



June 4, 2007

Mr. Greg Ainsworth
Impact Sciences, Inc.
803 Camarillo Springs Road
Suite A
Camarillo, CA 93012

**Subject: Results of Focused Coastal California Gnatcatcher Surveys; Masters College- Project
Los Angeles, California**

Dear Mr. Ainsworth,

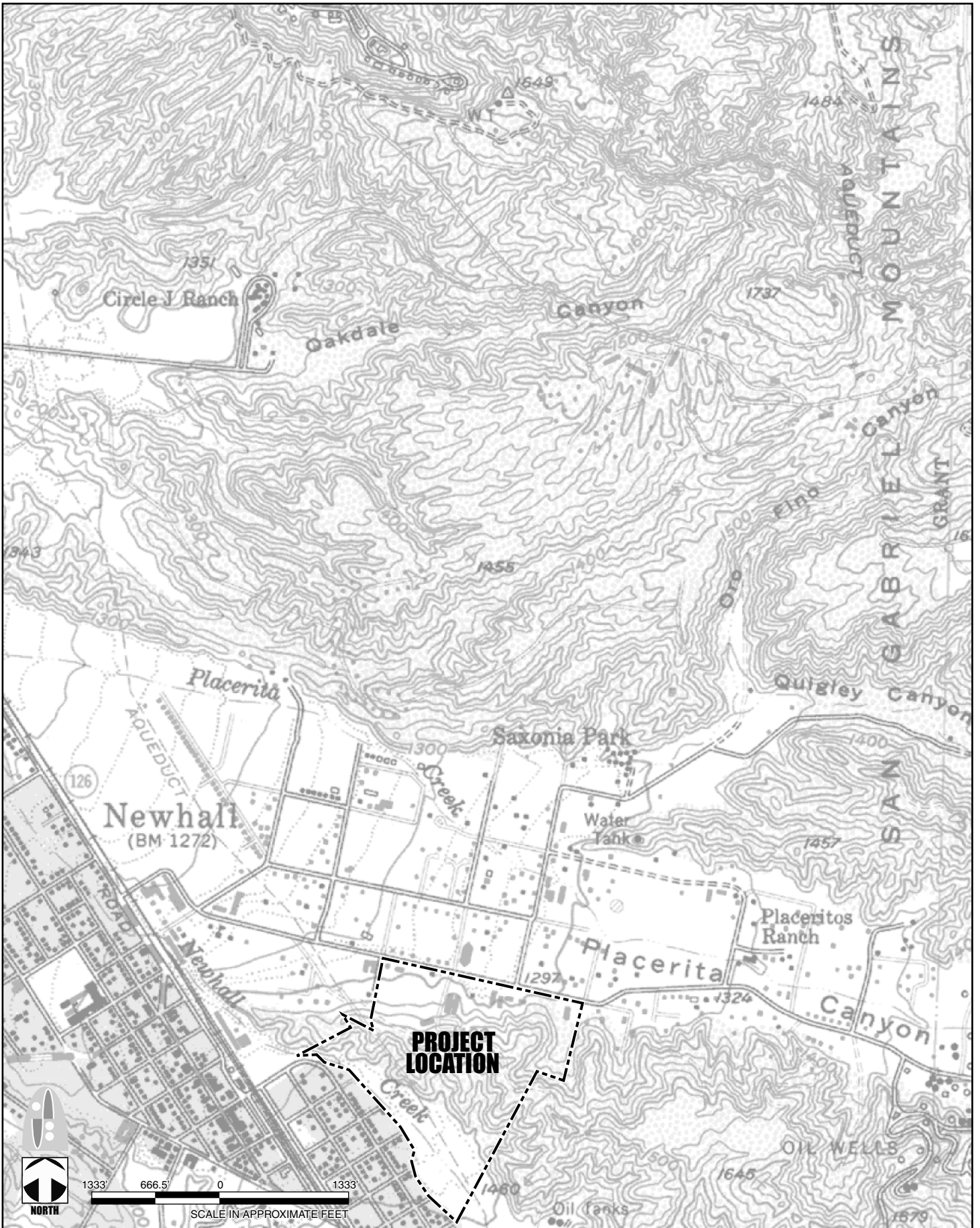
This letter report summarizes the methodology and findings of surveys for the federally-listed Threatened California gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica*) (herein CAGN) conducted by Compliance Biology, Inc. on the Master's College project site in Los Angeles County, California. The surveys were conducted for the purpose of determining the presence or absence of CAGN within the study area.

