

Jason Lopez
Resource and Trails Manager
San Dieguito River Park
18372 Sycamore Creek Road
Escondido, CA 92025
18 August 2018

Dear Jason,

RE: Results of 2018 Cactus Wren and California Gnatcatcher Bernardo Mountain surveys

We, Clark R. Mahrtdt (CRM) and Kenneth L. Weaver (KLW), conducted eight surveys from 4 April to 13 August 2018 on the breeding status of the Coastal Cactus Wren and the California Gnatcatcher within the Bernardo Mountain Preserve, San Diego County, California. This is our fourth survey (see reports by Mahrtdt and Weaver 2015, 2016, 2017) in the preserve. Surveys conducted in 2014 (Mahrtdt and Weaver 2015) revealed three defined territories (T-1, T-2, T-3; Figure 1) which are reported herein as survey results.

COASTAL CACTUS WREN. We initially identified two breeding pairs, one each, from T-1 and T-3. We also observed two apparently unmated males and three, possibly four juveniles. We did not observe any definite brood nests although fresh nests and nest-building activity was noted in all three territories. These nests were located in close proximity to the San Dieguito River Trail and were identified as roosting nests. Carrying food or feeding of young was not verified despite the presence of juvenile-plumaged wrens. We identified each individual by photographing and noting field characteristics including eye color (red in adults, brown in younger birds), presence and extent of dark chest patches (lacking in younger birds), and unique undertail spotting patterns. Based on these characteristics, we matched photos taken in 2017 with the males in previously-mapped territories. In addition, we noted foraging activity of wrens in restored prickly pear cactus-coastal sage scrub habitat in all three territories. Wrens observed singing are referred to as males. A chronology of observations follows:

4 April (0740 h – 1100 h); observers CRM and KLW.

T-1: Two adult wrens were observed simultaneously between 0753 h – 0802 h. The male was photographed, including the undertail. The second individual was only briefly observed and was not singing. It is not likely that this individual was a young bird as fledglings have not been reported in coastal wren populations before mid-April (Unitt 2004).

T-2: One singing male was photographed at 0841 h, including the undertail.

T-3: Two wrens were initially noted in this territory at 0916 h. Both were photographed, including undertail views. Both engaged in greeting displays indicating a pair. The pair was active traversing approximately 300 m of T-3.

Summary: Pairs occupying T-1 and T-3. A single male is present in T-2; no mate observed. Five individuals observed.

25 April (0715 h – 1105 h); observers CRM and KLW.

T-1: One singing male was photographed at 0753 h. Wren was vocal and flying from eastern portion of T-1 to the west for a distance of 260 m., and using an SDG&E steel power pole as a perch site.

T-2: Adult male was active and vocal, flying a distance of 90 – 95 m both up and downslope. No evidence of second individual.

T-3: A juvenile wren was photographed at 0903 h although may not be a young of the current breeding season. An adult was photographed showing characteristics of the male observed in T-3 on 4 April.

Summary: Males occupying T-1 and T-3; females may be on nests. Single male continues in T-2. Juvenile in T-3 may be the young from the previous year. Four individuals observed.

15 May (0745 h – 1145 h); observer CRM.

T-1: Observed male wren singing from the top of power pole then moving to several perch sites. Nest building and carrying food was not observed. Female was not present.

T-2: Wrens were not observed in this territory.

T-3: Pair present and active carrying nesting material and building (roosting?) nest (with photos). Pair was gathering nesting material in a 10-20 m radius around the nest site located about 15 m downslope from main trail.

Summary: One male wren in T-1 and a pair present in T-3. Wren not present in T-2 although observed on 4 and 25 April. Three individuals observed.

30 May (0756 h – 1140 h); observer CRM.

T-1: Male wren singing almost continuously from top of both power poles (east and west poles). This wren was very active covering T-1 and flying approximately 150 m downslope and southeast to a recently restored prickly pear cactus-CSS site. Individual covered the eastern portion of T-1 adding nesting material to two (roosting?) nests. Female wren was not present. There was no evidence of male feeding young.

T-2: Wren adding to nest in prickly pear cactus (with photos) at 0923 h.

