

1916 – Yolo Causeway Opens

by Don Morrill, Development Director

During the winter until 1916 you could take the train between Sacramento and Davis and on to Oakland and San Francisco, but it was much harder to go by automobile or wagon. For six to eight months of the year in order to drive to San Francisco from Sacramento you had to go south to Stockton, and then west over the Altamont Pass.

During the summer season, when the flood waters subsided and the Basin lands dried out, a precariously passable road known as the “Tule Jake Road” was the only way to cross the Yolo Basin going west. That temporary road, reconstructed every year, was described by local press as a “concatenation of ruts and chuckholes.”

The automobile industry was still in its infancy in 1916, but was starting to boom, and the California Automobile Club had been formed in part to promote road construction. In 1905, the first 27 cars were sold in Sacramento. By 1910 some 700 cars were sold, and by 1911, 75 cars a day were bought by Sacramentans. The impetus to build the Causeway and other paved roads was driven by that early excitement and by the passionate embrace of the automobile and the industry it spawned.

By 1914, automobile sections were common in newspapers, and auto ads were an increasing source of income. Articles showing off new models and types of vehicles filled the papers. A local auto section headline in 1916 proclaimed the “THE DAWN OF A HORSELESS ERA” had begun.

Work began on a “Sacramento-Davis Trestle” in November 1914 to cross the Yolo Basin, and what was later called the “Yolo Causeway” was opened on Saturday, March 18, 1916. When the Causeway was built, it was touted to be the “longest concrete bridge



in the United States” and the “longest trestle in the world.”

The final trestle was 18 feet in height, 21 feet wide, and 3.1 miles long. Cars were allowed to travel up to a maximum of ten (10) miles per hour. The cost of the Causeway was a little less than \$400,000, which in today’s dollars would be about \$5.6 million. The Causeway reduced the 130 mile drive from

“Spring Flooding Imperils Bypass”

(This opinion piece appeared in the Op-Ed section of the *Davis Enterprise* on April 26, 2009.)

by Robin Kulakow and Ann Brice

Don’t throw the baby out with the bathwater! A measure contained in the Bay Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP) would do just that if it isn’t modified.

The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta ecosystem is in trouble. Governor Schwarzenegger has assembled an army of agency leaders, staff and consultants with the goal of solving the Delta ecosystem crisis and providing guaranteed water to Southern California people and farms before he leaves office. “Delta Vision,” published in November 2008, is the outcome of their effort, and the BDCP is a complex multi-party plan to carry out the goals of “Delta Vision” within the context of the state and federal endangered species acts.

A model for solving the Delta’s problems exists here in Yolo County—the 16,000-acre Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area, and the partnerships it was founded on. Instead of incorporating this successful model, policy makers are on their way to undoing 20 years of community effort to create and manage this amazing public resource.

The Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area, owned and operated by the CA Department of Fish and Game, exemplifies the power of diverse interests working together, and its success is possible because of widespread community and agency support that is based on a long running grassroots effort.

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It exists within the flood control function of the Bypass; it contributes to the agricultural economy of Yolo County; and it is an open space jewel for the regional community, all while providing a healthy, diverse wetlands ecosystem. The fact that the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area is located adjacent to the State Capitol means it is accessible to a large metropolitan population, and its impact on building a community environmental ethic should not be underestimated.

The BDCP proposes to construct a notch in the Fremont Weir in order to prolong spring flooding, fundamentally changing how the Bypass works. The Fremont Weir currently diverts up to 500,000 cubic feet per second of water into the Yolo Bypass when the Sacramento River reaches flood stage. The proposed modification would be used to flood the Bypass for a 45 day period between January and May in most years.

This proposal is based on studies that compared the health of young ocean-going salmon that were carried by floodwaters into the Bypass with similar smolts caught in the Sacramento River. The fish that migrated via the Bypass showed signs of being healthier than those that migrated through the channelized Sacramento River. It is hypothesized that the difference is based on time spent in the shallow waters of the Yolo Bypass floodplain.

While this proposed measure may improve the survival chances for some young salmon in a few more years than currently happens, it is only one among many actions that need to be completed to improve salmon survival throughout their life cycle to the ocean and back. The Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area Land Management Plan contains five other actions to improve conditions for salmon and other native fish without notching the Fremont Weir. A copy of the plan can be found on the Yolo Basin Foundation's website: www.yolobasin.org.

