

2008 Addendum to Annotated Checklist of Birds of Ballona Valley
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With this addendum, I add one new native species to the Ballona Valley checklist: **Prothonotary Warbler**, as well as two introduced species observed for the first time, Mute Swan and Nutmeg Mannakin. I present details on several other scarce birds at Ballona from 2008, including third local records for Ferruginous Hawk, Tropical Kingbird and Golden-crowned Kinglet; and rare modern records for Canvasback, Common Tern and Rhinoceros Auklet. I also document the invasion of the Eurasian Collared-Dove, and the possible disappearance of the Loggerhead Shrike as a winterer.

Abbreviations used in text:

BFM = Ballona Freshwater Marsh, "Playa Vista"

BCr = Ballona Creek, from Mar Vista to Playa del Rey

BW = Ballona Wetlands proper; flat areas west of Lincoln Blvd.

DRL = Del Rey Lagoon, Playa del Rey

DW = Dune Willows, western edge of Ballona Wetlands

M. ob. = Multiple observers

PVRC = Playa Vista Riparian Corridor, east of Lincoln Blvd. at base of Westchester Bluffs

Observer initials:

JC: Jonathan Coffin

DSC: Daniel S. Cooper

KL: Kevin Larson

JP: Jean Pickus

DS: Don Sterba

RDS: Russell and Dorothy Stone

RVDH: Robert van de Hoek

Greater White-fronted Goose: The first-year bird that appeared at BFM on 18 Nov. 2007 (KL), remained until 12 April, often associating with a Cackling Goose (see below).

Ross's Goose: One appeared on 02 Dec. at the ballfields at "Area C" of the Ballona Wetlands (between Culver Dr. and Ballona Cr.; JC), where it remained for several days.

Cackling Goose: One that appeared at BFM on 21 Oct. 2007 (B.G. Johnson et al.) continued to 12 April.

Canada Goose: Several birds remained through the winter at BFM, where this species bred once again (two pairs), and wandered around the valley somewhat.

[Mute Swan: Two birds were at DRL on 31 Oct. (RVDH), for a first Ballona record of this introduced species. Though now fairly common farther north along the coast, free-flying birds are rare over most of southern California.]

Green-winged Teal: Birds were present in the Ballona Valley from 04 Aug. (1, BFM) to 17 Apr. (pair along Ballona Cr., both DSC), and a remarkable 53 birds were on the flooded Ballona Wetlands saltpan on 24 Feb. (DSC), which may have included northbound migrants.

Canvasback: The 4th and 5th modern records were provided by birds along BCr on 02 - 06 Jan. (L. Gomes) and at BFM on 24 Nov. (DS).

Ring-necked Duck: A rare record away from BFM was provided by a single on DRL on 05 Dec. (C. Taylor).

White-winged Scoter: One was present along BCr from 21 Mar. - 05 Apr. (KL), and possibly prior to these dates.

Black Scoter: Two along BCr on 08 Apr. (T. Collender, LACoBirds) were likely spring migrants, while three on 28 Dec. (M. Meyers) were wintering locally

Long-tailed Duck: One discovered along BCr 30 Dec. 2007 (L. Allen; not included in 2007 Addendum) remained to 08 Apr. (m. ob.).

Ruddy Duck: A pair through the spring and summer along the PVRC (KL) suggested an expansion of breeding slightly east from BFM.

Black-vented Shearwater: 20 were off PdR on 06 Jan. (KL) during a seawatch, one of just a handful of actual records of what is a reasonably common bird just offshore.

Sooty Shearwater: Up to three birds were off PdR 10 - 24 May (KL); they are rarely reported, but probably regular offshore in spring and summer.

American White Pelican: Two records for 2008 (the species is barely annual), two birds at BFM on 14 Feb. (E. Read), and one here and at nearby BCr 15 - 25 Oct. (DS).

Brandt's Cormorant: Much remains to be learned of this species' status in the Ballona ecosystem; an estimated 10,000 birds were observed leaving a night roost on the outer breakwater on 05 Apr. (KL), heading south, possibly toward nesting areas in western Mexico.

Pelagic Cormorant: One was along lower BCr on 12 July (DSC) for a rare summer record (first fall birds typically arrive in August).

Least Bittern: One along the PVRC on 10 Aug. (KL) was followed by up to four there in Sept. (J. Feenstra, DSC); however, this species did not remain through the winter here, as it did at nearby BFM.

Great Egret: Two nests were reported (to DSC) by K. Alberts from the large heron rookery in MdR near Washington Lagoon. This species is a recent colonist as a nester to the Ballona area, with the nearest nesting colony being up the coast in Malibu.

Little Blue Heron: For the 4th modern record (6th overall, contra the 2007 addendum), a first-year ("calico") bird was present mainly at BFM from 17 May - 21 July (KL).

