

California Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica*) Survey

Santa Susana Field Laboratory,
Ventura County, California

Area I and Area III (Soil & Groundwater Remediation Sites)
& Southern Undeveloped Land (Borrow Sites)

Prepared by:

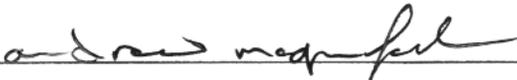


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This report is a true and accurate statement regarding the methodology and results of surveys for California gnatcatcher (Polioptila californica) conducted by Andrew McGinn Forde and Ron Francis Jr. of Forde Biological Consultants at the Santa Susana Field Laboratory, Ventura County, California between May 10 and June 16, 2014. The biologists conducted the surveys under authority of Federal Recovery Permits TE-062907-7 and TE-085880-3 and State Scientific Collecting Permits SC-003750 and SC-8357, respectively.


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SUMMARY

Andrew McGinn Forde and Ron Francis Jr. of Forde Biological Consultants conducted surveys for California gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica*) at proposed soil and groundwater remediation sites in Area I and Area III and proposed borrow sites in the Southern Undeveloped Land of the Santa Susana Field Laboratory, Ventura County, California between May 10 and June 16, 2014. The biologists conducted the surveys under authority of Federal Recovery Permits TE-062907-7 and TE-085880-3 and State Scientific Collecting Permits SC-003750 and SC-008357, respectively. The biologists did not detect California gnatcatcher during the surveys.

BACKGROUND

The California gnatcatcher is listed as a threatened species under the federal Endangered Species Act of 1973. It occurs from Ventura County south to northwestern Baja California, Mexico. It is limited to lower elevations south and west of the Transverse and Peninsular Ranges. The largest populations occur in coastal areas of Orange and San Diego counties. Smaller populations occur in western Riverside and southwestern San Bernardino counties and inland San Diego County. Small populations occur in Ventura and Los Angeles counties. The California gnatcatcher occurs almost exclusively in coastal sage scrub communities (and occasionally in chaparral). Coastal sage scrub is composed of relatively low-growing, summer deciduous, and succulent plants. Characteristic plants of this community include coastal sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*), various species of sage (*Salvia* spp.), California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*), lemonadeberry (*Rhus integrifolia*), California encelia (*Encelia californica*), prickly pear, and cholla cactus (*Opuntia* spp.). On October 24, 2000 the USFWS finalized the designation of 513,650 acres of Critical Habitat for California gnatcatchers in southern California. Thirteen units of Critical Habitat were designated throughout southern California for California gnatcatcher. The SSFL is not located in a critical habitat area; however, due to suitable habitat occurring on site and locations of individuals in the region, FBC considered it prudent to conduct surveys for this species. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service developed the *Coastal California Gnatcatcher (Polioptila californica californica) Presence/Absence Survey Guidelines* in July 28, 1997 to help determine presence-absence of the species at sites that may be affected by development or other types of project activities.

INTRODUCTION

The Santa Susana Field Laboratory (SSFL) is located in southeastern Ventura County, near the crest of the Simi Hills at the western border of the San Fernando Valley. The location of the SSFL is depicted in Exhibit A. The SSFL is divided into four administrative areas, Area I, Area II, Area III, and Area IV. Another area to the north is called Northern Undeveloped Land and to the south another area called Southern Undeveloped Land. The proposed project includes soil and groundwater remediation, which will affect approximately 154-acres of land within Area I and Area III. The project will also use soil from “borrow sites” that will affect approximately 27-acres of land located within the area called Southern Undeveloped Land. A map depicting the proposed soil and groundwater remediation areas and borrow sites are depicted in Exhibit B.

