



# BIRDS OF THE SEASON

by Jon Fisher

Birds of the Season- December 2023

**M**ild temperatures and limited precipitation were features of fall this year, and so were many rare birds. Though the traditional vagrant season for passerines ends with October, that doesn't mean the end of good birds. Increasingly, neotropical migrants are found well into November and later. Neither were these limited to songbirds; as always, the variety was ample. Additionally, Christmas Birds Counts, run from December 14-January 5, have already turned up more notable birds.

These days virtually every rarity is documented with photos, often by legions of birders. It's a far cry from just a couple of decades ago when even seeing a birder with a camera was itself a rarity. Back then, taking field notes was an art, still practiced by some, but today largely replaced by multiple JPEGs. That's mostly a good thing, since in most cases a photo seals the deal as far as confirming identification.

From waterfowl to passerines, the county had it pretty well covered. Here's a look at what was found in November and December.

The county's first **Tundra Bean-Goose** continued one of the oddest rare bird sagas in memory. First discovered in the Antelope Valley in

March of 2023, it sustained a wing injury and then appeared in Willowbrook in July where it remained through November 22. Whether the bird ended up here on its own is still in question. Finally in late November it was captured and taken to rehab for treatment, with x-rays showing a lead pellet in its right carpal bone.

**Eurasian Wigeons** were at the Piute Ponds on Edwards AFB on October 26 (Chris Dean), at Earvin Magic Johnson Recreation Area in Willowbrook on November 4 (Justin Hartsell), in Pico Rivera on November 24 (Becky Turley) and at Bonelli Regional Park in San Dimas on December 3 (Lauren Simpson).

The Piute Ponds on Edwards AFB hosted an unusual inland **Surf Scoter** on November 7 (Chris Dean). Three **Common Goldeneyes** at Crystal Lake in the San Gabriel Mountains on November 22 were at an unexpected locale (Brendan Crill).

A **White-winged Dove** at Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park in Harbor City on November 2 was the only one reported.

An **American Oystercatcher** was at the Los Angeles Harbor on November 22 and a returning wintering **Pacific Golden-Plover** was along lower Ballona Creek through December 16.

Scarce and declining, both locally and in general, **Mountain Plovers** included ten at the A&G Sod Farm in the Antelope Valley from November 1-12 (Kimball Garrett), twelve by 120th Street West and Ave. B on November 29 (Rachel Woodard) and coastally-where very rare- one was at Dockweiler State Beach in El Segundo from November 11-18 (Benjamin Vizzachero).

Two **Red Knots**, quite scarce in the county, were at the Ballona Creek mouth on December 2 (Luke Tiller).

A **Little Gull**, the county's first in twenty-one years, was off San Pedro on December 10 (Andy Birch, Naresh Satyan, Mark Scheel). Still rare but more expected was a **Laughing Gull** at Cabrillo Beach in San Pedro from December 16-21 (Chezy Yusuf).

**Lesser Black-backed Gulls**, increasing in the county, were along the lower Los Angeles River in Long Beach on November 10 (Jeff Boyd), farther upstream in Maywood from November 20-December 16, with two there on the latter date (Naresh Satyan, Van Pierszalowski), at Lake Hollywood from December 4-21 (Andy Birch) and at Peck Road Water Conservation Park in Arcadia on December 8 (Grigory Heaton).

Rare inland was a **Red-throated Loon** at Legg Lake in South El Monte on December 16 (Lee Pace). Likewise was a **Pacific Loon** at the flood basin in the Antelope Valley just off the 14 Freeway from November 10-13 (Kimball Garrett).

Thirty-two **Western Cattle Egrets** were recorded over the period including a notable count of twenty-five at Bonelli Regional Park on October 31 (Keith Condon).

Unusual seabirds included a **Flesh-footed Shearwater** and a **Brown Booby** in Santa Monica Bay on December 7 (Jon Feenstra).

At least thirteen **Yellow-crowned Night-Herons** were found over the period, with most of these continuing at Ballona Lagoon in Marina del Rey.

Late **Swainson's Hawks** were at Quail Lake near Gorman on November 10 (Brad Rumble), at Bonelli Regional Park in San Dimas on November 21 (Keith Condon) and at Rosemead Park in Rosemead on December 10 (Luke Tiller).

Up to three **Zone-tailed Hawks** continued along the coastal slope of the San Gabriel Mountains in Monrovia and Glendora.

**Short-eared Owls**, always a good find in the county, were at the Ballona Wetlands near Playa del Rey from November 9-22 (Rick Pine), in Griffith Park from November 11-12 (Andy Birch) and in the west Antelope Valley on December 2 (Grigory Heaton).

**Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers** were at Hopkins Wilderness Park in Redondo Beach on November 12, continuing on Santa Catalina Island through December 10, at Monte Cristo Fire Station in the San Gabriel Mountains on November 29 (Luke Tiller), at El Dorado Park in Long Beach from December 4-5 (Nancy Salem) and at Veteran's Memorial Park in Sylmar on December 17 (Teresa Palos).

Pale "**Prairie**" **Merlins** were in the

east Antelope Valley on November 1 (Kimball Garrett) and just southwest of there- possibly the same bird- on December 1 (Luke Tiller)

Late and potentially wintering **Ash-throated Flycatchers** were at Willow Springs Park in Long Beach on November 12 (Brad Dawson), along San Jose Creek in Whittier on November 19 (Alex Coffey) and at Pierce College in Woodland Hills on December 16 (Dan Cooper, Nurit Katz). A returning wintering **Brown-crested Flycatcher** was at the South Coast Botanic Garden in Palos Verdes Estates from December 9-16 (Manuel Duran, Alejandra Cedillo).

Five **Tropical Kingbirds** were present during the period. Of greater interest was a returning wintering **Thick-billed Kingbird** at Griffith Park from October 23-December 22 (Mario Pineda). Also of note was a late **Western Wood-Pewee** at Lincoln Park in Lincoln Heights on November 15 (Ed Stonick).

**Hammond's Flycatchers** were at Tournament Park in Pasadena from November 10-December 18 (Jack Wickel) and at Bonelli Regional Park in San Dimas on December 16 (Ken Burgdorff, Seth Thompson). Late **Dusky Flycatchers** were at St. Andrew's Abbey near Valyermo from October 23-November 12 and at the Piute Ponds from October 27-December 16 (both Kimball Garrett). A **Gray Flycatcher** was unusual on the desert at the Piute Ponds on Edwards AFB on December 14 (Jon Feenstra). Over ten **Western Flycatchers** were recorded over the period.

**Eastern Phoebes** were at Lake Lindero from November 15-December 17 (Dan Cooper) and at the Piute Ponds on Edwards AFB on November 24 (Naresh Satyan).

Seven **Cassin's Vireos** were reported over the period, all on the coastal slope. A great find was a **Yellow-green Vireo** at the West San Gabriel River Parkway Nature Trail in Lakewood on November 22 (Becky

Turley). It was reported through December 16.

**Red-breasted Nuthatches** continued to be found seemingly everywhere, with hundreds present. This was a remarkable contrast to last year when fewer than two dozen were recorded in the lowlands.

Eight **Pacific Wrens** were recorded during the period, an above average number.

A rare **Brown Thrasher** was at the West San Gabriel River Parkway Nature Trail in Lakewood from November 16-24 (Joyce Brady).

Equally rare was a **White Wagtail** seen briefly along the lower Los Angeles River in Long Beach on December 1 (Jeff Boyd, Richard Barth, Juan Limon).

A non-native **Scaly-breasted Munia** at 6,500 feet at Buckhorn Campground in the San Gabriel Mountains on November 18 was unusual (Jodhan Fine, Russell Campbell). This species is common and widespread on the coastal slope and continues to expand its range.

A **Lapland Longspur** was in Griffith Park from November 12-14 (Andy Birch) and a **Chestnut-collared Longspur** was there from October 28-29 (Jodhan Fine).

Single **Evening Grosbeaks** were at Islip Ridge in the San Gabriel Mountains on October 28 (Catherine McFadden, Paul Clarke) and at Lake Hughes on November 9 (Will B.).

**Grasshopper Sparrows** were at Pt. Vicente on November 12 (Naresh Satyan) and in Griffith Park on December 3 (Andy Birch). **Lark Buntings** were at El Dorado Park in Long Beach on November 4 (Joyce Brady), in Griffith Park from November 11-14 (Andy Birch) and at the Piute Ponds on Edwards AFB on November 13 (William Tyrer).

Very rare in the county was an **American Tree Sparrow** at Switzer's Picnic Area in the San Gabriel Mountains on November 10 (William & Emily Tyrer). **Clay-colored Sparrows** were at Angel's Gate Park in San Pedro on October 30 (David Ellsworth), in Griffith Park on November 5 (Andy Birch) and at Santa Fe Dam in Irwindale on December 8 (Chris Dean). A **"Red" Fox Sparrow** was at the Piute Ponds on Edwards AFB from November 24-25 (Naresh Satyan).

