
**Guthrie, D.A., "Surveys for Least Bell's Vireo Along the Santa Clara River
and Its Tributaries near Valencia" (1991; 1991A)**

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**SURVEYS FOR LEAST BELL'S VIREO ALONG THE SANTA CLARA RIVER AND ITS TRIBUTARIES
NEAR VALENCIA, CALIFORNIA**

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Nature and Scope of Surveys

During the late Spring of 1991 a survey was conducted of a section of the Santa Clara River and its tributaries in the vicinity of Valencia, California to determine presence or absence of least Bell's vireo. Numbers of all species observed were noted, and special attention was placed on locating species considered rare and endangered.

Each survey was conducted on foot by observers well acquainted with both visual and auditory patterns of Southern California birds. All surveys occurred between 6 and 10 a.m. and at a time of year when breeding birds are active. A taped voice of Least Bell's Vireo was played periodically to elicit response from territorial males during all surveys.

To facilitate surveys, the area was divided into eight sections (Figure 1). Delineation of the eight areas and comments on each follow.

Area 1. Santa Clara River, I-5 to the mouth of Castaic Creek and Castaic Creek from this confluence to State Route 126.

Length of area, 4.0 miles. The Santa Clara River flows continuously in this section and is augmented by the Valencia wastewater outfall near the upstream end of this section. Riparian vegetation is well developed. Ponds have been created for cultivation of water cress along a portion of the stream. Except for a short section adjacent to the Santa Clara River, this section of Castaic Creek is dry. An oil spill during the winter of 1991 affected this section of the Santa Clara River.

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

Length of area, 1.4 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. An oil spill during the winter of 1991 affected about 1/4th of this section of the Santa Clara River.

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

Length of area, 1.2 miles. Water, supplied by the Saugus wastewater outfall at Boquet Canyon bridge, is continuous in this section of the Santa Clara River.

Area 4. Santa Clara River, Boquet Canyon Road upstream to DWP transmission lines.

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Length of area, 2.3 miles. This section of the Santa Clara River showed signs of spring flooding but was totally dry during this study. There were almost no wet riparian species in this area owing to the lack of permanent water.

Area 5. Castaic Creek, Route 126 to Interstate 5.

Length of area, 2.5 miles. Although there was evidence of spring flooding, the only water during this study was two small pockets of runoff from culverts at the northern end of the area and puddles left from spring floods near Route 126.

Area 6. San Francisquito Creek, from Santa Clara River upstream 2.5 miles.

Length of area, 2.5 miles. This section was dry except for the section below Newhall Ranch Road which was continuously wet due to runoff from the nearby industrial park.

Area 7. South Fork of Santa Clara River, McBean Parkway to Magic Mountain Parkway (Route 126).

Length of area, 1.0 miles. Although runoff water from the park enters this section of the river, the channel is narrow and very sandy. Lack of riparian vegetation keeps bird numbers low.

Area 8. South Fork of Santa Clara River, Route 126 to Newhall Creek.

Length of area, 1.8 miles. This section of the river was dry except for damp areas formed by runoff from three culverts along the west side of the creek and one culvert on the east side of the creek. Cattails are developed in pockets supported by runoff from adjacent housing and these supported redwings and other riparian species.

Observations

Bird observations are listed in Table 1. Eighty species of birds were observed during the surveys, many of which were migrants. With few exceptions, numbers of species and individuals were comparable with observations in past years. Construction on the McBean Parkway bridge over the Santa Clara River eliminated nesting under this bridge by Cliff and Rough-winged Swallows and the use of the bridge as a roost by Barn Owl. The numbers of wet riparian species along the Santa Clara river were similar to observations in past years, indicating that the oil spill that occurred during the winter had little residual effect. More obvious was the reduction in numbers of dry riparian species such as Bewick's wrens and yellow-breasted chats. This was due to die off along several sections of the Santa Clara River and its tributaries of dense stands of willow and cottonwood. This die off was apparently due to a lowered water table in the fourth year of an extended drought. The result was large stands of dead trees, especially noticeable along San Francisquito Creek, Castaic Creek, and the upper section of the Santa Clara River above the Boquet Canyon Road bridge.

Birds considered rare or endangered or Species of Special Concern that were observed are as follows:

Least Bell's Vireo

A single vireo was observed and heard singing its territorial song on May 12. The site was visited again on May 21st to confirm the first sighting. The vireo was still present and singing. The site, along the Santa Clara river west of Interstate 5, is near Castaic Junction and is the same site at which vireos were found in 1987 by RECON surveys of the Santa Clara River. The site is not far from where a single vireo was observed during surveys in 1990.

The site is in a dense willow stand near the edge of a watercress pond along the north side of the Santa Clara River near Castaic Junction (see Fig. 1). The presence of a newly formed artificial pond for growing water cress has stabilized the water level in the area and caused a moistening of the surrounding soil with the result that annual plant growth beneath the willows is lush and a cattail marsh has developed in the area.

