Guthrie, D.A., "Bird Surveys along the Santa Clara River, 2000; Mouth of Castaic Creek Downstream to the Los Angeles/Ventura County Line" (August 2, 2000; 2000C)

Original in Workice BIRD SURVEYS ALONG THE SANTA CLARA RIVER, 2000 MOUTH OF CASTAIC CREEK DOWNSTREAM TO THE LOS ANGELES/VENTURA COUNTY LINE

Prepared for:

Mark Subbotin Newhall Land and Farming 23823 Valencia Blvd. Valencia, Ca. 91355

Prepared by:

Daniel A. Guthrie W.M. Keck Science Center Claremont Colleges 925 N. Mills Ave. Claremont, Ca. 91711 909 607-2836 dguthrie@jsd.claremont.edu

August 2, 2000

78 000052

0716021327

Bird Surveys along the Santa Clara River, 2000 Mouth of Castaic Creek downstream to the Los Angeles/Ventura County Line

Daniel A. Guthrie W.M. Keck Science Center, Claremont Colleges 925 N. Mills Ave. Claremont, Ca. 91711 909 607-2836

Nature and Scope of Surveys

During the spring and early summer of 2000 a survey was conducted along the section of the Santa Clara River between its confluence with Castaic Creek and the Los Angeles/Ventura County line (Figure 1). The total length of the section surveyed was approximately 5 miles.

The riparian area of the Santa Clara river reported on here was surveyed eight times, in accordance to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Protocol for least Bell's vireo. Three of the surveys were conducted within the time frames recommended by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Protocol for Southwestern willow flycatcher. In order to follow least Bell's vireo protocol on kilometers covered per day, the area was divided into two sections, each surveyed separately. However, observations from these two surveys are combined in data presentation (Table 1).

Each survey was conducted on foot by observers well acquainted with both visual and auditory and behavioral characteristics 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 5:30 and 10 a.m. All birds sighted were counted, but special emphasis was placed on finding focus species, Species of Special Concern, and brown-headed cowbirds. If focus species (yellow-billed cuckoo, least Bell's vireo, Southwestern willow flycatcher) were not visually observed, tapes of their calls were played in an attempt to elicit a response. Personnel for all surveys were Daniel A. Guthrie and Judith A. Sugden, both working under Federal Fish and Wildlife Service Permit number TE810394-1, issued under section 10(a)(1)(A) of the Endangered Species Act.

Habitat Condition and Bird Observations

The winter of 1999-2000 was relatively mild with little flooding of the Santa Clara River. What flooding did occur caused little damage to riparian vegetation with the result that wet riparian vegetation from previous years continued to increase in size. However, some retrenchment of the stream channel into the sediments deposited in 1999 left marginal riparian vegetation high and dry. The overall result was a narrowing of the wet riparian zone. Observations of all birds are shown in Table 1. The numbers shown are of birds seen and heard, with heard individuals forming the majority of the observations. Numbers vary between censuses for several reasons. First, there was fog on some censuses which decreased bird activity. Secondly, census routes varied somewhat, covering different sides of the riparian zone. Finally, bird activity varies with season. Different species breed at different times of the year. In general, species are most easily observed when they are actively defending territories by song during the establishment of breeding pairs. Once pairs are established and nesting begins song often decreases and the numbers of birds observed, therefore, also decreases. After young leave the nest, numbers observed increase. Thus, for most resident species, numbers of adult birds are most accurately censused in April and May, when territorial activity is at a maximum. A few species such as Anna's hummingbird that nest early in the season may be underestimated. Numbers of nesting species observed may be higher than normal in May due to migratory birds passing through the area, then decrease slightly in June and early July when birds are less active during nesting, and increase in late June and July when young birds leave the nest.

Comments on Threatened and Endangered Species

Yellow-billed Cuckoo

The yellow-billed cuckoo is listed as a State Endangered Species. Despite playing taped calls of this species during June and July surveys, no individuals of this species were observed in 2000.

Southwestern Willow Flycatcher

This subspecies is listed 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. The main California breeding populations of this species are along the Kern River and north of Santa Barbara.

Following the Protocol outlined by Sogge (Technical Report NPS/NAUCPRS/NRTR-97/12) three surveys were conducted specifically for Southwestern willow flycatcher (May 26, June 11, and June 2). All surveys occurred between 5:30 and 10:00 am. and used taped calls to elicit a response if flycatchers were not first observed. No willow flycatchers were observed along this section of the Santa Clara River during any surveys in 2000.

