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**Guthrie, D.A., "Status of the Least Bell's Vireo along the Santa Clara River and Its Tributaries near Valencia, California, Spring 1988" (1988)**

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STATUS OF THE LEAST BELL'S VIREO ALONG THE SANTA CLARA RIVER  
AND ITS TRIBUTARIES NEAR VALENCIA, CALIFORNIA,  
SPRING 1988

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During the late Spring and early Summer of 1988 a survey was conducted of a section of the Santa Clara River and its tributaries in the vicinity of Valencia, California to determine the status of Least Bell's Vireo in the region. The areas surveyed were the Santa Clara River channel from the mouth of Castaic Creek upstream to the Boquet Canyon Road crossing, Castaic Creek from the Santa Clara River to Interstate 5, and a riparian section of San Francisquito Creek about a mile from the Santa Clara River.

Each survey was conducted on foot by two observers well acquainted with vireo calls and habits and occurred during early morning hours at the time of year when Least Bell's Vireos were known to be active elsewhere in southern California. Taped voices of singing Least Bell's Vireos were used to elicit response from territorial males. Two surveys were conducted. The first was completed in late April and early May and surveyed the whole area described. The second survey occurred in late May and early June and was a resurvey of only the most likely habitat for vireos, namely, the sections of stream system containing permanent water.

To facilitate surveys, the areas was divided into five sections (Figure 1). Descriptions of each are as follows.

Area 1; Santa Clara River, I-5 to the mouth of Castaic Cr.

Length of area, 3 miles. The Santa Clara River flows continuously in this section and riparian vegetation is well developed. Ponds have been created for cultivation of water cress along a portion of the stream.

Area 2: Santa Clara River, I-5 to McBean Parkway.

Length of area, 1.3 miles. The Santa Clara River flows continuously in this section and riparian vegetation is well developed. Ponds have been created for cultivation of water cress along a portion of the stream.

Area 3: Santa Clara River, McBean Parkway to Boquet Canyon Rd.

Length of area, 1.2 miles. Permanent water occurs only in the westernmost portion of this section near McBean Parkway. This area was heavily disturbed by construction during this study.

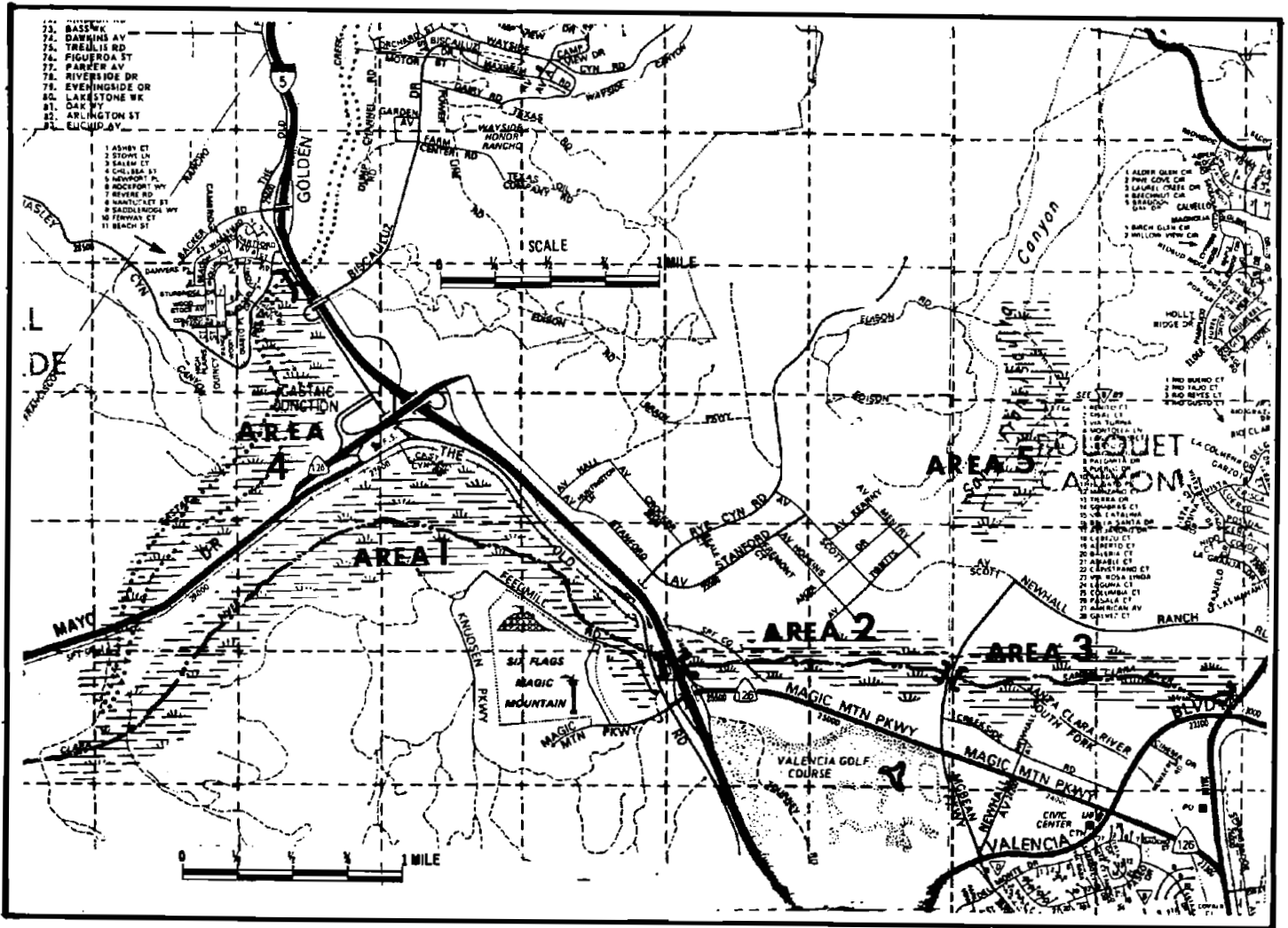
Area 4: Castaic Creek from the Santa Clara River to I-5.

