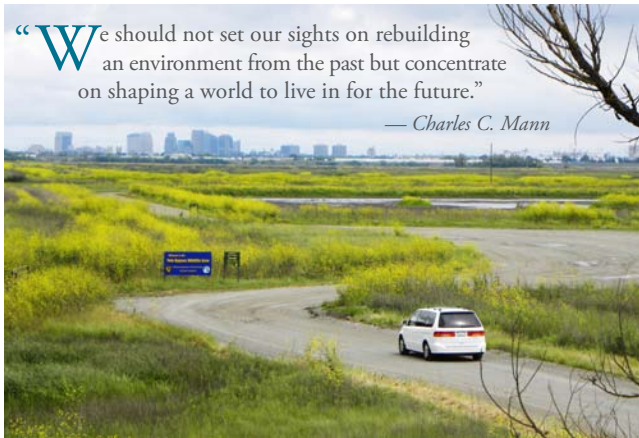




Gateway to the Delta

by Dave Feliz, Manager, Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area



“We should not set our sights on rebuilding an environment from the past but concentrate on shaping a world to live in for the future.”

— Charles C. Mann

Photo credits: Dave Feliz

acre Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area has become an incredible and valuable public asset for the people of Northern California, truly a Delta Success Story.

The Sacramento San Joaquin Delta is unique in this world. Historically two of California’s largest rivers collided in this basin 70 miles from the sea. The progression from river system to the open ocean included over 1000 miles of Delta sloughs, the large estuarine systems of the

Suisun Marsh and the enormous San Pablo and San Francisco Bays. The mixture of fresh and salt water took place at various places on this progression depending on tide, outflow and climatic conditions.

This system has all changed now. We now manage massive river flows through a flood control system that culminates in the Yolo Bypass. Rivers are confined within large levees. Large reservoirs capture most big outflow events. Finally, much of our water goes into man-made channels designed to deliver water to the farms of the San Joaquin Valley and the cities of Southern California. In regards to the flora and fauna within the waters of

the Delta, currently 90% of the biomass is introduced species.

The Delta is far from a natural ecosystem. California is dependent upon the waters of the north being distributed elsewhere, the flood control system protects thousands of acres of farmland and urbanized areas, and adequate fresh water outflow is delivered to keep the saline waters of the bay out past the Suisun Marsh.

The Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area was developed to coexist with this managed setting. Many interests cooperated to insure that the project would not compromise the flood control system, create a health hazard or negatively impact agriculture. This strategy set the tone for its long term management and set the table for multiple public benefits within the reality of today’s modern world. People now have a place to go in the Delta to hike, to hunt, to learn and to not only witness but to also participate in the workings of our collective vision of the 21st Century Pacific Flyway.

Next time you go over the Yolo Causeway, look to the south and realize you are traveling across the northern edge of the Delta and what you see is not only a great place to visit, but is also a model for success as we further “shape our world to live in for the future.”

After recently reading the book *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus*, the words above resonated in my mind for days. They summed up my feelings about what we have been able to accomplish in the Yolo Bypass. In the fall, we may have twenty or thirty bird watchers on the tour route, the rice farmers will be finishing their harvest and flooding the rice stubble, cattle may be moving from one field to the next or perhaps getting shipped to the hills, over a hundred hunters may be sitting quietly doing all they can to lure wild ducks within shooting range, and a group of school kids may excitedly observe the flight of thousands of snow geese lifting off the flooded rice fields. The 16,000-

Farewell from Sarah!

by Sarah Ross, Volunteer Coordinator

Bar-tailed Godwits fly nonstop from Alaska to New Zealand, a nine day journey all up. It will take my family and me around 12 hours flying time, plus a few hours hanging around airport lounges to return to New Zealand in January. Sadly for us, our migration is one-way only.

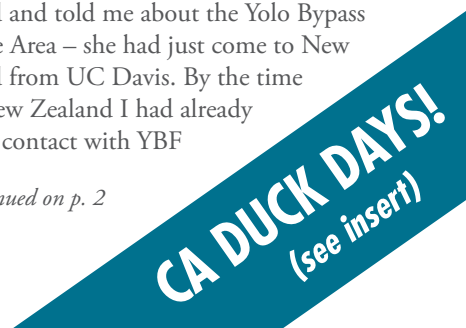
In the four years I have lived in Davis and been with the Yolo Basin Foundation first as a

volunteer then as a staff member, I have been on a constant learning curve. I have learnt what scat is. I have learnt to say parking lot instead of carpark, cookies instead of biscuits, and ice chest instead of chilly bin, though I often forget that one. I have learnt to drive on the opposite side of the road to that which I am used – this has been generally successful. I have also learnt that it is okay to dump your garden waste on the street (if you live in Davis). What I have learnt most of all is that while California supports a huge human population, it is also home to more birds

and other animals that I had ever imagined, and that some extraordinary citizens help to ensure that these animals will have safe haven and be around for generations to come.