California Least Bell's Vireo

Surveys of the wet riparian areas along the Santa Clara River followed U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Guidelines for least Bell's vireo. Eight surveys were conducted between April 10 and July 31 (see Table 1 for dates). All surveys occurred between 5:30 and 10:00 am. and taped vireo calls were played if no vireos were heard or seen. Once vireos were found, no

attempt was made to determine nesting success or presence of leg bands on birds as other researchers were also surveying vireos and determining nesting success along this section of the river (Zev Labinger and Jim Greaves, monitoring Restoration Phase of the ARCO/Four Corners Oil Spill).

Two single least Bell's vireos were observed as shown on Figure 1, one on June 17^{th} and one of July 15^{th} . The bird near the mouth of Castaic Creek was in an area of suitable habitat, although the area of appropriate vegetation was small in size. The bird near the agricultural fields was in a willow stand that seemed more mature than that preferred by other vireos along the river. Although searched for, neither bird could be relocated on subsequent censuses and are, therefore, not considered to represent breeding birds. Both birds appeared to be young birds that had dispersed along the river after fledging.

Comments on Sensitive Species

Great Blue Heron

Great blue herons are listed on the California Natural Diversity Data Base as a species that warrents monitoring. Individuals of this species was observed sparingly along the river after the breeding season and along other sections of the river during winter and migration. No nesting was observed.

Great Egret

The great egret is listed on the California Natural Diversity Data Base as a species that warrents monitoring. A few individuals were observed along the river during migration and after the breeding season.

White-tailed Kite

This species, formerly the Black-shouldered Kite, is considered a Species of Special Concern by the State of California. During this year one pair of kites nested in the dry riparian woodland on the south side of the Santa Clara River approximately ¹/₄ mile downstream from the mouth of Castaic Creek.

Cooper's Hawk

Cooper's Hawk is considered a Species of Special Concern by the State of California. Cooper's Hawks were observed rarely along the main river in 2000.

Peregrine Falcon

The peregrine falcon is listed as a Fully Protected species by the California Dept. of Fish and Game. A single peregrine was observed hunting along the river on July 28th. Peregrines may nest in the Santa Susanna Mountains to the south of the study area.

Yellow Warbler

The Yellow Warbler is considered a Species of Special Concern by the State of California. Yellow Warblers prefer wet riparian habitat but are also found in large cottonwoods in drier riparian areas. Singing yellow warblers were observed throughout the surveys along the Santa Clara River. The higher numbers observed on May 15th probably represent breeding individuals augmented by migrants. The lower numbers observed in June are probably more indicative of local breeders.

Yellow-breasted Chat

The Yellow-breasted Chat is considered a Species of Special Concern by the State of California. The nearly dozen chats calling from territories along this section of riparian woodland are about the same number as observed here in previous years.

Northern Cardinal

The northern cardinal is listed as a Special Concern Species by the State of California. Cardinals are native in California only along the Colorado River. All other sightings, including the two sightings listed here along the Santa Clara River, are considered to be of escaped cage birds and not of naturally occurring individuals..

Lawrence's Goldfinch

This species is a highest priority species on the Audubon Birds to Watch list for 1996 and is a Bird of Management Concern for the Fish and Wildlife Service. Although a species of the coastal sage, small flocks of this species visited the riparian zone of the Santa Clara River during the summer.

Comments on Brown Headed Cowbird

Cowbirds were regularly observed in all sections of the study area. At the beginning of the surveys in April, large numbers of cowbirds were present in a mixed flock of blackbirds feeding in agricultural areas along sides of the Santa Clara River. By late April, cowbirds had dispersed. Numbers remained high along the river until late July, by which time nesting of parasitized species was mostly finished.

Summary

Two of the focus species, yellow-billed cuckoo and southwestern willow flycatcher, were not observed along this section of the Santa Clara River during 2000. Two individuals of the third focus species, the least Bell's vireo, were observed. Both observations are thought to be of young of the year which moved into the area from nest sites elsewhere downstream. Although both birds sang territorial songs, neither attracted a mate or could be relocated on subsequent visits, indicating no nesting occurred.

Among species of concern, the riparian species; yellow warbler and yellow-breasted chat occurred in small numbers in riparian woodlands along the river. White-tailed kite and Cooper's hawk were also observed in small numbers and are known to nest in woodlands along the river. Two other species, great blue heron and great egret, were observed feeding in small numbers on the river, but did not nest in the area. Finally, one coastal sage species, Lawrence's goldfinch, was observed on the river as a visitor from nearby coastal sage habitat. Table 1. Bird Observations along the Santa Clara River 2000; Mouth of Castaic Creek west to the Los Angeles/Ventura County line.

