



YOLO FLYWAY



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Spring 2011—The Bypass Does Its Job!

By Dave Feliz, Manager, Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area

The Monday morning staff meeting on March 14th was the turning point. We had observed that both Lake Shasta and Lake Oroville were near optimum storage capacity, the rivers were conveying healthy flows and it was raining steadily. We knew the Bypass would start flooding later in the week. We could not have predicted how quickly it happened.

By Thursday, I had received the phone call from the Central Valley Flood Center—the Fremont Weir would start topping Thursday. It was a minor flood, lots of time. We began to retrieve the portable toilets, trash cans, and heavy equipment. Most everything was out by Friday afternoon. Who could predict the deluge that occurred in the Sacramento Valley that weekend? By Monday morning, the water was levee to levee.

In parking lot B, the fully accessible portable toilet was fully inaccessible somewhere in the vicinity, completely invisible from the western levee. In the trees along the western edge of the Bypass raccoons, muskrats, and beavers clung to the willows and floating tule mats. Snakes, pheasants, rodents escaped over the west levee to the safety of the high ground beyond. Down by Putah Creek, sat our CAT D4 Bulldozer partially submerged. Heroically, Spencer Larson and Scott Miller took a boat ride to the D4 and moved it to the nearest high spot, parking lot G. The water was already too deep to drive the machine out.

Ultimately, this turned out to be the biggest flood we've had since 2006, with approximately 100,000 cubic feet per second moving down the Yolo Bypass from the Sacramento/Feather

Rivers, Cache Creek, the Knight's Landing Ridge Cut, Willow Slough and Putah Creek. Depths at Lisbon Weir reached 19 feet. The water extended so far west it nearly surrounded the umbrella barn on the Tule Ranch. Both houses on the Tule Ranch were evacuated.

With this flood came an unusual amount of floating debris. Thick tule mats settled next to Interstate 80, along the western levee near the entrance gate, and on high ground south of Putah Creek. Amongst the debris was lumber of all sizes, bottles, tree branches, whole trees and innumerable duck decoys.

Under the water, spittail migrated upstream to spawn on the inundated floodplain. Also moving upstream were sturgeon and salmon, lured by the high flows into the flood control channel as they tried to find their spawning grounds. Juvenile salmon hatched earlier in the winter found their way down their natal streams, the Sacramento River, over the Fremont Weir, and spread out onto the floodplain of the Yolo Bypass.

The situation after the flood is that all farming operations are delayed, with white rice harvesting now taking place in mid-autumn when the chance of additional storms is likely. Lots of undesirable weeds such as Cocklebur are growing in the pond bottoms and will need to be controlled this summer by cattle or tractors. Layers of silt deposited on roads will require new capping layers of gravel before next winter.

Managing wetlands in a floodway comes with special challenges. But wetlands are constantly changing, and the Yolo Basin has received flood waters for hundreds of thousands of years. It is truly amazing to witness this spectacle first hand, but ultimately one has to look over at the Sacramento skyline and think “Better us, than them.” 



Flooding along the Causeway (top).

Fish & Game's Waylon Wittry boats over flooded Tule Ranch (above).

New Wildlife Area
Map Inside

Visitors From Near and Far

by Robin Kulakow, Executive Director



Ann Brice, Dave Feliz and Jack DeWit host resource agency heads visiting from China in December 2010.

The Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area is getting a lot of attention these days from people with variety of backgrounds. The Wildlife Area is being recognized as an excellent example of how many interests can work together to create thousands of acres of diverse wildlife habitat, continue profitable farming and provide recreation and education opportunities while maintaining the flood control function of the Bypass.

