

Baja California Peninsula



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The drought—worst on record in at least the northwestern portion of the Region—continued unabated, clearly impacting the reproductive efforts of many species. Observer coverage was weak except in the northern quarter of the Region; we were especially pleased to receive many significant observations in the Río Colorado region from Osvel Hinojosa-Huerta and co-workers. We took a flexible approach to the reporting period and included a number of other records relevant to the nesting season. Thanks again to guest editor Michael Patten, sitting in this time for the vacationing Robb Hamilton.

LOONS THROUGH STORKS

A Pacific Loon at Cerro Prieto 2 Jun (*fide* OH-H) provided the first record of a spring migrant for the Colorado Desert portion of the peninsula, although it contributed to a pattern in the Salton Sink (of which Cerro Prieto is the s. tip), where the species has occurred over a dozen times between 14 May—22 Jun (Patten et al. 2003. *Birds of the Salton Sea: Status, Biogeography, and Ecology*, Univ. Calif. Press). *Aechmophorus* grebes are not known to breed in nw. Baja California, but up to 55 Western

and Clark's Grebes at Presa Rodriguez, on the se. edge of metropolitan Tijuana, 30 Apr and 9 May were in heavy courtship and included a few mixed pairs, with one pair engaged in nest-building (RAE). Small numbers of **Brown Boobies** have been noted around Is. Los Coronados in spring since 2000. This year, up to 6 were noted 6 Apr (*fide* HRC), and the species attempted to nest on Middle Rock of that archipelago. Two pairs were apparently incubating 17–18 May (DW et al.), and one pair was tending a nest containing an addled Western Gull egg 19 Jun (*fide* HRC).

A Least Bittern on the Maneadero Plain 5 Jul (RAE) hints at the possibility that this species nests on the coastal slope. A heronry at Estero El Zacatal near La Paz 25 Jun contained only about 100 nests but a marvelous assortment, including Great Blue, Little Blue, and Tricolored Herons, Snowy and Cattle Egrets, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, and White Ibis (EA, EP). Parque Revolución, Ensenada hosted 15 Snowy Egret nests and 23 Black-crowned Night-Heron nests, most with large young, 1 Jun (RAH et al.).

Remarkable were two pairs of nesting **Tricolored Herons** in the Mexicali Valley near Ejido Oaxaca 26–31 Jul—the first such record for Baja California—and one pair of nesting **Reddish Egrets** at I. Montague 25 Jul (both ph EM, JAC). In addition, an ad. Tricolored was noted along the Río Colorado at Vado Carranza 2 Jun (KLG, KCM). Reddish Egrets continue to breed on Is. Todos Santos, with 7 ads. 12 Apr, three nests 21 May, and 4 fledglings 6 Jul (EP, FG et al.). A flock of 36 Wood Storks along a tributary to the Río Hardy in ne Baja California 30 Jul (ph. EM, JAC) was remarkable. This species has all but disappeared from the Salton Sink, where 40 years ago it occurred as a post-breeding visitor in the thousands and 20 years ago still occurred in the hundreds (Patten et al., 2003, *op. cit.*).

GEESE THROUGH TERNS

Considering the Black-bellied Whistling-Duck's remarkable range expansion in n Mexico and the s. United States and its ever increasing tendency to wander across the continent, the species remains little-reported on the Baja California Peninsula. As many as 8 have wintered in recent years at Lagunas de Chametla, BCS, but up to 11 there 5–7 Aug (*fide* RC) were probably post-breeding dispersants. The Lesser Canada Goose at Lagunas de Chametla since at least 29 Oct 2001 was still present 7 Aug (*fide* RC). A female Northern Shoveler at Presa Rodriguez 21 Jun (RAE, PU) was late or summering. A female Redhead with



Northern Harrier was confirmed as a breeder in northwestern Baja California this season. This bird's nest with three eggs was found at the mouth of the Río San Telmo 21 April 2002, and several other pairs were seen in the vicinity. *Photograph by Enrique D. Zamora-Hernandez.*

5 chicks at Lagunita El Ciprés, BC 8 Aug (RAE) documented nesting there for the 2nd consecutive year.

An active Osprey nest at El Sauzal 20 Apr (MAP) was unexpected, as the species was unknown as a breeder in nw. Baja California; however, the breeding population has swelled in adjacent *San Diego* in recent years (San Diego Bird Atlas, unpubl. data). Breeding of Northern Harrier was confirmed in nw. Baja California when a nest with three eggs was discovered at the mouth of the Río San Telmo 21 Apr (RAE, ph. EDZ-H et al.); several additional pairs were also observed on this part of the peninsula. An ad. Golden Eagle at a nest with one large young along the Río Santo Domingo 31 May (RAH et al.) provided one of the Region's few documented breeding occurrences.

