

## Re-thinking a Moratorium on Tree Care to Protect Birds

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**The welfare of trees, birds and humans are linked.** Trees are not only vital habitat for birds, but they provide many ecosystem functions that benefit humans. Energy savings, water sequestration and cleaner air are just a few examples. By caring for trees properly we reduce the chance of pests and disease, increase their longevity, reduce the impact of climate change and protect birds and human wellbeing at the same time.

**Birds need to be protected in all seasons.** Our planet is changing. In the past few decades, scientists have documented that climate change is triggering earlier migration, flower blooming and the egg-laying dates of birds. Changes in some fruit and nut yields are emerging and more are anticipated. Since birds track resources we can therefore also expect to see changes in when they benefit from insect prey and forage in some trees. As birds respond to changing conditions, it is more important than ever that we remain aware of risk to nesting birds and the resources they need *all year*. It is therefore best that tree care

providers are trained to protect and consider the needs of birds in every season.

**Good tree care management is not seasonal.** The International Society of Arboriculture advises that management of trees needs to be driven by acceptable work objectives and suitable timing, not merely by season. Many factors influence when pruning is most effective, such as when wounding trees makes them more susceptible to pests and disease. It is important to consider when pests and diseases are least active when scheduling tree work. Depending on species and individual situations, some pruning is best done in spring and summer and some is better in fall and winter.

Furthermore, as increasing numbers of trees become more susceptible to pests and pathogens, management of trees for invasive pests and to prevent spread cannot always be based on season. Naturally, throughout the year safety to people, structures and birds must weigh into decision-making.



**Guidelines are available to protect nesting birds.** [The Tree Care for Birds and other Wildlife project](#)(TCB) in California has developed [Best Management Practices \(BMPs\)](#) for the tree care industry to prevent harm to nesting birds and to comply with

the [Migratory Bird Treaty Act](#). We can all agree that not every tree is used by a nesting bird, and that when young birds have fledged it is possible that the tree will not be used again that year. This suggests an argument for approving work in a tree when a) it has been confirmed that birds have fledged, b) when no active nests have been found in the tree during the pre-work inspection, and c) when other bird protection guidelines as outlined in the BMPs are considered.

Individual homeowners as well as other property managers share responsibility for protecting birds by requiring those they hire to comply with bird protection laws and follow the BMPs. The BMPs, along with [a short training video in English and Spanish](#) are available on the TCB website. Other free, downloadable resources on the website include an example of [language to insert in a tree-care contract](#), as well as sample letters to send to HOAs and municipalities.

**Good tree care and stronger protection for birds is best assured by using a professional company that is in business all year.** Selecting a tree care service simply because they provide the lowest bid does not guarantee a good outcome. Professional tree care companies are most likely to have the best trained workers and those trained to comply with bird regulations. An excellent source of information and one that can help you find a certified arborist in your area is [Trees Are Good](#). Another is [Urban Tree Foundation](#).

If professional tree care companies are forced to close or greatly reduce their business for 7-8 months annually (assuming they can survive), they will most certainly lose their best trained crews and have to rely on a temporary work force that is unlikely to be as well trained or aware of, or care about,

wildlife protection regulations. This will compound another growing challenge faced by the industry—a reducing workforce. Nationally, fewer people are interested in becoming tree care workers. Now more than ever, we need a robust tree canopy to offset the impact of climate change, so it is in the interest of humans, birds and trees that we have a sufficient, well-trained work force.



BRIAN FRENCH OF ARBORICULTURE INTERNATIONAL SHOWS HOW TO MAKE A CAVITY IN A DEAD TREE.

**Strong partnerships yield unimagined benefits.** Professional tree care providers and wildlife advocates have knowledge and experience that is of mutual benefit. Requesting a presentation, an article for a newsletter, or partnering on a field trip can be enlightening for everyone. Volunteer opportunities exist to work together. For example, tree care providers can return an immature raptor to a tree, repair a damaged raptor nest or create a new one, and enhance

habitat in a dead tree by creating cavities. Innovation and cooperation at this level is growing but unfortunately not well known to everyone.



WEST COAST ARBORISTS RETURN AN OWL TO ITS TREE.

The Tree Care Industry Association has updated its pruning standards to include the objective of managing trees for wildlife. In the past two years four major industry professional publications have accepted articles about protecting and reducing harm to birds, as well as innovative ways of increasing habitat in trees. Throughout California an increasing number of workshops are provided to train arborists how to be wildlife aware. Furthermore, in 2017 and 2018 the Western Chapter of International Society of Arboriculture (WCISA) and the ISA have included workshops on this topic at their annual conferences. Recently, the Western Chapter has agreed to promote the BMPs and suitable training to all four states in their region. They

have welcomed partnerships with wildlife advocates.

Despite poor enforcement of bird regulations, tree care companies are highly motivated to avoid bad press by accidentally harming wildlife. This motivation is likely to continue to encourage cooperation and compliance. Change in thinking and behavior is frequently slow for everyone, and bridging historic divides takes time and perseverance. A commitment to mutual understanding, respect and cooperation between all stakeholders is best for birds and trees. Together we can create a new dawn for the future health and diversity of our urban forest.

*In the long history of humankind (and animal kind, too) those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed.*

—Charles Darwin