



Colorado Native Bird
Care and Conservation

P.O. Box 2697
Lyons, CO 80540

Tree Trimming Guide

Just like humans, songbirds build homes to raise their babies and stay safe. While many people think songbirds only nest high up in the trees, the truth is they nest other places like bushes, cavities (holes in a tree), on the ground; in human dwellings, under bridges. A songbird nest can be as tiny as 1.5 inches in diameter to as large as 1.5 feet. Most are 3 to 6 inches in diameter, they're small and well camouflaged.

From April through September, Colorado is a nursery for different resident and migratory species of songbirds. Unfortunately, this period of time also coincides with the time of year that many humans trim trees, shrubs and clear brush from their property. It is unhealthy for your vegetation to be pruned at this time because it opens the plant up to more viruses and pests. And these activities can destroy active nests and reduce the availability of nest sites for our songbirds. So, it is best for trees and shrubs AND the birds, to save these projects for the late fall and winter.

If you *must* trim a tree or prune a shrub during the breeding season, carefully inspect the area before you begin the project. Songbirds are masters at concealing their nests, making it very difficult for the observer to spot an active nest.

Before trimming, quietly observe the proposed project area from a distance of about 50 feet for at least a few days.

- Look and listen as you approach the proposed project area.
- Are adult birds collecting food? Observe where they fly to deliver the food.
- Watch for birds entering the tree or bush. Listen for the food call of young or calls of an adult.
- Are you being scolded or dive bombed by an angry bird? If so, there is a nest nearby.

If you begin trimming, pruning or clearing and discover an active nest, you must cease the work immediately. All native birds, their chicks, eggs and nests are protected by a federal law called the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Birds are also protected by Colorado state laws. These laws state that it is against the law to harm, harass, possess or kill a native bird, its eggs, chicks or active nest. Violation may result in heavy fines and sometimes even a jail sentence.

If you observe someone destroying or disturbing an active nest, report them immediately to Colorado Department of Fish and Wildlife at (303) 866-3437 or call us at CNBCC at (303) 823-2326. Be prepared to provide the exact location, as well as vehicle license plates and company name if applicable. If possible, take photos and collect evidence (dead or live chicks, broken eggs).

Many people ask, can I move an active nest to another location? No. Parent birds choose a nest location for very specific reasons. Safety from predators, protection from the elements and proximity to food and water are important criteria birds use to select the perfect nest site – not too different from the criteria we humans use. Disturbing or relocating an active nest is a form of harassment, which is a violation of the federal and state laws that protect the birds. This form of harassment can also cause parent birds to abandon their chicks or eggs.

If you accidentally displace a songbird nest, call CNBCC at (303) 823-2326. We can help you with a solution that will keep the babies with their parents. With careful observation and good planning, you can help protect great numbers of songbirds. In turn, our native songbirds can achieve breeding success and healthy populations, and continue to grace the natural world with their beauty and ecological benefits.