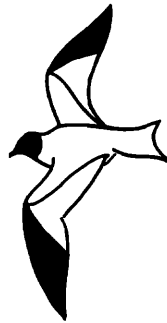


# CALIFORNIA BIRDS



Volume 1, Number 2, 1970

## THE AMERICAN REDSTART IN CALIFORNIA

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The American Redstart (*Setophaga ruticilla*), one of the most abundant breeding species in the eastern portion of North America, reaches as far west as the coast of southeastern Alaska and extreme northeastern Oregon as a nesting bird. It winters primarily in Central America and in the West Indies with numbers reaching the northern portions of South America and southern Mexico, and part of the population is known to winter along the west coast of Mexico north to Sonora. Its migration route is primarily across the Gulf of Mexico and through the West Indies, with significant numbers using the east coast of Mexico; the northwestern population is thought to migrate east of the Rockies both during the spring and fall, and it is considered a rare migrant in the southwestern United States.

The American Redstart is noted most frequently in three areas of California. 1. Most of the records are from the immediate vicinity of the coast between Point Reyes, Marin County (one record for Humboldt Bay, Humboldt County, is the only coastal record in California north of this point) and Imperial Beach, San Diego County, an area with many observers. I know of 212 fall and 30 spring records for this region. The majority occur during the fall migration in the southern portion of the region where numbers may be augmented by individuals moving southwestward from the southern end of the Sierras. Of the 12 winter reports for the coast region five birds were observed for more than one or two days: Sebastopol, Sonoma County, between 24 February and 9 March 1963 (National Audubon Society, 1963);

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Carmel, Monterey County, between 11 January and 3 February 1964 (National Audubon Society, 1964), and between 2 December 1967 and 14 January 1968 (National Audubon Society, 1968); San Diego, San Diego County, between 2 December 1962 and 20 April 1963 (pers. obs.), and between 25 January and 4 April 1964 (pers. obs.). Some of these records indicate the American Redstart can successfully winter along the coast of California, though it certainly does not do so regularly or in any numbers.

2. American Redstarts are recorded regularly from some localities east of the Sierra Nevada. I know of 47 fall and 20 spring records for this region. Since there are very few observers in this area, the number of records would indicate the American Redstart may be more common here than elsewhere in California. One or more can usually be found at Deep Springs, Inyo County, in late May or early June, or in September, and five have been recorded here on more than one occasion in early September.

3. There are 17 fall, 28 winter, and nine spring records for southeastern California, including the area around the Salton Sea and along the Colorado River. The majority of the winter records are from the Salton Sea area where I have seen as many as seven individuals together during January. This indicates that the American Redstart may be a regular winter visitor in this region. As this is an area with few observers the species is probably every bit as common here as it is along the coast. Records away from these three areas include one from the Sierras and three from the coastal mountains, both areas with few observers but ample habitat in which a single bird is hard to locate, and three from the Sacramento and San Joaquin Valley region, where there are observers on the lookout for this species. This may indicate it does not often get into the Central Valley of California.

All of the 382 occurrences of the American Redstart known to me through 1968 are summarized in Figure 1. Each occurrence is plotted to show the time of the year it was found. To do this an arbitrary year starting on 1 January was chosen and then broken down to the standard 52 weeks. Each occurrence was plotted according to the week of the year in which it was recorded (e.g., a bird seen on 17 January is indicated above the third week of the year). Individuals known to have remained in one locality for more than one week were removed from the lower portion of the figure and are indicated at the top of the figure; this was done to prevent a false impression of abundance during the winter period. The recorded occurrences of the American Redstart were obtained from a number of sources. All the

