

YOLO FLYWAY

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Transitions at the Wildlife Area

by Ann Brice, Co-Executive Director

Full is a time of transition at the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area, and the most dramatic change is the flood-up of the seasonal ponds. Over the summer, the landscape, which was a palette of greens in the



Photo credit: Susan Nishio

spring, becomes a patchwork of browns. Not only has the rain stopped, but the water is drawn down to allow for seed plant germination, weed removal, and maintenance. Cattle are even brought in to help graze the unwanted plants. The rice, of course, adds color to the scene and provides a source of water for wildlife over the hottest months.

It's fascinating to watch the water seep into the big ponds when the pumps are turned on. It follows a course of swales that has been designed in the wetlands. In mid-September observers were treated to the sight of Swainson's Hawks standing in front of the water line waiting for small creatures to run out of the water's path.

Within days of starting the pumps the waterfowl arrive. The mosquito district allows some fields to be flooded in early September

at the Wildlife Area, but open water is still a rare commodity on the flyway then, and the ducks quickly find it. Early arrivals include Mallards, Pintails and various teals. Terry Colborn, who led a moonrise field trip at the Wildlife Area on September 19th, estimates that more than 6,000 ducks flew off one of the permanent ponds as the delighted tour participants watched the moon come up.

Another sure sign of fall is the rice harvest. The wild rice is harvested wet, and the Great Egrets and White-faced Ibis were seen following in large numbers as the big machinery lumbered along exposing the invertebrates, like crayfish. The wild rice harvest was finished by mid-September, and the white rice, which is harvested dry, follows in October.

As the days shorten and the nighttime temperatures drop, the bats begin to leave us. The moms and their young that were born here over the summer have started their migration. Corky Quirk, our resident bat expert, led a record 39 bat tours this summer, and everyone left well satisfied with the spectacle of tens of thousands of bats emerging

at dusk, including a Peregrine Falcon who wowed the crowd with his aerial acrobatics and ability to eat on the fly!

In addition to the arrival of waterfowl, another indication of autumn is the passage of Sandhill Cranes overhead with their distinctive calls. We wish that more would land at the Wildlife Area, but we're happy to know that they'll be nearby, both north and south of us.

Finally, we're waiting to see if the beavers that built the big lodge north of Parking Lot C will reappear now that there's water in their old neighborhood. Every summer, as the seasonal ponds are drained, the beavers move to areas with permanent water. Evidence of beavers delights the school children that visit the Wildlife Area. The *Discover the Flyway* school program begins in late September every year—a sure sign that fall has arrived. 



Photo credit: Rob Fieberke

Featured Volunteer: Cay Pratt

by Michael Herrera, Volunteer Coordinator

“Out-of-door life takes the child afield and keeps him in the open air, which not only helps him physically and occupies his mind with sane subjects, but keeps him out of mischief. It is not only during childhood that this is true, for love of nature counts much for sanity in later life. This is an age of nerve tension, and the relaxation which comes from the comforting companionship found in woods and fields is, without doubt, the best remedy for this condition.” Handbook of Nature-Studies for Teachers and Parents, Anna Botsford Comstock, 1911

If you’ve been involved with environmental education in the area, chances are you have met or heard of Cay Pratt. Cay has been sharing her passion for outdoor education and nature with the community for over four decades. Her contributions include: writing a book for the City of Davis Child Care Services; being the first Education Chair for the Davis Audubon Society (now the Yolo Audubon Society); helping to develop an on-site outdoor education program for the U.C. Davis Arboretum and leading tours there for students of all ages as well as being a docent at Jepson Prairie and Yolo Basin Foundation.

With an undergraduate degree in bacteriology from Cornell, where she was in the same graduating class as Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and a masters in education from UC Davis, Cay has the formal education to back her accomplishments, but this self-taught naturalist, while acknowledging the importance of coursework, attributes much of her education simply to reading books.

Cay was born in the Philippines where her father was working for National City Bank of New York, now known as Citicorp. When she was nine, life changed dramatically. In December 1941, Japan attacked the Philippines. Cay and her family, along with 4000 other ‘enemy civilians’ were gathered and transported to an internment camp at the University of Santo Tomas. A community, including a school

for the children, soon formed within the wall surrounding the camp. Cay would spend the next three years of her life at Santo Tomas. “At first it wasn’t too bad. We had contact with people outside the camp and access to food, letters, and supplies, but once Japan started to lose the war, they made it tougher and tougher on us. Eventually,” Cay recalls, “all we had to eat was rice soup.”

