

Hairy Woodpecker *Picoides villosus*

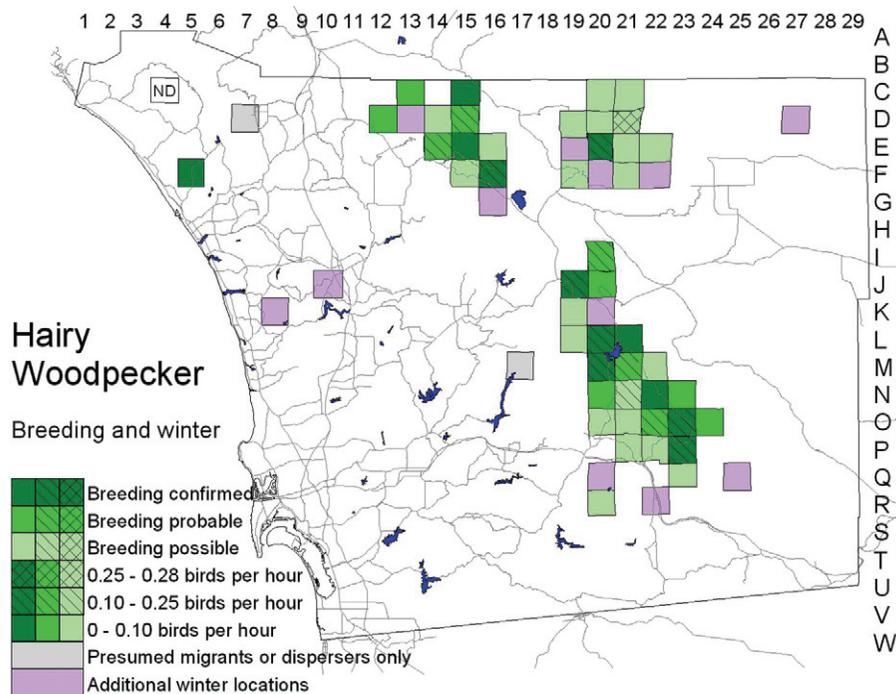
The Hairy Woodpecker’s sharp call, like a rubber squeeze-toy, is a characteristic sound of coniferous forests in San Diego County’s mountains. The species is an uncommon year-round resident in this habitat. Only a few individuals spill over into nearby oak-dominated woodland with few or no conifers. Winter vagrants far from the breeding range are very rare. But the Hairy Woodpecker also occurs irregularly at low elevations in the breeding season, mainly in the county’s northwestern corner.

Breeding distribution: During the breeding season, atlas results show a close correspondence between the Hairy Woodpecker and San Diego County’s coniferous forests. The highest counts per day are of only six, as on Hot Springs Mountain (E20) 27 June 2001 (K. L. Weaver, C. R. Mahrtdt) and in the Cuyamaca Mountains (M20), on Middle Peak 11 June 2000 (R. E. Webster) and on Cuyamaca Peak 13 July 2000 (J. R. Barth). In the southern half of the county the Hairy Woodpecker breeds down to about 3800 feet elevation, but around Palomar Mountain it breeds locally even lower, down to 2470 feet along the San Luis Rey River (F16; pair nesting June–July 2000 and 2001, W. E. Haas) and about 1600 feet in Marion Canyon (D12; one agitated 18 June 2001, K. L. Weaver). Some outlying locations for the species are Bucksnot Mountain (C20; up to two on 24 June 2000, L. J. Hargrove) and Corte Madera Mountain (R20; one on 20 June 1998, P. Unitt).

