

## DAVID F. DeSANTE'S BIRDS OF CABO SAN LUCAS, FALL 1968: A HISTORIC ACCOUNT

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**ABSTRACT:** In preparation for his doctoral studies at Stanford University, the late David F. DeSante spent the fall of 1968 studying migratory landbirds at Cabo San Lucas. Although his hopes to capture numerous vagrant warblers were not met, he amassed an impressive list of distributional records for the Baja California Peninsula at a time when few ornithologists were working there. Among these were peninsular firsts for the Ring-necked Duck (*Aythya collaris*), Broad-billed Hummingbird (*Cynanthus latirostris*), Broad-winged Hawk (*Buteo platypterus*), Bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*), and Painted Bunting (*Passerina ciris*). Another six species, and one subspecies, were found for the first time in Baja California Sur. Venturing away from the immediate confines of Cabo San Lucas, DeSante established the first peninsular record of the Gray-headed Junco (*Junco hyemalis caniceps*) and first state records for another five species and one subspecies. Although many of these records have been reported previously, the junior authors believe it is appropriate to synthesize them more completely with current context, in Dave's honor.

Those familiar with the work of David F. DeSante (1942–2022) are aware of his visit to Cabo San Lucas in search of vagrant landbirds in the fall of 1968, early in his doctoral studies at Stanford University. The most notable observations from that season were reported by Wilbur (1987), Howell and Webb (1995), and Erickson and Howell (2001). DeSante had planned a more thorough account of his own—mentioned in passing in his dissertation (DeSante 1973) as “The fall migration of birds at the southern tip of Baja California.” He discussed it briefly with Erickson, Pyle, and others, but his plans ended with his untimely death in pursuit of California's first Willow Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilus*) in Marin County on 18 October 2022.

After 1968, DeSante went on to complete the field work for his dissertation on Southeast Farallon Island, California, after which he managed the landbird-monitoring program there while working for the Point Reyes Bird Observatory (DeSante and Ainley 1980, DeSante 1983). At the same time he was also studying the effects of annual variation in the snowpack on bird dynamics in the high Sierra Nevada (DeSante and Saracco 2021). He then went on to found the Institute for Bird Populations and to establish the acclaimed programs Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survival (MAPS) and

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Monitoring Neotropical Migrants in Winter (MoSI), which organize banders across North America to record standardized data from which birds' vital rates can be calculated (Siegel 2023). With all of these and other activities (for a full list of his publications see David DeSante at <https://www.birdpop.org/pages/pubsDatabase.php>), along with extensive climate-change activism over the past decade, DeSante never found time to return to this unfinished manuscript.

Here we attempt to present something akin to what DeSante originally envisioned, with his original field observations supplemented with annotations and analyses by the junior authors. Although some of this information has been published previously, second-hand, we believe it is useful to synthesize these observations and analysis based on >50 more years of context.

## STUDY AREA AND METHODS

According to a preliminary unpublished report that DeSante wrote in 1969 (excerpts shown in quotations here), the primary study area was “just outside the town of Cabo San Lucas [Baja California Sur] on an approximately [20-hectare] plot.... A more ideal location for this project could not have been imagined. Lying at the very southern tip of the Baja California Peninsula, the study area faced across the tiny bay of San Lucas to the grotesque rocks of the cape itself. The eastern half of the study area was composed of a fairly dense mesquite woodland surrounding an underground spring that surfaced just behind the beach, forming a small pond—the only surface fresh water for a radius of over [30 km] (except for a similar but polluted pond behind the cannery in the town of Cabo San Lucas). The western half of the study area was composed primarily of cultivated land, rows of orange trees and some grazed, cleared scrubland. The area was bordered to the north by the typical Arid Tropical Scrub of the Cape Region and to the south, of course, by the sea and the rocks of the cape.”

Regarding forays outside the study area, DeSante wrote, “In order to understand the fall migration in the Cape Region more fully, frequent trips were made to other areas. Most prominent among these were San José del Cabo and Todos Santos—both places where an abundance of fresh water could be found—and La Paz Bay. Three days were spent in early November at La Laguna, [1675 m] elevation, in the Cape Region mountains. Finally, in order to get a feel for pelagic birds, [DeSante sailed] to the Tres Marias Islands from Cabo San Lucas in late October.”

The spring and pond DeSante described in his primary study area may correspond to the (seasonal?) wetland at the mouth of the Arroyo Salto Seco, 22.892° N, 109.900° W (referred to as Estero Playa Cascada at eBird.org), but urban/tourist development at Cabo San Lucas has been extensive since 1968 and we are unable to identify with certainty the exact bounds of the study area. As of this writing, some land in the area remains undeveloped, but we are aware of no remaining agriculture.

DeSante was at Cabo San Lucas from 26 September 1968 to 5 January 1969. During this time, he “tended up to six mist net lanes in the study area and banded” birds. Many of those birds “were subjected to nocturnal orientation tests for at least one, and sometimes up to seven, nights.” A full explanation

of these procedures was provided by DeSante (1973). "In addition to banding and orientation work, a daily census was taken in the study area, giving a complete record of the fall migration at the cape."

