


2006

Annotated checklist of extirpated, reestablished, and newly-colonized avian taxa of the Ballona Valley, Los Angeles County, California

Daniel S. Cooper

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholar.oxy.edu/scas>

 Part of the [Ornithology Commons](#), and the [Terrestrial and Aquatic Ecology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Cooper, Daniel S. (2006) "Annotated checklist of extirpated, reestablished, and newly-colonized avian taxa of the Ballona Valley, Los Angeles County, California," *Bulletin of the Southern California Academy of Sciences*: Vol. 105: Iss. 3.
Available at: <http://scholar.oxy.edu/scas/vol105/iss3/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by OxyScholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Bulletin of the Southern California Academy of Sciences by an authorized administrator of OxyScholar. For more information, please contact cdla@oxy.edu.

Annotated checklist of extirpated, reestablished, and newly-colonized avian taxa of the Ballona Valley, Los Angeles County, California

Daniel S. Cooper

*Cooper Ecological Monitoring, Inc., 15 So. Raymond Ave., 2nd Floor,
Pasadena, California 91105*

Abstract.—Successful ecological restoration depends on a clear understanding of the history of local species loss and colonization. One area of California where this can be uniquely achieved is the Ballona Wetlands, one of the best-studied coastal habitats in the state, recently acquired by the State of California for restoration and protection as a proposed Ecological Reserve. Though birds are among the primary beneficiaries of this effort, the avifauna of Ballona Wetlands has not been critically examined in more than 60 years. In an effort to guide future restoration projects, I present a review of bird taxa that have been extirpated, reestablished or that have newly colonized the Ballona area since 1900. This information should facilitate the development of target species to be monitored as the Ballona ecosystem is restored, and should help set local and regional restoration goals.

The Ballona Valley, a large remnant open space area at the mouth of Ballona Creek that includes the Ballona Wetlands in southwestern Los Angeles County, is currently receiving an unprecedented infusion of funding for land acquisition and habitat restoration, coincident with the start of construction on a 462-acre housing and commercial development (“Playa Vista”). In 2003, the California Wildlife Conservation Board acquired 483 acres—a little less than half the open space that remained in the valley through the 1990s—for conservation, including all the remaining intact salt marsh (Trust for Public Land 2003). This belatedly fulfilled a dream of local conservationists, birders, and public officials who have advocated for its protection since at least the early 1900s (Ellis 1926; Cooke 1946; Fuller 1955; Hise and Deverell 2000:220). As restoration projects to recreate or emulate historical natural conditions proceed, knowledge of the current and historical bird community is essential in determining appropriate restoration and conservation goals. Previous efforts at restoring degraded natural communities in the Ballona area have been marked by confusion over the composition of historical plant communities as well as their distribution across what is now a seriously degraded and much-diminished landscape (see Longcore et al. 2000).

Though much of the proposed restoration at Ballona has sought to improve conditions for birds (e.g., NAS 1986), synthesized information on the occurrence of birds and the composition of bird communities at Ballona is surprisingly sparse, being limited to a handful of unpublished surveys of varying quality. Not since the early 1940s (von Bloeker 1943) has any attempt been made to analyze the records of local birders and collectors (either unpublished or published). Drawing from historical and current sources, including museum records and field notes of experienced observers, I present a list of regularly occurring species, and provide

detailed accounts for species known to have been lost in the Ballona Valley since the early 1900s, those that have since reestablished populations, and those that have newly colonized the Ballona Valley as nesting or wintering species. Knowledge of this avifaunal change at Ballona should help establish benchmarks of successful restoration, and may serve as an example for reconstruction of lost natural communities elsewhere.

Methods and Site Description

The term “Ballona Valley” here refers to the lowlands from the Westchester Bluffs north across Ballona Creek to the rise in elevation that roughly follows Washington Blvd. in the Venice and Mar Vista neighborhoods of Los Angeles (see Fig. 1). I identify the 10-lane 405 Freeway as the eastern boundary, and thus include the communities of Marina del Rey, Mar Vista, Playa Vista and Playa del Rey. Historical collecting sites within the Ballona Valley include “Port Ballona” (an early bluff-top community at the northern end of the El Segundo Dunes just south of Playa del Rey c. 1880s, *per* Robinson 1939); “Ballona Harbor” (now Playa del Rey); “Del Rey” (now Mar Vista, *per* Robertson 1990); and “Venice Marshes” (presumably the northern portion of historic wetlands now covered by Marina del Rey, east of Venice). Modern birding areas were described by Cooper (2005d).

I consider taxa to be current breeders if one or more pairs have nested successfully for at least two consecutive years. Likewise, I consider winter residents to be any taxa for which two or more individuals have been present through the winter months for at least two consecutive years in the past five years. In one case (Elegant Tern) I consider the species to be a non-breeding summer resident, since large numbers (hundreds) are present continuously from early spring through fall. Taxa are considered “extirpated” if they once maintained consistent breeding or non-breeding populations in the Ballona Valley but no longer do. “Reestablished” taxa have been extirpated in at least one role (winter, summer or both) for a period of several decades, but have resumed breeding, summering and/or wintering since the mid-1900s (the start of consistent record-keeping). “Colonists” are defined as any taxa that have established a consistent breeding or wintering population since the mid-1900s (and that occurred only as transients or vagrants, if at all, prior to this).

Because of the lack of standardized historical survey data during migration periods, taxa known only as transients are not treated here (see Cooper 2005c for a complete checklist), even though it is clear that many birds scarce or absent today were once frequently observed transients (e.g., Fulvous Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna bicolor*). I also omitted the Great Horned Owl *Bubo virginianus*, given its strongly nocturnal habits. I do not treat the distinctive avifauna of the outer jetties, the breakwater, and the inshore marine environment at Playa del Rey, nor do I include the avifauna of residential Westchester on the bluffs to the south of the Ballona Valley, which, owing to its mature trees and landscaping, has developed a woodland-like avifauna distinct from that of the Ballona Valley (e.g., wintering Townsend’s Warbler *Dendroica townsendi* and Dark-eyed Junco *Junco hyemalis*).



Ballona Freshwater Marsh

Fig. 1. Aerial view of western Ballona Valley. This image shows open space recently acquired by the state of California near the mouth of Ballona Creek, as well as birding locations mentioned in the text. The boundaries of the study area extend east 2 km to the 405 Fwy. The "Ballona Wetlands" is the large open area in the center of map, north and south of the Ballona Creek channel. The main salt pan is visible as a large whitish patch at center left.

Table 1. Summer, winter and year-round resident birds of the Ballona Valley (excludes transients). An asterisk (*) indicates consistent recent breeding.

