

2006 Addendum to Annotated Checklist of Birds of Ballona Valley
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Last updated: 1/24/07

With this addendum, four new species are added to the Ballona Valley checklist since it was published on-line: Short-tailed Shearwater, Eurasian Wigeon, Gull-billed Tern and Varied Thrush.

Here I present details on several other scarce birds at Ballona mainly from late 2005 through 2006, including the first local breeding of Say's Phoebe, the first successful over-wintering by Burrowing Owl in 20 years; plus second known records of Rock Sandpiper, Swainson's Hawk, Glaucous Gull, Xantus' Murrelet, Sage Thrasher, Golden-crowned Kinglet and Scott's Oriole; and third records of Little Blue Heron and Summer Tanager. This period also brought sightings of several species known primarily from older or historical records and now scarce (incl. Canvasback, American Avocet, wintering American Bittern; Franklin's Gull and California Thrasher). Finally, I include several previously-overlooked records from the Western Tanager ("WT") newsletter from 1980-present, listed in brackets below to distinguish them from truly new records.

Abbreviations used in text:

BFM = Ballona Freshwater Marsh, "Playa Vista"

B. Cr. = 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

See "Annotated Checklist of Birds of Ballona Valley, Los Angeles County, California" (Cooper 2006) for list of observers cited below.

Greater White-fronted Goose: A lingering bird at Del Rey Lagoon was last seen on 13 Apr. 2006 (RVDH, *per* KL) after spending nearly two years here, present since Nov. 2004. A transient was present in a pond at the base of the Westchester Bluffs on 01 Oct. 2006 (KL), for just the fifth modern record.

[Snow Goose: An apparent spring migrant, and just the seventh modern record, one was reported from "Marina del Rey" on 10 Apr. 1990 (WT).]

[Ross's Goose: The 1996 bird at Playa del Rey lingered to 29 Mar. (WT), not 21 Mar.]

Cackling Goose: One was at BFM on 28 Oct. 2006 (KL).

Canada Goose: A spate of spring records from BFM and B. Cr. was followed by the remarkable successful nesting at BFM (4, then 3 young in May 2006), the first ever for Ballona.

Eurasian Wigeon: First Ballona record. One was at Ballona Lagoon on 06 Jan. 2006 (DB) present for just 1 day.

American Wigeon: The last report of the bird summering at BFM during 2005 was 10 Sept. (DB).

Northern Pintail: Rare observations of birds in saltmarsh/brackish habitats (where virtually unknown in modern times, but where formerly nested), included a female in the BW tidal channels 07 – 09 Dec. 2005 (DSC) and two at DRL on 08 Jan. 2006 (DSC), possibly the same birds that were recorded here on 12 – 31 July 2006 (DS). Prior to this, up to 2 birds were recorded flying low over the BW in late fall 2004, but were not observed to land.

Canvasback: One was reported with scaup on B. Cr. on 04 Jan. 2006 (L. Gomes), for only the 3rd modern record for Ballona.

Long-tailed Duck: Up to 3 individuals were present along B. Cr. 17 Feb. – 06 Apr. 2006 (m. ob.).

[Black Scoter: Four additional records bring the total number of modern records to eight: 19 Feb. – 19 Mar. 1991 (WT), 21 Mar. 1992 (WT) and 18 Dec. 1993 (WT) and 4 (male and 3 females) flying north on 26 Apr. 2005 (DB). March and April sightings likely pertain to northbound migrants, and more records from this season would be expected with increased observer coverage.]

Western Grebe: One at BFM on 10 Nov. 2006 (KL) was the first record for this location.

Clark's Grebe: Still apparently wintering in very small numbers, singles (possibly the same bird?) were along Ballona Cr. on 27 June (RB) and 01 Oct. 2006 (DS); the first wintering birds are not expected until the end of October, with most arriving in December.

Little Blue Heron: Only the 3rd Ballona record, an adult was at Ballona Lagoon 23 Mar. – 23 Apr. 2006 (DB). This heron remains very rare in the county.

