2003 GOLDEN-CHEEKED WARBLER MONITORING STUDY SCHRAMM RANCH, TRAVIS COUNTY, TEXAS

Submitted to

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September 26, 2003

INTRODUCTION

On 16 July 1998, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) issued a Section 10(a)(1)(B) permit authorizing the incidental take of the endangered golden-cheeked warbler (*Dendroica chrysoparia*) during construction and occupation of specified portions of the Vista Royale property in western Travis County, Texas (USFWS Permit No. PRT-812695). The Vista Royale property, which consists of approximately 498 acres, is now referred to as "Schramm Ranch." Schramm Ranch is located east of Ranch Road 620 approximately two miles north of State Highway 71. The City of Lakeway lies immediately northwest of the property and the City of Austin is located approximately 14 miles to the east-southeast (Figure 1).

Approximately 198 acres of golden-cheeked warbler habitat on Schramm Ranch were required to be set aside and maintained in perpetuity as a preserve for the species under the terms and conditions of the Section 10(a)(1)(B) permit. In addition, presence/absence monitoring surveys for the golden-cheeked warbler were required to be conducted in preserve areas every third year until project build-out.

The first golden-cheeked warbler monitoring survey on Schramm Ranch was conducted in 2000 by SWCA® Environmental Consultants (SWCA). In 2000, a total of 48 hours and 30 minutes was spent conducting surveys on 29 March, 6, 12, and 25 April, and 2 May. It was estimated that all or portions of 10 golden-cheeked warbler territories were present on Schramm Ranch in 2000.

This report provides the results of monitoring surveys conducted on Schramm Ranch in 2003, as required by the terms and conditions of the Section 10(a)(1)(B) permit. Since 2000, ownership of the Schramm Ranch preserve areas was transferred from the entity planning to develop the property to the City of Lakeway.

METHODS

SWCA biologists familiar with golden-cheeked warbler habitat and vocalizations in Travis County conducted presence/absence surveys for the warbler in the Schramm Ranch preserve areas on 27 March, 1 and 16 April, and 9 and 14 May 2003. A total of 48 hours and 5 minutes was spent conducting surveys over these five days.

Surveys were conducted primarily by walking through areas and listening for golden-cheeked warbler vocalizations. No tape-recorded calls of warblers or screech owls were used to elicit responses. Birds located during surveys were usually followed for periods of time in an attempt to better determine the extent of their territories. Locations of all birds seen or heard on the property were recorded in the field on topographic aerial photographs at a scale of 1" = 300'. Lines were drawn connecting observations representing the same individual. Territory number, size, and configuration were estimated based on distribution of warbler sightings and contemporaneous warbler vocalizations.

Map produced using the USGS 2-foot Bee Cave DOQ (2002)

Approximate Property Boundary

Golden-cheeked Warbler Observation

Less Precisely Located Golden-cheeked Warbler Observation

Female Golden-cheeked Warbler Observation

Less Precisely Located Female Golden-cheeked Warbler Observation

Fledgling Golden-cheeked Warbler Observation

Solid lines connect sequential observations. Dashed lines connect contemporaneous vocalizations. Observations believed to represent the same individual are enclosed. large dashed lines across enclosures represent uncertainty as to whether observations represent one or two birds. Enclosures do not represent territorial boundaries.

FIGURE 2

Results of the 2003 Schramm Ranch Golden-cheeked Warbler Survey

500 0 500 Feet

N W E S

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PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

Schramm Ranch lies on the eastern edge of the Edwards Plateau and has topography typical of the region with relatively flat-topped ridges separated by steep-walled canyons. Two well-developed tributaries of Honey Creek originate on the property, both draining to the northeast. A segment of a third smaller tributary of Honey Creek is present in the northwest corner of the property. These tributaries are separated by steep-sided ridges and hills.

Virtually all of the approximately 198-acre warbler preserve area is comprised of steep-sided canyons. Vegetation within the canyons consists primarily of Ashe juniper (*Juniperus ashei*)/mixed-deciduous woodland. Live oak (*Quercus virginiana*) trees are generally common throughout. Texas oak (*Q. buckleyi*), escarpment black cherry (*Prunus serotina* var. *eximia*), shin oak (*Q. sinuata* var. *breviloba*), and Carolina buckthorn (*Rhamnus caroliniana*) trees occur in low to moderate densities on canyon slopes, being most common along the courses of ravines that incise the canyon slopes. Cedar elm (*Ulmus crassifolia*), Arizona walnut (*Juglans major*), sugarberry (*Celtis laevigata*), sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*), and black willow (*Salix nigra*) trees also occur in the woodlands, although primarily in low to very low densities and along the channels of the tributaries. Canopy closure within the woodlands is generally high, usually greater than 75 percent. Because of the mostly closed canopy, shrub development within the woodlands is poor. Shrub species present include yaupon (*Ilex vomitoria*), Texas persimmon (*Diospyros texana*), Mexican silktassel (*Garrya lindheimeri*), common hop-tree (*Ptelea trifoliata*), redbud (*Cercis canadensis*), and agarita (*Berberis trifoliolata*).

Those portions of Schramm Ranch planned for development primarily lie on ridgetops and hilltops. Planned development areas primarily supported open to semi-open Ashe juniper/live oak woodland prior to permit issuance and during the 2000 monitoring survey. These areas had been cleared of most woody vegetation prior to the 2003 survey. Also since the 2000 survey, some commercial development had been constructed along Ranch Road 620 in the northwest corner of the property and a road had been constructed along ridgetops to the east of this development.

SURVEY RESULTS

All or portions of an estimated 10 to 11 golden-cheeked territories were estimated present on Schramm Ranch in 2003 (Figure 2, map pocket). Four warbler territories were estimated present in the larger canyon on the west side of the property and six to seven territories were estimated present in the larger canyon on the east side. An estimated three female warblers were observed on the property in 2003, and fledgling warblers were observed in two locations. One fledgling warbler was observed with a female in the larger western canyon on 14 May, and a group of two fledglings was observed with a female in the eastern canyon, also on 14 May.

The distribution of warbler observations in 2003 was generally similar to that of 2000, with observations in both years primarily restricted to the canyon slopes. However, in 2000, two warbler territories were estimated present in the western canyon (compared to four in 2003) and eight territories were estimated present in the eastern canyon (compared to six to seven in 2003). Two female warblers and three groups of warbler fledglings were observed on Schramm Ranch in 2000, all in the eastern canyon.

FUTURE WORK

Development of Schramm Ranch is in its early stages. Therefore, monitoring surveys on the property will continue pursuant to the terms and conditions of the Section 10(a)(1)(B) permit. The next monitoring survey is scheduled to be performed in the spring of 2006.