

Tree Care for Birds and Other Wildlife

Notes of October 30, 2015 Meeting

The meeting was held at the Resource Conservation District office in Riverside on October 30, 2015 from 8:30 a.m. to noon. Fourteen attended: Gillian Martin, Andy Trotter, Amelia Oliver, Brandon Watts, Carlos Jauregui, Cheryl Thomas, David Haas, Diana Ruiz, Magen Shaw, Mike Palat, Ryan Gilpin, Scott Thomas, Susan Sims, and Anne Fege.

Updates since July Meeting

1. California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFire) has provided \$18,000 in funds, transferred to California ReLeaf to administer. Funds must be spent by December 2016. A match is required; that can include time, travel, and purchases, and Amelia is tracking that with a form (provided at meeting and sent electronically).
2. Pomona Audubon contributed \$2,000, and these funds are much more flexible. With the funding, more work can be done with consultants, to supplement the contributions of professionals who are volunteering their time on this project.
3. Andy will provide a one-page budget summary with volunteer and professional contributions, to share with Audubon chapters in southern California
4. Gillian reported that 48 people are on the roster, hooray!
5. Diana Ruiz welcomed the group to the Riverside-Corona Resource Conservation District site. They feature demonstration areas for sustainable practices for native, urban/suburban and agriculture land uses.

Actions before February Meeting

1. Literature review and draft “white paper,” led by Magen, also Ryan and Anne
2. Draft BMPs, led by Ryan and Kara, also Mike, Susan, Andy, Lynnette, Chris G.
3. Summary of regulations, led by Scott, also Lynnette (or other CalFire), ask Kara
4. Metrics, initial discussions with Anne, Magen, and Star
5. Charter for this group, what’s covered and not
6. Telephone calls with steering group

The work groups can use GoogleDocs for drafts, ask others in the project to review and comment, and use teleconference meeting(s) to discuss (such as GoToMeeting).

Agenda Items for February Meeting

1. Objectives for tree care and protection of birds and wildlife
2. Review Federal and state regulations (Scott)
3. Present definitions/glossary for this project
4. Review draft BMPs for tree care practices
5. Initial discussion about BMPs for habitat enhancement

The next in-person meeting will be in February (not a Friday), at the WestCoast Arborist office, 2200 East Via Burton, Anaheim, CA 92806 (near the intersection of freeways 91 and 57, and 4.5 miles from Amtrak train station).

Project Title and Scope

The project name discussed and agreed upon: Tree Care for Birds and Other Wildlife. It does not include the word “urban” but clearly focuses on tree care of individual trees (not silviculture or forest stand management).

Some attendees asked for a “charter” for the project, and California Audubon wants a charter to consider being an official supporter. Scott will send an example. Such a charter could include the action items listed in the strategic approach (developed from the July 16 meeting) and the workshop expectations expressed in that first meeting:

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

Regulations

Scott gave an overview of Federal regulations and will provide additional information by the February meeting.

1. Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA), written for hunting in early 1900s, has been applied to many other settings and activities. US Fish and Wildlife Service rules are outlined in Federal Regulations, and there have been some recent revisions.
2. Need permit to move nests, eggs, young of protected species
3. State law is similar to MBTA, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife is also looking at “clarification of language” about utility and transmission lines. Any changes would apply to the tree maintenance issues even if they not written for that.
4. Common (rock) pigeon, European starling, and house sparrow are the only species not protected under State or Federal regulation.

Urban Habitats (not all will be featured in this project)

1. Riparian areas, estuaries and coastal wetlands
2. Open spaces such as canyons, greenbelts, and large natural vegetation areas
3. Parks
4. Street parkways and rights-of-way
5. Utility lines
6. Easements for utilities and transportation
7. Private residential landscaping and buildings
8. Private commercial landscaping and the buildings
9. Development projects for residential and commercial buildings
10. Schools and educational institutions
11. Wildland-urban interface, residential backyards adjacent to open space
12. Agriculture, including urban gardens and agriculture

Nest Locations and Other Wildlife Habitat Elements

1. Ground nests
2. Canopy nests
3. Cavity nests
4. Utility poles and towers
5. Buildings
6. Bushes, shrubs, and understory vegetation

A paragraph needs to be written about each nest location, including common nest types, materials and shapes that are relevant to tree care practices. Scott, Sue, Brandon, Ryan and Star can contribute to this.

Activities of Birds and Other Wildlife

A paragraph needs to be written for each of the bird and other wildlife activities that could occur during tree care:

1. Foraging, including feeding on fruit, seeds
2. Breeding, nesting
3. Roosting/perching, social behavior
4. Sheltering
5. Human responses to bird activities (such as droppings and nest sites) and emotional connections to birds and trees

Tree Maintenance Activities

1. Pruning, including canopy cleaning, pruning limbs
2. Trimming palms
3. Removing trees, leaving a snag, grinding stumps
4. Preservation of older trees, and support for trees (cables, staking)
5. Planting trees
6. Emergency response work
7. Plant health care, including pesticides, growth hormone regulators and nutrient injections
8. Doing hazard assessments, tree inventories
9. Managing and harvesting fruit
10. Protecting trees during construction
11. Incorporating tree care into master, community, and project development plans