American Bittern: One apparently wintered again at BFM (3rd modern record), with sightings on 03 Oct. 2005 (DB); 03-10 Feb. (RB), and 24 Mar. 2006 (E. Read). An apparent migrant was here on 10 Nov. 2006 (KL), but did not remain to winter.

White-faced Ibis: One along Ballona Cr. at Centinela Cr. on 14 May 2006 (J. Coffin) provided a rare recent spring record.

[Black-vented Shearwater: A high count of 2500 birds off MdR was recorded on 04 Jan. 1991 (WT); large numbers are probably somewhat regular in mid-winter.]

[Short-tailed Shearwater: Two off Marina del Rey on 04 Jan. 1991 (WT) appear to be the first local records.]

[American White Pelican: A species with fewer than 10 Ballona records, a mid-summer wanderer was along Ballona Creek on 10 July 1994 (WT).]

Osprey: Singles along Ballona Cr. on 06 Dec. 2005 (DSC) and hunting at BFM on 22 Dec. 2006 (DS) provided rare winter records; a mid-summer wanderer was at BFM on 18 July 2006 (KL). A handful of Osprey are seen each year outside the fall migration window, present for a day or two before moving on.

Northern Harrier: A late-moving juvenile at BW (Parcel A) on 03 Dec. 2005 (J. Coffin) was the only one reported that winter, and another first-year was found the next year (08 Nov. 2006, DS), which is apparently trying to winter (no successfully over-wintering since the 1990s for this species).

Swainson's Hawk: One over Mar Vista on 07 Mar. 2006 (KL) was only the 2nd known Ballona record.

[Peregrine Falcon: A rare 1990s record was of one at the Ballona Wetlands on 21 Mar. 1992 (WT).]

Black-necked Stilt: A single pair nested at the southern extension of BFM in spring 2006, possibly the last nesting pair in the valley as development plans proceed at Playa Vista and this southerly extension is vegetated.

American Avocet: Several very recent records include singles at BFM on 06 Dec. 2005 (DSC) and 07 Jan. 2006 (KL), three sightings in Mar. from DRL and nearby B. Cr., including up to 10 at DRL on 31 Mar. 2006 (KL), and four along Ballona Cr. at the Centinela Cr. confluence on 03 Aug. 2006 (J. Coffin, LACoBirds) suggest that this species may be attempting to re-colonize the area as a regular migrant or a wintering species. Though once breeding locally (to 1920s) and wintering (through the 1970s), this species is now an occasional transient mainly in late fall.

Short-billed Dowitcher: A calling bird along Ballona Cr. on 03 Dec. 2006 (KL) is the only known winter record, though this species might have wintered here historically.

Spotted Sandpiper: A very early fall migrant was at BFM on 18 July 2006 (KL) preceded the previous early date by about two weeks.

Rock Sandpiper: One was discovered on 22 Nov. 2006 on the Playa del Rey jetties (BGJ), and is wintering. The only other local record is of 1-2 individuals present in the same area during the 1960s.

Red Phalarope: One was at the Ballona Wetlands on 06 Mar. 1995 (WT), and two were off the PdR jetty on 03 Jan. 2006 (DB) during a storm, when somewhat expected (but rarely recorded).

[Pomarine Jaeger: Adding to very few specific records one was reported along "Ballona Creek" on 13 Oct. 1993 (WT).]

Glaucous Gull: One was reported from Marina del Rey on 25 Feb. 2006 (WT) for only the second modern record.

[Little Gull: The record from 21 Mar. was erroneously listed as 1991. It should be from 1992 (WT).]

Franklin's Gull: One on 06 Apr. 2005 along B. Cr. (RB) was only the 3rd in spring for Ballona; each of these spring records have come since 2000.

Gull-billed Tern: First Ballona record. One was well described by Tom Ryan and Lyann Comrack flying along the beach at MdR on 19 May 2005.

Least Tern: One off the PdR jetty on 01 Apr. 2006 (W. Lamb, LACoBirds) was exceptionally early, as were two at Ballona Lagoon on 05 Apr. (DB). Later in the season, two were seen copulating on the islet in the southern extension of BFM on 02 June 2006 (RB, JP).

