



## Rio Rockwell Residential Development Project

### Appendix C

2018 Breeding Season Coastal California Gnatcatcher Survey

Rancho Del Oro Site

2018 BREEDING SEASON  
COASTAL CALIFORNIA GNATCATCHER  
SURVEY RESULTS  
For the  
RANCHO DEL ORO PROJECT  
OCEANSIDE, CALIFORNIA

**Prepared For:**

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July 5, 2018

## Introduction

This report summarizes the results of a presence/absence survey for the coastal California gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica californica*) (“CAGN”) in accordance with USFWS survey guidelines. Surveys were conducted to determine if the site supports CAGN, as the parcel may be used as a conservation area and potentially be included within a hardline preserve area in the Subarea Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Community Conservation Plan in the City of Oceanside. The required 15-day notification to conduct focused protocol surveys was submitted by email to the permit coordinator at the Carlsbad U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Office dated May 15, 2018 (Appendix 1).

## Background

The Oceanside Subarea Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Communities Conservation Plan comprehensively addresses how the City of Oceanside will conserve natural biotic communities and sensitive plant and wildlife species pursuant to the California Natural Community Conservation Planning Act of 1991 and the California and U.S. Endangered Species Acts (CESA and ESA). Vegetation communities that are rare or ecologically important will receive special protection. Coastal sage scrub will be preserved to protect numerous sensitive plant and animal species dependent on them, with focus on larger patches that provide regional habitat connectivity.

This Project site is located within the boundaries of the Oceanside Subarea Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Community Conservation Plan. A previous biological assessment was conducted in October 2017 to map vegetation communities in the project area and to identify suitable sensitive habitat. Even though the site is not located within the USFWS critical habitat for federally threatened and endangered species, the site contained high quality coastal sage scrub habitat, which is considered habitat for the federally threatened CAGN. Protocol breeding season surveys were then conducted to verify if the habitat does indeed support CAGN. This report contains findings for the presence and/or absence of CAGN and lists any other sensitive species observed.

## Site Location

The Rancho Del Oro Project Site (site) is located in the City of Oceanside, San Diego County California. Generally, the project site is located east of Interstate 5, south of highway 76, and Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton and the San Luis Rey River, and north of highway 78 (Figure 1). Specifically, the project site is located east of Rancho Del Oro Drive, south of Basilica Way, and north of Camino Parque (Figure 2). The project site location can also be described as being located in the City of Oceanside, San Diego County California in Section 17 of Township 11 South, Range 4 West of the San Luis Rey, CA U.S Geological Survey (USGS) 7.5-Minute Topographic Map Quadrangle (Figure 3).

Figure 1. Regional Map (Google Maps 2018)

