

Birds of the Season- August 2023

Following a relatively cool early July, summer finally arrived. Temperatures increased and some weak systems brought a modicum of subtropical moisture. Thankfully there were no significant wildfires locally thus far.

But the stunner from a weather and birding perspective was a very strong tropical storm- the remnants of hurricane Hilary- that hit the county on August 20. This event dumped five inches of rain or more in many locations and was accompanied by high winds in many places. The added precipitation from Hilary makes severe fires even less likely, but not out of the question.

Though not unexpected, the resulting occurrence of pelagic birds well inland following Hilary was remarkable. While Los Angeles County's bounty was almost entirely restricted to Storm-Petrels, elsewhere inland in southern California there were multiple Red-billed Tropicbirds, a Sooty Shearwater and several jaegers.

The phenomenon of displaced seabirds during and following hurricanes and tropical storms is well known, but as far as California is concerned a storm of this magnitude and the resulting fallout of birds may be a once in a lifetime event for most birders.

Numbers of shorebirds were reduced on the usually very productive lower Los Angeles River this summer, certainly a result of above average water levels following a wet winter and the passage of Hilary. For different reasons, the Piute Ponds also had unfavorably high water levels.

A few southbound passerines began to appear in July and numbers increased through August, with a small number of vagrants also in the mix. Though the list of notable birds from this period was conspicuously shorter than we expect later in fall, there were still plenty of interesting birds.

The long-staying **Tundra Bean-Goose** at Apollo Park near Lancaster continued there through July 8. Despite an apparently injured wing it was remarkably found at the Earvin Magic Johnson Recreation Area in Willowbrook where it was reported from July 13 through August 27. The manner of its conveyance- natural or human assisted- remains a mystery.

A late **Hooded Merganser** was at Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park in Harbor City on July 11. Also of note were nine **Common Mergansers** at Bouquet Reservoir on August 21, indicating possible local breeding (Naresh Satyan).

White-winged Doves were at Malibu Lagoon on August 13 (Frank Gilliland, Henry Witsken) and at Angels Gate Park in San Pedro on August 30 (Richard Fisher).

Very rare as spring migrants, **Yellow-billed Cuckoos** were at Solstice Canyon in Malibu on July 12 (Owen Sinkus, Jack Parlapiano) and Sunset Peak Saddle above Claremont on July 15 (Paul Clarke, Catherine McFadden). Though these locations are far from suitable willow riparian breeding habitat, breeding is possible in the county, though yet unconfirmed. Historically, and at least until the 1940s, this species was a regular breeder on the coastal plain of the county.

Small numbers of **Black Swifts** continued above Claremont through August 11, with a maximum of four recorded.

A very early **Pectoral Sandpiper** along the lower Los Angeles River in Long Beach on June 23 was the only one reported thus far (Jeff Boyd) and an early **Solitary Sandpiper** was at the Piute Ponds on Edwards AFB from July 8-9 (Mark Scheel).

A **Semipalmated Sandpiper** on the lower Los Angeles River from August 8-18 was the first of the season (Chris Dean) and two were present there on August 19 (Merryl Edelstein). Another was on the Ballona Salt Pan on August 26 (Andrew Birch).

A few **Craveri's Murrelets** were found offshore, with five near San Clemente and Santa Catalina Islands from June 24-25 and six near Santa Catalina Island on July 9 (Naresh Satyan).

Unusual inland was a **Least Tern** at El Dorado Park in Long Beach from June 22-July 3 (Chris Dean). Also scarce inland was a **Common Terns** at the Piute Ponds on Edwards AFB on August 19 (Jack Wickel), two at Lake Balboa in Van Nuys on August 21 (Nurit Katz), three at Lake Palmdale on August 21 (Alex Lamoreaux).

Red-billed Tropicbirds were south of Santa Catalina Island on July 23 (many observers) and again on August 7 (Jessica Cross). Two more were south of San Clemente Island on August 22 (Jimmy McMorran).

At least eighteen **Wedge-rumped Storm-Petrels** and about seventy **Least Storm-Petrels** were recorded inland from August 21-22 coincident with the arrival and passage of tropical storm Hilary. These birds were found at various locations including Castaic Lake and Lagoon, Quail Lake, Lake Palmdale, Lancaster Water Treatment Plant, Bouquet Reservoir and Bonelli Regional Park. Four **Black Storm-Petrels** were also at Lake Palmdale on August 21.

For comparison, just three **Wedge-rumped Storm-Petrels** had been previously recorded in Los Angeles County waters and all were well offshore. Black and Least Storm-Petrels are of course regular offshore, but exceptional inland.

As exciting and rewarding as this event was for birders, it's unfortunately less so for the birds themselves. Stranded inland, far from their natural habitat, a number succumb to predation, starvation or exhaustion. Yet many were quickly gone once the storm passed and were likely able to return to the ocean.

