

The Coastal Cactus Wren In Ventura County

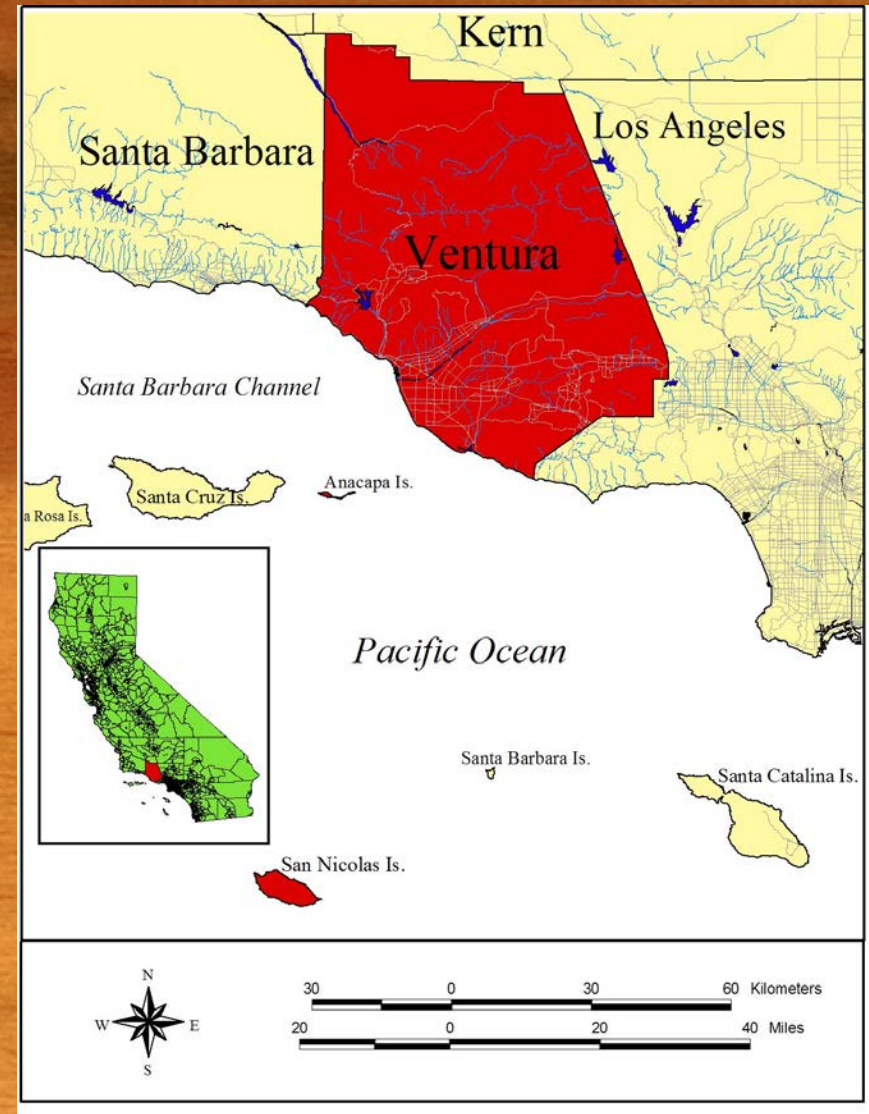


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Ventura County

- Northern extent of “coastal” Cactus Wren (CACW) range;
- Prior to 2012/eBird, range of CACW in VEN very poorly known;
- Extensive cactus-rich coastal scrub;
- Aggressive conservation activity (COSCA, SMMC, TNC).











Biological Importance of Ventura Co. CACW

Populations isolated on coastal slope with many T/E/Sensitive plants and animals, incl.:

- Birds (California gnatcatcher)
- Mammals (American badger)
- Reptiles (Coast horned lizard)
- Rare plants (*Dudleya*, *Eriogonum spp.*)

Three main habitat types:

- Alluvial fan scrub (riverbeds)
- *Opuntia* patches in low hills (<1000' a.s.l.)
- Cholla-rich coastal bluff scrub

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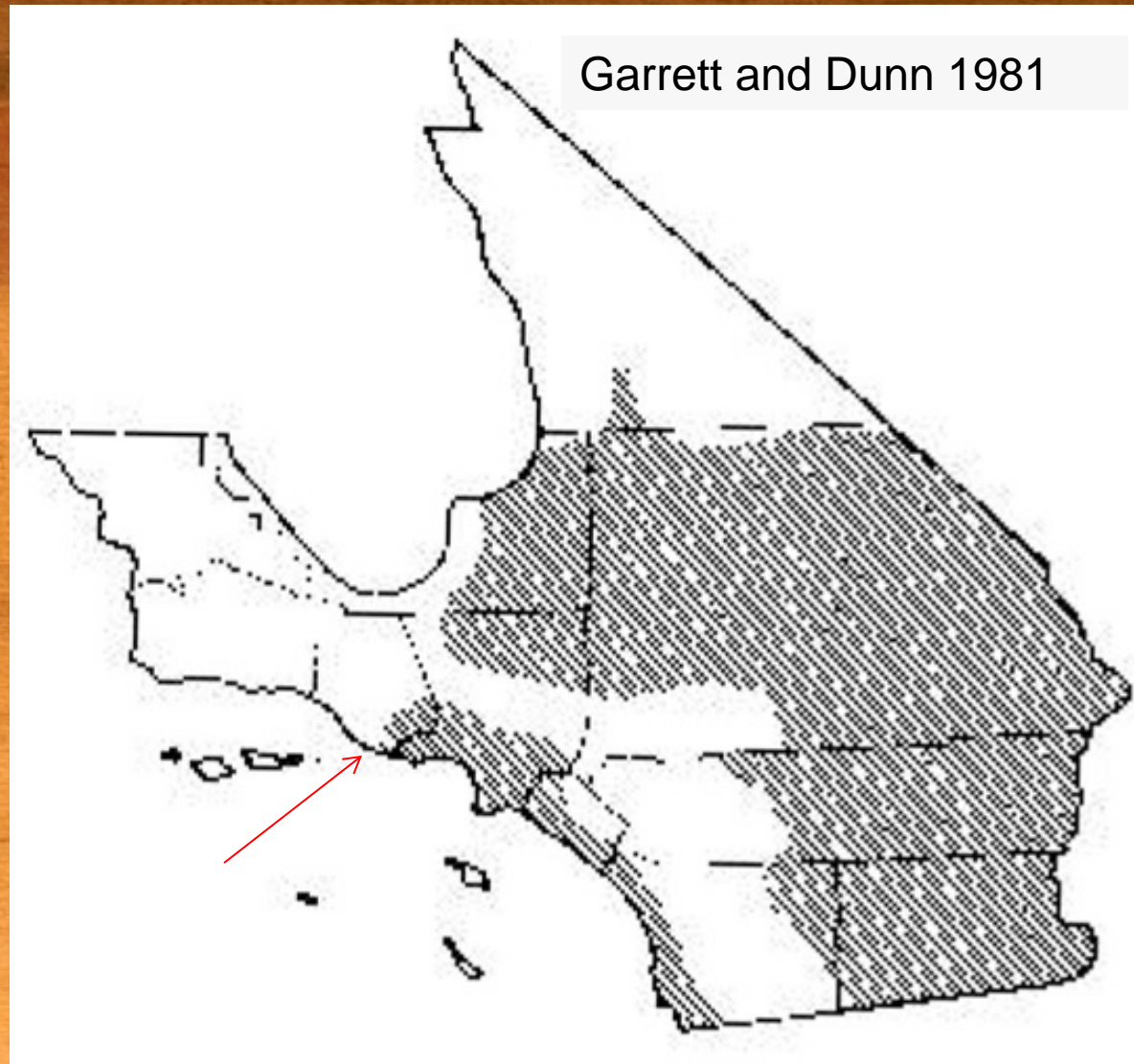
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Three main habitat types:

