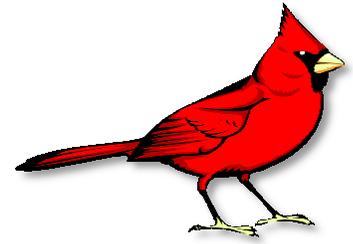


THE OBSERVER



Calendar

February 14. Beginner bird walk at Sycamore Canyon. Meet at the Sycamore Canyon trailhead at **8:00 AM**. The trail is located adjacent to Rose Hills Cemetery gate 17, but note that the trail is **not** in the cemetery! The entrance to Sycamore Canyon is a driveway just southwest of the entrance to the cemetery. Linda Oberholtzer leads. Rain or recent rain cancels.

February 19. Monthly meeting and program 7:30 PM at the Whittier Community Center. Program details are TBD at press time but it's sure to be interesting.

February 21. Field trip to Bolsa Chica wetlands. Meet at the Whittier Community Center at 7:00 AM for carpooling. Jeff Allison leads; details on page 3.



whittieraudubon.org

USING eBIRD

[The following is taken, with permission, from an email that Kimball Garrett sent around in January. Kimball is the ornithology collections manager at the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History and an expert birder. He's also one of the folks tasked with reviewing submissions to eBird, which means verifying unusual sightings and weeding out bad data. Obviously his life gets easier if we birders submit good data to eBird, and eBird gets more useful that way too. So he sent out some recommendations. I thought this was educational and some of his species comments are useful knowledge whether you use eBird or not. — ed.]

Birders,

Los Angeles County continues to lead most of the universe in terms of level of participation and number of checklists submitted. I think we can all be proud that we have amassed such an important database, and that eBird data continue to be useful for learning about status and distribution in the county and, yes, even planning birding outings. A great many of you submit your sightings to eBird, and I'm sure virtually all of you want the database to be as accurate as possible. Toward this end, I wanted to point out some frequent errors in data submission in hopes we can continue to upgrade the quality of the data.

METADATA ISSUES

The biggest single mistake many eBirders make is to check the "Yes" box for the "All species reported?" question when it is clear that only a subset of species found were entered on the list. A hypothetical example: a two-hour checklist from The Village Green with only Worm-eating Warbler and (Yellow-shafted) Northern Flicker on the list. Clearly other species were seen, so when entering this selective list, one should tick "No" to the "All Species Reported?" question. Remember, you are only being asked if you are submitted a list of all species you encountered during your visit – there will always be reasons why you miss some (or many) species present, but if you encountered species and excluded them from your list, you should tick "No" rather than "Yes."

Another frequent error is either mis-mapping the locality or using the wrong locality from your drop-down list of "My Localities." These errors are especially frequent when data are entered via smartphones and similar devices. Also a common problem is the merging of multiple localities into a single checklist, though birders have gotten much better about this over the years. In general, checklists should cover discrete areas over distances of less than 5 miles. Use "Hotspots" whenever possible, and when creating a new locality, zoom in as close as possible (in satellite view) before entering the pin.

Finally, the use of smartphone "apps" has led to numerous mistaken species entries (a whopper was the Albert's Lyrebird entered for an Imperial Valley checklist – I'm reasonably certain the submitter started to type in "Abert's Towhee, misspelling it as "Albert's, and then entered the species that popped up. A continuing issue with eBird is that submissions through some smartphone apps seem to bypass the prompt to confirm unusual species.

SPECIES ISSUES

GENERAL: The failure to review the entire list once it is completed; please make a point of always spending a minute to review your checklist for errors when you submit it – you can make corrections right there and resubmit if necessary.

(Continued from page 1)

GENERAL: Please don't feel obligated to enter sightings at the level of subspecies unless you are certain (by the characteristics of the bird[s] you encountered) of the subspecies. In a few cases it is safe to make assumptions based on geographical locality, but this should be done only in cases where any other subspecies or subspecies group is not found anywhere near the region.

SPECIFIC ISSUES: What follows is just a partial list of some of the most frequent identification issues that arise on L. A. County eBird submissions. By no means am I saying that all such entries are incorrect – some in fact have been supported by good documentation. But in most cases entries are inadequately documented or have no documentation submitted at all:

GREATER SCAUP: This species is WAY over-reported away from a few deep-water interior lakes like Quail Lake. This is a very scarce bird in coastal Los Angeles County; for example, Dan Cooper has encountered it on only a handful of occasions in the Ballona/Playa del Rey area despite having covered that area intensively for many years. And yet flocks in double figures are routinely reported from there in eBird without documentation.

HORNED GREBE: There are many early fall (September) records without details.

BRANDT'S VS. PELAGIC CORMORANT: the latter vastly over-reported along our coast; at almost all sites it is greatly outnumbered by Brandt's.

