
Guthrie, D.A., "Bird Surveys along the Santa Clara River, 1998; Castaic Creek Downstream to just below Las Brisas Crossing" (July 28, 1998; 1998A)

1998

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BIRD SURVEYS ALONG THE SANTA CLARA RIVER, 1998
CASTAIC CREEK DOWNSTREAM TO JUST BELOW LAS BRISAS CROSSING

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July 28, 1998

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**Bird Surveys along the Santa Clara River, 1998
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 1998 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), with 8 surveys, two each in April, May, June and July. All surveys were conducted on foot by observers well acquainted with both visual and auditory patterns of southern California birds. Surveys occurred approximately every other week between early April and late July (there was some variation in timing to avoid periods of poor weather) and occurred between 6 and 10 a.m. 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 six 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. The first survey in July was restricted to areas where vireos had been observed previously. While species seen during this census were recorded, numbers of individuals was not recorded. 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.

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Habitat Condition and Bird Observations

Bird observations for the two sections of river studied are presented in tables 1 and 2. The heavy El Nino rains of 1998 resulted in heavy scouring of the river channel. This eliminated wet riparian vegetation and narrowed the band of surviving riparian forest along the margins of the river.

Despite the resultant change in vegetation along the river, changes in bird populations were minimal. Although some species, such as spotted sandpiper and killdeer, which nest in the river channel, suffered with May rains which washed away nests, most wet riparian species moved into adjacent weedy agricultural fields and did not decrease significantly in number. During June, numbers of many species increased as young birds fledged, and in July, additional species from coastal sage areas bordering the river began to appear in censuses (Phainopepla, Loggerhead Shrike, Lazuli Bunting, Lark Sparrow).

Comments on Sensitive Species

Least Bell's Vireo

Least Bell's Vireos occurred in four sections along the river, as follows.

- 1) A single male was observed on May 15th singing in an area of Bachcharis and willow directly adjacent to the agricultural fields 1/4 mile west of the confluence of Castaic Creek with the Santa Clara River. Although a small area of suitable habitat exists in this location, this individual could not be relocated on subsequent visits. No pairing or nesting is believed to have occurred at this site.
- 2) Two singing males were observed on several occasions on the north side of the river just west of the Los Angeles/Ventura County line (Figure 1). This is an area where several birds have been observed in past years. The "colony" at this location has numbered up to 5 pair in recent years and seems to be declining. During spring flooding the ground below this area was covered with mud which reduced the growth of annual plants.
- 3) Three to four pairs of vireos nested along the Santa Clara River in dense vegetation about 1 mile east of Las Brisas Crossing (Figure 2). Although this is about the same number observed in this area in recent years, this colony was, in previous years, further east. The movement of this colony to the west is probably due to the nature of the vegetation in the area. The riparian vegetation zone on the sides of the river in this area was reduced in size by winter flooding. The colony is now in the densest area of remaining vegetation. One side

Salt Creek

Figure 1. Location of Least Bell's Vireo sightings in 1998



effect of the reduction of vegetation by flooding was that nests seemed more subject to cowbird predation than in the past. Cowbirds were regularly observed near this area and other workers have reported an increase in cowbird parasitism all along the Santa Clara River.

- 4) 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 (Figure 2). A pair of vireos was observed in this location in 1996 and 1997. This bird usually did not sing except in response to a tape (having no neighbors, no singing?).

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. The major population of cuckoos is north of the Santa Clara River, mostly along the Kern River in Central California. Although no cuckoos were observed this year along the river, individual migrants have been observed in previous years.

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. Individuals were observed on June 6 and June 16, which is during the migration period for this species. As these bird could not be refound on subsequent visits, it is presumed that they were migrants passing through the area.

Loggerhead Shrike

This is a California Species of Special Concern. Shrikes are resident in the coastal sage habitat adjacent to the Santa Clara River and are infrequently observed when they enter the riparian

zone in late summer seeking water and insects. A single bird was observed on June 16th.