- Alluvial fan scrub (riverbeds) – EXTIRPATED
- *Opuntia* patches in low hills (<1000' a.s.l.)
- Coastal bluff scrub – BURNED 2012



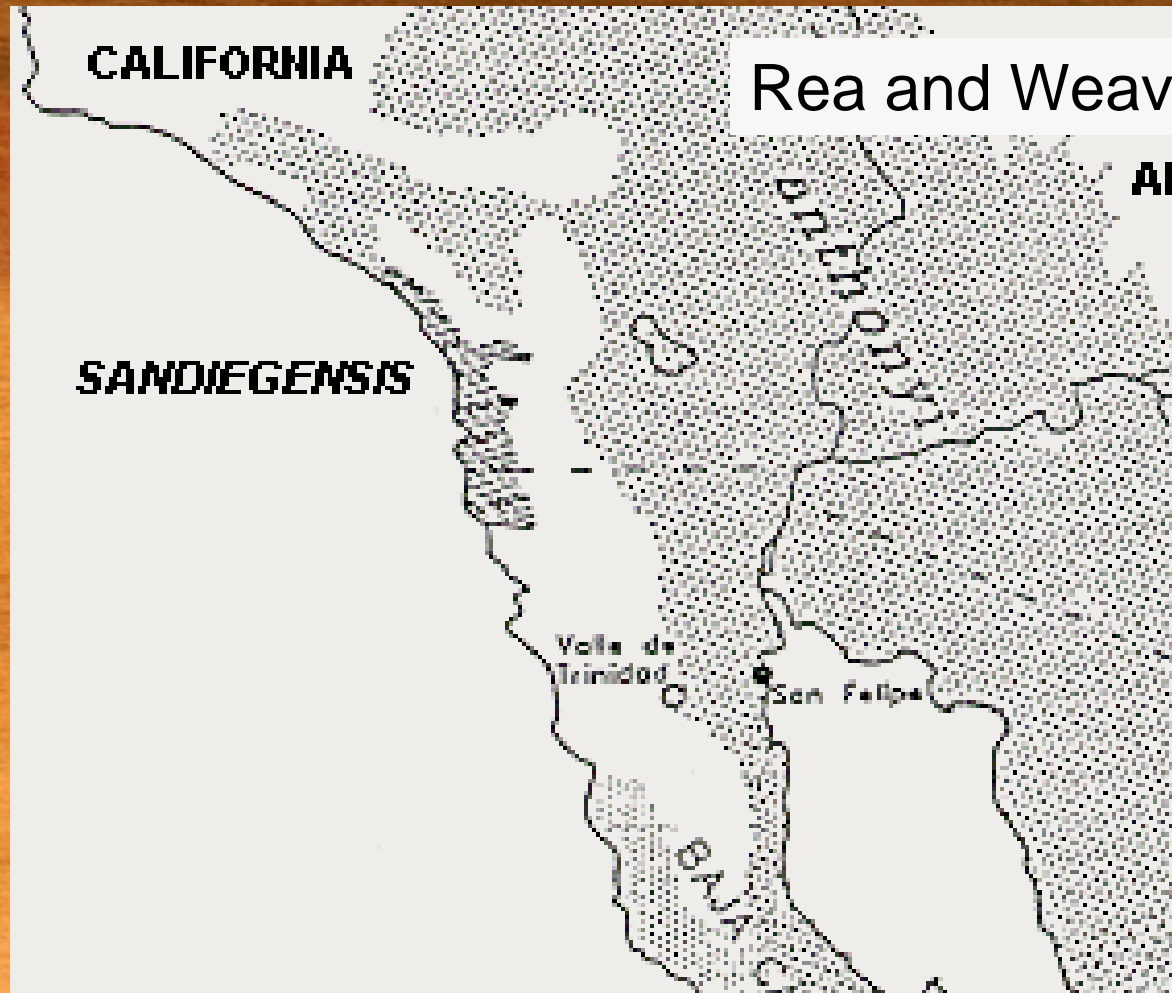
Known distribution of coastal cactus wren in Ventura Co. (pre-2012)



- Southeastern corner of VEN Co.
- Contiguous with coastal Los Angeles Co. birds
- Isolated from Mojave Desert birds.



Another take...



Rea and Weaver 1990

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Main Questions: (2012)

Where does the coastal cactus wren actually live in Ventura Co.?

Is it isolated (or was it) from desert populations? Other coastal populations?

What are current threats?

What landowner(s) are most responsible for conservation?

Are desert populations unrelated to all coastal populations?

2012 Survey (funded by CDFW)

(Protocol developed with Robb Hamilton, based on 10 years of surveys of NROC)

1. Locate cactus patches of >1 acre.
2. Sketch boundaries of cactus onto acetate/aerials.
3. Classify Type I and II (based on cactus height/extent).
4. Map territories of birds/nests (= "Sites")
5. Revisit 3-7 times during spring.

VEN Co. survey effort (2012)

1. Volunteers (30+ birders);
2. Four main areas of County:
 - South of US 101 (Pt. Mugu, CSUCI)
 - North of US 101 (Hill Canyon – private)
 - Thousand Oaks
 - Moorpark/Simi Valley
3. Attempted to access various private property, with mixed success.
 - Gated communities
 - Ranches
 - Utility ROWs



Image © 2012 City of Thousand Oaks

© 2012 Google

34°13'12.50" N 118°53'08.81" W elev 913 ft

Google

Eye alt 2898 ft

1989



Challenges immediately apparent:

