

# southern pacific coast region



Offshore from Los Angeles County, California, between Santa Barbara Island and Santa Catalina Island, this Laysan Albatross was unusually close to shore for that region May 9, 1998. Photograph/ Kimball L. Garrett

GUY MCCASKIE

The weather was unsettled throughout the period, with rain along the coast continuing into May, and noticeably cooler and windier conditions prevailing throughout the eastern portion of the Region.

Although no major rarities were found, an exciting variety of unexpected waterbirds were found in the eastern part of the Region, particularly in eastern Kern County.

We witnessed a very prolonged migration period for passerine migrants; the first were in general on time and in expected numbers. Possibly due to adverse weather conditions at higher elevations, peak numbers along the coast were higher than normal, but vagrants were virtually non-existent. Stragglers were still moving through the Region at the end of May, with all-time late dates for such migrants as Hermit Thrush (June 12), Olive-sided Flycatcher (June 12), and Townsend's Warbler (June 13) at desert oases in eastern Kern County.

In summary, a great but weird spring.



**Abbreviations:** C.L. (China Lake Naval Air Weapons Station, extreme n.e. Kern Co.); E.A.F.B. (Edwards Air Force Base, s.e. Kern Co.); F.C.R. (Furnace Creek Ranch, Death Valley National Monument, Inyo); H.D.L. (Harper Dry Lake, n.w. of Barstow, San Bernardino Co.); N.E.S.S. (north end of the Salton Sea, Riverside Co.); S.E.S.S. (south end of the Salton Sea, Imperial Co.); S.F.K.R.P. (South Fork Kern River Preserve near Weldon, Kern County). Since 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 Committee review list is forwarded to the CBRC Secretary and archived at the Western Foundation for Vertebrate Zoology in Camarillo.

## LOONS THROUGH CORMORANTS

Two Pacific Loons inland on L. Isabella Apr. 8 (MTH) were at a location where this species has wintered, but one in alternate plumage at N.E.S.S. May 25 (CAM) was clearly a migrant. A Yellow-billed Loon was



seen with other migrants flying N past Pt. Piedras Blancas, *San Luis Obispo*, May 10 (RR). An alt.-plumage Horned Grebe near Palo Verde, *Imperial*, May 7 (RMcK) was late and inland. The wintering Red-necked Grebe at Morro Bay, *San Luis Obispo*, remained through Mar. 28 (TME), and the one at Dana Pt., *Orange*, was still present Apr. 25 (TR); one at Seal Beach, *Orange*, Apr. 4 (JFit) had probably wintered locally.

A Laysan Albatross photographed off *Los Angeles* between Santa Barbara I. and Santa Catalina I. May 9 (KLG) was unusually close to shore for this area, but another seen from Pt. Piedras Blancas May 17 (RR) was in an area where deep water is close to the coast, and where small numbers evidently come close to shore. Twenty-five N. ~~Falmars~~ *Falmars* seen passing Pt. La Jolla, *San Diego*, during 5 hours of sea watching Mar. 28 (GMcC), along with reports of smaller numbers from elsewhere along the coast in late March and early April, points to an incursion of these birds into the inshore waters. Single Short-tailed Shearwaters were seen from Pt. La Jolla during periods of strong NW winds Mar. 26 (GMcC) & 28 (GMcC), and an Ashy Storm-Petrel was seen there Mar. 28 (GMcC).

A tropicbird seen 10 mi s. of Santa Barbara I. Apr. 19 (BS) was probably a Red-tailed, but not seen well enough for specific identification. An imm. Brown Booby seen plunge-diving off Pt. Piedras Blancas Apr. 26 (RR) was one of an increasing number of reports of boobies along the coast. An areal survey of the Salton Sea Mar. 5 resulted in a count of 26,500 Am. White Pelicans (DWA), illustrating just how important this area is for this and other waterbirds as a place to stop and feed during migration. An ad. Neotropic Cormorant at S.E.S.S. Apr. 28 (KZK) was still present at the end of the period. A Brant's Cormorant in Atascadero, *San Luis Obispo*, Apr. 18 (TME) was e. of the Santa Lucia Mts., and only the 2nd to be found inland in S. California.

