

Big T Wash Line

April 2015



A Publication of the
County of Los Angeles
Department of Public Works
(LACDPW)



Announcements



Report suspicious activity occurring at Big T! If you see something occurring at Big T that shouldn't be, call LA County Sheriff Department Dispatch immediately to report it. LACDPW can't respond to emergencies; however, please notify us at BTWMA@dpw.lacounty.gov of any incidences reported to law enforcement and we will gladly follow up. *LA County Sheriff Department Dispatch: 1-800-834-0064.*

Bilingual visits- Be sure to say Hola, Hello, Howdy, or Hi to our bilingual biologists this summer! Biologists will be on site over the weekends between Memorial Day and Labor Day to talk with people about all things Big T. They will be happy to answer any questions you have. They also carry cool pamphlets that show all the things you can and can't do in the Mitigation Area.

Big T has its own email! Feel free to contact BTWMA@dpw.lacounty.gov with any questions or concerns about Big T or any of the activities occurring in it.

View past newsletters- To view Big T's past water quality reports, annual reports, newsletters, CAC meeting minutes, or just to find out more information, check out the Big T website at: www.dpw.lacounty.gov/wrd/projects/BTWMA/

Brown-headed cowbirds- It's time again to begin the trapping program for brown-headed cowbirds that parasitize the nests of other birds. The cowbirds lay their eggs in nests of other birds but never provide care. In order to eliminate cowbird nest parasitism, traps will be placed in and around Big T again in 2015. These traps contain food, water, shade and have a slot on the top where the birds fly in, but can't get out. Don't worry about the other species that might get in because a biologist checks the traps daily and releases the non-target birds! Traps will be in Big T from April to June. Remember to let the traps be!



Nesting Bird Season- The breeding season for most bird species has begun so make sure to save all of your tree trimming activities for the fall! Most bird species are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, a federal law that was established to protect birds, their nests, and their habitat. Violation of this law can lead to fines or even jail time. So do that hummingbird in your hibiscus a favor and wait until September or later to trim your trees and shrubs. 🐦



Exotic Wildlife Removal



Over 2,000 individual exotics of 11 different species were removed from Big T in 2014! The most common species removed were red swamp crayfish, largemouth bass, and mosquitofish. Two different species of turtles were also removed. Removing exotic aquatic wildlife from the waterways directly benefits the native fish species present in Haines Canyon Creek, so the more exotics removed, the merrier for our native fishes! 🐢



Biologist removes a swamp crayfish (left). A red-eared slider from the Ponds (right).

ABOUT THE BIG TUJUNGA WASH MITIGATION AREA

Big T is a parcel of land located in the City of Los Angeles' Sunland area (see Page 4). Big T covers an area of approximately 210 acres of sensitive habitat. The site was purchased by LACDPW in 1998 for the purpose of compensating for habitat loss for other LACDPW projects.

LACDPW's implementation of the Master Mitigation Plan for the Big Tujunga Wash Mitigation Area (Big T) has been underway since April 2000.

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 contains habitat for sensitive bird species (least Bell's vireo, southwestern willow flycatcher).

The purpose of this newsletter is to provide updates to ongoing programs and to explain upcoming enhancement measures that will be implemented on the site. Newsletters are published on a semi-annual basis (spring and fall).

More information can be found at www.dpw.lacounty.gov/wrd/projects/BTWMA



What's going on at Big T this Spring? Focused surveys!



Keep an eye out for more of ECORP's biologists this spring and summer at Big T because this is a year when focused surveys for sensitive species will be conducted. Every three years, the Master Mitigation Plan requires specific surveys for wildlife species that are listed as endangered or threatened under the Federal and State Endangered Species Acts. Big T was established to preserve and improve habitat for sensitive species, so the focused surveys provide a periodic glimpse of the wildlife population at Big T. The target species for the focused surveys are the southwestern willow flycatcher, least Bell's vireo, Santa Ana sucker, and arroyo toad.

Southwestern willow flycatcher and least Bell's vireo are birds that are both federally- and state-listed as endangered. These birds occupy the riparian habitats near the creek and the Tujunga Ponds. The vireo likes a dense, shrubby understory and the willow flycatcher prefers the tall trees near water. If they are there, the biologists will easily identify them by their songs and calls because they both make very unique sounds. Migrating willow flycatchers have been observed at Big T in the past but they didn't stop and establish a nesting territory. Least Bell's vireos are known to occur just downstream of Big T at Hansen Dam so hopefully, they will one day call Big T home too!

During the focused surveys for the Santa Ana sucker, you will likely see wetsuit-clad biologists moving around in the creek. This fish species is



federally listed as threatened and occurs in the creek at Big T. Santa Ana suckers live mostly in the shallow portions of the creek where the bottom has a lot of rocks and cobbles. During the survey, the biologists will capture and quickly measure each Santa Ana sucker and then return them to the creek without harming them. By conducted surveys every three years, the biologists can get an idea of whether the population of Santa Ana suckers is increasing or decreasing at Big T.