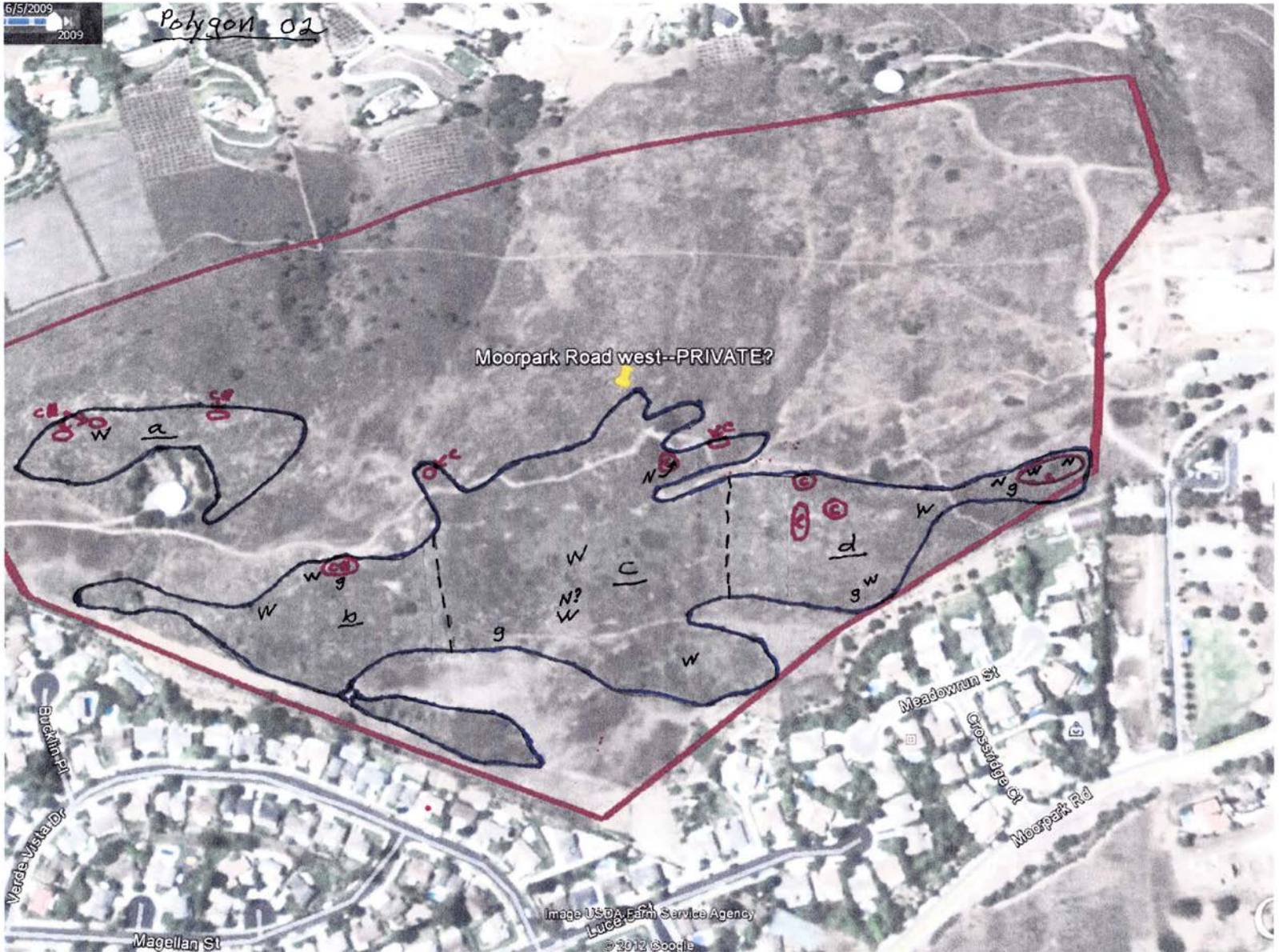
- Can't read maps;
- Can't draw outlines of cactus patches onto aerials;
- Too much area to cover in some areas, not enough in others.

But...

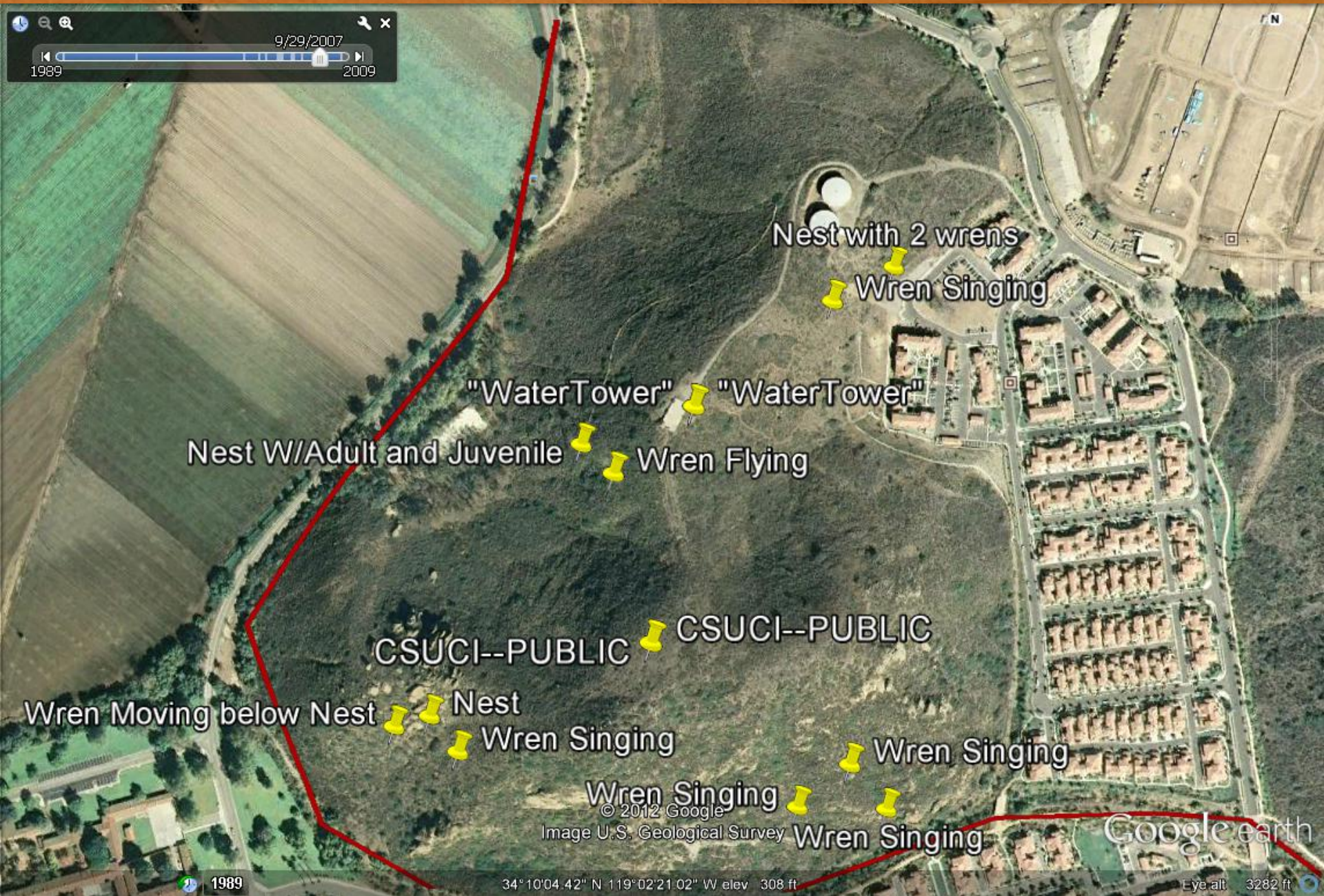
A surprisingly large amount of high-quality data began to accumulate as the season progressed...