Many visitors have a specific interest in the Sacramento San Joaquin Delta. The Wildlife Area, located in the north edge of the Delta, provides an excellent case study of successful management practices that can be applied elsewhere in the Delta. In March the *Delta Conservancy* Board of Directors including California Secretary of Resources John Laird spent time learning about the unique values of the Wildlife Area. Deputy Resources Secretary Jerry Meral spent a morning with Dave Feliz and Robin Kulakow, becoming familiar with the management challenges and the opportunities the area has to offer. In late March, as part of their weeklong tour of the Delta, the Stanford University *California Water Service Learning Team* spent a morning out on the Wildlife Area learning about how water is managed for wildlife, agriculture and flood control. Ann Brice and Betsy Marchand provided an informational introduction to how the Wildlife Area is managed to maintain the flood control function of the Bypass.

for the *California Water Education Foundation Delta Flood Management Tour*. The following week the *Water Education Foundation Delta Recreation Tour* stopped by.

Staff from California Department of Water Resources *Flood Maintenance Environmental Support Branch* visited recently. They were very interested in the vegetation management practices that could be applied on other floodplains in the Central Valley flood control system. The *California Association of Planning Commissioners* finished up their annual conference with a visit to Wildlife Area. They were especially interested in how mosquito production is managed.

Annually we host several groups of Army Corps of Engineers employees who are participating in various watershed-planning courses at the *Hydrologic Engineering Center* in Davis. They come from all over the country and acquire an important "on the ground" perspective about wetland management. Recent international visitors have included groups from China, North Korea, South Korea and New Zealand who want to look at our rice ground and managed wetlands.

Along with the 4,000 K-12 students that discover the Wildlife Area each year, many adults are getting the picture too. They come for a variety of reasons, and everyone leaves inspired by the beauty and the uniqueness of the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area. ☀

Quick Action from Glide Foundation Protects YBF Office

Yolo Basin Foundation is very grateful to the T.S. and Katrina D. Glide Foundation for helping a friend in need! This winter after a big storm we came into the office to find water running down our walls and onto one of our printers—our flat roof was finally beyond patching. We sent an emergency plea out to the Glide Foundation, which has been generous with us in the past but never on such short notice. Within a week we had a \$5,000 donation. Next we talked to HB Urethane Roofing owner, Harry Bunfill, who it happens loves to hunt at the Wildlife Area, and he agreed to make a donation to YBF to help keep the cost at \$5,000. You can't even see the roof from the ground, but now we know there'll be no leaks when next season's storms arrive! Many thanks to the Glide Foundation and HB Urethane Roofing. ☀



Harry Bunfill assists Robin Kulakow as she inspects the new roof installed by HB Urethane Roofing.

Mexican Free-tailed Bats at the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area

by Corky Quirk, Education Associate and Founder of NorCal Bats

With approximately 250,000 Mexican free-tailed bats living under the causeway, the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area has become a popular place to view these amazing animals. The Mexican free-tailed bat (*Tadarida brasiliensis*) is a medium sized bat with a 3.5 inch body, 12 inch wing span and a weight of 12 grams. It is grey to brown in color with a tail that is longer than the skin between the legs. It has large mouse shaped ears and wrinkled lips.

Referred to as the “extreme bat,” these mammals live in extremely large colonies including the largest colony of any single mammal in the world – 20 million Mexican free-tailed bats in Bracken Cave, Texas. They fly extremely high, and have been tracked by Doppler weather radar at two miles high consuming migrating cotton boll worm moths (a.k.a. corn ear-worm moth), army cut-worm moths, and other costly agricultural pests. They are also the jet planes of bat species, averaging 25-45 mph but have been clocked at 60 mph with a tail wind. They are well adapted for fast flight with short fur, a tail membrane that can be retracted to reduce drag, ears that form air foils for lift, and long, narrow wings.

Bats in the United States eat insects and are the largest natural control of pests in agricultural crops. Fruit bats, vampire bats, and meat eating bats are not found in the U.S. There are a few species that drink nectar and pollinate plants in far southern desert areas. A bat eats approximately half its weight in insects each night. Pregnant and nursing females consume about the equivalent of their own weight in insects. Doing the math, this means the Wildlife Area bats eat at least 500 pounds of insects nightly.

Some free-tails stay in the Sacramento Valley all year but most migrate for the winter. They begin returning in large numbers in March and April, with colony sizes stabilizing in May. They give birth to live young from the last week of June to the first week of July, each mother birthing and nursing one pup at most per year. Approximately 25-50% of these young will live through the first year. The pup will begin to fly and learn to hunt

at about five weeks of age. Mom will continue to supplement the hunt with milk for another couple of weeks. If the pup can live though one full year, hunting, migrating, and avoiding predation, the animal may live 20 years.

