

# Big T Wash Line

APRIL 2011



A Publication of the  
County of Los Angeles  
Department of Public Works



## Announcements

- ◆ Please be aware that **parts of Big T's trails are flooded** due to the spring rains. Be extra careful when traveling on the trails east of the Cottonwood Area (north of Gibson Ranch). Also, the trails along the northern border of the Tujunga Ponds (adjacent to Hwy 210) **are flooded and very muddy, making traveling by foot a challenge**. Trail flooding is minimal just west of the south Wheatland entrance, but caution should be practiced just the same.
- ◆ The **new ordinance signs** have been installed at seven entrances into the Mitigation Area (See map on page 4).
- ◆ **Bird nesting season is NOW!** Please take extra care to stay on the existing trails and do not hike or ride your horses off into the adjacent plant communities. Enjoy the sounds and the antics of the baby birds because they will be leaving the nests soon.

## Aquatic Exotics

Why are there exotic aquatic species in the Big T Ponds? How did they get here?



Last year, ECORP biologists removed a common snapping turtle from the East Pond. This species is **not native** to California. Many of

Big T's exotic species are a result of unwanted pets, abandoned animals, or sport fish being released into the ponds or the stream. Unfortunately, exotic species have negative effects on native species (See the article on page 2). ECORP biologists have been very successful at removing exotic species from Big T, but it's everyone's responsibility to protect Big T's native species. Responsible pet owners should donate unwanted pets to a rescue organization and not release them at Big T. The California Turtle and Tortoise Club has a rescue and adoption program. More information can be found at this link:  
<http://tortoise.org/cttc/adoption.html>



## ABOUT THE BIG TUJUNGA WASH MITIGATION AREA

The County of Los Angeles Department of Public Works' implementation of the Final Master Mitigation Plan for the Big Tujunga Wash Mitigation Area (Big T) has been under way since April 2000.

Big T is a parcel of land located in the City of Los Angeles' Sunland area (see Page 6). Big T covers an area of approximately 210 acres of sensitive habitat. The site was purchased by the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works in 1998 for the purpose of compensating for habitat loss for other County of Los Angeles Public Works projects.

Big T protects one of the most rapidly -diminishing habitat types found in Southern California—willow riparian woodland. Big T is home to several protected species of fish (Santa Ana sucker, Santa Ana speckled dace, arroyo chub) and birds (least Bell's vireo, southwestern willow flycatcher).

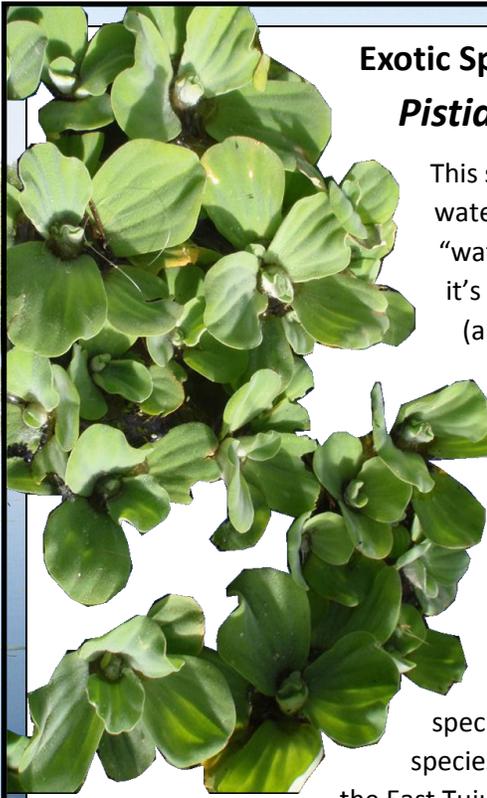
The purpose of this newsletter is to provide an update of ongoing programs and to explain the upcoming enhancement measures that will be implemented on the site in the next few months. Newsletters will be published on a bi-annual basis (Spring and Fall).

More information can be found at  
<http://www.ladpw.org/wrd/facilities>

## Native Plant Species Restoration Continues

**Competition for resources, such as space and sunlight, among Big T's plants can be fierce.** To give native plants a boost, a restoration crew (headed by an ECORP biologist) continued exotic plant removal during the month of April. We are happy to report that **exotic plants in the riparian area have not made a significant comeback.**





### Exotic Species Feature *Pistia stratiotes*

This species of invasive water plant is called “water lettuce”, and it’s scientific name (above) means

“water soldier”.

Water lettuce was first reported in Florida in the late 18th century and it is considered an unwanted

species. At Big T, this species has taken hold of the East Tujunga Pond and has

slowly made its way to the West Pond. Water lettuce grows best in warm weather (72-86°F), easily covering the surface of still or slow-moving waters.

