

Always consider nesting birds when trimming trees

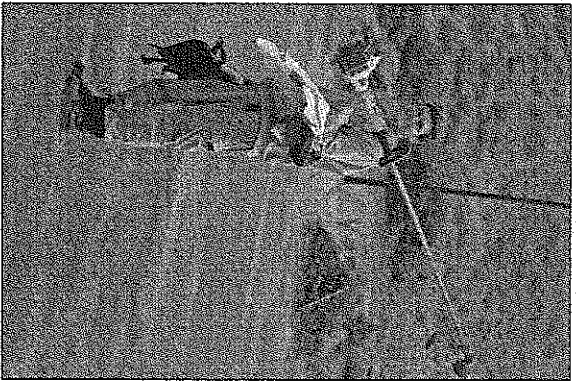
It is actually against the law to disturb nesting birds, habitat

CATALINA ISLAND CONSERVANCY FOR THE CATALINA ISLANDER

Spring is a traditional time for trimming trees and clearing brush on Catalina Island, especially after California's prolonged drought.

But spring is also the time when many of the Island's birds are nesting and the Catalina Island foxes are denning. Disturbing a nest or den may cause the parents to abandon it and their young. It's also against federal and state law to needlessly destroy birds' nests and eggs, and the foxes' denning activities are protected under federal law.

To protect both, it is best to avoid the nesting and denning seasons altogether and do your tree trimming and brush clear-



Americorps volunteer Dawson Bentzel helped with brush clearance, making certain that he didn't disturb bird nests or fox dens. Photo by Laura Meacy

ance between September and February. Recognizing that this may not be possible, especially in fire-prone areas, residents and tree-trimmers can look closely for nests and denning activity

before trimming trees or clearing brush.

For larger areas and sensitive habitats, such as areas of native plants, dense brush, stream sides and stands of trees, it is best to hire a trained biologist to conduct the survey. Most birds conceal their nests carefully and will not be visible to the average observer. But they do provide obvious clues of their whereabouts that residents and tree-trimmers can use to help them determine if a nest is nearby before trimming a tree or clearing brush.

To spot such activity, look on the ground for concentrations of white-colored droppings, then check the vegetation above. Look for birds flying about and scolding you for being near a tree. Also, watch for birds flying in and out of trees with nest-building materials in their beaks. All are signs of nesting activity.

You may also search the trees for nesting activities, paying close attention to the undersides of the canopy and places where

the branches come together to create a perch for birds to build a nest. If you do spot a nest, all work that has the potential to disturb or destroy the nest should cease in the immediate vicinity.

For songbirds, that would be within 150-300 feet of the nest. For raptors, work should cease within 350-500 feet of the nest.

If the nest contains unhatched eggs or young, the California Department of Fish and Game or Los Angeles Audubon may be able to provide the amount of time until the eggs hatch and nestlings fledge. If the nest is voluntarily abandoned or depredated (and again depending on species) work probably can be continued.

However, a precise determination can only be made by an expert, such as a consulting biologist or the California Department of Fish and Game.

Keep in mind that most trees in Southern California are trimmed excessively and inappropriately. This can harm the trees and

leave fewer habitats for birds. For instance, pine trees and conifers don't need to be trimmed to the point where you can see through them, and sycamore trees don't need pruning because they don't drop limbs.

As for the Catalina Island fox, brush removal is a greater threat to its denning activities. Most of the foxes den in Catalina's wildlands.

But occasionally they do wander into town. So be on the watch for fox activity before clearing brush, and please alert the Conservancy if you see any foxes where you're planning to clear brush.

We can check to be sure your brush clearing won't interfere with the foxes' denning activities. For more information, visit the California Department of Fish and Game website, Wildlife.ca.gov, the Los Angeles Audubon website, LosAngelesAudubon.org, and the Catalina Island Conservancy's website, CatalinaConservancy.org.