

Calliope Hummingbird *Stellula calliope*

North America's smallest bird breeds in western coniferous forests and winters in central Mexico. At the latitude of San Diego County, its usual nesting habitat lies at an elevation higher than the tops the county's highest mountains. Thus it occurs in San Diego County mainly as a rare spring migrant. A few birds have occurred in summer on Palomar and Hot Springs mountains and even engaged in courtship displays, but the species' nesting in the county has not yet been confirmed.

Migration: The Calliope Hummingbird is seen in San Diego County mainly in April, occasionally as early as the last week of March. Exceptionally early records are of one in Presidio Park (R8) 5 March 1976 (AB 30:892, 1976) and one that struck a window in downtown San Diego (S9) 18 February 2000 (L. van Epps, NAB 54:221, 2000, SDNHM 50375). During the atlas period our latest was one at Point Loma (S7) 16 May 2001 (G. C. Hazard); in previous years the species was reported as late as 24 May (1982, one in the Tijuana River valley, T. Meixner, AB 36: 894, 1982) and 25 May (1985, one at Point Loma, C. G. Edwards).

Numbers of Calliope Hummingbirds passing through San Diego County vary somewhat from year to year. Usually the species is rare and seen singly, but Point Loma has been the site of concentrations as large as 15 on 30 April 1989 (J. Oldenettel, AB 43:537, 1989). In the exceptionally dry spring of 2002 Calliope Hummingbirds, like some other migrants, concentrated in irrigated ornamental plantings in San Diego and were reported continuously from 9 March to 20 May with up to 12 per day (R. E. Webster, NAB 56:357, 2002). The species is encountered most frequently along the coast, especially at Point Loma,



Photo by Anthony Mercieca

but occurrences are scattered over the coastal slope. In the Anza-Borrego Desert the only records are of one along Coyote Creek 26 March 1979 (B. Cord), one in nearby Box Canyon (C23) 19 April 2000 (M. B. Mulrooney), one at the Borrego sewage ponds (H25) 20 April 2002 (G. C. Hazard), two at Yaqui Well (I24) 26 April 1984 (A. Baker), and two at nearby Tamarisk Grove 18 April 2002 (R. Thériault).

The only fall record is of a single bird in the Tijuana River valley 26 September 1981 (E. Copper). The Calliope Hummingbird migrates in a loop heading north along the Pacific coast, south along the Rocky Mountains (Phillips 1975), so the species is not expected in San Diego County in fall. The route by which the bulk of the population crosses from mainland Mexico to the Pacific coast of the United States is not well known but probably largely north of San Diego County.

Breeding distribution: Before we initiated field work for this atlas, the only summer records of the Calliope Hummingbird in San Diego County were of a male displaying to a female on Hot Springs Mountain (E21) 24 June 1980 (Unitt 1981) and a male near the Palomar

Observatory (D15) throughout July 1983 (R. Higson, AB 37:1028, 1983). Thus the number of possibly breeding Calliope Hummingbirds we noted from 1997 to 2001 was a surprise. On Hot Springs Mountain, at 5040 feet elevation near San Ignacio (E21), K. L. Weaver and C. R. Mahrtdt noted one 18 May 2001. Near the north base of the mountain, at 4850 feet elevation 3.1 miles north-northwest of the summit (D20), J. M. and B. Hargrove observed a male displaying to a female 10 May 1999. Around High Point, Palomar Mountain (D15), at patches

of scarlet bugler and scarlet larkspur, Weaver noted one 13–14 May 1999, two males and one female 20 May 2000, and one male and two females 12 July 2000. Completely unexpected was his discovery of a male and female in a small glade at 1900 feet elevation in Marion Canyon on the southwest slope of Palomar Mountain (D12) 18 June 2001. Nesting of the Calliope Hummingbird may be possible even in this area; it has been reported exceptionally from foothill oak woodland at 420 feet elevation in Placer County (Williams 2001).