



# Big T Wash Line

September 2012



A Publication of the  
**County of Los Angeles**  
**Department of Public Works**  
 (LACDPW)



## Announcements

- **Report suspicious activities to the LA Sheriff's Department Dispatch.**

Please report issues such as loose or aggressive dogs, weapons, vandalism, and anything else that seems suspicious. It is important to report these issues to law enforcement because each time something is reported a record is created, which in turn, brings more attention to the issue.

**LA Sheriff's Department Dispatch:**  
**1-800-834-0064**



- **Award Nomination:** LACDPW has been nominated for an award presented by the National Association of Environmental Professionals (NAEP) for the excellent management of Big T. Great job! Thank you to all of the community members for your loyal support!!

- **Trails Maintenance Day:** Please join LACDPW and ECORP Consulting for the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Trail Maintenance Day on October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2012. Come give a helping hand by cleaning up litter along Big T's beautiful trails. Meet us at the Cottonwood entrance (Wentworth St. and Cottonwood Ave.) at 8 am. Water, snacks and trash bags will be provided.



Remember to wear comfortable clothes and closed-toed shoes, and bring your gloves, hat, sun block, and bug repellent.

Event will be cancelled if rain is forecasted.

## ABOUT THE BIG TUJUNGA WASH MITIGATION AREA

Big T is a parcel of land located in the City of Los Angeles' Sunland area (see Page 6). Big T covers an area of approximately 210 acres of sensitive habitat. The site was purchased by the LACDPW in 1998 for the purpose of compensating for habitat loss for other LACDPW projects.

The LACDPW implementation of the Master Mitigation Plan for the Big Tujunga Wash Mitigation Area (Big T) has been underway since April 2000.

Big T protects one of the most rapidly diminishing habitat types found in Southern California, willow riparian woodland. Big T is home to several protected species of fish (Santa Ana sucker, Santa Ana speckled dace, arroyo chub) and contains habitat for sensitive bird species (least Bell's vireo, southwestern willow flycatcher).

The purpose of this newsletter is to provide updates to ongoing programs and to explain upcoming enhancement measures that will be implemented on the site. Newsletters are published on a bi-annual basis (Spring and Fall).

More information can be found at <http://www.ladpw.org/wrd/facilities>




## U.S Fish and Wildlife Service Biologist Visits Big T!



Santa Ana suckers are one of the native fish found in the streams at Big T. They are federally listed as threatened.

On June 12, 2012, Ms. Christine Medak, a biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), visited Big T to discuss how to continue to improve the habitat for the federally threatened Santa Ana sucker. Haines Canyon Creek in Big T is the only creek left in the Los Angeles River Watershed that still supports this native fish species. USFWS is concerned about threats to this species from non-native species (bullfrogs, largemouth bass, and water lettuce) that have invaded the ponds and the creek. Ms. Medak stated that "LACDPW's management efforts are contributing substantially to maintaining high quality aquatic and riparian habitats for sensitive native species."

LACDPW would like to thank Ms. Medak for visiting the site and for her valuable input on future activities that may help to improve and protect the Santa Ana sucker habitat at Big T. 

## **DON'T LET THE INVASIVES BE TOO PERSUASIVE**

There are many invasive plant species that have snuck their way into Big T and are causing problems by displacing native vegetation and the wildlife that depend on them. Some of the plant species that are creating quite an uproar for Big T include African fountain grass, bigleaf periwinkle, tree of Heaven, and edible fig. These tricky species are commonly used in landscaping and can easily escape into unwanted territory when seeds are picked up by the wind or fall into streams and are carried elsewhere.

Out at Big T you may have noticed African fountain grass, which is a drought-tolerant herb that not only competes with native vegetation, but also increases the risk for wildfires. Three additional species, one shrub and two trees, have also become well-established problem species within Big T. Bigleaf periwinkle, a perennial herb that is native to southern Europe and northern Africa, is a sneaky plant that can thrive in full sun or shade and can easily become established anywhere. The tree of Heaven is an invasive tree that loves sunlight. This tree is native to China where its leaves, bark, and roots are commonly used for medicinal purposes. This tree can re-sprout easily after being cut, making it very difficult to remove. The edible fig tree has also snuck its way into Big T through seed dispersal. This species is native to the Middle East and was one of the first trees cultivated for their edible fruit.

