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SURVEY FOR BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT HERONS AND GREAT BLUE HERONS

SURVEY FOR BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT HERONS AND GREAT BLUE HERONS AT PORTS O' CALL, LOS ANGELES MARITIME MUSEUM AND WORLD CRUISE CENTER, PORT OF LOS ANGELES

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INTRODUCTION

Black-crowned night herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) and great blue herons (*Ardea herodias*) have been known to nest and roost in large trees in the vicinity of Ports O' Call Village, Los Angeles Harbor (MBC 2002a). Both species have also nested in tall trees at Reservation Point in Los Angeles Harbor (MBC 2000a). Reservation point is about 0.5 mi southeast of Ports O' Call Village. Other local nesting sites are in the Port of Long Beach and the City of Long Beach.

METHODS

On 9 May 2008, MBC biologists Carol Paquette and Wayne Dossett conducted a survey of black-crowned night herons and great blue herons in the area of Ports O' Call Village, Los Angeles Maritime Museum, and World Cruise Center, between 0915 and 1200 hr. All large trees in the parking lots and around the buildings were investigated, using binoculars. Trees investigated included (but were not limited to) Indian laurels, Mexican fan palms, Eucalyptus, Brazilian pepper, coral tree, jacaranda, paperbark (*Melaleucca*), Chinese elm, and Canary Island date palm.

RESULTS

The survey began at the south end, at Ports O' Call Village. A black-crowned night heron nest was seen in a tall Mexican fan palm, one of a cluster of palms at the main entrance to the Ports O' Call businesses (Photo 1). The nest was large and well-built, but did not appear to be active (no droppings on the nest or the palm leaves and no egg shells or droppings on the ground). Signs of black-crowned night heron roosting (large areas of bird droppings on the ground) were seen at only three trees: one at the south end of the parking lot and another nearby next to the southern-most building, and the third, a large Indian laurel near S. P. Slip (Photo 2), where fishing boats are tied up. Five black-crowned night herons (four adults and one one-year-old) were observed on light posts and superstructures of fishing boats in that area.

Farther to the north, between the main Village area and the Maritime Museum, evidence of roosting was seen at two coral trees next to a water-side restaurant (Photo 3).

A well-built nest and a partial (disintegrating ?) nest were seen in two tall Mexican fan palms on the south side of the Maritime Museum (Photo 4). Neither nest showed evidence of nesting activity.

The Canary Island date palms that extend from the World Cruise Center entrance south along the new water basin (with fountains), next to the Waterfront Red Car Line, were examined, but no evidence of nesting or roosting was observed in any of those trees (Photo 5). The Mexican fan palms in that area are smaller than those in Ports O' Call Village, and did not appear to be suitable for nesting. The date palms and Indian laurels along the Cruise Ship Promenade (north side of the cruise ship basin to the SS Lane Victory) were also checked (Photo 6).

Other birds seen in the survey area included lesser goldfinch, American crow, rock pigeon, house sparrow, house finch, Pacific-slope flycatcher, northern mockingbird, European starling, mourning dove, and Western gull. Rock pigeons, house sparrows, house finches, northern mockingbirds, European starlings, and mourning doves probably nest in the area. House sparrows and starlings in particular undoubtedly use the Canary Island date palms, which provide crannies for these cavity-nesting birds.

DISCUSSION

Nests in two trees, both tall Mexican palms, suggest probable nesting in the survey area, but it was not possible to confirm that. Probable roosting was assumed for only three locations, all of them in the Ports O' Call area. No great blue herons or great blue heron nests were seen.

Many of the trees examined in the Ports O' Call Village area appeared to be suitable for black-crowned night heron or great blue heron nesting. Black-crowned night herons prefer trees with a dense canopy, such as Indian laurels, and the nesting birds choose sites with overhead cover (Hamilton 1996, MBC 1997-1999, 2000b, 2001, 2002a, 2003-2007), but they will nest in a variety of tree types, including palms (MBC 2000a). Great blue herons usually nest at or near the top of a tree, with the nest open to the sky, but will also use industrial structures, such as towers and cranes (MBC 2000a, 2002b). Although no herons were seen in the survey area (only at the adjacent fishing slip), evidence of recent roosting was found at a few locations, such as the coral trees at a Ports O' Call Village restaurant. The reason for the absence of active nests and roosting birds on the survey day is unknown.

