

Escondido Christmas Bird Count Dec. 28, 2014

The past Christmas Bird Count was notable for the coldest initial temperatures of all of our three decades-worth of counts. Many teams in low-lying and back-country areas experienced below-freezing temperatures to start the day. The birds responded, according to many teams, with low levels of activity. Our list of 154 species for the day wasn't as high as my original prediction, but still very good for a count with no ocean-front property. Letters associated with sightings listed below are coded to a list of observers found at the end of the summary.

New species. A female Orchard Oriole reported from the Safari Park is an addition to our CBC list (S). This is an eastern bird which normally winters in the tropics. Recently, a few have wintered along the San Diego County coast. This is the most inland record of which I am aware.

More rarities. A Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, staked out in Ramona (P), was only our second record of this eastern counterpart of the Red-naped and Red-breasted Sapsuckers. Varied Thrush was also a second record for the count. Ten of these thrushes along Canyon Road in Escondido (F) and one along the Old Coach Trail in Poway (L) were representatives of this species' major invasion of San Diego County this winter. Rare flycatchers included a Gray Flycatcher in Ramona (P). A Dusky/Hammond's Flycatcher and a bright male Vermilion Flycatcher, both occurred near Rangeland Road (U).

Scarce waterbirds. Two Wood Ducks showed up at the newly "improved" Sand Lake in Kit Carson Park (F). "Improved" meaning all the cat-tails and reeds have been removed. Another two enlivened the campground pond along Woods Valley Road in Valley Center (V). A pair of Hooded Mergansers graced a pond on Summit Drive in Escondido (J) and another pair was spotted in Ramona near Highland Valley Road (E). Common Mergansers included six at Lake Wohlford (G) and two in Ramona at the Quarry or Duck Pond (P). Seventeen Western Grebes on Lake Wohlford is the best showing of these birds since the 90s (G).



*Wood Duck pair at Kit Carson Park.
Photo by Alison Davies.*

Sparse raptors. Our Rangeland Road team noted the continuing Bald Eagle pair (U) and a third bird was a nice find near Mule Hill in south Escondido (H). Individual Golden Eagles were counted by our south Pamo Valley (N), Ramona (P), and Rangeland Road teams (U). Our Ferruginous Hawk count included one each in the North Pamo (M) and San Pasqual valleys (R) and six individuals near Rangeland Road (V). A Peregrine Falcon made a meal of a Mourning Dove in Kit Carson Park (F).

Overwintering birds. Birds we recorded whose populations largely winter south of the U.S. included a Black-throated Gray Warbler in Kit Carson Park (F), a Wilson's Warbler at the Safari Park (S), and four Western Tanagers in a single flock near Canyon Road in South Escondido (F).

Mountain birds. We noted some “downslope” movement of mountain birds this year. Notable were five Band-tailed Pigeons at Dixon Lake (B), three more near Paradise Mountain Road in Valley Center (O) and a single pigeon at the Safari Park (T). These are all unusually low elevation sites for this bird. Forty-seven White-breasted Nuthatches recorded by twelve teams is an above-average count for this bird. Sixty-eight Pine Siskins and eight Purple Finches were additional birds generally associated with the mountains. We last recorded the finches in 2007. A single Steller's Jay showed near the north end of Pamo Valley (M).

Some numbers. The Bandy Canyon team counted eleven Common Ground-Doves in the groves of the San Pasqual Valley (A). Single birds were also noted in the San Dieguito River Valley (Q) and in south Escondido (L). This is the highest number of these birds since 1998. This little dove was completely missed last year. Ten Selasphorus Hummingbirds recorded by three teams (D, F, S) may indicate that this species (almost certainly Allen's) is extending its range. Six species of thrushes were an all-time high. They included a single Townsend's Solitaire, another “mountain” bird, near Woods Valley Road in Valley Center (V). Record high counts were set by Hermit Thrushes and American Robins with 175 of the former and 313 of the latter. Three teams in Ramona recorded a total of forty-five Mountain Bluebirds (M, N, U).

Update on exotics. Wild Turkeys, likely descendants of birds introduced into the county in 1993, still maintain a presence within the count circle with 70 individuals recorded by three teams



Purple Finch along Woods Valley Road in Valley Center. Photo by Lisa Ruby.



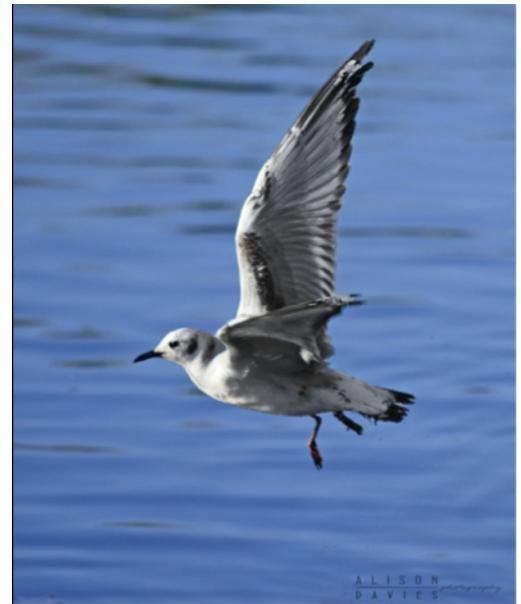
Common Ground-Doves in the San Pasqual Valley. Photo by Darlene Luckins.



Townsend's Solitaire near Woods Valley Road. Photo by Lisa Ruby.

