

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

The Northern Shoveler is primarily a winter visitor to San Diego County, abundant in shallow water over a muddy bottom. Here the shovelers can use their spatulate bills to filter the water for seeds, snails, and plankton. Small numbers remain through the summer, but the shoveler is known to have nested in San Diego County only once.

Winter: The Northern Shoveler winters widely in San Diego County's coastal wetlands and on its inland lakes. Certain lakes and lagoons, however, are sites of consistently large concentrations. The most important of these are O'Neill Lake (E6; up to 1000, as on 4 December 2000, P. A. Ginsburg), Windmill Lake (G6; up to 763 on 27 December 1997, P. Unitt), Whelan Lake (G6; up to 593 on 21 January 1998, D. Rorick), Lake Hodges (K10/K11; up to 655 on 22 December 2000, R. L. Barber), San Elijo Lagoon (L7; up to 2000 on 20 January 1998, A. Mauro),

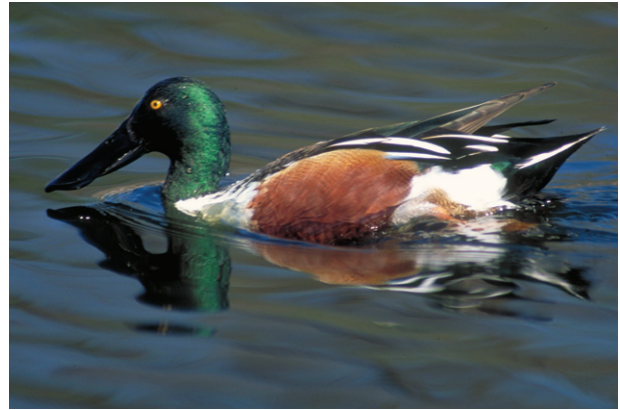
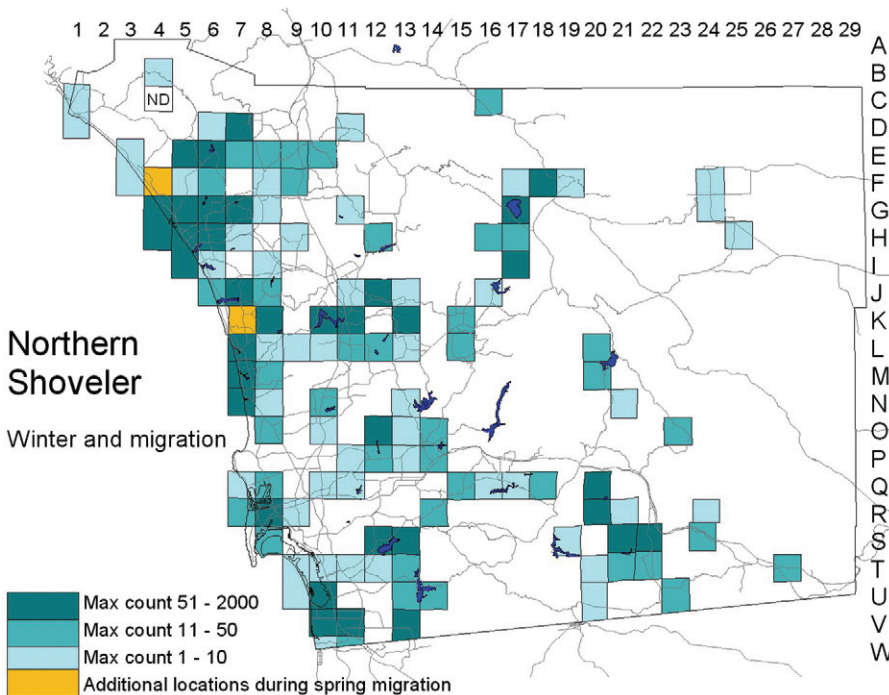


Photo by Anthony Mercieca

and Sweetwater Reservoir (S12/S13; up to 800 on 14 January 1999, P. Famolaro).

Though most common on fresh or brackish water, the shoveler also uses tidal mudflats and salt marshes, with up to 330 in south San Diego Bay (U10) 16 December 2000 (G. Moreland). If water is adequate, shovelers exploit seasonal wetlands and intermittently filled lakes such as Big Laguna (O23; 30 on 23 February 2002, K. J. Winter), Corte Madera (Q20/R20; 75 on 20 February 1999, G. L. Rogers), and the upper basin of Lake Morena (S21; 550 on 16 February 1998, S. E. Smith). In the Anza-Borrego Desert the shoveler is a rare visitor reported only from artificial ponds in the Borrego Valley (maximum five in the north Borrego Valley, E24, 5 December 1976, P. D. Jorgensen).

Migration: Northern Shovelers begin arriving in San Diego



County in mid August, and their numbers increase through December (Unitt 1984, King et al. 1987). Yet, in weekly surveys of the south San Diego Bay salt works through 1993, Stadtlander and Konecny (1994) did not find shovelers in numbers until November. Spring departure is in March and April. Substantial numbers may remain as late as mid April (84 at Buena Vista Lagoon 13 April 1999, M. Freda), but almost all depart soon after that.

Breeding distribution: From May to July the Northern Shoveler is rare in San Diego County, but from 1997 to 2001 we noted it during these months in 11 areas. Summering birds were most frequent at Whelan Lake and Buena Vista Lagoon (up to seven on 29 May 2001, R. Gransbury). Particularly surprising were three on the Campo Plateau at Tule Lake (T27) 27 June 2001 (J. K. Wilson). Shovelers at Sweetwater Reservoir (S12/S13) 1–3 May 2000 (P. Famolaro) appeared paired, but otherwise we saw no suggestion of the species' breeding in San Diego County. Alice Fries' observation of five ducklings following their mother in the sewage pond at Camp

Margarita (E5) 6 June 1978 is still the county's only confirmation of shovelers nesting.

Conservation: The evidence for trends in shoveler numbers in San Diego County is contradictory. At San Elijo Lagoon, King et al. (1987) found no trend from 1973 to 1983, and the numbers we recorded there 1997–2002 seem consistent with the high levels of that earlier study (winter average 600 birds). The Rancho Santa Fe Christmas bird count, including San Elijo, shows no clear trend in shovelers. On the San Diego count, however, shovelers have increased, from an average of 161 from 1960 to 1985 to an average of 870 from 1997 to 2002. Yet on the Oceanside count the trend looks negative. On that count shovelers went from an average of 3105 from 1975 to 1984 to an average of 758 from 1997 to 2002. Unfortunately, the historical record is too poor to illuminate the species' history further. But, with the development of most of the coastal floodplains and Mission and San Diego bays, many of the shallow and seasonal wetlands ideal for shovelers have been lost.