SURVEY LOCATION

The subject project area totals approximately 50 acres and supports approximately 10 acres of suitable coastal sage scrub and buffer habitat. The project site is located on the south side of Placerita Canyon Road and northeast of Newhall Creek. The project is situated at T4N, R16W, in the San Francisco Land Grant area, west of Section 36 of the Newhall, California USGS 7.5-minute quadrangle map (**Exhibit 1**).

SITE DESCRIPTION

The survey site is generally characterized by ridgelines, small valleys and hills that slope southwest toward Newhall Creek.. Elevation at the project site ranges from approximately 1,300 feet at Newhall Creek up to approximately 1,440 feet above mean sea level in the central portion of the site. Existing residential development surrounds the subject parcel. Remnant charred vegetation on the site suggests brush fire occurred in the past few years.



SOURCE: MapTech USGS Quads, 1997

exhibit 1
PROJECT LOCATION

VEGETATION

Vegetation on the survey site is characterized primarily by disturbed/ruderal vegetation with remnant patches of coastal sage and chaparral scrub. Dominant species in the habitat surveyed include California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*), white sage (*Salvia apiana*), chamise (*Adenostoma fasciculatum*), and non-native annuals including mustard (*Hirschfeldia* and *Brassica* spp.), and annual grasses (*Bromus* and *Avena* spp.). The patchiness of the scrub may be a result of recovery from the past fires, or general disturbance on site (series of mountain bike and pedestrian trails, homeless camp, etc.) or both.

METHODOLOGY

Service recommended survey guidelines stipulate a minimum of six surveys shall be conducted at least one week apart between March 15 through June 30, and from July 1 through March 14, a minimum of nine surveys shall be conducted at least two weeks apart. Guidelines also recommend that surveys be completed between 6:00 a.m. and 12 p.m.; that they shall avoid periods of inclement weather or excessive heat, rain, wind, and fog; and the rate of coverage should be no more than 80 acres per day per permitted biologist.

Based on the aforementioned guidelines, 6 focused surveys were conducted within and adjacent to potentially suitable on-site coastal scrub and buffer habitats with at least a seven-day interval between surveys. All field surveys were performed by David Crawford under the authority of his individual Endangered Species Recovery Permit.

Focused surveys were conducted on April 25, May 1, 8, 15, 22, and 29, 2007. All potential habitat and adjacent buffer habitat areas were systematically surveyed on foot by walking slowly and methodically along random transect routes. The location of transects and survey points along each transect were based on the vegetation and topographic conditions (size, location, and shape of habitat) of the area to be surveyed to ensure complete coverage. A combination of taped vocalizations (played at 30-60 second increments) and "pishing" sounds were used at each calling point.

Weather conditions during the surveys were generally conducive to a high level of bird activity. All surveys were conducted between the hours of about 6:00 a.m. and approximately 11:00 a.m. Temperatures varied from approximately 57 degrees Fahrenheit (F) to a maximum of about 80F. Wind speed ranged from 0 to 10 mph during the surveys and typically averaged less than 5 mph. Cloud cover varied from overcast to completely clear.

RESULTS

A total of 40 avian species was observed or detected on the subject property. A complete list of all vertebrate species observed during the survey efforts is included as **Attachment A**. No California gnatcatchers were recorded. Additionally, no other state or federally-listed avian species were observed or detected during the survey effort.

Four bird species considered by the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) as Species of Special Concern or Fully Protected Species were identified during the survey period and are discussed in the following text.

White-tailed kite (*Elanus leucurus*); **California Fully Protected Species**. A white-tailed kite was observed on site during three of the six surveys. This species typically nests in or near riparian areas. There were no apparent nests on site and a mate was not observed. Notwithstanding, it is expected that this species is local to the area and likely utilizes resources on and adjacent to the site for foraging. Some suitable nesting habitat is present on site, particularly in the oak trees in the southwestern portion of the site.

Cooper's hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*), **California Species of Special Concern**. A single Cooper's hawk was observed flying over and perching in trees on site during one of the six surveys. No obvious nests were observed on or adjacent to the site during the gnatcatcher survey efforts, but suitable nesting habitat does occur in association with the oaks in the southwestern portion of the site and in the vicinity off site in larger trees in and adjacent to Newhall Creek.

California horned lark (*Eremophila alpestris actia*); **California Species of Special Concern**. One individual horned lark was observed during one of the six surveys. As such, it was likely a migrant passing through the area. Nesting habitat on site is marginal. As such, the site likely only provides periodic foraging areas for horned larks occurring in the area.

Southern California rufus-crowned sparrow (*Aimophila ruficeps canescens*); **California Species of Special Concern**. This species most commonly nests and forages in mixed chaparral and coastal sage scrub habitats that occur on relatively steep, often rocky hillsides. One rufus-crowned sparrow was observed during only one of the surveys. Due to the sparse and scattered nature of the scrub habitat on site, it is expected there is a low potential for nesting. Due to the single sighting and the marginal condition of scrub habitat on site, this species is not expected to be a resident on site.

