

Summary Report



To: Joshua Winter, Senior Planner, Planning Division,
Development Services Department, City of Upland
From: Eric Dugan, Dugan Biological Services (DBS)
Report Date: 5/10/2023
Re: Villa Serena Specific Plan; Nesting Bird and
California Gnatcatcher Habitat Assessment

At the request of The Colonies Partners, L.P., DBS conducted a general habitat assessment for California Gnatcatcher and nesting birds at the proposed Villa Serena Specific Plan Project (APNs 1045-121-04, 1045-151-35, 0207-483-46 and 0207-483-46) site in Upland, California. The site is situated in an urban area north of East 15th Street and Red Hill North Drive, east of Fernando Avenue, and west of Cerrito Rojo Drive in the city of Upland, San Bernardino County, California. Surrounding land use includes two country clubs, an RV and boat storage facility, and numerous residential developments. This summary report presents the methods and results of the habitat assessments, and discusses mitigation recommendations associated with construction.

Methods

For purposes of reporting, the Project site was divided into two sections. The Western section includes the locations of 65 proposed single-family homes, associated roads, and residential infrastructure (Photos 1-2). The Eastern section includes part of the existing basin where impacts will be limited to minimal grading, and where the preservation of native habitats is planned (Photos 3-4). Figure 2 of the Biological Resources Technical Report (Aspen, 2023) associated with the project illustrates the approximate boundaries of the western and eastern portions of the site.

DBS Senior Biologist, Dr. Eric Dugan conducted a pedestrian visual-encounter survey (Table 1) of the site on 16 April, 2023. Binoculars were used to locate, identify, and observe behavior of native avian species. When possible, avian calls and songs were used to identify species present on site. The survey provided 100% coverage of the Project, and included suitable habitats (e.g., tree and hedge rows) immediately adjacent to the Project limits. Field efforts focused on identifying and determining suitable nesting habitats for native bird species, and determining habitat suitability for California Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica*).

Table 1. Site visit and habitat assessment details

DATE	PERSONNEL	FIELD CONDITIONS
4/16/23	Eric Dugan	Time: 0830-1015 Temperature: 52 F (start), 55 F (end); Winds: W6 mph (start), W4 mph (end) Visibility: Good, partly cloudy

Results

Nesting Bird Habitat Assessment

A total of 19 native avian species (Sibley, 2000) were observed during the site visit (Table 2). Vegetation communities found on-site included ruderal, hydrophytic, and mixed California buckwheat scrub. A mature tree line is located along the Northern edge of the site, consisting primarily of non-native tree species that have encroached from the golf course located to the north. Previous reports (RCA, 2018; Aspen, 2023) provide additional details and discussion on the species composition and abundance of vegetation communities found on site.

Nine native bird species were observed on the Western half of the project (Table 2). No special-status species were observed. The Western half of the site has been mechanically cleared in the recent past, resulting in sparse ruderal vegetation dominating this portion of the site. Small patches of hydrophytic vegetation are found in association with several swales and runoff culverts entering the site from surrounding urban sources. Nesting habitats for most native species were largely absent within the cleared ruderal habitats. The Western half of the site lacks mature native vegetative structure, significantly reducing suitability for nesting birds. Avian activity, abundance, and diversity were all notably low in the Western half of the site.

Fifteen native bird species were observed on the Eastern half of the project (Table 2). No special-status species were observed. The Eastern half of the site was generally less disturbed and had not undergone mechanical clearance as recently as the Western half. As a result, native vegetation was more diverse and became increasingly dense from west to east. A mixed California buckwheat scrub was the dominant vegetation community, being most abundant and well-developed on sloped areas. A mosaic of smaller interspersed areas of ruderal and hydrophytic vegetation was also noted. Localized patches of hydrophytic vegetation were found in association with swales and runoff culverts entering the site from surrounding urban sources. Avian activity, abundance, and diversity were highest in the Eastern half of the site.