Year-round residents	
Gadwall <i>Anas strepera</i>	Barn Owl <i>Tyto alba</i>
*Mallard <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	*Great Horned Owl <i>Bubo virginianus</i>
Cinnamon Teal <i>Anas cyanoptera</i>	*White-throated Swift <i>Aeronautes saxatalis</i>
*Ruddy Duck <i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i>	*Anna's Hummingbird <i>Calypte anna</i>
*Pied-billed Grebe <i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>	*Allen's Hummingbird <i>Selasphorus sasin</i>
Brown Pelican <i>Pelicanus occidentalis</i>	*Black Phoebe <i>Sayornis nigricans</i>
Double-crested Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax auritus</i>	*Cassin's Kingbird <i>Tyrannus vociferans</i>
Least Bittern <i>Ixobrychus exilis</i>	*Western Scrub-Jay <i>Aphelocoma californica</i>
*Great Blue Heron <i>Ardea herodias</i>	*American Crow <i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>
Great Egret <i>Ardea alba</i>	Common Raven <i>Corvus corax</i>
Snowy Egret <i>Egretta thula</i>	*Tree Swallow <i>Tachycineta bicolor</i>
*Green Heron <i>Butorides virescens</i>	*Bushtit <i>Psaltriparus minimus</i>
*Black-crowned Night-Heron <i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	*Northern Mockingbird <i>Mimus polyglottos</i>
Cooper's Hawk <i>Accipiter cooperii</i>	*European Starling <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
*Red-tailed Hawk <i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	*Common Yellowthroat <i>Geothlypis trichas</i>
*American Kestrel <i>Falco sparverius</i>	*California Towhee <i>Pipilo crissalis</i>
*American Coot <i>Fulica americana</i>	*"Belding's" Savannah Sparrow <i>Passerculus sandwichensis beldingi</i>
*Killdeer <i>Charadrius vociferus</i>	*Song Sparrow <i>Melospiza melodia</i>
*Black Oystercatcher <i>Haematopus bachmani</i>	*Red-winged Blackbird <i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>
*Black-necked Stilt <i>Himantopus mexicanus</i>	*Western Meadowlark <i>Sturnella neglecta</i>
Western Gull <i>Larus occidentalis</i>	*Brewer's Blackbird <i>Euphagus cyanocephalus</i>
Caspian Tern <i>Sterna caspia</i>	*Great-tailed Grackle <i>Quiscalus mexicanus</i>
*Rock Pigeon <i>Columba livia</i>	*House Finch <i>Carpodacus mexicanus</i>
Spotted Dove <i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>	*Lesser Goldfinch <i>Carduelis psaltria</i>
*Mourning Dove <i>Zenaida macroura</i>	*House Sparrow <i>Passer domesticus</i>
Rose-ringed Parakeet <i>Psittacula krameri</i>	*Orange Bishop <i>Euplectes franciscanus</i>
Winter Residents	
American Wigeon <i>Anas americana</i>	Wandering Tattler <i>Heteroscelus incanus</i>
Northern Shoveler <i>Anas clypeata</i>	Spotted Sandpiper <i>Actitis macularius</i>
Northern Pintail <i>Anas acuta</i>	Whimbrel <i>Numenius phaeopus</i>
Green-winged Teal <i>Anas crecca</i>	Marbled Godwit <i>Limosa fedoa</i>
Redhead <i>Aythya americana</i>	Ruddy Turnstone <i>Arenaria interpres</i>
Ring-necked Duck <i>Aythya collaris</i>	Black Turnstone <i>Arenaria melanocephala</i>
Greater Scaup <i>Aythya marila</i>	Surfbird <i>Aphriza virgata</i>
Lesser Scaup <i>Aythya affinis</i>	Sanderling <i>Calidris alba</i>
Surf Scoter <i>Melanitta perspicillata</i>	Western Sandpiper <i>Calidris mauri</i>
Bufflehead <i>Bucephala albeola</i>	Least Sandpiper <i>Calidris minutilla</i>
Red-breasted Merganser <i>Mergus serrator</i>	Dunlin <i>Calidris alpina</i>
Pacific Loon <i>Gavia pacifica</i>	Long-billed Dowitcher <i>Limnodromus scolopaceus</i>
Common Loon <i>Gavia immer</i>	Wilson's Snipe <i>Gallinago gallinago</i>
Horned Grebe <i>Podiceps auritus</i>	Mew Gull <i>Larus canus</i>
Eared Grebe <i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>	Ring-billed Gull <i>Larus delawarensis</i>
Western Grebe <i>Aechmophorus occidentalis</i>	California Gull <i>Larus californicus</i>
Brandt's Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax penicillatus</i>	Herring Gull <i>Larus argentatus</i>
Pelagic Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax pelagicus</i>	Thayer's Gull <i>Larus thayeri</i>
White-tailed Kite <i>Elanus leucurus</i>	Glaucous-winged Gull <i>Larus glaucescens</i>
Sharp-shinned Hawk <i>Accipiter striatus</i>	Heermann's Gull <i>Larus heermanni</i>
Merlin <i>Falco columbarius</i>	Bonaparte's Gull <i>Larus philadelphia</i>
Peregrine Falcon <i>Falco peregrinus</i>	Royal Tern <i>Sterna maxima</i>
Virginia Rail <i>Rallus limicola</i>	Belted Kingfisher <i>Ceryle alcyon</i>
Sora <i>Porzana carolina</i>	Northern Flicker <i>Colaptes auratus</i>
Common Moorhen <i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	Say's Phoebe <i>Sayornis saya</i>
Black-bellied Plover <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	Loggerhead Shrike <i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>
Greater Yellowlegs <i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>	House Wren <i>Troglodytes aedon</i>
Willet <i>Catoptrophous semipalmatus</i>	Marsh Wren <i>Cistothorus palustris</i>

Table 1. Continued.

Winter Residents (Continued)	
Ruby-crowned Kinglet <i>Regulus calendula</i>	“Large-billed” Savannah Sparrow <i>Passerculus sandwichensis rostratus</i>
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher <i>Polioptila caerulea</i>	Lincoln’s Sparrow <i>Melospiza lincolnii</i>
Hermit Thrush <i>Catharus guttatus</i>	White-crowned Sparrow <i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i>
American Pipit <i>Anthus rubescens</i>	Golden-crowned Sparrow <i>Zonotrichia atricapilla</i>
Orange-crowned Warbler <i>Vermivora celata</i>	American Goldfinch <i>Carduelis trisris</i>
Yellow-rumped Warbler <i>Dendroica coronata</i>	
Savannah Sparrow (migratory races) <i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>	
Summer Residents	
Elegant Tern <i>Sterna elegans</i>	*Cliff Swallow <i>Petrochelidon pyrrhonota</i>
*Least Tern <i>Sterna antillarum</i>	*Barn Swallow <i>rustica</i>
*Western Kingbird <i>Tyrannus verticalis</i>	*Brown-headed Cowbird <i>Molothrus ater</i>
*Northern Rough-winged Swallow <i>Stelgidopteryx serripennis</i>	*Hooded Oriole <i>Icterus cucullatus</i>
	*Bullock’s Oriole <i>Icterus bullockii</i>

Results and Discussion

A list of known regularly wintering, summering, and year-round resident birds in the Ballona Valley is presented in Table 1. Between the early 1900s and spring 2005, the data indicate that 38 taxa were extirpated from the Ballona Valley in at least one role, with 11 having since become reestablished in one or more roles. Twenty-two species have newly colonized the Ballona Valley either as summer or winter residents, including four non-native taxa. Ten species considered “data-deficient” may have maintained populations at Ballona prior to 1900 but are known only from scattered reports or specimens; several were treated as present by von Bloeker (1943) but are possibly attributable to the adjacent El Segundo Dunes, described below.

In the following species accounts, current local status is followed by historical status. Species order follows the American Ornithologists’ Union Checklist of North American Birds (A.O.U. 1998) and the most recent supplement (A.O.U. 2004). Standard abbreviations for museums are LACM (Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County), MVZ (Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, University of California, Berkeley), and WFVZ (Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology, Camarillo, California). Other frequently-used abbreviations include BFM (Ballona Freshwater Marsh at Playa Vista, constructed 2003), CBC (Christmas Bird Count), LACBBA (Los Angeles County Breeding Bird Atlas, data housed at LACM), and PdR (Playa del Rey, exact location unspecified). Where possible, sight records are included only if published in Audubon Field Notes/(North) American Birds (hereafter “AFN”) or in the Western Tanager (“WT”), or if the observer is known to the author.

A handful of dedicated observers have kept field notes from regular visits to the study area for 5+ years, including Kimball L. Garrett (KLG; early 1970s to present), Robert Shanman (RSh; monthly from 1977 to 1987) and Art Pickus (AP; 1993 to 1998) along lower Ballona Creek; Barbara O. Courtois at the western Ballona Wetlands (BOC; 1998 to present); Chuck and Lillian Almdale at Ballona Lagoon (CLA; monthly from 1996 to present); and Russell and Dorothy Stone in the Westchester/Playa Vista area (RDS; 1996 to present). Other observers who have contributed numerous previously unpublished sight records to me directly,

or to Kimball L. Garrett (“LACM files”), are cited below by name, or in the case of regular contributors Richard Barth, David Bell, Kevin Larson and Don Sterba, by initials.

Extirpated and Reestablished Taxa

Brant *Branta bernicla*. Extirpated as a winter resident; now an occasional spring transient (1–2/yr. early Feb.—late May); casual in summer and winter. Several spring sightings have involved birds in the tidal channels of the Ballona Wetlands (including a group of six on 03 Apr. 2001, BOC), indicating that Brant may still occasionally attempt to use Ballona as a stopover site. Two summer/fall records include sick or injured birds in 1980 (H. Brodtkin, LACM files) and 1996 (DS). The Brant was historically much more common along the coast of southern California with birds in Los Angeles County wintering on kelp beds just offshore (Willett 1912, 1933), a phenomenon that no longer occurs. Though omitted by von Bloeker (1943), this may have been an oversight; groups of up to 12 birds attempted to winter at Ballona as late as the 1950s (WT 12:22; AFN 5:225; WT 18:23; AFN 7:234), and singles were recorded on the Los Angeles CBC through the 1950s (NAS 2002). One modern (post-1950s) wintering attempt involved what was presumably the same bird on 03 Dec. 2002 (BOC) and 12 Jan. 2003 (KL).

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*. Extirpated, then reestablished as a winter resident; currently fairly common in fall and winter at BFM; uncommon to rare elsewhere. Since the creation of BFM in 2003, fall transients have appeared at the end of August in 2003 and 2004, building to several dozen birds by midwinter (Cooper 2005a). I observed dozens feeding on the flooded saltpan of the Ballona Wetlands after heavy rains in Jan. 2005. The Northern Shoveler was not recorded by von Bloeker (1943) but was likely overlooked; early authors (e.g., Grinnell 1898, Willett 1933) have it common or abundant throughout coastal southern California, and a count of 200 presumably wintering birds was made at PdR on 05 Feb. 1947 (WT 13:28). A dramatic decline in the Ballona Valley apparently occurred after the 1950s (Table 2), and between the early 1970s and 2003, the species was recorded just eight times (RSh, KLG, AP).

