Guthrie, D.A., "Bird Surveys along the Santa Clara River, 1995; Castaic Creek Downstream to just below Las Brisas Crossing" (July 13, 1995; 1995B)





# BIRD SURVEYS ALONG THE SANTA CLARA RIVER, 1995 CASTAIC CREEK DOWNSTREAM TO JUST BELOW LAS BRISAS CROSSING

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#### Nature and Scope of Surveys

During the spring and early summer of 1995 a survey was conducted of the section of the Santa Clara River between its confluence with Castaic Creek and a point 1/4 mile below the Las Brisas bridge over the Santa Clara River. The total length of the section surveyed was 7.5 miles. For convenience in surveying, this section was divided into two portions at the Los Angeles -Ventura County line.

Surveys were conducted according to procedures set out in U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service guidelines for Least Bell's Vireo surveys (Appendix 1), except that only five surveys were conducted. All surveys were conducted on foot by observers well acquainted with both visual and auditory patterns of southern California birds. Surveys occurred every other week between May and early July, except when weather conditions caused some delay, and occurred between 6 and 10 a.m. Because of the width of the river, the north and south sides of the river were walked on alternate surveys. All birds sighted were counted, but special emphasis was placed on finding brown-headed cowbirds and least Bell's vireos as well as other Species of Special Concern. On the last three surveys, tapes of territorial calls of least Bell's vireos were played along the sections of the river where no birds had been previously heard or In areas where vireos were heard no tapes were played, observed. and care was taken to not closely approach singing birds so as to cause as little disturbance as possible to these species. Personnel for all surveys were Daniel A. Guthrie, Judith A. Sugden, and Richard F. Clements.

## Habitat Condition and Bird Observations

Bird observations for the two sections of river studied are presented in tables 1 and 2. The Spring of 1995 was unusually wet

and the Santa Clara River experienced heavy flooding which destroyed much of the wet riparian growth along the river. The result was a lack of cattails and wet riparian vegetation in April, but excellent growth of undergrowth through May and June. Except for the early lack of vegetation on the stream margins, riparian vegetation appeared in excellent condition.

Bird numbers observed in 1995 censuses along the river appear very similar to observations in 1994. Numbers of wet riparian species (song sparrow, common yellowthroat) and of riparian woodland speices (chat, yellow warbler, Bewick's and house wren) increased in the wide Los Angeles County riparian zone, where vegetation that was dry in previous years benefitted from the wet spring. In the Ventura County portion of the river, wet riparian species were down in numbers. This section of the river is narrow and destruction of the wet riparian vegetation by spring rains was more severe than along the upper river. Woodland species remained about the same along this section. During late June, numbers of many species increased as young birds fledged, and additional species from coastal sage areas bordering the river began to appear in censuses (phainopepla, lazuli bunting, lark sparrow). Species that utilize the sandbars along the river (killdeer, spotted sandpiper) also were about the same for the two years.

## Comments on Species of Special Concern

## Least Bell's Vireo

Singing least Bell's vireos were heard and observed near the Los Angeles - Ventura County line. A colony of vireos was found in this location in past years. Figure 1, shows the location and dates of all vireo sightings. To avoid disturbance of vireos, the section where vireos were present was surveyed from the top of the bank north of vireo habitat. In accordance with Fish and Wildlife regulations, no tape recordings were played. Therefore, not all birds were observed during every census.

All vireos in this area were sighted along the northern edge of the wet riparian zone along the Santa Clara River. Vegetation consisted of salt bush, Bachharis and willow. Three singing birds were observed in May, one very close tothe Ventura/Los Angeles County line, and two birds further west just before a dirt road crossing the river. During June and July only the bird at the County line was observed. This bird was banded on the right leg with a metal band. Thus, at least one breeding pair was present and possibly three, although it seems likely that the two downstream birds observed only in May may not have nested. In 1994 there were up to 5 singing birds in this area. No cattle were in this section of the river in 1995 and the vegetation apeared to be in very good condition.

