

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker *Sphyrapicus varius*

With improved information on the species' identification, birders are finding the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker to be an annual though rare winter visitor to southern California. At least 25 have been found in San Diego County. Most are immature birds retaining the largely brown mottled head of juvenile plumage.

Winter: Records of the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker are scattered throughout San Diego County, on the coastal slope from Fallbrook (D8) in the north (one from 1 December 1984 to 17 February 1985, R. Higson, AB 39:210, 1985) to Imperial Beach (V10) in the south (one on 18 February 2001, G. McCaskie). But at least ten are from that mecca for sapsuckers, the Santa Ysabel Mission (I18). Only two have been identified in the Anza-Borrego Desert, both at man-made oases: the Roadrunner Club, Borrego Springs (F24), 6 November 1999, and Casa del Zorro (H25) 4 November 2001 (P. D. Jorgensen).

The historical record for this species is still short, but numbers reaching San Diego County may vary appreciably from year to year. During the five-year atlas period, there were none in 1997–98, six in 1998–99, and one each in the three following years.

Migration: Dates of Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers in San Diego County range from 19 October (1985, one at the



Photo by Anthony Mercieca

Santa Ysabel Mission, C. G. Edwards, AB 40:159, 1986) to 3 March (1998, one in the Tierrasanta area of San Diego, P10, D. K. Adams, FN 52:258, 1998).

Conservation: An apparent increase in Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers wintering in southern California could be a result not only of improved identification criteria but of the breeding range spreading west, into Alaska (Erwin et al. 2004).