
**Guthrie, D.A., "Bird Surveys along the Santa Clara River, 2002; Mouth of
Castaic Creek Downstream to just below Las Brisas Crossing"
(August 16, 2002; 2002C)**

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BIRD SURVEYS ALONG THE SANTA CLARA RIVER, 2002
MOUTH OF CASTIAC CREEK DOWNSTREAM TO
JUST BELOW LAS BRISAS CROSSING

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 16, 2002

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Mouth of Castaic Creek Downstream to just below Las Brisas Crossing

Daniel A. Guthrie
W.M. Keck Science Center, Claremont Colleges
925 N. Mills Ave.
Claremont, Ca. 91711
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Nature and Scope of Surveys

During the spring and early summer of 2002 surveys were conducted along 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.

Each area was surveyed eight times, in accordance to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Protocol for least Bell's vireo. Five 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, each portion (one in Los Angeles and one in Ventura County) was divided into two sections, each surveyed separately. However, observations from these two surveys are combined in data presentation (Tables 1-2).

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 mid April and mid July (there was some variation in timing to avoid periods of poor weather) and occurred between 6:00 and 10:00 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 and permitted for both least Bell's vireo and southwestern willow flycatcher.

Habitat Condition and Bird Observations

The 2001-2002 winter and spring seasons were the driest on record in southern California. As a result, there was no flooding. All annual vegetation away from the river proper failed to show any development. The only exception to this was along the edges of irrigated agricultural fields and runoff channels from these fields. Away from these areas, many perennial plants showed the effects of drought. Some smaller perennials died while older trees dropped branches.

Observations of all birds are shown in Tables 1-2. 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. 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.

Migratory birds seemed much more frequent during 2002 as compared to past years. This is attributed to the drought conditions that gave migrants few areas away from riparian areas in which to feed. The result was a concentration of migrants in any wet vegetation.

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, when this species might be present, no individuals of this species were observed in 2002.

Southwestern Willow Flycatcher

This subspecies is listed as Federally Endangered under the Federal Endangered Species Act. Willow flycatchers were once widespread in wet riparian woodland in southern California but now only a few individuals remain. Following the Revised Protocol (Fish And Wildlife Service, July 2000) five surveys (see tables 1-2 for dates) were conducted specifically for southwestern willow flycatcher. All surveys occurred between 6:00 and 10:00 am. and used taped calls to elicit a response if flycatchers were not first observed.

Seven willow flycatchers were observed during the census of May 21st and a single bird was observed on June 3rd. The location for these sightings are shown in Figures 1 and 2. Two of the sightings (Fig. 1) were of pairs of birds that were actively chasing and calling. The remaining sightings were of single birds that were not calling. Despite the territorial or courtship behavior observed, none of these birds could be relocated on subsequent visits. These birds, therefore, are considered to be migrants passing through the area.

Willow flycatchers are fairly common migrants through southern California and most of the migrants are believed to be of the common subspecies of willow flycatcher, *E. t. brewsteri*, which breeds throughout southern Canada and the northern United States, rather than representatives of the southwestern subspecies. Southwestern willow flycatchers are positively identified primarily by nesting within the geographic area of their range or by measurements of in hand specimens. Lacking any evidence of nesting, none of the observations of willow flycatchers can be positively identified as belonging to the southwestern form of willow flycatcher. The report forms required for this species have been forwarded to the Ventura Office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

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 tables 1-2 for dates). All surveys occurred between 6:00 and 10:00 am. and taped vireo calls were played if no vireos were heard or seen. In order to avoid disturbing vireos, no special efforts were made to determine nesting success or presence of leg bands once birds were observed. However, at each location where vireos were found, they were observed at least once, and no leg bands were observed.

Least Bell's vireos were regularly heard and seen at six locations along the Ventura County section of this survey during 2002, as shown in Figure 3. All are in areas where vireos were found in previous years. Vireos were seen or heard at each location on at least five of the eight surveys and, although nests were not actively searched for, all locations are thought to be nesting pairs.