Increased frequency and duration of spring flooding will have a serious impact on agriculture and habitat management in the Yolo

Bypass, tipping the balance toward inviability. The extensive rice growing operations in the Bypass provide millions of dollars of income that contributes to the vibrant Yolo County agriculture economy as well as valuable habitat for water birds. The Yolo County Agriculture Commission estimates that the combination of rice and other crops plus ranching in the Yolo Bypass creates about \$44 million in direct farm income annually.

Rice farmers need to start preparing the ground and planting rice starting in March.

eration of emergent vegetation reduces the ability of the Yolo Bypass to move floodwaters away from urban areas as designed. Late spring flooding also adversely affects the success of ground nesting birds because the growth of grasses that provide cover is delayed.

Yolo Basin Foundation, the nonprofit associated with the Wildlife Area, is working to deliver the message to the members of the BDCP Steering Committee that there are other measures available to improve aquatic

habitat for fish while sustaining the existing high quality mosaic of farm fields and wetlands. We are encouraging them to work with us to develop a set of actions that builds upon the success of the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area and honors current management underway on public and private lands throughout the Yolo Bypass.

We also urge the citizens of Yolo County to weigh in on the BDCP effort by expressing support for the protection of the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area and the values it represents. The BDCP EIR/EIS scoping process is open for public comment until May 14th. For information

on how to submit comments go to <http://www.resources.ca.gov/bdcp/>. 

The Davis Enterprise

April 26, 2009

“A model for solving the Delta’s problems exists here in Yolo County... the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area and the partnerships it was founded on.”

There are already years in which spring flooding prevents this field work and the rice acreage decreases significantly. Increased spring flooding makes nearly every year a bad year for Bypass farmers and the habitat benefits they provide.

Agriculture, including ranching, is fully integrated into the management of the Wildlife Area. With the involvement of the Dixon Resource Conservation District, agricultural activities help Fish and Game fulfill their habitat goals while generating important income for the operation of the Wildlife Area. This income is what makes it possible for the Wildlife Area to be open to the public and managed in a way that creates and sustains diverse habitat.

Spring flooding is problematic in other ways. Floodwaters that linger into spring encourage the growth of tules, cattails, and willows which left unmanaged will slow down the movement of floodwaters. This prolif-

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Newsletter

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“Four and Twenty Blackbirds”

By Melanie Pope, Education Director

Mother Goose described these birds as singing and bursting out of the King’s pie, and as you make a visit to the Wildlife Area you will find various “blackbirds” swooping about, singing and socializing in the wetlands just like the animated birds that were released from the King’s meal.

The Wildlife Area hosts four main species in the Icterid family, including the Red-winged Blackbird, the Yellow-headed Blackbird, the Tricolored Blackbird and the Brewer’s Blackbird. Look closely at the coloring and size of the blackbirds in question and pay attention the time of year you are making your visit, and you will soon be able to differentiate among the numerous (guaranteed more than “four and twenty”) blackbirds of the Wildlife Area.

The **Red-winged Blackbird** (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) is probably the most abundant blackbird in the Wildlife Area at any given time of the year.



This mimics the fact that it is one of the most common birds in all of North America at any given time of the year. A male Red-winged Blackbird (8.5-8.75 inches in length) has many nest-building females in his territory and spends many hours maintaining his habitat. These birds may nest near each other at the water’s edge and share similar space but are not considered to be truly colonial. The male puffs up his red epaulets (sometimes highlighted with yellow below) to defend his territory against other males and to keep a large area for his brown and ruddy-tinged female friends.

The **Yellow-headed Blackbird** (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) is a rarer sight in the Wildlife Area, although in the past few springs, sightings have been much more numerous and Yellow-headed nesting colonies have been spotted. This blackbird spends much of



its time breeding north in Canada and in parts of central United States and winters mostly in southwest US to southern Mexico. The Yellow-headed Blackbird is larger (9-10 inches in length) than the Red-winged Blackbird with a bit stockier bill. The male’s bright and distinct yellow-hooded head makes him easily recognizable perched in the green and brown tules and cattails of the ponds. If at first you don’t see the bird, listen for his raucous or “unpretty” call, which differs from the melodic song of the Red-winged Blackbird. The Yellow-headed Blackbird is a colonial nester and mixes into the same nesting areas as the Red-winged Blackbird. Although he defends a smaller territory, where it does overlap, he usually wins the fight against his smaller Red-winged counterparts. Here is where he spends his time with the dark brown, slightly yellow-fronted females in nests over deep water.