By mid-fall the Sacramento/Central Valley bats begin their movements to wintering locations. The colonies in Northern and Central Mexico increase substantially in size as the U.S. populations decrease, but there is thought that the free-tail bats of California may not make the long distance migrations,



Bat viewing at the Wildlife Area

but may regionally relocate. They may enter torpor during inclement winter weather, but they do not hibernate.

These bats have adapted to live in structures built by humans, and the Yolo Causeway is a good example. With 16 parallel expansion joints of one-inch width and 12-20 inch depth, this three-mile bridge provides a home to one of the largest colonies of bats in California. There are several locations where the bats leave the roost, with the most spectacular being on the east side, about .25 miles from West Sacramento.

Special Bat Tours for Members

Members should contact Corky Quirk at cquirk@yolobasin.org or 530-902-1918 if they would like to attend a complimentary Bat Talk and Walk on July 27th at 6:30 or August 15th at 6:15. Members may reserve up to 4 spaces. Not a member yet? Consider joining and enjoy a free bat tour!

The Yolo Basin Foundation sponsors several tours throughout the summer to watch this nightly event. Each begins with a presentation about bats, followed by viewing of live, non-releasable native bats. After a short break, a caravan is formed to travel through the Wildlife Area to the best viewing spot, which is in the rice fields and not accessible except on

tours. Tours are offered for the general public, YBF members and private groups. The summer schedule is available at www.yolobasin.org. We ask for a \$10 donation for adults.

The public can also view a smaller colony on the west side of the causeway by entering the bike trail on top of the west levee, north of the causeway. The bats begin to exit as much as 15 minutes before sunset, and flights vary due to weather and time in the birthing cycle. 

Yolo Basin – Swampland to Farmland

by Don Morrill, former YBF Development Director and long-time history buff



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A tractor crew rolls tules in preparation for burning. The Yolo Basin underwent “reclamation” during the second half of the 19th century.

Please check our website, www.yolobasin.org, for the first article in Don's history series entitled "Early History of the Yolo Basin." It can be found in Yolo Flyway, Vol. 19, Issue 2, Summer 2010.

Today we all enjoy the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area, an amazing 16,000-acre multi-use facility filled with seasonal and permanent wetlands. But it wasn't long ago that it was known as "swamp and overflow land" of no value, an impediment to progress, and a threat to everyone's health.

Most people shared the view of John Audubon, the famous naturalist's son, who described the Sacramento area during his 1850 visit as a "swampy neighborhood, bad atmosphere, malarial conditions must render

this section of the country unhealthy to a great degree for half the year...Fever and ague is very prevalent now and dysentery is feared by all. Many farmers I find here tell me they are only working to get money enough to get back with, and that nothing would induce them to settle here" (Audubon pp. 234-237).

When thinking about this time period, it's important to know that California in 1849-50 was rife with diseases, many of them fatal. Malaria, cholera, dysentery, typhoid, tuberculosis, and scurvy were among the common maladies.. A physician here at the time estimated that one in five immigrants in 1849 was dead within six months of arrival.

Malaria was brought to California by Hudson Bay Company trappers in 1832-33 and led to the death of some 20,000 valley Native Americans-- nearly the entire regional

population. Tuberculosis (or "consumption") and particularly cholera were also prevalent and led to thousands of deaths. About 15% of the population of Sacramento died in a cholera epidemic within two months in the fall of 1850.

Physician James Tyson in 1850 called tule marshes "nurseries of disease," causing "Sacramento fever." Illness was commonly attributed to 'miasma' or vapor from the swamps contaminated by decaying vegetable matter. It would not be until 1898 that the relationship with mosquitoes was discovered.

