

NATIVE FLORA & FAUNA WITH SIERRA FOOTHILL CONSERVANCY

High-Flying King of the Air

By **CECILIA SHEETER**
Sierra Foothill Conservancy docent

Aero acrobat. Fierce defender of domain. Melodious chirper of the predawn darkness. The Western Kingbird is all of these. Common in the rolling grasslands of the Sierra foothills, they arrive around the first week of April, after wintering in southern Mexico and Central America. With an ashy gray jacket and sulphur yellow belly, they embody a beauty that accents the golden grasses beneath them. They can often be seen on low perches, such as the posts or upper strands of barbed wire fences. Other preferred haunts are in solitary trees or on telephone and utility lines.

Western Kingbirds defend their territory with fierce and daring maneuvers, even riding aggressively on the backs of hawks and crows as the bigger birds deviate from their course and fly away, harried expressions often on their faces. They also won't tolerate close proximity to other nesting kingbird pairs. With incredible focus, Western Kingbirds can spot something as tiny as a buzzing mosquito, snapping up the snack with precision while

attaining speeds of up to 20 miles per hour diving and swerving in pursuit of their prey. Being in the flycatcher family, they are a beneficial bird. Ever determined in their quest for insects, kingbirds will dine not only on mosquitos but wasps, winged ants, grasshoppers, crickets, beetles and even bees. They may also eat the fruits of elderberry, hawthorn and other shrubs.

Western Kingbirds form monogamous pairs who raise their young together. The female actually weaves the nest herself. The open cup of grasses, fine twigs and other plant fibers is generally located in the elbow of smaller tree branches. Kingbirds will also construct nesting sites on manmade structures such as utility poles and windmills. The female lays 2-7 eggs and incubation lasts 12-19 days. The babies fledge 13-19 days later and the parents will continue to feed them for up to three weeks. At that point, the pair separates and the Western Kingbird returns to its solitary existence until the next breeding season the following year. Despite their lack of tolerance for species they perceive

as hostile invaders, kingbirds will nest amicably in trees with Mourning Doves, Common and Boat-tailed Grackles, Bullock's Orioles, House Sparrows and American Robins. Even with their gutsy strategies of defense, nest failure is often due to predation from snakes, squirrels and wood rats to raptors, crows and shrikes.

The Western Kingbird, as aggressive in adapting as it is in defending, can now be spotted in trees throughout suburbia, from neighborhoods to parking lots and school campuses. It is for this reason that their conservation status is relatively low.

The next time, while out walking or working in your yard, you see a gray and yellow bird dancing in the sky, pause for a moment and be inspired by both the sheer pluck and agility of this beneficial songbird. Make sure to listen for their melodious dawn song as the night gives way to morning.



The Western Kingbird in glorious flight (above) and at rest (below).



Staggering pandemic losses

Pandemic-related losses to California farms, ranches and agricultural businesses will range between \$5.9 billion and \$8.6 billion this year, according to an economic study released June 23. The analysis says the state's agricultural sector has already suffered \$2 billion in losses so far, from disrupted markets and rising production costs related to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Financial impacts of the pandemic vary widely among different parts of the agricultural economy, the study says, depending in part on how much a particular crop or commodity relies on sales to food service and how much it has been affected by shifts in retail demand and changes in costs of production and processing.

Produced by Davis-based ERA Economics, the study was commissioned by a coalition led by the Calif. Farm Bureau Federation and including UnitedAg, Ag Association Management Services, the Calif. Fresh Fruit Assoc., Calif. Strawberry Commission, Calif. Tomato Grow-

ers Assoc. and Western Plant Health Assoc.

Analysts looked specifically at 15 different sectors, using data on production, exports and prices through early May, plus interviews and surveys of people and businesses. The study showed the greatest dollar-loss impact to dairy, \$1.4 billion to \$2.3 billion; grapes, \$1.5 billion to \$1.7 billion; and flowers and nurseries, \$660 million to \$740 million.

