



City of Arcata Vegetation Management and Construction Guidelines for the Protection of Nesting Birds

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act passed in 1918 makes it unlawful to "...pursue, hunt, take, capture (or) kill...any migratory bird, any part, nest, or eggs of any such bird...". Therefore, during the breeding season, The City of Arcata would like to remind contractors and landowners to check for active nests before vegetation trimming or removal. Seasonal guidelines below will help you decide when to limb trees, trim brush, and remove vegetation. Contractors should have nesting bird surveys conducted by a qualified biologist prior to any project that requires vegetation removal in the breeding season. Contact the City of Arcata Environmental Services Department at (707) 822-8184 if you require assistance or for further information.

Vegetation Management Work Windows to Avoid Nesting Birds

FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN
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Early nesting, check
before limbing trees

Nesting Season - Check for active nests
Before trimming or removing vegetation

Non-nesting Season - Best time to
work

When to plan vegetation management:

September 1 – January 31 is the best time to plan for tree removal, invasive plant species management, mowing and brush clearing. A tree removal permit may be required for trees of 16" or more in diameter at breast height.

When to avoid vegetation management:

February 1 – April 15 is the early bird nesting season (raptors, hummingbirds). Major disturbance to vegetation, especially trees, should be avoided during this time unless there is a thorough check for nesting birds prior to work. Mowing lawn grass and “weeding” in an exception to this rule.

April 15 – August 31 (most birds) is the primary nesting season. Disturbance to vegetation should be avoided during this time unless there is a thorough check for nesting birds prior to work, except lawn mowing and “weeding”.

To detect bird nests, look for concentrations of white droppings on the ground, then check the vegetation above it; or watch bird behavior for carrying nest material or food to the same place in a patch of vegetation more than once. The actual nest structure is likely to be well concealed and may not be seen if it is in dense vegetation. If a bird is observed repeatedly visiting a nest or suspected nest site, building a nest, or sitting on a nest, it is considered “active”, with eggs or nestlings. If the area of your planned vegetation management contains sensitive habitats such as native plants, dense brush, watercourses, or stands of trees, you may need to hire a professional biologist to conduct the nesting bird survey prior to any work.

If an active nest is found prior to work, avoid work in the area until the young have fledged. A 50' no-work buffer should be applied for song birds and a 500' no-work buffer should be applied for raptors. Follow-up surveys may be necessary to determine when the nestlings have fledged and the nest can be considered no longer “active”.