

Southern Pacific Coast



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Committee (C.B.R.C.) review list is forwarded to the C.B.R.C. Secretary and archived at the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology in Camarillo.

LOONS THROUGH RAPTORS

An alternate-plumaged Pacific Loon inland at N.E.S.S. 14 Jun (TMcG, MSanM) was an exceptionally late spring migrant. A few Northern Fulmars remained along the coast through the summer, as indicated by single birds at Newport Beach, *Orange* 31 Jul (BED), off La Jolla, *San Diego* 12 Jul (MBi), and at San Clemente I. 23 Jul (JMM). Moderate numbers of Cook's Petrels (up to 6/hour) were seen during a CalCOFI survey 276+ km off the coast in late Jul (KNN).

The only Red-billed Tropicbirds reported were 2 over the Cortez Bank well off *San Diego* 28 Jul (GT). A Masked Booby at China Pt. on San Clemente I. 13 Jul+ (ph. BLS) was believed to be the same individual here last Aug. A major influx of Brown Pelicans to the Salton Sea and Lower Colorado River in early Jun primarily involved young of the year dispersing after very successful nesting in the Gulf of California; individuals pushed northward into the Owens Valley 1–10 Jul (BKS, T&JH) to establish the first record for *Inyo*, and westward to L. Henshaw in the mts. of *San Diego* 27 Jun (ELK). The only Magnificent Frigatebird was an imm. at S.E.S.S. 24 Jul (HBK, GMcC).

The only Little Blue Herons reported away from the resident population in coastal *San Diego* were an ad. on Upper Newport Bay, *Orange* 24 Jul (BJ), a "calico" bird at Point Mugu, *Ventura* 13 Jun–18 Jul (MR), and a juv. in Carpinteria, *Santa Barbara* 11 Jul (LM). Imm. Reddish Egrets on the Santa Ana R. in Huntington Beach/Costa Mesa, *Orange* 26 Jul+ (MMcL) and at Bolsa Chica, *Orange* 29 Jul+ (BED) were the only ones reported. The earliest Wood Stork at S.E.S.S. was one on 12 Jun (KLG), with numbers there building to 32 by the end of Jul (GMcC).

A Canvasback, rare in summer, was at S.E.S.S. 3–10 Jul (GMcC), and at least 5 Ring-necked Ducks, also rare in summer, were in the Owens Valley during the summer (T&JH), with additional singles at C.L. through 29 Jul (SS) and near Seeley, *Imperial* 9 May–27 Aug (GMcC). A Bufflehead successfully fledged a duckling at Tinemaha Res. near Big Pine, *Inyo* in Jun (T&JH) to establish one of the southernmost nestings in California (see *Western Birds* 29: 36–40). The Harlequin Duck found on Mission Bay in San Diego in Mar 2001 was still present at the end of the period (MBi). A Surf Scoter inland at Salton City, *Imperial* 20 May–11 Jun (GMcC) and a White-winged

Highlights of the season included a nesting attempt by Hooded Warblers and the presence of several summering Northern Parulas, following a spring in which these and other species of southeastern origin were recorded in relatively high numbers, and the Region's southernmost nesting of Common Merganser, which followed this spring's unprecedented successful nesting of Hooded Merganser. There was a resurgence of nesting efforts by fish-eating birds at the Salton Sea, and, although breeding success was mixed, this was testimony to at least the short-term resilience of the Sea's ecosystems following cutbacks in the agricultural water that feeds it. West Nile virus hit the Region hard for the first time this summer, although by the end of the period there were only anecdotal accounts of diminished populations of crows and other species.