Xantus' Murrelet: One photographed along Ballona Cr. on 10 Aug. 2006 (DS) provided just the second or third Ballona record.

White-winged Dove: One-two were present on the Ballona Wetlands on 04 Sept. 2006 (JRC; one ph.), within the expected window of this rare-but-annual fall transient.

Barn Owl: One in Mar Vista near date palms 09-19 June 2006 (KL) provide one of the few records of a species that may be resident in very low numbers.

Short-eared Owl: A rare transient was just west of BFM in the Ballona Wetlands 28-29 Oct. 2006 (KL, RB), only the third record in the past 10 years.

Burrowing Owl: One wintered on the Ballona Wetlands from 29 Oct. 2005 (J. Coffin; first seen in Parcel A) through 19 Feb. 2006 (KL), making use of a ground-squirrel burrow in Parcel B, south of the bikepath/levee. This was the first successful wintering since the mid-1980s. Presumably the same individual was back in the same spot on 16 Nov. for a second winter (CLA).

Rufous Hummingbird: One well-described at LMU on 21 Oct. 2006 (RDS) was the first known fall record, and was probably wintering locally.

Red-breasted Sapsucker: One was at LMU, where probably regular in winter, on 19 Feb. 2006 (KL).

Downy Woodpecker: One was at DW on 13 July 2006 (BOC), one of just a handful of local records.

Yellow-shafted Flicker: One was probably wintering vic. LMU, recorded 21 Jan. 2006 (R. Stone); an apparent hybrid was at BFM on 26 Oct. 2006.

Gray Flycatcher: Another spring record within the expected window was one in residential Playa del Rey with a large group of migrants on 20 Apr. 2006 (DSC).

Dusky Flycatcher: One at BFM on 03 Oct. 2005 (DB) and another in residential Playa del Rey on 28 Apr. (DSC) added to the few local records of this species. A Hammond's Flycatcher, more regularly observed here, was also in PdR on the 28th.

Say's Phoebe: The first local nesting was confirmed in the summer of 2006, with an adult near the old Hughes building on Playa Vista on 18 June (KL), then a vocal family group of two adults with two young here on 17 July (JRC). A photograph of one of the young-of-the-year was obtained on 01 Aug. (RDS). This species has been increasing recently as a nester in coastal southern California for unknown reasons, despite the concurrent decline of its preferred open habitats, and nesting birds "colonized" the Baldwin Hills just to the east only in the past few years.

Ash-throated Flycatcher: One on the Westchester Bluffs on 28 Oct. 2006 (KL) extended the previous late date by about a week.

Cassin's Kingbird: Three were at BFM on the unusual date of 07 July 2006 (RB).

Western Kingbird: A loose flock of 50 flying north over Ballona Lagoon on 20 Apr. 2006 (DSC) was notably large, occurring during a major movement of this species through coastal southern California (pers. obs.).

Horned Lark: Four were observed and heard flying over BFM on 28 Oct. 2006 (KL) provided just the 3rd record since the species was extirpated in the 1970s.

Violet-green Swallow: Rarely recorded, a spate of records at BFM from early spring 2006 included 6 on 17 Mar. (KL).

Bank Swallow: Up to two were at BFM in mid-May 2006 (m. ob.), where probably regular.

Golden-crowned Kinglet: Two were at LMU (2nd Ballona record), where probably somewhat regular, on 19 Feb. 2006 (KL).

Bewick's Wren: Up to three (on 19 Sept.) were at the Dune Willows in fall 2005, with one continuing through winter (DB, DSC), and one was at Ballona Lagoon, where rare, on 07 Jan. 2006 (KL).

Sage Thrasher: A remarkable three birds were present at BFM 2005-06, including one here 03-05 Oct. 2005 (DB) and a spring migrant on 03-08 Feb. 2006 (RB). Prior to this, there had been just one previous record, in 2004.

