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RANGE EXTENSION OF THE COMMON GROUND-DOVE INTO SANTA BARBARA AND VENTURA COUNTIES, CALIFORNIA

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Recent sightings of Common Ground-Doves (*Columbina passerina*) in Santa Barbara County and, especially, Ventura County, California, indicate that this dove is less rare in those counties than previously thought. This apparent change in status may not be due to inadequate coverage in the past, but rather may reflect a population increase due to relatively recent changes in agricultural practices and dramatic increases in avocado acreage in Ventura and southern Santa Barbara counties.

Webster et al. (1980) listed only three records of the Common Ground-Dove for this area: up to two seen near Santa Paula 20-21 August 1947, a single bird at McGrath State Beach on 13 September 1974, and another at Goleta on 2 October 1977. An additional record from Carpinteria, 25 August 1923 (Lehman 1982), was omitted by Webster et al. According to Garrett and Dunn (1981), the resident population closest to this area occurs in northeastern Orange County, including Garden Grove, Yorba Linda, and near Whittier. Recent records for Los Angeles County include at least five individuals near the Orange County line in Hawaiian Gardens, a residential area of northeastern Long Beach, since 1984 (McCaskie 1984c). Other reports come from the San Gabriel Valley; however, there is very little habitat suitable for ground doves in heavily urbanized lowland Los Angeles County.

In Santa Barbara County and, especially, Ventura County, ground doves have been recorded frequently since these publications. In the extreme southeastern corner of Santa Barbara County, the species has been recorded in small numbers on a number of occasions in the Carpinteria area, including three to four seen from 4 October 1984 to 23 November 1984 (McCaskie 1985a) and up to four seen from 30 November 1984 to 9 January 1985 (McCaskie 1985b). Goleta has had records of one or two individuals each fall from 1982 to 1985 (McCaskie 1983a, 1984a, 1985a, 1986). The foothills and canyons near Goleta represent the northernmost extension of significant commercial avocado and lemon orchards. Common Ground-Doves recorded in Ventura County include up to nine individuals seen throughout the winter of 1981-1982 near Camarillo, where they had been present at least the previous two years (McCaskie 1982), up to five near Oxnard during September and October 1982 (McCaskie 1983a), three in Santa Paula on 23 February 1983 (McCaskie 1983b), and one individual seen from 26 February to 11 March 1984 near Castaic Junction, where the Santa Clara Valley extends into Los Angeles County (McCaskie 1984b).

With access into private citrus and avocado groves in Ventura County in 1984 and 1985, I have found that the Common Ground-Dove is uncommon to fairly common in the Las Posas Valley (west of Moorpark) and in the El Rio area of the Oxnard floodplain. I have seen this species also on many occasions, but less commonly, throughout the Santa Clara Valley. Around the perimeter of roughly 40-acre parcels of avocado or lemon orchards in the Las Posas Valley and in the El Rio area I saw, on the average, three to five individuals, while in the Santa Clara Valley I found an