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*. Extirpated as a breeding resident; reestablished as a winter resident; now uncommon in migration and winter. The first southbound birds trickle through in late August (two along Ballona Cr. 21 Aug. 2004, KL), and up to 10 remained through the winter 2003–04 (but were rare the following winter, Cooper 2005a). The status of the pintail in winter and migration has changed dramatically from its being historically very numerous (“abundant winter visitor on salt marsh lagoon,” von Bloeker 1943), declining through the late 1900s, then back to being irregularly present, albeit in greatly reduced numbers, at BFM. Examples of historical numbers include 2000 birds at a local gun club with freshwater impoundments in late summer 1952 (WT 19:4); and 1000 birds along Ballona Cr. on 12 Oct. 1953 (WT 20:15) and 04 Jan. 1954 (WT 20:30). This species was also historically more common offshore during migration (e.g., AFN 2:189), and it apparently nested in the historical Ballona Wetlands (Willett 1933). Though the Northern Pintail was still being recorded in large numbers on the Los Angeles CBC in the 1970s (NAS 2002), there are just seven known records between the 1950s and 2003.

Table 2. Detection of selected species on the Los Angeles Christmas Bird Count, 1940–present (NAS 2002).

Species	# of CBCs per decade when recorded (high count in parentheses)					
	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s
Gadwall	5 (8)	1 (2)	2 (3)	1 (2)	0	6 (19)
Northern Shoveler	10 (533)	10 (2501)	8 (45)	3 (5)	2 (3)	2 (8)
Northern Pintail	10 (1362)	10 (20,429)	8 (110)	10 (480)	4 (16)	5 (9)
Redhead	6 (14)	6 (4)	6 (20)	5 (10)	1 (1)	0
American Bittern	9 (3)	1 (3)	2 (3)	2 (10)	1 (2)	2 (1)
White-faced Ibis	2 (15)	0	0	0	0	0
Northern Harrier	10 (9)	8 (24)	4 (3)	4 (4)	2 (4)	7 (2)
Clapper Rail	8 (3)	3 (1)	1 (1)	0	0	0
Pacific Golden-Plover	2 (3)	0	5 (7)	5 (3)	2 (1)	0
Snowy Plover	7 (71)	10 (114)	9 (70)	4 (32)	2 (2)	3 (2)
American Avocet	10 (200)	9 (176)	6 (41)	2 (1)	3 (6)	1 (1)
Long-billed Curlew	9 (18)	7 (17)	5 (3)	4 (6)	2 (1)	3 (2)
Burrowing Owl	4 (3)	5 (3)	7 (2)	10 (10)	4 (5)	2 (1)
Short-eared Owl	5 (2)	6 (4)	5 (4)	3 (5)	1 (2)	1 (1)
Allen's Hummingbird	0	0	0	5 (2)	8 (16)	10 (116)
Horned Lark	7 (600)	5 (47)	4 (43)	10 (145)	0	0
European Starling	0	0	10 (1900)	10 (4929)	9 (1579)	10 (2109)
“Large-billed” Savannah Sparrow	10 (7)	2 (5)	0	0	0	0

Cinnamon Teal *Anas cyanoptera*. Extirpated as a breeding resident; colonized as a winter resident; now a fairly common transient and winter resident on fresh-water (mid-Aug.–May); uncommon in mid-summer. At BFM, fall migrants arrive in mid-August (a high of 25 by the end of August 2003, DSC) and remain in variable numbers through May (but have not yet bred). This teal apparently nested at Ballona during the early 1900s “in the salt marsh” (von Bloeker 1943), which would have included brackish wetlands and tule-lined ponds, but apparently had been reduced to a transient by the 1920s (Bird-Lore 26:347). Between the early 1900s and the construction of BFM in 2003 recorded only in early spring (up to 30 late Jan.—mid. Mar.) and fall (4 records Sept.–Nov.), with an anomalous sighting on 14 May 1998 (AP).

Canvasback *Aythya valisineria*. Extirpated as a winter resident; two modern records of singles at PdR on 12 Jan. 1985 (RSh) and at BFM on 05 Oct. 2003 (DSC). Von Bloeker (1943) considered the Canvasback “fairly common in winter on the salt marsh lagoon,” a reference to the water body at the mouth of Ballona Cr. that was subsequently reduced in size and transformed to Del Rey Lagoon and Ballona Lagoon. The only other local mention is of an individual within a mixed-species raft of waterfowl in the ocean just off Playa del Rey (including Scaup, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail and Ruddy Duck) on 11 Dec. 1925 (Bird-Lore 27:22).

Redhead *Aythya americana*. Extirpated, then reestablished as a winter resident; now uncommon in fall and winter. Von Bloeker considered this species “occasional in winter on the salt marsh lagoon” (1943). Oddly, Grinnell (1898) termed Redhead “tolerably common in summer” in coastal Los Angeles Co., but this may have been a misprint for “winter,” (which he did not mention) when more expected in the region (see Willett 1912, 1933). From the early 1900s until the creation of BFM, the Redhead was known from just a handful of records Dec.–Feb. (WT 16:24; WT 18:34; AFN 10:56, where termed “irregular in numbers and occasional in this region”); with just a single post-1960 sighting prior to 2003 (02 Dec. 1994, AP). Since 2003, up to seven birds have wintered at BFM (Cooper 2005a, pers. obs.).

Common Merganser *Mergus merganser*. Extirpated as a winter resident; two modern records: 16 Jan. 1998 (B. Elliot); and two females on 26 Jan. 2000 (RB). Considered a “moderately common” winter visitor by von Bloeker (1943), this species now winters on large inland reservoirs in the region (Garrett and Dunn 1981) but was historically more common on the immediate coast (Willett 1933, Grinnell and Miller 1944).

Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis*. Extirpated, then reestablished as a breeder; now a fairly common breeding resident. Between the 1950s, when common in winter (e.g., 53 along Ballona Cr. on 31 Dec. 1954, WT 21:34) and the construction of BFM in 2003, recorded in single digits during fall and winter, with peaks in late winter (Feb./Mar.) during the 1990s (AP) possibly involving early spring migrants. Since 2003, up to 30 birds have wintered at BFM (Cooper 2005a), with numbers lowest in early fall. Though breeding was known from the historical Ballona Wetlands (“formerly nested in the salt marsh [also referable to brackish wetlands] and may still do so in small numbers,” von Bloeker 1943), it had apparently ceased doing so by the second half of the 20th century, when birds were present in winter only. With the construction of BFM in 2003, breeding was

reestablished (8 young observed on 24 June 2003; T.P. Ryan), with additional broods the following summers (Cooper 2004, Cooper 2005b).

California Quail *Callipepla californica*. Extirpated as a breeding resident; three recent records. Von Bloeker (1943) considered quail a “common resident of the meadow (= grassland habitat) and meadow slope of the dunes. Nests here between middle April and late June,” and confirmed nesting as late as 1940. This population persisted into the 1970s (15 seen from the Culver Blvd. bridge over Ballona Cr. on 05 Jan. 1975; KLG), and Dock and Schreiber (1981) wrote of a “small covey observed regularly throughout the year on (the area of Ballona Wetlands south of Culver Blvd.), and recorded sporadically (north of Culver Blvd. and north of Ballona Cr.)” Post-1980s records limited to a “flock” on what is now Playa Vista on 22 August 1998 (RDS); one on the Westchester Bluffs on 10 Apr. 1999 (B. Elliot); and a male and a female at BFM 17–18 Apr. 2004 (C. Day, RB, m. ob.), the male continuing to 26 July (RB). Quail remain common in the Baldwin Hills just east of the Ballona Valley (Garrett 2001).

American Bittern *Botaurus lentiginosus*. Extirpated as a winter resident; two modern (post-1960) records. One apparently wintered at BFM 23 Oct. 2004–03 Apr. 2005 (RB, B.G. Johnson), and another was at the Ballona Wetlands on 06 Dec. 1980 (RSh). This species was once much more numerous in winter and migration at PdR (von Bloeker 1943), and one on the early date of 06 Aug. 1924 (Bird-Lore 26:347) suggests the possibility of nesting. Birds were recorded on the Los Angeles CBC through the early 1950s (Table 2), and the last local record during this period is of one at PdR 07–20 Jan. 1952 (WT 18:28).

Least Bittern *Ixobrychus exilis*. Extirpated, then reestablished as a rare and localized resident, essentially confined to BFM. The first modern record was of one present at BFM 24 July–05 Aug. 2003, and up to two have been recorded here year round since, including one heard singing at BFM through spring 2005 (Cooper 2005b). Historically, this species likely nested in the Ballona Valley; von Bloeker (1943) wrote “formerly rarely seen in late spring and summer in vicinity of tule-bordered ponds and sloughs in the salt marsh. As a result of the elimination of many of the tule patches (for agriculture, *Ibid*), this species may no longer occur. . .” Subsequent to that statement and before the 2003 record, the Least Bittern was recorded just once at Ballona: a probable transient at PdR on 07 Sept. 1950 (AFN 5:38).