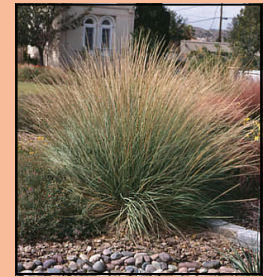
How can you help in the fight against exotic plant invasion? By planting native trees and shrubs in your yard, of course! Native grasses, trees and bushes require much less water and attention because they are adapted to surviving in warm, dry climates like ours. They also attract native wildlife by providing the natural habitat these species have adapted to. Instead of planting African fountain grass, try planting native deer grass, which has flower stalks that can bring beauty to any garden. Deer grass also has deep roots that have been known to remove chemicals from agriculture runoff from the soil. Rather than bigleaf periwinkle, try planting California aster in your garden, a species that has white or purple flowers that bloom in summer and attract native butterflies such as monarchs and painted ladies. Black walnut trees are a good alternative to the tree of Heaven because they grow fast and provide lots of shade. Squirrels and other wildlife love to nibble on the walnuts that the trees produce too! Toyon is a great alternative to the edible fig tree. Toyon, which is visited frequently by many butterfly and bird species, produces beautiful, red berries in the winter that makes them look quite festive! If any of these native species find their way into Big T, we won't complain at all!

### **Instead of:**



**African Fountain Grass**

### **Try this:**



**Deer Grass**



**Bigleaf Periwinkle**



**California Aster**



**Tree of Heaven**



**California Black Walnut**



**Edible Fig**



**Toyon**

Check out these websites for more information on how to keep your garden beautiful with native plant and tree species!

<http://www.cal-ipc.org/landscaping/dpp/planttypes.php?region=socal>

<http://www.calipc.org/landscaping/dpp/plantpage.php?region=socal&type=Trees>

## The Birds Are Buzzing! ...What!?!

Chances are if you've spent much time outside lately you've come across that familiar buzzing and whirr of wings that indicate that a hummingbird is near! Or maybe you've seen a flash of bright yellow and black that announce the presence of an oriole. In either case, these are some beautiful nectar-drinking birds you don't want to miss!

Orioles are bright yellow birds with markings of glossy black on their head, wings, and tail. They mostly eat fruits, nectar, and insects, and will use their sharp beak to break through flowers to get the nectar at the flower's base. Look for orioles in areas with scattered trees and along streams within Big T. Find a bird guide (see below for suggestions) and see if you can identify the hooded, Scott's, and Bullock's orioles in your own neighborhood. All three of these species will be around during the summer breeding season. You can also look for a nest of woven plant fibers hanging from trees in your backyard and neighborhood that indicates oriole presence.



Did you know that, unlike most bird species, both male and female orioles will sing? In the case of the Bullock's oriole, males and females have slightly different songs. During the nesting season the female may actually sing *MORE* than the male Bullock's.

Keep your eyes open for the Anna's, Allen's, black-chinned, Costa's, and rufous hummingbirds. The Anna's and Allen's hummingbirds will stick around all year, while the other hummingbird species will visit during the breeding season only. Anna's are the most common hummingbird along the Pacific Coast and have bright green feathers with iridescent rose-colored heads and throats. Allen's are rust-colored



with red throats and green shoulders and backs. Both Anna's and Allen's hummingbirds can be found in many types of habitats and in urban areas in and around Big T. Costa's and black-chinned hummingbirds only visit during the breeding season (spring and summer) and are only found in the alluvial scrub habitat in the northwestern portion of Big T. Rufous hummingbirds will only occasionally stop by Big T during their migration between Mexico and Canada.

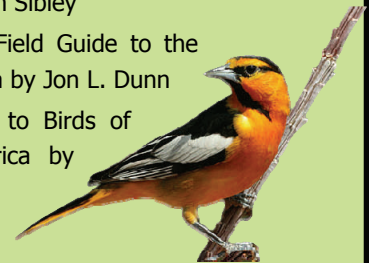


Did you know that hummingbirds beat their wings 40 to 50 times per second during flight? The speed of their wing beats creates the "hum" that gives them their name. The unique way they beat their wings, a rapid figure eight pattern, allows them to hover in place while drinking nectar from flowers.

Want to attract these beautiful birds to your house? Hummingbirds and orioles are easily attracted to nectar feeders placed in your backyard. Hang one by a window and see how many different species you can identify! You can also attract orioles to the nectar feeders if you remove the little yellow "flowers" on the feeding tubes. Just make sure to keep your cats indoors when the bird feeder is out!

Want to know what birds you see regularly in your backyard? Check out one of these great bird field guides!

