



# VALLEY VENTURES

*A publication of the Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture, keeping you informed about habitat and wildlife conservation in our Valley*

## *Bird Conservation Soars To Next Level!*

Across North America, society holds birds in high regard. After all, Canada, the United States, and Mexico each have a bird as a national symbol. Each of the Canadian provinces, as well as each of the states in the US, have a provincial or state bird. In residential neighborhoods, we drive along many streets that are named after birds. Many species of birds are bred at our automobile factories, such as the Skylark, Firebird, Hummer, Thunderbird, and the Falcon (an extinct species known only to our older readers). And, of course, the greatest and most prestigious honor ever bestowed upon any bird species is to grace the uniform of a professional

sports team! Believe it or not, there are sixteen teams whose names reference a type of bird! How many can you name?

Despite this obvious fascination and affinity for birds, many bird species across the continent are experiencing severe population declines, to the point where they are considered threatened, endangered, or are on the brink of being listed as such. Approximately 1,200 species of birds inhabit North America, comprising nearly 15% of the world's avifauna. More than 1,000 species are found in Mexico, 800 in the United States, and 600 in Canada. Hundreds of these species are shared

*see NABCI: page 2*



*The North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) will create a forum where existing initiatives can coordinate their efforts to ensure the health of the continent's native bird populations, including waterfowl, such as this Wood Duck, raptors, songbirds, and shorebirds. Photo: David Rosen*

### *Winter, 2002*

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## *Grasslands 101*

Located in Merced County in the Central Valley of California, the Grassland Wetlands encompass approximately 160,000 acres. For nearly a century, this 25-mile by 30-mile expanse has miraculously survived massive water diversions, urban encroachment, and agricultural development. Today, the Grassland Wetlands remain California's largest wetland ecosystem.

Nearly 110,000 acres of these historic wetlands are privately owned, managed mostly as waterfowl hunting clubs. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the CA Department of Fish and Game, and CA State Parks manage the remaining 50,000 acres.

This unique area has maintained incredible habitat diversity, offering permanent and seasonal wetlands, riparian corridors, and native grasslands. More than 550 species of birds, animals, and plants, including 47 species that are federally listed as sensitive, threatened, or endangered, have been identified in the Grassland Wetlands. It is perhaps best known for its staggering populations of wintering waterfowl. It hosts approximately one million ducks, geese, and swans each year between November and February, with Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Northern Shoveler, and Gadwall each numbering 100,000 or more. The

*see Grasslands: page 6*

*NABCI* from front page: among all three nations and many are endemic to North America. In Canada, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife designates 42 species of birds (or 7% of the avifauna) as endangered, threatened, or vulnerable. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service lists 90 species (about 11% of the avifauna) as endangered or threatened in the United States and another 124 species (about 26%) are of high conservation concern.



Mexico's Secretariat of Environment, Natural Resources, and Fisheries lists 178 bird species as in danger or threatened, constituting about 17% of the species regularly occurring in Mexico.

Many other species still considered as "common" are undergoing widespread and alarming population declines.

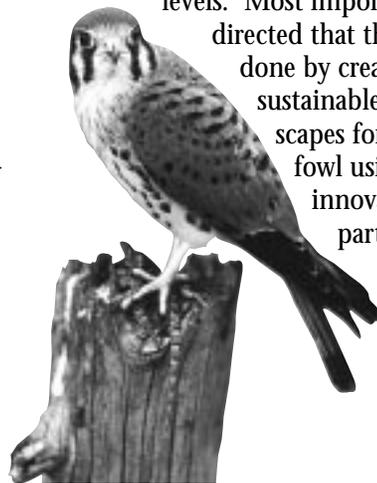
The North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) was launched in November of 1998 by nearly 120 leading conservationists from Mexico, the United States and Canada. The effort has been supported and facilitated by the Commission for Environmental Cooperation, an organization created by the North American Free Trade Agreement to deal with environmental issues that affect Mexico, the United States, and Canada. The purpose of NABCI is to ensure the long-term health of North America's native bird populations through partnerships among governments, non-governmental organizations, and the citizens of Mexico, the United States and Canada. NABCI's goal is "to deliver the full spectrum of bird conservation through regionally-based, biologically-driven, landscape-oriented partnerships." The mantra of those involved with the initiative is "all birds across all habitats."

There are a number of well-established and successful bird conservation

programs already operating in North America. Each of these, however, only targets the habitat and other needs of a specific group of species, such as waterfowl, waterbirds, shorebirds, migratory and resident land birds, and various endemic and endangered species within those bird groups. The North American Waterfowl Management Plan, for example, is a model of successful bird conservation. Partners In Flight is making huge impact on landbird conservation. The Strategy for the Conservation of birds in Mexico is off to a dynamic start. Shorebird Conservation Plans are under development in the United States and Canada, and efforts have begun to plan for comprehensive protection for all waterbirds. The goal of the North American Bird Conservation Initiative is to facilitate the implementation of these separate programs in a combined effort. The hope is to create a forum where existing initiatives can coordinate their activities.