Western Gulls at Presa Rodríguez 21 Jun (PU, RAE) and 9 Aug (RAE) were away from the immediate coast. Astounding was an **Elegant Tern** on a nest at Cerro Prieto 27 Apr (KCM, KLG), although no ads. could be found there 2 Jun. This species had wandered into the Salton Sink from the Gulf of California only about 20 times and had previously been recorded in the Mexicali Valley only once, on 19 May 2001 (Patten et al. 2001. *Monographs in Field Ornithology* 3: 29–63).

CUCKOOS THROUGH FINCHES

Encouraging were single Yellow-billed Cuckoos on the Río Colorado at Ejido Pachuca 6 Jun and w. of Plan de Ayala 15–23 Jun (*fide* OH-H). Except for 2 on the Río Hardy 9 Jul 1995 (Patten et al., 2001, *op. cit.*), we are unaware of any Regional records—on the Río Colorado or in the Cape District—since the 1970s (Wilbur, S. R. 1987. *Birds of Baja California*. University of California

Press). The Pacific-slope Flycatcher has colonized most of lowland *San Diego* since 1940, becoming especially conspicuous in the last 20–25 years (San Diego Bird Atlas, unpubl. data), and should prove to be a lowland breeder in nw. Baja California as well. Nevertheless, 2 apparently unpaired singing males at Parque Morelos, Tijuana 21 Jun (PU, RAE) appear to represent the first breeding season record for the lowlands. At least 19 Vermilion Flycatchers at six locations along the Río Colorado 11 Mar—16 Jun, including at least one successful nesting pair (*fide* OH-H), were more than expected, given the dearth of recent records in ne. Baja California.

With no records in nearly 20 years, Bell's Vireos also made news on the Río Colorado, with single singing males at Presa Morelos 17 Apr (RAE), w. of Plan de Ayala 8 May (*fide* OH-H), and 2 km downstream from Vado Carranza 9 May (*fide* OH-H). On the Pacific slope, Bell's Vireos at Presa Rodríguez, on the Río de las Palmas in La Mesa, at Presa Emilio López Zamora in Ensenada, and at Santo Tomás Winery were at new locations. One at La Grulla, Maneadero Plain 20 Apr (RAH, RAE) was apparently a migrant, and 26 singing males on the Río Santo Domingo 31 May (RAE, RAH, ERL) represented a notable concentration. The number of American Crows in sw. California has increased dramatically, and nw. Baja California is also feeling the pressure. Crows were found this spring and summer along the border from Tecate to Tijuana and on the coast s. to Ensenada and 15 km e. of Ensenada. Nesting in *Eucalyptus* was confirmed at Parque Morelos, Tijuana, where a nest with young was seen 9 May (RAE), and at El Sauzal, where a pair fledged 3 young 30 May—5 Jul (ERL et al.).

A singing Marsh Wren at Presa Rodríguez and 2 on the Río de las Palmas in La Mesa 21 Jun (RAE, PU) were of note; previous summer records on the Pacific slope have been restricted to Lagunita El Ciprés (cf. *N.A.B.* 55: 485). Following exceptional numbers of Hermit Warblers on the coast in Apr and May, a female at Punta Banda 1 Jun (RAE et al.) provided the first Regional Jun record. An even later migrant was the Green-tailed Towhee downstream of San Luis Río Colorado 11 Jun (*fide* OH-H). Three hundred Tricolored Blackbirds at Ojos Negros 16 Mar (MAP) and 200+ on the lower Río San Telmo 20 Apr (RAE, RAH) exceeded previous counts at those locations, but 1000–1200 at a nesting colony at La Mision 1 May (JAC, SG-G) was more than ever reported in the Region. Nesting was also confirmed for the first time at Presa Rodríguez 9 May (10+ ads.; RAE). Not surprisingly, Great-tailed Grackles were also found nesting at new locations in nw. Baja California: Presa Rodríguez 30 Apr—21 Jun (up to 15 ads.; RAE, PU) and Presa El Carrizo 9 May (4 males, 2+ females, RAE). Nesting was confirmed for the 2nd consecutive year on the Maneadero Plain, involving 10+ ads. 22 Apr—5 Jul (RAH et al.). A pair of Lesser Goldfinches on the Río Colorado w. of Plan de Ayala 23 Apr was followed by a female with a brood patch banded 2 Jun (*fide* OH-H), confirming nesting in northeastern Baja California (cf. Patten et al., 2001, *op. cit.*)

EXOTIC SPECIES

An exotic “big day” in Tijuana 21 Jun included free-flying Black-throated Magpie-Jay, Purplish-backed Jay, White-collared Seedeater, and female Painted Bunting (RAE, PU). Two more magpie-jays were south of Ensenada in early Jun (ph. TW), and another seedeater was captured at Lagunas de Chametla 5 Aug (ph. RC)

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