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**Guthrie, D.A., "Bird Observations in the Commerce Center Project Site, near  
Valencia, California, 2004" (August 24, 2004; 2004B)**

2004  
Bird

**BIRD OBSERVATIONS IN THE COMMERCE CENTER PROJECT SITE,  
NEAR VALENCIA, CALIFORNIA, 2004**

Prepared for:

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**REVISED**

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**Nature and Scope of Surveys**

During the spring and early summer of 2004 surveys were conducted within the boundaries of the Commerce Center Project Site (Figure 1). The area surveyed is roughly triangular in shape, bounded on the south by route 126, on the east by The Old Road and on the northwest by a series of hills. Much of the area in Hasley Canyon (Fig. 1) has already been developed as has the area to the east of Castaic Creek. The three major areas still undeveloped are shown as Areas A, B, and C in Figure 1. Area A consists of agricultural fields both active and abandoned. Area B is a hilly section covered with sage scrub. Area C consists of steep hillsides at the western end of the study area which are also covered predominantly with sage scrub habitat. Smaller areas of undeveloped land lie along the north side of Castaic Creek.

Surveys were focused on determining presence or absence of California gnatcatcher, and followed U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Guidelines for this species. Surveys followed the protocol for non-NCCP areas, involving 6 surveys of each area, occurring between March 15 and June 30 (see Table 1 for exact dates). Each survey involved two observers and lasted about 3 hours (7:30 to 10:30 a.m.), with each observer covering an area less than 80 acres of suitable habitat.

Each survey was conducted on foot by observers well acquainted with both visual and auditory characteristics of southern California birds. Tapes of calls of California gnatcatcher were played periodically along survey routes in an attempt to elicit a response. Survey routes were designed to visit all areas within the Proposed Project Area. However, routes for regular coverage were selected through preliminary surveys and were designed to cover all areas of appropriate habitat for the focus species. Personnel for all surveys were Daniel A. Guthrie and Judith A. Sugden, both working under Federal Fish and Wildlife Service Permit number TE810394-2, issued under section 10(a)(1)(A) of the Endangered Species Act.

On each survey, numbers of all species observed were noted and, in addition to the gnatcatcher, special attention was placed on locating species considered rare and endangered or of Special Concern, and on determining numbers of raptorial birds. Table 1 presents all observations during these surveys.

## Habitat Condition and Bird Observations.

Much of the area south of Castaic Creek was under cultivation. A portion of the this area, indicated as A (figure 1) had been graded in the past but has been fallow for several years. The area is dominated by non-native weeds and a few sage scrub species. A bare area was a site for horned lark nesting. Area B (fig. 1) consisted of a hilly area covered with sage scrub habitat plus a disturbed area along the north side of Castaic Creek dominated by non-native plants. Area C (fig. 1) consists of two sections of steep dry hillsides. Canyons in this area show evidence of some disturbance from flood control efforts, but are well vegetated by sage scrub habitat.

The avifauna (see Table 1) is dominated by coastal sage species, with mourning dove, California quail, Bewick's wren and California towhee being the common species. Grassy areas support mourning dove and a few lark sparrow and the previously plowed area to the east of Castaic Creek (Area A, Figure 1) had one or two pair of horned larks. Ornamental plantings around commercial property within the study area attracted many house finch and Bullock's orioles.

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. Some censuses were not complete but, rather, were focused on particular places or areas. Also, 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. Many species that nest in the area also migrate through the area to more northern portions of their ranges. Thus, numbers of nesting species observed in May, which include migratory birds passing through the area, do not give an accurate count of actual resident birds.

## Comments on Threatened and Endangered Species

### California Gnatcatcher (*Poliopitila californica*)

The California Gnatcatcher was listed as a Threatened species under the Federal Endangered

Species Act in 1993. Preferred habitat includes various sage scrub communities, often dominated by California sage (*Artemisia californica*) and buckwheat (*Eriogonum sp.*). California gnatcatchers generally avoid nesting in areas with a slope of greater than 40%. Although the area surveyed here is outside the Designated Critical Habitat for the California gnatcatcher, it is near to areas designated as critical habitat on the south side of route 126. (Federal Register, 2003)

Survey routes were selected to cover prime habitat for California Gnatcatcher, namely, stands of dense Sage Scrub in canyon bottoms and on north facing hillsides with slopes of less than 40%. No California gnatcatchers were heard or observed during our surveys.

### Comments on Sensitive Species

#### Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*)

This is a California Species of Special Concern. A single shrike was observed on June 6<sup>th</sup> hunting in area B. No evidence of nesting in the Project Site was observed.

