

# Baja California Peninsula



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Rainfall returned early and in abundance to drought-stricken northern parts of the Region. Then, following a warm spell, observers on the Ensenada C.B.C. 17 Dec enjoyed an early emergence of butterflies and nest-building Anna's Hummingbirds in spring-like conditions. Regional coverage was spotty, as is typical in winter, but five first state records included Mexico's first for Barrow's Goldeneye and the Region's firsts for Garganey and Bendire's Thrasher. The appearance of Unitt's *San Diego County Bird Atlas* (2004. *Proceedings of the San Diego Society of Natural History* 39) joins the previous year's *Birds of the Salton Sea* in providing excellent context for analyzing bird distribution at the northern end of the Region.

## FRIGATEBIRDS THROUGH TERNS

Two Magnificent Frigatebirds at Laguna Percebu, s. of San Felipe, 31 Dec (DSC) were unseasonal. A Greater White-fronted Goose on the Maneadero Plain 17 Dec (MSM et al.) was a C.B.C. first, while another was at Parque Morelos, Tijuana 26 Feb–16 Apr (ph. MJB, MJI). Eight Wood Ducks at the Mexicali Zoo 25 Oct–1 Apr (MJI, ph. RAH et al.) suggested successful fledging of the entire family found there in May 2004. A female Garganey at Estero San José del Cabo 21 Jan (vt. SGM, ph. Bob Van Vuren) represented a first for the Region. The only previous Mexican record is from Sinaloa 22 Mar 1973 (Howell and Webb 1995). The Estero Punta Banda area hosted a nice duck selection for the C.B.C. 17 Dec, including a female Eurasian Wigeon, a female Greater Scaup, a female Black Scoter, a female White-winged Scoter (ph. MJI et al.), and a Long-tailed Duck (LAC et al., ph. PAG, †MJI); the latter two continued on 18 Dec. Colima Canal, a diversion of the Río Colorado from Morelos Dam, was found to have good goldeneye concentrations in Jan 2004. A return visit 6 Jan produced 131 Commons along with 2 imm. male Barrow's Goldeneyes (ph. †MJI). Both birds lingered, with the last report of a single bird 23 Jan (m.ob.). This represents the first Barrow's Goldeneye record for Mexico, though there are prior unsupported reports (Howell and Webb 1995, *Monographs in Field Ornithology* 3: 190). Common Mergansers made another strong showing in the Mexicali Valley, with a high of 33 at Cerro Prieto geothermal ponds 6 Jan (MJI); much rarer was an imm. on the Pacific coast at the mouth of the Río San Telmo 16 Dec (ph. MJI).

Notable Mexicali Valley raptors included an ad. Bald Eagle on the Río Colorado s. of Colonia Nueva 16 Dec (RAE, HI) and an imm. Red-shouldered Hawk near Ejido Chiapas 6 Jan (ph. MJI). An imm. Broad-winged Hawk at Estero San José del Cabo 21 Jan (vt. SGM) furnished the 2nd winter record for Baja California Sur. A Clapper Rail heard at

**SA** Fall–winter 2004–2005 reports of Cackling/Canada Geese included three *leucopareia* Cacklings at Estero Punta Banda 24 Oct, with one still present 1 Nov (KAR, †SGM, ph. RAH et al.); 6 *minima* Cacklings and one *taverneri/parvipes* at Lagunita El Ciprés 12 Dec–29 Jan (ph. GR-C, ph. MJI et al.); 2 imm. *minima* at Guerrero Negro 1 Jan–24 Mar (ph. AG-A, ph. JEP); and at San José del Cabo: 3 *taverneri/parvipes* 21 Jan, a separate *taverneri/parvipes* 21 Jan, and a *minima* that associated with the latter 23 Jan and the former 1–3 Feb (ph. SGM, NB). Mlodinow and Bruce Deuel identified the San José del Cabo birds as three *taverneri* and one *parvipes*.

The recent separation of Cackling Goose from Canada Goose begs an evaluation of the status of the four taxa known from the Region (through summer 2004); all are now decidedly rare. Since specimen evidence is limited to one *minima* from each state, plus n. Baja California band returns of *moffitti* and *leucopareia*, we offer a review of the status of each based on previous reports by Wilbur (1987. *Birds of Baja California*. University of California Press), by Erickson et al. (*Monographs in Field Ornithology* 3:119–120), and in *N.A.B.* Note that all forms may occur as often in flocks as they do individually.

