

Tricolored Blackbirds Nest at Wildlife Area

by Robert Meese, Ph.D., UC Davis

On June 25th, 2009 Mary Schiedt of the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area and Dr. Robert Meese, an ecologist in the Department of Environmental Science & Policy at the University of California, Davis, observed several thousand tricolored blackbirds, *Agelaius tricolor*, a California species of special concern, in Field 20 at the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area. Numerous female tricolors were observed to be carrying nest materials, indicating that the birds had just recently arrived and had begun to nest. Dr. Meese, who has been working with tricolors for five years, communicated with Dave Feliz, Wildlife Area Manager, and obtained permission to monitor the colony and to trap and band breeding birds. This year's tricolor colony, the first at this location since the Wildlife Area was established in 1997, was subsequently estimated to consist of 5,600 breeding birds and by the end of July had fledged an estimated 3,200 young.

In addition to monitoring the breeding by the tricolored blackbirds at the Wildlife Area, Dr. Meese, assisted by

Wildlife Area employees Mary Schiedt and Levi Souza and several volunteer assistants, trapped and banded tricolors. In 14 days of banding, the team banded 4,233 adult and



Photo credits: Dave Feliz and Robert Meese

18 fledgling tricolors and 14

yellow-headed blackbirds. In addition, the team recaptured 99 birds, that is, captured birds which had previously been banded

elsewhere, including 3 individuals that had been banded in 2007 and 43 in 2009 at the Conaway Ranch in Yolo County, and one that was originally banded in April of this year on a private duck club in Kern County, 383 km away. Other recaptured birds were originally banded at colonies in Merced, Yuba, and Colusa Counties. These recaptured birds helped to "fill in the blanks" in our understanding of where and when birds move among breeding sites.

The successful breeding by tricolored blackbirds at the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area in 2009 contributed substantially to statewide

conservation efforts, demonstrated that several years of active management has created ideal breeding conditions for tricolors and other marsh-dependent species, enhanced our understanding of the movements

of tricolors through space and time, and provided Wildlife Area visitors a rare opportunity to view a breeding colony of one of California's most charismatic bird species. 

The Delta

As you can see from Melanie Pope's article on page 3, Yolo Basin Foundation's education programs are as successful as ever. We are very busy with the conservation part of our mission as well. In the past year we co-sponsored the Lower Yolo Bypass Planning Forum and offered a locally-based set of alternatives for improving fish habitat in the Yolo Bypass. The Planning Forum developed two important position statements that have been sent to the Bay Delta Conservation Plan Steering Committee. To read these two groundbreak-

Conservation Update

by Robin Kulakow, Executive Director

ing documents you can go to: <http://www.yolobypass.net>.

We continue to educate state legislators and their staff on the important work being done on the Wildlife Area and how proposed Delta "fixes" may impact the quality of habitat, agri-

culture, flood control, environmental education and other public uses in the Yolo Bypass. We participate in the many Delta discussions taking place as part of our role as the leader of the Yolo Bypass Working Group and as participants in the Yolo County Water Resources Association's Integrated Regional Water Management Plan. We also sit on the Central Valley Joint Venture Delta Committee.

Transmission Lines

Yolo Basin Foundation participated in the discussions that eventually led to the end of

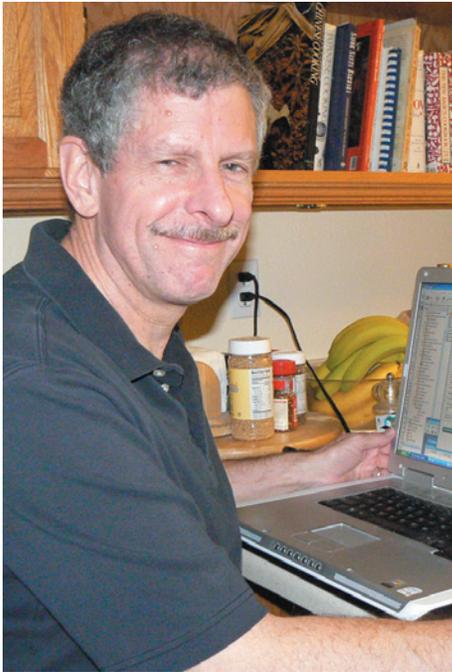
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Featured Volunteer: Website Wonder—Evan Fletcher

by Sarah Ross, Volunteer Coordinator

The phrase “for more information, please go to our website at www...” is one commonly utilized by organizations these days. And the Yolo Basin Foundation staff has confidence using it, thanks to one person--volunteer Evan Fletcher.

Evan first started volunteering at YBF in 2006. We know this because he checked his



computer files for the website, and the earliest date was December 2006. So, in fact, Evan was volunteering for the Foundation before he was even a signed-up volunteer! Like many involved here, he came to be a volunteer in a round about way. He and his wife Judy have been friends of Robin Kulakow, Executive Director of YBF, and her husband Bill Julian for years. Evan's son was in day care with Robin and Bill's daughter Leah for the first three or four years of their lives. Evan says “We go back 13 or 14 years. But more recently - summer of 2006 I think - our families were at a party held by mutual friends. Robin said something about needing someone to maintain the YBF website and I volunteered.” Lucky us!

In “real life” Evan works as a project scientist in a neurology lab at UC Davis. Evan describes his work as being “a lot of software development and application. Our lab studies brain issues related to healthy aging and dementia, using MRI brain images stored in our computer system.”

