

# San Diego Botanic Garden—Annual Bird Report for 2017

Submitted by Susan E. Smith, January 11 2018

During 2017, 105 different species of birds were seen in the San Diego Botanic Garden (SDBG) on our monthly bird walks and replicate surveys. Higher species numbers likely reflect the greater survey effort in recent years, and increased popularity of birding in the SDBG. An additional 11 species were documented for SDBG on Cornell University's eBird website during the year, spotted by visiting birders. We completed 34 survey days in 2017, representing 118 survey hours. This includes time spent (and sightings made) during the popular monthly bird walks held the first Monday of each month (starting at 8am), led by long-time SDBG bird walk leader, Rita Campbell, and volunteer bird guide, Gretchen Nell, who filled in as leader when Rita was sidelined by hip surgery this year. These walks, open to the public, accounted for about 34% of the total survey hours, and continue to have consistently good attendance. Participation ranged from a low of 17 in January and July, to a high of 37 on our March bird walk. Participation was slightly up this year, averaging about 23 people on each walk.

Year	#Bird Species
2009	68
2010	88
2011	87
2012	90
2013	89
2014	100
2015	99
2016	105
2017	105

## Bird Checklist



San Diego  
BOTANIC  
GARDEN

This list was prepared by SDBG birding guides Susan Smith and Rita Campbell and is dedicated to Freeman Hall, who led SDBG birding walks from the early 1980s through 2003.

**New Bird Checklist Published**—In July, our bird checklist was updated and printed, with impetus from Mike Blanco and design and layout help from Sally Sandler. It replaces the previous checklist, first printed in April 2012, and adds an additional 28 species and 3 species groupings to our previous checklist, plus 7 new breeding birds. This new official SDBG pocket bird list on card stock is available for purchase (\$1) at the entry kiosk as well as in the gift shop.

**New Bird Species Added in 2017**— Four new birds were added to our SDBG list this year. At the start of the New Year, on 4 Jan, a visiting birder, Alison Heirs, discovered and photographed a rare **Dusky-capped Flycatcher**, flitting between the Bamboo Garden and Subtropical Fruit Garden, drawn to insects around a flowering White Sapote Tree. This unusual bird stayed the winter and remained through early May, drawing many visiting birders and bird photographers. Normally breeding in SE Arizona and SW New Mexico, and a small area in Texas, it usually winters in central and southern Mexico and points south. In June, Eve Martin, a regular on our bird walks, spotted our first **Black Skimmer**, circling the Overlook area before heading west. This large tern uses its elongated red bill to 'skim' the surface of the water for food and is more often found in lagoons, and on calm days, over the nearshore ocean. In November, another

visiting birder, Jo Quinn, found and photographed a **Thick-billed Kingbird** on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November. It's another "southern" flycatcher, normally found in SE Arizona and SW New Mexico, and winters south into Mexico. It was only seen that one day, and then disappeared. While searching for it the next day on November 2, Gretchen Nell found another rarity in the Native Garden, a **Verdin**—a small bird that normally lives in our southwestern deserts, and rarely strays from that habitat. It stayed for about a week, and was seen again by some of us on our November 6 bird walk, but then was not seen again.



Dusky-capped Flycatcher, photo M. Senac

**Breeding Birds News**— Julian Duval confirmed first-time breeding of the **Eurasian Collared Dove** on the SDBG grounds on April 27. This Eurasian dove, introduced to the Bahamas in 1974, spread to Florida and then rapidly throughout the US, reaching southern California around 2002, where it's now a relatively common urban bird, but not that common in the Garden. This brings the number of breeding birds nesting on the SDBG grounds to 37 species, an admirable number for the acreage of the Garden

Our hawks, and their young, continue to be very dramatic and vocal as they squabble over nesting territory and food. First, in early March, the **Red-Shouldered Hawks** established a nest in their favorite tall *Bunya bunya* tree by the tropical forest pond. By mid-March the **Cooper's Hawks** had settled into their nest in the tall Brisbane Box tree in the Australia Garden. This is the same tree the Cooper's Hawk pair nested in last year, but at least one of the pair may be new. This year's female was a younger bird, still in immature plumage. They raised 3 fledglings, which were observed on our July 3<sup>rd</sup> walk. We are not sure how the Red-shouldered Hawks fared, but in early summer we could hear calls from at least two young birds, coming from the tall *Bunya bunya* tree.

**Other Interesting Birds in 2017**— Other bird surprises in 2017 included a **Double Crested Cormorant** discovered swimming around in the Bamboo Garden Pond on 13 January. These birds are rarely seen flying over the Garden much less paddling around in one of our ponds. Then there was the amazing reappearance on 3 April of **two Acorn Woodpeckers** perched close together at the top of a Torrey Pine above a cork oak tree at the northwest corner of the Lawn Garden, not far

## New Checklist

from our Acorn Woodpecker display tree! (The last Acorn Woodpecker seen here in the SDBG was recorded in June 2006). A small population of these birds once nested here during the years 1987-2005, representing the only instance of this species colonizing an exotic oak habitat (Old World cork oak). We have been hoping they would return, but alas, this pair soon departed, probably to the east toward the foothills and the oak woodland habitat they are usually associated with. On that same day in April, we also had an **Orchard Oriole**, in the large Coral Tree across from the Ecke Bldg. This species is normally found in Mexico and Central America during winter, and breeds in the eastern part of the US in summer. We also had increased sightings of the **Endangered California Gnatcatcher** this year, but these appeared to be dispersing birds from breeding areas elsewhere. Nonetheless, we are hopeful that a pair will eventually breed here in the Native Garden or Overlook area. On April 27, a **Swainson's Hawk** was seen rising and circling above the Walled Garden, a rare hawk for coastal San Diego. We think it had a peaceful night here (and maybe a sip from the Walled Garden Fountain!) before continuing its northward migration. Also, an **all-white (leucistic) American Crow** was first spotted and photographed in the Garden by Julian Duval on 17 July, and later was seen at various times in the summer and fall, causing quite a stir and local publicity. Another photo was later taken by Susanne Brueckner near the Seeds of Wonder.

**Wild Mammal Sightings**--- On September 15, fresh **Bobcat** scat and tracks were sighted on the trail near the pond in the Native Garden. On our October 2 Bird Walk, a resting **Coyote** was discovered (and photographed) just below the Overlook area.

SDBG Coyote seen in early October.  
Photo by Jane Mygatt



Finally, our bird monitoring and bird walk outreach efforts with the public continue. This includes sharing with others the Garden's birds on our 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](http://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. ###



A pair of Acorn Woodpeckers visited in April. Photo Jane Mygatt



A Black Skimmer flew over in June



This One-Day-Wonder Thick-billed Kingbird appeared in November. Photo Jo Quinn



A yellow-faced Verdin, a desert dweller, surprised us with a visit in November



White 'leucistic' American Crow with standard issue Crow on left. Photo by Susanne Brueckner



One of our fledgling Cooper's Hawks in June. Photo by Gail DeLalla



Rare Orchard Oriole photographed by Charlotte Morris in April