



YOLO FLYWAY



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Tour Route Extension Opens



By Dave Feliz, Manager, Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area

For nearly a hundred years, travelers have been traversing the Yolo Causeway, passing close to incredible numbers of birds during the winter months. Most readers of this article are well aware of the dense flocks of White-fronted Geese, Northern Pintails and Green-winged Teals packed in the flooded rice fields and are easily distracted by the increasing numbers of birds rising like storm clouds above the flood plain. However, I believe a very small percentage of Causeway drivers actually notice the avian chaos erupting to the south.

How do we get the attention of everybody else? And in the process, can we raise their awareness of the tremendous resource that fills this great open space just west of Sacramento?

Anything we do within sight of the Causeway is well noticed. Hence, I frequently receive emails and phone calls about the rice operation and the cattle in the weeds north of the freeway; and also when we bring a group of people close to the highway, and the traffic backs up for half a mile with drivers trying to see what we're looking at. We consider the proximity of Interstate 80 as an opportunity to reach out to people who wouldn't normally notice birds and their habitats. We need to visually present scenes that make it clear to Causeway drivers that many opportunities exist to explore the wetlands in the Yolo Bypass. The auto tour route is one way to do it.

Our tour route is becoming increasingly more visible due to expansions completed in 2008 and this past summer. The road now goes through an active rice farm. If you are visiting in the summer, you see

the DeWit family's lush green rice. During the winter, the harvested fields are flooded, attracting thousands of birds. The leg completed this year takes people further east than they have ever been before. Paul Phillips from California Waterfowl designed and managed the construction of this meandering path currently ending at the edge of extensive wild rice fields. It is an easy walk north to the freeway ponds where we've had Least Bitterns, Tri-colored Blackbirds, and hundreds of early Mallards.

In coming years, the road will begin to run south, eventually forming a loop road about 8 miles in length. It will travel past permanent wetlands, wild rice fields, seasonal wetlands, white rice, and shallow mud flat habitats.

The Wildlife Area is still in its infancy. Expect large numbers of birds in the coming years. Expect visual spectacles that compare with any bird concentrations in the world. Expect the deafening cacophony of snow geese calls and flapping wings, blurred by the high whistles of hundreds of thousands of pintails.

So, come out this winter and explore this inviting new road that winds across a fallow rice field. Get closer to the flocks of swans than ever before. And realize that this road is part of something much bigger and better than any of us imagined. 

Duck Days • February 25-26
See pages 4-5

“Backers Have Big Dreams for Wildlife Refuge”

by Robin Kulakow, Executive Director

The words above were the headline in the *Davis Enterprise* on November 27, 1990. Well, here we are in December 2010, twenty years later. Look at what our dream has become. It is the 16,000-acre Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area owned and managed by California Department of Fish and Game. Over 5,000 acres of diverse wetland habitats have been restored with a combination of federal and state funds. Income from Wildlife Area farming and grazing operations provides most of the operating funds to keep the place running. Just recently 300 acres of rare fresh water tidal habitat was restored at the very south end of the Wildlife Area.

The *Enterprise* article quotes me saying “I expect all different kinds of wintering waterfowl – Snow Geese, Cackling Geese, Tundra Swans and many different types of ducks, too.” What an understatement! Today school aged visitors observed the now annual spectacle of thousands of ducks, geese and swans

moving in and out of the wetlands in a scene that we could only imagine two decades ago. The bird life goes way beyond my imagination back then. Innovative management is providing scarce mudflat habitat for tens of thousands of shorebirds traveling the Pacific Flyway every spring and summer. White-faced Ibis and Tri-colored Blackbirds, rarely seen in Yolo County twenty years ago, now nest in the cattails and tules. The opportunity to observe a Peregrine Falcon hunting at high speeds is almost a routine occurrence.