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APPENDIX
SURVEY PHOTOS

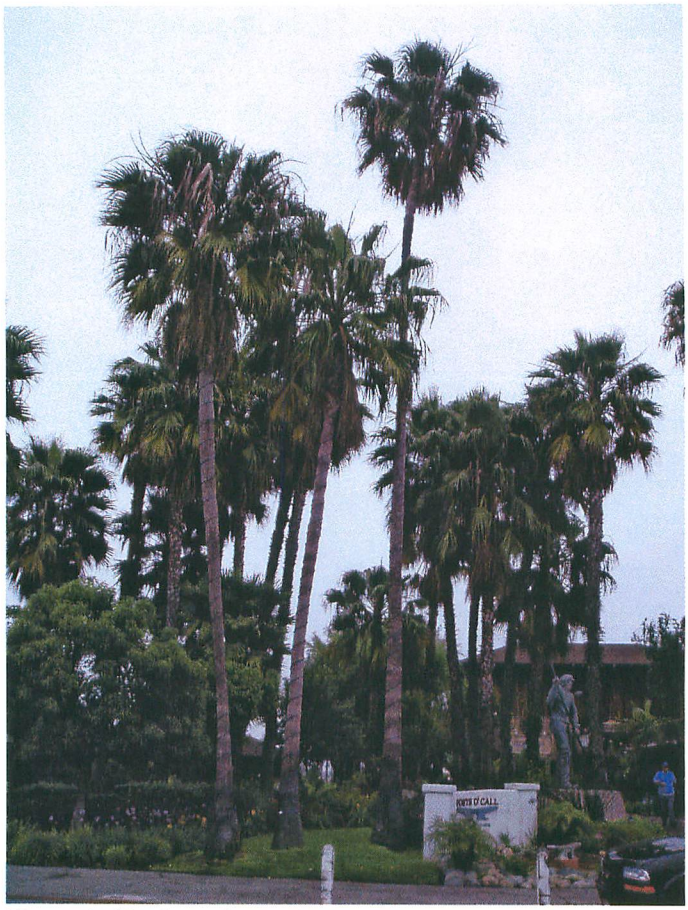

Photo 1. Mexican fan palm (tallest palm) with an inactive black-crowned night heron nest, Ports O' Call Village. 9 May 2008.

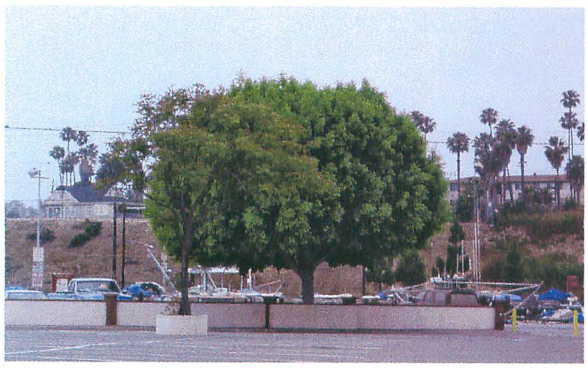

Photo 2. Indian laurel, Ports O' Call Village parking lot, near S. P. Slip, below which was seen large areas of bird droppings, indicating roosting and perhaps nesting of black-crowned night herons. No nests were seen. 9 May 2008.

Photo 3. Coral trees at a Ports O' Call Village restaurant, with evidence of roosting. 9 May 2008.

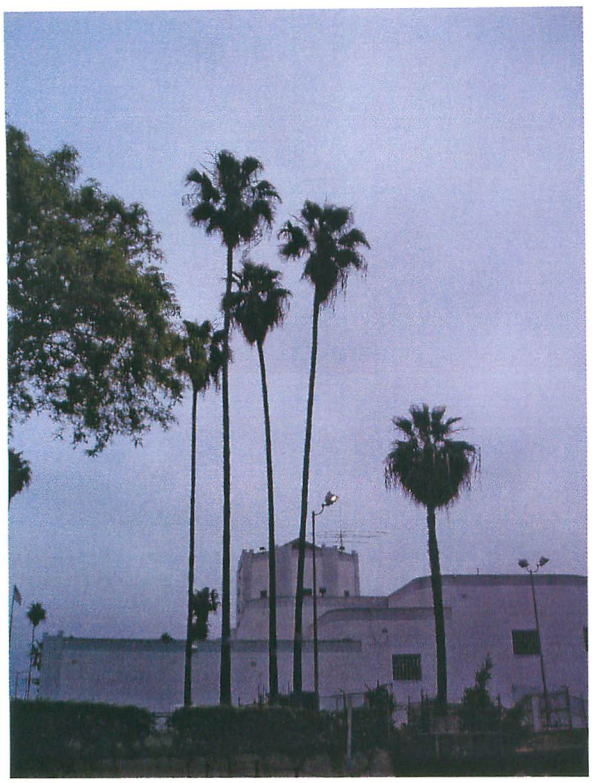

Photo 4. Mexican fan palms (with black-crowned night heron nest and nest fragment) at the Los Angeles Maritime Museum. 9 May 2008.

Photo 5. Canary Island date palm at the World Cruise Center promenade (near the Waterfront Red Car Line). 9 May 2008.

Photo 6. Canary Island date palms along the Cruise Ship Promenade. 9 May 2008.