

## Cinnamon Teal *Anas cyanoptera*

Unlike the Mallard and Gadwall, the Cinnamon Teal has enjoyed no great population increase in San Diego County. Instead, the population may be slipping with the loss of the shallow natural wetlands that the teal favors. Deeper reservoirs without a fringe of low wet vegetation are inferior habitat. Currently, the Cinnamon Teal is common as a spring migrant, generally uncommon as a breeding summer resident, and fairly common as a fall migrant and winter visitor.

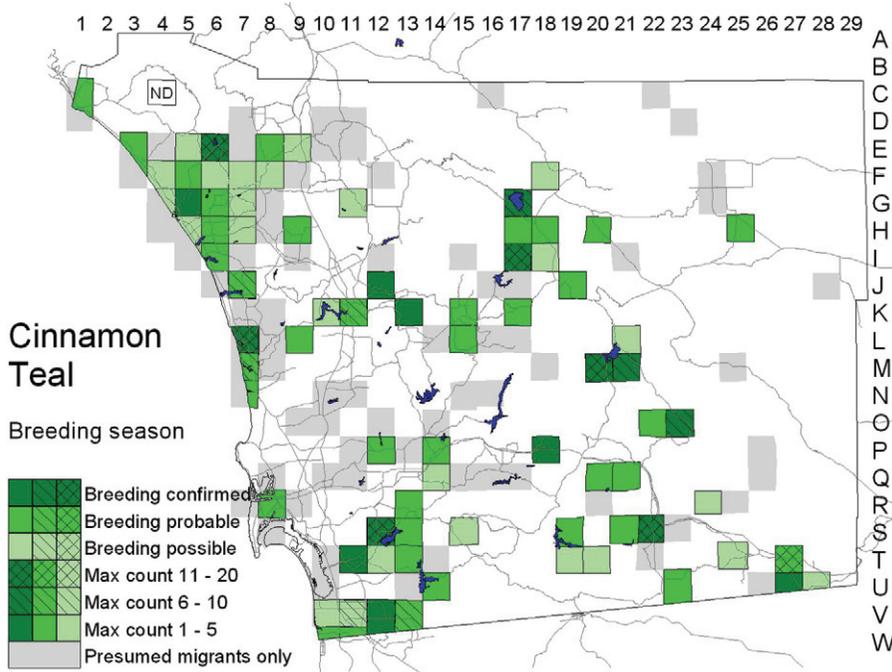
**Breeding distribution:** Nesting Cinnamon Teals are widely scattered on the coastal slope of San Diego County and extend east over the divide on the Campo Plateau and possibly in San Felipe Valley. But they are seldom common. During the narrow interval from mid May to early July when migrants are not expected, our high counts were of 16 (including young) at O'Neill Lake (E6) 4 July 2000 (P. A. Ginsburg), 15 (including young) on Sweetwater Reservoir (S12) 8 June 1998 (P. Famolaro), 16 at the upper end of Lake Morena (S22) 2 July 2000, chicks there 31 May 1998 (R. and S. L. Breisch), and 20 at Tule Lake (T27) 21 June 2000 (J. K. Wilson). Other known nesting sites include Lake Henshaw (G17), the Mesa Grande area (I17), Cuyamaca Lake (M20/M21), and Big Laguna Lake (O23), so in San Diego County the Cinnamon Teal is just as likely to nest well inland as in the coastal lagoons and lowland. Even intermittent ponds can support the species: at a pond 2 miles south of Bankhead Springs (U27), empty in dry years, the Cinnamon Teal has nested repeatedly (F. L. Unmack). Nesting is not confirmed in the Borrego Valley but possible. In 1998, at the Borrego sewage ponds (H25), six were in courtship

*Photo by Anthony Mercieca*

display 5 April 1998 (P. D. Jorgensen) and one remained until 23 May (H. L. Young, M. B. Mosher).

**Nesting:** Like other dabbling ducks the Cinnamon Teal nests on the ground near water, in and often under dense vegetation. From 1997 to 2001 almost all our confirma-





the lower Santa Margarita River (G5) 25 January 1998 (B. C. Moore). During migration, Cinnamon Teals visit salt water, which they avoid at other seasons. Quarterly surveys of south San Diego Bay outside the salt works 1988–89 found the species only in early spring (maximum 22 on 7 February 1989, Macdonald et al. 1990). Weekly surveys within the salt works 1993–94 found it February–April and in September almost exclusively (maximum 27 on 24 February 1993, Stadtlander and Konecny 1994).

