar (HA). An ad. **Little Blue Heron** was seen high in the trees of B.V.C. 13 & 21 Apr (EC, FVP, WB, ph), where there is no water. There was an imm. **Reddish Egret** at Estero Marúa 31 Mar (HA). A **Brant** of the race *nigricans* was seen as it flew from the ocean into the mouth of Estero Pozo in San Blas, Nay. 2 Mar (MDC). Following the sighting of 73 **Wood Ducks** in three large groups over the Nazas R. near Sapioriz, Dgo. in late Feb (FVB, WB), fifteen pairs were seen at La Isla and other locations in the Nazas R. 5 May (FG, FVP), on 12 & 19 May, males were still frequently seen, but females seemed absent in most locations, suggesting probable nesting (FG, FVP). Migration of Green-winged Teal, Gadwall, Northern Shoveler, and Blue-winged Teal in the Torreón area seemed to take place later than usual, with sightings in May, when unrecorded in previous years (FG, FVP, WB). The Puerto