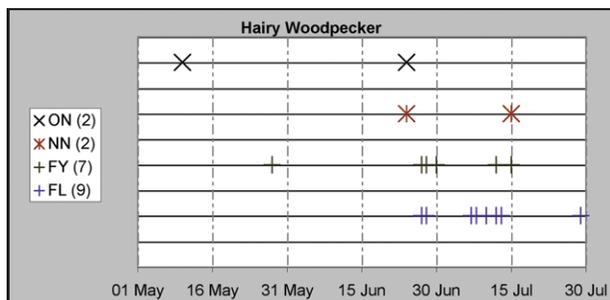


Photo by Anthony Mercieca

The Hairy Woodpecker occurs in the breeding season rarely and irregularly in lowland riparian and oak woodland in northwestern San Diego County. Otherwise, the species’ lowland distribution extends south to the Santa Ana River valley in northwestern Riverside County (Garrett and Dunn 1981, Gallagher 1997). On 28 June 1998, an adult was feeding a fledgling along the Santa Margarita River near Rifle Range Road (F5; R. E. Fischer)—the southernmost confirmation of the Hairy Woodpecker nesting at low elevation along the Pacific coast. At Los Jilgueros Preserve, Fallbrook (D7), there was a single individual on 21 January and 7 May 1998 (E. Ashton). In 1983, Scott (1984) found two territories and one nest in riparian woodland along the Santa Margarita River at De Luz Creek (D6); in 1989 Weaver (1990) found one territory in coast live oak woodland in the Santa Margarita Ecological Reserve (C9). At a mere 850–900 feet, though only about 6 miles west of the species’ normal habitat, was a single Hairy Woodpecker along the San Diego River between Cedar and Boulder creeks (M17) 21 March and 6 June 1998 (R. C. Sanger).



Nesting: The Hairy Woodpecker excavates a typical woodpecker hole in a tree, commonly a dead snag, but atlas observers found few nests in San Diego County. One nest on Hot Springs Mountain was about 25 feet above the ground. The nest along the San Luis Rey River was



in a sycamore, an atypical site for the species in southern California. Our rather meager records of breeding activity range from an occupied nest on 10 May to young fledging in the third week of July and fledglings out of the nest on 29 July. These dates suggest egg laying at least from mid May to early June, well within the range of 23 March–21 June given for 43 California egg sets by Bent (1939).

Migration: The few records of Hairy Woodpeckers outside their breeding range in San Diego County are scattered from 27 August (1988, one in the Tijuana River valley, B. E. Daniels, AB 43:169, 1989) to 26 February (1980, one at Old Mission Dam, P11, C. G. Edwards).

Winter: The Hairy Woodpecker remains in its breeding range year round. Our highest daily count in winter was of four around Mount Laguna (O23) 21 January 2002 (E. C. Hall, J. O. Zimmer). The species has been noted outside its known breeding range in San Diego County on about 25 occasions. During the atlas period the one farthest from the usual range was at Olivenhain (K8) 28 December 1997 (L. R. Santaella), but earlier records extend as far as Otay Valley (V11; one from 15 December

1979 to 26 January 1980, AB 34:307, 1980; one on 15 December 1990, P. Unitt) and the Tijuana River valley (cited above). There are only two records from the Anza–Borrego Desert, of one in pines planted on a golf course in Borrego Springs (F24) 21 December 1991 (M. L. Gabel) and one in pinyons between 4800 and 5000 feet in the Santa Rosa Mountains 1.6 miles east-southeast of Villager Peak (D27) 9 January 2002 (L. J. Hargrove). The latter had probably dispersed along the ridge from more heavily wooded areas of the Santa Rosa Mountains in Riverside County, where the species is resident.

Conservation: Data sufficient to demonstrate any trend in the Hairy Woodpecker's status in San Diego County do not exist. Anecdotal observations suggest no significant change. On 26 May 1976 A. Fries noted two at Mesa Grande (H17), an area of oak woodland where we found none during the atlas period; the species could be irregular in this area.

Taxonomy: The Hairy Woodpeckers resident in San Diego County are *P. v. hyloscopus* (Cabanis and Heine, 1863), in which the whitish underparts are lightly tinged buffy-gray. Long-distance vagrancy of Hairy Woodpeckers is unknown in California, yet the one specimen from outside the breeding range in San Diego County, from Cottonwood Campground (Q25) 19 January 1985 (SDNHM 43460), has conspicuously whiter underparts than any specimen of *hyloscopus*. It matches specimens of *P. v. orius* (Oberholser, 1911), which breeds from south-central British Columbia south to Arizona, including the Sierra Nevada and mountains of the Great Basin, if *P. v. leucothorectis* (Oberholser, 1911) is considered a synonym of *orius* (Phillips et al. 1964, Short 1982).