

CALIFORNIA GNATCATCHER PROTOCOL SURVEYS FOR THE SIMI VALLEY LANDFILL EXPANSION

Conducted by Jim Greaves for Padre Associates, 25 April-11 June 2002

Report prepared 17 June 2002

SUMMARY

From 25 April through 11 June 2002, six (6) surveys were made at 2 portions of the Simi Valley Landfill slated for removal and fill, to determine presence or absence of the federally "threatened" species, California Gnatcatcher (*Poliophtila californica*). Surveys were conducted in accordance with US Fish and Wildlife Service protocols for the gnatcatcher. There were none found. In addition, a list of other bird species (as well as other wildlife) was compiled, with special attention to the status on site of any "special status" or "sensitive" species (Species of Special Concern, Raptors, other Threatened and Endangered Species), including mammals, reptiles and amphibians. Rufous-crowned Sparrow, Blue Grosbeak, Grasshopper Sparrow, Turkey Vulture, Red-shouldered Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, and Cooper's Hawk were the only species in the latter categories noted on site, breeding status likely or confirmed for the first two only. Approximate locations where the two species bred were marked on maps obtained from Frank Keisler of the Landfill on the first site visit.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the surveys was to determine whether or not California Gnatcatchers were present in 2 locations on Simi Valley Landfill; in addition, on 2 of the site visits, survey was made of a part of the Landfill that had already been cleared for work, but to ensure that they were still clear of any special status birds. Previous to this year's work, bird surveys were made by Jim Greaves in 1998 and 2000, during which he did not find California Gnatcatchers in the locations then under study (including both of the main 2002 portions) ["Report on survey for California Gnatcatcher *Poliophtila californica* at Simi Valley Landfill, Ventura County, California, during spring 2000", prepared by Jim Greaves for Padre Associates and Simi Valley Landfill].

The 2 locations under investigation were a parcel in the northwest corner of the Landfill property consisting of 2 ravines ("fill" area) with sparse to dense mixed Coastal Sage and Grassland vegetations, and a partially restored hillside portion of naturally growing and artificially planted and watered Coastal Sage Scrub vegetation along the north edge of the property, selected for possible use elsewhere on the Landfill as fill material ("borrow" area).

METHODS

Surveys for California Gnatcatcher were conducted on 25 April, 01, 10, 17 and 29 May, and 11 June 2002. US Fish and Wildlife protocol calls for slowing moving through appropriate habitat during dawn to near noon, six times, each survey at least a week later than the previous survey, from 15 March to 30 June. In order to establish presence or absence, one walks slowly in or around the habitat of the survey area, intermittently broadcasting a recording of the California gnatcatcher calls to aid in eliciting response from any individuals that might be present. Failure to detect California Gnatcatchers during required numbers of surveys is considered adequate to conclude that the species is not present. Because they can be heard up to 100 meters away without need of an amplifier, Panasonic voice recorders (#s RR-QR80 and RR-QR100) were used to broadcast the gnatcatcher's calls; Swift Audubon 8.5 x 44 binoculars were used to identify all birds detected that could not be seen up close, or which were silent or could not be identified by their calls.

RESULTS

California Gnatcatchers were not detected on site during 6 protocol surveys.

Other special status species found during the surveys included Cooper's Hawk, American Kestrel, Red-tailed Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, Turkey Vulture, Blue Grosbeak (BLGR), Rufous-crowned Sparrow (RCSP), and Grasshopper Sparrow (Table 1). Of these, only Blue Grosbeak and Rufous-crowned Sparrow showed evidence of breeding on the Landfill in both locations investigated in 2002.

Figures 1 and 2 show approximate centers of the locations of Blue Grosbeaks and Rufous-crowned Sparrows, respectively, that were found during all or most of the surveys of the 2002 "fill" and "borrow" areas. These areas were surveyed in 1998 (borrow area only) and 2000 (borrow and fill areas). Also, most accessible undeveloped portions of the landfill were surveyed in 1998, with emphasis on the southwest corner and the north edge (borrow area).

