

Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*

Every fall a few Pectoral Sandpipers visit San Diego County's coastal marshes, where they keep to well-vegetated areas and avoid open mudflats. The largest numbers, however, are seen at fresh water, in wet pastures or on lakeshores. Nearly all Pectoral Sandpipers seen in San Diego County are juveniles.

Migration: The Pectoral Sandpiper has been found at most of San Diego County's coastal wetlands. Since the 1990s it has generally been seen singly (or in flocks with other shorebirds), though larger numbers occurred in the past, up to 20 at San Elijo Lagoon (L7) 11 October 1963 and 10 October 1965 (G. McCaskie). The former flooded pastures in the Tijuana River valley were a draw to Pectoral Sandpipers, yielding up to 40 on 22 September 1984 (G. McCaskie, AB 39:102, 1985). Farther inland, the species has been reported less frequently, but Lake Henshaw (G17) has had numbers as large as 36 on 17 September 1977 (P. Unitt) and 23 on 20 September 1984 (R. Higson, AB 39:102, 1985). Covering the upper end of Lake Hodges (K11) regularly through the early 1980s, K. L. Weaver found the Pectoral Sandpiper only in 1982 with a maximum of eight on 26 September. The only fall record for the Anza-Borrego Desert is of one at the Borrego sewage ponds (H25) 9–15 October 1990 (A. G. Morley).

Adult Pectoral Sandpipers have been seen in San Diego County at San Elijo Lagoon 29 June 1977 (E. Copper, AB 31:1190, 1977) and at Los Peñasquitos Lagoon (N7) 23 July 2000 (S. E. Smith, NAB 54:423, 2000), providing the earliest fall records. But not until late August, with the arrival of juveniles, is the species expected. It is most frequent in September and October. The latest reliable date is 18 November (1983, one photographed at Lake Henshaw,



Photo by Brian L. Sullivan

R. Higson, AB 38:246, 1984); 25 November seems too late for the five reported on that date at Mission Bay in 1955 (AFN 10:57, 1956).

In spring, the Pectoral Sandpiper reaches California only casually, and there are just two spring records for San Diego County, of one bird at the Borrego sewage ponds 15 April 1991 (A. G. Morley) and another at Lindo Lake, Lakeside (O14), 10–11 May 2000 (N. Osborn, NAB 54:327, 2000).

Conservation: The decrease in Pectoral Sandpiper numbers in San Diego County since the early 1980s is likely due to local habitat changes. The elimination of pastures and the reduction of irrigation in the Tijuana River valley have decreased that area's attractiveness to fresh-water shorebirds.