

**Canvasback *Aythya valisineria***

Unlike many wintering ducks, which return to the same sites year after year, the Canvasback is rather irregular. Almost everywhere it occurs it is usually uncommon, yet large flocks appear from time to time on some lakes and lagoons. Though the brackish lagoons of northern San Diego County are some of the Canvasback’s most consistent sites, the species is rare on the salt water of San Diego and Mission bays.

**Winter:** From 1997 to 2002 O’Neill Lake, Camp Pendleton (E6), was by far the principal site for the Canvasback in San Diego County. Counts there exceeded 150 every year of the atlas period and reached a maximum of 600 on 4 December 1999 (P. A. Ginsburg). The next most important site was Buena Vista Lagoon, where counts were at least 20 in the west basin (H5) in all five years and reached a maximum of 232 on 27 December 1997 (D. Rorick). Large numbers were fairly frequent at the Santa Margarita River mouth (G4; up to 250 on 8 February 2000, P. A. Ginsburg) and in the east basin of Batiquitos Lagoon (J7; up to 120 on 26 February and 18 December 1999, M. Baumgartel). The Canvasback is often found on lakes elsewhere in northwestern San Diego County, making this region the nucleus of the species’ distribution in the county.

Elsewhere the Canvasback is more scattered and less consistent. Lake Cuyamaca (M20) is one of the more regular sites, with up to 50 on 14 December 1999 (A. P. and T. E. Keenan). We also found the Canvasback repeatedly in southeastern San Diego County with up to 42 at Corte Madera Lake (Q20) 21 February 1999 (W. E. Haas), 76 in Round Potrero (T20) 23 December 1999 (L. J. Hargrove), and 40 at Tule Lake (T27) 5 January 2000 (F. L. Unmack). With the installation of ponds in the Borrego Valley the



Photo by Anthony Mercieca

Canvasback has become a rare visitor in that area, with up to three individuals on golf courses in Borrego Springs (G24) 21 February 1999 (P. D. Ache) and 17 December 2000–21 January 2001 (S. and J. Berg).

Atlas participants saw one or two Canvasbacks on Mission Bay only twice and did not find any on San Diego Bay. Various intensive surveys of San Diego Bay 1988–95 yielded only a single sighting, of three in the bay’s southeast corner (U10) 26 November 1988 (Macdonald et al. 1990).

**Migration:** The Canvasback begins arriving in San Diego County in early November (Unitt 1984); arrival in October could be expected because the species has been found as early as 7 October at the Salton Sea (Patten et al. 2003). Spring departure is in March and early April. A count as high as 100 at O’Neill Lake 26 March 2001 (P. A. Ginsburg) was exceptionally late. Our latest spring migrant was one at Round Potrero 16 April 2000 (P. Unitt).

Summer stragglers have been recorded at Carlsbad 14 June 1982 (T. A. Meixner, AB 36:1015, 1982), Batiquitos Lagoon 29 July 1989 (J. Oldennett, AB 43:1367, 1989), and Lake Cuyamaca (16 May 1964, G. McCaskie; 8 June 2000, J. D. Barr; 24 August 2002, J. R. Barth, P. Unitt).

**Conservation:** The Canvasback’s population rangewide, monitored closely because of the species’ popularity with duck hunters, has fluctuated considerably. It decreased from 1982 to 1995 but then rebounded (Mowbray 2002). The Canvasback’s decline at the Salton Sea has not been reversed (Patten et al. 2003). Any trend in San Diego County is obscured by the species’ irregularity.

