

### Cassin's Vireo *Vireo cassinii*

*William E. Haas*

Rare in San Diego County as a breeding bird, Cassin's Vireo is best found by visiting oak and coniferous woodlands above 4000 feet elevation from late May to mid July. It is seen throughout the county in migration, though uncommonly. It is a regular winter visitor to riparian woodland and ornamental trees near the coast but rare in that role as well. Though Cassin's Vireo was never abundant, parasitism by cowbirds is likely responsible for the vireo's population decline and current rarity.

**Breeding distribution:** Currently, Cassin's Vireos summer in San Diego County only in montane mixed oak and conifer woodland above 4000 feet elevation. On Palomar Mountain, our 15 records during the atlas period were all of single individuals except for one nesting pair near Doane Pond (E15) 12 June 1999 and two nesting pairs at the lower end of Jeff Valley (F16) 30 May 1999 (W. E. Haas). Around Hot Springs Mountain, our only record during the atlas period was of a nesting pair at the north base in a small pocket of incense cedars in Lost Valley (D20) 10 June 2000 (W. E. Haas), though previously the species occurred near the summit (E20/E21; five, including a nesting pair, 8 June 1985, P. Unitt). Similarly, on Volcan Mountain (I20) and around Julian (K20) during the atlas period we had only three observations of single individuals, though numbers not long before were higher; for example, five on Volcan 30–31 May 1993 (P. Unitt). In



*Photo by Jack C. Daynes*

the Cuyamaca Mountains we had 13 sightings at various sites, the best of which was Middle Peak (M20), with up to four, including three singing males, 11 June 2000 (R. E. Webster) and nesting of two pairs confirmed 3 June 1998, 18 June 2000, and 9 June 2001 (W. E. Haas). In the Laguna Mountains the 11 observations were concentrated around Wooded Hill and the heads of Agua Dulce and La Posta creeks (P23), with up to five on 3 June 1999 (E. C. Hall, J. O. Zimmer). The only sighting in the breeding season away from these areas was of one about 3500 feet elevation 2.6 miles southeast of Mesa Grande (I17) 15 June 2000 (D. C. Seals).



Diego County since the late 1980s, Cassin's Vireo, unlike Bell's, has yet to show any evidence of recovery. From the viewpoint of San Diego County, the trend toward increase reported for the species as a whole (Sauer et al. 2003) looks unlikely; in all of the species' local roles the trends look flat to negative.

**Taxonomy:** With the split of the Solitary Vireo into the Blue-headed, Plumbeous, and Cassin's, the last consists of only two subspecies, nominate *V. c. cassinii* Xantus, 1858, being the only one in the United States.