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BIRD SURVEYS ALONG THE SANTA CLARA RIVER, 1996
CASTAIC CREEK DOWNSTREAM TO JUST BELOW LAS BRISAS CROSSING

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July 11, 1996

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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 1996 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 six 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 mid April and early July 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 four 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 observed. In areas where vireos were heard no tapes were played, 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 1996 was dry, following a wet winter. However, there was no serious flooding of the river

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nor scouring of riparian vegetation. The result was the continued development of a thick layer of young willow, cottonwood and Baccharis along the river channel, creating excellent habitat for riparian species.

Bird numbers observed in 1996 censuses along the river appear very similar to observations in 1995. 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 despite the fact that vegetational recovery is rapidly eliminating bare sand bar areas.

Comments on Sensitive Species

Least Bell's Vireo

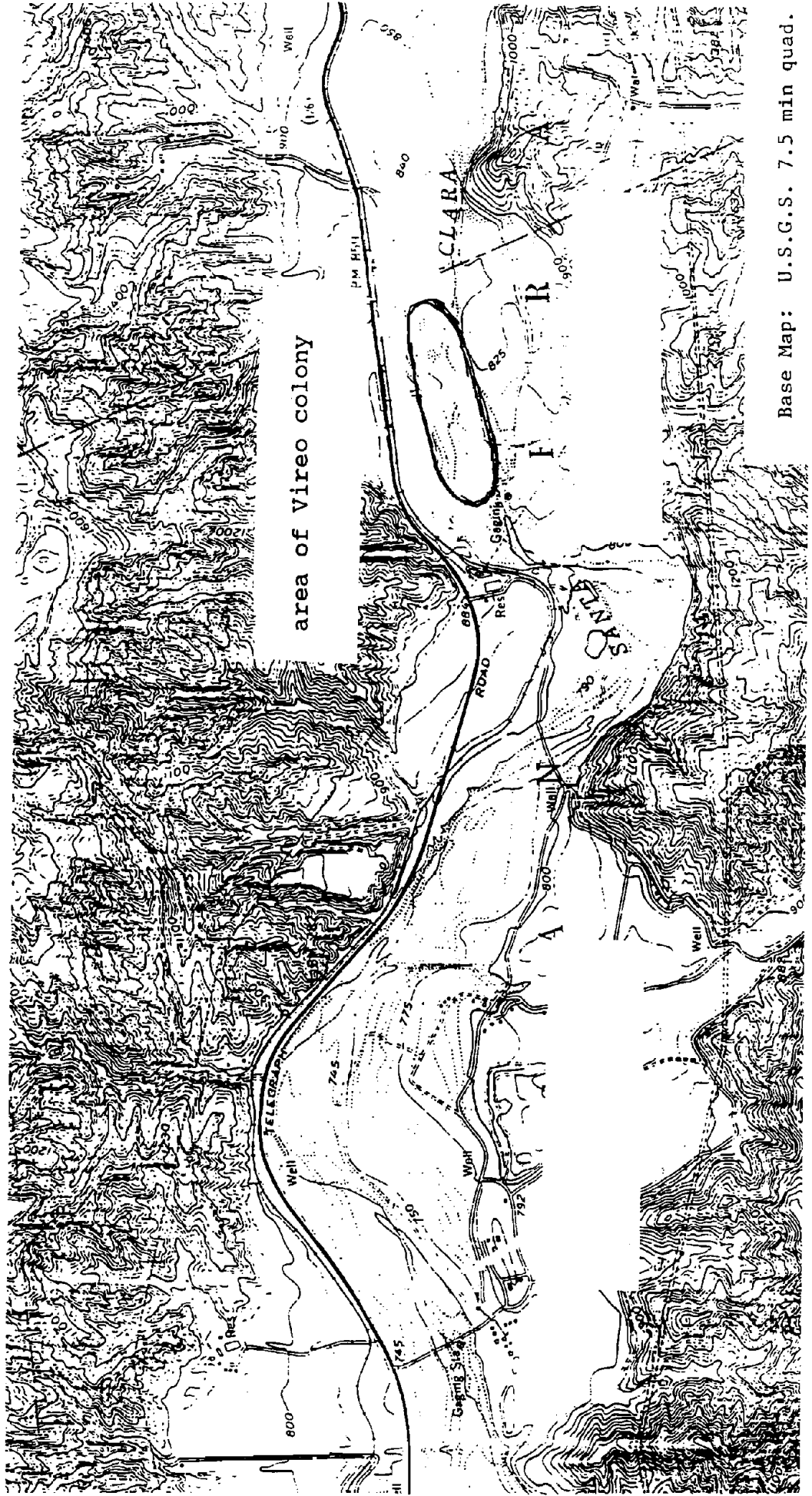
Singing Least Bell's Vireos were heard and observed near the Los Angeles - Ventura County line. A colony of vireos was found in this location in past years. Figure 1, shows the location of this colony. To avoid disturbance of vireos, the section where vireos were present was surveyed from the top of 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. On April 23 three vireos were singing. When a tape was first played on May 22nd, five vireos responded, two from areas downstream from the three singing birds but within the same area. On two occasions, April 23 and July 11 a bird was found singing just east of the Los Angeles County line.

