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BIRD SURVEYS ALONG THE SANTA CLARA RIVER, 1997
CASTAIC CREEK DOWNSTREAM TO JUST BELOW LAS BRISAS CROSSING

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Copy to Matt 1/19/97
file video survey file

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June 23, 1997

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Nature and Scope of Surveys

During the spring and early summer of 1997 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. Despite heavy rains in the winter,

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the spring of 1997 was dry with no serious flooding or scouring of riparian vegetation. As a result, almost all sandbars along the river were completely covered with dense vegetation.

Bird numbers observed in 1997 censuses along the river appear very similar to observations in 1996. During 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

Up to four 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. 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, Baccharis and willow.

A pair of vireos was also regularly 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?). A second pair was regularly encountered near highway construction on the north side of the river approximately 1/2 mile above the Las Brisas crossing.

Additional vireos were encountered in dense willow and Baccharis thickets just west of the "bend" in the river about 1/2 mile west of the Ventura County Line (see Figure 1). These vireos, however, moved around somewhat. At least three pair were possibly present. All vireo locations are shown on Figure 1.

The cowbird is a nest parasite for Least Bell's vireo and one of the major factors leading to nest failure in vireos. 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. Trapping for cowbirds during 1997 occurred in three places along the Santa Clara River upstream of

Topographic map of the Santa Clara area. The map shows the Santa Clara River, surrounding hills, and various landmarks. Handwritten annotations include:

- 3 singing males**: Written near the river on the left side.
- 4 singing males**: Written near the top right of the map.
- A, B, C, D, E, F**: Markers indicating specific locations on the map.
- ROAD**: A road running horizontally across the middle of the map.
- Well**: A well located near the bottom right of the map.
- BM 859**: A benchmark located near the top left of the map.
- Santa Clara**: The name of the river and the area.
- Contour lines**: Lines indicating elevation, with labels such as 1000, 900, 800, 700, 600, 500, 400, 300, 200, 100.
- Scale bar**: A scale bar at the bottom of the map.

- - Yellow-billed Cuckoo
- - Least Bell's Vireo

Castaic Creek and may have contributed to lower numbers of cowbirds along the river.

Cooper's Hawk

One pair 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. At least one pair of kites nested along the censused section of the Santa Clara River.

Yellow-billed Cuckoo

The Yellow-billed Cuckoo is listed as a State Endangered Species. A single individual was observed on June 19th, as indicated in Figure 1. The major population of cuckoos is north of the Santa Clara River, mostly along the Kern River in Central California. As the date of observation is within the migratory period for this species and as the cuckoo could not be relocated on June 23rd, this individual is considered to have been migrating through the area rather than a breeding bird.

Willow Flycatcher

This species is listed as an endangered species 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. One individual was on June 7, which is during the migration period for this species. As this bird was not observed on a subsequent visit, it is presumed to have been a migrant passing through the area.

Yellow Warbler

This species is considered a Species of Special Concern by the State of California. Although up to 20 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 17 pair of chats nested along the surveyed section of the Santa Clara River, a number slightly lower than observed in 1996.

Lawrence's Goldfinch

This species is considered of Highest Priority on the Audubon Watchlist for 1996. Pairs of Lawrence's Goldfinch were observed drinking at the river near Castaic Creek on two occasions.

Table 1. Bird Observations along the Santa Clara River System,
1997: Santa Clara River from Castaic Creek confluence to
Ventura County Line.