According to the Biological Resources Study prepared by Padre Associates, Inc, December 2013, vegetation throughout the SSFL is composed of various coastal sage scrub, chaparral, oak woodland, mulefat scrub, and annual grassland communities but that substantial portions of the proposed soil and groundwater remediation areas are located within previously developed areas, with little or no vegetation or areas that have recently been restored. The vegetation map included in the Biological Resources Study indicates that approximately 74.5-acres of the soil and groundwater remediation areas are dominated by vegetation alliances typically associated with coastal sage scrub and chaparral communities. A map depicting the location of these alliances is included in Exhibit C. Andrew McGinn Forde visited the SSFL on April 9, 2014, to familiarize him with the site, to determine the extent of suitable breeding and foraging habitat occurring within the proposed soil and groundwater remediation areas and borrow sites, and to develop a survey approach. The biologist determined that less than 50% of the 74.5-acres of habitat within the proposed soil and groundwater remediation areas, although suitable for foraging, did not appear to be suitable breeding habitat for California gnatcatcher. The proposed soil and ground remediation site with the most apparent suitable breeding habitat is located within The Bowl in Area I (see Exhibit C). The most apparent suitable breeding habitat is located within and adjacent the proposed borrow sites in the area known as Southern Undeveloped Land (see Exhibit C). Proposed soil and groundwater remediation sites that did not appear to have suitable breeding habitat or adjacent suitable breeding habitat were excluded from the survey. Two potential soil remediation sites were also excluded from the survey due to remote location, steep topography, and dense vegetation. A map depicting excluded areas is included in Exhibit D.

METHOD

The guidelines require a minimum of six surveys be conducted at least one week apart between March 15 and June 30 or nine surveys at least two weeks apart between July 1 and March 14. Andrew McGinn Forde and Ron Francis Jr. conducted the surveys a week apart between May 10 and June 16. The biologists split the proposed soil and groundwater remediation areas and borrow sites into three separate survey areas; Area A, Area B, and Area C and surveyed one area per day; a total of 18 survey days (see Exhibit D). The biologists conducted the first survey together to ensure they were on the same page regarding the areas that should be surveyed and areas that should not. The guidelines require that surveys be conducted between 6:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m. and should avoid periods of excessive or abnormal heat, wind, rain, fog, or other inclement weather. The biologists conducted all surveys between 6:00 am and 12:00 pm and avoided periods of excessive heat, wind, rain, fog, and other inclement weather. The guidelines state that no more than 80 acres (32 ha) of potential habitat can be surveyed per biologist per day. The biologists surveyed less than 80 acres of potential habitat per day.

To elicit responses from potentially occurring California gnatcatcher, the biologists broadcast conspecific vocalizations. Biologist Andrew McGinn Forde used a 1st-generation iPhone 5 and a SONY SRS-T33 Digital Active Speaker System to broadcast calls and used Bausch and Lomb Elite 8 x 42 Binocular with a focal range

of less than 5 feet for observation. Ron Francis Jr. broadcast calls using a Motorola Android and used Eagle Optics 8 x 42 Binocular for observation. The biologists broadcast calls within suitable breeding habitat within the soil remediation areas, the groundwater remediation areas, the borrow sites, and around the perimeters of each. The biologists effectively covered the entire area consisting the soil and groundwater remediation sites and the borrow sites. The biologists also broadcast calls in suitable breeding habitat occurring within approximately 200 feet of the proposed soil and groundwater remediation areas and borrow sites. At each survey point, the biologists listened and watched for California gnatcatcher, broadcast conspecific vocalizations, listened and watched for responses for a few minutes, repeated the broadcast, and listened and watched for responses again.

RESULTS

The biologists did not detect California gnatcatcher within or adjacent the proposed soil and groundwater remediation sites or borrow sites during the surveys or during any other fieldwork associated with the project. Table 1 includes survey dates, survey times, names of surveyors, and weather conditions during the surveys. Appendix A includes a list of species observed or otherwise detected during the surveys.

