

Big T Wash Line

April 2013



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



Announcements

- **Report any suspicious activity you see occurring in the Mitigation Area immediately to the LA Sheriff's Department Dispatch.** Please report issues such as loose or aggressive dogs, weapons, vandalism, and anything else that seems suspicious. It is important to report these issues to law enforcement because each time something is reported a record is created, which brings more attention to the issue.

LA Sheriff's Department
Dispatch: 1-800-834-0064



- **Watch out for mosquitoes!** If you see any mosquito infestations at Big T, please report them to LACDPW (refer to page 6 for contact information). Mosquitoes can carry deadly diseases such as West Nile Virus.

- **Save your tree trimming needs for the fall!** The breeding bird season is currently in full swing! Do our feathered friends a favor and save your tree trimming activities for the fall. Most bird species are protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, a federal law that was established in 1918 to protect birds, their nests, and their habitat. Violation of this federal law can mean bad news, so be sure to plan your trimming needs for September or later.

- **Be sure to say *iHola!* to our bilingual biologists!** Bilingual biologists will be visiting Big T on weekends during the spring and summer to educate people about the special habitats and wildlife as well as the appropriate recreational activities at the site. The biologists would love to talk with you and answer any questions you may have about the area.

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 6). Big T covers an area of approximately 210 acres of sensitive habitat. The site was purchased by the LACDPW in 1998 for the purpose of compensating for habitat loss for other LACDPW projects.

The LACDPW 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

<http://www.ladpw.org/wrd/facilities>

Native Fishes Survey Results

In 2012, aquatic biologists conducted a native fishes survey at Big T to assess the populations of the federally-threatened Santa Ana sucker (*Catostomus santaanae*) and other sensitive fish present in Haines Canyon Creek and Big Tujunga Wash. It looks like populations in the creek have dramatically increased! When this survey was conducted in 2009, only 41 Santa Ana suckers were observed in the creek. In 2012, the biologists found 502 Santa Ana suckers; that's 12 times more fish in just 3 years! This is really exciting news for both Big T and for the entire Santa Ana sucker population. Let's keep up the good work and make sure our waterways are free of rock dams, trash, and other obstacles so our native fishes can thrive! 🐟



Santa Ana suckers are one of the native fish found in the streams at Big T. They are federally listed as threatened.



Red-tailed hawk. Ben Smith

Do You Recognize that Raptor?

Whether soaring through the air or perched high up in a tree, raptors, or birds of prey, are abundant at Big T. The three most common raptors at Big T are the red-tailed hawk, red-shouldered hawk, and Cooper's hawk. Here, we'll provide you with some pointers to improve your enjoyment of these majestic birds.

Red-tailed hawks are large raptors with brown backs and pale underparts. They are best distinguished from other hawks by their distinctly red tail, which is most visible in flight, although some of these hawks can be so darkly colored that their red tail is hard to see. Those hawks are called dark morphs. They give a harsh call described as "kee-eee-ar." Their large nest (up to three feet in diameter and six feet tall), consists of a tall pile of sticks lined with bark and dry vegetation and are placed high in a tree. Look for these hawks either soaring high in the air in circles or perched on anything tall, such as a tree or telephone pole. They eat small mammals like mice and rabbits.



Red-tailed Hawk
(*Buteo jamaicensis*).
Ben Smith



Red-shouldered hawk (*Buteo lineatus*). Richard J Kinch

If you want to see a **red-shouldered hawk**, head to the wooded areas along the creek at Big T. It's likely you'll hear one of these hawks crying "Kee-rah" before you even see it – they tend to be pretty noisy! These hawks are medium-sized with a red breast, black-and-white checkered wings, and black and white bands on the tail. Their nests are also made of sticks and vegetation, are two feet in diameter, and are placed in a tree just below the canopy. Red-shouldered hawks eat small animals such as lizards, rodents, and insects.

The **Cooper's hawk** actually eats other birds. It is a medium-sized raptor with a gray back, reddish breast, and long, striped tail. If you have binoculars, you may see that this bird's eyes are red. You're likely to find Cooper's hawks in wooded areas or anywhere with trees, including your neighborhood! Their stick nests are about the same size as a red-shouldered hawk's nest, but are found higher up in trees. Listen for the repetitive "kek-kek-kek" call of the Cooper's hawk to identify it.