6/5/2009
2009

Polygon 02



9/29/2007
1989 2009



Nest with 2 wrens

Wren Singing

"WaterTower"

"WaterTower"

Nest W/Adult and Juvenile

Wren Flying

CSUCI--PUBLIC

CSUCI--PUBLIC

Wren Moving below Nest

Nest

Wren Singing

Wren Singing

Wren Singing

Wren Singing

© 2012 Google
Image U.S. Geological Survey

Google earth

1989

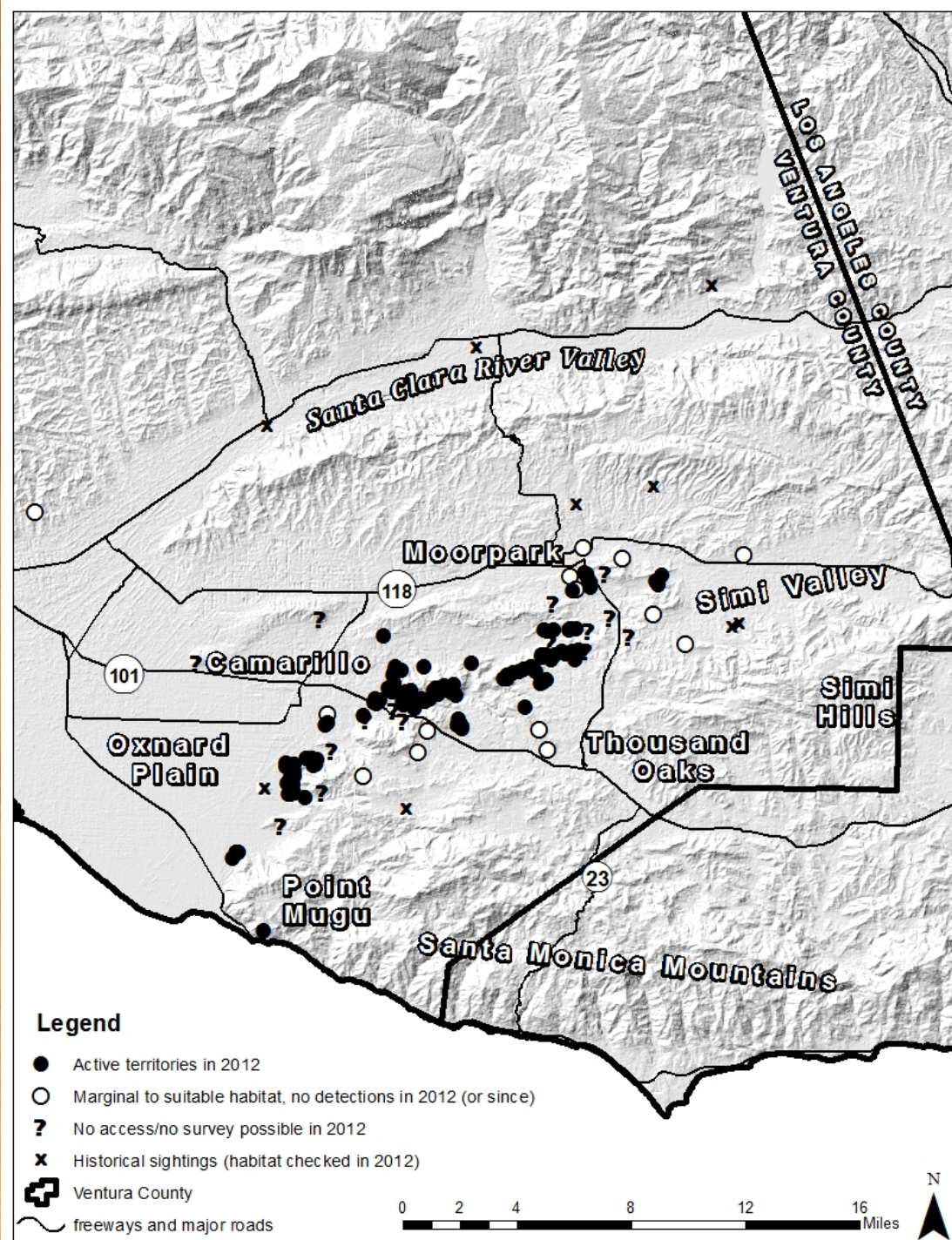
34°10'04.42" N 119°02'21.02" W elev 308 ft

Eye alt 3282 ft

| Region and subregion | Nearest cities | Active territories (2012 survey) | | |
|---|-------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|-------|
| | | Documented | Estimated (additional) | Total |
| Santa Clara River valley | | | | |
| Lower | Santa Paula | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Upper | Fillmore | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Moorpark | | | | |
| “Moorpark Grasslands” (north of U.S. 118) | Moorpark, Simi Valley | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Tierra Rejada/Las Posas Hills (south of U.S. 118) | Moorpark, Simi Valley | 15 | 15 | 30 |
| Thousand Oaks | | | | |
| Mountclef Ridge/Wildwood Park | Thousand Oaks | 26 | 10 | 36 |
| Hill Canyon/Camarillo Springs (north of U.S. 101) | Newbury Park, Camarillo | 40 | 10 | 50 |
| Oxnard Plain (including Point Mugu) | | | | |
| CSU Channel Islands and vic. (south of U.S. 101) | Camarillo | 30 | 20 | 50 |
| Total | | 111 | 55 | 166 |