NABCI shares several similarities with the enormously successful North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP). In 1986, the United States and Canada signed the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (joined by Mexico in 1994) to restore waterfowl populations to 1970's levels. Most importantly, it

directed that this be done by creating sustainable landscapes for waterfowl using innovative partnerships



*Western bluebird (top) and American kestrel (above). Photos: David Rosen*

*Valley Ventures* is published by the Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture, a public-private partnership formed in 1988 to implement the North American Waterfowl Management Plan within the Central Valley of California.

The Joint Venture's conservation efforts encompass wetlands and associated habitats to benefit waterbirds, other wildlife, and you.

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Please contact any of the partners on the back of this newsletter regarding their efforts and how you can support them and become involved.

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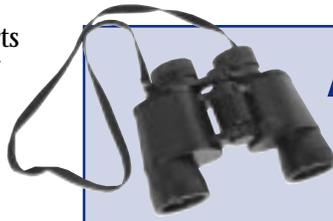
among the Federal, State, and private sectors. NAWMP partners have created highly successful regional "joint venture" partnerships, delivering biologically-based habitat conservation in areas critical to waterfowl.

Just as the Joint Ventures of NAWMP were established in regions determined to be critical to the life cycles of North American waterfowl populations, NABCI's framework is being established with Bird Conservation Regions (BCRs). BCRs are ecologically defined areas that provide a consistent spatial framework for bird conservation across North American landscapes. By working within regions that are ecologically meaningful to bird populations (rather than arbitrary

political regions), conservation efforts can be tailored to support groups of species throughout the heart of their range, whether it be breeding areas, migratory stopovers, or wintering grounds.

BCRs are being used to help assign "conservation priority" scores for bird species. Each BCR, regardless of internal political boundaries, will have its own unique list of "priority" species. Species contained on a given BCR list will be ranked by conservation importance according to a standardized set of criteria determined by partners from Mexico, the United States, and Canada. Lists of priority species will help guide conservation activities throughout the continent. With partners from all three countries using a common framework and shared priorities, the potential for more effective conservation is high.

Birds constitute a vital component of biological diversity and are among North America's most important natural resources for ecological, economic, and aesthetic reasons. From



## Let's Go Surfing Now!

Here are some websites you can check out to learn more about birds and bird conservation programs:

- Birdsource <http://www.birdsource.org>
- National Audubon Society <http://www.audubon.org>
- Cornell Lab of Ornithology <http://www.birds.cornell.edu>
- Wild Birds Unlimited <http://www.wbu.com>
- American Birding Association <http://www.americanbirding.org>
- Partners in Flight <http://www.PartnersInFlight.org>
- American Bird Conservancy <http://abcbirds.org>
- Ducks Unlimited, Inc. <http://www.ducks.org>
- Bird Studies Canada <http://www.bsc-eoc.org/bscmain.html>
- Birdwatching Information and Resources <http://www.birdwatching.com>
- California Waterfowl Association <http://www.calwaterfowl.org>
- Point Reyes Bird Observatory <http://www.prbo.org>
- USFWS Division of Bird Habitat Conservation <http://birdhabitat.fws.gov>



insect pest control, to plant pollination and seed dispersal, to critical links in the food web, birds are an integral part of a dynamic ecosystem and a visible indicator of its health. These functions prevent hundreds of millions of dollars in economic losses in agricultural and

forest products industries each year. In addition, birds are one of the greatest ecotourism attractions in North America, resulting in billions of dollars of spent in local and national economies by birdwatchers, hunters, photographers, and others.



## NABCI In A Nutshell

The North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) is an unprecedented effort to align the conservation community and society at large in the

task of conserving this continent's bird life. NABCI is one of the most powerful coalitions for conservation ever assembled on this or any other conti-

• NABCI will generate resources for bird conservation and increase efficiency in the delivery of resources.

• NABCI will help focus research and monitoring on areas where it can make the most significant contributions to bird conservation.

• Success will keep birds and other organisms common, resulting in savings to society through reduction in regulatory actions and desperate recovery measures.

The Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture has adopted the principles set forth in the NABCI framework and is coordinating with other bird initiatives to achieve benefits not only to waterfowl, but to all wetland associated avian species. For more information, visit the NABCI website at [www.nabci.org](http://www.nabci.org).



The Ash-throated flycatcher and other migratory songbirds that nest in the Central Valley will benefit from NABCI's efforts. Photo: David Rosen



## Partner Spotlight:

# Audubon CALIFORNIA

The Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture (CVHJV) coordinates the efforts of a unique partnership of sixteen agencies and conservation organizations to maximize the overall efficiency of wetland conservation efforts in California's Central Valley. Each issue of *Valley Ventures* highlights one of the partners whose work is integral to the protection, enhancement, and restoration of wildlife habitat in the Central Valley. In this issue, we'd like to introduce you to Audubon-California, one of the private, non-profit partners of the CVHJV.

Founded in 1905, the National Audubon Society (NAS) is named for John James Audubon (1785-1851), famed ornithologist, explorer, and wildlife artist. The Society was originally established to increase public awareness of the indiscriminate slaughter of birds in North America, primarily wading birds such as herons and egrets, whose plumes were prized possessions in ladies' hats. As a result of the uncontrolled hunting, many bird species were experiencing population declines which alarmed ornithologists. The mission of the NAS was originally to protect the birds whose populations were declining, however, over the last century, it's mission has been expanded to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds and other wildlife for the benefit of humanity and the earth's biological diversity.

