

**FY 2012 Report on Monitoring and Management
of the Black-capped Vireo (*Vireo atricapilla*)
on Travis County's Balcones Canyonlands Preserve**



Photo: Black-capped Vireo, Vireo Ridge Tract (Bret Whitney)

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Department of Transportation and Natural Resources
Natural Resources & Environmental Quality Division**



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 4

STUDY SITES..... 5

HABITAT RESTORATION 7

METHODS 8

 Data Collection 8

 Banding..... 10

 Data Analysis 10

RESULTS 11

DISCUSSION..... 15

RECOMMENDATIONS 18

LITERATURE CITED 20

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Balcones Canyonlands Preserve Location Map, Travis County, TX.....23

Figure 2. BCVI Survey Locations and Observations 2012, Travis County, Texas24

Figure 3. Restored BCVI Habitat and Habitat Restoration Areas (HMA) Travis
County, Texas (2012).....25

Figure 4. BCVI Observations and Territories on the Jollyville Unit, Travis County,
Texas (2012).26

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Summary of Jollyville Unit BCVI survey data collected by various agencies, Travis
County, Texas.....12

Table 2. Abundance, territory number, and pairing success rate for BCVIs (*Vireo atricapilla*) on Jollyville Unit, Travis County, Texas, March-September 2001-2012.....13

Table 3. Breeding success and productivity for BCVI (*Vireo atricapilla*) territories on Jollyville Unit, Travis County, Texas, March-September 2001-2012.....13

Table 4. Features of BCVI nests located on Travis County BCP lands in 2012.....14

INTRODUCTION

In the United States and Canada, 448 native bird species breed in terrestrial habitats (Rich et al. 2004). Approximately 200 of those terrestrial species, commonly known as neotropical migrants, breed in North America, and then migrate south to winter in Mexico, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean (Sibley 2001). A majority of neotropical migratory bird species face population declines due to a wide array of threats including, but not limited to, habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation (Rich et al. 2004). Partners in Flight, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and many other cooperating agencies are actively developing recovery and conservation plans, acquiring and protecting critical habitat, and educating the general public about bird conservation issues in order to slow or prevent further population declines.

The Black-capped vireo (*Vireo atricapilla*, hereafter BCVI, or vireo) was listed as a federally endangered species in 1987. Habitat loss and nest parasitism by Brown-headed cowbirds (*Molothrus ater*) are among the greatest threats to BCVI populations. The breeding range of this neotropical migrant has decreased markedly within the last few decades. Historically, BCVIs in the United States were found in Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas during the breeding season (Grzybowski 1995). Presently, the BCVI breeds in a restricted range that includes: three counties in Oklahoma, portions of central and south-central Texas, and south into central Coahuila, through Nuevo Leon and into southwestern Tamaulipas, Mexico (Farquhar et al. 2005; Grzybowski et al. 1994; Grzybowski 1995, Oklahoma Dept. of Wildlife Cons. 1999; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1991). Between 1996 and 2005, BCVI populations in Texas have been reported in only 38 south-central and central counties (Wilkins et al. 2006). A USFWS review of the BCVI population status was completed as required by the Endangered Species Act in 2006 (Wilkins et al. 2006).

Available BCVI habitat, and subsequently BCVI populations, in Travis County have been significantly reduced as natural disturbances, such as fire, are suppressed and suburban development continues to expand. Additionally, browse pressure from White-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) overpopulation can negatively affect BCVI habitat structure (Grzybowski 1995). In 1996, less than 100 individual BCVIs were estimated to occur in Travis County (USFWS 1996a). More recent analyses of survey data indicate that since 2000, the BCVI population estimate in Travis County is fewer than 50 individuals (Wilkins et al. 2006).

The USFWS issued the Balcones Canyonlands Conservation Plan (BCCP) section 10(a)1(B) permit to the City of Austin and Travis County in 1996 (USFWS 1996b). The plan calls for a minimum of 30,428 acres of endangered species habitat in western Travis County to be set aside and managed within the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve (BCP or Preserve; see Figure 1). As of September 2012, the BCP encompassed 30,438 acres. A minimum of 2,000 of these acres are required to be designated as BCVI habitat. Due to changes in land use and fire suppression, most BCVI habitat will have to be maintained and/or created through habitat restoration efforts (USFWS 1996c). Currently, Travis County manages 7,616 acres designated part of the BCP.

BCVI habitat has been described as:

“low scrubby growth, mostly deciduous and of irregular height and distribution, with small spaces between the thickets and clumps, with vegetation cover to ground level. This is an early to mid-successional progression, or one maintained in edaphic (due to soil or topography) settings such as occurs in rocky gullies, edges of ravines, and on eroded slopes; thus often quite localized (Grzybowski 1995).”

