

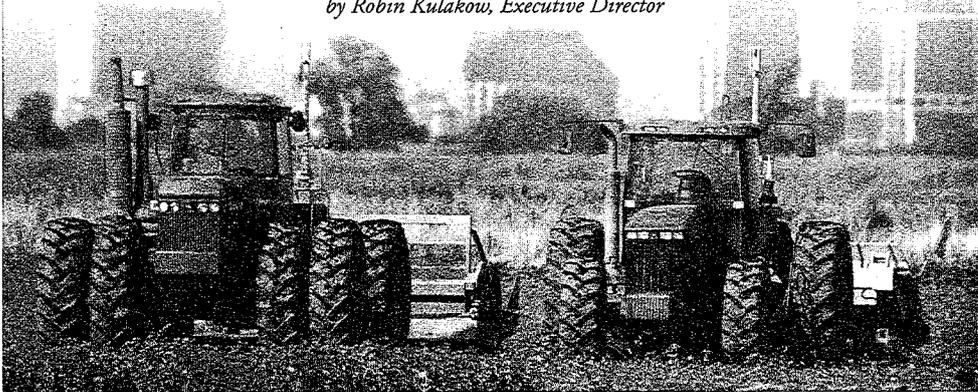
YOLO FLYWAY

Volume 14, Issue 3, Fall 2005

A Publication of the Yolo Basin Foundation

Improved Habitat & Viewing at the Yolo Wildlife Area

by Robin Kulakow, Executive Director



Tractors with laser-controlled grading equipment resculpt wetlands..

Photo credit: Dave Feliz

Big changes are ahead for the driving loop at the Yolo Wildlife Area. As many of you know, the first 700 acres that you see as you enter the Wildlife Area are set aside for wildlife viewing, either by car or by foot. This area was restored to wetland habitat starting in 1994 as part of the US Army Corps of Engineers Yolo Basin Wetlands project. Since that time the science of wetlands restoration has evolved, including the widespread use of GPS systems for surveying elevations. It is now possible to have thousands of elevation points rather than hundreds from traditional surveying methods.

The North American Waterfowl Management Plan sponsors a nation-wide competitive grant program for wetlands restoration projects. Ducks Unlimited (DU) and California Waterfowl Association (CWA) have been very successful in receiving grant funds for projects at the Yolo Wildlife Area. Several years ago CWA completed a wetlands improvement project in the Northeast section of the Wildlife Area, and DU finished a project this summer for the Central Unit.

The transformation of the habitat in the Northeast Unit has been impressive. The diversity of bird life is spectacular, each species

finding its own preferred water depth. The look of the wetlands has a much more natural "feel" to it as well.

The result of the CWA contractors' expert earth-working skills is a diverse wetlands with a wide spectrum of microhabitats. These microhabitats are created by the changes in water depth as a result of swales, islands, deep areas, and low ridges created by the earthmovers. All changes in elevation are in compliance with the restrictions necessary to maintain the flood carrying capacity of the area.

Fish and Game habitat managers and the Sacramento/Yolo Mosquito and Vector Control District welcome the improvements to the water system for both filling and draining ponds. These improvements will allow the independent flooding and draining of wetland units. Water will move on and off these smaller ponds more efficiently. This is important to minimize mosquito larvae and control unwanted weeds like cockle burr.

As the changes to the wildlife-viewing loop take place, you can expect to see the large ponds broken up into several smaller ponds. Like the Northeast Unit, this land will be contoured into swales, islands, and ridges. Water control structures are also being replaced with improved models. The land may look like it's being prepared for a new housing development, but we know from experience that a diverse wetlands teeming with much improved wildlife viewing opportunities will be in place for the public to enjoy this fall. 🌍

Spring Flooding

By Dave Feliz, Manager, Yolo Wildlife Area

The spring of 2005 held many surprises for land managers throughout the Central Valley. The warm days of March followed by rain, followed by more warmth, more rain, sunny days and finally a spring flood in the Yolo Bypass. How did this effect the operation of the Wildlife Area? Perhaps a little history is in order.

The seasonal flooding of the Yolo Bypass is far removed from the historic inundations that formerly occurred in the Yolo Basin. The low lands of the Yolo Basin were utilized for the creation of a carefully engineered flood control channel designed to move water from the confluence of the Feather and Sacramento Rivers to the Sacramento Delta. This connection did not exist prior its construction. Before this engineering feat, the Yolo Basin received overflow from the Sacramento River starting in the vicinity of the City of Sacramento, and these flood waters slowly receded over the ensuing months. During especially

wet years, some water probably remained throughout the year.

