

Preface: Special Double Issue on the Tricolored Blackbird

If a flock of goldfinches is called a “charm,” and a flock of crows, a “murder,” what is a flock of Tricolored Blackbirds (*Agelaius tricolor*) called? Whatever the word, it could not possibly be adequate to describe the mind-boggling energy and excitement generated by a flock of over 50,000 Tricolors settling at a colony. Whether an avid birder or weekend naturalist, you can’t help but be amazed by this sight, for it is one of the Central Valley’s most spectacular natural phenomena.

Welcome to a special double issue of the CVBC Bulletin devoted primarily to a single species. No bird is more deserving than the Tricolored Blackbird. The fact that the Central Valley supports over 90% of the world’s Tricolored Blackbirds is reason enough for this distinction. However, the catalyst for this special publication is a concern shared by many regarding the species’ future due to serious population declines from its former abundance. Petitions to list the Tricolored Blackbird under the State and Federal Endangered Species Acts are currently being considered by the California Department of Fish and Game and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Numerous surveys and studies have been stimulated recently out of concern for the Tricolored Blackbird. The results include some noteworthy contrasts: the species is evidently undergoing a steady population decline due principally to habitat loss, but it has also demonstrated promising adaptability to different breeding substrates; the species amasses during the nesting season, but locating and then accurately counting those masses is a vexing challenge.

Described herein are the results of a 2004 Tricolored Blackbird survey that was conducted to update existing information on large, historic nesting colonies. The success of this volunteer effort can be largely attributed to CVBC members and other survey participants who sacrificed all or part of an April weekend to search for colonies up and down the valley. In addition to the survey results, we include an analysis, by Bill Hamilton, of productivity by certain colonies in 2004 and some of his thoughts regarding important conservation steps that should be taken to reverse this decline. Debra Schlafmann and David Hardt describe the conservation history of a nesting site in Tulare County, known as the “Toledo Pit.” Julian Meisler discusses the potential for Land Trusts to help private landowners actively conserve Tricolored Blackbird habitat. Julie Yee and Michael Miller of the U.S. Geological Service discuss their partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to derive standardized, repeatable monitoring protocols for this species. Rich Stallcup provides insights into the needs of a small but important colony in Marin County and contrasts the timing of the Marin nesting season with that of various parts of the Central Valley.

We recognize that this would not have been possible without the CVBC and a journal devoted to the collection and dissemination of information about the avifauna of the Central Valley. We also recognize that this effort never would have materialized without the help of a talented group of authors, reviewers, and editors.

We hope that you enjoy this special double issue. More than that, we hope that it inspires you to learn more about this unique species and our opportunities to help ensure that it is protected adequately in the future. We encourage you to support Tricolored Blackbird conservation by participating in future surveys and other efforts that will increase public awareness of the need to protect one of our most fascinating and threatened birds, and secure forever the opportunity to witness the annual spectacle of 50,000, better yet, 100,000 birds, crowding the Central Valley sky.

*Leo Edson, CVBC Conservation Committee Chair
Michael Green, US Fish and Wildlife Service*

[Editor's Note: Edward C. Beedy, a member of the Editorial Board for the CVBC Bulletin and co-author of the Tricolored Blackbird species account for *The Birds of North America* Project, ably assisted as co-editor of this special issue, and his efforts are greatly appreciated. -- TM]