## RESULTS

Notes concerning the fall of 1968 found among DeSante's possessions included a two-page unpublished preliminary summary; cumulative lists of species observed at Cabo San Lucas; numerous details of individual birds seen, banded, or collected; and summaries of relevant literature. The notes contain nothing regarding his trips to La Paz, and those addressing San José del Cabo and Todos Santos are only cursory. Even at the Cabo San Lucas study area, complete census data (e.g., numbers of each species seen each day, or even presence/absence every day) have apparently been lost, and were not available to us. Some information supplemental to ours had been given to Wilbur (1987) and Erickson and Howell (2001). When specific information allowed, we entered DeSante's records into eBird.org. All of DeSante's notes on research from Baja California Sur and elsewhere during his career will be archived at a California museum.

### Study Area, Banding, and Censusing

Table 1 is a complete list of the 178 species observed by DeSante at the Cabo San Lucas study area. Our few annotations in it primarily concern banding and specimen records. More detailed accounts of selected species follow.

DeSante banded some 400 birds of 39 species and collected at least 25 specimens representing 19 species; these are located at the California Academy of Sciences, San Francisco (CAS; 17 specimens), or the Colección Nacional de Aves, Departamento de Zoología, Instituto de Biología, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Mexico City (CNAV; 8 specimens). Pyle re-examined all of the specimens at CAS (including those obtained away from Cabo San Lucas and discussed below) and, with one exception, agreed with age and sex designations he applied to specimen labels. Museums housing specimens collected by others and referred to in the text: LACM (Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County), MCZ (Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University), MVZ (Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, University of California, Berkeley), UBC (University of British Columbia), and USNM (United States National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution).

### Species Accounts

Ring-necked Duck. One seen on 29 Oct 1968 (Wilbur 1987) established the first record of the Ring-necked Duck for the Baja California Peninsula. Surprisingly, Grinnell (1928) had listed no records. The species is now an annual winter visitor locally the length of the peninsula (Erickson et al. 2023).

Surf Scoter. One seen 28 Nov 1968 (Wilbur 1987) was the first found south of La Paz in Baja California Sur, where the species is now a rare winter visitor (Erickson et al. 2023).

Vaux's Swift. DeSante made 53 total observations on 13 days, 30 Sep–22 Nov 1968 (actual number of individuals unknown). Wilbur (1987) was unaware of these and listed no records for Baja California Sur, as Grinnell (1928) had questioned the only

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**TABLE 1** Species Observed at the Cabo San Lucas Study Area 26 September 1968–5 January 1969

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Cinnamon Teal *Spatula cyanoptera*  
 Northern Shoveler *Spatula clypeata*  
 Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*  
 Green-winged Teal *Anas crecca*  
 Ring-necked Duck *Aythya collaris*<sup>a</sup>  
 scaup *Aythya* sp.  
 Surf Scoter *Melanitta perspicillata*<sup>a</sup>  
 California Quail *Callipepla californica*  
 Common Ground Dove *Columbina passerina* (24 banded 1 Oct–12 Dec 1968)  
 White-winged Dove *Zenaida asiatica*  
 Mourning Dove *Zenaida macroura*  
 Greater Roadrunner *Geococcyx californianus*  
 Lesser Nighthawk *Chordeiles acutipennis*  
 Common Poorwill *Phalaenoptilus nuttallii*  
 Vaux's Swift *Chaetura vauxi*<sup>a</sup>  
 White-throated Swift *Aeronautes saxatalis*  
 Costa's Hummingbird *Calypte costae* (2 collected: CNAV 001869, 12 Oct 1968;  
 CNAV 001870, 12 Oct 1968)  
 Broad-billed Hummingbird *Cynanthus latirostris*<sup>a</sup>  
 Xantus's Hummingbird *Basilinna xantusii*  
 Virginia Rail *Rallus limicola*  
 American Coot *Fulica americana*  
 Black-necked Stilt *Himantopus mexicanus*  
 American Avocet *Recurvirostra americana*  
 Black-bellied Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*  
 Killdeer *Charadrius vociferus*  
 Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus*  
 Snowy Plover *Charadrius nivosus*  
 Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*  
 Long-billed Curlew *Numenius americanus*  
 Marbled Godwit *Limosa fedoa*  
 Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*  
 Black Turnstone *Arenaria melanocephala*  
 Sanderling *Calidris alba*  
 Dunlin *Calidris alpina*  
 Baird's Sandpiper *Calidris bairdii* (seen 28 Sep–28 Oct 1968; 1 collected 28 Oct  
 1968, CAS 68575, male having commenced or suspended preformative molt of  
 body feathers)  
 Least Sandpiper *Calidris minutilla* (1 collected: 8 Dec 1968, CAS 68576, formative  
 plumage)  
 Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos* (seen 28 Sep–30 Oct 1968; 1 collected 30 Oct  
 1968, CAS 68574, male in juvenile plumage)  
 Western Sandpiper *Calidris mauri*  
 Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus*  
 Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus*  
 Wilson's Snipe *Gallinago delicata*  
 Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius*  
 Solitary Sandpiper *Tringa solitaria* (seen 2 Oct 1968)  
 Wandering Tattler *Tringa incana*  
 Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca*

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(continued)

## DESANTE'S BIRDS OF CABO SAN LUCAS

TABLE 1 (continued)

