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MEMO

Client: People for Upland Parks
Attn: Shari Wasson, Natasha Walton
Date: June 8, 2021
Re: Birds of Upland Memorial Park

Description of work

I conducted a survey for nesting birds and sensitive species at Upland's Memorial Park on 6 June 2021. The temperature was c. 60-65 degrees F and the sky overcast during my visit (7:50 AM – 9:30 AM). My surveys consisted of walking slowly and deliberately through the park, making note of all visible wildlife encountered. I also surveyed as much of the area within 100' of the park as was accessible, and scanned with binoculars for raptor nests. I was accompanied by biologist Natasha Walton during my survey.

I paid special attention to species deemed to have “special status” by regulatory agencies, including Species of Special Concern (CDFW), and nesting birds likely to be impacted by proposed redevelopment of the park. In coastal southern California, the bird nesting period typically extends from late February through mid-August, and all active/occupied nests are protected by the State of California under the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

In addition to my field visit, Shari Wasson and Natasha Walton provided me with additional documentation of birds at Memorial Park, including:

- Site Plan from the Memorial Park Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration;
- Description of natural setting/site and wildlife and plants from the “General Biological Resources Assessment, Memorial Park Upgrades/Improvements Project, Upland, CA”;
- Table of special-status species from the Memorial Park Upgrades/Improvements Project, Upland, CA (“Appendix A”); and
- Summary of Christmas Bird Count (“CBC”) sightings from Memorial Park (via Pomona Valley Audubon Society, “PVAS”).

I also queried two popular online nature-sightings platforms, eBird (www.eBird.org) and iNaturalist (www.inaturalist.org) to locate additional sightings from Memorial Park and vicinity (e.g., <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L3988338>).

Results

Ecological Setting

The ecological setting of Memorial Park is described in existing documentation, but I would add that the large size of the coast live oak grove at the park is notable, and that it supports several bird species typical of natural oak woodland. Thus, the characterization of the entire park as “Disturbed and/or Developed” and “altered from a natural state”, while technically true, does not capture the current function of the (native, though planted) oaks and sycamores at the park.

Oak and oak-sycamore woodland was a common natural feature in the vicinity of the park (the “Sycamore Inn”, with its massive sycamores, lies a short distance away, and coast live oak groves are frequent along the foot of the San Gabriel Mountains in the area). Thus, the ecological setting should be evaluated not simply on the basis of how the oaks and sycamores arrived at the park, but rather, on their current ecological function.

Given how developed the central and south Upland-Rancho Cucamonga area has become (south of Foothill Blvd.), it is clear that Memorial Park acts as an oasis/refuge for native oak woodland birds and other natural elements, rather than part of the undifferentiated “disturbed/developed” vegetation that characterizes the unbroken urbanized/residential areas of southern California. As such, I would consider Memorial Park to support a “modified oak woodland” (i.e., one devoid of understory), but one with enough elements to retain enough natural function to support multiple oak woodland bird species.

Birds and Wildlife

Though my visit was brief, I found an expected number and diversity of birds given the setting (surrounded by urbanization, no understory). Bird species I found that are typical of oak woodland include Band-tailed Pigeon, Cooper’s Hawk, Acorn Woodpecker, Oak Titmouse, and Western Bluebird, all of which would be expected to nest in the park.

In addition, PVAS has detected other oak/oak-sycamore woodland species, including Red-shouldered Hawk (6 of 8 CBC counts from 2006-2020), Nuttall’s Woodpecker (6 of 8 counts), Hutton’s Vireo (4 of 8 counts), White-breasted Nuthatch (5 of 8 counts), Chipping Sparrow (7 of 8 counts) and Lark Sparrow (6 of 8 counts).

I also detected two native mammals, Audubon’s cottontail (*Sylvilagus audubonii*) and California ground squirrel (*Otospermophilus beecheyi*).

Because the consultants who prepared the General Biological Resources Assessment failed to include a species list, it is unclear whether they recorded these species. They do list 13 species in their summary, one of which was almost certainly a mis-identification: Song Sparrow occurs in riparian vegetation and/or lush plantings, neither of which is present, and this species is not among the 53 species known from the park *per* eBird.

The consultants also list “Squirrels (*Sciurus* spp.)” indicating they were unable to identify the local squirrels at the park, which is concerning (the common squirrel is the fox squirrel, *Sciurus niger*).

The fact that the consultants “missed” *all* the oak woodland bird species I found (and all the others confirmed by additional sightings by PVAS and eBird) is also concerning.

Special-status Wildlife

The consultants who prepared the General Biological Resources Assessment determined that none of the 58 special-status species submitted to the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB) had any likelihood of being recorded in the park.

This is puzzling because one, Cooper’s Hawk (CA WatchList), is listed as occurring in eBird, and the habitat (large trees in a residential area) is ideal habitat for the Cooper’s Hawk. In fact, it has been known to nest in the park in past years (N. Walton, pers. comm.) and during my visit, I easily found an active nest in the park (**Figure 1**). This pair presumably uses the park to hunt (they eat a variety of birds, mammals, and other animals).

In addition to Cooper’s Hawk, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service maintains a list of “Bird Species of Concern” that should be addressed in CEQA documentation. I found two of these species on this list in the park during my visit, Allen’s Hummingbird and Oak Titmouse, and one (Nuttall’s Woodpecker) has been found by PVAS and eBird observers. All three likely nest in or near the park.

