

### Northern Waterthrush *Seiurus noveboracensis*

The Northern Waterthrush breeds west to Alaska and winters in the coastal mangroves of Baja California. Yet it is rarely seen as a migrant and winter visitor in San Diego County. Some of this rarity is due to the species' habits: it walks on the ground in the dense understory of riparian woodland, staying close to water or hopping through branches hanging low over water. Often it reveals itself only by call, a characteristic loud "chink."

**Winter:** In San Diego County, the Northern Waterthrush is primarily a winter visitor to the coastal lowland. Since 1985 winter records have been almost entirely from the Tijuana River valley, where the species occurs annually. During the atlas period our only counts of more than a single individual were of two in the valley west of Hollister Street (V10) 18 December 1999 (W. E. Haas) and two at the Dairy Mart pond (V11) 1 January 2000 (G. McCaskie). Five were in the valley in December 1990 (R. E. Webster, AB 45:322, 1991). The Northern Waterthrush has also been seen repeatedly along the lower Otay and San Luis Rey rivers, the latter accounting for the Oceanside Christmas bird count picking up the species in 1981 and 1984.

**Migration:** Northern Waterthrushes wintering in the Tijuana River valley may arrive as early as 6 September (2003, G. McCaskie) and remain as late as 4 May (1980, AB 34:817, 1980). The earliest fall date recorded for the



Photo by Anthony Mercieca

county is 13 August (1966, San Diego, AFN 21:79, 1967). Sightings of the Northern Waterthrush at the usual sites for vagrant fall warblers on Point Loma (S7) are exceptional (24 September 2002, J. K. Wilson; 6 September 2003, W. McCausland). A Northern Waterthrush in Los Peñasquitos Canyon (N8) 11 April 1999 (P. A. Ginsburg) was our only spring migrant during the atlas period. Outside the coastal lowland, the Northern Waterthrush has been recorded four times in the Anza-Borrego Desert, at Lower Willows (D23) 4 May 1980 and 18 May 1981 (the latest spring record for San Diego County, A. G. Morley), at Agua Caliente Springs (M26) 8 May 2002 (J. K. Wilson), and along Vallecito Creek at the east end of Mason Valley (M23) 2 September 1984 (SDNHM 43173).