
**Guthrie, D.A., "Bird Observations in the Stevenson Ranch, Phase 5 Area,
near Valencia, California, 2004" (July 2, 2004: 2004C)**

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BIRD OBSERVATIONS IN THE STEVENSON RANCH, PHASE 5 AREA
NEAR VALENCIA, CALIFORNIA, 2004

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DRAFT

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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 Stevenson Ranch, Phase 5 (Figure 1). 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 1,2 for exact dates). Each survey involved two observers and lasted about 3.5 hours (6:30 to 10:00 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.

Habitat Condition and Bird Observations.

A previous study of the site (Impact Sciences 2000) included a map of vegetational types for Stevenson Ranch, Phase 5. While much of the site is covered by chaparral and other dense shrub vegetation (cherry woodland, oak woodland) three areas in particular contain large tracts of sage scrub communities (Figure 1). Two of these areas, in Pico Canyon and Potrero Canyon, were

burned over in 1993 and contained very little remaining suitable habitat for gnatcatchers. The upper section of Long Canyon, and areas along the northern edge of the site contained large tracts of undisturbed sage scrub habitat and were the major focus of all survey work. Surveys focused on sites where California sage (*Artemesia californica*) and buckwheat (*Eriogonum sp.*) were dominant and where slopes were less than 40%. However, in the course of surveys every area of the Stevenson Ranch, Phase 5 area was visited.

Observations of the avifauna are presented in tables 1 and 2. Table 1 covers observations in the southern and western half of the site and includes Long, Potrero and Pico Canyons. Table 2 contains observations from the northern half of the site and the eastern edge adjacent to developed areas.

Dominant birds in the survey areas include species typical of chaparral and sage scrub with California quail, mourning dove, Bewick's wren, wren-tit, western scrub jay, spotted and California towhee and rufous-crowned sparrow being the common species. Lack of any permanent water or development of riparian vegetation caused a near total absence of riparian species such as song sparrow and yellow warbler. Oak woodlands at the head of Potrero Canyon supported acorn woodpecker and Cooper's and sharp-shinned hawks.

The numbers shown in Tables 1 and 2 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 (*Polioptila 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 (*Artemesia californica*) and buckwheat (*Eriogonum sp.*)

California gnatcatchers generally avoid nesting in areas with a slope of greater than 40%.

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. No California gnatcatchers were heard or observed. Several blue-gray gnatcatchers were found nesting in scrub oak areas on the study site.

Comments on Sensitive Species

Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*)

The sharp-shinned hawk is considered a Species of Special Concern by the State of California. This species is found in southern California only in winter, and was observed on the study site in late March and early April.

Cooper's Hawk (*Accipiter cooperi*)

Cooper's hawk is considered a Species of Special Concern by the State of California. A pair of Cooper's hawks nested in the oak woodland in Potrero Canyon.

Yellow Warbler (*Dendroica petechia*)

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. Single yellow warblers were observed in April and early May and, as no nesting was observed in subsequent visits, were probably migrating through the area.

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 throughout the unburned portions of the site.

Bell's Sage Sparrow (*Amphispiza belli belli*)

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. Bell's sage sparrows were observed once in dry sage scrub habitat on cliffs near the eastern edge of the study site and probably nest in small numbers in the area.

Lawrence's Goldfinch (*Carduelis lawrencei*)

This species, which occurs sporadically in chaparral habitat, 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. Lawrence's goldfinch was observed rarely in the study area.

Summary

California gnatcatchers were not observed on the site. Birds of the site are those typical of chaparral, sage scrub and oak woodland habitat. Three California Special Concern species, Cooper's hawk, southern California rufous-crowned sparrow and Bell's sage sparrow nest on the site while two other Special Concern Species, sharp-shinned hawk and yellow warbler, were observed migrating through the area.

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.

Impact Sciences, 2000. Results of Focused Surveys for the Coastal California Gnatcatcher, ±156 acre Project Site, Santa Clarita, Los Angeles County, California.