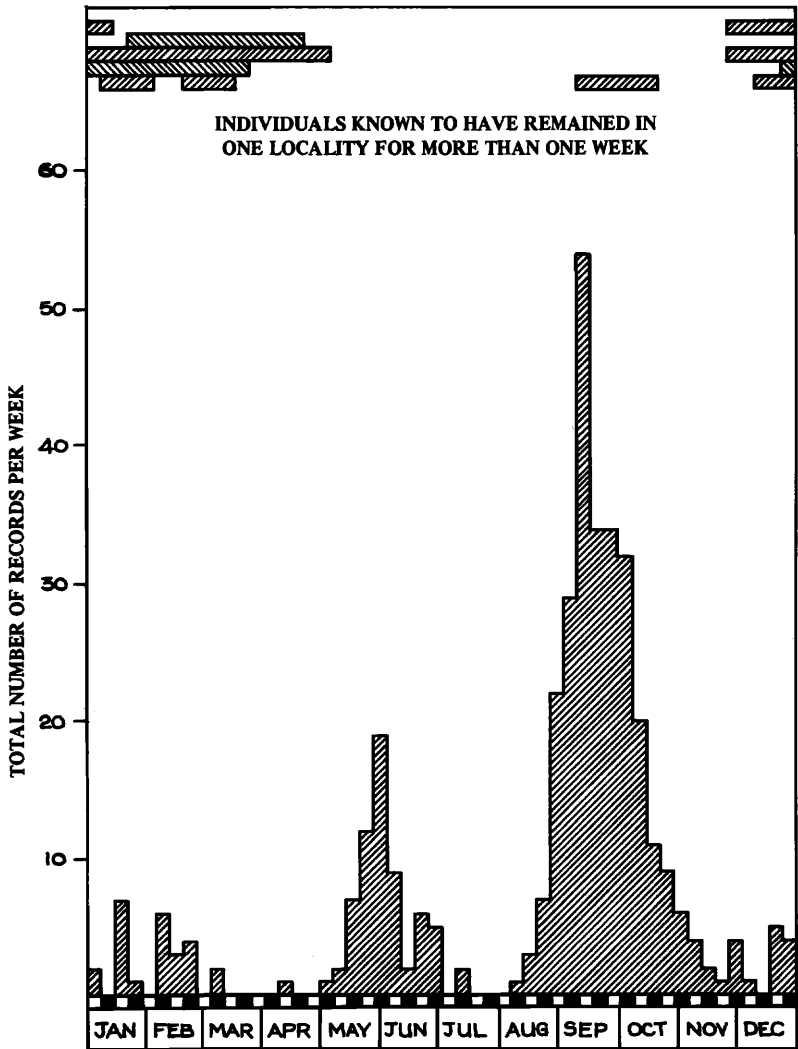


FIGURE 1. The seasonal distribution of American Redstart records in California.

individuals recorded in the four regional reports (Great Basin, Central Rocky Mountain Region; Southwest Region; Middle Pacific Coast Region; and Southern Pacific Coast Region) of Audubon Field Notes Vol. 1, No. 1 through Vol. 23, No. 1 were used in addition to those recorded in the referenced literature; all the individuals recorded in my personal notes, and others reported to me by persons I felt reliable, were used; and all the unpublished specimen-supported records deposited in the museum collections I have checked (California Academy of Sciences, Los Angeles County Museum, Museum of Vertebrate Zoology — Berkeley, San Bernardino County Museum, and San Diego Natural History Museum) were incorporated in the figure.

Note that the peak of the spring migration is approximately 1 June, or about one month later than that expected for warblers which normally migrate through California to the northwestern portion of North America. As spring records of vagrant eastern warblers in California also tend to occur in late May and early June, this suggests that the American Redstarts occurring in California in spring are also vagrants, and are not following a normal route from their winter quarters to their nesting grounds. Individuals seen in April may be birds that have wintered in California; late June and July records are probably spring migrants that have become hopelessly lost.

The peak of fall migration for most western warblers, as well as for the American Redstart, occurs in September. On the other hand, fall records of eastern vagrants tend to occur much later in the year. This suggests that some American Redstarts normally move south through California during the fall, perhaps from the northwestern part of the species' range to the western coast of Mexico or even to southern California for the winter.

Pulich and Phillips (1953) discussed the possibility of a desert flight line centered on the Lower Colorado River Valley. If there is such a flight line, however, it would have to include the whole of southeastern California. Their 4 spring and 11 fall records for the Nevada and Arizona side of the Colorado River all fall within the two peaks indicated on Figure 1. It is most likely their fall records pertain to birds that have moved south along the east side of the Sierras and fanned out over the desert, and that their spring records pertain to vagrants. The lush vegetation along the Colorado River Valley will obviously attract and hold any migrant warbler in the area, and thus we can expect more records from this area than from the surrounding desert area.

SUMMARY

The American Redstart is apparently a regular and normal fall migrant along the coast of California and along the east side of the Sierras, fanning out over the deserts of southeastern California. It appears to be a regular vagrant during the late spring rather than a normal west coast spring migrant and occurs in the same areas where it occurs during the fall. A small number of American Redstarts regularly winter in the vicinity of the Salton Sea and possibly elsewhere in southeastern California, and a few individuals have wintered along the coast from San Francisco Bay southward.

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