Environmental documents to be released soon.

**Riverside Documents “Hit the Street”**

For four years, EHL has served on three Advisory Committees for the Riverside County Integrated Project: Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP), Community and Environmental Transportation Acceptability Process (CETAP), and General Plan. Environmental documents (EIRs and/or EISs) have been, or will shortly be, released for all three components.

CETAP is proposing new north-south and east-west multimodal transportation corridors. These do not include the controversial route over the Cleveland National Forest to Orange County. Staff has recommended two preferred alternatives from among dozens of options. Analysis of the potential effects on wildlife by state and federal agencies is still pending. EHL is closely evaluating the alternatives in terms of biology, growth induction, and ability to serve population centers with transit. The Riverside County Transportation Commission will make a final decision in early 2003.

**General Plan shaped by EHL and others toward “smart growth”**

The General Plan was significantly shaped by EHL and other stakeholders toward “smart growth,” including revolutionary—for Riverside County—walkable, mixed-use, and transit-supportive Community Centers. We have thus been bitterly disappointed by the erosion of rural landscapes due to recently approved sprawl development—and are now fighting to prevent further loss of rural and agricultural lands as hundreds of landowners seek last minute changes.

Yet, if adopted, the plan will finally begin to turn around the old pattern of development, and will also put in place a “Certainty System.” Initiated by EHL, this system would prevent piecemeal amendment of the General Plan, as occurs currently.

**Community Center adoption uncertain**

Due to fear of higher densities, prospects for Community Center adoption are very uncertain, however, despite the support—secured with EHL-led outreach—of the Greater Riverside Chamber of Commerce and Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. Hearings before the Board of Supervisors could begin in December.

The MSHCP would set aside 150,000 acres of new, currently private land, including a veritable “wish list” of conservation priorities. While the plan has shortcomings, failure to adopt it would be catastrophic.

EHL has endorsed a ballot measure to renew sales tax EHL has endorsed a ballot measure that would renew a transportation sales tax, cause the region’s cities to join the County in implementing the MSHCP, and direct mitigation monies toward the plan.

**NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING**

The 2002 Annual Meeting of the Endangered Habitats League will be held on December 15, 2002 at Audubon-California Starr Ranch Sanctuary, 100 Bell Canyon Road, Trabuco Canyon, CA 92679. The meeting will begin at 1:00 PM. Agenda items will include bylaws amendments, board seats, and EHL participation in the Earth Discovery Institute in San Diego, along with the standard annual meeting items such as the treasurer’s report.

**Directions**

Take the 5 Freeway to Alicia Parkway exit. Go east on Alicia Parkway for approximately 5 miles. Turn right on Santa Margarita Parkway to Plano Trabuco Road; go right on Plano Trabuco Road to Dove Canyon Drive; turn left on Dove Canyon Drive and proceed to the security gate. Present this newsletter to the guard, who will admit you. Continue on Dove Canyon Drive to Grey Rock Road (watch carefully for the street sign; it’s on the left). Turn left on Grey Rock Road and go 100 yards to the Starr Ranch access road on the right. Proceed cautiously and follow the signs. Call Starr Ranch at 949-858-0309 if you need help finding your way.

**Subject: Beasts & Botany**

**Phainopepla has odd nesting habits**

By Jess Morton

One of the pleasures of the world of nature around us lies in its unexpected ways it makes itself noticed. Thus, as I walked out my front door the other morning, I was greeted with a soft rising whistle coming from the purple-blossomed nightshade that takes up a corner of the yard.

In a moment, a sleek black crested bird, roughly the size of a Starling, showed itself. If I had not recognized him by his distinctive call, the plumage of the male Phainopepla made him instantly identifiable. He spread his wings, exposing the great white blaze, which sweeps across the central part of the wing’s primary feathers, and flew to the phone line above, where he promptly whistled again.

*This story continues on page 4*

**San Diego River Park Conservancy established**

With the signing of a key piece of environmental legislation, the San Diego River has a new conservancy—and a new future. Saying that the creation of the San Diego River Park Conservancy would “turn the tide on years of neglect,” Governor Gray Davis, whose wife hails from Santee, signed the enabling bill on October 13 in San Diego.

The objectives of the conservancy are to provide recreational opportunities, open space, wildlife habitat, species restoration and protection, wetland protection and restoration, and protection and maintenance of the water quality of the San Diego River. Its creation will bring $12 million in state funds to river protection in San Diego.

