

San Diego Botanic Garden—Bird Report for 2013

Submitted by Susan Smith, 15 Jan 2014

During 2013, 89 different bird species were seen over the year in the San Diego Botanic Garden (SDBG), one bird species less than the previous year's 90, but still a good number of species and an increase over 2009 (68), 2010 (88) and 2011 (87). We completed a total of 29 bird survey days, representing 92 survey hours. This includes some of the time spent (and sightings made) during the popular monthly bird walks held the first Monday of each month, led by Rita Campbell. Rita's walks continue to have a high number of attendees. Participation this year ranged from a low of about 10 (a rainy day), to a high of 33 people and an average of about 21 people per bird walk. This year we had a special San Diego Audubon-SDBG Bird Walk on November 18, at the request of the SDAS, which had the highest number of participants (33). In 2012, as you might recall, we had a combined SDBG-SDAS joint walk on the traditional first Monday of November with 40 people attending, so this year's split of the groups made the attendee numbers a little more manageable (though not by much!).

Four new species were added to the SDBG checklist this year—White-throated Sparrow, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Common Loon and American Robin. The White-throated Sparrow and Rose-breasted Grosbeak were both spotted on April 25, apparently rare eastern vagrants, off course during migration. The Common Loon was seen flying over the Garden on 4 November, a flock of eight American Robins were seen flying low over the garden on 4 March. Am not sure why this latter iconic American species has not been recorded in the Garden before, but unlike its regular occurrence in northern North America, the Robin is more of an eruptive visitor to the San Diego county and only began to breed here after the 1950s or so. In general, Robins are more common in winter, and for breeding, prefer montane forests and orchards, or residential areas and parks with extensive lawns and shade trees. Thus with the Loon and Robin, we have a new total of 127 species seen in and from the garden.

This year we added two new breeding species to our list—Killdeer and Cooper's Hawk. This makes a total of 32 bird species that nest in the Garden, or about 25% of all species recorded for the Garden since records began around 1990. On 29 April, a pair of Killdeer were observed attending three downy young in the overflow parking lot, and on 2 June, two young Cooper's Hawks were fledged from a nest in the top of the large Bunya bunya tree in the tropical garden. Also in the overflow parking area, the Western Bluebirds continue to fledge young from the installed nesting box there, and another pair fledged young from a natural cavity formed by one of the shoots of a Fishtail Palm in the Tropical Garden.

There were no new unusual vagrant warblers this year, and numbers of migrating and wintering warblers were slightly down. The decline in red gum lerp psyllids in eucalyptuses that border the main parking lot may be a factor in the lower numbers, since this invasive species is a popular bird food source, but it is hard to say at this point. Over the past decade, a biological control (*Psyllaephagus bliteus*, an Australian parasitic wasp) was released into various locations in San Diego Co. (and in other California areas) to rid the trees of infestation. Published results show a significant decline in the lerp psyllid, especially in coastal areas, since these introductions. Even so, our wintering Yellow-rump Warblers continue to be drawn to these eucalyptuses and the lerps that remain, and our wintering Townsends Warblers, especially like the large Tipuana tipu tree (False Locust) that shades the patio of the Lawn House (the best place to view them during wintertime). The ripe and overripe fruits in the tropical fruit garden, and the flowering coral trees and other blooming vegetation also continue to draw birds, especially on those cold mornings

when they are looking for sugary fast energy from fruits and nectars. A rare Orchard Oriole was recently discovered feeding on the nectar of two coral trees on 3 January 2014.

We continue efforts to get the word out about our Garden's birds. On October 10, Rita Campbell and I spoke at one of Anne Spindel's SDBG Tour Guide Meetings. I gave a Power Point presentation about the diversity, distribution, habitat preference and seasonal abundance of the Garden's birds, providing statistics and info that will hopefully help them answer some of the questions that visitors might have about birds in the garden and where to find them. Rita gave a talk about the history of the monthly bird walks, and took the tour guides for a quick bird tour around the garden. Some of them have now joined the monthly bird walks. In December 2013, Rachel Cobb created a link called "Current Bird Counts" on our SDBG Birdwatching web page. This links directly to the San Diego Botanic Garden birding "Hotspot" in the Cornell Ornithological Laboratory's eBird online data base, so that people can instantly access the most recent reports of birds in the Garden, and the historical data as well from our web site. We continue to input our bird count data into the eBird data base, so the bird survey information is constantly being added to, and will increase in value and accuracy over time. Also, the official SDBG pocket bird list is now available for purchase at the entry kiosk as well as in the gift shop.

Both Rita Campbell and I look forward to continuing our bird monitoring in 2014, sharing with others the beauty garden's birds, and encouraging non-members to become members. We especially enjoy educating people on how important the Garden is for breeding, wintering and migrating birds, tracking trends in bird abundance and distribution, and observing and documenting how birds depend on certain plants and habitats and how they adapt to exotic plantings.