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NEWSLETTER

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The Elusive Inhabitants of Elkhorn Ranch

by Taryn Cadena,
Conservation Associate, Yolo Land Trust



Foxes photographed by hidden camera

Nestled along the meandering curve of the Sacramento River, Elkhorn Ranch accommodates a variety of thriving occupants both wild and domestic. They prowl, hunt, and take refuge amongst the numerous habitats found throughout Elkhorn's agricultural terrain. On my excursions to the property I have come across common mourning doves and bluebirds on wires along the dirt roads, and the occasional wild turkey lurking in the walnut orchards. Red-winged blackbirds perch upon tall reeds along irrigation canals, and chubby ground squirrels scurry to their burrows at the sound of an approaching truck. Anxious mother killdeer will flop about pretending to have a broken wing to lead you away from her gravel nest where precious eggs lay. Swainson's hawks, the largest predators I've encountered on the property, can be spotted circling high above the expanses of row crops in search of prey with their keen eyesight. But larger predators also roam the ranch as evidenced by a series of covert photos taken between the hours of dusk and dawn.

Camouflaged cameras equipped with motion sensors were placed throughout Elkhorn Ranch and the photos that came back were unexpected and exciting. I observed long-eared jackrabbits, masked raccoons, and the occasional skunk. Most surprising to me were the great number of photos portraying foxes. They visited the camera sites often in the dead of night—lean, healthy, and spirited. They play fight with one another, and seem to be successful hunters due to photo evidence of a fox with a dead rodent hanging from its mouth.

These fascinating behaviors are currently being studied by California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) researchers. Under the Terrestrial Species Stressor Monitoring project, they hope to gain an understanding of which habitats are currently utilized by wildlife, and if habitat conditions affect animal movement, range, and population. Senior Environmental Scientist Misty Nelson heads the project. Nelson approached the Yolo Land Trust last year looking for willing landowners who would volunteer to host a research site on their property. Agricultural land was one of many varieties to be studied, and, curious to learn more, we proposed Elkhorn Ranch.

Owned by Yolo Land Trust (YLT) and the Sacramento Valley Conservancy, Elkhorn Ranch offers acres of orchards, row crops, and restored habitat. "In 2016, we conducted monitoring at over 300 individual sites throughout the Central Valley and Mojave Desert,"

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The Yolo Land Trust is a nonprofit corporation, founded in 1988 by an innovative group of farmers, ranchers, community leaders, and conservationists dedicated to conserving Yolo County's land. The Yolo Land Trust has helped landowners place voluntary farmland conservation agreements on over 60 family farms throughout Yolo County, permanently conserving over 11,000 acres for future generations. These farms remain privately owned and operated. The Yolo Land Trust is working to preserve the rural heritage of Yolo County.



For more information on the Yolo Land Trust or to receive YLT's E-news, visit www.TheYoloLandTrust.org, or provide us with your email address on the enclosed remit envelope.



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A Day in the Country

A Day in the Country, Yolo Land Trust's annual community event, was held September 11, 2016 at the Barger Keasey Family Farm in Davis. Paul and Laura Barger graciously hosted the event at their beautiful walnut orchard northwest of Davis. More than 500 guests sampled food and beverages from 22 restaurants and 17 wineries and breweries. A Day in the Country is the Yolo Land Trust's largest fundraising event and it wouldn't be possible without generous donations of time and goods from restaurants, wineries, breweries, farms, and ranches. Thank you to everyone who attended, sponsored, and volunteered. We look forward to celebrating the abundance of Yolo County again at next year's A Day in the Country on Sunday, September 10, 2017. ■



Inhabitants of Elkhorn Ranch

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said Nelson. "In the Central Valley, over 90 sites were monitored on more than three dozen properties, including both public and private lands. We will be continuing this project for a second year in spring of 2017 and plan to add an additional 200 sites in the Central Valley."

I had the opportunity to accompany two CDFW researchers, Hannah Bishop-Moser and Zachary McDonald. Out on the field, I watched as they noted the ground conditions, time, and their exact location using GPS. Walking north, the two of them were completely silent and alert. McDonald held a pair of binoculars at the ready for any birds and swept his eyes along the path for animal scat. Bishop-Moser, meanwhile, peered around for mammals and herptiles (reptiles and amphibians). The two are seasoned observers, which is important as this type of research demands the ability to recall a specific species from vast possibilities. A ball of grey plumage burst from a hedge about 20 feet to our left and soared over the canal, disappearing in a matter of seconds. "That was a quail," McDonald said.

