

Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis*

When a plant or animal is released in a place where it is not native, often it dies out quickly because the new environment does not meet its needs. Sometimes, in the lack of its usual predators or other mechanisms of population control, it proliferates, becoming a pest or upsetting an ecological balance. And there are paths between these extremes, as exemplified by the Spotted Dove. Introduced from Asia to Los Angeles about 1915, the Spotted Dove multiplied and spread, arrived in San Diego County by 1950, and established itself here as an uncommon and local resident. But in the 1980s and 1990s it decreased, and with the turn of the century it died out completely.

Breeding distribution: From 1997 to 2001, in spring and summer, we found the Spotted Doves at only two sites in San Diego County. Though Encanto (S11) and Spring Valley (R12/S12) were long the center for the species in metropolitan San Diego, our only sighting in this area was of a single bird singing in Encanto 21 June 1997 (P. Unitt). In the north county, the only area where the Spotted Dove persisted into the atlas period was Rainbow (C9), where our single record during the breeding season was of two on 19 April 1999 (D. C. Seals).

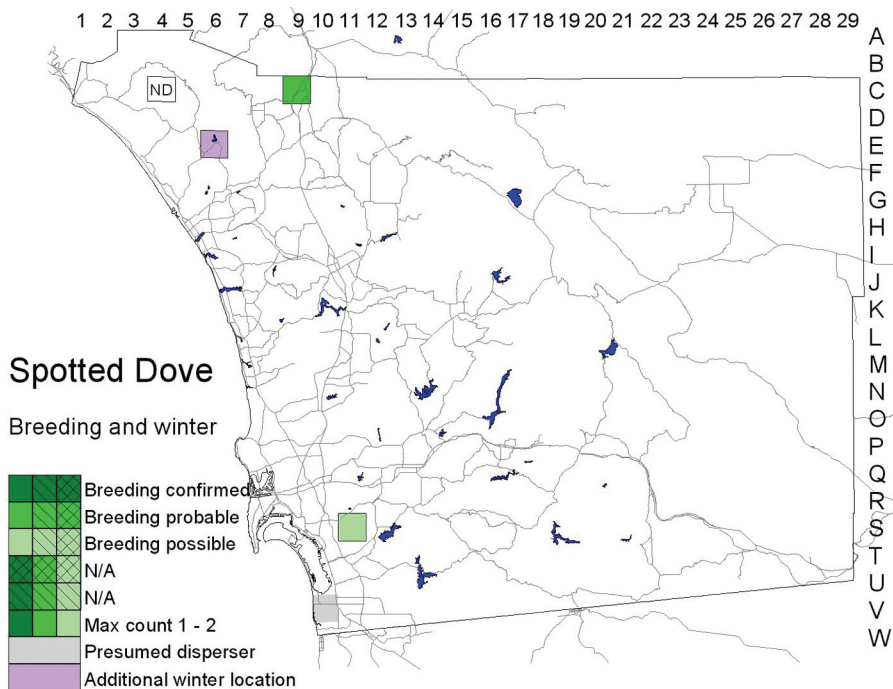
Nesting: The Spotted Dove's nesting habits are similar to those of other doves, with a flimsy nest and some breeding year round (Garrett and Walker 2001). Nesting in San Diego County was never well described.



Photo by Anthony Mercieca

Winter: We noted the Spotted Dove at Rainbow in winter as well as in spring with three on 28 January 1999 (D. C. Seals) and one on 18 February 2000 (K. L. Weaver). Our two other sightings in fall and winter, of one at Imperial Beach (V10) 2 November 1998 (P. Unitt) and one at O'Neill Lake (E6) 18 December 1998 (P. A. Ginsburg), represented wandering individuals rather than resident populations.

Conservation: The Spotted Dove was first reported in San Diego County on the Oceanside Christmas bird count 30 December 1950, when four were noted. The species first appeared on the San Diego count 26 December 1954. Sams and Stott (1959) reported it from Spring Valley, the Oceanside area, and Balboa Park, "among other



places.” In San Diego County the Spotted Dove was always uncommon and local, never approaching the abundance it reached in metropolitan Los Angeles. All five county specimens in the San Diego Natural History Museum are from East San Diego or Spring Valley. Outside the coastal lowland the only reports are three from Borrego Springs (F24/G24), the last of six on 22 October 1996 (E. Jorgensen), and of one on the Lake Henshaw Christmas bird count 16 December 1991. Numbers on the San Diego Christmas bird count peaked at 9 on 29 December 1957; numbers on the Oceanside count peaked at 27 on 31 December 1977. By 1980, however, the species was declining. Marjorie and Don Hastings last noted it at their home in Spring Valley (R12) in 1989, and about that time other

residents of Spring Valley called the San Diego Natural History Museum to inquire about the birds’ disappearance. The last record on any Christmas bird count was of two on the San Diego count 16 December 1995. It seems certain that the five-year atlas period, 1997–2002, saw the extirpation of the county’s resident population; if any more are seen, they are likely to be rare dispersers only.

The Spotted Dove’s reversal of fortune is not confined to San Diego County but has been noted widely in southern California (McClure 1992, Garrett and Walker 2001). The reasons for the decline are unclear. Garrett and Walker (2001) suggested predation by the increasing population of American Crows and increased density of urban devel-

opment as contributing factors. The areas the doves colonized in San Diego County longest were of relatively low-density development or dominated by agriculture, but the birds have disappeared whether the land use has changed or not. The story of the Spotted Dove in California parallels that of some other birds like the Varied Tit (*Parus varius*) in Hawaii or the Crested Mynah (*Acridotheres cristatellus*) on Vancouver Island, introduced populations that thrived for decades but ultimately failed.

Taxonomy: Nominate *S. c. chinensis* was the subspecies of the Spotted Dove introduced to southern California.