Green Heron *Butorides virescens*. Extirpated, then reestablished as a breeder; now an uncommon resident. Up to 4 birds per day have been recorded year round since the 1990s, with nesting first confirmed in 1995 (fledglings at a condominium complex near Ballona Lagoon on 16 July 1995; LACBBA). Breeding was noted at BFM in 2005 (Cooper 2005b). Until the 1930s, the Green Heron was a characteristic breeding bird of Ballona: six egg sets were collected between 1933 and 1935 (WFVZ), and Howsley (1936) estimated four pairs nesting in the area. Between then and the 1990s, however, records were restricted to fall and winter (RSh, LACM files).

White-faced Ibis *Plegadis chihi*. Extirpated as a winter resident; now an uncommon fall transient (late Aug.–early Dec.), occasional in spring and early summer. In 2003, up to 20 were present more or less continuously from 20 July (3, RB) through early November (1 to 09 Nov., m. ob.), with similar numbers present in the following autumn (2004). There have been six records of apparent spring

transients (12 Apr.–23 May) since 2003, mainly from BFM, as well as two recent June records. Only a handful of records were known between the 1940s and 2003, most involving fall migrants (incl. small flocks). Ibis were apparently regular in winter and spring through the 1920s (Bird-Lore 26:131; Bird-Lore 29:285), and Grinnell (1898:13) considered it “of common occurrence in fall, winter and spring,” adding “a few remain through the summer in the Ballona marshes, and A.M. Shields believes that they breed here.” By mid-century, it was irregular in winter (von Bloeker 1943), the last instances of over-wintering coming in the early 1940s (Bird-Lore 45:15; NAS 2002).

Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura*. Extirpated as a winter resident; now an uncommon transient. Recent (post-1990s) records have been concentrated in spring and mid-fall (Sept.–Oct.), coinciding with the peak movement through southern California (Rowe and Gallion 1996). Though over-wintering is unknown, spring migration begins as early as late Dec., with early sightings typically occurring during periods of warm, southerly air flow. A handful of late spring and summer records (e.g., Westchester on 14 June 2003, RDS) likely involve tardy migrants or wanderers rather than local breeders. Birds were apparently more common through the winter in previous decades (e.g., six birds on 12 Dec. 1981, RSh) and von Bloeker (1943) considered the Turkey Vulture a “common resident.” It later grew scarce, with AP recording just a handful in the 1990s, mostly in May and October.

Northern Harrier *Circus cyaneus*. Extirpated as a breeding resident; now an occasional fall and winter visitor (Oct.–Dec.). Harriers formerly occurred in winter in small but consistent numbers, but have not over-wintered here since the mid-1990s (AP, RDS). Up to two birds are recorded on the Los Angeles CBC each year (NAS 2002), and only one winter sighting per year at Ballona is now expected. A high of seven was on the Ballona Wetlands 01 Jan. 1955 (WT 21:34), and harriers nested at Ballona as late as 1953 (WFVZ; other egg records from 1935 and 1947).

Clapper Rail *Rallus longirostris*. Extirpated as a resident breeder. A resident population of the Light-footed Clapper Rail (*R. l. levipes*) persisted at least into the 1950s. Four were at PdR 09 Oct.–06 Nov. 1950 (AFN 4:35), and singles were recorded on the Los Angeles CBC in 1952, 1955, and 1956 (NAS 2002). This population had been long documented by specimen and egg collections (Grinnell 1898; WFVZ), with the last egg set collected 24 Apr. 1944 at “Del Rey” (WFVZ). In the past fifty years there have been but two records, presumably of vagrants from extant populations in neighboring Ventura or Orange counties, in “February” 1966, a calling bird at the Ballona Wetlands near the tidal inlets from Ballona Cr. (*vide* MSM); two in “January” 1995 in this same tidal channel (D. De Lange, pers. comm.; photos of one reviewed by KLG but subsequently lost).

Virginia Rail *R. limicola*. Extirpated as a resident breeder; reestablished as an uncommon transient and rare (or rarely-seen) winter visitor at BFM. Small numbers have been recorded here since 2003, with dates extending from 23 Aug. to 05 May (RB, KL). Von Bloeker (1943) considered the Virginia Rail “resident in the salt marsh” (but note his expanded definition of salt marsh, which included freshwater and brackish marshes), and breeding was documented in 1902 (“two egg sets taken by W.L. Chambers at Ballona, Los Angeles County, April 13, 1902,” Willett 1933:32). The only other credible record from the 1900s was of

one observed at PdR on 19 Feb. 1952 (WT 18:38). Several sightings in atypical habitat reported by Dock and Schreiber (1981) are not credible and may pertain to Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*.

Sora *Porzana carolina*. Extirpated as a breeding resident; reestablished as a fairly common transient and winter resident at BFM (July through May). The first modern record is of an early fall transient found mortally injured (possibly mobbed by crows or gulls) along Ballona Cr. on 29 Jul. 1998 (LACM 110576). All other recent records are from BFM since its opening in 2003 (five at BFM on 04 Jan. 2004), beginning with another fall transient on 31 July 2003 (RB). Von Bloeker (1943) considered the Sora “present in small numbers throughout the year in the salt marsh most frequently being found in vicinity of tule-bordered ponds and creeks,” and even breeding (in “April and May”). Prior to the 1998 record, the last records of Sora in the Ballona Valley were from the early 1950s (AFN 5:225; WT 18:38).

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*. Extirpated as a (presumably) breeding resident; reestablished as an uncommon transient and winter visitor at BFM. The first modern record involved a transient at BFM on 19 Apr. 2003 (DSC), with subsequent records of up to two birds every month of the year (though no evidence of breeding or paired birds). This freshwater marsh obligate was apparently lost very early, for it was “seen frequently in a restricted area of the marsh” during April and May 1924 (Bird-Lore 26:278), with multiple birds present that fall (Bird-Lore 26:426). These two references comprise the entire historical record of this species at Ballona prior to 2003; its loss was apparently overlooked by von Bloeker (1943).

American Coot *Fulica americana*. Extirpated, then reestablished as a breeder; now a common breeding resident at BFM; still a transient and winter resident elsewhere. Prior to the construction of BFM, coots were mainly winter visitors to freshwater portions of Ballona Cr. (upstream of Culver Blvd.) and on Del Rey Lagoon (peaks of >200 birds Sept.–Mar.; RSh). Breeding was noted at BFM its first year (T.P. Ryan) and in subsequent years (Cooper 2004, 2005b). Though von Bloeker (1943) found this species breeding from mid-April to mid-June, it had apparently ceased doing so by the time the area was surveyed by Dock and Schreiber (1981) and Corey (1992).

Pacific Golden-Plover *Pluvialis fulva*. Extirpated as a fall transient and winter resident. The Ballona Wetlands, including the saltpan and the modern Ballona Cr. channel, were the last Los Angeles County wintering area for this species (records 14 Sept.–09 Mar.), with nearly annual records (up to 6 birds) through 1983 dating back at least to the 1920s (Bicknell 1924, WT, AFN, LACM files).

Snowy Plover *Charadris alexandrinus*. Extirpated as a breeding resident; now an occasional transient and rare winter visitor. Playa del Rey was historically an important wintering area (e.g., “more than 100 returned for winter at upper beach at Playa del Rey” in late July 1926; Bird-Lore 28:355), and several dozen birds were recorded on Los Angeles CBC into the 1960s (Table 2). Numbers declined sharply in the late 1960s, but Page et al. (1986) still found up to eight birds on eight of nine winter counts in the Playa del Rey area 1978–1985. By the end of the 1980s, birds were no longer wintering at Ballona (*vide* RSh, AP), and there have been only two winter records since the start of near-daily coverage by birders in early 2003, both of small flocks: just south of the Ballona Cr. mouth on 09

Jan. 2003 (10, KLG), and north of the Marina del Rey mouth 16–29 Dec. 2004 (up to 14, DB). Just to the south, a loose wintering flock has developed on Dockweiler State Beach since the 1990s (*vide* RB). Snowy Plovers historically bred on the sand spit that once separated the “Ballona swamp” from the ocean (Chambers 1904; Willett 1912), and though the last local egg set was collected on 18 June 1914 by J.E. Law (WFVZ), small numbers nested successfully as late as 1925 (Bird-Lore 27:273).

Black-necked Stilt *Himantopus mexicanus*. Extirpated as a breeder; reestablished as a common perennial resident and localized breeder away from the immediate coast. Stilts are found year round in freshwater portions of Ballona Cr. at low tide, at seasonal ponds on Playa Vista, and at BFM. They nested at least once on the Ballona Wetlands proper in recent years: an occupied nest that produced four young was found on 25 June 1998 (LACBBA). At BFM, a pair bred subsequently at BFM in 2003 (T.P. Ryan) but not since, but up to two pairs bred on nearby Playa Vista property (seasonal pools) in May 2004 (DSC). Historically, the Black-necked Stilt was much more common as a breeder, nesting noted through 1952 (AFN 6:299). Eight egg sets were collected on 11 May 1931 by L.R. Howsley, described in his journals (WFVZ) as being “3/4 mi east of Del Rey Hills Calif. (near Venice). Location in swamp area between main highway and the Del Rey Hills to the west. A colony of 9 or 10 nests here. Nest placed on top of salicornia [sic] so dense as to form a mat over a wide area and then died out leaving suitable ‘platforms’ upon which to build nests—only an inch or two above the water.” During the latter half of the 1900s, however, the stilt occurred primarily as a transient and winter visitor.