Additionally BCVI habitat has been characterized as including the following:

- greater density of deciduous vegetation in height zones from 0 - 2 meters.
- average amounts of deciduous cover ranging from 30-45%, with total woody cover including Ashe juniper ranging from 36-55%.
- greater within-territory heterogeneity of vegetation structure (with shrubs closely spaced but still separated, and allowing light to penetrate to ground levels).
- openness not exceeding about 65% in older adult vireo territories (i.e. at least 35% woody cover) (Grzybowski 1995).

This report presents the results of the 2012 BCP surveys for BCVI conducted by Travis County Natural Resources personnel. Annual BCVI population data collected from Travis County-managed lands is analyzed in order to monitor changes in distribution, abundance, and productivity. Monitoring the population will help gauge the effectiveness of habitat restoration projects and prioritize sites for future restoration activities.

STUDY SITES

During the 2012 breeding season, BCVI territory surveys were conducted on the Jollyville Unit, which is owned and managed by Travis County and is part of the Cypress Creek Macrosite of the BCP (Figure 2). Secondary locations were also checked periodically for

presence/absence of BCVIs on other areas of the Jollyville Unit, the Lake Travis Bluffs subsection of the Lucas tract, the Ribelin tract and Steiner Ranch Preserve (Figure 2).

The Jollyville Unit is comprised of 1,875 acres (759 ha) and includes the following tracts: Buntens, Collins, Cuevas, Cuevas East, Grandview Hills, Nootsie, Snowden, Vireo Ridge, and Vista Point (Figure 2). The Jollyville Unit is located approximately 13 miles (21 km) northwest of downtown Austin. Both Golden-cheeked warbler (*Setophaga chrysoparia*, hereafter GCWA) and BCVI inhabit this unit. Topography includes upland plateaus that give way to irregular, steep slopes and ravines. Ravines drain into an unnamed tributary of Lake Travis (Colorado River) or into Cypress Creek. Drainages tend to flow from the east to west. The Travis County soil survey shows that riparian soils in these drainages are composed primarily of soils of the Volente complex; Brackett and Tarrant soils are found on steep slopes (USDA 1974). Tarrant soils also occur in level upland areas.

The Jollyville Unit contains closed canopy, oak-juniper (*Quercus sp.-Juniperus ashei*) woodlands, which cover the majority of the canyons and slopes. Historic harvest of mature Ashe juniper has allowed shrubby, secondary-growth junipers to dominate much the uplands and slopes. Open grasslands are found in some valleys and ridge tops, and riparian vegetation, which is dominated by black walnut (*Juglans nigra*), sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*) and elms (*Ulmus spp.*), occupies riparian areas along creeks and drainages.

The Lucas tract, which includes the Lake Travis Bluffs subsection, totals 297 acres (120 ha) located approximately 1.5 miles (2.4 km) northeast of Mansfield Dam that impounds Lake Travis (Colorado River). Primary access points are either on RM 620, which bounds the property to the south, or Comanche Trail, which bisects the property into eastern and western sections. The Lucas tract is part Lake Travis Unit of the Cypress Creek Macrosite.

Topography includes upland plateaus, steep slopes and ravines. Ravines drain directly into Lake Travis on the western portions of the property and into Bullick Hollow Creek, a tributary of Lake Travis, on the eastern portion. The Travis County soil survey defines the surface soil types as part of the Brackett Association (USDA 1974). The uplands are dotted with karst features, including caves and sinks.

Vegetation types found on the Lucas tract are generally similar to those on the Jollyville Unit. Prior to Travis County ownership, small portions of this tract were cleared for livestock pens and hunting lanes. Malta starthistle (*Centaurea melitensis*), Chinaberry (*Melia azedarach*) and Roosevelt weed (*Baccharis neglecta*) are common in these disturbed areas. The Lake Travis Bluffs section, acquired in 2011, is an 18.5 acre parcel that was previously

cleared for development. Subsequently, most of the entire area has grown into excellent BCVI habitat dominated by shin oak (*Quercus sinuata*), sumacs (*Rhus* spp.) and Texas redbuds (*Cercis canadensis*).

Site descriptions for the Ribelin tract can be located in the 2012 Travis County Golden-cheeked warbler monitoring report. Steiner Ranch Preserve site description can be located in the 2009 Travis County BCVI monitoring report.

HABITAT RESTORATION

Beginning in FY2001, and continuing every winter thereafter, Travis County has conducted BCVI habitat restoration within BCVI Habitat Management Areas (HMAs) (Figure 3). These HMAs are located within Travis County BCP lands and they have been designated as having the potential to be restored to BCVI habitat. HMA locations are targeted based on known historic vireo occupancy and soil and vegetative components necessary for vireo habitat. More HMAs will be developed as additional land with restoration potential is acquired.

