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## Suit filed to get tricolored blackbird on endangered list

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*The Associated Press*

SAN FRANCISCO - The population of tricolored blackbirds has been plummeting for decades to dangerously low levels, but the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has failed to list them as endangered, according to a suit filed Monday.

The Center for Biological Diversity initially filed a petition with the federal agency in April 2004 asking for the highly social bird to be listed under the federal Endangered Species Act. The agency's failure to act on their request for 16 months and the bird's continued decline led to the suit filed in San Francisco federal court asking for emergency protection, said representatives with the advocacy group.

The Center for Biological Diversity cited studies showing the tricolored blackbird population declined from the millions in the 1930s to about 162,000

in 2000, and has continued to drop as birds deprived of their natural habitat by development and farming try to nest among crops, where their nests are plowed over during harvest.

Once seen all along the West Coast from Washington to Mexico, the bird is now reduced to the heart of its historical range - California's agricultural Central Valley.

"They're getting hammered," said Monica Bond, biologist for the Center. "If we don't get this protection, we might see their extinction in our lifetime."

The federal agency has been working to protect the glossy blue-black bird, made distinctive by its red and white shoulder patches, said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service spokesman Al Donner.

Donner said the agency should have the initial review of the organization's petition ready by the end of the year.

In the meantime, they're working with a coalition

of academics, agricultural industry representatives, environmentalists and government agencies to help the bird by improving its food supply and working with farmers to reduce harm done to those nesting in farm fields.

"We're working proactively to develop conservation strategies to help the blackbird bounce back before it reaches crisis stage," Donner said.