Table 1 - Survey Dates, Times, Surveyors, Weather, & Detections

Survey Number	Date	Time	Surveyor	Temp	Wind	California Gnatcatcher
1 (A)	May 10, 2014	6:00am - 12:00pm	Andrew Forde Ron Francis Jr.	@ 06:00 am 52°F @ 12:00 pm 72°F	@ 6:00 am 2 mph @ 12:00 pm 5 mph	No
1 (B)	May 10, 2014	6:00am - 12:00pm	Andrew Forde Ron Francis Jr.	@ 06:00 am 52°F @ 12:00 pm 72°F	@ 6:00 am 2 mph @ 12:00 pm 5 mph	No
1 (B)	May 11, 2014	6:00am - 12:00pm	Andrew Forde Ron Francis Jr.	@ 06:00 am 58°F @ 12:00 pm 73°F	@ 06:00 am 5 mph @ 12:00 pm 10 mph	No
1 (C)	May 11, 2014	6:00am - 12:00pm	Andrew Forde Ron Francis Jr.	@ 06:00 am 58°F @ 12:00 pm 73°F	@ 06:00 am 10 mph @ 12:00 pm 3 mph	No
2 (A)	May 17, 2014	6:30am - 12:00pm	Andrew Forde	@ 06:00 am 60°F @ 12:00 pm 84°F	@ 06:00 am 1 mph @ 12:00 pm 8 mph	No
2 (B)	May 17, 2014	6:00am - 12:00pm	Ron Francis Jr.	@ 06:00 am 60°F @ 12:00 pm 84°F	@ 06:00 am 1 mph @ 12:00 pm 8 mph	No
2 (C)	May 18, 2014	6:00am - 12:00pm	Ron Francis Jr.	@ 06:00 am 54°F @ 12:00 pm 74°F	@ 06:00 am 0 mph @ 12:00 pm 8 mph	No
3 (A)	May 24, 2014	6:00am - 12:00pm	Andrew Forde	@ 06:00 am 58°F @ 12:00 pm 63°F	@ 06:00 am 2 mph @ 12:00 pm 1 mph	No
3 (B)	May 24, 2014	6:00am - 12:00pm	Ron Francis Jr.	@ 06:00 am 58°F @ 12:00 pm 63°F	@ 06:00 am 2 mph @ 12:00 pm 1 mph	No
3 (C)	May 25, 2014	6:00am - 12:00pm	Ron Francis Jr.	@ 06:00 am 60°F @ 12:00 pm 74°F	@ 06:00 am 0 mph @ 12:00 pm 8 mph	No
4 (A)	May 31, 2014	6:00am - 12:00pm	Andrew Forde	@ 06:00 am 52°F @ 12:00 pm 80°F	@ 06:00 am 0 mph @ 12:00 pm 8 mph	No
4 (B)	May 31, 2014	6:00am - 12:00pm	Ron Francis Jr.	@ 06:00 am 52°F	@ 06:00 am 0 mph	No

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				@ 12:00 pm 80°F	@ 12:00 pm 8 mph	
4 (C)	June 1, 2014	6:00am - 12:00pm	Ron Francis Jr.	@ 06:00 am 52°F @ 12:00 pm 82°F	@ 06:00 am 0 mph @ 12:00 pm 9 mph	No
5 (A)	June 7, 2014	6:00am - 12:00pm	Andrew Forde	@ 06:00 am 52°F @ 12:00 pm 73°F	@ 06:00 am 2 mph @ 12:00 pm 9 mph	No
5 (B)	June 7, 2014	6:00am - 12:00pm	Ron Francis Jr.	@ 06:00 am 52°F @ 12:00 pm 73°F	@ 06:00 am 2 mph @ 12:00 pm 9 mph	No
5 (C)	June 8, 2014	6:00am - 12:00pm	Ron Francis Jr.	@ 06:00 am 52°F @ 12:00 pm 76°F	@ 06:00 am 4 mph @ 12:00 pm 9 mph	No
6 (A)	June 14, 2014	6:00am - 12:00pm	Ron Francis Jr.	@ 06:00 am 53°F @ 12:00 pm 75°F	@ 06:00 am 0 mph @ 12:00 pm 7 mph	No
6 (B)	June 15, 2014	6:00am - 12:00pm	Ron Francis Jr.	@ 06:00 am 59°F @ 12:00 pm 73°F	@ 06:00 am 2 mph @ 12:00 pm 9 mph	No
6 (C)	June 16, 2014	6:30am - 12:00pm	Andrew Forde	@ 06:00 am 58°F @ 12:00 pm 73°F	@ 06:00 am 3 mph @ 12:00 pm 7 mph	No

A total of 60 avian species were recorded during the surveys including Southern California rufous-crowned sparrow (*Aimophila ruficeps canescens*) and Cooper's hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*), which are included on the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's (CDFW) list of Special Animals as Watch List species. Allan's hummingbird (*Selasphorus sasin*), Nuttall's woodpecker (*Picoides nuttallii*), Costa's hummingbird (*Calypte costae*), oak titmouse (*Parus inornatus*), and Wilson's warbler (*Cardellina pusilla*) also appear on the Special Animal list. These species are not afforded legal protection by USFWS or CDFW, but are considered to be declining in California by other agencies and/or organizations. The majority of the species detected during the surveys are expected to nest on site. Appendix A includes a list of birds detected at the site during the surveys.

