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Baja California Peninsula



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There was plenty to write about this season, as the north and south ends of the Region were well covered. We appreciate reports from visitors to Los Cabos who are not necessarily focused on birding. Highlights included the Region's first confirmed Streak-backed Oriole, Baja California's first Dusky-capped Flycatchers and Blue-headed Vireo, rare waterfowl, the return of Sandhill Cranes to the Mexicali Valley, Long-tailed Jaegers in the Gulf of California, and numerous rare passerines.

Abbreviations: C.P.G.P. (Cerro Prieto geothermal ponds); E.S.J.C. (Estero San José del Cabo).

WATERFOWL THROUGH FRIGATEBIRDS

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck went unrecorded for the first winter this decade, while Fulvous Whistling-Duck sightings at Lagunas de Chametla continued from our last report: 3 on 23 Dec (IMC, RV) and one 18–22 Mar (ph. MJI). All six of the Region's goose species were reported. Only 2 of 20 Greater White-fronted Geese, but 8 of 10 Snow Geese, were in Baja California. An imm. Ross's Goose at the Río Guadalupe estuary 17–18 Dec was relocated at Real del Mar 20 Dec–31 Jan (TJM, ph. MJB et al.). We consider many of the following white-cheeked goose reports tentative at the subspecies level, especially at the *taverneri* Cackling/*parvipes* Canada species interface (cf. N.A.B. 59: 329). Aleutian Cackling Geese (*B. h. leucopareia*) were at the Maneadero Plain 10 Oct (6; ph. RAH et al.) and El Descanso 3 Dec (ph., †MJI, MJB), and *minima* Cacklings were at Guerrero Negro 7–30 Nov (5, AG-A) and C.P.G.P. 24 Jan (1, MJI, RAE). Up to 3 *taverneri* were at C.P.G.P. 24 Jan–25 Feb (ph. MJI et al.) and "Lessers" at Heroes de la Independencia 21 Jan–26 Feb may have included one *taverneri* and 4 *parvipes* (†MJB, ph. TJM, DP), but we still consider *parvipes* unconfirmed in the Region. Lastly, up to 40 *moffitti* Canadas were at C.P.G.P. 9 Dec–24 Jan (ph. GR-C, GDLG et al.).

Wood Ducks were well reported, with up to 5 at the Mexicali Zoo 22 Sep–25 Feb (ph. MJI et al.), a female in Tijuana 7–16 Jan (ph. MJB, TJM), and a male record far s. in Baja California at Lagunita El Ciprés 29 Jan (ph. MJB et al.). A male Eurasian Wigeon at E.S.J.C. 18–23 Jan (ph. DSC, ph. SGM) was the 2nd for Baja California Sur; 3 were found in the Region's far north. Also rare in Baja California Sur, 3 Mallards at E.S.J.C. 25 Jan (†MN, CN)



Sandhill Cranes had not been seen in Baja California for nearly 25 years, so these birds dropping in to roost at the Cerro Prieto geothermal ponds 24 January 2006 were a welcome sight. Their long necks, long bills, and especially their extensive red caps all indicate they were Greater Sandhill Cranes (subspecies *tabidal*), which has recently become more prevalent in the adjacent Imperial Valley. Photograph by Marshall J. Iliff.

were the first found since Sep 2000. Last winter's female Garganey apparently returned to E.S.J.C., where it was seen 17–22 Mar (ph. MJI). The most unusual of 9 Greater Scaup was a male at E.S.J.C. 21 Jan (†SGM). The female Harlequin Duck at La Joya 11 Nov–31 Jan (ph. MJB et al.) was presumably the same one seen there in Mar 2003 and Mar–Jun



One of the highlights of the 19 December 2005 Ensenada Christmas Bird Count was this first-year female Pine Warbler on the Maneadero Plain, the first to be photographed well in the Baja California Peninsula region.

Photograph by Marshall J. Iliff.

