

# Baja California Peninsula



## Richard A. Erickson

LSA Associates  
20 Executive Park, Suite 200  
Irvine, California 92614  
(richard.erickson@lsa-assoc.com)

## Robert A. Hamilton

34 Rivo Alto Canal  
Long Beach, California 90803  
(robb.hamilton@gte.net)

## Eduardo Palacios

Ecología, Centro de Investigación  
Científica y Educación Superior de Ensenada  
Miraflores 334, Fracc. Bella Vista  
La Paz, Baja California Sur 23050, Mexico  
(U.S. mailing address:  
P.O. Box 434844, San Diego  
California 92143-4844)  
(epalacio@cicese.mx)

## Roberto Carmona

Departamento de Biología Marina  
Universidad Autónoma de Baja California Sur  
Apartado Postal 19-B  
La Paz, Baja California Sur, Mexico  
(beauty@uabcs.mx)

Severe drought conditions this season continued to influence birds in the Region, as discussed below. Coverage was good in northwestern Baja California but light elsewhere. Two shorebirds new to México—Terek Sandpiper and Little Stint—generated the most excitement, and four other Peninsula firsts were documented. The vagrant passerine season was otherwise modest, especially in comparison to 2001.

## SHEARWATERS THROUGH TERNS

Nearshore seabird feeding flocks included the following notable totals: 10,000+ Black-vented Shearwaters (including at least one white-backed and 4 partially leucistic birds) off La Bufadora 22 Oct (MJI et al.); 1200 Brown Pelicans near El Socorro 19 Sep (HGdS et al.); 10,000 Brandt's Cormorants off Bahía Asunción 23 Sep (RAE et al.) and 3000+ off the mouth of the Río Santo Tomás 15 Oct (MSM et al.); 15 Parasitic Jaegers off the mouth of the Río Santo Tomás 20 Sep (HGdS et al.); and 2000 Royal Terns at Punta San Carlos 29 Oct (PAG et al.). An American Bittern, very rarely encountered in B.C.S., was at Lagunas de Chametla 25 Oct (SGM, BT). Three Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks were at Lagunas de Chametla 25 Oct (vt. SGM, BT). Greater White-fronted Geese were recorded at four locales (two in each state) 20 Oct–5 Nov, with a high count of 12 at Estero San José del Cabo 26 Oct (SGM, BT). An imm. Ross's Goose was at the Río Santo Tomás estuary 5 Nov (†JEP), and 6 "Lesser" Canada Geese were at El Rosario 2–4 Nov (JEP). The lingering Canada Goose at Lagunas de Chametla was present throughout the period (*vide* RC), and the saga continues. A team of Canada Goose experts organized by Paul F. Springer examined videotape taken 25 Oct (vt. SGM) and, contrary to our spring report, they believe the bird is best considered the formerly Endangered Aleutian subspecies *leucopareia*, not recorded previously in B.C.S. A complete discussion is anticipated for publication elsewhere. Blue-winged Teal counts of 200+ at El Rosario 25 Sep (SNGH et al.) and 100 at Estero San José del Cabo 26 Oct (SGM, BT) apparently exceed all counts in California.

A juv. Red-shouldered Hawk at Punta Eugenia 15 Oct (†JEP) furnished just the 2nd record for the Vizcaíno Peninsula, following one at Bahía Tortugas 16 Oct 1997. At least 6 Swainson's Hawks in fields s. of Algodones 17 Nov (KLG, KCM), and 3–8 at Santa Teresita 24 Sep–17 Oct (SNGH et al.) probably involved some wintering birds. The season's only Zone-tailed Hawk in B.C. was a juv. on the San Quintín Plain 30 Oct (RAH et al.). A light-morph juv. Ferruginous Hawk at Santa Teresita 24 Sep (SNGH et al.)