Besides the perceived health issues of wetlands, they were a significant obstacle to travel to and from the gold fields, since they stretched for miles on either side of the Sacramento River. Sailboats navigating to Sacramento required numerous rope and

—Continued on p. 9



June, 2011

Dear Friends of the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area;

After 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ years as the manager of the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area, our time has come and Dee and I are moving on. Over the course of the summer, I will transition into the position of Area Manager of the Elkhorn Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve in Moss Landing.

I can't begin to express the satisfaction the Wildlife Area has brought to me. We've had the opportunity to create thousands of acres of new wetlands and have created educational and recreational opportunities for untold numbers of people. At the time of my arrival, the Wildlife Area consisted of 3,700 acres of newly constructed wetlands, the demonstration wetlands were a series of watery depressions surrounded by seedlings, and the office landscaping consisted of various varieties of mud.

Oh what a long way we have come. We seized the opportunity to expand to over 16,000 acres in 2001, laying out the blueprint for our future. This expansion did not come with any new money, so we had to get creative. The result is a beautiful working relationship with the agricultural community which not only provides operational funds but is constantly breaking new ground in developing new techniques to develop and manage wildlife habitat.

We've discovered species new to the area, some extremely rare. We've restored over 6,000 acres of new wetlands, in effect defining the "golden age" of the return of the Yolo Basin wetlands.

I can't begin to pay tribute to all the fantastic people associated with this project. One of my favorite things about this job is the opportunity to interact with a wide variety of people. A typical day could include conversations with my staff, our education volunteers, Foundation folks, school kids, academics, hunters, birders, farm workers, cowboys and whoever might walk in the front door or call our office. All share a curiosity about things wild.

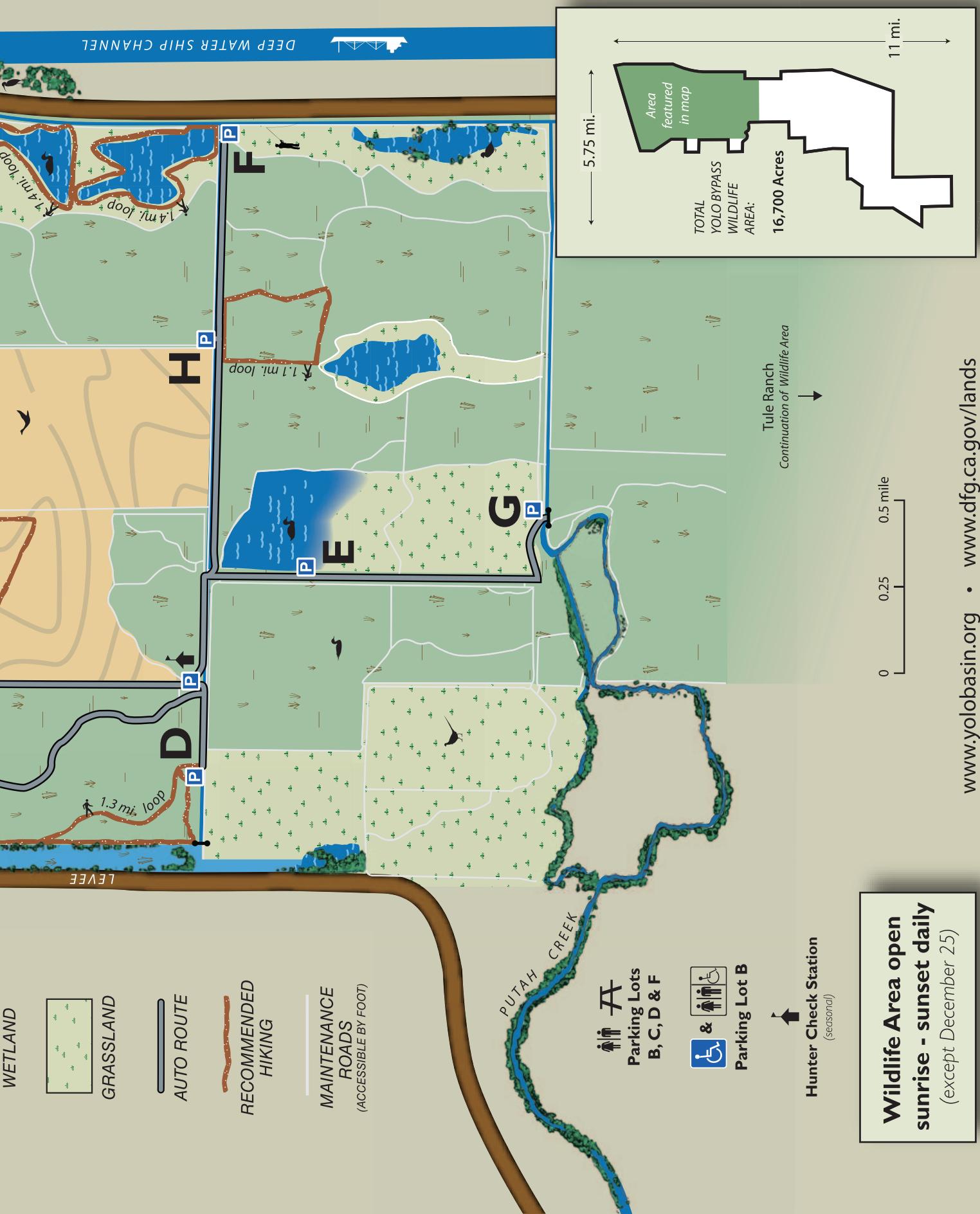
I've had the opportunity to traverse wetlands (and yes, get stuck) on air boats, all terrain vehicles, and muddy hip boots; wander amongst immense fields of goldfields and tidy tips, gaze at the internal structure of a hundred year old barn, dive after speeding Yellow-bellied Racers, and see hundreds of thousands of waterfowl rise from flooded rice fields, rivaled in number only by the hundreds of thousands of bats flying out from the Causeway into the Yolo night skies.

