

Memorandum

To	Kristine Preston	Page	1
CC			
Subject	Summary of 2022 SDMMMP Tricolored Blackbird Surveys		
From	AECOM Staff		
Date	September 30, 2022		

Between April 15, 2022 and June 08, 2022, AECOM biologists conducted tricolored blackbird visual surveys and habitat assessments at 24 survey areas in San Diego County (see GIS data submitted under separate cover). Below is a summary of the results from those surveys.

- 12 of the survey areas had potentially suitable nesting habitat for tricolored blackbirds, 5 had unsuitable habitat (e.g., vegetation too short, habitat patch too small or too sparse), and 7 had no suitable nesting habitat.
- 6 survey areas were occupied by tricolored blackbirds, and there were birds present in the vicinity of (but not within) two other survey areas (Lake Henshaw and Ramona Grasslands North).
- 2 survey areas (Puerta La Cruz and Rancho Jamul Ecological Reserve South Pond) had confirmed breeding colonies.
- 3 survey areas had tricolored blackbirds feeding in foraging areas associated with them (Lake Henshaw, Puerta La Cruz, and Rancho Jamul Ecological Reserve South Pond).
- The nesting colony at Puerta La Cruz had an estimated 450 birds, while Rancho Jamul Ecological Reserve South Pond had an estimated 500 birds.

Similar to 2021, the southern pond at Rancho Jamul Ecological Reserve had a large, healthy colony of approximately 500 tricolored blackbirds that successfully fledged many young. Additionally, freshwater marsh vegetation had improved within the northern pond and tricolored blackbirds have begun to use the habitat but were not documented nesting at the northern pond. The vast grasslands between the south and north ponds were used for foraging by hundreds of tricolored blackbirds.

The small pond at Chihuahua Creek Confluence had one potential male tricolored blackbird detected during the first survey in mid-April, but a follow-up visit resulted in negative findings. Hence this survey area was not considered occupied by tricolored blackbirds.

The colony of tricolored blackbirds that breed within the Ramona Municipal Water District Pond on the west side of Rangeland Road were not detected foraging within the Ramona Grasslands North survey area, as they were in 2021. Because cattle have been mostly removed from feeding in the Ramona Grassland North survey area, and little effluent water was being sprayed, the habitat has decreased in quality. Tricolored blackbirds were

detected perching on powerlines along Rangeland Road but were not observed foraging within Ramona Grasslands North.

The Lake Henshaw/Warner Springs Valley located on Vista Irrigation District Lands is a stronghold for tricolored blackbirds that was not previously surveyed in 2021. Since access was granted for 2022, biologists surveyed all potentially suitable breeding habitat that could be found. One colony with approximately 450 birds was detected at Puerta La Cruz. Several hundred birds were nesting and foraging nearby in open rangelands with multiple fledglings detected. A flock of approximately 500 tricolored blackbirds was also detected near the northwest corner of Highways 76 and 79. This flock of tricolored blackbirds was detected foraging in open grassland habitat on an irruption of grasshoppers. This flock was not observed associating with any breeding habitat, despite the presence of mature Himalayan blackberry shrubs nearby. Two other locations where tricolored blackbirds were not detected breeding but were observed later in the season (likely post-breeding dispersing birds), was Hwy 79, Warner Springs South and Swan Lake.

Finally, no tricolored blackbirds were detected within Pamo Valley in 2022. In 2021, around a dozen tricolored blackbirds were detected at the north end of Pamo Valley breeding in a small cattle pond. No tricolored blackbirds were detected anywhere in Pamo Valley during 2022 surveys, despite the presence of suitable breeding habitat.

In 2022, additional information was recorded for locations where tricolored blackbirds were observed foraging. Tricolored blackbirds were observed foraging around Puerta La Cruz in the Lake Henshaw Valley and around the Rancho Jamul Ecological Reserve South Pond. Both locations have active cattle grazing, which helps to maintain vegetation at a short height. Tricolored blackbirds were observed foraging for prey items on the ground in short grassland (often less than 20 centimeters in height) that had a semi-open nature. Tricolored blackbirds avoided areas of dense nonnative grassland where no bare ground was visible.