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 significantly. As Yellow Warblers sing during migration, the June numbers are 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. Despite spring floods, the numbers of chats observed in 1998 were approximately the same as observed in 1997. 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 in late July.

**Table 1. Bird Observations along the Santa Clara River System,
1998: Santa Clara River from Castaic Creek confluence to
Ventura County Line.**

<u>Species</u>	<u>date: 4/16</u>	<u>4/30</u>	<u>5/15</u>	<u>5/27</u>	<u>6/6</u>	<u>6/16</u>	<u>7/6</u>	<u>7/22</u>	<u>status</u>
Great Blue Heron	-	1	-	-	-	3	-	-	M
Great Egret	2	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	M
Snowy Egret	-	4	2	-	-	-	-	-	M
Green Heron	-	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	R*
White-f. Ibis	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	M
Mallard	2	5	2	-	2	1	-	-	R*
White-tailed Kite	1	3	1	2	1(3)	-	x	1	R*
Cooper's Hawk	2	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	R*
Red-shouldered Hawk	4	2	2	2	1	-	x	2	R*
Red-tailed Hawk	7	2	4	3	4	5	x	3	R*
American Kestrel	1	-	-	2	-	5	-	-	R*
California Quail	32	14	38	23	16	35	x	44	R*
Killdeer	8	9	9	2	8	10(3)	x	8	R*
Black-necked Stilt	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	M
Spotted Sandpiper	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	S*
Ring-billed Gull	-	2	20	-	-	-	-	-	M
California Gull	300	20	-	-	-	-	-	1	M
Western Gull	1	60	10	-	60	70	x	104	M
Domestic Pigeon	80	25	60	60	8	-	x	66	R*
Mourning Dove	5	13	33	16	23	36	x	20	R*
Greater Roadrunner	2	3	-	1	1	-	x	-	R*
Barn Owl	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	R*
Great Horned Owl	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	R*
White-th. Swift	-	-	-	-	10	8	-	-	R*
Black-ch. Hummingbird	-	-	-	1	-	4	-	-	S*
Anna's Hummingbird	5	5	5	5	6	9	x	4	R*
Belted Kingfisher	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	M
Nuttall's Woodpecker	5	6	5	9	6	10	x	9	R*
Downy Woodpecker	4	1	1	2	-	10	x	2	R*
Hairy Woodpecker	1	1	3	1	1	3	-	2	R*
Northern Flicker	3	2	-	1	-	5	x	1	R*
Western Wood Pewee	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	M
Pac. slope Flycatcher	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	M
Willow Flycatcher	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	M
Black Phoebe	2	4	2	-	1	1	x	5	R*
Say's Phoebe	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	-	R*
Ash-thr. Flycatcher	7	14	15	12	15	16	x	9	S*
Cassin's Kingbird	-	-	2	-	1	1	x	2	R*
Western Kingbird	3	4	8	7	6	12	x	13(5)	S*
Horned Lark	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	R*
Tree Swallow	2	-	-	1	1	2	-	-	S*
Violet-green Swallow	1	2	3	-	4	4	x	2	S*
N. Rough-w. Swallow	8	16	17	6	6	28	x	-	S*
Cliff Swallow	-	50	26	140	60	128	x	6	S*
Scrub Jay	5	11	15	9	14	22	x	9	R*
American Crow	20	15	9	6	10	9	x	26	R*
Common Raven	17	14	14	10	10	12	x	36	R*
Plain Titmouse	17	16	21	8	9	11	x	6	R*

Table 1 (Cont.). Bird Observations along the Santa Clara River System, 1998: Santa Clara River from Castaic Creek confluence to Ventura County Line.

