



Federal support means more help for Tricolored Blackbirds

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Audubon California today received a major federal grant to help grow the population of the Tricolored Blackbird, one of California's most imperiled species. The funding from the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service will support a partnership with Farm Bureau, Western United Dairymen, DairyCares, and Sustainable Conservation to work with farmers to protect birds that breed in silage fields.

Because of habitat loss in California's Central Valley, Tricolored Blackbirds often set up massive breeding colonies on dairy farms, which becomes a problem when the farmers need to harvest their fields to feed their cows. Most of this \$1.1 million grant will go to farmers who delay harvesting to give the birds time to fledge their chicks, and fund off-farm habitat restoration to encourage these birds to safely set up their colonies away from the dairy farms.

Although this grant provides much-needed funding for Tricolored Blackbird conservation, the fact that it is a matching grant means that Audubon California will still rely on supporters to help fund silage buyouts, perform habitat restoration, and do other important conservation tasks.

The Tricolored Blackbird program is one of six new partnership-driven conservation projects in California funded under a new section of the 2014 Farm Bill. Two of those six provide conservation benefits on a multi-state level.

"We are excited and energized by the new opportunities made possible with a strong mix of partners involved in the RCPP projects that will take place here in California," said NRCS State Conservationist Carlos Suarez. "It is very powerful to be able to engage in partnerships that embrace both agricultural and environmental interests and perspectives — and find collaborative ways of making progress on critical issues such as avian habitat, climate change, groundwater protection and more."



Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack [announced](#) his department's national grant program, including the Tricolored Blackbird grant, at the Rio Salado Audubon Center in Phoenix this morning. (photo by Sarah Porter)

The funding comes at a critical time for the Tricolored Blackbird. In December, the California Fish and Game Commission approved an emergency listed for the species under the state's Endangered Species Act. The move was in response to a recent statewide survey showing a 44 percent decline in Tricolored Blackbirds since 2011. Tricolored Blackbirds live almost entirely in California.

The new grant takes to a whole new level work that Audubon California has been doing in partnership with the NRCS for the last three years. Partnering with the Farm Bureau, Western United Dairymen and DairyCares on outreach and education to dairy farmers is a critical element.

(photo of a Tricolored Blackbird by Lee Karney/USFWS)

- **Maureen Lahiff** // [Jan 14, 2015 at 2:16 pm](#)

This is great news, an important step.

Thanks so much to all the partners.