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MEMO

Client: Friends of the Los Angeles River
Attn: Johanna Hackett
Date: April 12, 2017
Re: Nesting bird and sensitive-species surveys of sites along the Los Angeles River and tributaries: San Fernando Valley

Description of work

We are conducting 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 scheduled for three dates in April 2017 (Figure 1). This memo summarizes findings from surveys at four sites in the San Fernando Valley on April 11, 2017, which are scheduled for cleanup on April 15, 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. The biologist (for Daniel S. Cooper, DSC) used for the surveys was Michael C. Long (MCL; retired Natural Areas Director, County of Los Angeles). Michael “Mickey” Long has experience conducting bird surveys in Los Angeles County, and is a local plant expert active in the San Gabriel Mountains chapter of the California Native Plant Society.

The following four sites were surveyed as follows:

1. Big Tujunga Wash at Haines Cyn. Channel (east of 210 Fwy., end of Wentworth Ave.)
 - April 11, 7:27 - 8:37 AM (MCL)
 - Checklist: <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S35881485>
2. LAR/Sepulveda Basin west of Balboa Blvd. (north side of LAR)
 - April 11, 9:06 - 9:56 AM (MCL)
 - Checklist: <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S35882159>
3. LAR/“Glendale Riverwalk” and Bette Davis Park, Burbank (east and west of Riverside Dr.)
 - April 11, 10:30 – 11:35 AM (MCL)
 - Checklist: <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S35882758>

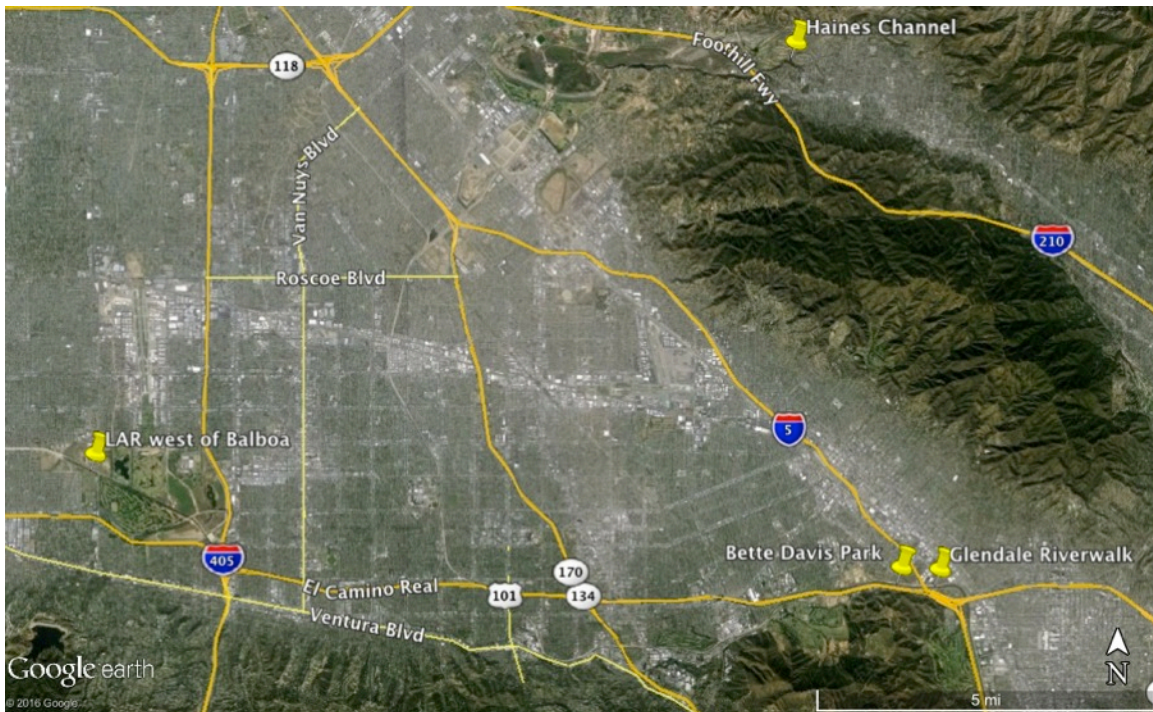


Figure 1. Map showing locations of areas surveyed for the April 16, 2016 clean-up, San Fernando Valley subregion.

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 under the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act. While we encountered no active nests (probably due to difficulty of accessing islands of habitat within channel), we found several areas likely to hold nesting birds on the day of the cleanup. Also of note is that gusty winds at the early morning sites may have reduced the bird activity and detectability, thus all precautions listed for cleanup work should be heeded. Most nesting areas will be easily avoided during the proposed cleanup event, and these are 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 are not likely 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. One special-status species is likely in the vicinity of the proposed cleanup areas, the yellow warbler (*Dendroica petechia*; California Bird Species of Special Concern), but it was not found this year (last year, in 2016, it was found at Glendale Narrows).

In addition, in past surveys singing least Bell's vireos (*Vireo bellii pusillus*) and a singing yellow-breasted chat (*Icteria virens*) have been detected along the north side of the Los Angeles River south of Lake Balboa, but well east of the area slated for the cleanup.

No other sensitive wildlife was encountered.

No special-status plant species was encountered; however, the Tujunga Wash site is located adjacent to a fairly pristine example of Alluvial Fan Scrub, considered by the State of California to be a rare habitat type, with arid scrub (no water) and abundant native wildflowers.

All sites had various types of riparian vegetation, some of which are considered by the State of California to be rare habitat types. Mature willow forest, typically a fairly linear "gallery forest", is present at the Haines Canyon site, the Lake Balboa/Sepulveda Basin site, and adjacent to Bette Davis Park/Glendale Riverwalk.

Site detail and recommendations

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

Tujunga Wash @ Haines Cyn.

No active nests were noted.

Recommendations: Participants should avoid stepping in water, particularly pools of shallow water, and should stay away from the adjacent alluvial fan scrub habitat nearby, and focus on the riparian areas only.

L.A. River @ Lake Balboa

The Los Angeles River channel was surveyed from Balboa Ave. west (upstream) approximately ¼ mi., along the north side of channel to even with the west end of the sports fields to the north. No nesting birds were observed. As a note, three separate homeless encampments were noted here (north side of channel) so caution should be taken when entering.

Participants should stay on established footpaths and limit activity on river islands in the channel, or entering dense reed beds.

LAR @ Bette Davis Park/LAR @ Glendale Riverwalk

Cliff Swallows noted collecting mud and building nests under the freeway bridge at Glendale Narrows (Figure 2).

Participants should stay on established footpaths and limit activity on river islands in the channel, or entering dense reed beds.



Figure 2. Cliff Swallows collecting mud, Glendale Narrows (photo Michael C. Long).