The national headquarters of NAS is located in New York City and oversees the activities of state offices. Each state office, in turn, oversees and coordinates the efforts of numerous local Audubon chapters within that state. The Audubon state office for California, which also serves Nevada, is located in

Sacramento and coordinates the membership, conservation, and education activities of over fifty local chapters. In addition to the broad national mission, Audubon-California provides leadership on state conservation and environmental education programs; develops and strengthens local conservation action through its chapter network; and participates as a division of the National Audubon Society on national and international campaigns to protect and restore wildlife habitats.



*Dan Taylor is the Executive Director of the Audubon - California State office in Sacramento, which also handles activities in Nevada. Photo: David Rosen*

Audubon-California has been an important partner in the CVHJV, playing an active role in many habitat enhancement and restoration projects within the Central Valley and providing support on a number of key legislative issues affecting conservation in our region. Audubon perhaps has the greatest impact in California through its local chapters with their grassroots membership and volunteers. It is at the local chapter level that most people become acquainted with the NAS, through guided birdwatching trips led by volunteers in their local area. Audubon chapters are the leaders on local conservation issues, important

partners with each other and Audubon-California on regional conservation issues, and key contributors to setting and accomplishing state and national conservation priorities. The chapters deliver programs emphasizing conservation, education, habitat restoration, and recreation, thus complementing Audubon-California's efforts to connect people with nature.

### Audubon's Science

The National Audubon Society has long been respected for its scientific contributions to the fields of ornithology and conservation, especially regarding population trends in many bird species. The organization has conducted and coordinated Christmas Bird Counts for over a century, as well as breeding bird surveys and migration counts. Much of the data is gathered by expert volunteers and then compiled and analyzed by the Society's staff biologists. This long-term information has proven to be a valuable asset in many conservation decisions that have been made historically and that are still being made through new efforts such as the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI). NABCI is an attempt to coordinate bird conservation efforts throughout the US, Canada, and Mexico. The Important Bird Areas (IBA) Program is a global effort to identify the areas that are most important for maintaining bird populations, and focus conservation efforts at protecting these sites. The NAS has been charged with implementing the IBA Program at the national, state, and local levels. Audubon has agreements with two of the NABCI partners (the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan and the North American Waterbird Conser-

vation Plan) to identify IBAs throughout the country that support significant shorebird and waterbird populations. Audubon also works in cooperation with Partners in Flight to identify IBAs for landbirds.

Audubon-California's Important Bird Area Program took off during 2001, when dozens of California field ornithologists, representing a broad range of agencies and affiliations, were interviewed and questioned about sites significant to birds in the state. These interviews and resulting suggestions were incorporated into a comprehensive assessment of sites. The report describes over 200 areas, found in all 58 counties, that meet eight criteria for identification as an IBA. Upon completion of the report Audubon-California will release a book describing the sites, with a target date of mid-2002.

This network of IBAs will become a cornerstone of Audubon's conservation activities in California. Their identification will help guide conservation both at the chapter, state, and national levels of Audubon, and can serve to showcase noteworthy habitat to other groups and agencies. Over the next few years, Audubon will work with local chapters to conserve these sites and to develop systems to monitor their bird life.

The IBA Program will offer opportunities for participation by volunteer, citizen scientists, in projects such as monitoring programs, which provide much needed data. For information on this and other Audubon programs in California, visit [www.audubon-ca.org](http://www.audubon-ca.org).

#### Audubon Sanctuaries

Audubon-California has acquired and preserved several sanctuaries throughout the state that provide critical habitat to a wide variety of birds and other wildlife. The areas are managed by Audubon and total over 10,000 acres. Some of Audubon-California's preserves are open to the

public by appointment only. Here are some of the Audubon Sanctuaries in the Central Valley:

**Kern River Preserve:** Audubon California's newest preserve contains over 1,500 acres of the most ecologically important riparian forest in the state. The Kern River Preserve was one of the first ten Globally Important Bird Areas to be designated in the United States. It is Globally Important for its protection of Fremont cottonwood and red willow habitat, major populations of migrating Turkey Vultures, and nesting Western Yellow-billed Cuckoos, Southwestern Willow Flycatchers, Summer Tanagers, and Kern Red-winged Blackbirds. Some 324 bird species (roughly half of California's total avifauna) have been seen here.

**Paul L. Wattis Sanctuary:** A sanctuary consisting of about 900 acres of former agricultural land in the flood plain of the Sacramento River, Audubon has restored the property to wetlands and waterbird habitat. Audubon, with the help of public and private conservation sources, has created a wetland with a diversity of water levels and potholes that includes 22 nesting islands. Two hundred acres of the sanctuary are permanent marsh, providing breeding habitat to waterfowl and wetland species, and 300 acres are seasonally flooded to provide wintering habitat for migrating waterfowl.