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Red-necked Phalarope <i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>
Red Phalarope <i>Phalaropus fulicarius</i> (seen 15 Nov 1968)
Black-legged Kittiwake <i>Rissa tridactyla</i> <sup>a</sup>
Bonaparte's Gull <i>Chroicocephalus philadelphia</i> (1 collected: CNAV 000903, 13 Nov 1968)
Franklin's Gull <i>Leucophaeus pipixcan</i> <sup>a</sup>
Heermann's Gull <i>Larus heermanni</i>
Ring-billed Gull <i>Larus delawarensis</i>
Western Gull <i>Larus occidentalis</i>
California Gull <i>Larus californicus</i>
Herring Gull <i>Larus argentatus</i>
Glaucous-winged Gull <i>Larus glaucescens</i> (seen 15 Nov 1968)
Black Tern <i>Chlidonias niger</i> <sup>a</sup>
Common Tern <i>Sterna hirundo</i> (seen 9 Oct 1968)
Forster's Tern <i>Sterna forsteri</i>
Royal Tern <i>Thalasseus maximus</i>
Elegant Tern <i>Thalasseus elegans</i>
Pacific Loon <i>Gavia pacifica</i> (seen 27 Dec 1968)
Black Storm-Petrel <i>Hydrobates melania</i>
Least Storm-Petrel <i>Hydrobates microsoma</i>
Magnificent Frigatebird <i>Fregata magnificens</i>
Masked/Nazca Booby <i>Sula dactylatra/granti</i> (seen 18 Dec 1968; Wilbur 1987)
Brown Booby <i>Sula leucogaster</i>
Brandt's Cormorant <i>Urile penicillatus</i>
Double-crested Cormorant <i>Nannopterum auritum</i>
Brown Pelican <i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i>
Great Blue Heron <i>Ardea herodias</i>
Snowy Egret <i>Egretta thula</i>
Little Blue Heron <i>Egretta caerulea</i>
Cattle Egret <i>Bubulcus ibis</i> <sup>a</sup>
Black-crowned Night-Heron <i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
White-faced Ibis <i>Plegadis chihi</i> <sup>a</sup>
Turkey Vulture <i>Cathartes aura</i>
Golden Eagle <i>Aquila chrysaetos</i> <sup>a</sup>
Sharp-shinned Hawk <i>Accipiter striatus</i> (first seen 28 Sep 1968)
Cooper's Hawk <i>Accipiter cooperii</i>
Broad-winged Hawk <i>Buteo platypterus</i> <sup>a</sup>
Swainson's Hawk <i>Buteo swainsoni</i> <sup>a</sup>
Zone-tailed Hawk <i>Buteo albonotatus</i>
Red-tailed Hawk <i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>
Barn Owl <i>Tyto alba</i>
Western Screech-Owl <i>Megascops kennicottii</i> (observed 28 Sep 1968)
Great Horned Owl <i>Bubo virginianus</i>
Elf Owl <i>Micrathene whitneyi</i> (observed 20 Nov 1968)
Belted Kingfisher <i>Megaceryle alcyon</i>
Gila Woodpecker <i>Melanerpes uropygialis</i> (11 banded 30 Sep–29 Oct 1968)
Ladder-backed Woodpecker <i>Dryobates scalaris</i>
Gilded Flicker <i>Colaptes chrysoides</i>
Crested Caracara <i>Caracara plancus</i>
American Kestrel <i>Falco sparverius</i>
Merlin <i>Falco columbarius</i> (seen 31 Oct 1968)
Peregrine Falcon <i>Falco peregrinus</i>

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## DESANTE'S BIRDS OF CABO SAN LUCAS

TABLE 1 (continued)

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Prairie Falcon *Falco mexicanus* (seen 20 Dec 1968)  
 Ash-throated Flycatcher *Myiarchus cinerascens* (2 banded: 11 Oct, 17 Nov 1968)  
 Tropical Kingbird *Tyrannus melancholicus*<sup>a</sup>  
 Cassin's Kingbird *Tyrannus vociferans* (1 banded 9 Dec 1968)  
 Western Kingbird *Tyrannus verticalis*<sup>a</sup>  
 Eastern Kingbird *Tyrannus tyrannus*<sup>a</sup>  
 Scissor-tailed Flycatcher *Tyrannus forficatus*<sup>a</sup>  
 Western Wood-Pewee *Contopus sordidulus*<sup>a</sup>  
 Gray Flycatcher *Empidonax wrightii* (6 collected: CNAV 003283, 27 Oct 1968;  
 CNAV 003284, 1 Nov 1968; CNAV 003285, 2 Nov 1968; CNAV 003286 2 Nov  
 1968; CAS 68581, 19 Nov 1968, male in formative plumage; CAS 68582, 28 Dec  
 1968, female in formative plumage; 5 banded 1–30 Oct 1968)  
 Western Flycatcher *Empidonax difficilis* (6 banded 3 Oct–11 Dec 1968)  
 Black Phoebe *Sayornis nigricans*  
 Say's Phoebe *Sayornis saya*  
 Vermilion Flycatcher *Pyrocephalus rubinus* (2 banded 4, 17 Oct 1968)  
 Bell's Vireo *Vireo bellii* (2 banded 18 Oct, 24 Dec 1968)  
 Cassin's/Plumbeous Vireo *Vireo cassinii/plumbeus* (seen 25 Nov 1968)  
 Loggerhead Shrike *Lanius ludovicianus*  
 California Scrub-Jay *Apelocoma californica*  
 Common Raven *Corvus corax* (first seen 11 Oct 1968)  
 Verdin *Auriparus flaviceps*  
 Bank Swallow *Riparia riparia*<sup>a</sup>  
 Tree Swallow *Tachycineta bicolor*  
 Violet-green Swallow *Tachycineta thalassina*  
 Northern Rough-winged Swallow *Stelgidopteryx serripennis*  
 Purple Martin *Progne subis*  
 Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*  
 Cliff Swallow *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*  
 Cedar Waxwing *Bombcilla cedrorum*  
 Phainopepla *Phainopepla nitens*  
 Blue-gray Gnatcatcher *Poliophtila caerulea* (1 banded 9 Oct 1968)  
 California Gnatcatcher *Poliophtila californica*  
 Cactus Wren *Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus* (1 banded 3 Oct 1968)  
 House Wren *Troglodytes aedon* (2 banded 17 Oct, 24 Nov 1968)  
 Marsh Wren *Cistothorus palustris*  
 Gray Thrasher *Toxostoma cinereum*  
 Northern Mockingbird *Mimus polyglottos* (1 banded 3 Oct 1968)  
 Swainson's Thrush *Catharus ustulatus*<sup>a</sup>  
 Hermit Thrush *Catharus guttatus* (seen 11 Oct 1968, 1 banded 29 Oct 1968)  
 American Pipit *Anthus rubescens*  
 House Finch *Haemorhous mexicanus* (2 banded 8 Oct 1968)  
 Lesser Goldfinch *Spinus psaltria* (1 banded 24 Dec 1968)  
 Lawrence's Goldfinch *Spinus lawrencei*<sup>a</sup>  
 Chestnut-collared Longspur *Calcarius ornatus*<sup>a</sup>  
 Grasshopper Sparrow *Ammodramus savannarum* (seen 17 Oct 1968)  
 Lark Sparrow *Chondestes grammacus* (10 banded 8–17 Oct 1968)  
 Lark Bunting *Calamospiza melanocorys*  
 Chipping Sparrow *Spizella passerina*  
 Clay-colored Sparrow *Spizella pallida* (1 collected: CAS 68595, 28 Oct 1968, male  
 in formative plumage [also probably CNAV 011255, although the database date  
 entered is 15 Oct 1978]; 1 banded 21 Nov 1968)

