

Mew Gull *Larus canus*

San Diego County lies near the southern limit of the Mew Gull's winter range, so the species occurs here as an uncommon winter visitor. It is almost exclusively coastal in this area, being rare just a few miles inland. For no clear reason, in San Diego County Mew Gulls are clumped in just two areas.

Winter: From 1997 to 2002, Mew Gulls concentrated in San Diego County at just two sites. One is the basin and breakwater at Camp Del Mar, within Camp Pendleton (G4), where counts averaged 20–25 and reached a maximum of 69 on 10 January 2001 (P. A. Ginsburg). Often some of these birds use the nearby sewage ponds at Stuart Mesa Road and Vandegrift Boulevard (G5), where counts ranged up to 14 on 26 December 1998 (T. A. Burr). The other site is the beach at North Island Naval Air Station (S8), where counts in the 20s are usual and 100 on 5 January 1998 (B. C. Moore) was exceptional. Sometimes the birds flock near the Hotel del Coronado (T9), but we did not record any such concentration there during the atlas period.

Elsewhere along San Diego County's coast the Mew Gull is widely scattered but uncommon. During the atlas period we had no count away from the two main sites greater than five at Encinitas (K6) 29 December 1998 (S. Schultz). The only inland locations where we recorded Mew Gulls 1997–2002 were Lake San Marcos (J8), with up to two on 27 December 1997 and 2 February 1999 (J. O. Zimmer), and Kit Carson Park, Escondido (K11), with



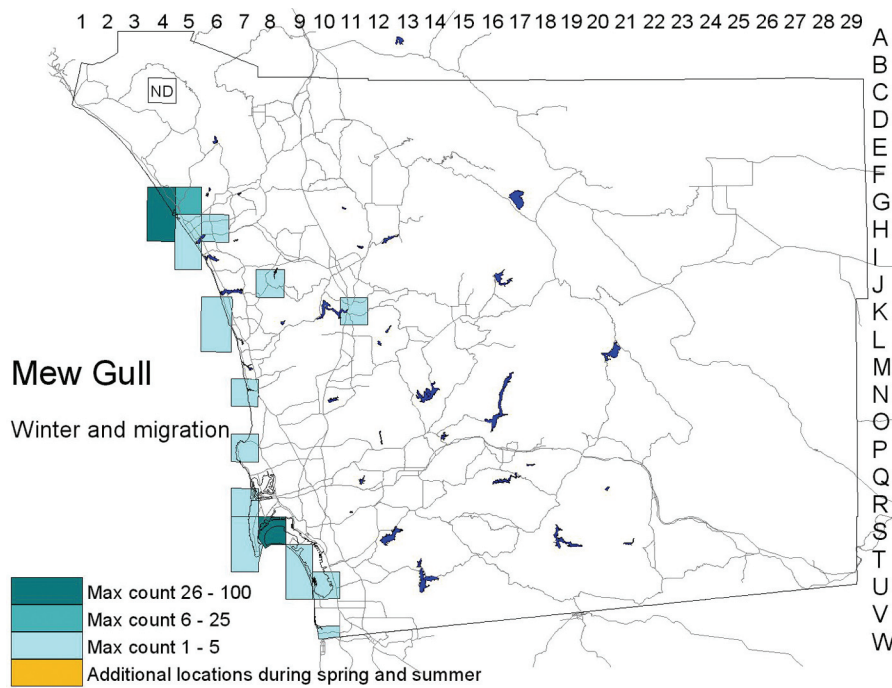
Photo by Anthony Mercieca

a first-year bird found after a storm 4 February 1998 (E. C. Hall). Previous inland records are all within 7 miles of the coast (Unitt 1984).

Migration: The Mew Gull occurs primarily from late November to late March, though it does not reach peak numbers until early January (Devillers et al. 1971). Extreme dates are 15 October (1955, one at Oceanside, H5, AFN 10:57, 1956) and 4 May (1962, one at the San Diego River mouth, R7, G. McCaskie). There are also two summer records, of one collected on Mission Bay (Q8) 31 July 1922 (SDNHM 2351) and one seen on San Diego Bay at Chula Vista (U10) 6–30 July 1977 (AB 31:1190, 1977).

Conservation: The sites where Mew Gulls flock shift over time. In the 1970s the San Luis Rey River mouth (H5), San Diego River mouth (R7), and Tijuana River mouth (V10) were the main sites (Devillers et al. 1971, Unitt 1984), but by the beginning of the 21st century the gulls were not using these regularly. Nevertheless, the numbers reaching the county have changed little in 30 years: Devillers et al. (1971) wrote "the total population probably does not exceed 100 birds." Christmas bird counts suggest considerable annual variation; the San Diego count has ranged from highs of 227 in 1982 and 183 in 1983 (El Niño?) to lows of one in 1973 and 1995.

Taxonomy: Only the New World subspecies of the Mew Gull, *L. c. brachyrhynchus* Richardson, 1831, has been found in California.



Mew Gull
Winter and migration