

Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

The Winter Wren reaches the southern limit of its range in San Diego County, where it is a rare winter visitor. The wren's apparent rarity is exacerbated by the difficulty of finding it: the birds hide in dense woodland undergrowth, revealing themselves only with their double "chick" note. One summer occurrence of the Winter Wren on Palomar Mountain was far outside the species' breeding range and one of the least expected events brought to light by the field work for this atlas.

Winter: Most of the published records of the Winter Wren for San Diego County are from well-birded sites around metropolitan San Diego, especially Point Loma (S7) and the Tijuana River valley. The more uniform coverage of the county directed toward this atlas, however, yielded Winter Wrens only in the foothill and mountain zones, likely reflecting the species' distribution more accurately. Three of the nine reported from 1997 to 2002 were around Palomar Mountain, and together with previous records for the area (e.g., Beemer 1949) suggest this is the most likely area for Winter Wrens in San Diego County. Nevertheless, at least 45 Winter Wrens have been



Photo by Alan M. Craig

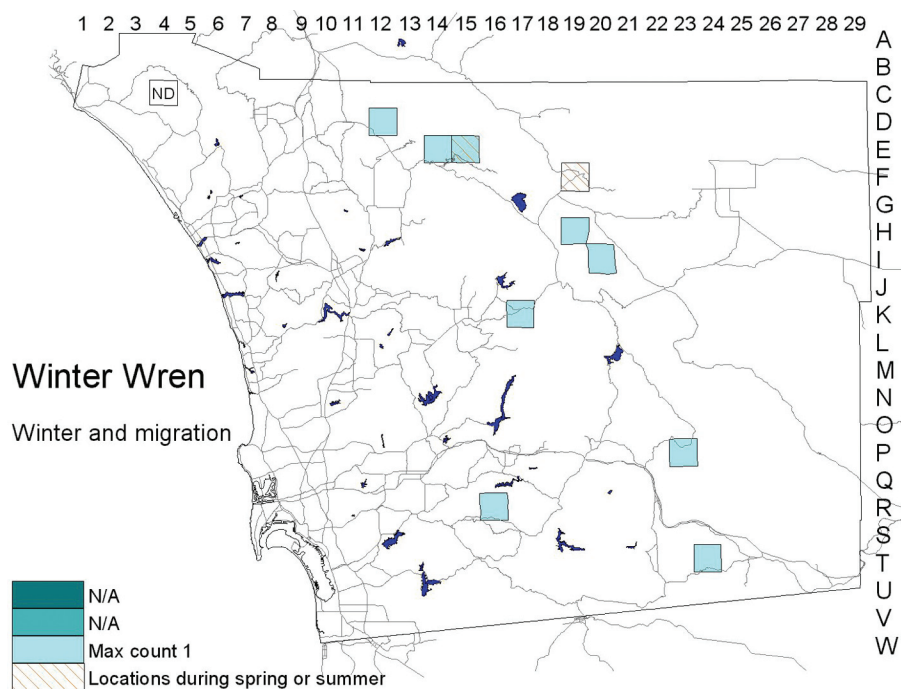
reported in the county, south to Smuggler's Gulch (W10), site of the southernmost record of the Winter Wren along the Pacific coast. In the Anza-Borrego Desert the Winter Wren has been reported only from Coyote Creek Canyon (D23; 7 December 1977 and 16 February 1978, AB 32:400, 1978) and Pinyon Mountain Road (K24; 26 November 1983, B. Massey).

Winter Wrens have been seen in San Diego County only singly, except for two in Marion Canyon (D12) 6 March 1949 (Beemer 1949). The number reported per

winter during the atlas period varied from zero in 1997–98 to five in 1999–2000; the only earlier year with more was 1983–84, with six.

Migration: Dates for the Winter Wren in San Diego County range from 30 September (1981, Point Loma, R. E. Webster, AB 36:218, 1982) to 6 March (cited above), except for one at Warner Springs (F19) 3 May 1999 (C. G. Edwards) and the single summer record.

Breeding distribution: The sole summer record of the Winter Wren in San Diego County is the only one from anywhere in California south of Santa Barbara County and the Sierra Nevada. Clark R. Mahrtdt and Edward C. Hall observed one



in Jeff Valley (E15), at 4900 feet elevation on Palomar Mountain, repeatedly from 28 May to 12 July 1999. It sang territorially, and on the final date was carrying twigs, but since only one bird was ever seen, presumably it was an unmated male. Hall tape-recorded the song and sent the recording to K. L. Garrett at the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History; Garrett confirmed the song as typical of western Winter Wrens.

Taxonomy: The Winter Wren has yet to be collected in San Diego County, so the subspecies occurring here is (are?) uncertain. Both the dark rufous *T. t. pacificus*

Baird, 1864, and the less rufous *T. t. salebrosus* Burleigh, 1959, have been collected well to the south of their breeding ranges (Rea in Phillips 1986). One in the Tijuana River valley 3–15 December 1990 was “thought to be a bird from the eastern population (i.e., *T. t. hiemalis* Vieillot, 1819) on the basis of its call” (D. M. Parker, AB 45:322, 1991). Winter Wrens giving the call of *hiemalis* have been heard in Death Valley and the Imperial Valley (Patten et al. 2003) and probably photographed in southeastern Arizona (Monson and Phillips 1981), but the subspecies has yet to be collected in winter west of New Mexico.