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, Baccharis and willow. Although a single bird was observed in the Los Angeles section of the census area near the Ventura County line, on all subsequent censuses birds were only observed in Ventura County, all observations occurring between the county line and the first road crossing downstream. From the number of singing birds, there is a possibility of up to 5 pair in this area.

On two occasions a single bird was observed between 200 and 300 yards upstream from the Las Brisas bridge on the south side of the river. A bird has been observed in this location in previous years. This bird did not sing except in response to a tape (having no neighbors, no singing?). On the July 11 census two birds and a juvenile were observed at this location, indicating probable nesting.

Brown-headed Cowbirds were regularly observed along all sections of the Santa Clara River, as indicated by census numbers

Figure 1. Least Bell's Vireo Sightings, 1996



Base Map: U.S.G.S. 7.5 min quad.

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. Possibly two pair of kites nested along the censused section of the Santa Clara River and were observed with flying young in late June.

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 1996. In previous years migrating individuals of this species were observed along the Santa Clara River.

California Horned Lark

This species is a candidate for listing under the Federal Endangered Species Act. Numbers of Horned Larks (parents and young) were observed in plowed fields along the north side of the river in Los Angeles County on June 27. This species is a common nester on dry sections of the adjacent hills.

Yellow Warbler

This species is considered a Species of Special Concern by the State of California. Although up to 30 Yellow warblers were singing in May, by June numbers had dropped to about 12. As Yellow Warblers sing during migration, the latter number is probably a better indication of nesting numbers.

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, a number similar to that observed in 1995.

Table 1. Bird Observations along the Santa Clara River System, 1996: Santa Clara River from Castaic Creek confluence to Ventura County Line.

Species	date: 4/23	5/8	5/22	6/14	6/27	7/11	status
Great Blue Heron	-	-	-	-	2	1	M
Great Egret	-	1	-	-	-	-	W,M
Snowy Egret	-	1	-	-	-	1	W,M
Green Heron	-	1	-	1	2	-	R*
Bl. cr. Night Heron	2	-	1	-	-	1	M
Mallard	8	12	7	2	-	1	R*
Cinnamon Teal	1	-	-	-	-	-	M
Turkey Vulture	-	2	-	4	-	-	S
White-tailed Kite	1	-	-	3	1	-	R*
Cooper's Hawk	-	1	-	-	-	-	R*
Red-shouldered Hawk	-	1	1	3	2	-	R*
Red-tailed Hawk	-	1	1	4	2	5	R*
American Kestrel	1	-	2	-	-	-	R*
California Quail	38	43	40	52	80	22	R*
Killdeer	4	7	10	10	7	3	R*
Spotted Sandpiper	-	3	4	5	5	4	S*
Western Sandpiper	10	-	-	-	-	-	M
Least Sandpiper	4	-	-	-	-	-	M
Domestic Pigeon	3	10	64	5	3	-	R*
Mourning Dove	19	17	6	10	10	8	R*
Roadrunner	-	-	1	-	-	-	R*
Great Horned Owl	-	-	-	-	1	-	R*
White-th. Swift	-	2	2	3	3	2	R
Anna's Hummingbird	8	7	10	5	3	13	R*
Belted Kingfisher	-	-	1	-	-	1	M
Nuttall's Woodpecker	9	7	5	9	8(3)	8	R*
Downy Woodpecker	4	3	1	2	3	7	R*
Hairy Woodpecker	1	-	2	1	2	1	R*
Northern Flicker	1	3	3	5	2	4	R*
Black Phoebe	2	2	3	3	2	15	R*
Ash-thr. Flycatcher	17	11	11	10	17(2)	18	S*
Western Kingbird	11	10	2	1	11(3)	22	S*
Horned Lark	-	-	-	-	70	-	R
Violet-green Swallow	4	4	-	4	14	4	S*
N. Rough-w. Swallow	4	14	29	30	75	3	S*
Barn Swallow	-	-	1	-	-	-	S
Cliff Swallow	15	150	32	125	260	-	S*
Scrub Jay	15	21	11	9	11	19	R*
American Crow	10	8	10	17	24	8	R*
Common Raven	19	35	11	13	36	12	R*
Plain Titmouse	10	-	1	4	6	10	R*
Bushtit	5	6	3	36	8	15	R*
Bewick's Wren	27	21	29	15	18	23	R*
House Wren	34	19	31	3	4	-	R*
Western Bluebird	4	7	6	13	3(3)	8	R*
American Robin	4	-	-	-	-	-	R*
Wrentit	6	7	6	4	9	9	R*

