

Evaluation of Communication Strategies to Mitigate Visitor Use Impacts On Marbled Murrelets

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Marbled murrelet and corvid interpretation effectiveness was studied in Redwood National and State Parks (RNSP). The Park is located along the northern coast of California, and it attracts visitors from all over the United States and the world. The summer months are the busiest time of year.

The National Park Service and California State Parks have put a great deal of effort into their murrelet messaging. The study objectives are to evaluate the murrelet interpretive materials using best practices in the field of interpretation and to gather information from visitors about what messages they remember and their attitudes toward murrelets.

On-site data collection occurred from May through July 2010. Three instruments were used to collect data from visitors -- a survey was completed by 650 visitors, interviews were conducted with 179 visitors, and observations were made of 596 visitors.

Data was collected at Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park, Del Norte Coast Redwoods State Park, and Jedediah Smith Redwood State Park. There were several sampling sites within each of these parks.

Visitor Characteristics

According to results from the written survey, approximately 52% of visitors were male. Most visitors (25.1%) were between the ages of 18 and 29 years. Not surprisingly, a majority of the visitors were white (87.4%), highly educated (over 63% had completed college or graduate school), and most visitors were financially well off (a median household income of between \$60,000 and \$80,000). Over half of visitors (54.3%) had never been to RNSP before. Family groups were the most common (62.3%) visitor group type.

Visitor Attitudes toward Murrelets and Corvids

Most visitors have attitudes toward wildlife that are in line with the messages promoted by management. The question that had most visitors in agreement was “Marbled murrelets are important to protect.” There was also strong group disagreement that “The Parks think it’s ok to feed jays, ravens, or crows.”

Interpretive Messaging

This study focuses on two different types of marbled murrelet messaging in Redwood National and State Parks (RNSP), and how effective those mediums and messages are at meeting targeted goals. First is the written messaging that visitors receive in the form of signs, rack cards, visitor guide articles, children’s coloring pages, magnets, buttons and postcards. Second is the oral messaging that visitors receive in visitor centers, campground check-in kiosks, campfire programs, guided hikes, and from roving rangers. This report summarizes what is being done well and what improvements can be made to make murrelet messaging in RNSP more effective.

Written Interpretive Messaging

All written messages provided to the researchers were analyzed for technical aspects as well as message type. Detailed analyses for each item can be found toward the end of this report. Overall, the written materials did a good job at conveying a sense of what the problem is (feeding corvids that then eat murrelet eggs and chicks). Messaging could be improved by shortening the overall length, stating the targeted message earlier in the text, including a very specific targeted behavioral message regarding the care that should be taken with any food in the park, providing a picture of the corvids and placing messages in closer proximity to where visitors would have to encounter them.

Oral Interpretive Messaging

For oral messaging, campfire programs were evaluated using a similar method as the written messaging and were found to be of wide ranging effectiveness depending on presenter. There were some programs that gave great thematic messages about marbled murrelets that were woven carefully into the program. There were other programs where a main message regarding marbled murrelets could not be identified. The best murrelet messages were those that were

incorporated into the larger program. Roving interpretive messages were not consistently provided, and when they were seemed to be very impactful. Oral messaging could be improved by providing consistent messages with very specific behavioral targeted requests that are integrated into programs seamlessly.

Overall Effectiveness at Impacting Visitors

The survey and interview data show that many visitors are attending to and remembering the target messages regarding murrelets. The effectiveness can be improved by simplifying the messages, providing them first and with frequency, ensuring that all personnel are trained in and capable of delivering targeted messages, and making behavioral requests specific and clear. Given that the majority of visitors were first time users and most could answer messaging questions correctly, the Parks are generally doing a good job at communicating the target messages.

Other Observations Made by Researchers

The researchers made a few observations about jays, ravens and crows throughout the course of the project. It was observed that jays that get the most food wait at a campsite while a group is eating. Then, as soon as the group leaves, the jays swoop in. Children are also responsible for quite a few incidents where food is deliberately thrown at the birds. Big Tree at Prairie Creek has the most aggressive corvids of all the survey locations.

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