

Zone-tailed Hawk *Buteo albonotatus*

San Diego County lies at the northwest corner of the Zone-tailed Hawk's primarily Mexican range. At the beginning of the 21st century four or five were being seen in the county each year. A pair on Hot Springs Mountain from 1986 to 1992 was one of only two pairs ever known to have nested in California. Though sightings of the Zone-tailed Hawk are more frequent in winter than in summer, continued scattered individuals in San Diego County's mountains suggest that further nestings are likely. An apparent mimic of the Turkey Vulture, the Zone-tailed Hawk associates regularly with vulture roosts.

Winter: At least 30 Zone-tailed Hawks have been noted in San Diego County in fall and winter, mainly in the inland valleys of the coastal lowland. Several birds have apparently returned in successive years to the same area. During the atlas period one or two wintered regularly at the Wild Animal Park (J12), evidently attracted by the Turkey Vulture roost, and at nearby Oak Hill



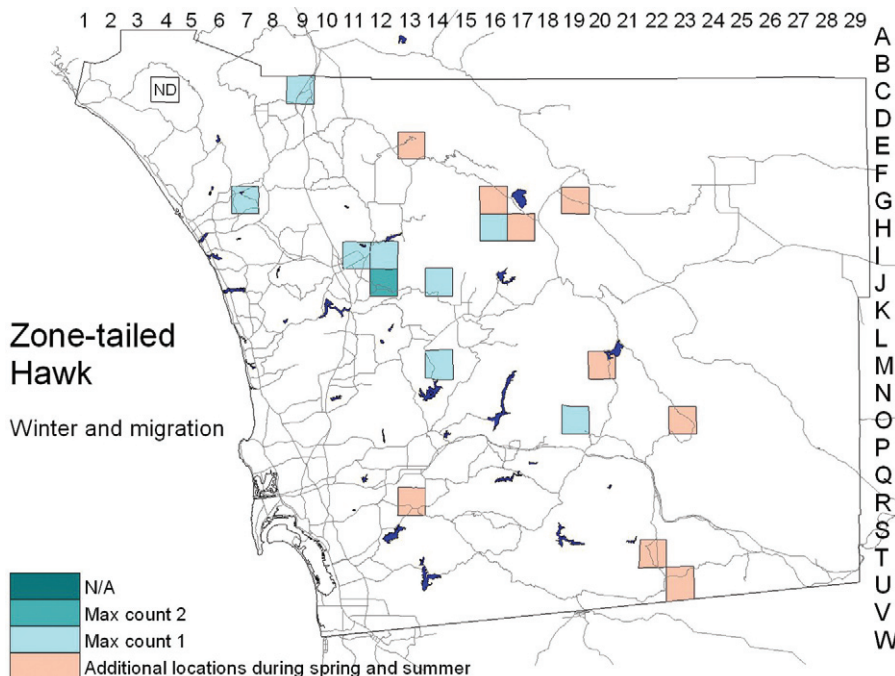
Photo by Anthony Mercieca

Cemetery, Escondido (I12), where the gardener put out the gophers he trapped for the hawks. Other areas where Zone-tailed Hawks have wintered repeatedly are the San Luis Rey River valley from Oceanside to Vista and Bonsall (G6/G7/G8/F8; 1979–97) and Santee Lakes (O12/P12; 1991–96). Only five or six have been seen in

winter at elevations above 2000 feet, but one was near the summit of Palomar Mountain (D15) 26 February–7 March 1983 (R. Higson, Roberson 1993).

Migration: All but one of the low-elevation sightings of the Zone-tailed Hawk fall within the interval 19 August (2001, Wild Animal Park, M. Billings) to 16 April (1998, same location, Rottenborn and Morlan 2000). The exception was a bird that wintered repeatedly, seen also 9–27 June 1984 at the Bonsall bridge over the San Luis Rey River (F8; C. Wilson, Roberson 1993).

The summering birds on Hot Springs Mountain (E20) were reported from 5 May (1991) to 10 August (1986).



Breeding distribution: A pair of Zone-tailed Hawks nested in a steep west-draining canyon of Hot Springs Mountain in 1986, 1987, and 1988, fledging one young at least in 1986 (R. Higson; AB 40:1255, 1986; 41:143, 1987; Langham 1991). The pair was seen annually through 1992, with only a single individual noted in 1993 and none subsequently. The only other nestings known in California, all unsuccessful, were by a single pair on the north slope of the Santa Rosa Mountains of Riverside County 1979–81 (Weathers 1983), about 8 miles north of San Diego County.

Other spring and summer sightings in San Diego County are from Nate Harrison Grade, southwest slope of Palomar Mountain (E13), 17 April 1999 (C. Sankpill), near Angel Mountain (G16) March 1999 (D. Bittner) and 31 May 1999 (W. E. Haas), 1.5 miles east-southeast of Angel Mountain (H17) 13 June 1998 (P. Unitt, Erickson and Hamilton 2001), near Warner's Ranch (G19) 24 June 2000 (E. C. Hall, NAB 54:423, 2000), at Mount Laguna (O23) 22 July 2000 (D. W. Aguillard, NAB 54:423, 2000),

1.25 miles northwest of Cameron Corners (T22) 7 May 2000 (R. and S. L. Breisch), and one at Campo (U23) 27 May 2001 (D. S. and A. W. Hester, NAB 55:356, 2001).

Nesting: Both California nests of the Zone-tailed Hawk have been in tall conifers on steep slopes: in a sugar pine in the Santa Rosa Mountains (Weathers 1983), in a conifer of unrecorded species on Hot Springs Mountain. In 1986 the young fledged in July.

Conservation: From 1862 to 1972 only six Zone-tailed Hawks were reported from San Diego County. Since 1973 the hawk has become ever more frequent, prompting the California Bird Records Committee to drop the species from its review list in 1998. The nestings in southern California are part of the evidence for a slight northward spread of the species' range (Johnson 1994). But urbanization and desiccation of riparian woodland have eliminated the species from other former habitat in Arizona and Texas (Johnson et al. 2000).