The Endangered Habitats League’s Michael Beck, Chair of the San Diego River Lakeside Conservancy (SDRCL), was instrument in gathering the many geographically diverse river groups together in 2001 to focus their labors on a comprehensive strategy. Their efforts, combined with the work of key elected officials—Assemblywoman Chris Kehoe, Supervisor Diane Jacobs and Mayor Dick Murphy—made the new conservancy a reality.

*This story continues on page 4*
Smart Growth America Report gives Inland Empire the bad news on sprawl

In a report that verified what most Inland Empire residents already know—that sprawl in the region is out of control—a team of academic researchers has identified the Riverside-San Bernardino area as having the worst sprawl in the U.S. The report, which embodies three years of research, was written by professors at Cornell and Rutgers universities and was released October 18 by its sponsor, the Smart Growth America environmental coalition.

It ranked the Riverside-San Bernardino area as having the worst sprawl of the 83 largest metropolitan areas of the country.


The report said that the region has become increasingly bleak and dispiriting with growing traffic, pollution and congestion.

The report pointed to sprawl as one of the nation’s largest conservation groups, the National Wildlife Federation and Defenders of Wildlife, have endorsed The Heart and Soul Coalition, including San Juan City Councilman John Gelff and Laguna Beach Councilwoman Toni Iseman, voiced their support for good planning through SCORE.

On October 30, 2002, a public workshop has held in which the agencies presented a dozen reserve alternatives. A huge turnout of more than 400 citizens voiced strong support for protecting the Rancho’s great resources, making a major impression. Friends of the Foothills/Sierra Club are to be thanked for getting the word out so effectively. EHL testified at the hearing, provided important letters from independent scientists to the wildlife agencies, and will submit additional written comments from biologic and hydrologic experts.

San Diego County

Countryside the Key Issue in General Plan Update

We are pleased to report steady progress on the “2020 Update” on the San Diego County General Plan. Most importantly, a new map has been created that reflects input from the Interest Group advisory committee on which EHL serves. The new map shows increased protection for the beautiful and defining backcountry landscapes of the county while directing growth to towns. EHL and other environmental representatives spent long hours creating overlaid of needed changes. While by no means final, if this map can be a vehicle for reaching consensus with community groups, it will prove very valuable. The Interest Group is also wrestling with a complex set of standards, ranging from steep slopes to floodplains and wetlands. EHL continues to supply
San Diego Housing Action Network–endorsed project receives Affordable Housing tax credits

The California Tax Credit Allocation Committee has announced that Metro Villas, a new affordable housing project in the City Heights neighborhood of City of San Diego, will receive an allocation of $18.8 million in federal and state tax credits. Metro Villas, the housing component of the Metro Center project, is the only affordable housing development in San Diego to be awarded tax credits.

The project was endorsed by the Housing Action Network (HAN), co-chaired by the Endangered Habitats League's Lynne Baker. HAN is a broad-based coalition that works to foster "smart growth" projects to increase the supply of both market rate and affordable entry level housing. For EHL, such projects are an essential complement to the protection of wildlife habitat because they direct growth inward, to underutilized urban core areas, and link growth areas by public transit rather than by building more freeways.

**Metro Center a model redevelopment project**

“The Metro Center is a model redevelopment project,” said Councilmember Toni Atkins, whose Third District includes the site of the proposed project. “This $44 million project combines quality, affordable family housing located next to a park and transit services, combined with public facilities to help working families improve their lives.”

The Metro Center, to be constructed on University Avenue adjacent to and just west of Interstate 15, includes:

- A four-story, 81,000-square-foot office tower, which will be the future home of the Workforce Partnership One-Stop Metro Career Center
- A 5,000-square-foot childcare center
- A community meeting facility
- The Metro Villas housing complex that will include two "tot lots"
- A 489-space parking structure to be shared by the housing and office complex.

**Complex will include 120 affordable housing units**

The Metro Villas complex will include 120 affordable housing units made up of one-, two-, three- and four-bedroom units. These units will be made available to families and individuals who make less than 65 percent of the area’s median income.

“We have a critical need for decent, affordable, dignified family homes for City Heights residents,” said Atkins. “This project provides two tot lots, exceeds the open space and parking requirements, and is located within yards of the busiest transit corridors in the city, including the new MTD bus service, the Premium Express 'jobs routes' to Downtown and UTC.”

**The City Heights Community Development Corporation and San Diego Interfaith Housing** will be partners in the housing project.

