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Birding

AMERICAN BIRDING ASSOCIATION



Introducing Scripps's Murrelet!

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Redux, v. 2012

a real possibility to appear on a San Diego pelagic trip in midwinter. The main confusion species there are Black-vented, Manx, and Townsend's shearwaters, but Galápagos Shearwater is noticeably smaller with shorter wings, and, if seen well, many have white markings about the eye. Some birds have extensive dusky wing linings, which, if present, are also helpful in identification. For more on this species, see Steve N.G. Howell's recently released *Petrels, Albatrosses, and Storm-Petrels of North America*.

Xantus's Murrelet Split

Say goodbye to the Xantus's Murrelet! The two taxa until recently treated as readily identifiable subspecies are now afforded species status and—believe it or not—have been given new names. This is an A=B+C split. Unlike some other recent splits (for example, Winter Wren split into Winter Wren and Pacific Wren), we won't have to wonder what people mean when they use the old name. "Xantus's Murrelet" will function like "Solitary Vireo" and "Traill's Flycatcher," useful descriptors for ambiguous-looking or poorly seen birds in those groups.

The two species are called Scripps's Murrelet (*Synthliboramphus scrippsi*) and Guadalupe Murrelet (*S. hypoleucus*). Scripps's Murrelet is the species that breeds widely in the Channel Islands off California and off northern Baja California, and is often seen (usually not terribly far from shore) well north in California waters, even on occasion in Washington and British Columbia. Guadalupe Murrelet breeds around Guadalupe and San Benito islands off the west coast of the central Baja California Peninsula; it is much less common in U.S. waters (usually occurring well offshore) than Scripps's and has occurred as far north as Washington. Although impossible to say for sure, if you've seen only one or two "Xantus's Murrelets" off the West Coast, they were likely Scripps's.

The two species are easily identifiable with a good look at the face. Guadalupe has a paler face overall, with pale auriculars and a large white crescent in front of and partially over the eye that produces a vaguely spectacled appearance. In Scripps's, this marking is reduced to a small white "tongue" in front of the eye. Guadalupe has a longer and thinner bill, on average, making it intermediate between Scripps's and Craveri's in this regard. Both differ from the similar Craveri's Murrelet in having paler, grayer upperparts, in lacking a substantial black "spur" at the shoulder, in having a white (rather than black) chin, and in having white (rather than dusky) wing linings.



Members-only Online Content

Want more? Of course you do! ABA members can't get enough of splits and lumps, of name changes and checklist shuffles, of anything and everything affecting their lists. **Peter Pyle** and **Michael L. P. Retter**—authors of two feature articles in this issue—hold strong opinions on these topics. And they share their opinions, by means of an online conversation available only to ABA members. To hear from Peter and Michael, go to: aba.org/birding/2012-september

Galápagos Shearwaters superficially resemble Black-vented and Manx shearwaters, but they're smaller, with shorter wings. Their flight is more fluttery, and they often have white, spectacle-like markings around the eye. *Off Puerto Ángel, Oaxaca; January 2010. Photo by © Michael L. P. Retter.*





Scripps's (left) and **Guadalupe** (right) murrelets differ markedly in facial pattern and are readily identifiable with a good view of the head—something, unfortunately, these tiny alcids don't always give observers. *Graphite on paper* by © Michael L. P. Retter.

Gray Hawk Split

This is a split of the $A=A+B$ variety, if you're talking about standard English names; with scientific names, it's $B'=A'+B'$! Fortunately for the ABA Area, any confusion should be momentarily limited to the scientific name only. *Buteo nitidus* (Gray Hawk) has been split into *B. nitidus* (Gray-lined Hawk) and *B. plagiatus* (Gray Hawk). The latter is the species found in the ABA Area, south to central Costa Rica. Gray-lined Hawk is found from southern Costa Rica south. The two are "allopatric" in distribution; that is, they do not overlap.

Not only are the genetic data convincing, but the birds also look and sound different. Adult Gray Hawks are relatively unpatterned medium gray above, whereas Gray-lined Hawks are barred slate gray and ashy gray above—rather like a darker version of the underparts. In addition, the juvenile plumages differ. Compared to the juvenile Gray Hawk, the juvenile Gray-lined Hawk has a paler head with a less contrasting dark cap and very little in the way of a dark malar stripe; in some ways, the juvenile Gray-lined resembles a pale Rough-legged Hawk. Juvenile Gray-lined Hawks have large dark blotches on the flanks that Grays lack, and they have pale primary windows (like juvenile Red-tailed Hawks) in flight, also lacking in Gray Hawks. For more details, check out Brian A. Millsap and coauthors' paper in *The Condor* that led to the split <tinyurl.com/2GrayHawks>.

Given that the word "line" usually refers to a mark along the length of a bird's body, the name Gray-lined Hawk for a species covered in gray (transverse) bars is puzzling to me. The name is said to have a historical basis, but it strikes me as misleading if not downright incorrect. At least the Ring-necked Duck has a ring 'round the neck when you are holding an adult male specimen in perfect light. You'll be looking for a long time to



Breeding ranges of "Xantus's Murrelets." Scripps's nests on islands indicated in **red**; Guadalupe nests on Guadalupe Island, indicated in **blue**. Both species have been found on islands indicated in **purple**. The situation on the Channel Islands is complex: Scripps's is absent from San Nicholas Island but present elsewhere; Guadalupe has nested on Santa Barbara and San Clemente islands, but its present status is unclear. *Map by* © Kei Sochi.

find gray lines on a Gray-lined Hawk. I wonder if Northern Gray-Hawk and Southern Gray-Hawk might have been better choices for the standard English names.

Falcons, Parrots, and Passerines

Hold on to your seat. Genetic data from multiple studies have now confirmed that the falcons and parrots are related to the passerines. Specifically, passerines and parrots are each other's closest relatives (they are "sister groups"), and the passerine-parrot grouping is the closest relative of the falcons. So expect