

Tree Pruning to Enhance Habitat for Birds and Other Wildlife

Strategic Approach, August 4, 2015

The following strategic approach was developed at a workshop held at Fullerton Arboretum on July 16, 2015 from 9:00 a.m. to noon. The 28 workshop participants included birders, arborists, and other professionals from non-profit organizations, businesses, utilities, and local, state and Federal agencies.

Key Action Items

The actions are outlined in greater detail in Tasks 1 to 5, in this document. These key actions can and should be initiated to begin the collective work of modifying tree pruning practices to enhance habitat for birds and other wildlife.

1. Establish leadership group to adopt strategic plan and begin actions outlined in the plan
2. Schedule and hold meetings and workshops at least twice yearly.
3. Compile literature on bird nesting and tree care practices in Southern California urban areas
4. Establish methodology to collect baseline data and incident reports on bird and nest losses
5. Develop Best Management Practices that municipalities and businesses can adopt
6. Establish central webpage with local resources and links
7. Develop presentation for educational programs and training sessions
8. Draft and propose ISA wildlife protection certification
9. Participate in local professional networks to increase knowledge about trees and wildlife
10. Develop common flyer and other educational materials
11. Advocate for communities and organizations to adopt BMP's

Workshop Expectations

- Share current practices for tree pruning and palm trimming
- Learn about impacts and benefits of these practices on nesting birds and other wildlife
- Understand issues relating to tree-wildlife conflicts, public safety risks, and liabilities
- Explore how to allow year-round tree trimming without affecting nesting birds
- Make this “step one” of a process to change policies and practices
- Establish relationships among agencies, cities, utilities, arborists, and birders

Goals (Desired Future Conditions) in Five Years

- More urban wildlife, more bird songs in the morning
- Fewer birds disturbed in their life cycle, fewer fallen birds and nests
- Increased cavity nesting habitat in urban settings
- Large healthy trees in open spaces, parks, public spaces, and private property
- Fewer topped and over-pruned trees, and fewer falling trees and limbs
- Uniform policies that public agencies could adopt
- Best Management Practices (BMPs) for minimizing impacts of tree pruning
- Effective education materials for professionals and public
- Certification program for professionals
- Compliance with ANSI standards, even by small operators

- Improved relationships between arborists and bird specialists
- More scientific research on wildlife habitat in urban settings in southern California

Resources and Opportunities

- Any location is good for birds, in southern California!
- California is rich in bird/migratory bird species, as it is located along the Pacific Flyway
- Laws and policies protecting wildlife habitat and nesting birds
 - Most non-endangered, native species are protected under Migratory Bird Treaty Act
 - State laws generally provide greater protection for raptors and colonial nesting birds
 - Guidelines in habitat conservation plans, including SDG&E Sub-regional Natural Community Conservation Plan, 1995, <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Planning/NCCP/Plans/San-Diego-GE>
 - Model policies and reports from other regions and states
- Local informational materials
 - Guides and webpages from local Audubon chapters, including Los Angeles, Golden Gate, and Sea and Sage
 - Websites of wildlife rehabilitation centers, and animal control departments
 - San Diego Breeding Bird Atlas
 - Backyard Birds of Inland Empire
 - When issues arise, there is often a public education opportunity
- Professional associations: International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) and Western Chapter of ISA; California Urban Forest Council (CaUFC) and local councils; Professional Tree Care Association (PTCA), California Relief
- Certified Wildlife Protector program, http://wildlifetraining.org/Wildlife_Certification.html
- ANSI standards for pruning trees, <http://tcia.org/business/ansi-a300-standards/part-1>
- Community planning groups and local bird and wildlife advocates
- Professionals backing agencies to support active enforcement

Barriers and Threats

- Birds are everywhere!
- Drought is increasing tree losses and bird/wildlife habitat
- Demolition crews cut trees down on private property
- Private property owners hire tree companies that don't have certified arborists
- Tree trimmers/climbers have different skills than arborists
- Smaller companies need to, but don't always, follow policies and BMPs
- Adherence to pruning standards keeps more foliage and bird habitat, yet the public and cost-minimizing contracts favor heavier pruning
- Inspections take time
- Lack of enforcement, no one to call and inadequate staff to inspect
- Everyone can make claims and calls about issues even if they are not knowledgeable
- Mitigation often required for permits to take nests, when public safety issues arise
- Public education approaches and media resources are changing
- Language barriers, need materials in Spanish
- Little funding for public education programs

- Possible changes in state policies, federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act
- Regional differences in regulations and conditions
- Difficult to make changes in five years, but can make considerable progress