Poor quality BCVI habitat has been altered through a variety of techniques to create the patchy, early to mid-successional physiognomy associated with BCVI breeding habitat. By selectively removing undesirable monoculture woody species such as Ashe juniper, the growth and shrubby structure of other woody species can be improved. The following woody species benefit from Ashe juniper removal: shin oaks (*Quercus sinuata*), possumhaw (*Ilex decidua*), yaupon (*Ilex vomitoria*), Texas redbud (*Cercis Canadensis* var. *texensis*), wafer-ash (*Ptelea trifoliata*), Carolina buckthorn (*Frangula caroliniana*) and sumacs (*Rhus* sp.). Several sections of habitat, particularly those restored from 2001 to 2004, have become good to excellent quality habitat. It has been observed on the Jollyville HMA that BCVIs begin occupying restored areas three to five years following initial habitat manipulation.

In the winter (January/February) of 2012, the previously manipulated area on the Ribelin tract (first restored in 2010) was revisited for maintenance and removal of additional Ashe juniper and old slash piles. Additionally, a new area of approximately 5.3 acres (2.14 ha) primarily on the New life tract was mechanically manipulated. Lastly, working closely with Austin Energy during their scheduled right-of-way maintenance, approximately 1.23 acres (.5 ha) of potential BCVI habitat was selectively cleared on the Ribelin tract. This cooperative effort benefited both the company, by reducing the amount of larger trees that would have to be trimmed during future maintenance operations, and the Preserve, by

retaining or enhancing potential BCVI habitat. These actions increased the cumulative total of restored habitat on Travis County managed lands to approximately 143.33 acres (58.0 ha).

Follow up clearing is required to maintain BCVI habitat at an early to mid-successional stage. In most previously manipulated areas, much of the refined hand clearing is completed in subsequent years rather than at the onset of initial larger scale brush removal. Areas cleared in 2001-2002 are beginning to grow out of ideal BCVI habitat and will require maintenance in the near future, and possibly as early as winter 2012-2013. Other locations being considered for targeted habitat restoration in the future include areas on the Vireo Ridge, Lucas, Ribelin, New Life and Cuevas East tracts due to their history of occupancy and proximity to currently occupied habitat (Figure 2).

Restoration activities will continue where habitat potential has been identified on the HMAs. Target areas for restoration vary from year to year based primarily on the following: habitat utilized by BCVIs during the preceding breeding season, presence of occupied golden-cheeked warbler habitat, diversity of desired woody species, and available budget. Travis County staff utilizes a flexible multi-year BCVI habitat restoration plan which defines areas targeted for restoration and allows for additional areas to be added or removed based on new land acquisitions, changes in land use and updated management techniques and recommendations.

METHODS

Data Collection

Detailed protocol for BCVI territory mapping, nest monitoring, and presence/absence surveys are described in an unpublished report by Travis County (2009). In FY 2012, territory mapping was used to estimate BCVI abundance and number of individual territories present. All observations (both visual and auditory) of male, female and juvenile BCVIs were plotted on hard-copy, digital ortho-photo maps with a scale of 1:3,000 or less. The following data were recorded in the field for each observation: location, date, behavior, sex, age, presence of a mate, number of fledglings and color band combination (if banded). BCVI locations and corresponding data were later recorded into an ArcGIS 10 (ESRI, Inc., Redlands, CA) geodatabase with the Texas State Plane (with NAD 1983 projection) coordinate system. All males encountered were assigned a unique number (“territory number”) to signify them as individuals. Female locations were either recorded as independent locations or with the corresponding territory number of a territorial male where applicable.

Territory mapping methods generally followed International Bird Census Committee (IBCC) guidelines (1970). Bibby's (2000) "consecutive flush" method was employed to increase accuracy in assigning observations of BCVIs to specific territories ("clusters"). However, Bibby's method was modified to be less intrusive in order to avoid harassment and/or human induced behaviors (Holiman and Craft 2000). No more than 10 locations for an individual bird were mapped at one time. The presence of returning color-banded BCVI allowed identification of particular individuals in many cases. When band status was unknown or when dealing with unmarked BCVI, conspecific singing or counter-singing was used to differentiate between males. BCVIs that could not be positively identified were designated as "unknown." Playback tapes of BCVI vocalizations were used infrequently late in the season in accordance with USFWS protocol to elicit BCVI responses.

Pairing status of male BCVIs was determined by observing one or more of the following conditions: a male associating with a female, an active nest associated with a male, and/or a male tending at least one fledgling. If any of the criteria for pairing success was met or if a male was observed in the same general location on at least three different occasions with at least a week between observations, it was considered to have established a breeding territory.

Nests were located opportunistically during normal territory mapping surveys. Disturbance was minimized by refraining from intensive nest searches. When found, nests were checked every five to seven days from the date of discovery until an outcome could be determined. Nest stage, contents, location and behavior of the attending adult were recorded during each nest check. In territories where no nest was found, but fledglings were present, staff recorded the maximum number of fledglings observed being attended. Fledglings observed being tended by a male or female confirmed breeding success within a territory; the total number of fledglings observed at any one time was used as a conservative measure of productivity.