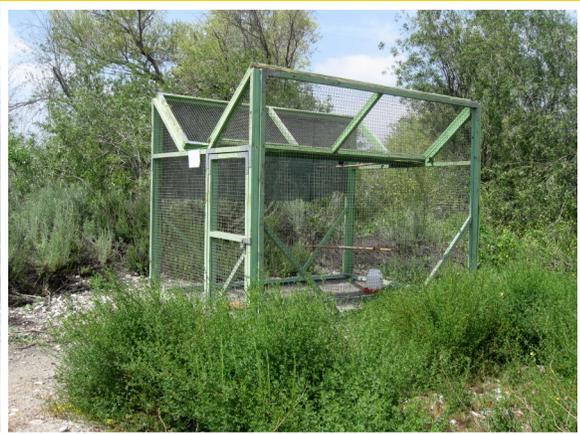
The large mats covering the East Tujunga Pond have affected water temperature, sunlight penetration, and oxygen levels. A recent survey of the ponds by ECORP aquatic biologists found that water temperature was cooler because water lettuce deflects sunlight. Submerged vegetation is shaded and normal growth is prevented. Oxygen levels were also lower, which may be harmful to fish and invertebrates in the ponds.

Water lettuce is commonly sold in the aquarium trade and can adapt well in different conditions. The water lettuce population is the result of non-native species being introduced into the Tujunga Ponds. ♻️



### Brown-Headed Cowbird Trapping Begins

The brown-headed cowbird is a **nest parasite** that evolved this behavior due to its nomadic life style. Flocks long ago followed bison populations, since insects (cowbird food!) abound with the bison. Cowbirds evolved a strategy to lay eggs in a host nest, freeing them to follow bison. Removing cowbirds from Big T directly benefits our native birds from becoming a host parent.



**Brown-headed cowbird** trapping has commenced at Big T, so during your hike or ride you may encounter one of these traps. **If you encounter a trap, please**

**keep in mind that it is very important that the trap not be disturbed** for the following reasons:

First, cowbirds must be enticed to enter the traps. Decoy cowbirds (males and females) and food and water are used to attract more cowbirds.

**If a cowbird senses danger, it will forego entering the trap** in spite of a free meal or a potential mate, so please do not disturb the traps.

Secondly, **trapped birds perceive humans as a threat**, so approaching a trap is very stressful to the birds. It’s important to keep clear of the trap, especially since native birds may also be present.

Each day all cowbird traps are checked and stocked with clean water and food and if native birds are also present they are released without harm. ♻️



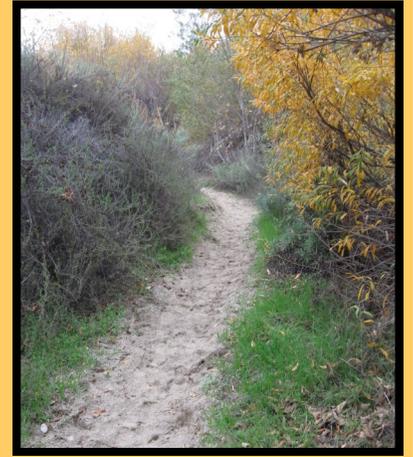
**Thanks for your cooperation!**



# LET'S TALK TRAILS!!!

Did you know, back in 2000 when the Mitigation Area was established, the community members named a trail after Bert Bonnet? Who, you ask, is Bert Bonnet? Well, Bert is a very long time resident of Shadow Hills who was originally responsible for cutting and maintaining most of the trails that wind through Shadow Hills and surrounding areas. He also initiated and led many of the long-distance (100 to 200 miles) trail rides held annually in California. Bert has not made a profession of training horses but everyone knows that training horses is his "gift." Bert's calm demeanor and his "whisperer" approach to training horses is well known by his friends. His philosophy for training horses includes being kind, handling them quietly, and avoiding rushing them through the training. Amazingly, Bert broke his first horse at age 6. At age 101, Bert still continues to ride with his friends in Shadow Hills and with the two groups he helped to form (Corral 20 and the Trailblazers). In December, Bert had a tragic accident on his horse and the fire department, veterinarians, and local resi-

dents conducted a valiant rescue effort. Bert was OK but unfortunately, his horse did not make it. Our hearts go out to Bert in the loss of his beloved horse. Bert is an honored member of the Shadow Hills Community and that is why the community members named a trail after him (See map on Page 4). Next time you ride the Bert Bonnet Trail, take your hat off to Bert and **honor Bert** by being responsible trail users. Riding single file eliminates impacts to the natural habitat along the trails and minimizes erosion along the trails, particularly at the stream crossings. Let's all be good stewards of the trails in the Mitigation Area and if you see vegetation that needs to be trimmed to keep the trails clear, then please contact **Valerie De La Cruz at LADPW (626) 458-6126.**



## Songbird Profile: Common Yellowthroat

While on a hike or ride through Big T, you may hear a gentle whistle

that says, "wichety, wichety, wichety." Chances are it's a common yellowthroat, a native bird species.