Yes, this is the greatest job in the world. But as most Wildlife Area managers have experienced, it is more than a job, it is an obsession. There is an endless list of great ideas to experiment with on this Wildlife Area. It is a project that will never be finished and there would never be a "good" time to leave.

Countless animals have moved in and out of the Yolo Basin for thousands of years and will continue to do so forever, if we have anything to say about it. We are all graced by their presence.

We are grateful for the opportunity to work with all of you and participate in building this cherished treasure.

Dave Feliz



05.27.2011

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**Wildlife Area open
sunrise - sunset daily**
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We Love Our Volunteers!

Volunteer Appreciation Dinner, June 2, 2011



Swampland to Farmland, cont. from p. 4

pulley hoists using tree trunks on shore to battle tides and currents and make progress. A boat trip from San Francisco took 6-8 days before 1850 when steamboats arrived. Travel by land across marshes like the Yolo Basin was grueling and dangerous. An early gold rush traveler complained of thick tule swamps and sloughs stretching for miles on either side of the river that took an entire day to travel 1½ miles.

However, regardless of the character of the land, the desire to own it was nearly universal during the Gold Rush, driven by the Jeffersonian ideal model of the self sufficient, independent farmer. The demand was heightened by failures of most gold seekers to secure a quick fortune or even a nominal living on Sierra foothill river banks.

At the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ending the War with Mexico in 1848, California was ceded to the U.S. All property that had not been given to earlier settlers such as John Sutter in Sacramento and John Wolfskill in Winters by Mexican land grants was owned by the U.S. government. Very little land in the Delta was in private hands. In the first step to develop wetlands in 1850, the Arkansas Act granted swamp and overflow lands to the states to sell to settlers for the purpose of reclamation.

There was a widely held belief that drained swamps would be productive. In 1852 California Governor McDougal said that the state should prioritize making swamp and overflow land available to settlers because it would “contribute largely to the state treasury...tule lands when drained will become the most desirable lands in the state...capable of producing...rice, sugar cane, and other...products that can not be grown in other parts of the state.” (John Thompson p.187)

Farmers who chose to settle in the Valley during and after the Gold Rush wanted productive fields to support their families, and the county and state governments wanted tax revenue from land that was currently owned by the state.

