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MEMO

Client: Friends of the Los Angeles River
Attn: Johanna Hackett
Date: April 27, 2017
Re: Nesting bird and sensitive-species surveys of sites along the Los Angeles River and tributaries: Long Beach area

Description of work

We conducted pre-work surveys for nesting birds and sensitive species at several areas along the Los Angeles River and its tributaries in 2017 in preparation for a large, multi-site river cleanup taking place this month (Figure 1). This memo summarizes findings from surveys at four sites in the Long Beach area on April 25, 2017, which are scheduled for cleanup on April 29, 2017.

The cleanup will involve teams of volunteers at pre-determined sites along the river hauling trash and non-natural debris out of the riverbed and up onto the levee for disposal. Potential impacts to riverine habitats include trampling and disruption of soil and vegetation through trash removal. Noise and general human activity is not felt to be an impact due to the existing high noise level along the river channel (the Los Angeles River runs adjacent to freeways and/or train tracks for most of its length), and because of the high human usage of much of the study area, including unauthorized camping by homeless people.

Pre-work surveys consisted of a biologist walking slowly and deliberately through and adjacent to the habitat targeted for trash cleanup, making note of all visible wildlife encountered. Special attention was paid to species deemed to have special status by regulatory agencies, including Species of Special Concern (CDFW), as well as nesting birds likely to be impacted by river-cleanup activity. Two additional biologists (aside from Daniel S. Cooper, DSC) were used for the surveys: Robert A. Hamilton (RAH; president, Hamilton Biological), and Michael C. Long (MCL; retired Natural Areas Director, County of Los Angeles). All have experience conducting bird surveys in Los Angeles County, and Michael “Mickey” Long is a local plant expert active in the San Gabriel Mountains chapter of the California Native Plant Society.

Here we treat the following four sites, each surveyed on April 25 (all surveyed by Robert Hamilton):

1. Compton Creek – Artesia Station, 2:35 – 3:05 PM, 71° F
2. Compton Creek – Del Amo Station, 1:05 – 2:25 PM, 70° F
3. L.A. River south of Willow St., 5:00 – 6:00 PM, 66° F
4. Golden Shore Marine Reserve, 6:10 – 6:40 PM, 64° F



Figure 1. Map showing general locations surveyed.

Survey Results

Nesting birds

In coastal southern California, the bird nesting period typically extends from late February through mid-August, and all active/occupied nests are protected by the State of California Fish & Game Code and the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act. We found no clearly active nests (probably due to difficulty of accessing islands of habitat within channel) but found several areas likely to hold nesting birds on the day of the cleanup. Most nesting areas will be easily avoided during the proposed cleanup event, as described in detail below. Note: we are not addressing birds nesting up under bridges; these require more specialized survey methods than those employed here, and the birds nesting under bridges unlikely to be affected by participants on the ground.

Sensitive species

Concurrent to the nesting bird survey, we searched for individuals of several special-status plant and wildlife species known to occur along the Los Angeles River and its tributaries. Two special-status species, both California Bird Species of Special Concern, were encountered: a Yellow Warbler (*Setophaga petechia*) in the vicinity of the Willow St. cleanup site, and 240 Black Skimmers (*Rhychops niger*) at the Golden Shore Marine Reserve site. The warbler was a singing male and presumed to have been a migrant. The skimmers were

roosting on an exposed mudflat during low tide (the skimmer's nearest known breeding colonies are near Terminal Island and at Bolsa Chica State Beach).

No other sensitive wildlife was encountered.

Golden Shore Marine Reserve features a coastal saltmarsh and mudflat habitat, which are considered by the State of California to be rare habitat types. The Willow St. site on the L.A. River and the two Compton Creek sites support freshwater marsh, which is generally considered by the State of California to be a rare habitat type. Mature willow forest is absent from these sites, though a small stand of willows is present at the Artesia Station site and another occupies a small island at the Willow St. site (and not accessible on foot).

Site detail and recommendations

Note: complete species lists are provided at the end of this memo.

Compton Creek, Artesia Station

The riparian/freshwater marsh habitat in this small area is limited, and relatively few birds were observed in the creek.

No specific recommendations for volunteers.

Compton Creek, Del Amo Station

Numerous Common Yellowthroats, Song Sparrows, and Red-winged Blackbirds were observed in the reeds (*Scirpus* sp.) directly along the main channel of Compton Creek, as well as in the broad, weedy borders of the creek (see Figures 2 and 3 on the next page).