**Bobelaine Sanctuary:** This 434-acre sanctuary, located near Yuba City, along three and a half miles of the Feather River, offers prime riparian woodland habitat to resident wildlife and migrant

bird species that travel through each fall and winter. Research, restoration, and



*Through Audubon Centers, we will provide opportunities for people to develop relationships with their natural environment. Communities will be informed about conservation issues and educated on the public policy process. Our goal is to engage diverse communities and create a culture of conservation. Every child deserves the opportunity to connect with nature.*



Dan Taylor, Executive Director of Audubon-California

education all take place at this sanctuary that is jointly managed by Audubon-California and the Sacramento Audubon Society.

#### Audubon Centers

National Audubon Society's 2020 Vision plan includes the building of 1,000 Audubon Centers nationwide by the year 2020. The first phase of the plan involves five key states that will become home to five education centers each. California is one of those states. Nature centers aren't new to Audubon. It already has more than 50 across the United States, including two in California. But now it plans to build the equivalent of one center a week for 19 years, to a total of 1,000 nature centers by 2020. By offering hands-on conservation experiences, the centers hope to reach one in four schoolchildren in America and help quintuple Audubon's membership to 2.75 million.



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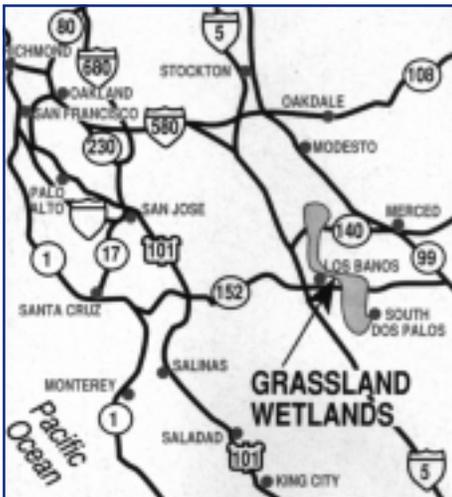
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Visit [www.audubon.org](http://www.audubon.org) for membership information.

*Grasslands from front page:*

area is a critical wintering ground for nearly 15,000 Sandhill Cranes each year. Winter roosts of White-faced Ibis have been estimated at over 10,000 birds, making it the second largest concentration in California.

The Grassland Wetlands has been designated one of only 22 Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Sites in the world. It is a major stopover site for shorebirds moving through the Central Valley, with an average of 10,000 each fall, winter, and spring, and over 200,000 counted during the peak periods. Because of the diversity and concentrations of birdlife, as well as the sensitive, threatened, and



endangered species present, the Grassland Wetlands has been designated by Audubon-California as one of the Important Bird Areas in the state. The protection, enhancement, and restoration of thousands of acres of habitat within the Grassland Wetlands have significantly contributed to the goals of the Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture. The conservation partnerships that have been established between landowners, private organizations, foundations, and local, state, and federal agencies have served as a model for successful conservation efforts for others across the country.

Recreation opportunities abound in the Grassland Wetlands area. Wildlife

## Did You Know?

- The estimated value of California wetlands for recreation such as bird watching, fishing, hunting, hiking, and photography is \$160 million annually.
- The Grassland Wetlands produce \$11.5 million each year for the local economy and provide hundreds of jobs.
- Over 250,000 people visit the Grassland Wetlands each year, spending thousands of dollars locally on food, lodging, and outdoor recreation.
- Wetlands provide California with nearly \$10 billion in values annually in the form of groundwater recharge, flood control, and water purification.

(Source: Grassland Water District)

viewing is what draws most visitors to the area. Nearly 70 percent of the Grassland Wetlands is in private ownership and not open to the public; however, the county roads in the area provide visitors with excellent views of the habitat diversity and the wildlife. At the State and Federal refuges, such as Los Banos State Wildlife Area, Merced National Wildlife Area (NWR), San Luis NWR, and Kesterson NWR, vehicle tour routes, hiking trails, interpretive displays, and printed materials are available.

In addition to the huge concentrations of waterfowl, sandhill cranes, and shorebirds, there are many other

wildlife spectacles you can witness in the Grassland Wetlands. There are Tule Elk at some of the public refuges. Spectacular wildflowers bloom around the vernal pools from March to June. Many different species of raptors (birds of prey) provide year-round entertainment. Eagles and falcons may be seen during the fall and winter when they feed on ducks in the wetlands. Swainson's Hawks arrive to breed in March but head back to Central and South America in August and September, only to be replaced by Rough-legged and Ferruginous Hawks from October to March.

For information on public areas in the Grassland Wetlands that are open for wildlife viewing, contact:

**Grassland Water District**

(209) 826-5188

**San Luis National Wildlife Refuge Complex** (209) 826-3508

**Los Banos Wildlife Area Complex** (209) 826-0463



*Tule Elk are just one of the many wildlife spectacles in the Grasslands Wetlands. Photo: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*

## Experience Wild On Wetlands!

A wildlife festival with field trips, presentations, games, and crafts, in the heart of the Grassland Wetlands. A great family get-away!

Wild On Wetlands will take place March 9-10, 2002 in Los Banos, CA

For more information call:

209-826-3508 or 1-800-336-6354  
or visit <http://www.losbanos.com>.