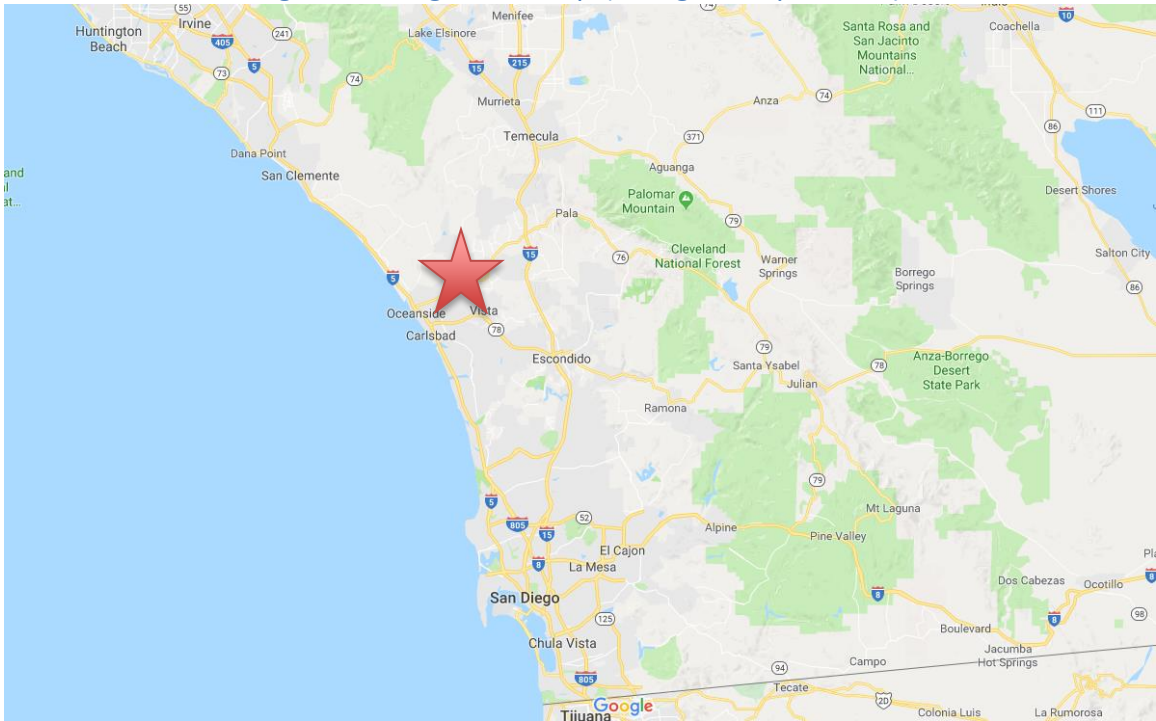
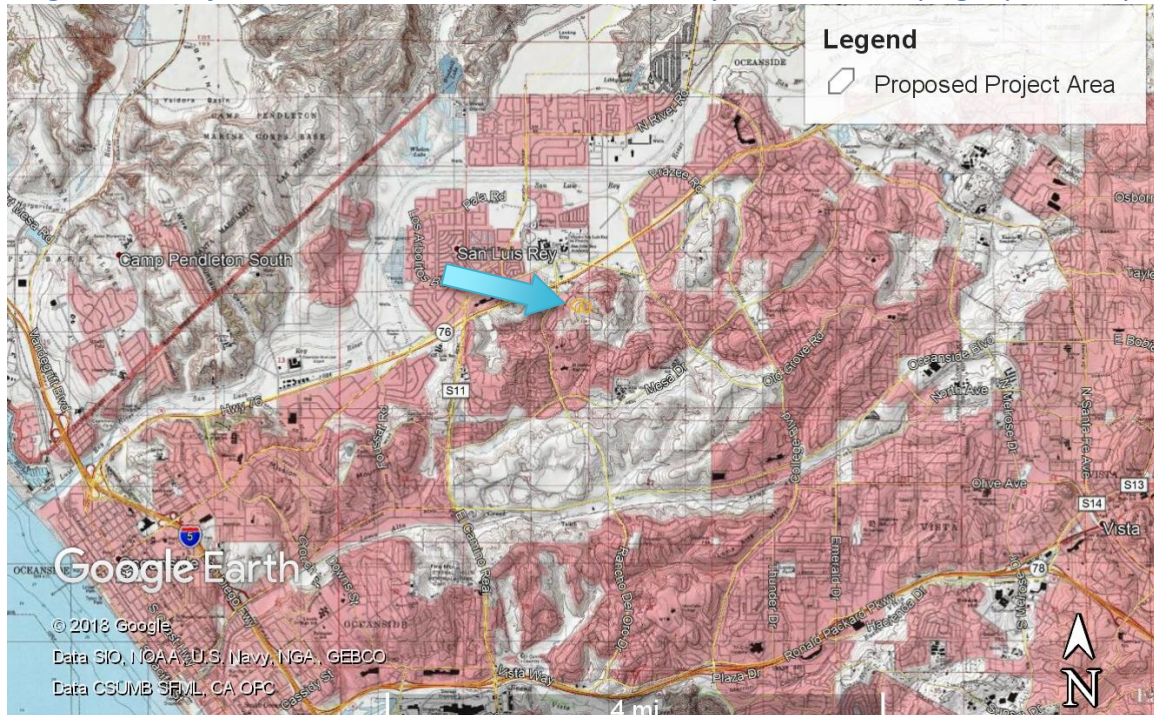


Figure 2. Survey Area (Shown in Orange)