Figure 4 shows the locations of least Bell's vireo sightings along the Los Angeles County section of the Santa Clara River. Vireo 1 was seen only in July and is thought to be a post-breeding juvenile that was not mated. The remaining 5 sightings were regularly observed and thought to be mated pairs. No bands were observed on any of the vireos mentioned here.

Comments on Sensitive Species

Great Blue Heron

Great Blue Herons are listed on the California Natural Diversity Data Base as a species that warrants 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 warrants monitoring. A few individuals were observed along the river during migration.

White-tailed Kite

This species, formerly the black-shouldered kite, is considered a Species of Management Concern by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Kites were occasionally seen in the dry riparian woodland near the Ventura County line in 2002. Kites have nested along the river in previous years but drought conditions may have limited their food supply (field mice) and no evidence of nesting was observed this year.

Cooper's Hawk

Cooper's hawk is considered a Species of Special Concern by the State of California. Cooper's hawks were observed rarely hunting along the main river in 1999 and may have nested near the mouth of Castaic Creek.

Loggerhead Shrike

This is a California Special Concern species. Shrikes are resident in the coastal sage scrub areas adjacent to the Santa Clara River. A single observation along the river was presumably of an individual visiting the riparian zone from the surrounding coastal sage habitat.

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.

Yellow-breasted Chat

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

Southern California Rufous-crowned Sparrow

This species is considered a California Special Concern species by the Department of Fish and Game and a Species of Concern by the Fish and Wildlife Service. Rufous-crowned sparrows are a fairly common resident and breeding species in coastal sage habitat and are a rare visitor to irrigated fields and the riparian zone, especially in drought years.

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 early spring and summer.

Comments on Brown Headed Cowbird

Cowbirds were regularly observed in all sections of the study area and seemed to be attracted by tapes of least Bell's vireo calls. Numbers remained high along the river until late June, by which time nearly all nesting was completed.

Summary

No yellow billed-cuckoos were observed during 2002. Several willow flycatchers were observed during their migration period but, despite careful searches and the use of taped calls could not be relocated on subsequent visits. Because of the time of observation, these birds are considered to represent migrants passing through the area to breeding grounds further north.

About nine pairs of least Bell's vireos were observed along this section of the Santa Clara River during 2002, six in Ventura County and five in Los Angeles County. This is an increase from previous years and may reflect greater nesting success and population increase of this species statewide.

Among species of concern, the riparian species; yellow warbler and yellow-breasted chat occurred in small numbers in riparian woodlands along the river. Two raptors that regularly nest in riparian woodlands, the white-tailed kite and Cooper's hawk, were also observed in small numbers. Two wintering and migrant species of concern, great blue heron and great egret, were observed feeding in small numbers on the river, but did not nest in the area. Finally, three coastal sage species, loggerhead shrike, rufous-crowned sparrow and Lawrence's goldfinch, were observed along the river in small numbers as visitors from nearby coastal sage habitat.

Table 1. BIRDS OF THE SANTA CLARA RIVER BASIN,2002: Santa Clara River from the mouth of Castaic Creek downstream to the Los Angeles/Ventura County Line.

