



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Farmers Offered Funding to Help Nesting Tricolored Blackbirds in their Fields

DAVIS, April 2, 2014—Farmers who have tricolored blackbirds nesting in their fields may be eligible for financial assistance from USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to delay harvesting and allow the birds 35 days to fledge their young. Interested producers have until May 2, 2014, to apply for funding.

"This is a unique approach but one that has been shown to work," says Carlos Suarez, NRCS State Conservationist for California. "Our goal is to work with our partners to create a strong incentive for farmers to voluntarily help these birds recover."

Every spring, Tricolored Blackbirds build large colonies of nests in the Central Valley areas that were once marshy ecosystems and are now cropland. About 43 percent of the birds now use silage crops such as triticale and wheat to build their nests. Usually, the winter-planted crops are harvested before the birds have fledged, resulting in great declines in the Tricolored Blackbird populations. The species is now federally listed as a Bird of Conservation Concern, a California state Species of Special Concern, and also protected under the provisions of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Farmers with Tricolored Blackbirds can help the birds by delaying their harvesting until the young can fly away. Last year, 65,000 breeding birds were saved – one-fifth of the species' entire global population – after farmers agreed to delay their harvest schedule.

This initiative is being coordinated through a partnership effort with Audubon California. Tricolored Blackbirds may choose different fields in different years and only farmers in Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, Riverside, Stanislaus, and Tulare counties, who actually have Tricolored Blackbirds on their property in a winter silage crop, are eligible to participate.

In order to be considered eligible for financial assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, the applicant must have a vested interest in production agricultural and meet other program eligibility requirements.

More information on NRCS' products and services can be found on the NRCS California web site at www.ca.nrcs.usda.gov.

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