

### **Tricolored Heron** *Egretta tricolor*

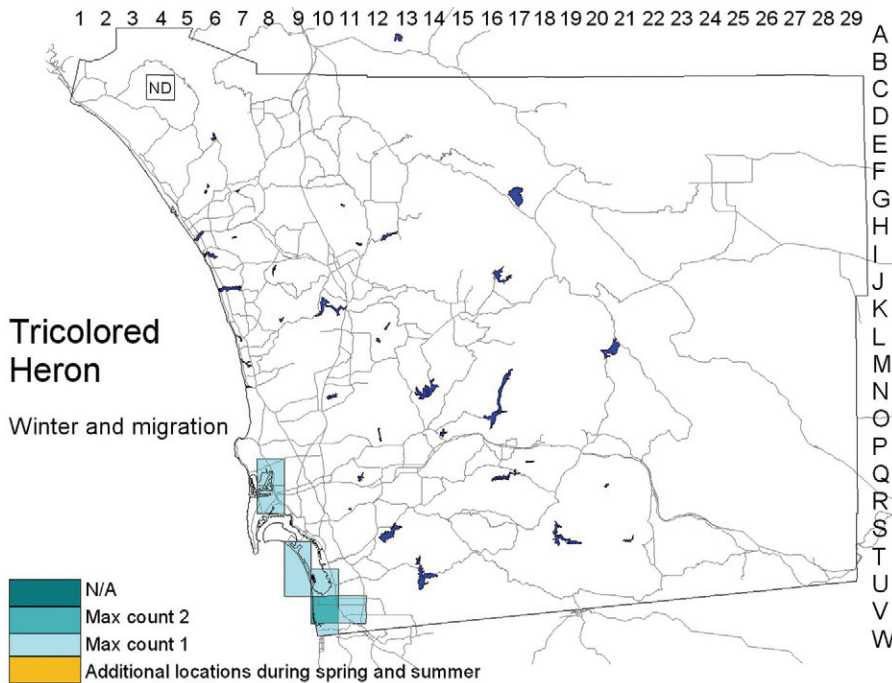
Like the Reddish Egret, the Tricolored or Louisiana Heron is a rare visitor from the south that reaches the northern tip of its normal range at San Diego. The Tricolored is most often seen foraging like other herons in the channels through the Tijuana River estuary or in shallow water around south San Diego Bay. Unlike many other herons, which are on the increase, the Tricolored has been decreasing in frequency since the mid 1980s, though one shows up in most winters.

**Winter:** The Tijuana River estuary (V10/W10) was our only site for more than a single Tricolored Heron



*Photo by Anthony Mercieca*

1997–2002, with two (one adult, one immature) there 5 December 1999 (B. C. Moore). There were also repeated



observations around south San Diego Bay (T9/U10), with birds presumably moving between there and the Tijuana estuary. During the atlas period, a Tricolored Heron also showed up twice in the San Diego River flood-control channel (R8; 9 June–3 July 1999; 6 November–9 December 1999, T. Hartnett, J. R. Sams, NAB 54:104, 220, 2000), once at Kendall–Frost Marsh, Mission Bay (Q8; 29 December 1998, J. C. Worley).

**Migration:** The Tricolored Heron has been seen in San Diego County in every month of the year, but is least frequent in summer. Immatures may arrive in fall as early as 23 September (1978, AB 33:213, 1979). Usually the birds disappear by 1 May, but some have remained through the summer, as in 1984 (AB 38:958, 1061, 1984). About a dozen have apparently arrived in summer.

Though largely coastal, Tricolored Herons have been found three times at fresh water in the Tijuana River valley (Unitt 1984) and once at Lake Henshaw (G17; 18 October 1983, R. Higson, AB 38:246, 1984). Because the species is also a rare visitor to the Salton Sea, this bird

may have moved into San Diego County from the east.

**Conservation:** Laurence M. Huey (1915) found the Tricolored Heron in San Diego County (and California) for the first time at the south end of San Diego Bay 17 January 1914 (SDNHM 30889). For the next 40 years, while observers were few, the species was seen irregularly. But from the mid 1950s through the mid 1980s, with an increase of birders, the heron proved regular along San Diego’s coast in small numbers. During this interval, it occurred occasionally in the lagoons of northern San Diego County, with up to six at San Elijo Lagoon (L7) 1 November–27 December 1963 (McCaskie 1964). Since 1980, however, the only Tricolored

Hérons in coastal north county have been one at Los Peñasquitos Lagoon (N7) 8 January 1984 (D. B. King, AB 38:357, 1984) and one there 1 May 1988 (B. C. Moore, AB 42:481, 1988). In the San Diego area the numbers peaked in 1979–80 with five (AB 34:306, 1980). The winter of 1984–85 was the last with as many as three (AB 39:209, 1985). Nevertheless, at least one showed up each subsequent year through 2001 except the winter 1996–97.

Dredging and filling of the bays, siltation of the lagoons, and development of the shoreline have eliminated much Tricolored Heron habitat. The species was regular at Mission Bay before that area was developed (Sams and Stott 1959). Nevertheless, the increase of some other herons suggests that other factors are likely contributing to the Tricolored Heron’s decrease, perhaps a diminution of the source population in Baja California.

**Taxonomy:** Tricolored Herons throughout North America are *E. t. ruficollis* Gosse, 1847, as *E. t. occidentalis* (Huey, 1927), described from Baja California, is generally considered a synonym.