Cattle Egret: Two birds at PdR/BCr 12 - 17 April (KL, DSC) were within the winter/spring window of occurrence; they were seen flying up the coast during a seawatch on the first date, entering Ballona Creek, and then were seen roosting along BCr on the last date.

Black-crowned Night-Heron: Around 40 nests were estimated at Oxford Drain/Washington Lagoon (K. Alberts, to DSC). This was not a systematic survey, and it is possible that many more were actually present.

White-faced Ibis: Still scarce, 2008 records include 10 birds over BFM on 28 Apr. (DSC), with one remaining here to 13 May (m. ob.), an exceptionally large flock of 58 birds over the Ballona Wetlands on 01 Sept. (KL), and one at PVRC on 05 Oct. (DSC).

Turkey Vulture: One over BW (Area C) on 04 Dec., the only one reported, was apparently a mid-winter wanderer (JC).

Osprey: What may have been the same resident bird from 2007 was observed on 29 - 30 Jan. A bird reported on five dates between 14 Mar. and 23 May might have included the same bird as the over-wintering one, or multiple birds moving north; after a summer gap in reports, the first fall migrant was seen on 02 Sept. (m. ob.).

White-tailed Kite: After January, singles were first reported 26 Apr. (m. ob.) and on 07 (JC) and 11 June (DS) for rare spring records; however, unlike in 2007, this species was apparently not present continuously through the spring

(or even through late winter in 2008). A bird at BFM on 01 Aug. (JP, et al.) and on the Ballona Wetlands 18 Aug. (RVDH) may have been southbound migrants, and two birds were present by the end of Dec. (2 on 28 Dec., M. Meyers).

Northern Harrier: The first-year male wintering from late 2007 was last reported 30 Mar. (m. ob.). It was joined by a female toward the end of its stay (17 Mar. - 30 Mar.), and another apparent migrant was at BFM 18 Apr. (J. Ivanoff). The first southbound bird was reported 17 - 18 Aug., with two apparent first-year birds together on 28 Dec. (M. Meyers), which were clearly attempting to winter. It appears that this species is reclaiming the Ballona Wetlands as a wintering area after a 10-year absence (see Cooper 2006b).

Red-shouldered Hawk: What was likely a bird continuing from late 2007 was an immature at BFM from 11 Jan. to 07 Mar. (m. ob.); additional sightings from BFM from 24 Aug. to the end of the period may have been multiple birds migrating through (about one per month), or an elusive bird attempting to over-winter again.

Ferruginous Hawk: Only the 3rd record since the early 1980s, one was reportedly observed by Fred Heath on the Los Angeles Christmas Bird Count (02 Jan. 2008, *per* E. Osgood); investigation (by JC and DSC) revealed that it had actually been present at the northern end of the El Segundo Dunes (mainly in a closed area of LAX) since at least 20 Nov. 2007, when it was photographed atop a pine tree along Pershing Way (by Rick Pine). This bird occasionally cruised north to the BW during late winter in 2008, and was last seen on 10 Mar. (JC). Prior to this, one had wintered on the eastern BW near Lincoln Blvd. during the winter of 2004 - 05 (Cooper 2006a). Later in 2008, what was presumably the same bird from March was back at the dunes on 24 Oct. (KL), where it remained through the end of the period.

Virginia Rail: Up to three birds were along PVRC to 25 May (KL), suggestive of at least attempted nesting here in 2008 (stay tuned...).

Common Moorhen: A family group that included two young was observed at BFM on 02 May (JP et al.), for the first modern nesting record; later that summer, a family with three grown young was along the nearby PVRC on 10 Aug. (KL); perhaps the same family group moved east?.

Black-necked Stilt: As in 2007, two nests were constructed on the small island at the southern extension pond of BFM from April to June; however, this year, one was successful, and held two young on 18 June (DS), which makes this the first such success since 2004.

American Avocet: Unlike last year, which saw several fall records, all sightings in 2008 were in spring, with up to five birds present at PdR, including birds at the BW salt pan and even the ocean surf during 26 Feb. - 04 May (m. ob.). It is possible more were present in fall but simply went unreported, as this species remains very common elsewhere in the county.

Solitary Sandpiper: One was at PVRC on 09 Apr., and another was at BFM 27 Apr. - 02 May (KL, m. ob.) adds another record of this rare (but predictable) transient.

Long-billed Curlew: Just three reports, within expected migration periods, 12 Apr., 17 May and 10 Aug. (all KL).

Red Knot: A rare spring bird, but within the established spring window, was at DRL 27 Mar. - 05 Apr. (M. Zarky).

Pectoral Sandpiper: Also rare but predictable, just one record, a bird at PVRC on 05 Oct. (DSC).