		•			•	_ •				
Species	date:	-	-	-	-	6/17	-	-	•	<u>.</u>
Creat Dluc	11	4/19			5/25	6/18				Status
Great Blue		3	1	1 1	-	1 1	2	2 2	1	M,W
Great Egret		3 3	2 2	2	-1	1 —	_	2 _	-	W W
Snowy Egret		5	2 1	Z 	1 	_	_		-	w M
Cattle Egre Green Heron		_	- -	_	3	_	_	-	-	™ R*
Blcr.Nigh) -	_	_	1	2	_	-	_	R*?
-			_	_	<u>т</u>	2	_	_	_	к. М
White-faced Ibis Canada Goose		-		_	_	Ţ	_	_	- 15	M
	se	. –	- 5	- 4	5	- 11	3	-	15 4	M R*
Mallard	d Vita	4		4 2	5	11 	ン 		42	
White-taile		-						- 1		R*
Cooper's Ha			-	-	- 1		-	1	—	R*
Red-shoulde			-	2	1	1	2	-	-	R*
Swainson's		1	-				-	-	-	M
Red-tailed		2	4	1	1	4	3	5	3	R*
American Ke		-	-	4	2	1	2	-	-	R*
Peregrine F		_	-	-		-	_	_	-	R
California	Quail	44	44	38	36	48	22	12	11	R*
Killdeer		2	4	11	6	14	18	12	13	R*
Spotted San	dpiper	-	-	4	2	8	4	3	3	S*
Whimbrel		-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	М
Ring-billed		-	20	60	_	_	-	-	-	W
Western Gul		10	60	20	60	80	41		-	R
Caspian Ter		-	-	-	-	-	2	-	_	М
Domestic Pi	.geon	27	-	8	-	15	20	-	2	R*
Mourning Do	ve	26	29	26	13	30	28	14	26	R*
Great Horne	ed Owl	-	-	1	1		-	-	-	R*
Greater Roa	drunner	-	-	-	-		-	1	1	R*
White-thr.	Swift				-	4	-	-	4	R*
Vaux Swift		4	-		-	-	-	-		R*
Blch.Humm	ingbird	l –	-	-	-	-	-	4	1	S*
Anna's Humm	ingbird	l 5	4	1	2	1		15	22	R*
Costa's Hum	mingbir	:d –		1	-	-	-	1	-	S*
Belted King	fisher	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	М
Nutt. Woodp	ecker	6	10	14	12	11	13	4	6	R*
Downy Woodp		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	R*
Hairy Woodp		-	-	-	-	2	1	_	1	R*
Northern Fl		_	3	6	-	2	3	1	1	R*
Western Woo		• —	-	2		-	_	-	-	М
Pacsl.Fly			-	2	_	_	_	-		М
Black Phoeb		_	1		2	1	4	7	10	R*
Ash-thr.Fly		. 9	14	18	15	8	18	14	13	S*
Western Kin		7	-	6	4	_	4	1	_	S*
				-	-		-	_		-

Table 1. (cont.). Bird Observations along the Santa Clara River 2000; Mouth of Castaic Creek west to the Los Angeles/Ventura County line.

Out of the second second		4 (0 0	F /10	F 10 4	C /4 P	<i>c</i> / 0 0	- /	- /	
Species date:	4/14				6/17 6/18		7/15	•	Status
Horned Lark		-	<u> </u>		20	-			R*
Tree Swallow	_	-	10		2	_	_	_	R*
Violet-gr.Swallo	w 10	9	_	_	12	_	_		S*
N.Rough-w. Swall		8	2	-	14	14	28		S*
Cliff Swallow	250	100	20	120	206	20	6	1	S*
Barn Swallow	1	-	6	-	-	_	_	-	S*
Scrub Jay	10	3	5	8	16	15	17	7	R*
American Crow	6	4	4	16	12	36	70	11	R*
Common Raven	13	15	8	6	26	15	26	4	R*
Oak Titmouse	14	12	6	2	10	2	6	6	R*
Bushtit	4	-	10	10	16	5	-		R*
Bewick's Wren	26	25	22	21	24	22	22	14	R*
House Wren	28	27	38	29	17	2	1	2	R*
Western Bluebird	16	4	8	4	10	7	21	13	R*
Hermit Thrush	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	М
American Robin		2		_	-	1	-		R*
N. Mockingbird	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	R*
Wrentit	10	6	6	10	8	18	13	8	R*
Calif. Thrasher	5	2	7	3	4	1	-	1	R*
Phainopepla	-	-	2	2	3	2	3	6	S*
European Starling	g 64	26	27	20	70	13	22	6	R*
Bell's Vireo	-	-	~		1	-	1	-	S*
Orange-cr.Warble:		-	-	-	1	-	-	-	М
Yellow Warbler	3	5	7	3	3	1	2	-	S*
Yellow-r.Warbler	15	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	W,M
Com.Yellowthroat	8	8	18	16	19	15	11	3	R*
Wilson's Warbler	-	1	5	-	-	-	-	-	М
Yellow-br. Chat	-	1	4	2	3	5	3	→	S*
Western Tanager	-	-	1	-	-			-	М
Black-h. Grosbeal	< 11	21	15	16	17	22	5	2	S*
Blue Grosbeak	1	2	3	2	3	-	12	5	S*
Lazuli Bunting		1	1	2	-	1	17	8	S*
Spotted Towhee	15	12	24	15	25	21	12	2	R*
California Towhee		12	14	32	18	13	26	10	R*
Lark Sparrow	4	-	-	-	4			8	R*
Savannah Sparrow	24	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	W,M
Song Sparrow	38	46	50	42	50	30	18	7	R*
Lincoln's Sparrow		-	-	-	-			-	W,M
White-cr. Sparrow		2	_	_	_	_	-	-	W,M
Red-wing.Blackbir		7	42	30	2	16	-	-	S*
Brewer's Blkbird	20	-	-	2	2	6	_	4	R*
Brown-h. Cowbird	33	11	15	16	16	10	8	2	S*