Abbreviations: B.S. (Butterbredt Spring at the s. end of the Sierra Nevada above Cantil, e. Kern); C.L. (China Lake Naval Air Weapons Station, extreme ne. Kern); F.C.R. (Furnace Creek Ranch, Death Valley N.M., *Inyo*); G.H.P. (Galileo Hill Park in extreme e. Kern); N.E.S.S. (n. end of Salton Sea, *Riverside*); P.P. (Piute Ponds on Edwards Air Force Base, ne. *Los Angeles*); S.C.R.E. (Santa Clara R. Estuary near *Ventura, Ventura*); S.E.S.S. (s. end of Salton Sea, *Imperial*); S.F.K.R.P. (South Fork Kern River Preserve near Weldon, Kern); V.A.F.B. (Vandenberg A.F.B. in nw. *Santa Barbara*); V.C.G.P. (Ventura County G.P., near Pt. Mugu Naval Air Station, *Ventura*). Because virtually all rarities in s. California are seen by many observers, only the observer(s) initially finding and identifying the bird are included. Documentation for species on the California Bird Records

Scoter at S.E.S.S. 9 May–10 Jul (GMcC) were evidently attempting to summer locally; 2 of the Surf Scoters found at N.E.S.S. in early May remained through 6 Jun (CMcG), the White-winged Scoter through 27 Jun (JFG), and one of the Black Scoters through 4 Jul (HBK). A Long-tailed Duck in Santa Barbara 23 Jun (DMC) was evidently summering locally. A Hooded Merganser near Glendale, Los Angeles 11–24 Jul (RB) was believed present since May. The presence of four family groups of Common Mergansers, including a female with 14 ducklings, on Piru Cr. above Piru L., Ventura 8 Jun (JG) established the s. limit of the species' breeding range.

A pair of Bald Eagles that fledged 2 young at L. Henshaw in Jun (NB) established the first modern-day nesting record for San Diego. Since there are very few breeding records for Sharp-shinned Hawk in s. California, one at Montana de Oro S. P., San Luis Obispo 13 Jun (JLR) was noteworthy. A Cooper's Hawk near Westmoreland, Imperial 4 Jul (CAM, MSANM) was one of a very few recorded in the Imperial Valley in summer. A Red-shouldered Hawk near Seeley 17 Jul (GMcC) established the earliest date for a fall migrant/winter visitor around S.E.S.S.

RAILS THROUGH ALCIDS

Up to 2 calling Black Rails were present near Seeley, Imperial through the summer (GMcC). An ad. Black-bellied Plover was at C.L. on the unexpected date of 29–30 Jun (SS). An American Oystercatcher was photographed on Anacapa I. 6 Jun (JF), and a black-and-white oystercatcher on Santa Cruz I. 5 Jul (DH) was believed to be the same bird present since Mar. A Lesser Yellowlegs at S.E.S.S. 17 Jun (GMcC) established the earliest date for a fall migrant at the Salton Sink. The first Solitary Sandpipers of the fall were at C.L. 30 Jun (SS), near Lakeview, Riverside 21 Jul (CMcG), F.C.R. (2) 22 Jul (JLD), P.P. 25 Jul (JF), Baldwin L., San Bernardino 27 Jul (MBy), and on the Los Angeles R. in Long Beach, Los Angeles 30 Jul (MSANM). Casual in Inyo, a Whimbrel at Owens L. 25 Jul (BS, SS) coincided with large numbers passing southward through the Salton Sink. Two Black Turnstones at S.E.S.S. 3 Jul+ (GMcC) were either summering locally or exceptionally early fall migrants. Single ad. Semipalmated Sandpipers were at P.P. 21 Jul (TMcG, MSANM), C.L. 29 Jul (SS), and Goleta 20 Jul (WTF); a juv. in Goleta, Santa Barbara 29 Jul (WTF) and 3 on the Los Angeles R. in Long Beach 31 Jul (KGL) were the earliest this fall. Southbound Western and Least Sandpipers reached the Salton Sea early, with 15 Westerns and 3 Least on 17 Jun (GMcC) establishing the earliest dates for fall migrants at the Salton Sink. An ad. Baird's Sandpiper was at the mouth of Villa Creek, San Luis Obispo 21 Jul (GPS), and another was at Lancaster the same day (TMcG, MSANM); the first juv. was one on the Los Angeles R. in Long Beach 31 Jul (RB). Three Short-billed Dowitchers in Goleta 23 Jun (NAL) were early fall mi-

grants. A male Ruff in alternate plumage at V.C.G.P. 1 Jul (DDesJ) was an early fall migrant. A Wilson's Snipe in the Prado Basin, Riverside 30 Jun–2 Jul (JEP) was an exceptionally early fall migrant.

