

### Solitary Sandpiper *Tringa solitaria*

The Solitary Sandpiper is a sandpiper of fresh or brackish water only, found mainly on ponds, lake-shores, and sluggish streams, especially where these are overhung by vegetation. In San Diego County it is principally a fall migrant, uncommon to rare. There are just a few records for winter and spring.

**Migration:** Because of its preference for fresh water, the Solitary Sandpiper occurs widely over San Diego County's coastal slope. Most records, though, are from the coastal lowland, where the suitable habitat is concentrated. The Tijuana River valley yields the largest numbers, up to 10 on 4 September 1998 (P. A. Ginsburg). The species has been found up to Lake Henshaw (G17; up to three on 12 August 1985, R. Higson) and Lake Cuyamaca (M20; one on 12 August 1986, D. B. King). The only fall record for the Anza-Borrego Desert is of one in the Borrego Valley (F24/G24) 26 September 1991 (M. L. Gabel).

The Solitary Sandpiper passes through San Diego County mainly in August and September. Extreme dates are 14 July (2000, one in Santa Maria Valley west of Ramona, K13, P. M. von Hendy) and 18 October (1975, one at Otay Mesa, V13, AB 30:126, 1976), except for a late straggler at Upper Otay Lake (T13) 20 November 1999 (P. Unitt, NAB 54:105, 2000).

Three spring sightings during the atlas period were unexpected. Two Solitary Sandpipers were in the estuary of Aliso Creek (F4) 31 March 2001 (B. Anderson, K. Estey, J. M. Roberts), one was at a vernal pool in the Santa Maria Valley west of Ramona (K13) 24 April 1999 (F. Sproul), and one was along San Ysidro Creek at the Pacific Crest Trail (G20) 27 April 1999 (L. J. Hargrove). In the Borrego Valley, one was at the Ram's Hill sewage pond (H25) 4–10 April 1994 (ABDSP database). The three earlier spring records for San Diego County, listed by Unitt (1984), fall within the range of dates of the more recent ones.



Photo by Anthony Mercieca

**Winter:** The winter records of the Solitary Sandpiper in San Diego County probably represent only two individuals. One was in the Tijuana River valley 28 February–13 April 1988 (F. Dexter, AB 42:321, 481, 1988). Another apparently returned repeatedly to Santee Lakes (O12/P12), being reported 6 March 1990 (C. G. Edwards, AB 44:329, 1990), 21–23 March 1992 (AB 46:480, 1992), and 8–14 February 1995 (NASFN 49:197, 1995).

**Conservation:** Like other shorebirds preferring fresh water, the Solitary Sandpiper has lost much habitat with the decline of agriculture and the spread of cities. Muddy ponds seldom fit in a landscape being managed ever more intensively.

**Taxonomy:** All specimens of the Solitary Sandpiper collected in California, including the one from San Diego County (southeast San Diego, S10, 1 September 1931, SDNHM 15606), are of the western subspecies *T. s. cinnamomea* (Brewster, 1890). It has the spots on the upperparts deeper buff than in the more eastern nominate subspecies, which should occur occasionally as a vagrant but has yet to be recorded in California.