The artificial channel created in the Yolo Bypass now receives Sacramento River flows when large amounts of water are released from reservoirs such as Shasta and Lake Oroville. It is a balancing act of storing enough water in the reservoirs to provide water for the people of California while protecting those same people from devastating floods.

The Wildlife Area was created in the Yolo Bypass with full knowledge that this seasonal

—continued on p. 2

SPRING FLOODING—*continued from p. 1*
flooding was a critical tool for water management in the state, and the Department of Fish and Game made assurances that this function would not be violated.

In years the Bypass does not flood, we see significant changes in wildlife populations. Pheasant numbers soar since nesting cover develops at the appropriate time, creating ideal conditions for recently hatched chicks. Primarily insectivorous during the first three weeks of their life, pheasant chicks find plenty to eat, resulting in high chick survival and tremendous numbers of adults during the fall hunting season. During successive non-flood years, pheasant numbers increase exponentially until the next flood.

Prior to the mid-May flood, we had seen very few pheasant chicks, so we know they had not yet hatched. Unfortunately, the flood waters destroyed almost all pheasant nesting efforts. Surviving hens seem to have nested again and we expect to see many young birds late into the fall months.

At the time of the flood, most of the planned 1800 acres of rice had been prepared, and aerial seeding was the next step. All of the rice fields went underwater and with it the best laid plans of our rice farmers.

Cutting our losses, the rice acreage was reduced to 500 acres of wild rice only with no acres of white rice planted. Wild rice has a shorter growing period, with a harvest possible in 90 days. This was a significant loss of income for the Wildlife Area while at the same time it created a great opportunity to do some wildlife food plots within the unused rice fields.

Unfortunately, this was a situation that we were ill equipped to take full advantage of within the short window of opportunity. Nevertheless, we managed to plant approximately 50 acres of milo, 130 acres of millet and irrigate an additional 300 acres of beneficial wetland plants such as Sprangletop, watergrass and swamp timothy. Additionally, the DeWits agreed to plant 100 acres of

white rice that is being grown experimentally without constant flooding. The absence of flooding will be observed as a means to grow rice without producing large numbers of mosquitoes. Upon maturation of the seed, the field will be flooded for wildlife use. Some of the other rice fields have been disced and flooded to provide mudflats for migratory shorebirds. Sure enough, by mid-July, large flocks of Dowitchers, Western Sandpipers and Least Sandpipers were massing in synchro-

Spring floods can severely depress rodent populations on the Wildlife Area. In past years, I have observed small mice-like rodents called voles adjacent to Green's Lake within 6 weeks of a receding flood. The movement of rodents across the Bypass in response to seasonal flooding may have important management implications. Healthy populations of voles are often an indicator of available prey for raptors. We would expect considerable numbers of nesting Short-eared Owls and



A Red-tailed Hawk searches for food in the flooded bypass.

Credit: Dave Feliz

nized mid-air flights above the wet fields of the Causeway Ranch.

Not only were the commercial farmers adversely affected by the spring flood, but the public farmers (Fish and Game staff) lost about 150 acres of safflower to the flood. All of this was replanted in June but there is little likelihood that a seed crop will be ready for the opening day of dove season. The Los Rios farmers suffered the same fate with their wildlife food plots of safflower which were subsequently replanted. Some of their fields may be ready in time for a late season dove shoot. The Wildlife Area staff and all of our tenant farmers are to be commended for the extra effort they have expended in this trying year.

Northern Harriers after a winter and spring without flooding. That may not be the case this year.

The flurry of management activities following this year's May flood is quickly shadowed by the arrival of migratory birds heading south within the Pacific Flyway. Shorebirds in July, pintails in August, soon large flocks of mallards will be feasting in the seasoned watergrass fields. Hold on to your binoculars, because despite the devastating effects of the late spring flood, extraordinary human efforts have made the most of a bad situation, and we will soon be witnessing another fall and winter bird spectacle. 🦅

Third Graders to Explore the Patwin People in New *Discover the Flyway* Program

In September, the *Discover the Flyway* school program will inaugurate a new third grade curriculum entitled “Patwin Life: A Circle of Seasons”, the first in a four-grade series of school programs called “Living With Water, The Story of Yolo Basin and Its People.” Third graders will explore the lives of Yolo Basin’s Native inhabitants, the Patwin, who lived in villages along the edges of the large tule marshlands of Yolo Basin as well as in the Suisun flatlands and



