

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

Turnstones got their name from their habit of foraging by flipping pebbles, looking for invertebrates hiding beneath them. In San Diego County, however, it is in sea lettuce on the mudflats around San Diego Bay or in kelp washed up on beaches that the Ruddy Turnstone is most likely to be seen rummaging. Breeding in the arctic, the Ruddy Turnstone is a locally common migrant and winter visitor along San Diego County's coast. Small numbers of non-breeding birds remain through the summer.

Winter: The Ruddy Turnstone occurs along most of San Diego County's coast but is concentrated on the mudflats around San Diego Bay (70 on 15 December 2001, M. Bache). Rocky shorelines are also one of the Ruddy Turnstone's regular habitats (25 at La Jolla, P7, L. and M. Polinsky). The Ruddy Turnstone is far less numerous in northern San Diego County: though the San Diego Christmas bird count averages 86 (1954–2002), the Oceanside count averages 5.2 (1976–2002), the Rancho Santa Fe count 4.4 (1980–2003). From 1997 to 2002 our



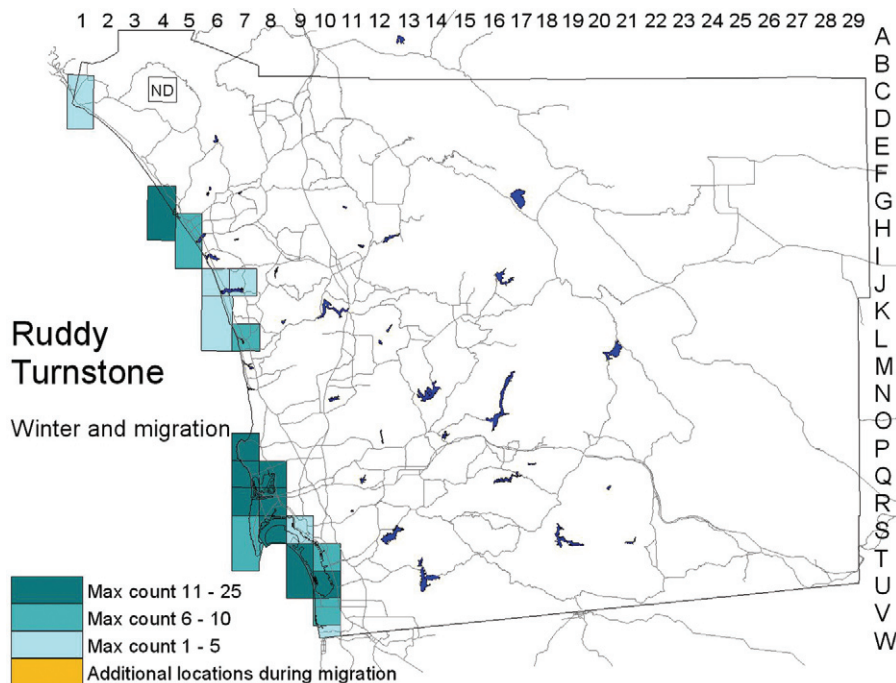
Photo by Jack C. Daynes

highest winter counts in northern San Diego County were of 13 on the jetty at Camp Del Mar (G4) on 20 January and 14 February 2000 (P. A. Ginsburg).

Migration: Fall migrants begin arriving in July but are not clustered in a distinct seasonal peak. In spring, by contrast, there is a distinct peak in April. In and near the San Diego Bay salt works (U10/V10), on weekly surveys 1993–94,

Stadtlander and Konecny (1994) had their highest count of 50 on 14 April 1993. Ruddy Turnstones heading north clear out in early May; late records of migrants are of one at La Jolla 7 May 2000 (L. Polinsky) and three in definitive alternate plumage at the south end of San Diego Bay 9 May 1978 (P. Unitt).

Modest numbers of nonbreeding Ruddy Turnstones summer in San Diego County, mainly on San Diego Bay. Macdonald et al. (1990) tallied 28 on 24 June 1988, whereas Stadtlander and Konecny (1994) charted up to 21 in June 1993. The largest number of summering birds reported there is 100 in 1987 (R. E. Webster, AB 41:1487, 1987). In northern San Diego County summering turnstones are rare.



On the basis of monthly counts 1973–83, King et al. (1987) recorded an average of 0.4 from May to August. During the atlas period our only summering turnstones in the north county were four on the jetty at Camp Del Mar 3 July 1999 (P. A. Ginsburg).

The only inland records are from Lake Hodges (K10/K11), of one 26 September 1982 (K. L. Weaver, AB 37:224, 1983) and one 14 August 1987 (G. McCaskie, AB 42:135, 1988).

Conservation: San Diego Christmas bird counts show

no trend in Ruddy Turnstone numbers, but counts of migrants as high as 500 in the early 1960s have not been repeated since. Like many shorebirds, the Ruddy Turnstone lost much habitat with the development of San Diego and Mission bays. The cleaning of kelp and other debris from beaches also deprives the turnstone of opportunity to forage.

Taxonomy: Nominate *A. i. interpres* (Linnaeus, 1758) is the subspecies of Ruddy Turnstone migrating along the Pacific coast of North America.