2004, one of only 2 found in the Region. Additional rare sea ducks were 5 Black Scoters in the far nw. and Long-tailed Ducks at La Fonda 3 Dec (MJB, †MJI) and Estero Punta Banda 19 Dec–31 Jan (†MSM, LAC, AG-A). A Hooded Merganser was at E.S.J.C. 22 Jan (ph. SGM), and 7 were seen in the far north.

Notable seabird sightings included Laysan Albatrosses on both sides of the peninsula near I. Santa Margarita 14 Feb and near I. San José 16 Feb (both PAG, PJ), a *Pterodroma petrel* (probably not *Cookilaria*) just s. of I. del Carmen 5 Mar (†MG), and a Nazca Booby near Gorda Bank 21 Feb (MG). Two Magnificent Frigatebirds in the San Felipe area 26 Feb (MJB, ph. TJM, DP) were unusual so far n. in winter.



The Baja California Peninsula region rarely generates reports of Long-tailed Jaegers and, like most places in the northern hemisphere, had produced none in winter. These molting adults/near-adults near Isla Santa Cruz in the southwestern Gulf of California 18 February 2006 were among 23 seen in the area over a two-day period.

Photograph by Aaron Remy.

HERONS THROUGH TERNS

Two American Bitterns at Lagunita El Ciprés 21 Jan (ph. EDZ-H) were the only ones reported, and up to 2 Least Bitterns in Tijuana 28 Aug–7 Jan (MJB) and at least one at E.S.J.C. 22 Jan–15 Mar (MN, CN, MJI) were in areas lacking recent records. All Bald Eagles seen were ads. in the far north: Laguna del Indio 14 Dec (RAE et al.), C.P.G.P. 24 Jan (MJI, RAE), and Laguna Hanson 26 Jan (ph. GR-C). An ad. Broad-winged Hawk at E.S.J.C. 20 Feb (†PAG) may have represented the re-

turn of the imm. that was seen there in Jan 2005. An imm. on the Maneadero Plain 18 Dec–31 Jan (ph. RAE et al.) was seen by many. Twelve Swainson's Hawks were noted in s. Baja California Sur, including 3 s. of La Paz. A Merlin on the Maneadero Plain 19 Dec (ph. MJI, DSC) matched the dark nw. subspecies *suckleyi*; previous Regional reports have been considered tentative (*Monographs in Field Ornithology* 3: 122). Four Sandhill Cranes (apparently *G. c. tabida*) coming in to roost at C.P.G.P. 24 Jan (ph. MJI, RAE) were the first seen in the Region since 1982 (*Monographs in Field Ornithology* 3: 123). Solitary Sandpipers were found again in the Cape District: 2 at Santiago 23 Jan (SGM) and one at E.S.J.C. 17–22 Mar (MJI).



This female Harlequin Duck at La Joya, Baja California on 11 November 2005 was believed to be the same individual present there in March 2003 and March–June 2004.

Photograph by Mark J. Billings.

The season's biggest surprise was 23 ad./subad. Long-tailed Jaegers in three groups in the s. Gulf, from near I. Santa Cruz to near I. Partida, 18–19 Feb (†PAG, ph. AR, PJ). The species' winter range is not well known, especially in the Pacific, but there appear to be no records n. of Panama and the cen. Pacific (Wiley and Lee, *Birds of North America* account). A first-winter Mew Gull at E.S.J.C. 15–17 Mar (ph. MJI) was the 2nd to be confirmed in Baja California Sur. Disturbing was the report from Bahía Magdalena 28 Feb of ad. Western Gulls: "many... had obviously yellow legs, but otherwise looked and sounded like Westerns" (DAS). On the heels of last year's first winter record in Baja California, 4 or 5 Gull-billed Terns were found in the ne. 13 Dec–24 Jan: at C.P.G.P., Laguna del Indio, and the Río Colorado delta (RAE, ph. GDLG et al.). Up to 4 were at El Centenario 27 Jan–19 Mar (SGM, DAS, MJI). Elegant Tern was found again in the Cape District in winter, with 2 at La Paz 17 Dec (*vide* EP) and one at E.S.J.C. 22–25 Jan (MN, CN).