Table 1 (cont.). Bird Observations along the Santa Clara River 2000; Mouth of Castaic Creek west to the Los Angeles/Ventura County line.

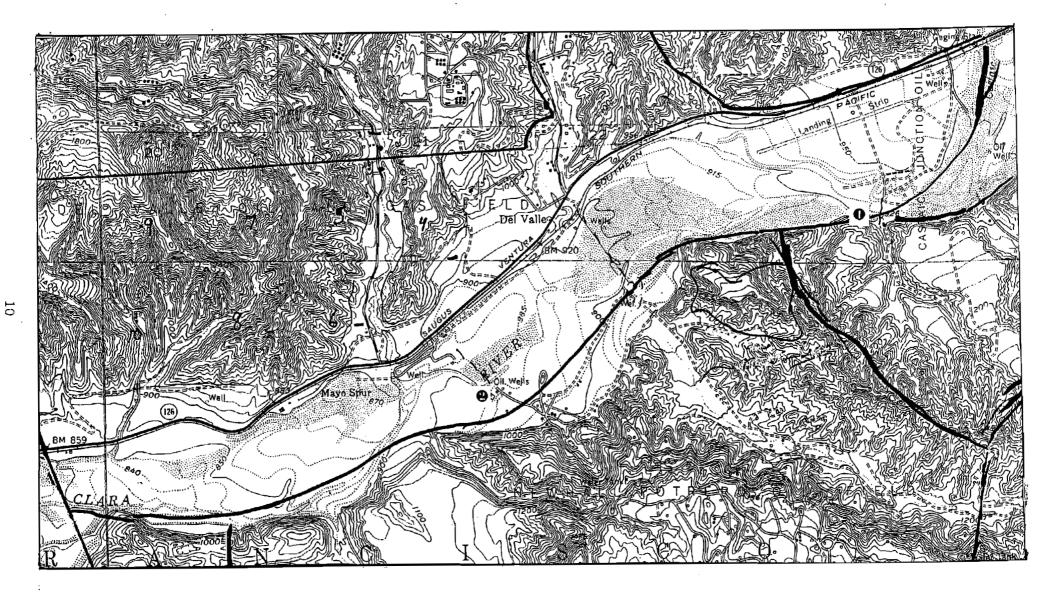
.

Species	date:	4/14	4/26	5/12	5/24	6/17	6/30	7/15	7/27	
		4/19	5/1	5/15	5/25	6/18	7/2	7/16	7/28	Status
Hooded Oriole		-	-	2	-	4		-	_	S*
Bullock's	Oriole	19	5	10	7	5	-	5	1	S*
N. Cardin	al	1	-	—		-	-	1	-	R
House Fin	ch	38	24	24	16	21	24	30	15	R*
Lesser Go	ldfinch	47	32	30	14	6	22	18	4	R*
Lawr. Gol	dfinch		6	2	-		_	6	4	R*
American Goldfinch		n 8	6	-	-	-		4	2	W,R*
Total Spe	cies:	52	50	60	46	56	46	46	48	
Total Species on all visits: 91										
Total Potential Breeding species: 68 (marked with *)										
Status: M- Migrant; R- Resident; S- Summer Only; W- Winter only										

9

...

Figure 1. Least Bell's Vireo Sightings along the Santa Clara River between Castaic Creek and the Los Angeles/Ventura County line, 2000



0 - Location of Least Bell's Vireo sighting.

0 - June 17, 2000

Base Map: U.S.G.S. 7.5 minute topographic map for Val Verde, California,1952, photorevised 1969.

2 - July 15, 2000