REFERENCES

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1993. Threatened coastal California gnatcatcher; final rule and proposed special rule. Federal Register 58, Number 59.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1997. Coastal California Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica californica*) Presence/Absence Survey Guidelines. July 28. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Carlsbad Field Office, California.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2000. 50 CFR Part 17. Final Determination of Critical Habitat for the Coastal California Gnatcatcher. FR 65 (206);63680-63743. Oct. 24.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2003. 50 CFR Part 17. Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Designation of Critical Habitat for the Coastal California Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica californica*) and Determination of Distinct Vertebrate Population Segment for the California Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica*); Proposed Rule. Federal Register, Vol. 68, No. 79, Thursday, April 24, 2003, Proposed Rules.

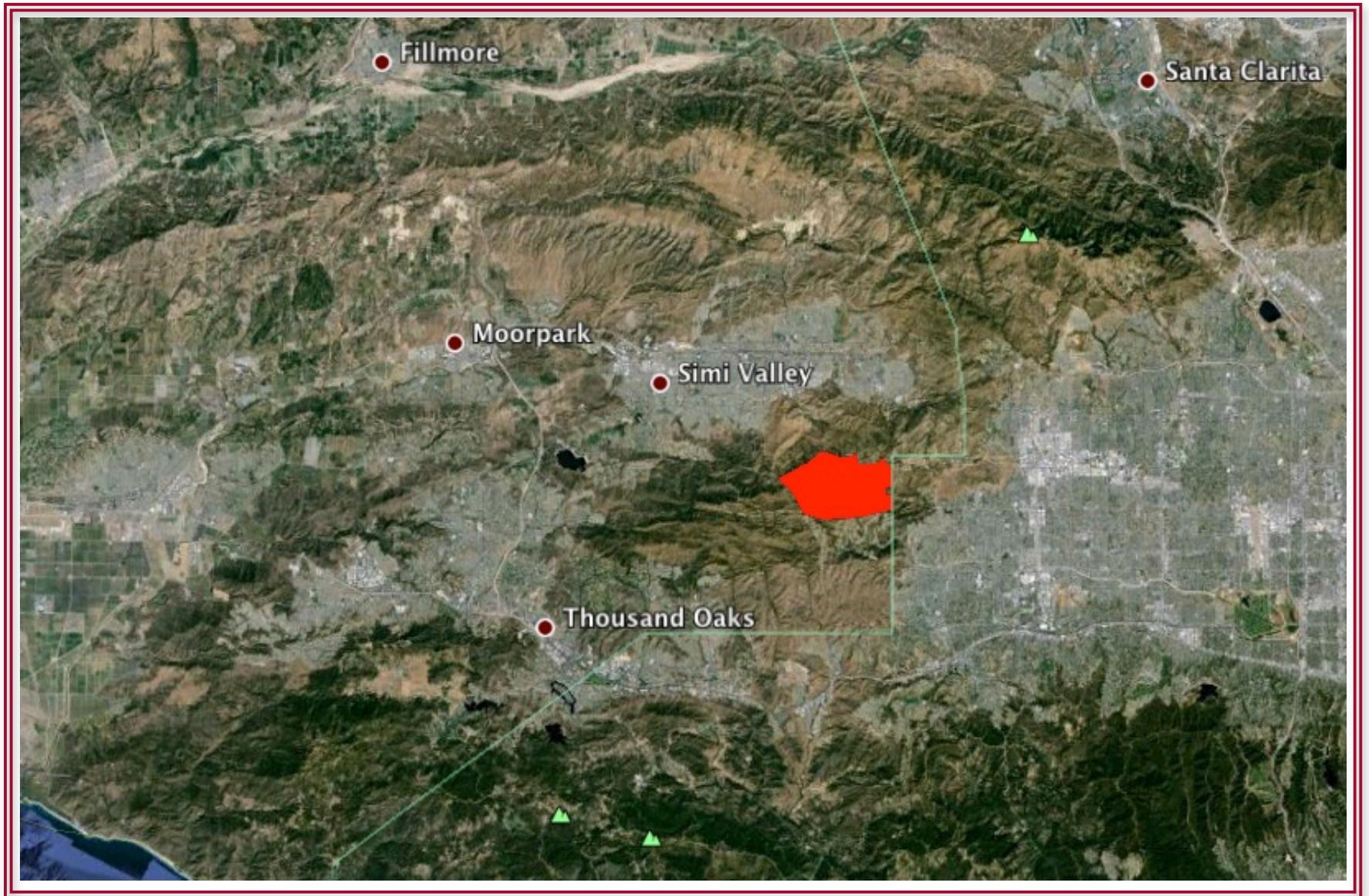


Exhibit A - Location of Santa Susana Field Laboratory

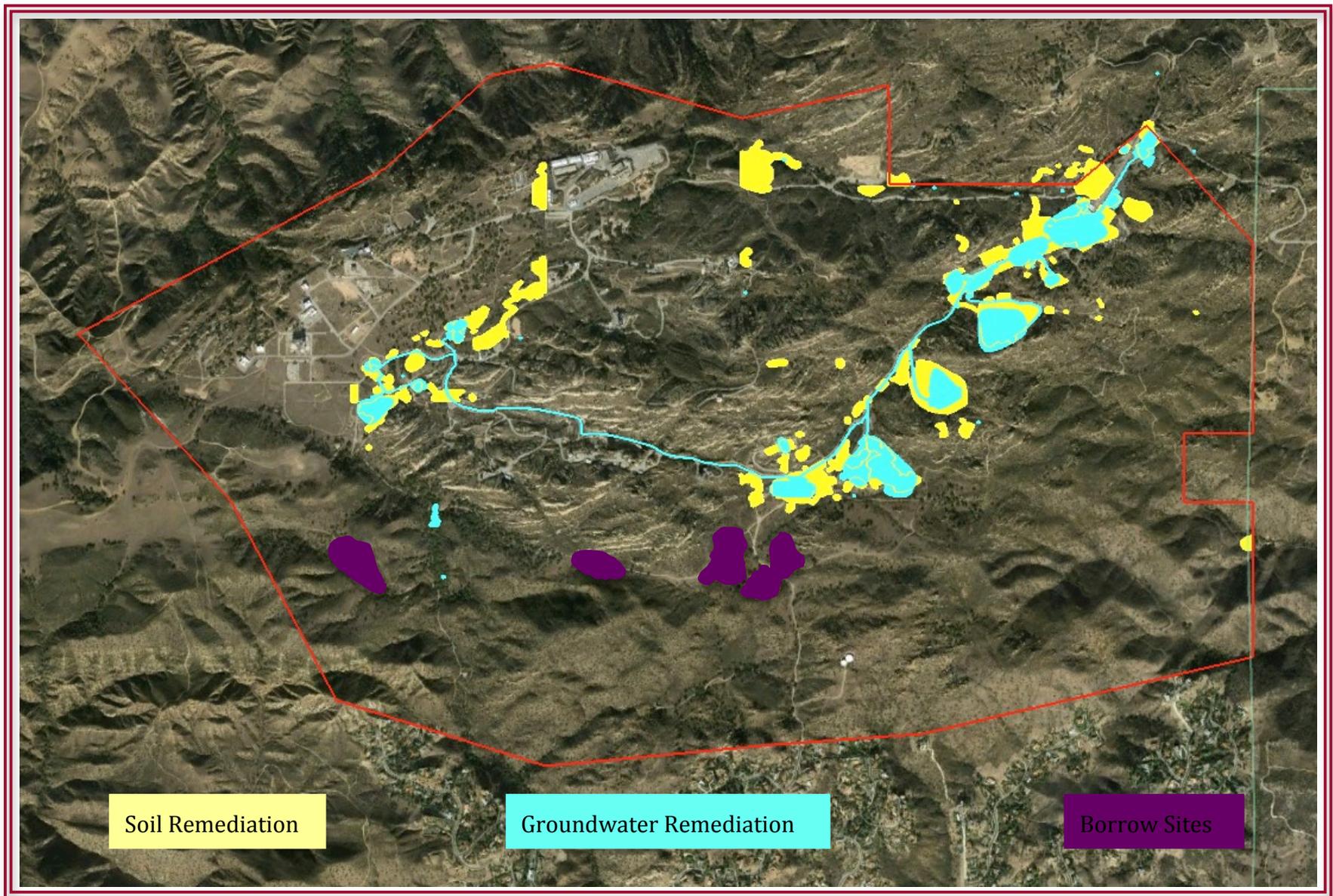


Exhibit B - Soil Remediation Areas, Groundwater Remediation Areas, and Borrow Sites

