

### Ring-necked Duck *Aythya collaris*

The Ring-necked Duck differs from other diving ducks in its preference for small ponds and avoidance of coastal bays and lagoons. It is a common winter visitor at some inland lakes and ponds but rare or absent at others. A few individuals remain into the summer each year, but the species has never been found nesting in southern California.

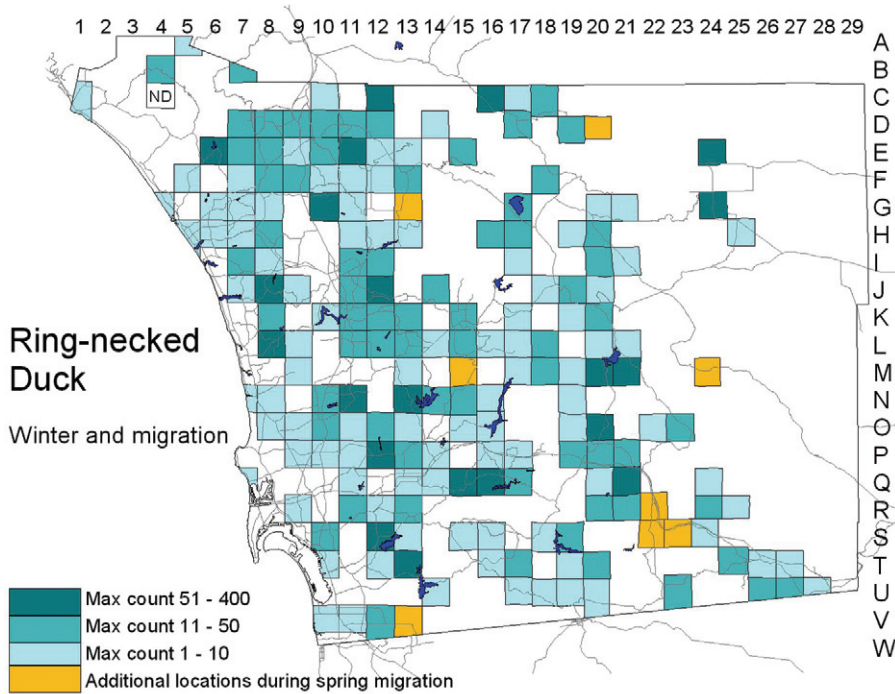
**Winter:** Because the Ring-necked Duck uses both small ponds and larger lakes, it is more widespread than most diving ducks. Sometimes it is common on large lakes such as Cuyamaca (M20; 120 on 22 February 1999, A. P. and T. E. Keenan), Loveland (Q16; 70 on 31 January 2001, J. K. Wilson), and Sweetwater (S12; 60 on 16 December 2000, P. Famolaro). But numbers can be just as large on small ponds such as one at the mouth of Beeler Canyon, Poway (N11; 100 on 17 December 1999, K. J. Winter) and another in Rancho Santa Fe (L8; 1000 on 22 December 2000, A. Mauro). Ornamental ponds in cemeteries are often good Ring-necked Duck sites: Greenwood Cemetery (S10) is the most consistent site for the species within the San Diego Christmas bird count circle. From 1997 to 2002 the



Photo by Anthony Mercieca

largest flocks were at O'Neill Lake (E6), where numbers are usually 10–50 but were 150 on 18 February 1998 (P. A. Ginsburg), and the Wild Animal Park (J12), where numbers are usually 75–130 but were 400 on 30 December 1999 (D. and D. Bylin).

Besides the Ruddy Duck, the Ring-necked is the most frequent diving duck at artificial ponds in the Borrego Valley. It has been recorded on 11 of 19 Anza-Borrego



Christmas bird counts 1984–2002. High numbers for the desert are 60 in the north Borrego Valley (E24) 17 December 2000 (P. R. Pryde) and 52 at Club Circle (G24) 16 December 2001 (D. Waber).

Along the coast the Ring-necked Duck is rare. From 1997 to 2002 we found it only eight times in coastal wetlands, with maxima of five in the Santa Margarita River estuary (G4) 22 January 1999 (P. A. Ginsburg) and four in the northwest corner of Mission Bay (Q7) 21 January 2001 (L. and M. Polinsky). Various systematic surveys of San Diego Bay (Macdonald et al. 1990, Manning 1995, Mock et al. 1994, Stadtlander and Konecny 1994)

yielded only two records from the salt works, with a maximum of six birds 5 January 1994. King et al. (1987) reported only one record from San Elijo Lagoon (L7) with none on 10 years of monthly surveys 1973–83.

**Migration:** In fall the Ring-necked Duck arrives rarely as early as late September but does not become common until November. In spring it remains common through March and departs largely in April. Small numbers persist through May. The end of spring migration is indistinct because of the regularity of summering individuals. We found at least one Ring-necked Duck from June to August in each of the five years of the atlas period; 1999 and 2000 each yielded five. Our maximum count of summering

birds at one site was four at Pine Hills (K19) 10 June 2000 (L. J. Hargrove).

**Conservation:** Christmas bird counts show no clear trend in Ring-necked Duck numbers in San Diego County. But it seems likely that the species is now more numerous and widespread than before so many reservoirs were built and so much water was imported. Stephens (1919a) called the Ring-necked Duck only an “occasional winter visitant,” suggesting numbers lower than today’s. The species may be on the increase range wide, and its breeding distribution is spreading (Hohmann and Eberhardt 1998).