The common yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*) is found year-round at Big T in low grassy and weedy habitats. Recently, common yellowthroats have been spotted on the scrubby

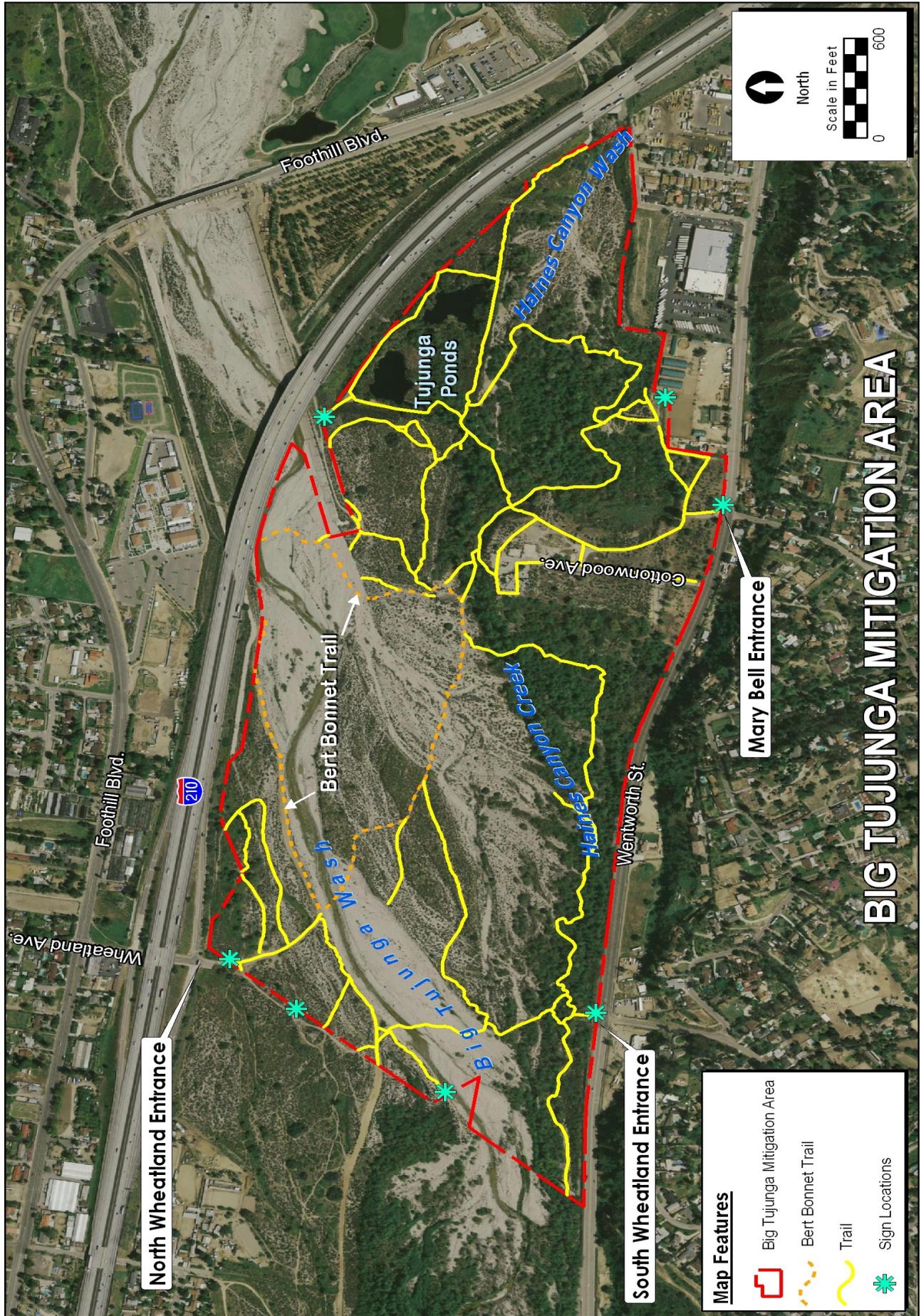
vegetation near the Mary Bell entrance and in the Cottonwood area.

Males and females have different plumage colors.

Males have a dark mask and a brightly colored throat, and are often called the "bandit bird." Females are olive colored and blend in with their environment (a camouflage tactic).

Females tend to choose males with the brightest yellow feathers, because this signals the ability to gather food successfully. It's also a signal for health, since the yellow coloration comes from eating the right food items. Females have evolved this behavior to recognize a good mate that will pass on his food-gathering skills to their offspring.





