

Notes based on Joe Morlan's Ornithology class lecture September 30th, 2010.
Joe Morlan is not responsible for these notes, any errors or omissions in them are mine.

On the **field trip on Sunday to Rodeo Lagoon** there was a **Palm Warbler** around the edge of the parking lot that overlooks bird rock at the end of the trip. A **Black-and White Warbler** was also in a willow thicket, but only another birdwatching group got to see it.

Both species are **eastern vagrants** that have navigated the wrong way. That is particularly true of the Palm Warbler. **The Black-and-White Warbler** is more a rare migrant. It breeds due north of us and we get enough Black-and-White Warblers coming through each year that it suggests that this is the periphery of their normal migration route, where their density is really thin. It's a question whether or not the bird is mirror-image off course, which would be the Palm Warbler, or possibly just a rarity at the periphery of its normal range. Black-and-White Warbler could be either one. The Black-and-White Warbler is a nuthatch mimic. It creeps around the branches of the trees, often upside down.

The Palm Warbler acts like a pipit. It often stays close to the ground pumping its tail. The Palm Warbler was new to the cumulative field trip list.

The Palm Warbler is divided into two subspecies. The western subspecies is *palmarum*. The eastern subspecies is *hypochrysea* (which means: golden beneath). The western Palm Warbler winters in the east, particularly Florida and the Caribbean. In Florida in the wintertime Palm Warblers are abundant roadside birds. If you drive along the road in suitable habitat, small flocks of brown birds fly up. Here in CA those are White-crowned Sparrows, in Florida those are Palm Warblers. The eastern Palm Warbler breeds in the Maritime Provinces and winters at the gulf coast, mostly west of Florida. The two different subspecies have a crisscross migration route, which is unusual.

An interesting article about the subspecies of the Palm Warbler by Ron Pittaway's in Ontario Birds, April 1995: <http://www.jeaniron.ca/2010/palmwarblers.pdf>

The Palm Warblers we get here in CA are almost all western ones, they come here because of mirror image misorientation. They occur with some regularity along the coast of CA as vagrants. A **vagrant** is a bird which is migrating and is off course, not on part of its normal migration route.

There are some birds showing the characteristics of eastern Palm Warbler that have been found in CA, one of which wintered along Corte Madera Creek. That bird was very distinctive. It was midwinter, the bird was all yellow on the entire underparts, and the streaks on the chest were chestnut in color. It was brighter even than any breeding western Palm Warbler Joe has seen. Many eastern Palm Warblers seem to be bright year round, not having a drab winter aspect. Important field marks for the Palm Warbler are the yellow undertail coverts and the tail bobbing behavior.

Another bird that was new to the cumulative list was the **Common Murre**. Pigeon Guillemots occur regularly there in the spring time but are pretty much gone by the end of August.

Also a lot of migrant **Yellow Warblers** at Rodeo Lagoon.

Terms used for **abundance**. There are attempts to quantify what they mean but they seldom work out very well. If you consider absolute numbers of birds vs. the visibility of those birds you may get different results. Usually it means something like how many times are they likely to be detected.

Accidental: usually has only one or two records, there is no significant pattern to explain how it got here. Examples in CA Golden-cheeked Warbler, showed up on the Farallon Islands in September many years ago. Now a specimen at the Academy of Sciences. Or the White-tailed Tropicbird that came in to a model air plane field in Orange County in the 1960s.

Casual: more than two records, but the species does not occur annually and it is not at all expected. But there is enough of a pattern to no longer consider them to be accidental.

Rare: seen annually in the smallest numbers.

Every year there will be Palm Warblers, but they occur in relatively small numbers.

Palm Warbler would be considered a rare vagrant. Even though they are vagrants, nevertheless they occur with some regularity and even predictability. There is a pattern to the occurrence.

Most are along the immediate coast from the end of September through October.

Rare also is applied to species which are rare in the world, like California Condor. Certain endangered species are considered to be rare, because their whole world population is relatively small, even though they might be common or even abundant locally at one particular place.

Uncommon: birds which are around, but you are not guaranteed of seeing them if you go to the appropriate habitat. Mountain Quail is an example.

Common: very likely to be seen in suitable habitat on every trip that you take to that habitat in season. Yellow Warblers are pretty common in season at Rodeo Lagoon, we saw quite a few of those on the field trip.

Abundant: species which are so common that you can't avoid seeing them even when you are not birdwatching.

Threatened or endangered is not really a category of how common they are, it talks about how imperiled they may be.

Something that is used in CA and in other states is **species of special concern**. They are not listed as threatened or endangered but appear to be in trouble, the bird is in danger of becoming threatened or endangered.