The arroyo toad, which is federally listed as endangered, likely occurred in Big T Wash long ago. It has not been observed at Big T since the Mitigation Area was established but the surveys are conducted just to keep a look out for this species. Arroyo toads tend to occupy the sandy banks along streams where willows and other riparian plant species occur. Their sandy coloration provides excellent camouflage and it takes a trained eye to spot them! The biologists will conduct surveys along the creek and Big T Wash during the day to look for toads and then they will also conduct nighttime surveys to listen for the toad's calls.

Conducting periodic focused surveys at Big T helps to monitor and protect this rapidly diminishing habitat type found in Southern California. If you see the biologist conducting these surveys, ask them what interesting species of wildlife they have observed and hopefully, they will tell you they have found some of the target sensitive species!



LEFT: An ECORP biologist surveys trails at Big T.

RIGHT: Santa Ana sucker found in the creek at Big T.

Animal Corner: Amphibians

Big T is home to many different types of wildlife, including amphibians, which are animals that spend their lives both in the water and on the land, such as frogs, toads, and salamanders. These amphibians begin their lives as eggs that are laid in the water. When the egg hatches, it grows into a larva, which is the "baby" stage of amphibians. The larval stage of a frog or toad is called a tadpole, which has a tail but it doesn't have legs. The larval stage of a salamander is sometimes called a waterdog or mud puppy. These larva can only live in the water where they breathe air through gills like a fish does. When the larva grows to a point where it is ready to leave the water, it has to go through a process called "metamorphosis". Metamorphosis allows the larva to change shape, grow legs, and grow lungs so it can walk on land and breathe air. Frogs spend a lot of time in the water as well as on the land but many species of toads only return to the water once in a while. Since amphibians usually have soft, moist skin, they have to spend their time on land in areas where it is wet, such as under the cover of leaves, or they will dig down into the damp soil.

Now that you know what an amphibian is you might ask, "What kinds of amphibians call Big T home?" Amphibians that have



California Treefrog

been found at Big T include the California toad, California treefrog, Pacific treefrog, and American bullfrog. The amphibian that is most commonly seen or heard at Big T is the American bullfrog because they are large and they like to float near the plants at the edge of the Tujunga Ponds. The American bullfrog is one of the largest frogs found in North America with an average length between 4 to 7 inches and weighing up to 1 pound. In contrast, the California treefrog and the Pacific treefrog are small frogs that grow up to 2 inches long. If you would like to know more about our native amphibians (California toad, California treefrog, or Pacific treefrog) or the American bullfrog, please visit the California Herps website:

www.californiaherps.com.



American Bullfrog
(public-image-domain.com)



California Toad



Baja California Treefrog

The Birds are Migrating



Have you ever noticed an increase in bird activity in the spring or fall? Every year migratory birds travel from their nonbreeding territories (winter homes) to their breeding territories (summer homes). In the fall, temperatures drop, weather conditions can be harsh, and resources, such as food and shelter, are less available. As winter approaches many birds migrate south to areas where food is more readily available and the weather is less harsh. In the spring, insect populations increase, plants start budding, and birds that have gone south for the winter will migrate north to take advantage. This means that a lot of the birds we find at Big T migrate south in the fall and then return to Big T in the spring time. On the other hand, you may see some birds at Big T in the fall that head north for the spring.

There are three main types of migrating birds: short, medium, and long-distance migrants. Short-distance migrants may travel from a mountain top to the foothills. The medium-distance migrants may move from Northern California to Southern California. Long-distance migrants may travel as far as Canada to South America. The distance a bird



Photos from public-domain-image.com

migrates varies depending on the size, the genetic make-up, and the habitat and diet preferences of the bird.

Birds migrate using several techniques, some of which are not fully understood. These techniques include using the stars, changes in the earth's magnetic field, and even smell to help navigate their journeys. Often, birds will use the same annual migration path year after year. Birds migrate at different times, but generally the larger, soaring birds migrate by day, and the smaller songbirds migrate by night. Some birds make stops each day to recover from the long flights, while others may fly directly from their breeding territories to their wintering territories without stopping.

We are currently in the spring migration season as well as nesting season for some species. Migration season is a wonderful time to observe beautiful migrating birds. The creek and ponds at Big T make for a nice resting spot for migrating birds that may need recovery time, or great habitat for birds that are getting ready to nest. You may notice the birds in the area becoming more vocal and active during this time period. When you are walking the trails at Big T, keep an eye and an ear out! You never know what you may see or hear. 

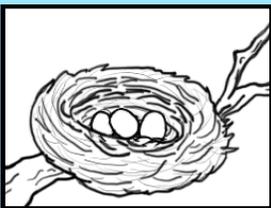


Birds Clockwise from Top Left: Yellow Warbler, Lazuli Bunting, Cedar Waxwing

What kind of nest is that?!