Table 1 lists all wildlife species detected, including 55 species of birds (range, 31-40 per survey date), indicating potential breeding status in the areas to be affected by the expansion project.

DISCUSSION

The presence of BLGR and RCSP in 2002 was not unexpected, as both species had been found scattered in undeveloped portions of the Landfill during the surveys in both 1998 and 2000. In addition, both species foraged onto the open slopes on the opposite of the road from the undeveloped portions; RCSP may actually have nested in such areas (as apparently did several pairs of Lark Sparrow, though no nests were actually found there).

In contrast to 1998, Rufous-crowned Sparrow was found with recently fledged young in the southwest location (not mapped in 2002) near the peak of the hill overlooking the office complex below. Although the species was encountered on the south and southwest property edge on both visits in 2002, no evidence of breeding by it or any other target species was found in that part of the Landfill in 2002.

Table 1. Species of birds and other wildlife detected during 6 Federally mandated protocol surveys for threatened California Gnatcatcher at the Simi Valley Landfill, Ventura County, California, 25 April-11 June 2002.

American kestrel (3)
Anna's hummingbird (3) R *
Ash-throated flycatcher (5) B
Bewick's wren (6) R/B [young] *
Black phoebe (4)

Black-chinned hummingbird (2)
Black-headed grosbeak (1) B
Blue grosbeak (6) B [on site territories] *
Blue-gray gnatcatcher (1)
Brewer's blackbird (2)

Brown-headed cowbird (6) B [probable hosts on site] *
Bullock's oriole (4) B
Bushtit (6) R/B [1 nest; young] *
California quail (4) R/B [huge flock] *
California towhee (6) R/B [young] *

California thrasher (6) R *
Cliff swallow (6)
Common raven (6)

Common yellowthroat (6) R?/B [young] *
Cooper's hawk (1)

Costa's hummingbird (5) B *
English sparrow (2)
European starling (5) [young - from off site]
Grasshopper sparrow (1)
Greater roadrunner (6) R [pair on site] *

House finch (6) R/B [young] *
Killdeer (3)
Lark sparrow (6) B [1 nest; young] *
Lawrence's goldfinch (2)
Lazuli bunting (6) B *

Lesser goldfinch (6) B [1 nest; young] *
Mallard (2)
Mourning dove (6) R/B [old nest; young] *
Northern flicker (1)
Northern mockingbird (6) R/B [2 nests] *

Oak titmouse (2) R
Olive-sided flycatcher (1)
Phainopepla (2)
Red-shouldered hawk (1)
Red-tailed hawk (6) [recent old nest 50 meters off site]

Red-winged blackbird (1)
Rufous-crowned sparrow (6) R/B [young] *
Savannah sparrow (1)
Say's phoebe (2)
Song sparrow (6) R?/B *

Spotted towhee (6) R/B *
Turkey vulture (3)
Vaux's swift (2)
Violet-green swallow (2)
Western gull (not noted, always nearby)

Western kingbird (6)
Western scrub-jay (6) R [young] *
White-throated swift (2) [young - from off site]
Wilson's warbler (3)
Wrenit (6) R [young] *

Other wildlife species observed:

Bobcat (flattened carcass - "borrow" road) R?/B?
Coyote (2 dens - both in "fill" area) R/B *
Mule deer (4) R/B *
Rabbit (5) R/B *

Side-blotched lizard (not noted all surveys; R/B)
Western fence lizard (not noted all surveys; R/B)

NOTES: Numbers of surveys on which species were detected is in parentheses; "B" = breeding confirmed

or highly likely on sites; "R" = resident, likely breeds on sites; * = individuals or pairs of some likely to be adversely affected by proposed expansion project. Bold = special status species.