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## DESANTE'S BIRDS OF CABO SAN LUCAS

TABLE 1 (continued)

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Brewer's Sparrow <i>Spizella breweri</i>
White-crowned Sparrow <i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i> (5 <i>Z. l. gambelii</i> banded 10 Oct–31 Dec 1968; 33 <i>Z. l. ssp.</i> banded 8 Oct–31 Dec 1968)
Vesper Sparrow <i>Poocetes gramineus</i> (seen 17 Oct 1968)
Savannah Sparrow <i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>
California Towhee <i>Melospiza crissalis</i>
Green-tailed Towhee <i>Pipilo chlorurus</i> (8 banded 9 Oct–4 Dec 1968)
Yellow-breasted Chat <i>Icteria virens</i>
Yellow-headed Blackbird <i>Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus</i> (seen 20 Nov 1968)
Bobolink <i>Dolichonyx oryzivorus</i> <sup>a</sup>
Hooded Oriole <i>Icterus cucullatus</i> (13 banded 30 Sep–9 Oct 1968)
Bullock's Oriole <i>Icterus bullockii</i> <sup>a</sup>
Scott's Oriole <i>Icterus parisorum</i> (7 banded 3 Oct–9 Dec 1968)
Brown-headed Cowbird <i>Molothrus ater</i>
Brewer's Blackbird <i>Euphagus cyanocephalus</i>
Northern Waterthrush <i>Parkesia noveboracensis</i> <sup>a</sup> (1 banded 7 Oct 1968)
Black-and-white Warbler <i>Mniotilta varia</i> <sup>a</sup> (1 collected CAS 68584, 5 Oct 1968, male in formative plumage; 4 banded 3 Oct–20 Nov 1968)
Orange-crowned Warbler <i>Leiothlypis celata</i> (109 banded 29 Sep–31 Dec 1968)
Lucy's Warbler <i>Leiothlypis luciae</i> <sup>a</sup>
Nashville Warbler <i>Leiothlypis ruficapilla</i> <sup>a</sup>
MacGillivray's Warbler <i>Geothlypis tolmiei</i> (1 banded 3 Oct 1968)
Belding's Yellowthroat <i>Geothlypis beldingi</i> (seen 1 Nov 1968)
Common Yellowthroat <i>Geothlypis trichas</i>
Yellow Warbler <i>Setophaga petechia</i> (5 banded 1–16 Oct 1968)
Palm Warbler <i>Setophaga palmarum</i> <sup>a</sup> (several observed beginning 15 Oct 1968; 1 collected CNAV 014163, 28 Oct 1968; 1 banded 28 Oct 1968)
Yellow-rumped Warbler <i>Setophaga coronata</i>
Audubon's Warbler <i>S. c. auduboni</i> (69 banded 11 Oct–28 Dec 1968)
Myrtle Warbler <i>S. c. coronata/hooveri</i> <sup>a</sup>
Townsend's Warbler <i>Setophaga townsendi</i> (seen 1 Dec 1968)
Wilson's Warbler <i>Cardellina pusilla</i> (4 banded 17 Nov–9 Dec 1968) <sup>a</sup>
Western Tanager <i>Piranga ludoviciana</i> (2 banded 3, 19 Oct 1968)
Northern Cardinal <i>Cardinalis cardinalis</i> (3 banded 3 Oct–9 Dec 1968)
Pyrrhuloxia <i>Cardinalis sinuatus</i> (2 banded 1 Nov, 11 Dec 1968)
Black-headed Grosbeak <i>Pheucticus melanocephalus</i> (12 banded 3 Oct–11 Dec 1968)
Blue Grosbeak <i>Passerina caerulea</i>
Lazuli Bunting <i>Passerina amoena</i>
Varied Bunting <i>Passerina versicolor</i>
Painted Bunting <i>Passerina ciris</i> <sup>a</sup>

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<sup>a</sup>See species accounts for additional data.

previous reports, of single birds seen by M. A. Frazer at San José del Cabo 24 Sep and 2 Nov 1887 (Brewster 1902). Vaux's Swift is currently considered a very rare fall migrant and winter visitor in the Cape Region (Erickson et al. 2023).