Figure 3. Project site shown on the San Luis Rey, CA USGS Topographic Map



### Natural History of the California Gnatcatcher

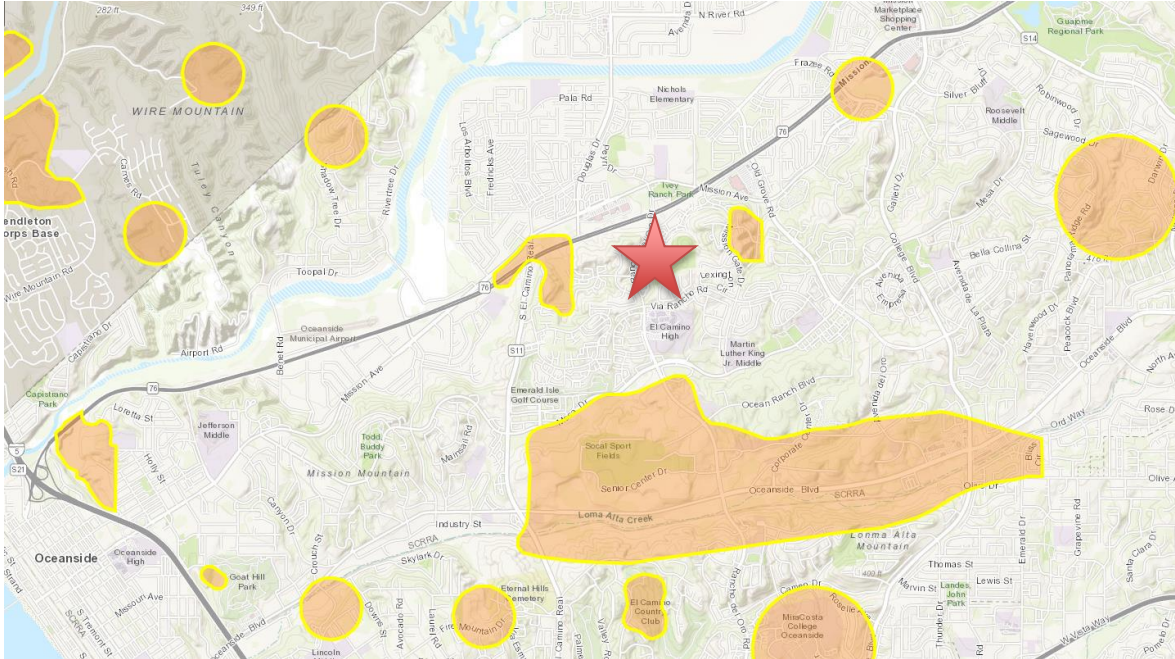
The CAGN is a federally-threatened species. It is most commonly found in the sage scrub communities of coastal southern California. According to J. Atwood and J. Bolsinger (1992), 99% of all CAGN observations are in areas with elevations below 950 feet. CAGN are ground and shrub-foraging insectivores. They feed on small insects and other arthropods. A CAGN's territory is highly variable in size and seems to be correlated with distance from the coast, ranging from less than 1 ha to over 9 ha (Mock, 2004). In a 1998 study, biologist Patrick Mock concluded that CAGN in the inland region require a larger territory than those on the coast in order to meet the nutritional requirements needed for survival and breeding.

The main threat to the CAGN is habitat loss, fragmentation, and degradation of habitat from invasive plant species and drought. Urban and agricultural development, livestock grazing, invasion of exotic grasses, off-road vehicles, pesticides, and military training activities all contribute to the destruction of CAGN habitat. Once locally common, CAGN have experienced widespread habitat loss and have lost most of their former range. By 1997, no more than 2,900 pairs remained in the United States. Only small patches of coastal sage scrub remain, and the majority is privately owned, making species recovery a difficult task.

The regional observations of CAGN are shown in Figure 4: *CNDDB Documented Gnatcatcher Observances in relation to the site*. These locations were obtained from the California Department of Wildlife's (CDFW) Natural Diversity Data Base (CNDDDB) (2018). Approximately half of all of the reported occurrences of CAGN are found in San Diego County. There are two known populations

within the immediate vicinity of the site (2002 & 2007) however there are no previously reported occurrences of CAGN on the actual site. The site is not located in USFWS designated critical habitat for the CAGN.