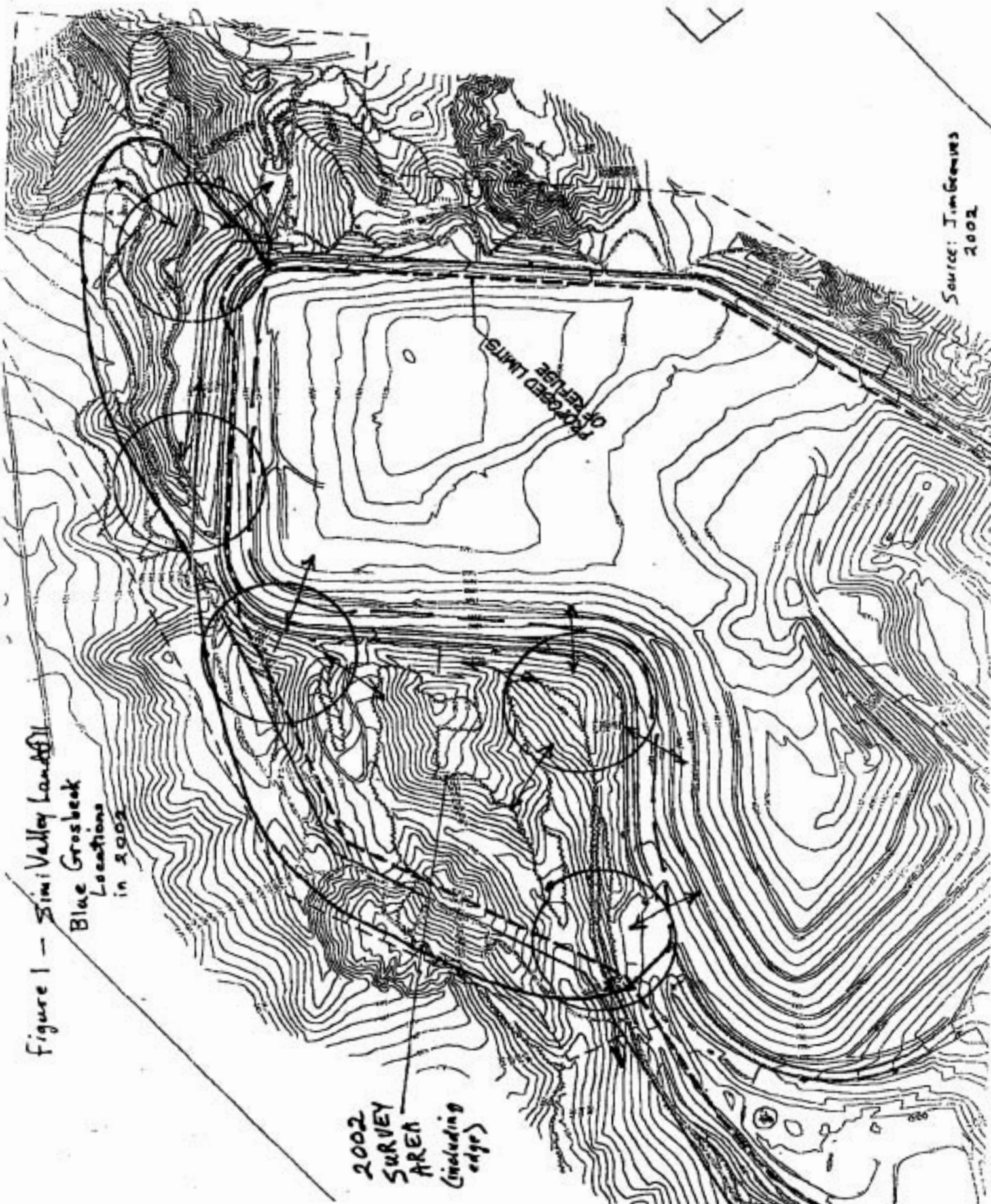


Figure 2 - Simi Valley Landfill
Rufous-crowned Sparrows
Locations in 2002

2002
SURVEY
AREA
(including
edge)

PROPOSED LIMITS
OF REFUSE

Source: Jim Greens
2002

