

Black-capped Vireo Survey
Big Bend National Park, Brewster County, Texas
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Introduction

Between 1 and 6 May 2007 I surveyed drainages in the Chisos Mountains of Big Bend National Park (BBNP), Brewster County, Texas for Black-capped Vireos (*Vireo atricapillus*; BCVI). The census was conducted as Study # BIBE-00221 for the National Park Service in accordance with Resource Activity Permit # BIBE-2007-SCI-0018. This survey was the 21st annual BCVI census since 1986.

Objective

To purpose of this survey was to assist BBNP with their annual BCVI census.

Survey Methods

Survey sites were chosen from descriptions of areas used by BCVI in previous years (Maresh 2004, Williams 2005, Troy 2006). Areas of appropriate habitat were surveyed by listening and watching for BCVI. Visual contact was attempted for most individuals. Universal Transverse Mercator (UTM) coordinates were recorded for vireos. UTM coordinates are referenced to North American Datum 1983.

Results

I spent 34.25 field hours surveying Black-capped Vireo habitat over a period of 6 days (1-6 May). Between 25 and 27 adult BCVI were detected (19-21 males and 6 females). No nests were observed.

Lost Mine Trail (trailhead) to Basin Campground – I surveyed habitat on both sides of Basin Road from the Lost Mine Trail trailhead to the Basin Campground (0730-1015 on 2 May; 1915-1930 on 5 May). Between six and seven adult BCVI observed.

I observed two BCVI pairs in neighboring drainages along Basin Road near points (13R 0665850, 3239715) and (13R 0666043, 3239735). One pair was in the drainage below the “25 MPH” sign along Basin Road.

I observed either one or two males along Basin Road between the two pairs and the turnoff for the Basin Campground near points (13R 0665732, 3239671) and (13R 0665661, 3239486).

An additional male was observed higher in elevation than the two pairs along Basin Road near point (13R 0666150, 3239641).

Window Trail – I surveyed habitat from the Basin Lodge Store to the Window pour-off (1515-1730 on 2 May; 0730-1030 on 6 May). Two adult male BCVI observed.

I detected two male BCVI in drainages along Window Trail. These males were heard only despite attempts for visual contact. One was located in a large drainage south of the trail near point (13R 0664570, 3239566). The second male was located in a drainage north of the trail near point (13R 0664049, 3239893).

Laguna Meadows Trail – I surveyed habitat from the Basin Lodge Store along this trail until BCVI habitat was no longer observed near the trail (1030-1115 on 2 May; 1615-1700 on 4 May). No BCVI observed.

Blue Creek Canyon – I surveyed habitat in drainages between the trailhead near Homer Wilson Ranch and the Pinyon/Oak habitat in the Chisos (0745-1230 on 4 May). Two adult BCVI pairs observed.

I observed two BCVI pairs along the trail through the main drainage. Both pairs were heard and seen. One pair was observed near point (13R 0662134, 3234432). The female was observed joining an adult Gray Vireo (*Vireo vicinior*) and Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (*Poliophtila caerulea*), shuffling at a Mexican Jay (*Aphelocoma ultramarina*). The second pair was observed on the trail near point (13R 0662376, 3234759).

Panther Canyon – I surveyed habitat in both forks of Panther Canyon (1515-1730 on 1 May; 0900-1145 on 5 May). Two adult male BCVI observed.

I observed two male BCVI in Panther Canyon. One male was located in the right fork of the canyon near point (13R 0672175, 3244377). The second male was located in the left fork near point (13R 0672337, 3244197).

Juniper Canyon – I surveyed habitat between the Juniper Canyon Trail trailhead and the Pinyon/Oak habitat in the Chisos (0730-1030 and 1130-1345 on 3 May). Six adult BCVI observed.

I observed two males singing simultaneously. These males were only heard. Both birds were singing from the drainage south of the trail. One bird was detected approximately 80 m southeast of point (13R 0668656, 3236762). The second male was detected singing approximately 80 m southwest of the same point.

