

Protect birds and wildlife from the dangers of open pipes

Exposed vertical pipes with open tops pose a tremendous hazard to birds and other wildlife. They are particularly hazardous for birds that either fall into these openings, or enter looking for nesting space. Once inside, birds are unable to open their wings to fly out, and the smooth sides make it impossible to climb out. Inevitably, the birds suffer a miserable, unnecessary death from starvation and exposure.

Open pipes are a threat to all birds

Open pipes kill birds indiscriminately. Both common birds and protected species have been found among the layers of dead birds in open pipes. And the destruction can occur in pipes from one to 10 inches wide.

Audubon California staff recently pulled down a 20-foot-tall ventilation pipe from an abandoned irrigation system and discovered a seven-foot-long black mass composed entirely of decomposed carcasses of hundreds of dead birds and animals including kestrels, flickers, bluebirds, and fence lizards. The date etched into the concrete at the base of the pipe showed that it had been in place for more than 50 years.

Where open top vertical pipes can occur

Open vertical pipes occur in more places than you might think, including:

- Sign posts
- Fences
- Survey markers
- Buildings
- Irrigation systems
- Put screens over sapling protector tubes, or leave openings at the bottom for birds and wildlife to escape
- Unused chimneys

How you can help on your property

- Look around and identify all the open top vertical pipes on your property.
- Cap, close, remove or screen all of them.
- When you use
- When you visit other properties – public or private – share what you know about the dangers of open pipes



Above, an open irrigation system ventilation pipe. Below, carcasses and bones of birds and other wildlife that collected at the bottom of an open pipe (photo by Jeff King).

