

**TRICOLORED BLACKBIRD
(AGELAIUS TRICOLOR)**

DFG: Species of Special Concern



Description

Tricolored blackbirds are medium-sized passerines with length totaling 7-9 inches (18-24 cm). Adult males are entirely black with a red shoulder patch (lesser coverts) and conspicuous white margin (median coverts). Adult females are a dark gray color with a whitish-gray throat. This species forms the largest colonies of any North American passerine.

Habitat

Breeding colonies require a nearby water source, adequate foraging habitat and a suitable nesting substrate. Tricolored blackbirds forage for grasshoppers, snails, and grains in irrigated pastures, lightly grazed rangelands, feedlots, and dairies. Nesting substrates include cattails (*Typha* spp.), Himalayan blackberries (*Rubus discolor*), stinging nettles (*Urtica dioica*), and agricultural crops such as wheat (*Triticum* spp.), barley (*Hordeum* spp.), and safflower (*Carthamus tinctorius*). The colonial nature of this species and the tendency for colonies to nest in agricultural fields makes it vulnerable. Harvesting and plowing of fields during the breeding season has the potential to decimate colonies.

Range/distribution

Tricolored blackbirds are known throughout the San Joaquin Valley.

Photo: © Jim Stasz from URL: <http://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/id/framlst/i5000id.html>.

References

Beedy, E.C., and W.J. Hamilton III. 1999. Tricolored Blackbird (*Agelaius tricolor*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 423 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Birds of North America, Inc. Philadelphia, PA.