**SA** Severe drought conditions in the state of Baja California and adjacent areas were believed responsible for unusual dispersal patterns in a number of species. Representing "resident" species were the first Western Scrub-Jays and Western Bluebirds to be found at Cataviña/Santa Inés, the first White-breasted Nuthatches to be found in the Region's lowlands, and Spotted Towhees venturing well into the Vizcaino Desert. At least three jays (with plumage matching birds from the California district rather than the interior southwestern U.S.) were present 19 Sep–29 Oct (HGdS, ph. MJI et al.), and 3 bluebirds at Santa Inés 29 Oct (MSM, ph. †PAG, vt. RAH, RAE) appeared to be of the subspecies *anabetae*, from the Sierra San Pedro Mártir, and were the first recorded in the Vizcaino Desert. The White-breasted Nuthatches were on the Maneadero Plain 21 Sep (SNGH), at Santo Tomás 8–9 Oct and 28 Oct–5 Nov (both RAE et al.), and on the lower Río Santo Tomás 5 Nov (JEP). Up to 6 towhees at Cataviña/Santa Inés 19 Sep–29 Oct (HGdS et al.) were more than ever before, and one was s. to Punta Prieta 22 Sep (MJI et al.). All of the nuthatch and towhee calls noted were typical of Pacific coast birds (RAE, SNGH, JEP).

Migratory passerines also appear to have been impacted: Townsend's Solitaires were on the Vizcaino Desert 29 Oct at Rancho El Descanso and Santa Inés (MSM et al.), and record numbers of Fox Sparrows, Golden-crowned Sparrows, and Oregon Juncos were recorded in the lowlands and s. to Cataviña/Santa Inés. Most reports of Fox Sparrows were of birds resembling the subspecies *altivagans*, followed by birds resembling *unalaschensis* and *schistacea*. Reports from Cataviña 11 Oct–4 Nov were representative and included up to 11 *altivagans*, 2 *unalaschensis*, and 2 *schistacea*.

Drought effects on several western warbler species and possibly the Sage Sparrow are discussed in the main account.

was both at the s. limit of its range and over two weeks earlier than any previously found in the Region. A confiding juv. Clapper Rail at the Río Santo Tomás estuary 20 Sep (HGdS, vt. RAH, MSM) provided the first record for that location.

An impressive horde of 665 Semipalmated Plovers was at El Centenario 25 Oct (SGM, BT). Only 2 Solitary Sandpipers were detected 20 Sep–26 Oct (vt. SGM et al.). The highlight of the season was a cooperative Terek Sandpiper wintering on the beach at Chametla 22 Aug+ (DG, RV, LS, RC), a first for the country. Additional details will appear in the winter report. The lone record of a Semipalmated Sandpiper was one captured at Lagunas de Chametla 9 Aug (*fide* RC). Another Mexican first was the juv. Little Stint that obligingly remained at Estero Punta Banda 22–30 Oct (ph. BLS, ph. †MJI, ph. TL et al.). A Dunlin at Lagunita El Ciprés 7 Sep (RAE) was over two weeks earlier than previous records; Estero Punta Banda held 20 birds on 21 Sep, and the following day 10 were at Guerrero Negro (SNGH et al.). This corresponds with early arrivals in Marin, California, and presumably elsewhere and may suggest an early breeding season and subsequent departure from the breeding grounds (*fide* SNGH). Wilson's Phalaropes tarried at Estero Punta Banda, with 3 still present 13–18 Oct (vt. RAH et al.). A first-year Laughing Gull, very rare on the Pacific coast



**This female Downy Woodpecker was at El Descanso, Baja California on 20 October 2002. Although possibly resident in extreme northwestern Baja California, there are still fewer than 10 records of this species for Mexico. Photograph by Tony Leukering.**

of B.C., was at El Sauzal 29 Nov (KAR). An ad. Herring Gull at Guerrero Negro 22 Sep (MJI et al.) was the Region's earliest by eight days. A juv. Sabine's Gull at Estero Punta Banda 16 Oct (MSM et al.) provided the Region's 2nd onshore record, following a juv. at the same spot 4 Oct 2001 (SNGH, RAH). Noteworthy terns at El Centenario included 2 Gull-billed 18 Oct and 11 Least 21 Sep (late; both RC).

