



APPENDIX F

California Gnatcatcher Survey Report

**CALIFORNIA GNATCATCHER SURVEY FOR
ROBINSON RANCH RESIDENTIAL PROJECT – 2005
(PRT-TE839078-2)**

INTRODUCTION

The project site is located in the eastern portion of the City of Santa Clarita in northern Los Angeles County southeast of the intersection of State Route 14 and Sand Canyon Avenue (Figure 1). The project site is comprised primarily of the alluvial outwash fan of Oak Spring in Oak Spring Canyon (Figure 2), but also includes small hillocks and is bordered on the southwest by steep canyon slopes. The northern-most portion of the project site occupies the south bank of the Santa Clara River and is separated from the remainder of the project site by an active rail line. The site ranges in elevation from approximately 1600 feet (488 m) on the northwest corner to approximately 1800 feet (549 m) above mean sea level in the southeast corner of the Robinson Ranch golf course.

The proposed project includes conversion of undeveloped chaparral and scrub to residential development and the northerly expansion of the Robinson Ranch golf course which currently adjoins the project site (Figure 3).

The project site falls wholly within the Final Critical Habitat Unit 13, Western Los Angeles County, established for the coastal California gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica californica*) by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and thus, focused surveys were required. The work was conducted by biologist Spencer Langdon under Endangered Species Permit (PRT-TE839078-2). Results of those surveys are presented here.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Site Description

In addition to the physical description of the project site given above, the project site shows evidence of human disturbance by the use of off-road vehicles. Dilapidated structures occur on the east edge of the project site, in association with motocross jumps, and show evidence of being used for firearm targeting and paintball warfare. Finally, earlier project surveys (EIR's) indicate that parts of the project site had previously been used for agriculture.

Vegetation

Three major natural vegetation communities are present on the project site; chaparral, alluvial fan scrub, and coast live oak woodland. Individual California walnut (*Juglans californica*) trees were found in association with coast live oak woodland and in moist areas of alluvial fan scrub. Non-native ruderal vegetation (consisting largely of agricultural species [oats, barley], mustards, Russian thistle, and other herbaceous types) occupies nearly 40% of the project site.

Coastal California Gnatcatcher

The coastal California gnatcatcher, a small gray songbird, is a resident of scrub dominated plant communities from southern Ventura County southward through Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego Counties, California into Baja California, Mexico, to approximately 30 degrees North latitude near El Rosario (Atwood 1980, 1990).

The coastal California gnatcatcher is strongly associated with sage scrub in its various successional stages. Characteristic plants of this community include California sagebrush

(*Artemisia californica*), various species of sage (*Salvia* sp.), California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*), lemonadeberry (*Rhus integrifolia*), California encelia (*Encelia californica*), and *Opuntia* spp. Ninety-nine percent of all gnatcatcher locality records occur at or below an elevation of 984 feet (Atwood 1990).

The coastal California gnatcatcher was listed by the USFWS as threatened in March of 1993. It occurs from approximately El Rosario in Baja California, Mexico to Palos Verdes, Los Angeles County, with a small, disjunct population in the Moorpark area of Ventura County. It is a resident and occurs almost exclusively in the coastal sage scrub plant community.

Although observed declines in numbers and distribution of the gnatcatcher has resulted from numerous factors, habitat destruction, fragmentation and adverse modification are the principal reasons for the gnatcatcher's current threatened status (USFWS 1993). The amount of coastal sage scrub available to gnatcatchers has continued to decrease during the period after the listing of the species. It is estimated that up to 90 percent of coastal sage scrub vegetation has been lost as a result of development and land conversion (Barbour and Major 1977), and coastal sage scrub is considered to be one of the most depleted habitat types in the United States (Kirkpatrick and Hutchinson 1977; Axelrod 1978; Klopatek et al. 1979, Westman 1987; O'Leary 1990).

The fragmentation of habitat may artificially increase populations in adjacent preserved habitat; however, these population surpluses may be lost in subsequent years due to crowding and lack of resources (Scott 1993).

