
**Guthrie, D.A, "Surveys along Castaic Creek for least Bell's Vireo"
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Office

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Surveys Along Castaic Creek for least Bell's Vireo, 1991

During the months of April and May, 1991, weekly bird surveys were conducted along Castaic Creek between Interstate 5 and State Route 126. These surveys were designed to meet the Army Corps of Engineers Condition No. 16 placed on the development project on the north side of Castaic Creek. This condition was as follows:

"Surveys for the presence of the least Bell's vireo, (Vireo bellii pusillus), shall be conducted at weekly intervals during the months of April and May, for the duration of the construction of the bank protection in Castaic Creek. Following the culmination of these surveys, documentation and results of the surveys shall be submitted to the Corps for review. In the event that a vireo is spotted, the surveys shall be extended through June or until a nest is located. If nesting vireos occur in the area, then any construction within 3000 feet of the nest shall be discontinued until the nest is abandoned. The vireo shall not be harassed in any way, and if one is injured or killed, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service shall be notified immediately pursuant to the Endangered Species Act."

All surveys were conducted between 6 a.m. and 9 a.m. by competent birders well acquainted with the call of least Bell's Vireo and with visual field marks. The section of Castaic Creek covered (between I-5 and Rte. 126) was divided into two sections, an upper half and a lower half, and these were covered simultaneously by two observers. Routes covered on foot during each visit varied but were designed to visit all areas within the creek bed with green perennial vegetation. This included cottonwoods, Baccharis, willow and small areas of cattail marsh. A list of all bird sightings is attached (Table 1).

There was evidence of heavy flooding along Castaic Creek during the early Spring. By the time our surveys commenced in April, however, no flowing water was present in the creek bed. Two small puddles existed near the Rte. 126 bridge that dried up during the first two weeks of surveys. Throughout the period there was a small amount of runoff from the residential area at the north end of the study area adjacent to Interstate 5. This runoff from storm drains supported two dense stands of willows and a cattail marsh.

No least Bell's vireos were heard or seen along Castaic Creek during the survey period. A vireo was found along the Santa Clara River during the survey period, however, indicating that our survey techniques were correct. Lack of vireos along Castaic Creek was not surprising as the habitat was not appropriate for vireos. Running water and more importantly, damp soil that could support annual growth was lacking during the study period. As a result there was very

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little development of shrub or annual growth along Castaic Creek. Our results are consistent with surveys of Castaic Creek performed during the last three years which also failed to find any evidence of least Bell's vireo presence.

During the surveys a total of 77 species were observed. Of these, twenty-six are considered resident along Castaic Creek and adjacent habitat and an additional eight species are summer breeders in the area. The remaining species were migrants through the area or wintering species.

Dry riparian species dominated the resident group. Most prominent among these were scrub jay, Bewick's wren, California quail, rufous-sided towhee and black-headed grosbeak. A few species, including horned lark, Brewer's Blackbird and wren-tit were not residents of the riparian zone but occasional visitors from coastal sage and grassland habitat adjacent to the stream. The only species considered wet riparian were song sparrow and Yellow Warbler. Song sparrows were found sparingly along the length of Castaic Creek, being confined to wet areas near runoff from residential areas or moist spots remaining from spring rains. Although large numbers of yellow warblers were seen during migration, with a high count of 17, only three appeared to be nesting along Castaic Creek. These were in tall cottonwoods or in the small wet riparian area formed from suburban runoff. Numbers of breeding birds, especially song sparrows and Bewick's wren were low compared to 1990. There are two reasons for this. The extended drought apparently lowered the water table in Castaic Creek sufficiently to cause the death of extensive stands of young cottonwood and Baccharis, resulting in extensive areas of dead trees in the creek bed. This affected the numbers of breeding species, such as Bewick's wrens, that are adapted to dry riparian habitat. Spring flooding in 1991 scoured the creek bed, filling in pockets that once held water and removing the surface clay layer deposited over the years by less violent spring flooding. The result was that despite a wetter than usual Spring, the stream bed failed to retain water as well as it had in past years.

During the period of survey the stream was not only dry but much vegetation had been knocked over and covered with a layer of silt. This resulted in drier conditions that affected wet riparian species such as song sparrow.

In sum, avian surveys of Castaic Creek between Interstate 5 and Rte. 126, conducted weekly during April and May 1991, failed to discover any least Bell's vireo present in the area. Although least Bell's vireos are present in wetter riparian vegetation along the Santa Clara River to the south of Rte. 126, Castaic Creek lacks permanent flow with the result that the habitat along Castaic Creek is too dry to be suitable for Least Bell's vireo.

