

Appendix E

Comments from Dave Hardt Regarding Tri-colored Blackbird Survey



Western Grebe (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*)

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From an e-mail to Cheryl Harding dated June 27, 2011.

Cheryl,

I hate to admit it but the reason you couldn't find a final report from me was due to the fact I had never pulled it together. Sorry about that! But here are the facts as they relate to the Kern Water Bank Authority tricolored blackbird nesting colonies for 2011.

I began the TRBL nesting season with some pre-scouting prior to the official survey period of April 15-17, 2011. Initially there was a very large nesting colony along both sides of the Kern River channel between Enos Lane and I-5. There were at least a couple thousand birds nesting in nettles adjacent to the river and I observed active nests, one of which contained at least one egg. We have had birds nesting there in the past. When I returned on April 16 for the official survey, the site was abandoned with no evidence of nest predation or destruction by predators. It appears that this was an early attempt to nest but I feel those birds pulled out of the site and moved to the east joining thousands of other birds to form a huge colony in Basin 6 on City property. On April 17 and 18th, I made a reasonably accurate count on this colony and set the number of adults in the colony at 10,000 birds. We gained permission from the City to monitor this colony and followed them through fledging.

On the April 17th and 19th I attempted to locate colonies on KWBA lands and eventually located a total of 5 smaller colonies that totaled around 400 birds. All colonies were located in patches of nettles in association with mesquite trees. Most were adjacent to the river while one was located along the south side of basin M-7 and another on the north side of M-2. It was interesting that in the same mesquite bush in M2 that contained TRBL nestlings, there was also an active quail nest. A dove nest was also located less than 50 yards away that contained two eggs that had been deposited directly on the soil with no nest material being present. The nest was being incubated when it was located.

I am certain that there were more small TRBL colonies on KWBA property but I simply ran out of time to look. The mesquite trees with their associated nettle understory provide very good nesting substrate for a variety of species. With the small colonies, when all nests are being incubated there is so little activity that you can drive by and never notice the colony is present. Once the chicks hatch the activity level increases exponentially which makes the colony much more visible.

There were also two small TRBL colonies on the Tule Elk Preserve property and another colony that appeared very late on the far south end of the Preserve adjacent to the East Side Canal north of the Cross Valley Canal. Since this was such a late colony it is quite possible that we also had late nesters on the KWBA lands as well that went undetected.

It will be interesting to see what the next water year holds in store for us. In many of your basins cattail has begun growing again after several years of being dry. If those cattail stands continue to grow and are flooded again next spring you could have some substantial blackbird colonies in cattails. The area looks great and the diversity of habitat that you are providing this year is exceptional. Thank you for allowing me access for surveying tricolors and I hope we will have sufficient water again next spring so that we can do it all again.

Dave
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