At the Salton Sea, several pairs of California Gulls and 35–50 pairs of Caspian Terns successfully nested on Mullet I., but 117 pairs of Gull-billed Terns along the s. shore experienced a high level of disturbance and predation; nearly 400 pairs of Black Skimmers were on nests at the end of the period, so their success has yet to be determined (KCM). A Laughing Gull near Imperial Beach, San Diego 26–27 Jun (TH) was on the coast, where rare. Two Franklin's Gulls at C.L. 9–10 Jun (SS) were late spring migrants, and one there 29 Jul (SS) was the first for the fall. A second-summer Western Gull in the Prado Basin 23–30 Jun (JEP) was far inland. A worn second-summer Glaucous-winged Gull at N.E.S.S. 13 Aug (TL) had obviously summered locally, one of a very few to have done so on the Salton Sea.

Two alternate-plumaged Arctic Terns inland at Fig Lagoon near Seeley 3–4 Jul (GMcC, CAM) were evidently exceptionally late spring migrants. A pair of Forster's Terns that attempted unsuccessfully to nest at Tinemaha Res. near Big Pine in late Jun (T&JH) represented the first breeding attempt in Inyo. A pair of Least Terns successfully nested about 24 km inland on the Santa Ana R. in Anaheim, Orange in Jun (DRW); 2 were much farther inland at N.E.S.S. 6 Jun (CMcG), and 2–3 were at S.E.S.S. 23 May–17 Jul (GMcC). Two Xantus's Murrelets of the s. race *hypoleucus* 120 km w. of San Clemente I. 17 Jul (KNN) were early for this far north.

DOVES THROUGH VIREOS

A White-winged Dove in Hermosa Beach, Los Angeles 22 Jun (LC) and another on San Clemente I. 30 Jun (SWS) were w. of the species' normal range. Ruddy Ground-Doves remained near Calipatria, Imperial through the period and were suspected of nesting. The first of the breeding Yellow-billed Cuckoos reached S.F.K.R.P. 16 Jun (BB); single birds at Ridgecrest, Kern 5 Jun (LS), Borrego Springs, San Diego 13 Jun (MBi), Blythe, Riverside 14 Jun (RH), and Morongo Valley, San Bernardino the same day (MAC) were migrants away from known nesting localities. Northern Pygmy-Owls in the San Bernardino Mts. at Bluff L. 27 Jul (MBy) and Heart Bar campground 31 Jul (AH, VH) were at the s. extreme of this species' known range in California. Calling Whip-poor-wills, a species yet to be proven to nest in California, were around Heart Bar and Fish Creek campgrounds in the San Bernardino Mts. in Jun (DK, ES). The only Chimney Swifts reported were single birds over Inglewood, Los Angeles 9 Jun (RB) and Long Beach 22 Jun (KGL). Up to 2 male Broad-tailed Hummingbirds frequenting a feeder at Heart Bar campground in the San

Bernardino Mts. 11–31 Jul (DL, HBK, AH) were w. of the species' normal range.

Just how late the spring migration of Willow Flycatchers can be is illustrated by a count of 60 at B.S. 10 Jun, with the species "abundant" at nearby G.H.P. the same day (KNN). In contrast, the subspecies *extimus* is nearly extirpated as a breeder in the Region; in addition to the small population at S.F.K.R.P., a territorial male was in Fillmore, Ventura 4 Jun (JG). A Willow Flycatcher at Fig Lagoon near Seeley, Imperial 24 Jul (GMcC) established the earliest fall record for the Salton Sink. A calling Least Flycatcher was at S.F.K.R.P. 11 Jul (AS). A Pacific-slope Flycatcher at Bolsa Chica, Orange 30 Jun (RAE) was well away from any known nesting area. A pair of Vermilion Flycatchers nested successfully again this year in San Bernardino, San Bernardino, with 2 young fledging in Jun (TB). Two pairs of Brown-crested Flycatchers were at Borrego Springs, San Diego through the period (MBi, GMcC); a vocal bird was at China Ranch, Inyo 22 Jul (JLD). Eastern Kingbirds were at Carpinteria, Santa Barbara 18 Jun (LRB) and ne. of Bishop, Inyo 21–23 Jul (J&DP).