#### BITTERNS THROUGH FALCONS

A Least Bittern at Galileo Hill in extreme e. *Kern* May 26–30 (SBT) was only the 5th to be found at such a location in this part of the desert. An ad. Little Blue Heron at Imperial Dam, *Imperial*, May 8 (RMcK) was the only one reported away from *San Diego*. The Tricolored Heron that was present at Bolsa Chica, *Orange*, through the winter was last seen Apr. 26 (JW). An ad. Reddish Egret was at Seal Beach Apr. 17 (JFit), and what was probably the same bird was at nearby Bolsa Chica Apr. 18 (BW). An

ad. Yellow-crowned Night-Heron in La Jolla Apr. 30–May 26 (RN) was the same bird that has been associating with nesting Black-crowned Night-Herons at this location since 1981, and another was with nesting egrets at Sea World in San Diego Mar. 26–Apr. 21 (JRJ).

Brant migrating northward from wintering grounds in the Gulf of California regularly pass over the mountains of e. *San Diego* on their way to the Pacific coast. Large numbers can be found on L. Henshaw (eg. 40 Apr. 1; PU) and other nearby inland lakes during storms in March and April. Smaller numbers also regularly occur on the Salton Sea at this same time, with some remaining into the summer—about 40 at N.E.S.S. May 29 (MAP, GMcC). Elsewhere in the interior of S. California, Brant are rare to casual, so three at Lancaster, *Los Angeles*, May 9 (ST); two at H.D.L. Apr. 27 (EAC); at least five at E.A.F.B. between Apr. 13 and May 31 (MTH); four at C.L. Apr. 23 (MTH); and another near Cantil, *Kern*, June 1–5 (MTH) were of note. The female Harlequin Duck found in Chula Vista, *San Diego*, Jan. 22 was still present at the end of the period (PU) and appeared to be summering locally. A wintering Oldsquaw remained in Huntington Beach, *Orange*, through Apr. 13 (DT), a late migrant flew past Pt. Piedras Blancas May 10 (RR), and what was undoubtedly a summering bird was still on s. San Diego Bay at the end of the period (PU). One at Twentynine Palms, *San Bernadino*, Mar. 31 (EAC) was unusual inland. A Black Scoter that flew past Pt. Piedras Blancas May 10 (RR) was late for a migrant. Surf Scoters follow the same northward migration route as Brant from wintering areas in the Gulf of California (eg. 300 on L. Henshaw Apr. 1; PU), with small numbers regularly remaining on the Salton Sea into the summer—about 15 on the Salton Sea May 30 (MAP, GMcC); a male in Corona, *Riverside*, Apr. 6 (JEP) was the only one found away from interior *San Diego* and the Salton Sea. Five White-winged Scoters at N.E.S.S. May 17 through the period (GMcC) and another in nearby Salton City May 29 (GMcC) were the only ones found inland.

A White-tailed Kite in Bishop, *Inyo*, May 9 (JFin) was in an area where this species is considered rare. Most of the Mississippi Kites recorded in California were at F.C.R. in late May and early June, so one there June 6–7 (AH) was almost expected, but a sub-adult at Morongo Valley May 28 (EAC) appears to be the first to be reported in *San Bernadino*. A Harris's Hawk in the w. Ante-

lope Valley, *Los Angeles*, May 24 (ST) was believed to be the same bird found there 2 years ago. The largest flock of Swainson's Hawks reported was 117 near Bakersfield, *Kern*, Mar. 13 (JCW). An ad. Zone-tailed Hawk in Irvine, *Orange*, May 28 (PB) was unexpected considering the time of the year. A Merlin at L. Hemet, *Riverside*, Apr. 25 (MAP) was late, and another in San Dimas, *Los Angeles*, May 14 (MCL) was exceptionally so.

#### CRANES THROUGH PHALAROPES

A Sandhill Crane in flight over the Sepulveda Pass in W. Los Angeles Mar. 19 (JDB), another in Ridgecrest, *Kern*, Apr. 16–25 (JW), and a 3rd at San Elijo Lagoon, *San Diego*, Apr. 26 (MB) were all away from areas of normal occurrence.