## PIGEONS THROUGH PIPITS

Ruddy Ground-Doves have recently colonized s. B.C.S., and a total of 6 were found from La Paz southward 25 Oct–20 Nov (vt. SGM, BT, †CFZ). The Region's first record of a **Flammulated Owl** was furnished by a live bird inside a house at Bahía de Los Angeles 12 Oct. (CE). Placed outside, it died that night and the carcass was photographed 13 Oct (ph. G&MF) before being preserved (\*UABC 1315). At least 65 Vaux's Swifts detected in n. B.C. 18 Sep–29 Oct included 3–4 inland around Cataviña 22 Sep (MJI et al.); in B.C.S., where small numbers may winter, one was s. of Todos Santos 28 Oct (SGM, BT). A total of 13 Black-chinned Hummingbirds was higher than usual for the Region in autumn

and included one of the peninsula's most southerly records: Lagunas de Chametla 27 Oct (SGM, BT). A sapsucker at San Antonio 25 Oct (vt. SGM, BT) showed characters possibly suggesting a Red-naped x Yellow-bellied hybrid. Downy Woodpeckers are

quite rare in the extreme nw. during fall/winter, and 2 were recorded this season: a male at Tijuana 20 Sep (†MJI) and a female at El Descanso 20 Oct (BLS, ph. TL, BPG).

Willow Flycatchers are rare to uncommon fall migrants in B.C., and a total of 20 recorded 18 Sep–22 Oct was above average; a calling bird at Miraflores 26 Oct (SGM, BT) provided the peninsula's southernmost record and one of only a few for B.C.S.. Five Least Flycatchers exceeded expectations, with individuals at the Río Santo Tomás estuary 21 Sep (RAE) and 5 Nov (†JEP), La Bufadora 13 Oct (RAH et al.), se. of Maneadero 15 Oct (†MSM et al.), and Punta Banda 16 Oct (DSC et al.). Single Hammond's Flycatchers were at the mouth of the Río Santo Tomás 10 Oct (JEP) and s. of Playas de Tijuana 14 Oct (DSC et al.), and one or 2 were at Punta Banda 21–28 Oct (†JEP et al.). An unprecedented 5 migrant Dusky Flycatchers included 3 in B.C.; Cataviña 22 Sep (SNGH, RAE), s. of Playas de Tijuana 13 Oct (RAH et al.), at La Bufadora 18 Oct (RAE); and 2 in B.C.S., at Rancho Santa Mónica 23–24 Sep (SNGH, ph. MJI, RAE) and at Santa Teresita 24 Sep (†MJI et al.). The Region's 6th Eastern Phoebe was at El Rosario 4 Nov (†JEP), while the first **Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher** was at El Descanso 20–22 Oct (ph. †MJI, ph. TL, ph. BLS, BPG). Seven Tropical Kingbirds 20 Sep–27 Oct (5 in B.C., 2 in B.C.S.) was slightly above average. Seven Thick-billed Kingbirds were at Miraflores 26–29 Oct (vt. SGM, BT), and one was at Caduaño 29 Oct (SGM, BT), but spring and summer records that would prove the species' residency in the Cape District are still lacking. Rounding out the flycatchers are two very scarce species, a first-fall Eastern Kingbird at Bahía Tortugas 23–24 Sep (SNGH et al.) and single Scissor-tailed Flycatchers at El Rosario 25 Sep (MJI et al.) and 3 Nov (†JEP).

The views of a first-fall **White-eyed Vireo** at Santa Teresita 24 Sep (†SNGH) were frustratingly brief but adequate to provide the Region's first record. The only Bell's Vireo found n. of the normal wintering range was at Santa Inés 19 Sep (MSM et al.). Plumbeous Vireos were unusually scarce, with reports limited to individuals at Santa Inés 19 Sep (RAH et al.) and on the lower Río Santo Tomás 20 Sep (MSM et al.). The only migrant Cassin's Vireo reported was at Ensenada 21 Sep (RAE et al.). One of the fall's most remarkable finds was the fresh carcass of a road-killed imm. Philadelphia Vireo at El Rosario 21 Oct (BLS et al.; \*UABC 1303). Red-eyed Vireos were at El Sauzal 17 Sep (RAH et al.) and 27 Oct–1 Nov (RAH, †JEP), and at the mouth of the Río Santo Tomás 21 Sep (SNGH). The fall's

only Yellow-green Vireo was an imm. near Santa Teresita 16 Oct (†JEP).