I am incredibly indebted to the YBF intern who visited a class I was teaching in New Zealand and told me about the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area – she had just come to New Zealand from UC Davis. By the time I left New Zealand I had already been in contact with YBF

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Featured Volunteer:

John McNerney – City Biologist, YBF Volunteer

by Sarah Ross, Volunteer Coordinator

If you read any *Davis Enterprise* article pertaining to habitat or impacts on wildlife in Davis, then you will assuredly see John McNerney mentioned. John is the wildlife biologist for the City of Davis. In his words, he “provides a miscellany of services for both the human and wildlife communities in and around Davis. My primary tasks include habitat/ wildlife planning, restoration, management and education and outreach, but I also support the City’s Stormwater Management and Integrated Pest Management programs.”

One of those “miscellany of services” just happen to be us – the Yolo Basin Foundation.

John provides the city end of the YBF/ City of Davis partnership that coordinates the City of Davis Wetland public tours and trains the tour docents. John says that when he first started working for the city, he “initially only considered YBF as a wonderful resource to help the city facilitate and effective docent program for the Davis Wetlands. I knew very little about YBF’s mission and commitment to environmental education. However, after working with the wonderful YBF staff and getting a better understanding about the great things they do, I began to change my thinking from ‘what can YBF do for me’ to ‘what can I do for YBF?’”

That thought, “what can I do for YBF?” has provided the Yolo Basin Foundation with an unofficial and highly active volunteer. In addition to his involvement with the Davis Wetlands tour program, John has been a

pivotal member of the California Duck Days Steering Committee for the last six years. He helps coordinate the tours, produces the tour and workshop timeline, draws up the parking spaces, provides the GEM cars, leads a tour, starts around 5:30am on the day and is one of the last to leave after packing up, usually around 13 hours later.

John has volunteered on several of the Bat Walk and Talks in the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area over the last two summers and has helped harvest tules in the demonstration wetlands. Some of you may remember John as the tall man in the funny hat trying to sell you raffle tickets at Bucks for Ducks in 2008, or maybe he served you a drink at Bucks for Ducks this year. John says he enjoys volunteering for YBF because of “our shared interest in environmental conservation and education. However, it is a deep appreciation of the dedicated and compassionate staff, both at YBF and the Yolo Wildlife Area, that keeps me coming back.”

In addition to his time spent with the City of Davis and the Yolo Basin Foundation, John sits on the Putah Creek Council Board of Directors and several planning committees for the Western Section of the Wildlife Society. He and his very patient wife (John’s words) have a seven year old son with whom John enjoys backpacking, fishing, nature watching, woodworking, and baking.

John’s involvement with and support of the Yolo Basin Foundation has been enriching for

all of us. As Robin Kulakow, YBF’s Executive Director says, “John McNerney is a man of many talents. He’s the perfect combination – knowledgeable, generous, energetic and fun to work with.”

Thanks John, see you at Duck Days! 🦆



Farewell, *continued from p. 1*

staff and was able to volunteer at Duck Days a couple of weeks after arriving here. From there it was entirely natural to volunteer with the wonderful *Discover the Flyway* school program. The Volunteer Coordinator’s job was icing (sorry, frosting) on the cake. Which means our volunteers must be the candles!

What an absolute joy this job has been. The greatest joy has been working with so many wonderful selfless people, volunteers and staff, who give of their time and knowledge to ensure that the work of the Yolo Basin Foundation and the Yolo Bypass Wildlife

Area can continue and grow. There is a real sense of community amongst staff and volunteers and I think this is one of our strengths. Another joy has been the unexpected pleasure my children have had through contact with YBF. My son, an avid birder, has been lucky enough to have met some wonderful mentors. He has now seen over 330 US bird species. My daughter loves to come to my work place, because in her words I work with “such cool people.” As a family we have spent many hours birding and traveling around the states, and we pretty soon felt that flying into Sacramento meant we were “home.”

Thank you to all our volunteers who have made my job a complete breeze and a delight. Who says that finding volunteers is hard work! Thank you to my colleagues for being inspirational. I will miss you all very much and we hope to see many of you as visitors to our part of the world. You would be more than welcome.