Cooper's Hawk
(*Accipiter cooperi*).
Tom Grey

Can you recognize the different raptors at Big T? Next time you're out, see if you can find all three species! 🦅



2012 Trail Cleanup Day



Volunteers met early on Saturday morning to clean up the trails at Big T. Look at all the trash they collected!



The 8th Annual Big Tujunga Wash Mitigation Area Trail Cleanup Day was held on October 20, 2012 and was a complete success! Over 20 volunteers donated their time on a Saturday morning to help beautify Big T. Enthusiastic community volunteers, high school students, ECORP's biologists, and LACDPW staff all got together on this drizzly Saturday to clean up litter along the designated trails at Big T.

The focus of the event was trash removal in the upland, riparian, and creek areas. ECORP's biologists attended the event to provide guidance and support during cleanup activities and to ensure the safety and

protection of sensitive species at Big T. The volunteers were successful in clearing a record amount of trash from along the trails thanks to Terry Kaiser's organized and clear instructions on which areas to target during the cleanup. Many large items were removed from along the trails, including a rusted shopping cart, a footstool, an old tire, and a sleeping bag! Thanks to the dedicated efforts and hard work of the volunteers, the trails at Big T were left in a sparkling clean condition!

Thanks to all that participated in this important effort!



Volunteers worked hard on October 20th to make sure the trails at Big T were looking good. They did a great job at cleaning up the area!

The next annual trail cleanup day will take place in the fall of 2013. We anticipate it will be scheduled in September. Please look for the next Trail Cleanup Day event announcement in the Fall 2013 newsletter or on our website: <http://www.ladpw.org/wrd/facilities>. 🦅

Mind Your Manners (On the Trails)

As people head out to Big Tujunga this spring, so will many birds, who travel long distances from their winter homes to have babies at Big T. During this exciting time, there are ways that you can help the birds successfully raise their young while you are out enjoying the site.

Take a look at the birds you see next time you're out on one of the trails and try to see if you can figure out what they are doing! Birds spend their time in many of the same ways we spend our time; talking with each other, building homes, courting their mates, feeding their babies, looking for food, and defending their home areas. This time of year, the males will spend most of their time singing and flying around their territory – it's their way of defending their home from unwanted intruders. The males may also be singing to try and attract a female for a mate. The female doesn't sing as much as the male; her job after she pairs with a male is to spend her time on the nest incubating the eggs. Males and females that have paired up together will usually communicate with one another by giving simple calls to let their mate know of their whereabouts, what they're doing, and when they're coming "home" to the nest.



Yellow Warbler. MDF/CCSA



As you can see, it's really important for us humans to practice proper trail etiquette during this time of year to help the birds safely rear their young. If we aren't careful when walking or riding along the trails we can unintentionally disrupt the birds' natural behaviors, which can make life tough for the birds that are trying to

California Gnatcatcher. Mari Quillman

raise their babies. Birds will actually leave the nest if you get too close because they consider you a predator! Not only does this stress the birds, it also keeps them away from eggs or young, which need constant care.

If you're walking on the trails, stick to marked areas, stay alert, and try to keep noise levels down. This will allow you to better appreciate all of the interesting bird activity around you. Running on the trail or making large, sudden gestures with your arms should also be avoided, as this can disturb birds and other wildlife. Feel free to stop and watch birds, but if you notice that a bird is "scolding" you (making a lot of noise and flying around you), then it is best to move on quietly – that bird probably has a nest nearby. If you're walking a dog, keep your dog on-leash at all times. A dog off-leash likes to explore and could disturb nests in the shrubs along the trail. Birds respond a bit differently to horseback riders, as they don't see horses as predators. Nonetheless, if you're riding a horse, stay on the trail and don't ride through vegetation off-trail because this can be very destructive to nests in the vegetation. If you're riding with a group, ride single-file, go at a slow pace, and avoid loud conversations.



Now that you're aware of ways to protect nesting birds, go out and enjoy them! See if you can watch the birds to figure out how they are spending their day. There are many useful bird field guides and smartphone apps such as iBird that can help you learn more about birds and their behaviors. 🌀

A biologist observes birds from afar.

Trail vs. Drainage: What's the Difference?

Drainages, also known as washes or dry creeks, are natural channels that carry water on a seasonal basis to or from rivers and streams. Drainages can often look a lot like trails but there are a few differences to note. As opposed to established trails, drainages at Big T are usually full of rocks because smaller dirt and sand particles get washed away by the fast flowing water, which leaves larger rocks and gravel exposed. Drainages can be narrower than trails and often contain traces of a high water line (even when the drainage is dry). Two ways you can tell a high water line is present: 1) Plant debris that was washed down from higher ground is present on the edges of the drainage as well as wrapped around the base of trees, shrubs, and large rocks, and 2) there is a visible change in the dirt from inside the drainage to the banks of the same drainage.

