

The Antelope Valley IBA:

Los Angeles County's *Globally Important Bird Area*

California's Globally Important Bird Areas Need Special Consideration

Worldwide, a coalition of organizations has identified over 8,000 IBAs or Important Bird Areas. The purpose of the IBA Program is to set "science-based" priorities for habitat conservation to "promote positive action to safeguard vital bird habitats." According to the Audubon's IBA website, "IBA inventories provide a scientifically defensible method for prioritizing conservation activities and allocating limited conservation dollars to ensure the maximum benefit to birds."

IBAs are discussed in current DRECP documents. Not referenced however is the subset of these 8,000 sites has been given the higher status of "Globally Important Bird Areas." **These 424 worldwide sites have special status due to "global conservation concern."**

One of these 424 areas is in Los Angeles County, in the Western Antelope Valley. This site, **the Antelope Valley Important Bird Area** provides breeding, foraging and nesting habitat for Swainson's Hawk, Golden and Bald Eagles, Northern Harriers, Burrowing Owls, Le Conte's Thrasher, Tricolored Blackbirds, Prairie Falcons and other sensitive species including the California Condor.

Tragically, with no safeguards in place, the Antelope Valley IBA is being overrun by alternative energy development pushed by corporations rushing to plant their giant footprint on this land ahead of the implementation of regulation that would likely impede their projects.

The Antelope Valley IBA, rimmed by the Angeles Forest and Tehachapi Mountains, is already home to First Solar's AV Solar Ranch I, which will be one of the largest solar plants in the world when completed. A number of other projects, both large and small are also proposed. All of these projects are moving forward prior to completion of both the Los Angeles County plan for alternative energy and the statewide DRECP process, both specifically targeted to ensure that wind and solar plants are properly sited.

Fortunately, due to the diligence of local citizens, there are areas of this Globally Important Bird Area where birds are already protected: the world famous **Antelope Valley California Poppy Reserve State Park, nearby Ripley Desert Woodland State Park** and three other areas protected by both LA County and private conservancies.

Unfortunately the Poppy Reserve may soon be surrounded by Element Power's ironically titled "Wildflower" industrial-scale energy "farm." This proposed plant, which would be the first hybrid solar and wind turbine energy plant in Los Angeles County – and the first wind turbine plant as well – is proposed for the western and southern borders of the Reserve. It would cover an area roughly the size of the reserve itself with a combination of solar panels and giant

turbines – a double threat to the avian life currently thriving on the Poppy Reserve and surrounding areas of the Antelope Valley IBA.

To avoid the unintended consequence of further hastening species decline caused by alternative energy development, policies must be in place to protect the avian life of areas already set aside for protection due to their importance as globally significant habitat. In this quest, we respectfully suggest the following be included in the DRECP process:

California IBAs that are among the group of 424 sites worldwide that have been elevated to “globally” important status **should have special attention** when designating areas as inappropriate for alternative energy development

These sites should be evaluated to identify existing protected habitat within the IBA boundaries. Land adjacent to these protected areas should then be designated as “do not develop” to take full advantage of existing protected spaces to provide connectivity, protection of migration routes and large areas of contiguous habitat for nesting, breeding and foraging for sensitive species.

In this manner, land in high biological value areas such as the Antelope Valley Globally Important Bird Area that is adjacent to existing protected habitat will be given the “no industrial development” status for alternative energy that it should have.

With these protections in place alternative energy development can then be directed away from these areas and avoid the unintended consequence of speeding the decline of sensitive species in the quest to reduce fossil fuel emissions.

Thank you for considering this suggestion for protecting California's wildlife,

Margaret Rhyne
Poppy Reserve Mojave Desert/Interpretive Association

Vern Biehl
Concerned Citizens of the West Antelope Valley

Robert Kerekes
Westside Citizens for Environmental Responsibility

Susan Zahnter
Friends of Antelope Valley Open Space