Natural History and Scientific Information

- Specific research findings often cannot easily be applied; it is natural history that provides the greatest information about birds
- Four primary factors influencing tree care impacts on birds: bird groups, tree types, tree care objectives, and timing (season)
- Arborists generally know little about birds and their habitat requirements, but can be trained to see and hear birds as a pre-work inspection
- Tree pruning depends on objectives, generally are to reduce limb failure (safety), increase visibility, shape canopy, and reduce canopy size
- Wildlife and birds are favored, when pruning is limited (no more than 25% of canopy), which is also the best pruning for trees
- Nests are meant to be hidden and hard to see!
- Specialty nesters need to be considered (such as orioles in palms and woodpeckers in dead trunk and limbs)
- Considerable information available in southern California from museums (Bird Atlas from San Diego Natural History Museum, others?), Audubon chapters
- Research and monitoring programs can answer key questions for urban birds in southern California:
 - Does regular pruning reduce chance of nesting in the future?
 - What percentage of nests can be identified from the ground during pre-inspection?
 - Is urban disturbance reducing nesting in urban trees?
 - What predators and introduced species reduce bird populations, and how are they affected by tree care practices?
 - What percentage of trees being trimmed have nests in them?
 - What are the actual wildlife losses resulting from tree trimming?
 - What other urban forestry practices can increase bird and other wildlife habitat?

Action Steps

1. Establish project plan and structure
 - a. Establish leadership/steering group and meet monthly by teleconference call
 - b. Distribute draft strategic approach to all attendees for review/comment
 - c. Identify short- and mid-term funding needs and possible contributors
 - d. Set up meeting in about six months, for coordination and/or learning
 - e. Schedule and hold meetings and workshops at least twice yearly.
 - f. ***Estimated resources***
 - i. ***Volunteer efforts of workshop participants and others***
2. Compile and share natural history and science information
 - a. Compile literature on bird nesting in urban areas, and impacts of tree care practices on bird habitats
 - i. Assemble applicable Federal and state policies and regulations, including removal of unoccupied nests and other wildlife habitat impacts

- ii. Incorporate literature into guides to habitats, tree preferences, and nest types for various bird groups and seasons in southern California (I recall Scott Thomas saying that it was not practical or wise to try to identify the many tree species that might be preferred by some bird species since we can assume that most trees may be used by birds. Would suggest omitting ‘tree preferences.’)
 - b. Compile baseline data and incident reports on actual losses of birds due to pruning and trimming. The records of Animal Control and rescue organizations are likely the only reliable sources of some of these losses. Tree trimmers are not likely to report such events. For this information to be helpful someone will have to track this data for years. Of how much value will it be in meeting our goals?
 - i. Develop methodology to collect, analyze, and use data
 - ii. Collect monitoring data on bird losses, as various actions are taken
 - c. Invite local university faculty and students to conduct research on birds and urban trees
 - i. Ask local Audubon chapters to contribute to a contact list of university and community college faculty with interests in birds and urban wildlife
 - ii. Include local research publications in literature compilation
 - d. *Estimated resources***
 - i. *Consultant to compile literature report on bird nesting and tree care practices in Southern California urban areas (40 hours)***
 - ii. *Consultant to develop methodology to monitor data on bird losses and wildlife habitat impacts (hours depend on what existing methods are identified)***
 - iii. *Volunteer participants to review and finalize both products***
- 3. Develop and adopt Best Management Practices (BMPs)
 - a. Develop steps to include landscape-level or area assessment, pre-work inspection, and actions that tree trimmers are expected and trained to take
 - i. Identify indicators for assessment, inspection, and pruning actions
 - ii. Inspections require a list of conditions to inspect, and actions that tree worker is expected to take based on those conditions
 - iii. Include guidance on finding nests, recognizing breeding behavior, and actions to take if a tree has an active nest
 - iv. Define pruning types that minimize nest disturbance while maintaining pruning objectives and public safety
 - b. Consider developing two sets of BMPs: for private homeowners and public agencies/large businesses
 - i. For private homeowners, focus on tree pruning and palm trimming outside nesting season
 - ii. For public agencies and utilities, include risk assessment, scheduling, assessment of trees, human health and safety, consulting biologist if nest removal cannot be avoided
 - c. Consider the range of options: ordinance/code, best management practices, enforcement, voluntary adoption, mandatory adoption
 - d. *Estimated resources***
 - i. *Consultant to identify and review regulations and guidance provided in southern California and other jurisdictions (80 hours)***