## Valley Visions: Looking Ahead

By: Bob Shaffer, Coordinator, Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture

The beginning of a new year is the perfect time to reflect on the previous year's successes, and to identify priorities for the year ahead. I am pleased to report the Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture made significant strides in wetland conservation last year. Acreage estimates for wetland protection and restoration are now being compiled and will be available in the next issue of *Valley Ventures*. The recent acquisitions of the 12,808-acre Glide Ranch in the Yolo Bypass and the 9,200-acre Staten Island in the Sacramento/San Joaquin Delta highlight the land protection component of the Joint Venture goals. Other highlights include:

- A Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program was established. This multi-agency organization and private landowner effort is aimed at providing incentives to farmers to place marginal, irrigated cropland in the Sacramento Valley under conservation uses. When

fully implemented, we should expect an additional 10,000 acres of upland nesting cover, 1,500 acres of restored wetlands, and 500 acres of riparian buffer habitats in the Valley.

- Joint Venture partners successfully obtained North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA) grants totaling nearly \$2 million for wetland conservation projects in both the Sacramento and San Joaquin Valleys.

- Planning activities began toward updating the 1990 Joint Venture Implementation Plan.

- Multi-year investigations on wetland water supplies in the Central Valley culminated in a report, aptly titled, "Central Valley Wetlands Water Supply Investigations," which is now available to interested parties.

The Joint Venture has high expectations for the coming year. Nelson Mathews of the Trust for Public Lands has graciously offered to continue into

his second year as Chairman of the Management Board. Our Land Protection, Water and Power, Agricultural and Wildlife Enhancement, and Legislative Affairs Committees are regrouping to address important issues to be incorporated into the Implementation Plan. We look forward to the submittal and acceptance of several more NAWCA grants and to the development of new partnerships as we move toward all bird conservation in the Central Valley of California.



### Did You Know?

#### North America's National Birds

Canada: Common Loon  
United States: Bald Eagle  
Mexico: Crested Caracara

## NAWCA Projects Update

The Poso Creek Flood Plain Wetland Habitat Project proposal was recently submitted for a North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) grant and it has been recommended to the North American Wetlands Conservation Council for funding.

The Poso Creek Flood Plain Project, located in the southern portion of California's Central Valley, is the first of its kind within the Tulare Basin, combining the resources of 17 private landowners, Federal and State agencies, a non-profit organization, and a foundation. The project area has been identified as a priority Basin within the Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture with the highest need for protection, restoration, and enhancement within the Central Valley. This proposal is landscape-based and includes projects

that will protect, restore, and enhance over 9,000 acres of habitat on private land and on the Kern National Wildlife Refuge to promote the recovery of migratory and resident populations of waterfowl, shorebirds, and upland-dependent species. Project sites comprise a mosaic of declining and threatened wetland types, including seasonal and semi-permanent wetlands, riparian forests, and associated upland areas. They include some of the last remaining vestiges of Tulare Lake and upland areas that are of major importance to the recovery of numerous Federal and State threatened and endangered species.

Although the Tulare Basin is the driest region of the Central Valley, historically it was the largest single block of wetland habitat in California,

providing over 500,000 acres of permanent wetland and seasonally flooded scrubland. As recently as the mid-1800s, Tulare Lake was once the largest body of fresh water west of the Mississippi River and the second largest fresh water lake in the United States, providing vast areas of habitat for migratory waterfowl, shorebirds, wading birds and other species. The Lake was once reachable via navigable waterways from San Francisco Bay and it supported a large commercial fishery. This region has suffered the greatest percentage of habitat decline in the lower 48 states. Approximately 97% of the Basin's historic wetlands have been lost to other land uses, leaving only about 15,000 acres. The remaining Tulare wetlands are the most threatened wetlands in the California.



## Fauna Facts: The Aleutian Canada Goose

One of the greatest conservation success stories of the last 40 years is that of the Aleutian Canada goose, *Branta canadensis leucopareia*, a winter resident here in California's Central Valley. A small subspecies of the Canada goose, the Aleutian Canada goose is identifiable by a distinctive white neckband, small size, and shorter bill. It nests on only a few of Alaska's remote, windswept Aleutian Islands, within the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge, and winters mainly in the San Joaquin Valley of California. This subspecies of Canada goose was first listed as endangered in 1967 under Federal laws that predated the Endangered Species Act of 1973. The Aleutian Canada goose was one of the first animals to be protected under this Act.

Biologists trace the origin of the subspecies' decline back as far as 1750 when fur-farmers and trappers began introducing non-native foxes on more than 190 islands within the goose's nesting range in Alaska. The fox introductions hit their peak from 1915 to 1936, when fur demand was high. The foxes preyed heavily upon the birds, which had no natural defenses against land predators on the previously mammal-free islands. Scientists recorded no sightings of Aleutian Canada geese from 1938 until 1962 and it was feared the Aleutian Canada goose was extinct. Finally, in 1962, biologists discovered a remnant population on rugged, remote Buldir Island in the western Aleutians. Scientists believe Buldir was fox-free because its rocky, stormy coast was difficult to approach. The first accurate count of the birds in 1975 revealed only 790 individuals.