Loggerhead Shrikes continue to decline on the coastal slope, with the tiny populations in San Luis Obispo and Ventura impacted by predator-control programs designed to protect nesting Snowy Plovers and/or Least Terns. One on the Morro Bay sandspit, San Luis Obispo 4 Jul (RF) was away from recent breeding sites. Shrikes bred at Carpinteria in Jul for the first time on the e. coast of Santa Barbara (DMC). A locally-fledged bird at Ormond Beach, Ventura 31 Jul (WW) was in a known nesting area from which birds have been trapped and relocated to protect nesting Least Terns. Only one certain nesting pair was reported from the Los Angeles coastal lowlands, in Cudahy in Jul (RB).

In contrast to shrikes, the recovery of Least Bell's Vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*) populations in the Region continues at an encouraging rate: over 500 territorial males were in the Prado Basin, Riverside/San Bernardino this summer (DP). Atypical was a family group in Irvine, Orange 1 Jul in non-native *Myioporium/Eucalyptus* landscaping along a freeway border (DRW). At the n. end of the species' range in the Region, one was at Wildrose Ranger Station, Inyo 4 Jun (T&JH), and another was at China Ranch, Inyo 22 Jul (JLD). A Hutton's Vireo on San Clemente I. 12–13 Jun (BLS) was the 2nd to be found on that island. Yellow-throated Vireos, casual in California, were found in Palm City, San Diego 21–22 Jun (GLR) and in Vandenberg Village, Santa Barbara 4–5 Jul (MAH et al.). A migrant Red-eyed Vireo was in Los Angeles 5–12 Jun (RB), and another bird summered at Huntington Beach, Orange 4 Jul–14 Aug+ (LO et al.).

SWALLOWS THROUGH WARBLERS

Two Bank Swallows at S.E.S.S. 24 Jun (GMcC)

were very early fall migrants. A California Gnatcatcher at the Thousand Oaks Botanical Garden 19 Jun–8 Aug (RSw) was some 15 km s. of the small remnant *Ventura* population in Moorpark. A Ruby-crowned Kinglet in the fir forest on Clark Mt., *San Bernardino* 10 Jul was in one of the few areas of the Region with multiple mid-summer records (CC). Western Bluebirds continued their range expansion in the coastal lowlands; this summer, they nested on the Palos Verdes Peninsula and in West Los Angeles and Inglewood, *Los Angeles* (RB, KGL), as well as at Huntington Beach, *Orange* (D&PC). A Swainson's Thrush near El Centro, *Imperial* 31 Jul (KZK) was difficult to categorize, as it was a full month earlier than the earliest desert records of this scarce interior fall migrant. A Hermit Thrush at Palomar Mt. S. P., *San Diego* 19 Jun (PU) was well s. of the species known breeding range. Cedar Waxwings routinely linger in the Region until early Jun, but a bird in Laguna Niguel, *Orange* 18 Jun (LL) was very late.

