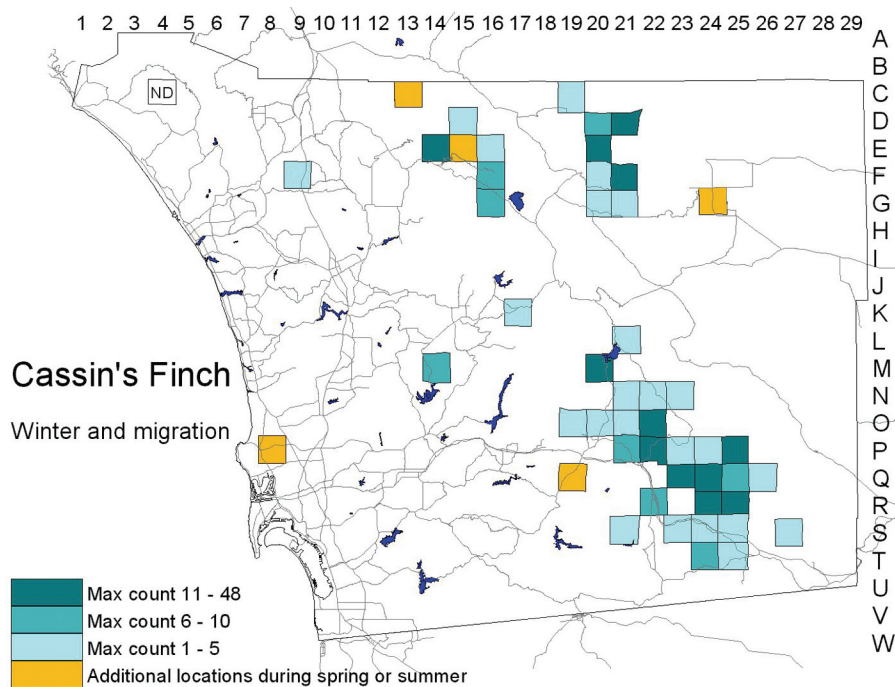


Cassin's Finch *Carpodacus cassinii*

Cassin's Finch is another of those high-mountain birds whose breeding range skips over San Diego County's comparatively low mountains. It breeds in the San Jacinto and Santa Rosa Mountains to the north and in the Sierra San Pedro Mártir to the south, but in San Diego County there is only a single summer record. Some winters pass with no records of Cassin's Finch either—the species is quite irregular. On rare occasions, though, Cassin's Finches invade, and flocks of dozens can be seen, mainly in the mountains. One of these incursions took place in the winter of 2000–01, because of the



Photo by Anthony Mercieca



atlas the best documented Cassin's Finch invasion in San Diego County history.

Winter: In most winters, Cassin's Finch is a rare visitor to San Diego County's mountains, especially the Laguna Mountains, which offer more of the open dry pine forest that resembles the species' breeding habitat. In some years there are none, in some substantial incursions. The atlas' five-year term captured the full range of this variation. The annual total was 0 in 1997–98, 15 in 1998–99, 0 in 1999–2000, 503 in 2000–01, and 4 in 2001–02. The invasion of 2000–01 may have been the largest in San Diego County history, rivaled only by that of 1975–76, when B. Cord counted 103 in the Laguna Mountains 26 January. In 2000–01, numbers in pine-dominated woodland ranged up to 45 around Crouch Valley (P22) 7 January (P. Unitt) and 38 in Lost Valley near Shingle Spring (D21) 23 December (L. J. Hargrove). The birds spread into oak and riparian woodland as well, however, sometimes in numbers

just as large: 48 in Thing Valley (Q24) 7 January (J. R. Barth) and 36 in the Manzanita Indian Reservation (R25) 10 February (K. J. Winter, A. Mauro). Few birds strayed from the mountains; the only records below 2500 feet elevation were of one near Bonsall (F9) from December to 18 February (J. Evans) and eight at Fernbrook (M14) 10 February (B. Hendricks). Lowland records were rare during past incursions as well.

Migration: As expected in an irruptive species, Cassin's Finch does not follow a regular migration schedule. With one exception, dates for San Diego County extend from 3 October (1987, three at Point Loma, S7, J. L. Dunn, AB 42:139, 1988) to 17 May (1997, two at Pine Valley,

P21, J. K. Wilson). The winter preceding initiation of field work for this atlas, 1996–97, was also an invasion year for Cassin's Finch, as for several other mountain birds, so spring 1997 generated several late records, most notably of one in the Clairemont area of San Diego (P8) 10 April 1997 (C. G. Edwards). After the incursion of 2000–01 the latest sightings were from Panawatt Spring, Los Coyotes Indian Reservation (F21), of nine on 5 May and one on 6 May (J. Hargrove).

The first summer record of Cassin's Finch for San Diego County was of a single singing male on Birch Hill, Palomar Mountain (E15), 3 July 2000 (C. R. Mahrtdt, E. C. Hall). Curiously, this sighting followed a winter in which no Cassin's Finches reached San Diego County.

Conservation: No strong trends in Cassin's Finch numbers have been reported, but these numbers fluctuate at some places even in the species' core range (Hahn 1996), making long-term changes difficult to detect.