An impressive concentration of swallows at Lagunas de Chametla 25–27 Oct included one Purple Martin, 3 Trees, 800–1000 Violet-greens, 15 Northern Rough-wingeds, one Bank, one Cliff, and 300 Barns (SGM, BT). Single Red-breasted Nuthatches were found at La Salina 20 Sep (SNGH, †MJI, RAE) and at the mouth of the Río Santo Tomás 20–21 Sep (vt. RAH et al.). A Gray Catbird at La Salina 13–16 Oct (†PAG, vt. RAH et al.) was welcome indeed; two previous Regional records were undocumented (*Monographs in Field Ornithology* 3: 191). A Red-throated Pipit was on the Maneadero Plain 21 Oct (†JEP).

**WARBLERS THROUGH FINCHES**

Thirty-one warbler species found this season was down five from last year's record, and most e. species were recorded in modest numbers. The following represented fairly typical showings: 7 Tennessees 17 Sep–28 Oct (B.C. 4, B.C.S. 3); 3 Lucy's 20 Sep–29 Oct (2, one); 4 Magnolias 21 Sep–20 Oct (4, 0); 3 Black-throated Greens 14–30 Oct (2, one); 2 Blackburnians 18–22 Oct (2, 0); 4 Palms 15 Oct–3 Nov (2, 2); 13 Blackpolls 20 Sep–21 Oct (9, 4); 4 Ovenbirds 19 Sep–27 Oct (4,0); and 2 Canadas (Punta Banda 18 Sep, †MSM; Rancho San José de Castro 23–24 Sep, SNGH et al.). Totals for three warbler species were higher than in 2001: 7 Virginia's 18 Sep–21 Oct (5, 2); 7 Prairies 21 Sep–22 Oct (3, 4); and 4 Hoodeds 22 Sep–29 Oct (0, 4). Totals for the Chestnut-sided Warbler (one at Punta Banda 8 Oct, RAE) and Black-throated Blue Warbler (one at El Rosario 3 Nov, JEP) were low, but the former species traditionally underperforms compared to s. California. The season's top warbler finds were the Region's and B.C.'s 2nd Worm-eating Warbler on the Maneadero Plain 21 Sep (†MJI, SNGH) and a Mourning Warbler at Todos Santos 28 Oct (†SGM, †BT).

Presumably extending the spring pattern—when drought conditions in natural habitats drove migrants to concentrate in parks and other mesic lowland settings—several w. warbler species were recorded in high numbers: approximately 25 Nashvilles 20 Sep–5 Nov, all but 4 in B.C.; 16 Hermits 18 Sep–30 Oct, all in B.C.; more than the usual number of Black-throated Grays; and a single-location high count of 1000+ Audubon's Warblers se. of Maneadero 14 Oct (RAH et al.). Miraflores is a historical

locality for Belding's Yellowthroat, but a male there 29 Oct (SGM, BT) was perhaps the first recorded there since the 1800s. A new locality for the species was Lagunas de



**This Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher at El Descanso, Baja California 20 October 2002 represented the first record for the Baja California Peninsula. It remained until at least 22 October; thirteen fall records for Alta California span the period 13 September to 20 October. Photograph by Brian L. Sullivan.**

Chametla, where different individuals were found 25 & 27 Oct (SGM, BT). Single Yellow-breasted Chats at Todos Santos 28 Oct (SGM, BT) and Cabo San Lucas 22 Nov (CFZ) were presumably at wintering sites.