A consequence of urbanization that is contributing to the loss, degradation, and fragmentation of coastal sage scrub is an increase in wildfires due to anthropogenic ignitions. High fire frequencies and the lag period associated with recovery of the vegetation may significantly reduce the viability of affected subpopulations of the gnatcatcher (USFWS 1991)

METHODS

To determine the status of the California gnatcatcher and the cactus wren at the proposed site focused presence/absence surveys were conducted. All potentially suitable gnatcatcher habitat in the project vicinity was surveyed three times. Surveys were conducted on: 2, 17, and 24 May; and 7, 16, and 29 June 2005.

The methodology used in the surveys followed the guidelines of Mock *et al.* (1990), the Southern California Coastal Sage Scrub Scientific Review Panel (Brussard *et al.* 1992) and the USFWS monitoring protocol (USFWS 1997), as follows;

- Surveys were conducted during the morning hours and when the temperature exceeded 55°F.
- No more than 100 acres were surveyed by each biologist per day, and no surveys were conducted during windy (>15 miles per hour), rainy, or extremely hot (>95°F) conditions.
- Taped vocalizations of gnatcatchers were used to elicit a response from resident birds, if they were present.
- All located birds were observed long enough to determine their breeding status (whether paired or unpaired).
- Located birds were observed long enough to determine if they were banded.
- All data were recorded on standardized data sheets and male/pair locations were plotted on 200-scale topographic maps of the project site.

Results

No California gnatcatchers were detected during the focused surveys. Non-target species detected during the surveys are included as Appendix A.

California gnatcatcher survey results – 2005

Date	Site conditions	CAGN detected
2 May	Partly cloudy, 61 to 76 degrees F, wind light and variable to 4 mph	none
17 May	Clear, 64 to 77 degrees F, southerly winds to 5 mph	none
24 May	Partly cloudy, 60 to 85 degrees F, southerly winds to 5 mph	none
7 June	Clear, 66 to 80 degrees F, southerly winds to .5 mph	none
16 June	Clear, 63 to 76 degrees, southerly wind to 5 mph.	none
29 June	partly cloudy, 75 to 92 degrees F, southerly wind to 5 mph.	none

References

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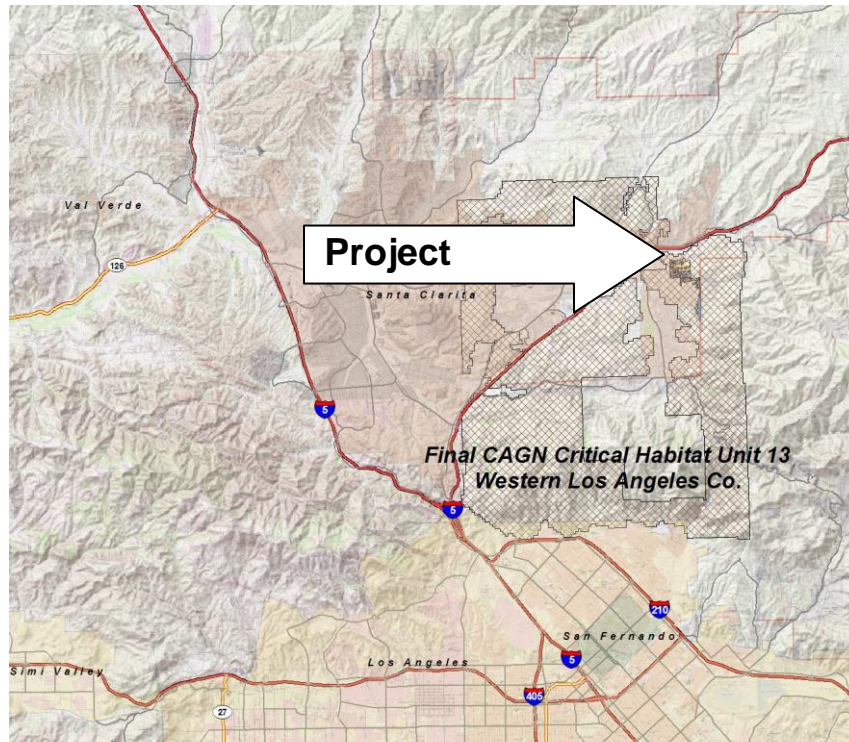


