

Special Issue on the Status, Management, and Conservation of the Tricolored Blackbird

The Tricolored Blackbird is a near-endemic of the Central Valley and a symbol for the Central Valley Bird Club (see cover). It truly is “California’s Blackbird”. The species is in trouble for a variety of reasons, and the solutions are not obvious or easy to achieve. In December 2014, the California Fish and Game Commission listed the Tricolor as Endangered under its emergency protection procedure, and the species has been petitioned for listing under the federal Endangered Species Act. These actions, however, are not a solution. Rather, they are the start of a new chapter in conservation efforts.

We must continue to work on many levels cooperatively to safeguard the species. A hallmark of the Central Valley Bird Club has been its cooperative work with the agricultural and ranching communities on a variety of projects, including management of rice lands for waterbirds and assessing and protecting private grasslands for wintering and breeding raptors. Success in conserving the Tricolored Blackbird will require an unprecedented level of cooperation and collaboration with these and many other entities. Conservation will require both encouraging practices that benefit the species and mitigating those activities that are harmful. The responsibilities however, must be assigned in a manner that doesn’t unfairly burden private entities upon whose land the blackbird depends, but rather as a commitment shared by all.

This special issue of the Bulletin provides important information documenting the precarious status and declining trend of the Tricolored Blackbird both on a statewide and regional basis. It identifies a new approach to population assessment that can give a more frequent assessment of the species status and the effectiveness of conservation actions. It also provides new information on the ecology of the species in the lower foothills of the Sierra Nevada and a program to provide incentives for private ranchers to protect and enhance Tricolored Blackbird nesting habitat.

The issue also includes key information on recovery actions and management practices needed for Tricolored Blackbird habitats, and information on a large scale cooperative program to address the difficult issue of nesting loss during harvest of silage crops at dairy farms. Finally we include a case study of the formation of an impressive ad-hoc group representing Audubon Chapters, Audubon California, and the Central Valley Bird Club that has rapidly undertaken a leadership role in conducting on the ground actions to reverse the species’ decline.

The Central Valley Bird Club is proud to provide so much critical information in a timely manner to support Tricolored Blackbird conservation

efforts. To that end, we are more broadly marketing this issue to a wider audience with interest in conserving this species.

We hope you enjoy this issue, but more importantly, we hope it spurs you to action on behalf of the Tricolored Blackbird. Your support of the Central Valley Bird Club has helped prepare this issue of the Bulletin. There are many other meaningful contributions that you can make: assisting with ongoing species surveys, financially supporting ongoing conservation efforts, advocating on behalf of the species, publicizing the plight of the species and gaining public support, joining action groups that are identifying and implementing conservation projects... the list goes on. Find a way to help.

Chris Conard (CVBC President) and Daniel A. Airola (CVBC Editor)



Flock of Tricolored Blackbirds. *Photo © Andrew Engilis, Jr.*

Note from Editor:

This issue was made possible through the dedication and hard work by many people. I particularly thank species experts Drs. Robert (Bob) Meese and Edward C. (Ted) Beedy who authored many papers and reviewed others. I also offer thanks to Lowell Young for his encouragement in preparing this volume and his dedication to Tricolored Blackbird conservation. Finally a huge thanks to Layout Editor, Frances Oliver; Photo Editor, Dan Brown; and proof-reader Dan Kopp for their substantial and critical efforts in bring this issue to press.

Daniel A. Airola