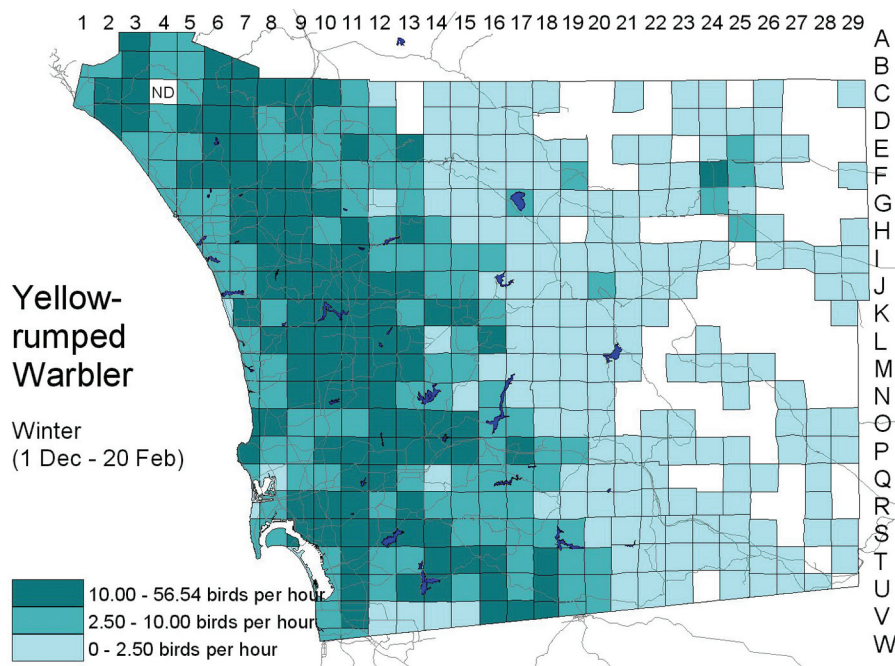


Yellow-rumped Warbler *Dendroica coronata*

The Yellow-rumped Warbler is probably San Diego County's most abundant winter visitor. If the White-crowned Sparrow exceeds it, it is not by much. Eucalyptus groves and other exotic trees planted in developed areas suit the Yellow-rumped Warbler at least as much as natural sage scrub, chaparral, and woodland. The birds are strongly concentrated in the coastal lowland but are found almost throughout the county, lacking only from the most rugged parts of the Anza-Borrego Desert. As a breeding species, however, the Yellow-rumped Warbler is a recent colonist, rare and confined to coniferous

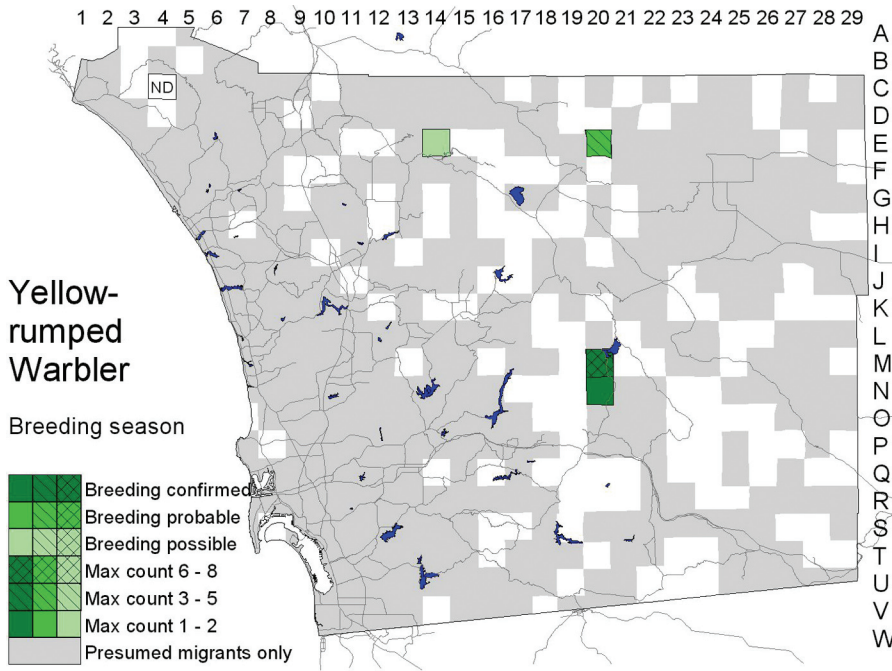


Photo by Anthony Mercieca



forest on San Diego County's highest mountains. Because almost all Yellow-rumped Warblers are readily distinguished in the field as belonging to either the eastern or the western group of subspecies, and the status of each is so different, this account refers to them by their traditional names, Audubon's Warbler for the yellow-throated western birds, Myrtle Warbler for the white-throated eastern ones. See under Taxonomy for the status of the Myrtle.

