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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 1989" (July 5, 1989)**

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STATUS OF THE LEAST BELL'S VIREO ALONG THE SANTA CLARA RIVER  
AND ITS TRIBUTARIES NEAR VALENCIA, CALIFORNIA,  
SPRING 1989

*sent to JB, RH, SS, SE, PB  
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July 5, 1989

During the late Spring and early Summer of 1989 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 and Castaic Creek from the Santa Clara River to Interstate 5.

Each survey was conducted on foot by 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 Complete surveys were conducted in April and May and a third partial survey, which covered only the most promising vireo habitat, the wet areas of the Santa Clara River channel, was conducted in June.

To facilitate surveys, the areas was divided into four sections. 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.

#### OBSERVATIONS - GENERAL

A total of 64 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

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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. 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

No Least Bell's Vireos were observed during this study. Reports from observers in other areas in southern California indicate that vireo populations were down everywhere this year. The reason for this decline is not known. It is thought to be tied, perhaps, to conditions on wintering grounds in Mexico.

#### DISCUSSION

Compared to a similar study conducted in 1988, there were fewer water birds and smaller numbers of nesting riparian species. Both these differences from the previous year may be due to the drier conditions during the spring of 1989 and the lower volume of runoff.

#### SUMMARY

Surveys of the Santa Clara River and its tributaries in the vicinity of Valencia, California during the Spring of 1989 failed to observe any territorial or nesting Least Bell's Vireos. The study area is within the historical range of Least Bell's Vireo and contains many areas of suitable habitat, as indicated by the presence of other avian species preferring wet riparian areas. In recent years, however the population of Least Bell's Vireos in this area has been marginal to non-existent. High parasitism by cowbirds and isolation from other population centers of this species may prevent reestablishment of the vireo in the study area.

Table 1. Birds Observed along the Santa Clara River, Spring, 1989

Species	Status	Area 1			Area 2			Area 3		Area 4	
		Date:	4/10	5/12	6/6	4/26	5/11	6/2	4/26	5/11	4/27
Great Blue Heron	M,W	-	x	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Snowy Egret	M,W	x	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Green-backed Heron	M,W	x	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Black-cr. Night Heron	M	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mallard	R	x	-	x	-	-	-	x	-	-	-
Cinnamon Teal	M,R	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Turkey Vulture	M,	-	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	-
Black-shouldered Kite	R	2	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Red-shouldered Hawk	R	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
Red-tailed Hawk	W,R	x	-	x	x	x	x	-	-	-	-
American Kestrel	R	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
California Quail	R	x	x	x	x	x	-	x	-	x	x
Killdeer	R	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	x	x
Spotted Sandpiper	M,R	x	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rock Dove	R	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
White-winged Dove	S?	-	-	-	-	-	x	-	-	-	-
Mourning Dove	R	x	-	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Greater Roadrunner	R	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
White-throated Swift	R	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Anna's Hummingbird	R	x	x	x	-	x	x	-	-	x	x
Costa's Hummingbird	S	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bl.-chin. Hummingbird	S	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Nuttall's Woodpecker	R	x	-	x	x	x	x	x	-	x	x
Downy Woodpecker	R	x	-	x	-	x	x	-	-	x	-
Northern Flicker	R	x	x	x	x	-	x	-	-	x	-
Western Kingbird	M	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Western Wood Pewee	M	-	-	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	-
Black Phoebe	R	x	-	x	-	x	x	-	-	x	-
Ash-th. Flycatcher	S	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Tree Swallow	M	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rough-winged Swallow	S	x	-	x	x	x	x	-	-	x	x
Cliff Swallow	S	-	-	x	x	x	x	-	x	-	-
Barn Swallow	M	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Scrub Jay	R	x	-	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
American Crow	R	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	x	-	-
Common Raven	R	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	x	x
Plain Titmouse	R	x	-	x	x	x	x	x	-	x	-
Bushtit	R	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	x	x
Bewick's Wren	R	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
House Wren	R	x	-	x	x	x	x	-	-	x	-
Western Bluebird	M	x	-	-	-	-	-	x	-	-	-
Wrentit	R	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	x	-
California Thrasher	R	x	-	x	x	x	x	x	-	x	x

Table 1 (cont.). Birds Observed along the Santa Clara River, Spring, 1989

Species	Status	Area 1			Area 2			Area 3		Area 4	
		Date:	4/10	5/12	6/6	4/26	5/11	6/2	4/26	5/11	4/27
European Starling	R	-	-	x	x	x	-	x	x	x	x
Warbling Vireo	M	-	-	x	-	x	x	-	-	-	-
Orange-cr. Warbler	R	-	x	-	x	x	-	-	x	-	-
Yellow Warbler	S	x	x	-	2	1	4	4	-	3	-
Yellow-rumped Warbler	W	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Common Yellowthroat	R	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Wilson's Warbler	M	-	-	-	x	x	-	-	x	x	-
Yellow-breasted Chat	S	-	1	2	-	1	1	-	-	-	-
Western Tanager	M	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	x	-
Black-headed Grosbeak	S	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Blue Grosbeak	M,S	1	1	2	1	1	-	-	1	-	-
Rufous-sided Towhee	R	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Brown Towhee	R	x	-	x	-	-	x	-	-	x	x
Song Sparrow	R	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
White-cr. Sparrow	W	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Red-winged Blackbird	R	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Brown-headed Cowbird	S	17	5	30	10	3	25	11	6	14	9
Northern Oriole	S	x	x	x	-	-	x	-	-	x	-
House Finch	R	x	-	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Lesser Goldfinch	R	x	x	x	-	x	x	-	-	x	x
American Goldfinch	R	-	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	-
TOTAL SPECIES:		49	23	42	31	36	33	22	17	32	22

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

Area 1; Santa Clara River, Mouth of Castaic Creek upstream to I-5.

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

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

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