“It will be a wonderful resource for the local schools,” I am quoted as saying. “It will be something for the children of Yolo County to be...proud of.” Another understatement! Since 1997 40,000 K-12 students have participated in our *Discover the Flyway* program. Thousands of children in five counties have grown up with the wetlands. This includes my own family—at the time of the article my 21-year-old son David was only 18 months old!

“Kulakow, who has two children expects

them to someday be able to benefit from her work now.” I’ve marked the progress of the Wildlife Area and our programs by David’s age. He was a bartender at *Bucks for Ducks* last month! My daughter Leah, who is now learning to drive, was born the year that restoration activities began and my stepdaughter Sarah was 17 when she had the opportunity to introduce President Clinton when he spoke at the Wildlife Area dedication.

Hundreds of volunteers have donated thousands of hours of time to grow and sustain Yolo Basin Foundation activities. Many talented staff and board members have devoted years on behalf on the Yolo Basin wetlands and efforts to make them meaningful to the regional community. Many loyal supporters have donated annually for 20 years.

The community built the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area, and my dream today is that the Yolo Basin Foundation community will sustain it for another twenty years as a wonderful place for birds and people. 🌿

Congratulations to Helen Thomson, 21-year friend of the Yolo wetlands

By Robin Kulakow

Long time friend of the Yolo Basin Foundation, Supervisor Helen Thomson, is retiring after 36 years of public service. Back in 1989 Helen attended one of the very first meetings held by a small group of people with a vision to restore wetlands at the Putah Creek Sinks, now referred to as the Yolo Basin. That meeting was held at the Woodland home of Ted Beedy and Susan Sanders. Helen sat on the floor to look at the original map outlining our vision. From that day forward Helen was one of our strongest supporters. She spoke at our very first press conference on the west levee of the Yolo Bypass with then Congressman Vic Fazio and State Senator John Garamendi. Little did we know that ten years later that very same spot on the levee would be the home to the large Vic Fazio Yolo Wildlife Area sign that everyone sees as they speed by on I-80.

Helen signed many letters supporting the effort to establish the Yolo Bypass Wildlife



Area at every step of the way as either a member or chair of the Yolo County Board of Supervisors and during her six years in the State Assembly. For 20 years, she was available to talk with me on short notice whenever I requested her advice or wanted to update her on one of the multitude of issues affecting the Yolo Bypass.

Helen and her husband Cap have attended every Yolo Basin Foundation event that I can remember. Their home must be full of artwork purchased at *Bucks for Ducks*! I have fond memories of when Helen and Cap joined my extended family for our very first day after Thanksgiving trip to the Wildlife Area. Over the years Helen has sent me brochures from Wildlife Areas around the country as she traveled with Cap. We all wish Helen and Cap many more trips as they enjoy a well earned retirement. 🌿

The Wonder of Winter at the Wetlands

By Ann Burris, Education Coordinator

Thousands of migrating ducks, geese and swans stop at the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area every winter. Some come to rest then move on; others stay longer enjoying the quality habitat that the Wildlife Area's 16,000 acres provides. This amazing gathering gives visitors the perfect opportunity to view a wide variety of birds as they go about their daily lives. We arrive at the Wildlife Area just after daybreak, my favorite time to visit this special place. It is chilly out and the sky is overcast. As we start down the gravel road into Parking Lot A, we roll down the windows and turn up the heater. We want to listen to the "morning songs and sounds" and we also want to stay warm. The first sounds are from a couple of Killdeer who were very vocal and active as they fly around us, then land near a mud puddle and become quiet. We slowly move on watching both sides of the road for movement and listening for nature's sounds. The warm pink morning light filters through the clouds, reflecting in the water, highlighting and silhouetting, cattails and tules and the ducks and coots that are silently swimming there.

The silence of the moment is broken by the loud quacks of a Mallard. We stop and see Northern Shovelers, Mallards and American Coots dabbling for an early breakfast. Great Egrets are also seen, some off in the distance, their stark white bodies easily visible as they hunt the edges of the ponds. As we continue we turn to the east, bypassing Parking Lot B, I watch the ditch area on the north side of the road for movement from beavers, muskrats or otters, knowing that this is an area where they might be seen this time of the day. We have no luck this morning.