Somehow Evan fits the constant updating of events, formats and images on the YBF website around his work. He says he usually does this late at night or early in the morning. Now we really feel guilty! At present, the Yolo Basin Foundation is trying to get all of the ticketing and reservations systems associated with Duck Days, Bat Tours and the Gaggles of Gatherings onto an online system called Ticket Turtle. Evan has been very involved in the website end of this. While he says the website work is fairly straightforward and that he is always given ample notice by YBF staff, we know in fact that that is not always true and are hugely grateful for the patience Evan shows with us and for his many initiatives and his understanding of what we are trying to achieve here at the Yolo Basin Foundation.

In his spare time (thank goodness he has some after we've tried to fill it) Evan stays fit working out at the gym. I know--I see him there. He also enjoys reading, playing video games with his son and his son's friends, and he teaches a class about theories of consciousness to UC Davis freshmen once a year.

When asked what he enjoyed about volunteering with the Yolo Basin Foundation, Evan replied “I enjoy you all: the contact and satisfaction of knowing you and working for something that is important. Being connected to nice people! And I also enjoy working on websites - making pages look nice is quite satisfying.” Funny – that's what we YBF folks enjoy about wonderful volunteers like Evan and their work. Next time you look at our website www.yolobasin.org and notice that there has been an update, think of Evan who has been working away on it, probably when the rest of us were asleep. Thanks Evan! 🐼



Education Wrap-up

by Melanie Pope, Education Director

The 2008-2009 field trip season for the *Discover the Flyway* school program was as busy as ever! With thousands of students visiting this past school year, we were very thankful that our docent volunteer team reached new heights—we grew from 11 to 20, just about doubling the force that clocked in a whopping 1,300 plus volunteer hours! With the help of our docents, as well as our wonderful student interns, we were able to bring the wetlands to life for students and chaperones alike.

The need for schools to find outside funding for field trip busses was very apparent this past school year since we received more requests than ever for our “Transportation

Basin Foundation members, board members and staff, as well as the staff of the Department of Fish and Game and California Waterfowl, have made our school year very successful! Each of you has helped educate our visiting teachers and chaperones and has contributed to memorable wetlands experiences for our students. We look forward to another successful *Discover the Flyway* school year in 2009-2010, and we are grateful for your strong commitment and support of the program. 🦋



Did you know?
Out of almost 4,000 visiting students, we tracked that more than 750 have backgrounds in over 25 first languages, including Spanish, Russian, and Hmong!

Mini-Grants.” We anticipate an even greater need for the coming year. The program received tremendous financial support from corporate donors, including Educational Legacy Fund, Kinder Morgan Foundation, Monsanto Community Fund, PG&E, Recreational Equipment Inc., River Cats Foundation, Teichert Foundation, and Wallis Foundation. Thanks to them, we were able to fund over 30 buses, providing a trip experience for over 1,000 students from under-served schools.

Thank you to our docents who have dedicated an amazing number of hours teaching during the field trips, as well as completing many behind the scenes preparation and repair projects. The efforts and support of the Yolo

Discover the Flyway School Program “Stats” for the 2008-2009 School Year

Total <i>Discover the Flyway</i> student visits since 1997:	34,706
Student visits:	3,837
Chaperones accompanying field trips:	981
Teaching days:	127
Participating schools:	64 <i>(54 public and 10 private)</i>
School districts served:	15
Counties served:	5 <i>(Yolo, Sacramento, Solano, Placer, El Dorado)</i>
Teachers trained (<i>Discover the Flyway</i> workshops):	50
Sponsored buses:	32 <i>(53 classes and 1035 students)</i>
Other student visits (Nature Bowl and Marsh Madness):	216
<i>Discover the Flyway</i> docent volunteer hours (Sept-June):	1320

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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.

Yolo Basin Foundation is grateful to the following donors:

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the proposed high power transmission line that was to bisect important open spaces and farmland in Yolo County, including the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area. We sponsored one Yolo Bypass Working Group meeting specifically to talk with Transmission Agency of California (TANC) staff and consultants. This landowner-based forum provided important information to the TANC planners that illuminated the large-scale impacts of putting an additional transmission line in the path of the millions of birds traveling the Pacific Flyway.

Wetlands Ordinance

A recent issue we are working on involves refining a draft ordinance proposed by the Yolo County Board of Supervisors to regulate wetland restoration in an attempt to control large scale out of county mitigation projects. We will be continuing discussions with California Audubon, California Waterfowl Association,

Ducks Unlimited and Yolo County supervisors and staff to ensure that local restoration projects on private lands can continue.

Flood Planning

Several years ago the Legislature passed Senate Bill 5 that directs the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) to complete a Central Valley Flood Protection Plan (CVFPP) by 2012. This summer DWR embarked on an ambitious effort to work from the ground up to complete a plan that all involved have a vested interest in. The Yolo Basin Foundation was asked to be part of several of their initial interest-based and region-based work groups. Since these work groups are time consuming, we decided to participate in the Delta Regional Conditions Work Group in this initial round of planning. For more information on CVFPP go to: <http://www.water.ca.gov/cvfmp>. 

To make a donation or become a member of Yolo Basin Foundation, please go to www.yolobasin.org and click on "Join/Donate Now."