The **Tricolored Blackbird** (*Agelaius tricolor*) is a harder species to spot in the Wildlife Area. It is made up of western populations mostly in California and the northwestern US. The Tricolored Blackbird (8.75-9 inches in length) is very similar to its Red-winged cousin in size and behavior, and the males of both species have similar bright red shoulder patches (although the Tricolored patch is more crimson than the orangy-red of the Red-winged).



However, the Tricolored has a white stripe below the red marking, versus no (or sometimes yellow) lower stripe of the Red-winged Blackbirds. The Tricolored also has a bit pointier wing and the female’s feathers are a darker gray with an absence of the reddish tones in the Red-winged females. Look for this colonial nester in the same areas as the Red-winged

Blackbird, over the shallow areas of the ponds woven in between the cattail and tule plants.

The **Brewer’s Blackbird** (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) (9 inches in length) mingles among the other blackbird species, with the male showing a hint of bluish-green on his body and a purple iridescence on his head. He also has a yellow eye to differentiate among the blackbird species. The female is similar to the male but is more grayish brown in color.



The Brewer’s can be found in smaller groups in comparison to the Red-winged Blackbird. It is often found year round in the Wildlife Area and flocks in more open areas such as the farm fields of the area. Its nests can usually be found close to the ground and occasionally placed in shrubs or trees.

You may also see other “black birds” sharing similar habitat of the Wildlife Area. Check your field guide for species such as the Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*), the Great-tailed Grackle (*Quiscalus mexicanus*) and the European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*). (It is interesting to note that the European Starling was introduced with about 100 individuals in New York’s Central Park in the 1890’s and has now grown to over 200 million birds and is considered to be a pest!) 🌐

Sources:

- Sibley, David Allen. *The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Western North America*. NY: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 2003
- Tekiela, Stan . *Birds of California Field Guide*. Cambridge, MN: Adventure Publications, Inc., 2003.
- <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAbout-Birds/BirdGuide/>

Photos by Sam Steiner

We Love Our Volunteers!

By Sarah Ross, Volunteer Coordinator



In the current economic climate, many communities and organizations are finding that volunteers are now needed more than ever to perform work that may not otherwise be done due to budget cuts. The Yolo Basin Foundation and Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area have always been immensely fortunate to have a dedicated volunteer force available to educate our communities about the need to conserve wetlands, the need to provide habitat for flora and fauna, and the need to protect the heritage of future generations. Volunteers are the heart of our organization and are the best advocates for the Wildlife Area.

Volunteer hours are recorded and are important because they show how we, as a community group, care and have an impact. They are also important when looking for financial support. We often receive grants from private



groups because they recognize that the Yolo Basin Foundation is a worthy organization, as evidenced by its committed volunteers.

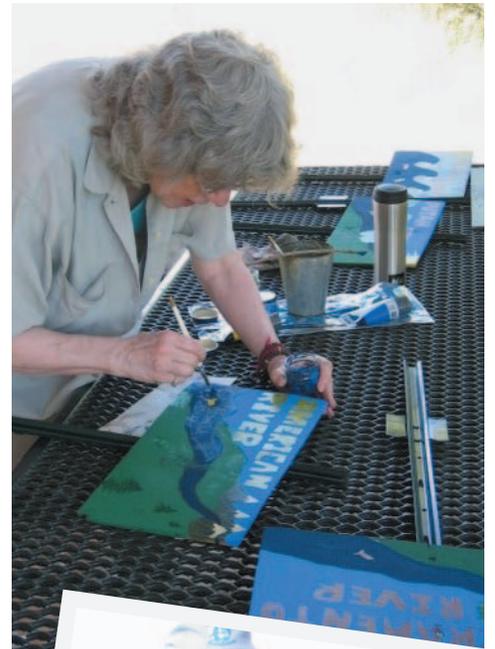
Currently YBF/YBWA has around 130 volunteers active in public tours, outreach events, the board of directors, administration, fundraising events, equipment maintenance and the school program. In listing the volunteer hours, there are undoubtedly hours that we have missed, as many volunteers carry out work unannounced. As staff, we are always hugely grateful for the support of our volunteers, and the truth is that volunteers *are* the Yolo Basin Foundation. 🌱



Volunteer Hours for April 2008 through March 2009

Discover the Flyway School Program	1375.5 hours
YBWA Tours/Vernal Pool/ Bats/ Outreach	195 hours
Volunteer Training	500 hours
Administration	201 hours
Bucks for Ducks	407 hours
Miscellaneous Wildlife Area	82.5 hours
YBF Board and Committees	750 hours
Duck Days	394 hours
Davis Wetlands Tours	72 hours
Total	3977 hours





Yolo Basin Foundation Legacy Gift

Many people arrange substantial estate gifts to organizations whose mission reflects their most passionate pursuits. If Yolo Basin Foundation is that organization for you, the most common way to make a gift is as a bequest of an amount or percentage of the estate using the following language: "to Yolo Basin Foundation, a not-for-profit institution incorporated in the State of California with the business address of P.O. Box 943, Davis, CA 95617 and Tax I.D. #680230311".

