

Recovery of Least Bell's Vireo After Suppression of Giant Reed in California



The Santa Ana River Basin in Southern California ranges through San Bernardino, Riverside and Orange counties. It is home to willows, cottonwoods, shrubs and forbs, all of which provide excellent habitat for many wildlife species, including the least Bell's vireo, a small songbird that was once commonly found in the region. The bird is now listed as an endangered species because of habitat destruction.



Arundo Donax forms a monoculture that eliminates needed native vegetation.

Challenge:

More than 10,000 acres of the basin had become infested with giant reed (*Arundo donax*). This invasive plant formed a monoculture in some areas, choking out traditional plant species and destroying habitat for the least Bell's vireo and other songbirds. Giant reed is a poor food source for native birds, and increases fire risk to communities, and consumes nearly three times as much water as native vegetation.

Result:

Giant reed was controlled in many parts of the Santa Ana river basin, allowing portions of the river to return to its normal meandering pattern, recreating the necessary substrata for willows and cottonwoods to grow. To date, 3,000 acres of native habitat have been restored.

The restoration created nesting and feeding grounds for the least Bell's vireo. In 1986, there were only 19 nesting pairs of the endangered songbird in the area. By 2004, there were 413 nesting pairs and 767 fledglings. This can be attributed to the removal of the giant reed and the restoration of native habitat.

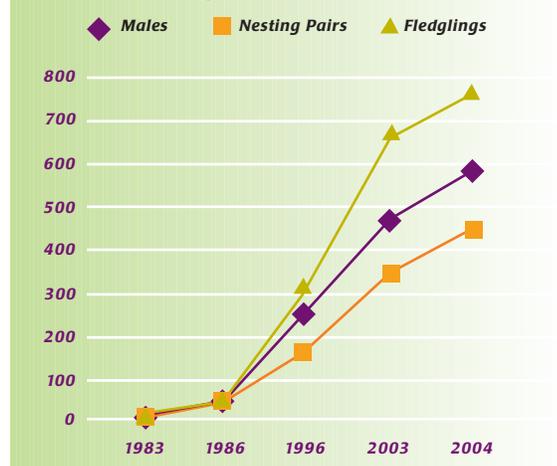
Solution:

The Riverside County Parks and Open Space District partnered with the Orange County Water District, Resource Conservation Districts in Riverside and San Bernardino counties, and the Santa Ana Water Project Authority to restore the land and restore habitat for the endangered least Bell's vireo. Together, they are working to remove giant reed from the Santa Ana River Basin using a combination of mechanical and chemical control methods.



The least Bell's vireo requires a diverse group of native plants for habitat and food supply.

Number of Males, Nesting Pairs and Fledglings of Least Bell's Vireo from 1983-2004



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