Broad-billed Hummingbird. A female in formative plumage collected 24 Nov 1968 (*C. l. magicus*, CAS 68577) had been seen the day before and represented the first record for the Baja California Peninsula. Wilbur (1987) listed this one among "several" that DeSante saw in 1968.

Black-legged Kittiwake. Several seen during "winter 1968" (Wilbur 1987) were the first reported from Baja California Sur. The first report was on 30 Nov 1968, and one undated photograph has been archived (Hamilton and Howell 2001).

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Franklin's Gull. One seen 17 Dec 1968 (Wilbur 1987) was the first found in Baja California Sur, where the species is currently considered a very rare transient and winter visitor (Erickson et al. 2023).

Black Tern. An unknown number was seen 1 Dec 1968. Grinnell (1928) listed several records for the Cape Region, but Wilbur (1987) mentioned only one "recent record" for the peninsula, from Baja California in 1976. More recently, the Black Tern has been a rare transient in the Cape Region, and an extremely rare winter visitor (eBird.org; Erickson et al. 2023).

Cattle Egret. A female in formative plumage collected 16 Oct 1968 (*B. i. ibis*; CAS 68573) established the first specimen record for the Baja California Peninsula, and few specimens have been collected there subsequently (Howell et al. 2001, Ruiz-Campos et al. 2001, VertNet.org). Dickerman (1964) summarized the earliest records for Mexico, Hubbs (1968) reported the first records for the Baja California Peninsula (including the first for Baja California Sur at Isla San José 24 Apr 1964), and Wilbur (1987) reported "many sightings" by DeSante between La Paz and Cabo San Lucas in 1968/1969. The Cattle Egret is now a fairly common resident in the Cape Region.

White-faced Ibis. An unknown number was seen 7 Oct 1968. Grinnell (1928) summarized five early records from the Cape Region, but Wilbur (1987) reported only a few on the peninsula in "recent years," none south of La Paz. This was in keeping with a low point in the population in western North America in the 1960s and 1970s (Shuford et al. 1996, Ryder and Manry 2020). Erickson et al. (2001) summarized additional records from the 1980s and 1990s, and Marrón et al. (2022) updated the species' status in Baja California Sur and documented the first nesting in the state, in 2021.

Golden Eagle. One seen 13 Oct 1968. Wilbur (1987) listed several records for Baja California Sur, but none for the Cape Region, where it is now considered a rare resident (Rodríguez-Estrella 2002, Erickson et al. 2023).

Broad-winged Hawk. "Several" observed in 1968, "earliest date 31 Oct" (Wilbur 1987). These represented the first records for the Baja California Peninsula. The Broad-winged Hawk is now of annual occurrence in the Cape Region in fall and winter, 30 Sep–17 Apr, with maximum counts up to 20 per observation (eBird.org).

Swainson's Hawk. One seen 31 Oct 1968 (Wilbur 1987) represented the first record for Baja California Sur. Following population lows in the mid 20th century, Swainson's Hawk numbers have increased, at least in California (Furnas et al. 2022), and the species has been seen almost annually in the Cape Region this century, sometimes in the hundreds (eBird.org).

Tropical Kingbird. One collected (29 Sep 1968; *T. m. satrapa*; CAS 68579) and four others seen 28 Sep–22 Nov 1968 Wilbur (1987) believed to be the first recorded on the Baja California Peninsula, but that honor goes to one collected by the eminent fisheries biologist Peter A. Larkin at Cabo San Lucas 22 Mar 1957 (UBC B008415). The species has since become established as a breeding resident in coastal lowlands from La Paz southward, with nesting first confirmed in 2007 (N. Am. Birds 61:645, Erickson et al. 2023).

Western Kingbird. Wilbur (1987) listed no records for Baja California Sur, so Rodríguez-Estrella et al. (1990) reported two south of La Paz, 29 Sep 1990, as the first for the state. Erickson et al. (2001), Hamilton and Erickson (2001), and Wurster et al. (2001) then reported numerous additional records from 1988 to 1999. None of those authors was aware of DeSante's 78 total observations (actual number of birds unknown) on 12 days 28 Sep–22 Nov 1968, with one banded 3 Oct. The date of a Western Kingbird from the Henry Bryant collection taken at Cabo San Lucas in the mid-1800s (MCZ 363213) cannot now be verified (J. Trimble pers. comm.). In the current century, the Western Kingbird has been recorded in small numbers in



the Cape Region every “winter,” with extreme dates of 7 Jul (N. Am. Birds 61: 645) and 25 May (eBird.org).