In addition to the territory mapping work conducted on the Jollyville Unit, presence/absence surveys were conducted at the following eight additional sites: 1) a portion of Vireo Ridge (Jollyville Unit) referred to as "35 acres" that had been restored in both 2006 and 2007; 2) the east-west running ridge of the Vista Point tract (Jollyville Unit), referred to as "Coffee Cup Ridge" that was restored in 2008; 3) an area on the Ribelin tract that was occupied by a BCVI in 2009; 4) areas along a power line easement on the Ribelin tract that were restored in 2009 and 2010; 5 and 6) two previously restored areas in the Steiner Ranch Preserve; 7) a previously occupied area in 2009 and 2010 on the Cuevas East tract; and 8) the Lake Travis Bluffs section of the Lucas tract (Lake Travis Unit) that was occupied in 2011. Survey efforts on the Ribelin tract actually exceeded what is required by the protocol as a result of the site

being located on a GCWA survey plot. Subsequently, this location was visited 10 times throughout the breeding season.

BCVIs were surveyed for a total of 141 hours from April 6 (first detection) to August 29, 2012 (last detection). Data can be interpreted as a comprehensive census due to the relatively large amount of time spent monitoring these birds.

Banding

In an effort to build a long term demographic data set, the banding program initiated in 2008 as part of a graduate study of avian dispersal, has continued. The original project investigated interpatch dispersal patterns within a fragmented preserve network (Simper 2009). Throughout the survey season, Travis County staff updates and shares data, including banded bird resightings and nest locations in an effort to coordinate banding attempts. Travis County intends to continue the BCVI banding program initiated by this project.

Data Analysis

BCVI abundance is defined as the sum of all individual male BCVIs detected at a given study site (regardless of territory status). Overall species distribution is comprised of all locations where BCVIs were detected (i.e. registrations) and includes males, females, fledglings, and multiple sightings of the same individual. An individual male was considered to have established a breeding territory the following behaviors were observed: 1) accompanying a female, 2) tending a nest or fledglings, or 3) singing in the same locality on three separate occasions each separated by one week (i.e. six days between observations). In calculating territory number, all BCVI territories, whether they were observed entirely or partially on Travis County managed property, were considered 'full' territories (as opposed to 'edge' or partial territories). Due to limitations of time and survey effort, the set of registrations shown on attached maps do not represent a definitive description of territory boundaries.

Pairing success rate was calculated as the proportion of territories within which a female was observed or a nest was located (Anders 2000). Productivity data is represented in the following two ways: 1) the total number of fledglings divided by the total number of territories and 2) the total number of fledglings divided by the number of successful territories. A territory was considered successful if at least one fledgling was observed with a territorial male or female. The breeding success rate is the proportion of full territories that successfully fledged young (Kolozsar and Becker 2000).

RESULTS

In 2012, BCVI abundance on all Travis County BCP tracts totaled nine males (Figure 4). All nine males were observed on the Jollyville Unit. Seven males established eight territories (one color-banded male established two separate, isolated territories), and all territories were located in areas where habitat restoration had previously occurred (Figures 4). The remaining two unique males did not establish territories, possibly being transient or migrating individuals, and thus were only accounted for in abundance. No BCVI territories were established in entirely new areas on the Jollyville Unit and no BCVIs were detected in any of the areas surveyed for only presence/absence. Table 1 presents a summary of BCVI data collected during the 2012 breeding season in addition to data collected by various agencies exclusively on the Jollyville Unit since 1989.

In 2012, all eight territories were considered successfully paired (Table 2). Seven territories fledged offspring, yielding at least 19 'hatch year' (HY) individuals observed in the field. Current protocol counts either the number of fledglings directly observed in the field or the number of nestlings discovered in a nest that is later demonstrated to be successful. Because of their dull-colored plumage, cryptic behavior, and unpredictable flights, we expect observer counts of fledglings to be biased low. Productivity in 2012 (Table 3), whether measured relative to successful territories (3.0 HY per terr.) or all territories (2.6 HY per terr.), is actually fairly accurate and possibly only just slightly underestimated due to the fact that six of seven (86.7%) successful territories had nests that were monitored and thus exact HY totals known. Only one territory produced young where HY counts were gathered in the field post-fledge from an unmonitored nest.

Table 1. Summary of Jollyville Unit BCVI survey data collected by various agencies, Travis County, Texas.

Year Surveyed	Agency**	Abundance	No. Territories
1989	DLS	11	5
1990	DLS	11	5
1991	DLS	14	9
1992	TXDOT	Unknown ¹	Unknown
1993	TXDOT	25	20
1994	TXDOT	27	27
1995	TXDOT	23	23
1996	SWCA	19-22	15
1997	No Data	Unknown ¹	Unknown
1998	No Data	Unknown	Unknown
1999	No Data	Unknown	Unknown
2000	SWCA	3 ²	Unknown
2001	Travis County TNR	19	13
2002	Travis County TNR	21	19
2003	Travis County TNR	21	20
2004	Travis County TNR	13	12
2005	Travis County TNR	12	11
2006	Travis County TNR	12	9
2007	Travis County TNR	14	13
2008	Travis County TNR	15	15
2009	Travis County TNR	13 ³	11
2010	Travis County TNR	13	11
2011	Travis County TNR	9	8
2012	Travis County TNR	9	8 ⁴

*Study area is only referred to as “Jollyville Unit” since 2001. ** See Literature Cited for appropriate report citation.

