

Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius*

After the Greater Yellowlegs, the Spotted Sandpiper is the most widespread sandpiper in San Diego County, found widely inland as well as along the coast. It is not gregarious, however, so it is generally uncommon in winter, fairly common in migration. It is seldom found on tidal mudflats, preferring instead lakeshores, freshwater ponds, brackish lagoons, rocky ocean shores, and sandy beaches. The Spotted is the only sandpiper that nests in San Diego County, albeit in small numbers. The county's breeding records are the southernmost for the species.

Winter: Because of its diverse habitats, the Spotted Sandpiper is widespread on San Diego County's coast, though its density in winter is low. In San Diego Bay, the Spotted Sandpiper is more numerous on the sandy and riprap-lined shores of the north bay (up to seven on the waterfront of downtown San Diego, S9, 20 December 1998, Y. Ikegaya) than on the mudflats of the south bay [no more than four per day reported by atlas observers, Macdonald et al. (1990), or Stadtlander and Konecny (1994)].

Wintering Spotted Sandpipers are more numerous inland than along the coast. The largest numbers, up to 21 on 26 December 1999, have been found at Lake Hodges (K10; R. L. Barber). Other sites of notable concentrations from 1997 to 2002 were Lake Henshaw (G17;



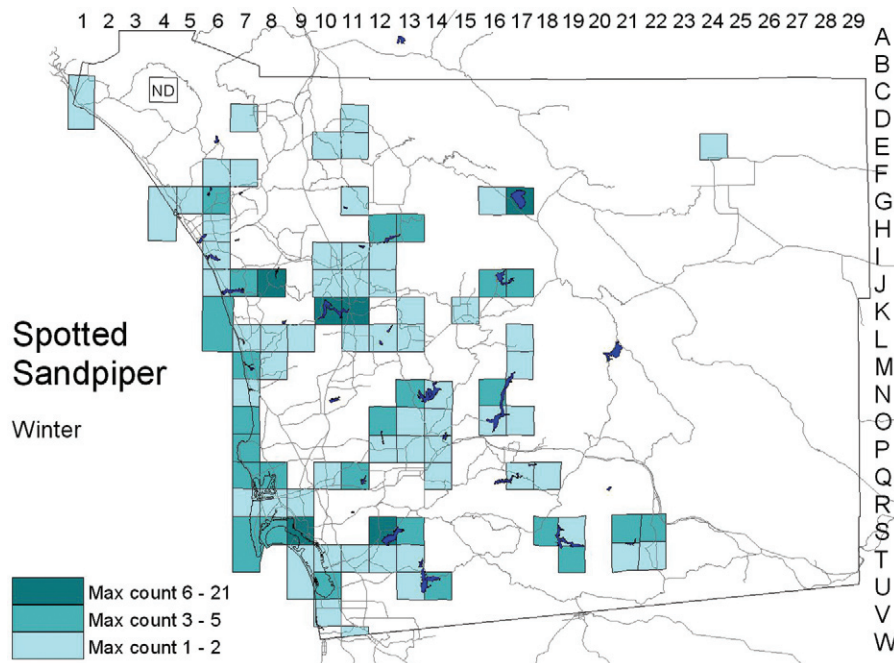
Photo by Anthony Mercieca

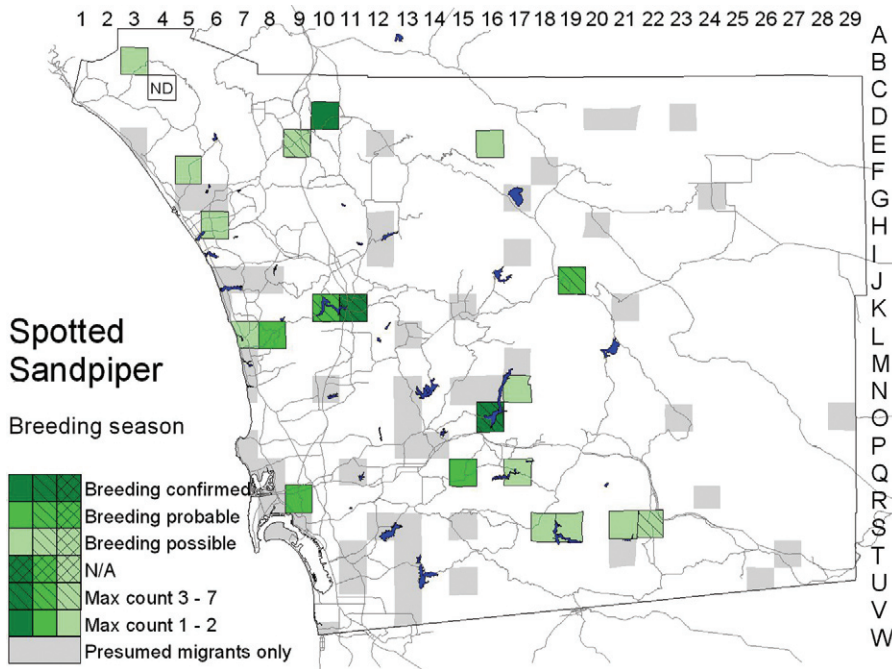
up to eight on 21 December 1998, S. J. Montgomery), along San Marcos Creek near Questhaven Road (J8; up to 10 on 23 December 2000, J. O. Zimmer), and Sweetwater Reservoir (S12; up to nine on 19 December 1998, P. Famolaro). The Spotted Sandpiper is regular at Lake Morena (T21/S21/S22), with up to four on 24 February 2002 (R. and S. L. Breisch), but at 3000 feet this is the highest elevation where we found the species in winter.