Up to 2 Virginia's Warblers on Clark Mt. 7 Jun–10 Jul (DG, CC) and a pair with 2 fledglings at 2526 m near Onyx Summit in the *San Bernardino* Mts. 25 Jun (RLMcK) were in areas for which at least sporadic nesting is documented. Early fall migrant Lucy's Warblers were found coastally at Harbor Regional Park near San Pedro, *Los Angeles* 10 Jul (KGL) and e. Anaheim 31 Jul (DRW), and on the deserts away from breeding areas near Seeley 17–25 Jul (GMcC) and at C.L. 28 Jul (2; SS). A pair of Northern Parulas remained at Eaton Canyon, *Los Angeles* 10 Jun–25 Jul, with the male present to at least 8 Aug (JF), and a male at Harbor Regional Park 12 Jun+ was associating with a female on 10 Jul, with a possible juv. observed in Aug (KGL); additional birds not included in the spring report included 5 in coastal *Orange* 1–8 Jun (DRW), one in Poway, *San Diego* 17–18 Jun (KGr), one at Prado Basin, *Riverside* 18 Jun (JEP), up to 3 at S.F.K.R.P. 10 Jun–12 Jul (AS, LS, MBr), one in Ridgecrest, *Kern* 10–11 Jun (JS), one n. of Bishop 6 Jun (J&DP), one at F.C.R. 19–26 Jun (V&GW), and one in Blythe 21 Jul (RH). A singing Chestnut-sided Warbler at S.F.K.R.P. 22 Jun was a late spring vagrant (TS). Three pairs of Yellow-rumped Warblers at Cuyamaca Rancho S. P., *San Diego* 5 Jun were at the s. end of the California breeding range (PJ). A well-described male Blackpoll Warbler at L. Fulmor in the *San Jacinto* Mts., *Riverside* 25 Jul (J&MT) established an unprecedented mid-summer record. Black-and-white Warblers were on Pt. Loma 14 (MBi) & 24–25 Jun (JW, DF) and on San Clemente I. 27 Jun (WMF). American Redstarts were at Oso Flaco L., *San Luis Obispo* 24 Jun (CF), Santa Barbara 19 Jun (RSm), Goleta 26 Jun (JHo), near Imperial Beach 23 Jun (DRW), and G.H.P. 10 Jun (KNN). Late spring Ovenbirds were on San Clemente I. 8 (JMM) & 17 Jun (BLS), at Palomar Mt. S. P. 19 Jun (PU), and in Man-

hattan Beach, *Los Angeles* 23 Jun (RB). A singing Northern Waterthrush was in Bautista Canyon, *San Jacinto* Mts. 3–4 Jun (CMcG).

A male Kentucky Warbler was in Webb Canyon in San Dimas, *Los Angeles* 27–30 Jun (JEP). In addition to Hooded Warblers at V.A.E.B. 16 Jun (DMC) and Prado Basin, *Riverside* 21 Jun (JEP), a male summered at Huntington Beach 1 Jun+ (LRH), and a pair was in Goleta 21 Jun–17 Jul (DMC et al.), with the male present through the period; the Goleta pair nested, with three warbler eggs and two Brown-headed Cowbird eggs found on 3 Jul but the nest was abandoned by 17 Jul (nest to Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History). Wilson's Warblers summered and apparently bred at Harbor R.P., with 2 drab immes. with a singing male 26 Jun (KGL); one near El Centro 28 Jul (KZK) established the earliest fall record for the Salton Sink.

TANAGERS THROUGH FINCHES

A pair of Hepatic Tanagers was at Arrastre Cr. in the *San Bernardino* Mts. through at least 18 Jul, with an active nest found 20 Jun (M&NF, TEW); another pair was on Clark Mt. 7 Jun (DG, SJM), with 2 males there 10 Jul (CC). The only spring vagrant Scarlet Tanager was a second-year male at Oso Flaco L. 3–5 Jun (AFS). At least six pairs of Summer Tanagers were found in riparian woodlands in e. *San Diego* this season (PU); among the scattering of birds away from breeding areas was a second-year male in atypical oak-conifer habitat at 2000 m at Chilao in the *San Gabriel* Mts., *Los Angeles* 26 Jun (AB).