Now if only I could find a way to be allowed to introduce hummingbirds into New Zealand! 🦋

What are those big white things?



Photo credit: Dave Feliz

by Melanie Pope, Education Director

On a recent school field trip, an inquisitive and attentive third grade student stood next to me, gazed out into the flooded rice fields in front of us, and asked, “What is that big white thing?” That “big white thing” was a Tundra Swan (*Cygnus columbianus*) scooting about in the water mixed in with thousands of birds, all moving about. Soon, all the other students and the parents turned their attention toward the rice fields, and we all fell silent. The amazing sights and the sounds of the many swans, geese and ducks were a sure sign that winter was near and waterfowl migration from the north was in full swing.

The Tundra Swan, formerly known as the Whistling Swan, is a large (52 inches, 14 pounds, 5 ½ foot wingspan) all-white waterbird with a black bill, legs and feet. The plumage of the male and female do not differ, but in the juvenile stage, the plumage is gray and the bill mostly pink. The name “Whistling Swan” did not come from the Tundra Swan’s call, which is a French horn-like honk, but the sound it makes with its slow and strong flapping wing beat.

Altogether there are three swan species found in North America, but neither the Trumpeter nor the Mute Swan winter in the Central Valley. The Tundra Swan breeds in the spring and summer in lakes, ponds and coastal pools in the top reaches of North America, Canada and Alaska. After migrating through parts of Canada and northern portions of the United States, the Tundra Swan winters on both American coasts. In the east, it frequents the Chesapeake Bay area and North Carolina, and in the west, its winter range includes California’s Central Valley

lakes, ponds and, more recently in history, agricultural fields. While feeding in open water, the Tundra Swan is commonly seen dipping its head down into the water and dabbling to eat aquatic plants; while in fields, it can be found feeding on seeds and grains.

Tundra Swan pairs make a long term bond, likely for life, with individuals living for up to 20 years of age. The pair bonds around 2-3 years of age, but they wait to breed for about a year until they reach 4-5 years of age. These swans are solitary nesters, placing large open bowl nests of grasses and mosses on the ground in late May and early June. Occupying mostly ground sites in the breeding season, the Tundra Swans can be more commonly found in open water during the winter. The pairs’ breeding territory is fairly large, and successful spots are used again from year to year.

The clutch size is about five creamy white unmarked eggs, and after 35-40 days of incubation, the young hatch in July with open eyes, covered in down and sometimes feed at first on aquatic invertebrates. The young must grow fast and furiously and move to larger lakes and waters as the Arctic freeze-ups approach. After about two months, the young fledge and remain with the parents for the first year. Together, they make the cygnets’ inaugural migration as a family in large flocks.

Early cold weather conditions, late spring cold weather in breeding areas, cold weather in the eastern wintering grounds, as well as long migration routes (over 3,700 miles round trip) are all threatening factors to survival of the Tundra Swan. Although swans have size on their side for defense, nest predators include bears, foxes, and even gulls. Human activity affecting breeding sites and

wintering feeding areas also pose continual risks to the survival and success of Tundra Swan populations.

These birds are quite an amazing sight against the backdrop of the capital city skyline. “There seems to be a substantial increase in the numbers of wintering Tundra Swans that appears to be correlated with our rapid expansion of wetland habitat and rice cultivation,” says Dave Feliz, Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area manager. Check your field guide for other large white birds visiting the Bypass in the winter, such as the Snow Goose (*Chen caerulescens*), which can be distinguished from the Tundra Swan with its smaller size, pink bill, legs and feet and black wing tips seen in flight.

Come visit the Wildlife Area during the winter and look out for the “big white things!”

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(530) 756-7248 robin@yolobasin.org

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Ann Brice

(530) 758-0530 abrice@yolobasin.org

Development Director: Don Morrill

(530) 219-1832 dmorrill@yolobasin.org

Office Manager: Dee Feliz

(530) 757-3780 deefeliz@yolobasin.org

Volunteer Coordinator: Sarah Ross

(530) 757-4828 sross@yolobasin.org

Education Director: Melanie Pope

(530) 758-1018 mpope@yolobasin.org

Education Associate: Corky Quirk

(530) 758-1018 cquirk@yolobasin.org

Bookkeeper: Guadalupe de la Concha

Street address:

45211 County Road 32B, Davis, CA
95618

Mailing address:

P.O. Box 943, Davis, CA 95617

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.

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