Length of area, 1.5 miles. During this study there was no water flowing in this section. Water was present only at a marsh area left from winter rains occurred just north of the Rte 126 bridge and also near the upper portion of this section.

Area 5: San Francisquito Creek, 1 - 2 miles above Santa Clara River.

Length of area, 0.5 miles. Except for a small puddle near a leaking agricultural cistern, no water was present in this section during the study.

Figure 1. Survey Areas along the Santa Clara River and Tributaries, 1988



## OBSERVATIONS - GENERAL

A total of 75 species were observed during this study (Table 1). Of these, 37 were resident species and an additional 12 are breeding birds present only during the summer months. Twenty-four of the 49 species of breeding birds are woodland or riparian species, three species are marsh birds, 9 are residents of coastal sage habitat and 13 species are general in their habitat preferences.

Exact counts were taken of several species that are often associated in riparian woodland with Least Bell's Vireo. These include Yellow Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat and Blue Grosbeak. These species were observed in the areas where water occurred, namely sections 1, 2, 3 and 4. Counts of Brown-headed Cowbird were also made as this bird is a nest parasite that has been implicated in the decline of many riparian species. Cowbirds were found to be common in the area.

## OBSERVATIONS - LEAST BELL'S VIREO

Only a single Least Bell's Vireo was observed during this study, an unbanded singing male found on May 3rd about 100 yards downstream (west) of the McBean Parkway Bridge. The bird was found at 7 am and was observed for about 15 minutes. During this time the bird followed the observer for about 70 feet downstream. The bird could not be relocated at the spot at 8:30 the same day nor was it relocated on subsequent visits to the area. This following behavior and the lack of any observation of another vireo in the area indicates that this bird was a migrant passing through the area and was not settled on a nesting territory.

The vegetation in the area where the Least Bell's Vireo was observed consists of low willow growth and annual plants. The area had been cleared during the construction of the McBean Parkway Bridge (about 1980). This area is one of the very few sections of streamside young willows in the entire study area, most willows being much older and forming dense stands.

## DISCUSSION

The study area contains much high quality riparian habitat. Despite a high level of human disturbance from off road vehicles on weekends and a high density of cowbirds in the area, many riparian species are found in the area, including species such as Yellow Warbler that are heavily parasitized by cowbirds. Absence of Least Bell's Vireo from the area may be because the habitat is not suitable due to the mature nature of most of the willow stands. The few vireo observations that have been made in the area have been in areas where willows were removed, either for road construction or for the development of water cress ponds.

## SUMMARY

Surveys of the Santa Clara River and its tributaries in the vicinity of Valencia, California during the Spring of 1988 failed to observe any territorial or nesting Least Bell's Vireos. The single sighting that occurred was of a migrant individual that did not stay in the study area. It may be significant that this individual was found in one of the few areas of young willow growth in the area.