**Q-1:** This bird is a common yellowthroat. Is this a male or a female?



**Q-2:** This plant is growing in the Tujunga Ponds, but it does not belong in Big T. Its name is \_\_\_\_\_?

- A. Water carrots
- B. Water onions
- C. Water lettuce



**Q-3: True or False:** Is it OK to visit the cowbird traps in Big T?



**Q-4:** Which of these is correct?

- A. Snapping turtles are not from California.
- B. Last year, a snapping turtle was found in the Tujunga Ponds.
- C. It's NOT OK to abandon any kind of turtle in the Big T ponds.
- D. All are correct.

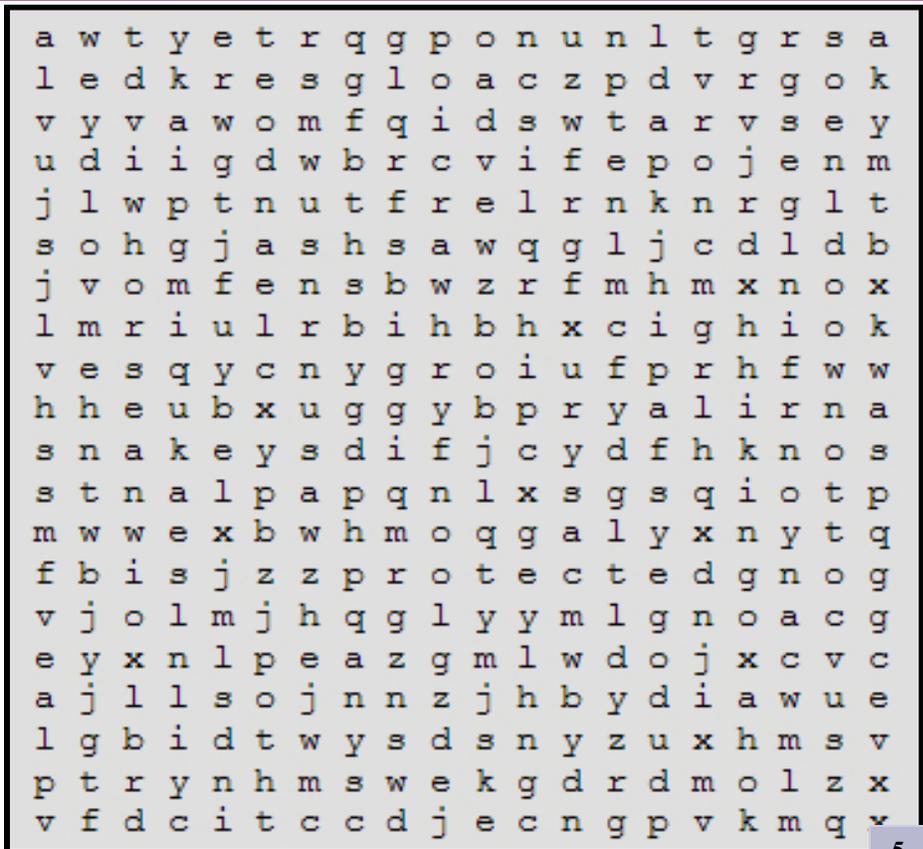


ANSWERS: Q-1: male Q-2: C Q-3: False Q-4: D

# Big T Word Search

We've hidden 15 Big T vocabulary words. Most are things you may see on a visit to Big T. GOOD LUCK on your search!

- birds
- canyon
- cottonwood
- creek
- willows
- equestrian
- fish
- hiking
- horse
- native
- plants
- protected
- snake
- trails
- wash





**Water Resources Division**  
**County of Los Angeles**  
**Department of Public Works**  
**900 S. Fremont Avenue**  
**Alhambra, CA 91803**



**Where is Big T?**

**Downstream of Big Tujunga Canyon, right in the heart of Sun Valley south of the 210 freeway, you'll find a native riparian (water loving plant) natural area filled with cottonwoods, willows and pools of water that support many native aquatic species. Check out the Big T website for more information at:**



**Emergencies? Incidents? Questions?**

- **CALL 911 TO REPORT ANY EMERGENCY SUCH AS FIRE OR ACCIDENT**
- Please **DO NOT** use 911 to report minor incidents or regulation infractions. Contact the Sheriff's Department at 1-800-834-0064.
- In the case of an emergency situation (those where 911 is involved) please make a follow up call to the Department of Public Works as soon as possible at the numbers listed below.\*
- Do not attempt to enforce regulations. Contact Sheriff's Department to handle the situation/incident.

\* For emergency follow up or to report minor incidents, obtain information, or get questions answered during weekday work hours (8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Thursday\*\*), please contact:

**Valerie De La Cruz or Cindy Rowlan**  
 Water Resources Division  
 County of Los Angeles Department of Public Works  
 900 S. Fremont Avenue  
 Alhambra, CA 91803  
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