Bird nests come in all shapes and sizes and some are easy to find while others are hidden quite well. Unless you are specifically looking for nests, you probably don't even realize when you are passing one while walking on the trails at Big T. However, with a little knowledge about nests shapes and locations, and with a little insight on the parent bird's behavior, you may soon realize how numerous nests are at Big T.

One of the most common nests you will see is a "cup nest," which is named for its shape. Cup nests can range in size from very small, such as a hummingbird nest that is no bigger than a golf ball, to a common raven nest, which is often a couple feet wide and a few feet tall. This type of nest is usually secured where the branches fork in a shrub or tree and they are typically well-hidden and difficult to see.

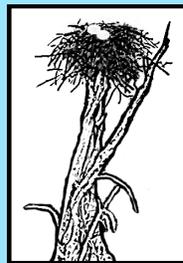
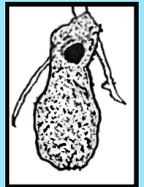


"Cavity nests" may appear as holes in the trunk or larger branches of a tree. The most common cavity nesters are woodpeckers and with their tough beaks, they can excavate a cavity large enough to fit several young. If you see a suspicious hole in the side of a tree, take some time to quietly observe it and you may be treated to a view of the baby birds as they peek out and wait for mom or dad to bring them food.



"Pendant nests" are very unusual in that they are an elongated sac woven of soft grasses or plant fibers that hang

down from a tree limb. When the birds build the nest, they leave a small opening at the top so they can climb inside where they lay their eggs. Common pendant nest builders are bushtits and orioles. These species are very good at camouflaging their nests, which makes them very difficult to locate. Keep an eye out for old pendant nests that may have been blown out of a tree because they are real engineering masterpieces!



Large birds, such as hawks and eagles, use "platform nests" made high up in a tree, on a cliff edge, or on a power pole. These nests, which the birds return to almost every year, are typically piled with many layers of sticks and can be very noticeable. In addition, the chicks are noisy when they are hungry so it isn't hard to find these sorts of nests.

When hiking on the trails, be aware of birds in your vicinity. Many bird species will become agitated if you get too close to their nest or young. If you hear scolding calls or if a bird is flitting around in the vegetation close to you, then stop, look around to make sure you aren't going to damage a nest, and then slowly and quietly move out of the area. When you get to a safe distance and the bird doesn't appear agitated, take time to watch the bird and you may discover the location of the nest. Let's give our feathered friends the best chance at successfully raising their young so the young birds will return to nest next year at Big T! 

Big Tujunga Word Scramble



Kid's Corner

Use the scrambled word bank to fill in the blanks. Hint: the newsletter will have clues in the articles you can use to find the right words.

- 1) A _____ nest hangs from a tree limb.
- 2) It is best to trim your trees in the _____, when the birds are not nesting.
- 3) The _____ at Big T attract migrating birds.
- 4) _____ lay their eggs in other bird's nests.
- 5) Large birds such as hawks and eagles make _____ nests.
- 6) Amphibians typically start out living in the water as _____.
- 7) Most of the sensitive species at Big T prefer _____ habitats.
- 8) _____ live within sandy banks in riparian woodlands.

YORARO SADOT	DSORWICB
PANIRARI	NPSOD
VAARL	ANTPNED
TAMROFLP	ALFL

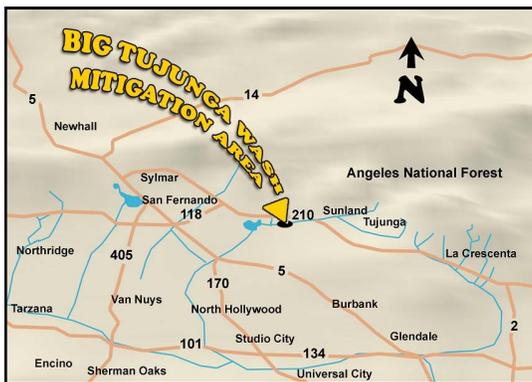


Image Search

Can you find all of California Poppies throughout the newsletter?
How many do you see? Hint: look on all 4 pages of the newsletter

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: www.dpw.lacounty.gov/wrd/projects/BTWMA.



Emergencies? Incidents? Questions?

- **CALL 911 TO REPORT ANY EMERGENCY SUCH AS FIRE OR ACCIDENT**
- To report minor incidents or regulation infractions contact the Sheriff's Department at 1-800-834-0064. (Please **DO NOT** use 911.)
- Do not attempt to enforce regulations yourself; please allow law enforcement 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:

Grace Yu, Water Resources Division
County of Los Angeles Department of Public Works
900 S. Fremont Avenue
Alhambra, CA 91803
Email: BTWMA@dpw.lacounty.gov
Phone: (626) 458-6139



*WORD SCRAMBLE 1)pendant
2)fall 3)ponds 4)cowbirds
5)platform 6)larva 7)riparian
8)barro leads IMAGE SEARCH
There are 27 poppies through-
out the newsletter.*