Yellow Warbler

The yellow warbler is considered a second priority Species of Special Concern by the State of California. Yellow warblers prefer wet riparian habitat but are also found in large cottonwoods in drier riparian areas. Singing yellow warblers were observed along nearly every section of river surveyed (Table 1). Many of the birds observed were probably migrants and this species is known to sing its territorial song during migration. For instance, 17 yellow warblers were observed along Castaic Creek on May 10th but only 3 birds were found singing during surveys on May 21. It is clear that some yellow warblers nest along the Santa Clara River and its tributaries. However, in order to determine exact numbers, surveys need to be conducted in late May and early June after migrating birds have left the area.

Yellow-breasted Chat

The yellow-breasted chat is considered a Second Priority Species of Special Concern by the State of California. Chats were observed sparingly along the wet sections of the Santa Clara River. Fewer chats were observed than in previous years. This may be due to flooding or to some destruction of riparian vegetation west of Interstate 5 caused by the winter oil spill into the stream.

Summer Tanager

The summer tanager is considered a Second Priority Species of Special Concern by the State of California. A single summer tanager was observed in a cottonwood grove along the Santa Clara River just west of Interstate 5. At this location there is a well developed dry riparian habitat next to the Magic Mountain employee parking area. Summer tanagers were observed in this area in 1990 also.

Cooper's Hawk

The Cooper's Hawk is considered a Third Priority Species of Special Concern by the State of California. Single Cooper's hawks were observed along San Francisquito Creek and along the Santa Clara River just above Interstate 5. This species is a resident species which nests and hunts in riparian woodland habitat.

Figure 1.

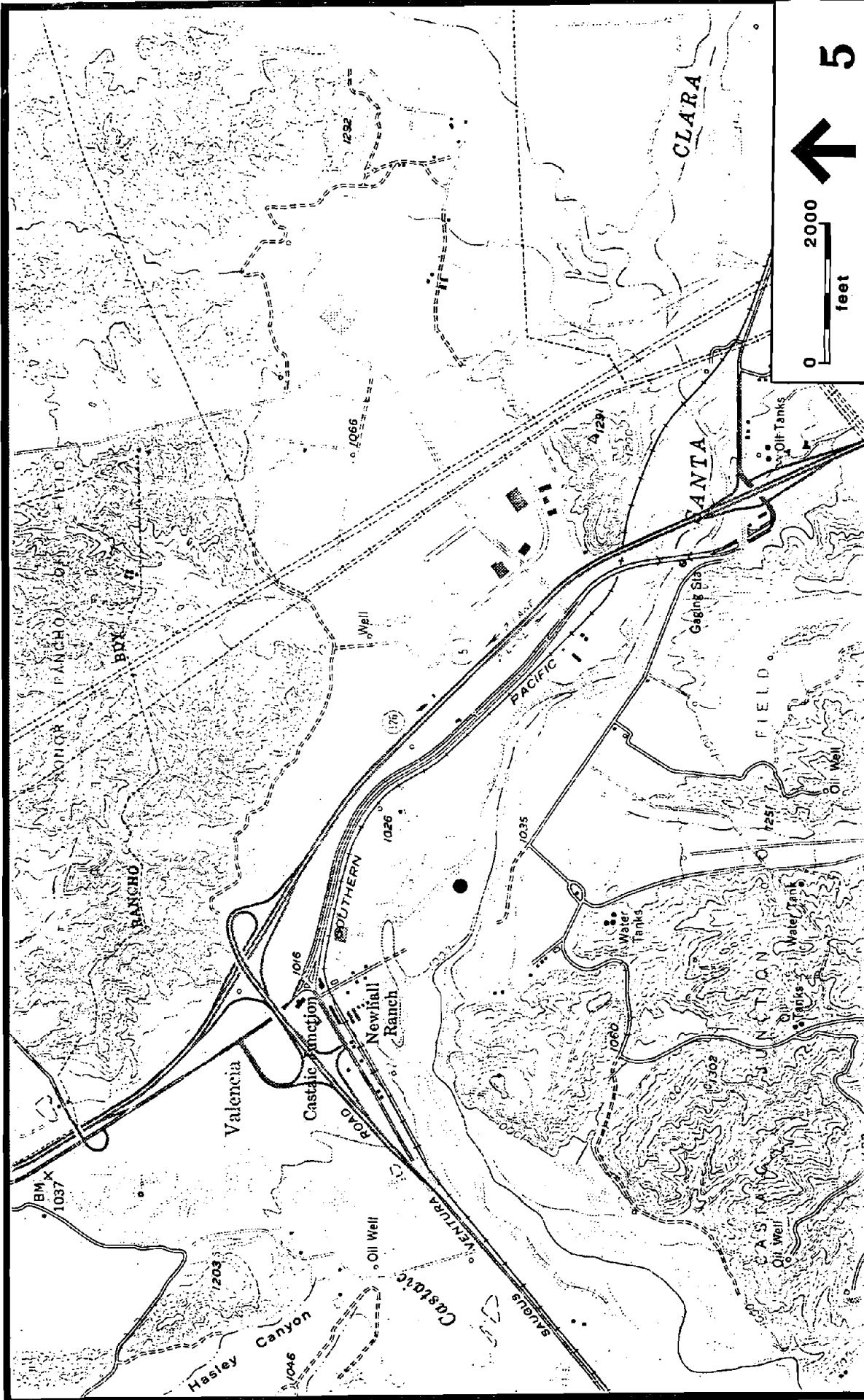


FIGURE 5. LEAST BELL'S VIREO LOCATION ON SANTA CLARA RIVER

RECON

Table 1. Bird Observations along the Santa Clara River and its Tributaries, 1991.