One BCVI pair was heard and seen north and south of the trail near point (13R 0668410, 3237001). This male seemed to be favoring an area of brush (flying to it from multiple locations within the territory). This may indicate a nest was in or near this favored cluster of vegetation. An attempt was made find this possible nest; however efforts were unsuccessful.

A second BCVI pair was heard and seen north and south of the trail near point (13R 0668044, 3237204).

Green Gulch – I surveyed habitat in drainages (0715-1200 on 1 May; 1730-1830 on 4 May; 0800-0830 and 1615-1800 on 5 May). Between five and six adult BCVI observed.

I observed between three and four male BCVI were observed singing from territories surrounding the largest rocky outcrop east of Basin Road in Green Gulch near points (13R 0668170, 3241637), (13R 0668129, 3241380), (13R 0667961, 3241268), and (13R 0667985, 3241420). No females were observed with these males.

I also observed one male in a drainage west of the rocky outcrop near point (13R 0667832, 3241525).

I observed one male BCVI in a drainage just west of Basin Road near point (13R 0667251, 3241116).

Pine Canyon – I surveyed habitat between the Pine Canyon trailhead and Pinyon/Oak habitat (1530-1700 on 3 May). No BCVI observed.

Laguna Meadow – Not surveyed in 2007.

Discussion

Most sites known to have Black-capped Vireo breeding territories in recent years were surveyed (Maresh 2004, Williams 2005, Troy 2006). Unvisited isolated patches of BCVI habitat in drainages surrounding and within the Chisos Mountains may harbor additional BCVI. Therefore, some BCVI within Big Bend National Park may have been undetected.

A total of 25 to 27 individuals were detected (19-21 males, 6 females). These results are similar to those of the previous survey (Troy 2006). Numbers detected in 2005 may be reflective of earlier survey dates compared to previous censuses (Williams 2005). Numbers of adult males and females differ from numbers detected in 2004 (Maresh 2004).

Black-capped Vireos were detected in almost all areas known to have held territories in recent years. Each site is individually discussed below and compared with results from previous surveys.

- The area along Basin Road from the Lost Mine Trail trailhead to the Basin Campground revealed 6-7 adult BCVI in 2007. Between 4 and 6 adult BCVI (2-3 pairs) were observed in 2006. (4 adult BCVI detected in 2004; 2 in 2003; 3 in 2002; 3 in 2001; 6 in 2000). This site was not surveyed in 2005. This suggests consistent habitation of this site by vireos compared with recent years.
- I detected two adult male BCVI on the Window Trail in 2007. Two adult male BCVI were observed in 2006. (0 adult BCVI detected in 2005; 4 in 2004; 3 in 2003; 3 in 2002; 0 in 2001; 2 in 2002).
- I observed no BCVI on the Laguna Meadows Trail between the Basin Lodge Store and the Pinyon/Oak habitat in 2007. One male was observed in this location in 2006. This area was not surveyed in 2004 or 2005. It appears that reasonably good BCVI habitat occurs on this trail.
- I observed two BCVI pairs in Blue Creek Canyon in 2007. One adult was observed in 2006. (0 in 2005; 2-3 in 2004; 4 in 2003; 3 in 2002; 0 in 2001; 0 in 2000).

- I observed two male BCVI in Panther Canyon in 2007; one in each fork of the canyon. The 2006 survey revealed a BCVI pair with two hatch-year birds in the right canyon. Panther Canyon was surveyed for the first time in 2004 (2 adult BCVI) and not visited in 2005. It is my recommendation that Panther Canyon be a regular part of the annual BCVI census.
- Juniper Canyon revealed six adult BCVI (4 males and 2 females) in 2007. Eight adult BCVI were observed in this location in 2006 (6 males, 2 females). (3 adults in 2005; 3 in 2004; 5 in 2003; 4 in 2002; 5 in 2001; 6 in 2000).
- I detected no BCVI in Pine Canyon in 2007.
- I observed between five and six male BCVI in Green Gulch in 2007. Four male and one female BCVI were observed in 2006. (5 adults in 2005; 8-9 in 2004; 5 in 2003; 1 in 2002; 1 in 2001; 0 in 2000). This suggests consistent habitation of BCVI in this site compared with the previous 3 years.

Acknowledgements

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