

Virginia's Warbler *Vermivora virginiae*

Though Virginia's Warbler breeds in the Great Basin and Rocky Mountains, it is a rare vagrant to coastal southern California, in fall almost exclusively. Since 1962, when Guy McCaskie discovered it in fair numbers in the Tijuana River valley, its frequency has decreased precipitously. By the beginning of the 21st century only two or three were being reported in San Diego County per year.

Migration: Though San Diego County is not on Virginia's Warbler's normal migration route, the species is most frequent here in September, like other western warblers, not shifted later in the season like vagrants from the east. There are many records for August, one as early as the 13th (1972, Tijuana River valley, G. McCaskie), and few later than mid October. All fall records for Virginia's Warbler in San Diego County are from the coastal lowland, except for one at Jacumba (U28) 3 September 1963 (AFN 18:75, 1964).

There are three spring records, one from Encinitas (K6/K7; 29 April 1979, AB 33:806, 1979), two from Point Loma (S7; 15 May 1988, G. McCaskie, AB 42:482, 1988; 3 May 2001, J. C. Worley).

Winter: San Diego County has seven winter records of Virginia's Warbler, all for the coastal lowland. Unitt (1984) listed three; more recent were three in January



Photo by Anthony Mercieca

and February 1990 (AB 44:331, 1990, Rancho Santa Fe Christmas bird count) and one at La Jolla (P7) 16 March 2001 (P. K. Nelson).

Conservation: The highest number of Virginia's Warblers reported in San Diego County per fall was 35 in 1962, when McCaskie was the county's only birder searching out vagrants (McCaskie and Banks 1964). In spite of the increase in observers, by the mid to late 1970s, the rate had dropped to five to ten per year (Unitt 1984). Thus the current rate of two per year continues a 40-year trend of decline. No significant decrease has been reported in the species' breeding range, so the reason for this decrease in San Diego County is not clear.