¹ Restricted access on the tract.

² Detected while on brief site visit.

³ Does not include individual detected on Lake Perspectives tract (now part of the Lake Travis Unit).

⁴ One banded male established two separate, isolated territories.

Table 2. Abundance, territory number, and pairing success for BCVIs (*Vireo atricapilla*) on Jollyville Unit, Travis County, Texas, March-September 2001-2012.

Year	Total Hours Surveyed	Abundance	No. Territories	Successfully Paired	Pair Success Rate (%)
2001	100	18 ^a	15 ^a	13 ^a	86.7 ^a
2002	179	21	19	18	94.7
2003	290 ^b	21	19 ^a	14	73.7 ^a
2004	127.5	13	12	9	75
2005	140	12	11	8	72.7
2006	146	11 ^a	9	8	88.9
2007	178	14	13	12	92.3
2008	199	15	15	14	93.3
2009	204	13 ^c	11	11	100
2010	181	13	11	11	100
2011 ^d	131	9	8	8	100
2012	141	9	8	8	100

^a Adjusted values to reflect BCVI found only on the Jollyville Unit.

^b Total hours surveyed for 2003 could not be verified and may be overestimated.

^c The male located at Lake Perspectives (Lake Travis Unit) was not included in this dataset.

^d The male located at Lucas-Lake Travis Bluffs (Lake Travis Unit) was not included in this dataset.

Table 3. Breeding success and productivity for BCVI (*Vireo atricapilla*) territories on Jollyville Unit, Travis County, Texas, March-September 2001-2011.

Year	No. of territories with breeding success ¹	Breeding success rate (%)	No. Fledglings	No. fledglings/ successful territory ²	No. fledglings/ total no. territories ³
2001	4	26.7*	12	3.0*	0.8*
2002	13*	68.4*	25*	1.4*	1.3*
2003	9	47.4*	16	1.8	0.8
2004	6	50.0	13	2.2	1.1
2005	1	9.1	1	1.0	0.1
2006	8	88.9	15	1.9	1.7
2007	8	61.5	24	3.0	1.8
2008	10	66.7	29	2.9	1.9
2009	7	63.6	12	1.7	1.1
2010	8	72.7	10	1.3	0.9
2011	4	50.0	11	2.8	1.4
2012	7	87.5	21	3.0	2.6

¹ Represents the number of all territories that fledged at least one young.

² Represents the average number of fledgling from territories with breeding success.

³ Represents the average number of fledgling from all successfully paired territories.

* Adjusted values to reflect BCVI found only on the Jollyville Unit.

A total of six BCVI nests were located this year. Detailed data regarding nest substrate, height, and orientation were collected post breeding season for each nest found (Table 4). Table 4 also lists the outcome for each nest identified. There were no second nest attempts observed, however it is likely that some of the territories had early failed nest attempts. All of the six nests located and monitored successfully fledged at least one young.

Table 4. Features of BCVI nests located on Travis County BCP lands in 2012.

ID#	Substrate	Primary substrate height (m)	Concealment	Nest height (cm)	Distance from stem (cm)	Distance from foliar edge (cm)	Orientation	Comments
1	Shin oak	3.0	Shin oak	76	67	32	North	Successful; (3HY)
	<i>(Quercus sinuata)</i>		Ashe juniper <i>(Juniperus Ashei)</i>					
			Evergreen sumac <i>(Rhus virens)</i>					
4	Wafer ash <i>(Ptelea trifoliata)</i>	1.2	Ashe juniper	79	36	25	Southwest	Successful; (4HY)
5	Shin oak	3.5	Shin oak	71	33	12	West	Successful; (1HY)
			Texas persimmon <i>(Diosperos texana)</i>					
6	Shin oak	3.0	Shin oak	105	70	21	East	Successful; (4 HY)
7	Gum bumelia <i>(Sideroxylon lanuginosum)</i>	1.38	Gum bumelia <i>(Sideroxylon lanuginosum)</i>	89	43	20	Northwest	Successful; (4 HY)
			Texas mountain laurel <i>(Sephora secundiflora)</i>					
8	Evergreen sumac <i>(Rhus virens)</i>	1.98	Ashe juniper Evergreen sumac <i>(Rhus virens)</i>	78	102	10	East	Successful; (3 HY)
			Plateau live oak <i>(Quercus virginiana var. fusiformis)</i>					

Definitions: Substrate: plant species in which the nest is located.

Concealment: plant species or other substrates that is primarily responsible for concealing the nest.

Orientation: compass direction of nest relative to its substrate.