Table 1 (cont.). Bird Observations along the Santa Clara River System, 1996: Santa Clara River from Castaic Creek confluence to Ventura County Line.

Species	date: 4/23	5/8	5/22	6/14	6/27	7/11	status
Calif. Thrasher	2	5	3	1	3(1)	4	R*
Phainopepla	-	-	2	9	5	8	R*
Loggerhead Shrike	-	-	-	-	-	2	R*
European Starling	12	16	19	3	33	3	R*
Bell's Vireo	1	-	-	-	-	1	S*
Warbling Vireo	2	-	-	-	-	-	M
Orange-cr. Warbler	1	1	-	-	-	-	M
Yellow Warbler	10	15	12	4	2	-	S*
Yellow- r. Warbler	2	-	-	-	-	-	W,M
Hermit Warbler	-	1	-	-	-	-	M
Common Yellowthroat	5	16	16	24	5	8	R*
Wilson's Warbler	-	1	1	-	-	-	M
Yellow-br. Chat	12	9	4	-	5(2)	-	S*
Western Tanager	-	1	-	-	-	-	M
Black-headed Grosbeak	9	17	28	19	11	1	S*
Blue Grosbeak	3	4	8	9	7	13	S*
Lazuli Bunting	2	4	1	5	4	1	S*
Spotted Towhee	14	13	22	12	9	1	R*
California Towhee	13	12	18	13	11	12	R*
Lark Sparrow	-	-	2	2	2	8	R*
Savannah Sparrow	1	-	-	-	1	-	R*
Song Sparrow	28	47	40	47	19	24	R*
Red-winged Blackbird	45	43	80	61	82	90	S*
Tricolored Redwing	-	1	-	-	-	-	M
Yellow-H. Blackbird	14	1	-	-	-	-	M
Brewer's Blackbird	-	5	6	6	-	-	R*
Great-tailed Grackle	-	-	1	-	-	-	M?
Brown-headed Cowbird	30	24	13	14	6	6	S*
Hooded Oriole	-	-	-	-	-	4	
Bullock's Oriole	16	13	11	14	12	-	S*
House Finch	15	14	11	20	71	20	R*
Lesser Goldfinch	20	11	17	8	11	29	R*
Lawrence's Goldfinch	4	-	1	-	-	19	R*
American Goldfinch	13	2	-	-	-	-	W,M
House Sparrow	-	-	6	-	-	-	R*
Total Species:	56	56	56	50	52	48	
Total Individuals:	575	713	669	591	1009	493	

Total Species on all visits: 79

Total Probable Breeding species: 59 (marked with *)

Status: M - Migrant; R - Resident; S - Summer Only; W - Winter Only

() = dependent young birds

Censuses of 4/23, 5/22, 6/27 on the north side of river,
Censuses of 5/8, 6/14, 7/11 on south side of river.

**Table 2. Bird Observations along the Santa Clara River System,
1996: Santa Clara River from Ventura County Line to Western
Limit of Las Brisas Ranch.**