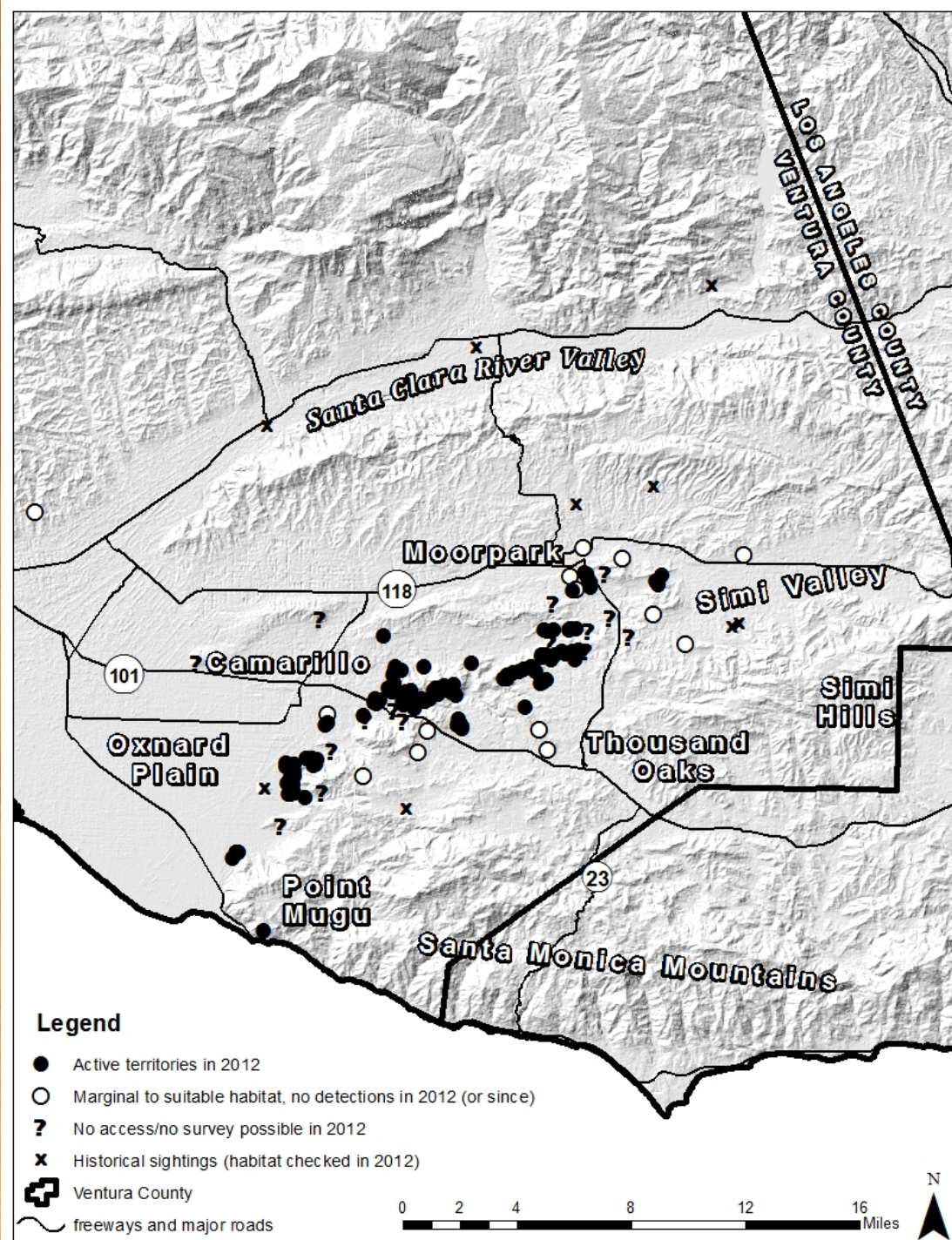
General (2012) distribution of Cactus Wrens in Ventura Co.





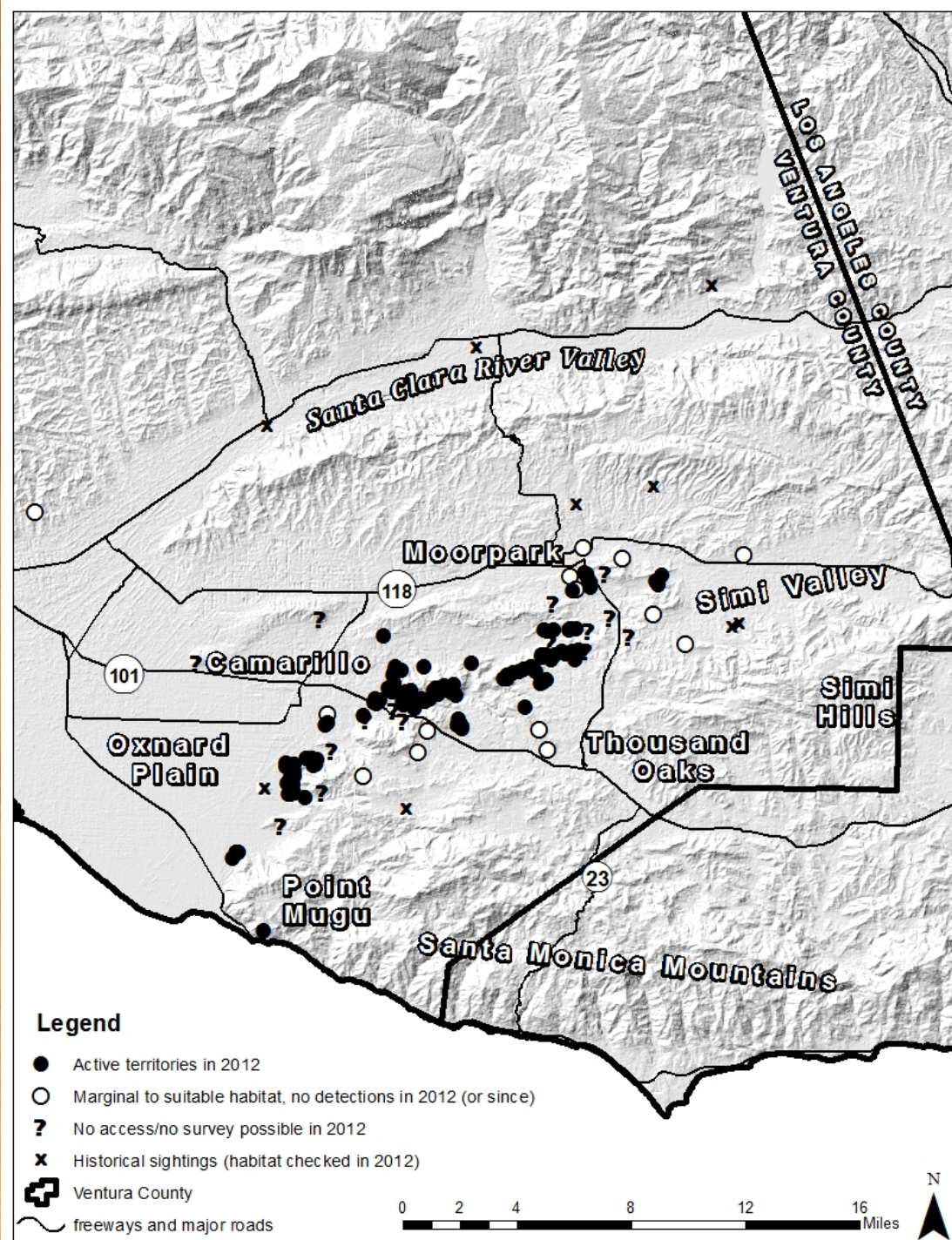
Currently (2013), CACWs are restricted to a fairly narrow band along the far western edge of the Santa Monica Mountains and Simi Hills, west and north of Thousand Oaks.

Populations once present along the Santa Clara River and Santa Susana Mountains north of Moorpark/Simi now extirpated.