The ponds on the south side of the road though are busy with silhouettes of ducks and coots gliding through the water, dipping down to eat, then slowly moving on. We see Black-crowned Night Herons singly and silently returning to their roosting area among the cattails. As we turn to the south, along the road to Parking Lot C, we notice a White-tailed Kite sitting quietly atop a willow tree. We stop to take a closer look, but the Kite lifts off and flies across the road to chase a Northern Harrier who is flying low just above

the vegetation on the other side of the road. Just ahead we see a willow with a really large Red-tailed Hawk perched at its top. The tree looks like it is barely able to support the bird and bends under her weight.

The morning sounds really begin as we enter Parking Lot C. We hear hundreds of ducks all talking to each other each with their own special sounds. There are Gadwalls, Northern Shovelers, elegant looking Northern Pintails and beautifully rust colored Cinnamon Teals. We decide this is the perfect place to stop and enjoy a snack. As we sit at the picnic table enjoying our coffee and muffins, we watch a little Marsh Wren as it busily moves from the tules to the pond edge just in front of us. Then it darts back to the tules, then back to

and small "V" flights of geese. Sometimes they are hard to see as their color blends into the clouds, but we keep watching.

Our attention refocuses as our eyes return to the ponds. We get out the spotting scope and find a single Bufflehead, its small black and white body a stark contrast to the muddy bank on which it is sleeping, and an American Wigeon and a Blue-winged Teal float among the other ducks.

Throughout the morning we have seen huge flocks of blackbirds. Some off so far in the distance they look like swarms of tiny black flying specks hovering above the horizon. At other times they are closer and look like ribbons or streamers undulating through the sky. They fly together, split apart, reform,



In the winter, ample opportunities exist for great bird viewing.

Photo: Dave Feliz

the pond's edge. We are attentively watching the wren's antics when we hear the sound of Tundra Swans above us. Quickly, we look up and there they are--twenty graceful long-necked forms. They are close enough to view without binoculars. As the swans pass I look around and notice just above the horizon of vegetation far off to the north that there are thousands of Snow and White-fronted Geese in the sky. We quickly grab our binoculars to watch their movement. Then we start to notice that the sky to the east is filled with large

and then, configure into another form. You could seemingly watch them all day as they perform their aerial ballet and you'll never see the same performance twice.

Morning turns into afternoon, and we decide to head into town for lunch. On our way out we see other cars driving slowly, stopping now and then to enjoy the sights and sounds. We've all come to experience the wonder of winter at the wetlands, and no one leaves the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area disappointed! 🌿

CALIFORNIA DUCK DAYS

We hope to see you at CA Duck Days on Saturday February 26th at the Yolo Bypass Headquarters in Davis. Check out the Schedule of Events online at www.yolobasin.org for workshops and field trips your family will want to attend, and then don't forget to sign up! you'll get a space on one, or even two, of the field trips.

Field Trips for Duck Days 2011



- Mystery Bird Trip
- Hedgerow Farms
- Conaway Ranch
- Putah Creek Dam to Dam
- Central Valley Raptors
- Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area "Lite"
- Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area
- Birding for Beginners
- Rice Farm First Hand
- East Delta Birding
- Putah Creek Riparian Reserve
- Davis Wetlands
- Ecological Field Techniques
- Tule Ranch Tour
- Local Owling

Surprise Visitors at Duck Days 2010!



Mobile Fish Exhibit



Trout Fishing for Kids



Exhibit Hall and Workshops



ss Wildlife Area
n.org to see what
register online early so



Scenes from Duck Days 2010

Photos by:
George Feliz
Pat McKown
Jo Ellen Ryan



Don't miss the Duck Days Art Show and Welcome Reception!