The **Wrentit** is a taxonomic conundrum. Its almost endemic to CA, with small populations in Oregon and Baja, a specialty bird from the CA chaparral. Somewhat wren-like but clearly not a wren. It has light colored eyes and builds a cup shaped nest.

Don Roberson has a page about it and its relatives here:

<http://creagrus.home.montereybay.com/sylvids.html>

For a long time it was placed in its own family. The AOU currently classifies it as a member of an old world family of birds called babblers. It may be more closely related to the genus *Sylvia* of the Old World Warblers. Those warblers are under taxonomic revision, too. It may indeed be so that the *Sylvia* are more closely related to the babblers than to many other Old World warblers.

On Saturday there was the **Rare Bird Roundup** in SF. Joe did Lake Merced, joined by Sally part of the time. They had a Moorhen by the concrete bridge. Also saw one or two Green Herons. Did not refind the Northern Waterthrush, but somebody from England refound it recently.

Red Crossbills were in the trees at the compilation site at Crissy Field. Best birds seen on the roundup were Broad-winged Hawk and Lewis's Woodpecker. **Battery Godfrey** off Lincoln on the west side of the Presidio. You stand on top of a tilted battery roof and you can see the hawks coming across the Golden Gate. There was an immature Lewis's Woodpecker and one person also had a Green-tailed Towhee there. Other Lewis's Woodpeckers have been seen in Marin County and in Shasta County, they are on the move.

Lewis's Woodpeckers are interior birds. The closest breeding colonies are in Santa Clara County in San Antonio Valley, the upper Mines Road area. They used to breed all along Mines Road, but have been driven out by European Starlings. The starlings evict the woodpeckers out of their holes. The woodpeckers have not evolved to defend their holes. It is the same with Acorn Woodpeckers. In some places Acorn Woodpeckers have started to nest unusually late, they wait until the starlings are done. Lewis's Woodpecker is also a somewhat erratic species. They are seen in migration from the hawk lookout, they are a diurnal migrant. Sometimes they show up along the coast. One year there were quite a few out at Pt Reyes. Once they settle in they may stick around for several weeks or even the whole winter.

Bill Oddie's Little Black Bird Book is a marvelous book, one of the most hysterical little tracts. Bill Oddie is a British comedian and also a very serious birder. People who have birded with him are saying he has no sense of humor at all when he is birdwatching.

Joe is receiving an award from the ABA, **the Ludlow Griscom Award Outstanding Contributions in Regional Ornithology**. Ludlow Griscom was a person who did a lot for early ornithology, basically one of the first people who was able to do field identification. Joe is a huge fan of his.

Many *Pterodroma* **Petrels** have bold or distinct **patterns on the underwings**.

These birds fly in high arcs, seldom flapping but tilting from side to side. Often fly vertically with one wing up and one down., gliding rapidly like that and then quickly tilting to the other side. The bird is not flapping but just hurtling away. The pattern in the underwing is really important for field identification.

Hawaiian Petrel

Discussed after Stejneger's Petrel further down.

Mottled Petrel

Called **Scaled Petrel** in old field guides

OCCURRENCE

Breeds in the south Pacific on islands off New Zealand in its summer, December and January.

Then migrates into the northern hemisphere in its winter, July and August.

Ranges in the summer months all the way into deep water just south of the Aleutian islands.

The species is most likely to be seen in the summertime from ferries that run from Kodiak Island to some of the Aleutian islands which sometimes swerve out into deep water. Birdwatchers book on this ferry hoping that they are going to get out into the water where the Mottled Petrels occur. If you do get out into deep water your chances of Mottled Petrel are probably close to 50%. But on a lot of the trip the weather forces them to take a longer route inland and not the shortcut over the deep water.

Occurrences in CA originally were based on a few tideline corpses and occasional sight records. One was found alive at the mouth of Pine Gulch Creek in Bolinas Lagoon. It was sick and died at a wildlife rehab center.

FIELD MARKS

Rather small, very long wings.

In flight a W-pattern across the upper surface of the wings.

Gray back.

Gray belly, unlike most other *Pterodroma* petrels, makes it distinguishable from a considerable distance. Frequently the belly is in shadow, the appearance of a gray belly maybe something that you see ephemerally on as a white bellied bird.

Rounded head.

Short, rather stubby bill.

A bold dark ulnar bar or carpal bar extends on the underside of the wing diagonally from the wrist towards mid-wing where the wing is connected to the body.

Cook's Petrel

Named after Captain James Cook who did some explorations in the Hawaiian Islands and in the South Pacific.