Table 1. Birds of the Stevenson Ranch, Phase 5, Southern Half, 2004:

Endangered Species and Species of Concern Shaded

SPECIES	STATUS	Dates of Surveys					
		1- Apr	8- Apr	29- Apr	9- May	3- Jun	16- Jun
Turkey Vulture	s	2	1	1	1	1	0
Cooper's Hawk	r	0	0	0	0	0	3
Red-tailed Hawk	r	8	2	1	1	3	0
California Quail	r	98	138	32	80	75	32
Killdeer	r	0	0	0	0	0	3
Spotted Sandpiper	s	0	0	0	0	0	1
Rock Dove	r	0	20	30	0	0	0
Mourning Dove	r	36	38	18	54	37	17
Greater Roadrunner	r	0	0	0	2	0	0
Barn Owl	r	0	0	2	0	0	0
White-th. Swift	r	3	1	2	1	2	1
Black-chinned Hummingbird	s	0	0	0	0	3	1
Anna's Hummingbird	r	13	8	22	5	17	13
Costa's Hummingbird	s	0	2	0	0	0	0
Rufous Hummingbird	m	1	0	0	0	0	0
Allen's Hummingbird	r,m	2	3	0	0	0	0
Acorn Woodpecker	r	0	0	4	1	0	0
Nuttall's Woodpecker	r	5	0	0	1	7	0
Northern Flicker	r	1	0	0	0	0	0
Pacific Slope Flycatcher	s	0	0	1	0	0	0
Black Phoebe	r	2	0	1	0	3	4
Say's Phoebe	r	0	0	2	0	2	0
Ash-throated Flycatcher	s	0	3	6	10	4	11
Cassin's Kingbird	s	2	2	0	0	0	0
Western Kingbird	s	12	2	4	4	2	1
Western Scrub Jay	r	27	25	14	56	31	12
American Crow	r	0	0	0	0	0	2
Common Raven	r	15	10	7	6	5	9
Violet-green Swallow	s	0	0	0	0	8	5
N. Rough-winged Swallow	s	0	0	4	2	4	0
Cliff Swallow	s	14	0	60	0	27	97
Barn Swallow	s	0	0	0	0	0	1
Oak Titmouse	r	2	2	2	2	0	7
Bushtit	r	21	18	6	31	27	19
Bewick's Wren	r	23	36	59	67	33	15
House Wren	r	3	4	2	4	1	0
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	r	12	2	2	2	2	6
Western Bluebird	r	0	0	0	0	0	6
Hermit Thrush	w,m	1	1	0	0	0	0
Wrentit	r	28	58	52	72	40	22
Northern Mockingbird	r	7	2	4	16	20	3
California Thrasher	r	4	18	6	8	5	4

Table 1 (cont.). Birds of the Stevenson Ranch, Phase 5, Southern Half, 2004:

Endangered Species and Species of Concern Shaded

SPECIES	STATUS	Dates of Surveys					
		1- Apr	8- Apr	29- Apr	9- May	3- Jun	16- Jun
European Starling	r	0	1	3	2	5	2
Phainopepla	r	1	0	3	74	55	8
Orange-crowned Warbler	w,m	9	8	8	0	2	0
Yellow Warbler	s,m	1	0	0	0	0	0
Black-th. Gray Warbler	m	0	1	0	0	0	0
Common Yellowthroat	r	1	0	0	1	2	3
Wilson's Warbler	m	0	1	1	5	0	0
Western Tanager	m	0	0	0	1	0	0
Spotted Towhee	r	19	25	34	55	70	28
California Towhee	r	46	73	48	74	64	25
Rufous-crowned Sparrow	r	15	32	14	11	6	0
Lark Sparrow	r	0	0	5	0	0	2
Sage Sparrow	r	0	2	0	0	0	0
Song Sparrow	r	0	0	2	4	1	4
Lincoln's Sparrow	w,m	3	3	0	0	0	0
White-crowned Sparrow	w,m	15	10	0	1	0	0
Golden-crowned Sparrow	w,m	17	8	0	0	0	0
Black-headed Grosbeak	s	1	8	18	62	34	11
Blue Grosbeak	s	0	0	1	0	0	0
Lazuli Bunting	s	0	0	6	4	0	0
Brown-headed Cowbird	s	0	0	7	8	6	5
Hooded Oriole	s	2	0	1	0	0	0
Bullock's Oriole	s	8	0	0	16	25	0
House Finch	r	36	47	64	24	54	116
Lesser Goldfinch	r	0	0	10	0	2	22
Lawrence's Goldfinch	r	2	0	0	0	0	0

