

Cañada de los Osos Nesting Bird Survey for 2015

Erratic weather, as in other parts of the country, was the norm this year at the Reserve. The cavity nesting birds that we monitor, and others, experienced some dramatic ups and downs in response to this and the disruption of needed food resources.



Tree Swallows, at least the males, arrived earlier than usual, and found difficulty finding food on the wing as flying insects, due to heavy rains and cool weather were grounded. The females arrived later and in smaller numbers. Nesting started in earnest, but persistent cool, damp weather caused many birds to turn to eating eggs to sustain themselves and some early hatchlings died. Once the weather changed, reproduction hit high gear and nesting success was pretty good. Most birds nested a second time and many a third time. Most laid many eggs and successfully reared hatchlings. By mid-July, things were dry and hot, wildflowers were fading rapidly, and flying insects again became scarce. Those birds with large clutches suffered significant losses and even some adults died. Persistence paid off though, and what could have been a poor year turned out fairly good with 210 Tree Swallows fledged.



Western Bluebirds, which largely feed on ground insects and some fruits and berries, occur in much smaller numbers and have less competition. They managed to pull off a fairly successful season with 50 young fledged.

Black Phoebes, in the Flycatcher Family, had a poorer than usual season. Our resident paired at the cabin only nested once and fledged 5 hatchlings. They have always nested twice in the past. Three nests down by the education center were total failures. They are not cavity nesters.

There was only one pair of **Violet-Green Swallows** that nested this year. They tend to be intimidated by large numbers of Tree Swallows, and this family was raised in a box farthest away from the others. The male disappeared early on, but the female managed to hatch her 4 eggs and fledge all her youngsters.

Only one **House Wren** nested this year, instead of the usual three or four. This one laid 7 eggs in a box in the nursery and all were hatched and fledged. Over the years, every House Wren nest monitored on the Reserve has produced 7 eggs per nest.

The drought was not a deterrent in any way to some of the other birds that nest at the Reserve. California Valley Quail were highly successful, with several pairs producing two or even three families.

Wild Turkeys dispersed quite early from the lowlands near the education center this year and were seen in many parts of the Reserve where they have not been seen much before. General observations are that they were a little less successful than in previous years, but populations are still high. They are returning slowly to the valley. Their usual haunts are a little meager at present as much of it has been prepared for the planting of native grasses this fall. Once done, their old home will be replete with good grass cover and an abundance of grasshoppers for the chicks and seeds for all. The many springs that we have developed in the backcountry that now provide quality water resources may entice some groups to establish themselves permanently in other parts of the Reserve. Spreading the population out is good for the habitat and diminishes the chances of disease outbreaks.

Last, but not least, we have a population of threatened **Tri-colored Blackbirds** that have honored us by nesting at Tooth Lake for the past few years. Numbers have declined rapidly throughout the State. Much of it due to the drought. These birds tend to nest here and near the coast early in the year and then move into the Central Valley to nest again. Much of the land used during their second nesting has been usurped by dairy farms that now need the forage for their cattle. Apparently, Cattle Egrets and Black-crowned Night Herons have discovered their colonies as significant food sources and some colonies have completely failed due to these predators. Since there are fewer birds to return in the spring, our numbers have declined also. This year about 100 pairs nested on the Reserve. They are very communal and nest quite close together. The smaller colony of **Red-winged Blackbirds**, which share the lake, are highly territorial but have given up the battle and have moved their nesting colony up to a mustard field north of the lake. Both species have been highly successful at this location. There is adequate food, and no Cattle Egrets or Black-crowned Night Herons.