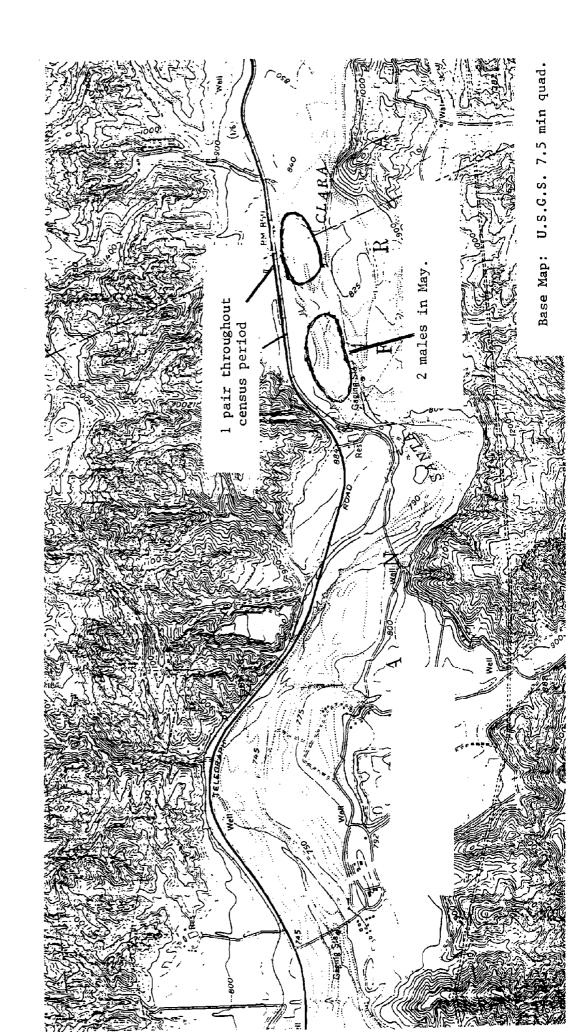


Figure 1. Least Bell's Vireo Sightings, 1995

Brown-headed Cowbirds were regularly observed along all sections of the Santa Clara River, as indicated by census numbers in tables 1 and 2. There appeared to be no greater concentration of cowbirds in the vicinity of least Bell's vireos than along other sections of the river. Cowbirds appeared to regularly patrol the riparian vegetation zone along the river and were often seen flying up and down the river during censuses.

## Cooper's Hawk

One and possibly two pairs of Cooper's Hawk were present along the river during the census period. Cooper's Hawk is listed as a Species of Concern by the State of California.

# White-tailed Kite

This species (previously called black-shouldered kite) is considered a Special Animal by the State of California. One pair of kites nested along the censused section of the Santa Clara River.

## Willow Flycatcher

This species is considered a Category 1 Candidate for listing under the Federal Endangered Species Act. Willow flycatchers were once widespread in wet riparian woodland in southern California but now only a few individuals exist in southern California. The main California breeding populations of this species are along the Kern River and in northern California. No individuals of this species were observed in 1995. In previous years migrating individuals of this species were observed along the Santa Clara River.

## Yellow Warbler

This species is considered a Species of Special Concern by the State of California. Up to 20 pair of Yellow Warblers nested in the wet riparian vegetation along the surveyed section of the Santa Clara River.

#### Yellow-breasted Chat

This species is listed as a Species of Special Concern by the State of California. Approximately 20 pair of chats nested along the surveyed section of the Santa Clara River, an increase over those observed in 1994.

# California Horned Lark

This species is a candidate for listing under the Federal Endangered Species Act. A family of Horned Larks (parents and young) were observed in plowed fields along the north side of the river in Los Angeles County on July 1st. They had probably nested in the grasslands adjacent to the river and were coming to the river to forage after nesting.

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Appendix 1. Fish and Wildlife Rules for Least Bell's Vireo Censuses.

## LEAST BELL'S VIREO SURVEY GUIDELINES

- 1. All riparian areas should be surveyed once a week from April 1 to July 31. These datas encompass the period during which most vireo nesting activity occurs. If additional information on vireo habitat utilization is needed, these surveys should be extended to August 31. Information typically collected after July 31 will reflect a broader extent of the riparian habitat and other adjacent habitat types that the vireo utilizes during the latter phase of the breeding season, especially when the young become independent of the adults.
- 2. Surveys must be conducted by qualified biologist(s) familiar with song and plumage characteristics of the vireo.
- 3. Surveys shall be conducted between dawn and 11:00 a.m. Surveys shall avoid periods of excessive heat, wind, and rain.
- 4. All vireo detections (e.g., vocalization points, areas used for foraging, etc.) should be used to define individual home range. These data need to be mapped on a large-scale aerial photograph.
- 5. Data on virso breeding status (e.g., number and location of paired or unpaired territorial males, nest building efforts, feeding of nestlings, location of virso nests, etc.) should be noted during each survey.
- 6. All sightings of cowbirds and their numbers in vireo territories should. be noted during each survey.
- 7. No attempts should be made to locate or examine vireo nests unless authorized by permits issued by California Department of Fish and Game and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
- 8. A final report should be prepared which describes survey dates, methods, locations, and information identified in items 4, 5, and 6 above.

If you have any questions regarding these survey guidelines, please contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at (714) 643-4270.

Table 1. Bird Observations along the Santa Clara River System, 1995: Santa Clara River from Castaic Creek confluence to Ventura County Line.

