



Figure 1. SDBG Bird Walk birders checking out Garden birds in April 2022.

San Diego Botanic Garden—Annual Bird Report for the Year 2022

Submitted by Sue Smith, January 2023

In 2022, our monthly SDBG Bird Walks resumed in full force after closure during the pandemic years. These walks are held on the first Monday of the month, with the new starting point at the Conservatory main entrance, new sign-up procedures, and a new route. The walk is free to Members, a standard day-fee is charged for non-members, and the attendance cap is currently 40. The Bird Walk has been held at the Garden since 1988, and led by birding specialist Rita Campbell since 1990. SDBG volunteer Sue Smith joined her as a co-leader in 2009, and Gretchen Nell joined as co-leader in 2014. As attendance grew to 40 in January and February 2022, we were grateful to welcome experienced birder, Jeff Clingan, Chair of the SDBG Volunteer Committee, as our 4th co-leader last April 2022. We also continued with our monthly independent bird surveys, covering the old pre-pandemic route, so that our 13-yr-old bird data stream will remain comparable. These independent bird surveys are conducted with 1-2 people (volunteers Sue Smith and Gretchen Nell), each covering different parts of the Garden, one morning per month. All birds seen and identified on these bird walks and surveys are recorded in an online (eBird) data base available to the public.

SDBG Bird Species Checklist Updated and Talk Given at Pacific Horticultural Society Event—In June 2022, an updated Checklist of SDBG Birds (166 species) was prepared and submitted to Tomoko Kuta, Senior Director of Education & Visitor Services. Eighteen new species were added to our bird list since the last bird list was prepared in 2017. In October, Sue Smith presented a talk to SDBG and Pacific Horticultural Society (PHS) members entitled, “San Diego Botanic Garden Birds—Diversity and Abundance,” as part of talk series offered at the SDBG-hosted PHS event, “Connecting with Plants and People, a Celebration of Local Biodiversity.”

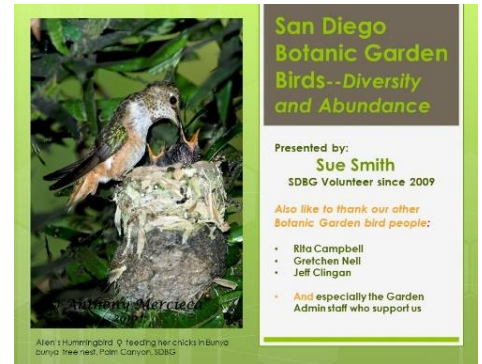


Figure 2. Talk given in Oct 2022 on SDBG Bird Diversity and Abundance.

2022 Birding Stats—During 2022, 12 public bird walks were completed, averaging 28 people per walk (including leaders), ranging from 16 to 44 participants covering an average of 1.7 miles and 3.3 hrs each walk. Added to this were 12 independent monthly bird surveys covering an average of 3.1 miles each survey and 5.3 combined survey hours. This survey effort included the Dec 27 Audubon Christmas Bird Count conducted by Gretchen Nell and Jeff Clingan. There were also 8 days of incidental spot checks of the Garden made by us over the year (~7 hrs. of survey effort, covering a total of about 6 miles). Together, this amounted to 32 bird count days, and at least 110 hrs and 63 miles of bird count effort.



Figure 3. Rare Lark Bunting, found by member, Eve Martin, 28 Sept near SDBG entrance. Dane Adams photo.

Bird Diversity, Abundance, and Rarities-- A total of 89 bird species was recorded by us in the Garden in 2022, 12 more species than the previous year. Counts of individual birds seen in 2022 ranged from a high of 517 birds per survey in January to a low of 292 per survey in May, with an average of 400 individual birds per monthly survey in the Garden. Visitors added another 10 species including a rare **Lark Bunting** seen by a member near the Garden entrance, on the edges of the Heritage Museum parking lot in September. While technically not seen on or from the Garden property, we still like to count it, as it was seen by visiting birders on their way in to the Garden from the overflow parking lot. This handsome sparrow is a grassland and sagebrush-loving bird of the Great Plains north to central Canada, and is rare along the West Coast in fall and winter.



Figure 4. Rare Green-tailed Towhee, wintered over in the Native Garden, and stayed until mid-April 2022.

In addition to the **Lark Bunting**, which was new for our Garden's Bird List in 2022, a **Savannah Sparrow**, likely a Spring migrant passing through, was added retroactively to our bird list this year, based on a confirmed sighting by another visiting birder who recorded it on 11 April 2019. Also, the **Green-tailed Towhee**, first found in October 2021, stayed the winter in the Native Garden and was last seen in mid-April 2022, likely returning to its traditional spring breeding grounds. This towhee is rare in the county, with only a few birds breeding high in the Cuyamaca Mtns, the rest found in mountain chaparral to the north and northeast of us.



Figure 5. Savannah Sparrow, a recent addition to the SDBG Bird List. Web photo.

Breeding Bird News---24 species were confirmed as breeding in the Garden in 2022, three more than the previous year, with many others 'probable' breeders. We also discovered three new first-time breeders in the Garden-- **Swinhoe's White-eye**, **Downy Woodpecker** and **Black-headed Grosbeak**. The exotic **Swinhoe's White-eye**, first seen in the Garden in Dec 2020, continues to increase, and on 22 Aug 2022, we saw two adults feeding young in the Subtropical Fruit Garden. This fruit-loving Southeast Asian species is one of the most popular cagebirds in China, introduced to southern California some decades ago, but only spread and started breeding in San Diego Co. in recent years. These birds are striking with their yellow and lime-green coloring and large, white, saucer-like eye rings. We were also surprised to confirm breeding in the Garden of the **Downy Woodpecker** since they prefer riparian-willow habitat, and also the **Black-headed Grosbeak**, which prefers oak and riparian woodland for nesting. And once again, we confirmed nesting of the endangered **California Gnatcatcher**, when an adult male was observed feeding two fledglings in the California Gardenscapes area on 20 July. We also documented the nesting of a pair of **Great-horned Owls** in 2022, after Ana Arft, SDBG Education Specialist, reported seeing them and alerted us to a nest in the Australia Garden. These birds are excellent at rodent control.



Figure 6. The Endangered coastal California Gnatcatcher bred and raised young in the California Gardenscapes area in 2022. Web photo.



Figure 7. A pair of Great-horned Owls nested in the Australia Garden in 2022. Tim Lumley photo

The Future---We plan to resume our Monthly Bird Walks in February 2023, and look forward to sharing with others the beauty of the Garden's birds and encouraging non-members to become members. We also like to stress how important the Garden is as an oasis and feeding stop for birds in arid San Diego, especially for breeding, wintering and also migrating birds. We will continue our independent bird surveys, which are now more important than ever in maintaining a consistent data base time series on bird abundance and diversity in the Garden. This now 13-year SDBG eBird data base continues to grow on the Cornell Ornithological Laboratory's eBird online data repository, where the Garden is designated a **Birding Hotspot**. For a link to these data, and to check on current bird sightings, go to <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L873348>.



Figure 8, 9, and 10. The diminutive Downy Woodpecker (left, D. Brisance photo), the Black-headed Grosbeak (center, D. Streiffert photo), and the Swinhoe's White-eye (right, Frances Yap photo), all were confirmed as breeding for the first time ever in the San Diego Botanic Garden in 2022.