



NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

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Owls Moving In ***Civic Center Rats Concerned***

San Rafael, CA - Marin County Parks and the Marin County Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Program, in partnership with Wildcare and the Hungry Owl Project, will be installing new owl boxes at the Marin Civic Center on Saturday, September 10. The County's IPM Ordinance and Policy guide all decisions relative to dealing with pests. Rats have become an increasing problem at the Civic Center. We are not using poisons on County property to control rats, and trapping alone has not fully addressed the problem. Owls are an important part of the environmental web when it comes to managing rodents and sustaining a healthy, toxic-free environment.

While most raptors prefer to nest in areas that are relatively undisturbed by human activity, owls have historically staked out nesting sites that are sometimes right in the midst of considerable human hustle and bustle, including the bushy and ivy laden surroundings of the Marin County Civic Center. Attracted by a reliable population of small rodents in the ground-hugging vegetation, owls have already made themselves at home in an owl box on site.

Despite the best efforts of our existing small Civic Center owl community, in the past year the rodent population has increased and the rats have developed a taste for the internal mechanisms of County vehicles stored near the County garages. Electrical systems have been chewed to pieces, tubing and upholstery and carpet have been ripped out by the industrious rodents and used to build their nests. In keeping with the County's IPM program, County staff consulted with experts in the field and increased the number of rat traps placed around Civic Center grounds. The traps have been very effective in reducing the rat population without using harmful poisons, and the damage to County vehicles has decreased noticeably. However, the rats are too numerous to be managed with traps and the owls currently in residence.

Through collaboration with the Marin County IPM Program, Wildcare and the Hungry Owl Project, this is a creative approach that we hope will improve conditions even more. Volunteers are the key to making IPM programs like this work. If you think you want to be part of the solution and help this effort, you are invited to contact: the Hungry Owl Project at hungryowl.org, Wildcare at wildcarebayarea.org, or the Marin County IPM Program Coordinator Ed Hulme at (415) 499-6531.

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