Twenty-one **Cook's Petrels** were recorded well offshore in July as were eleven in August. This species was once considered very rare in southern California waters before pelagic birding well offshore became more intensive. That said, our offshore waters are by far the least explored part of the county.

Rare in Los Angeles County waters were **Manx Shearwaters** south of San Pedro on July 31 (Matt DuRoss) and west of Redondo Beach on August 17 (Jon Feenstra).

Magnificent Frigatebirds, rare but expected this time of year, were off Long Beach on July 2 (Bob Schallmann) and at Redondo Beach on July 24 (Roger Carlson).

Any species of booby remains a good count bird. This summer **Masked Boobies** were east of San Clemente Island on July 31 (Michelle McLeod) and south of San Clemente Island on August 22 (Jimmy McMorran). A **Red-footed Booby** was offshore west of Redondo Beach on July 15 (Henry Witsken).

Neotropic Cormorants have now become a regular part of Los Angeles County avifauna, with over twenty reported during the period at various locations on the coastal slope.

Reddish Egrets included one at Belmont Shore in Long Beach on July 2 (Dessi Sieburth) and another far less expected inland along the San Gabriel River in Irwindale on August 2 (Andy H.).

Up to seven **Yellow-crowned Night-Herons** continued at Ballona Lagoon in Marina del Rey through August 20, up to five were at the San Gabriel River mouth from July 4-22, six were at Sims Bio Pond in Long Beach on July 9 and others continued at Alamitos Bay through July 20.

Three **California Condors** were near Pyramid Lake on July 3 (Kevin Bock) and a **Zone-tailed Hawk** was in Glendora on June 19 (Tom Miko).

An early fall **Willow Flycatcher** was at Stephen Sorenson Park in Lake Los Angeles on July 24 (Kimball Garrett).

A very nice find was a **Red-eyed Vireo** present at Rio de Los Angeles Park in Los Angeles from July 3-10 (Samuel Bressler). This was the first in the county since June of 2021.

Two **Purple Martins** were at Bonelli Regional Park in San Dimas on August 23 (Keith Condon).

Quite unusual was a **Verdin** along Big Tujunga Wash in Lake View Terrace on July 27 (Brad Rumble). There are only a few coastal slope records of this desert species.

Out of season was a **Cedar Waxwing** at Zuma Canyon in Malibu on July 15 (Walt Sakai). This species departs late in spring and arrives early in fall, but this record falls outside any expected dates.

Though likely an early fall migrant, a **Brewer's Sparrow** along Blue Ridge Road near Big Pines on July 8 was in an area where singing late spring birds have been detected in past years (Dessi Sieburth).

Lucy's Warblers were along the lower Los Angeles River in Long Beach on August 4 (Keneth Howard Jr.) and at Hahamongna Watershed Park in Pasadena on August 19 (Darren Dowell). A **Virginia's Warbler** was at Stephen Sorensen Park in Lake Los Angeles on August 29 (Kimball Garrett).

American Redstarts were in Topanga on August 9 (Dick Norton) and in Sullivan Canyon near Pacific Palisades on August 15 (Peter Gaede). A rare **Yellow-throated Warbler** was on San Clemente Island on June 18 (Ben Stalheim, Kandace Glanville, Nicole Desnoyers) while an early fall **Hermit Warbler** was at Piute Ponds on Edwards

AFB on July 31 (Sylvia Afable). Another nice late spring find was a **Black-throated Green Warbler** on San Clemente Island on June 18 (Ben Stalheim).

Summer Tanagers included birds at El Dorado Park in Long Beach on June 28 (Joyce Brady) and in Zuma Canyon on July 15 (Walt Sakai) and two in Griffith Park on August 22 (Timothy Aarons).

A male **Indigo Bunting** was along the lower Los Angeles River in Long Beach by Cressa Park from July 15-August 6 (Tracy Drake) and a female was here from July 28-29 (Jeff Boyd, Richard Barth). Another was at the Sepulveda Basin in Van Nuys on July 28 (Greg Slak).

Rarer were **Painted Buntings** along the Los Angeles River in Long Beach on August 19 (Luke Tiller, Alex Coffey, Christine Jacobs) and in the Sepulveda Basin in Van Nuys on August 26 (Jon Fisher).

It's often said that we live in interesting times. While that statement may fairly be applied to various periods in history, it was most certainly true this summer in the birding world. With any luck, it will also be true in September and October.

Fall migration is a favorite of many birders due to both the variety of birds and the potential for regular and unexpected rarities. Last fall's Wood Warbler remains fresh in mind and there's no telling what might turn up this year; whether it be eastern flycatchers, vireos, warblers or strays from Asia. Far from being limited to vagrant passerines, fall can also produce shorebirds, pelagics and others.