Three wintering Pacific Golden-Plovers were still present at Seal Beach May 2 (GLT), and another was still in Huntington Beach Apr. 25 (PS). A migrant golden-plover near Lakeview, *Riverside*, Apr. 21 (DRW) was too distant to be identified to species, but any golden-plover inland is of note. A **Wilson's Plover** photographed in Coronado Apr. 27–May 2 (EC) was the 9th to be found in California. Single Solitary Sandpipers, rare in spring anywhere in S. California, were near Big Pine, *Inyo*, Apr. 14 (T&JH); Chino, *San Bernadino*, Apr. 24 (DSP); and near Lompoc, *Santa Barbara*, May 9 (BH). A Wandering Tattler at E.A.F.B. May 6 (MTH) was only the 2nd to be found in *Kern*. A Black Turnstone, very rare inland, was at S.E.S.S. May 31 (KLG). Surfbirds were evidently moving northward in large numbers along the coast between Mar. 25 and Apr. 20, as was evident from numerous reports of flocks feeding on beaches, including an impressive 354 in Goleta, *Santa Barbara*, Apr. 11 (DH). An impressive 30–40 Sanderlings at various localities in e. *Kern* between Apr. 23 and the end of the period (MTH), and two at Twentynine Palms May 14 (EAC), were the only ones reported from inland localities away from the Salton Sea. A Semipalmated Sandpiper at S.E.S.S. May 3–9 (MAP, GMcC), one at H.D.L. Apr. 23 (EAC), and another at C.L. May 5 (MTH) were the only three found this spring. Since Baird's Sandpipers are most unusual in S. California in spring, one in Irvine May 9–10 (COJ), two on the Colorado R. just south of the *San Bernadino/Riverside* line Apr. 10 (ES), and up to seven at E.A.F.B. between May 27 and June 6 (MTH) were a surprise. A Stilt Sandpiper at C.L. May 3–8 (MTH) was the first to be found in *Kern* in spring, and



another at N.E.S.S. May 16 (MAP) was the only other one to be found away from S.E.S.S., where this species is expected. At least 25 alternate-plumage Red-necked Phalaropes with Red Phalaropes passing Pt. La Jolla during 5 hours of sea watching Mar. 28 (GMCC) were exceptionally early. Four Red Phalaropes found inland in e. Kern between Apr. 24 and May 21 (MTH) came as a surprise, since there are only 2 prior records for this area at this time of the year.

## GULLS THROUGH MURRELETS

Franklin's Gulls were a little more numerous than expected, with the earliest migrants at Dana Pt. Mar. 27–28 (JW) and in Chino Mar. 30–Apr. 2 (JEP), but with the bulk of the 60 reported being between May 20 and the end of the period. These included individuals offshore near Santa Barbara I. May 9 (KLG), along the entire coast between Chula Vista and Pt. Piedras Blancas, at the Salton Sea, and scattered throughout the n.e. desert part of the Region. At least one ad. Heermann's Gull remained around S.E.S.S. throughout the period (GMCC, JFit), and another was at nearby Finney L. Apr. 11 (PEL). A 2nd-year Thayer's Gull at C.L. May 26 (MTH) was the first to be found in e. Kern. A 3rd-year Glaucous-winged Gull was found far inland on L. Isabella Mar. 7 (JCW). A somewhat late Glaucous Gull was in Pismo Beach, *San Luis Obispo*, Mar. 24 (TME). Black-legged Kittiwakes appeared in unexpected numbers along the coast in late March, as illustrated by 170 seen passing a point on San Nicolas I. during one hour of sea watching Mar. 19 (RAH) and 500+ seen passing Pt. La Jolla during 5 hours of sea watching Mar. 28 (GMCC). One in Goleta Apr. 24 (JNB) and another at the Santa Maria R. mouth, *Santa Barbara*, May 8 (WW) were the latest. Unexpected were single Sabine's Gulls inland at E.A.F.B. May 3 (MTH), 24 (MTH) & 26 (MTH), since there is only one previous spring record for this area.

Two Least Terns, rare inland, were at N.E.S.S. May 16 (MAP), two more were there May 30 (MAP), and another was at C.L. June 1 (MTH). An ad. **Sooty Tern** at Bolsa Chica Apr. 12–19 (RH) was believed to be the same individual that has associated with the nesting terns at this location each of the past 4 summers. Two Black Skimmers flew N past Pt. Piedras Blancas May 21 (RR), clearly heading into Central California.

A minor influx of Ancient Murrelets to the coast in late March resulted in more

than a dozen being reported between Mar. 22 and May 2, including six seen from Pt. La Jolla during 5 hours of sea watching Mar. 28 (GMCC).