There are financial vehicles other than bequests that can provide enhanced income, tax advantages, and life use of real estate. Estate plans should be discussed with your attorney and/or tax advisor. For more information on vehicles and resources contact Don Morrill, Development Director, 530-219-1832.

Monsanto Fund Supports Discover the Flyway

For the last two years, the Monsanto Fund, the philanthropic arm of Monsanto Company, has generously supported Yolo Basin Foundation. In 2007-08, Monsanto Fund funded our volunteer recruitment, training, and enrichment activities. This school year, the organization is sponsoring ten classes for wetlands and wildlife field trips for schools that otherwise might not be able to attend.

The Fund focuses on programs for a healthy environment and science education, both of which are central to Yolo Basin Foundation's mission. In addition, we've been recognized for our collaborative work with the farm community in education and on the Wildlife Area.

Management staff at CalGene in Davis, and Seminis Seeds, Inc. in Woodland, both Monsanto companies, have graciously endorsed our application effort with the Monsanto Fund, based in St. Louis. Employees from these companies have also volunteered at Yolo Basin Foundation for a work day on the Wildlife Area, cutting tules for use in field trips and for Duck Days.

We are grateful to the local Monsanto staff for their encouragement and steady support, and appreciate them as neighbors!

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Sacramento to San Francisco via Stockton to 100 miles.

H.J. McCurry of Sacramento, official photographer of the California Highway Commission, accompanied by Highway Engineer Austin B. Fletcher, drove a "Kissel Kar Four-32 of the roadster type" on the first automobile crossing on March 18th.

The official opening was to be the next day—March 19th, but Davis residents, led by Supervisor W.O. Russell conspired to beat Sacramentans to the punch. Twenty-seven auto loads, totaling some 175 Davisites, stormed across the Causeway on the afternoon of March 18th. According to the Davis Enterprise, "The Chief of Police of Sacramento was called up and promptly gave his sanction for a parade over Sacramento streets and enthusiastically added that the city would be turned over to the invaders."

The Sacramento Union described the crossing: "A heavy downpour of rain did not dampen the ardor of the Yolo County people, who proved as lively a band of boosters as has ever visited this City. With their band playing and horns blowing, the twenty-seven machines made their way out K Street, advertising to the world that Davis has awakened, and that the town realizes that a thousand and one benefits are to accrue from the completion of the causeway." Supervisor Russell assured dignitaries upon arrival that "Sacramento would be well taken care of as annexed territory to Davis," according to the Enterprise account.

Davis visitors used the early foray into Sacramento to promote their annual city picnic at the University Farm on April 22. It was to be the eighth "Picnic Day," and the town could now expect to draw many more than the usual 5000 visitors.

The next day, Sunday, March 19th, more than 2000 cars crossed the Causeway. Many visitors traveled on to Woodland and up into the Capay Valley.

This enthusiasm for the Causeway opening was mirrored even more dramatically in Sacramento, as the community organized to stage an enormous celebration May 11-14, 1916. Houses were decorated in red, white and blue. There were races and tugs of war between firemen and police department teams, a full track meet with local teams competing, folk and ballroom dancing, band concerts and choruses, boxing, swimming, wrestling, diving contests, a river regatta with canoe, row and speedboat races, water polo, diving competition and fancy high diving, a greased pole contest, bicycle races, fencing, acrobatics, and Japanese sports, including wrestling and Jui Jitsu.

Frank E. Steinbacher, better known as "The Human Fly" climbed the Capitol Building and slid on a wire to the top of the P.G. & E. building. He also dropped from the top of the Southern Pacific bridge into the Sacramento River during the regatta.

The celebration included a four-mile long parade on Saturday, May 13th with cars, floats, and bands participating. People decorated their cars, and floats, including one as far away as Santa Cruz, with "bathing girls" highlighting their seaside resort. All of some 10,000 Sacramento school children marched in a parade on Friday with each school displaying a different theme including costumes and exhibits.

The event drew the largest number of out-of-town visitors in Sacramento history with some 100,000 people participating from throughout the Central Valley, including 8,000 from Yolo County.