American Kestrel Significance

While not a formally-designated special-status species, the likely nesting American Kestrel at Memorial Park is notable for several reasons. First, while it has a large global range, it is considered a sensitive species in several U.S. states/Canadian provinces due to recent declines. Of c. 500 raptor nests we have monitored in Los Angeles since 2017 (“Griffith Park Raptor Project”), we have found only *two* American Kestrel nests in the study area, which extends from the middle San Fernando Valley south to Culver City, and east to east Los Angeles. This is a species that is nearly extirpated as a nester from the Los Angeles Basin, so its presence at Memorial Park is significant, as it is clearly finding some important resource/nesting structure here to allow it to persist.

A check of eBird reveals that kestrel has been observed in spring 2021 at just one other site in Upland (vic. Sierra Vista Park), and records involving more than one individual (i.e., suggesting nesting) have only been found as close as Bonelli Park in San Dimas, the northern Chino Hills, and at Prado Basin. Clearly, it is a localized nesting species, and thus the Memorial Park pair is part of a dwindling population and should be addressed in environmental documentation. Notably, American kestrel was missed by consultants working on the General Biological Resources Assessment.

Recommendations

Based on my site visit and research, I would recommend that no further development occur at Memorial Park that would remove oaks and sycamores, or that would occupy existing parkland with hardscape. Due to the rarity of nesting kestrels, I would not replace the light fixtures in the baseball diamond area (or if they are to be replaced, I would install at least one kestrel nesting box in the area).

I hereby certify that the information herein is correct.



Daniel S. Cooper
President, Cooper Ecological Monitoring, Inc.

Species List

Upland Memorial Park, San Bernardino, California, US

Jun 7, 2021 7:50 AM - 9:30 AM

18 species

Band-tailed Pigeon (*Patagioenas fasciata*) 2 pair
Mourning Dove (*Zenaidura macroura*) 2
Anna's Hummingbird (*Calypte anna*) 2 Female collecting nesting material
Allen's Hummingbird (*Selasphorus sasin*) 1
Cooper's Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*) 2 Active nest at SW corner of park (in pine). Photos to add.
Acorn Woodpecker (*Melanerpes formicivorus*) 4
American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) 2 Calling pair at baseball field, perched atop light fixtures where presumably nesting (in small compartments in the metal fixtures). Copious whitewash. Several display flights (by male) observed.
Black Phoebe (*Sayornis nigricans*) 6 At least one family group (begging fledgling)
California Scrub-Jay (*Aphelocoma californica*) 1
Common Raven (*Corvus corax*) 1
Oak Titmouse (*Baeolophus inornatus*) 1
Northern Rough-winged Swallow (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*) 1
Bushtit (*Psaltriparus minimus*) 12 at least two family groups
European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) 6
Western Bluebird (*Sialia mexicana*) 5 Pairs; likely nesting (confirmed by photos from volunteer)
American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) 8 Pair collecting food for young
House Finch (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) 15
Lesser Goldfinch (*Spinus psaltria*) 5

View this checklist online at <https://ebird.org/checklist/S89893563>



Figure 1. Cooper's Hawk nest. One of the nestlings is visible in the center of the nest; the adult is perched on the right side of the rim. Nest located in the southwestern corner of the park property. Photographed June 7, 2021.

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EDUCATION

University of California, Los Angeles, Ph.D. 2020 (Biology)
University of California, Riverside, M.Sc. 1999 (Biogeography)
Harvard University, A.B. 1995 (Biology)

EXPERIENCE

Cooper Ecological Monitoring, Inc. Los Angeles, CA. 2005 - present
President. An independent ecological consulting firm specializing in land use, wildlife and biodiversity issues, we provide expertise in study design & analysis, ecological assessment, and management recommendations.

- Manage projects in the \$1,000 - \$100,000 range for up to 20 clients per year in the Los Angeles area.
- Past clients include municipalities (Los Angeles, Torrance), non-profit groups (The Nature Conservancy, Trust for Public Land), agencies (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, California Coastal Conservancy), and various private firms and individuals.
- Hire and supervise up to five subcontractors per year.

National Audubon Society Los Angeles, CA. 2001 - 2005
Director of Bird Conservation, Audubon California.

- Member of senior management team for Audubon California, worked with national staff and partner organizations to shape bird conservation agenda in California.
- Organized donor cultivation activities, and assisted development staff in grant writing.
- Wrote and published a landmark reference guide ([Important Bird Areas of California](#); findings later incorporated into state legislation).
- Helped draft Audubon California's strategic plan (2003-04).
- Visited and evaluated sites for new Audubon nature centers; wrote staff training manuals for existing centers and programs.

Biologist, Audubon Center at Debs Park 1999 - 2001

- Member of core team charged with developing an urban nature education center at a large city park in urban Los Angeles (Debs Park); drafted and implemented habitat management plan.
- Organized neighborhood focus groups for parents and teachers in northeast Los Angeles to assess public perception of nature and conservation organizations.
- Initiated baseline natural history research in surrounding region for development of educational materials and programs for new Audubon Center.

APPOINTMENTS/BOARDS

Research Associate, Dept. of Ornithology, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, 2020 – present
IUCN World Protected Areas, 2017 – present
Associate Editor, *Western Birds* 2014 – present
Southern California Academy of Sciences 2013 – 2015
SEATAC (Los Angeles Co. Dept. of Regional Planning) 2009 – 2013
Los Angeles Dept. of Recreation and Parks - Griffith Park Postfire Recovery Team, 2007 – 2008
California Dept. of Water Resources - Salton Sea Restoration Advisory Committee 2003 – 2005
Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture – Management Board 2002 – 2005
California Partners-in-Flight - Executive Steering Committee 2003 – 2005
Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers and Mountains Conservancy - Technical Advisory Board 2002 – 2005
Friends of the Los Angeles River - Technical Advisory Board 1989 – 2001