

Painted Bunting *Passerina ciris*

The most popular cage bird in Baja California, the Painted Bunting occurs in San Diego County mainly as an escapee from captivity. On the basis of records of immatures well north of the international border, however, the species also reaches California as a natural vagrant, at least in fall migration. The California Bird Records Committee has accepted 15 Painted Buntings as vagrants to San Diego County, but identifying any particular individual as a vagrant rather than escapee is now impossible.

Migration: Of San Diego County's 15 committee-endorsed records of the Painted Bunting, eight are from the Tijuana River valley, five are from Point Loma, one is from San Diego (4 September 1992, N. Whelan, Garrett and Singer 1998), and one is from Encinitas (K7; 21–22 October 2000, K. Aldern, Garrett and Wilson 2003). The 14 fall records range in date from 24 August (1993 or 1994, Tijuana River valley, D. W. Aguillard, McCaskie and San Miguel 1999) to 3 December (1995, same locality, G. McCaskie, Garrett and Singer 1998). Even though the evidence for spring vagrancy of the Painted Bunting to California is much weaker, the committee has also accepted one spring record from San Diego County, of a female at Cabrillo National Monument (S7) 16 May 2001 (G. C. Hazard, T. Plunkett, Garrett and Wilson 2003).

In northern Baja California, Hamilton (2001) found the Painted Bunting to be the cage bird offered for sale



Photo by Anthony Mercieca

most abundantly by far. Females are sold as much as males. Escapees are seen at all seasons; at least 13 were reported in San Diego County during the atlas period 1997–2002. They can often be identified by injuries around the bill, damage to the flight feathers, and, in adult males, by the faded red of the underparts. Even some of the accepted records from San Diego County may represent escapees. At least the five Painted Buntings in the Tijuana River valley 1962–63 (McCaskie et al. 1967c), however, were almost certainly vagrants, as they predated the explosive growth of Tijuana's human population.

Taxonomy: Thompson (1991) discounted the long-maintained division of the Painted Bunting into two subspecies.