California Thrasher: Only the 2nd or 3rd modern record, a singing bird was photographed in BW (Parcel A) on 14 May 2006 (J. Coffin), still present (south side of Ballona Cr.) on 04 June (KL).

American Robin: Two at BFM on 26 Feb. 2006 (KL) were a first for that location.

Varied Thrush: First Ballona Valley record. One was at LMU on 22 Feb. 2006 (RB).

Virginia's Warbler: One apparently wintered in willows south of BFM, recorded 05 – 24 Mar. 2006 (RB), for just the 5th Ballona record, and the only one outside of the expected fall period.

Hermit Warbler: One was on the floor of the Ballona Valley (BW; end of Falmouth Dr.), where rare, on 28 Apr. 2006 (DSC).

Blackpoll Warbler: One was at BFM on 20 Oct. 2006 (DS), the fifth local record of a rare-but-regular transient.

Black-and-white Warbler: One was at LMU on 07 Oct. 2006 (RDS), for only the third Ballona record; one apparently wintered here the previous year, recorded in March 2005.

Wilson's Warbler: One at BFM on 03 Nov. 2006 (DS) was late; the wintering bird referred to in the annotated checklist (Cooper 2006) may have been one previously reported in Marina del Rey on 15 Jan. 1997 (WT).

Common Yellowthroat: One was singing at Ballona Lagoon on 27 Apr. 2006 (DSC), followed by 2 here on 19 May (DB), which may indicate birds attempting to summer/nest in the restored scrub and marsh vegetation, the first in 10 years of monitoring (*fide* CLA).

Yellow-breasted Chat: One was singing on 04 June 2006 in scrub just north of BFM (KL), for the first modern breeding-season record (this species was believed extirpated by the mid-1900s); this bird did not linger.

Summer Tanager: A female was observed feeding on bees at LMU on 14 Jan. 2006 (KL); another (or the same?) female was in a large wave of migrant Western Tanagers in residential PdR on 20 Apr. 2006 (DSC), for only the 3rd or 4th Ballona record.

Green-tailed Towhee: A fall transient was on the Westchester Bluffs from 30 Sept. – 01 Oct. 2006, for just the third Ballona record (all recent).

Spotted Towhee: Up to three (on 07 Dec.) wintered at DW 2005-06, where previously known only in migration (DSC).

Clay-colored Sparrow: Up to four were found at BFM fall 2006, one on 22 Oct. (KL), two on 26-28 Oct. (DS, KL), and another on 03 Nov. 2006 (JP). This species is doubtless regular in fall in the Ballona area, but records are still fewer than 10.

Lark Sparrow: One just west of BFM on 26 Aug. 2006 (DS) tied the earliest fall record; one sighting per fall is expected.

Fox Sparrow: Up to three (e.g., on 07 Dec. 2005) wintered at DW 2005-06, where rare (*per* B. Courtois); two birds in the eucalyptus grove of BW on 06 Dec. 2005 were apparently of the “Thick-billed” race, scarce on the immediate coast, seen and heard giving “chink” call notes (DSC).

Swamp Sparrow: One singing at BFM on 03 Oct. 2005 (DB) was one of the earliest ever for southern California; this bird apparently did not winter.

White-throated Sparrow: One at Ballona Lagoon on 07 Jan. 2006 (KL) and another adjacent to BFM 03-08 8Nov. 2006 were only the fifth and sixth Ballona records.

Dark-eyed Junco: One at BFM on 30 Oct. 2006 (KL) was a first for that location, and one of the few records away from the Westchester Bluffs/LMU.

Rose-breasted Grosbeak: Only the 4th Ballona record, and the only one in spring, one was a male at Ballona Lagoon on 19 May 2006 (DB).

Bobolink: One was reported from BFM on 15 Sept. 2006 (LACoBirds); this species is barely annual, mainly in fall.

Yellow-headed Blackbird: Three were at BFM in a large blackbird flock on the afternoon of 19 Aug. 2006 (LF), one of just a handful of records outside of the expected April/May window.

[Scott’s Oriole: One of just two known Ballona records was one in Marina del Rey on 30 Dec. 1995 (WT).]