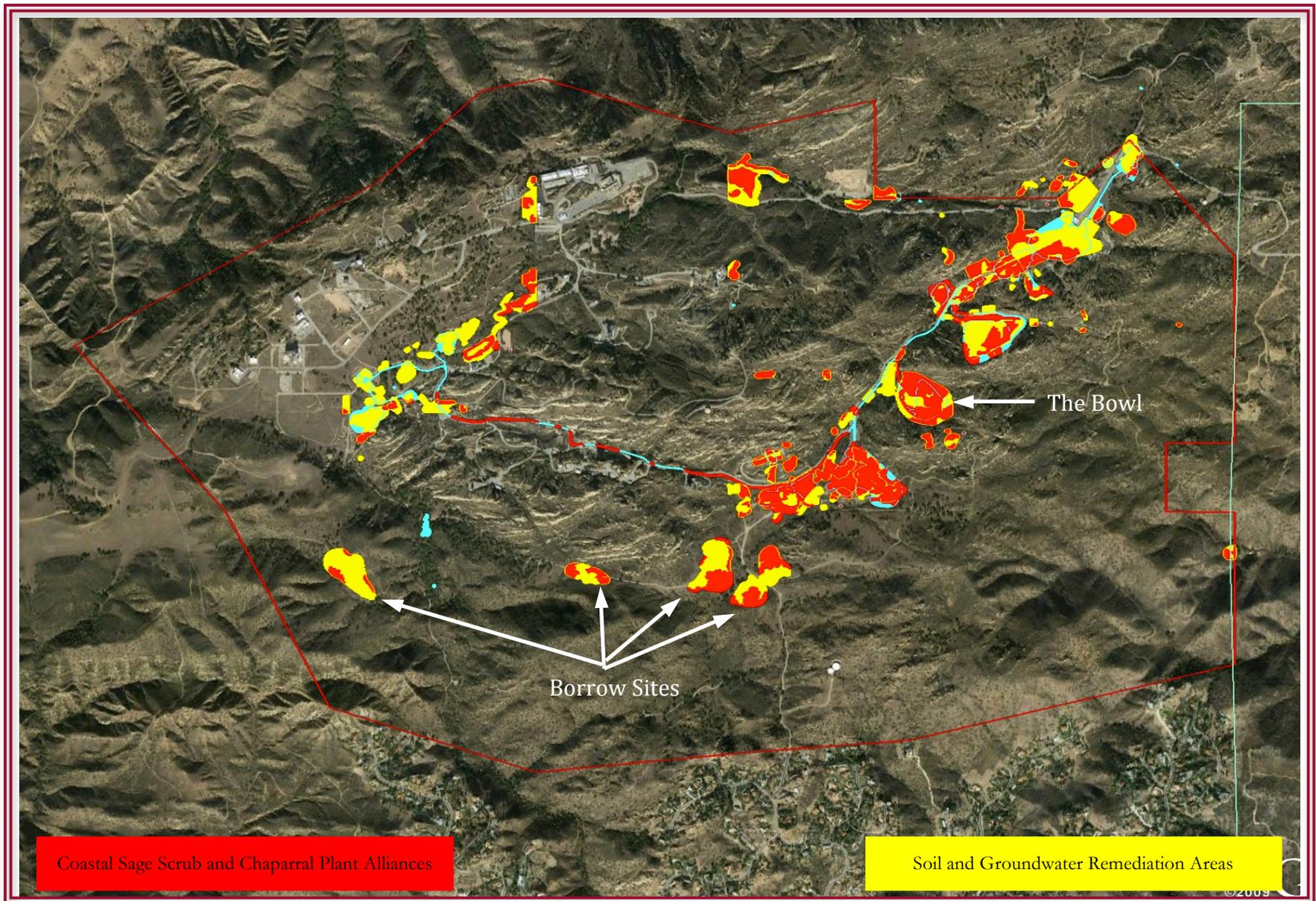


Exhibit C - Coastal Sage Scrub and Chaparral Alliances

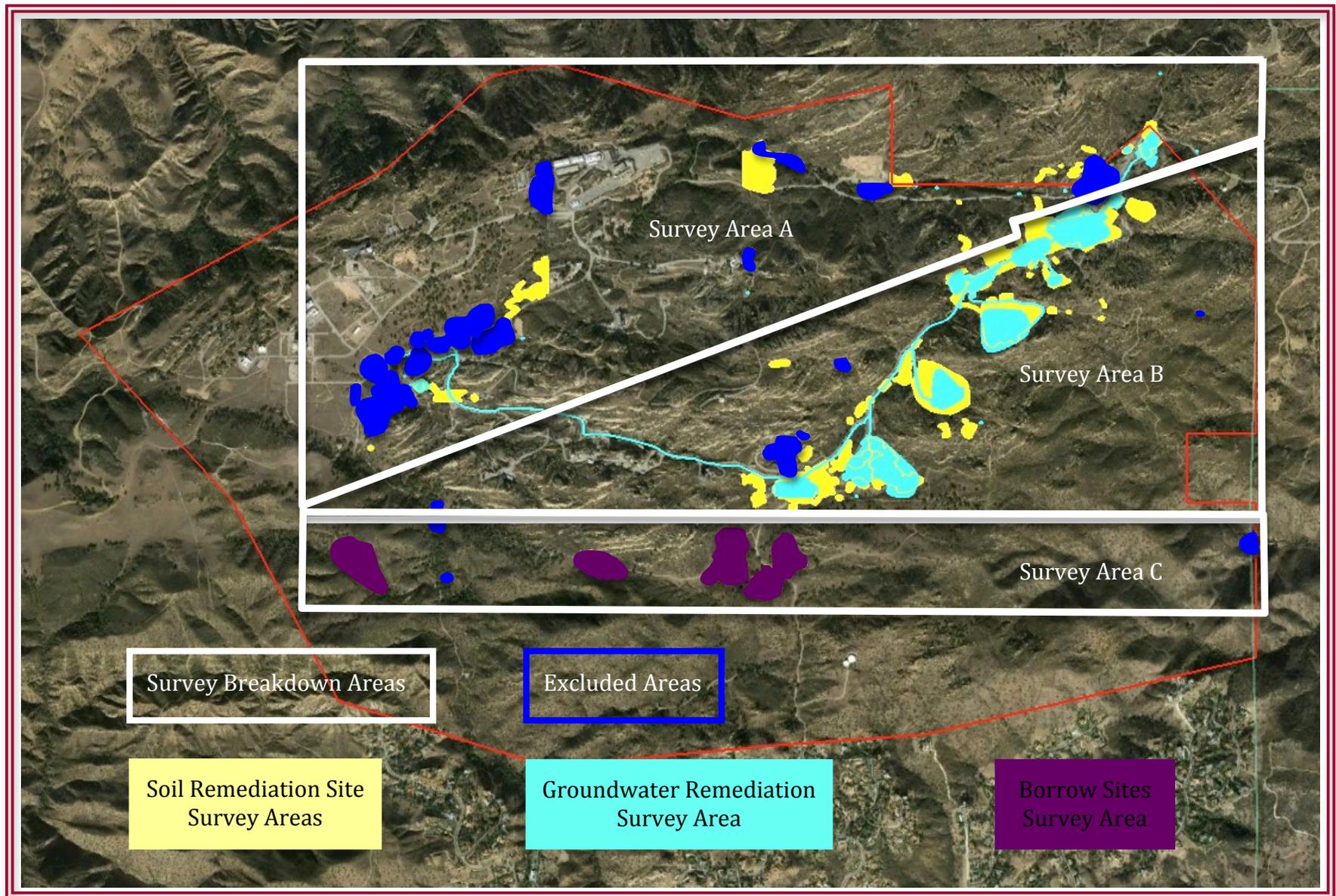


Exhibit D - Survey Area Breakdown, Survey Areas, and Excluded Areas

Appendix A
Avian Species Compendium

Scientific Name	Common Name
Cathartidae	New World Vultures
<i>Cathartes aura</i>	Turkey vulture
Accipitridae	Hawks
<i>Accipiter cooperii</i>	Cooper's hawk
<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	Red-tailed hawk
Phasianidae	Grouse, Pheasants & Quails
<i>Callipepla californica</i>	California quail
Columbidae	Pigeons & Doves
<i>Columba livia*</i>	Rock Pigeon
<i>Patagioenas fasciata</i>	Band-tailed pigeon
<i>Zenaida macroura</i>	Mourning dove
Apodidae	Swifts
<i>Aeronantes saxatalis</i>	White-throated swift
Trochilidae	Hummingbirds
<i>Calypte anna</i>	Anna's hummingbird
<i>Calypte costae</i>	Costa's hummingbird
<i>Selasphorus sasin</i>	Allen's hummingbird
Picidae	Woodpeckers
<i>Melanerpes formicivorus</i>	Acorn woodpecker
<i>Picoides nuttallii</i>	Nuttall's woodpecker
<i>Colaptes auratus</i>	Northern flicker
Tyrannidae	Tyrant Flycatchers
<i>Empidonax difficilis</i>	Pacific-slope flycatcher
