

### Greater Scaup *Aythya marila*

In San Diego County, near the southern tip of its winter range, the Greater Scaup is uncommon to rare. It is found with Lesser Scaups and easily overlooked among the large flocks of the more common species. The two scaups' close similarity has led to their numbers being pooled in many studies and has left the Greater's exact status in San Diego County poorly known.

**Winter:** The Greater Scaup occurs in San Diego County primarily in south San Diego Bay, where it mingles with the large flocks of the Lesser Scaup. Rarely are more than three or four individuals identified, but 35 were along the Silver Strand between Crown Cove and Coronado Cays (T9) 6 December 1988 (Macdonald et al. 1990), and 53 were in south San Diego Bay (U10) 3 March 1993 (Stadtlander and Konecny 1994). The Greater occurs at least irregularly on Mission Bay (up to 10 near Crown Point, Q8, 10 December 2000, E. Wallace) and in the San Diego River flood-control channel (R8; up to five on 12 February 2002, M. B. Mulrooney).

Elsewhere along the county's coast the Greater Scaup is even scarcer. It has been reported on 8 of 22 Rancho Santa Fe Christmas bird counts 1980–2003 with a maximum of 35 on 18 December 1988. It has been reported on only 2 of 28 Oceanside Christmas bird counts 1976–2002, with a maximum of two on 28 December 1980. On fresh water wintering Greater Scaups have been reported only from the lower Otay River just east of San Diego Bay (V10), with one on 17 December 1977 (G. McCaskie), and Santee Lakes (P12), with two from 10 January to 2 February 1978 (J. L. Dunn) and one each



Photo by Anthony Mercieca

on 20 January 1998 (E. Post) and 4 February 2002 (J. C. Worley).

The skeleton I previously reported (Unitt 1984) as a Greater Scaup was actually a mislabeled Lesser Scaup, but J. R. Barth found a recently dead Greater Scaup at the Chula Vista Wildlife Reserve, south San Diego Bay (U10), 13 April 2003 (SDNHM 50696).

**Migration:** The Greater Scaup's typical season in San Diego County extends from 5 November (1977, one at Border Field State Park, W10, L. Bevier) to 21 March (1977, three on San Diego Bay, E. Copper). In 1978, a year of apparently exceptional abundance, the species remained as late as 19 May (four at the San Diego River mouth, AB 32:1054, 1978). Two Greater Scaups were on south San Diego Bay 30 May 1963 (AFN 17:434, 1963) and one was there 15 September 2000 (G. C. Hazard). Late stragglers are probably unhealthy; the one picked up

13 April 2003 had failed to molt properly.

One at Lake Henshaw (G17) 2 March 1985 was presumably a spring migrant crossing from the Gulf of California to the Pacific coast (R. Higson, AB 39:349, 1985).

**Conservation:** There is no evidence for historical change in the Greater Scaup's status in San Diego County. Though the numbers reaching San Diego may vary from year to year, the species has never been common.

**Taxonomy:** Banks (1986b) ascertained that *A. m. nearctica* Stejneger, 1885, is the proper name for the North American subspecies of the Greater Scaup.

