



# YOLO FLYWAY



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A Publication of the Yolo Basin Foundation and the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area

## “The Fall and Rise of the Wetlands of California’s Great Central Valley”

**Y**olo Basin Foundation was pleased to host Dr. Philip Garone for the first *Flyway Nights* lecture of the fall in November. His research focuses on the history and ecology of the Central Valley, especially in terms of the effects of agriculture and water development projects on wetlands and the wildlife they support. His new book “The Fall and Rise of the Wetlands of California’s Great Central Valley” may be of interest to many of our newsletter readers, so we’ve included a brief description of it here:

Weaving together ecology, grassroots politics, and public policy, Philip Garone offers this first comprehensive environmental history of California’s Great Central Valley, where freshwater and tidal wetlands once provided critical habitat for tens of millions of migratory waterfowl. This book exposes how California’s millions of acres of wetlands were nearly obliterated by vast irrigation and reclamation projects, but have been brought back from the brink of total destruction by the organized efforts of duck hunters, whistle-blowing scientists, and a broad coalition of conservationists. Garone examines the many demands that have been made on the Valley’s natural resources, especially by large-scale agriculture, and traces the unforeseen ecological consequences of this unrestrained manipulation of nature. On a broader scale, he investigates changing public and scientific attitudes that are now ushering in an era of unprecedented protection for wildlife and wetlands in California and in the nation as a whole.

Garone, Philip. 2011. *The Fall and Rise of the Wetlands of California’s Great Central Valley*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. 



*Eagle Scout Ryan Stevens with the benches he and fellow scouts built for the Discover the Flyway program.*

## Hooray! Benches for our students at last

**T**hanks to Ryan Stevens and his fellow Eagle Scouts, Yolo Basin Foundation now has comfortable, attractive seating for more than 30 students at the Demonstration Wetlands. The era of blue tarps on the ground is over! Ryan is an amazing young man. He’s in 10th grade and is homeschooled. He’s a straight A student, a gifted pianist, an enthusiastic traveler, and the patrol leader in his scout troop (Troop 133). He loves science, especially biology. He

completed in Nature Bowl from 3rd through 6th grade, where his love of life science and nature flourished. When thinking of where he might want to do an Eagle Scout service project, Yolo Basin was his preference since he had spent many happy hours preparing for and competing in Nature Bowl there. We at Yolo Basin Foundation are honored and grateful that Ryan chose our organization as the place to display his commitment to the environment. 

## What’s in a name?

Beginning on January 1, 2013, the California Department of Fish and Game officially became the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Notice the new logo at the top of this page.

“The name of the department was changed to better reflect our evolving responsibilities,” said Department Director Charlton H. Bonham. “As our role has grown to meet 21st century expectations, we remain committed to our traditional responsibilities and to honoring our deep

roots in California’s natural resources legacy.”

Previously known as game wardens, the department’s law enforcement staff will now be called wildlife officers.

The department has a new website ([www.wildlife.ca.gov](http://www.wildlife.ca.gov)) and email addresses for CDFW employees, but the old URL and email addresses will continue to work indefinitely. Also, in a cost-saving measure, all supplies and equipment with the old name will continue to be used. 

**California Duck Days  
February 22-23**

# Our special Great Horned Owl!

By Corky Quirk, Education Associate

In the middle of December, while leading a school class through the Wildlife Area, I spotted him--the Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*) was finally back in view. Often in the winter, when the leaves have fallen from the trees, this majestic owl can be seen in the willows that parallel the auto tour route, just before Parking Lot C. His dark brown feathers and barred belly camouflage him well as he perches close to the trunk of the tree, but the prominent ear tufts give away his location to those who look carefully. His eyes glow orange-yellow as he silently observes the passing cars.

The Great Horned Owls are year-round residents. They are nocturnal and generally hunt by aerial dives from perches next to open areas. Swooping silently, the owl catches its prey in powerful talons that often kill on impact. A Great Horned Owl can carry prey two to three times heavier than itself. They are carnivores whose diet varies widely. Although their diet consists predominantly of mammals, especially rabbits, they are known to also consume insects, amphibians, reptiles and birds. Many types of rodents fall victim,

as do birds including ducks, herons, songbirds and other owls. This owl will knock into a nest of tree squirrels to flush them and will take crows off their night roost. It is one of the only animals to regularly hunt skunks, and often the owl and its nest will smell of skunk. A regular feeding roost is near the nest site and often is an old unoccupied nest. Human conflicts occur when the owl takes domestic chickens, turkeys or house pets.

The Great Horned Owl has few natural predators other than one of its own kind. In the wild they may live to 13 or 14 years of age and twice as long in captivity. Humans are the largest contributor to early death through road kills, lead toxicity and electrocution. In recent years more lethal rodenticides, using anticoagulant poisoning, have come onto the market. Many of the owls and other predators die in high numbers from secondary poisoning as they accumulate contaminants from their prey.

The Great Horned Owl in the willow at the Wildlife Area is probably a male. Likely the female, who is larger with a higher pitched hoot, has chosen a nesting location. The pair

is monogamous, but do not stay together all year. When nesting season arrives, they repeat rituals of greeting including hooting, bowing, bill rubbing and preening.

Look for the big nests in the large trees near the west levee where the South Davis storm water flows into the bypass. These nests have been used by various large birds over the years. Last year one was occupied by a Great Horned Owl pair. Frequently the pair chooses a nest built by Red-tailed Hawks, crows or herons; they do not build their own. Normally, two to four eggs are incubated by both parents for 26-30 days. Both parents bring food to the young. The timing of hatch is a bit ahead of the hatching and birthing of other animals that then can become food for the owl chicks. By March/April the young start roaming along the branches but don't fly until they're about nine to ten weeks old. They continue to be fed as they gain independence over the next few weeks. The juveniles disperse in autumn.

