

Plumbeous Vireo *Vireo plumbeus*

In sharp contrast to most vireos, whose ranges have shrunk, the Plumbeous Vireo has spread. It was first noted in southern California in 1962, small numbers colonizing the east slope of the Sierra Nevada, San Gabriel Mountains, and San Bernardino Mountains, and becoming a regular and widespread if still rare migrant and winter visitor.

Migration: In San Diego County, the Plumbeous Vireo has been recorded from 16 September (1973, one in the Tijuana River valley, G. McCaskie) to 10 May (1981, one on Palomar Mountain, D15, R. Higson). From 1997 to 2001, 12 spring migrants were reported, between 26 March (2000, one at Yaqui Well, I24, E. Moree) and 24 April (2001, one at Point Loma, S7, J. C. Worley; one in Wonderstone Canyon, D29, R. Thériault). Spring migrant Plumbeous Vireos are scattered throughout San Diego County; the 12 during the atlas period were evenly split between the coastal lowland and the Anza-Borrego Desert. All records were of single individuals except for two in oak woodland in Poway 1.9 miles southwest of Starvation Mountain (K12) 16 April 1998 (E. C. Hall).

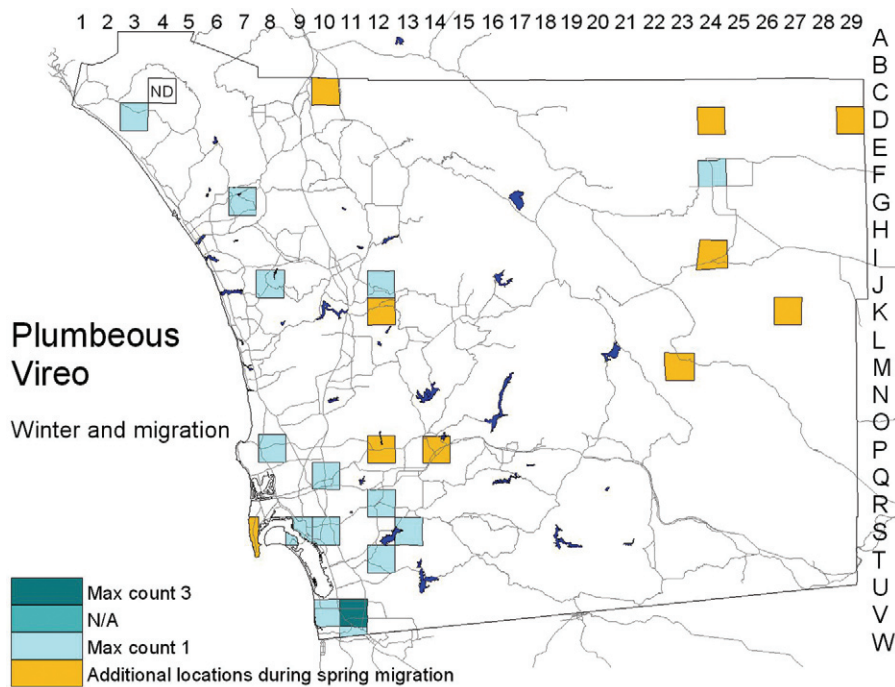
A unique summer record is of one at Banner (K21) 26 June 1994 (P. D. Jorgensen). A few Plumbeous Vireos have colonized the San Bernardino Mountains, a considerable jump in the breeding range, but the breeding habitat is pine woodland, not the riparian woodland found at Banner.

The first specimen of the Plumbeous Vireo for San Diego County was an immature found dead at Mission Santa Ysabel (I18) 1 November 2002 (A. Mercieca, SDNHM 50893).



Photo by Anthony Mercieca

Winter: The Plumbeous Vireo is a regular winter visitor in the coastal lowland, mainly in riparian woodland, occasionally in urban trees. From 1997 to 2002, between 17 and 26 individuals were reported, depending on how many birds seen in the same area in successive winters were returnees. All records were of single individuals except for three at the Dairy Mart pond in the Tijuana River valley (V11) 19 December 1998 (G. McCaskie). The only wintering Plumbeous Vireos outside the coastal lowland during the atlas period were from planted pines in Borrego Springs (F24), 1 November–20 December 1998 (P. D. Jorgensen, R. Thériault) and 17 December 2000 (N. Osborn). Two earlier winter desert records are of one at Butterfield Ranch (M23) 8 February 1987 (D. B. King, AB 41:331, 1987) and one at Yaqui Well 11 February 1989 (D. and M. Hastings, AB 43:367, 1989). The species is now annual in winter in the Salton Sink (Patten et al. 2003).



Conservation: The breeding range of the Plumbeous Vireo is spreading gradually north and west (Johnson 1994), and this change has been accompanied by an even

more striking shift in the species' distribution in migration and winter. In San Diego County the Plumbeous Vireo was first noted 16 November 1969, with one in the Tijuana River valley (G. McCaskie). Soon after that occurrence became annual. Numbers seen on San Diego County Christmas bird counts, however, have remained stable at about two per year since the mid 1980s.

Taxonomy: Plumbeous Vireos in the United States are all nominate *V. p. plumbeus* Coues, 1866—if the species is indeed polytypic. The genetic studies supporting the split of the Solitary Vireo into the Plumbeous, Cassin's, and Blue-headed were confined to the United States (Johnson 1995), and the "Plumbeous Vireos" resident in southeastern Mexico and Central America look more like Cassin's (Phillips 1991).