OCCURRENCE

Breeds on islands off New Zealand. New Zealand has done a yeoman's job of recovering species which have been threatened and which have declined due to the introduction of rats and other predators on the nesting islands. Once you get rid of those predators the population is booming. The number of Cook's Petrels is probably ten times now what it was ten years ago.

Probably the most common *Pterodroma* off CA waters now.

The first record was found on a driveway in Santa Cruz in the middle of the night.

Joe Jehl started to detect them on cruises off Baja California, he predicted that they would be showing up in CA waters during warm water years.

Last year there was a big incursions including flocks of hundreds of them seen off southern CA. There is a record of a Cook's Petrel from the north end of the Salton Sea.

Sometimes while the seabirds are migrating north in the Davidson Current they get shunted off into the Sea of Cortez. When they reach the head of the Sea of Cortez they are landlocked. The first body of water you come to going north from the Sea of Cortez is the Salton Sea, a very large man made body of water in extreme southeastern CA.

FIELD MARKS

A very small *Pterodroma*.

Tail relatively short, wings relatively long. That helps separate the Cook's Petrel from several other similar species which are longer tailed and shorter winged. Most of those similar species are not believed to migrate into the northern hemisphere. Long distance migrants usually are long winged. We don't think the shorter winged similar petrels migrate very long distances.

Not as graceful as some of the large ones but perhaps a little more acrobatic.

Has the angled forward wrist joint of all the *Pterodromas*.

Not much of a dark bar on the underwing, pretty much all white underneath.

Gray above, M-pattern on the back.

Quite a bit of white in the tail, however seeing that in the field is usually pretty tricky.

Fairly pale on the crown.

The cap can look dark in worn plumage or in bad light.

Bill relatively small.

A variable little dark patch below the eye.

Stejneger's Petrel

OCCURRENCE

Breed only on the island of Mas a Fuera in the Juan Fernandez Islands off central Chile (eastern south Pacific as opposed to Cook's which is in the western and central south Pacific).

The first idea that they might possibly occur off CA was based on specimens collected by Rollo Beck on the Whitney South Seas Expedition.

The first accepted Stejneger's sight records were removed from the ABA checklist when people learned about how similar worn Cook's Petrels can look. A very interesting situation since it was still on the CA checklist. After the ABA reversed itself on Stejneger's Petrel an unequivocal Stejneger's Petrel was photographed on a boat trip out of SF.

FIELD MARKS

About the same size as Cook's Petrel.

All white underneath.

Distinct dark cap, but Cook's cap can look dark if worn or in bad light.

Dark finger projects down at the sides of the breast.

Cook's don't get quite that contrast around the back of the neck and they don't have that little projection.

Hawaiian Petrel

Was lumped together with the Galapagos Petrel as the Dark-rumped Petrel until a few years ago.

OCCURRENCE

Considered to be endangered.

There are no specimens from CA waters of either Hawaiian or Galapagos.

There is some question as to whether or not the bird could be put onto the state list without a specimen.

The problem is that collecting a specimen of an endangered species is not something that anybody wants to do. The only way we are likely to get a specimen would be a tideline corpse. Pretty much all that is known about at sea identification of the two types of Dark-rumped Petrel is in an article linked from Joe's website. Nat Geo was printed before these new field marks were derived.

The California Bird Records Committee has undertaken a review of all claims of Dark-rumped Petrels in CA (a good 15 or 20, some of them not too far offshore) and analyzed them to see if they were identifiable. Some of the good photos were identifiable as Hawaiian Petrels, others were not identifiable. Peter Pyle did an analysis of these birds and a bunch of previously accepted records of Dark-rumped Petrels got accepted as Hawaiian Petrels.

The documentation from the known distribution at sea suggests that Hawaiian Petrels do wander east towards the CA current. There is no evidence that the Galapagos Petrel wanders north. All CA records of Dark-rumped Petrels probably apply to Hawaiian Petrel.

FIELD MARKS

A large *Pterodroma*, more graceful than the ones just discussed.

All dark above with a white forehead and a white throat.

A moderate dark carpal bar on the underside of the wing.

Dark on the rump probably one of the more distinctive features.

Hawaiian differs from Galapagos in subtle ways mostly having to do with overall size, the vocalizations the birds give in their nesting burrows and other minor differences which can only be detected in the hand.

At sea it is believed that they may be distinguishable by the pattern on the side of the neck. The Hawaiian Petrel shows a dark spur extending out onto the throat area, similar to Stejneger's Petrel. In Galapagos Petrels the dark area comes straight back and does not have a projecting finger.