A Green-tailed Towhee at only 900 m elevation on Sulphur Mt., e. of Ojai, *Ventura* 16 Jun (BSi) was below expected breeding elevations. An unseasonal Brewer's Sparrow was on San Clemente I. 1–2 Jun (IR). A Black-throated Sparrow at Ramer L., *Imperial* 18 Jul (HBK) was an early wanderer into the Salton Sink. A Lark Bunting at Montana de Oro 17 Jun (BAB) established the first summer record for *San Luis Obispo*. Breeding populations of Grasshopper Sparrows in the Region are often ephemeral and generally declining, so of note were at least 5 territorial males in Fagan Canyon near Santa Paula, *Ventura* 6 Jun (MSanM). A White-crowned Sparrow of undetermined subspecies on San Clemente I. 22 Jun (SWS), and a Golden-crowned Sparrow lingering to 20 Jun in Thousand Oaks (RSw, WW) were both exceptionally late.

At least 14 Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were found at scattered sites in the Region 3 Jun–9 Jul. Many of the 10 Indigo Buntings found in the coastal counties during the period were summering birds; nesting was suspected but not proven at Eaton Canyon, *Los Angeles*; on the n. deserts, a male was near Bishop 16 Jun (C&RH). A Bobolink on San Clemente I. 8 Jun (BLS) was a typical date for a spring vagrant of this species; a Tricolored Blackbird there 9 Jun (JMM, ELK) was the 2nd to be

found on the island. Up to 4 Bronzed Cowbirds (2 males, 2 females) were at the w. edge of their range in Borrego Springs 9 Jun+ (RT, MBi), and a male in Twentynine Palms 1 Jun (EAC) was n. of the normal range. American Goldfinches in Big Pine 13 Jun (T&JH) and Independence 30 Jun (RAH) were considered very late for *Inyo*.

EXOTICS

A flock of at least 10 Peach-faced Lovebirds (*Agapornis roseicollis*) in Blue Gum Eucalyptus woodland in Nipomo, *San Luis Obispo* on 9 Jul confirmed the continuing existence of this small population (TME). A nesting pair of Red-shouldered Parrots (*Amazona autumnalis*) fledged 2 young in *Orange* in Jun (LE).

Cited observers (county coordinators in boldface): Larry R. Ballard, Bob Barnes, Richard Barth, Nick Basinski, Tom Benson, Mark Billings (MBi), Bill A. Bouton, Matt Brady (MBr), Ann Brooks, Martin Byhower (MBy), Dick and Pat Cabe, Eugene A. Cardiff, Mark A. Chappell, David M. Compton (*Santa Barbara*), Clark Conrad, Lori Conrad, Brian E. Daniels, Don Desjardin, Jon L. Dunn, Tom M. Edell (*San Luis Obispo*), Loretta Erickson, Richard A. Erickson, Wendy M. Fair, Jon Feenstra, Craig Fiehler, Rosemary Flamion, Mary and Nick Freeman, Wes T. Fritz, Dave Furseth, Kimball L. Garrett (*Los Angeles*), David Goodward, Kathy Granillo (KGr), Jim Greaves, John F. Green (*Riverside*), Loren R. Hays, Tom & Jo Heindel (*Inyo*), Roger Higson, David Hill, Jim Hodgson (JHo), Mark A. Holmgren, Andrew Howe, Vernon Howe, Robert A. Hudson, Terry Huenfeld, Barbara Johnson, Paul Jorgensen, Doug Karalun, Eric L. Kershner, Howard B. King, Alexander E. Koonce (*San Bernardino*), Dan Langhoff, Kevin G. Larson, Lucy Lee, Tim Lenz, Nick A. Lethaby, Curtis A. Marantz, Liz Mason, Guy McCaskie (*Imperial*), Chet McGaugh, Todd McGrath, Robert L. McKernan, Mike McLaughlin, Jimmy M. McMorran, Kathy C. Molina, Bob Miller, Stephen J. Myers, Kristie N. Nelson, Jim and Debby Parker, Dharm Pellegrini, James E. Pike, Isabel Robichaud, Geoffrey L. Rogers, John L. Roser, Martin Ruane, Mike San Miguel, Larry Sansone, Alan F. Schmierer, Brad K. Schram, Joyce Seibold, Tim Shelmerdine, Brad Sillassen (BSi), Gregory P. Smith, Ron Smith (RSm), Edward Stanton, Bob Steele, Susan Steele, Sam W. Stuart, Brian L. Sullivan, Ashley Sutton, Roger Swanson (RSw), Robert Theriault, Jennifer & Michelle Tobin, Gerald Tolman, Philip Unitt, Walter Wehtje (*Ventura*), Douglas R. Willick (*Orange*), John C. Wilson (*Kern*), Vicki and Gerry Wolfe, Joseph Worley, Thomas E. Wurster. An additional 30+ observers who could not be individually acknowledged submitted reports this season; they have our thanks and appreciation. 🌞