American Avocet *Recurvirostra americana*. Extirpated as a breeding resident; now an occasional transient. Since the mid-1980s, there have been about 10 records, mostly in late fall (26 Sept.–01 Dec.), but also in spring (02 Mar.–27 May). Historically, the American Avocet was apparently resident, breeding at “Del Rey” in 1923 (Willett 1933). An egg set from this colony, noted as being “on mud-hump in marsh” was collected on 29 Apr. 1923 (WFVZ), and adults accompanied by young were present here the next year on 27 July (Bird-Lore 26:347), making the last year of known nesting 1924 (*contra* Willett 1933). Numbers of fall migrants would build through late summer (Bird-Lore 29:438; WT 16:8), and winter counts of up to 200 birds were recorded into the late 1950s (Bird-Lore 26:131; WT 13:28; NAS 2002). The avocet apparently declined through the 1960s (NAS 2002); RSh (1977–1987) recorded birds mainly in single-digits in winter and migration, including highs of 20 birds in January and February. The last Los Angeles CBC record was in 1993 (NAS 2002), and the only winter record in the past ten years (10 Feb. 1996, AP) may have been a very early spring transient.

Long-billed Curlew *Numenius americanus*. Extirpated as a winter resident; now an occasional transient. Spring dates extend from 08 Mar. to 31 May, and fall records are between 03 July and 17 Oct. (nearly all involving single birds). During visits in the 1970s and 1980s, RSh recorded it just six times 27 August–04 Apr., with a record of 5 birds on 06 Dec. 1980 being the last known winter sighting for the Ballona Valley. Historically a common transient and winter resident (von Bloeker 1943, Bird-Lore 26:278, Bird-Lore 26:347), curlews were recorded in small numbers on most Los Angeles CBC (presumably at Ballona) through the mid-1970s, reaching double-digits as late as 1958 (NAS 2002).

Burrowing Owl *Athene cunicularia*. Extirpated as a breeding resident; now a rare transient in fall and winter. Birds are apparently still attempting to winter locally, as singles have appeared along lower Ballona Cr. in three consecutive recent winters, though none remained for the entire season: 14 Jan. 2003 (B. Elliot), 15–16 Dec. 2003 (RB) and 27 Nov. 2004 through late Dec. (L. Brown, DB, m. ob.). Recent records of presumed migrants include one on the Westchester Bluffs “near the LMU sign” in April 1990 (Corey 1992); one found dead in PdR on 03 Mar. 2003 (LACM 112292); and birds credibly reported by locals along lower Ballona Cr. to DSC on 31 Oct. 2003 (2) and to J.R. Coffin in “late August” 2004. Von Bloeker (1943) found this species to be a “common resident of the dunes, meadow, and drier portions of the salt marsh,” recognizing two distinct areas of nesting: in grassland and dune vegetation, birds lived in old burrows of California Ground Squirrels *Spermophilus beecheyi*; and in what were likely old housing pads at the western edge of current-day Los Angeles International Airport, he found them “in cavities excavated under the pavement.” From 1977 to 1985, RSh recorded this owl on 11 out of 62 monthly visits (spanning the year) along Ballona Cr., on the Ballona Wetlands proper, and on the “Hughes Property” (now Playa Vista). Owls were recorded on Los Angeles CBC through the mid-1980s but on only two counts in past two decades (NAS 2002). Dock and Schreiber (1981) wrote of two pairs known nesting “in banks adjacent to Ballona Cr.” and of birds “probably” nesting along bluffs south of the “agricultural area” (= Westchester Bluffs). The last known breeding occurred along Ballona Cr. in 1983 (“family of 4 birds” on 12 Mar. and 10 Oct.; RSh, B. Elliot).

Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*. Extirpated as a winter resident; now a casual transient. Historically observed using both the Ballona Wetlands proper as well as the grassland of the “Hughes property” (now Playa Vista). Both early (Bird-Lore 25:137; 30:137) and recent records indicate consistent wintering or attempts to winter, with sightings of up to three birds in fourteen winters between 1947 and 1996 (AFN, WT; *contra* Keane Biological Consulting 1996). The Short-eared Owl was consistently recorded on the Los Angeles CBC through the 1970s but the species has only been seen on one count since 1980 (NAS 2002). Since the last winter sighting (14 Feb. 1996, BOC), only two records of transients: Ballona Wetlands on 26 Oct. 2000 (BOC), and BFM on 20 Mar. 2004 (J. Fuhrman). Though there is no direct evidence of historical nesting, one was observed at “the Motordrome” (= Ballona Wetlands, near present-day BFM) on the late date of 11 May 1935 (field notes of L.B. Howsley, WfVZ).

Northern Flicker *Colaptes auratus*. Extirpated as a breeder; now a common fall and early spring transient; fairly common through winter. Though modern records extend only from 23 Sept. to early Apr., this species apparently once bred in the area, having been described by von Bloeker (1943) as nesting “in willows or in telegraph poles, and in corners under eaves of old houses.” Early authors (e.g., Willett 1933) confirmed that this species was a common nesting resident in the lowlands of southern California.

Loggerhead Shrike *Lanius ludovicianus*. Extirpated as a breeder; now an uncommon summer, fall, and winter resident (June–March). Long a characteristic resident of the Ballona Valley (e.g., von Bloeker 1943), the last locally nesting shrikes were recorded at the Ballona Wetlands in the mid-1990s, with an occupied nest on 29 Apr. 1995 and “two young fledglings” observed on 09 June 1996

(LACBBA). Aggression or courtship displays were observed at the eastern end of the Playa Vista property on 14 June 1998 (LACBBA), and one was there in “April” 2000 (RDS), but no breeding evidence was obtained. An exceptionally early adult accompanied by a juvenile was present for one day near BFM on 16 May 2004, but was not seen afterward (J.R. Coffin).

Hutton’s Vireo *Vireo huttoni*. Extirpated as a winter resident. Von Bloeker (1943) considered this species an “occasional winter visitant in the brushy portion of the sand dunes and in the willow thickets of the Playa del Rey salt marsh. Also found in shrubbery and trees around houses.” He mentioned a specimen collected “on the meadow slope of the dunes” on 05 Dec. 1931, but aside from this, there is no other record of the Hutton’s Vireo occurring at Ballona before or since, and no records from the Baldwin Hills (Garrett 2001). However, this species was probably at least a winter resident along Ballona Cr. before it was channelized, consistent with the species’ general status in the Los Angeles Basin when riparian habitat was more extensive there (see Grinnell 1898).

Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris*. Extirpated as a breeding resident; now a casual fall transient. A flock of five over BFM on 14 Nov. 2004 (KL, RB) provided the first record since fall 1994, when this species was recorded on 10 Oct. and 15 Nov. (AP, KLG). Once a characteristic resident of coastal dunes and fields in the Ballona Valley (e.g., 25 at the “Venice Marshes” on 29 Jan. 1955; WT 22:41), the last suggestion of local breeding came in the mid-1970s (one “sky-larking” on 21 Mar. 1975, KLG). Birds were consistently recorded on the Los Angeles CBC until the late 1970s (e.g., 145 in 1975), after which just one bird has been found on a single count (NAS 2002).

Rock Wren *Salpinctes obsoletus*. Extirpated as a breeding resident; now a casual fall and winter visitor. Only about one per decade is now expected; recent records include singles on 13 Sept. 1980 (RSh), “winter c. 1992–1993” (KL), and “late Oct.” 2001 (RSh). Von Bloeker (1943) wrote that this wren was a “resident of the established fore-dune area at El Segundo and along cliffs at Palisades del Rey” where they may have persisted until these bluffs were covered with houses in the 1960s and 70s.

Marsh Wren *Cistothorus palustris*. Extirpated as a breeder; now a fairly common fall transient and winter resident. The first fall arrivals appear in late August (23 Aug. 2003, RB), and birds are gone by the end of March. Von Bloeker (1943) considered the Marsh Wren a breeder “in tule patches, along edges of ponds and sloughs from April to June;” egg sets extend to 1936 (10 May at Venice, WFVZ).

Yellow-breasted Chat *Icteria virens*. Extirpated as a breeder; now an occasional transient. This species has been detected a handful of times both in fall (23 Sept.–09 Oct.) and in spring (15 Apr.–11 May), but local nesting, presumably in once-common willow thickets, is known only from a set of three eggs collected by J.H. Baumgardt on 20 May 1936 at “Venice” (WFVZ).

