

**Golden-crowned Sparrow *Zonotrichia atricapilla***

Less conspicuous than its familiar relative the White-crowned Sparrow, the Golden-crowned is actually more numerous in montane chaparral and the shady undergrowth of oak woodland. Manzanita, snowberry, California coffeeberry, and poison oak offer the Golden-crowned Sparrow prime habitat. In drier, more open chaparral, in sage scrub, and in riparian scrub the Golden-crowned Sparrow occurs at a much lower density. The Golden-crowned Sparrow is a winter visitor to San Diego County, occurring generally from the first week of October to the first week of May.

**Winter:** The Golden-crowned Sparrow occurs widely over the coastal slope of San Diego County. Its abundance is not uniform over this area but concentrated in two zones. The zone of greatest concentration is the higher mountains, where counts can range as high as 113 around High Point of Palomar Mountain (D15) 21 December 1999 (K. L. Weaver) and 100 along upper La Posta Creek (P24) 19 December 2001 (E. C. Hall, J. O. Zimmer). Within 15 miles of the coast, in the shadier canyons and on north-facing slopes, the Golden-crowned Sparrow is also common. Daily counts there range up to 80 around Torrey Pines City Park (O7) 25 January 2002 (D. G. Seay) and 66 around Batiquitos Lagoon (J7) 22 December 2001 (R. and A. Campbell). Between these zones, the species is only fairly common and can be missed where favorable habitat is sparse. On the Campo Plateau it is quite uncommon, and in the canyons draining into the Anza-Borrego Desert it is usually rare, with the only report of more than two individuals being of five in Box Canyon (L23) 13 February 1998 (D. Lantz). On the desert floor, our only winter records were during an unusual influx



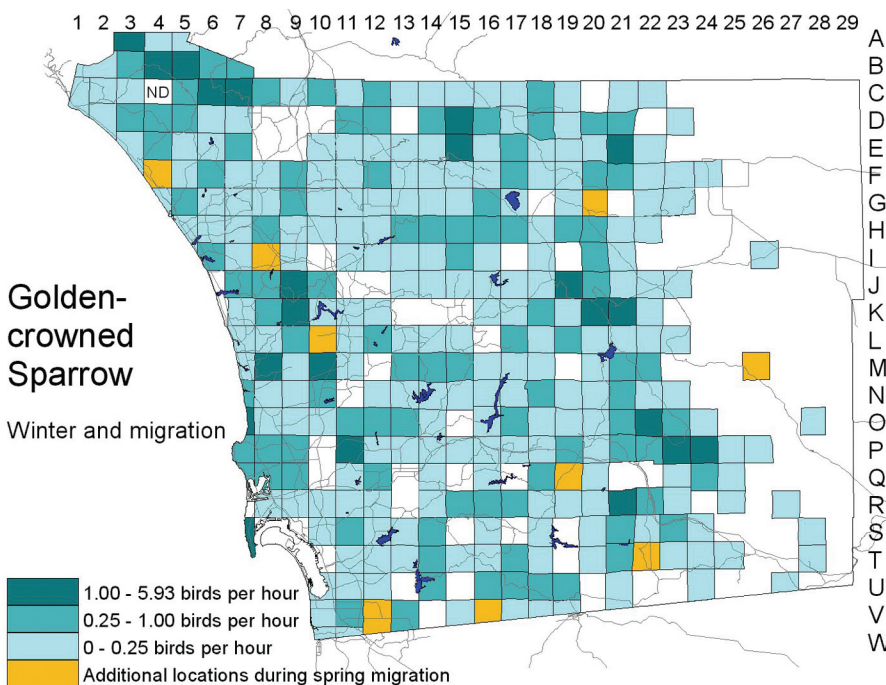
Photo by Jack C. Daynes

of several species of sparrows in response to rain (or, in the case of the Golden-crowned, possibly to snowstorms at higher elevations): four near San Felipe Narrows (I26) 10 January 1998 (A. Mauro) and eight in lower Carrizo Valley (O28) 11 January 1998 (P. D. Jorgensen).

**Migration:** In San Diego County, the Golden-crowned Sparrow is no more numerous in migration than in winter, as one might expect with the county's lying near the southern tip of the main winter range. Migrants occur rarely, though, at places in the Anza-Borrego Desert where the species does not winter. Our only such record during the atlas period was of one at Agua Caliente Springs (M26) 27 April 1998 (D. C. Seals), but Massey (1998) reported a few others, including two in spring far out on the desert in Hawk Canyon (H27). Fall arrival is in early October, exceptionally very late September. Spring departure takes place in late April and early May. In the first week of May, the Golden-crowned Sparrow can still be seen in small numbers, e.g., up to 12 near Adobe Springs (C18) 2 May 1999 (A. Mauro, J. R. Barth).

From 1997 to 2001, however, the only record later than 6 May was of two near the Palomar Observatory (D15) 14 May 1999 (K. L. Weaver). Later stragglers occur rarely, even into the first week of June: Tijuana River valley, 3 June 1978 (AB 332:1057, 1978), and Point Loma (S7), 7 June 1984 (R. E. Webster, AB 38:965, 1984). There remains only a single San Diego County record of a Golden-crowned Sparrow in summer, 1000 miles south of the species' breeding range: one at Old Mission Dam (P11) 14 August 1974 (AB 29:124, 1975).

**Conservation:** The Golden-crowned Sparrow occurs in residential areas planted heavily with thick shrubbery but is less numerous there than in natu-



ral habitats. Thus development of the coastal lowland degrades the sparrow's habitat in its secondary zone of concentration. But the primary zone lies in deep canyons and rugged mountains farther inland, suggesting that the

Golden-crowned Sparrow should long remain common in San Diego County. Christmas bird count results vary much from year to year, but the variations are not parallel among the counts, and there is no long-term trend.