DOVES THROUGH PIPITS

The Flickers reported much on small doves at Bahía de Los Angeles. An Inca Dove 30 Jan–6 Apr (ph.) followed one there 19 Oct 1999, es-

tablishing the only records away from the northeast. The Ruddy Ground-Dove present since Oct was joined by 3 more 30 Jan, and all remained through Feb. Two at Algodones 27 Dec (KAR) were the first for the northeast. An Elf Owl at the Guerrero Negro saltworks 25 Jan (NA, VA) was nw. of previous state records; the unusual habitat suggests a wandering bird. A high count of 775 Lesser Nighthawks at E.S.J.C. 20 Jan (SGM) may have included wintering birds from the n. in addition to local residents. Up to 20 Vaux's Swifts were at E.S.J.C. 18 Jan–21 Mar (†DSC et al.). Rare hummingbirds in the s. were an imm. male Broad-billed near Ciudad Constitución 16 Mar (†MJI) and an imm. female Black-chinned at E.S.J.C. 15 Mar (ph., †MJI). In the nw., wintering Costa's Hummingbirds are remarkably hard to come by (e.g., it was missed on the first four Ensenada C.B.C.s), so 7 on the coast s. to Maneadero 17 Dec–1 Apr (ph. RAH, ph. MJB et al.) was an unexpectedly robust total. The male Downy Woodpecker at Playas de Tijuana since 27 Aug was last recorded 29 Jan (ph. MJB et al.), and another male was at the Río Guadalupe estuary 9 Feb (†CGE et al.).

A Dusky Flycatcher on the Río Colorado at Ejido Chiapas #3 on 8 Mar (†MJI, MJB, RAH) provided the Region's first (presumed) winter record. A calling Pacific-slope Flycatcher s. of nearby Pachuca 8 Mar (MJB, ph. MJI, RAH) probably was also wintering, as were 6 individuals along the nw. coast (ph. MJB et al.). Baja California's first Dusky-capped Flycatchers corresponded with a banner year for the species in California: Playas de Tijuana 18 Dec–1 Apr (ph., †DSC et al.) and Ejido Chiapas #3 8–12 Mar (ph. RAH et al.). Four Tropical Kingbirds were seen in the Cape District



A flock of over 100 Blue-winged Teal at Estero San José del Cabo, Baja California Sur, included this female Garganey 17 March 2006. It was assumed to be a returning individual from one year before.

Photograph by Marshall J. Iliff.

and one was at Ensenada 19 Dec (EDZ-H, †RAH). Wintering Western Kingbirds were at La Paz 17 Dec (*vide* EP) and on the road to San Antonio de la Sierra 26 Jan (SGM). A



A male Eurasian Wigeon at Estero San José del Cabo 18-23 January 2006 was the first to be photographically documented in Baja California Sur. The only prior record hails from nearby La Paz 13 April 1970. Photograph by Steven G. Mlodinow.

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher roosted with Cassin's Kingbirds at Cantamar 18 Dec-28 Jan (MJI, ph. MJB et al.).

Noteworthy wintering vireos included a Bell's on the Maneadero Plain 20 Dec (TJM, ph. MJB et al.) and a Plumbeous at the Mexicali Zoo 28 Dec (KAR). Best was a singing first-winter Blue-headed Vireo, Baja California's first, at Ejido Chiapas #3 8-12 Mar (ph. MJI et al.). The winter swallow concentration at E.S.J.C. is renowned; this year's maxima included 20 Tree, 1000 Violet-green, 100 Northern Rough-winged, 25 Bank, 10 Cliff, and 400 Barn. On the e. side of the Sierra Juárez, 135 Western Bluebirds at Cañon de Guadalupe 1 Jan (BLS) was a high number for a lowland site. The season's only Varied Thrush was on the Maneadero Plain 19-20 Dec (ph. PAG et al.). A Red-throated Pipit of uncertain age at E.S.J.C. 17-22 Mar (ph., v.r. MJI) was where one wintered the previous year.