Table 1. Bird Observations for 1991 on Castaic Creek between I-5 and Rte. 126.,

Species	Dates-	4/2	4/11	4/18	4/25	5/1	5/10	5/15	5/21	STATUS
Turkey Vulture	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	M
Red-tailed Hawk	2	1	-	1	-	1	2	1	1	R
American Kestrel	1	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	W
California Quail	12	15	13	18	11	19	15	12	12	R
California Gull	-	-	-	20	5	-	-	-	-	M
Mourning Dove	-	5	4	10	69	26	20	10	10	R
Vaux's Swift	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	M
White-throated Swift	-	-	-	18	-	-	-	5	5	A
Black-chinned Hummingbird	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	M
Anna's Hummingbird	2	1	6	6	8	4	7	4	4	R
<u>Selasphorus sp.</u>	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	M
Northern Flicker	3	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	1	R
Nuttall's Woodpecker	1	3	2	1	-	-	1	2	2	R
Downy Woodpecker	1	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	R
Olive-sided Flycatcher	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	M
Western Wood-Pewee	-	-	-	-	-	3	1	-	-	M
Dusky Flycatcher	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	M
Hammond's Flycatcher	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	M
Pacific Slope Flycatcher	-	-	2	2	-	-	2	-	-	M
Black Phoebe	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	W
Ash-throated Flycatcher	-	7	2	3	6	2	4	4	4	S
Cassin's Kingbird	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	M
Western Kingbird	2	16	5	4	8	2	1	-	-	S
Horned Lark	-	-	-	1	5	3	2	6	6	R
Rough-w. Swallow	-	-	3	8	11	7	21	-	-	A,S
Violet-green Swallow	-	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	A,M
Cliff Swallow	-	-	-	-	-	1	10	-	-	A,S
Barn Swallow	-	10	-	12	-	1	-	-	-	A,M
Scrub Jay	26	25	23	6	11	10	14	12	12	R
American Crow	7	-	-	-	-	-	4	-	-	R
Common Raven	6	2	10	6	10	8	5	11	11	R
Plain Titmouse	1	-	1	1	4	-	1	-	-	R
Bushtit	2	-	6	2	12	2	5	3	3	R
Bewick's Wren	13	5	8	8	12	3	10	5	5	R
House Wren	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	M
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	3	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	W
Western Bluebird	-	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	W
Swainson's Thrush	-	-	-	-	-	8	5	-	-	M
Hermit Thrush	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	M
Wrentit	-	1	1	2	-	1	1	1	1	R
Northern Mockingbird	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	R
California Thrasher	9	5	4	4	5	8	11	5	5	R
American Pipit	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	M
Phainopepla	-	-	-	-	-	2	3	1	1	S
European Starling	6	7	10	10	7	5	115	5	5	R
Warbling Vireo	-	3	1	-	5	10	2	1	1	M
Orange-crowned Warbler	23	34	26	5	5	2	-	-	-	M
Yellow Warbler	-	-	1	5	6	17	15	3	3	M,S
Nashville Warbler	-	7	21	8	2	-	-	-	-	M
Townsend's Warbler	-	-	1	1	1	-	-	-	-	M

Table 1 (cont.). Bird Observations for 1991 on Castaic Creek between I-5 and Rte. 126.

Species	Dates-	4/2	4/11	4/18	4/25	5/1	5/10	5/15	5/21	STATUS
Yellow-rumped Warbler		26	14	5	5	-	1	-	-	W,M
Black-thr. Gray Warbler		-	2	-	1	3	-	-	-	M
MacGillivray's Warbler		-	1	2	1	-	1	-	-	M
Common Yellowthroat		7	10	7	8	3	6	2	-	R,M
Wilson's Warbler		4	13	21	9	11	48	4	2	M
Western Tanager		-	-	1	3	26	4	3	-	M
Blue Grosbeak		-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	M
Black-headed Grosbeak		1	8	8	10	14	10	8	9	S
Lazuli Bunting		-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	M
Rufous-sided Towhee		8	4	8	8	11	11	7	5	R
California Towhee		-	2	1	1	3	-	8	4	R
Chipping Sparrow		-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	W
Savannah Sparrow		10	6	4	2	4	-	-	-	W
Fox Sparrow		-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	W
Vesper Sparrow		-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	V
Song Sparrow		7	6	14	3	18	9	11	7	R
Lincoln's Sparrow		12	8	1	2	-	-	-	-	W
White-crowned Sparrow		21	35	27	4	-	-	-	-	W
Red-winged Blackbird		19	58	45	54	22	31	18	34	S
Brewer's Blackbird		-	-	3	3	-	-	10	4	R
Brown-headed Cowbird		-	2	26	19	12	16	5	7	S
Northern Oriole		5	7	10	4	5	6	1	1	S
Purple Finch		-	-	6	9	-	-	-	-	W
House Finch		22	11	19	7	4	9	6	8	R
American Goldfinch		-	-	9	7	-	-	-	-	M
Lesser Goldfinch		9	15	15	6	4	5	4	-	R
House Sparrow		-	-	-	-	10	-	-	1	R
No. Species		34	44	45	48	37	40	40	29	
No. Individuals		276	367	386	331	355	307	367	174	

STATUS: A = Aerial over site, M = Migrant, R = Resident, S = Summer, W = Winter.