

Dead trees can support a lot of life

Although clearing away dead branches and trees is customary stewardship on ranches, leaving those dead trees in place can provide important resources for wildlife. More than 80 species of birds rely on dead trees (called snags) for nesting, food storing, hunting, roosting, and resting. Mammals, reptiles, and insects rely on snags as well. This is particularly true in oak woodlands, where a large variety of bird species eat the insects attracted to decaying wood, store acorns in the soft wood of standing snags, and make nests in their cavities. Leaving dead trees on your property is a simple way to help birds and other wildlife.

Woodpeckers need something to peck on!

A good example of a bird that relies on snags is the woodpecker. Although woodpeckers have sturdy beaks designed for chipping away at wood, the birds prefer the softer dead or decaying wood in snags, where they find a variety of insects. Snags also provide good lookout towers for flycatchers and raptors. Nature creates snags via fire, lightning strikes, old age, and disease. If you are interested in providing wildlife habitat on your land, it's best to leave dead trees where they stand, but we understand that this is not always possible.

Here are some tips:

- If a dead tree is causing a problem on your property, consider removing only part of it. Everything counts in nature.
- If you must remove a dead tree or branch, consider relocating it somewhere birds and wildlife can take advantage of it. Good locations are near water, near live trees, and on the edges of fields.
- Tree trunks that have been removed from the ground can be placed into holes elsewhere on your property.



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Acorn Woodpecker with hoard. Johnathan Nightingale/Flickr.