In all, a total of eight individual adult BCVIs wearing color bands were observed on Travis County properties in 2012. Three adult males and one adult female were banded in the 2012 field season. Three additional male BCVIs (banded in 2008, 2010 and 2011) and one additional female BCVI (banded in 2009) previously banded by Travis County were also observed this year. Adult males showed a 66.7% return rate (two of three banded males observed in 2011). The two returning males generally occupied the same territories they held in 2011, and one of these has occupied the same area every season since 2008. One of the two banded females observed in 2011 returned in 2012, hence a 50% return rate of females. Nestlings were not banded due to permit restrictions.

DISCUSSION

Both overall abundance and the number of territories matched the 2011 season's totals which marked the lowest numbers since BCVIs have been managed by Travis County (since 2001, Table 1). The cause of the drop in BCVI numbers is unclear, but normal population fluctuations as well as the prolonged 2011 drought, changes in migration patterns through the area and general habitat loss could also be factors. Of the 22 (68.4%) adult (or post-fledge) BCVIs banded prior to 2012 (2008-2011), 77.3 (17 of 22) of these would be five (5Y) or after fifth year (A5Y) adults in 2012. The average lifespan of the BCVI is five to six years (Graber 1961) indicating a relatively older group in this data set. Interestingly, one of the three returning males, referred to as "Dos" was at least 7 years old (A6Y) and since the 2010 season has only one leg.

Pairing success has stayed at 100% for the fourth straight year and marked the sixth straight year of greater than 90% pair success. This may indicate that habitat patch size and landscape effects may not be having a negative impact on pairing success. Overall productivity was at its highest levels since 2007. Productivity for the total number of successfully paired territories (2.6) was the highest on record (since 2001). Six successful nests, all from different territories, were located and monitored, thus providing a definitive count of offspring. In one case two fledglings were observed accompanying adults in a territory in which a nest was not located. In that case the recorded number of offspring could be an undercount. The eighth territory appeared to not produce young, although successfully paired. Survey effort for this territory was adequate enough to suggest that this territory failed in producing young. The amount of survey hours in 2012 was slightly higher than 2011, by 10 hours. Although overall there was a reduced amount of survey time compared to previous years, this reduced effort was primarily due to the fewer number of territories being monitored. Additionally, nests were generally found early in the season and were all successful, resulting in less effort spent acquiring productivity data. 2012 was an exceptional

year with, for the first time, all located nests being successful. An increase in territories or a more typical nesting season with fewer successful early nests in 2013 would require survey effort to increase.

Territory establishment in 2012 occurred in the same general core areas on the Jollyville Unit as in previous years (Travis County 2001-2011). Although the same areas are being utilized, often by returning males (documented by resighting of banded birds), the distribution of BCVI territories on the Jollyville Unit has changed each year. Several factors may influence territory distribution, including the intrinsic habitat characteristics of the site, the age structure of the population, the overall population density, and habitat restoration activities on the Preserve (Grzybowski et al. 1994; Anderson and Gutzwiller 1996).

Although territory numbers (eight) on the Jollyville unit remained unchanged from those in 2011, there was one less male represented. One banded male was observed establishing two uniquely separate territories with separate females. Both of these territories had successful nests. The first nest fledged four young approximately two weeks prior to a lone egg being deposited in the second nest. The nests were located approximately .58 mile (943m) and the male was observed at both locations during the overlap of the first nest fledging and the second nest in egg and nestling stage.

Habitat loss and degradation is a primary concern for BCVI recruitment onto Travis County BCP properties and may be affecting productivity. Typical BCVI nesting habitat was uncommon on the Jollyville Unit when first acquired by Travis County in 2000 and 2001. Habitat change through vegetational succession dominated primarily by encroaching Ashe juniper reduced the openings in the deciduous cover; these openings are generally associated with optimal BCVI habitat. Additionally, the vegetative growth pattern in historically occupied areas tends to be vertical, rather than the horizontal, mid-successional stage preferred by BCVIs. Through mechanical efforts of BCVI habitat restoration, significant portions of the Jollyville Unit HMA now show characteristics of prime BCVI habitat.

All of the 2012 BCVI territories on the Jollyville Unit were established primarily in previously manipulated areas which may be considered “restored”. This has been the observed trend since 2006. These observations indicate that BCVIs continue to respond positively to habitat restoration efforts undertaken since 2001 where it appeared that the remaining BCVIs were shifting annually from lesser quality habitat into higher-quality restored areas. It should be noted, however, that large areas of apparently restored habitat still have not been reoccupied and other areas that, although have been occupied, appear to have

enough space for additional territories. Countless factors influence territory establishment, but regional natural population fluctuations, declining amounts of suitable habitat, as well as the location of the preserve on the far eastern edge of BCVI range all must contribute to overall population trends. It is worth mentioning that although 2012 was a wetter year, the general prolonged drought over the last few years is likely negatively impacting the population. These impacts may include decreased habitat suitability e.g., decreased invertebrate population or sparse vegetation cover, which in turn could affect reproductive success.