Two additional avian species considered 'special animals' by CDFG were also recorded during the surveys efforts and are discussed in the following text.

California thrasher (*Toxostoma redivivum*); **California special animal**. This species is relatively common in the region but was only observed during two of the focused surveys; suggesting they are probably not residents on site. This species is not afforded any specific protection under the Endangered Species Act, but recently regulatory agencies have become interested in tracking nesting locations. No active nests were directly observed, and only marginally suitable nesting habitat for this species is present on site.

Lark sparrow (*Chondestes grammacus*); **California special animal**. This is another species that is still relatively common in the areas, but CDEFG is interested in tracking nesting locations. Lark sparrow was observed during two of the six focused surveys. This could mean it was migrating through the area or is a resident on another site nearby and occurs on the subject site periodically to forage. No active nests were directly observed, and only marginally suitable nesting habitat for this species is present on site.

CONCLUSIONS

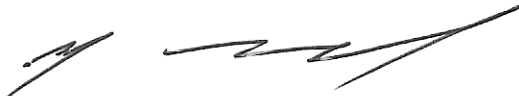
No CAGN were observed or detected during the series of six protocol surveys and, as such, are considered to be absent from the project site at this time. Additionally, the sparse and patchy nature of the scrub habitat on site substantially reduces the likelihood of this species utilizing on-site resources.

Four bird species, considered to be California Species of Special Concern or Fully Protected species and two others considered as special animals by CDFG, were also observed during the protocol surveys. As all were only recorded during one or two of the surveys, none are expected to be residents on site. Though not protected under the ESAs, impacts to each of these species must be considered during the environmental review process for any projects subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Because none are considered to be residents on or immediately adjacent to the site and based on the existing habitat conditions, impacts to each of these species potentially resulting from alteration of the site would be considered less than significant.

Notwithstanding, although most of the individual birds observed are not afforded any protection under state or federal laws, most avian species present on site are protected under the California Fish and Game Code and the Federal Migratory Bird Species Treaty Act while actively nesting. As such, grading and/or any other activity resulting in the removal of vegetation should be conducted outside the typical nesting season (February 1 through July 30). Should such activities be required during this period of

Thank you for the opportunity to provide Impact Sciences with continued biological services. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions regarding the contents of this report.

Sincerely,



Dave Crawford
Principal Biologist
Permit #TE-821229-5

Cc: Chris Dellith; US Fish and Wildlife Service

REFERENCES

- California Department of Fish and Game. 2003. "Special Animals (670 taxa)." January 2003 update. Prepared by the Wildlife and habitat Data Analysis Branch. California Natural Diversity Database.
- California Natural Diversity Data Base (CNDDDB). Wildlife & Habitat Data Analysis Branch. Department of Fish and Game. May 2007. Commercial Version. Newhall, Oat Mountain, San Fernando, and Mint Canyon, California USGS 7.5-minute quadrangle maps.
- Hickman, J.C. (Editor). 1993. *The Jepson Manual, Higher Plants of California*. University of California Press, Berkeley, California.
- Holland, R.F. 1986. "Preliminary Descriptions of the Terrestrial Natural Communities of California." Unpublished Report. State of California, The Resources Agency, Department of Fish and Game, Natural Heritage Division, Sacramento, California.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1997. "Survey Protocol for the Coastal California Gnatcatcher." February 28.
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- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1985. *Migratory Bird Treaty Act*. 16 U.S.C. 703-712.

Attachment A
Avian Species Observed or Detected on the
On the Master's College Property¹