Endangered Species and Species of Concern Shaded

SPECIES	STATUS	Dates of Surveys							
		21-Apr	9-May	19-May	3-Jun	15-Jun	25-Jun	5-Jul	15-Jul
Great Blue Heron	m,w	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Snowy Egret	m,w	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Green Heron	r	0	3	1	0	1	2	1	1
Turkey Vulture	r	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Canada Goose	r	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mallard	r	7	11	2	4	9	6	0	1
White-tailed Kite	r	1	0	1	0	3	0	0	0
Cooper's Hawk	r	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Red-shouldered Hawk	r	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
Red-tailed Hawk	r	1	4	3	1	3	2	2	2
American Kestrel	r	1	3	1	2	1	1	0	1
California Quail	r	36	18	35	35	12	66	6	8
Killdeer	r	13	19	8	7	12	10	8	2
Spotted Sandpiper	s	0	6	0	2	3	3	2	1
Western Gull	v	0	0	0	0	0	50	0	0
Rock Dove	r	5	4	37	0	0	0	3	0
Mourning Dove	r	12	26	20	25	10	13	10	9
Vaux's Swift	m	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	0
White-throated Swift	r	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0
Black-chinned Hummingbird	s	0	2	0	1	1	0	0	2
Anna's Hummingbird	r	5	1	6	0	3	3	1	4
Nuttall's Woodpecker	r	5	7	8	11	9	9	9	11
Downy Woodpecker	r	5	1	0	1	1	1	0	1
Hairy Woodpecker	r	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0
Northern Flicker	r	3	2	1	0	0	0	2	2
Olive-sided Flycatcher	m	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Western Wood-pewee	m	0	0	8	1	0	0	0	0
Willow Flycatcher	m	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Hammond's Flycatcher	m	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Pacific Slope Flycatcher	s	2	1	1	1	1	0	1	0
Black Phoebe	r	5	5	4	3	3	6	7	9
Say's Phoebe	r	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Ash-throated Flycatcher	s	14	10	6	17	15	19	14	18
Western Kingbird	s	1	2	0	8	2	3	3	2
Bell's Vireo	s	4	0	3	2	2	5	4	3
Plumbeous Vireo	s	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Warbling Vireo	s	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Western Scrub Jay	r	3	5	16	13	6	3	3	8
American Crow	r	2	8	8	6	10	46	12	32
Common Raven	r	9	32	10	6	4	5	8	18
Tree Swallow	s	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Violet-green Swallow	s	0	1	8	7	6	5	2	9
N. Rough-winged Swallow	s	7	0	6	8	26	10	46	0

**Table 1 (Cont.). BIRDS OF THE SANTA CLARA RIVER BASIN, 2002: Santa Clara River
from the mouth of Castaic Creek downstream to the Los Angeles/Ventura County Line.**

Endangered Species and Species of Concern Shaded

SPECIES	STATUS	Dates of Surveys							
		21-Apr	9-May	19-May	3-Jun	15-Jun	25-Jun	5-Jul	15-Jul
Cliff Swallow	s	28	65	34	30	75	100	68	59
Barn Swallow	s	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	3
Oak Titmouse	r	10	13	4	7	2	1	6	5
Bushtit	r	16	19	2	6	17	0	12	37
Bewick's Wren	r	15	25	16	17	6	4	9	14
House Wren	r	23	40	14	8	1	1	0	0
Western Bluebird	r	9	5	8	3	7	3	9	11
Swainson's Thrush	s	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
American Robin	r	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wrentit	r	8	8	5	7	11	9	10	13
Northern Mockingbird	r	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0
California Thrasher	r	0	1	4	2	2	0	1	1
European Starling	r	14	32	15	12	6	7	0	0
Cedar Waxwing	w	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0
Phainopepla	r	0	2	2	4	0	4	4	2
Loggerhead Shrike	r	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Orange-crowned Warbler	w,m	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Yellow Warbler	s,m	4	18	8	3	4	7	1	1
Black-throated Gray Warbler	m	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Townsend's Warbler	m	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Common Yellowthroat	r	12	21	25	17	24	30	8	2
Wilson's Warbler	m	0	13	2	0	0	0	0	0
Yellow-breasted Chat	s	4	4	2	1	6	5	0	1
Western Tanager	m	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Spotted Towhee	r	8	13	17	14	7	3	5	2
California Towhee	r	26	27	52	56	26	36	45	58
Rufous-crowned Sparrow	r	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Lark Sparrow	r	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	2
Savannah Sparrow	w,m	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Song Sparrow	r	72	80	58	32	36	20	4	20
White-crowned Sparrow	w,m	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Black-headed Grosbeak	s	19	18	22	15	16	8	4	1
Blue Grosbeak	s	5	5	2	6	7	8	5	8
Lazuli Bunting	s	4	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Red-winged Blackbird	s	84	100	72	1	1	6	24	0
Brewer's Blackbird	r	15	0	0	1	2	2	0	4
Brown-headed Cowbird	s	35	20	11	10	8	25	17	12
Bullock's Oriole	s	3	14	7	7	7	0	0	0
House Finch	r	20	37	24	28	16	23	45	63
Lesser Goldfinch	r	20	35	17	15	23	21	22	3
Lawrence's Goldfinch	r	0	0	0	8	0	0	0	0
American Goldfinch	w,m,r	7	10	0	0	0	0	0	2

Table 2. BIRDS OF THE SANTA CLARA RIVER BASIN, 2002: Santa Clara River from Los Angeles/Ventura County line to 1/2 mile below Las Brisas Crossing.