Prior to 2008 there was no banding program in place, precluding staff from determining return rates, recruitment and associated data. From 2003 to 2009 BCVI territory and abundance numbers slowly declined despite a period of growth in 2007 and 2008. This year, as in 2011, at least two ‘second year’ males, i.e. males in their first reproductive season, were recruited. With the fourth season of the banding program now complete, some light has been shed on this issue. The bulleted list below summarizes relevant demographic information since 2010:

- Proportion of SY males (pSY): In 2010, the pSY was 27.3% (three of 11 males). In 2011, the pSY was at least 20% (two of 10 males), although this number is conservative since at least three males were never successfully aged. In 2012, the pSY was at least 28.6% with only one male never aged. This figure has been used as an estimate of recruitment. A minimum pSY value (29%) has been suggested as a measure of a stable population (USFWS 1996a).
- Site fidelity: In 2010, the return rate for adult males on the Jollyville unit was 70% (seven of 10 banded males). In 2011, however, only two of eight marked males (25%) returned, both to territories they have occupied continuously since 2008. In 2012, adult males showed a 66.7% return rate (two of three banded males observed in 2011). The two returning males generally occupied the same territories they held in 2011. Additionally, one of the two banded females observed in 2011 returned in 2012, hence a 50% return rate of females.

In general, BCVIs tend to be “semi-colonial” and establish territories near other BCVIs (Ward and Schlossberg 2001). However, isolated territories composed of either individual pairs or small-clusters have occasionally been located (Grzybowski 1990). These territories are often difficult to detect as noted by Ward and Schlossberg (2001). They found that in low-density populations of BCVIs, song rates and duration of song bouts were much lower

than in high-density populations. Thus, low detection rates of these isolated territories may affect estimates of abundance.

Continued research and monitoring of BCVI on the Jollyville Unit is essential to determine whether the colony is a source population or a population sink. Source populations contribute to the general overall population and help to maintain satellite colonies. Population sinks are maintained solely through immigration and contribute nothing to species-wide abundance (Pulliam 1988). Data obtained from continued banding efforts would improve estimates of inter-population connectivity as well as age-specific survival and reproduction. If adequate connectivity with neighboring sub-populations is not maintained, then BCVI numbers on isolated preserve tracts may decline precipitously and eventually lead to local extinctions. Information regarding productivity and dispersal is limited because it is difficult and slow to obtain. Additional survey seasons and continued research will help gauge the effectiveness of habitat restoration projects and prioritize sites for future restoration. Without comprehensive productivity, survivorship, and dispersal information, as well as complimentary data from surrounding properties, we cannot make a definitive statement regarding the role of the Jollyville Unit within the central Texas portion of the BCVI's range.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue to conduct intensive BCVI monitoring, including annual color-banding. Such research could help address many questions concerning the long-term viability of the Jollyville Unit colony and its relationship to other sub-populations in the region. The long-term data sets generated from such studies would facilitate yearly comparisons and improve the accuracy of model-generated population forecasts. Data collected should include the following: abundance, age structure, dispersal patterns, distribution of subpopulations, habitat associations throughout the breeding season, nest success, recruitment, return rates and age-specific measures of productivity and survivorship. Research should be focused upon answering questions of immediate relevance to management and recovery priorities.
- Collect and compile age-specific survivorship and reproductive information for marked birds. This information may provide a more accurate picture of population dynamics in cases where field data is believed to be incomplete or biased (e.g. using mean values to account for number of HYs per nest rather than number of fledglings observed in the field).
- Continue to facilitate opportunities for graduate students to collect and analyze quantitative habitat and vegetation data in order to construct habitat suitability and

dispersal models. Longitudinal studies are needed to compare the results of habitat restoration treatments over time. Ideally, such data would be collected in a GIS-compatible format and at a scale that would allow preserve-wide spatial analysis. Such analyses could improve our ability to locate existing areas of high quality habitat as well as areas with high potential for successful restoration. Additionally, further research is needed to better understand dynamics of vegetative succession and its relationship to BCVI habitat suitability and reproductive success in this region.

- Refine and standardize BCVI monitoring procedures, giving special attention to minimum hours of survey and nest searching needed. This is especially important for new properties with potential BCVI habitat.
- BCVI habitat and potential habitat for restoration should continue to be identified and mapped on all tracts owned and managed by Travis County. Historic BCVI locations on properties owned and managed by Travis County should be visited regularly during the field season to determine presence/absence of BCVIs.
- Habitat restoration efforts will continue on tracts that support BCVI populations and on surrounding tracts that harbor potential habitat. Restoration methods will be evaluated to determine the best techniques for creating suitable BCVI breeding habitat.
- Create a more structured GCWA survey methodology for monitoring territories and productivity in both potential and managed BCVI habitat. Efforts should be made to document any co-occurrences of GCWA and BCVIs during the breeding season in order to investigate and evaluate the possibility of creating areas of mixed or composite habitat.
- Judicious use of recorded BCVI vocalizations should continue in accordance with USFWS protocols, especially in areas where few and/or isolated BCVIs have been detected. This recommendation is also useful to determine absence of a target species. Playback should increase detections of territorial males (Horne 2000).
- Cowbird trapping should continue on and adjacent to any Travis County-managed properties occupied by endangered songbirds, with traps added or removed based on cowbird activity. Shooting female cowbirds in habitat is also recommended.
- Although no BCVI nest attempts failed due to red imported fire ant (RIFA) predation in 2012, control of this nuisance species should continue within restored BCVI habitat areas when warranted.