Species	date: 4/16	4/30	5/15	5/27	6/6	6/16	7/6	7/22	status
Bushtit	9	6	12	4	14	16	x	24	R*
Bewick's Wren	47	46	35	23	24	27	x	25	R*
House Wren	30	24	46	39	36	58	x	4	R*
Western Bluebird	2	2	11	2	2	7	x	2	R*
Swainson's Thrush	-	-	4	1	-	-	-	-	M
American Robin	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	R*
N. Mockingbird	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	R*
Wrentit	14	10	5	13	7	12	x	11	R*
Calif. Thrasher	5	5	6	5	4	5	x	2	R*
Phainopepla	-	-	2	3	4	3	x	4	S*
European Starling	25	28	45	41	30	94	x	20	R*
Bell's Vireo	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	S*
Warbling Vireo	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	M
Orange-cr. Warbler	3	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	M
Yellow Warbler	3	12	20	11	6	-	-	-	S*
Yellow- r. Warbler	17	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	W,M
Common Yellowthroat	13	8	28	33	18	17	x	7	R*
Wilson's Warbler	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	M
Yellow-br. Chat	-	2	9	7	-	2	-	-	S*
Western Tanager	-	-	6	-	-	-	-	-	M
Bl.-headed Grosbeak	23	24	29	13	16	12	x	4	S*
Blue Grosbeak	-	2	-	6	5	3	x	9	S*
Northern Cardinal	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	?
Lazuli Bunting	-	-	1	-	-	-	x	22	S*
Spotted Towhee	12	22	14	13	11	18	x	7	R*
California Towhee	18	25	24	29	30	18	x	19	R*
Lark Sparrow	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	12	S*
Savannah Sparrow	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	W
Song Sparrow	27	41	72	55	34	38	x	38	R*
Lincoln's Sparrow	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	W,M
White-cr. Sparrow	18	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	W,M
Red-w. Blackbird	2	2	16	47	27	2	-	-	S*
Brewer's Blackbird	40	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	R*
Brown-headed Cowbird	21	10	7	18	14	33	x	10	S*
Hooded Oriole	-	-	-	-	-	6	-	2	S*
Bullock's Oriole	6	14	23	20	11	23	x	3	S*
House Finch	22	10	33	34	17	57	x	39	R*
Lesser Goldfinch	16	9	10	18	4	5	x	14	R*
Lawrence's Goldfinch	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	R*
American Goldfinch	9	4	6	-	-	-	-	-	W,R*
Total Species:	59	57	59	48	47	51	43	47	

Total Species on all visits: 88

Total Probable Breeding species: 66 (marked with *)

Status: M - Migrant; R - Resident; S - Summer Only; W - Winter Only
() = dependent young birds

Table 2. Bird Observations along the Santa Clara River System, 1998: Santa Clara River from Ventura County Line to Western Limit of Las Brisas Ranch.