Great Basin Canada Geese (*moffitti*) were once common in n. Baja California, but the species does not winter in numbers as far s. as formerly (Leopold, A. S. 1972. *Wildlife of Mexico*). Hundreds wintered in the Mexicali Valley at least into the 1960s and flocks into the 30s were seen in Jan/Feb 1994 s. to Laguna Figueroa, but there has been only one double-digit report since (18 at Cerro Prieto geothermal ponds 13 Jan 2003). There is only one record s. of the n. half of Baja California (Bahía de Los Angeles 25 Jan 1996). There are six records (10+ individuals) of Cackling Goose (*minima*), 4 from Baja California and 2 from Baja California Sur. Aleutian Cackling Goose (*leucopareia*) has four records (16+ individuals), three from Bahía San Quintín northward (24 Nov–18 Dec) and a long-staying bird at La Paz 29 Oct 2001–1 Feb 2003.

The fourth form involves the enigmatic “Lesser Canada Goose,” a moniker that includes both *parvipes* and *taverneri*, subspecies that had been synonymized by some due to their close morphological similarity but that are now assigned to different species—*taverneri* to Cackling Goose, *parvipes* to Canada Goose. Six records (2 Nov–18 Mar; 4 in Nov) involved 23 birds, just one from Baja California Sur; notably, the Baja California records extend s. only to El Rosario. (We have generally accepted the subspecific identifications provided by observers but emphasize that the La Paz *leucopareia* was originally identified as a “Lesser”—when imm. and lacking a neck ring—and 7 poorly seen birds in the Estero Punta Banda area 19 Dec 2002 were identified as possible “Lessers,” Aleutians, or *minima*, depending upon the observer.) The relative status of *parvipes* and *taverneri* is still poorly known in California (B. E. Deuel, pers. comm.), but our current assumption is that birds of this type occurring in s. California, where rare, are primarily *taverneri*. The records from the Cape District may more likely pertain to over-shooting *parvipes*, as the longitude of the Cape is more in line with their central Mexican wintering areas. Though recent work holds promise for field separation of this pair (e.g., Deuel, B. 2004. Preliminary notes on the identification of Cackling and Canada Geese. *Western Birds* 35: 181–183), we prefer to remain conservative and consider all reports safely identifiable only to *taverneri/parvipes*. Thus, we believe Canada Goose (*sensu stricto*) remains unconfirmed from Baja California Sur.

stituted the only potential winter record of either from this area since *N.A.B.* reporting began in fall 2000.

A female Yellow-shafted Flicker in Mexicali 9–22 Jan (KAR, ph. MJI et al.) was gray-faced and considered impure; there is one record of a phenotypically pure bird for the Region (*Monographs in Field Ornithology* 3: 130). A Red-shafted Flicker at Santiago 24 Jan (†SGM) was the 2nd for Baja California Sur but the first for the Cape District. Kingbird highlights were all in Baja California Sur: 3 Tropicals each at Lagunas de Chametla (ph. RC, ph. JEP et al.) and San José del Cabo (SGM, NB et al.); 20 scattered Thick-billed; and Westerns found among roosting Cassin’s at Santiago 5 Feb (7; ph. JEP) and El Rosario, n. of El Triunfo, 7 Feb (JEP). The Gray Catbird found at Guerrero Negro 12 Oct remained through at least 18 Apr (AG-A, ph. JEP, MB). The mimid highlight, however, was the Bendire’s Thrasher 8 km se. of Valle de la Trinidad, Baja California 1 Jan (†DSC), the first to be confirmed in the Region (cf. *Monographs in Field Ornithology* 3: 191). A Red-throated Pipit at Estero San José del Cabo 1–3 Feb (ph. NB) represented the 2nd winter record there; one of the New World’s oldest records of the species involves a bird collected there 26 Jan 1883.