State of the Region

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Southern California might be considered the poster child for the collisions that result from the superimposition of an immense human population on a region of high biodiversity and endemism. The numbers are staggering. The human population of the Southern Pacific Coast Region is close to 22 million and rapidly growing; 73% of these people live in the three coastal counties of Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego. All but three of the Region's eleven counties experienced human population increases of over 10% from 1990 to 2000, with this growth exceeding 30% in Imperial and Riverside Counties (USCB 2004)! The Region's bird list stands at some 572 species, and all eleven counties in the Region, four of them landlocked, boast lists over 400 species and thus exceed the species totals for several entire states. Indeed, San Diego at 493 and Los Angeles at 488 have the highest bird species lists of any counties in the entire United States (Morlan 2004). The Region boasts one endemic bird species (Island Scrub-Jay) and many others (e.g. Xantus's Murrelet, Ashy Storm-Petrel, California Condor, Allen's Hummingbird, Nuttall's Woodpecker, California and Le Conte's Thrashers, Lawrence's Goldfinch) whose breeding ranges are centered in the Region but extend into adjacent ones; endemism is especially high at the subspecies level, a legacy of the Region's complex topog-



The biggest single threat facing birds and their habitats in the Southern Pacific Coast Region is urbanization—which brings with it not just the obvious impact of direct habitat loss but countless other threats, from disturbance by outdoors enthusiasts to global climate change. In southern California, coastal lowland and foothill habitats have seen the most impact from urbanization: it is estimated that 90% of coastal sage scrub, home to the nearly endemic California Gnatcatcher, has disappeared. Photograph by Herbert C. Clarke/VIREO.

raphy, coastal/desert transition, and offshore islands. Two Bird Conservation Regions are involved here, those being the Mojave Desert (BCR 32) in the east and Coastal California (BCR 33) in the west, but the native habitat types within these divisions are numerous and complex, and artificial habitats—several of which are now important for bird conservation—are also legion.

From the above, it should be clear that the biggest single threat facing birds and their habitats in the Southern Pacific Coast Region is urbanization, a sprawl that is now enveloping even inland counties at a prodigious rate. But the issues are far more complex, since urbanization embodies a great many interlocking threats to habitats, from the obvious impact of direct habitat loss, to the grave but more subtle effects of habitat fragmentation, changing fire regimes, massive water transfers, introduction of exotic species, recreation pressures, and, ultimately, global climate change. Coastal lowland and foothill habitats have seen the most impact from urbanization, with estimates of habitat loss (examples of impacted species are indicated in parentheses) of up to 85% for coastal estuaries (Clapper Rail, *beldingi* Savannah Sparrow) and 90% for coastal sage scrub (California Gnatcatcher, coastal populations of Greater Roadrunner and Cactus Wren). Even more striking have been near-total losses of lowland riparian (*extimus* Willow Flycatcher, *occidentalis* Yellow-billed Cuckoo) and freshwater marsh (bitterns, Tricolored Blackbird) habitats through drainage and large-scale stream channelization, and of native grasslands and coastal prairies (*actia* Horned Lark, Grasshopper Sparrow), and natural undisturbed beaches (Snowy Plover, Least Tern). Even degraded open lowland areas on the coastal slopes are succumbing to urban infill development, with associated steep declines of Burrowing Owls and Loggerhead Shrikes.