Eastern Kingbird. An adult male collected 28 Sep 1968 (Howell and Webb 1995; CAS 68578) represented the first record for the Baja California Peninsula since one seen at Todos Santos 3 Aug 1924 (Lamb 1925). There have been several subsequent records for Baja California Sur (and Baja California), but no more from the Cape Region (Erickson et al. 2023).

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher. One seen 2–5 Nov 1968 was photographed. Wilbur (1987) believed it to be the first for the Baja California Peninsula, but one had been collected at Cabo San Lucas 2 Mar 1959 (Erickson et al. 2001; UBC 8976). The species is currently very rare in winter in the Cape Region, having been recorded at least 18 times 29 Oct–14 Apr, 1989–2023 (eBird.org, Erickson unpubl. data).

Western Wood-Pewee. Two: one captured 8 Oct 1968 and one in formative plumage captured 11 Oct 1968 that died in captivity 13 Oct 1968 (CAS 68583). Our current understanding of the species’ status in Baja California Sur is as an uncommon summer resident in the mountains of the Cape Region (the endemic subspecies *peninsulae*) and as a rare transient south to Punta Abreojos (26.705° N, Erickson et al. 2023). Farther south, away from the Sierra de La Laguna, no confirmed reports have been submitted to N. Am. Birds (Erickson et al. 2008), or to eBird, although Erickson and Marrón have been presented with some unconvincing claims.

And yet, several pewees had been collected in the lowlands of the Cape Region prior to 1968 (VertNet.org): San José del Cabo 2 Apr 1895 (*C. s. peninsulae*; USNM 140040) and 17 Jun 1923 (*C. s. peninsulae*; LACM 14165); Todos Santos 17 Nov 1923 (*C. s. peninsulae*; MVZ 44310; reported as 13 Nov by Grinnell 1928); and Isla Cerralvo 8 Nov 1961 (*C. s. peninsulae*; CAS 62650; “assumed to have been a wanderer from the peninsula” Banks 1963). We acknowledge that locality data for old specimens may be imprecise, such that named coastal sites may actually refer to mountain localities nearby.

The subspecies of the Western Wood-Pewee are differentiated only weakly in bill shape and plumage color, and Pyle (2022) considered the species monotypic. In regards to the origins of the birds discussed above, we recall a memorable conversation long ago, when DeSante firmly corrected Erickson’s initial thinking that Nashville Warblers wintering in coastal Humboldt County, California, may have come from the local breeding populations. They might have come from anywhere, but not from local populations—long-distance migration matters, and is mandatory in species such as the Western Wood-Pewee. It may not be possible to confirm, but in the spirit of DeSante himself (who did not identify the two wood-pewees he observed to subspecies), we doubt the identifications of these specimens as *peninsulae*, and suggest that the lowland pewees found in the Cape Region (including Cerralvo) are more likely to have come from populations far removed, rather than from the Sierra de La Laguna. Pyle examined the two CAS specimens (62650 and 68583) and could not distinguish them definitively from any other fall-collected Western Wood-Pewees in the collection.

Bank Swallow. An unknown number seen 17 Oct 1968. The only previous published record for the Baja California Peninsula was for San José del Cabo, Sep 1890 (Bryant 1891), as reported by Grinnell (1928): “thousands of swallows, in which this species was chiefly represented.” The Bank Swallow has been reported in the Cape District many times subsequently, and in the 21st century has been found annually at localities scattered throughout the peninsula, usually in low numbers (eBird.org).

Swainson’s Thrush. One banded 1 Oct 1968. Swainson’s Thrush is one of several neotropical migrant species whose migration circumvents the more distal portions of the Baja California Peninsula. Besides DeSante’s, there are no other records from the coastal lowlands in the Cape Region, and very few from the foothills (one 13 Jun

1887, Brewster 1902; four 1 Oct–7 Nov 2005–2012, eBird.org) and mountains (three 4–16 May 1887, Brewster 1902). Only the *ustulatus* group of subspecies (Russet-backed Thrush) has been confirmed on the Baja California Peninsula (Ramos 1991, Erickson et al. 2020).

Lawrence's Goldfinch. First observed 29 Oct 1968; adult male collected 5 Nov 1968 (CAS 68592; Wilbur 1987). This established the first record for Baja California Sur, and there has been only one subsequent record for the Cape Region (10 Nov 2014; N. Am. Birds 69: 160).

Chestnut-collared Longspur. One seen 28 Oct 1968 (Wilbur 1987, Hamilton and Howell 2001) was the first for Baja California Sur, and still one of only five recorded for the state.

Bobolink. One male collected 20 Nov 1968 (Wilbur 1987; CAS 68590, in formative plumage though DeSante labeled it as an adult) established the first record of the Bobolink for the Baja California Peninsula. At least 30 have since been recorded in northwestern Baja California Sur (1996–2019; eBird.org, Erickson unpubl. data), but the only subsequent record for the Cape Region is of up to three at Estero San José 1–3 Oct 2005 (N. Am. Birds 60: 146).

Bullock's Oriole. One banded 3 Oct 1968. The only prior records for Baja California Sur are from San Ignacio (Bancroft 1930) and Agua Caliente (23.442° N, 109.774° W), where two specimens were collected on 16 and 19 Apr 1910 (MCZ 318642 and 318643). Bullock's Oriole is another species whose migration typically circumvents Baja California Sur, and it remains a rare visitor to the state (Erickson et al. 2023).

