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Date: 2/18/99 2:20pm
Subject: Additional Comments for CALFED species

Attached are comments from Lyann Comrack on some grassland and wetland CALFED bird species. She generally addressed prescriptions and mitigation measures. Please note that the Riparian Habitat Bird Conservation Plan fully addresses CALFED species and riparian birds that probably should be CALFED species. In previous comment letters we strongly urged CALFED to adopt the discussion of ecological characteristics and identified enhancement mitigation areas for riparian birds. Please consider the preceding as a third request.

Please feel free to contact me at khunting@hq.dfg.ca.gov or Lyann at lcomrack@audubon.org if you have any questions or comments.

Sincerely,

Kevin Hunting

**CALFED Conservation Strategy
for Selected Species (2/9/99-1c)**

I. California Yellow Warbler (*Dendroica petechia brewsteri*)

A. Status

- California Bird Species of Special Concern

The Yellow Warbler is one of 14 riparian bird focal species selected by the Riparian Habitat Joint Venture for inclusion in the Draft Riparian Bird Conservation Plan (Dec. 1997). These 14 species were selected to capture the conservation needs of the complete range of riparian habitat types throughout the state.

B. Breeding Habitat Recommendations

There are no data specific to the CALFED project area for Yellow Warbler. However, the following may be extrapolated from other sources:

- Territory size: 0.16 ha on average; 0.3 - 1.62 ha range noted;
- Concealing cover for nest;
- Tall singing posts in territory;
- Feeding areas in trees.

Vegetation preferences for nesting territories:

- Generally found in wet areas with early successional riparian communities, vertical stratification of vegetation and a semi-open canopy;
- Well-developed willow, alder, and cottonwood canopy cover;
- Shows a decided preference for deciduous trees;
- Dense understory of trees and shrubs and piles of dead wood and litter.

High degree of breeding site fidelity, especially of males, noted in YEWA.

Brown-headed Cowbird nest parasitism may have contributed to the decline of the species in the CALFED area. YEWA is a common cowbird host.

Frequency of cattle grazing on an annual basis was negatively correlated with the number of breeding YEWA in Oregon.

C. Historical and Current breeding status in CALFED area

Bay/Delta Bioregion - *D.p. brewsteri* was a "common summer resident throughout the [San Francisco Bay] region" with nesting records including Palo Alto, May 11 (Grinnell and Wythe 1914 in CPIF 1998). Currently, the species is no longer common in this bioregion. It is

confirmed breeding at Coyote Creek Riparian Station, at a few sites in Marin County, and is still common in coastal Sonoma County.

Sacramento Valley Bioregion - *D. p. brewsteri* was the second most abundant species detected on 3 miles of the Sacramento River approaching Tehama (10 individuals) and on 1.5 miles of Paine's Creek (6 individuals) and the fourth most abundant on 2-3 miles of the Sacramento River downstream from Red Bluff (9 individuals) (CPIF 1998). No recent records of confirmed breeding in this bioregion.

San Joaquin Bioregion - YEWA was a common summer visitant in limited numbers along all the water courses in the valley. They were found breeding in willow associations that marked the larger canals and sloughs (Tyler 1913 in CPIF). No recent records of confirmed breeding in this bioregion.

II. Yellow-breasted Chat (*Icteria virens*)

A. Status

- California Bird Species of Special Concern

The Yellow-breasted Chat is one of 14 riparian bird focal species selected by the Riparian Habitat Joint Venture for inclusion in the Draft Riparian Bird Conservation Plan (1997). These 14 species were selected to capture the conservation needs of the complete range of riparian habitat types throughout the state.

B. Breeding Habitat Recommendations

There are no data specific to the CALFED project area for Yellow-breasted Chat. However, the following may be extrapolated from other sources:

- Average territory size variable. Ranges reported nationally include 0.04 to 1.3 ha;

Vegetation preferences for nesting territories:

- Nests in low, dense shrubs 1 - 8 feet high;
- Prefers wet areas, swampy margins, riparian thickets of willows and other brushy tangles;
- Often found in early successional riparian habitat.

YBCH is a common Brown-headed cowbird host.

No bioregional information available for historical and current distribution in CALFED area.

III. Grasshopper Sparrow

A. Status

- USFWS Region 1 Species of Management Concern (1995)

The Grasshopper Sparrow is one of 15 grassland bird focal species selected by California Partners in Flight for inclusion in the Draft Grassland Bird Conservation Plan (in prep.).

B. Breeding Habitat Recommendations

There are no data specific to the CALFED project area for Grasshopper Sparrow. However, the following may be extrapolated from other

- Average territory size reported as 0.8 ha. Ranges reported nationally include 0.3 ha to 1.7 ha;
- Semi-colonial breeding groups.

Vegetation preferences for nesting territories:

- Prefers ungrazed or lightly grazed grassland;
- Prefers dry, dense grasslands with a variety of grass species and tall forbs;
- Scattered shrubs for singing perches;
- Prefers thick cover.

Uncommon cowbird host.

Nests may be mowed in cultivated grassland.

No bioregional information available for historical and current distribution in CALFED area.

IV. Long-billed Curlew

A. Status

- California Bird Species of Special Concern
- USFWS Region 1 Species of Management Concern (1995)

B. Wintering Habitat Recommendations

There are no known breeding records for Long-billed Curlew in the CALFED project area. However, the Bay/Delta Region includes important wintering habitat for the species. Surveys of California's Central Valley document it as one of the most important regions in western North America to migratory and wintering shorebirds (Shuford et al. 1998), including

LBCU. Of 12 numerous species with comparable data, 7 (including LBCU) had Central Valley populations exceeding those on the California coast in at least one season. (LBCU: August and winter).