- The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Western North America by David Allen Sibley
- National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America by Jon L. Dunn
- Peterson Field Guide to Birds of Western North America by Roger Tory Peterson



*Clockwise from top left: hooded oriole (male, adult), rufous hummingbird (male, adult), Bullock's oriole (male, adult), Anna's hummingbird (male, adult). Photographs by Tony Battiste.*

## Time to Trim Those Trees!

Do you have trees or shrubs in your yard that need to be trimmed? So do we! Fall is the time of year to do all your trimming and pruning. Why, you ask? To protect the birds and your trees!

Most people don't realize that trimming trees and shrubs during the spring and summer can be a problem because birds may be nesting in them. Almost all native North American birds are protected by the **Migratory Bird Treaty Act**, a federal law that was established in 1918 to protect the migratory birds that spend winters in other locations and return to their nesting areas in the spring to raise their young. In Southern California, the nesting season extends from February through August.

Here at Big T we need to keep those pesky exotic plant species at bay throughout the year to maintain the quality of the habitat. While we conduct exotic plant species removal efforts during all seasons, the activities we conduct during the spring and summer months are limited because of the nesting birds.

In fact, all large removal efforts are performed in the fall or winter. If we do need to conduct minor removal efforts during the nesting season, a biologist is on site the entire time to protect any nests that may be present in the area.

Want another reason to trim trees during the fall or winter? Tree branches are dormant during this time and diseases and pests can't penetrate the newly cut branches, which greatly improves the health of your plants. So, break out those chainsaws and clippers to get all your trimming needs done now!

A bird's nest in a tree branch. Nests can be very delicate and sometimes hidden!



## Leave the Swimming to the Fishes!

Big T is home to three sensitive native species of fish: Santa Ana sucker, Santa Ana speckled dace, and the arroyo chub. These fish are only found in a handful of places in Southern California. Particularly, the Santa Ana sucker is a federally listed threatened species, meaning that it is on the verge of extinction! The fast flowing water within the creek creates the perfect habitat for these native fishes. However, unauthorized man-made rock dams in the creek are becoming a common nuisance throughout the Mitigation Area. Unauthorized rock dams are built by people who are looking to beat the heat by taking dips in the pools built up behind these artificial dams. Not only is swimming not allowed in the mitigation area, but building rock dams to create swimming pools is a big NO-NO!

These swimming pools are not natural within the creek and are the perfect habitat for exotic species such as the American bullfrog and largemouth bass that feed on our native fish. The construction of rock dams also reduces the amount of water downstream, and can result in stranded fish! LACDPW is constantly working to preserve and protect the stream habitat by removing rock dams from the creek as soon as possible and by sending bilingual biologists to the site on weekends to educate the site users about the stream habitat and the sensitive fish found within it. What can you do to help? If you see a rock dam in the creek, please contact LACDPW so that they may remove it. You could save the lives of some very special fish! 🐸



Rock Dam Before Removal



Rock Dam After Removal

## A Huge Thank You to Terry Kaiser!!!!

LACDPW would like to extend a huge thank you to Terry Kaiser for his efforts in containing a fire from spreading at Big T. Terry was at Big T on the morning of May 30 to discuss trail issues with LACDPW and ECORP when he noticed smoke in an area that had burned a few days before. Smoldering ashes had reignited woody debris. In order to keep the fire from spreading, Terry pulled additional woody debris away from the burning area. LACDPW called 911 and within a few minutes, the fire department was there to put out the fire. Please remember, smoking and campfires are not allowed at Big T. If you see a fire please call 911. Thanks again to Terry for his heroic efforts! 🐸



**Left:** Terry Kaiser removes brush that could fuel the fire.



**Bottom Left:** Minutes later a fireman was able to put out the remainder of the fire.

# Big Tujunga Crossword



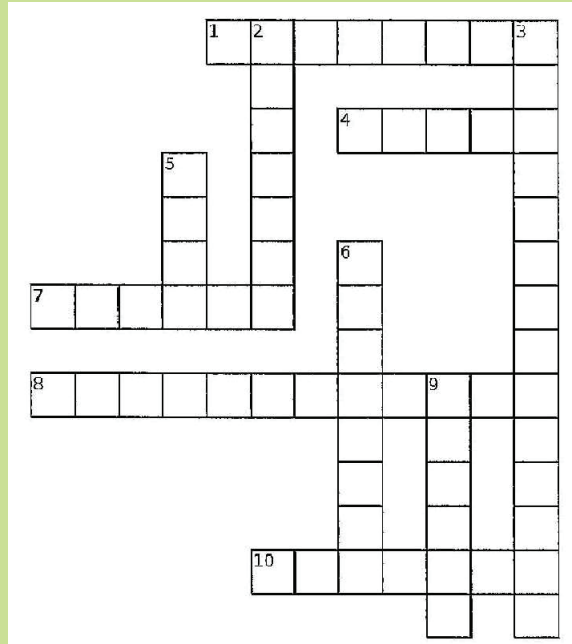
Use the hints below and the articles in the newsletter to fill out the crossword puzzle below.