Species	date: 4/16	4/30	5/15	5/27	6/6	6/16	7/6	7/22	status
Great Blue Heron	-	2	-	-	-	1	-	-	M
Great Egret	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	M
Snowy Egret	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	M
Green Heron	-	2	1	-	-	-	-	1	R*
Bl. cr. Night Heron	-	3	-	1	1	-	-	-	M
Mallard	3	7	2	-	-	2	-	-	R*
White-tailed Kite	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	R*
Cooper's Hawk	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	R*
Red-shouldered Hawk	1	2	1	1	-	-	-	-	R*
Red-tailed Hawk	1	-	1	1	-	2	x	2	R*
Ring-necked Pheasant	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	?
California Quail	8	38	15	24	12	31	x	28	R*
Killdeer	3	10	4	4	11	11	x	3	R*
Spotted Sandpiper	-	6	5	3	2	2	-	1	S*
Domestic Pigeon	2	1	-	-	4	-	-	2	R*
Mourning Dove	5	19	14	14	14	20	x	13	R*
Common Ground Dove	-	-	-	1	-	-	4	-	R*
Greater Roadrunner	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	R*
Black-ch. Hummingbird	8	4	3	2	2	-	-	1	S*
Anna's Hummingbird	20	16	15	11	13	3	x	4	R*
Costa's Hummingbird	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	S*
Rufous Hummingbird	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	M
Belted Kingfisher	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	M
Acorn Woodpecker	-	1	-	2	-	-	-	-	R*
Nuttall's Woodpecker	11	5	14	14	9	9	x	10	R*
Downy Woodpecker	12	5	8	4	1	5	x	3	R*
Hairy Woodpecker	5	1	2	2	4	9	x	2	R*
Northern Flicker	3	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	R*
Pac. slope Flycatcher	-	-	2	1	-	-	-	-	M
Willow Flycatcher	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	M
Black Phoebe	5	4	5	8	2	15	x	14	R*
Ash-thr. Flycatcher	10	19	11	11	15	12	x	9	S*
Western Kingbird	-	2	2	4	2	-	x	2	S*
N. Rough-w. Swallow	13	12	17	6	9	35	x	3	S*
Barn Swallow	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	S
Cliff Swallow	200	200	206	440	405	400	x	39	S*
Scrub Jay	15	11	22	18	19	13	x	9	R*
American Crow	19	12	18	4	5	2	x	30	R*
Common Raven	6	3	7	13	12	6	x	39	R*
Plain Titmouse	7	6	9	8	12	9	x	9	R*
Bushtit	2	9	37	13	34	28	x	5	R*
Bewick's Wren	14	14	42	50	28	28	x	13	R*

Table 2 (Cont.). Bird Observations along the Santa Clara River System, 1998: Santa Clara River from Ventura County Line to Western Limit of Las Brisas Ranch.

Species	date: 4/16	4/30	5/15	5/27	6/6	6/16	7/6	7/22	status
House Wren	8	15	12	22	10	5	x	-	R*
Western Bluebird	-	2	4	2	2(3)	3	-	3	R*
American Robin	1	-	2	1	4	-	-	1	R*
N. Mockingbird	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	R*
Wrentit	9	6	10	9	6	13	x	9	R*
Calif. Thrasher	3	6	2	11	5	9	x	2	R*
Phainopepla	-	2	5	11	12	17	x	4	S*
Loggerhead Shrike	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	R*
European Starling	20	3	23	5	12	7	-	1	R*
Bell's Vireo	7	8	5	6(1)	7	4	6	2	S*
Yellow Warbler	2	5	6	7	6	4	x	-	S*
Nashville Warbler	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	M
Yellow-r. Warbler	55	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	W,M
Common Yellowthroat	11	8	5	18	9	15	x	36	R*
Wilson's Warbler	3	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	M
Yellow-br. Chat	1	9	10	6	9	5	x	-	S*
Bl.-headed Grosbeak	17	19	21	27	11	11	x	9	S*
Blue Grosbeak	-	3	-	-	2	3	x	2	S*
Lazuli Bunting	-	4	-	1	1	-	-	3	S*
Spotted Towhee	11	18	15	19	10	22	x	22	R*
California Towhee	18	16	29	28	14	26	x	18	R*
Lark Sparrow	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	S*
Song Sparrow	55	65	93	93	76	72	x	54	R*
Lincoln's Sparrow	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	M,W
Red-w. Blackbird	3	6	-	-	-	-	-	8	S*
Brewer's Blackbird	1	-	-	-	-	6	x	5	R*
Brown-headed Cowbird	26	29	12	10	15	12	x	11	S*
Hooded Oriole	5	2	1	2	2	-	-	2	S*
Bullock's Oriole	11	10	2	9	5	5	x	-	S*
House Finch	13	19	10	11	19	23	x	8	R*
Lesser Goldfinch	27	23	59	47	16	14	x	98	R*
American Goldfinch	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	2	W,R*
House Sparrow	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	R*
Total Species:	50	52	50	50	46	43	40	46	

Total Species on all visits: 75

Total Probable Breeding species: 61 (marked with *)

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

() = dependent young birds

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.