Figure 4. CNDB Documented CAGN Observances in relation to the Site



## Existing Conditions

The approximate 6-acre project site is characterized as an open space vegetated with coastal sage scrub and non-native grassland vegetation types. Topography of the project site is described as a canyon area with a relatively flat base and surrounding slopes. Elevation of the survey area ranges from approximately 175 feet above mean sea level (AMSL) to approximately 280 feet AMSL. Surrounding land uses include residential developments in all directions, with adjacent open space to the southeast and southwest. The habitat within the open space is classified as coastal sage scrub (CSS) and non-native grassland. Dominant plants in the CSS include California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*), California sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*), black sage (*Salvia mellifera*), coyote brush (*Baccharis pilularis*), California brittlebush (*Encelia californica*), poison oak (*Toxicodendron diversilobum*), and white sage (*Salvia apiana*). Portions of the CSS contain shrubs such as Laurel sumac (*Malosma laurina*), toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*), and coastal prickly pear (*Opuntia littoralis*). Dominant plants in the non-native grassland habitat include rattail fescue (*Vulpia myuros*), summer mustard\* (*Hershfeldia incana*), tocalote (*Centaurea melitensis*), Italian thistle (*Carduus pycnocephalus*), red brome (*Bromus madritensis subsp. rubens*), tree tobacco (*Nicotiana glauca*), and rigput brome (*Bromus diandrus*). Areas of non-native grasslands appear to have been maintained through disking or mowing activities. Approximately half of the habitat in the project area is considered suitable for CAGN.



## Methodology

Methods employed were in conformance with USFWS CAGN presence/absence survey guidelines for conducting breeding season surveys within an NCCP area (USFWS 1997). Accordingly, three (3) diurnal surveys were conducted during the breeding season, at least one (1) week apart. Surveys were conducted between the hours of 7:30 A.M. and 10:30 A.M. within all portions of the site supporting potentially suitable habitat. The permitted biologist slowly walked through the site while visually examining the area for CAGN and stopping at appropriate intervals to observe bird activity. If no CAGN were detected within 20-30 minutes at each interval, uttering pishing sounds, and/or playing a digital recording of CAGN vocalizations was conducted at each spot. The audio was played for several seconds at each interval, followed by a 5 minute pause to listen for a response. Intervals were not pre-determined, but were instead determined organically by the surveyor based on topography, suitability/quality of habitat and bird activity. The location(s) of CAGN observations (if any) were mapped with the use of a Garmin GPS unit.

## Results

Breeding season surveys were conducted by the USFWS permitted biologist Miki A. Kern (Permit number TE56726A-1) in accordance with USFWS guidelines. Table 2, below, summarizes the results of each survey.

**Table 1. Survey Data**

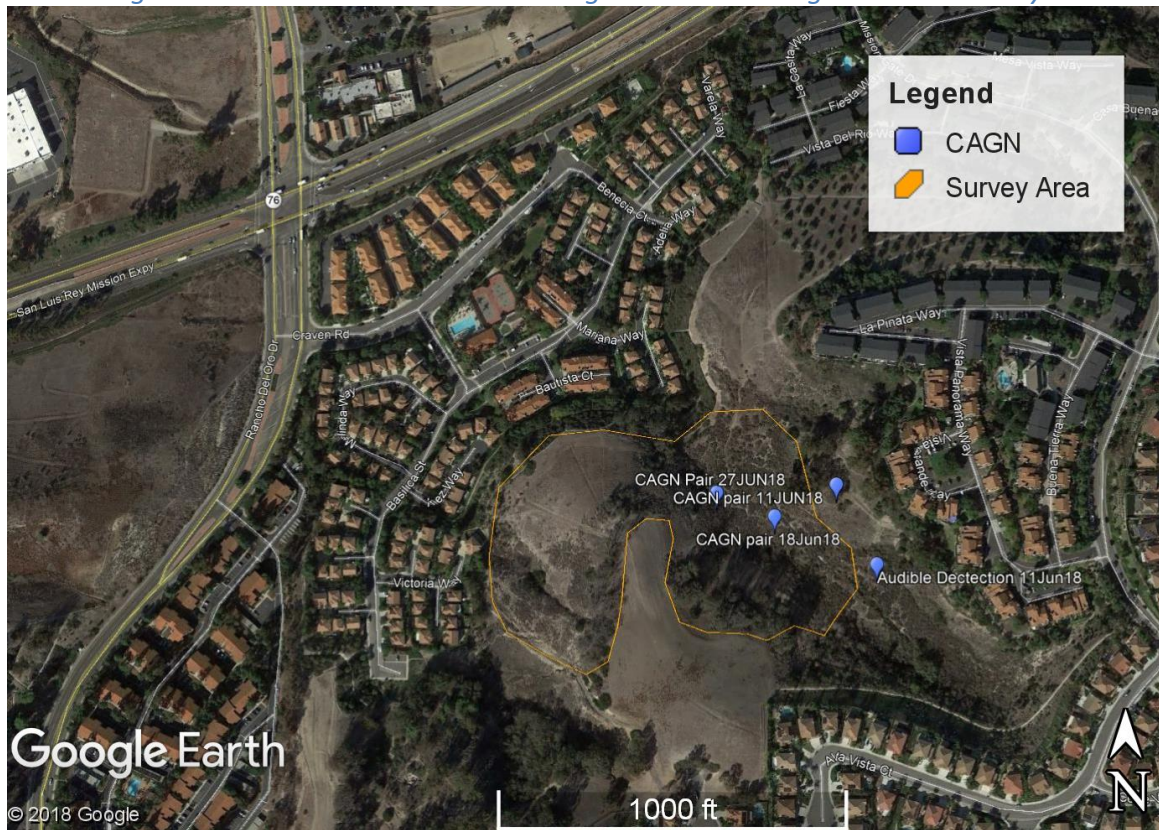
Date	Time	Wind (MPH) (start/end)	Temperature (F) (start/end)	Weather (start/end)	Results	Number times Callback played
06/11/18	0730-1030	1-3/1-4	60°/71°	100% Cloud Cover/20% Cloud Cover	Pair CAGN observed and one audible detection	4
06/18/18	0730-1000	1-4/1-5	62°/72°	100% Cloud Cover/15% Cloud Cover	Pair of CAGN observed	4
06/27/18	0730-0900	1-2/1-3	63°/68°	100% Cloud Cover/40% Cloud Cover	Pair of CAGN observed	2