Since 1967, biologists have worked to eliminate introduced foxes from former nesting islands and to reintroduce geese. The removal of these predators has benefited many other bird species on the islands, including



*Aleutian Canada goose: Photo: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*

puffins, murrelets, and auklets. Besides removing foxes, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and State wildlife agencies closed Aleutian Canada goose hunting in wintering and migration areas, banded birds on the breeding grounds to identify important wintering and migration areas, and released families of wild geese caught on Buldir Island on other fox-free islands in the Aleutians.

In California's Sacramento and San Joaquin Valleys and along the northern California coast, the Service has worked extensively with local landowners in cooperative partnerships to protect and manage wintering habitat on private land through fee title acquisition, easements and voluntary programs. Some landowners plant crops to provide forage for the geese, which graze on plant material while in their wintering range. Important wintering and migration habitat in California and Oregon also has been acquired as national wildlife refuges.

As a result of these recovery efforts, the population increased to 6,300 birds

by 1990, enough to allow the Service to reclassify the subspecies from endangered to threatened. The recovery continued through the 1990s, with new populations established on islands in the western Aleutians. Through unprecedented cooperation with State governments and in partnership with private landowners and organizations, the Service has been able to slowly bring back the Aleutian Canada goose. Today the population stands at about 37,000 birds and the threat of extinction has passed. Highlighting the 35-year conservation effort, Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton announced in 2001 that the Aleutian Canada goose had fully recovered and was being removed from the list of threatened and endangered species.



### Did You Know?

The National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) will celebrate its Centennial in 2003! The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages the 93-million-acre NWRS that encompasses more than 530 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands, and other special management areas. It also operates 66 fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It oversees the Federal program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars from excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to State fish and wildlife agencies.

## To Hunt Or Not To Hunt

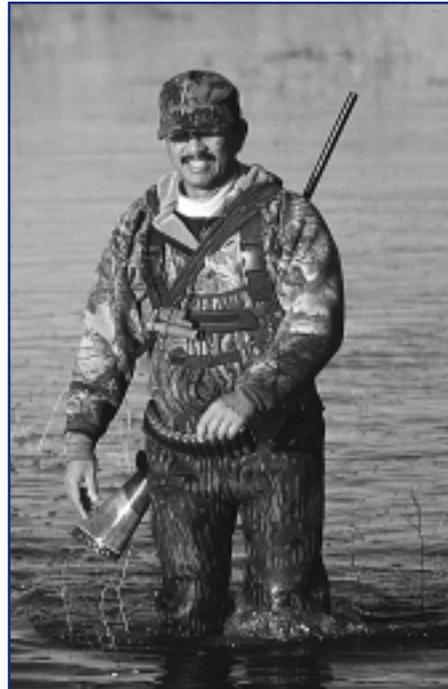
As this waterfowl hunting season draws to a close, let's take a few moments to think about the millions of Americans, young and old, male and female, who have developed an interest in conservation and wildlife. Lots of these folks realize and appreciate the role of hunters in the development of conservation and wildlife management in our nation. But many do not.

There are many people who are simply non-hunters. However, there is a segment of the population that is vehemently anti-hunting. Some of the anti-hunting crowd tend to lump all hunters into categories such as Neanderthals or bloodthirsty killers with no regard for animals' rights. On the other end of the spectrum, there are some hunters who tend to lump all non-hunters into categories such as environmental extremists or animal rights activists with no regard for an individual's right to hunt. As with most controversial issues, the truth about hunting lies somewhere between the views of these fringe elements.

Let's look at some of the ways hunting contributes to wildlife conservation in the United States. Whether or not you hunt, we hope by reading this you will discover some benefits of hunting of which you were previously unaware. If you are a non-hunter, perhaps you will become more accepting of those who hunt. If you are a hunter, maybe you will become a more effective ambassador of conservation when speaking to non-hunters about hunting issues. In any event, at least you will have a broader understanding of the importance of hunting as a conservation tool in California and across the United States.

- Hunting can control populations of certain species in the absence of natural predators. For example, snow geese nesting in the high arctic have become over-abundant and are eating

themselves out of house and home, devastating the habitat for themselves and other non-game species.



*A waterfowl hunter wades through the wetlands of the Vic Fazio Yolo Wildlife Area between Sacramento and Davis. Photo: David Rosen*

- Hunting may help disperse waterfowl and reduce the risk of disease outbreaks. In the Central Valley of California, about 95% of the historic wetlands have been lost. Yet, an estimated 60% of the waterfowl that use the Pacific Flyway winter in or migrate through the 5% of the remaining habitat. This packs huge numbers of birds into small parcels of habitat and leaves them more susceptible to density-dependent diseases such as avian cholera and avian botulism.

- Of the remaining wetland habitat in California, close to 70% of it is privately owned, most of it managed as duck hunting clubs. Landowners benefit economically from these clubs by selling or leasing hunting opportunities to others. If there was no water-

fowl hunting, the landowners would lose the economic incentive to manage their property as wetlands and California would possibly lose up to two-thirds of its remaining wetland habitat.

- The economic incentive for rice growers in the Sacramento Valley to flood their post-harvest fields and sell hunting opportunities has resulted in an increase in farming practices that benefit wildlife, improve air quality for Valley residents, and maintain a productive farming operation.