A **Dark-eyed "Pink-sided" Junco** continued at Bonelli Regional Park in San Dimas through December 4 and another was in Signal Hills on November 25 (Kim Moore, Christine Jacobs). A returning **Dark-eyed "Gray-headed" Junco** was at Hahamongna Watershed Park from November 11-December 3 (Jeffrey Hale) with two there on December 1.

Fifteen **White-throated Sparrows** made their way to the county this fall as did a dozen **Swamp Sparrows** and seven **Green-tailed Towhees**.

An **Orchard Oriole** was at Satellite Park in Cerritos on November 9 (Thomas Lopez), while **Hooded Orioles** were in Rolling Hills from November 23-December 10 (Jim Aichele, Cathy Nichols), at the LA County Arboretum in Arcadia on November 25 (Mitch Walters) and at the Huntington Gardens in San Marino on December 10 (Danny Perez). Also notable was a **Baltimore Oriole** in Zuma Canyon in Malibu on November 11 (Max Breshears).

**Rusty Blackbirds** were at the San Gabriel Coastal Basin Spreading Grounds in Pico Rivera from December 6-15 (Sarah Boscoe) and at Hansen Dam on December 9 (Brad Rumble).

Seven **Black-and-white Warblers** were detected as were four **Tennessee Warblers** including birds at St. Andrew's Abbey near

Valyermo on October 23 (Kimball Garrett), at Neff Park in La Mirada on October 24 (Jonathan Rowley), at Rolling Hills Landfill Loop on the Palos Verdes Peninsula on November 5 (Naresh Satyan) and at Hahamongna Watershed Park in Pasadena on December 16 (Darren Dowell).

A **Lucy's Warbler** was at La Mirada Community Regional Park in La Mirada on November 15 (Jonathan Rowley) and **American Redstarts** were at Oakdale Memorial Park in Glendora from December 3-9 (Rick Fisher).

A **Cape May Warbler** returning for its third winter was at Loyola Marymount University in Westchester on October 28 but has not been reported since (Kevin Lapp). A **Bay-breasted Warbler** was found on November 22 at Hahamongna Watershed Park in Pasadena, also never to be seen again.

Unusual in winter on the deserts was a **Yellow Warbler** at the Piute Ponds on Edwards AFB from November 17-December 16 (Femi Faminu). **Chestnut-sided Warblers** were on the UCLA Campus in Westwood on November 16 (Chris Sayers) and at Hahamongna Watershed Park in Pasadena from November 19-December 16 (Darren Dowell).

Eight **Palm Warblers** were detected in November and December, while **Pine Warblers** were at Wardlow Park in Long Beach from December 3-10 (Christine Jacobs) and at Satellite Park in Cerritos on December 10 (Charles Thomas, Adam Lopez). Quite rare in the county was a **Grace's Warbler** on the UCLA Campus in Westwood on November 5 (Chris Sayers).

**Painted Redstarts** were in San Dimas Canyon Park from November 12-December 21 (David & Patty Thorne, Mary Ann Ruiz), at Cheviot Hills Park from November

23-25 (Kevin Lapp) and in Arcadia on December 5 (Eric Gai).

A very good bird for Los Angeles County was a **Hepatic Tanager** in Griffith Park from November 20-December 22 (Adam Cunningham). Sixteen **Summer Tanagers**, expected in small numbers, were found in November and December.

**Rose-breasted Grosbeaks** were in Eagle Rock on October 21 (Julie Desmond), at Elysian Park on October 30 (Andy Birch) and at Hopkins Wilderness Park in Redondo Beach on November 13. Late **Black-headed Grosbeaks** were at Hahamongna Watershed Park in Pasadena on November 5 (Darren Dowell, Jeffrey Hale) and in Griffith Park on November 8 (Otto Mayer). Wrapping things up was a **Dickcissel** continuing on Santa Catalina Island through October 24.

It's hard to believe we've come to the end of another bird year. Like all others, this one was filled with vagrants both major and minor, unexpected surprises and many enjoyable days in the field.

Soon after we officially get into winter, northbound migrants will be appearing. In the meantime though, there is still plenty for birders to do. No doubt there are still undiscovered wintering vagrants waiting to be found, gulls to be debated and new places to be explored. Parks and various green patches, deep water inland lakes and sea-watching locations and more all have potential to produce good birds. The deserts offer an interesting mix of specialties, including possible longspurs. Even the higher mountains can offer something of interest.

Despite human development, traffic congestion and large numbers of people, Los Angeles County continues to be one of the best places in the country for birds and birding. Yet most who live here have no idea that's the case. 