Lucy's Warbler. Several seen, beginning 12 Oct 1968; two collected (31 Oct 1968, CAS 68586, male in formative plumage; 15 Nov 1968, CAS 68585, adult male). These represent the first records of Lucy's Warbler for Baja California Sur, where the species is now a rare fall and winter visitor (Erickson et al. 2023).

Nashville Warbler. One seen 22 Nov 1968 was the first reported for the Cape Region, where the Nashville Warbler is now a rare fall and winter visitor (Erickson et al. 2023).

Myrtle Warbler. One collected 31 Oct 1968 (CAS 68588, female in formative plumage) was the first reported for Baja California Sur, where the subspecies is now considered a regular winter visitor (Erickson et al. 2013).

Painted Bunting. A male in formative plumage captured 15 Nov 1968 died in captivity 26 Nov 1968 (Wilbur 1987; CAS 68591, labeled *P. c. pallidior*, though Thompson [1991] and Pyle [2022] considered the species monotypic). This was the first record for the Baja California Peninsula, where the species remains a rare vagrant (Erickson et al. 2023), although its true status may be somewhat obscured by escaped cagebirds (Mlodinow and Hamilton 2005).

## Orientation Tests

DeSante tested the orientation of 86 individuals of 22 species. "A total of 136 orientation traces were obtained. The results of these tests indicate that:

Freshly captured wild birds will show a strong nocturnal orientation or *Zugunruhe* only if they are migrating that night. Birds captured while entering a night roost did not show *Zugunruhe* even though they had heavy fat deposits and apparently migrated a few nights after being released.

These wild birds generally maintained a fixed orientation during successive nights of testing. A captive bird often developed an orientation even if it was inactive the first night.

Of the 22 species tested, five were vagrants. Three of these, a Painted Bunting, a Lucy's Warbler, and a Palm Warbler had consistent west or south-

west—out into the ocean—orientations. Two October Black-and-white Warblers, however, oriented east or southeast—toward the mainland. A Northern Waterthrush and three November-caught Black-and-white Warblers were unoriented. One of these Black-and-white Warblers was later found wintering in San José del Cabo, only [40 km] away. [The Black-and-white Warbler and Northern Waterthrush are now known to winter regularly in the Cape Region and are no longer considered vagrants there.]

The general direction of regular migrants [e.g., Orange-crowned Warbler] was found to be southeast, roughly parallel to the lie of the peninsula.”

#### Observations away from the Cabo San Lucas Study Area

Tundra Swan *Cygnus columbianus*. Three at Estero San José 8 Dec 1968 were the first found south of La Paz (Wilbur 1987). The species is a very rare winter visitor on the Baja California Peninsula (Erickson et al. 2023).

Yellow-billed Cuckoo *Coccyzus americanus*. One found dead, “badly shot up,” 14 Oct 1968 was incorrectly attributed to the state of Baja California by Wilbur (1987). Although we do not know the actual location of “El Saucito,” we do know that DeSante did not travel north of 28° N in October 1968. The Yellow-billed Cuckoo is an uncommon summer resident in the Cape Region.

South Polar Skua *Stercorarius maccormicki*. DeSante noted one approximately 26 km southeast of Cabo San Lucas 19 Oct 1968 (not 1971, as reported by Wilbur 1987). Another approximately 200 km southeast of Cabo San Lucas 21 Oct 1968 was apparently closer to the Tres Marias Islands, and therefore in the waters of Nayarit. The only prior Mexican report of this now regularly occurring species appears to be that of one 60 nautical miles west-southwest of Islas Coronado, Baja California, 10 May 1961 (Audubon Field Notes 15: 438).

Cooper’s Hawk *Accipiter cooperii*. One was seen flying north, approximately 7 km southeast of Cabo San Lucas, 19 Oct 1968. Cooper’s Hawks are rarely observed at sea.

American Kestrel *Falco sparverius*. One was approximately 40 km southeast of Cabo San Lucas, 19 Oct 1968. Similarly, kestrels are rarely observed at sea,

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*. Seen at the town of Cabo San Lucas 26 Sep 1968. Bancroft (1930) first reported the species in Baja California Sur at Santa Rosalía, but there appear to be no other records prior to 1968. The species is now common and widespread at human settlements throughout the state (eBird.org).

Gray-headed Junco *Junco hyemalis caniceps*. Four at La Laguna 10–11 Nov 1968 (Wilbur 1987; 2 collected: CAS 68594, male in formative plumage; CNAV 011693) established the first records of *J. h. caniceps* for the Baja California Peninsula. Remarkably, the subspecies has not been confirmed in southern Baja California Sur since. The eight recorded elsewhere in the state were in the Vizcaíno Peninsula region (7) or on Isla Carmen (1; eBird.org; Erickson unpubl. data).

Oregon Junco *Junco hyemalis thurberi/shufeldti*. One collected at La Laguna 10 Nov 1968 (Erickson et al. 2001; CAS 68593, male in formative plumage) established the first record for Baja California Sur. Pyle examined the specimen, and its plumage color appears well saturated as in a first-fall male of the population breeding in western Washington and western Oregon—*shufeldti* according to Miller (1941) but named *simillimus* by Phillips (1962). The Oregon Junco has proved to be of casual occurrence in northern Baja California Sur south to Bahía Asunción (27.13° N, eBird.org) and San Francisco de la Sierra (27.60° N, three on 8 Apr 2022, Marrón). But since 1968 it has been reported only once from the Cape Region (Sierra Las Pirras, 8 Jan 2022, N. Block, <https://ebird.org/checklist/S100475591>).