Scientific Name ²	Common Name ²	Status ³
BIRDS		
Cathartidae	New World Vultures	
<i>Cathartes aura</i>	Turkey vulture	
Accipitridae	Hawks	
<i>Accipiter cooperii</i>	Cooper's hawk	CSC (nesting)
<i>Buteo lineatus</i>	Red-shouldered hawk	
<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	Red-tailed hawk	
<i>Elanus leucurus</i>	White-tailed kite	CFP (nesting)
Falconidae	Falcons	
<i>Falco sparverius</i>	American kestrel	
Phasianidae	Grouse, Pheasants & Quails	
<i>Callipepla californica</i>	California quail	
Charadriidae	Plovers	
<i>Charadrius vociferus</i>	Killdeer	
Columbidae	Pigeons & Doves	
<i>Columba livia*</i>	Rock dove	
<i>Zenaida macroura</i>	Mourning dove	
Cuculidae	Cuckoos & Roadrunners	
<i>Geococcyx californianus</i>	Greater roadrunner	
Trochilidae	Hummingbirds	
<i>Archilochus alexandri</i>	Black-chinned hummingbird	
<i>Calypte anna</i>	Anna's hummingbird	
Tyrannidae	Tyrant Flycatchers	
<i>Myiarchus cinerascens</i>	Ash-throated flycatcher	
<i>Tyrannus verticalis</i>	Western kingbird	
Alaudidae	Larks	
<i>Eremophila alpestris actia</i>	California horned lark	CSC
Hirundinidae	Swallows	
<i>Hirundo pyrrhonota</i>	Cliff swallow	
<i>Stelgidopteryx serripennis</i>	Northern rough-winged swallow	
Corvidae	Jays & Crows	
<i>Aphelocoma coerulescens</i>	Scrub jay	
<i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>	American crow	
<i>Corvus corax</i>	Common raven	
Paridae	Titmice	
<i>Baeolophus inornatus</i>	Oak titmouse	
Aegithalidae	Bushtits	
<i>Psaltriparus minimus</i>	Bushtit	
Troglodytidae	Wrens	
<i>Thryomanes bewickii</i>	Bewick's wren	
<i>Troglodytes aedon</i>	House wren	
Muscicapidae	Kinglets, Gnatcatchers, Thrushes & Babblers	
<i>Chamaea fasciata</i>	Wrentit	

Attachment A (continued)
**Avian Species Observed or Detected on the
 On the Master's College Property¹**

Scientific Name ²	Common Name ²	Status ³
Mimidae	Thrashers	
<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>	Northern mockingbird	
<i>Toxostoma redivivum</i>	California thrasher	sa
Ptilonotidae	Silky-Flycatchers	
<i>Phainopepla nitens</i>	Phainopepla	
Sturnidae	Starlings	
<i>Sturnus vulgaris*</i>	European starling	
Emberizidae	Wood Warblers, Tanagers, Buntings & Blackbirds	
<i>Aimophila ruficeps canescens</i>	Southern California rufous-crowned sparrow	CSC
<i>Chondestes grammacus</i>	Lark sparrow	sa (nesting)
<i>Dendroica coronata</i>	Yellow-rumped warbler	
<i>Icterus bullockii</i>	Bullock's oriole	
<i>Pheucticus melanocephalus</i>	Black-headed grosbeak	
<i>Pipilo erythrophthalmus</i>	Spotted towhee	
<i>Pipilo crissalis</i>	California towhee	
<i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i>	White-crowned sparrow	
Fringillidae	Finches	
<i>Carpodacus mexicanus</i>	House finch	
<i>Carduelis psaltria</i>	Lesser goldfinch	

Attachment A (continued)
**Other Vertebrate Species Observed or Detected on the
 On the Master's College Property¹**

Scientific Name ²	Common Name ²	Status ³
REPTILES		
Iguanidae	Iguanid Lizards	
<i>Sceloporus occidentalis</i>	Western fence lizard	
<i>Uta stansburiana</i>	Side-blotched lizard	
Teiidae	Whiptail Lizards	
<i>Cnemidophorus tigris multiscutatus</i>	Coastal western whiptail	sa
MAMMALS		
Leporidae	Hares & Rabbits	
<i>Sylvilagus audubonii</i>	Desert cottontail	
<i>Sylvilagus bachmani</i>	Brush rabbit	
Sciuridae	Squirrels	
<i>Spermophilus beecheyi</i>	California ground squirrel	
Geomyidae	Pocket Gophers	
<i>Thomomys bottae</i>	Botta's pocket gopher	
Canidae	Wolves & Foxes	
<i>Canis latrans</i>	Coyote	
Felidae	Cats	
<i>Lynx rufus</i>	Bobcat	
Cervidae	Deers	
<i>Odocoileus hemionus</i>	Mule deer	

KEY:

¹ Occurrences documented during focused CAGN surveys conducted on site from April 25 through May 29, 2007.

² Scientific and common names are from the American Ornithologist's Union (2000) for birds, Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles (2000) for reptiles, and Jones et al. (1992) for mammals.

³ Status:

CFP = California Fully Protected Species

CSC = California Species of Special Concern

sa = California Special Animal - species with no official federal or state status, but are included on CDFG's Special Animals list as they are interested in tracking occurrences.

(nesting) = For most taxa the CNDDDB is interested in sightings for the presence of resident populations. For some species (primarily birds), the CNDDDB only tracks certain parts of the species range or life history (e.g., nesting locations). Those species noted with a sa or CSC followed by (nesting) indicate the agency interest or protection status only applies to active nests of that species.