Dee Feliz teaches children how to make tule cordage.

the southeastern hills of the Coast Range. The repeating patterns of the seasons – drenching floods of winter; warm green days of spring; hot droughts of summer; and the dry coolness of fall – established an annual cycle for the animals, plants, and people of the region, shaping the lives and culture of the Patwin people. Students will experience each season in a series of four station visits, learning about Patwin life through activities about storytelling and games (winter), the salmon run (spring), basketry and cordage (summer), and the acorn harvest (fall). After their station explorations, students will have an opportunity to tour the Yolo Wildlife Area and to learn more about the natural world the Patwin inhabited.

“Living With Water, the Story of Yolo Basin

and Its People” was developed by educational consultant Margaret Kralovec and funded with a grant from CalFed. It invites students from grades 3 through 6 to visit the Yolo Wildlife Area to explore the human history of the Yolo Basin region, and the role that water played in that story. Students will learn about the influences of the region’s climate and water resources on the local inhabitants, from the Native people who first inhabited the Yolo Basin through 19th century settlement

periods, right up to the present day. They will also learn how people have sought to control and manage the waters of the lower Sacramento Valley, both for their use and for their protection. These standards-based, hands-on programs in the “Living with Water” series encourage students to think about current water issues of the area, and raise awareness of the impact that individuals and communities can have on local water resources. Future offerings in this series are briefly described below.

Yolo Basin, Feeding the People

Fourth graders will explore food production in Yolo Basin, from the natural food resources utilized and nurtured by the Patwin, through the large-scale commercial farming of today. Students will learn about the changing face of agriculture and ranching over California’s history, particularly in the 19th century, and about the role that water has played in this development. They will participate in hands-on activities while getting an in-depth

understanding of irrigation, land reclamation for agriculture, transport of food products by ships and railroad, and the role of local grain and rice production.

Community Water – Sources, Uses, and Treatment

Fifth graders will learn about water that serves our communities: its source, availability, quality, and conservation. Students will explore topics such as efficient use and reuse of water, quality of drinking water, water needs for community fire departments, and water treatment. They will learn about how people view water rights in different eras from the Rancho Period to the present. The program will also offer students tips that they and their families can use to conserve water and to keep our rivers, lakes, and aquifers clean.

FLOOD! The Yolo Basin Story

Sixth graders will study the destructive force of floods in our area that have periodically destroyed lives, communities, and livelihoods in Yolo Basin and the lower Sacramento Valley. They will learn about flood control practices employed locally over the past two centuries. Students will discover that the Yolo Bypass, in which the Yolo Wildlife Area is located, is itself a massive flood control project that channels seasonal flood waters, and protects Sacramento Valley communities and farmlands. Sixth graders will investigate flood control topics that relate to this area, including channeling, sedimentation (and hydraulic mining), levee construction, and dams.

We are very excited to be adding the history of people in the Yolo Basin region to our existing science-based programs. Third grade teachers have already begun registering their classes for “Patwin Life: A Circle of Seasons,” and we expect more to follow. You can help by passing along news of our exciting new offering to third grade teachers and schools in your community! 🌱

Tips on Fishing in the Yolo Wildlife Area

by Don Morrill, Development Director

When you want to find out where to fish, when to fish, and how to fish, you're wise to go to someone who's done it successfully for years. I found out that's Kirk Yates, part time Fish and Game employee, part time student, and life long fisherman, hunter and outdoorsman on the Yolo Wildlife Area.

"As soon as duck season is over," Kirk says you can find him at or near Parking Lot F at the "Toe Drain" canal fishing for sturgeon. The Toe Drain is the canal that runs north/south on the far east side of the Wildlife Area, right at the base (or "toe") of the east levee. It can be loaded with fish during certain times of the year, and is best reached by driving the

auto loop to the bottom turning left just past the "Check Station" and going about 1 1/2 miles east to parking lot F.

Sturgeon come up from San Francisco Bay beginning early in the winter. Keeping bait—ghost shrimp, pile worms, or shad—lying on the bottom is a way to pick up one of these monsters. Last winter, Kirk and his Dad caught a couple—one too "small" at 45 1/2 inches and the other a keeper at 56" or nearly 5 feet long! Fish bigger than six feet you'll also have to let go. You need to be ready with heavy equipment for these fish, so check with an experienced tackle shop.