T-3: Observed a recently constructed nest in clear view at 0943 h. I flushed a pair of wrens from prickly pear cactus (photo of location). The male was foraging for nesting material and flew to new nest where it added nesting material. The female was not observed during the remainder of the survey. At 1000 h, observed wren gathering additional nesting material. This activity was confined to the northern portion of T-3. At 1053 h, the male flew to the southern end of T-2 and vocalized.

Summary: Males detected in T-1 and T-2, and a pair in T-3. Four individuals observed.

12 June (0755 h – 1130 h); observer CRM.

T-1: The male wren was again vocalizing from the top of the east power pole but also frequented the first large patch of prickly pear cactus just to the east of the same pole. This behavior was noted on 3-4 occasions with the wren returning to the pole and singing. A nest, if any, was not in clear view. The male was not observed carrying food or nesting material. It appears this is a single male; no female was observed.

T-2: Wrens were not observed in this territory.

T-3: Observed pair of wrens at nest. At 1000 h, both individuals flew south 90-100 m down slope to cactus patch near Lake Hodges shoreline (with photos). At 1020 h, the pair flew back up slope and perched on *Sambucus* growing along the periphery of the prickly pear cactus. The pair was active and foraging in T-3 north. Carrying nesting material or food was not detected. I lost track of the pair around 1045 h on both south and north sections of T-3. Playing tape did not elicit a response.

Summary: Male detected in T-1 and a pair in T-3. Wrens not detected in T-2. Three individuals observed.

26 June (0720 h – 1100 h); observers CRM and K LW.

T-1: Wrens were not observed in this territory.

T-2: An unoccupied wren nest was detected in prickly pear cactus above the trail. At 0825 h, two wrens were observed and photographed at 0828 h perched side-by-side downslope of the San Dieguito River Trail near Lake Hodges. The male was seen on all survey dates above in T-3. The second individual, believed to be a female, showed characteristics of the non-singing individual reported on 4 April in T-3. A third individual was noted prior to our observations of the pair and was chased by the two adult birds photographed. Activity of these three individuals was centered in recently planted prickly pear patches. At 0840 h, the female flew up slope to a yucca. The same individual at the nest site mentioned above showed characteristics of the male noted in T-2 on 4 April.

T-3: Wrens were not observed in this territory.

Summary: The pair previously noted in T-3 has now occupied portions of T-2. We speculate that the third individual noted in the “chase” could be the male originally observed in this territory on 4 April or could possibly indicate begging behavior by an offspring. Three individuals observed, all in T-2.

17 July (0719 h – 1105 h); observers CRM and K LW.

T-1: Observed a pair of wrens in prickly pear and perched on a *Sambucus* (with photos) at 0742 h. This is the second survey since 4 April where we observed a pair in T-1. The photos of the male matched the male previously photographed in this territory. We observed the pair foraging in prickly pear and coastal sage scrub for approximately 20 minutes. A nest was located just below the trail and two nests were located above the trail. We returned to T-1 at 1014 h. A male cactus wren was observed near the west power pole (western portion of T-1) and vocalizing at 1949 h. The male was joined by what appeared to be three juvenile-plumaged wrens (with photos) that remained in close contact.

T-2: An adult male singing (0758 h – 0801 h) below, and later above the trail, displayed an undertail pattern not previously photographed. An individual matching the characteristics of the adult male originally observed in T-3 on 4 and 25 April and later in T-2 on 26 June appeared above the trail near a nest at 0839 h. Returned at 0940h and noted individual as it emerged from prickly pear at 0953 h and vocalizing.

T-3: Wrens were not observed in this territory.

Summary: The pair in T-1 produced two possibly three young. The male originally observed in T-3 on 4 April, then later on 25 April, 30 May, and 26 June continues in T-2. A wren of unknown origin (“mystery bird”) has appeared in T-2. Six, possibly seven, individuals observed.

13 August (0650 h – 1031 h); observer CRM.

T-1: Arrived in T-1 at 0926 h. A wren flew up from below the San Dieguito River Trail and perched high on the east power pole. Ten minutes later, a second wren flew out of the western section of T-1 and joined the first wren. Both wrens were making contact calls.