Winter: San Diego County must be near the core of the Audubon's Warbler's winter range. The species is common to abundant



Breeding distribution: Audubon's Warbler is another of those birds, like the Fox Sparrow, Green-tailed Towhee, and Dusky Flycatcher, whose breeding habitat lies in an elevation zone barely pierced by San Diego County's highest peaks. The warblers are now of annual occurrence in the Cuyamaca Mountains, with up to eight, including five singing males, on Middle Peak (M20) 11 June 2000 (R. E. Webster) and six on Cuyamaca Peak (M20) 5 June 2001 (M. B. Mulrooney). On Cuyamaca Peak almost all Audubon's Warblers are found on the northeast slopes, with only one report from the south slope (N20; adult with fledgling 18 June 2000, G. Hazard). On Cuyamaca Peak the birds occur above 5200 feet elevation, but on

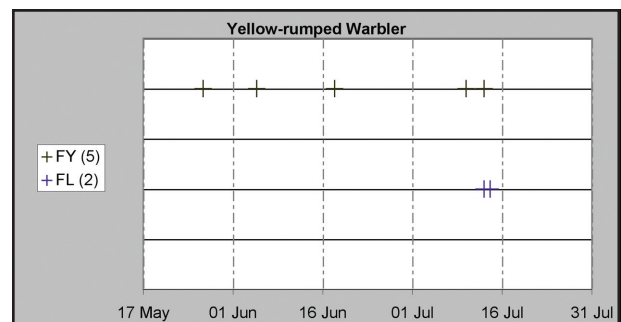
from the coast up to about 2500 feet elevation. In this region, daily counts commonly reach into the hundreds, occasionally over 1000 (1300 around Lake Hodges, K10, 22 December 2000, R. L. Barber). At higher elevations the birds become uncommon and more localized to developed areas. Above 3500 feet elevation they can be missed, and at the county's highest elevations they are rare. Above 5000 feet elevation in the Laguna Mountains, for example, we never encountered more than one individual per day. In the Anza-Borrego Desert Audubon's Warbler is abundant in the developed areas of Borrego Springs (up to 328 north of Palm Canyon Drive, F24, 19 December 1999, P. K. Nelson) but much less common in native desert habitats. It is rare to absent in the least-vegetated tracts of desert and lacking entirely from the pinyon-juniper zone of the Santa Rosa and Vallecito mountains.

Migration: In fall, Audubon's Warblers may begin arriving in the first week of September or may not show up until mid September. By the end of September they are common. The end of fall migration is governed by the weather and food supply (Terrill and Ohmart 1984). In spring, the birds are apparently on the move by late February, certainly by March (Massey 1998). Numbers as high as 36 in Blair Valley (L24) 21 February 1998 (R. Thériault) and 40 at Butterfield Ranch (M23) 26 February 2000 (E. C. Hall) had not been approached at these desert locations earlier in the winter. Audubon's Warblers depart in late April and early May; by mid May they are scarce. Stragglers are occasional even in the first week of June. From 1997 to 2001 the latest were two in Ballena Valley (K17) 5 June 2000 (O. Carter); in 1995 there was one as late as 9 June (San Diego, R. E. Webster, NASFN 49:308, 1995). There is also one unseasonal summer record far from plausible breeding habitat, of one at Blue Sky Ecological Reserve, Poway (L12), 23 June 1998 (M. and B. McIntosh, FN 52:504, 1998).

Middle Peak they go down to 4920 feet (R. E. Webster). Since 1986 Audubon's Warblers have summered at least irregularly above 6000 feet elevation near the summit of Hot Springs Mountain (E20). The maximum count there is of four, all singing males, 9 June 2001 (K. L. Weaver, C. R. Mahrtd). One on the steep north-facing slope near Doane Pond in Palomar Mountain State Park (E14) 21 May 2000 (G. Hazard) could have been a late migrant but was more likely a summering bird, as previous summer sightings from Palomar are known (Unitt 1984).

Nesting: In the higher mountains of southern California, Audubon's Warblers usually nest in the outer branches of the middle levels of conifers. A nest on Middle Peak in 2004 was in a burned canyon live oak retaining toasted leaves. Dates of fledglings range from 18 June to 14 July; sightings of adults carrying insects, possibly to young still in the nest, are as early as 27 May.

Conservation: Yellow-rumped Warblers may have benefited from urbanization, urban trees offering more habitat than sage scrub. In any case, no trends in the number of winter visitors are obvious. As a breeding bird, however, the species is a recent arrival. Though the first summer report, from Palomar Mountain, was as long



ago as 1949, the species' breeding was not confirmed until 1986, with a pair feeding fledglings on Hot Springs Mountain 12 July (G. McCaskie, AB 40:1256, 1986). Unitt (1981) had not found the warblers on this mountain in 1980, so it is almost certain the birds first colonized about the time they were confirmed breeding. They became regular on Cuyamaca Peak only in the late 1980s as well. Thus Audubon's Warbler is part of the pattern exemplified by several breeding birds of southern California's high mountains, extending their range to the comparatively low summits of San Diego County's peaks. Sometimes, as in the case of Audubon's Warbler, this means filling in a gap between the San Jacinto Mountains to the north and the Sierra San Pedro Mártir to the south.

Taxonomy: The dominant subspecies of the Yellow-rumped Warbler in San Diego County is *D. c. auduboni* (Townsend, 1837). In the western United States, north of southeastern Arizona, Audubon's Warbler is often divided into two subspecies, smaller *auduboni* in the Pacific states, larger *D. c. memorabilis* Oberholser, 1921, in the

Rocky Mountain region. The size difference, however, needs better quantification before its ability to define a subspecies can be assessed. Breeding males of *memorabilis* tend to be blacker than those of *auduboni*, but the difference is of no help in identifying the birds in their winter plumage.

The Myrtle Warbler reaches San Diego County as an uncommon winter visitor, flocking indiscriminately with Audubon's Warblers in riparian woodland but avoiding dry scrub. Most records are from the coastal lowland, but there are some from Borrego Springs and as high as 3200 feet elevation near Warner Springs (F19; one on 18 December 2000, C. G. Edwards). The highest count during the atlas period was of 11 at Lake Hodges (K10) 22 December 2000 (R. L. Barber), but past daily tallies run as high as 30 in Tijuana River valley 17 December 1977 (P. E. Lehman). Dates for the Myrtle range from 5 October to 23 May (Unitt 1984). The Myrtle Warbler too is usually divided into two subspecies; only the larger, more western *D. c. hooveri* McGregor, 1899, has been reported from California.