Coastal Cactus Wren Conservation Working Group Meeting

DRAFT MEETING NOTES

March 30, 2010

USFWS Office, Carlsbad, California

Attendees:

Dan Cooper, Cooper Ecological

Laura Coley Eisenberg, RMV

Andrew Fisher, AECOM

Beth Forbus, Camp Pendleton

Nancy Frost, CDFG

Robb Hamilton, Hamilton Biological, Inc.

Eric Kershner, USFWS

Megan Lulow, IRC

Will Miller, USFWS

Sarah Motheral, CRES

Yvonne Moore, SMMP

Kris Preston, NROC

Beth Procsol, RECON

Roland Sosa, Camp Pendleton

Trish Smith, TNC

Jerre Stallcup, CBI

Jeff Tracey, SDMMP  
Jennifer Vaughan, SDSU

Lily Verdone, RPVLC

Clark Winchel, USFWS

Colleen Wisinski, CRES

1. **Updates on Current CACW Research/Monitoring Activities**
2. Clark Winchell/USFWS:
   * USFWS will be coordinating the second year of CACW surveys across MSCP lands in San Diego.
   * They will conduct 3-pass surveys across all southwest-facing cactus scrub slopes surveyed in 2009.
   * This year’s work will also include habitat mapping and CACW surveys on southeast facing slopes.
   * Surveys will not be initiated until late June/July; USFWS had good results conducting late season surveys in 2009. Robb Hamilton indicated that surveys into August can be successful.
3. Andrew Fisher, AECOM

* Will be initiating a reproductive study on the CACW this year for a small population of CACW near Market Street in Chula Vista. Here they are conducting habitat enhancement on a 32 acre site that supports 5 pairs of CACW.
* Will be studying recruitment and anthropogenic predation on this semi-closed population that may be linked to other nearby habitat fragments.
* This year will be a pilot phase.
* http://www.groundworksandiego.org/projects/cactus-wren-restoration-project

1. Colleen Wisinksi, CRES
   * This year’s work at the Wild Animal Park will be focused on nest searches, CACW surveys, and measuring habitat variables for occupied CACW habitat.
   * Next year hope to initiate a 5-year CACW reproductive study that evaluates survival, recruitment, dispersal, and use of restored habitat
   * 3-yr restoration project, to be monitored for 5 years to document use of restored habitat
   * Hope to include San Pasqual Battlefield State Park in surveys

Discussion: Length of time needed for CACW to use restored habitat

Andrew Fisher: Restored site at Otay Ranch was used 4 years after planting.

Kris Preston: Margot Griswold had CACW placing roost nests in mature translocated cactus the first year after transplanting cactus to Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park in OC

Lily Verdone: CACW using restored habitat at Trump Golf Course 6 years after planting

Most CACW use of restored habitat involves large transplants of cholla or prickly pear.

Eric Kershner noted that a lot of restoration is being conducted across the region and suggested that a database be developed to identify attributes with the various restoration projects, i.e., size of restoration, density of plantings, distance to nearest occupied CACW habitat, etc.