Fifteen Summer Tanagers were found the length of the peninsula 22 Sep–3 Nov, but the only Scarlet Tanagers were at El Socorro 21 Oct (†MJI) and Bahía Tortugas 15 Oct (†JEP). More than the usual number of Clay-colored Sparrows were found from the Vizcaíno Peninsula northward: about 15 during the period 22 Sep–29 Oct. A Black-chinned Sparrow at Ensenada 21 Sep (SNGH et al.) and a Large-billed Savannah Sparrow in fields at Villa Jesús Maria 22 Sep (RAE) were out of place, but not nearly so much as a Bell's Sage Sparrow at Rancho Santa Mónica 23 Sep (SNGH, ph. MJI, RAE). This dark subspecies is generally considered sedentary and had not been recorded any closer than Santa Catarina Landing, approximately 240 km to the north. Patten and Unitt (*Auk* 119: 26–35, 2002) discussed the diagnosability of Sage Sparrow subspecies. Sticking with well-marked subspecies, a Pink-sided Junco was at Punta Banda 16 Oct (MSM, DSC et al.) and 3–4 Gray-headed Juncos were found along the coast s. to El Rosario 13 Oct–3 Nov. A Lapland Longspur near Laguna Figueroa 28 Oct (RAH et al.)

was at a traditional spot, but was the first Regional record since 1997.

Only 2 Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were found: Bahía de Los Angeles 26 Nov (ph. G&MF) and Rancho Santa Mónica 24 Sep (SNGH et al.). Late migrants at Cataviña included a Blue Grosbeak 29 Oct (PAG et al.) and a Lazuli Bunting 3 Nov (JEP). Four Indigo Buntings 24 Sep–29 Oct were evenly divided between the two states. Dickcissels and Bobolinks made strong showings from the Vizcaíno Peninsula northward, with 11–12 of the former 19 Sep–10 Oct and 10 of the latter 20 Sep–27 Oct. Another Bronzed Cowbird was found on the Pacific slope of B.C., this time an imm. male at Cataviña 29 Oct (MSM, ph. PAG, vt. RAH, RAE). Noteworthy orioles reported included Orchards at Punta Banda 8 Oct (RAE) and Todos Santos 28 Oct (SGM, BT), 4 Bullock's and 2 Baltimores on the Vizcaíno Peninsula 23–24 Sep (MJI et al.), and Baltimores in interior B.C. in the Sierra San Miguel (e. of San Quintín) 28 Sep (GR-C, \*UABC 1290) and at Rancho San José 28 Oct (RAH et al.). Pine Siskins were recorded s. to Bahía de Los Angeles (one 28 Oct, M&GF) and Lawrence's Goldfinches s. to Rancho Santa Mónica (female 23–24 Sep, RAE, ph. MJI, SNGH; the first for the Vizcaíno Peninsula).

**EXOTICS**

Indications of non-native species increasing their claims on the peninsula included 2 Spotted Doves on the Maneadero Plain 13 Oct (RAH et al.), pairs (?) of Black-throated Magpie-Jays at El Sauzal and Punta Banda in Sep and Oct, and 1000 European Starlings at Lagunas de Chametla 25 Oct (SGM, BT). A female or imm. Painted Bunting at San José del Cabo 26 Oct (vt. SGM, BT) was in heavy head molt and is best considered an escapee from captivity.

**Contributors:** Georgina Brabata, Roberto Carmona, Daniel S. Cooper, Andrea Cuéllar, Jeff N. Davis, Richard A. Erickson, Carolina Espinoza, Mary and George Flicker, Peter A. Gaede, Daniel Galindo, Kimball L. Garrett, Brian P. Gibbons, Héctor Gómez de Silva, Robert A. Hamilton, Steve N. G. Howell, Marshall J. Iliff, Tony Leukering, Rita López, Steven G. Mlodinov, Kathy C. Molina, James E. Pike, Kurt A. Radamaker, Gorgonio Ruiz-Campos, Mike San Miguel, Luis Sauma, Brian L. Sullivan, Bill Tweit, Rosalba Vazquez, C. Fred Zeilemaker. ☺