<i>Sayornis nigricans</i>	Black phoebe
<i>Sayornis saya</i>	Say's phoebe
<i>Myiarchus cinerascens</i>	Ash-throated flycatcher
<i>Tyrannus verticalis</i>	Western kingbird
Hirundinidae	Swallows
<i>Tachycineta thalassina</i>	Violet-green swallow
<i>Stelgidopteryx serripennis</i>	Northern rough-winged swallow
<i>Hirundo pyrrhonota</i>	Cliff swallow
Corvidae	Jays & Crows
<i>Apelocoma coerulescens</i>	Western 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

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Scientific Name	Common Name
Troglodytidae	Wrens
<i>Catherpes mexicanus</i>	Canyon wren
<i>Thryomanes bewickii</i>	Bewick's wren
<i>Troglodytes aedon</i>	House wren
Muscicapidae	Kinglets, Gnatcatchers, Thrushes & Babblers
<i>Poliophtila caerulea</i>	Blue-gray gnatcatcher
<i>Sialia mexicana</i>	Western bluebird
<i>Chamaea fasciata</i>	Wrentit
Mimidae	Thrashers
<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>	Northern mockingbird
<i>Toxostoma redivivum</i>	California thrasher
Ptilonotidae	Silky-Flycatchers
<i>Phainopepla nitens</i>	Phainopepla
Sturnidae	Starlings
<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> *	European starling
