



Market Hunting in the Yolo Basin, 1850-1950

by David Hickman, Ph.D. and Don Morrill

Every winter we cherish the sight of thousands of geese swirling overhead in the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area. Photographers spend hours seeking the ultimate waterfowl picture, many of which we love to see at Bucks for Ducks. But not long ago, even into the 1950's, those sights were seen by many as principally an opportunity for profit. From the Gold Rush through the Great Depression, market hunters shot upwards of a quarter-million ducks, geese and shorebirds each year in order to meet the demand of restaurants and saloons from San Francisco to Lake Tahoe.



Hunters in a tule splitter, circa 1900. Courtesy: Bancroft Collection.

Early settlers in the Yolo Basin saw ducks, geese, shorebirds, and even songbirds as resources to be harvested for sale to miners and city dwellers, or for export to China and elsewhere. "Rimlanders" as landowners adjacent to wetlands were called, used the money earned from winter hunting to help establish their farms, and they treated waterfowl as just another crop to add to their seasonal mix.

The most common method for gathering waterfowl was "bull-hunting" in which a live bull or steer was employed as a moving blind. After the Gold Rush, cattle became so numerous in the Yolo Basin that ducks and geese grew accustomed to them. Steers, specifically trained for hunting, pulled wagons to within sight of the flocks of waterfowl. After unhitching the wagon, the hunter hid behind the steer and carefully maneuvered the animal close to the flocks, circling to force the birds into tight concentrations. When satisfied with his positioning, the hunter tapped the steer away and opened fire, shooting once at the birds in the pond and again as they took flight. With skill and luck, the hunter might bag nearly a hundred birds in a single shooting.

By 1880 market hunting was a big business. "Duck draggers," as market hunters were called, often worked in teams of three at night with leases from farmers intent on reducing crop depredation. Hundreds of thousands of ducks and geese every year began to flow into San Francisco and Sacramento. On peak days, more than 10,000 birds arrived in the City by Wells Fargo freight, from railroads, or by steamer down the Sacramento River.

Particularly prized for their taste were the White-fronted Goose, White-faced Ibis, Long-billed Curlew, Mallard and Canvasback.

Sandhill Cranes were used early as a replacement for the Christmas goose, and were prized for their medicinal qualities in Chinese communities. Often cranes and other large birds were captured and fattened in captivity. A great variety of birds in the Valley, including Robins, Red-winged Blackbirds, Quail, and even House Finches were shot and sold for dishes. "Bird on Toast" was a common listing in San Francisco restaurants.

One of the best known commercial shooters was Peter St. Clair, renowned for his prowess at harvesting in the Yolo and Natomas Basins. With boat mounted shotguns, some as large as 2 gauge, he supplied many hundreds of birds daily. He was respected as both a businessman and an amateur naturalist, being knowledgeable enough to chronicle and mount unusual species. In fact, after the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, the California Academy of Science employed hunters like St. Clair to restore their wildlife collections as the hunters had an unrivaled expertise with the state's diverse animal life and habitats.

In the early 20th century, several factors pushed California away from market hunting and towards increased conservation. First, dwindling waterfowl flocks became increasingly apparent to residents, and that sense was bolstered by research by Joseph Grinnell at UC Berkeley and Tracy Storer at UC Davis. In addition, as elsewhere in the U.S., sport hunting was a growing pastime of urban professionals. Sport hunters in Sacramento brought increasing pressure to bear on Yolo County, and influenced state game policy. The Sacramento Record-Union began editorializing as early as the 1890's about excesses of market hunters like Peter St. Clair and calling for stricter hunting regulations. Sacramento County soon enacted a relatively strict season and bag limits and hired a game marshal to enforce the laws. Hunting licenses, first sold in 1907, provided income to support CA Department of Fish and Game personnel and strengthened their role.

Despite the progress, California voters, as in other western states and particularly in rural areas, proved resistant to wildlife conservation measures. For instance, when the legislature passed a law prohibiting market hunting of game in 1914, the state's voters overturned the measure in the first

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Duck Days Feb. 24-25th
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Introducing Our New Board Members

by Joy Elson, Development Coordinator

Yolo Basin Foundation has a very committed Board of Directors who contribute in many ways, including raising money and offering guidance to the organization. Board members represent the full range of wetlands-related interests including agriculture, flood control, science, policy, planning and education. A complete list of board members and officers is located on the back page of this newsletter. We pleased to welcome our four newest members!

Mike Deas is a Consulting Engineer for Watercourse Engineering, Inc., which provides professional engineering services for water quantity and quality issues associated with river and reservoir systems. He has over 20 years of experience and is a recognized expert in Northern California and the Central Valley.