Endangered Species and Species of Concern Shaded

SPECIES	STATUS	Dates of Surveys							
		21-Apr	10-May	21-May	5-Jun	16-Jun	26-Jun	6-Jul	15-Jul
Great Blue Heron	m,w	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Great Egret	m,w	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Green Heron	r	2	3	3	2	2	9	6	4
Black-crowned Night-heron	m,w	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
Turkey Vulture	r	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Mallard	r	11	6	5	4	16	9	0	9
White-tailed Kite	r	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Cooper's Hawk	r	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Red-shouldered Hawk	r	0	2	0	0	1	1	4	2
Red-tailed Hawk	r	4	2	0	2	3	0	2	1
American Kestrel	r	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0
California Quail	r	48	10	57	6		5	26	29
Killdeer	r	9	8	5	10	17	8	3	10
Spotted Sandpiper	s	0	3	1	2	4	2	2	3
Least Sandpiper	m	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Western Gull	r	0	40	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rock Dove	r	0	18	4	0	0	0	2	20
Mourning Dove	r	40	84	71	46	49	24	16	41
Common Ground Dove	r	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
Greater Roadrunner	r	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Selasphorus sp.</i>	m	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Black-chinned Hummingbird	s	4	1	0	1	2	0	1	7
Anna's Hummingbird	r	7	10	15	3	12	6	4	15
Costa's Hummingbird	s	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Belted Kingfisher	m	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Acorn Woodpecker	r	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nuttall's Woodpecker	r	3	3	11	8	21	11	5	16
Downy Woodpecker	r	4	6	9	8	5	2	0	7
Hairy Woodpecker	r	3	0	3	2	2	2	1	3
Northern Flicker	r	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0
Western Wood-Pewee	m	0	1	8	1	0	0	0	0
Willow Flycatcher	m	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	0
Pacific Slope Flycatcher	s	1	0	5	2	1	0	1	1
Black Phoebe	r	5	5	8	6	14	6	11	8
Ash-throated Flycatcher	s	17	12	15	12	23	13	11	18
Western Kingbird	s	0	0	3	2	0	0	2	0
Bell's Vireo	s	5	7	7	8	11	4	5	6
Warbling Vireo	m	0	5	1	0	0	0	0	0
Western Scrub Jay	r	8	13	31	11	15	9	8	7
American Crow	r	5	1	5	5	2	5	8	4
Common Raven	r	16	9	4	9	31	15	79	31
Violet-green Swallow	s	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
N. Rough-winged Swallow	s	11	7	7	13		10	12	3

Table 2(cont.). BIRDS OF THE SANTA CLARA RIVER BASIN, 2002: Santa Clara River from the Los Angeles/ Ventura County line to 1/2 mile below Las Brisas Crossing.