The importance of the appearance of these elusive critters may be more apparent to the CDFW researchers. The analysis of their vast collection of data is highly anticipated, although it could be more conclusive should they be given more access to privately owned lands throughout the Central Valley. Writes Nelson, "A project of this scale inherently requires a large amount of cooperation from a variety of partners, particularly the diversity of land ownership in the Central Valley." Private landowners willing to allow monitoring on their property in spring of 2017 should contact Misty Nelson at Misty.Nelson@wildlife.ca.gov.

I await the results of CDFW's research to learn more about the mysterious habits of these elusive creatures and their relationship with the agricultural land they call home. To view photos from the research sites, and hear audio clips of Elkhorn Ranch wildlife, use the following link:

<http://theyololandtrust.org/sights-and-sounds-of-elkhorn-ranch/#more-2427>. ■



Welcome Board Member: Lynnel Pollock

Yolo Land Trust is happy to welcome Lynnel Pollock back to our Board of Directors. Pollock was one of the founding board members of the Yolo Land Trust and left to become a Yolo County supervisor in 1997, where she then served for eight years. Prior to that, she was a Yolo County planning commissioner for four years, and has been involved with many other community organizations including the Yolo County Farm Bureau, California Farm Bureau, Woodland Chamber of Commerce, and various water-related entities. Pollock served as the executive director of Cache Creek Conservancy until her retirement in June 2015. Pollock and her husband, Herb, farm in northern Yolo County, growing a variety of row crops, grain, and walnuts. Their farm near the community of Yolo has had a conservation easement with the Yolo Land Trust since 2006. They have two sons, Brad and Greg, who farm with them, and are blessed with two grandchildren. Pollock graduated from Stanford University with a degree in biological sciences, and is a graduate of the California Agricultural Leadership Program. ■

Yolo Land Trust by Way of Malawi

By Tiffany Loveridge, Advancement Officer, Yolo Land Trust

In March of 2014, I quit my job at an online advertising company, packed up my apartment in San Francisco and moved to Lilongwe, Malawi. Malawi is a small country located in southeast Africa, between Mozambique to the south and east, Tanzania to the north, and Zambia to the west. Lake Malawi, the southernmost of the Rift Valley lakes and the third largest lake in Africa, runs the length of the eastern border of the country and provides a home to more than 1,000 species of cichlids—a diverse family of fish that includes Chambo, a tilapia-like fish endemic to Malawi and popular on menus across the country. The rich fish life of the lake is in sharp contrast to the economy of the country. Malawi is the poorest country in the world with a GDP of just \$226.50 and ranks among the African countries whose agriculture is most severely at risk from climate change. With 80% of the population heavily reliant on subsistence farming, the country's economic, social, and environmental well-being is in a perilous state. Exacerbating the effects of climate change are destructive agricultural practices and rampant deforestation. The results are depleted soils, decreased harvests, food insecurity, and unpredictable water cycles.

I moved to Malawi to take a job with an organization that is working to address the critical issues facing farmers in the country. From March 2014 to July 2016, I worked for Kusamala Institute of Agriculture & Ecology, a local non-governmental organization (NGO) working to train and educate farmers. Through courses, projects, and consultancies, Kusamala promotes agroecology systems such as permaculture design, to help farmers maximize land productivity, reduce the need for expensive inputs, and increase agricultural diversity to improve nutrition, food security, and livelihoods.

As communications and programs manager at Kusamala, I wore many different hats, from developing marketing materials, writing grants, and redesigning the organization's website to organizing training and education programs, and overseeing interns and volunteers. Through my experiences working in Malawi, I understand how important communication is among stakeholders at all levels in order to build support for a cause. Working with farmers, district councils, private business, and other NGOs helped build a robust network of dedicated collaborators and supporters. We achieved more together than we could have achieved apart.

After two and a half years abroad, I am excited to be back home in Northern California. As a native of Davis, I am thrilled to join the Yolo Land Trust (YLT) to help protect the agricultural heritage of the places where I grew up and that really make Yolo County feel like home to me. In my new role as Advancement Officer, I plan to focus on building stronger relationships between YLT and the communities in Yolo County in order to raise awareness of the threats to agricultural land. Building a strong and engaged base of supporters of agricultural preservation is essential to protecting the quality of life we all love. I look forward to meeting you, our supporters, and working together to protect our lands and our future.

As Yolo Land Trust's new Advancement Officer, Tiffany Loveridge is responsible for managing YLT's fund development and communications plan. She can be reached at tloveridge@theyololandtrust.org. ■