Source: Kidd Biological, Inc., 2018

One pair of CAGN (same male and female pair) were detected during each survey conducted at the site. In addition, during the first survey only, one CAGN was detected by call only on the edge of the survey site, which was adjacent to suitable coastal sage scrub habitat. During the second survey pass it was noted that a northern mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*) was mimicking a CAGN call and it is assumed the lone bird noted by audible detection only during the first survey was likely the same mimicking mockingbird detected during survey pass two.

No brown-headed cowbirds (*Malothus ater*) were observed on the project site during surveys. All avian species detected during the surveys are listed in the *Avian Compendium* (Appendix B).

Figure 5. CAGN Detections During 2018 Breeding Season Surveys



## Other Sensitive Species Observed

This survey was focused on a single species, the CAGN; however, incidental observation(s) of all sensitive species were documented if observed. During the three surveys conducted, no other sensitive species were detected.

## Conclusion

CAGN were detected during breeding season surveys conducted on the site during the 2018 breeding season. The site supports a large patch of suitable CAGN habitat that is mostly dominated by coastal sage scrub and is adjacent to additional suitable CAGN habitat. Presence of CAGN indicates that the area supports habitat essential for the species' conservation. Designating this area as a preserve area in the Subarea Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Community Conservation Plan would be encouraged in providing essential habitat for CAGN populations and aid in conserving the region's biodiversity.



**CERTIFICATION:** *We hereby certify that the statements furnished above and in the attached exhibits present the data and information required for this biological evaluation, and that the facts, statements, and information presented are true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.*

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Miki Kern". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Miki Kern

July 5, 2018

Date

## References

- Atwood, J.L., and D.R. Bontrager. 2001. California Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 574 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Birds of North America, Inc, Philadelphia, PA.
- Atwood, J.L., and J.S. Bolsinger. 1992. Elevational distribution of California Gnatcatchers in the United States. *J. Field Ornithol.* 63: 159-168.
- California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB). *RareFind5*. Wildlife & Habitat Data Analysis Branch, Department of Fish and Game. Accessed June 1, 2018
- California Department of Fish and Game Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB) Biogeographic Data Branch's *Special Animals list* (April 2018)
- Mock, P.J. 1998. *Energetic constraints to the distribution and abundance of the California Gnatcatcher*. *Western Birds* 29: 413-420
- Mock, P. 2004. *California Gnatcatcher (Polioptila californica)*. In *The Coastal Scrub and Chaparral Bird Conservation Plan: a strategy for protecting and managing coastal scrub and chaparral habitats and associated birds in California*. California Partners in Flight. <http://www.prbo.org/calpif/htmldocs/scrub.html>
- Munz, P.A. 1974. *A Flora of Southern California*. University of California Press, Berkeley, California.
- Pounds, J. A., Fogden, M. P. L. & Campbell, J. H. *Biological response to climate change on a tropical mountain*. *Nature* 398, 611±615 (1999).
- Preston K.L., P.J. Mock, M.A. Grishaver, E.A. Bailey, and D.F. King. 1998. *California territorial behavior*. *Western Birds* 29: 242-257.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1997. *Coastal California Gnatcatcher (Polioptila californica californica) Presence/Absence Survey Guidelines dated February 28, 1997*.
- Bernard, B. 2017. *Preliminary Biological Site Assessment for the Rancho Del Oro Project located in San Diego County, California*. Prepared by Carlson Strategic Land Solutions, Inc October 2017.