T-2: At 0842 h, a pair of wrens was observed perched in a dead *Sambucus* in a patch of prickly pear cactus about 50 m upslope from the trail. They remained there during my 40 minute visit where I noted one individual would leave the perch site, fly to the prickly pear, and then return to the site. The second individual would repeat this behavior. I did not photograph this pair nor did they respond to my tape.

T-3: Wrens were not observed in this territory.

Summary: A pair was present in T-1. Fledglings observed on 17 July in T-1 were not present and possibly left the territory. The pair in T-2 remains and, based on my observations, I suspect this pair was attending to an active brood nest. An individual of unknown origin noted 17 July was not observed.

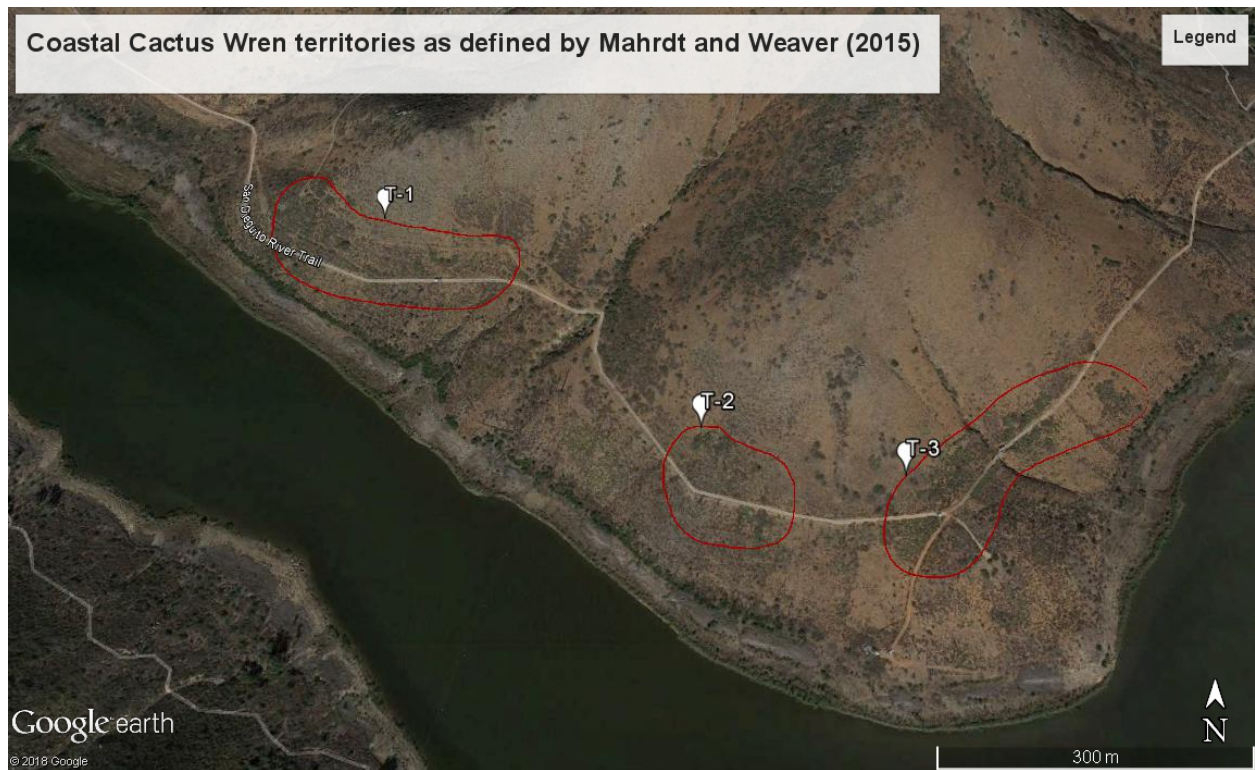


Figure 1. Original locations of Coastal Cactus Wren territories (T-1, T-2, T-3) as defined by 2014 surveys (Mahrtdt and Weaver (2015) from Bernardo Mountain, Lake Hodges, San Diego County, California.