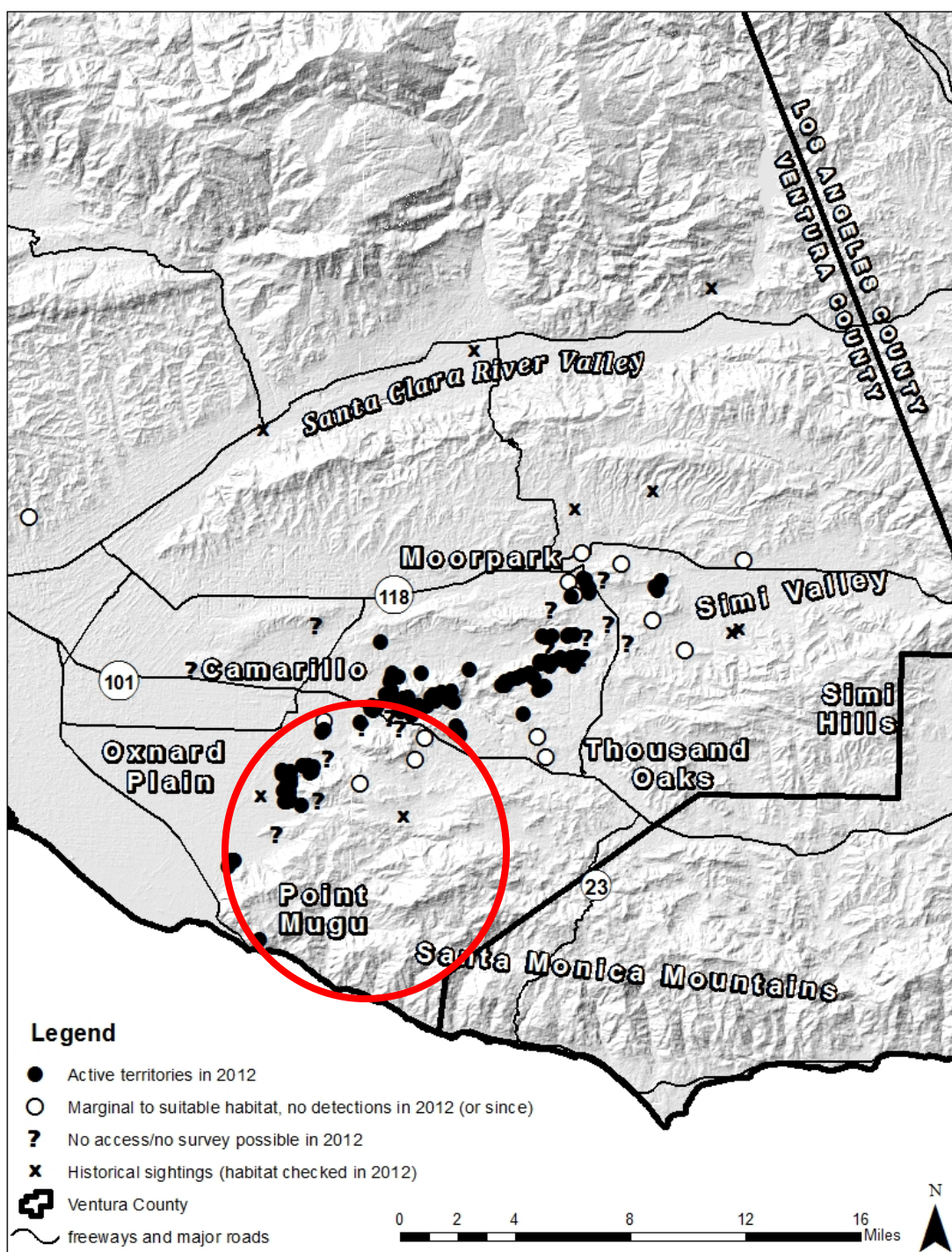
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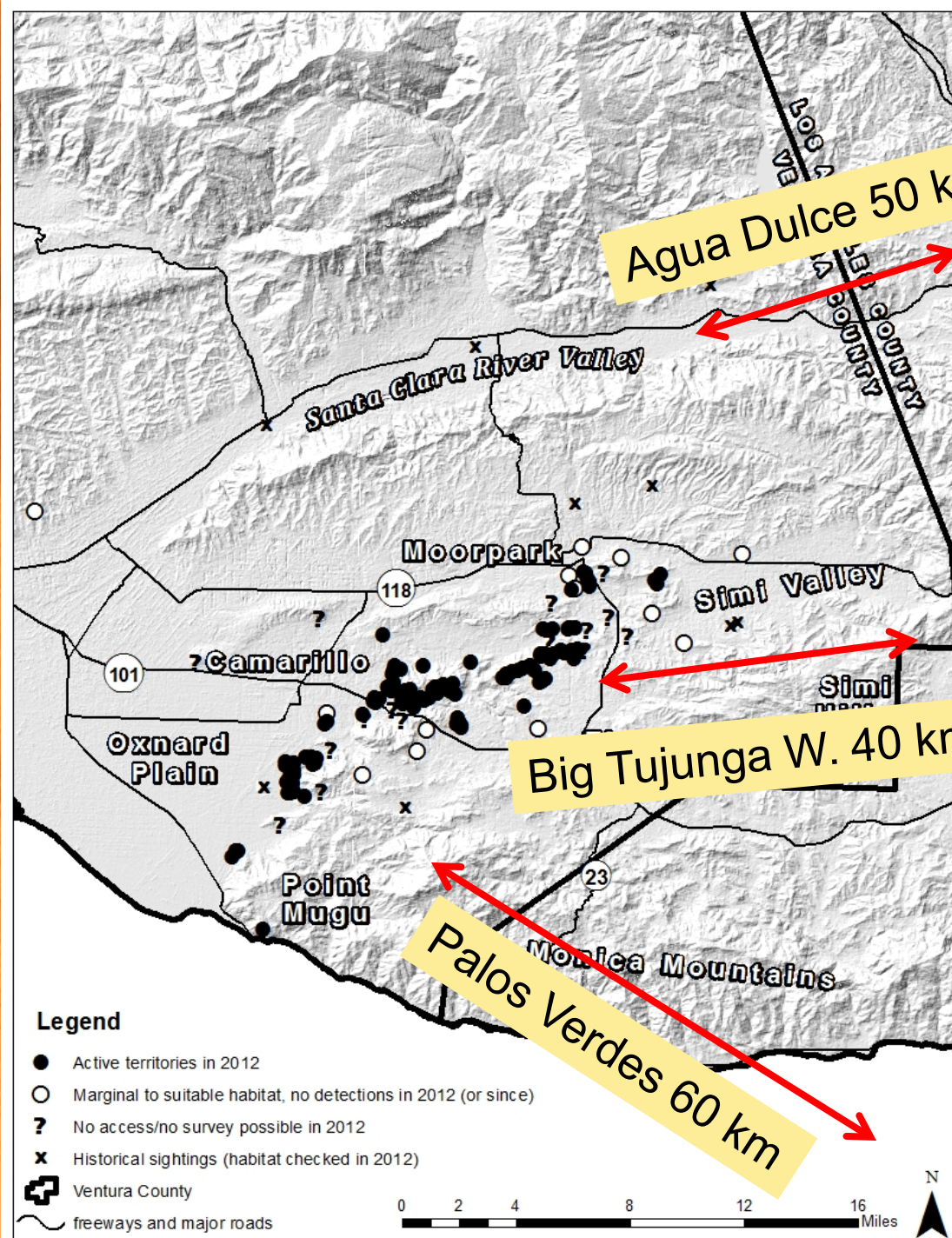
Of the estimated 166 active territories (2012), 100 are split between the north and south sides of US 101. The rest are split between Moorpark/Tierra Rejada Valley and Montclef Ridge north of Thousand Oaks

The 2013 Spring Fire south of US 101 may have claimed 20% of known territories.