“Large-billed” Savannah Sparrow. *Passerculus sandwichensis rostratus* Extirpated as a winter resident; currently represented by one (rarely two) birds in winter. After decades of absence, the first modern record since the 1950s was furnished by a bird on the jetty at PdR from 09 Dec. 1998 to 27 Feb. 1999 (KLG), and it has been record nearly annually since, arriving as early as 15 August (in 2000, RB). Von Bloeker (1943) termed it a “common winter visitant in the salt marsh and along the seaward slope of the dunes,” citing two specimens

from 26 Oct. 1939. One early account mentions “numbers of Large-billed Sparrows all over jetties” on 05 Feb. 1947 (WT 13:28), and up to six individuals were recorded on the Los Angeles CBC until the mid-1950s (Table 2).

Black-headed Grosbeak *Pheucticus melanocephalus*. Extirpated as a breeder; now a fairly common transient; rare summer resident. Recent spring records extend into June, and fall birds have been seen as early as 05 August. Hamilton (1997) believed a male was on territory in willows at the base of the Westchester bluffs in summer of 1996, but subsequent searches here (by DSC and KL) have not revealed more records and no modern nesting evidence is known. Of this common southern California nester, von Bloeker wrote (1943) “moderately common summer resident in willow bottoms of the salt marsh and along Ballona Creek. Nests chiefly in May.”

American Goldfinch *Carduelis tristis*. Extirpated as a breeder; now an irregularly uncommon transient and winter visitor. There is no evidence that this bird breeds locally, although recent (2004 and 2005) records during April and May include apparent pairs, singing males, and immature birds along the eastern edge of the Ballona Wetlands and in residential Westchester. Von Bloeker (1943) termed this species a “common resident, nesting in the willows of the salt marsh and along Ballona Creek chiefly in May and June.” Numerous egg sets were collected in willows in the Ballona Valley during April and May from 1934 to 1936 (WFVZ).

Yellow-headed Blackbird *Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*. Extirpated as a winter resident; now a fairly common spring and rare fall transient at BFM. Since the creation of BFM (2003), this species has proven regular in mid-spring, occurring from early April to mid-May, with even large flocks occasionally present (200–300 birds on 23 Apr. 2004; DS, DSC). Though rare in fall (three records in Aug.–Sept. since 2003), it was apparently historically common at this season, even remaining through winter (e.g., “50 seen at their winter haunts in the marsh area” on 28 Sept. 1925; Bird-Lore 27:417). Through most of the 1900s, the species was known as rare transient with just six spring records and one in fall.

New Colonists (see Above for Discussion of Cinnamon Teal)

Gadwall *Anas strepera*. Colonized as a winter resident; now fairly common in winter and migration on freshwater, including rain pools; uncommon through the summer; one recent breeding record. Up to 20 birds were present at BFM during its first winter (2003–04), and several apparently paired birds remained through the summer of 2003, eventually breeding in 2005 (two pairs, incl. an adult with 4 chicks on 16 June, RB). Not mentioned by von Bloeker (1943) or earlier authors, this duck was apparently a casual winter and spring transient in the Ballona Valley during most of the 1900s (three records 1950–1990s), with wintering noted only in 1998, presumably along Ballona Cr. (AP). The Gadwall has been expanding its breeding range in southern California and in northwestern Baja California, Mexico, most dramatically in the coastal lagoons of San Diego Co. (Unitt 2004).

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*. Colonized as a breeder; now a common breeding resident at BFM. Though its status may be obscured by the presence of feral birds, this duck was only an “occasional winter visitor” in the early 1900s (von Bloeker 1943), was absent on lower Ballona Cr./DRL from mid-Apr. to early

Sept. from 1977 to 1987 (BSh), and was unrecorded in summer by Corey (1992). Surveys since 1996 at Ballona Lagoon have found up to 10 on May–July visits (CLA), and Mallards were summering along Ballona Cr. by 1998 (AP). Successful nesting was documented on the Ballona Wetlands as early as 1995 (adult with three young on 18 April, LACBBA) and several pairs have raised young at BFM each year since 2003 (Cooper 2004, 2005b).

Ring-necked Duck *Aythya collaris*. Colonized as a winter resident; uncommon at BFM through winter. A single (?) bird at PdR on 07 Dec. 1995 (AP) served as the sole local record until the creation of BFM in 2003, when up to two pairs were present during the first winter (from 03 Oct. 2003, JP) and the subsequent year (Cooper 2005a). This species was unrecorded by von Bloeker (1943), so its historical status locally is unclear. However, given its preference for relatively deep freshwater ponds and tendency to avoid the immediate coast in southern California, it appears to be a recent addition to the Ballona avifauna.

Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps*. Colonized as a breeder; now a common and conspicuous breeding resident at BFM; fairly common fall transient and winter visitor in fresh and brackish water throughout. The first local nesting evidence came in 2003 and continued in subsequent summers (4 broods at BFM on 29 June, DSC; Cooper 2004, 2005b). Though the Pied-billed Grebe may have bred at Ballona historically, it was rare in summer in southern California during the early 1900s (Willett 1912, 1933), and was known only as a migrant and winter visitor here prior to 2003.

Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias*. Colonized as a breeder; now a common breeding resident, most numerous in fall but localized in early spring when actively breeding. Small numbers nested in the lone cottonwood on the western edge of the Ballona Wetlands at least in 1995 (Keane Biological Consulting 1996; BOC), but now breed in trees at Marina del Rey adjacent to Ballona Cr. (e.g., 10 nests on 16 Feb. 2002, KLG; at least 8 nests in March 2004, DSC). This heron's historical breeding status is unknown, but it was only a transient and winter visitor by the 1920s (e.g., Bird-Lore 26:347). Von Bloeker (1943) found this heron “frequently observed in the meadow area and in the salt marsh” but did not mention breeding, and nor did subsequent authors (e.g., Dock and Schreiber 1981; Corey 1992).

Black-crowned Night-Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*. Colonized as a breeder; now a fairly common breeding resident. Nesting was first documented in a row of eucalyptus at the “Oxford Basin” along Washington Blvd. in Marina del Rey (3 nests, 1 with young, on 11 April 1995; LACBBA). This site is still occupied (20 nests on 04 Mar. 2005, DSC). Historically an uncommon perennial visitor; previous workers (e.g., von Bloeker 1943, Dock and Schreiber 1981, Corey 1992) found small numbers year round (increasing through the 1990s, *per* AP), but with no indication of local breeding.

Merlin *Falco columbarius*. Colonized as a winter resident; now uncommon in migration and winter throughout the Ballona Valley and adjacent residential areas. Wintering dates since 1999 (*fide* RDS) have spanned 18 Sept. (2004, DSC) to 26 Apr. (2002, KL). Historically more frequently observed in inland areas in the Los Angeles Basin (Grinnell 1898, Willett 1933), I located only four Ballona records prior to 1997.

Elegant Tern *Sterna elegans*. Colonized as a summer resident; now common

in spring, summer and fall along the immediate coast. Elegant Terns roost on the saltpan of the Ballona Wetlands and on the sandy beach in spring and summer, but are otherwise rarely seen away from salt water. Until the early 1980s, this tern was principally a post-breeding visitor to Ballona (30 Jul.–13 Nov.). However, spring records increased in frequency through the 1990s, possibly the result of a regional increase in nesting birds (Collins et al. 1991). Current high counts include several hundred birds in spring (400–500 on 28 Apr. 2005, B.G. Johnson.) and early fall (300 on 05 Aug. 2004, DSC). The first known local records of this tern came with a flock of “upwards of 300 birds” between 30 July and 28 August 1927 at PdR (Schneider 1927), but the species remained rare enough to be notable through the first half of the 20th century (von Bloeker 1943, Small 1950, WT 18:4).

Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis*. Colonized as a breeding resident; currently rare and local, nearing extirpation. This non-native species was established widely in Los Angeles by the 1920s (Willet 1933), but was first reported locally by Dock and Schreiber (1981). Common and numerous into the 1990s (W. Sakai, RDS, AP), only sporadic sightings are now made, primarily in ornamental plantings near Ballona Lagoon. The last known local breeding was documented in Marina del Rey along Washington Blvd. on 24 Apr. 1999 (LACBBA).

Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*. Colonized as a breeding resident; currently rare and local. This non-native species apparently arrived as a breeder during the 1990s, with a high count of 12 along Ballona Cr. at Beethoven St. on 18 Nov. 1995 (DS). One was excavating a cavity at a known nest site in PdR on 01 Feb. 1992 (KLG), which a pair then used for several years (M. Ingalls). Small numbers have since been present in PdR, mainly along Pershing Dr. (DSC).

White-throated Swift *Aeronautes saxatalis*. Colonized as a breeder; currently an irregularly common winter visitor (up to 100 birds Nov.–Feb.), less common during other times of year. Formerly present only in winter (e.g., von Bloeker 1943; RSh), nesting swifts apparently colonized as nesters in the late 1990s (confirmed 1997, LACBBA), with birds occupying “weep-holes” on the underside of State Route 90, which was constructed in the late 1960s.

