

Dickcissel *Spiza americana*

The Dickcissel breeds largely in the prairie region of the central United States and winters largely in the llanos of Venezuela, in immense flocks. Its frequency as a vagrant to San Diego County is on the decline, reaching about one every other fall by the beginning of the 21st century. Responsible factors likely include both overall population decline and local habitat changes, in the form of loss of the agricultural fields in the Tijuana River valley where the species had been found most often.

Migration: All of San Diego County's fall records of the Dickcissel are from the Tijuana River valley, Otay Mesa (V12/V13), and Point Loma (S7), except for one at Camp Pendleton 3 October 1964 (AFN 19:82, 1965). Their dates range from 7 September (1980, Tijuana River valley, AB 35:228, 1982) to 2 November (1968, Otay Mesa, AFN 23:112, 1969).

Winter: The county's single winter record of the Dickcissel is of one that frequented a feeder on Kearny Mesa (P9) 2



Photo by Richard E. Webster

December 1963–16 March 1964 (McCaskie et al. 1967c).

Conservation: The maximum annual count of Dickcissels in San Diego County was 12 in 1963 (McCaskie et al. 1967c). By the mid to late 1970s the species was occurring at a rate of one to four per year (Unitt 1984). From 1993 through 2003, however, only four were reported. The Dickcissel's concentration on the Venezuelan llanos in huge winter roosts renders the species vulnerable to mass killing, especially as it is regarded there as an agricultural pest.