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<u>Species date:</u>	5/12	5/26	6/16	7/1	7/12	status
Great Blue Heron	1		_	_		W,M
Snowy Egret	-	-	1	-	-	W, M
Green Heron	5	-	1	-	-	R
Bl. cr. Night Heron	_	_	1	-	-	М
Mallard	7	16	19	13	4	R*
Cooper's Hawk	1	1(2)		1	-	R*
Red-shouldered Hawk	1	- ` `	<b>—</b> .	1	1	R*
Red-tailed Hawk	1	2	3	3	6	R*
American Kestrel		-	-	2	-	R*
California Quail	35	43	20	66	62	R*
Killdeer	23	6	19	12	5	R*
Spotted Sandpiper	1	-	7	2	6	S*
Domestic Pigeon	29	36	-	11	5	R
Mourning Dove	10	17	3	15	12	R*
Barn Owl	_	-	-		1	R
Great Horned Owl	1	2	-	1	-	R*
White-throated Swift	-	9	-	-		R
Black-ch. Hummingbird	1 2	5	·	-	2	S*
Anna's Hummingbird	7	19	1	6	7	R*
Nuttall's Woodpecker	16	20	9	13	8	R*
Downy Woodpecker	4	9	4	6	4	R*
Hairy Woodpecker	1	7	1	2	-	R*
Northern Flicker	1	1	4	4	3	R*
Pac. Slope Flycatcher	r –	1	-	-	-	М
Black Phoebe	-	-	2	2	11	R
Ash-thr. Flycatcher	21	16	12	17	18	S*
Western Kingbird	3	7	-	5	3	S*
Horned Lark	-			6	-	R
Tree Swallow	4	-	-	-	-	M
Violet-green Swallow	4	3	17	3	3	S
N. Rough-w. Swallow	28	41	37	11	2	S*
Barn Swallow	1	-	-	-	-	M
Cliff Swallow	8	11	80	4	8	S*
Scrub Jay	25	24	21	29	20	R*
American Crow	18	19	22	18	14	R*
Common Raven	11	31	15	29	8	R*
Plain Titmouse	8	23	6	10	9	R*
Bushtit	10	25	2	8	4	R*
Bewick's Wren	30	51	18	33	25	R*
House Wren	18	4	6	14	4	R*
Western Bluebird	2	-	19	15	7	R*
Swainson's Thrush	-	2	-	-	-	S,M
Wrentit	5		7	5	9	R*
Calif. Thrasher	8	5	3	3	6	R*
Phainopepla	-	-	-	3	-	R

Table 1 (cont.). Bird Observations along the Santa Clara River System, 1995: Santa Clara River from Castaic Creek confluence to Ventura County Line.

<u>Species</u>	date:	5/12	5/26	6/16	7/1	7/12	status	
European Sta	rling	16	24	9	13	13	R*	
Bell's Vireo	_	1	-	1	1	_	S*	
Warbling Vir	3	-	-	-	-	М		
Orange-cr. W		4	-	-		-	M	
Yellow Warbl		20	8	3	4	3	S*	
Common Yello		9	17	3	11	3	R*	
Wilson's War		12	1	-	-	-	M	
Yellow-br. C		8	6	2	8	2	S*	
Western Tana		8	-	-	-	-	M	
Black-headed		22	32	10	18	7	S*	
Blue Grosbea		7	9	3	3	3	S*	
Indigo Bunti		-	1	-	-	-	S	
Lazuli Bunti		2	1	-	1	11	S*	
Rufous-sided		11	35	10	11	8	R*	
California T		13	15	7	32	23	R*	
Song Sparrow		28	65	20	38	10	R*	
Red-winged B		10	63	2	3	-	S	
Western Mead		4	3			-	R	
Brewer's Bla		-	-	1	-	-	R	
Brown-headed		25	50	12	11	2	S*	
Hooded Oriol		-		-	-	2	S	
Northern Orio	ole	6	3	2	21	1	S*	
House Finch	_	12	15	9	33	29	R*	
Lesser Goldf		10	7	9	3	12	R*	
American Gold	lfinch	4	1	-	-	_	W,M	
Total Species	5:	57	49	44	50	44		
Total Individ			812	454	590	401		
Total Species on all visits: 70 Total Probable Breeding species: 45 (marked with *)								
Status: M - M	igrant; R	- Resi	dent;	s – Su	mmer C	only; W ·	- Winter Only	

() = dependent young birds

Censuses of 5/26 and 7/1 on the north side of river. Censuses of 5/12, 6/16 and 7/12 on the south side of river.

Table 2.									
1999	5: Sant	a Clara	River	from	Ventura	County	Line	to Weste	rn
Limit of Las Brisas Ranch.									

1. 1. .