WARBLERS THROUGH BLACKBIRDS

Lucy's Warblers were present at Rosarito 11 Nov-28 Jan (ph. MJB et al.) and at E.S.J.C. 21-23 Jan (ph. SGM, †MN, CN). At Guerrero Negro, the returning male Black-throated Blue Warbler was present Nov-20 Feb (ES, AG-A et al.), and near Ciudad Constitución, the returning male Grace's Warbler was present 16-23 Mar (ph. MJI). The Region's 3rd Pine Warbler, a first-year female on the Maneadero Plain 19 Dec (ph. MJI), eluded subsequent searchers and so was not confirmed as the Peninsula's first overwintering bird. After being unrecorded in the fall, 2 Palm Warblers were on the Maneadero Plain 18-19 Dec (ph. MJI et al.), and one was at E.S.J.C. 21 Jan-17 Mar (SGM, ph. MJI). Up to 3 American Redstarts were on the nw. coast 18 Dec-29 Jan (DSC et al.), and an ad. female was at the Mexicali Zoo 13 Dec-24 Jan (RAE, ph. MJI). The Region's 2nd wintering Ovenbird was at Miraflores 18 Mar (MJI), and a male MacGillivray's Warbler on the



Prior to this year, a Dusky-capped Flycatcher collected in the Sierra de La Laguna 24 June 1896 provided the Region's only record. The second of two this winter was found on 8 March 2006 on the Rio Colorado near Ejido Chiapas No. 3. Photograph by Robert A. Hamilton.

was an overdue first for the Region (cf. *Monographs in Field Ornithology* 3: 191). Baltimore Orioles were found at the Mexicali Zoo 28 Dec-25 Feb (KAR, ph. MJB et al.), the first for

the ne., and in the Cape District at Santa Anita 19 Jan (ph. DSC).

Maneadero Plain 18-19 Dec returned for at least its 5th winter (RAE, LAC, MJI). Summer Tanager was unrecorded in Baja California in fall 2005, but 8 were found this season, including 3 at the Mexicali Zoo. A female Western Tanager at the zoo 24 Jan (RAE, ph. MJI) was the first in the ne. in winter; 7 were seen in the northwest.

Sparrows of interest included 2 Clay-colored on the Maneadero Plain 19 Dec (ph.

MJI et al.), a Black-chinned in nearby Arroyo San Carlos 1 Jan (DSC), up to 3 Grasshoppers at E.S.J.C. 19-20 Jan (ph. DSC, ph. SGM), a Swamp at Real del Mar 3 Dec-16 Jan (ph. MJI, ph. MJB, TJM), White-throateds at Punta Banda 18-19 Dec (ph. MJB, TJM) and the Maneadero Plain 19 Dec (MJI), and a singing ad. *pugetensis* White-crowned at El Descanso 3 Dec (ph., †MJI, MJB). Two Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were in the nw., another was at Ejido Lagunero 1 Jan (NA, VA), and 2 were in the far south. Up to 60 Tricolored Blackbirds at Laguna Hanson 4 Dec-27 Jan (ph. GR-C et al.) were the most ever reported in the mountains.

Yellow-headed Blackbirds are seldom found in the Cape District, but up to 150 were at E.S.J.C. 17-21 Mar (ph. MJI). A female Bronzed Cowbird at Lagunas de Chametla 19 Mar (ph. MJI) was in an area where one or more females were seen on 25 Jan and 7 Oct 2005. The season's only Orchard Oriole was an ad. male at Playas de Tijuana 18 Dec-8 Jan (†DSC, ph. MJB et al.). Northerly female Hooded Orioles were at Ensenada 19 Dec (†RAH, EDZ-H) and Tijuana 3 Mar (MJI, MJB). A Streak-backed Oriole (possibly an ad. female) at Miraflores 22 Jan (ph., †SGM)

the ne., and in the Cape District at Santa Anita 19 Jan (ph. DSC).

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This Black Merlin (subspecies *suckleyi*)—photographed on the Maneadero Plain, Baja California on 18 December 2005—was the first one well documented on the Peninsula and showed no obvious signs of introgression.

Photograph by Marshall J. Iloff.

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