

### Allen's Hummingbird *Selasphorus sasin*

Breeding only in a slender strip along the coast of California and southern Oregon, Allen's Hummingbird has a remarkably limited distribution. A migratory subspecies breeding south to Ventura County passes through San Diego County on its way to and from a winter range centered on the mountains around Mexico City. Preadapted to suburbia, a nonmigratory subspecies resident on the Channel Islands spread to metropolitan Los Angeles and southward through Orange County. It has now reached San Diego County, where it was found nesting for the first time at San Onofre in 2001.

**Migration:** Allen's Hummingbird is famous for its migrations being shifted early in the year; the earliest arriving Allen's Hummingbirds are the first of any land bird in both spring and fall. "Spring" migration takes place largely before the equinox marks the beginning of spring; "fall" migration begins before the summer solstice and concludes by the beginning of September. As a spring migrant Allen's Hummingbird is uncommon in San Diego County; from 1997 to 2001 there was no report of more than two per day. A concentration as large as the 200 noted by G. McCaskie in the Tijuana River valley 15 February 1964 has never been approached since. At this season the species occurs mainly in the coastal lowland, rarely in the Anza-Borrego Desert (only two reports 1997–2001), and rarely as high in the mountains as 4000 feet elevation (one in Corte Madera Valley, R20, 21 February 1999, D. Herron). Specimens range in date from 18 February (1940, La Jolla, P7, SDNHM 18095) to 31 March (1961, Alpine, P17, SDNHM 30263), with one mist-netted and measured 10 April (1971, Point Loma, S7, G. McCaskie). The early specimen date is not representative, however, because the species begins arriving in its breeding range in late January. Sight records for San Diego County range from 16 January (1988, near San Diego, J. Oldenettel, AB 42:322, 1988) to 22 April (1997, one at the upper end of Sweetwater Reservoir, S13, P. Famolaro). An unidentified *Selasphorus* hummingbird north of Lake Morena (S21) 10 January 1998 (S. E. Smith) was most likely an early Allen's. Two reports in May could be of misidentified Rufous Hummingbirds or pioneers of the nonmigratory subspecies.

Allen's Hummingbird is probably more numerous in San Diego County in summer as a southbound migrant than in late winter as it heads north. But in summer adult males make up a smaller proportion of the population. Because only adult males are identifiable in the field, high counts are concentrated during the last week of June and



Photo by Anthony Mercieca

first week of July (at least 10 in Barker Valley, E16, 25–29 June 1997, D. Rawlins), the time when most adult males pass through. Specimens of southbound migrants range from 30 June (1997, Mission Hills area of San Diego, R9, SDNHM 50045) to 1 September (1996, La Jolla, SDNHM 49586). Sight records range from 3 June (2000, Horno Area, Camp Pendleton, D3, R. Breisch; 1997, probable Allen's along upper Pine Valley Creek, O21, R. A. Hamilton) and 4 June (1970, two banded at Point Loma, AFN 24:717, 1970) to 10 September (1998, Point Loma, P. A. Ginsburg). At this season Allen's Hummingbirds are scattered over the coastal slope but there are no reports from the Anza-Borrego Desert.

**Winter:** *Selasphorus* hummingbirds are rare winter visitors in coastal San Diego County, and some percentage of these are Allen's. There are at least ten sight records of apparent adult males, all within 3 miles of the coast, from late November to early January, such as one that remained at Del Mar (N7) from fall migration to 26 December 1999 (B. C. Moore) and one at Point Loma 6 January 2002 (R. E. Webster, NAB 56:224, 2002). More important, there are two specimens, from Coronado (S9) 29 November 1968 (SDNHM 37875) and La Jolla 22 December 1999 (SDNHM 50350), plus one mist-netted at Point Loma 1 January 1968 (AFN 22:479, 1968).

**Breeding distribution:** Allen's Hummingbird was confirmed nesting in San Diego County for the first time in 2001, when John and Beverly Hargrove noted three, including a displaying male and a female gathering nest material, at San Onofre State Beach (C1) 20 January 2001. In the same area, a territorial male had edged a few feet across the line from Orange County 18 May 1998, when P. A. Ginsburg observed one defending a clump of bottlebrush.

Further knowledge of Allen's Hummingbird's colonization of San Diego County should be based on actual breeding behavior and observations in late May, during the brief window between the departure of the last Rufous Hummingbirds and the arrival of the first migratory Allen's.

**Nesting:** Nesting in January, as seen at San Onofre, is expected for Allen's Hummingbird in southern California. On the Palos Verdes Peninsula, Los Angeles County, Wells and Baptista (1979) reported females attending nests or fledglings in all months of the year except September and October.

**Conservation:** On the California mainland, the Channel Islands subspecies of Allen's Hummingbird was discovered nesting on the Palos Verdes Peninsula in 1966 and was common there by the following year (Wells and Baptista 1979). From there the birds began spreading into the Los Angeles basin, reaching Orange County by 1980, when they were first found nesting at Newport Beach and Costa Mesa. By 1997 they had spread south along the coast to Laguna Beach, less than 15 miles northwest of the San Diego county line (Gallagher 1997). They use ornamental vegetation as least as much as native willow

trees, so further spread south along San Diego County's coast seems assured.

The primitive migration route for Allen's Hummingbird was north at low elevations along the coast, then south at high elevations through the mountains, a strategy geared to the availability of flowers in each zone (Phillips 1975). With the proliferation of exotic plants that flower over intervals different from those of native species, this constraint is relaxed. The spread of the tree tobacco in particular appears to be allowing southbound Allen's Hummingbirds to migrate at low as well as at high elevations.

**Taxonomy:** The two subspecies of Allen's Hummingbird differ in size, especially bill length. The migratory nominate *S. s. sasin* (Lesson, 1829) is smaller than the nonmigratory *S. s. sedentarius* Grinnell, 1929. See Stiles (1972) for a key; identifying the bird's age and sex is a necessary precursor to identifying the subspecies, as it is for distinguishing the Rufous and Allen's as species.

All specimens from San Diego County are *sasin* except for one collected at Point Loma 25 April 1971 (SDNHM 37764). Note that the date of this early pioneer of *sedentarius* falls outside the normal migration schedule of *sasin*.