Endangered Species and Species of Concern Shaded

SPECIES	STATUS	Dates of Surveys							
		21-Apr	10-May	21-May	5-Jun	16-Jun	26-Jun	6-Jul	15-Jul
Western Bluebird	r	3	1	8	3	1	2	3	2
Swainson's Thrush	m	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
American Robin	r	7	0	2	1	1	0	2	1
Wrentit	r	5	11	30	15	17	11	18	19
California Thrasher	r	1	0	4	2	4	0	5	3
European Starling	r	2	6	15	5	8	1	0	2
Cedar Waxwing	w,m	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Phainopepla	r	1	1	3	4	8	2	2	5
Orange-crowned Warbler	w,m	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Yellow Warbler	s,m	8	12	52	9	16	5	1	2
Black-throated Gray Warbler	m	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Yellow-rumped Warbler	w,m	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hermit Warbler	m	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Common Yellowthroat	r	34	106	50	77	93	55	56	61
Wilson's Warbler	m	4	25	6	0	0	0	0	0
Yellow-breasted Chat	s	7	5	15	14	14	7	5	4
Western Tanager	m	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0
Spotted Towhee	r	44	35	36	24	18	6	12	10
California Towhee	r	61	45	71	42	52	16	17	65
Chipping Sparrow	w,m	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lark Sparrow	r	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
Song Sparrow	r	124	137	86	38	98	93	84	124
Golden-crowned Sparrow	w	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Black-headed Grosbeak	s	23	18	36	24	26	10	5	3
Blue Grosbeak	s	4	0	3	1	11	6	2	8
Lazuli Bunting	s	0	1	2	3	4	0	0	0
Red-winged Blackbird	s	83	98	89	39	39	0	37	6
Brewer's Blackbird	r	10	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Brown-headed Cowbird	s	36	28	20	43	39	22	24	28
Hooded Oriole	s	0	0	10	2	2	0	0	4
Bullock's Oriole	s	4	15	21	6	6	1	1	1
House Finch	r	52	23	46	32	32	34	57	51
Lesser Goldfinch	r	54	86	76	91	95	27	29	83
American Goldfinch	w,m,r	34	4	10	4	5	0	3	8

Status: m, migrant; r, resident; s, summer only; w, winter

Figure 1. Sightings of southwestern willow flycatcher, Ventura County, 2002.

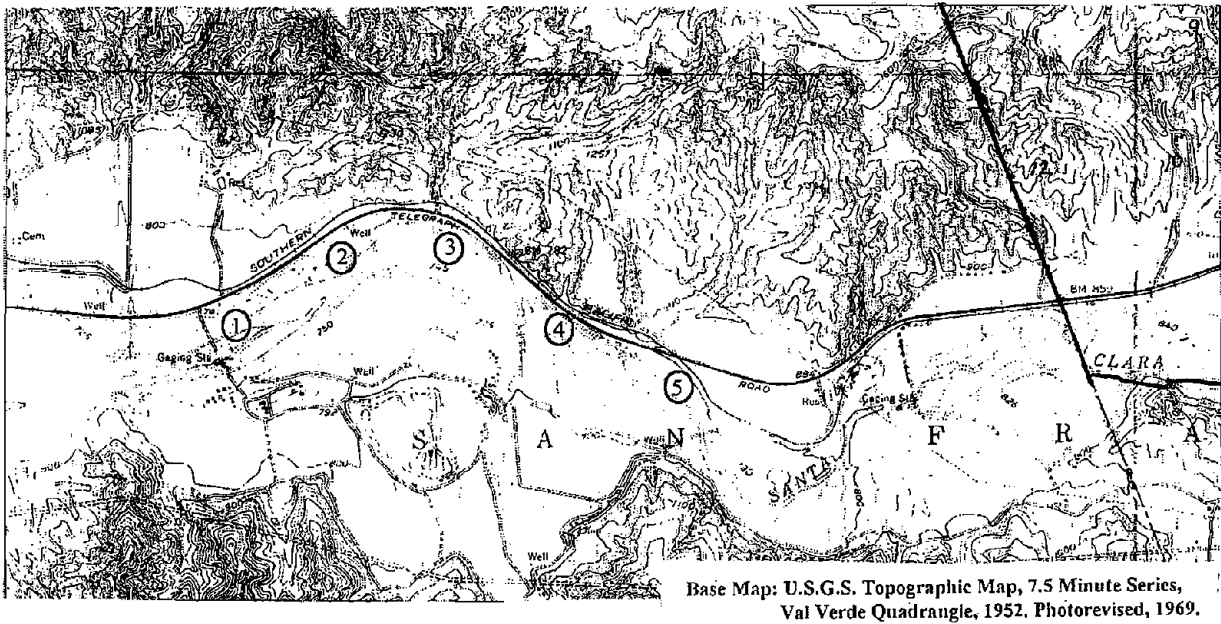


Figure 2. Sightings of southwestern willow flycatcher in Los Angeles County, 2002.

