



**San Bernardino Valley Audubon Society**  
P. O. Box 10973, San Bernardino, California 92423-0973

November 20, 2014

Fish and Game Commission  
1416 Ninth Street, Room 1320,  
Sacramento, CA 95814

By email to [fgc@fgc.ca.gov](mailto:fgc@fgc.ca.gov)

**SUBJECT:** Petition from the Center for Biological Diversity (“CBD”) to list the Tricolored Blackbird (*Agelaius tricolor*) as an Endangered Species under the California Endangered Species Act (pursuant to Section 2073.3, Fish and Game Code) and possible adoption of emergency regulation to add Tricolored Blackbird (*Agelaius tricolor*) to the list of Endangered Species (pursuant to Section 2076.5, Fish and Game Code)

**REFERENCE:** Fish and Game Commission meeting agenda December 3, 2014

Dear Commission Members,

The San Bernardino Valley Audubon Society (“SBVAS”) is a non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation and a local chapter of the National Audubon Society with about 2000 members. In spite of its name, the chapter covers almost all of San Bernardino and Riverside counties. SBVAS is an educational and public interest environmental organization. Its mission is to help educate the public as to the importance of the natural environment, and to preserve habitat for birds and other wildlife.

We strongly urge the members of the Commission to vote to list the Tricolored Blackbird (*Agelaius tricolor*) as an Endangered Species under the California Endangered Species Act. Our chapter area includes most of the more southerly habitat for this species, which is mostly endemic to the state of California. Our members have been regular participants in the Tricolored Blackbird population counts cited in the CBD Petition (pp 11 ff). The chapter has participated in efforts to save nesting colonies in farmers’ fields, sometimes successfully, sometimes not. We are leading efforts to conserve and enhance Tricolored Blackbird habitat in our chapter area.

The population counts cited on pages 11 and 12 of the CBD petition clearly show that this bird is on its way to extinction in just a few years. Between 2008 and 2011, the population dropped from 394,858 to 259,322, a decline of 34% in the population in just these three years, and a loss of an average of 45,179 birds per year. Between 2011 and 2014, the population dropped from 259,322 to 145,135, a decline of 44% in the population in these three years, and a loss of an average of 38,062 birds per year. Projecting these numbers as a straight-line decline – which hopefully will not occur – the Tricolored Blackbird will be extinct in the state in about 2018. (145,135 birds total divided by a loss of 38,062 birds per year = 3.8 years left.)

This straight-line projection is justified by the fact that while the loss of individuals per year went down between 2011 and 2014 compared to 2008 to 2011, the percentage of loss went up.

The first factor would cause the projection line to be less steep – meaning a later extinction – while the second factor would cause the projection line to be steeper - meaning an earlier extinction. These factors seem approximately equal and thus would essentially cancel each other out. We know from historical examples that remnant populations can persist in favorable localities, but such species are not healthy as species and we cannot assume that such a remnant population will survive.

Our own local observations over the recent decades mirror this precipitous decline. To cite just one comparison among dozens, in 2006 Audubon was able to save a field of about 5,000 Tricolored Blackbirds that had nested in a farmer's field just south of the San Jacinto Wildlife Area by buying the crop. The flock, discovered by the then manager of the San Jacinto Wildlife Area, was able to raise its young until they fledged. In 2013, Audubon was unable to save a flock of Tricolored Blackbirds nesting in almost the same place. This time the flock was estimated at between 1,000 and 2,000 birds.

In sum, with precipitous population declines throughout the state, the Tricolored Blackbird is headed for extinction in the near future and needs the protection of the California Endangered Species Act. We therefore strongly urge the members of the Commission to vote to list the Tricolored Blackbird (*Agelaius tricolor*) as an Endangered Species under the Act.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Drew Feldmann". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Drew Feldmann  
Conservation Chair

