

6.0 BIRDS - SL, SO, SS

6.1 Tricolored Blackbird (*Agelaius tricolor*) – Category SL

Management Units with Known Occurrences

Tricolored blackbirds are permanent residents of California and are considered a California Species of Special Concern, though their status is currently under evaluation for state and federal listing as a threatened or endangered species. These passerines are the most colonial songbird in North America and typically form large, dense colonies, with specific requirements for breeding in areas that include open accessible water, a protected nesting substrate that includes flooded or thorny/spiny vegetation, and suitable foraging space within a few kilometers of the nesting colony (Beedy and Hamilton 1999).

The history of the tricolored blackbird in San Diego County has been one of continuous decline. According to Unitt (2004), there may be 20–30 colonies around the county, totaling about 5,000–8,000 birds typically concentrated in two areas: north-central San Diego County from Dameron Valley and Oak Grove south to Ramona and Santa Ysabel, and the Campo Plateau from Potrero to Jacumba. On Conserved Lands, these colonial songbirds occur in MUs 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 9 (see online map: <http://arcg.is/2hokRNf>). At least five colonies in the county's coastal lowland supported up to 1,000 nests in 1935 and 1936 (Neff 1937), none of which are present currently. Through a collaboration of volunteers from state and federal agency biologists, nongovernmental agencies, industry representatives, and academic scientists, the Tricolored Blackbird Working Group has been conducting statewide surveys every 3 years since 2008 and will be preparing another statewide census for 2017. A sample survey was conducted in 2016 by the working group with results revealing a colony of 2,000 birds from Warner Springs Hwy 79 and Hwy S2 (Vista Irrigation). However, at Rancho Jamul Ecological Reserve, a site typically occupied during the nesting season for more than a decade and with varying population numbers, the 2016 nesting season was the first in many years that no tricolored blackbirds were seen at the site despite the implementation of management actions for habitat enhancement (T. Nelson, pers. comm.).

Management Categorization Rationale

The tricolored blackbird should be managed as a Species Management Focus Category SL because persistence of one or more significant occurrences in the MSPA is at high risk of loss without immediate management action above and beyond that of daily maintenance activities and because management of habitat alone will not ensure its persistence.

Tricolored blackbirds are under threat in southern California on many fronts. A primary threat to this species is undoubtedly the loss and degradation of habitat, which can be attributed to urban development and agricultural practices and conversions (Beedy and Hamilton 1999). They are particularly susceptible to disturbances and habitat loss due to their colonial breeding biology combined with their narrow geographic range (Kelsey 2008). Additional threats include altered hydrological conditions, nest predation, and the loss of nests in silage due to the timing of harvests (Beedy 2008; Tricolored Blackbird Working Group 2009).

Management and Monitoring Approach

The overarching goal for tricolored blackbird is to protect, enhance, and restore occupied and historically occupied habitat to create resilient, self-sustaining populations that provide for persistence over the long term (>100 years).

For the 2017–2021 planning cycle, the management and monitoring approach for the tricolored blackbird is to:

- (1) continue to support statewide survey efforts every 3 years along with supporting El Monte and other current habitat restoration processes;
- (2) inspect occupied habitat and document abundance and record threats to determine management needs;
- (3) conduct routine management and utilize occurrence and threat data to develop a management plan;
- (4) implement the highest priority management actions for tricolored blackbirds, and
- (5) monitor the effectiveness of the recommended management actions.

For details and the most up-to-date goals, objectives, and actions, go to the MSP Portal [Tricolored Blackbird summary page: http://portal.sdmmp.com/view_species.php?taxaid=179060](http://portal.sdmmp.com/view_species.php?taxaid=179060)

Tricolored Blackbird References

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