

**Ferruginous Hawk *Buteo regalis***

Open plains are home to the Ferruginous Hawk, an uncommon winter visitor to San Diego County. About 100 individuals reach the county annually. Conservation of the county’s most extensive grasslands is essential to maintenance of these numbers.

**Winter:** The Ferruginous Hawk’s patchy distribution in San Diego County corresponds largely to the larger tracts of grassland, especially those more than 12 miles inland. Our highest counts 1997–2002 were from such areas: nine in the east arm of Warner Valley (G19) 15 March 1998 (P. D. Jorgensen), eight in the upper basin of Lake Cuyamaca (L21) 25 December 2001 (L. and M. Polinsky), and eight just southwest of Ramona (L14) 17 January 1999 (F. Sproul). The largest numbers of Ferruginous Hawks in San Diego County have been found on Lake Henshaw Christmas bird counts, with up to 34 on 19 December 1988. The years of high counts correspond with discoveries of Ferruginous Hawks roosting communally in trees and on telephone poles at Warner Springs (F19), up to 13 in a cluster (King et al. 1988).

Within 12 miles of the coast our only count of more than two individuals was of four in the Fallbrook Naval Weapons Station (D7) 28 February 2002 (K. L. Weaver). The maximum recorded on any of San Diego County’s three coastal Christmas bird counts is four as well.

The Ferruginous Hawk also occurs fairly regularly in the Borrego Valley, where our highest counts per atlas square per day were of two individuals. The species was recorded on 15 of 19 Anza–Borrego Christmas bird counts 1984–2002, with an average of 1.5. One or two



Photo by Anthony Mercieca

individuals are seen regularly in Earthquake Valley (J23/K23) but the species is rare in other desert valleys like Clark, Culp, Blair, and Vallecito.

**Migration:** The Ferruginous Hawk occurs in San Diego County mainly from October to March; extreme dates are 14 September (1962, San Diego area, AFN 17:68, 1963) and 17 September (year not specified, Lake Cuyamaca, J. G. Peterson in Grinnell and Miller 1944) in fall and 21 April (year not specified, Lake Cuyamaca, J. G. Peterson in Grinnell and Miller 1944) and 25 April (1997, between Carlsbad and San Marcos, J8, J. O. Zimmer) in spring.

**Conservation:** The Ferruginous Hawk has lost some habitat to urbanization, as at Rancho Otay (U12/U13). Conservation of the threatened Ramona grasslands in Santa Maria Valley is critical to sustaining the hawk’s numbers in San Diego County. Overgrazing could also degrade the Ferruginous Hawk’s foraging habitat by reducing the supply of prey. Indiscriminate use of rodenticides could reduce the hawk’s food supply as well. It appears from Lake Henshaw Christmas bird count results that the numbers in Warner Valley were greater from 1983 to 1989 (average 28) than from 1997 to 2002 (average 8). Bad weather and no searches for communal roosts during the more recent interval, however, may account for some of the difference.