#### California Horned Lark (*Eremophila alpestris actia*)

This species is a California Special Concern species. One to two pair of horned larks were observed on bare agricultural fields within the study area and behaved as if nesting in area B.

#### Southern California Rufous-crowned Sparrow (*Aimophila ruficeps canescens*)

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 on steep hillside sage habitat of area C.

### Summary

California gnatcatchers were not observed on the site. Birds of the site are those typical of dry sage scrub habitat and two of the observed species which probably nest on the site, horned lark and Southern California rufous-crowned sparrow, are considered Species of Concern. A third species of Special Concern, the loggerhead shrike was observed once foraging on the study site.

### References

Federal Register, 2003. Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Designation of Critical Habitat for the Coastal California Gnatcatcher (*Poliophtila californica californica*) and Determination of Distinct Vertebrate Population for the California Gnatcatcher *Poliophtila californica*. Vol 68, no 79 April 24, 2003, p. 20228.

Table 1. Birds of the Commerce Center Project Site, 2004.

Endangered Species and Species of Concern Shaded

SPECIES	STATUS	Dates of Surveys					
		23- Apr	30- Apr	13- May	25- May	6- Jun	15- Jun
Turkey Vulture	s	0	1	0	0	1	1
Red-tailed Hawk	r	4	2	0	3	0	2
American Kestrel	r	0	2	1	3	1	1
California Quail	r	17	8	28	12	36	31
Rock Dove	r	2	15	0	8	0	200
Mourning Dove	r	7	14	22	20	21	15
White-th. Swift	r	4	4	0	0	0	0
Black-chin. Hummingbird	s	3	2	0	0	0	0
Anna's Hummingbird	r	5	11	5	3	1	4
Costa's Hummingbird	s	0	1	0	0	2	0
Allen's Hummingbird	r,m	1	0	0	0	0	0
Nuttall's Woodpecker	r	2	0	0	0	0	0
Black Phoebe	r	0	0	0	0	0	1
Say's Phoebe	r	0	0	0	0	1	1
Ash-throated Flycatcher	s	3	6	0	2	6	3
Western Kingbird	s	5	2	1	0	11	3
Western Scrub Jay	r	6	10	10	9	6	8
American Crow	r	1	0	2	0	1	0
Common Raven	r	4	0	3	3	2	7
Tree Swallow	s	0	1	0	0	0	0
Violet-green Swallow	s	20	7	0	3	0	0
N. Rough-winged Swallow	s	6	8	3	5	0	4
Cliff Swallow	s	18	150	4	25	230	6
Barn Swallow	s	0	0	0	1	0	2
Oak Titmouse	r	0	0	0	0	2	0
Bushtit	r	2	6	2	4	2	0
Bewick's Wren	r	11	22	11	15	7	18
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	r	0	0	0	0	1	0
Western Bluebird	r	0	1	0	0	2	0
American Robin	r	0	0	0	1	1	2
Wrentit	r	42	20	5	9	3	20
Northern Mockingbird	r	2	2	4	2	5	0
California Thrasher	r	11	5	1	0	4	3
European Starling	r	1	7	3	0	4	0
Phainopepla	r	0	0	1	2	6	4
Wilson's Warbler	m	1	0	0	0	0	0
Western Tanager	m	1	0	0	0	0	0
Spotted Towhee	r	11	10	2	12	1	4
California Towhee	r	62	28	9	17	10	21

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		<b><u>23-</u> <u>Apr</u></b>	<b><u>30-</u> <u>Apr</u></b>	<b><u>13-</u> <u>May</u></b>	<b><u>25-</u> <u>May</u></b>	<b><u>6-</u> <u>Jun</u></b>	<b><u>15-</u> <u>Jun</u></b>
<b>White-throated Sparrow</b>							
Lark Sparrow	r	1	0	2	0	3	2
Song Sparrow	r	0	0	6	0	0	0
Black-headed Grosbeak	s	0	1	0	0	0	0
Blue Grosbeak	s	1	2	0	0	0	1
Red-winged Blackbird	s	0	2	2	0	0	0
Brewer's Blackbird	r	0	0	0	0	2	0
Brown-headed Cowbird	s	0	0	4	2	2	0
Hooded Oriole	s	2	4	0	0	3	0
Bullock's Oriole	s	1	8	10	3	13	4
House Finch	r	32	10	114	49	64	27
Lesser Goldfinch	r	0	0	5	3	5	7
House Sparrow	r	0	0	18	0	6	0

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

Figure 1. Map showing study area of Valencia Commerce Center Project