Species	date: 4/6	4/29	5/10	5/28	6/7	6/21	status
Great Blue Heron	-	-	1	-	1	1	M
Great Egret	-	-	-	1	-	-	W,M
Snowy Egret	2	-	-	-	-	-	W,M
Green Heron	-	-	-	1	-	3	R*
Mallard	9	5	19	8	14	5	R*
Common Merganser	1	-	-	-	-	-	M
Turkey Vulture	-	-	-	2	-	-	S
White-tailed Kite	1	-	-	-	-	-	R*
Red-shouldered Hawk	3	1	-	-	2(2)	2	R*
Red-tailed Hawk	5	-	4	3	2	4	R*
American Kestrel	1	1	-	-	3	-	R*
California Quail	50	55	28	25	42(7)	70	R*
Killdeer	13	9	35	12	14	6	R*
Spotted Sandpiper	-	-	9	2	4	-	S*
Least Sandpiper	-	4	-	-	-	-	M
Western Gull	-	60	30	-	18	-	W
Domestic Pigeon	-	-	4	4	-	-	R*
Mourning Dove	8	20	28	26	26	32	R*
Common Ground Dove	-	-	2	-	2	-	R*?
Roadrunner	1	1	-	1	-	1	R*
Barn Owl	-	-	-	1	1	1	R*
White-th. Swift	-	-	5	12	-	-	R*
Vaux's Swift	-	40	-	-	-	-	M
Bl.-Ch. Hummingbird	-	-	2	-	-	-	S*
Anna's Hummingbird	6	5	3	5	9	11	R*
Belted Kingfisher	2	-	-	-	-	-	M
Nuttall's Woodpecker	5	9	6	8	8	9	R*
Downy Woodpecker	2	2	-	-	1	2	R*
Hairy Woodpecker	1	-	-	1	-	-	R*
Northern Flicker	7	2	1	2	1	3	R*
Black Phoebe	1	1	3	1	4	7	R*
Ash-thr. Flycatcher	3	14	15	10	12	9	S*
Western Kingbird	10	2	5	3	4	4	S*
Violet-green Swallow	2	2	10	10	12	16	S*
N. Rough-w. Swallow	6	11	21	5	20	18	S*
Barn Swallow	-	1	-	-	-	-	S
Cliff Swallow	200	100	104	200	200	200	S*
Scrub Jay	11	16	21	12	25	23	R*
American Crow	11	9	12	8	22	11	R*
Common Raven	11	8	7	16	39	19	R*
Plain Titmouse	5	2	16	6	12	7	R*
Bushtit	14	18	6	10	10	6	R*
Bewick's Wren	20	25	25	11	15	29	R*
House Wren	10	25	20	10	2	1	R*
Western Bluebird	3	2	6	-	1	5	R*
Hermit Thrush	2	-	-	-	-	-	W

Table 1 (cont.). Bird Observations along the Santa Clara River System, 1997: Santa Clara River from Castaic Creek confluence to Ventura County Line.

Species	date: 4/6	4/29	5/10	5/28	6/7	6/21	status
Wrentit	8	10	8	5	15	9	R*
Calif. Thrasher	4	4	4	3	2	3	R*
Phainopepla	-	-	-	-	3	4	R*
European Starling	4	41	7	16	24	1	R*
American Pipit	1	-	-	-	-	-	W
Warbling Vireo	1	-	1	-	-	-	M
Yellow Warbler	-	5	3	1	2	1	S*
Yellow- r. Warbler	19	1	-	-	-	-	W,M
Common Yellowthroat	9	12	19	37	51	24	R*
Wilson's Warbler	1	2	7	-	-	-	M
Yellow-br. Chat	-	5	6	5	2	3	S*
Western Tanager	-	1	-	-	-	-	M
Bl.-headed Grosbeak	4	18	24	17	15	22	S*
Blue Grosbeak	-	9	8	2	13	10	S*
Lazuli Bunting	-	6	9	2	8	24	S*
Indigo Bunting	-	-	-	-	-	1	S*
Spotted Towhee	13	14	19	18	21	20	R*
California Towhee	12	20	18	24	28	18	R*
Lark Sparrow	-	4	-	-	2	11	R*
Lincoln's Sparrow	1	-	-	-	-	-	W,M
Song Sparrow	29	27	53	45	79	54	R*
Red-wing. Blackbird	46	60	76	19	53	28	S*
Yellow-h. Blackbird	-	3	-	-	-	-	M
Western Meadowlark	-	2	-	-	-	-	R?
Brewer's Blackbird	1	-	-	3	-	2	R*
Brown-headed Cowbird	11	18	18	4	12	11	S*
Hooded Oriole	-	-	-	-	2	-	S*
Bullock's Oriole	10	9	8	12	11	12	S*
House Finch	15	22	17	20	26	30	R*
Lesser Goldfinch	8	15	8	5	6	22	R*
Lawrence's Goldfinch	-	-	2	-	2	-	R*
American Goldfinch	12	4	-	-	-	-	W,M
Total Species:	52	53	49	48	51	49	
Total Individuals:	635	762	763	654	903	815	

Total Species on all visits: 78

Total Probable Breeding species: 59 (marked with *)

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

() = dependent young birds

Censuses of 4/29, 5/28, 6/21 on the north side of river,
Censuses of 4/6, 5/10, 6/7 on south side of river.

Table 2. Bird Observations along the Santa Clara River System,
1997: Santa Clara River from Ventura County Line to
Western Limit of Las Brisas Ranch.

