

### Mourning Dove *Zenaida macroura*

One of our most familiar birds, the Mourning Dove is common over most of San Diego County year round. The doves benefited from the arrival of western civilization; they are now more abundant in agricultural areas and suburbs than in native woodland or scrub. But they are found in all of the county's habitats from the coastal strand to open montane coniferous woodland to the desert floor.

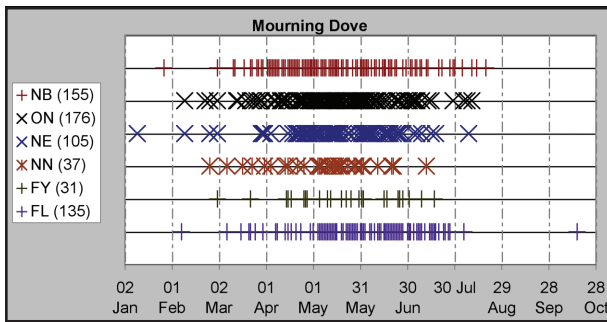
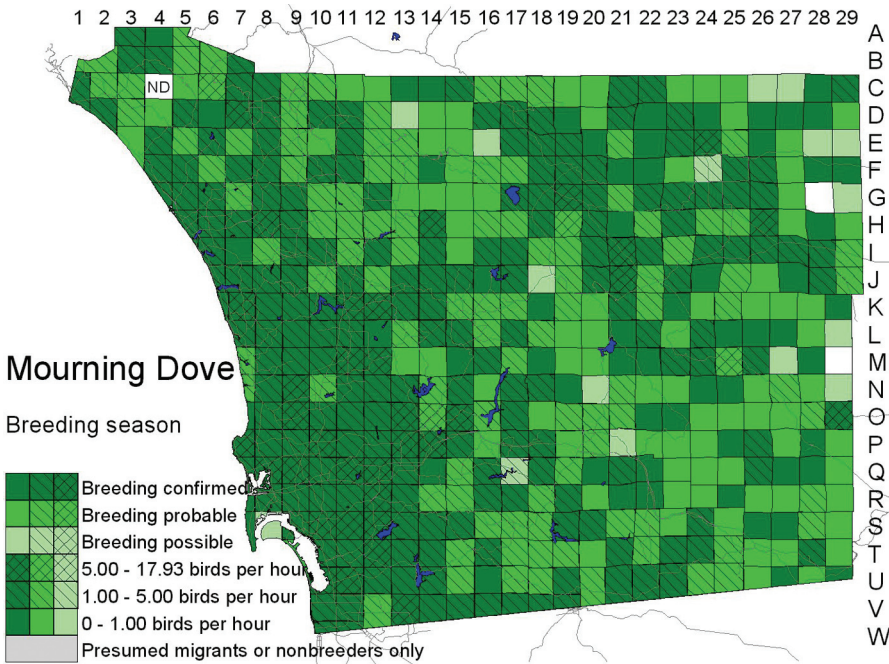
**Breeding distribution:** The Mourning Dove is tied with the House Finch for the title of San Diego County's most widespread bird. Both species were missed in just two covered atlas squares; we failed to find the Mourning Dove only in two of the least-vegetated parts of the Anza-Borrego Desert. The dove is most abundant in the coastal lowland, especially in urban and agricultural areas, in Warner Valley (G19; up to 300 on 25 June 2000, P. Unitt), and at oases and in developed areas of the Anza-Borrego Desert (up to 250 in the orchard-planted region of the Borrego Valley, E24, 8 June 2001, P. D. Jorgensen). It is least abundant in the coniferous woodland of San Diego County's higher mountains and in the drier regions of the Anza-Borrego Desert. The Mourning Dove needs to drink regularly, but evidently almost all of the Anza-Borrego Desert is within the distance the birds can commute to water daily. A nest with nestlings along Fish Creek Wash (L27) 13 April 2000, for example, was miles from the nearest known spring (M. B. Mulrooney).