Black bass, stripers, and catfish also live or swim up the Toe Drain, which connects directly to the Delta near Prospect Island about 20 miles south. The Toe Drain can be fished from February to October for catfish and black bass from parking Lot F.

While Lot F demands the least walking, folks with some energy can trek from the parking lot south on the maintenance road about one mile to where Putah Creek enters the Toe Drain. That's a good spot for stripers when they run in April and May. "Rattletraps" are the most popular lures for stripers, and you'll need a good spin fishing outfit. These fish can be big—an 18 lb. striper was caught there last spring. From where the creek dumps into the Toe Drain, you can walk upstream and fish sections of the stream nearby.

Take a drive down to Parking Lot G and get out of your car. Walk down the maintenance road south to the Putah Creek seasonal dam. It gets taken down in the late fall, and placed back around May each year. In April and into May you can

fish below and above the dam for stripers.

The Toe Drain canal can also be reached from the West Sacramento (east) side. Going westbound on Interstate 80, take the western most exit before the Causeway, drive to the bottom of Enterprise Blvd. and take a right on Channel Dr. to the end. Eastbound, take the first exit east of the Causeway and turn right at the signal. You can't drive vehicles on the levee, but you can walk or bike south to where Putah Creek enters the Toe Drain, or even farther if you want. It runs south for 22 miles down to Little Holland Tract and the bottom of the Yolo Bypass.

The slower pace of the Wildlife Area is available to everyone and is only an off ramp away from the fast lane in which we too often find ourselves. People have been fishing in the Yolo Basin for centuries, so if you'd like to give it a try, go to www.yolobasin.org for a map showing the parking lots mentioned above or stop by the Wildlife Area headquarters on Chiles Road. Be sure to display your valid California Fishing License at all times. 🐟



Kirk Yates enjoying a moment to fish at the Wildlife Area.

Mark Your Calendars!

**CA Duck Days
2006 will
be held on
February 24
and 25.**

*(Please note that this is
NOT Presidents' Day
weekend.)*

Swainson's Hawk Survey

This year Department of Fish and Game Yolo Wildlife Area Biologist Chris Rocco found 8 active Swainson's Hawk nests within the boundaries of the Wildlife Area and another 28-30 more on adjacent land. Chris said he was "surprised at the huge increase this year, up 5 pairs from last year, especially closer to Putah Creek. Wetlands are actually not good foraging habitat for these hawks, but they'll nest here as long as they have access to open forage areas nearby. The perception is that Swainson's Hawk nesting behavior is changing and they are increasingly becoming more urban, not just rural agricultural area birds."

Chris has been doing Swainson's Hawk surveys for DFG off and on since 1994 in the Yolo Wildlife Area and in other parts of the Central Valley. He found 52 active nests this year, including several random sites in the Elk Grove area. He is now working on a pilot study with the Resource Assessment Program (RAP) and a team of public and private folks with many years of experience in Swainson's Hawk surveys and identification. The study will take a good look at the total number and density of these hawks, not just in the Central Valley, but from northeastern California to the Great Basin. Will Patterson, a Swainson's Hawk expert recently retired from the CA Department of Energy is coordinating the effort. Their goal is to develop the best possible survey techniques for a population density study that will estimate the current population throughout California. The actual survey will begin early in 2006 and continue through the breeding season of 2007.



Swainson's Hawk - Yolo Wildlife Area

© Jim Dunn

Regularly Scheduled Tours

YOLO WILDLIFE AREA

Second Saturday of each month September through June

Each month birders of all levels gather to explore the 16,000 acre Yolo Wildlife Area, which is one of the largest wetland restoration projects in the nation. Driving over the I80 causeway, many people are not aware of all the life below. Join the talented volunteers and expert tour

leaders who guide visitors to the best spots to view the hundreds of different species of birds that stop here during migration as well as those species that call the Wildlife Area home. Tour times vary throughout the year: September: 8 am to 11 am, October through April: 9 am to 12 pm, and May through June: 8 am to 11 am.