*Willow?  
He really  
saw!*

Table 1. Birds Observed along the Santa Clara River, Spring, 1988

	Date:	4/29	5/3	5/3	5/4	5/4	5/25	5/25	6/2
Species	Area:	1	2	5	3	4	2	3	1
	Status								
Great Blue Heron	M,W	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	x
Great Egret	M,W	x	x	-	-	x	-	-	-
Snowy Egret	M,W	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cattle Egret	M,W	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Green-backed Heron	M,W	x	-	-	-	x	-	-	-
Black-cr. Night Heron	M	-	-	-	-	x	x	-	x
Mallard	R?	x	x	-	-	-	x	x	-
Cinnamon Teal	M	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Turkey Vulture	M,S	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Black-shouldered Kite	R	4	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
Cooper's Hawk	R	x	x	x	-	-	-	-	x
Red-shouldered Hawk	R	2	-	-	-	-	x	-	2
Red-tailed Hawk	W,R	x	x	-	x	x	-	x	x
American Kestrel	R	x	x	x	-	x	-	x	x
California Quail	R	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Killdeer	R	x	x	-	x	x	x	x	x
Spotted Sandpiper	M	x	x	-	-	-	-	-	x
Western Sandpiper	M	-	-	-	-	x	-	-	-
Least Sandpiper	M	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mourning Dove	R	x	-	-	x	x	x	-	x
Greater Roadrunner	R	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	-
Great Horned Owl	R	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	x
Vaux's Swift	M	x	-	-	-	x	-	-	-
White-throated Swift	R	-	-	-	-	x	-	-	x
Anna's Hummingbird	R	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Costa's Hummingbird	S	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	x
Nuttall's Woodpecker	R	x	x	-	-	x	x	x	x
Downy Woodpecker	R	x	x	-	-	-	x	x	x
Northern Flicker	R	x	x	-	-	-	-	x	x
Western Wood Pewee	M	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	-
Willow Flycatcher	M	-	-	-	-	x	-	-	-
Black Phoebe	R	-	-	x	-	-	x	x	x
Ash-throated Flycatcher	S	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Western Kingbird	S	-	-	-	x	x	-	-	x
Tree Swallow	M	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Violet-green Swallow	M	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	x
Rough-winged Swallow	S	x	x	-	-	-	-	-	x
Cliff Swallow	S	x	x	-	-	x	x	x	x
Scrub Jay	R	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	x
American Crow	R	x	x	x	-	-	x	-	x
Common Raven	R	x	x	x	-	x	x	-	x
Plain Titmouse	R	x	x	-	-	x	x	-	x
Bushtit	R	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Bewick's Wren	R	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
House Wren	R	x	x	x	-	-	-	-	x
Western Bluebird	M	-	-	-	-	-	-	x	-

Table 1 (cont.). Bird Observations along the Santa Clara River.

	Date:	4/29	5/3	5/3	5/4	5/4	5/25	5/25	6/2
Area:		1	2	5	3	4	2	3	1
Species	Status								
Wrentit	R	x	x	x	-	-	-	x	x
California Thrasher	R	x	x	-	x	x	x	x	x
Cedar Waxwing	W	-	x	-	x	x	-	-	-
European Starling	R	x	x	-	-	x	x	-	x
Northern Mockingbird	R	-	-	-	x	-	-	-	-
Least Bell's Vireo	S,M	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Warbling Vireo	M	x	x	-	-	-	x	-	-
Orange-crowned Warbler	R?	-	x	-	-	x	x	-	x
Nashville Warbler	M	x	-	x	-	-	-	-	-
Yellow Warbler	S	6	5	-	-	5	10	4	7
Yellow-rumped Warbler	W	-	-	-	-	x	-	-	-
Common Yellowthroat	R	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Wilson's Warbler	M	x	x	x	x	x	-	x	-
Yellow-breasted Chat	S	1	-	-	1	-	4	-	1
Black-headed Grosbeak	S	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Blue Grosbeak	M,S?	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Western Tanager	M	x	-	-	x	-	-	-	x
Rufous-sided Towhee	R	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Brown Towhee	R	-	-	-	x	x	-	-	x
Lark Sparrow	W	-	-	-	-	-	x	-	-
Song Sparrow	R	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Red-winged Blackbird	R	x	x	x	-	x	x	x	x
Yellow-headed Blackbird	M	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Brewer's Blackbird	R	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	x
Brown-headed Cowbird	S	33	16	-	3	25	21	5	70
Northern Oriole	S	x	x	x	-	x	x	x	x
House Finch	R	x	x	-	x	x	x	x	x
Lesser Goldfinch	R	x	x	-	-	x	x	-	x
Lawrence's Goldfinch	M?	-	-	-	-	-	x	-	-
American Goldfinch	R	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	x
TOTAL SPECIES:		53	43	23	23	39	35	27	50

STATUS: M - migrant, R - resident, S - summer only, W - wintering

Area 1; Santa Clara River, I-5 to the mouth of Castaic Cr.

Area 2: Santa Clara River, I-5 to McBean Parkway.

Area 3: Santa Clara River, McBean Parkway to Boquet Canyon Rd.

Area 4: Castaic Creek from the Santa Clara River to I-5.

Area 5: San Francisquito Creek, 1 - 2 miles above Santa Clara River.