He has a Ph.D. in Civil Engineering, an M.S. in Water Resources Management, and a B.S. in Civil Engineering, all from the University of California, Davis.

Mike and his wife Jeanene live in Davis and have four children, ages 4 to 14. Mike coaches soccer and baseball and enjoys spending time with his immediate and extended family, as well as a wide range of outdoor activities, including hiking, backpacking, camping, and fishing.

Mike says, "My interest in the Yolo Basin Foundation is further exploring the successful collaborative and cooperative mechanisms among the multiple uses managed in the area. Education, agriculture, flood control, wildlife preservation, hunting and fishing, other outdoor recreation (birding, hiking, bat watching), and other activities share this unique environment set adjacent to extensive urban environments. My aim is to learn what I can and contribute where I can to the Foundation."

Lucas Frerichs is Legislative Director for the Office of Assemblyman Rich Gordon. Lucas is responsible for the success of the Assemblyman's legislative bill packages; staffs various policy issue areas, including natural resources, housing, transportation, parks, and water-related issues; and serves as a representative to the state Wildlife Conservation Board.



He has a Certificate in Land Use and Environmental Planning from University of California, Davis, and a BA in Government from California State University, Sacramento.

Lucas and his wife Stacie are 15-year residents of Davis/Yolo County, and are "parents" to a German Shorthaired Pointer, Poppy. In their free time they love to travel, garden, hike and backpack.

Lucas says, "I'm interested in the Yolo Basin Foundation for several reasons. Firstly, the Yolo Bypass/ Vic Fazio Wildlife Area provides numerous benefits to the region, from essential bird/wildlife habitat to flood protection, and I think many local citizens aren't aware of how diverse it really is. Second, I am amazed at the range of programs YBF offers, particularly the science curriculum to elementary aged students, as well as the guided bird and bat tours. We're so fortunate to have such a dynamic environmental and educational organization right in our midst."

Steve Macaulay is Vice President at West Yost Associates. Steve has worked on issues related to the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta his entire career and has over 39 years of experience in a full range of activities related to water supply reliability and local, regional, and state-wide water resource planning.



He has an M.S. in Civil Engineering from

California State University, Sacramento, and a B.S. in Chemical Engineering from University of California, Davis.

Steve and his wife Terry live in rural Yolo County. They have two children, Kristen, 30, and Scott, 28. Steve and Terry are active bicyclists and love to go on tours. Steve is also an active skier.

Steve says, "Terry and I feel strongly about environmental protection and stewardship. We have done restoration on our small property in Yolo County and a larger ranch in the hills. We love the work of the Foundation, have been members for more than ten years, and look forward to helping even more."

Bill Ziebron is Vice President of Northern California Operations for Dudek. Bill also serves as a Senior Management Consultant and Environmental Planning Executive to other small groups. His experience encompasses all aspects of urban and regional planning, large-scale infrastructure analysis and planning, natural resource management, environmental assessment, and the design and implementation of public participation programs.



He has a M.A. in Urban and Regional Planning from San Jose State University, and a B.A. in Political Science from Stanford University.

Bill and his wife: Karen live in West Sacramento, and have two grown daughters. He enjoys hiking, travel, collecting fine wine, golf, the San Francisco Giants and especially spending time with his family.

Bill says, "I am interested in the Yolo Basin Foundation because it is a vital resource for the Sacramento area. As a planner, it addresses comprehensive land use management including flood control, which is important in this region and for the future of California. Environmental education for children is also near and dear to my heart." 🌱

Jillian Wilkowski: A Volunteer for All Seasons

by Heidi Satter, Volunteer Coordinator

Volunteer jobs tend to change with the seasons so it's not surprising that many of YBF's volunteers are involved seasonally. There are some rare volunteers however who contribute their time and energy year round. One such volunteer is Jillian Wilkowski, who actively contributes to programs, tours, outreach and special events every month of the year.

Jillian started volunteering with YBF in 2008 as a docent for the *Discover the Flyway* school program. "I'd seen an ad for docents for *Discover the Flyway* in a local paper shortly after I'd moved to Woodland from Oakland. I was looking for a way to connect with the community. The *Discover the Flyway* Program was the perfect match."

As a DTF docent, Jillian often spends the whole day with the school group, not only teaching in the morning but also touring the Wildlife Area after lunch. "Riding the bus with the children out to tour the Wildlife Area is always a treat. The children squeal with delight on seeing an egret wading in a pond or blackbirds on a telephone wire. It's often difficult to contain their excitement."

