

**Lesser Yellowlegs** *Tringa flavipes*

The Lesser Yellowlegs is much less conspicuous and usually less numerous than its larger relative, the Greater Yellowlegs. In San Diego County, the Lesser is fairly common in migration but rare in winter; California is the northern limit of the species' winter range. For habitat, the Lesser Yellowlegs prefers salt marshes, brackish coastal lagoons, and shallow

freshwater ponds. It is much less frequent inland than the Greater.

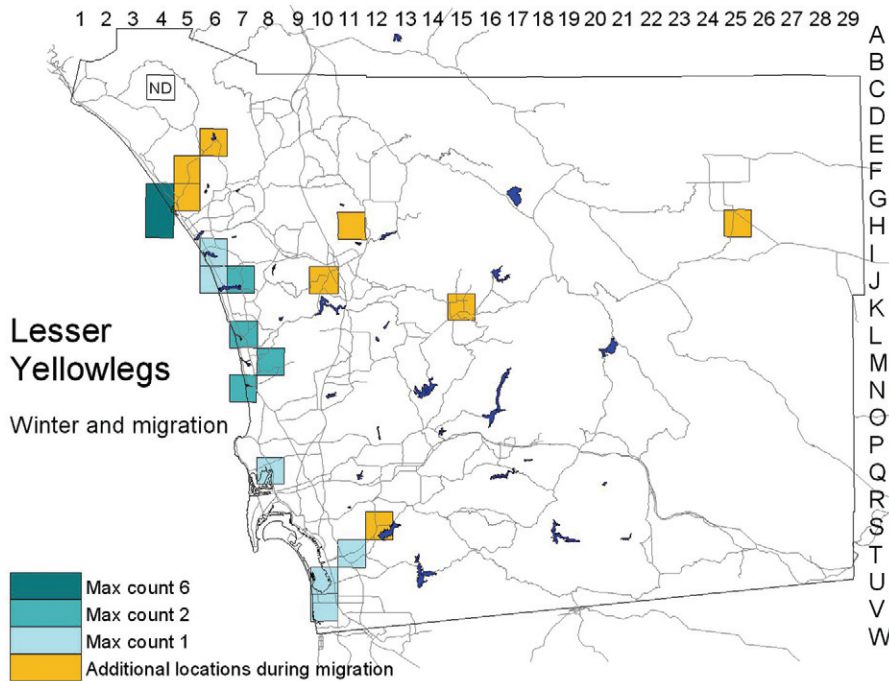
**Migration:** The Lesser Yellowlegs is most numerous in San Diego County as a fall migrant. It arrives rarely as early as 29 June (1977, one at the San Dieguito River mouth, M7, P. Unitt), regularly in early July. Numbers peak in August and September, then drop in October.

Spring migration begins in late February, as indicated by two in southwest Escondido (J10) 19 February 1998 (O. Carter) and six at the Santa Margarita River mouth (G4) 25 February 2000 (P. A. Ginsburg). Most spring migrants pass through in March and April; from 1997 to 2001 our latest date was 25 April (2001; one at Daley Ranch, H11, A. Mauro). On their monthly surveys of San Elijo Lagoon (L7) 1973–83, King et al. (1987) found the Lesser Yellowlegs twice in May, the latest one on 4 May 1975. The only records of overwintering Lesser Yellowlegs are of one near Imperial Beach (V10) 17 June 1987 (R. E. Webster, AB 41:1487, 1987) and two at San Elijo Lagoon 1 June 2000 (A. Mauro).

The lagoons of northern San Diego County are the species' favored sites. At San Elijo Lagoon, King et al.



Photo by Anthony Mercieca



(1987) found an average of 10 in August and September and an average of 7.5 in March and April. Their fall maximum was 44 on 12 September 1976; their spring maximum was 37 on 1 April 1979. Along the coast of southern San Diego County the Lesser Yellowlegs is uncommon; in surveys of south San Diego Bay and the salt works, neither Macdonald et al. (1990) nor Stadtlander and Konecny (1994) found more than six per day.

Inland the Lesser Yellowlegs is scarcer still and found mainly in floodplains and at reservoirs near the coast. Eight in Ysidora Basin (F5) 12 April 1998 (R. E. Fischer) was our largest count during the atlas period. On the coastal slope our most inland site for the Lesser Yellowlegs was Ramona (K15), with three on 19 March 1999 and one on 20 April 1998 (M. and B. McIntosh). At the east end of Lake Hodges (K11), K. L. Weaver noted up to six on 6 August 1981. There are three records from the Borrego Valley, of one at the Roadrunner Club (F24) 17 April 1991

(A. G. Morley), one at the Ram's Hill ponds (H25) 24 April 1994, and one at the Borrego sewage ponds (H25) 21 March 1999 (P. D. Jorgensen).

**Winter:** From December through mid February atlas observers reported no more than two Lesser Yellowlegs per atlas square per day. Macdonald et al. (1990) reported up to four around south San Diego Bay 6 February 1989. Totals on San Diego Christmas bird counts range up to nine, though they average 2.1. The Rancho Santa Fe count averages 1.8, the Oceanside count 0.7. Thus, contrary to what I reported previously (Unitt 1984), the Lesser Yellowlegs now winters in the north county lagoons just as often as around San Diego Bay. During the atlas period, 18 of 24

winter reports were in the north county. The only inland area where we found the species 1997–2002 was San Dieguito Valley (M8), with three sightings of single individuals. There are just two other inland winter records, of one in San Pasqual Valley (J12) 4 January 1997 (P. Unitt) and one on the Anza–Borrego Christmas bird count 30 December 1990.

**Conservation:** The winter range of the Lesser Yellowlegs may have spread north into California in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, though this inconspicuous species could have been overlooked. Grinnell and Miller (1944) listed only three winter records for California, and the one from San Diego County (Michael 1935b) was more likely of misidentified Greater Yellowlegs. Nevertheless, in San Diego County wetlands attractive to the Lesser Yellowlegs have been much reduced, especially freshwater wetlands in floodplains near the coast.