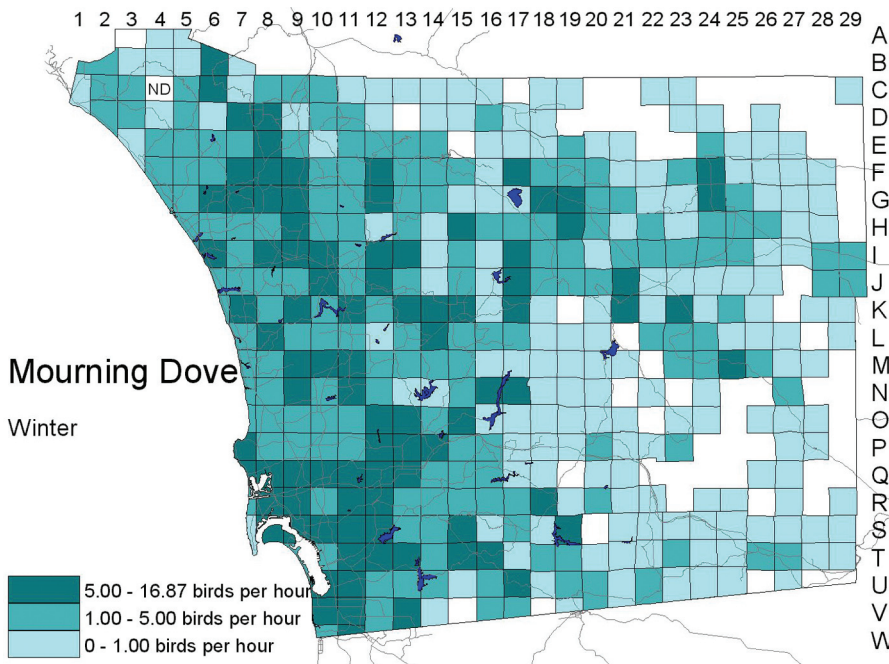
Photo by Anthony Mercieca

**Nesting:** Mourning Doves nest in situations as diverse as their habitats, but most nests are in trees or large shrubs. Because the nest is so flimsy the birds often build it on the thicker branches. This preference for firm supports also leads the doves to use man-made sites like building eaves, bridge girders, and hanging flower baskets. Nests on the ground are fairly common, too, accounting for about 18% of all Mourning Dove nests atlas observers described (ground nests may have been commented on disproportionately often). Some ground nests were somewhat protected by being built under cacti or thistles, but others did not have even this defense.

One key to the Mourning Dove's success is that in spite of laying only two eggs per clutch, it has a short nest-



ing cycle, long nesting season, and nests repeatedly in a single year. Most nesting takes place from March to July, but activity outside this interval is not rare. In residential



areas of San Diego, we noted a nest with eggs as early as 10 January 1998 and a recent fledgling on 7 February 2001, implying egg laying in early January. In late summer and fall, we noted nest building as late as 19 August 2000 and a fledgling as late as 16 October 1999, implying egg laying in early September. Sharp (1907) found eggs at Escondido as late as 2 September. In natural habitats the dove's season is less extended, but in the wet spring of 1998 the birds began nesting in the Anza-Borrego Desert in the last week of February, when the earliest desert report was of an occupied nest near the Borrego Air Ranch (H26) 22 February (M. L. Gabel).

**Migration:** The Mourning Dove is highly migratory; the large flocks seen in winter may consist largely of winter visitors from the north. A few may be seen out of sight of land on almost every pelagic trip off San Diego in May and September. Birds banded at San Diego 3 January 1929 and 11 March 1929 were recovered at Boise, Idaho, 7 September 1929 and at Reno, Nevada, 10 September 1929, respectively (Lincoln 1936).

**Winter:** In the coastal lowland and inland valleys, the Mourning Dove is even more abundant in winter than in spring and early summer. Wintering birds often gather into large flocks, up to 600 along Dulzura Creek (T15) 5 February 1999 (D. W. Povey). At higher elevations, however, the dove is less common. In extensive chaparral, montane woodland, and sparse desert scrub the dove is rare to absent in winter, even where it is fairly common in spring and summer.

**Conservation:** Though the Mourning Dove's population in the western United States has declined since the 1960s (Dolton 1993), in San Diego County the trend is likely flat to positive. With their buildings and trees, developed areas offer more nest sites than the natural scrub and chaparral they replace. The importation of water favors a bird that must drink. San Diego County Christmas bird counts show no clear trend.

**Taxonomy:** The pale *Z. m. marginella* Woodhouse, 1852, is the only subspecies of the Mourning Dove occurring in California.