California Gnatcatcher Habitat Assessment

California Gnatcatcher was not observed on site during the habitat assessment. Suitable habitat consisting of dense mixed California buckwheat scrub was observed along the Eastern half of the site. As part of the habitat assessment, the biologist spent time

listening for the distinctive calls of California Gnatcatcher. None were heard during the site visit.

Discussion

Nesting Bird Habitat Assessment

The Project proposes the development of 65 single family homes located in the Western half of the site, whereas the Eastern half of the site will remain preserved. This approach will result in the majority of work occurring in areas largely absent of suitable nesting habitats. The construction plan to avoid impacts to the Eastern half of the site, will serve to preserve the highest quality nesting bird habitat and ensure native birds continued access to the best foraging and nesting habitats found on site. Additionally, the absence of special-status species further suggests that overall impacts to nesting birds are minimal.

In order to mitigate impacts during construction, vegetation removal should occur outside of the recognized nesting bird season which generally runs from February 15th to August 31st. If construction is scheduled to occur during the nesting season, a pre-construction nesting bird survey is recommended in order to locate and identify any active nests. If active nests are identified, additional mitigation measures (e.g., avoidance buffers and biological monitoring) should then be implemented to prevent the take of an active nest.

California Gnatcatcher

Although suitable habitat was observed on site, the likelihood of California Gnatcatcher inhabiting the site is low. Suitable habitats on site are immediately adjacent to and bound by numerous residential developments, a maintained dirt access road, and an active golf course. California Gnatcatcher are typically found in areas of larger, intact patches of suitable habitat. Currently occupied California Gnatcatcher habitats are not known within 5-miles of the site (Aspen, 2023), and recolonization of the site remains unlikely. Additionally, focused surveys conducted between January-April, 2022 and June-July, 2022 failed to detect the presence of the species.

References

Aspen Environmental Group (2023). Biological Technical Report. Villa Serena Specific Plan (Tracer No. 20245) Project

RCA Associates Inc.(2018). General Biological Resources Assessment. Upland Colonies 59, Upland, San Bernardino County, California.

Sibley, D.A. (2000). The Sibley Guide to Birds. First Edition. Chanticleer Press Incorporated, New York, USA.

If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact Dr. Eric A. Dugan at eric.dugan@dbsbio.com or (951) 545-2457.

Table 2. Avian species observed on-site during the habitat assessment, with location of observation and special status designation.

COMMON NAME	OBSERVATION LOCATION	SPECIAL STATUS
American Crow <i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>	Western Half	No
Anna's Hummingbird <i>Calypte anna</i>	Eastern and Western Halves	No
Barn Swallow <i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Eastern Half	No
Bewick's Wren <i>Thyromanes bewickii</i>	Eastern Half	No
Black Phoebe <i>Sayornis nigricans</i>	Eastern Half	No
Bushtit <i>Psaltriparus minimus</i>	Eastern Half	No
California Towhee <i>Melospiza crissalis</i>	Eastern and Western Halves	No
Cooper's Hawk <i>Accipiter cooperii</i>	Eastern Half	No
House Finch <i>Haemorhous mexicanus</i>	Eastern and Western Halves	No
Lesser Goldfinch <i>Spinus psaltria</i>	Eastern Half	No
Northern Mockingbird <i>Mimus polyglottos</i>	Eastern and Western Halves	No
Mourning Dove <i>Zenaida macroura</i>	Western Half	No
Bushtit <i>Psaltriparus minimus</i>	Eastern Half	No
Red-shouldered Hawk <i>Buteo lineatus</i>	Eastern Half	No
Red-tailed Hawk <i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	Western Half	No
Western Scrub Jay <i>Aphelocoma californica</i>	Eastern and Western Halves	No
Western Kingbird <i>Tyrannus verticalis</i>	Eastern Half	No
White-crowned Sparrow <i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i>	Eastern and Western Halves	No

Photo 1. Large culvert near the Western end of the site, facing east.



Photo 2. Ruderal vegetation within the Western half of the site, facing east.



Photo 3. Potential nesting habitats along the Eastern half of the site, facing east.



Photo 4. California buckwheat scrub along the Eastern half of the site, facing north.

