

GNATCATCHER SYMPATRY NEAR SAN FELIPE, BAJA CALIFORNIA, WITH NOTES ON OTHER SPECIES

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In a monograph concerning speciation and geographic variation in black-tailed gnatcatchers, Atwood (1988) identified three principal areas of sympatry between the California Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica*) and the Black-tailed Gnatcatcher (*P. melanura*); the largest of these lies in northeastern Baja California, extending north along the coast of the Gulf of California from approximately 29° N (near Bahía de los Angeles) to 30° N (near Bahía San Luis Gonzaga) and 30 km inland along the eastern base of the Sierra San Pedro Mártir to approximately 30° 50' N, 115° 15' W (Arroyo El Cajón). To the northeast, along the gulf coast, only *P. melanura* is known (Grinnell 1928, Wilbur 1987, Atwood 1988, Howell and Webb 1995).

On 10 May 1997 we observed single family groups of *P. californica* (pair with two fledglings) and *P. melanura* (pair with three fledglings) in a desert wash tributary to Río Las Amarillas, approximately 9 km south of San Felipe and 4 km from the coast, near the road to the San Felipe International Airport (30° 56' N 114° 47' W); this is approximately 45 km east of all previous records. In contrast to the surrounding creosote bush (*Larrea tridentata*) and saltbush (*Atriplex* spp.) scrub that characterizes the Colorado Desert, this wash was relatively lush, supporting numerous large shrubs and small trees, such as palo verde (*Cercidium* sp.) and tamarisk (*Tamarix* sp.). This is consistent with Atwood's (1988:11) observation that, in the drier portions of its range, the California Gnatcatcher tends to select "relatively densely vegetated areas such as occur along washes, alluvial fans, or other drainage systems." The two gnatcatcher families occupied adjacent territories within the wash, and at one point the adult males exchanged scolding calls and flew at each other, appearing to make physical contact before returning to their respective families. The California Gnatcatchers appeared consistent with *P.c. margaritae* of central Baja California, being somewhat paler than both *P. c. californica* of southern California and *P. c. atwoodi* of northwestern Baja California.

Notably, and in agreement with Wilbur (1987), we found two Gambel's (*Callipepla gambelii*) and three California (*C. californica*) quail in this same segment of wash on 10 May 1997 (cf. Patten et al. 2001).

On 22 February 1998, we briefly inspected this wash with Richard A. Erickson and found that intense rains had greatly changed its appearance, with deep deposits of woody debris holding pools of standing water. One male *P. melanura* was detected during this winter visit. Finally, on 25 March 2000, Hamilton, Erickson, Michael A. Patten, and Thomas E. Wurster inspected the wash (its tamarisk woodland habitat now largely recovered) and surrounding scrub, detecting three pairs of *P. melanura* and two pairs of *P. californica*.

Approximately 15 km south of San Felipe, near Punta Radar (30° 56' N 114° 44' W), the appearance of cordón (*Pachycereus pringlei*) and torote prieto (*Bursera hindsiana*) signifies a zone of transition from the Colorado to the Vizcaíno desert floristic provinces (Patten et al. 2001, Howell 2001). Nelson (1922) mapped this transition just below 29° N, near Bahía de los Angeles, and was followed by Wiggins (1980), Wilbur (1987), and Roberts (1989). Bancroft (1926) placed the transition zone well to the north, near the Colorado River mouth (approximately 31° 30' N). During a brief stop near Punta Radar just before dusk on 25 March 2000, we detected

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two flickers with obvious yellow underwings, presuming them to be Gilded Flickers (*Colaptes chrysoides brunnescens*) of the Vizcaíno Desert (cf. Patten et al. 2001). This would extend the subspecies' known range approximately 100 km north of that reported by Grinnell (1928) and further support recognition of the desert transition zone in the vicinity of Punta Radar/San Felipe. Since we could not rule out the very unlikely possibility that they were Yellow-shafted Northern Flickers (*C. auratus auratus* group), and we failed to detect flickers in this area during a subsequent visit on 2 September 2000, future observers must confirm our tentative identification.

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