



Allen's Hummingbird Charles Jackson photo

San Diego Botanic Garden—Annual Bird Report for 2016

Submitted by Susan Smith, Jan 2017

During 2016, a total of 105 different bird species was seen over the year in the San Diego Botanic Garden (SDBG). This is the highest diversity of species recorded annually since we began keeping eBird records in 2009, and also since annual tallies from monthly bird walks began in 1998. Higher species numbers probably reflect the greater survey effort in recent years, and increased birding activity in garden.

Year	#Bird Species
2009	68
2010	88
2011	87
2012	90
2013	89
2014	100
2015	99
2016	105

We also completed 36 survey days this year, representing about 106 survey hours. This survey time includes time spent (and sightings made) during the popular monthly bird walks held the first Monday of each month, led by SDBG volunteer Rita Campbell. These walks, open to the public, accounted for about 37% of the total survey hours, and continue to have a good number of attendees. Participation this year ranged from a low of 8 during a downpour rain in March (amazing, considering the conditions!), to a high of 32 on our November bird walk. The annual joint SDBG-SD Audubon bird walk in November was not held this year because the numbers of birders (54 last year!) became too excessive and unwieldy for group birding on a given morning. So participation leveled off this year to more manageable sizes, and averaged about 20 birders per walk. New SDBG volunteer Gretchen Nell continues to provide her bird expertise to the monthly walks and periodic surveys.



Whimbrel

T. Swem USFWS



Willow Flycatcher S.Mlodinow



California Gnatcatcher

Herb Knufken

Four New Birds Added to the SDBG Bird List in 2016--- These were **Whimbrel**, **Willow Flycatcher**, **California Gnatcatcher**, and **Baltimore Oriole**. The **Whimbrel**, a medium-sized shorebird, was a flyover seen by a visiting birder on May 3. The **Willow Flycatcher** (most likely of the northwestern race *E. t. brewsteri*, not the Endangered southwestern race *E. t. extimus*) was seen in the Tropical Fruit Garden on May 20. Also, an amazing pair of Endangered **California Gnatcatchers** was first seen on Sept 5 in the Native Garden by the pond, with subsequent September sightings in the coastal scrub Overlook area, again in the Australia Garden, with a last sighting on 20 October, again in the coastal scrub area east of the Overlook. We are hoping this pair returns and breeds here! Finally, on the 7 Nov walk, a rare **Baltimore Oriole** (east coast version of our Bullock's Oriole) was spotted feeding in the eucalyptus trees bordering the main parking lot. This eastern oriole has been unusually abundant along our coast this winter, for reasons unknown. It usually spends the winter in Central America and northern South America, but small numbers are known to overwinter in the SE and SW United states. Our new total for bird species seen in/from the Garden now stands at 143 species.



Baltimore Oriole, 11/7/16 Steve Brad

Breeding Birds News--- We confirmed breeding of another new species on the SDBG grounds , with adult **Scaly-breasted Munias (aka Nutmeg Manikins, or Spice Finch)** feeding fledglings in the Native Garden pond reeds on July 21. This brings the number of breeding birds nesting on the SDBG grounds to 36 species. Flocks of these colorful, exotic Munias from tropical Asia (now naturalized here in San Diego), have been found most of the year at the pond in the Native Garden, and also other locations like the Hamilton Children's Garden. In other breeding news, a record three nesting pairs of **Pacific-slope Flycatchers** nested here this year, one pair nesting in the Dragon Tree grove in the Canary Island Garden, another in the Tropical forest area, and another in the Tropical Fruit Garden. Two **Western Bluebird** pairs nested in separate nesting boxes in the overflow parking lot and in the Hamilton Garden parking lot area, but only one pair was successful in fledging young. The box in the Hamilton Garden was apparently disturbed by nesting rivals, most probably House Wrens. Because of this and the new Conservatory construction, we hope to find a new location for this box next year. This also seemed a productive year for our resident **Orange-crowned Warblers**, who fledged numerous young.



Scaly-breasted Munia
photo Tom Blackman

Our hawks continued to battle with each other and the crows for nesting space, and in recent years **Cooper's Hawks** seem to have won out over the Red-shouldered Hawks as our main hawk nesters, often joining the crows in chasing them off. This year one Cooper's pair built a nest high in a tall Brisbane Box Tree in the Australia Garden, fledging at least one bird in May, but another younger nestling fell out of the nest in early June, where it was discovered on the ground, and rescued by Project Wildlife. SDBG President and CEO, Julian Duval, reports a continuing, almost tame, **Red-tailed Hawk**, which seems to prefer hanging out around the overflow lot.



Orange-crowned Warbler bathes in Hubbell stream sculpture. Charles Jackson photo

Other Interesting Birds in 2016--- Early in January, the wintering flock of rare **Purple Finches**, continued to be seen, but left by March and did not return this recent winter. Our 3-4 colorful **Western Tanagers**, continue to overwinter in the garden, and were still being seen as recently as the end of December 2016. Other unusual birds seen this year included a **Calliope Hummingbird** near the Walled Garden April 14, a **Northern Parula** in a lerpy eucalyptus in the main parking lot April 22, a **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** in the Overlook area September 5, a **Summer Tanager** in the Tropical Fruit Garden Nov 25, and a flyover **Turkey Vulture** seen by Julian Duval Nov 28.

Bird Trends: Analyses of average number of birds seen per survey day since 2010 indicate that populations of most of our resident bird species seem to have held steady over the years, with some populations like the Munia, Orange-crowned Warbler, Red-tailed Hawk, Black Phoebe, Western Bluebird, Crow, Eurasian Collared Dove increasing. Those whose numbers have leveled off in recent years, but are still below 2010 averages include Anna's hummingbird, House and Bewick's Wrens, Song Sparrow, and Lesser Goldfinch. On the other hand, many of the Neotropic migrants, and also wintering-only species, have shown declines, such as Yellow-rumped Warbler, Townsend's Warbler, and Ruby-crowned Kinglet. Our summering Hooded Orioles, who breed here but leave for the tropics in winter, have also declined to less than half the average number noted in 2010. Drought conditions could be a factor.

Our bird monitoring and bird walk outreach efforts with the public continue. This includes sharing with others the garden's birds on Rita Campbell's monthly bird walks and making timely bird sighting and bird trend information available online. Our SDBG Bird Data Base grows on the Cornell Ornithological Laboratory's eBird online data base, where the Garden is a designated Birding Hotspot. You can see a link to this data on our web site www.sdbgarden.org, and instantly access the most recent SDBG bird reports, and the historical data as well. Just click on 'Explore' then 'Bird Watching' then 'Current Bird Counts on eBird.' Or simply go to our Hotspot page located at <http://ebird.org/ebird/hotspot/L873348>. Bird survey information is constantly being added to, and will increase in value and accuracy over time. The official SDBG pocket bird list on card stock continues to be available for purchase (~\$1) at the entry kiosk as well as in the gift shop.

###