## WARBLERS THROUGH FINCHES

A Lucy’s Warbler at Santiago 6 Feb (JEP) made it three years in a row that the species has been found there. Although Pike did not systematically search for wintering *Vermivora* as he did last year, this was the only non-Orange-crowned found in the Region and surely represents a significant change from last year in particular. Also for the 3rd consecutive winter, Northern Parula was recorded at Caduaño: an ad. and an imm. 22 Jan (SGM). An imm. male Black-throated Blue

the same location 22 Jan (SGM) was a local first, and a rare Solitary Sandpiper was found in Miraflores 23 Jan (ph. SGM).

The massive gull flocks of Cerro Prieto geothermal ponds still have not received the attention they deserve, given that 40,000+ gulls roost there nightly. Highlights this winter were a second-winter Mew Gull 6 Jan (†MJI) and a first-winter Glaucous Gull 6–8 Jan (ph. MJI et al.), both firsts for the Mexicali Valley. Also seen there in Dec/Jan were 4 ad. Laughing Gulls, 3 Yellow-footed Gulls, 11+ Glaucous-winged Gulls, at least 3 Thayer’s Gulls, and a smattering of hybrids involving Herring, Glaucous-winged, and Glaucous Gulls (MJI et al.). Additional first-winter Glaucous Gulls at Guerrero Negro 31 Jan (ph. JEP) and the Islas Los Coronados 13–14 Feb (GMcC et al., †GLR, ph. MS, ph. Anne Scofield) made for a better-than-average winter total. An ad. Gull-billed Tern joined the Cerro Prieto geothermal ponds gull flocks 6 Jan (MJI) for a first Baja California winter record, while up to 3 at El Centenario 27 Jan–8 Feb (SGM, JEP) were where recorded regularly since Oct 2002. An Elegant Tern at Estero Punta Banda 17 Dec (†PP, MJB) likewise provided Baja California

with a winter first, while 2 at Estero San José del Cabo 21 Jan, with one continuing on 3 Feb (SGM, NB), provided a 3rd Baja California Sur winter record.

## HUMMINGBIRDS THROUGH PIPITS

Wintering *Archilochus* hummingbirds were well represented in Baja California Sur, with the state’s first Ruby-throated Hummingbird (an imm. male) at San José del Cabo 21–24 Mar (†MB, ph. †OJ, †DVP) and an imm. female Black-chinned at Santiago 6 Feb (ph., †JEP). Ruby-throated Hummingbirds winter from s. Sinaloa southward, but the only previous Regional record is from the nw. coast 29 Sep 2003 (*N.A.B.* 58: 148). Anna’s Hummingbirds nested later than last year at Guerrero Negro (first active nest 8 Jan, AG-A), but the unusual weather apparently drove 2 females to nest-building at Ensenada 17 Dec (RAE, RAH), one day earlier than has been recorded in San Diego. Costa’s and Rufous/Allen’s Hummingbirds were unrecorded in the California District. Although both are annual in San Diego in winter, a Rufous/Allen’s at El Rosario 24 Jan–5 Feb 2002 (JEP) con-



Field identification of Cackling Geese to subspecies is still evolving. This adult (barred flanks) at Estero Punta Banda, Baja California 1 November 2004 is tentatively identified as *leucopareia* by its paler breast and larger size compared to *minima*, and by its conspicuous white neck ring with some blackish below (present on most adult *leucopareia*, but not on most *taverneri*); *hutchinsii* is eliminated primarily by range, though the back color is darker than is typical for that subspecies. Other sight records of *leucopareia*, including the lone Baja California Sur record, have been identified using similar criteria. Photograph by Robert A. Hamilton.



These two immature *minima* Cackling Geese were photographed 31 January 2005 at Guerrero Negro, Baja California Sur. Identification as *minima* is relatively straightforward, given the extremely short necks, stubby bills, and dark breasts. They are aged as first-winters by the visible molt in the breast, the uneven edges to the back and wing coverts, and the still mostly unbarred flanks. This taxon was recorded just twice in the state prior to this winter. Photograph by James E. Pike



This, the Region's first recorded Garganey, was at Estero San José del Cabo, Baja California Sur 21 January 2005. Photograph by Bob Van Vuren.



