

Mountain Plover *Charadrius montanus*

The Mountain Plover is one of North America's most seriously threatened birds. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed that it be listed as an endangered species in 1999, then canceled the proposal in 2003. The primary factor decimating the plover is apparently habitat change in its breeding range on the Great Plains and intermountain plateaus: conversion of short-grass prairie to cropland and pastures of taller grass and elimination of the prairie dogs that once kept the prairie partly open (Leachman and Osmundson 1990, Knopf 1996). But in its winter range in southern California the plover



Photo by Kenneth Z. Kurland

has also lost much of its habitat, of open plains and plowed fields of bare dirt. The Mountain Plover's former regular wintering in San Diego County came to an end in 1991. Only a single migrant has been reported since then.

Winter: Though Stephens (1919a) called the Mountain Plover "rather common" in San Diego County, specific locations recorded for the species are rather few: Stuart Mesa (G4; eight on 22 December 1979, E. Copper), San Luis Rey (G6; 6 March 1960, A. M. Rea), Warner Valley along Highway 79 near Highway S2 (G18; up to 50 on 18 and 29 December 1981, C. G. Edwards), Ocotillo Wells (I28/I29; three on 18 March 1978, AB 32:1055, 1978), Lake Cuyamaca (L21; one on 9 November 1980, D. M. Parker), the airfield in what is currently known as Marine Corps Air Station Miramar (O9/O10; two collected of 75 seen 18 November 1939, SDNHM 18089–90, Abbott 1940; two seen 17 November 1956, AFN 11:61, 1957), Pacific Beach (Q7, on large lawn, no date, Sams and Stott 1959), Otay Mesa (V12/V13; up to 250 on 12 December 1971, G. McCaskie), Coronado Heights at the south end of the Silver Strand (U10/V10; five collected of 25 seen 1 January 1938, SDNHM 17677–81, Abbott 1940), and

the Tijuana River valley (regular 1962–91 with up to 201 on 18 December 1976, AB 31:882, 1972). In the last area the birds used both agricultural fields and the short grass around the airstrip at Ream Field (Imperial Beach Naval Air Station or Outlying Field; V10).

Migration: October to February was the Mountain Plover's main season in San Diego County, with extreme dates in fall of 20 September (1972, 15 in the Tijuana River valley, G. McCaskie), in spring of 18 March (at Ocotillo Wells) and 3 April (1884, flocks seen—but no specimen collected—in Santa Ysabel Valley, I18/J18, Emerson 1887). The only report since 1991 is of a migrant at Stuart Mesa (G4) 19 October 1999 (P. A. Ginsburg, NAB 54:105, 2000).

Conservation: Abbott (1940) implied the Mountain Plover was already in decline by the late 1930s. On San Diego Christmas bird counts, the species was found in the Tijuana River valley almost annually from 1966, when the count circle was shifted to include the area, until 1979, when the count yielded 108. During the 1980s the numbers were much smaller, and the last report from the area was of five from 19 October through November 1991 (G. McCaskie, AB 46:149, 1992).