**Three organizations added funds to tax credits**

In addition to the $18.8 million in tax credits, funding was provided by the San Diego Housing Commission, Centre City Development Corporation, and the City of San Diego Redevelopment Agency. The Metro Career Center is a partnership of the San Diego Revitalization Corporation—the development arm of Price Charities—and the City’s redevelopment agency. The Metro Career Center is scheduled to open by December 2003, while the housing component should be completed six to eight months after that.

“This project is a perfect example of how redevelopment can be used to create liveable neighborhoods along with public facilities to benefit working families in our older, urban communities,” said Atkins.

---

**Grants funded to preserve central section of the Ramona grasslands**

A key EHL habitat focus area in the Ramona grasslands received funding for acquisition in October. A U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service grant of $660,000 coupled with a $165,000 grant of the state Wildlife Conservation Board will help preserve the central section of the 5,000 acre Ramona grasslands. EHL is working to provide further protection for these lands in several arenas.

One of two grants awarded by the federal agency under the year-old Recovery Land Acquisition program, the gift will be used by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) as a down payment toward the purchase of the 420-acre Cagney Ranch in the grasslands area south of the Ramona airport. The Ramona grasslands are a key site for preservation since they are relatively undisturbed and retain connectivity to area habitat plans and preserves.

Ann Van Leer of TNC said the group hopes to raise the rest of the nearly $2 million needed to purchase the ranch, which is dotted with vernal pools and pockets of undisturbed native grasses, from private donors and through other grants. Janet Gilbert, spokeswoman for a group called Ramona Grasslands, said purchase of the Cagney ranch will be a major achievement. Other organizations instrumental to obtaining the grants include the Wildlife Research Institute and the Vernal Pool Association.

Completion of this purchase will protect creatures such as the federally endangered San Diego fairy shrimp, arroyo toad, Stephen’s kangaroo rat and the threatened California gnatcatcher. The area south of the Ramona airport is also home to wintering raptors and serves as a stopover for migratory waterfowl and songbirds. The ultimate goal in the Ramona grasslands is to purchase about 5,000 acres and bordering terrain and join it with the San Dieguito River Park and Multiple Species Conservation Program lands to the south.

The property was owned by William J. Cagney, the brother of movie star James Cagney. “I can reiterate that the Cagney Trust is very happy that this is going to happen,” said their realtor. “They think this is a positive step for Ramona and for their family’s legacy.”
A Phainopepla visits (continued from page 1)

Though I could not make out its color in the dull light of the overcast morning, I knew he was watching my every move through striking scarlet eyes. The leaden sky also masked the sheen of the black feathers, so evident in full sunlight.

The Phainopepla is one of the few North American birds that has identical common and scientific names. In this case, the name is most appropriate. It comes from the Greek and means “shining robe,” which certainly fits the adult males very well. The female is gray, though, and only shows a light gray, not white, wing patch. If her feathers are more drab than those of the male, she still shares his scarlet enquiring eye.

This species has what is probably the odddest breeding cycle of any of our birds. It often has two broods, which is quite unusual in the bird world, but the two nests may be separated by several hundred miles! Not only must the bird adapt to the rigors of breeding in one locality, but must master an entirely different place well enough to raise young there, too.

In the Sonoran Desert region of Eastern California, the Phainopepla is found wherever there is mistletoe in the tops of the palo verde and mesquite. The mistletoe provides food for the adults and shelter for the shallow nest the male makes for the two or three eggs the female lays. After the early spring brood is raised, the adults move north and westward for a second round of nesting. One of the habitats favored for this nesting is the riparian (streamside) willow thickets of Southern California.

Although Phainopeplas do eat berries, such as those in my nightshade bush, their main sustenance comes from the insects they hawk from the air. Indeed, they are most frequently to be observed perched high in trees, waiting to fly out after some passing bug.

The profile of the bird is characteristic. Although there are several crested birds in the United States, the two best known, Northern Cardinal and Blue Jay, are both eastern species. We have one common crested species, the Cedar Waxwing, often seen in flocks of 20 to 150 birds, especially in May and June, just before they migrate northward to their nesting grounds.

While Phainopeplas may be seen in treetop perches, a flock of 50 crested birds can be relied upon to be waxwings.

So the next time you walk outside and hear a pleasant little rising whistle, don’t automatically assume it’s the guy down the street getting fresh. Take a look around. Perhaps it will be one of nature’s unexpected bonuses, a Phainopepla stopping by for a brief visit as it makes its way to some coastal canyon to continue its hectic life cycle.