CITY OF DAVIS WETLANDS

First Saturday of each month

Learn about the various biological processes that enhance water quality, the advantages of a native plant community, and see hundreds of migra-

tory and resident birds at the City of Davis Wetland Ponds. The 400 acre site is a restored native California wetland ecosystem which includes oak riparian woodlands and large stands of native grasslands. The City of Davis Wetlands at the Water Pollution Control Plant utilizes treated wastewater and storm water to create a unique wildlife habitat. Docents trained by Yolo Basin Foundation staff lead these public tours each month. Times vary throughout the year: September through February: 3 pm - 5 pm; March through August: 9 to 11 am.

See www.yolobasin.org or call 530-758-1018 for more details and notice of other trips.

Thanks to Ms. Herrin's 3rd Grade Class!



Janet Herrin and her 3rd graders with the beaver mount they funded.

Last winter Janet Herrin and her 3rd graders from the Oak Chan Elementary School in Folsom participated in the Discover the Flyway program. After a morning at the Demonstration Wetlands, the kids boarded their bus to tour the Wildlife Area. When they got to the "y" intersection, they stopped to see the otter slides and signs of beaver. The kids piled out of the bus to find a newly deceased beaver that had apparently been hit by a vehicle. They were sad but fascinated and, with adult guidance, spent time looking at the beaver's clawed and webbed feet, amazing tail and very large teeth. Ms. Herrin was so pleased with the teaching

opportunity that she offered to have the class raise the money to have a mount made of the beaver. YBF Education Coordinator, Corky Quirk found Brian Singal of Wildlife Designs, a taxidermist in Wilton CA who donated many hours of his time to stay within the budget the Oak Chan school had set, and the result is in the photo. At the end of August Ms. Herrin reassembled last year's class to meet the beaver, who turned out to be a girl. She can now be found in the Fish and Game Headquarters' front lobby, serving as a wetlands educational model in perpetuity thanks to a great teacher and an enthusiastic group of 3rd graders.

Featured Volunteer: Carol Wolf

by Teri Engbring, Education Associate

Volunteers are the lifeblood of the Yolo Basin Foundation in every aspect of the program, from teaching Discover the Flyway student and adult guests, to fundraising and policy guidance by the Board of Directors. Today we'll introduce you to Carol Wolf, who has taken on the task of updating our vital database, the key to keeping in touch with thousands of YBF supporters. "Carol has been a god-send. She keeps me organized!" says Development Director, Don Morrill.

Pouring over sign-in sheets and forms several hours each week, Carol's data entry often entails detective skills and handwriting analysis to get the job done. But her love of computers, details, discipline and service make it the perfect fit. She ends most volunteer sessions with a visit to the birds in the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area before returning to her home in Sacramento. "The auto tour route is so easy and accessible for viewing birds, especially with the great variety in winter, easily 30-40 species in an hour!"

This retired Air Force and civilian registered nurse says she chose YBF because she "wanted to give to some place that cares about

the environment and helps kids learn about the value of natural resources. Wildlife and wetlands are constantly assaulted from all angles. Kids and parents need to understand how they work and why they're important to us all. Yolo Basin's program teaches them that." Carol was taught the importance of



community service early on. In fact, her 90 year old mom, a long time birder, still volunteers two days a week in Eugene, Oregon, where her only sibling also lives.

Carol grew up on Long Island, raised by Nebraskan parents. She graduated from Cornell University-New York Hospital School

of Nursing in New York City, and headed west after she fell in love with San Francisco in the movie "Vertigo." Then she heard President Kennedy's "Ask not what your country can do for you..." speech and joined the Peace Corps. "The Peace Corps was the best education I ever had", she says of her 2 years in Malaysia, learning about their art, culture, history, and institutions. The next stage for this nurse with a love of travel was 20 years in the US Air Force, which included a master's degree in nursing from the University of Washington in Seattle. After the Air Force, she worked a civilian nursing job at Mather Air Force Base in Sacramento for 8 years until the base closed and she retired. She's enjoyed Duck Days for years and learned about YBF's never ending need for volunteers through this newsletter.

Carol feels it is important to support a program that "brings bus loads of kids who don't normally get out in nature into the wetlands. You can't introduce them too early to birding and how they fit into this wonderful wild place. I get more than I feel I give back (to YBF)." Thanks, Carol, for giving us so much valuable support. 🌿

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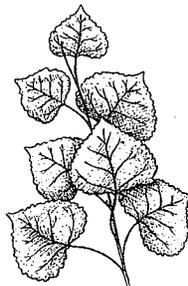
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Newsletter

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Editor: Ann Brice



Considering a Planned Gift or Bequest



There are a number of choices in estate planning that can increase income and provide current year tax benefits. Yolo Basin Foundation can facilitate the purchase of a "gift annuity" which can increase income in retirement, and/or help set up other ways to substantially reduce inheritance tax while providing current year tax breaks.