1. Beth Procsol, RECON (City of Chula Vista)
   * Conducting CACW surveys prior to restoration/enhancement in Rice Canyon, Chula Vista
   * 2 solitary CACW documented by RECON in Rice Canyon; uncertain if this population is linked to other habitat fragments in the area.
2. Roland Sosa, Camp Pendleton
   * Conducting base-wide CAGN surveys this year and noting incidental observations of CACW.
   * Thus far there have been 20 incidental observations of CACW on base, including 3 or 4 CACW pairs.
3. Jennifer Vaughan, SDSU
   * Completing habitat suitability model for CAGN and CACW on Camp Pendleton.
   * Model will be used to identify core habitat areas and prioritize future survey areas for CAGN and CACW on base.
4. Nancy Frost, CDFG
   * Will be looking to assist with CACW surveys on Camp Pendleton and Fallbrook in 2011.
   * CDFG also open to assisting other locations with CACW surveys.
5. Kris Preston, NROC
   * In 2009 initiated a reproductive study of CACW at several sites within the Nature Reserve of Orange County. As part of this study banded approximately 160 birds (mostly juveniles).
   * Will be continuing and expanding this study this year, and will be monitoring reproduction, survivorship and dispersal.
   * Thus far have documented that two banded CACW from the UCI preserve have dispersed together approximately 2.5 miles to the southwest into Buck Gully. Dispersal involved crossing an 8 lane freeway and movement through semi-marginal habitat (chaparral, CSS, ornamentals).
   * NROC is also measuring nest site habitat variables, and it appears that CACW prefer more open, bare ground habitat for foraging. Megan Lulow identified that she had read that loggerhead shrikes also prefer more open/bare ground habitat and that it may be useful to look at what has been done to increase open habitat for loggerhead shrike. Eric Kershner says that various methods have been used to open up habitat for shrikes, including weed wackers, tarps, and chemical control. Dan Cooper wondered if the decline in jack rabbits has resulted in less open habitat.
   * Discussion on whether dispersal of CACW could be facilitated with establishment of “vocalization stations” along potential CACW corridors.
6. Megan Lulow, Irvine Ranch Conservancy
   * In 2009/2010 IRC established 40 ~15 meter diameter cactus scrub patches in 5 different regions of the Irvine Ranch to facilitate cactus wren recovery.
   * Robb Hamilton discussed the artificial nest structure project being implemented by IRC. Over the last few years IRC has erected several PVC and barbed wire nesting structures that have been pretty much ignored by CACW. More recently, IRC has constructed 32 nest boxes at 16 sites where CACW had been previously documented. The next boxes sit atop a 7 foot pole within cactus scrub, with a predator baffle at the bottom. IRC has attached nesting material in the boxes. No response noted from CACW at this time. CACW have only been observed at 6 of the 16 sites.
7. Lily Verdone, Rancho Palos Verdes Land Conservancy
   * RPVLC will be conducting post fire CACW surveys in the Portuguese Bend burn area this year and for the next 2 years.
   * Currently are obligated to conduct CACW surveys every three years. Interested in identifying thresholds for management intervention. Clark Winchell suggested that since we know very little about the species, it is very difficult to identify thresholds, and because of its declining status that the time for management intervention is now.
8. Dan Cooper
   * Currently working with a few volunteers in Ventura county to assess historic CACW locations and access in preparation for potential surveys in 2011. Several new parks in Thousand Oaks and Moorpark may facilitate access to historic CACW locations.
9. **Review of Goals and Objectives**
   1. Distribution Data: CACW data collected over the past 3 years have provided an update to available historic data so that we can assess its overall status and what measures may be needed to further ensure CACW protection in coastal southern California. We may not know where every CACW is, but we have sufficient information to tell us how the CACW is faring overall region-wide.
   2. West Nile Virus: Kris Preston indicated that NROC was interested in taking blood samples for WNV testing, but there was a concern about the amount of blood that would have to be taken from each bird. Additionally, just because the sampled bird does not test positive for WNV antibodies doesn’t mean it is not susceptible. The best way to sample WNV in CACW is with dead birds, which is problematic.
   3. Genetics: The issue of genetic differences between coastal and desert birds was raised as an information need. Others believed that questions related to genetic differences among isolated CACW populations along the coast was a more pertinent question. Genetic differences among isolated populations is an important consideration if translocation is going to be used as a long term management option. Blood samples are the best tool for genetic testing; however, such sampling should be done concurrent with reproductive studies and by someone who is focused and experienced. UC Davis Wildlife Health Center took blood for Santa Cruz Island Scrub Jays and may be an option for the CACW.
   4. Connectivity/Protected Status Analysis by County: Now that we have updated CACW distribution information, it was suggested that each county complete a GIS assessment that identifies historic vs. current CACW distribution, identification of potential connectivity “corridors” and potential land acquisition opportunities.

Assigments: Jerre Stallcup will conduct analysis for San Diego, Trish Smith for Orange County, and Dan Cooper for Los Angeles County

* 1. Cactus Scrub Restoration Database: The group agreed that we should develop a database for all the cactus scrub restoration activities currently underway.

Assignment: Trish Smith will develop a draft list of attributes to be collected for each cactus scrub restoration project and will follow up to assemble the database once the attributes are identified.