## DOVES THROUGH THRASHERS

A White-winged Dove in Goleta May 24 (JH) was the only one reported from along the coast; another in California City, *Kern*, June 5 (MMR) was somewhat to the northwest of this species' normal breeding range in s.e. California. Numbers of Eur. Collared-Doves continue to increase at scattered locations around Santa Barbara (Carpinteria to Goleta) and two–three were found near Lancaster Mar. 15 (KLG), with one on a nest there May 24 (KLG). A N. Saw-whet Owl photographed at Gallio Hill Apr. 20 (MTH) was obviously a migrant, and one of a very few to be found at such a desert oases. A Com. Nighthawk at Big Pine May 22 (T&JH) was the earliest of the spring migrants. Two Chimney Swifts over Arcadia, *Los Angeles*, May 3 (MJSM) were the earliest of the small number that now regularly summer in the Los Angeles Basin. An unusually high number of Calliope Hummingbirds were reported along the coast in April, especially in *Santa Barbara* and *San Luis Obispo*, indicating more than the usual number were moving N along the coast. The male **Broad-tailed Hummingbird** found in Santa Barbara Jan. 3 remained through Apr. 3 (JEL).

A pewee at Galileo Hill June 10 (MTH) frustrated the observer in that it would not give a full song; however, its appearance and calls indicated it was an **Eastern Wood-Pewee**, a species found in California on less than half-a-dozen occasions. A singing Cordilleran Flycatcher in Johnson Canyon in the Panamint Mts., *Inyo*, May 22 (REW), and another at Glacier Lodge on the e. slope of the Sierra Nevada Mts. above Big Pine May 31 (T&JH), were w. of this species known range. A Vermilion Flycatcher at Scotty's Castle in Death Valley N.P. Apr. 3 (ES) was a little to the north of this species normal range. A pair of Brown-crested Flycatchers had returned to a breeding location near N.E.S.S. in May (GMCC). A Scissor-tailed Flycatcher near Murrieta, *Riverside*, Apr. 10 (CMCG) was suspected to be the same bird found in Murrieta Dec. 13, but another at the n. end of the San Fernando Valley, *Los Angeles*, June 8 (RB) was clearly a spring vagrant.

A Varied Thrush near Palo Verde May 7 (RMCK) was somewhat late and one of very few to be found in *Imperial*. A Brown Thrasher, unexpected as a spring vagrant,

was in Borrego Springs, *San Diego*, Apr. 27–May 1 (PDA).

## VIREOS

### THROUGH WOOD WARBLERS

A Red-eyed Vireo, a somewhat regular vagrant in late May and early June, was inland at Galileo Hill June 10 (MTH), and another was on the coast in Goleta June 2–5 (MAH).

Only five Tennessee Warblers were found this spring, with the earliest along the coast at Goleta May 9 (KB) followed by single birds near Santee, *San Diego*, May 18 (REW) and on Pt. Loma in San Diego June 1 (REW), and inland at Butterbrecht Springs n. of Cantel, *Kern*, May 16 (TEW) and June 5 (MMR). Nesting Lucy's Warblers were back on territories at Borrego Springs Mar. 17 (SS); single birds in Big Pine Apr. 4 & 21 (both T&JH) were n.w. of this species known range, and the 2nd and 3rd to be found in the Owens Valley. Five N. Parulas was less than expected, with single birds inland at Butterbrecht Springs May 22–24 (AME), at the S.F.K.R.P. June 2–3 (RAB), in Inyokern, *Kern*, May 3–5 (TM), and in Independence, *Inyo*, Apr. 25 (A&LK), and near the coast near Buellton, *Santa Barbara*, June 9 (NS). A Palm Warblers in Goleta Apr. 7 (JEL) had probably spent the winter nearby, but one Huntington Beach Apr. 26–May 2 (JR) may have been a spring migrant. Nine Black-and-white Warblers in e. Kern and *Inyo* between May 5 and June 10 was about average for this area, but one near San Marcos Pass in Santa Barbara June 12 was the only one reported from along the coast. American Redstarts were remarkably scarce, with seven seen in e. Kern and *Inyo* between May 25 and June 13, and single birds on Pt. Loma in San Diego June 11 & 12 (both REW) being the only ones reported. A male Prothonotary Warbler was at the S.F.K.R.P. May 24 (RAB). The only Ovenbirds reported were two at Galileo Hill May 15–16 (REW) and another in California City May 30 (ST). Northern Waterthrushes were also much scarcer than normal. What was undoubtedly a wintering bird was near Corona, *Riverside*, Apr. 1 (JEP), and what were more likely wintering birds than early migrants were in Santee Apr. 19 (PL) and at Playa del Rey, *Los Angeles*, Apr. 22 (RAH). The only obvious spring migrant being a very late individual near Cantel June 12 (MTH). However, nine Hooded Warblers was more than expected, with single birds along the coast near Chatsworth, *Los Angeles*, May 30 (SJM) and on Vandenberg Air Force Base, *Santa*