**Across**

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_ reduce the water levels in the creek and can leave fish stranded.
- 4) Plant \_\_\_\_\_ instead of edible fig in your yard.
- 7) \_\_\_\_\_ hummingbird can be found in the alluvial scrub at Big T during the spring and summer.
- 8) \_\_\_\_\_ use much less water than exotic plants.
- 10) Some birds, like black-chinned hummingbirds, will spend the winter in one area and \_\_\_\_\_ to places like Big T for the spring and summer.

**Down**

- 2) Unlike many birds, both the male and female \_\_\_\_\_ will sing.
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_ is a threatened species of fish that lives at Big T.
- 5) \_\_\_\_\_ is home to three native fish species.
- 6) The \_\_\_\_\_ is an exotic species that eats the native fish at Big T.
- 9) Hummingbirds and orioles feed on \_\_\_\_\_.

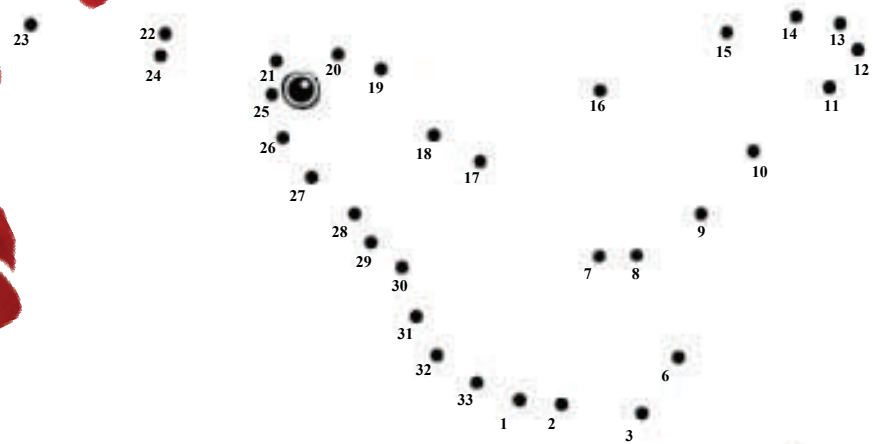


We've hidden 10 hummingbirds like this one **ON YOUR SEARCH!**



throughout the newsletter, can you find them all? **GOOD LUCK**

## Kid's Corner



### Connect the Dots

Connect the Dots Hummingbird  
 Crossword answers - Across 1) Rock dams 4) Toyon 7) Costas 8) Native plants 10) Migrate  
 Down 2) Orioles 3) Santa Ana sucker 5) Big T (6) Bullfrog 9) Nectar

Can you identify this critter? Once you have connected the dots, try to color the critter in correctly, too!



Water Resources Division  
 County of Los Angeles  
 Department of Public Works  
 900 S. Fremont Avenue  
 Alhambra, CA 91803



**Where is Big T?**

Downstream of Big Tujunga Canyon, right in the heart of Sun Valley, south of the 210 freeway, you'll find a native riparian (water loving plant) natural area filled with cottonwoods, willows, and pools of water that support many native aquatic species. Check out the Big T website for more information at:

<http://www.ladpw.org/wrd/facilities/>



**Emergencies? Incidents? Questions?**

- **CALL 911 TO REPORT ANY EMERGENCY SUCH AS FIRE OR ACCIDENT**
- To report minor incidents or regulation infractions contact the Sheriff's Department at 1-800-834-0064. (Please **DO NOT** use 911.)
- Do not attempt to enforce regulations yourself; please allow law enforcement to handle the situation/incident.

\* For emergency follow up or to report minor incidents, obtain information, or get questions answered during weekday work hours (8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Thursday), please contact:

**Grace Yu or Cindy Rowlan**  
 Water Resources Division  
 County of Los Angeles Department of Public Works  
 900 S. Fremont Avenue  
 Alhambra, CA 91803  
 Email: [gyu@dpw.lacounty.gov](mailto:gyu@dpw.lacounty.gov) or [crowlan@dpw.lacounty.gov](mailto:crowlan@dpw.lacounty.gov)