

Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus*

The Semipalmated Plover prefers coastal mudflats, as might be predicted from its mud-colored upperparts. Small numbers also visit sandy beaches and inland lakeshores. Like other shorebirds that breed in the far north, it spends most of its life in its winter range: the last northbound migrants and the first southbound migrants almost meet each other in June. Small numbers of nonbreeders remain year round. The Semipalmated is especially common in fall migration but common in winter as well—the number wintering in San Diego County is about 750 to 1000.



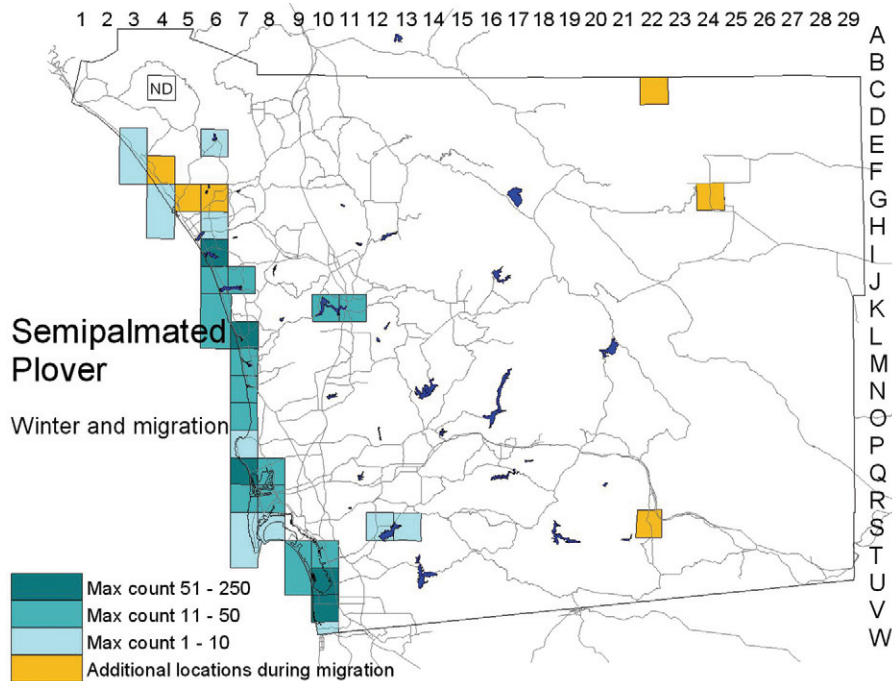
Photo by Anthony Mercieca

Winter: Wintering Semipalmated Plovers are well distributed along San Diego County’s coast, as a result of the birds’ using beaches as well as mudflats. In spite of the lack of extensive mudflats in this heavily developed part of Mission Bay, El Carmel Point (Q7) emerged as a hot spot for the species, with up to 250 on 12 February 2000 (L. Polinsky) and 400–500 on 24 October 1998 (J. L. Coatsworth). Elsewhere wintering Semipalmated Plovers are often common at north county lagoons (up to 77 at San Elijo Lagoon, L7, 23 December 2001, E. Garnica; 75 at Agua Hedionda Lagoon, I6, 12 February 2000, J. Ciarletta), in the San Diego River flood-control channel (R8; 30 on 5 January 1998, M. B. Stowe), around San Diego Bay (maximum 321 in the salt works, U10/V10, 26 January 1994, Stadlander and Konecny 1994), and in the Tijuana River estuary (V10; 75 on 15 December

2001, R. B. Riggan). Our maximum numbers on sandy beaches were 23 at Encinitas (K6) 10 December 2000 (E. Garnica) and 21 at Torrey Pines (O7) 11 February 2000 (D. G. Seay).

Inland the Semipalmated Plover is uncommon in migration and generally rare in winter, when it has been found only in the coastal lowland. From 1997 to 2002 our sites for the species inland in winter were O’Neill Lake (E6; up to five on 14 December 1997, B. C. Moore), Lake Hodges (K10/K11; up to 30 on 22 December 2000, R. L. Barber), and Sweetwater Reservoir (S12/S13; up to two on 20 December 1997 and 18 December 1999, P. Famolaro).

Migration: Adult Semipalmated Plovers begin returning in late June or early July; from 1997 to 2001 our earliest was one at the Santa Margarita River mouth (G4) 3 July 1999 (P. A. Ginsburg). Fall migration peaks in September and October with the arrival of juveniles. There is no clear peak of spring migrants, but the species occurs rarely at inland sites where it does not winter in both spring and fall migration (Unitt 1984). Our only record for southeastern San Diego County was of one at the upper end of Lake Morena (S22) 13 August 2000 (R. and S. L. Breisch). In the Anza–Borrego Desert all records are for spring: one at Middle Willows (C22) 3 May 1975 (G. Salzberger), two there 29 April 1997 (P. D. Jorgensen), six at Borrego Springs (G24) 25 April 1998, two there 15 April 2000 (P. D. Ache), and one at the Borrego sewage ponds (H25) 29 April 1990 (A. G. Morley).



Though a few migrants may still be moving north in early June, most Semipalmated Plovers seen then are probably staying for the summer. Maximum numbers are 16 at Batiquitos Lagoon (J7) 7 June 1998 (C. C. Gorman), 45 around south San Diego Bay 1 June 1987 (R. E. Webster, AB 41:1487, 1987), at least 40 there 12 June 1989 (Macdonald et al. 1990), and 20 in the Tijuana River estuary 6 June 1998 (B. C. Moore).

Conservation: Although the mudflats around San Diego Bay are much reduced from their primitive extent, results of San Diego Christmas bird counts 1953–2002 suggest a possible modest trend toward increase over the latter half of the 20th century. From 1953 to 1977 the count averaged 0.22 Semipalmated Plovers per party-hour, whereas from 1978 to 2002 it averaged 0.39.