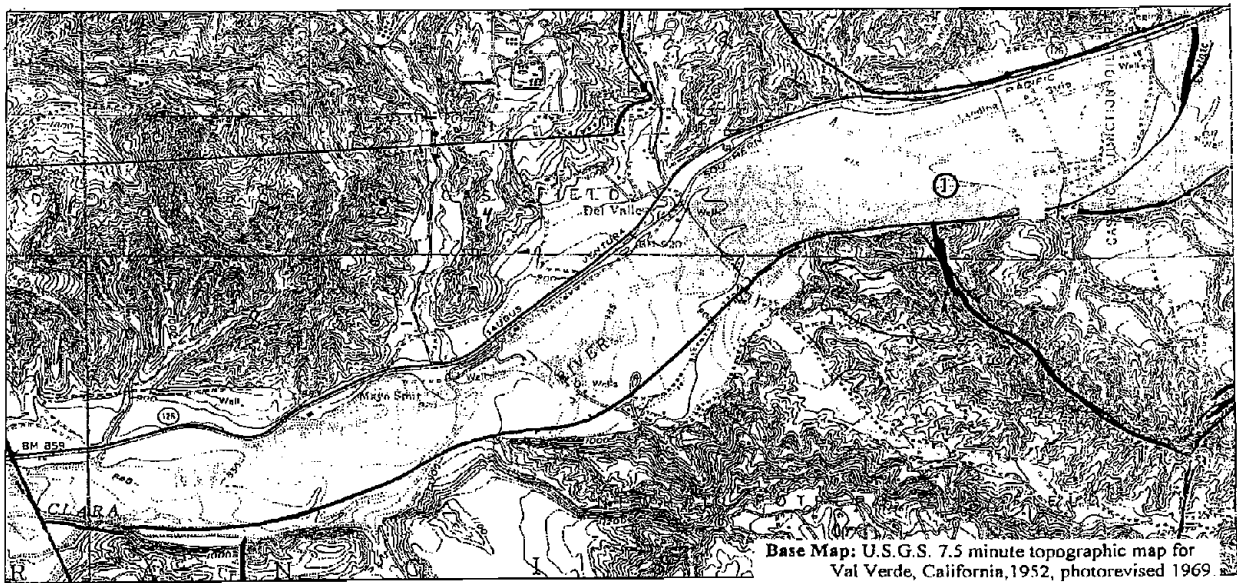
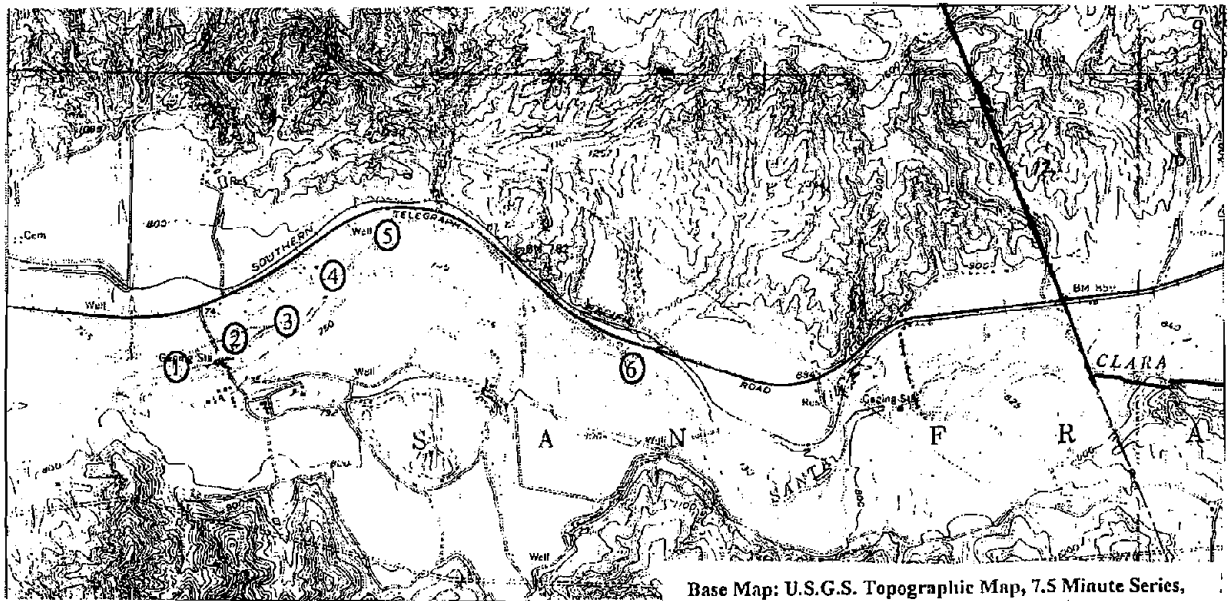


