

SANDPIPERS AND SNIPES — FAMILY SCOLOPACIDAE

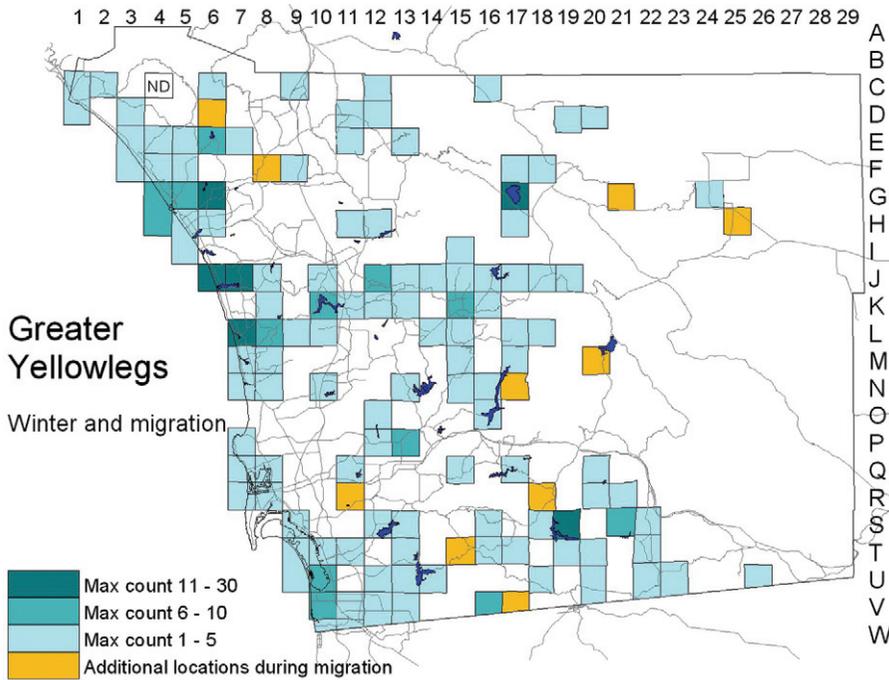
Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca*

The Greater Yellowlegs is one of San Diego County's most widespread shorebirds, found at reservoirs and small ponds inland as well as along the coast. It seldom gathers in flocks, however. It is common as a fall migrant, generally uncommon as a winter visitor and spring migrant, and rare as a nonbreeding summer visitor—during an interval barely four weeks long from late May to mid June.

Winter: The Greater Yellowlegs is widespread in San Diego County's coastal wetlands, especially those with extensive



Photo by Anthony Mercieca



tidal mudflats. Numbers along the coast range up to 30 in the east basin of Batiquitos Lagoon (J7) 15 February 1998 (R. Campbell), 18 at San Elijo Lagoon (L7) 23 December 2001 (E. Garnica), 25 in and near the south San Diego Bay salt works (U10/V10) in December 1993 (Stadtlander and Konecny 1994), and 10 in the Tijuana River estuary (V10) 24 January 1998 (B. C. Moore). On the basis of monthly counts 1973–83, the November–April average at San Elijo Lagoon was 4.3 (King et al. 1987); on the basis of weekly counts 1993–94, the December–February monthly averages in and near the salt works were 7 to 17.

The Greater Yellowlegs can be just as numerous inland, even far inland, as along the coast. From 1997 to 2002, our inland counts in winter ranged up to 20 at Whelan Lake (G6) 21 January 1998 (D. Rorick), 10 in San Pasqual Valley (J12) 26 February 1999 (D. and D. Bylin), 20 at Lake Henshaw (G17) 29 December 1997 (J. O. Zimmer), and 13 at Barrett Reservoir (S19) 2 February 2001 (R. and S. L. Breisch). The Escondido Christmas bird count averages 4.8, the Lake Henshaw count 4.4. Winter records range in elevation up to about 4000 feet, exceptionally to about 4600 feet in Lost Valley (D20; one on 21 January 2000, J. M. and B. Hargrove). In the Anza–Borrego Desert there are four winter records of single birds on ponds in the Borrego Valley, just one during the atlas period, in Borrego Springs (G24) 9 February 1998 (P. D. Ache).

Migration: The Greater Yellowlegs is one of the earliest migrants to return in “fall” even before the summer solstice. Our earliest apparent migrants 1997–2001 were seven at the upper end of Sweetwater Reservoir (S13) 17 June 1999 (P. Famolaro) and one at Chollas Reservoir 18 June 1998 (P. Unitt). Fall migrants are regular by the first week of July and peak in September, according to weekly censuses in the salt works 1993–94, where Stadtlander and Konecny (1994) recorded a high 46 on 15 September 1993. At San Elijo Lagoon, King et al. (1987) recorded the peak monthly average of 15 in August and September.

In spring, migration takes place from March to mid May. Its amplitude at that season is less than in fall, though a concentra-

tion of 45 was at Bonsall (F8) 3 April 1998 (L. Gammie). Our latest spring migrants were one at the upper end of Lake Sutherland (J17) 17 May 2000 (J. O. Zimmer) and four at the upper end of Lake Hodges (K11) 18 May 1997 (E. C. Hall). In the Borrego Valley the Greater Yellowlegs is more frequent in migration than in winter, though still rare, from 25 September (1999, one at Borrego Springs Country Club, G24, P. D. Jorgensen) to 3 May (1997, one at the Borrego Springs sewage ponds, H25, H. L. Young, M. B. Mosher).

During the atlas period, we had 12 reports of single Greater Yellowlegs between 21 May and 12 June, evidently summering. Most of these were coastal but one was at O’Neill Lake (G6) 12 June 2001 (P. A. Ginsburg), another at the east end of Lake Hodges 3 June 1997 (E. C. Hall). Much larger numbers of summering birds occur occasionally on south San Diego Bay, however: up to 40 in June 1987, 62 on 15 June 1991 (R. E. Webster, AB 41:1487, 1987; 45:1161, 1991), and 26 on 12 June 1989 (Macdonald et al. 1990).

Conservation: With its less social habits and more diverse habitats, the Greater Yellowlegs has sustained its numbers better than have some other large shorebirds. Over the second half of the 20th century there was no trend in the species’ numbers in San Diego County. Loss of tidal mudflats and seasonal wetlands in floodplains may have been offset by importation of water and creation of ponds and reservoirs.