2005 Survey Report

McGregor Preserve
Travis County

Lower Colorado River Authority

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Introduction

The McGregor Preserve is a 363-acre tract owned by the Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) and a part of the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve system set aside for Golden-cheeked warblers (*Dendroica chrysoparia*, GCWA). The preserve is located on the east side of Lake Travis, north of Hippie Hollow and Comanche Trail and south of the Cypress Creek Arm of the lake. Residential developments border the west side and part of the east. A wooded tract managed for the warblers and owned by the City of Austin borders the preserve on its northeastern corner. McGregor consists of steep hillsides and canyons with some moderate slope and level areas on the hilltops and valley floors. Most of the land is heavily forested, the main three components being juniper (*Juniperus ashei*, cedar), live oak (*Quercus fusiformis*) and red oak (*Quercus buckleyi*, Texas oak). Some of the more exposed slopes are semi-open with trees dwarfed by the thin soil and harsh conditions.

The preserve has been surveyed several times in the past, with a wide spread in the number of warbler territories found. LCRA biologists surveyed the land in 1992, 1993 and 1994 with estimated numbers of 14, 18, and 22, respectively. In 2001 a group of surveyors, put together by Blanton & Associates Inc. and Turner Collie & Braden Inc., came up with a total of 29 territories. And in 2004, personnel from SWCA Environmental Consultants returned a figure of 10 to 14. 10 territories were entirely within the preserve and 4 more territories were only partially on McGregor.

Methods

LCRA personnel surveyed McGregor Preserve again in 2005. Surveys followed the protocol established by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. This called for a minimum of four hours of survey time for every 100 acres of habitat per visit, or a minimum of five visits per site with five day intervals between visits. The staff went to McGregor five times during the season for a total of over 72 hours of survey time (Table 1). All of the preserve was searched.

Surveys were conducted mostly by walking slowly while looking and listening for the target species. The routes walked varied from survey to survey. No bird recordings were used to obtain reactions from the warblers.

Once a warbler was encountered, its location on the property was recorded in the field using an aerial photo and a G.P.S. (Global Positioning System) waypoint was taken. If the position could not be determined this way, a waypoint would be taken using a hand-held G.P.S. unit. The bird's exact position could then be mapped later using computer software. No nest searches were conducted.

Weather conditions were recorded at the start and end of each survey (Table 2). Members also recorded other bird species seen or heard. A composite list of these can be found in Table 3.

Results

Golden-cheeked warblers were found on all site visits. Anywhere from 1 to 8 males were seen on each visit, by each observer with at least 10 males observed on the entire property each visit. Two female GCWAs were seen on March 29th by two observers. Two sets of fledglings were also observed on May 17th. Approximately 17 territories were observed (and possibly as many as 21) at McGregor during the 2005 survey season.

Although male and female Brown-headed cowbirds (*Molothrus ater*) were seen throughout the preserve, no predation was observed.

Discussion

Although the number of territories observed this season was more comparable to those recorded in previous seasons (versus the low numbers recorded in 2004), it would still be advisable to at least conduct a presence/absence survey on the property in 2006. Several years of data is a better indicator for population trends, therefore, before determining numbers are stable at McGregor, at least one or two more years of surveys should be conducted before skipping a season. It is possible that declining populations can be missed by skipping a season, and by the time the property is again surveyed, the population could be in peril.

The McGregor Good Neighbor Program does not seem to have an adverse affect on warblers at this property. The opportunity to educate the public and the preserve neighbors is a valuable tool in land management. Having their observations is also a valuable tool for trespass awareness.

Trespass and encroachment by adjacent landowners is a continuing problem at McGregor Preserve. One landowner in particular was planting vegetation that does not belong in that ecosystem, was trapping animals, cutting down native vegetation and dumping trash on the preserve. He was trespassing regularly, for several years and continues to do so by a gate he had cut into LCRA fencing or by a ladder he had placed from his balcony to the property. Clearly, activities like this should be addressed immediately and strongly. Allowing this behavior and illegal activity to continue could jeopardize LCRA's mission as a BCP partner at this preserve.

