

## MOCKINGBIRDS AND THRASHERS — FAMILY MIMIDAE

### Gray Catbird *Dumetella carolinensis*

Though the Gray Catbird breeds west almost to the coast of British Columbia, it is only a rare vagrant to California—the bulk of the population migrates east of the Rocky Mountains. But the species is on the increase: of 107 reports accepted by the California Bird Records Committee 1884–1999, one third were in just the last four years of this interval. Similarly, of the 20 records of the Gray Catbird in San Diego County, 10 have come since initiation of the field work for this atlas in 1997.

**Migration:** Half of San Diego County's known catbirds have been fall migrants, occurring as early as 24 September (1976, one at Point Loma, S7, K. van Vuren, Luther et al. 1979). Besides eight fall records from Point Loma, there is one from the Tijuana River valley 7–8 November 1964 (the only specimen, SDNHM 35095), one from a boat 15 miles off Oceanside 26 October 1983 (M. W. Guest, Bevier 1990), and two from Paso Picacho Campground (M20) 29 October 1988 (D. W. Aguillard, Pyle and McCaskie 1992) and 17 November 2002 (T. McGrath, M. San Miguel, NAB 57:118, 2003). The four spring records are of single birds in San Clemente Canyon (P8), 27 April 1999 (M. B. Stowe, Rogers and Jaramillo 2002), at Southwest Grove, Mountain Palm Springs (P27), 31 May 2000 (D. G. Seay; NAB 54:327, 2000), and at Point Loma 28 May–2 June 2001 (R. E. Webster, M. U. Evans, NAB 55: 357, 583, 2001) and 27–28 May 2002 (R. E. Webster, NAB 56:358, 2002). One in riparian woodland along the Santa Margarita River near the Camp Pendleton airport (E5) 28 June 2000 (P. A. Ginsburg, NAB 54:424, 2000) may have been summering, and one in molt at



Photo by Anthony Mercieca

Cabrillo National Monument, Point Loma 11–17 July 1988 (B. and I. Mazin, Pyle and McCaskie 1992) certainly was.

**Winter:** Three wintering Gray Catbirds have been reported from San Diego County, from Balboa Park (R9) 16 December 1972 (P. Unitt) and from Point Loma 7 November 1983–13 March 1984 (V. P. Johnson, Roberson 1986) and 31 October 1999–21 January 2000 (D. Aklufi, NAB 54:222, 2000).

**Conservation:** The Gray Catbird's increase in California most likely reflects the westward expansion of the breeding range; the species exemplifies changes in migration route lagging behind changes in breeding distribution.

**Taxonomy:** The validity of the division of the Gray Catbird into eastern and western subspecies is dubious. The difference of a paler crissum in western catbirds, upheld by Phillips (1986), is not evident in specimens in the San Diego Natural History Museum.