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

Table 2. Birds of the Stevenson Ranch, Phase 5, Northern Half, 2004

Endangered Species and Species of Concern Shaded

SPECIES	STATUS	Dates of Surveys					
		23-Mar	6-Apr	28-Apr	11-May	7-Jun	18-Jun
Turkey Vulture	s	0	3	0	0	0	1
Sharp-shinned Hawk	m,w	3	1	0	0	0	0
Cooper's Hawk	r	0	1	0	0	0	1
Red-tailed Hawk	r	1	2	1	1	0	3
California Quail	r	62	460	102	150	142	98
Mourning Dove	r	35	34	18	36	7	65
Barn Owl	r	0	0	0	0	0	2
White-th. Swift	r	0	2	0	1	2	0
Black-chinned Hummingbird	s	0	0	0	0	1	0
Anna's Hummingbird	r	2	6	3	8	3	5
Allen's Hummingbird	r,m	0	0	0	0	1	0
Acorn Woodpecker	r	0	0	3	0	0	1
Nuttall's Woodpecker	r	2	1	0	0	0	0
Black Phoebe	r	0	1	0	1	0	0
Say's Phoebe	r	0	0	1	1	0	0
Ash-throated Flycatcher	s	0	2	6	3	8	11
Cassin's Kingbird	s	0	4	0	0	0	0
Western Kingbird	s	0	9	2	2	4	0
Warbling Vireo	m	0	0	0	1	0	0
Western Scrub Jay	r	4	30	12	22	20	22
American Crow	r	0	0	0	0	4	1
Common Raven	r	11	18	5	6	7	9
Tree Swallow	s	0	2	0	0	0	0
Violet-green Swallow	s	0	0	0	0	2	0
N. Rough-winged Swallow	s	0	0	0	0	52	2
Cliff Swallow	s	0	0	0	0	6	24
Oak Titmouse	r	0	0	0	7	2	3
Bushtit	r	13	22	0	24	10	14
Bewick's Wren	r	2	39	23	42	32	28
House Wren	r	0	4	3	4	0	0
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	r	0	0	0	2	2	2
Western Bluebird	r	0	0	2	0	0	6
Hermit Thrush	w,m	4	0	0	0	0	0
American Robin	m	12	0	0	0	0	0
Wrentit	r	18	72	16	60	14	47
Northern Mockingbird	r	4	8	2	10	4	17
California Thrasher	r	4	19	7	12	2	4
European Starling	r	0	0	0	0	0	2
Phainopepla	r	0	2	4	24	11	23
Orange-crowned Warbler	w,m	0	6	0	3	0	0