- The huge amounts of revenue generated by the sale of hunting licenses supports the wildlife management activities of State fish and game agencies. Much of the funding supports non-game species programs and conservation-education programs. Each year, the total revenue from sporting license fees nationally is nearly \$1 billion! That's almost \$3 million generated every day to benefit wildlife! According to the California Department of Fish and Game, there are about 300,000 hunters in the state, each of whom pay close to \$30.00 for an annual hunting license generating nearly \$9 million in revenue for state conservation programs.

- In addition to purchasing a hunting license, waterfowl hunters must purchase a Federal and State duck stamp. The revenue from these sales goes to the US Fish and Wildlife Service and state fish and game agencies to support their habitat restoration and management activities that benefit game and non-game species alike.

Federal duck stamp sales have raised well over \$500 million to support the acquisition of more than 5 million acres of National Wildlife Refuge lands since their inception in 1934. California duck stamp sales annually generate approximately \$750,000 for the state.

- When hunters purchase sporting

*see Hunting: page 10*

*Hunting from page 9:*

firearms, shells, handguns, and archery equipment, they pay an 11% percent Federal excise tax through the Pittman-Robertson Act. A portion of this tax is redistributed to the state fish and game agencies for use in their wildlife programs. In the year 2000, \$193.2 million was raised nationally for conservation through the Pittman-Robertson Act and California received over \$6.6 million of these funds.

- The remainder of the revenue generated through the Pittman-

Robertson Act excise tax is invested in the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund. The interest from this fund is one of the revenue sources for the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) grant program. NAWCA provides matching funds to conservation organizations and partnerships for habitat protection, restoration, and enhancement projects. Since it was established in 1989, NAWCA has helped conserve over 4.5 million acres of wildlife habitat by granting an estimated \$330 million for North

American projects, including \$20 million benefiting California wildlife!

- Historically, it has been hunters who have formed and sustained the private, non-profit wetland conservation organizations that have raised such enormous amounts of money for conservation efforts. For example, the California Waterfowl Association and Ducks Unlimited have been instrumental in legislative, habitat conservation, and educational activities that promote wetland conservation in the Central Valley and across the continent.



## What's On Your Mind?

In each issue of *Valley Ventures*, we will respond to your questions and comments about conservation issues in our Central Valley.

Are you wondering about the best timing to implement a special land management practice? Do you have questions about how some pending legislation will affect wetlands in your area? Do you want to learn more about a particular species of wildlife and how to attract it to your property? Would you like to share a conservation success story with others? Are you wondering how certain conservation decisions are made and by whom?

All these questions and more are fair game for *What's On Your Mind?* Just contact us via one of the methods in the box above and we will respond as quickly as possible. We may print your question or comment, along with our response, in the next issue of *Valley Ventures!*

### *From A Reader In Dixon*

#### **Question:**

"I'm a single Mom and I'd like to start taking my kids out more to watch birds and other wildlife but we don't really know where to go. Do you have any recommendations

What's On Your Mind?  
Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture  
2800 Cottage Way, W-2610  
Sacramento, CA 95825-0509  
FAX: (916) 414-6462  
Email: wonyourmind@aol.com

about safe places I can take them to observe and learn more about wildlife?"

#### **Answer:**

You and your kids can attend one of the many birding and wildlife festivals

that occur in the Central Valley every year. Most of these festivals have numerous field trips, led by experts, that go out and observe the critters. You'll be able to learn and explore with the group in a safe and friendly environment and maybe discover some areas where you'll feel comfortable going back and visiting on your own. Most of the festivals have lots of great exhibits, presentations, performances, art shows, and special activities for the kids too. Here is a listing of some wildlife festivals in the Central Valley coming up this year. Have fun!



## Central Valley Wildlife Festivals

February 15-17: **California Duck Days**, Davis (530) 758-1286

March 9-10: **Wild On Wetlands Weekend**, Los Banos (209) 826-3508

April 26-28: **Kern Valley Bioregions Nature Festival**, Kern Co. (760) 378-3044

May 11: **Walk On The Wildside Festival**, Sacramento Co. (916) 775-4421

May 18: **International Migratory Bird Festival**, Sacramento Zoo (916) 264-5889

June 1: **Suisun Marsh Field Day**, Solano Co. (916) 648-1406

September 27-29: **Kern Valley Turkey Vulture Festival**, Kern Co. (760) 378-3044

September 28: **Oroville Salmon Festival**, Butte Co. (800) 655-4653

October 12-13: **American River Salmon Festival**, Rancho Cordova (916) 361-8700

November 8-10: **Lodi Sandhill Crane Festival**, San Joaquin Co. (209) 367-7840

November 21-24: **Central Valley Birding Symposium**, San Joaquin Co. (209) 369-2010

## News From Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge

By: Greg Mensik, Deputy Refuge Manager



The Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge Complex encompasses several refuges in the Sacramento Valley, including Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge near Willows, CA. Photo: David Rosen

Concerns about the Klamath Basin water problems and the resulting lack of wetland habitat causing an earlier fall waterfowl migration into the Sacramento Valley and the Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge Complex (Complex) were addressed by refuge staff. Survey efforts on the Complex were increased and compared to

average survey data from previous years. There was no increase detected during any time period. More recent surveys have consistently counted 200,000 to 300,000 fewer ducks (15-20% less) than last year, with peak populations over 500,000 fewer ducks than a few years ago. Population totals are most likely reflecting 2-3 years of poor reproduction in the geographic areas contributing most to the Pacific Flyway (such as the prairie provinces of Canada), coupled with a wintering wetland habitat base in the Central Valley that has not been this abundant in many years! In recent weeks, flooding further dispersed the birds and closed some refuge hunting areas. A positive result of the recent trends is that the Complex has experienced few problems with disease outbreaks due to avian botulism or avian cholera this season.