Figure 1. Regional Setting: Robinson Ranch Residential Project, Santa Clarita, CA

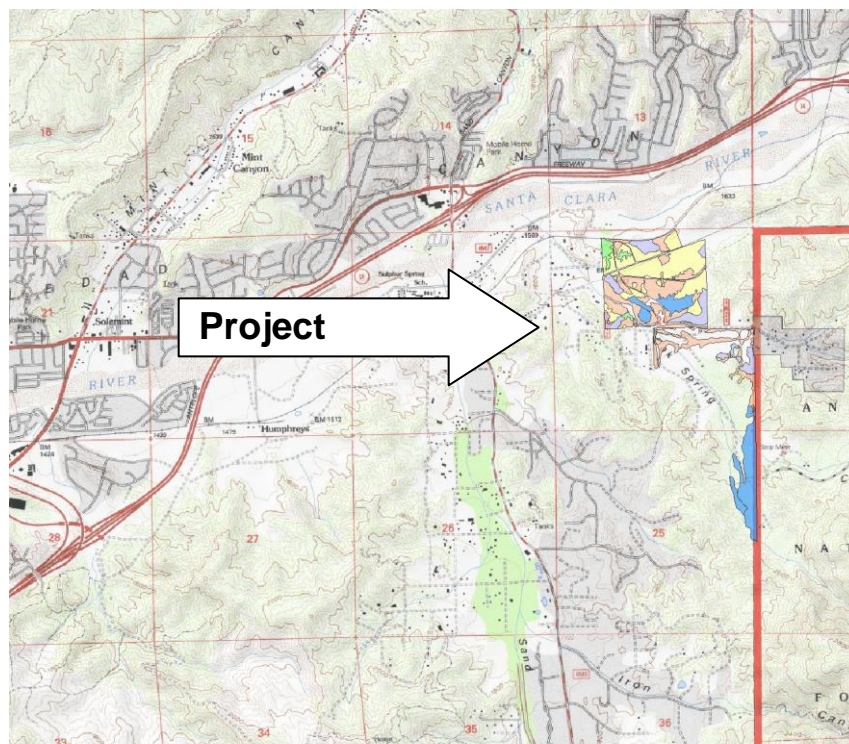
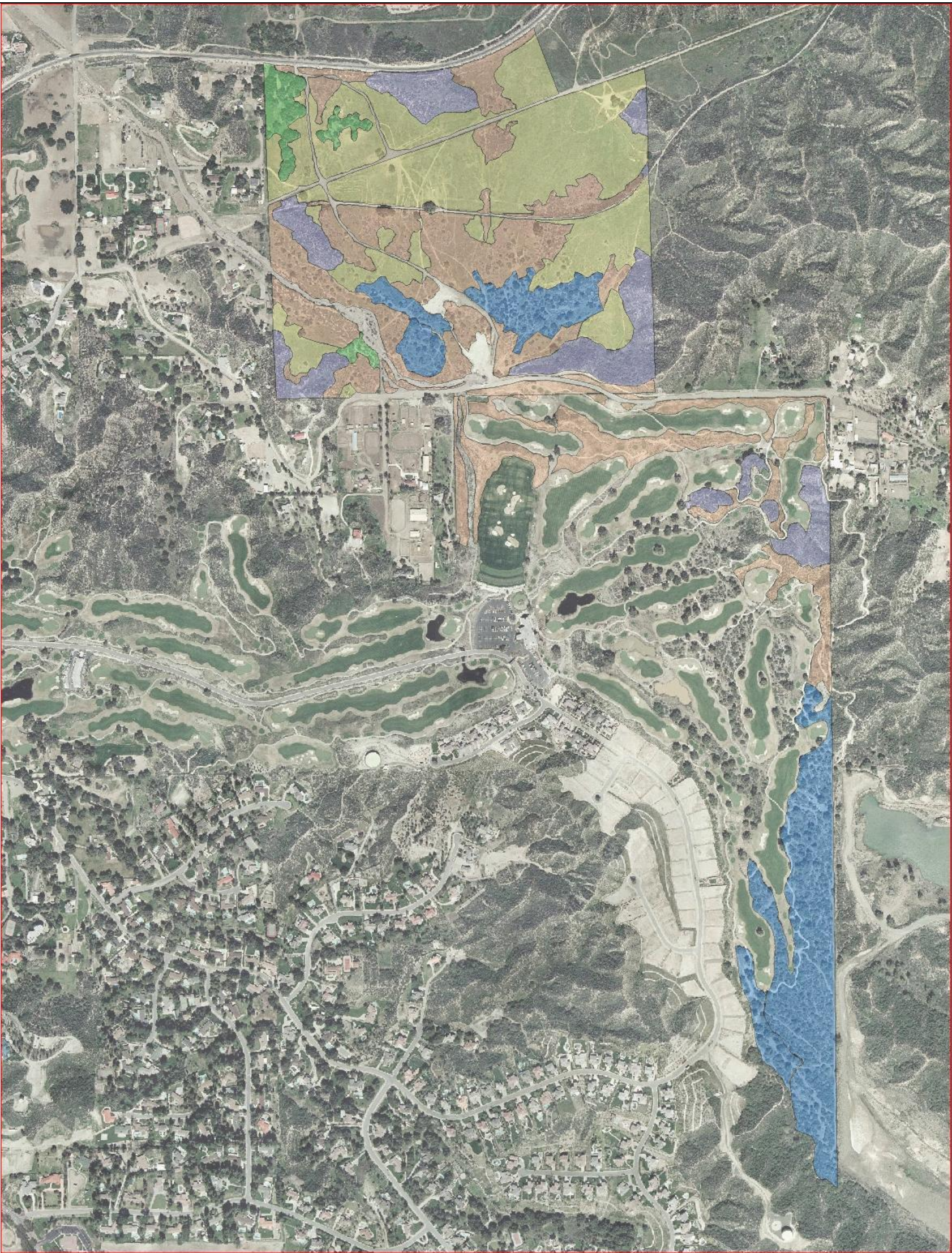







