

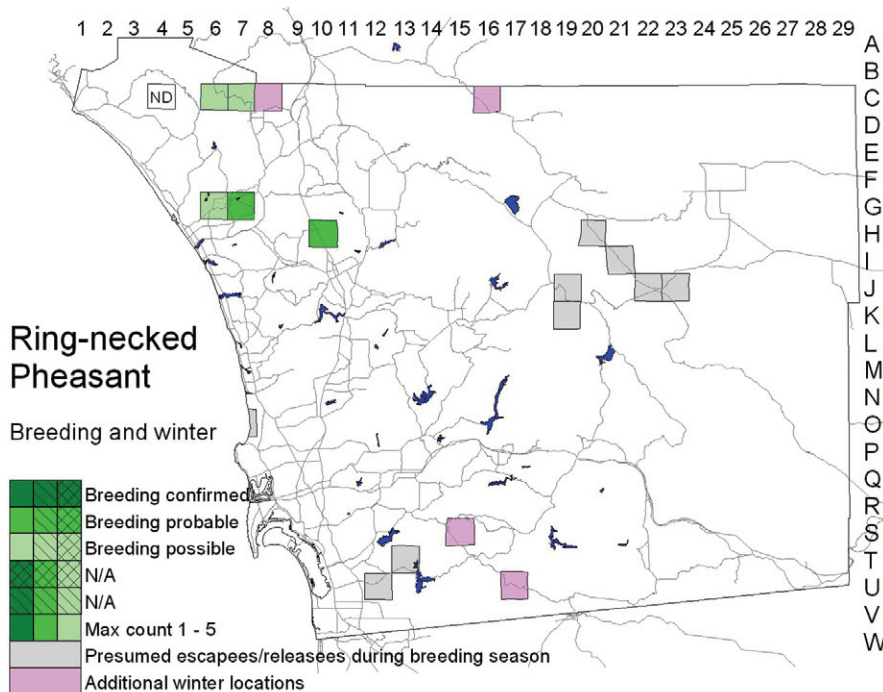
## PHEASANTS AND TURKEYS — FAMILY PHASIANIDAE

### Ring-necked Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

A native of Asia, the Ring-necked Pheasant has been introduced widely in North America as a game bird. It thrives best in grain-growing regions, which no longer include San Diego County. The pheasant's status in the county is tenuous; the birds may not be breeding in the wild and are seen with any consistency at only two sites. For hunting, the California Department of Fish and Game currently releases only males at Rancho Jamul and San Felipe Valley, guarding against the possibility of a feral population establishing itself from that source. Escapees or releasees from private breeders are also seen occasionally.



Photo by Anthony Mercieca



**Breeding/winter distribution:** From 1997 to 2002, the Ring-necked Pheasant was seen most regularly in and near Guajome Regional Park (G7), with up to five near the junction of Melrose Drive and Bobier Drive 10 and 12 April 2001 (C. Andregg) and ten in Guajome Park 23 December 2000 (C. G. Edwards). Another site was in north Escondido near Jesmond Dene Park and in the surrounding valley (H10), where Dan and Debi Bylin noted one or two individuals regularly, including a male and female together 8 April 1999, our closest suggestion of pheasants breeding in the wild

in San Diego County. Also, a male found struck by a car here 16 March 1998 had enlarged testes (SDNHM 50023). Three observations between De Luz and Fallbrook (C6/C7/C8; K. L. Weaver) may mean a small population persists in that area. Six sightings of up to two individuals from Wynola (J19) to Pine Hills (K19) were likely the result of releases by, or escapes from, exotic pheasant breeders in Wynola (S. E. Smith).

On a few occasions we saw the birds released for hunting at Rancho Jamul (S15) and San Felipe Valley (I21) and noted their dispersal as far as Dulzura (U17; one on 30 January 2001, D. Povey) and Sentenac Ciénaga (J23, one on 10 April 1999, D. Tomlinson). The few scattered sightings elsewhere were all likely of escaped captives.

**Conservation:** No history of the Ring-necked Pheasant's introduction into San Diego County has been preserved, and, until the beginning of the releases at Rancho Jamul

and San Felipe Valley in the late 1990s, may have been done by private individuals or clubs only. The earliest published records are from Christmas bird counts, on the Oceanside count beginning in 1952 and on the San Diego count beginning in 1955. The species was never more than uncommon and local and declined as urban sprawl spread over the pastureland and agricultural land where it was formerly seen. The number reported on the Oceanside Christmas bird count peaked at 18 in 1963. On the San Diego count, the pheasant was last reported in 1968, on the Escondido count in 1989, and on the Rancho Santa Fe count in 1990. The introduction of the Ring-necked Pheasant into San Diego County appears to be on the verge of failure early in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The current release program consists of "put and take" rather than an introduction intending to establish a self-sustaining population.