Table 1. Survey Hours

Date	Surveyor	Start Time	End Time	Daily Total
March 22, 2005	Melanie Pavlas	0812	1220	4.13 hrs.
March 22, 2005	Paul Turner	0840	1230	3.83 hrs.
March 22, 2005	Ben Archer	0730	1240	5.17 hrs.
March 29, 2005	Melanie Pavlas	0658	1306	6.13 hrs.
March 29, 2005	Paul Turner	0710	1220	5.17 hrs.
March 29, 2005	Ben Archer	0700	1245	5.75 hrs.
April 5, 2005	Melanie Pavlas	0720	1326	6.10 hrs.
April 5, 2005	Paul Turner	0730	1240	5.17 hrs.
April 5, 2005	Ben Archer	0728	1257	5.48 hrs.
April 26, 2005	Melanie Pavlas	0716	1159	4.72 hrs.
April 26, 2005	Paul Turner	0730	1230	5.00 hrs.
April 26, 2005	Ben Archer	0705	1221	5.27 hrs.
May 17, 2005	Paul Turner	0700	1230	5.50 hrs.
May 17, 2005	Ben Archer	0706	1230	5.40 hrs.
		Total Observation Time		72.82 hrs.

Table 2. Weather

Date	Time (start-end)	Temp. F (start-end)	Wind (start-end)		Sky (start-end) % cloud cover	
March 22, 2005	0730-1240	49-78	0-5	5-20	0%	50%
March 29, 2005	0658-1306	60-66	5-20	5-25	100%	100%
April 5, 2005	0720-1326	67-73	5-20	5-15	100%	100%
April 26, 2005	0705-1230	62-80	0-5	5-15	0%	0%
May 17, 2005	0700-1230	63-86	0	5-10	0%	50%

Table 3. Bird List

Mallard, *Anas platyrhynchos*
Northern Bobwhite, *Colinus virginianus*
Great Blue Heron, *Ardea herodias*
Black Vulture, *Coragyps atratus*
Turkey Vulture, *Cathartes aura*
Sharp-shinned Hawk, *Accipiter striatus*
Cooper's hawk, *Accipiter cooperii*
Red-tailed Hawk, *Buteo jamaicensis*
Sandhill Crane, *Grus canadensis*
Killdeer, *Charadrius vociferus*
Franklin's Gull, *Larus pipixcan*
White-winged Dove, *Zenaida asiatica*

Mourning Dove, *Zenaida macroura*
Common Ground Dove, *Columbina passerina*
Yellow-billed Cuckoo, *Coccyzus americanus*
Greater Roadrunner, *Geococcyx californianus*
Chimney Swift, *Chaetura pelagica*
Black-chinned Hummingbird, *Archilochus alexandri*
Belted Kingfisher, *Ceryle alcy*on
Ladder-backed Woodpecker, *Picoides scalaris*
Eastern Phoebe, *Sayornis phoebe*
Ash-throated Flycatcher, *Myiarchus cinerascens*
Great-crested Flycatcher, *Myiarchus crinitus*
Western Kingbird, *Tyrannus tyrannus*
Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, *Tyrannus forficatus*
White-eyed Vireo, *Vireo griseus*
Blue Jay, *Cyanocitta cristata*
Western Scrub-Jay, *Aphelocoma californica*
Common Raven, *Corvus corax*
Purple Martin, *Progne subis*
Cliff Swallow, *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*
Barn Swallow, *Hirundo rustica*
Carolina Chickadee, *Poecile carolinensis*
Black-crested Titmouse, *Baeolophus atricristatus*
Verdin, *Auriparus flaviceps*
Canyon Wren, *Catherpes mexicanus*
Carolina Wren, *Thryothorus ludovicianus*
Bewick's Wren, *Thryomanes bewickii*
Ruby-crowned Kinglet, *Regulus calendula*
Blue-grey Gnatcatcher, *Polioptila caerulea*
Veery, *Catharus fuscescens*
Hermit Thrush, *Catharus guttatus*
American Robin, *Turdus migratorius*
Northern Mockingbird, *Mimus polyglottos*
Cedar Waxwing, *Bombycilla cedrorum*
Orange-crowned Warbler, *Vermivora celata*
Nashville Warbler, *Vermivora ruficapilla*
Yellow-rumped Warbler, *Dendroica coronata*
Golden-cheeked Warbler, *Dendroica chrysoparia*
Black and White Warbler, *Mniotilta varia*
American Redstart, *Setophaga ruticilla*
Summer Tanager, *Piranga rubra*
Rufous-crowned Sparrow, *Aimophila ruficeps*
Chipping Sparrow, *Spizella passerina*
Dark-eyed Junco, *Junco hyemalis*
Northern Cardinal, *Cardinalis cardinalis*
Painted Bunting, *Passerina ciris*
Dickcissel, *Spiza Americana*

Red-winged Blackbird, *Agelaius phoeniceus*
Brown-headed Cowbird, *Molothrus ater*
Common Grackle, *Quiscalus quiscula*
House Finch, *Carpodacus mexicanus*
Lesser Goldfinch, *Carduelis psaltria*
American Goldfinch, *Carduelis tristis*
House Sparrow, *Passer domesticus*