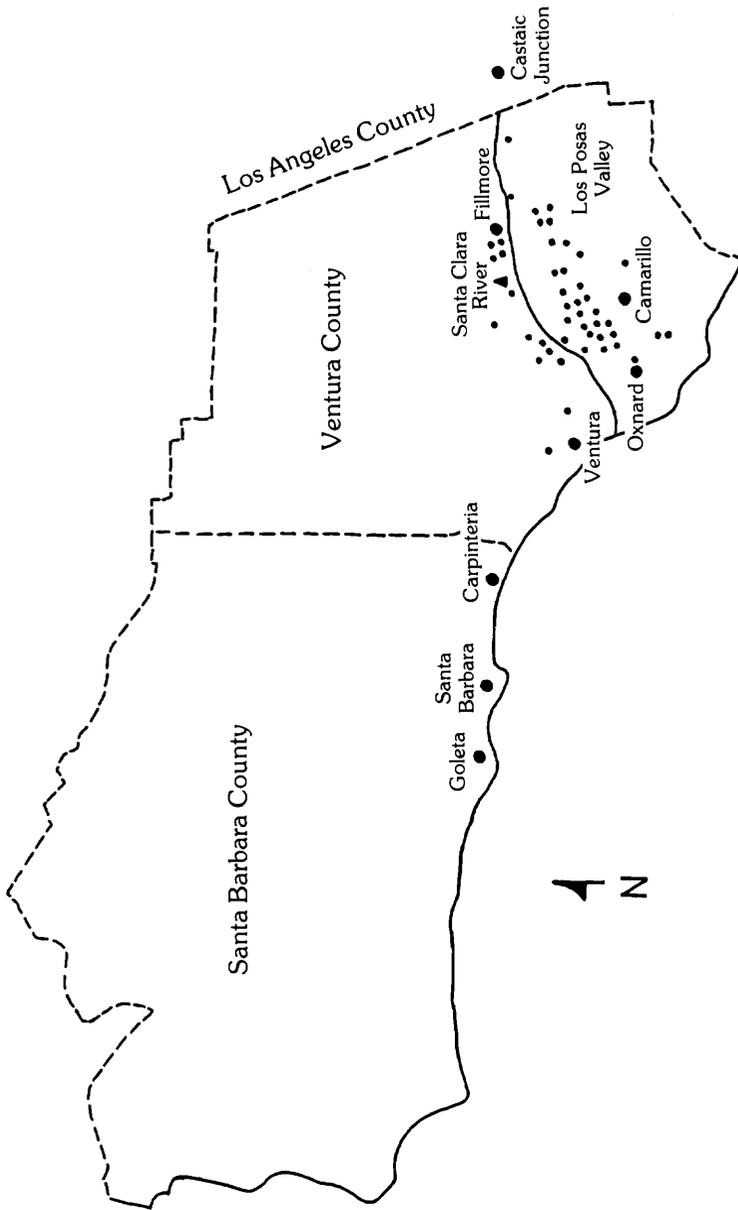


Figure 1. Recent sighting and nesting locations of the Common Ground-Dove in Santa Barbara and Ventura counties, California. ●, Sighting location; ▲, nesting location.

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average of one to two individuals around parcels of the same size, if Common Ground-Doves were present. On 3 October 1984 I counted an unusually high number, 29 individuals, on a 100-acre ranch in the Las Posas Valley. My ground dove sightings during 1984 and 1985 were continuous through the year. I eventually observed Common Ground-Doves on all the properties I visited in the Las Posas Valley and in the El Rio area, whereas I observed them on about 10% of the properties I visited in the Santa Clara Valley. On 11 September 1985 I located a Common Ground-Dove nest, the first nesting record for Ventura County, in an orchard on Sycamore Road, four miles west of Fillmore.

Grinnell and Miller (1944) mentioned that the Common Ground-Dove seemed to increase and spread with the irrigation of low-lying desert lands. Over the past 15 years or so, as avocados have become more profitable, there has been a large increase in avocado acreage in both counties. There also has been a widespread conversion from furrow to drip and sprinkler irrigation systems, reducing the amount of ground disturbance through cultivation, and this change may also have been a factor in the Common Ground-Dove's expansion into this area. This conversion has been carried out most widely in lemon orchards. Most of my observations during 1984 and 1985 were in lemon and avocado orchards; a few were in orange groves. The doves were attracted especially to orchards that had eucalyptus windrows, where I have observed them on the roads below the trees, tipping the eucalyptus capsules for their seeds. They favored the younger avocado orchards where the trees had not closed their crowns, thus leaving more edge area. Unlike avocado trees, lemon trees are pruned regularly, keeping the tree's crown low and the orchard relatively open, so ground doves occurred in lemon orchards of all ages. All of my observations of ground doves outside orchards in this area have been in arroyos not far from an orchard and in association with eucalyptus, willow, and/or California (Peruvian) Pepper (*Schinus molle*).

Ventura County and, to a lesser extent, Santa Barbara County have large tracts of agricultural habitat suitable for ground doves, and, though urban development pressure is increasing, it will be several years before the existing orchards are seriously threatened.

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