Governor Hiram Johnson spoke on the steps of the Capitol to dedicate the momentous occasion of the Causeway joining of the east and west sides of the valley. Life in the Sacramento and Davis would never be the same. 🌊



Wildlife Art Festival July 11 & 12, 2009

Pacific Flyway Decoy Association presents its 39th annual festival celebrating traditional wildlife art forms with contests and displays of carvings, paintings, antique decoys and sculpture at the Double Tree Hotel, 2001 Point West Way, in Sacramento. Kid activities both days. Admission: \$5 for the weekend, kids 12 and under are free. Saturday 9-4, Sunday 9:30-4. Information: (925) 754-4978 or www.pacificflyway.org (discount coupons).

Small Mammal Trapping at the Wildlife Area: A Manager's Perspective

by Dave Feliz, Manager, Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area

The cool breeze from the Delta softly rattled the tule pond to the south. Black-crowned Night Herons squawked as they left their day roosts. Soon the sun's last gasps of light hung glowing over the far ridges of the Coast Range. A firm but soft metallic slap punctuated the evening calm. A lone Deer Mouse just walked into the trap.

Eighty-one Sherman live traps had been set two hours earlier by Jen Neale's wildlife class from American River College. Two miles to the east, another array of 81 traps had been set by students from Ben Sacks wildlife ecology class. This husband and wife team of academics and their students resurrected what we hope will be a long term study of rodent populations on the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area.

Eight students fanned out across the pasture, each armed with a recycled paper Nugget bag, clip boards and the insatiable curiosity of those who have set traps, with the timeless goal of outsmarting the wildlife.

In early 2004, Barry Garrison and I set up a study of non-game wildlife on a series of survey points on the Tule Ranch. Having attended Humboldt State University together in the early 1980's, we were pleased to be working together on this fascinating piece of land. The idea was to examine wildlife use of the various Wildlife Area habitats on an elevational gradient. The plots ran west to east, dropping in elevation approximately 8 feet to near sea level. Among other things, I was interested in learning how rodent populations changed with the seasonal flooding that occurs to various degrees in the Yolo Bypass. After massive floods, were some species more likely to be the first to recolonize areas? How long did

these pioneer species dominate the rodent community and how did numbers and species composition change as time went by? How might this relate to wintering raptor numbers? The questions were endless.

Unfortunately, Fish and Game lost a great biologist later than year, when Barry passed away unexpectedly. Soon afterwards, the



last day to check traps. Only two animals were captured the previous weekend. Two animals from 324 trap nights (81 traps x 4 nights). Expectations were low, morale much higher. The crew methodically walked each trap line. Several traps were closed, but their light weight confirmed their empty contents. On to the last plot—the Bull Field.



A student sets a live trap as part of the study.

Department of Fish and Game reorganized and we became part of the Bay Delta Region. The funding for this project was lost and the project went to the back burner.

Sometime in 2008, I began speaking with Ben. He was interested in having his wildlife students trap four of the survey points every spring as part of their field work.

Jen was also interested in involving her Wildlife class in the

trapping effort. We put a work plan together and soon all of us were out standing in one of our fields on the Tule Ranch.

Two plots were trapped on four evenings one week, and a week later the other two plots were trapped. Nine rows of nine Sherman live traps were baited with oats and peanut butter every evening and checked the following morning.

It was day four, during the second session of trapping and results were sparse. This was

The Bull Field sits on the corner of County roads 105 and 38A. It has been known as the Bull Field for as long as anybody can remember. It is where the young bulls go prior to being introduced to the heifers in the spring. It holds a vernal pool with rare plants and invertebrates. Today it held two large bulls, right in the middle of the trap array.

Halfway through the traps a yell punctuated the cold morning air. One of the students held a shining Sherman live trap aloft. They caught a mouse. Soon another trap held the live weight of another rodent. This was the most successful trapping effort yet. The bulls remained unconcerned.

Eventually the two bulls grunted, rose slowly and paced away even slower. We gathered at the vehicles and looked at our bounty. Two Deer Mice (*Peromyscus maniculatus*) were weighed, sexed, measured and fitted with an ear tag. Soon these handsome little critters were back in their meadow, among the young bulls.

What have we learned so far? We've certainly learned it's not easy to catch mice on the Tule Ranch. It will take intensive effort to gather a meaningful amount of data. Then we can start to place this one small puzzle piece into the infinitely diverse habitat mosaic of the Yolo Bypass. 🐭

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Evening Bat Fly-out at the Wildlife Area

Peggy Gerick
Check the website at www.yolobasin.org for the summer bat program schedule. Tours begin May 28th, and online reservations are required.