Figure 2. Project Location: Robinson Ranch Residential Project, Santa Clarita, CA

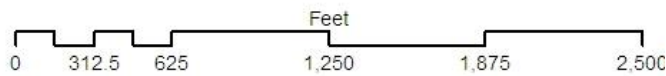


21 September 2005 by Langdon Biological Consulting

Vegetation Communities June 2004

Robinson Ranch Residential Project Survey Area

-  Alluvial Fan Scrub
-  Alluvial Fan Scrub/Oaks
-  Chamise Chaparral
-  Oak Woodland
-  Ruderal



Map Sources:
California Spatial Information Library (<http://gis.ca.gov>)
Sikand Engineering (info@sikand.com)

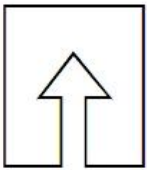


Figure 3. Robinson Ranch Residential Project: Vegetation Communities – No California gnatcatchers detected in potential habitat communities.

Appendix A: Table of wildlife species detected during California gnatcatcher surveys.

FAMILY/SPECIES NAME	COMMON NAME
AMPHIBIA	AMPHIBIANS
HYLIDAE	TREEFROGS
<i>Hyla regilla</i>	Pacific treefrog
REPTILIA	REPTILES
IGUANIDAE	IGUANIDS
<i>Sceloporus occidentalis</i>	western fence lizard
<i>Uta stansburiana</i>	side-blotched lizard
<i>Phrynosoma coronatum blainvillei</i>	San Diego horned lizard
TEIIDAE	WHIPTAILS
<i>Cnemidophorus tigris multiscutatus</i>	coastal western whiptail
<i>Cnemidophorus hyperthrus beldingi</i>	orange-throated whiptail
CATHARTIDAE	AMERICAN VULTURES
<i>Cathartes aura</i>	Turkey Vulture
ACCIPITRIDAE	KITES, HAWKS, EAGLES & VULTURES
<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	Northern Harrier
<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	Red-tailed Hawk
<i>Buteo lineatus</i>	Red-shouldered Hawk
FALCONIDAE	FALCONS
<i>Falco sparverius</i>	American Kestrel
PHASIANIDAE	PHEASANTS, PARTRIDGES & QUAIL
<i>Callipepla californica</i>	California Quail
COLUMBIDAE	PIGEONS & DOVES
<i>Zenaida macroura</i>	Mourning dove
CUCULIDAE	CUCKOOS & ROADRUNNERS
<i>Geococcyx californianus</i>	Greater Roadrunner
APODIDAE	SWIFTS
<i>Aeronautes saxatalis</i>	White-throated Swift
TROCHILIDAE	HUMMINGBIRDS
<i>Calypte anna</i>	Anna's Hummingbird
PICIDAE	WOODPECKERS
<i>Melanerpes formicivorus</i>	Acorn Woodpecker
<i>Colaptes auratus</i>	Northern Flicker
TYRANNIDAE	TYRANT FLYCATCHERS
<i>Tyrannus verticalis</i>	Western Kingbird
<i>Myiarchus cinerascens</i>	Ash-throated Flycatcher
