

Hammond's Flycatcher *Empidonax hammondi*

An uncommon migrant in spring and fall, Hammond's Flycatcher is not a familiar bird in San Diego County. But, in April and early May, after the Western Flycatcher, it is the next most likely *Empidonax* to be encountered here. In migration it has no special habitat preferences, other than trees or shrubs—it is as likely to be seen in sparsely vegetated desert washes as in oak or riparian woodland. The few winter records are all from parks and gardens near the coast, except for one from the Anza-Borrego Desert.

Migration: In spring, Hammond's Flycatcher is more frequent in the eastern half of San Diego County than near the coast, as one might expect in a species that typically avoids Baja California, keeping to the east side of the Gulf of California on its way north from wintering in the mountains of mainland Mexico. It arrives usually in early April, rarely as early as 20 March (1994, Agua Caliente County Park, M26, Massey 1998). Most are seen from mid April to early May, but the highest one-day count 1997–2001 was of only five, in the Inner Pasture (N25) 2 May 2001 (A. P. and T. E. Keenan). By the last week of May Hammond's Flycatcher is rare; the latest spring record is of one in Hauser Canyon (T21) 5 June 1997 (J. M. Wells, J. Turnbull).

In fall, Hammond's Flycatcher is probably most frequent in the mountains, though most records are along the coast, where birders concentrate. It overflies the desert almost entirely at that season. Fall records extend from 1 September (1986, 0.3 mile west of High Point, Palomar Mountain, D15, SDNHM 44416) to 5 November (1984, Point Loma, S7, R. E. Webster, AB 39:103, 1985), exceptionally to 16–17 November (1974, Old Mission Dam, P11, G. McCaskie, SDNHM 40738).



Photo by Anthony Mercieca

Winter: The only winter record 1997–2002 was of one in the Golden Hill section of Balboa Park (S9) 16 December 2001–1 March 2002 (M. B. Mulrooney, P. Unitt), returning 2 November 2002–18 January 2003 and 15 November 2003–24 January 2004 (G. Hollenbeck). There are only three previous winter records of Hammond's Flycatcher in San Diego County: October 1991–24 January 1992, Point Loma (R. E. Webster, AB 46:315, 1992), 1 December 1992–24 January 1993, Point Loma (R. E. Webster, AB 47:301, 1993), and 6 December 1992–20 January 1993, Yaqui Well (I24; A. G. Morley, AB 47:301, 1993). Note the coincidence of the previous records with El Niño. A supposed migrant at San Diego 10 March 1983 (another El Niño!) (AB 37:911, 1983) is so early that it may more likely have been wintering, paralleled by a specimen still in molt from Thermal in the Coachella Valley of Riverside County 19 March 1921 (Patten et al. 2003). The species undergoes its spring molt in its winter range (Johnson 1970).