Wintering habitat preferences include:

- Upland herbaceous areas
- Croplands
- Grasslands
- Large coastal estuaries

Conservation measures should be incorporated into a larger Shorebird Conservation Strategy for the CALFED target area.

V. Double-crested Cormorant (rookery)

A. Status

- California Bird Species of Special Concern

B. Breeding Habitat Recommendations

There are no data specific to the CALFED project area for Double-crested Cormorant. However, the following may be extrapolated from other areas:

- Site tenacious;
- Colonial breeding groups;
- Suitable nest-site must be within 8 - 16 km of dependable food supply;
- Nests in live or dead trees, on islands, rock ledges on cliffs, structures.

Conservation measures should include protection of the immediate nesting colony as well as a ---
-- buffer zone.

Consider adding the following conservation measures:

Valley Riparian Species such as: Least Bell's Vireo and California Yellow Warbler

Time management/restoration activities to avoid nesting and fledging of young bird species.

Manage grazing to ensure recruitment of young riparian deciduous shrubs and to avoid direct impacts to ground-nesting birds.

Control star thistle and other weedy non-native species to promote a diverse herb layer.

Yellow-Billed Cuckoo

The focus of restoration efforts should occur along the Sacramento River from Red Bluff to Colusa.

Restoration of habitat requires patches be a minimum of 50-100 acres, with a minimum width of 100 meters per pair. Optimal habitat for a pair would be 180 acres or more, and wider than 600 meters. Adjacent to suitable habitat should be upland refugia habitats for foraging in wet years.

Restore and manage riparian forests to promote structural diversity and volume of the understory to increase the value of existing/ongoing habitat and restoration projects.

Control the use of herbicides and pesticides in adjacent orchards.

Avoid groupings of cattle, associated facilities, and human habitation near high-priority riparian nest site during the breeding season. These land uses provide foraging areas for cowbirds.

Develop brown-headed cowbird control measures.

Use a groundcover in orchards and vineyards to discourage foraging by brown-headed cowbirds and increase productivity. If this vegetation is to be managed, avoid mowing through the nesting season or mow to 6 inches or less to discourage nesting.

Red-legged frog

Goal: "M" is O.K.

Prescription: Protect existing habitat and restore additional suitable aquatic, wetland, and riparian habitats.

Conservation Measures:

- create viable, self-sustaining populations that are connected to other populations
- reduce mortality from non-native predators
- reduce the use of herbicides that adversely affect the frog and its habitat
- restrict the clearing of vegetation from canal banks or the excavation of a canal to no more than one linear half during any given year
- restrict activities such as clearing or dredging to the months of March to October

Aleutian Canada Goose

Goal: "M" is O.K.

Table showing associated aquatic NCCP Habitats: Add grassland and natural seasonal wetland habitat.

Prescription: 7,500 geese

Conservation Measures:

- To provide 25,000 to 35,000 acres of feeding and roosting habitat; feeding habitats include pasture, harvested grain and bean fields, and sprouting winter wheat fields;
- roosting habitat includes large ponds, larkes, and off-shore islands.

Snowy Egret (rookery)

Goal: "M" is O.K.

Prescription: Identify and protect remaining snowy egret rookeries while restoring additional rookery sites.

Conservation Measures:

- create 5 new rookery sites that have a minimum of 5 breeding pairs using the site

San Joaquin Kit Fox

Goal: "M" is O.K.

Prescription: Protect existing San Joaquin kit fox habitat while enhancing existing and restoring corridors of movement between metapopulations.

Conservation Measures:

1. Within 60 days prior to the beginning of construction activities or any project activity likely to impact the San Joaquin kit fox, pre-construction or pre-activity surveys should be conducted by a qualified biologist. Surveys should determine the presence or absence of the kit fox on the project site(s), identify specific uses of the area by kit fox if possible, and assess the potential impacts to the species of the proposed activity. Survey methodologies should follow techniques acceptable to USFWS and CDFG.
2. If avoidance is not possible, limited den destruction may be permitted. Coordination with USFWS and CDFG prior to destruction will be necessary.
3. Activities should be conducted between March 1 and July 31 when kit fox activities are the easiest to detect.
4. Following pre-construction activities and before project activities begin, protective exclusion zones should be established around all known and potential San Joaquin kit fox dens. The size of these zones should be determined on a project-specific basis in consultation with USFWS and CDFG. Construction related and other project activities should be prohibited within these exclusion zones. Only essential vehicle operation on existing roads and simple foot traffic should be permitted.
5. Project-related vehicles should observe a 20 mph speed limit in all project areas, except on county roads and State and Federal highways; this is especially important at night when kit fox are most active. To the extent possible, night time construction should be minimized.
6. To prevent inadvertent entrapment of kit foxes or other animals during the construction phase of a project, all excavated, steep-walled holes or trenches more than 2 feet deep should be covered at the close of each working day by plywood or similar materials, or provided with one or more escape ramps constructed of earth fill or wooden planks. Before such holes or trenches are filled, they should be thoroughly inspected for trapped animals.
7. All construction pipes, culverts, or similar structures with a diameter of 4 or more inches that are stored at a construction site for any one or more overnight periods should be thoroughly inspected for kit foxes before the pipe is subsequently buried, capped, or otherwise used or moved in any way.
8. All food related trash items such as wrappers, cans, bottles, and food scraps should be disposed of in closed containers only and regularly removed from a construction or other project site.
9. No pets should be permitted on project sites.
10. Use of rodenticides or herbicides in project areas with known kit fox occurrences should be restricted.