

Toledo Pit, aka the Toledo Basin Tricolored Blackbird enhancement —

Toledo Pit is a storage basin owned by the Lower Tule Irrigation District in Tulare County, California. The Irrigation District allowed cattails (*Typhus* spp.) to flourish in Toledo Pit and, as a result, Tricolored Blackbirds (*Agelaius tricolor*) have successfully nested in the habitat. The 40 acre cell provided nesting habitat for approximately over 20,000 birds in the year 2000. In 2001 local biologists realized that the storage basin was not holding water during the critical nesting period. Tricolored Blackbirds were either selecting other sites or unsuccessfully attempting to nest in Toledo Pit. The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service together with the Bureau of Reclamation, California Department of Fish and Game, and the Tule Irrigation District created a cooperative agreement, signed in April 2002, to develop a well next to the storage basin. The well is supposed to deliver enough water to flood the 40 acre basin to the average depth of 6 to 12 inches, between February 15 and June 30, for 25 years or the life of the well – expressly for growing cattails for the benefit of nesting Tricolored Blackbirds. Management of the site is the duty of the Irrigation District, but in coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Water delivery in 2003 was too late for sufficient cattail growth. Proper management began in 2004, but cattail growth was sufficient to attract only 1000 birds. This, however, was considered a successful first step that hopefully will build quickly in the coming years to accommodate a sizable colony of Tricolored Blackbirds once again. Toledo Pit promises to provide nesting habitat in wet or dry years when wetlands are scarce. The future looks bright on this small site for the birds where habitat is guaranteed.—*Debra Schlafmann, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2800 Cottage Way, Sacramento, CA 95825; and David Hardt, Kern and Pixley National Wildlife Refuge Complex, Manager, 10811 Corcoran Rd., Delano, CA 93215.*



TM

sketch by Tim Manolis