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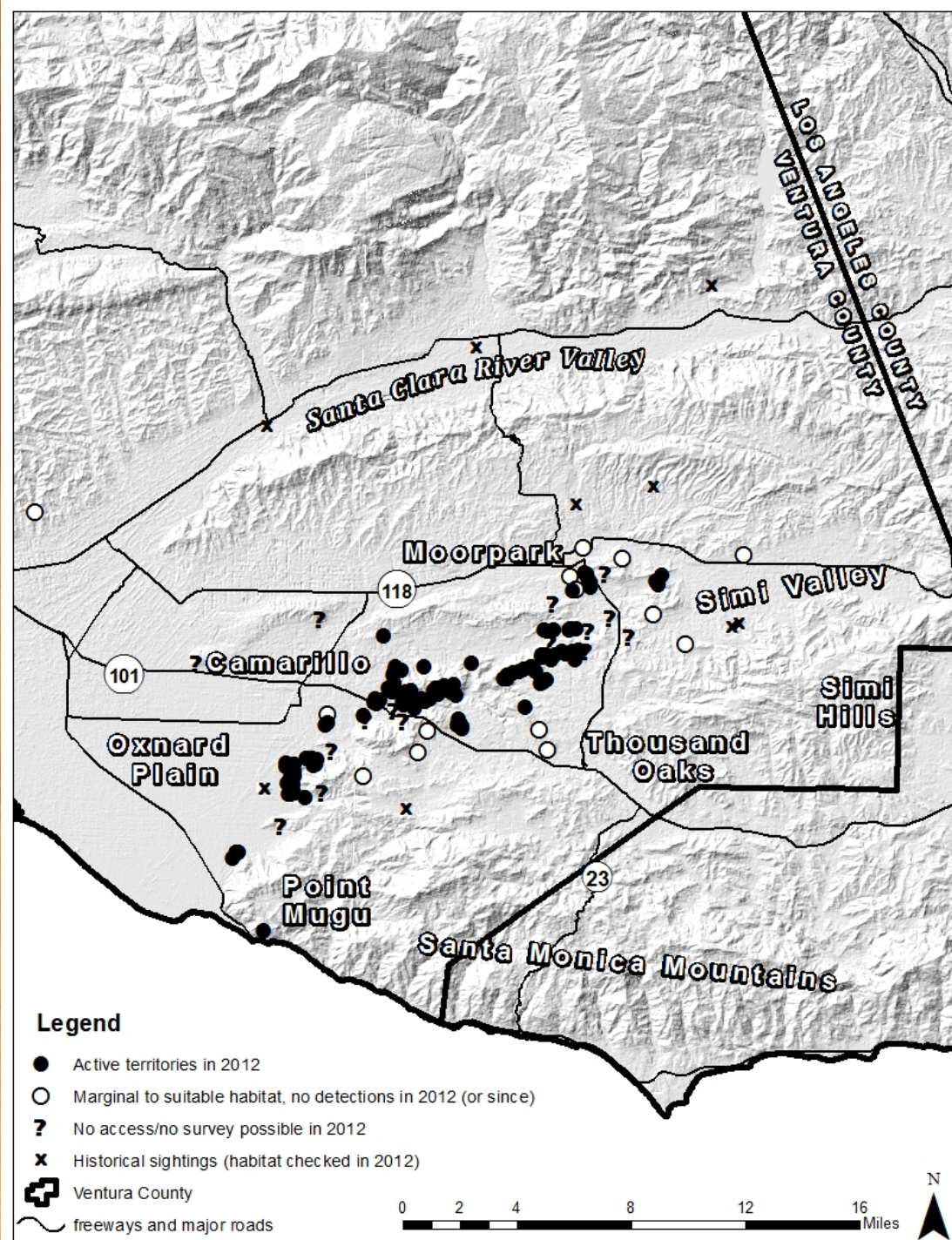
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Birds are now isolated from interior birds in the west Mojave Desert by 50 km, and coastal birds in the San Fernando Valley/Palos Verdes (Los Angeles County) by 40-60 km.

Now highly dependent on small blocks of habitat AWAY from large protected areas of SMM, etc.

Private lands probably VERY important.