February 25th, 5:30-7pm at the Davis Art Center

Enjoy the impressive artwork created by Yolo County high school students and the CA Junior Duck Stamp Art. There will also be good food and drink, entertainment by Dave Monterey and great company to kick off Duck Days. This event is free of charge.



Demonstrations



Rob Floerke

by Heidi Satter, Volunteer Coordinator

Not everyone spends their first day of retirement donning waders to take a nap in the marshy wetlands of the Yolo Wildlife Area under a warm September sun. But if you know Yolo Basin Foundation volunteer Rob Floerke, it wouldn't surprise you. I recently had the pleasure of spending

In return, he was given a special invitation to hunt.

I soon discovered that Rob has an impressive and distinguished history himself. He received a degree in zoology from UC Davis. Later, as a graduate student at CSUS, he started working for the California Department of Fish and Game in the Wildlife Disease lab. In

“the students and the excitement of learning. Volunteering regularly for *Discover the Flyway* “charges my batteries.”

In addition to being a DTF docent, Rob is a Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area tour leader. He volunteers at *Bucks for Ducks*, this year contributing over 40 hours to the event. He spends a 10-hour day at *Duck Days*, gutting trout the kids' catch. He occasionally assists Corky Quirk with the summer bat tours. He also takes Scout and youth groups into the Wildlife Area on special tours.

One of Rob's favorite YBF moments is attending the November 1997 dedication of the Yolo Wildlife Area by President Clinton with the winning Nature Bowl team he coached from Pioneer Elementary School. The date just happened to coincide with his birthday!

Rob has a passion for nature photography, and his work is beautiful. Some of his photos, along with others from the Photography Club of Davis, were recently shown at an exhibit at Bistro 33 in Davis.

Being involved and active outdoors seems to be a family thing for the Floerkes. (With a last name that translates as “flower”, it may not be optional!) Both of Rob's sons, Zack, 24 and Wyatt, 20, competed in Nature Bowl as kids and both are Eagle Scouts. Wyatt even volunteered for the Nature Bowl semi-finals at the Yolo Bypass HQ office. Rob's wife, Dale Hoffman-Floerke, in addition to being the CA Department of Water Resources' Acting Deputy Director of Delta and Statewide Water Management, finds time to volunteer for YBF. Most recently, she was a tremendous help in registration at the 2010 *Bucks for Ducks*.

Rob caught my attention as we rolled past a Great Blue Heron: “Oh look! A 4-5-6- bird! It's 4 feet tall, weighs about 5 lbs. and has a 6 foot wingspan!” His contagious teaching style continued to emerge. On the other side of the road, Rob pointed out the “soup for the ducks”, seasonally flooded rice fields managed for waterfowl.

The sky overhead was promising to become a photographer's dream. As we headed back to the HQ building, I had the sneaking suspicion that Rob would be going back to the Wildlife Area for sunset. 🌅



the better part of a crisp November afternoon touring the Wildlife Area with Rob and his two companionable labs, Tule and Maidu. With Rob at the wheel of his Toyota Highlander hybrid, (“nice and quiet to get close to the birds”) and the dogs legally confined inside the car, we headed out with the hope of sighting Tundra Swans. An extra pair of smooth, green binoculars was on the seat. Always the Eagle Scout, Rob was prepared.

Rob settled in for a brief history lesson as we drove along. “Long before there was a Yolo Wildlife Area, long before Yolo Basin Foundation, there were waterfowl and there was the Martin brothers' pond.” Back in 1974, he helped Bob and Don Martin who farmed on the Tule Ranch, in what is now the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area, mowing, cleaning, and setting out decoys for the hunting season.

1980 he graduated from the law enforcement academy and segued into the role of Game Warden. Rob became part of a special team, Oil Spill Prevention Response and steadily moved his way up the ranks. He became Regional Manager of the Central Coast Region and then Deputy Director.

