

Common Ground-Dove *Columbina passerina*

In spite of urban sprawl, agriculture remains important in San Diego County. Orchards, nurseries, and rural ranchettes are the Common Ground-Dove's principal habitat here. Indeed, agriculture is doubtless responsible for the dove's colonization of San Diego County, which began in the 1950s. Currently, the ground-dove is common and increasing in the Anza–Borrego Desert, mainly in the Borrego Valley, and uncommon and more or less static on the coastal slope, mainly in the inland valleys of the north county.

Breeding distribution: In San Diego County, the Common Ground-Dove is most widespread in the region of northwestern San Diego County dominated by avocado and citrus orchards. In this region it uses riparian woodland as well as artificial habitats. During spring and summer we encountered up to 10 per day in this area, as along the San Luis Rey River between Rice Canyon and Pala (D10) 10 June 2000 (K. Aldern, M. Bache) and at Valley Center (G11) in April 1997 (V. Dineen). One was at Buena Vista Lagoon (H6) 26 May 1997 (D. Rorick), but otherwise records at this season are at least 7 miles inland and below 1500 feet elevation. In southwestern San Diego County the only site where the ground-dove is currently resident year round is Rios Canyon just east of Lakeside (P15), an area of avocado orchards (nine on 11 May 2001, C. G. Edwards).

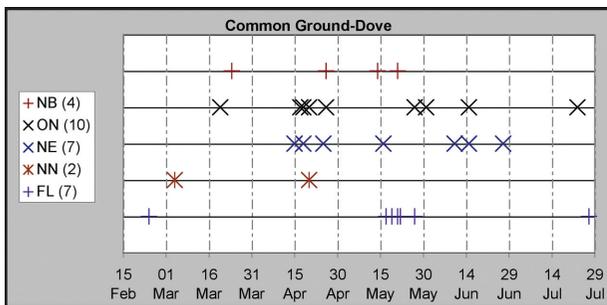
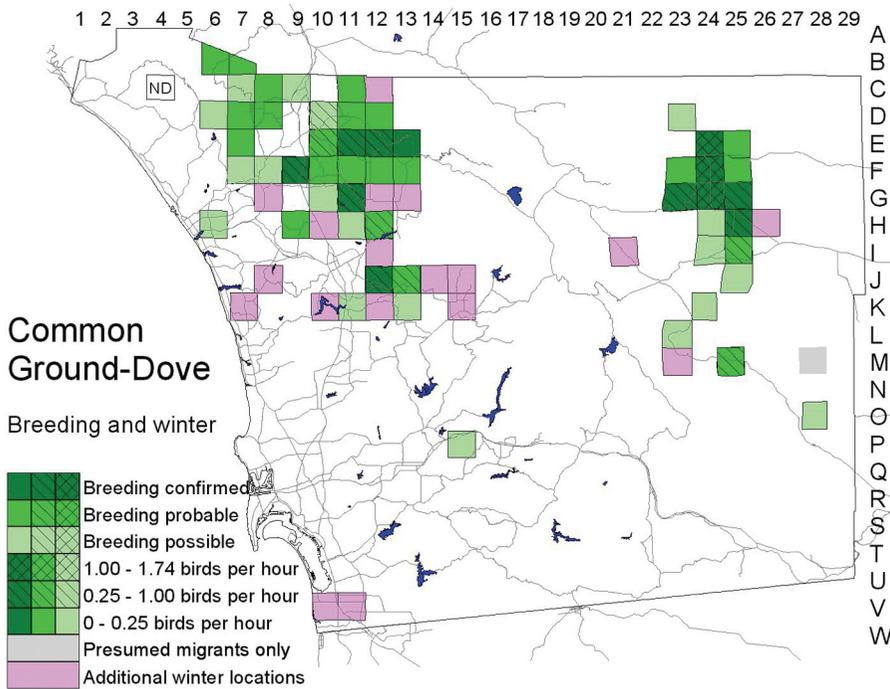
In the Anza–Borrego Desert, the ground-dove is concentrated in the Borrego Valley, in both the area of grapefruit orchards in the north end of the valley (E24; up



Photo by Anthony Mercieca

to 20 on 18 April 1998, P. K. Nelson) and in the residential areas of Borrego Springs (G24; up to 15 on 30 April 1997, P. D. Ache). It is evidently a permanent resident also in the mesquite thicket at Vallecito (M25), with up to five on 12 May 1999 (M. C. Jorgensen). Elsewhere in the Anza–Borrego Desert the ground-dove is irregular and not confirmed breeding, though this is possible, as the birds have been heard singing and seen in pairs, as at Yaqui Well and Tamarisk Grove (I24) 21 May 1998 (P. K. Nelson).

