

Varied Thrush *Ixoreus naevius*

Finding a Varied Thrush in San Diego County is always a pleasant surprise, a reminder of the rainforests of the Pacific Northwest. This rare and irregular winter visitor occurs mainly in the oak and coniferous woodland in the foothills and mountains, though records are scattered almost throughout the county.

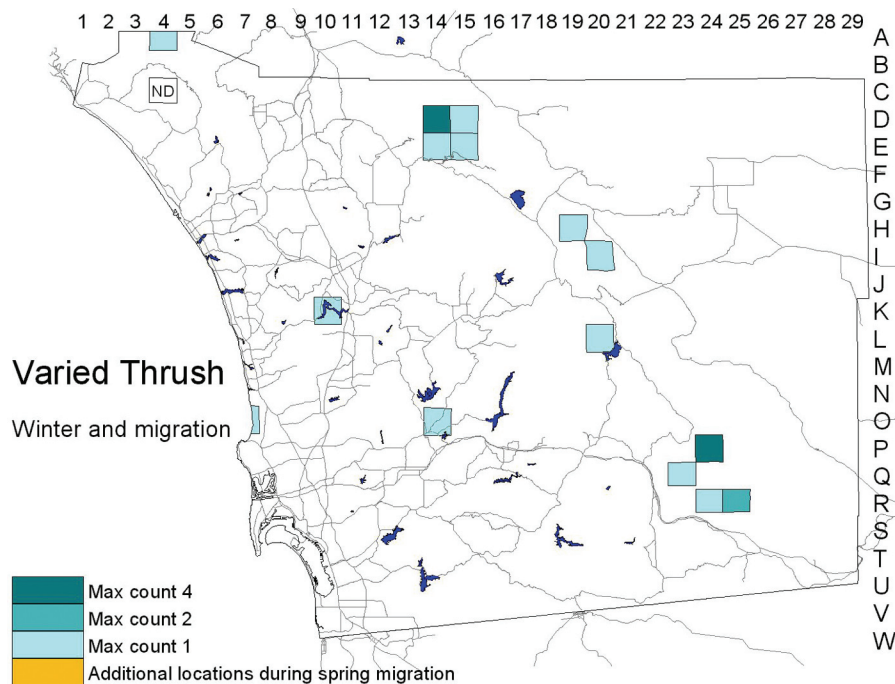
Winter: The Varied Thrush reaches San Diego County only irregularly, though its incursions often coincide with those of other irruptive winter visitors. In some years there are none, in others there are a few scattered individuals, and occasionally there are modest numbers. During the atlas period, the number of individuals noted per year was zero in 1997–98, six in 1998–99, 13 in 1999–2000, zero in 2000–01, and six in 2001–02. The best-documented incursions were in 1906–07, 1924–25, 1972–73, 1983–84 (highest totals on Christmas bird counts that year, with three on the San Diego count and 12 on the Lake Henshaw count), 1989–90, and 1996–97. The only records of more than a single bird in one atlas square per day from 1997 to 2002 were of four in Palomar Mountain State Park (D14) 26 February 1999 (P. D. Jorgensen), four



Photo by Dave Furseth

in the Cuyapaipe Indian Reservation (P24) 28 January 2000 (D. C. Seals), and two in the Manzanita Indian Reservation (R25) 22 January 2000 (J. K. Wilson). Past reports ran as high as 16 along Agua Dulce Creek, Laguna Mountains (P23), 17 January 1978 (C. G. Edwards).

The Varied Thrush may be most frequent on Palomar Mountain; seven of the 18 records during the atlas period were from this area. It is least frequent in the Anza-Borrego Desert, but even here there are about a dozen



records total, from oases and developed areas, south to Tamarisk Grove (I24).

Migration: Records of the Varied Thrush in San Diego County range mainly from mid October to March. After invasion years, stragglers have occurred at Point Loma (S7) as late as 13 May in 1984 (M. and B. McIntosh, AB 38:961, 1984) and 17 May and 6 June in 1997 (R. E.

Webster, FN 51:928, 1054, 1997). As expected in an irruptive species, Varied Thrush migrations follow no well-defined schedule.

Taxonomy: The subspecies of the Varied Thrush differ in the color of the upperparts of the females, brown in the more coastal, more southern *I. n. naevius* (Gmelin, 1789), grayish with variable brown tips in the more inland, more northern *I. n. meruloides* (Swainson, 1832). Both subspecies occur in San Diego County, but *meruloides* is much the more frequent, at least among the more recent specimens. Of the 13 skins of female Varied Thrushes in SDNHM, two to five are *naevius*, the southernmost known of this subspecies (Unitt 1984). Complicating the identification is the foxing of specimens: with

time, the gray feathers turn brownish, making *meruloides* look more like *naevius*.

Phillips (1991) split off the Varied Thrushes from the southern segment of the breeding range of *meruloides* as a new subspecies *godfreii*, intermediate between *meruloides* and *naevius*, but I have not seen specimens allowing me to evaluate this proposal.