Vireonidae	Vireos
<i>Vireo gilvus</i>	Warbling vireo
Emberizidae	Wood Warblers, Tanagers, Buntings & Blackbirds
<i>Vermivora celata</i>	Orange-crowned warbler
<i>Vermivora ruficapilla</i>	Nashville warbler
<i>Dendroica petechia</i>	Yellow warbler
<i>Setophaga townsendi</i>	Townsend's warbler
<i>Geothlypis trichas</i>	Common yellowthroat
<i>Cardellina pusilla</i>	Wilson's warbler
<i>Piranga ludoviciana</i>	Western tanager
<i>Phenicus melanocephalus</i>	Black-headed grosbeak
<i>Guiraca caerulea</i>	Blue grosbeak
<i>Passerina amoena</i>	Lazuli bunting
<i>Pipilo maculatus</i>	Spotted towhee
<i>Melospiza crissalis</i>	California towhee
<i>Aimophila ruficeps canescens</i>	Southern California rufous-crowned sparrow
<i>Spizella passerina</i>	Chipping sparrow
<i>Chondestes grammacus</i>	Lark sparrow
<i>Melospiza melodia</i>	Song sparrow
<i>Junco hyemalis</i>	Dark-eyed junco
<i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>	Red-winged blackbird
<i>Icterus cucullatus</i>	Hooded oriole
<i>Icterus bullockii</i>	Bullock's oriole
Fringillidae	Finches
<i>Carpodacus mexicanus</i>	House finch
<i>Carduelis psaltria</i>	Lesser goldfinch