

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron *Nyctanassa violacea*

Of the herons that reach San Diego County by dispersing north from Mexico, the Yellow-crowned Night-Heron is by far the scarcest. As few as nine individuals have been recorded, though the species has been seen many times more than this low number implies. One bird associated with the Black-crowned Night-Heron colony at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography for 20 years and probably accounted for all sightings in the county during the atlas period.

Breeding distribution: Even though only one Yellow-crowned Night-Heron joined the colony of the Black-crowned at Scripps (O7), it may have attempted nesting at least in 1989. That year, it “built a nest and stood by its mate sitting on the nest, but the eggs evidently did not hatch” (J. O’Brien, AB 43:1367, 1989). It was seen first at San Elijo Lagoon 25 October 1981 and intermittently into 1983 (T. Meyer; Binford 1985); it was presumed to be the same individual that appeared at Scripps annually from 1983 to 2001. Construction on the campus then disrupted the colony, but it may have relocated nearby, to the La Jolla Beach and Tennis Club (P7), where a Yellow-crowned appeared 6 December 2001 (C. Nyhan, NAB 56:223, 2002). The same bird was probably responsible for sightings at Los Peñasquitos Lagoon (N7) 20 November 1999 (K. Messer, NAB 54:104, 2000), La Jolla Valley (L10) (T. Johnson; AB 52:531, 1998), along Rose Creek near Mission Bay (Q8) 22 June 1998 (B. O’Leary), and Famosa Slough (R8) 17–19 May 2001 (V. P. Johnson, NAB 55:355, 2001).

Migration: San Diego County’s other records of the Yellow-crowned Night-Heron are scattered through the year. The first two were in fall at the Tijuana River estuary (V10) 3 November 1962 and 22–25 October 1963 (McCaskie 1964). Two in the Tijuana River near Dairy



Photo by Anthony Mercieca

Mart Road (V11) arrived in summer or fall and remained through winter: an adult 30 September 1990–7 January 1991, returning 13 October 1991–31 March 1992, and joined by a subadult 16 June 1991–13 February 1992 (G. McCaskie; Heindel and Garrett 1995, Patten et al. 1995b). Spring and summer records are of adults at Sea World (R8) 3 April 1979, the Tijuana River estuary 15 April–2 May 1979 (same bird?), the south end of San Diego Bay (V10) 18–26 July 1980 (Binford 1983), and the Santa Margarita River mouth (G4) 9 May 1984 (L. R. Hays, Roberson 1986), and a subadult at San Elijo Lagoon 11 June–24 September 2002 (B. Chaddock, NAB 56:486, 2002, 57:117, 2003).

The California Bird Records Committee questioned the identification of an immature at San Elijo Lagoon 1–11 November 1963 (McCaskie 1964, Roberson 1993).

Taxonomy: The one specimen from San Diego County, from the Tijuana River estuary 25 October 1963 (SDNHM 30758) is the large-billed subspecies *N. v. bancrofti* Huey, 1927, from the Pacific coast of Mexico, rather than the smaller-billed nominate subspecies from the southeastern United States (McCaskie and Banks 1966, Unitt 1984).