Nesting: Like other doves, the Common Ground-Dove builds only a minimal platform of twigs. Nest sites atlas observers described were in a palo verde, a tamarisk, a California fan palm, on an eave of a house, and inside a greenhouse. In the last, the eggs hatched on 25 July 1999, in spite of daily high temperatures in the shade at the nest ranging from 115 to 130° F, 10–20 degrees hotter than outside the greenhouse (P. D. Jorgensen).



The Common Ground-Dove has an unusually long breeding season, nesting repeatedly even if successful. Most nesting in San Diego County takes place from March through June, but a nest with nestlings in Borrego Springs (G24) 4 March 1997 (R. Thériault) and a fledgling on Hellhole Bajada (G23) 24 February 1999 (M. L. Gabel) translate to egg laying in mid February and late January, respectively. Even in the Anza-Borrego Desert the doves lay as late as the first half of July, as shown by a juvenile that fledged in Borrego Springs 27 July 1999 (R. Thériault) and the eggs that hatched in the greenhouse 25 July 1999. Morley (1959) reported ground-doves nesting in the Tijuana River valley as late as 2 October 1958, with one nest with eggs and another with young on that date.

Winter: The Common Ground-Dove gathers into small flocks when not breeding, probably accounting for reported numbers in winter being greater than those in spring and summer. The Anza-Borrego Christmas bird count has yielded up to 339 in the Borrego Valley on 16 December 2001, and the highest count in a single atlas square was 76 in Borrego Springs (F24) 19 December 1999 (P. K. Nelson et al.). On the coastal slope, the highest winter count by far was of 36 at De Luz (B6) 31 January 1998 (K. L. Weaver), where the birds were feeding on left-

over seeds from old gourds in a gourd farm. Other counts on the coastal slope are of 12 or fewer.

The ground-dove is nonmigratory but disperses somewhat when not breeding, accounting for records a short distance from sites of residency, such as one near San Marcos Creek and Questhaven Road (J8) 2 December 1998 (J. O. Zimmer), one at Ramona (K15) 30 December 2000 (D. and C. Batzler), and two in San Felipe Valley (I21) 27 December 1999 (W. E. Haas). The ground-dove was seen repeatedly in winter in Pamo Valley (J15), with up to seven on 2 January 1999 (I. S. Quon); it is probably resident here and just missed during the breeding season. The small population in Rios Canyon (P15) was found in winter as well as

spring, with six on 28 January 2001 (C. G. Edwards).

Though formerly breeding fairly commonly in the Tijuana River valley (V10/V11), currently the ground-dove reaches that area only irregularly in fall and winter, presumably by dispersing north across the international border. The maximum reported there in winter during the atlas period was only four on 20 December 1997 (G. L. Rogers).

Conservation: Before 1957, the Common Ground-Dove was known in San Diego County only from five specimens, collected at San Pasqual “about 1900” (Willett 1912), 3 miles north of Escondido 29 June 1915 (Dixon 1916), in Mission Valley 10 November 1915 (Grey 1916, SDNHM 1887), at Lakeside 21 December 1923 (SDNHM 2846), and at Santee 28 February 1939 (SDNHM 18051). In 1957 the birds were discovered in the Tijuana River valley and confirmed nesting there the following year (Morley 1959, Sams 1959). The ground-dove apparently colonized northwestern San Diego County beginning in 1962; this was the first year it was recorded on the Oceanside Christmas bird count and noted at Pauma Valley by Eleanor Beemer, who observed birds there since the mid 1930s. In the Anza-Borrego Desert the first observation was in 1964 and the first recorded nest in 1972 (ABDSP database). Numbers in the Borrego Valley have increased steadily since—from 1984 to 1988 the average on the Anza-Borrego Christmas bird count was 60, whereas from 1997 to 2001 it was 217.

In the Tijuana River valley, however, the breeding population died out in 1984 after having persisted continuously since 1957. Presumably this change was the result of the steady encroachment of urbanization on both sides of the border, leaving the valley as a shrinking enclave of open space. Even though the ground-dove is a bird of modified habitats in southern California, it

requires extensive open ground for foraging. It does not tolerate high-intensity development in which the earth is scraped, paved, and landscaped. The scenario in the Tijuana River valley warns that the ground-dove could be eliminated from northwestern San Diego County too, as agriculture gives way to urban sprawl. Conservation of riparian woodland benefits the ground-dove, too. Along the Santa Margarita River north of Fallbrook, the ground-

dove population crashed in 1993, when floods washed away mature trees (K. L. Weaver).

Taxonomy: Common Ground-Doves in southern California are *C. p. pallescens* (Baird, 1860), as its name states a subspecies paler than others occurring farther east and south.