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I certify that the information in this survey report and attached exhibits fully and accurately represents my work.

Daniel Cooper

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USFWS Permit #TE 100008-1

Protocol survey for California gnatcatcher *Polioptila californica* at the proposed northern extension area of Via Princessa, Santa Clarita.

Los Angeles, California

Summer/Fall 2010

Performed by:

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For:

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Summary

This report presents the findings from a protocol survey for the California gnatcatcher *Polioptila californica* in open space proposed for an extension of Via Princessa, a road in Santa Clarita, Los Angeles County, California. We found no California gnatcatcher at this site during this survey.

Site description

The open space proposed for an extension of Via Princessa is within a region of low hills south of the Santa Clara River on the eastern end of the City of Santa Clarita (Figure 1), and features deep, steep drainages (no permanent water) and a large (for the region), flat mesa with an apparent vernal pool. The open space is bounded on the west by Golden Valley Rd. and by Golden Valley High School on the south (Figure 2). Residential development is located on its eastern edge, and commercial and recreational development lies along the northern boundary (various streets). Dirt roads and footpaths provide access to most of the site, with the exception of steepest slopes. The site is located in open space proposed for the extension of Via Princessa, east of Golden Valley Road and 2 km northwest of S.R. 14. It is centered at the following

coordinates: 34.405015, -118.494909; and appears to fall within both the USGS "Mint Canyon" and "Newhall" 7.5' topographic quadrangles.

Approximately 30% of the site's c. 100 acres are believed to support coastal sage scrub (J. Decruyenaere, Impact Sciences, via email),

The dominant vegetation community is a mixed chaparral comprised mainly of thick-leaved ceanothus (*Ceanothus crassifolius*), with chamise (*Adenostoma fasciculata*) also common. Coastal sage scrub - the preferred vegetation of the California gnatcatcher - is present in patches throughout the site (Figure 3), mainly on lower slopes but also immediately surrounding the mesa, and is probably most extensive at the far northeastern end of the site (i.e., at the current terminus of Via Princessa). This scrub is dominated by California sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*) with purple sage (*Salvia leucophylla*) also frequent (Figure 4), and includes a wide variety of other shrubs and native forbs. Coast buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*) is rather scarce, occurring most abundantly on cut slopes (were presumably introduced by landscaping) on the southern side of the site. Riparian habitat is present, though limited, at the site, mainly as pockets of mulefat (*Baccharis pilularis*) in drainages; willows (*Salix* spp.) are rare. Woodland is present only as scattered coast live oak (*Quercus agrifolia*) trees, and very large toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*) are scattered in deeper, more mesic drainages and slopes. Ruderal habitat, apparently burned areas dominated by non-native annual cover, extend across large areas at the southern end of the site. The mesa, near the center of the site, features both non-native annuals but also native grasses, forbs (esp. clustered tarplant *Deinandra fasciculata*), and an intact vernal pool with several scarce/special-status annuals (to be discussed in environmental documentation elsewhere).

Effort

Following U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service guidelines (USFWS 1997) a total of nine visits at least two weeks apart were made to the site between 19 July and 23 December 2010. Surveys were performed by Daniel S. Cooper ("DSC"), and covered the entire site. Survey dates were as follows (all 2010):

- 19 July (08:40 - 10:20, 74 - 83 degrees F)
- 04 August (07:45 - 10:10, 66 - 77 degrees F)
- 27 August (09:00 - 10:15, 75 - 90 degrees F)
- 20 September (09:45 - 11:40, 71 - 80 degrees F)
- 08 October (09:40 - 11:30, 64 - 72 degrees F)
- 08 November (08:50 - 10:35, 57 - 62 degrees F)
- 22 November (09:30 - 11:30, 48 - 59 degrees F)
- 07 December (09:15 - 11:20, 60 - 64 degrees F)
- 23 December (10:40 - 12:30, 54 - 62 degrees F)

Wind was c. 0 - 5 mph on each visit except for 08 Nov., when gusts of up to 10 mph were estimated, but was not felt to interfere with detection of bird calls at any point during the survey.

Recorded vocalizations of the California gnatcatcher were not used during this survey, as no individuals were detected.

Findings

A total of 46 bird species was detected during the survey (see accompanying birdlist), and no California gnatcatcher was detected during in nine visits.

13 bird species were found on 7-9 visits:

- California Quail *Callipepla californica*
- Red-tailed Hawk *Buteo jamaicensis*
- Mourning Dove *Zenaidura macroura*
- Anna's Hummingbird *Calypte anna*
- Costa's Hummingbird *Calypte costae*
- Say's Phoebe *Sayornis saya*
- Black Phoebe *Sayornis nigricans*
- Cassin's Kingbird *Tyrannus vociferans*
- Western Scrub-jay *Aphelocoma californica*
- Common Raven *Corvus corax*
- Bewick's Wren *Thryomanes bewickii*
- Wrentit *Chamaea fasciata*
- California Thrasher *Toxostoma redivivum*
- California Towhee *Pipilo crissalis*
- House Finch *Carpodacus mexicanus*
- Lesser Goldfinch *Carduelis psaltria*