Subsequently, a continual and relentless effort by farmers, citizens and government at all levels drove a process from 1850 to 1871 to bring swamp or wetlands into private hands to “reclaim” and cultivate it. The first series

of state laws from 1855-59 allowed a settler to buy up to 640 acres of land for \$1 an acre (cheap given roughly \$20 an acre market price for dry land). A settler could pay 10% down and the balance in 5 years with proof that he had drained 50% of the purchased land. However, relatively little acreage of wetlands was privately acquired under these and subsequent increasingly generous incentives during the 1860’s.

Finally in 1868 under leadership of Assemblyman Will Green from Colusa, 22 separate laws for reclamation were rolled into one. Oversight of the process was given to the counties, and unlimited acreage could be bought for \$1 an acre with money refunded in full if owners could prove the land had been cultivated for three years. The boom in wheat farming from 1865-68 provided capital for nearby dry land farmers to finance an enormous land rush.

It was no wonder that prominent land owners in and near the “Putah Sink,” which is what the Yolo Basin was then called—R.S. Carey, William Marden, the Drummond brothers, the Montgomerys and others—were at the head of the courthouse line to file applications. Carey more than doubled his already large holding to 10,000 acres, and others gained significant acreage. By 1871 all land within the Yolo Basin had become privately owned, and “reclamation” or drainage projects began.

Over the next one hundred years, using increasingly sophisticated machines—pumps, dredges, bulldozers, etc.—more than 90% of the original 5 million acres of wetlands in the state were converted to agriculture or urban use. 

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In Memoriam

This year we lost two friends of Yolo Basin Foundation, Nancy Seyden and Maggie Goggin Rodoni. Their families have suggested that YBF be one of the beneficiaries of donations in their memories.

Among her many accomplishments, Nancy was also a *Discover the Flyway* docent. She braved the often cold and wet weather to help us with the school program. She was an inspiration to us all.

Maggie was a young woman, just married, who left us all too soon. She was an avid outdoors person and strongly supported the Foundation’s dedication to environmental education. Her mother, Nancy Hay, said that Maggie was happy to be able to spend time at the Wildlife Area shortly before her passing.

Yolo Basin is very grateful for the many donations made in memory of these two exceptional people. 

Terry Colborn

by Heidi Satter, Volunteer Coordinator

Finding Terry Colborn is like tracking a migrating bird: he makes regular and seasonal journeys in pursuit of the avian subjects that are his passion. Sharing his knowledge, experience and enthusiasm for birds is just one of the many ways that Terry has volunteered for the Yolo Basin Foundation since its inception over 20 years ago.

Terry's initial involvement with YBF came from his interest in birds and his belief in



Dave Feliz

We had a vision."

Today, Terry is on the YBF Board of Directors. When he was approached about this position 5 years ago, he was told that the goal would be to raise money for school kids to come out to the wetlands. He recalls thinking, "I can get behind this 110 percent!"

As a docent for both the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area and City of Davis Wetlands tours, Terry is a birder and tour leader extraordinaire. At over 6 feet tall, he has a charismatic

presence. Above his long, silver beard is a kind and friendly smile. His bright blue eyes notice everything. But his uncanny ability to imitate bird calls may be his most remarkable characteristic as a birder. "I started leading tours for YBF back in the '90s, before there was docent training." One of Terry's favorite things about leading these tours is the excitement of introducing people to "cool birds" in the scope.

For the past 3 years, Terry has also led YBF's popular Gaggle of Gatherings trip entitled *Birding with the Best*. On this all day field trip, Terry shares his expertise exploring local sites for winter-

ing raptors, waterfowl and Sandhill Cranes. At Duck Days, Terry contributes his time as a field trip leader. His day long, "Mystery Bird Trip" fills quickly.

One of his favorite YBF moments was at a summer "Bat Talk and Walk" program in the Wildlife Area. Assisting staff members Corky

Quirk and Don Morrill, he set up his spotting scope before sunset. "I will always remember seeing the kids, and the parents for that matter, mouths hanging open, as thousands of Mexican free-tailed bats emerged from under the causeway."