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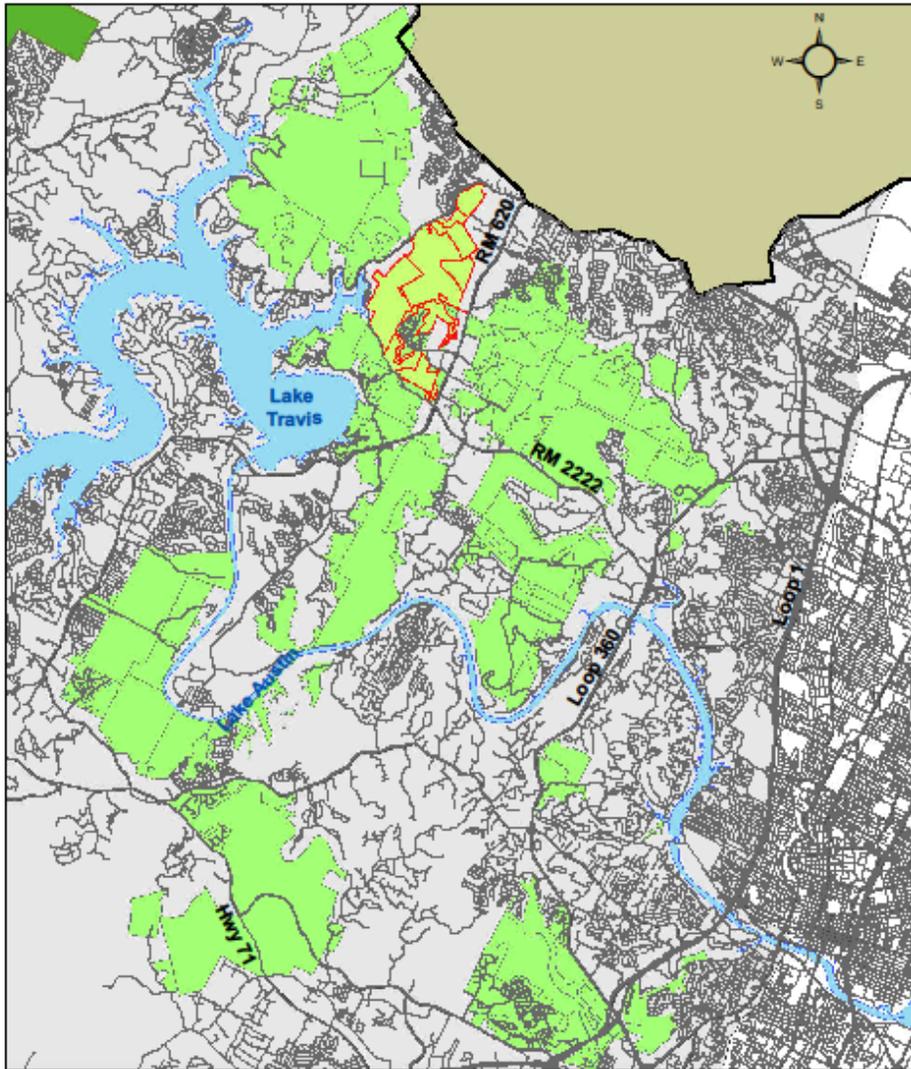
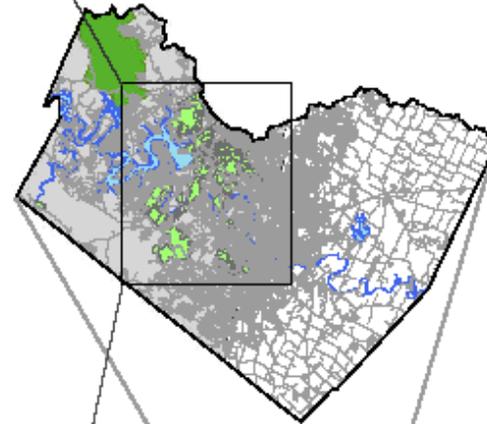


Figure 1: Balcones Canyonlands Preserve Location Map Travis County, TX.



- Legend**
- BCP
 - Jollyville Unit
 - BCNWR
 - Roads
 - Rivers & Lakes
 - BCCP Permit Area