Of the bird species recorded, the following may be considered Sensitive under state and/or federal law under certain conditions: the Cooper's hawk *Accipiter cooperii* (California "Watchlist", formerly a California Bird Species of Special Concern), Vaux's swift (*Chaetura vauxi*), a Bird Species of Special Concern, and the loggerhead shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*), a Bird Species of Special Concern. One to two Cooper's hawks were present most visits, and the species is likely a breeding resident in the area (could not be confirmed given the time of year). The Vaux's swift was recorded only on 08 Oct. (three individuals high overhead), and was clearly migrating; the species does not breed, when considered sensitive, in southern California. One, presumably the same, loggerhead shrike was detected on the mesa on 27 Aug. and incidentally on 07 Sept., but not before or after, and so we consider this individual to have been a transient unlikely to be wintering. However, suitable habitat is present for both wintering and breeding loggerhead shrike on the site (at the mesa; Figure 6). One sensitive herptile was observed (and photographed), the coastal whiptail *Aspidoscelis tigris stejnegeri*, found 20 Sept. and incidentally earlier in the season. This large lizard is considered a California Reptile Species of Special Concern.

Three species recorded have recently been identified as Los Angeles County Bird Species of Special Concern (see Allen et al. 2009) due to declining and vulnerable populations in the county: the greater roadrunner (*Geococcyx californianus*) and vesper sparrow (*Pooecetes gramineus*), recorded incidentally on 14 August and 01 October (singles), and the western meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*), found on 08 October (two birds). The roadrunner is likely resident here in open scrub in small numbers; both the vesper sparrow and the meadowlark were apparently migrants, as they were not recorded on subsequent surveys in November and December.

References

Allen, L.R. (and 10 co-authors) 2009. Los Angeles County's Sensitive Bird Species. *Western Tanager* 75(3). January/February 2009.

California Department of Fish and Game, 2003. *List of California Terrestrial Communities Recognized by the California Natural Diversity Database*. Biogeographic Data Branch (CDFG), Sept. 2003.

California Department of Fish and Game, 2009. *Special Animals* (883 taxa). Biogeographic Data Branch (CDFG), July 2009.

United States Fish and Wildlife Service, 1997. Coastal California Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica californica*) Presence/Absence Survey Guidelines. February 28, 1997.