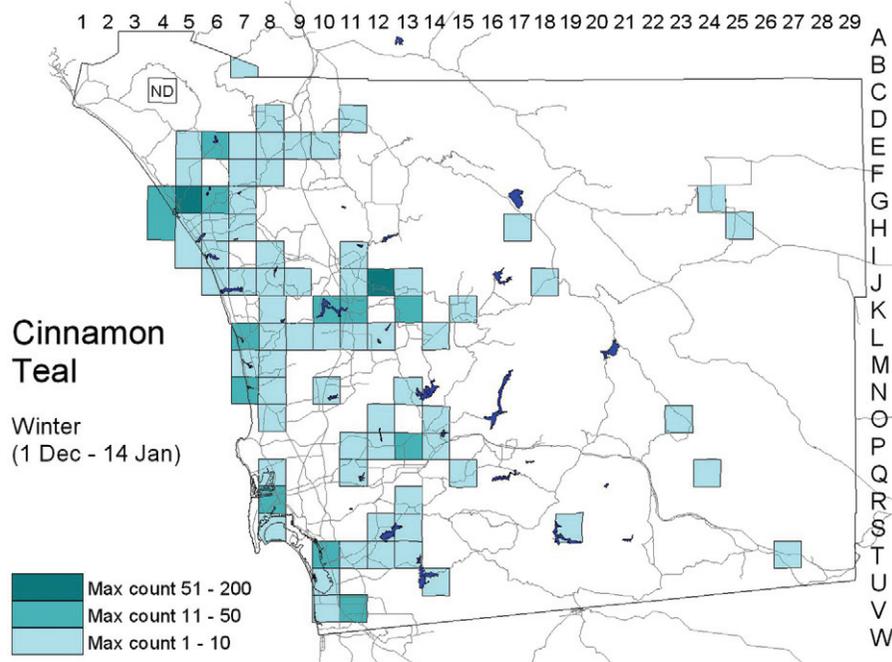
In the Anza–Borrego Desert the Cinnamon Teal is noted most often from February to early April, with high counts of 20 at the Borrego Springs sewage ponds 9 February 1993

tions of the species' breeding were sightings of chicks, on dates ranging from 24 April to 3 August. This interval suggests the species lays at least from late March to June. Cooper (1880) collected a female with an egg in her oviduct near San Luis Rey (G6) 22 June 1861, and G. McCaskie found a nest with eggs at Lake Cuyamaca (M20) 25 June 1978.

**Migration:** In San Diego County the Cinnamon Teal is considerably more widespread and numerous as a migrant than as either a breeding bird or winter visitor. It is also one of the area's earliest migrants. Its numbers increase rapidly in late January, and our highest count during the atlas period was of 300 on ponds near

(A. G. Morley) and 4 April 1997 (H. L. Young, M. B. Mosher). Eleven in Borrego Springs (G24) 4 May 2000 (P. D. Ache) suggest the teal's spring migration extends into early May. Away from artificial ponds, the birds stop occasionally at natural oases and even in the shade of boulders, far from water, to wait out the day. To their great surprise, atlas observers encountered Cinnamon Teals in rocky waterless desert twice: 15 were in Bow Willow Canyon (P26) 19 February 2001 (A. P. and T. E. Keenan); three were 3.5 miles southwest of Ocotillo Wells (J28) 4 April 2000 (J. R. Barth).

Fall migration extends mainly from mid July (40 at Lake Henshaw 17 July 1998, C. G. Edwards) to October. Four fall records from the Anza–Borrego Desert range from 15 August to 30 September.



**Winter:** Because of the species' migration schedule, the map of the Cinnamon Teal's winter distribution shows only records from 1 December to 14 January. The Cinnamon Teal winters mainly in the coastal lowland, on fresh or brackish water. Sites of exceptional concentration are the Wild Animal Park (J12; up to 200 on 30 December 1999, D. and D. Bylin; 72 on 30 December 2000, K. L. Weaver) and sewage ponds near the Santa Margarita River mouth (G5; up to 150 on 8 January 2000, R. E. Fischer). Elsewhere we found fewer than 50 and seldom more than 20. A few appeared in the foothills and mountains, twice even as

high as 5400 feet elevation at Big Laguna Lake (O23; one on 6 December 1999, D. S. Cooper; four on 24 December 2001, P. Unitt). Wintering Cinnamon Teals also show up rarely on ponds in the Borrego Valley. The species has been recorded on five of 19 Anza–Borrego Christmas bird counts 1984–2002, with a maximum of six on 22 December 1996.

**Conservation:** The status of the Cinnamon Teal in San Diego County seems not to have changed greatly through history. Loss of shallow natural wetlands, ideal Cinnamon Teal habitat, may have been offset by the importation of water. Numbers on San Diego Christmas bird counts have gyrated, from a low of two in 1971 to a high of 219 in 1992 and back down to nine in 2000 and 2002. But these

changes are likely due to variations in water levels and habitat changes within that circle; other counts in the county have been more stable. Nevertheless, there could be some broader decline: the numbers King et al. (1987) reported as averages at San Elijo Lagoon 1973–83 were seldom equaled anywhere in the county 1997–2002. The 42 young with 5 adult females at the east end of Lake Hodges (K11) 19 June 1982 (K. L. Weaver) were not equaled 1997–2002.

**Taxonomy:** All Cinnamon Teals in North America are *A. c. septentrionalium* Snyder and Lumsden, 1951. In addition to hybrid Cinnamon × Blue-winged Teals, a hybrid between the Cinnamon Teal and Northern Shoveler was reported from near Imperial Beach 1 March 1984 (E. Copper, AB 38:357, 1984).