Area	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Species: Survey Date	5/12	5/7	5/3	5/3	5/10	5/10	5/7	5/7
Cattle Egret	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Snowy Egret	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Green-backed Heron	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mallard	3	6	1	-	-	-	-	-
Turkey Vulture	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
Cooper's Hawk	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	-
Red-shouldered Hawk	3	1	-	1	-	-	-	-
Red-tailed Hawk	1	1	2	1	1	-	1	3
Kestrel	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-
California Quail	2	-	2	14	19	14	-	9
Sora Rail	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Killdeer	2	3	4	-	-	2	2	3
Spotted Sandpiper	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Domestic Pigeon	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-
Mourning Dove	10	4	2	11	26	11	2	3
Roadrunner	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Great Horned Owl	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
Vaux's Swift	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Black-ch. Hummingbird	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
Anna's Hummingbird	10	2	-	3	4	6	1	4
Acorn Woodpecker	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
Nuttall's Woodpecker	15	1	-	7	-	4	-	1
Northern Flicker	8	1	-	2	-	-	-	-
Olive-sided Flycatcher	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
Pac. Slope Flycatcher	2	1	1	2	-	-	-	-
Western Wood-Pewee	6	1	-	1	3	-	-	-
Hammond's Flycatcher	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-
Dusky Flycatcher	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-
Ash-throated Flycatcher	7	-	2	-	2	3	2	-
Black Phoebe	-	2	1	1	-	-	-	-
Western Kingbird	5	-	-	-	2	4	-	1
Horned Lark	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	-
No. Rough-winged Swallow	9	4	-	-	7	2	-	-
Barn Swallow	-	-	-	-	1	3	-	-
Cliff Swallow	90	5	2	2	1	1	2	1
Scrub Jay	25	-	6	13	10	12	1	6
Common Crow	11	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Common Raven	13	2	36	13	8	14	3	8
Plain Titmouse	12	-	2	-	-	2	-	-
Bushtit	14	-	5	9	2	4	-	4

Table 1(cont.). Bird Observations along the Santa Clara River and its Tributaries, 1991.

Species:	Area Survey Date	1 5/12	2 5/7	3 5/3	4 5/3	5 5/10	6 5/10	7 5/7	8 5/7
Bewick's Wren		46	5	8	8	3	13	5	3
House Wren		6	-	-	1	-	1	-	-
Swainson's Thrush		6	-	-	-	8	5	-	1
Northern Mockingbird		2	-	2	3	-	4	2	7
Wrentit		2	-	1	-	1	-	-	-
California Thrasher		7	5	2	24	8	3	1	-
Cedar Waxwing		15	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Phainopepla		3	-	-	2	2	-	-	-
European Starling		31	2	-	35	5	6	-	6
Bell's Vireo		1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Warbling Vireo		6	3	-	2	10	1	1	1
Orange-crowned Warbler		1	-	-	2	2	3	-	-
Nashville Warbler		2	-	-	3	-	-	-	-
Yellow Warbler		23	8	2	2	17	4	-	4
Yellow-rumped Warbler		-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
Black-thr. Gray Warbler		-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-
Townsend's Warbler		2	-	-	2	-	-	-	-
Hermit Warbler		-	-	-	3	-	-	-	-
Macgillivray's Warbler		-	-	-	3	1	-	-	-
Common Yellowthroat		13	-	-	2	6	1	-	1
Wilson's Warbler		34	12	31	19	48	18	1	10
Yellow-breasted Chat		1	1	1	-	-	-	-	-
Summer Tanager		1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Western Tanager		14	2	-	2	4	1	-	2
Blue Grosbeak		2	3	4	-	-	1	-	-
Black-headed Grosbeak		24	20	6	9	10	2	3	4
Lazuli Bunting		-	-	-	2	2	1	-	-
Rufous-sided Towhee		14	3	4	4	11	5	1	1
California Towhee		5	-	2	11	-	12	-	-
Song Sparrow		112	30	39	-	9	7	12	24
White-crowned Sparrow		-	-	-	3	-	-	-	-
Yellow-headed Blackbird		1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Red-winged Blackbird		111	1	2	-	31	10	2	6
Western Meadowlark		-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
Brown-headed Cowbird		36	16	12	3	16	4	5	13
Northern Oriole		8	6	-	9	6	11	-	5
House Finch		9	7	-	5	9	13	14	27
American Goldfinch		4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lesser Goldfinch		6	-	-	7	5	11	-	10
House Sparrow		-	-	6	7	-	-	-	-
No. of Species		59	32	29	45	40	40	19	29