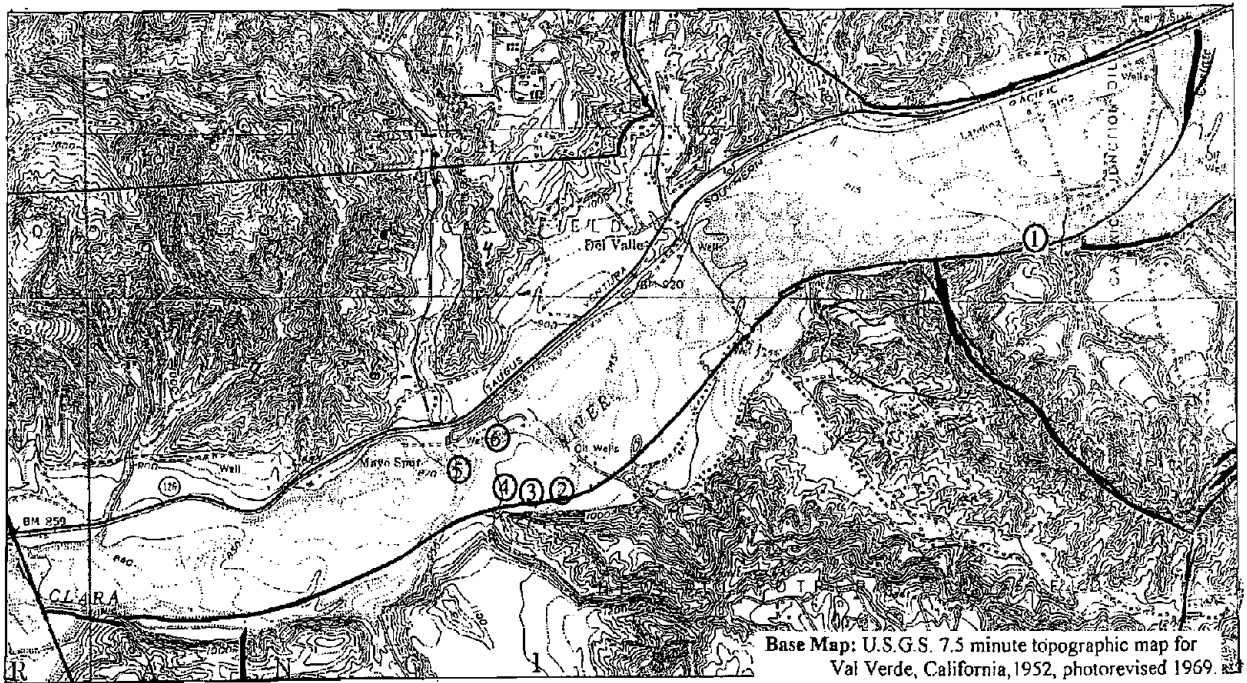
Figure 3. Least Bell's Vireo sightings, Ventura County, 2002



Base Map: U.S.G.S. Topographic Map, 7.5 Minute Series, Val Verde Quadrangle, 1952. Photorevised, 1969.

Numbers 1-6 represent location of sightings of vireos seen on at least 5 surveys.

Figure 4. Sightings of Least Bell's Vireo in Los Angeles County during 2002.



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

- Dates of Sightings:
1. 7/5, 7/15
 2. 4/24, 5/19, 6/26, 7/15
 3. 4/24, 5/19, 6/3, 6/14, 6/26, 7/5
 4. 4/24, 6/3
 5. 6/14, 6/26, 7/5, 7/15
 6. 5/21, 6/3, 6/26, 7/5