Allen’s Hummingbird *Selasphorus sasin*. Colonized as a breeding resident. Long known only as a migrant (von Bloeker 1943), breeding records date back to two nests found in Marina del Rey 22 and 24 May 1980 (Garrett and Dunn 1981). One bird remained through the winter in 1980–81 (unusual at the time), and breeding was again confirmed (female on nest) on 18 Dec. 1985 (J. Johnson, LACM files). Since then, it has become very common, occurring year round.

Cassin’s Kingbird *Tyrannus vociferans*. Colonized as a breeding resident; now uncommon year round mainly in eastern Ballona Valley; occasional migrant along immediate coast. The first Ballona Valley sighting was made at PdR on 13 Apr. 1995 (AP), and local breeding was first noted in 2002 along Jefferson Blvd. Since then, nesting has been observed in Mar Vista and near Loyola Marymount University (KL, L.M. Fimiani).

Tree Swallow *Tachycineta bicolor*. Colonized as a breeder; now a fairly common transient, an uncommon winter visitor, and a local nester. Prior to the construction of BFM, this species occurred as a rare (or at least rarely-identified) spring transient, recorded on a handful of dates from 07 Feb. to 16 May. Since 2003, up to 100 have been observed at BFM during the peak of spring migration (February–Apr.), with lower numbers in fall (20 on 28 Nov. 2004, DSC) and

small numbers remaining through the winter. In May 2004, a pair colonized one of several new nest boxes put up earlier that year at BFM, fledging at least two young in June (RB). Nesting commenced in early April the following year, with young again produced in June (Cooper 2005b). Widely extirpated as a breeder in southern California during the late 1900s, this species has reestablished itself locally south to San Diego Co., often utilizing bird boxes (Unitt 2004).

Northern Rough-winged Swallow *Stelgidopteryx serripennis*. Colonized as a breeder; now a common spring transient and a fairly common summer resident and early fall transient. Breeding was first noted in 1995 (LACBBA) with birds occupying essentially the same cement bridge habitat as White-throated Swifts (see above). Considered “occasional” in migration by von Bloeker (1943) and found just once by Dock and Schreiber (1981), RSh noted several into late April during the early 1980s, and Corey (1992) observed two in both May and June, suggesting that local breeding commenced before the 1990s.

Western Scrub-Jay *Aphelocoma californica*. Colonized as a breeding resident; now fairly common throughout the Ballona Valley except on the immediate coast. This jay was apparently not present during the 1930s (von Bloeker 1943) and was recorded by RSh (1977–87) just three times in dozens of visits to PdR. Multiple jays were observed at the Ballona Wetlands at least as early as 1990 (Corey 1992), when breeding was confirmed along the Westchester Bluffs. BOC found them every month of the year at the western Ballona Wetlands by 2002 (and in subsequent years), but they remain scarce along the immediate coast in Marina del Rey (*vide* DB); the first record from Ballona Lagoon was not until 26 June 2004 (CLA).

American Crow *Corvus brachyrhynchos*. Colonized as a breeder; now a common breeding resident. The crow was termed a “moderately common resident, not known to breed in the region” by von Bloeker (1943) and was recorded just singly on a few occasions by Dock and Schreiber (1981). Breeding was confirmed in the late 1990s (LACBBA) but may have begun decades prior.

European Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*. Colonized as a breeding resident. Starlings are most numerous in summer and fall, when huge flocks of mainly first-year birds are recorded (e.g., 800 at the Ballona Wetlands on 03 July 2004, with 500+ continuing into August, DSC). Unrecorded by von Bloeker (1943), the first records of this introduced species in southern California were in the late 1940s, and it began an exponential increase in Los Angeles during the 1960s (Table 2), when it presumably became common in the Ballona Valley.

Brown-headed Cowbird *Molothrus ater*. Colonized as a breeder; now uncommon in migration and through summer; rare in winter. Though breeding was suspected in the Ballona area (location unknown) on 17 July 1995 (copulation observed, LACBBA), it was not confirmed until 2004 when a juvenile was observed being fed by Common Yellowthroats at BFM on 04 July (DSC). Only four credible records prior to the 1990s, all transients in spring and fall (first: 2 on 28 May 1976, KLG). One was purportedly collected by von Bloeker in February 1932, but on a day on which he reported collecting several questionable birds (e.g., Wrentit and Western Bluebird, both otherwise unknown from Ballona), possibly the result of a labeling error.

Great-tailed Grackle *Quiscalus mexicanus*. Colonized as a breeding resident. The first local record of this species was of a pair in flight over Westchester on

27 Apr. 1997 (RDS). The next came on 09 Apr. 2002 (BOC), but the grackle “invaded” Ballona in spring 2003, with nesting commencing that summer (42 birds at BFM on 30 July 2003, J. Pickus). This species is oddly scarce during August and September, suggesting a fall dispersal of local breeders out of the Ballona Valley.

Hooded Oriole *Icterus cucullatus*. Colonized as a breeder; now fairly common through spring and early summer (06 March–31 August). Nesting was suspected during the late 1990s (LACBBA), but was confirmed only in 2004 (J.R. Coffin) in a eucalyptus along lower Ballona Cr. Von Bloeker (1943) considered this oriole only a transient, and subsequent observers (Corey 1992; CLA; RSh, AP) recorded only a handful through the 1990s, all in spring.

Orange Bishop *Euplectes franciscanus*. Colonized as a breeder; currently fairly common March through November within a small area that includes BFM and the base of the Westchester Bluffs immediately to the south; occasional elsewhere in the Ballona Valley and in winter. The total population in the Ballona Valley may not exceed 20 individuals and appears to be confined to invasive pampas-grass *Cortaderia sellona*. The first local record came in 1997 with one at the base of the Westchester Bluffs (RDS). Other early records include birds at the western Ballona Wetlands on 23 Oct. 2000 (6, R.A. Erickson) and 10 Oct. 2002 (BOC). The first record at BFM came on 01 June 2003 (3, DSC), and displaying males and hatch-year birds have been observed since then.

Data-deficient Taxa—Historical Presence at Ballona Questionable

Snow Goose *Chen caerulescens*. Modern records are now limited to about one per decade, the most recent in December 2001 at Del Rey Lagoon and adjacent Ballona Cr. (KL). Apparently unusual by the early 1900s (Bailey 1915), Grinnell (1898) described flocks feeding in the “Centinela grain fields” and roosting at sea, but did not provide a specific location.

Black Rail *Laterallus jamaicensis*. Though von Bloeker (1943) considered this species a “rare resident,” he noted “there appear to be no recent records of the occurrence of this rail in this locality.” Only two known records: 16 May 1895 (Grinnell 1898) and 25 Feb. 1928 (Ewan 1928).

Sandhill Crane *Grus canadensis*. Cranes historically occurred (pre-1900) in winter throughout the Los Angeles Basin (see Grinnell 1898) but were considered rare by the 1930s (von Bloeker 1943), with the only known Ballona record involving a bird at the Recreation Gun Club (east of PdR) from 25 Jan. to 27 Feb. 1949 (WT 15:28).

Mountain Plover *Charadris montanus*. This species was recorded on the Hughes airstrip (now Playa Vista) on 03 Dec. 1972 (J. Brandt); along Ballona Cr. on 30 Oct. 1976 (WT 43:6); and at PdR (2) on 02 Nov. 1979 (WT 46:8), but not before or since.

Greater Roadrunner *Geococcyx californianus*. Von Bloeker (1943) considered it a “resident of the meadow (= grassy areas inland from the saltmarsh and dunes) and sand dunes. Nests in April and May, usually in patches of cactus (*Opuntia littoralis*),” but this may have pertained to the El Segundo Dunes to the south; only one record is specifically known from the Ballona Valley, a male at PdR on 29 Dec. 1908 (LACM 21866).

Long-eared Owl *Asio otus*. Just two confirmed records: a “roadkill” (*per* von

Bloeker 1943) at PdR on 31 Dec. 1929 (LACM 16842) and another specimen from Marina del Rey on 08 Jan. 1934 (LACM 87423). Dock and Schreiber's (1981) remarkable report of 1–2 Long-eared Owls “flushed out of trees” just north of Ballona Cr. in “October” 1980 was given without details and may not be credible given the species' rarity at that time (Garrett and Dunn 1981). This owl was more common historically, even breeding in the Los Angeles Basin in the early 1900s (WFVZ).

California Gnatcatcher *Polioptila californica*. One historical record: 07 Oct. 1888 (LACM 12790) from “Port Ballona,” a record evidently overlooked by von Bloeker (1943). The historical status of this species in the Ballona region is unclear; there is no conclusive evidence of its ever occurring north of Redondo Beach along the coast, nor in the nearby Baldwin Hills, despite the presence of Rufous-crowned Sparrows, Cactus Wrens and other coastal scrub species there (Garrett 2001).