<i>Sayornis nigricans</i>	Black Phoebe
<i>Sayornis saya</i>	Say's phoebe
PTILOGONATIDAE	SILKY FLYCATCHES
<i>Phainopepla nitens</i>	Phainopepla
HIRUNDINIDAE	SWALLOWS
<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Barn Swallow
<i>Hirundo pyrrhonota</i>	Cliff Swallow
<i>Stelgidopteryx serripennis</i>	Northern Rough-winged swallow
CORVIDAE	CROWS, JAYS etc.
<i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>	American Crow
<i>Corvus corax</i>	Common Raven
<i>Aphelocoma coerulescens</i>	Western Scrub Jay
PARIDAE	TITMICE
<i>Parus inornatus</i>	Oak Titmouse
AEGITHALIDAE	BUSHTIT

<i>Psaltiriparus minimus</i>	Common Bushtit
TROGLODYTIDAE	WRENS
<i>Troglodytes aedon</i>	House Wren
<i>Thryomanes bewickii</i>	Bewick's Wren
MUSCICAPIDAE	THRUSHES, OLD WORLD WARBLERS, ETC.
MIMIDAE	MOCKINGBIRDS & THRASHERS
<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>	Northern Mockingbird
<i>Toxostoma redivivum</i>	California Thrasher
PTILOGONATIDAE	SILKY-FLYCATCHERS
<i>Phainopepla nitens</i>	Phainopepla
STURNIDAE	STARLINGS
<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	European Starling
FAMILY: EMBERIZIDAE	WOOD WARBLERS, SPARROWS, NEW WORLD FINCHES & BLACKBIRDS, ETC.
SUBFAMILY: EMBERIZIDAE	TOWHEES & SPARROWS, ETC.
<i>Melospiza melodia</i>	Song Sparrow
<i>Pipilo maculatus</i>	Spotted Towhee
<i>Pipilo crissalis</i>	California Towhee
SUBFAMILY: ICTERINAE	BLACKBIRDS, ORIOLES, ETC.
<i>Sturnella neglecta</i>	Western Meadowlark
FRINGILLIDAE	OLD WORLD FINCHES
<i>Carpodacus mexicanus</i>	House Finch
<i>Carduelis psaltria</i>	Lesser Goldfinch
PASSERIDAE	OLD WORLD SPARROWS
<i>Passer domesticus</i>	House Sparrow
PROCYONIDAE	RACOONS & COATIS
<i>Procyon lotor</i>	raccoon
Mustelidae	Weasels, Skunks, Otters
<i>Mustela frenata</i>	Long-tailed Weasel
<i>Mephitis mephitis</i>	Striped Skunk
CANIDAE	DOGS, WOLVES, FOXES
<i>Canis familiaris</i>	dog
<i>Canis latrans</i>	coyote
SCIURIDAE	SQUIRRELS
<i>Citellus beecheyi</i>	California ground squirrel
GEOMYIDAE	POCKET GOPHERS
<i>Thomomys umbrinus</i>	Botta's pocket gopher
<i>Neotoma lepida</i>	desert woodrat
LEPORIDAE	HARES, RABBITS
<i>Sylvilagus auduboni</i>	desert cottontail
CERVIDAE	DEER
<i>Odocoileus hemionus</i>	mule deer