

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

Everyone who goes to a beach in San Diego County is familiar with the Sanderling, scurrying back and forth on the beach with each advance and retreat of a wave. It winters commonly on beaches, less so within the lagoons and bays and on rocky shores. In migration the number of Sanderlings using these other habitats increases.

Winter: The Sanderling is common all along San Diego County’s coast, with up to 200 between the mouths of Horno and Las Pulgas canyons (E3) 16 February 1998 (R. and S. L. Breisch), 359 at Cardiff State Beach and San Elijo Lagoon (L7) 23 December 2001 (E. Garnica), and 302 at North Island (S8) 24 February 2000 (R. T. Patton). Away from the beaches, the Sanderling is less abundant. For example, our highest count in the east basin of Batiquitos Lagoon (J7) was eight on 5 December 1997 (C. C. Gorman). Inside Mission Bay (Q8), our counts ranged up to 40 on 5 February 1999 (E. Wallace); inside San Diego Bay, up to 27 at Coronado (S9) 20 December 1997 (R. T. Patton). In south San Diego Bay, Macdonald et al. (1990) found up to 35 on the mudflat adjacent to the D Street fill (T10) 22 November 1988. On weekly surveys in and near the salt works December 1993–February 1994, Stadtlander and Konecny (1994) recorded up to about 25.

Migration: In San Diego County, Sanderlings begin arriving in numbers in late July. Most depart in mid May,



Photo by Anthony Mercieca

with a few migrants still moving through late May. Inside northern San Diego County’s lagoons, the Sanderling is most abundant in fall migration. At San Elijo Lagoon King et al. (1987) found the peak to be in September, with a maximum of 590 on 7 September 1980. In and near the salt works, however, Stadtlander and Konecny (1994) found the fall peak in October. In 1978 I noted the peak of spring migration in early May (Unitt 1984), but in the salt works in 1993 Stadtlander and Konecny (1994) found a sharp peak in March, with up to 267 on 7 March.

Substantial numbers of Sanderlings in nonbreeding plumage remain through the summer on sandy beaches (50 at Pacific Beach, Q7, 15 June 1998, E. Wallace).

San Diego County’s five inland records of the Sanderling are all of fall migrants, at Lake Hodges (K10/K11; 17 August 1979, AB 34:201, 1980; 18 September 1982, R. E. Webster, AB 37:224, 1983) and Lake Henshaw (G17; 4 October 1982 and 7 October 1983, R. Higson, AB 37:224, 1983; 38:246, 1984; 26 July 1998, R. A. Hamilton, FN 52:503, 1998).

Conservation: Because most Sanderlings are dispersed along beaches rather than clumped into wetlands, they seem less vulnerable to habitat loss than most other shorebirds. Nevertheless, the habitat may be degraded from the Sanderling’s point of view when kelp is cleaned off the beaches.

