

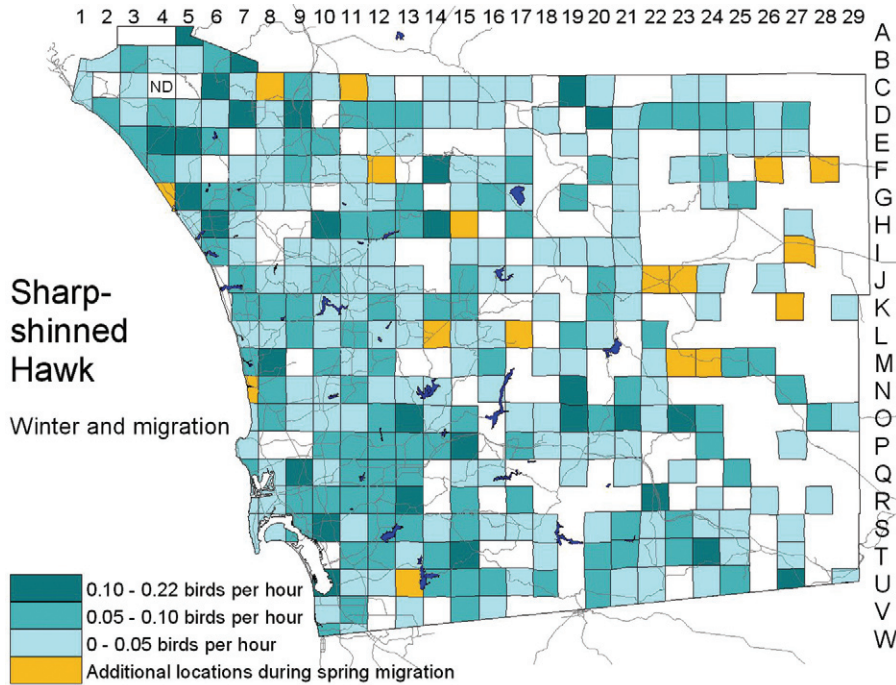
### Sharp-shinned Hawk *Accipiter striatus*

The Sharp-shinned Hawk is a widespread but uncommon winter visitor to San Diego County. It is found in a wide variety of habitats, though more frequently in areas with trees or tall shrubs than in those without them. Because the Sharp-shinned Hawk feeds predominantly on small birds, any place that concentrates flocks of House Finches, House Sparrows, White-crowned Sparrows, or juncos is likely to attract the hawk.

**Winter:** The Sharp-shinned Hawk is rather uniformly distributed over the coastal slope of San Diego County. On the scale of the atlas grid there is no clear region of concentration. In the Anza–Borrego Desert the species is sparser than on the coastal side, found mainly at oases, in developed areas, and in mesquite thickets. In winter 2002 the Wildlife Research Institute recorded the Sharp-shinned Hawk at only two of its 45 study sites in southwestern San Diego County.



Photo by Anthony Mercieca



Likewise, there is no great variation in the Sharp-shinned Hawk's abundance from year to year. From 1997 to 2002 the number of Sharp-shinned Hawks atlas observers reported per hour varied by no more than 23% from the mean for the five-year period.

**Migration:** In fall, the Sharp-shinned Hawk returns to San Diego County usually in the middle of September and is most numerous as a fall migrant in late September and early October, when up to 15 in a day have been seen migrating down Point Loma. In spring, it begins migrating out in March, and after the first week of April it is rare. From 1997 to 2001 our dates for the species ranged from 12 September (1997, one at Lake Hodges, K10, R. L. Barber) to 26 April (three records). Specimens range from 15 September (1889, Ballena, K17, SDNHM 325) to 6 April (1930, Point Loma, SDNHM 12716). The latest reliable date ever reported for

a migrant is 28 April (1982; one at Point Loma, R. E. Webster, AB 36: 893, 1982).

**Breeding distribution:** The Sharp-shinned Hawk has been confirmed nesting in the San Bernardino Mountains and seen repeatedly in summer in the San Jacinto Mountains, but in San Diego County evidence for its breeding is slight. J. B. Dixon (in Willett 1933) reported seeing the species "in the Cuyamacas and other mountains in San Diego County in summer. In one instance, the actions of the birds indicated a nest nearby." No more specific information is available. Through the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the only records of possibly breeding or summering Sharp-shinned Hawks were an apparent pair

in Banner Canyon (J20) 29 April 1978 (J. L. Dunn, AB 32:1208, 1978) and a single bird on Palomar Mountain (D14) 14 July 1982 (R. Higson, AB 36:1016, 1982).

**Conservation:** In contrast to the crash (due to slaughter of migrants) and recovery in the eastern United States, changes in the Sharp-shinned Hawk's numbers in California have been modest. Christmas bird counts in San Diego County suggest no long-term change. The birds use urban habitats as freely as natural ones. During the atlas period our highest daily count (of four) was in a heavily developed area, East San Diego (R10; 20 December 1997, J. A. Dietrick), as was our highest number per hour, in southeast San Diego (S10).

**Taxonomy:** *Accipiter s. velox* is the subspecies of the Sharp-shinned Hawk widespread across North America and the only one recorded in California.