

Ruby-crowned Kinglet *Regulus calendula*

The Ruby-crowned Kinglet is a winter visitor, commonest in riparian and oak woodland. It uses a wide variety of other habitats too, from urban eucalyptus trees to pines and firs in the mountains to desert oases. The Ruby-crowned Kinglet is San Diego County's leading practitioner of hover-gleaning: hovering momentarily at a leaf to glean minute insects. A northward contraction of the species' breeding range is not yet reflected in a decline in its winter numbers.

Winter: The Ruby-crowned Kinglet is one of San Diego County's most widespread winter visitors, recorded in 96% of all atlas squares covered. Only in the bleakest parts of the Anza-Borrego Desert, near the Imperial County line, is it likely to be missed. It is most abundant in northwestern San Diego County, where riparian woodland is most extensive. During the atlas period the highest counts were around Lake Hodges (K10), of up to 137 on 22 December 2000 (R. L. Barber et al.). Farther inland numbers can be quite high as well, up to 40 around Indian Flats (D19) 6 January 1999 (K. J. Burns) and 30 at the north end of Lake Morena (S21) 27 December 1998 (S. E. Smith). Even at elevations between 4000 and 6000

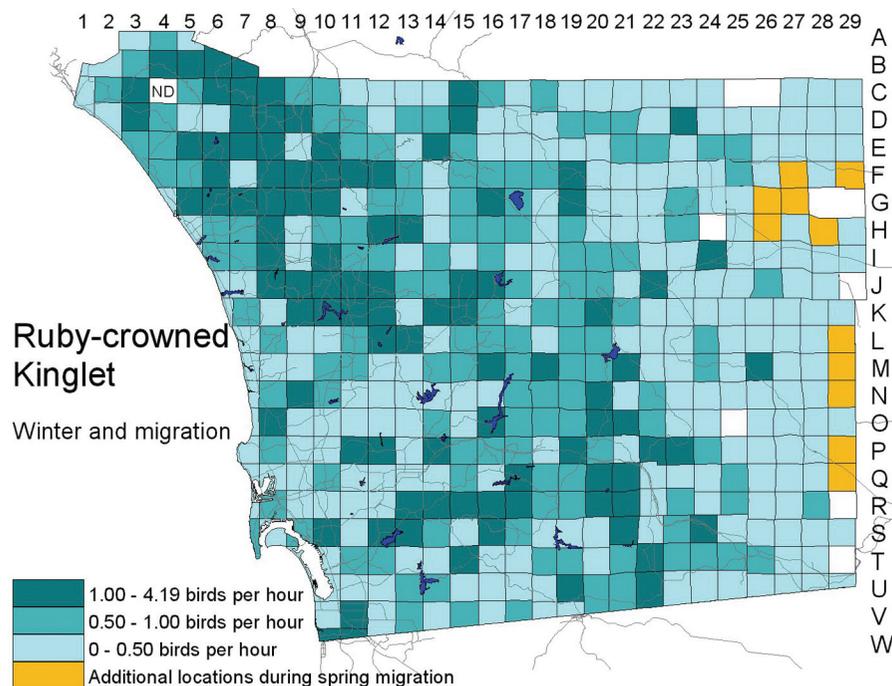


Photo by Anthony Mercieca

feet the Ruby-crowned Kinglet is common in winter, with counts up to 25 on West Mesa, Cuyamaca Mountains (N20), 9 January and 6 February 1999 (B. Siegel) and 23 near Filaree Flat, Laguna Mountains (N22) 9 January 1999 (G. L. Rogers). Around the summit of San Diego County's highest peak, Hot Springs Mountain (E20), C. R. Mahrtdt and K. L. Weaver noted it repeatedly, with a maximum five on 9 December 2000. In the Anza-Borrego Desert the Ruby-crowned Kinglet occurs mainly at oases and in developed areas, where it is generally uncommon. In dry desert washes it is uncommon to rare, but desert

numbers were considerably larger in the wet winter of 1997–1998 than in the subsequent four years of the atlas period. The number reported per hour in the desert that year was higher than in any of the other four by a factor of at least 2.8. The highest single-day counts in the Anza-Borrego Desert were of 25 at Agua Caliente Springs (M26) 1 December 1997 (E. C. Hall) and 20 near Sunset Mountain (J26) 11 January 1998 (J. Determan, A. Mauro).

Migration: In fall, the Ruby-crowned Kinglet arrives typically in the last week of September, exceptionally as early as 6 September (1973, one at Otay Mesa, V12, AB 28:106, 1974). In spring, most individuals depart



by the end of April, and by the second week of May the species is rare. During the atlas' term the latest date for the Ruby-crowned Kinglet ranged from 3 to 24 May. The only records after 16 May were of one near the Santa Margarita River mouth (G4) 21 May 2001 (P. A. Ginsburg), one at Point Loma (S7) 22 May 1999 (P. A. Ginsburg), and one near Filaree Flat, Laguna Mountains (N22), 24 May 1997 (G. L. Rogers). The last record recalls that of a singing male along Agua Dulce Creek, Laguna Mountains, 30 May 1974 (AB 28:950, 1974).

Breeding distribution: W. O. Emerson (in Belding 1890) thought that the Ruby-crowned Kinglet “perhaps breeds in the firs on Volcan Mountain,” and Stephens (1919a) reported it as a “rare summer resident of the highest mountains” in San Diego County. Neither reported specimens or definite observations to support these statements, however. The Ruby-crowned Kinglet formerly bred south to the San Jacinto Mountains (Grinnell and Swarth 1913). Now it may have retracted as a breeding

species north out of southern California entirely (Lentz 1993), though it may persist at the highest elevations of the San Bernardino Mountains.

Conservation: In spite of the apparent contraction of the breeding range, there is no clear trend in the number of Ruby-crowned Kinglets wintering in San Diego County. The birds use urban trees freely, helping to compensate for the loss of native riparian woodland.

Taxonomy: The widespread *R. c. calendula* (Linnaeus, 1766) is the predominant subspecies of Ruby-crowned Kinglet in San Diego County, as throughout southern California. However, the darker, buffier *R. c. grinnelli* Palmer, 1897, breeding in coastal southeastern Alaska and British Columbia, is known from one specimen collected at sea 10 miles west of Point Loma 25 September 1953 (SDNHM 29986). This is the southernmost record of *grinnelli*, which usually comes no farther south than northern California.