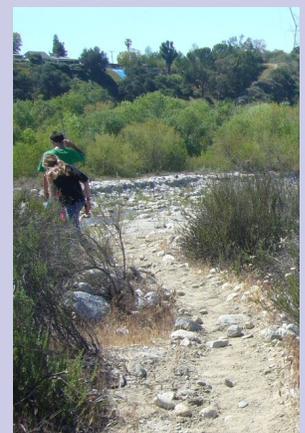


Here is a photo of a drainage that was taken at Big T. Note the rocky bottom, the distinctive banks, and the change in soil layers from the bottom of the drainage to the vegetated banks.

What should you do if you accidentally find yourself walking in a drainage instead of a trail? Stay calm and don't worry! Just stop, turn around, and head back the way you came from until you find yourself back on an established trail again. Whatever you do, don't step out of the drainage and begin creating a new trail to find your way back to the main trail. Once one person (or horse) walks overland through vegetation, it suggests to other people that this might be a potential trail. Before we know it, an unauthorized trail has become established at Big T!

As you might already know, it is important for visitors to remain on established trails. Why? The trail system within Big T is designed to allow visitors to enjoy the natural beauty of Big T while also allowing for the sensitive animals and plants to thrive in this designated conservation site.

If you have any questions about the established trails system, please contact LACDPW (contact information is on page 6).



Hikers enjoying the use of an established trail in Big T.



Are the trees dead? Nope, they are just holding their breath until Spring!

Have you noticed that a lot of the trees and shrubs at Big T look like they might be dead during the winter? This is because they are **deciduous**, meaning they lose their leaves each winter. Trees and bushes use their leaves to breathe.

Tiny microscopic holes in the leaf called stomata open and close each day to let the plant "breathe" in and out. And each time they open and close, a little bit of water escapes, too. Have you ever been outside when it's *really* cold and notice that you can see your breath? What you see is water escaping with the air that you are breathing out. The same thing happens when plants breathe. Winter is very dry, so instead of keeping all their leaves and losing water, deciduous plants just get rid of them. Then the plants become dormant and save energy by holding all their water in their trunks and branches until spring arrives.

If it doesn't quite make sense, here's an example: Take a deep breath. Now, hold it as long as you can... You held it for a while didn't you? Now hold it again, but this time jump up and down while you hold it. It was a lot harder this time, wasn't it? Just like you, it is easier for the tree to hold its breath, and therefore its water, when it is not using as much energy. But don't worry, spring is here and soon all the deciduous plants will take a nice big breath and start growing those beautiful green leaves again.

Some plants are still green in winter, you say? Take a closer look at those plants. Most of them have needles instead of leaves. The needle shape holds water better than a large, flat leaf shape. So, trees and shrubs with needles can keep their leaves all year and not have to worry about losing water in the winter. 🌀



Deciduous trees in summer with foliage.



Deciduous trees in fall changing colors.



Deciduous trees in winter without leaves.

Animal Corner: Long-tailed Weasel

The long-tailed weasel (*Mustela frenata*) has a long, slender body and short legs with a tail that is roughly half its body length. It is found in most areas of the United States and into Canada. In Southern California, the animal is reddish-brown to tan along its back and white to yellow along its belly. In the northern part of its range the long-tailed weasel turns white in winter to blend in with its snowy habitat.

Because its legs are so short and its body is so long, long-tailed weasels often use a bounding gate to get around. Bounding is fun to watch because weasels scrunch up their bodies like a caterpillar and hop from their back feet to their front feet and back again. They prey mostly on small mammals and help maintain rodent and rabbit populations. They live in woodlands and thickets as well as open areas, as long as they have access to a water source such as a stream. Long-tailed weasels are known to be noisy and will often call at other animals (even humans) that enter into their territory. However, they are also very secretive and are not often seen, so it is very special if you do happen to see one! Stay on the lookout in Big T; you never know what you might see (or hear)! 🌀



A long-tailed weasel looks around curiously. David Dahms.