Wrentit *Chamaea fasciata*. Von Bloeker (1943) considered Wrentit a “resident of the brush-covered portions of the dunes and meadow,” noting breeding in April and May. Though he cited a specimen “collected on the meadow [= inland] slope of the dunes 13 Feb. 1932,” this is the only known reference to this species' occurrence in the Ballona region (no egg records or specimens have been located), and it occurred on a date on which von Bloeker collected several unusual specimens (see above). Common in the Santa Monica Mtns., the Wrentit is unknown from the much more extensive scrub habitat of the Baldwin Hills and from the Palos Verdes Peninsula, but historically occurred in dense riparian thickets elsewhere on the floor of the Los Angeles Basin (Garrett and Dunn 1981; Garrett 2001).

California Thrasher *Toxostoma redivivum*. Two sightings in 2002: one on 08 June on the Westchester Bluffs (RDS) and another at the western edge of the Ballona Wetlands (at a seed feeder) in “October” (BOC). Von Bloeker (1943) considered the California Thrasher a fall and winter visitor, citing one caught in a rat trap on 25 Oct. 1931 (specimen not located), but this may have referred to the more extensive scrub of the El Segundo Dunes to the south. This sedentary species is casual in the nearby Baldwin Hills (Garrett 2001) and on the Palos Verdes Peninsula (*vide* KL), though a common resident to the north in the Santa Monica Mtns.

Sage Sparrow *Amphispiza belli*. No specific Ballona Valley records, although historically, the Bell's Sage Sparrow (*A. b. belli*) may have been a post-breeding visitor to the El Segundo Dunes: birds were collected at “Hyperion” on 16 July 1917 (LACM 1967); and at “El Segundo” on 08 Jan. 1925 (MVZ 81542) and 22 Aug. 1931 (von Bloeker 1943). Field notes of P.H. Robertson (WFVZ) mention “a few” Bell's Sparrows in dunes at “Redondo” on 16 June 1899.

Acknowledgments

This work would not have been possible without the enthusiastic cooperation of numerous individuals, especially the local birders who have sent me sightings and updates since 2003. I am especially grateful to Chuck and Lillian Almdale, Barbara O. Courtois, Jean Pickus, Robert Shanman and Russell and Dorothy Stone for granting permission to mine their long-term databases of bird sightings from the Ballona region. Herb Clarke graciously lent me several historical photographs

of the pre-Marina del Rey Ballona Wetlands and related helpful first-hand information about this vanished landscape. Edith Read of the Center for Natural Lands Management facilitated this effort in numerous ways, and Kimball L. Garrett accommodated many visits to conduct research at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. Linnea Hall and Rene Corado of the Western Foundation for Vertebrate Zoology and Carla Cicero of the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, University of California welcomed me at their institutions.

Literature Cited

- American Ornithologists' Union. 1998. Check-list of North American birds, 7th ed. Washington, D.C.
- . 2004. Forty-fifth supplement to the American Ornithologists' Union Check-list of North American birds. *Auk* 121:985–995.
- Bailey, F.M. 1915. A populous shore. *The Condor* 18:100–110.
- Bicknell, F.T. 1924. Golden Plover on the southern California coast. *The Condor* 26:77–78.
- Chambers, W.L. 1904. The Snowy Plover. *The Condor* 6:139–140.
- Collins, C.T., W.A. Schew and E. Burkett. 1991. Elegant Terns breeding in Orange County, California. *American Birds* 45:393–395.
- Cooke, T.D. 1946. The proposed bird sanctuary at Playa del Rey. *Western Tanager* 13:5.
- Cooper, D.S. 2004. 2004 Breeding bird survey, Ballona Freshwater Marsh at Playa Vista, Playa del Rey, California. Unpublished Report. Prepared for the Center for Natural Lands Management, Fallbrook, California, July 25, 2004.
- . 2005a. 2004–05 Winter bird survey. Ballona Freshwater Marsh at Playa Vista, Playa del Rey, California. Unpublished Report. Prepared for the Center for Natural Lands Management, Fallbrook, California, Feb. 8, 2005.
- . 2005b. 2005 Breeding bird survey, Ballona Freshwater Marsh at Playa Vista, Playa del Rey, California. Unpublished Report. Prepared for the Center for Natural Lands Management, Fallbrook, California, July 11, 2005.
- . 2005c. Checklist of birds of Ballona Valley, Los Angeles County, California (Online). Available: http://www.ca.audubon.org/Ballona_checklist.pdf (Accessed 2005).
- . 2005d. Birding the Ballona Wetlands. *Winging It*. 17:1–4.
- Corey, K.A. 1992. Bird survey of Ballona Wetland, Playa del Rey, CA 1990–1991. Unpublished Report. April 30, 1992.
- Dock, C.F. and R.W. Schreiber. 1981. The Birds of Ballona. *In*: R.W. Schreiber, ed. 1981 The biota of the Ballona region, Los Angeles County (Supplement I of Marina del Rey/Ballona Local Coastal Plan). Los Angeles County Natural History Museum Foundation.
- Ellis, E.H. 1926. Minutes of Cooper Club Meetings: southern division, September 1925. *Condor* 28: 55.
- Ewan, J. 1928. California Black Rail in Los Angeles County. *The Condor* 30:247.
- Fuller, B.T. 1955. Help! Cry the Los Angeles County waterbirds. *Western Tanager* 22:17.
- Garrett, K.L. 2001. Birds of the Baldwin Hills. *In*: Molina, K., ed., Biota of the Baldwin Hills, Los Angeles County, California. Community Conservancy International and Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County Foundation, Los Angeles, 77–126.
- . and J. Dunn. 1981. Birds of southern California: Status and distribution. Los Angeles Audubon Soc., Los Angeles.
- Grinnell, J. 1898. Birds of the Pacific slope of Los Angeles County. *Pasadena Acad. Sci.* 2.
- . and A.H. Miller. 1944. The distribution of the birds of California. *Pac. Coast Avifauna* 27.
- Hamilton, R.A. 1997. Playa Vista habitat mitigation and monitoring plan, recommended performance standards, bird use of wetland mitigation sites. Unpublished Report. Prepared for Maguire Thomas Partners—Playa Vista. Los Angeles, California. January 7, 1997.
- Hise, G. and W. Deverell. 2000. Eden by design: the 1930 Olmsted-Bartholomew plan for the Los Angeles Region. Univ. of California Press, ix + 314 pp.
- Howsley, L.B. 1936. Unusual sets of Bush-tit and Green Heron. *The Condor* 38:39.
- Keane Biological Consulting. 1996. Existing conditions—Avifauna of Playa Vista. Unpublished Report. Sept. 17, 1996.
- Longcore, T., R. Mattoni, G. Pratt and C. Rich. 2000. On the Perils of Ecological Restoration: Lessons

- from the El Segundo Blue Butterfly. Pp. 281–286 in: Keeley, J., M. Baer-Keeley, and C. J. Fotheringham, eds. 2nd Interface Between Ecology and Land Development in California, U.S. Geological Survey Open-File Report 00-62, Sacramento, CA.
- National Audubon Society. 1986. Ballona Wetland Habitat Management Plan. Draft. Prepared for the City of Los Angeles, November 1986.
- . 2002. The Christmas Bird Count Historical Results (Online). Available: <http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc> (Accessed 2005).
- Page, G.W., F.C. Bistrup, R.J. Ramer and L.E. Stenzel. 1986. Distribution of wintering snowy plovers in California and adjacent states. *Western Birds* 17:145–170.
- Robertson, J. 1990. La Ballona Wetlands and its environs. Map.
- Robinson, W.W. 1939. Culver City: A calendar of events, in which is included, also, the story of Palms and Playa del Rey together with Rancho La Ballona and Rancho Rincon de los Bueyes (Online). Available <http://www.cheviot hills.org/Ranchos.htm> (Accessed 2005).
- Rowe S.P. and T. Gallion 1996. Fall migration of turkey vultures and raptors through the southern Sierra Nevada, California. *Western Birds* 27:48–53.
- Schneider, F.B. 1927. Invasion of the southern California coast by Elegant Terns. *The Condor* 29:71.
- Small, A.S. 1950. An unusual concentration of Elegant Terns in southern California. *The Condor* 53: 154.
- Trust for Public Land. 2003. State acquires historic Ballona Wetlands property. Press release. Dec. 19, 2003 (Online). Available: http://resources.ca.gov/ballona_wetlands/Ballona_Wetlands_Purchase_Press_Release.pdf
- Unitt, P. 2004. San Diego County Bird Atlas. *Proc. San Diego Soc. of Nat. Hist.* 39.
- von Bloeker, J.C. 1943. The fauna and flora of the El Segundo Sand Dunes: Birds of El Segundo and Playa del Rey. *Bull. So. Cal. Acad. Sci.* Vol. 42, Part I (pp. 1–30) and Part II (pp. 90–103).
- Willett, G. 1912. Birds of the Pacific slope of southern California. *Pac. Coast Avifauna* 7.
- . 1933. A revised list of the birds of southwestern California. *Pac. Coast Avifauna* 21.
- Accepted for publication 13 February 2006.