

Long-tailed Duck or Oldsquaw *Clangula hyemalis*

The Long-tailed Duck is rare but of nearly annual occurrence on San Diego Bay, which represents the southern tip of the species' winter range. In good years up to seven individuals have been found, but in others there have been none at all. The Long-tailed Duck is less frequent in Mission Bay and only casual elsewhere in San Diego County.

Winter: San Diego Bay is the primary site for the Long-tailed Duck in San Diego County, though it is irregular even there. From 1997 to 2002 its numbers varied from at least seven in 1998–99 to zero in 2000–01, the only one of the five years of the atlas period in which it was missed. It has been recorded on 18 of 45 San Diego Christmas bird counts 1958–2002. Systematic surveys of San Diego Bay 1993–95 found the species occasionally in all parts of the bay, with no concentration in the south bay, as for so many other ducks. These studies yielded no more than two individuals per day (Manning 1995, Mock et al. 1994, Stadtlander and Konecny 1994). From 1997 to 2002 the largest numbers were five in north San Diego Bay at Harbor



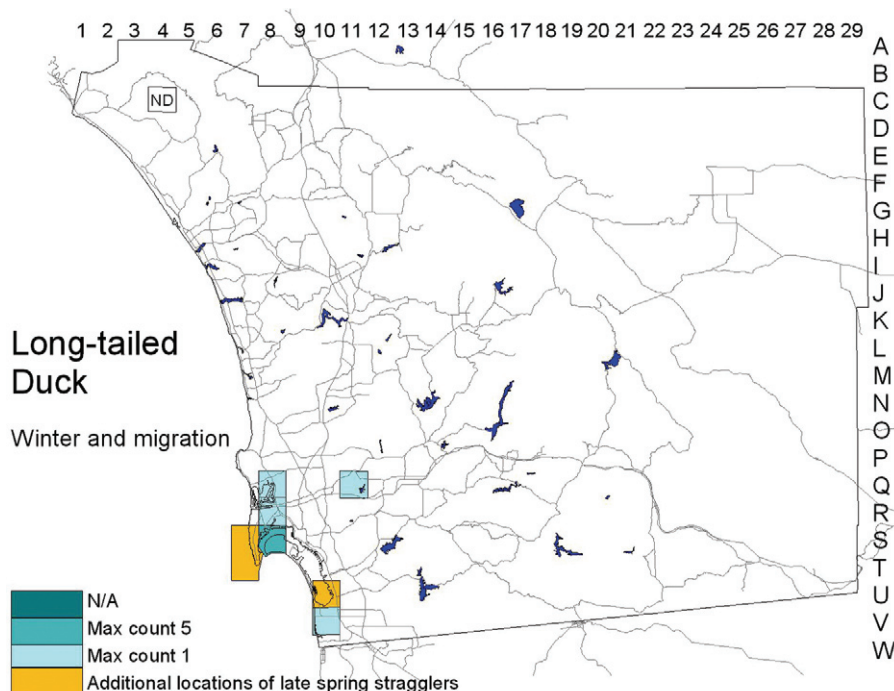
Photo by Anthony Mercieca

Island (S8) 4 February 1999 (E. C. Hall) and six, probably the same individuals, at the submarine base on the east side of Point Loma (S7) 17 April 1999 (P. A. Ginsburg). No larger numbers had been reported previously.

Though the Long-tailed Duck occurs occasionally in Mission Bay, during the atlas period we found only one there, in the bay's northeast quadrant (Q8)

7 January 1999 (E. Wallace). There have been a few sightings in the Tijuana River estuary and at the Imperial Beach pier (V10), including one at the pier 18 December 1999 (G. McCaskie). Along the coast from La Jolla to Oceanside the species is reported only about once every three or four years and was missed entirely during the atlas period. Inland there are only three records, of one at Santee Lakes (O12/P12) 6–8 November 1991 (C. G. Edwards, AB 46:148, 1992) and 12 March 2003 (M. B. Stowe), and one at Lake Murray (Q11) 10 January–28 February 1999 (J. Morris, N. Osborn, NAB 53:208, 1999).

Migration: The Long-tailed Duck begins arriving in November, with an earliest date



of 1 November (1979, one at Oceanside, AB 34:200, 1980; 1990, one at Point Loma, R. E. Webster, AB 45:151, 1991). Most individuals depart in March; those at the submarine base in 1999 were unusually late (three remaining on 22 April, one on 9 May, P. A. Ginsburg). There are 10 records of later stragglers, in poor plumage from failure to molt, including one that summered in south San Diego Bay (U10) in 1998 (R. T. Patton, FN 52:503, 1998).

Conservation: At the source, in Alaska, the Long-tailed Duck population is in decline. Aerial surveys of the arctic coastal plain found numbers decreasing at an average rate of 2.5% per year from 1986 through 2002 (Mallek et al. 2003), and the decrease over the period 1977–94 was even sharper (Hodges et al. 1996). But San Diego has received its dribble at the same rate for at least 40 years and probably longer—Stephens (1919a) called the species an “occasional winter visitant.”