

## U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services rejects blackbird protection

- By SAMANTHA YOUNG, Associated Press Writer  
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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service declined on Tuesday to list tricolored blackbirds as an endangered species, noting that the bird's population has increased with conservation efforts and it is not threatened.

The agency's decision ends a nearly two-year effort by the **Center for Biological Diversity** to get the birds on the Endangered Species Act.

"The population numbers have increased substantially in the last four years," agency spokesman Al Donner said. "Secondly, there is a broad-based conservation effort under way that is helping the species recover."

A 2004 agency survey showed the tricolored blackbird population increased to 260,000 by 2004, up from 154,000 in 2000.

The **Center for Biological Diversity** sued the agency earlier this year to get a decision on its 2004 petition to have the blackbird listed. It complained that the Bush administration's numbers fail to account for the bird's historical population, which once was in the millions.

Once seen all along the West Coast from Washington to Mexico, the glistening blue-black bird with its distinctive red and white shoulder patches is now reduced to the heart of its historical range — California's agricultural Central Valley. About 95 percent of the birds now live in California.

"We feel like it's another abdication of the administration's responsibility to protect wildlife," said **Peter Galvin, the center's conservation director**.

In its petition to the agency, the **Center for Biological Diversity** cited studies showing the tricolored blackbird population had declined by millions, largely because of the elimination of wetlands in the Central Valley.

The remaining birds are especially vulnerable because they nest in large groups, **Galvin said**.

The agency, in a notice in Tuesday's federal register, stated that the group failed to provide enough scientific information to warrant federal protection.

Donner said the agency is working with environmental groups, farmers and dairies in the Central Valley to protect bird habitat as part of a strategy to keep the blackbird from being listed as endangered.

On the Net:

Sacramento Fish and Wildlife Service:

The Center for Biological Diversity:

[www.fws.gov/sacramento](http://www.fws.gov/sacramento)

[www.biologicaldiversity.org/swcbd/](http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/swcbd/)

URL: <http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/n/a/2006/12/05/state/n163408S27.DTL>