One of North America's first recorded Red-throated Pipits was collected at San José del Cabo, Baja California Sur 26 January 1883. There are March and April records for the west Mexican mainland, but the species had not been recorded again in winter in North America until this bird was found on 1 February 2005—at the same location as the first. Photograph by Nigel Ball.



This adult male Hepatic Tanager in Mexicali, Baja California 9 through (here) 22 January 2005 represented the fourth record for Baja California and the peninsular Region. Photograph by Matthew T. Heindel.

Warbler at Guerrero Negro 5 Nov–19 Mar (AG-A, ph. JEP, †DVP et al.) was the 3rd in as many winters to be found in Baja California Sur. Yellow-throated and Grace's Warblers provided warbler highlights again this winter, with one of the former (showing characters of *albilora*) at Mexicali 22–23 Jan (MJI, ph. MTH et al.) and a now ad. male of the latter back for its 2nd winter at Ciudad Constitución 4 Feb (ph. JEP). Other notable warblers in Baja California included a returning Black-and-white in Mexicali 25 Oct–23 Jan (MJI, RAE et al.), a MacGillivray's on the Maneadero Plain for at least its 4th winter 25 Sep–1 Apr (RAE, MJB et al.), and a Wilson's in Mexicali 23 Jan (KAR et al.). An ad. male Belding's Yellowthroat at Guerrero Negro 1 Feb (†JEP) was well nw. of its normal range but followed one at the same location 16 Dec 2000 (N.A.B. 55: 231).

An ad. male Hepatic Tanager in Mexicali 9–22 Jan (ph. KAR, ph. MTH et al.) was the 4th found in the Region, all in the n. half of Baja California. A Lark Bunting with an unusually large concentration of Lark Sparrows on the Maneadero Plain 17 Dec (ph. JEP) may be the first ever recorded on the Region's northernmost coast. The season's single Grasshopper Sparrow was in s. Baja California Sur at Rancho Cuamuchilar 24 Jan (SGM), and the only White-throated Sparrow was a returning bird on the Maneadero Plain 17 Dec (PP). Bronzed Cowbirds were found in Mexicali for the 3rd consecutive winter (6 on 22 Jan, MJB et al.), and a female at Lagunas de Chametla 25 Jan (ph. SGM) provided another Cape District first (2nd for Baja California Sur). Rare orioles included 2 Orchards at Guerrero Negro 31 Jan–1 Feb (ph. JEP), a Bullock's in Ensenada 17 Dec (RAH), and Baltimore's at Punta Banda 17 Dec (2, PU et al.) and Agraria Reforma No. 1 on 5 Feb (JEP). The Pine Siskin incursion was not closely monitored, but 77 were in Maneadero 17 Dec (JEP), and 3 were in Mexicali 9 Jan, where 4 American Goldfinches were also unusual (KAR, SG). Exceptional was the imm. male American Goldfinch at Guerrero Negro 31 Jan–19 Mar (†JEP, †MB, †OJ, †DVP), the first to be confirmed in Baja California Sur.

**Observers:** Víctor Ayala, Nigel Ball, Mark J. Billings, Matt Brady, Roberto Carmona, José Alfredo Castillo, Lyann A. Comrack, Daniel S. Cooper, Andrea Cuéllar, Gustavo Danemann, Richard A. Erickson, Alejandro Franco, Peter A. Gaede, Steve Ganley, Marcela Garay, Kimball L. Garrett, Salvador González-Guzmán, Antonio Gutierrez-Aguilar, Robert A. Hamilton, Alan Harper, Matthew T. Heindel, Marshall J. Iliif, Helena Iturribarria, Oscar Johnson, Guy McCaskie, Eric Mellink, Steven G. Mlodinow, Kathy C. Molina, James E. Pike, Peter Pyle, Kurt A. Radamaker, Geoffrey L. Rogers, Gorgonio Ruiz-Campos, Matt Sadowski, Mike San Miguel, Dalia Saravia, Philip Unitt, David Vander Pluym. 🐦



Bronzed Cowbirds are being recorded with increasing frequency on the Baja California Peninsula. This one near La Paz 25 January 2005 was the second to be found in Baja California Sur and the first to be photographically documented. Photograph from videotape by Steven G. Mlodinow.