Louisiana Waterthrush *Parkesia motacilla*. Two at La Laguna 11 Nov 1968 (Wil-

bur 1987, Hamilton and Howell 2001) were the first found in Baja California Sur. The Louisiana Waterthrush was unrecorded thereafter until 2011, but since then has been found with some regularity in winter in the Sierra de La Laguna (eBird.org).

Black-throated Blue Warbler *Setophaga caerulescens*. A male in formative plumage at La Laguna 12 Nov 1968 (Wilbur 1987; *S. c. caerulescens*; CAS 68587) was the first found in Baja California Sur. The Black-throated Blue Warbler has been recorded only twice in the Cape Region since 1968, at Caduaño 25–27 Jan 2003 and Sierra de La Laguna 10 Nov 2019 (eBird.org). Elsewhere in Baja California Sur, two have been found in winter (one for three consecutive years) and at least 25 in fall (eBird.org, Erickson unpubl. data).

Palm Warbler *Setophaga palmarum*. A female in formative plumage collected at Migriño 6 Oct 1968 (Wilbur 1987; *S. p. palmarum*, CAS 68589) was the first recorded in Baja California Sur. In the Cape Region, the Palm Warbler is now found annually in winter in very small numbers (eBird.org).

Hermit Warbler *Setophaga occidentalis*. One at La Laguna 10 Nov 1968 (presumably representing the “one fall record in the Cape district” [Wilbur 1987]) was the first reported from Baja California Sur. It is currently considered a rare winter visitor in the mountains of the Cape Region (Erickson et al. 2023).

## DISCUSSION

DeSante visited Cabo San Lucas hoping to encounter a good showing of vagrant passerines, especially wood warblers. His subsequent field work at Southeast Farallon Island (DeSante 1973), was aimed at documenting “mirror-image vagrancy,” now widely viewed as one of the causal mechanisms for bird vagrancy around the world (Howell et al. 2014, Lees and Gilroy 2021). He was disappointed that the Blackpoll Warbler (*Setophaga striata*)—the primary focus of his dissertation due to the strong southeastern directional component to its normal migration—went unrecorded altogether. That species remains unrecorded as a fall vagrant in the Cape Region, or anywhere in southern Baja California Sur; the only observations from that area are at San José del Cabo on 23 May 2006 (N. Am. Birds 60:442) and 8 Jan 2009 (N. Am. Birds 63:328). Among DeSante’s other somewhat surprising misses of this sort were the American Redstart (*Setophaga ruticilla*) and especially the Orchard Oriole (*Icterus spurius*), given their regularity in the Cape Region now. The American Redstart has been known as a winter visitor to the Cape Region since 1883 (Grinnell 1928). These issues were noted briefly by Erickson et al. (2001), as part of a larger discussion of vagrancy on the entire Baja California Peninsula.

Among western migrants, DeSante’s findings of the Western Wood-Pewee and Swainson’s Thrush would be considered exceptional today. Somewhat surprising misses of western migrants included the Warbling Vireo (*Vireo gilvus*), Lincoln’s Sparrow (*Melospiza lincolni*), and Black-throated Gray Warbler (*Setophaga nigrescens*).

The presence or absence of certain species in the study area in 1968 reflects actual changes in distribution. The Eurasian Collared-Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*) and European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) are non-native species that in 1968 had not yet reached Cabo San Lucas. Neither did DeSante note the Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon; *Columba livia*), but Grinnell (1928) and Wilbur (1987) did not address this species at all (Howell et al. 2001), so comparisons

with earlier times are not possible. The earliest reports for Baja California Sur in eBird are from 1976. As noted above, another non-native species, the House Sparrow, was first recorded by DeSante in 1968. Native species regular today at Cabo San Lucas that were not present in 1968 include the Ruddy Ground Dove (*Columbina talpacoti*; first recorded on the peninsula in 1990), Anna's Hummingbird (*Calypte anna*), and apparently Great Egret (*Ardea alba*). The Common Raven was not recorded during the first two weeks of DeSante's visit, a feat that would seem to be impossible today given this species' close association with human development.

We are surprised by several other species unrecorded at DeSante's study area in 1968, and we are unable to speculate on why. These include the Willet (*Tringa semipalmata*), Caspian Tern (*Hydroprogne caspia*), Northern Harrier (*Circus hudsonius*), and Black-throated Sparrow (*Amphispiza bilineata*). The Yellow-footed Gull (*Larus livens*) had not been split from Western Gull at that time, so its absence from DeSante's lists is not surprising. Both gull species are regular in the Cape Region now. Knowledge of bird identification was more primitive in 1968, as were opportunities for photography. DeSante's notes make clear that he grappled with several bird identifications, and it is likely that had he had access to today's tools and knowledge, he would have recorded even more than he did.

In closing, we wish to emphasize the opportunities for study that remain at the tip of the Baja California Peninsula. To our knowledge, there still has never been a systematic census of raptor movement at the cape, or diurnal movement of landbirds either. The searching for vagrants that has been intensive farther north on the peninsula (e.g., Erickson et al. 2001) has been less so in the Cape Region. However, we do note the establishment of a new satellite campus of the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California Sur in Cabo San Lucas, and an associated avian study group led by Emer García. We look forward to their findings.

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