

What Bird will I see this month?

Birding in January

This is an ideal month to look for wintering shorebirds and ducks at our coastal lagoons. Wherever you look you see large numbers of our most common winter species, yellow-rumped warblers and white-crowned sparrows. San Diego's breeding raptors will be beginning their courtship. Early nesting hummingbirds can sometimes be found. Check out unruly clumps of honeysuckle, ivy, and other tangled thickets for over-wintering warblers, vireos, and an occasional oriole. Toyons and other winter berry bushes are haunts for thrushes, thrashers, mockingbirds, and other fruit lovers.

Birding in February

It's still winter. Most birds present are year-round residents or wintering migrants. This is the beginning of courtship and nesting behavior for some early-breeding species like hummingbirds, owls, hawks, egrets, and herons. As February progresses long distance migrants begin to appear. Swallows begin to arrive in numbers in mid-month, so begin to look for them flying overhead (especially over water) and swooping down to take insects on the wing. February is also a good month for comparison gull-watching at North County lagoon inlets, where an assortment of species of varying ages and plumages gather to loaf and preen.

Birding in March

March is when the bird breeding season begins to take off, especially in the warmer micro-habitats. Male breeders begin staking out their territories and attempting to attract mates with loud singing from conspicuous perches. Listen for the California thrashers especially. Spring migration picks up steam by late March, with warblers, vireos, grosbeaks, and orioles stopping by in riparian and oak woodlands for resting and refueling. Migrating thrushes and sparrows are evident in the brushy chaparral and grassland. Ducks and shorebirds begin leaving for northern climes. Individuals of certain species will sometimes sport their emerging breeding plumage just before departing.

Birding in April

April is the busiest month of the year for breeding activity in San Diego. Evidence of courtship and breeding is all around-males singing for attention, birds building nests, parents feeding young. Most wintering birds have left, and the county is experiencing waves of migrant birds passing through.

Birding in May

Nest-building is still going on, but many breeding species are now sitting on nests. Courtship singing begins to give way to agitated behavior and alarm calls as adults attempt to protect nest sites and warn of intruders. Adults can often be seen carrying food, and sometimes disposing of a fecal sack. Migration activity is beginning to wane, as most birds so disposed have already passed through on their way to northern breeding grounds.

Birding in the summer

June--Young birds are beginning to fledge in great numbers. Adult males of some species can be seen feeding fledglings off the nest, while females may be back at the nest sitting on a second brood of eggs. The last of the lingering migrants leave for the north. *July*--Most breeding activity is over and singing by male birds is noticeably reduced. Adult birds can still be seen being followed by new fledglings and juveniles looking for handouts. Successful birding must be done early in the morning, as warmer temperatures and a lessening of parental feeding responsibilities combine to reduce mid-day bird activity. *August*--Early migrants begin to show up from breeding grounds. The herons and egrets become more evident as they leave their rookeries to forage in the coastal lagoons. Some birds, notably house finches and bushtits, begin to form large flocks. Year-round chaparral birds, like thrashers, towhees, wrentits, and gnatcatchers, begin territorial singing again.

Birding in September

Smaller migrating birds like warblers are flying through our bushes and trees. For the most part these birds are just passing through on their way south. These smaller birds often migrate at night, coming down to protective habitat at dawn to rest and forage for food. Look for yellow-rumped warblers and white-crowned sparrows, our ubiquitous winter residents, to begin showing up the last week of the month. Most of our migrating breeders, like least terns, black-headed grosbeaks, and orioles, have headed south.

Birding in October

Migrating water fowl can be seen flying overhead, and those species that overwinter on San Diego's lakes and lagoons begin showing up in greater numbers. Our winter-only raptors, like the ferruginous hawk, sharp-shinned hawk, and merlin, begin to appear. Raptors that breed in San Diego County, such as the kestrel, red-tailed hawk, and red-shouldered hawk, are joined by others of their species who migrate in from the north for the winter.

Birding in early winter

November--Our last winter visitors appear, including the Canada goose. San Diego has many more species of birds present during the winter months than during the summer. Small groups of white pelicans have become a common sight on North County lagoons and lakes during the winter months. *December*--Very little migration activity occurs during this month, so bird species present in San Diego in December are generally considered to be either year-round permanent residents or over-wintering birds. Six different Audubon Christmas Bird Counts take place in San Diego within the weeks surrounding Christmas, providing an on-going database of the winter bird population of our area.