Literature Review

Magen summarized her initial search for relevant articles, that included (and could include) these subject areas:

1. Direct effects of pruning-trimming practices (very little research published)
2. Disturbances include distances from noise sources and decibels (mostly from silviculture and logging practices)
3. Habitat requirements that are subject to tree care, including urban snags, pruning
4. Differences between habitat requirements in urban dense settings, vs. edges-parks
5. Urban-adapted birds (see new *Suburdia* book)
6. Orchards, fruit and food values of trees

Some species are more successful in urban habitats, so the literature review needs to consider differences between (1) urban-adapted birds and wildlife that are dependent on trees, and (2) birds and other wildlife that are sensitive to urban conditions. There also need to be distinctions between (1) street trees and other trees in dense urban settings and (2) trees in open space habitats within the city such as riparian, edges and large areas of natural vegetation.

Literature review needs to predominantly be from peer-reviewed articles, with some “grey” articles and books added. Magen needs others to help read the literature (articles) that she has posted in the Dropbox. Research needs will be identified, and Scott offered to make contact later with some local colleges to invite them to do some research and monitoring.

Methodology to collect baseline data and incident reports (metrics) need to be developed. This could be included in a tree inventory, and could be reported by tree trimmers, citizens, Audubon members, and bird rescue people.

What research/categories need to be in the white paper?

- Consider literature on snags in forestry, seek articles on snags in urban settings
- Urban habitat for urban-adapted birds, songbirds, raptors, special status
- Utility lines, easement (these can be in dense urban areas, edges and backcountry)
- Avoiding disturbance and mortality of nest-eggs-birds (a lot of literature on how humans disturb birds, we know disturb them, there is clear science)
- Urban bird biology, where are the birds, what do they look for in urban trees (size, canopy density)
- Science behind the regulations for Migratory Bird Treaty Act
- For “listed” birds, requirements need to be met separately for each species, so BMPs need to refer to those regulations
- Information about natural history (of each bird) won’t be sufficient justification for BMPs that are broadly applicable

Best Management Practices

Andy gave an overview of BMPs and distributed copies of Tree Pruning BMP from ISA. Ryan provided a draft “decision tree” for gathering information and making decisions.

- Differences during and outside of nesting season
- Pre-job assignments (desk-top review), identify intersection of biological resources and project activities
- Consider whether trees are in “very urban” or less urban setting
- At the job site, what observations and information to gather
- When can a trained arborist do the inspection and when is a certified biologist is needed (can we define these thresholds by time or space?)
- Protect nests, eggs and young birds, what to do if discovered

Ways in which tree care practices may affect wildlife

- Reduces resources found in trees (food, snags/cavities, nesting spaces, shelter)
- Disturbance during nesting season (noise)
- Fatalities directly related to pruning practices
- Increased predation
- Increased exposure to elements (sunlight, wind, rain/snow, temperatures etc)

Improvements to pruning practices

- Retain snags that do not pose a threat to utilities, infrastructure or public safety
- Review keystone tree/shrub species in local ecosystems for wildlife before pruning
- Adopting mitigation measure for pruning practices, for example, providing nesting boxes when snags must be removed from trees

Other comments during this discussion:

- Need to consider productivity loss when a row of trees have to be avoided or delayed
- How does a crew recognize that the bird is a (small) raptor or sensitive species?

- Many regulations have a set distance (300 feet and 50 feet for different conditions), 300 feet is common distance for affecting disturbance
- Even if birds are accustomed to loud noise (freeways, next to buildings), a different noise (chain saw, chipper) may disturb them and cause them to leave or abandon nest
- Even visual inspection may disturb some birds when nesting
- Best if BMPs recommend rather than prescribe
- Generally, the biologist is referred to as “qualified,” doesn’t have to be an ornithologist
- There will always be a balance, as the primary reason for pruning is public safety

Include definitions/glossary. Two sources for words about birds and about tree care.

- ISA has an online international dictionary, <http://www.isa-arbor.com/education/onlineresources/multilingualdictionary.aspx>.
- The Cornell Lab of Ornithology has a 64-page glossary in .pdf format, <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/homestudy/studentinfo/HSCGlossary.pdf>.

BMPs for Enhancing Wildlife Habitat (begin this discussion before or at February meeting)

1. Follow pruning BMPs to grow healthy trees
2. Retain large canopies
3. Retain mature trees – mature trees likely provide more habitat than young trees
4. Leave parts of dead/declining trees as wildlife habitat, increase quality snags by leaving trunks and branches
5. Replant trees with species that provide wildlife habitat
6. Use Integrated Pest Management approaches

Training for Tree Care Workers (begin this discussion at February meeting)

1. Principles of enhancing urban trees for birds and wildlife
2. Regulations
3. What to look and listen for when assessing vegetation for nesting activity
4. Avoidance and protection measures
5. Need to reach both professionals and tree care workers

Public Education (begin this discussion at February meeting)

1. Develop public information materials
2. Use other materials as models (riparian brochure from Resource Conservation District)
3. Develop outreach plan
4. Work with local wildlife agencies and organizations to implement program
5. Need to focus on reasons for the tree care practices to enhance habitat
6. Set up website/webpages to assemble relevant information