Participants should avoid entering dense reed beds and the areas with the densest weedy vegetation. Cleanup activities in the less-dense weeds away from the centerline of the creek channel would not be expected to impact nesting birds.

L.A. River South of Willow St.

Figure 4 on Page 5 shows potential nesting bird constraints.

Participants should avoid entering dense reed beds. Participants should generally avoid any area where Killdeers are performing "broken-wing" or other distraction displays, as this generally indicates that a well-camouflaged ground nest, or very small chick(s), are in the area.



Figure 4. Yellow shaded area denotes dense marsh habitat south of Willow Street, which constitutes likely nesting habitat for Common Yellowthroats, Song Sparrows, and Red-winged Blackbirds.

Golden Shore Marine Reserve

No nesting or potentially nesting birds were observed; this site is very small and would not be expected to support any sensitive wetland or saltmarsh bird species except as transients.

No specific recommendations for volunteers.

Species Lists (all 4/25/17)

Compton Creek – Artesia Station, Los Angeles, US-CA

April 25, 2017, 2:35 – 3:05 PM, 71° F

Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*) 1
 Nuttall's Woodpecker (*Picoides nuttallii*) 1
 Northern Rough-winged Swallow (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*) 1
 Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*) 2
 Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*) 1
 Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*) 4
 House Finch (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) 10
 House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) 6

Compton Creek – Del Amo Station, Los Angeles, US-CA

April 25, 2017, 1:05 – 2:25 PM, 70° F

Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) 3
 Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) 1
 Green Heron (*Butorides virescens*) 1
 Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) 1
 Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*) 3
 Western Gull (*Larus occidentalis*) 3
 Eurasian Collared-Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*) 1
 Allen's Hummingbird (*Selasphorus sasin*) 1
 Black Phoebe (*Sayornis nigricans*) 2
 Cassin's Kingbird (*Tyrannus vociferans*) 1

American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) 3
 Common Raven (*Corvus corax*) 2
 Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) 1
 Bushtit (*Psaltriparus minimus*) 8
 Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*) 2
 European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) 8
 Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*) 2
 Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*) 11
 Western Tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*) 1
 Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) 40; many apparently nesting in reeds along main channel
 Hooded Oriole (*Icterus cucullatus*) 1
 House Finch (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) 20
 American Goldfinch (*Spinus tristis*) 2
 House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) 20

Los Angeles River below Willow St., Los Angeles, US-CA

April 25, 2017, 5:00 – 6:00 PM, 66° F

Canada Goose (*moffitti/maxima*) (*Branta canadensis moffitti/maxima*) 4
 Gadwall (*Anas strepera*) 2
 Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) 36 (20 adults plus 16 chicks in two broods)
 Bufflehead (*Bucephala albeola*) 1
 Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) 1
 American Coot (*Fulica americana*) 12
 Black-necked Stilt (*Himantopus mexicanus*) 14
 American Avocet (*Recurvirostra americana*) 4
 Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*) 1
 Least Sandpiper (*Calidris minutilla*) 30
 Long-billed Dowitcher (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*) 6
 Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularius*) 2
 Vaux's Swift (*Chaetura vauxi*) 1
 White-throated Swift (*Aeronautes saxatalis*) 5
 Anna's Hummingbird (*Calypte anna*) 1
 American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) 10
 Common Raven (*Corvus corax*) 1
 Northern Rough-winged Swallow (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*) 50
 Barn Swallow (American) (*Hirundo rustica erythrogaster*) 4
 Cliff Swallow (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) 100
 European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) 40
 Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*) 1
 Yellow Warbler (*Setophaga petechia*) 1
 Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*) 2
 Yellow Warbler (*Setophaga petechia*) 1 heard singing in willows; likely migrant
 Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*) 2

Golden Shore Marine Reserve, Los Angeles, US-CA

April 25, 2017, 6:10 – 6:40 PM, 64° F

Eared Grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*) 1
 Caspian Tern (*Hydroprogne caspia*) 6
 Black Skimmer (*Rynchops niger*) 240 roosting on mudflat
 American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) 1
 Northern Rough-winged Swallow (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*) 1
 Barn Swallow (American) (*Hirundo rustica erythrogaster*) 1
 Bushtit (Pacific) (*Psaltriparus minimus* [minimus Group]) 2
 Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*) 1
 House Finch (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) 4