Species	date:	4/6	4/29	5/10	5/28	6/7	6/21	status
Great Blue Heron	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	M
Snowy Egret	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	W,M
Green Heron	-	1	-	1	3	7	-	R*
Bl. cr. Night Heron	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	M
Mallard	3	7	10	6	6	4	-	R*
Turkey Vulture	-	2	-	-	-	1	-	S
White-tailed Kite	-	-	2	-	2	-	-	R*
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	W,M
Cooper's Hawk	-	-	-	1	1	1	-	R*
Red-shouldered Hawk	-	4	-	2	-	3	-	R*
Red-tailed Hawk	2	3	1	-	1	3	-	R*
American Kestrel	2	-	-	1	-	-	-	R*
California Quail	32	16	17	13	38	17	-	R*
Sora Rail	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	M
Killdeer	1	8	9	18	6	9	-	R*
Spotted Sandpiper	-	2	7	12	4	7	-	S*
Western Gull	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	M
Domestic Pigeon	-	25	-	-	1	1	-	R*
Mourning Dove	10	12	12	17	29	22	-	R*
Common Ground Dove	-	-	2	-	-	1	-	R*?
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	M
Roadrunner	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	R*
White-th. Swift	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	R*
Black-ch. Hummingbird	-	1	3	-	1	2	-	S*
Anna's Hummingbird	12	10	17	13	32	20	-	R*
Costa's Hummingbird	-	-	2	-	1	-	-	S*
Belted Kingfisher	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	M
Nuttall's Woodpecker	5	9	7	8	31	15	-	R*
Downy Woodpecker	3	4	1	3	8	4	-	R*
Hairy Woodpecker	-	3	2	-	5	6	-	R*
Northern Flicker	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	R*
W. Wood Pewee	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	M
Pac.-slope Flycatcher	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	M
Willow Flycatcher	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	M
Black Phoebe	5	8	9	12	8	14	-	R*
Ash-thr. Flycatcher	7	12	14	11	9	17	-	S*
Western Kingbird	-	6	3	-	3	3	-	S*
Violet-green Swallow	-	2	-	-	-	5	-	S*
N. Rough-w. Swallow	4	-	13	14	14	33	-	S*
Cliff Swallow	20	250	250	200	200	40	-	S*
Barn Swallow	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	M
Scrub Jay	6	14	14	10	18	17	-	R*
American Crow	9	5	13	12	21	3	-	R*
Common Raven	2	11	9	3	5	23	-	R*
Plain Titmouse	7	7	1	2	11	11	-	R*
Bushtit	7	30	26	5	23	40	-	R*
Bewick's Wren	8	44	13	22	19	21	-	R*
House Wren	-	12	15	6	9	4	-	R*

Table 2 (cont.). Bird Observations along the Santa Clara River System, 1997: Santa Clara River from Ventura County Line to Western Limit of Las Brisas Ranch.

Species	date:	4/6	4/29	5/10	5/28	6/7	6/21	status
White-br. Nuthatch	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	M?
Western Bluebird	-	2	4	2	4	3	-	R*
American Robin	-	2	-	1	-	-	-	R*
Wrentit	10	4	3	6	21	9	-	R*
N. Mockingbird	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	R*
Calif. Thrasher	1	6	3	3	13	4	-	R*
Cedar Waxwing	-	-	26	-	-	-	-	W
Phainopepla	-	2	4	6	8	4	-	R*
European Starling	6	6	17	9	6	7	-	R*
Bell's Vireo	-	4	3	5	3	6	-	S*
Orange-cr. Warbler	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	M
Yellow Warbler	2	12	.9	6	8	5	-	S*
Yellow- r. Warbler	29	-	-	-	-	-	-	W,M
Common Yellowthroat	18	71	66	74	41	52	-	R*
Wilson's Warbler	-	-	9	-	-	-	-	M
Yellow-br. Chat	2	19	11	11	13	12	-	S*
Western Tanager	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	M
Black-headed Grosbeak	-	20	22	25	33	22	-	S*
Blue Grosbeak	-	8	11	5	5	8	-	S*
Lazuli Bunting	1	3	4	4	4	14	-	S*
Indigo Bunting	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	S*
Spotted Towhee	7	24	21	13	30	21	-	R*
California Towhee	24	23	16	34	44	17	-	R*
Lark Sparrow	-	4	5	2	-	5	-	R*
Chipping Sparrow	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	M
Lincoln's Sparrow	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	M
Savannah Sparrow	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	R*
Dark-eyed Junco	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	M
Golden-cr. Sparrow	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	W
Song Sparrow	58	128	101	141	75	81	-	R*
Red-winged Blackbird	33	10	20	46	5	7	-	S*
Brewer's Blackbird	-	-	-	-	-	8	-	R*
Brown-headed Cowbird	19	31	18	17	15	22	-	S*
Hooded Oriole	-	1	1	-	7	2	-	S*
Bullock's Oriole	-	8	5	7	6	11	-	S*
House Finch	6	21	29	24	31	42	-	R*
Lesser Goldfinch	43	54	22	23	29	27	-	R*
American Goldfinch	-	-	6	-	2	1	-	W,M
Total Species:	39	58	53	48	53	59	-	
Total Individuals:	418	986	912	859	917	751	-	

Total Species on all visits: 86

Total Probable Breeding species: 62 (marked with *)

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

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.

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