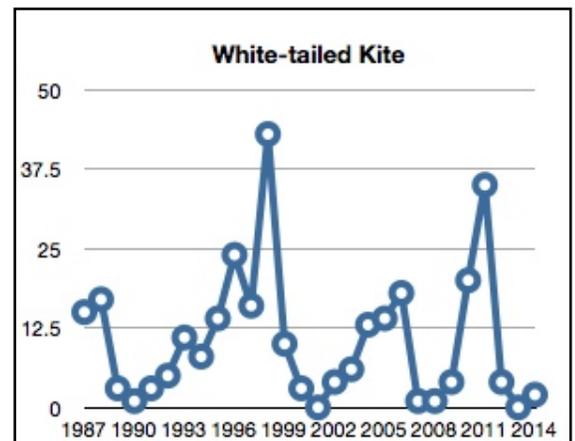
(N, O, P) in the Ramona area. Populations of Eurasian Collared-Dove are down significantly from a high count of 349 in 2008. Eleven teams, though still recorded 139 individuals showing it is still a widespread species. Sixteen Scaly-breasted Munias (a.k.a. Nutmeg Mannikin) included five at Kit Carson Park (F), six in the Mule Hill area (I), and five in north Poway (L), indicating a slow but continuing spread of this Asian bird.

Additional Notes. A Bonaparte's Gull with an oil stain on its breast turned up after the compilation meeting at Sand Lake in Kit Carson Park (Frank Fekel, Alison Davies). This bird occurred regularly at Lake Wohlford in the 1980s and 1990s, but has been scarce in the count circle since then.

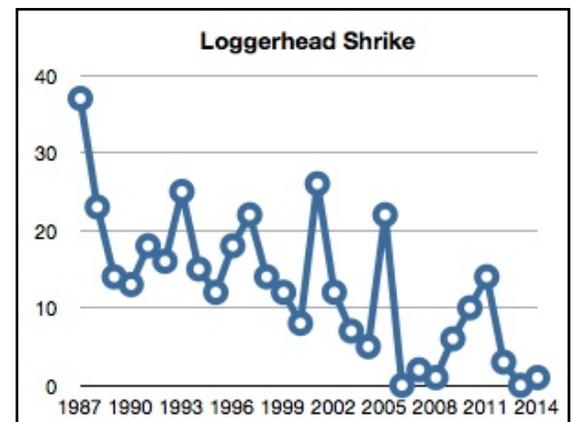


Bonaparte's Gull at Kit Carson Park. Photo by Alison Davies.

We missed the White-tailed Kite last year, but found two this count, one at Lake Wohlford (G) and another in south Pamo Valley (N). Some biologists consider populations of the kite to be cyclical following the ups and downs of the vole, its primary prey. A chart of this bird's numbers in the count circle over the years does show an interesting pattern. Another bird we missed last year is the Loggerhead Shrike. The San Pasqual Valley team (R) noted a single shrike, the only one reported. The second chart shows a disturbing trend for the shrike and, in fact, this bird is disappearing from most of coastal San Diego County.



Coastal sage scrub birds also remain in low numbers. Six teams recorded just eleven California Gnatcatchers. Four individuals observed in south Escondido was the most for a single team (H). Five teams recorded seventeen Cactus Wrens with six individuals in the Cloverdale Road area being our highest team count (B). The biggest shock, though, was the very low count of the California Quail. The highest count of our state bird was 330 individuals recorded by nine teams in 2006, the year before the disastrous fires occurred. Our total this year was only seventeen, noted by just three teams. Nine birds observed near Cloverdale Road represented the highest team count (C). The quail is apparently a victim of the count circle's frequent fires and the drastic 3-year drought we have experienced.



Special thanks go to Bruce Rideout, Jay Desgrosellier, and Christine Rideout for sacrificing sleep to count owls in the early morning/evening hours. They did well. Debbie Marlow did wonders for obtaining access to “back-country” areas of the San Diego Safari Park. I’ve relied on Philip Unitt’s excellent book, San Diego County Bird Atlas, for many facts. Philip has been a regular participant on the Escondido count for many years.

I will be posting the CBC list for the area that I covered on eBird and I recommend that other team leaders do the same. I will be glad to send your team list to you if you didn’t keep a copy. Our entire CBC list will be sent as a separate attachment.

Thanks and hope to see everyone next year,

Ken Weaver

Teams

A -- Clark Mahrtdt, Rick Grove, Darlene Luckins, Jan Nordenberg
B -- Tim Burr, Kirsten Winter
C -- Christine and Doug Rideout
D -- Philip Unitt, Stephen Perry, Linda Rasmussen, Heidi Marc-Aurele
E -- Bruce Rideout
F -- Paul Lehman, Barbara Carlson
G -- Trysten and Scott Loeffke, Jeff Enbright, Christine Harvey
H -- Dave Batzler, Frank Fekel
I -- Ed Hall
J -- Ryan and Lori Andrews, Terry and Lynn Badger
L -- Ken Weaver
M -- Christopher and Supeena Adler
N -- Sally and John Sanderson, Doug and Diane Walkley, Charlotte Morris, John Thomas
O -- Kris Preston
P -- Jay Desgrosellier
Q -- Peter Thomas, Millie Basden, Paul Jeffs, Joel and Patti Parker
R -- Jim Beckman, Hal Benham, Michael and Sonja Beeve, Marie Del Re, Dave Cowan, Stacy Eisenberg
S -- Stan Walens, Debbie Marlow, Nancy Christiansen, Tania Maher
T -- Brennan Mulrooney, Matt Farley, Candace Zylman
U -- Phoenix and Laurie Von Hendy, Phillip Dillon, Beth Cobb, Billy Lockett
V -- Lisa Ruby, Terry Hurst, John Bruin, Jeanne Raimond
Additional observers: Michael Wienholt, Alison Davies