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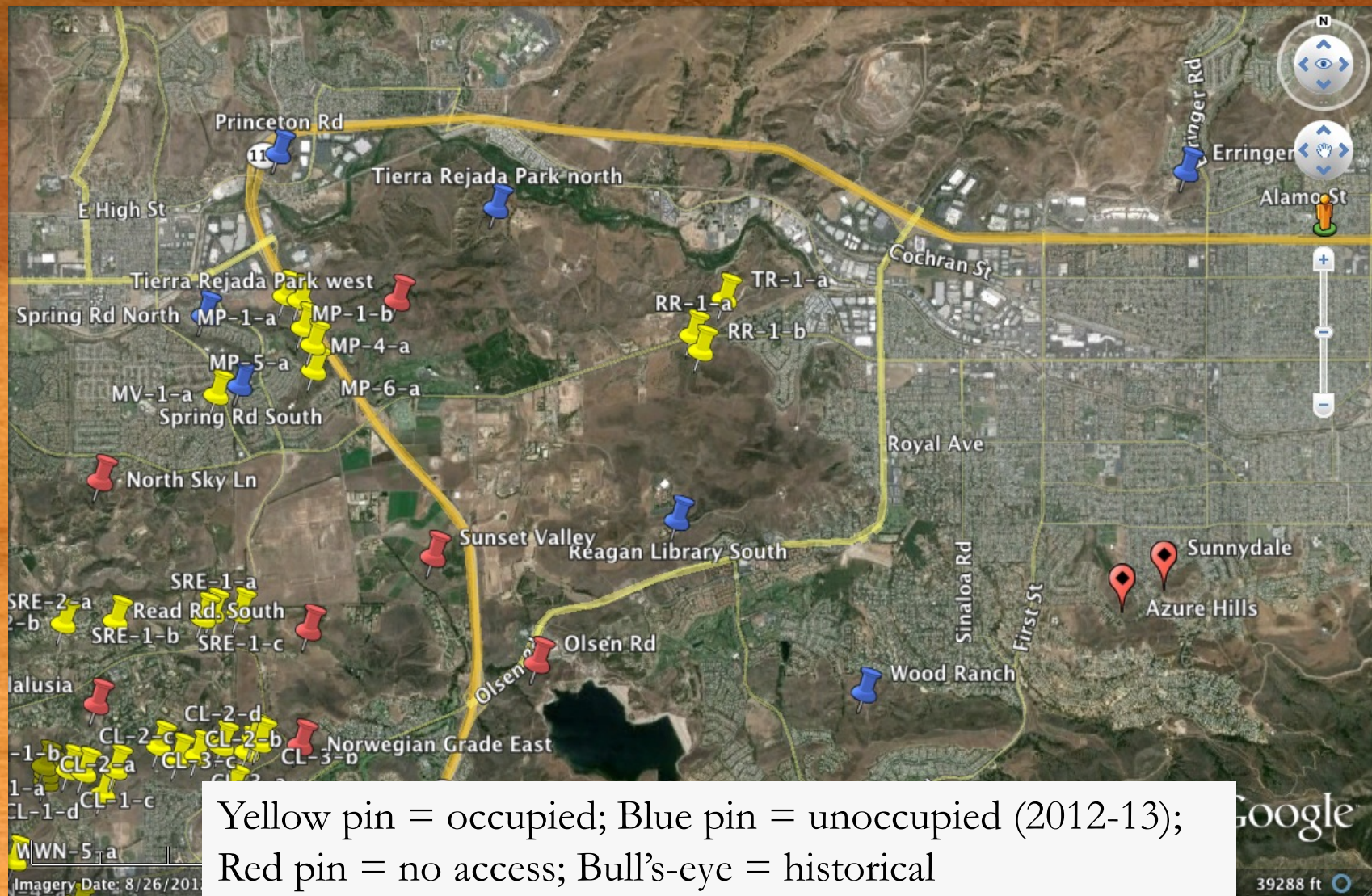
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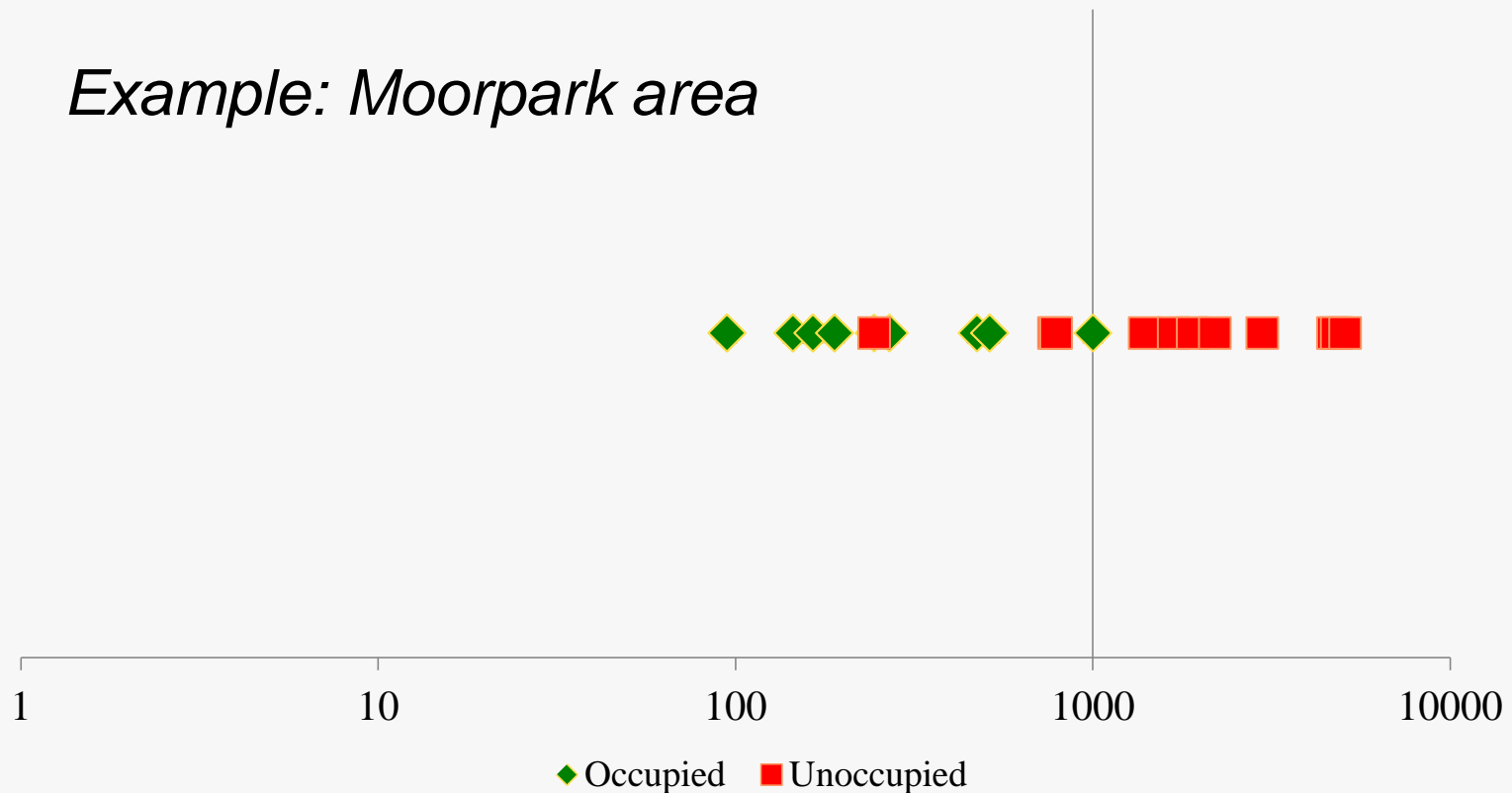
“Random” patches *within* subdivisions and “ranchettes” appear critical to survival of VEN Co. CACW.

All CACW territories in VEN Co. are within
c. 1 km of another CACW territory



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c. 1 km of another CACW territory

Example: Moorpark area



Meters from nearest neighbor

Research/conservation needs, L.A./Ventura Co. (2009)

Map Ventura County populations (immediately)

Formalize protection of Big Tujunga Wash population

Determine status of birds in Montebello Hills

Confirm loss of extirpated populations (e.g, Claremont)

Begin analysis of L.A. Co. demographic data (2009)

Survey “difficult”/overlooked sites missed in 2009

Add'l recommendations:

Identify ownership of core populations, satellite populations, and relevant agencies.

Work with landowners, municipalities, and agencies to stop degradation of habitats through brush-clearing, discing, etc.

Ensure that mitigation for California Gnatcatcher install large (1 acre+) contiguous patches of cactus.

A person wearing a backpack and a hat is walking through a field of tall, dry grass and cacti. The background shows rolling hills under a clear blue sky.

Thanks!!!

Karen Miner and Dan Blankenship (California Department of Fish and Wildlife); Shelly Austin and Kristin Foord (Conejo Open Space Conservation Agency), City of Thousand Oaks and Conejo Recreation and Parks District; California State University Channel Islands; Jody and Larry Neill; LeRoy Goldberg and Mike Simmons; and other private landowners.

Volunteers: Dan Blankenship, Mary Ann Campbell, Bonnie Clarfield-Bylin, Linda Dye, Adele Fergusson, Kitty Frallic, Alexis Frangis, Jennifer Gold, Carolyn Greene, Howard Higley, Linda Easter, Mark Holmgren, Jim Jennings, Dexter Kelly, Lindsey Kufra-Christie, Carol and William Langford, Larry Marcus, Heather Medvitz, David Pereksta, Allen Saute, Don Schroeder, Mike Sos, Eric Waian, Amy Worrell, Jackie Worden, Michael Zarky, and Francesca Zern for their time spent searching for Cactus Wrens.