One of Jillian's favorite volunteer memories is from a DTF field trip into the Wildlife Area. As Jillian recalls, "We were pulling into Parking Lot B in a bus full of chatting children. They were all anxious to get out and begin exploring. Someone looked out of the window and spotted a squadron of pelicans just above us. Silence fell over the bus as the children leaned into the windows to see the majestic birds circling the bus."

Touring the Wildlife Area with the school program gives Jillian the opportunity to combine two of her favorite things. It also nurtures a latent interest in ornithology. "I love teaching and the outdoors has always been a part of my life. My father was a hunter and fisherman. In our family the most praise came from spotting a pheasant in a cornfield or a deer on a mountainside. But it wasn't until I started doing the *Discover the*

Flyway Program and going with the children out to tour the Wildlife Area that I realized how much I enjoy bird watching."

Although Jillian is a "regular" with the school program, her special ability to share her love of teaching and the outdoors extends to everything she does at YBF, and she does a lot! In the summer, she assists Corky Quirk with YBF's popular *Bat Talk and Walk* programs. In the fall, she helps with *Bucks for Ducks*. In the winter, she volunteers at *California Duck Days* and in the spring she works on special projects.

Throughout the year, Jillian also works with tule. This past summer and fall, Jillian was part of the Tule Tuesday working group helping to build a new tule structure in the Demonstration Wetlands. She did everything from harvesting and drying tule in the spring to soaking it and using it to cover the tule hut's frame in the fall, sometimes single-handedly! She also makes tule duck decoys at Duck Days and has even shared this skill in classroom outreach for YBF.

Jillian worked in the insurance industry as a marine and aviation underwriter and after 20+ years decided to look for work "closer to my heart." Now working as an artist, Jillian "cobbles together a living" from her art, mosaics, concrete sculptures and collage. She has graciously donated her artwork to the Silent Auction at *Bucks for Ducks*. She is also a writer. "When I'm not working on my art or volunteering for DTF, you can find me sitting at my computer writing poetry or working on my latest novel."

Jillian's son recently graduated from Caltech and is working as a software engineer in Silicon Valley. She also has two special girls



in her life she considers "the daughters of my heart". They were neighbors who through "twists of fate became members of my family. They're 22 and 23 and have just finished college." In addition to her human family, Jillian has several furry companions. "At home I have three cats and two dogs: the sweetest border collie I've even known and a chow mix rescued in New Orleans after hurricane Katrina. In addition to my own 5 animals I'm currently fostering three tiny kittens."

Jillian has a calm and gentle confidence punctuated with a pleasant sense of humor. And sometimes, a sense of humor comes in handy when working with the school groups. As Jillian recalls, "One day, while waiting for the children to reach the activity I was leading, a parent leaned over and asked "what is it like to work with your husband?" I was puzzled. I don't have a husband so I asked what she meant. She replied, 'well, you have the same last name, "Docent".' I gently explained that 'docent' means we're volunteers. I still smile when I remember that morning. I'm so happy to be part of the YBF docent family."

We're happy you're part of the YBF family too, Jillian. Thank you for everything you do! 🐦

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John Laird, California Resources Secretary, accepting a plaque of appreciation from Yolo Basin Foundation's Betsy Marchand, Robin Kulakow and Ann Brice.

Secretary Laird spoke to the over 400 guests who attended *Bucks for Ducks* on November 18th at the Davis Veterans Memorial Center. The Secretary's enthusiasm and friendly manner helped set the positive and enjoyable tone for the event. The Secretary spoke of traveling throughout the state and seeing how people are developing sustainable industries and new ways of managing lands for many uses as the Yolo Basin Foundation did over 20 years ago.

He talked about the many challenges facing the Delta and that the Agency is committed to meeting the multiple goals of flood control, restoring fish populations and maintaining the wetlands of the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area. He challenged the people attending the event to continue to support the Yolo Basin Foundation at future *Bucks for Ducks*. He also encouraged the volunteers to continue their work of educating people.

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ever use of the referendum process. Nonetheless, after the federal government approved the 1918 Migratory Bird Treaty with Canada and later Mexico, market hunting became illegal. Over the next decades increasingly strict seasonal closures and limits were established by California state law.

Despite the tightening grip of the law, market hunting remained common in California through the Great Depression, driven by chronically high unemployment, cooperative farmers, and the difficulty of obtaining convictions in local courts. Networks of "duckleggers" continued to operate outside the law, supplying saloons and fine restaurants alike with illicitly acquired game. However, as the drought of the 1930s drove waterfowl populations to their lowest levels ever recorded, even diehard market hunters could see the end approaching. Finally, in the early 1950's, through the combination of changing popular attitudes and the vigorous undercover efforts of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and CA Department of Fish & Game, market hunting in the Central Valley effectively came to its end. 

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