- ii. *Consultant to work with local professionals to draft Best Management Practices for tree care practices that enhance habitats for birds and other wildlife (120 hours)*
 - iii. *Volunteer participants to review and suggest revisions in draft BMPs, and work with local jurisdictions to assess how to incorporate these BMPs*
4. Professional education and certification
- a. Establish central webpage for professionals and the public
 - i. Host webpage on one of the participants' websites Not sure this is necessary. Perhaps we can use the existing website of one of our participating groups. A new website will take funds and time to develop and require someone to manage long term.
 - ii. Provide links to local resources, publications, agency policies, local bird breeding atlas, and other information
 - b. Participate in regional networks for tree professionals and birding
 - i. Offer programs to educate local professionals at their association meetings
 - c. Develop and offer training for arborists and tree trimmers
 - i. Develop half-day course on bird and wildlife habitat requirements, effects of common tree care practices on habitats and populations, and methods to reduce impacts.
 - ii. Establish "train the trainer" program to teach professional courses
 - iii. Offer educational workshops to contractors being issued city business licenses for tree care
 - iv. Educate representatives from homeowners' associations, construction and demolition companies, cities, and others to bring the training programs back to their employees.
 - d. Establish ISA wildlife protection certification as a stand-alone certification and/or include in tree worker and arborist certifications/tests
 - i. Add requirement for a wildlife protection certification for municipal and utility work, as most require arborists on contracts
 - ii. Reach out to colleges and companies to get arborists and tree workers to enroll in training and certification programs
 - e. Add other participants to this effort:
 - i. International Society of Arboriculture
 - ii. Private contractors such as Peterson's Tree Service
 - iii. Municipal public works departments, city planners, and parks
 - iv. Other cities in southern California, including Laguna Beach, Mission Viejo
 - v. Other Audubon chapters, including Los Angeles and San Diego
 - f. *Estimated resources*
 - i. *Consultant to review existing materials and webpages, and draft content and links for common webpage (40 hours)*
 - ii. *Consultant to work with local professionals to develop PowerPoint presentation for training arborists and tree trimmers (120 hours)*
 - iii. *Volunteer participants who are certified arborists work with ISA to draft and propose ISA wildlife protection certification*
 - iv. *Volunteer participants advocate for local networks and associations to learn about and establish wildlife protection certification*

5. Plan, develop and initiate public education program.
 - a. Develop common flyer and other educational materials
 - i. Review and adapt information from current flyers and webpages
 - ii. Write materials that are multi-cultural and –lingual
 - iii. Provide information on municipal websites and at public libraries
 - iv. Consider distributing information in utility bills to property owners and with business permits to landscaping companies
 - v. Communicate reasons for tree pruning for safety and habitat, such as rationale for pruning trees under utility lines, even if there are active nests
 - b. Establish central webpage for professionals and the public, including link to specific resources, publications, and agencies (same as 4.a.)
 - c. Use social media to distribute key messages
 - d. Work with cities to distribute information to property owners and the public
 - i. Provide key information on municipal websites, with links to central webpage, and steps to report nest losses
 - ii. Encourage watering trees to reduce drought losses
 - iii. Provide reasons not to hire “Payless Tree Companies”
 - iv. Explore establishing program for “Wildlife Aware City USA and the Arbor Foundation.”
 - e. Engage all Audubon chapters in public education
 - i. Invite arborists to talk to local Audubon groups about pruning practices, what arborists look for, and best management practices
 - ii. Ask Audubon California to coordinate with local Audubon chapters
 - f. ***Estimated resources***
 - i. ***Consultant to review existing materials and draft flyer(s) for the public and professionals***
 - ii. ***Volunteer participants to review and finalize flyer and other informational materials***
 - iii. ***Volunteer participants post information on municipal, other agency, and non-profit websites, and link to common resource webpage***

Action Teams

The following participants offered to participate in six action teams:

- Steering committee/team: Andy Trotter, Gillian Martin, Kathy Degner, Ryan Gilpin, Susan Sims, Chris Guenther, and Scott Thomas
- Natural history group: Erin Kellogg, Magen Shaw
- BMPs: Lynnette Short, Ryan Gilpin, Kara Donahue, Mike Palat, Chris Guenther, Susan Sims
- Professional education and certification: Susan Sims, Andy Trotter, Gillian Martin
- Public Education: Erin Kellogg, Diana Ruiz, and Kathy Degner, Gillian Martin
- Funding (identify possible contributors): Magen Shaw, Kara Donahue, Cheryl Thomas

Workshop Agenda

July 16, 2015 at Fullerton Arboretum, 1900 N Associated Rd, Fullerton, CA 92831

- 8:30 Coffee and registration
- 9:00 Welcome, introductions, and expectations for workshop
- 9:45 Goals, “What do we want for urban birds, wildlife, and trees in five years?”