The Spotted Sandpiper is a rare winter visitor to ponds in the Borrego Valley with one or two recorded on 11 of 19 Anza-Borrego Christmas bird counts 1984–2002. During the atlas period our only winter record from this area was of one in the north Borrego Valley (E24) 19 December 1999 (P. R. Pryde).

Migration: The Spotted Sandpiper's migration schedule cannot be established precisely because of the small number of summering birds. Nevertheless, fall migrants arrive in July, exceptionally as early as 30 June (1978, one at the San Diego River mouth, R7, C. G. Edwards). Their peak is in September or October, with up to 17 at San Elijo Lagoon 10 September 1978 (King et al. 1987) and 17 at Batiquitos Lagoon (J6/J7) 27–28 October 1997 (Merkel and Associates 1997). Four fall records for the Anza-Borrego Desert include four birds at an ephemeral pond in Mortero Wash Narrows (R29) 22 August 1991 (M. C. Jorgensen).

Spring migration takes place mainly from mid April to mid May. Spring migrants are widespread, occurring occasionally





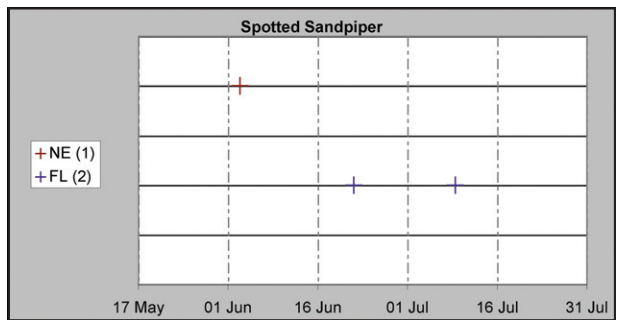
ing listed above, these included Wynola (J19; agitated pair 15 May 1999, S. E. Smith), the borrow pit in the Sweetwater River bed at Dehesa (Q15; pair 6 May and 1 June 1999, W. E. Haas), San Diego River in Mission Valley just east of Highway 163 (R9; pair 15 May 1997, J. K. Wilson; up to four on 10 and 15 May 1991, P. Unitt), and the upper end of Lake Morena (S22; up to three on 30 May 1999, R. and S. L. Breisch).

Nesting: The Spotted Sandpiper nests in a scrape on the ground, screened by low vegetation and lined with nearby grass (Oring et al. 1997). The limited data from San Diego County indicate the species lays here from at least mid May to late June. The

as high as 5400 feet at Big Laguna Lake (O23; two on 10 May 1997, M. R. Smith) and at isolated desert oases like Carrizo Marsh (O29; one on 27 April 2000 and 11 May 2001 (M. C. and P. D. Jorgensen). Ten at Sweetwater Reservoir 23 April 1998 (P. Famolaro) was our largest spring concentration during the atlas period. Spring dates for the Anza-Borrego Desert, where summering is implausible, run as late as 22 May 2001 (one in Borrego Springs, G24, P. D. Ache).

Breeding distribution: Confirmed nesting sites for the Spotted Sandpiper in San Diego County are at a borrow pit in the San Luis Rey River between the aqueduct and Gomez Creek (D10; chick with adult 22 June–4 July 2000, C. M. Manning), the upper end of Lake Hodges (K11; pair with young 26–30 July 1981 and 16–25 July 1982, G. McCaskie, K. L. Weaver, AB 36:1016, 1982; nest with eggs 3 June 1997, E. C. Hall), San Elijo Lagoon (L7; three pairs and two young 6 June 1982, D. M. Parker, AB 36:1016, 1982; three pairs nesting in summer 1983 D. King, AB 37:1027, 1983; nest with eggs 14 July 1986, S. and J. Gallagher, AB 40:1255, 1986), and the south end of El Capitan Reservoir (O16; pair with chicks 9 July 2001, R. T. Patton, J. R. Barth, P. Unitt). Also, in the Tijuana River valley, a pair “appeared to be defending a territory” 9 June 1984 (J. Oldenettel, AB 38:1062, 1984).

One surprise of field work for this atlas was the number of locations for possibly breeding Spotted Sandpipers: at least 18. In addition to the sites of confirmed nest-



Spotted Sandpiper’s habit of polyandrous mating, well studied in Minnesota, may be less prevalent in an area like San Diego County, marginal to the species’ range, where the nesting population is sparse.

Conservation: The Spotted Sandpiper’s breeding in San Diego County is recent, reported first in 1981. The creation of reservoirs and ponds (including the borrow pits left by sand mining in riverbeds) probably allowed the sandpiper to extend its breeding range south to San Diego County. Nevertheless, a few possible breeding sites are along undammed wilderness creeks, especially San Mateo Creek (B3; one on 27 May 2001, P. Unitt) and the west fork of the San Luis Rey River in Barker Valley (E16; one on 30 May 1999, R. Bergstrom). The same reservoirs and ponds allow the Spotted Sandpiper to winter more widely inland than under primitive conditions.