Wilson's Snipe: Birds wintered in exceptionally high numbers at BFM in 2007-08, with 71 counted here on 11 Jan. and 47 on 30 Jan. (both DS).

Wilson's Phalarope: Still scarce, one was at BFM on 02 May (JP et al.), and 8 were on the BW saltpan on 27 July (C. Taylor).

Jaegers: A Pomarine Jaeger was seen during a seawatch off PdR on 15 Mar., and a Parasitic Jaeger was similarly observed on 27 Jan. (both KL)

Black-legged Kittiwake: One was off PdR on 15 Mar. (KL), the first local report since 2001.

Common Tern: Just the 3rd local record since the late 1970s, one was present on the BW saltpan on 24 - 26 July (JC), which fits a late-summer pattern, now greatly diminished.

Black Skimmer: Still scarce, there were three reports this year from PdR, 24 Apr. (C. Taylor), 13 May (2, KL), and 08 Sept. (D. Sloan).

Common Murre: Four were observed flying past PdR during a seawatch on 15 Mar. (KL), and an unusual inshore record came of an oiled bird along BCr 09 - 28 Sept. (C. Taylor); there are still fewer than 10 records of this species at Ballona.

Rhinoceros Auklet: One offshore during a blustery seawatch from PdR on 02 Apr. provided one of few records from Ballona of a species that is rather common several miles offshore in winter.

White-winged Dove: Two records of this scarce transient, one in spring at BFM (09 May, KL) and the other in fall from DRL (17 Sept., J. McKenzie).

Eurasian Collared-Dove: After a lack of reports since a flurry in 2005, this species staged what is likely a permanent invasion into the residential neighborhoods in the northern part of the study area (western Mar Vista/eastern Venice) during spring 2008 (*fide* C. Taylor), and several pairs now reside here in neighborhoods along Washington Blvd. west of Alla Dr.

Burrowing Owl: One was discovered along the northern edge of the El Segundo Dunes adjacent to PdR from 04 - 16 Mar. (RVDH); one (perhaps the same bird) was at this same spot again on 24 Oct. (KL), but it apparently did not overwinter.

Short-eared Owl: Another record of this scarce migrant came with a bird present on the *Salicornia* marsh just west of BFM 09 - 11 Sept. (JC).

Costa's Hummingbird: One observed on 12 Jan. on the slope south of BFM (KL), feeding at bladderpod.

Rufous Hummingbird: One at Burton Chase Park (MdR) on 05 Apr. was the only one reported (KL).

Downy Woodpecker: Up to two birds were recorded at BFM on six dates between 12 Jan. and 15 Oct., though none appeared for two consecutive days here; however, one was at DW on 14 Oct., which may have been one of these two birds.

Willow Flycatcher: 5 birds at various locations on 24 May (KL) give an idea of how common these migrants are in late spring.

Dusky Flycatcher: One was on the Westchester Bluffs on 17 May (KL); [note: the two birds at LMU in 2007 were present on 07 May (listed simply as "07" in the previous addendum)].

Say's Phoebe: though breeding was not confirmed this year, single birds were present through the spring and summer, particularly at BFM and Playa Vista.

Tropical Kingbird: One at PVRC on 16 Sept. (J. Feenstra) was only the third valid record, and was part of a large movement of Western Kingbirds.

Loggerhead Shrike: Birds on the BW on 09 Jan. (C. Taylor) and at BFM 11 Jan. (JP et al.) were the last recorded in 2008; this species is thus far unrecorded in 2009 and may have already abandoned Ballona as a wintering area. It was extirpated as a breeder in the late 1990s, so this was not unexpected, as the shrike continues its steep decline in the southwestern California/northwestern Baja California region.

Bell's Vireo: The fourth local record was provided by a singing bird at BFM on 06 May (KL), a one-day wonder reminiscent of last year's bird here on 31 May.

Hutton's Vireo: The bird at Oxford Drain from Dec. 2007 was last recorded 27 Jan. (KL); a bird at LMU on 16 Feb. may have also wintered locally (or might have been the same bird).

Warbling Vireo: One at BFM on 09 Mar. (KL) extended the early arrival date by a few days.

Western Scrub-Jay: One at BFM on 12 July (RDS) appears to represent a first record from this well-worked locale (they are common elsewhere in the Ballona Valley).

Northern Rough-winged Swallow: Two birds were present at BFM through the winter along with several Barn Swallows (m. ob.).

Bewick's Wren: Birds on the eastern Westchester Bluffs on 02 Feb. (KL) and 05 Oct. (RDS) were the only reports this year.

Golden-crowned Kinglet: Two were in pines at LMU 18 Jan. - 16 Feb. (DS, RDS), where they were also present in 2000 (Cooper 2006a) and 2006.