- 10:00 Resources and opportunities for reaching the goals
- 10:15 Barriers and threats to reaching the goals
- 10:30 Break
- 10:45 Continue identifying resources and barriers
- 11:15 Some responsible strategies for the next few years (working lunch)
- 11:45 Choose 1-2 actions with action plan and identified resources
- 12:00 Adjourn
- 12:15 Optional guided tour of the Arboretum

Contacts

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Andy Trotter, West Coast Arborists, atrotter@wcinc.com, 714-920-1262

Anne Fege, Ph.D., Business and Ecology Consultants, afege@aol.com, 858-472-1293 (facilitator)

Selected References and Resources

- Adams, L., L.W. VanDruff, and M.Luniak. 2005. Managing urban habitats and wildlife, In: Techniques for wildlife investigations and management: The Wildlife Society, Editors: Clait E. Braun, pp.714-739, at http://www.researchgate.net/profile/Lowell_Adams/publication/261834561_Managing_urban_habitats_and_wildlife/links/0a85e53679df374dd8000000.pdf
- American Bird Conservancy. Land Managers Guide to Bird Habitats and Populations in Oak Ecosystems of Pacific Northwest, Bob Altman and Jamie Stephens, <http://abcbirds.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/QuercusGuidePart1.pdf> , species accounts http://www.abcbirds.org/newsandreports/special_reports/QuercusGuideSpeciesAccounts.pdf
- ANSI A300 (Part 1) - 2008 *Pruning* <http://tcia.org/business/ansi-a300-standards/part-1>
- Audubon-San Francisco Bay Area. Healthy trees, healthy birds, 2-pg flyer, http://www.goldengateaudubon.org/wp-content/uploads/Healthy_Trees_brochure.pdf
- California Code of Regulations (CCR) Title 14 Section 251.1- Harrassment of Animals. (intentional act which disrupts an animal's normal behavior patterns, including breeding, feeding, or sheltering)
- California Council for Wildlife Rehabilitators, flyers for tree trimmers on squirrels and birds, <http://www.ccwr.org/resources/resources.html>
- Cavity Conservation Initiative, Orange County, CA, several flyers at <http://cavityconservation.com/resources-to-promote-safe-dead-tree-management-and-retention/>
- Giles, B. 2004. Tree cutting and pruning to benefit urban wildlife. In: Proceedings 4th International Urban Wildlife Symposium. p. 325-329. <http://extension.arizona.edu/sites/extension.arizona.edu/files/pubs/snr070431.pdf> `
- International Urban Wildlife Conference, May 17-20, 2015 at Urban Wildlife Institute, Chicago, IL, <http://urban-wildlife.org/pdf/Program%20Overview%20050715.pdf>
- Kee, S.N. 2010. Backyard birds of the Inland Empire, Heyday Publishing, 224 p.
- Los Angeles Audubon Society, tree trimming guidance, <http://losangelesaudubon.org/index.php/tree-trimming-guidelines-mainmenu-155>. 6-page brochure to print and fold, <http://losangelesaudubon.org/images/stories/pdf/TTGMay2011/ttg-may-2011-english-print-collate.pdf>
- San Diego Natural History Museum. 2004. San Diego County Bird Atlas. Sunbelt Public. 766 p. <http://www.sdnhm.org/science/birds-and-mammals/projects/san-diego-county-bird-atlas/>
- Sea and Sage Audubon Society, tree trimming resource packet, <http://www.seaandsageaudubon.org/Conservation/conservationtree.htm><http://www.seaandsageaudubon.org/Conservation/TreeTrimming/TreeTrimmingPacket.html>
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2014. Guidebook on Urban Conservation Treaty for Migrating Birds. 44 p. (doesn't address tree pruning or care) <http://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/Partnerships/UrbanTreaty/Urban%20Bird%20Treaty%20V2%202014.pdf>
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Bird nests: What you need to know. 1 p. <https://www.fws.gov/cno/conservation/MigratoryBirds/BirdNests-final.pdf>
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Urban Conservation Treaty for Migrating Birds. <http://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/Partnerships/UrbanTreaty/urbantreaty.html>
- Urban Wildlife Working Group of The Wildlife Society, <http://urbanwildlifegroup.org/>