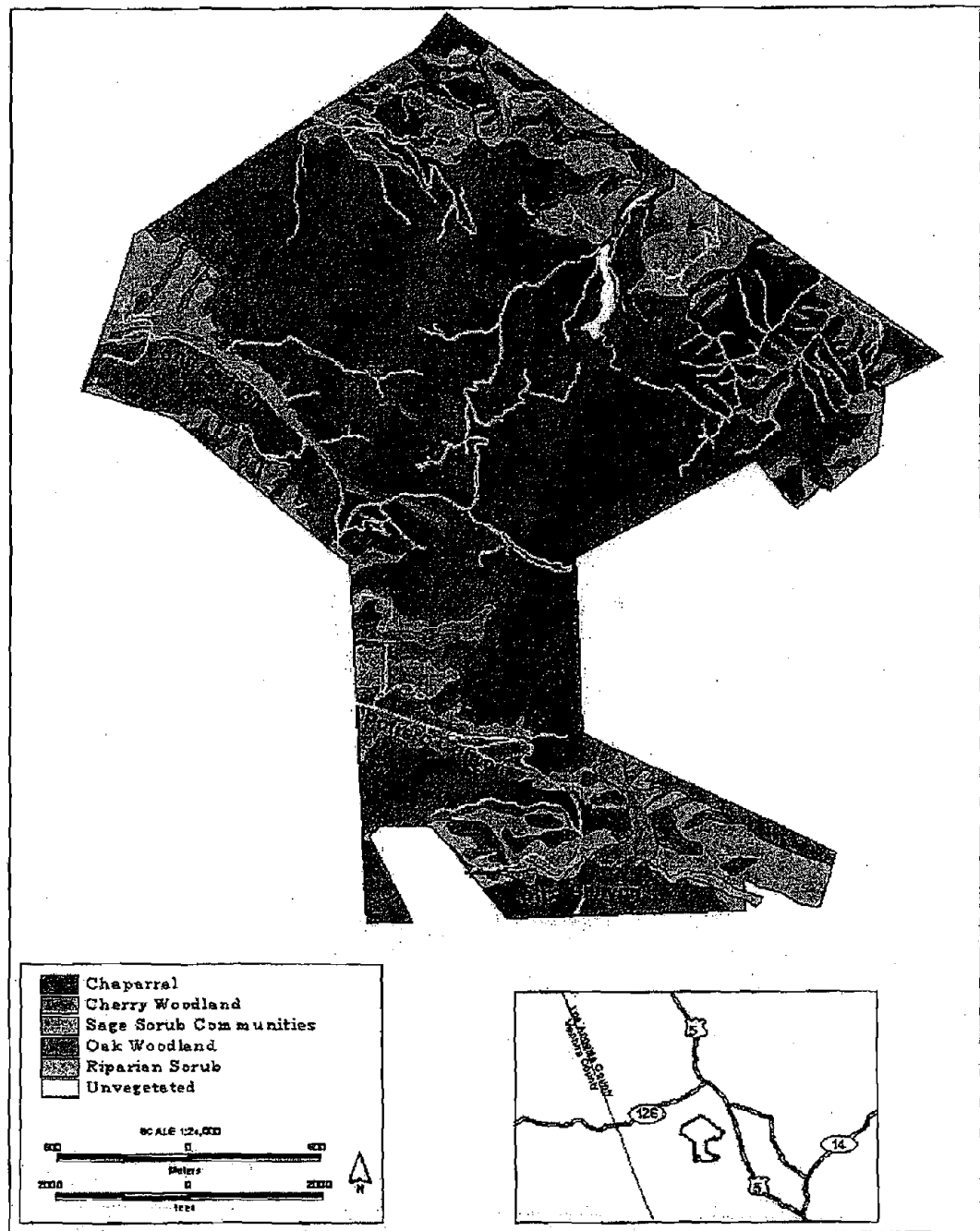
Table 2 (cont.). Birds of the Stevenson Ranch, Phase 5, Southern Half, 2004:

Endangered Species and Species of Concern Shaded

<u>SPECIES</u>	<u>STATUS</u>	<u>Dates of Surveys</u>					
		<u>23- Mar</u>	<u>6- Apr</u>	<u>28- Apr</u>	<u>11- May</u>	<u>7-Jun</u>	<u>18- Jun</u>
Yellow Warbler	s,m	0	0	1	1	0	0
Common Yellowthroat	r	0	0	1	0	0	0
Wilson's Warbler	m	0	0	0	1	0	0
Spotted Towhee	r	6	33	17	55	47	36
California Towhee	r	20	114	36	80	46	72
Rufous-crowned Sparrow	r	0	18	2	16	12	0
Lark Sparrow	r	0	0	0	0	0	2
Fox Sparrow	w	1	1	0	0	0	0
Song Sparrow	r	0	1	0	0	1	0
Lincoln's Sparrow	w,m	0	1	0	0	0	0
White-crowned Sparrow	w	8	12	0	0	0	0
Dark-eyed Junco	w	1	2	0	0	0	0
Black-headed Grosbeak	s	0	10	12	20	13	11
Blue Grosbeak	s	0	0	0	1	0	0
Lazuli Bunting	s	0	0	5	0	0	0
Red-winged Blackbird	s	0	0	0	0	6	0
Western Meadowlark	r	1	0	0	0	0	0
Brown-headed Cowbird	s	0	0	0	4	0	5
Hooded Oriole	s	0	2	0	0	0	0
Bullock's Oriole	s	0	5	7	9	0	0
House Finch	r	0	20	14	81	106	360
Lesser Goldfinch	r	0	0	0	0	2	3

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

Figure 1. Vegetation Map of Stevenson Ranch, Phase 5, with major locality names.



Map derived from Impact Science Inc. report of July 7, 2000