In addition, the report says farms, ranches and related businesses have incurred higher operating costs for measures intended to increase employee health and safety, and in the logistics required to move crops and commodities to market.

"Along with the loss of key markets due to food service disappearing overnight or flower shops and garden centers not being allowed to operate in certain areas, we now are adapting to significant increased operational costs that many California farmers will never recoup,"

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Note: ALL fireworks are illegal in our area

With the Independence Day holiday just two days away, Cal Fire-Fresno County Fire is reminding all Californians and visitors to do their part to prevent fires caused by illegal fireworks or the misuse of "Safe & Sane" fireworks. Cal Fire and Fresno County Fire have already responded to seven grass fires caused by fireworks this season, including the Sycamore Fire near Tollhouse.

Any person who causes a fire can be held liable for the costs of its suppression and associated property damage. Often these costs are in the hundreds of thousands and sometimes millions of dollars. There are also legal ramifications when it comes to certain types of fireworks. Possession or transportation of illegal fireworks can lead to a possible fine of up to \$50,000 as well as jail for

up to one year. Even "Safe & Sane" Fireworks taken into a city or county where they are banned are considered illegal.

In Fresno and Kings counties, ALL FIREWORKS ARE ILLEGAL in the Cal Fire State Responsibility Area (SRA). The SRA in Fresno and Kings counties is west of Interstate 5 and east of the Friant-Kern Canal, which includes the foothill and mountain communities.

NOTICE OF INTENT TO ADOPT A MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION & INITIAL STUDY

DATE: July 1, 2020 TO: Responsible Agencies, Interested Parties, and Organizations

SUBJECT: California Conservation Corps, Auberry Center Project — Town of Auberry, Fresno County

The California Conservation Corps (CCC) is the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Lead Agency for the proposed CCC Auberry Center Project (Proposed Project). CCC has directed the preparation of an Initial Study (IS) Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) in compliance with CEQA.

Project Location: The Proposed Project is located at 33367 North Auberry Road, immediately west of the Auberry Road and Powerhouse Road intersection, at the former Auberry Elementary School in Auberry, Fresno County, California within Assessor's Parcel Numbers (APNs) 128-560-12T and 128-560-02T.

Project Description: The California Conservation Corps (CCC) Auberry Center Project (Proposed Project) will renovate the existing dilapidated elementary school with an upgraded, modern facility that will allow the CCC to better fulfill its mission and objectives in the region. The Proposed Project would provide for a new residential, training, and operations facility for approximately 90 Corpsmembers and 26 staff. Totalling approximately 58,000 square feet (sf) of remodeled and new building construction, the Project will include 10 buildings consisting of an administration building, four dormitories, two education buildings, a multipurpose building, a mess hall, and a warehouse with work area and a hazardous materials storage room. The Project also includes a paved emergency crew and vehicle staging area, asphalt paved surfaces for driveways and parking, and concrete paving for service and staging areas and walkways.

The facility is designed based on the prototype and CCC's residential needs to house 90 permanent Corpsmembers. The center is intended to be designed to Zero Net Energy (ZNE) per the Governor's Executive Order (EO) B-18-12 and achieve at minimum a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Silver certification.

Potentially Significant Environmental Impacts: Potentially significant impacts to air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, geology and soils, and tribal cultural resources were identified in the Initial Study. All impacts would be reduced to a less than significant level with the implementation of identified mitigation measures.

Hazardous Waste Sites: Pursuant to Section 15087(c)(6) of the Guidelines for California Environmental Quality Act, CCC acknowledges the non-existence of hazardous waste sites within the Project area reviewed by this Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND).

IS/MND Document Review and Availability: The public review and comment period for the Draft IS/MND will extend for 30 days starting July 1, 2020 and ending July 31, 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, printed hard copies will not be available to the public. However, the Draft IS/MND can be viewed and/or downloaded at the following website: <http://www.ecorpcconsulting.com/docs/CCC-Auberry-Center-Draft-IS/MND-WITH-APPENDICES.pdf>

Comments/Questions: Comments and/or questions regarding the IS/MND may be directed to:

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