

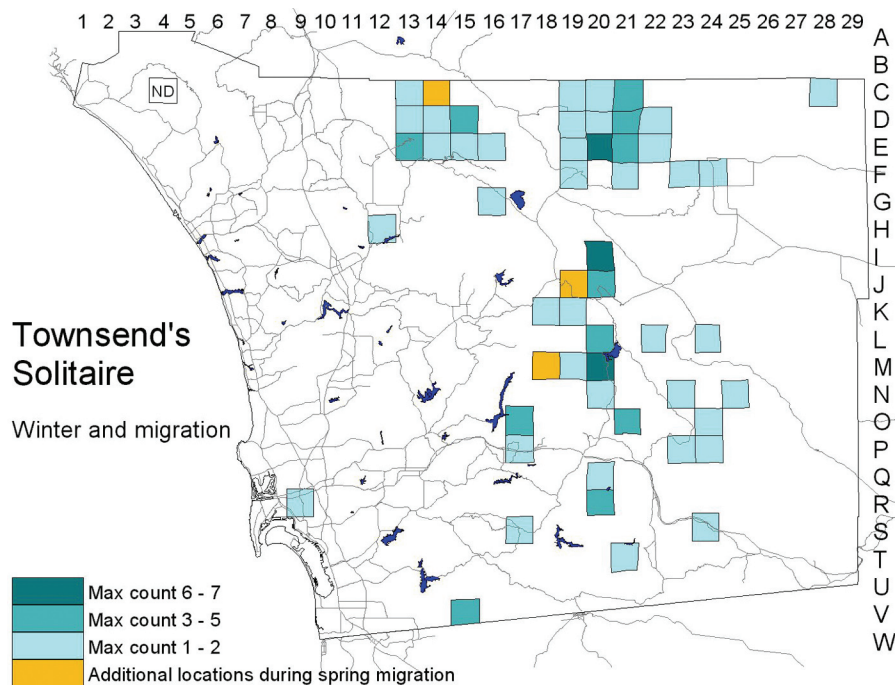
Townsend's Solitaire *Myadestes townsendi*

Townsend's Solitaire is a bird of coniferous forest at high elevations. Its breeding range extends south to the Santa Rosa Mountains—falling just a few miles short of San Diego County. The species thus reaches San Diego County principally as a rare migrant and winter visitor to the mountains, though there are also three summer records. Feeding on flying insects in summer, Townsend's Solitaire shifts to a diet largely of berries in winter.

Winter: In San Diego County, Townsend's Solitaire is most numerous in the higher mountains. Our highest counts were of six on Hot Springs Mountain (E20) 26 January 2002 (K. L. Weaver), seven on Volcan Mountain (I20) 17 December 2001 (R. T. Patton), and six on Cuyamaca Peak (M20) 17 January 2000 (E. Wallace). The solitaire's



Photo by Jack C. Daynes



frequency decreases with decreasing elevation. In the coastal lowland, the only report from 1997 to 2002 was of one in Balboa Park (R9) 2 January 2001 (J. Roberts). Only one Townsend's Solitaire has been seen on any San Diego Christmas bird count, 1953–2002, and only one has been seen on any Oceanside count, 1976–2002. The species is more frequent in the Anza–Borrego Desert, though still rare, with nine records during the atlas period.

Like other frugivorous winter visitors, Townsend's Solitaire varies considerably in numbers from year to year. During the five-year atlas period, solitaires were scarce in 1997–98 (only six reported) and 1999–2000, more numerous in 1998–99, 2000–01 (53 reported), and 2001–02.

Migration: Townsend's Solitaire occurs primarily from mid October, exceptionally 29 September (1973, one at Point Loma, AB 28:109, 1974), to mid March, with a few remaining into April (latest 21 April 1999, one along Boulder Creek near Eagle Peak, M18, R. C. Sanger). Stragglers have been noted three times in May: one at Point Loma 8–9 May 1990 (B. and I. Mazin, AB 44:497, 1990), one in the Tijuana River valley 24 May 1963 (AFN 24:375, 1963), and two at Palomar Mountain (D15) lingering to 25 May 1983 (R. Higson, AB 37:913, 1983). Though still quite rare, Townsend's Solitaire is considerably more frequent along the coast (especially at Point Loma) as a migrant than as a winter visitor.

Breeding distribution: Townsend's Solitaire is another of those mountain birds whose elevational range in summer lies above the tops of San Diego County's highest mountains. It breeds south to the Santa Rosa Mountains of Riverside County, where it is rare (Weathers 1983). Nevertheless, there are three summer records from San Diego County, one from the Palomar Observatory (D15), of one bird 19 July 1980 (AB 34:931, 1980), and two from Middle Peak, Cuyamaca Mountains (M20), of one bird 19 July 1987 (R. E. Webster, AB 41:1488, 1987) and an apparent pair 19 June 1988 (P. Unitt).

Taxonomy: Townsend's Solitaires in San Diego County, like those elsewhere in the United States, are of the paler subspecies *M. t. townsendi* (Audubon, 1838).