I asked Rob why he decided to volunteer for YBF. “Wildlife won't go out like a screaming eagle. There will be a quiet realization that it is gone. That's why I'm here.” Rob also believes that “to save natural resources, you need to talk to the adults of the future, get them knowledgeable, not indoctrinated. I want to pass on the passion I feel and have it become infectious so when they grow up and vote they do so with knowledge.”

One of Rob's favorite things about volunteering for the *Discover the Flyway* program is

Thanks to Our Youngest Supporters!

Imagine our surprise last summer when a delightful young man, Ian Hawes, a student at Cesar Chavez in Davis, walked into the Yolo Basin Foundation office with \$145. He said he really liked coming to Duck Days and wanted to do something to help. Instead of gifts for his birthday he asked his friends to give money to the Foundation, which he presented to an amazed group of staff members. When we walked outside with him to take a picture, we saw that this was not just something Ian's parents, Peter and Jill, had thought up for him. Ian was immediately engaged in talking to Corky and Ann about the animals he had seen at the pond on a previous visit. We did get him to stop for a quick pose with his donation!

Emily Alessandro is another budding environmental steward hailing from Vacaville. In September her mother mailed Yolo Basin a check for \$50 with a note that said the donation was from her daughter, who participated in Nature Bowl 2010. She made the money by collecting cans and bottles and encouraging her friends at Browns Valley Elementary School to do the same. Mrs. Alessandro said Emily "hopes to be able to make a difference for the Yolo Basin Foundation."

Knowing that young people, such as Ian and Emily, will be adults in just a few years makes us feel optimistic about the future of the environment! 🌱



Yocha Dehe Community Fund

Yolo Basin Foundation is very appreciative to be chosen as a recipient of a grant for \$10,000 from the Yocha Dehe Community Fund in 2010. This money will help to support our Discover the Flyway school program. The Fund is the philanthropic arm of the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation. Over the past decade, the Yocha Dehe Community Fund has provided nearly \$18 million in financial support to nonprofit organizations and service providers in Sacramento and Yolo Counties. The Fund offers support in education, community health, arts and culture, the environment, community development and social services. We've been very fortunate to have received grants from the Fund several times, beginning in 2001.

The Yocha Dehe Community Fund is dedicated to creating a healthy community through engaged philanthropy, deep community knowledge and awareness, and active leadership. Focusing on the six core elements mentioned above, the Fund uses philanthropy in ways that can effectively build a high quality of life for Yolo County residents and Native people wherever they live. The Yocha Dehe Community Fund was one of the first to be established by a Native American tribe in California and is a recognized leader in local charitable giving.

We are very thankful to the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation and Yocha Dehe Community Fund for their continued support and confidence in our work. 🌱



Ian Hawes presents YBF educators Corky Quirk and Ann Burris with a generous donation.

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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.

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This Email Made Our Day!

Subject: Most Wonderful Day Ever
Date: Monday, November 28, 2010 10:11 PM
From: Phil Robertson

"The Most Wonderful Day Ever"

That is what my 4-year old granddaughter Annika said about our visit to the Yolo Basin Wildlife Area today. First we visited the visitor center with all of its mounted birds and animals and most friendly and helpful staff (lovely folks). We examined the teeth, fur and flat tail of the beaver, the smoothness of the rabbit pelt, the size of the crane (as big as Annika), the variety of birds, and then we took a trip around the pond (Where are the fish, Poppy?).

Then we headed for the tour route with millions of questions and "BIRDS, BIRDS." We enjoyed a somewhat messy but tasty picnic and then continued the tour drive seeing many birds and many different species. Hundreds of thousands of blackbirds flying high, morphing into wondrous shapes even a 'black tornado of birds'...

Attached are today's photos from the Yolo Basin.

It was a wonderful day for me too!

Get those kids out into nature!!

Phil (aka Poppy)



Visit the Yolo Basin Foundation on Facebook for all the latest information and photos!