For the students in our school program, seeing the Great Horned Owl near Parking Lot C is often the highlight of the field trip. They don't even need binoculars to identify him. The most frequent comment is "Way cool!" 🦉

Milke Reinhart

## Thanks to our Donors



Yolo Basin Foundation Executive Director Robin Kulakow receives a check from Fred Teichert, while Jeff Stoddard, Joy Elson, and Heidi Satter look on.

We'd like to acknowledge the following for their recent funding for *Discover the Flyway* school program. We are very grateful for their support, which contributes to a successful 2012-2013 school year.

- **Rose Foundation**
- **Thorton S. Glide, Jr. and Katrina D. Glide Foundation**
- **Teichert Foundation**
- **U.S. Bank**

# Kim Elson

by Heidi Satter, Volunteer Coordinator

**Y**olo Basin Foundation volunteers give so much of their time and talents, they often feel like family. In the case of Kim Elson, this is especially true.

Kim first started volunteering with YBF in the summer of 2010 when she moved home to Davis after graduating with a degree in geology from Carleton College in Minnesota. Kim started helping behind the scenes, doing data entry and envelope stuffing for YBF's Development Coordinator and Database Manager, Joy Elson, who just happens to be her mom.

Since then, Kim has helped at just about every event and volunteer position YBF has to offer. According to Kim, "I've experienced most events—Bat Talk and Walks, Flyway Nights, Gaggle of Gatherings, Bucks for Ducks, outreach, Wildlife Area Bike Open House—just by helping out with preparation and set up." Kim's willingness to step in at the last minute has been especially appreciated. Quietly and efficiently, she always seems available to lend a hand whenever assistance is needed: cutting and prepping mountains of fruit, staffing sign-in and outreach tables, preparing signage, setting up supplies, pouring wine and even shopping for special events. She has spent hours on the YBF database and

has even baked gluten-free cakes for volunteer parties. With versatility and dependability, she gets the job done.

Kim was taking photographs of a visiting school group for a Yolo Basin Foundation grant application when she became interested in getting involved with the *Discover the Flyway* program. "I do a lot of data entry for my mom, but I really enjoy helping out with DTF. It's a lot of fun to see kids get excited about science and the outdoors."

As a DTF docent, Kim especially enjoys the Pond Activity and "Sinking Into Soil," a station that introduces students to the components of three soil types, including wetland soil. "It's right up my alley as a geology major." Not only does she have the educational background to excel as a docent, Kim has experienced the DTF program from both sides: as a Davis resident her whole life, it's not surprising that she has memories of attending the program while a 7<sup>th</sup> grade student at Holmes Junior High School. "I remember it was really muddy and a girl lost her shoe. And there was a really loud killdeer in the parking lot that was probably guarding a nest, though we couldn't see it."

Kim's youth belies varied interests and exciting travel opportunities. While in college, she studied abroad in Australia as part of a coastal ecology program. She also participated in the Williams-Mystic Maritime program, fostering her interest in ships and the ocean. These experiences resulted in several internships, including one at Big Thicket National Preserve in Texas through the Geologic Society of America in partnership with the National Park Service. "I was a "Geoscientist-in-the-Park" intern. My main project was incorporating Big Thicket National Preserve resources into the new NPS database, but I also got to help with long leaf pine restoration and documenting benches and boardwalks on all the trails in case of hurricane damage."

Another intern experience was on a research vessel off the Coast of South Africa. "On the ship, I was helping my friend with her PhD research on the Walvis Ridge Seamount trail in the Southern Atlantic. Basically we were mapping the seamounts (i.e. underwater vol-

canoes) and then dredging for rocks to send back to the labs on land. We were offshore (and saw no land whatsoever) for 47 days. "It was during this internship that Kim experienced one of her favorite memories. "I did get to spend a little time in South Africa, where I got to swim with penguins, which was pretty



Featured volunteer Kim Elson

much a highlight of my life seeing as penguins are my favorite animal ever."

In addition to her mom, Joy, Kim's family includes her dad, Tom, who is a consulting engineer in Woodland, and her twin sister, Amy, who is earning a Masters in Education and teaching credential at UC Davis. Kim currently works as an office assistant at Technology Sciences Group, "It's basically an environmental regulations consulting company. I help with the added paperwork for product renewals at the end of the year." When not working or volunteering at YBF, Kim enjoys running, cooking and anything maritime.

YBF is fortunate to have a volunteer with Kim's interests, education, experiences and dependability. She is a volunteer coordinator's dream come true. Her other family is pretty proud of her too! 



Burrowing Owls may also be seen at the Wildlife Area.

Mike Reinhart

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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.*

To become a member of Yolo Basin Foundation, go to:  
[www.yolobasin.org](http://www.yolobasin.org) and select "Join/Donate Now"



Mike Bumgardner

CALIFORNIA  
DUCK DAYS  
2013

**Friday, February 22:**

Reception & Student Wildlife Art Show

5:30-7:30 pm • Davis Art Center • 1919 F Street, Davis

**Saturday, February 23:**

Workshops, Field Trips & Activities All Day

Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area Headquarters

45211 County Road 32 B (Chiles Road), Davis

For a full schedule of events and to register for Duck Days go to [www.yolobasin.org](http://www.yolobasin.org).

For more information call Yolo Basin Foundation at 530-757-3780.

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