Species	date: 4/23	5/8	5/22	6/14	6/27	7/11	status
Great Blue Heron	-	1	-	-	1	-	W,M
Great Egret	1	-	-	1	-	-	W,M
Snowy Egret	2	-	-	-	-	-	W,M
Green Heron	1	-	1	1	1	-	R*
Bl. cr. Night Heron	-	-	1	-	-	-	M
Mallard	11	1	8	4	2	-	R*
Turkey Vulture	-	-	3	-	1	-	S
White-t. Kite	-	-	1	4	1	-	R*
Cooper's Hawk	-	-	1	-	-	-	R*
Red-shouldered Hawk	2	-	2	2	1	-	R*
Red-tailed Hawk	1	1	-	1	3	1	R*
American Kestrel	-	-	-	-	-	1	R*
California Quail	17	16	16	22	17	41	R*
Killdeer	2	3	8	5	5	-	R*
Spotted Sandpiper	-	2	12	4	10	5	S*
Domestic Pigeon	15	8	-	6	-	-	R*
Mourning Dove	18	20	10	10	12	10	R*
C. Ground Dove	1	1	-	-	-	-	R*
Roadrunner	-	-	1	-	-	-	R*
Great horned Owl	-	-	-	1	-	-	R*
Bl.-ch. Hummingbird	2	5	3	-	-	2	S*
Anna's Hummingbird	10	23	13	4	11	22	R*
Costa's Hummingbird	-	1	1	1	-	1	S*
Belted Kingfisher	1	-	-	-	-	1	M
Nuttall's Woodpecker	3	10	8	10	10	17	R*
Downy Woodpecker	4	10	4	6	4	17	R*
Hairy Woodpecker	-	7	4	1	2	5	R*
Northern Flicker	-	2	2	-	1	-	R*
Western Wood Pewee	-	2	-	-	-	-	M
Pac. slope Flycatcher	-	-	1	-	-	-	M
Black Phoebe	6	9	12	10	15	15	R*
Ash-thr. Flycatcher	12	21	10	14	21	15	S*
Western Kingbird	-	5	-	-	4	2	S*
Violet-green Swallow	-	-	-	-	45	-	S
Tree Swallow	-	-	-	-	1(1)	-	S*
N. Rough-w. Swallow	5	8	24	16	80	5	S*
Barn Swallow	-	-	-	1	1	-	S
Cliff Swallow	410	300	315	450	133	18	S*
Scrub Jay	11	8	13	14	12	1	R*
American Crow	19	12	45	25	18	21	R*
Common Raven	4	12	3	3	6	3	R*
Plain Titmouse	3	11	7	2	3	4	R*
Bushtit	7	31	37	-	14	16	R*
Bewick's Wren	23	14	26	24	33	36	R*
House Wren	10	5	4	12	13	2	R*

Table 2 (cont.). Bird Observations along the Santa Clara River System, 1996: Santa Clara River from Ventura County Line to Western Limit of Las Brisas Ranch.

Species	date: 4/23	5/8	5/22	6/14	6/27	7/11	status
Western Bluebird	-	2	2	6	-	-	R*
Swainson's Thrush	-	-	-	1	-	-	S*
American Robin	-	1	4	-	1	-	R*
Wrentit	9	15	16	13	9	7	R*
Calif. Thrasher	1	2	3	6(3)	9	2	R*
Phainopepla	-	-	6	13	19	15	R*
European Starling	4	7	17	6	12	-	R*
Bell's Vireo	3	1	5	3	4	5	S*
Orange-cr. Warbler	-	-	1	-	-	1	M
Yellow Warbler	4	17	13	8	6	6	S*
Common Yellowthroat	15	34	20	60	104	162	R*
Wilson's Warbler	1	3	2	-	-	-	M
Yellow-br. Chat	8	10	13	17	12	11	S*
Western Tanager	-	3	-	-	-	-	M
Black-h. Grosbeak	17	18	19	29	23	9	S*
Blue Grosbeak	1	5	4	7	10	35	S*
Indigo Bunting	-	-	-	-	-	1	S
Lazuli Bunting	3	2	-	7	47	125	S*
Spotted Towhee	7	15	18	16	16	3	R*
California Towhee	12	23	21	33	22	16	R*
Lark Sparrow	-	-	-	-	-	10	R
Song Sparrow	58	30	69	74	114	216	R*
Red-winged Blackbird	8	17	4	12	4	34	S*
Tricolored Blackbird	-	4	-	-	-	-	M
Brown-headed Cowbird	23	30	21	11	32	30	S*
Hooded Oriole	-	3	-	-	-	-	S*
Bullock's Oriole	4	2	9	1	4	3	S*
House Finch	8	10	9	38	32	15	R*
Lesser Goldfinch	37	50	28	55	120	71	R*
American Goldfinch	1	-	3	3	-	-	W,M
House Sparrow	2	1	2	1	2	1	R*
Total Species:	48	54	55	51	52	46	
Total Individuals:	827	854	905	1077	1084	1040	

Total Species on all visits:74

Total Probable Breeding species: 59 (marked with *)

Status: M - Migrant; R - Resident; S - Summer Only; W - Winter Only

() = dependent young birds

Censuses of 4/23, 5/22, 6/27 on the north side of river,
Censuses of 5/8, 6/14, 7/11 on south side of river.

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 dates 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 vireo breeding status (e.g., number and location of paired or unpaired territorial males, nest building efforts, feeding of nestlings, location of vireo 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.