Most people who include gifts in their estate choose a simple bequest "I hereby bequest \$ _____ to Yolo Basin Foundation, tax id 68-0230311". Please let Don Morrill, our Development Director know if you'd like assistance in this process (530-219-1832). He can help you or your accountant connect with professionals in the field of estate planning.

Bucks for Ducks 2005

Get ready for the 15th annual Bucks for Ducks! This year the celebration of our local wetlands will be held on Saturday evening, October 8 from 6 to 9 pm. The goal is to raise major funds to support the Foundation's popular hands-on education and outreach programs for the coming year.

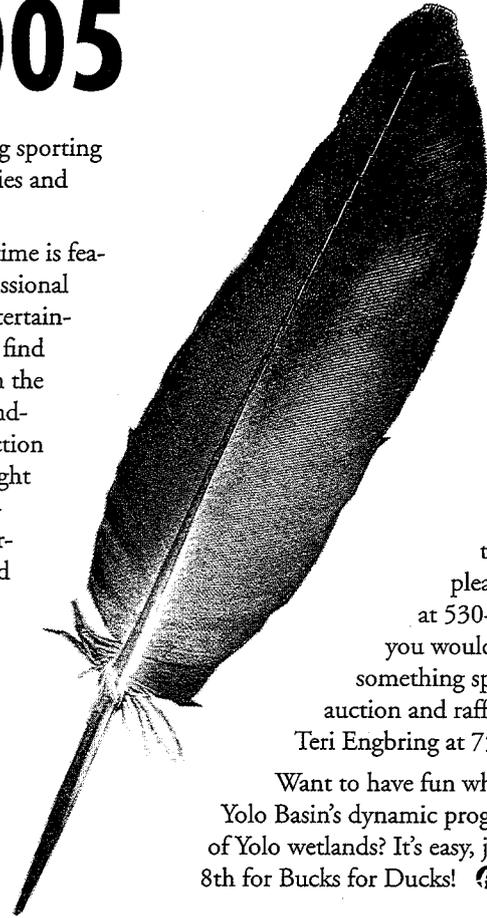
The Bucks for Ducks Party and Dinner for 2005 will be back at the Veterans Memorial Center at 203 East Fourteenth Street in Davis. Tickets are \$35 per person, which includes a full Italian dinner catered by Crachiola's Market and Deli of Woodland, wine, beer and other beverages. Special sponsors' tables for eight are also available for \$800.

This year's guests can find silent and live auctions with a wide variety of art, from blown glass, paintings and ceramics, to fabric art and jewelry by over 25 local artists. Guests can also help support wildlife in their community by purchasing wine and gift baskets, travel packages, professional services, books, guided tours by some of our area's best birders

and fishermen, tickets to exciting sporting events, and adventures for families and friends.

Bucks for Ducks for the first time is featuring David Chaddock, a professional auctioneer, to keep the event entertaining. In the live auction you can find an escape to a charming cabin in the woods for a week of R&R, a hand-crafted wine rack holding a selection of more than 20 fine wines, a flight over the wetlands with your personal pilot, or a four course gourmet dinner with world renowned author John Lescroart and 6 of your favorite folks. This is just a sample of the treats in store for Bucks for Ducks bidders.

Invitations, including raffle tickets, were mailed in early September, but if you have questions, need more tickets, or



would like to volunteer, please contact us at 530-757-3780. If you would like to donate something special for the auction and raffle, please call Teri Engbring at 757-4828.

Want to have fun while you help Yolo Basin's dynamic program in support of Yolo wetlands? It's easy, join us October 8th for Bucks for Ducks! 🦆

Current Yolo Flyway Club Members

We would like to thank the following donors for their substantial support of our programs. To learn more about the benefits of membership contact Development Director Don Morrill at 530-219-1832 or dmorrill@yolobasin.org.

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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.



mark the date
bucks for ducks
october 8, 2005

celebrate the
yolo basin foundation's
15th anniversary

dinner - raffle - silent/live auction

6:00-9:00 pm
veterans memorial center
203 east 14th st., davis, ca

\$35 per person
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