Barbara, June 3 (JG), and inland in River-side Apr. 22 (WW), four in e. Kern between May 5 and June 1 (MTH, TEW, KG, RC), one at the s. end of the Saline Valley, Inyo, May 11 (REW), and another at 6700 ft in the Sierra Nevada Mts. above the Owens Valley May 16 (A&LK). A **Red-faced Warbler** photographed in Bishop May 20–21 (BT) was the first to be found in Inyo, and only the 10th to be found in California.

#### TANAGERS THROUGH FINCHES

A female Hepatic Tanager on Pt. Loma in San Diego May 28 (REW) is one of a very few to be found in spring away from suitable breeding habitat in the mountains. Ten Summer Tanagers away from known breeding localities in the n.e. part of the Region between May 14 and June 13, along with one along the coast in Wilmington, Los Angeles, May 26 (MSM), was less than expected. Some of these tanagers are suspected to be of the nominant race that have wandered to the west of their normal range. However, a pair at Lone Pine May 14 (RH) and a territorial male in the Kingstone Mts. in e. San Bernadino May 23–24 (MAP) were in suitable breeding habitat, and could be birds of the w. race attempting to expand the species' range. A female Pyrrhuloxia on Pt. Loma in San Diego June 10 (REW) is the 3rd to be reported along the coast. A Rose-breasted Grosbeak that spent the winter at a feeder in San Dimas, Los Angeles, remained through Apr. 11 (JG). Six Rose-breasted Grosbeaks scattered throughout the Region in May was far below average, and the same can be said for the five Indigo Buntings reported during the same period.

Seven or more Black-chinned Sparrows near Cottonwood Spring in the Granite Mts. of e. San Bernadino Mar. 20 (CH) were not only a little early, but also in an area where previously unrecorded. A flock of ten Lark Buntings near Borrego Springs Apr. 25 (BT), one in that same general area Apr. 28 (JTR), and one in Proctor Valley, San Diego, Apr. 29 (PU) were migrants that were a little to the west of their normal route. However, three displaying males near Darwin, Inyo, May 10 (REW) may have been contemplating breeding in that area, but were not present on later dates. A Swamp Sparrow near Big Pine Mar. 7 (T&JH) had probably spent the winter locally, but another in Baker, San Bernadino, Apr. 4 (BD) was a migrant. A wintering White-throated Sparrow remained to Apr. 16 in Santa Barbara (PEL), and a presumed migrant was in Big Pine Apr.

12–20 (T&JH). An exceptionally late Golden-crowned Sparrow was in Carpinteria June 1 (RWH). Known wintering Harris's Sparrows remained in Santa Maria, Santa Barbara, to Apr. 12 (JMC), Big Pine to Apr. 29 (T&JH), and in Bishop to May 9 (J&DP), but one in Independence, Inyo, May 2 (RH) was probably a migrant.

The only Bobolink reported was a male at F.C.R. May 24 (AME). A male Com. Grackle, a rare straggler to California, was present at Twentynine Palms Mar. 27–Apr. 6 (EAC). A male Bronzed Cowbird in Brawley, Imperial, Apr. 12 (PEL) was the earliest to be found in the Imperial Valley, where it is now a regular summer visitor in small numbers. A male at Galileo Hill June 5 (SBT) was the only one found n. of the Salton Sea, and was only the 2nd to be seen in Kern. Vagrant Baltimore Orioles were in Goleta May 17 (JH), Carpinteria May 23 (RWH), and in Huntington Beach May 24 (DRW). A Scott's Oriole near Hemet, Riverside, Mar. 15 (CMCG) was a little to the west of this species' normal breeding range.

A Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch at 4000 ft near Bishop Apr. 1 (LB) was at an unusual low elevation.

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