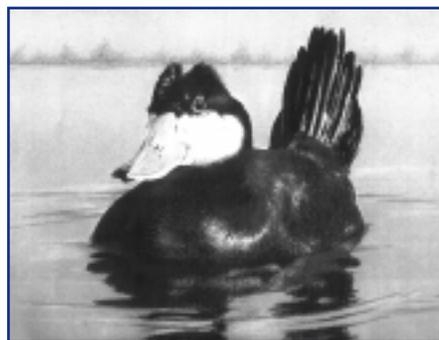


### Did You Know?

Since established in 1986, partnerships under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) have spent \$1.7 billion to conserve more than 5 million acres of waterfowl habitat in the United States! Another \$409 million has been spent to conserve 2.4 million acres in Canada. As part of NAWMP, the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, along with private matching funds, has provided \$30 million to finance 116 habitat restoration and enhancement projects in Mexico, benefiting waterfowl and other wetland species on millions of acres.

## Young Artists Wing Their Way Into 2002!

The artistic waterfowl creations of kindergarten to 12<sup>th</sup> grade California students are featured in the new California Junior Duck Stamp 2002 Calendar. The Federal Junior Duck Stamp Program, managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, is a classroom activity series that teaches

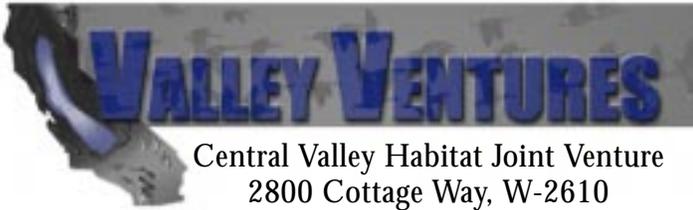


Congratulations to Steven Pate, age 15, from Sheldon High School in Sheldon (Sacramento Co.) for winning Best of Show in California with an exquisite drake Ruddy Duck!

students about conservation, habitat, wildlife management, wildlife art, and stamp collecting. As part of the program, students create waterfowl

images that are entered into an annual state contest. The Best of Show artwork from each state is sent to Washington, D.C. to compete in a national contest, the winner of which is featured on that year's Federal Junior Duck Stamp. The calendar was developed by the California Waterfowl Association under the sponsorship of the Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture, Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge Complex, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, and the California Department of Water Resources. To learn more about the Junior Duck Stamp Program, visit <http://duckstamps.fws.gov/jds/index.html> or <http://www.calwaterfowl.org>.





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## *Meet the Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture Partners*

### **American Farmland Trust**

260 Russell Blvd., Suite D  
Davis, CA 95616  
530 753-1073

### **California Waterfowl Association**

4630 Northgate Blvd., #150  
Sacramento, CA 95834  
916 648-1406

### **Ducks Unlimited, Inc.**

3074 Gold Canal Dr.  
Rancho Cordova, CA 95670  
916 852-2000

### **National Audubon Society**

555 Audubon Place  
Sacramento, CA 95825  
916 481-5332

### **Point Reyes Bird Observatory**

4990 Shoreline Highway  
Stinson Beach, CA 94970  
415 868-1221

### **The Nature Conservancy**

1330 21<sup>st</sup> St., #103  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
916 449-2852

### **The Trust for Public Land**

116 New Montgomery St., 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
San Francisco, CA 94105  
415 495-5660

### **CA Department of Fish and Game**

1416 9<sup>th</sup> St., 12<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
916 653-5284

### **CA Department of Water Resources**

3251 S St.  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
916 227-7530

### **CA Wildlife Conservation Board**

1807 13th St., Suite 103  
Sacramento, CA 95814-7117  
916 445-1109

### **US Army Corps of Engineers**

1325 J St., Room 1420  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
916 557-6701

### **US Bureau of Land Management**

2800 Cottage Way, W-1622  
Sacramento, CA 95825  
916 978-4639

### **US Bureau of Reclamation**

2800 Cottage Way, MP152  
Sacramento, CA 95825  
916 978-5039

### **US Environmental Protection Agency**

75 Hawthorne St., WTR-3  
San Francisco, CA 94105  
415 744-2016

### **US Fish and Wildlife Service**

2800 Cottage Way, W-2610  
Sacramento, CA 95825-0509  
916 414-6459

### **US Natural Resources Conservation Service**

430 G St., #4164  
Davis, CA 95616  
530 792-5656

*North American Waterfowl  
Management Plan*

*Central Valley Habitat  
Joint Venture*