Water issues • Most of the water that sustains urban and agricultural development in the Region comes from elsewhere, especially the Colorado River, the eastern Sierra Nevada/Owens Valley,

and the Sacramento River system. The impacts of such water transfers are profound, both within the Region (where, for example, Owens Lake is now essentially dry and the lower Colorado River has little water or functioning riparian habitat) and outside of it (e.g., massive environmental change in the Sacramento and Colorado River deltas and, threats to Mono Lake). Countless aquifers within the Region have also been drawn down to the point of serious environmental degradation of surface habitats. Recent transfers of water allocations from inland agricultural regions in the Imperial and Coachella Valleys to urban areas will have a profound effect on the Salton Sea, arguably the Region's most important waterbird habitat. Robbed of much of its freshwater input, the Sea will shrink dramatically; current engineering proposals to mitigate these impacts seem geared more toward economic viability, urbanization, and recreation than toward preserving or enhancing critically important wildlife habitats.

Fire Regimes • Fire is a critically important abiotic factor regulating many of the habitat associations in the Region, with regeneration of many plants dependent on regular burns. Recent fire regimes in the Region, however, are far from natural. The combination of decades of fire suppression to protect human dwellings (and in a misguided effort to improve the "health" of woodlands and forests) and the unnaturally catastrophic fires that inevitably result from such suppression have led to dense, brushy forest, loss of mature trees, and even the long-term conversion of pine forests to oaks and, most dramatically for sensitive lowland species, conversion of coastal sage scrub and low-elevation chaparral to exotic grasslands.

Changes in Marine Ecosystems • The commercial and recreational over-harvesting of key species that form important links in marine food chains, along with pollution, long-term ocean warming, changing regimes of sediment deposition, and other factors have resulted in major changes in the marine ecosystems and estuarine spawning grounds of the California Current and the Southern California Bight. The lingering impacts of DDT and its breakdown products continue to impact bird species high in the marine food chains, including Bald Eagle, which no longer nests successfully on the Channel Islands.

Other Threats • Habitat change and degradation in the Region stem from a host of additional perturbations. The spread of exotic invasive plants through desert and coastal grasslands, coastal sage scrub, riparian habitats and the Channel Islands has fundamentally altered large areas. Introduced predators such as Red Fox have threatened ground-nesting birds in many coastal habitats, but control of such predators involves overcoming a vocal and misguided societal element that favors protection of individuals of exotic species over populations of native species. Extractive industries have greatly impacted montane forests (logging) and deserts and inland valleys (mining), while historic over-grazing has left its mark locally in the Region, particularly in the Inner Coast Ranges in the north and on the Mojave Desert.

Human recreation pressures mount as "open space" becomes a playground for humans at the expense of wildlife. Twenty-two million people can clearly love the land to death! There seems to be little political will to preserve open space unless it can be used for active recreation, and open desert scrub, desert and coastal dunes, and many other habitats are being severely impacted by off-road vehicles and other destructive recreational practices.

Conservation Initiatives • Despite the above litany of threats to birds and their habitats, many parts of the Region enjoy varying degrees of protection, particularly in the Channel Islands, higher mountains, and portions of the deserts. Three national parks, numerous state parks, and several national wildlife refuges have been designated, along with many small-to-moderate-sized private reserves (of The Nature Conservancy and other NGOs). Large areas of the mountains and deserts are controlled by the Bureau of Land Management or the Forest Service (but policies regarding habitat protection on those lands shift with the political climate). Audubon California's Important Bird Areas program (Cooper 2004) holds promise for recognizing and preserving important habitats, and Audubon's new emphasis on urban nature centers may ultimately result in a more environmentally aware populace. The California Department of Fish and Game is completing a new review of "Bird Species of Special Concern" (PRBO 2004), which might spur conservation action. Rapidly urbanizing counties such as San Diego, Orange, and Riverside now have in place formal habitat conservation planning that aims to identify large, connected tracts of habitat for preservation while simultaneously reducing restrictions on development in other areas; these programs, however, have met with mixed success, and the monitoring and refinement of such planning efforts will be crucial to the preservation of habitats in the most populous portions of the Region.

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