<u>Species</u> dat	e: 5/12	5/30	) 6/10	5 7/1	7/12	<u>status</u>
Great Blue Heron	_	_	_	-	1	W,M
Great Egret	1	-	_	-	_	W,M
Bl. cr. Night Hero		_	-	_	-	M
Mallard	13	7	4(4	4) 6	3	R*
White-tailed Kite	_	_	_ `	2	1	R*
Cooper's Hawk	_	1	_	_	_	R
Red-shouldered Haw	k 1	3	2	3	2	R*
Red-tailed Hawk		_	-	5	2	R*
American Kestrel	-	-	_	1	_	R
California Quail	18	21	13	41	19	R*
Killdeer	4	8	8	1	5	R*
Spotted Sandpiper	1	8	6	2	7	S*
Domestic Pigeon	4	6	_	_	1	R
Mourning Dove	6	9	9	10	20	R*
Greater Roadrunner	–	1	_	_	1	R*
White-th. Swift	_	_	-	1	-	R
Black-ch. Hummingb:	ird 5	_	1	3	2	S*
Anna's Hummingbird	32	23	6	23	15	R*
Costa's Hummingbird			_	2	1	ŝ
Belted Kingfisher	2	_	-	-	_ _	M
Acorn Woodpecker	-	-	_	-	1	R
Nuttall's Woodpecke	er 8	15	17	11	10	R*
Downy Woodpecker	6	6	6	7	5	R*
Hairy Woodpecker	1	_	2	2	3	R*
Northern Flicker	_		3	4	3	R*
Black Phoebe	14	11	14	6	13	R*
Ash-thr. Flycatcher		16	24	29	18	S*
Western Kingbird	_	_	-	2	_	S*
Violet-green Swalld	- wc	_	56	-	_	S
N. Rough-w. Swallow		38	80	10	15	S*
Cliff Swallow	250	500	300	250	124	S*
Scrub Jay	. 6	25	17	20	11	R*
American Crow	. 0	29	14	13	12	R*
Common Raven	34	4	6	20	18	R*
Plain Titmouse	5	19	12	18	5	R*
Bushtit	15	28	39	18	8	R*
Bewick's Wren	25	28 43		18		R*
House Wren	25 44	4.5 5	21 5	2	22	R* R*
Western Bluebird	44 6	5		2		R* R*
Swainson's Thrush			2	3	4	
American Robin	1	-	2	-	1	S,M*
American Kodin	1	6	4	3	4	R*

Table 2 (cont.). Bird Observations along the Santa Clara River System, 1995; Santa Clara River from Ventura County Line to Western Limit of Las Brisas Ranch.

Cedar Waxwing 12 Phainopepla 5 2 5 2 1	2 R* - W,M 1 R* 1 R* 1 S*								
Cedar Waxwing 12 Phainopepla 5 2 5 2 1	- W,M 1 R* 1 R* 1 S*								
Phainopepla 5 2 5 2 1	1 R* 1 R* 1 S*								
	1 R* 1 S*								
Warbling Vireo 3	– M								
Orange-cr. Warbler - 1	M								
	6 S*								
Yellow-r. Warbler 2	- W,M								
Northern Waterthrush 1	– M								
Common Yellowthroat 6 16 22 13 21	1 R*								
Wilson's Warbler 14 4	- M								
Yellow-br. Chat 5 15 15 14 9	9 5*								
Western Tanager 6	– M								
Black-headed Grosbeak 7 26 23 26 9	9 S*								
Blue Grosbeak 5 6 3 3 6	5 S*								
Lazuli Bunting 11 5 2 1 31	l S*								
Rufous-sided Towhee 22 21 31 24 10	) R*								
California Towhee 8 26 37 47 26	6 R*								
Lark Sparrow 5	5 R								
Song Sparrow 43 92 92 44 86	5 R*								
Red-winged Blackbird 1 27	- S								
Brewer's Blackbird - 2	~ R								
Brown-headed Cowbird 18 31 17 35 42	2 S*								
Hooded Oriole 4 1 1	- S*								
Northern Oriole 10 4 3 6 2	2 S*								
House Finch 8 55 30 23 21	L R*								
Lesser Goldfinch 7 21 15 31 74	R*								
American Goldfinch 12 6 - 6 6	5 W,R*								
House Sparrow 1 2 10 4 -	- R*								
Total Species: 55 50 47 51 52									
Total Individuals: 772 1245 1019 859 724									
Total Species on all visits: 72									
Total Probable Breeding species: 51 (marked with	*)								
	,								
Status M - Migrant, D - Desident, C - Cummer Only, M - Mister Only									
Status: M - Migrant; R - Resident; S - Summer Only; W - Winter Only									
() = dependent young birds									
Censuses of 5/26 and 7/1 on north side of river. Censuses of 5/12, 6/16 and 7/12 on south side of river.									