After being ‘liberated’ by the 1st Cavalry and 44th Tank Division in February 1945, Cay and her family were brought to the United States, but they returned to the Philippines in 1946 where she attended an American high school for two years before finishing high school at an Episcopal boarding school in New York.

In 8th grade, Cay was given a copy of Anna B. Comstock’s classic 1911 *Handbook of Nature-Studies for Teachers and Parents* by her aunt, but it wasn’t until much later while living in Wisconsin that natural history became an interest for her. She started giving tours for the arboretum at the University of Wisconsin and became involved with leading nature walks through oak woods and reconstructed prairie to elementary students for Madison School District.

Cay and her family moved to Davis in 1970 when her husband was offered a position at UC Davis. By then they had four children. It didn’t take long for Cay to start her adventures as a “freelance naturalist” as she puts it. The next spring she began leading tours to potential students at the UC Davis Arboretum.

Cay’s fondness for nature, passion for learning, and desire to teach children to



Photo credit: Kim Elson

observe the world through an ecological lens helped create a path that led her to Yolo Basin Foundation. She had made several friends who encouraged her to become involved with YBF. She and David first became members in 2004 and have since been very active members, regularly attending YBF’s speaker series Flyway Nights and participating in events such as Bucks for Ducks, Duck Days, and seasonal tours. Both have volunteered their time, and Cay became a *Discover the Flyway* docent in 2010. “I’m very thankful for this program. It’s one of the few places left where kids can get this type of education.” In the past three years, Cay has contributed more than 400 hours of her time to the DTF program and recently helped train new docents.

Volunteering is often looked at as a ‘feel good’ experience, a way to help others, but it is also a way to create a community that is representative of our beliefs and values. Cay’s dedication, knowledge, and generosity have touched and inspired many in our community. Yolo Basin Foundation is fortunate to have Cay as a volunteer and grateful for her commitment to the education of future generations. 



Photo credit: Ann Burris

September 25th was the first *Discover the Flyway* field trip of the 2013-2014 school year. Thirty-one second grade students from Sacramento spent the morning experiencing four hands-on interactive science-based activities at the YBWA Headquarters Demonstration Wetlands. After lunch, they learned how to use binoculars. Next, the students loaded up in their chaperones' cars and caravanned out to the Wildlife Area for a time of discovery. They saw lots of different birds, including two Virginia Rails. A rare viewing indeed, not only for the students, parents and teacher, but also for the *DTF* staff and volunteers. A great way to start the year! — a report from Ann Burris



After three months with no school groups at the Demonstration Wetlands and the Wildlife Area, everyone at Yolo Basin Foundation was excited to have the first class arrive... well, *almost* everyone. The mother turkey and her eight full grown offspring weren't so thrilled. They had the entire Demo Wetlands and the adjoining alfalfa fields to themselves all summer. The sounds of the exuberant children sent them fleeing for the bushes!

The Kids are Back!

Welcome to Our New Interns



This fall we have three new interns helping with the *Discover the Flyway* program. Seen here is Heidi Satter, Education Coordinator, (left) explaining the pond activity to Katelyn Blake. She is a junior at Sac State with experience working with children outdoors.



Lubna Khan (left) and Maria del Carmen Sanchez Esquinas (right) helping to organize the binoculars bin. Lubna is a senior at Sac State majoring in biology, and Maria is from Spain with a degree in biology and experience working at an environmental education center in Cordoba.

Statistics for *Discover the Flyway* 2012-2013 Program Year

Category	Detail	Numbers
Who Was Served	Classes	141
	Schools	59
	School districts	16
	Counties	5
Field Trips & Training	Teaching days (one or more field trip/day)	117
	Teacher workshops	2
	Volunteer hours	2258
	Intern hours	360
Number of People Attending	Students	3,695
	Percentage from underserved schools	30%
	Teachers	141
	Parents accompanying classes	821
Bus Mini-Grants for Students from Underserved Schools	Number of buses	40
	Number of classes	48
	Number of students benefiting from buses	1,257

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The Yolo Basin Foundation is a non-profit public benefit corporation dedicated to the appreciation and stewardship of wetlands and wildlife through education and innovative partnerships.

To become a member of Yolo Basin Foundation, go to:
www.yolobasin.org and select "Join/Donate Now"



Bucks for Ducks 2013

a fundraiser for yolo basin foundation

Friday, November 15, 2013 • 5:30 - 9:00 pm
Freeborn Hall, UC Davis Campus, Davis, CA

\$60 per person. For a full listing of the evening's activities and to purchase tickets, please go to www.yolobasin.org or call 530.757.3780.