

Welcome to my first monthly update, Birdos4Eric,

Susan thought I should have a name for those of you following the progress of my big year, hence the salutation. You can direct any complaints to her. And if there's too much text for you here, you can cut to the chase—the pictures and the bird list are towards the end of this report.

My big year started off on an auspicious note. We were in San Clemente for New Year's and I went out early that day (well, early for a holiday), and the first bird of my big year was—drumroll, please—a Greater Roadrunner! Pretty cool, eh? There are some hiking trails above town that were introduced to me by an old friend several years ago and I was surprised to learn from him that there was a resident Roadrunner within the San Clemente city limits.

On that same trip down south, I had a nice walk in the Los Rios district of San Juan Capistrano—a lovely little neighborhood with lots of old buildings and native gardens. I picked up several kinds of common backyard birds there, but I was also lucky with a Cassin's Kingbird.

My final outing on that trip was a visit to the Bolsa Chica Reserve in Huntington Beach—a great place not only for ducks and shorebirds but also for coastal scrub birds. I got 41 species that morning, including Red-breasted Merganser, Reddish Egret and Blue-grey Flycatcher.

Back in Berkeley I did several walks along the bay, notably one at Arrowhead Marsh. The Arrowhead Marsh visit was a GGAS trip led by Maureen Lahiff and Dawn Lemoine on one of the king tides. The outing was particularly notable for rails—we saw six Ridgway's and three Soras—the last of these we watched being skewered—then devoured—by a Great Blue Heron. Nature can be spectacular in gruesome ways! But the bird of the day proved to be a Nelson's Sparrow—a bird generally found on the east coast, though this particular bird seems to be generating a fan club in the East Bay—he was pointed out to our group by a pair of birders who were there just to seek him out (though they did give a nod to all of the rail action.)

The other bay walk was at McLaughlin Eastshore State Park in Albany with my friend Sandy—and about 30 others who turned out for this GGAS walk. Lots of good duck and shorebirds, but the star of the show that day was the Burrowing Owl.

Sandwiched between my bay walks was a visit to Tilden Park and another to Hossmoor Ranch (where Susan and I have kept our horses over the years). The Tilden Park walk was one I lead quarterly for Ashby Village, a local nonprofit I've been associated with for several years now. A couple of my regulars on the walk are beginning birders and they were excited to get a close-up look at a Red-shouldered Hawk. My favorites that day were the Spotted Towhees—an extended family of them noisily going about their business—and doing so very visibly, too! The day at Hossmoor was a particularly good one, with 23 species, including a Band-tailed Pigeon—the first time I've seen this species on the ranch.

I'm writing this first update from the desert in Southern California where I've been for four days on a GGAS trip led by Eddie Bartley and Noreen Weeden. Spectacular! I've gotten a half a dozen life birds here—the Grey Flycatcher, the Black-throated Sparrow, the Mountain Plover, the Hooded Merganser, the Black-tailed Gnatcatcher (no, I'm not making these up!) and my favorite, the Rock

Wren. Perhaps the most unusual bird we've seen on the trip is the Ruff—it's described in *Sibley Birds West* as a "rare visitor from Eurasia." I had assumed it was a first sighting for me but it didn't come up as such on my eBird list; checking my records I discovered that I had seen it three years ago—in India, where it belongs!

Unfortunately, I wasn't able to get a photo of the Ruff, but I have seen a few photogenic species—including both colorful ones like the Vermillion Flycatcher and very cute ones like the Cactus Wren and Burrowing Owl (the owl is sitting in front of his home—a piece of plastic piping stuck in the ground just for that purpose, an abode for a burrowing bird).



But equally amazing is the sheer numbers of birds we've seen here. Here's a picture taken at the south end of the Salton Sea at sunset yesterday of a mixed flock of Snow and Ross's Geese—Eddie gave a conservative estimate of 2,500 birds!



I've decided that what would a monthly update be without a Bird of the Month? So January's Bird of the Month is Costa's Hummingbird. This little beauty is actually quite common in Southern California and we have seen lots of them in the desert.



So overall it's been a great first month for my big year. I've seen 150 species to date (I had hoped for 100 this month, so for now I'm out in front.) A complete list of the species I've seen organized by date is below. The first month is the easiest—I don't think I'll have another month this good (but I'm hoping for a really big one in Madagascar in October). We'll just have to wait and see.

I'd like to end this monthly update for thanking all of you who were interested enough in what I'm up to this year to sign up for this little newsletter of mine. And I'd particularly like to thank those of you who have made a donation to GGAS—among my first donors were Arden and Emory Love who live next door to me. Arden is nine and Emory is six. Together they donated \$100—I think that must be their combined allowance for the year! Thanks, too to John Palo, Bob Lewis, Patrick Corr, Paula Harrington, and Dan Joseph. And I'd also like to give a shout-out to Margaret Eldred and John & Judy Boe who have pledged to donate an amount at the end of year based on how many birds I see (yes, you can do this—if you'd like to pledge this way, just let me know the amount per bird and I'll send you an invoice next January 1. But be careful—my pal Bruce Mast has pledged 50 cents a bird—a sum I hope he doesn't regret when the bill comes due.... Bruce—you are up to \$75 already!)