Big Tujunga Wordsearch



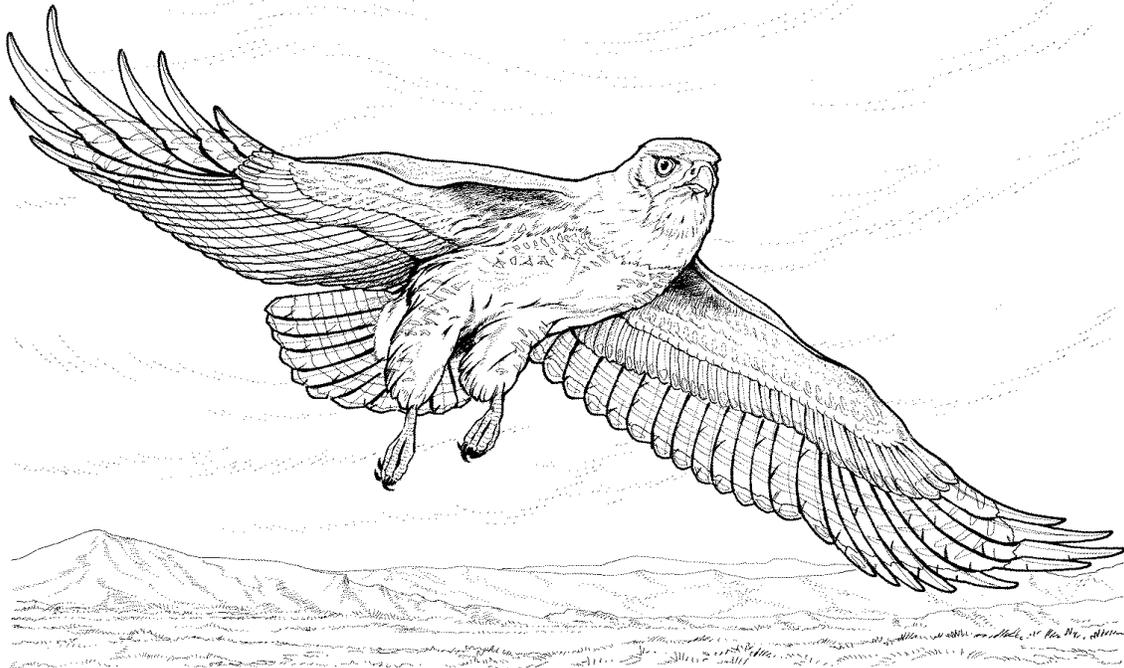
Use the articles in the newsletter to fill in the blanks in the sentences below. (answers on Page 6)

- 1) Five hundred and two _____ were observed when biologists surveyed Haines Canyon Creek at Big T in 2012.
- 2) Deciduous plants become _____ to save energy by holding all their water in their trunks and branches until spring arrives.
- 3) _____ can be identified by their red colored breasts and black-and-white checkered wings.
- 4) Long-tailed weasels have long _____, short _____, and a _____ that is roughly half its body length.
- 5) _____ is an important day held once a year at Big T where volunteers help clean up trash and make sure the site looks good.
- 6) _____ birds spend most their time singing and moving around their territories in the spring, whereas _____ birds usually sit on the nest and incubate eggs.
- 7) _____, which carry water after rain events, can be narrower than trails and often contain traces of a high water line.
- 8) _____ are most commonly identified by their distinctive red tail that is visible when they fly.
- 9) _____ trees lose their leaves each fall and winter, which can make the trees look dead (even though they aren't!).
- 10) If a bird starts _____ you and trying to make you feel unwanted in that area, it is best to move on quietly because that bird probably has a nest nearby.
- 11) _____ are known to be noisy and will often call at other animals or humans that enter their territory.
- 12) The bird of prey known as the _____ may prey on other birds.

We've hidden 10 red-tailed hawks like this one throughout the newsletter, can you find them all?
GOOD LUCK ON YOUR SEARCH!



Kid's Corner



Color this picture of a red-tailed hawk. Read the article about raptors on page 2 to learn more about this beautiful bird!



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: <http://www.ladpw.org/wrd/facilities/>



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: gyu@dpw.lacounty.gov

Answers to word search:
 1) Santa Ana Suckers; 2) Dorman; 3) Red-shouldered hawks; 4) Bodies, Legs, Tail; 5) Trail Cleanup Day; 6) Male, Female; 7) Drainages; 8) Red-tailed hawks; 9) Deciduous; 10) Scolding; 11) Long-tailed weasels; 12) Cooper's hawk