

How did County Workers keep the birds away and out of the Willows Memorial Park?

It was quite a year for the County Facilities Division staff assisted by the City of Willows Public Works staff at keeping the birds out of the Memorial Park this past nesting season. Bobbé Lewis, Facilities Manager, is proud to report that they won the battle against the birds. “We aren’t really sure which of the SCARE tactics was the “driving force” at keeping the birds away this year, but we did not stop any of them to find out.”

After pruning of the trees, the city with their lift truck strung up 3’ strips of reflective tape and some eye balloons/balls throughout the tree branches (up to 50’ in height). Then Christmas lights were strung around the branches and were lit up for a couple hours each night. Next they wired up cop car light bars that were taken off of wrecked vehicles donated by the Fleet Service. On the roof of the Memorial Hall, the County installed a sound system that the Glenn County Health Services Agency purchased ... it was equipped with six speakers that were installed along the west side of the Memorial Hall roof’s parapet; it was wired to a sprinkler timer that allowed the system to be programmed to come on and off for four different cycles. It started out hooting like an owl, then it would let off gunshot sounds (very loud and from 2 different speakers), then there were a couple of deep scary cougar growls (this seemed to really irritate the birds), and finally a whistle blew a couple of times in an ear piercing tone. The County received a propane Zon gun and positioned it up on the roof of the Memorial Hall. The gun was donated by a local contractor whose family farms rice. It was the last tactic of choice because it was very loud.

The Christmas lights and cop car lights were powered by a 12 volt battery that was trickle-charged throughout the day time using solar panels. It was positioned on a wood platform about 40’ off the ground up in a big evergreen tree, so that it could not be stolen or vandalized. After a week of really windy days, one of the solar panels began to malfunction and the lights quit working, the reflective tapes were almost completely blown off of the tree limbs and of the ten balloon/balls, there were only three remaining. The malfunctioning solar panel began to let off a high-pitched squealing noise that was so irritating it was thought that maybe this squeal had become a major tactic at keeping the birds moving. Also, there was a pair of hawks that nested in the big old redwood tree in front of the attorney’s office located across the street from the park and those hawks really kept the egret birds on the run!

One morning, there were approximately 20 birds combined in the trees next to the Memorial Hall and in the Park and at 7:00 a.m. when half of the County crew arrived for work, they started up the scare tactics and the birds were very resistant. It worried everyone. Then out came one of the hawks, it dive bombed one of the biggest egrets of the group and all of the birds simultaneously up and flew away. It seemed Mother Nature was hard at work with the County staff.

The most effective of the scare tactics was to slap two 2"x4" wood pieces together; it made such a piercing loud noise, that workers started using ear plugs. The County staff found it humorous ... that the primitive and most inexpensive devices seemed to work the best. The Facilities Manager was heard saying, "I wish I could put a family of hawks in the budget for the next 5 years."

There was a "HOTLINE TELEPHONE NUMBER" established for property owners living in the City of Willows that found birds in their own trees on their property. The City of Willows monitored the hotline and their staff called back or went out to help the property owners to perform the tactics that were working and taught them how to keep the birds moving which worked well for various city property owners. The collaboration between the city and county was very productive and successful.

Towards the end of the harassment period, one city property owner located on Elm Street opted to not perform any of the scare tactics and the birds established nests. As soon as one egg is spotted in a nest, all harassment and scare tactics are immediately stopped because these species of birds migrate, and all migratory birds are protected by federal law. The flock of the birds on Elm Street remained in those trees until late September.

The Glenn County and Willows City workers would like to thank the residential property owners living near the vicinity of the Memorial Park for their patience and understanding during this difficult period of time. The noises were deployed starting in the early evening hours and went off periodically throughout the middle of the night and in the very early morning hours. Only one complaint was received regarding the noises that were used to keep the birds moving along.

If anyone has questions, please feel free to call the Glenn County Planning & Public Works Agency, specifically the Facilities Division at (530) 934-6545. A brochure that highlights the story of the Birds is available for anyone interested.