Figures

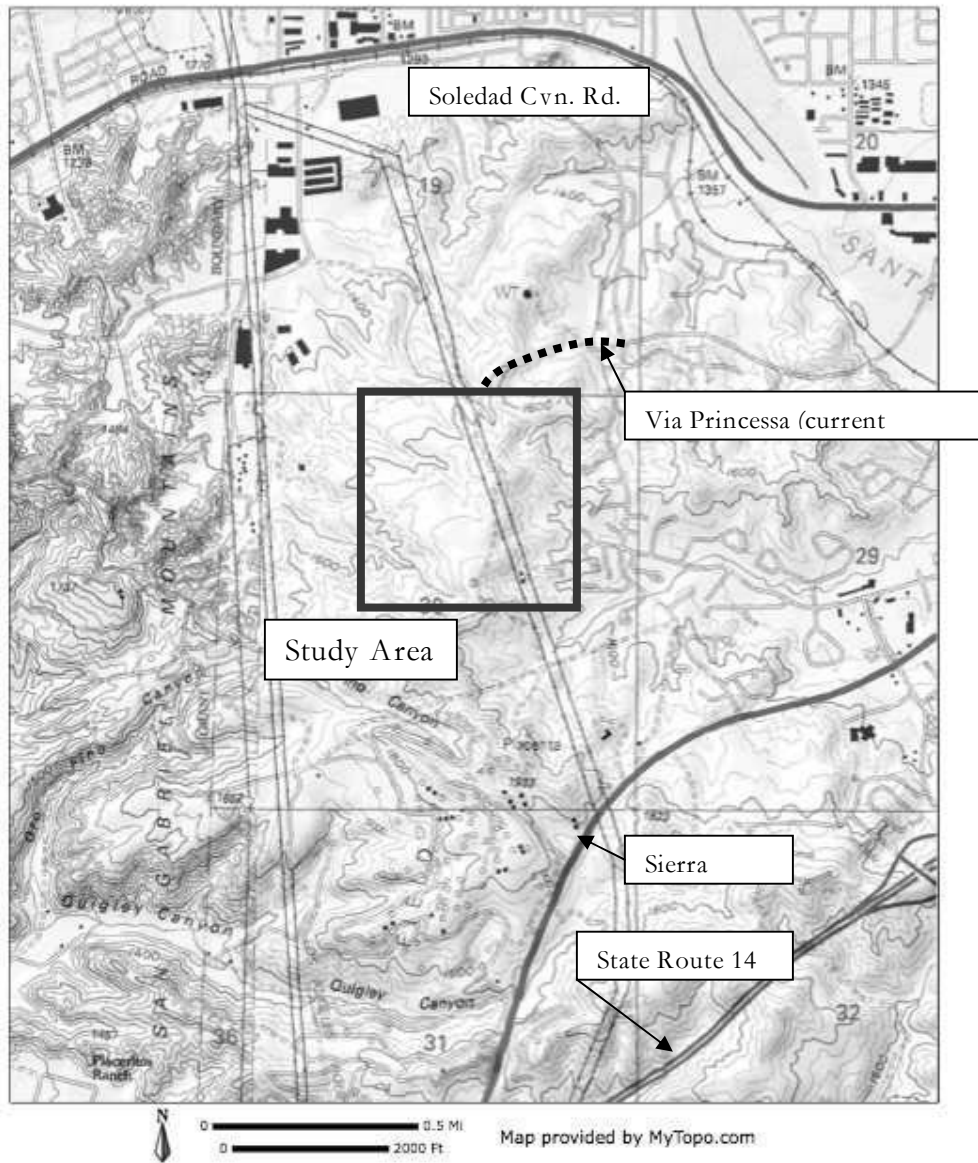


Figure 1. Location of study area (USGS "Newhall" and "Mint Canyon" quadrangles, Los Angeles Co.). Major roads are shown, including the current northern/western extent of Via Princessa (dotted line).

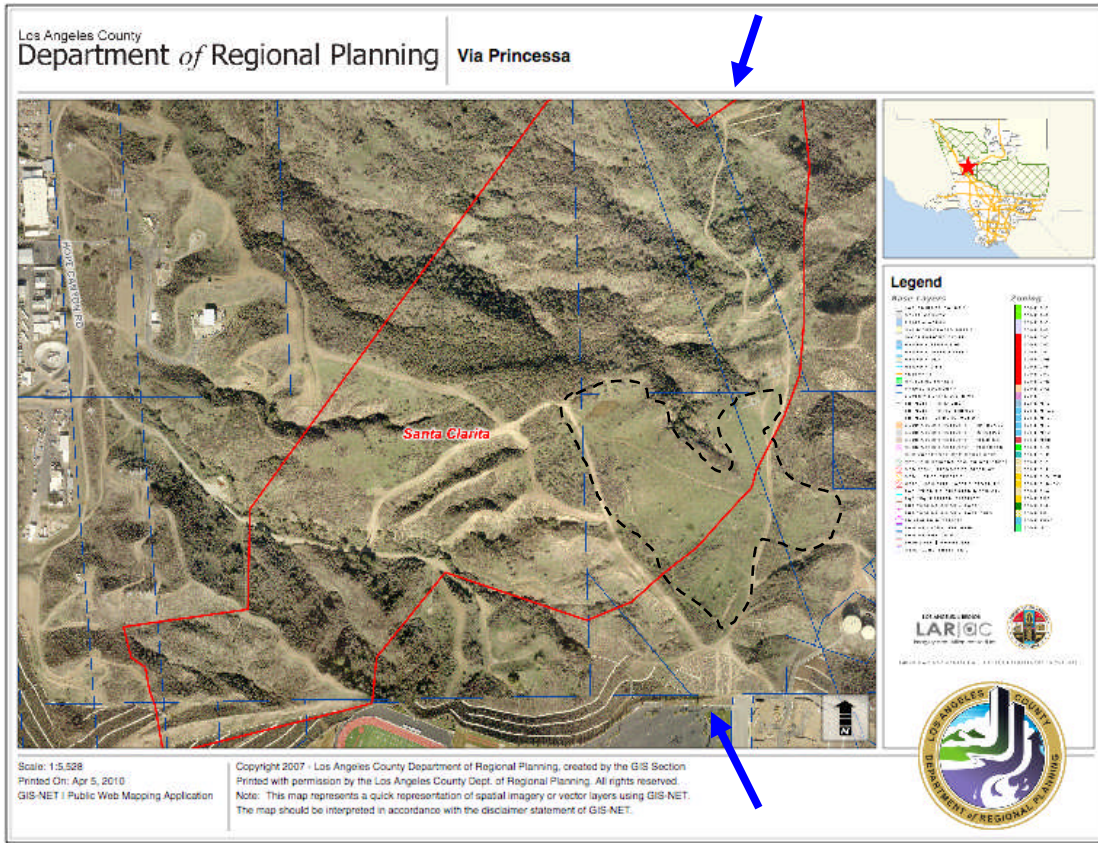


Figure 2. Map showing boundaries of study area (red line). Graded slopes at bottom of image are adjacent to Golden Valley High School. Access points shown by blue arrows. Dashed black line shows extent of mesa referred to in text.



Figure 3. Representative view of site habitat, showing mix of ruderal and coastal sage scrub species in foreground, and dense *Ceanothus*-dominated chaparral on higher slopes. Photograph by Daniel S. Cooper, 19 July 2010.



Figure 4. Closer view of coastal sage scrub, showing mature California sagebrush and purple sage, with scattered Mexican elderberry *Sambucus mexicana*. Photograph by Daniel S. Cooper, 07 Sept. 2010.



Figure 5. Loggerhead Shrike, on mesa (see text). Photograph by Daniel S. Cooper, 27 Aug. 2010.



Figure 6. Coastal whiptail *Aspidoscelis tigris stejnegeri* (California Reptile Species of Special Concern). Photo by Daniel S. Cooper, 26 July 2010.