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BREEDING VERMILION FLYCATCHERS IN CISMONTANE SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

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During the 2003 and 2004 breeding seasons I observed a pair of Vermilion Flycatchers (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*) make several nesting attempts on the campus of California State University San Bernardino (CSUSB; 34° 10' 54" N, 117° 19' 03" W), in San Bernardino County, California. Following two failed attempts in 2003, the pair's second attempt in 2004 produced two juveniles. This paper briefly reviews the species' breeding range in southern California, including extralimital occurrences, and provides details on the nesting efforts at CSUSB.

The Vermilion Flycatcher occurs regularly from the southwestern United States south through Central America to northern Argentina and the Galápagos Islands (Wolf and Jones 2000, Howell and Webb 1995). Its breeding range extends locally north to California, Nevada, Utah, and Oklahoma (Wolf and Jones 2000). In southern California the Vermilion Flycatcher breeds very locally in the deserts (Garrett and Dunn 1981, Small 1994). It was formerly more widespread in the Imperial, Coachella, and lower Colorado River valleys, but loss of riparian habitat has reduced its numbers there (Rosenberg et al. 1991). Away from the Colorado River, regular breeding is currently known from only a few locations in San Bernardino County, including Covington Park in Morongo Valley, Yucca Valley Golf Course, and recently Luckie Park in Twentynine Palms (Small 1994, E. A. Cardiff pers. comm.). The Vermilion Flycatcher also breeds regularly along the Mojave River between Helendale and Victorville and in Apple Valley (R. L. McKernan and S. G. Myers pers. comm., Small 1994, *N. Am. Birds* 54:423). Elsewhere in California's deserts, additional locations of recorded nesting, more or less sporadic, include Mason Valley, Vallecito Valley, Borrego Valley, and near Jacumba, San Diego County (S. G. Myers pers. comm., Small 1994, Unitt 2004); Ridgecrest, China Lake, South Fork Kern River Valley, and California City, Kern County (*Natl. Audubon Soc. Field Notes* 48:989, S. G. Myers pers. comm.); and Leona Valley and Lancaster, Los Angeles County (*Natl. Audubon Soc. Field Notes* 48:989, 52:504). On the coastal slope of southern California, Vermilion Flycatcher breeding has been confirmed at only eight locations, and suspected at two more (Table 1).

On 11 March 2003 I observed a male Vermilion Flycatcher singing and performing courtship display flights along the northwest edge of the athletic fields at CSUSB, with a female accompanying the male on 14 March. On 31 March Anthony Metcalf and I observed the female constructing a nest approximately 10 m above the ground in a fork in the outer branches of a long-needled ornamental pine tree. The female continued to build through 3 April and was first observed incubating on 12 April. I did not see the male contribute to the nest's construction. While the female was on the nest the male foraged and often perched approximately 1 m from the nest but did not interact with the female. The male also perched in the tree near the nest while the female foraged. On 15 April I returned to find that the nest had been destroyed, apparently by either depredation or heavy rain the previous day. The pair was foraging in a small grove of thornless honey locust trees (*Gleditsia triacanthos* var. *inermis*) and non-native pine trees approximately 50 m northwest of the destroyed nest. I monitored the pair periodically and on 9 May found the female incubating again. The second nest was located approximately 4 m above the ground in a fork in the interior crown of a thornless honey locust tree. On 15 May a single nestling

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Table 1 Vermilion Flycatcher Breeding Records in Cismontane Southern California

Location	Year(s)	Outcome	Source
Balboa Park, San Diego Co.	1958–1960	multiple successful broods	Crouch (1959), <i>AFN</i> 14:324, 14:478
near Santee, San Diego Co.	1958	fledged 3 young	Crouch (1959)
Bonita, San Diego Co.	1968	pair feeding 3 young	Unitt (1984)
near Camarillo, Ventura Co.	1988	fledged 1 young	<i>Am. Birds</i> 42:1341
Santa Barbara Canyon (near Cuyama Valley), Santa Barbara Co.	1992	“probably successful”; “immature” observed	Lehman (1994)
Chino, San Bernardino Co.	1995	fledged 2 young	R. McKernan (pers. comm.) Unitt (2004)
Warner Valley, San Diego Co.	1997–2001	fledged 2 young in 1997; nest with nestlings in 2000; pair in 2001	Unitt (2004)
Singing Hills/Rancho San Diego, 5 mi. ESE El Cajon (suspected), San Diego Co.	1999–2000	pair; singing male	Unitt (2004)
Bonsall, San Diego Co.	2000	fledged 2 young	Unitt (2004)
El Toro (suspected), Orange Co. San Bernardino,	2002	pair with presumed juvenile	D. Willick (pers. comm.)
San Bernardino Co.	2003–2004	fledged 2 young	this paper

was in the nest, and I observed both parents feeding it through 18 May. On 20 May I encountered the pair of adults near the nest, but the young bird was missing. Seeing no activity at or near the nest, I concluded that the second breeding attempt had also failed. The nestling could not have been more than 10 days old, too young to fledge, according to published data (reviewed by Wolf and Jones 2000). Following the second nesting failure, I searched for the birds only sporadically over the next several months. I did not observe any other nesting attempts in 2003, and I saw the male for the last time on 22 July.

On 15 March 2004 I again found a pair of Vermilion Flycatchers (presumed to be the same individuals) at the athletic fields at CSUSB. On 20 and 21 March I observed the female building a nest approximately 15 m above the ground in a fork in the outer branches of a long-needled ornamental pine. Again I did not observe the male contribute during nest-building. On 30 March the female was incubating, but on 5 April I discovered the nest on the ground below its original position in the tree. The birds remained in the area, and on 27 April I again observed the female incubating. This time the nest was placed approximately 6 m above the ground in a fork along the main trunk in the interior crown of a thornless honey locust tree. The female continued incubating through 12 May. From 13 to 20 May I observed the male and female feeding two nestlings, with the male occasionally bringing food to the female on the nest, which she in turn fed to the nestlings. On 27 May the parents were feeding the two fledglings in a nearby tree, and on 2 June they were feeding the fledglings in a tree approximately 50 m southeast of the nesting location. I observed one of the juveniles again on 15 June, and the two adults on 21 June 2004.

In summary, a pair of Vermilion Flycatchers made four nesting attempts over the course of the 2003 and 2004 breeding seasons, with their fourth attempt in May–June 2004 resulting in the successful fledging of two juveniles. The initial three attempts

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resulted in nest failure. Although the Vermilion Flycatcher breeds regularly in eastern San Bernardino County, this is only the second reported breeding attempt for the county's coastal slope, and one of only a few for cismontane southern California.

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