CALIFORNIA GNATCATCHER. This species was not the primary focus of the 2018 survey effort. Gnatcatcher presence and probable or confirmed breeding activity were observed above and below the San Dieguito River Trail over a distance of 1.5 km covering prickly pear-coastal sage scrub vegetation on the south-facing slope of Bernardo Mountain. Detection was based on direct observations or from vocalizing individuals. The presence of male and female birds and breeding behavior was recorded as follows: SH, species observed in suitable habitat for breeding; AB, agitated behavior; PR, pair in suitable habitat; PN, probable nest; TB, territorial behavior; ON, occupied nest; and FY, adult feeding young (Unitt, P. 2004. San Diego County Bird Atlas). We confirmed nesting in six pairs of gnatcatchers. The results are summarized in the table below.

| 2018 CALIFORNIA GNATCATCHER RESULTS, BERNARDO MOUNTAIN, LAKE HODGES (APRIL – JULY) | | | |
|--|-----------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| DATE | LOCATION ¹ | INDIVIDUALS OBS ² | BREEDING BEHAVIOR ³ |
| 4-April | 33.06064 -117.09324 | 4 | PR(4) |
| | 33.05782 -117.08958 | 3 | SH(1); PR(2) |
| 25-April | 33.06092 -117.09520 | 1 | SH(1) |
| | 33.06080 -117.09403 | 1 | SH(1) |
| | 33.05990 -117.09294 | 1 | SH(1) |
| | 33.05914 -117.09138 | 1 | SH(1) |
| | 33.05781 -117.08958 | 2 | FY(2); confirmed |
| | 33.05769 -117.08854 | 2 | FY(2); confirmed |
| | 33.05825 -117.08963 | 1 | SH(1) |
| | 33.05722 -117.08748 | 2 | PR(2) |
| | 33.05882 -117.08619 | 1 | SH(1) |
| | 33.05938 -117.08548 | 1 | SH(1) |
| 15-May | 33.06039 -117.09263 | 1 | AB(1) |
| 30-May | 33.06036 -117.09281 | 1 | AB(1) |
| | 33.06047 -117.09249 | 1 | AB(1) |
| | 33.06038 -117.09274 | 1 | SH(1) |
| | 33.05856 -117.09050 | 1 | AB(1) |
| | 33.05764 -117.08886 | 1 | AB(1) |
| | 33.05829 -117.08978 | 2 | PR, FY(2); confirmed |
| | 33.05902 -117.08625 | 1 | AB(1) |
| | 33.05887 -117.08571 | 1 | SH(1) |
| | 33.05839 -117.08724 | 2 | TB(2) |
| | 33.06065 -117.09302 | 1 | SH(1) |
| 12-June | 33.06081 -117.09432 | 3 | SH(1); PR, FY(2); confirmed |
| | 33.05824 -117.08983 | 2 | PR(2) |
| | 33.05768 -117.08823 | 1 | AB(1) |
| | 33.05847 -117.08638 | 1 | AB(1) |
| | 33.06032 -117.09279 | 1 | SH(1) |
| 26-June | 33.05785 -117.08818 | 2 | PN(2) |
| | 33.05857 -117.08644 | 2 | PN(2) |
| | 33.05913 -117.08598 | 2 | ON(2); confirmed |

| | | | |
|---------|---------------------|---|----------------------|
| | 33.05813 -117.09009 | 2 | PR, FY(2); confirmed |
| | 33.06165 -117.09597 | 2 | PN(2) |
| 17-July | 33.05803 -117.08980 | 2 | AB(2) |
| | 33.05838 -117.08677 | 3 | PN(2); SH(1) |
| | 33.05832 -117.08719 | 2 | PN(2) |
| | 33.05791 -117.08769 | 1 | SH(1) |
| | 33.06063 -117.09443 | 1 | SH(1) |

1. Location: \pm 5 meters

2. May represent multiple observations of the same individual(s)

3. Breeding behavior: SH=species obs in suitable habitat for breeding; AB=agitated behavior; PR=pair in suitable breeding habitat; PN=probable nest; TB=territorial behavior; ON=occupied nest; FY=adult feeding young.

Breeding behavior abbreviation from Unitt, P. 2004. San Diego County Bird Atlas.