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK: There are many reports mid-May through mid-September without sufficient details; they are virtually entirely absent from the county in summer.

DUNLIN: Many records prior to mid-September without details.

SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER: This species is greatly over-reported (and rarely documented) in late fall and winter. It is probably virtually absent from L. A. county from late October through February, though large numbers winter in estuaries in neighboring coastal counties. This species does not occur at freshwater wetlands in winter (and only very locally in migration), and our pitiful estuaries in L. A. County generally seem insufficient to support the species.

HEERMANN'S GULL: There are many interior records (including Antelope Valley) without documentation (though there are valid records for these areas as well).

RING-BILLED GULL: This species is over-reported on Santa Catalina I. (very rare on all Channel Islands) and at sea.

HERRING GULL: Reports from mid-May to mid-September require good documentation.

ELEGANT TERN: Many undocumented (or poorly documented) reports from mid-December, January and early February.

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVES: It is not rare to see very pale individuals in with flocks of this species; this is a plumage morph of Eurasian Collared-Dove, though such birds are frequently entered as "African Collared-Doves" (=domestic "Ringed Turtle-Doves") by birders; such pale individuals should be identified by detailed examination of tail pattern and/or by vocalizations.

BLACK-CHINNED HUMMINGBIRD: reports from mid-October to mid-February almost always lack documentation of diagnostic characters; this species is only a casual vagrant in California during that period.

RUFIOUS HUMMINGBIRD: This species is vastly over-reported from October through January; be very careful when assessing back color of adult males, as this can only be done when looking at the entire dorsal surface (i.e. bird faced away); females and immatures can be identified only in the hand (except some first-spring male Rufous with extensively rufous backs).

LADDER-BACKED WOODPECKER: Virtually all coastal slope reports almost certainly pertain to Nuttall's; extensive documentation needed to document any claim of Ladder-backed on the coastal slope

(YELLOW-SHAFTED) NORTHERN FLICKER: take care in distinguishing intergrades (very frequent) from "pure" Yellow-shafted (much scarcer).

WESTERN WOOD-PEWEE: Many reports from late October to early April without documentation.

WILLOW FLYCATCHER: Many spring reports prior to 5 May without documentation.

(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER: Many spring reports prior to 20 March without documentation.

CASSIN'S KINGBIRD: Greatly over-reported from the Antelope Valley, where very rare.

WESTERN KINGBIRD: Many reports from end of October through February without documentation.

CLIFF SWALLOW: Many reports from October to January without documentation.

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET: Many undocumented fall reports before ~10 September.

WRENTIT: There continue to be entries from the south coastal part of county where the species is absent; often the observer MEANT to enter "Bushtit."

HERMIT THRUSH: Lowland reports from June to early September require good documentation.

BELL'S SPARROW: Reports on the immediate coast need solid documentation and unless supremely documented should be entered as Bell's/Sagebrush.

LINCOLN'S SPARROW: Often reported in the lowlands, June through August; these essentially always prove to be juvenile Song Sparrows.

DARK-EYED (PINK-SIDED) JUNCO: Greatly over-reported and under-documented; beware dull and pale female "Oregon" juncos with pale gray heads and extensive pink sides.

CASSIN'S FINCH: There are many questionable coastal lowland reports

I'm sure I could double this list with a bit of additional thought, but for the time being this is a good place to start for an eBirding "gut-check."

FEBRUARY MEETING AND PROGRAM

I was not able to confirm the program for the February meeting at "press time" for the Observer. We will have a speaker and program, so please plan on attending despite the dearth of details here. The meeting will take place on Thursday, February 19th, at 7:30 PM at the Whittier Community Center. The Community Center is located at 7630 Washington Ave. (not be confused with Washington Blvd.), on the corner of Mar Vista St. and Washington Ave., in the City of Whittier, adjacent to the Whittier Public Library.

The program is free. Light refreshments will be served.

FEBRUARY FIELD TRIP TO BOLSA CHICA

OUR FEBRUARY FIELD TRIP WILL BE TO BOLSA CHICA WETLANDS in Huntington Beach.

The field trip will take place on Saturday, February 21st. Meet for carpooling at 7:00 AM at the Whittier Community Center parking lot at 7630 Washington Ave., Whittier, CA. Bring binoculars, water, and a hat. Scopes will be useful (but will need to be carried!).

Bolsa Chica is one of the great local birding spots. Ducks, shorebirds, and waders can be found in abundance. Gulls, terns, and pelicans are regular, as are raptors that nest on the bluffs.

We will drive over to Harriett M. Wieder Regional Park for a picnic lunch, so pack a lunch.

Jeff Allison will lead.



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