

Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow *Ammodramus nelsoni*

Most of the population of Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow migrates from central Canada to the Gulf of Mexico, but a few birds reach the coast of California. Here they are found in coastal salt marshes almost invariably. The birds seldom expose themselves outside the cover of dense vegetation, especially pickleweed. Birders have learned to look for them as they look for rails, during the winter's highest tides, when high water floods them out and forces them to the marsh's edge.

Winter: There are just 13 records of Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow in San Diego County, and some of these likely represent the same individuals returning in successive years. Locations are a freshwater marsh near Oceanside (H5) 11 October 1992 (R. R. Veit, AB 47:151, 1993), Kendall-Frost Marsh, Mission Bay (Q8), 31 December 1986–27 February 1987 and 8 October 1987–18 January 1988 (E. Copper, AB 41:331, 1987; 42:139, 323, 1988), the Sweetwater River estuary, Chula Vista (U10), 8 December 1987 (S. J. Montgomery, AB 42:323, 1988) and 2–17 December 1994 (V. P. Johnson, NASFN 49:200, 1995), and the Tijuana River estuary (V10). The six records for the last site encompass the only specimen, collected 2 November 1963 (McCaskie et al. 1967c, SDNHM 30788), the highest count (three from 22 December 1991 to 16 February 1992,



Photo by Anthony Mercieca

A. Mercieca, AB 46:316, 1992), and the only reports during the atlas period, of two 21–22 January 2000 (D. K. Adams, NAB 54:222, 2000) and 9 January 2001 (E. Wallace, NAB 55:229, 2001).

Migration: Extreme dates for this species in San Diego County are 8 October and 27 February.

Taxonomy: The split of the Sharp-tailed Sparrow into two species (AOU 1995) has still left Nelson's with three component subspecies. Nominate *A. n. nelsoni* Allen, 1875, is the one occurring in California. See Sibley (1996) for details on its identification.