Terry's interest in wildlife is life long. He recalls, "I have been fascinated with birds since I was a little kid." Terry grew up in New Jersey and moved to California to attend college. He earned a Bachelor's in Human Development from California State University East Bay (previously Hayward). Because of the amount of time and energy Terry volunteers for YBF, it is surprising to find out that he works full time! He is Vice President of Programs and Government Affairs for Easter Seals, providing advice on policy and budget issues. He has worked there for 25 years. Terry's wife, Diane, is the Chief Consultant for the State Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee, and they have two grown children, Byron and Danielle.

Terry also owns and operates TLC Birding, a tour company dedicated exclusively to birding. He has led birding tours throughout the United States as well as Costa Rica and Ecuador. The recent Ecuador trip included a donation for Yolo Basin Foundation. Plans are in the works for a birding tour to Brazil in 2012.

He loves everything about volunteering here, "The wonderful people, staff and visitors; being associated with great people helping to move forward this wonderful resource. I sell YBF to everyone I run across!"

When I caught up with Terry for this interview, he had just arrived home from a scouting trip for spring 2012, *Midwest Magical Migration*, and had already attended a day long legislative budget meeting on behalf of Easter Seals. Before heading off to another appointment, he said enthusiastically, "If you ever need someone to lead a private tour, a special group, please keep me in mind. I could come out before or after work. Anything I can do, let me know and I will do it!"

We know you will, Terry! Thank you for your dedication and support for the past 21 years!

the project. He recalls the early "What if?" meetings to establish YBF at Robin Kulakow's kitchen table with other supporters. "We asked questions like, 'What if we could restore agricultural lands to wetlands? How could it be done? Who would be involved?' Robin was our champion. We told her, 'You can carry the torch and we will back you up.'

Monsanto Fund Supports *Discover the Flyway*

The Monsanto Fund, a private foundation and the philanthropic arm of Monsanto Company, awarded a grant of \$20,000 to support ten *Discover the Flyway* class field trips. According to Marlin Edwards, research and development lead for the Monsanto Vegetable Business in Woodland, "Monsanto is committed to supporting the communities where our employees live and work. The Yolo Basin Foundation provides an excellent educational forum to help children and adults in our community appreciate our natural resources and our role in their stewardship. The Foundation's *Discover the Flyway* program provides a great example of the harmonious co-existence of wildlife conservation with farming and recreational uses of land."

The Monsanto Fund is focused on grant-making in four main areas: nutritional well-being through agriculture; science education, primarily on professional development for teachers; the environment, which includes conservation, protection of biodiversity, clean water and restoration of wildlife habitat; and improving the quality of life in communities where Monsanto employees live and work.

Yolo Basin Foundation is very grateful for the Monsanto Fund's continued support, Executive Director Robin Kulakow says, "Yolo Basin Foundation is pleased to team up with the Monsanto Fund to address the environmental education needs of our region."

Calling All Artists and Photographers

It's time to head out to the Yolo Wildlife Area to work on your creations for the exhibit at Bucks for Ducks 2011 on November 18th. The combined art and photography show was a big success last year, and the format will be the same for the upcoming gala.

All photographs must have been taken at the Wildlife Area. The categories are plants, animals, landscape, and abstract. Entries should be emailed to abrice@yolobasin.org in a high resolution jpeg format. The photographs will be judged by a three person panel, and photographers whose works are selected will be asked to deliver their prints in a finished size of no more than 80 square inches to Yolo Basin Foundation. More than one photo may be submitted.

Artists may submit work in any medium

except photography. Previously, in addition to paintings, we have had ceramic pieces, tiles, mosaics, and blown glass. All works created for the exhibit must be inspired by the Wildlife Area, and we want to remind the artists that agriculture is an important component of the area. Rice, various row crops, cattle, and farm equipment are all great subjects for the exhibit. The only stipulation is that the finished piece be an 8 x 8 x $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch birch-covered plywood squares available for artists who would like to use them.

A call for entries will be placed on the Foundation website, www.yolobasin.org by the end of June. If you have any questions, please contact Ann Brice at abrice@yolobasin.org or 530-758-0530. 



Painting by Mary Estep

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