

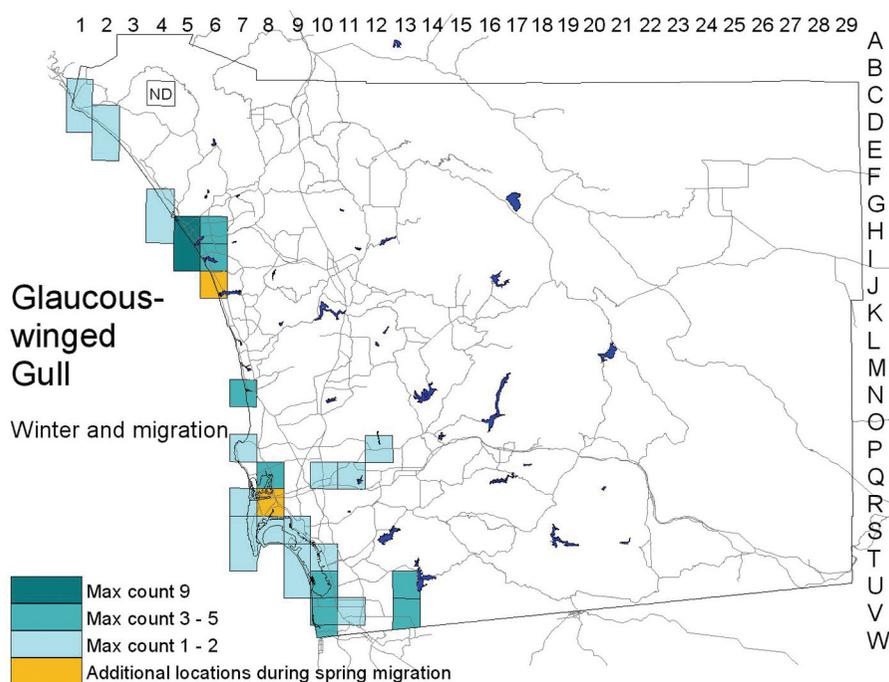
Glaucous-winged Gull *Larus glaucescens*

A winter visitor from the north, the Glaucous-winged Gull is uncommon in San Diego County, usually seen on beaches and bays in mixed flocks of the more common gulls. With gulls now driven from the county's landfills, there is no longer any place where the species can be seen consistently.

Winter: The Glaucous-winged Gull ranges all along San Diego County's coast with no consistent site of concentration. Any large mixed flock of gulls is likely to yield one or two. From 1997 to 2002 our highest count was of nine at Oceanside (H5) 28 December 1999 (S. Walens). When gulls were allowed to scavenge at garbage dumps these were the Glaucous-winged's primary haunts. During the atlas period, however, we found few away from the coast.



Photo by Anthony Mercieca



The site farthest inland was 12.5 miles from Mission Bay at Santee Lakes (P12; one on 7 January 1999, J. L. Coatsworth; one on 7 December 1999, M. B. Mulrooney); the only other inland sites were Lower Otay Lake (U13; up to four on 13 December 2001) and the pond at Siempre Viva and La Media roads, Otay Mesa (V13; up to five on 10 February 2001, P. Unitt).

Migration: Glaucous-winged Gulls typically begin arriving in early November, peak in late January and February, and depart through March and April. One at La Jolla (P7) 4 October 2001 (S. Walens) was exceptionally early. Any left after mid May are probably not migrating and may be in poor health, failing to molt on schedule. During the atlas period we noted two such stragglers, one at the

San Diego River mouth (R7) 31 May 2001 (N. Perretta) and one at the south end of the Silver Strand (U10) 27 June 1998 (C. G. Edwards). Unitt (1984) listed six previous summer records.

Conservation: The breeding population of the Glaucous-winged Gull has increased through the 20th century (Verbeek 1993), and winter visitors inland are becoming ever more frequent (Binford and Johnson 1995). But the numbers seen in San Diego County have declined since the 1970s. The San Diego Christmas bird count recorded its maximum of 270 in 1968; since 1988 the count has not yielded more than seven. Devillers et al. (1971) estimated that numbers in the San Diego area varied from 100 to 300

annually, but from 1997 to 2002 they were probably no more than 50. The exclusion of gulls from garbage dumps and changes in agriculture near the coast are presumably responsible for the decrease.

Taxonomy: The Glaucous-winged Gull has always been regarded as a distinct species, but it hybridizes with the Western Gull over a long strip of coastline in Washington and Oregon, and assortative mating is weak (Hoffman et al. 1978, Bell 1996, 1997, Good et al. 2000). A second-winter bird collected at the former Balboa Park dump (R8) 23 December 1969 (SDNHM 37626) appears to be a hybrid between the Glaucous-winged and the northern subspecies of the Western Gull, *L. o. occidentalis*.