*Appendix A. USFWS Correspondence*

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June 29, 2018

Ms. Stacey Love  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Carlsbad Field Office  
2177 Salk Ave #250  
Carlsbad, California 93003

**Subject: 15-Day Notice to perform California Gnatcatcher presence/absence surveys (breeding season) within an NCCP area for the Rancho Del Oro Conservation Site, Oceanside, California.**

Dear Stacey,

In order to determine if the proposed conservation area supports Coastal California gnatcatchers (*Poliophtila californica californica*, CAGN), we propose 3 surveys to be conducted over the course of the three weeks during the breeding season. Methods will follow the most current survey protocol (USFWS 1997).

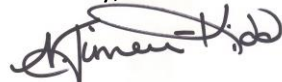
**LOCATION**

The Rancho Del Oro Project Site (site) is located in the City of Oceanside, San Diego County California in Section 17 of Township 11 South, Range 4 West of the San Luis Rey, CA U.S Geological Survey (USGS) 7.5-Minute Topographic Map Quadrangle (Figure 1). The approximately 6-acre Project site is located west of Rancho Del Oro Drive and south of Highway 76 (Figure 2). The Project site is located on the north eastern portion of Assessor's Parcel Number (APN) 160-020-49. It is our understanding the Project site may be used as a conservation area and potentially be included within a hardline preserve area in the Subarea Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Community Conservation Plan.

Surveys are to be performed per U.S. Fish and Wildlife (USFWS) California gnatcatcher protocol guidelines by permitted biologists Miki Kern (TE56726A-1). Biologist Scott Thomas (Sub-permittee TE036550-5) may be used as a back-up biologist should Miki be unavailable.

If you have any questions or comments regarding this letter, please contact me directly at (949)632-2756.

Sincerely,



Nina Jimerson-Kidd

*Appendix B. Avian Compendium*

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Scientific Name	Common Name	Observation Type
<b>Accipitridae</b>	<b>Hawks</b>	
<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	red-tailed hawk	OB
<b>Odontophoridae</b>	<b>New World Quails</b>	
<i>Callipepla californica</i>	California quail	A
<b>Columbidae</b>	<b>Pigeons and Doves</b>	
<i>Zenaidura macroura</i>	mourning dove	OB
<b>Trochilidae</b>	<b>Hummingbirds</b>	
<i>Calypte anna</i>	Anna's hummingbird	OB
<b>Tyrannidae</b>	<b>Tyrant Flycatchers</b>	
<i>Sayornis nigricans</i>	black phoebe	OB
<b>Corvidae</b>	<b>Jays and Crows</b>	
<i>Aphelocoma californica</i>	Western scrub jay	OB
<i>Corvus corax</i>	common raven	OB
<b>Aegithalidae</b>	<b>Bushtits</b>	
<i>Psaltriparus minimus</i>	bushtit	OB
<b>Troglodytidae</b>	<b>Wrens</b>	
<i>Thryomanes bewickii</i>	Bewick's wren	OB
<b>Poliophtilidae</b>	<b>Gnatcatchers</b>	
<i>Poliophtila californica, californica</i>	Coastal California gnatcatcher	OB, A
<b>Sylviidae</b>	<b>Sylvid Warblers</b>	
<i>Chamaea fasciata</i>	wren	OB
<b>Mimidae</b>	<b>Thrashers</b>	
<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>	northern mockingbird	OB
<i>Toxostoma redivivum</i>	California thrasher	OB
<b>Emberizidae</b>	<b>Towhees and Sparrows</b>	
<i>Pipilo crissalis</i>	California towhee	OB
<i>Pipilo maculatus</i>	spotted towhee	OB
<b>Fringillidae</b>	<b>Finches</b>	
<i>Haemorphous mexicanus</i>	house finch	OB
<i>Spinus psaltria</i>	lesser goldfinch	A
* Indicates non-native species Observation Type: FO=Fly over, A= Auditory only, OS= Off site only, OB= Observed within study area		