Wrentit: What was almost certainly the same bird from last year (the first modern record) was a singing individual in the same area of the Ballona Wetlands near BCr and Culver Blvd. from 22 July (DS) through the end of the period.

California Thrasher: An often-singing bird was present on the Ballona Wetlands (Area A, near the Wrentit, above) from 16 Mar. (JC) through at least 01 Oct. (*vide* J. Feenstra); this might have been the same bird from 2006, or a new arrival.

Virginia's Warbler: Almost a carbon-copy of prior years' situations, a third-year returnee was present in willows south of BFM on the odd dates of 09 Mar. - 09 Apr. (KL), with a transient east of here along PVRC on 05 Oct. (DSC). In 2006, the warbler was present 05 Mar. - 21 Apr., and in 2007 it was here 10 Mar. - 01 Apr. (both KL).

Yellow Warbler: A major spring push of this species seemed to come on 24 May, with 45 birds between BFM and Titmouse Park (DSC, KL). Up to four wintering birds were found by year's end or shortly after New Year's.

Palm Warbler: Birds were recorded at BFM on 05 and 15 Oct., within the expected late fall window.

Black-and-white Warbler: An adult male (black auriculars, black throat), possibly a returning bird, was at LMU in mid-Jan. (RDS), last seen 27 Jan.; however, on 08 Jan., a bird with grayish auriculars and a pale throat was found here (R. Barth) suggesting that two birds may have been wintering locally. Both proved elusive and were not found later that winter.

Prothonotary Warbler: A remarkable find was a singing bird at BFM on 06 June (DS), the first for the Ballona Valley. This species, a vagrant in the state, is especially rare in spring (Hamilton et al. 2007), and was one of very few ever found in Los Angeles County.

Northern Waterthrush: One was at BFM on 17 Sept. (DS), for about the 6th local record.

Wilson's Warbler: Four birds were wintering around the Ballona in late 2008/early 2009, which is high.

Yellow-breasted Chat: A singing bird was in willows southwest of BFM from 03 - 18 May, possibly attempting to summer; fall migrants were at PVRC 16-17 Aug. and 06 Sept., indicating how early fall birds can move through.

Spotted Towhee: Singles, possibly the same bird, were at the LMU "waterfall" (densely-landscaped slope along Westchester Bluffs) on 03 Jan., 26 April - 06 May, and 08 Nov. (RDS, KL), for the only report(s).

Chipping Sparrow: Several fall migrants were observed 06 - 21 Sept. at BFM/PVRC, and a spring migrant was at BFM on 03 May (all KL).

Brewer's Sparrow: One was along PVRC on 15 Sept. (J. Feenstra).

Clay-colored Sparrow: One at Titmouse Park on 14 Oct. (DSC) adds another record of this rare-but-regular migrant.

Lark Sparrow: One at PVRC on 15 Sept. (J. Feenstra) and at BFM two days later (DS) may have been the same individual.

Dark-eyed Junco: One female "Oregon" type was at Titmouse Park on 14 Oct. (DSC) for a rare coastward record; winter surveys at PVRC found up to three per day there (DSC), suggesting that this species may be regular in numbers in the eastern Ballona Valley floor, adjacent to LMU.

Rose-breasted Grosbeak: A female apparently wintered in fruiting *Myoporum laevis* along the PVRC, observed 21 Dec. - 04 Jan. (DSC) for the 5th Ballona record, the second in winter.

Blue Grosbeak: Though birds weren't reported as summering at PVRC (perhaps overlooked?), fall migrants were here on 15 Sept. (J. Feenstra) and on the extremely late dates of 02 - 11 Dec. (DSC), suggestive of an individual attempting to winter.

Brown-headed Cowbird: Eight birds were on wires along Braddock Dr. on 16 Feb. (KL), for a rare winter record.

American Goldfinch: Singing males were at BFM through June (DS, m. ob.) but still we obtained no indication of breeding.

[Nutmeg Mannikin: Up to three were at BFM 15 Oct. - 19 Nov. (DS), for a first Ballona-area record of this introduced species, a popular cagebird established locally in southwestern California.]

Erratum

Tricolored Blackbird: The 2007 record from PVRC for 17 June was retracted by the observer (fide KL), leaving only the two males at BFM in May, which stand as the only certain records since the species was recorded in 2003 (Cooper 2006a).

Hypothetical

As happens every year, several rare birds were reported that were either insufficiently described or otherwise not credible, including Golden Eagle, Franklin's Gull (determined to be an alternate-plumaged Bonaparte's Gull), Elegant Tern in early January (likely a Royal Tern) and Black-throated Green Warbler (reported as a group of four).

In addition, several free-flying escaped cage-birds (incl. parrots) were reported but not detailed here, including a European Goldfinch near BFM on 25 June (DS).

Sources cited:

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