

## LAWS PROTECTING BIRDS

**San Francisco County Municipal Code: Article 5, Section 5.08.** Unlawful to disturb birds and other animals in city parks.

**California State Code: 3503. and 3503.5. Title 14, Chapter 1, Section 251.1.** Unlawful to take, possess or destroy the nest or eggs of any migratory bird.

**Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act 703.** Unlawful to take, capture, kill, possess, sell, or purchase any migratory bird, part, nest or egg.



## FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO REPORT A VIOLATION

### To report bird issues or for advice on protecting nests:

California Department of Fish & Wildlife  
888.334.2258

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Northern California  
916.414.6464

### For advice on nesting birds or referrals for nest surveys:

Golden Gate Audubon Society  
510.843.2222 or [ggas@goldengateaudubon.org](mailto:ggas@goldengateaudubon.org)

### To report bird harassment or nest destruction in San Francisco and City parks:

Call 3-1-1.

### To report nest disturbance or inappropriate trimming in the coastal zone:

California Coastal Commission: 415.904.5260

Read more about bird-friendly tree trimming on the Golden Gate Audubon website at [www.goldengateaudubon.org/treecare](http://www.goldengateaudubon.org/treecare).



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# Healthy Trees, Healthy Birds

## *Bird-Friendly Tree Care for the San Francisco Bay Area*

*“With a little care and planning, arborists can protect nests and allow future generations to continue enjoying the beautiful birds that make the Bay Area their home.”*

— Roy C. Leggitt, III  
Consulting Arborist and Tree Risk Assessor



**GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON**



## Bay Area: Home to 350 Species

The Bay Area is home to more than just pigeons, sparrows and crows! Over 120 bird species live here year-round, and 350 species live, migrate or pass through the Bay Area each year.

Birds nest in a variety of spots—tree branches, cavities, bushes, on the ground, or on the sides and eaves of buildings. Nests are often in hidden, hard-to-spot locations.

Types of local tree nests:

- Stick or cup-shaped nests
- Pendant or hanging nests
- Cavity nests

Many birds nest between March 1 and August 31, the time of year when people tend to trim trees and clear brush. Severely cutting, thinning and topping greenery such as trees, bushes and dense reeds in the spring and summer can destroy nests and eliminate valuable nest sites.

Cover: Black-crowned Night Heron by Roy C. Leggitt, III; above: Great Horned Owl by Jerry Ting; above right: American Robin by Bob Lewis; flap: Anna's Hummingbird by Ron Wolf.

## Before You Trim

Avoid nesting season if possible; schedule tree trimming between **September and February**. During any season, carefully inspect the area before beginning your operation. It's best to hire a trained biologist to do a nest survey of larger areas or sensitive habitats such as areas of native plants, dense brush, stream-sides and stands of trees. Many nests are difficult even for experts to spot.

The ANSI A300 pruning standard calls for a clearly defined objective before pruning is undertaken. We recommend that maintaining habitat for birds be included in your plan.

## How to Detect Nests

- Look on the ground for concentrations of white-colored droppings, then check the vegetation above.
- As you walk through an area, look for birds flying out of vegetation close to you and scolding you. They may have a nest nearby.
- Sit quietly and watch for birds bringing nest material or food repeatedly to one place. Birds tend to place their nests on the undersides of the tree canopy and where branches join together. Some birds nest in a tree cavity or even under a flap of bark.

## If You Find a Nest

*Reschedule!* Cease work that could disturb or destroy the nest. Keep 50 feet away from songbird nests, and 500 feet away from raptor (hawk or owl) nests.

Do not move the nest. Contact a qualified biologist or the California Department of Fish & Wildlife to find out how to protect the nest. Ideally the nest should be left undisturbed until the young have left on their own. The DFW or Golden Gate Audubon may be able to give you an estimate of how long until eggs hatch and nestlings leave.



## Why Nests Cannot Be Moved

Parent birds choose a nest location for specific reasons such as proximity to food and water, and protection from predators and the elements. If the nest is disturbed, parents may abandon it along with their eggs or young. Local, state and federal laws prohibit taking, destroying or damaging nests. Moving a nest requires special permission from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and is usually only granted for human health and safety reasons.

## Pruning Considerations

Removing internal limbs results in lion-tailing and over-thinning, and increases the hazard potential for a tree. Birds utilize internal branches and foliage. Trees and shrubs should be pruned in a manner that considers the time of year, incorporates a pre-work inspection to check for nesting, and maintains branch density. In general, less pruning is better for birds. Pruning using these considerations is consistent with proper pruning that maintains tree health and safety while providing habitat for the birds that depend upon the trees and shrubs.

**For more information** on tree care and nests (including special needs of species such as herons) and tips for planning a tree care project, visit Golden Gate Audubon at [www.goldengateaudubon.org/treecare](http://www.goldengateaudubon.org/treecare).