

Annual Report

California Ricelands Waterbird Foundation



Continuing Habitat Programs & New Innovations

September 1, 2023 through August 31, 2024



Chairman's Message



Dear Foundation Supporters,

This fiscal year we saw a continued transition to more reliance on use of our donor funds to keep significant numbers of enhanced habitat acres out on the landscape as the State investments continued to trend lower with lessening drought mitigation concerns and more fiscal challenges for California. With the support of all our many donors we have kept the habitat pipeline flowing and even forged new ground by continuing our pilot testing of new innovative approaches to nesting habitat.

We also continued to assist our partner organizations in deploying their funding to projects helping birds and salmon here in the Sacramento Valley. Our Bid4Birds web-based platform has now become the one-stop shop for our partners to communicate about funded programs and gather digital applications from rice growers who are interested in participating. It has been great to see this habitat project “portal” become so frequently utilized and to also appreciate that it was built by all of you—our ongoing donors.

This report will dive into our many projects across all the seasons to enhance flooded habitats for shorebirds, food for salmon in our rivers and a continued exploration of ways to advance nesting habitat for ducks and many other bird species which rely on scarce nesting habitat in the Valley.

Please know how much we appreciate the dedication of our annual donors that keep our habitat projects afloat. Thank you all for your continued commitment and support.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Buttner".

Paul Buttner
Chairman

Annual Report

California Ricelands Waterbird Foundation

The California Ricelands Waterbird Foundation (“Foundation”) was created in 2015 to help implement activities that create and promote habitat projects on the ground in and around California ricelands. Over the past eight years, we have used our donor funding as leverage to help California Rice acquire large federal grants from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The active rice industry grants during this fiscal year include the NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) which was awarded in 2020 and now being renewed in 2025. The State of California also continued contributions and is using our programs to deploy state funds in viable habitat projects.

The Foundation’s partners help make this work successful, and we greatly appreciate their financial and technical service contributions. We work closely with staff from the California Rice Commission (CRC), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Point Blue Conservation Science, and Audubon California to make our shorebird habitat programs successful. The Foundation used its web-based conservation program delivery tools to support multiple projects funded through grant agreements with the CRC. In our work on nesting waterfowl habitat in ricelands, we work closely with staff from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and California Waterfowl Association (CWA).



Long-billed Dowitcher feeding in a rice field.

Major Activities

This fiscal year included the following continuing activities:

- 1) Invested donor funds into high-quality shorebird habitat projects and helped to direct additional State funds from the Department of Water Resources (DWR) into these projects as well.
- 2) Implemented a continuing pilot project to test a new method of planting cover crops for waterfowl upland nesting habitat.
- 3) Prioritized and selected winter-flooding habitat projects on ricelands as part of a program funded by the CDFW.
- 4) Continued to host California Trout’s Fish Food Subsidy Program on our website, helping young salmon in the Sacramento Valley for another consecutive year.

High-quality Shorebird Habitat: A Key Component of our Annual Habitat Work

This fiscal year was the fifth year the Foundation has been running its own habitat program through our web-based platform called Bid4Birds. The Bid4Birds program turns farmers' fields into temporary habitat for shorebirds and other waterbirds during times of year when habitat is limited on the landscape, during what we call 'shoulder seasons'. This habitat is critical to supporting Pacific Flyway waterbird

populations. Creating this habitat has real costs for the farmers and the Foundation uses Bid4Birds to provide incentive payments to help offset those costs for farmers.



Kristin Sesser (CRC/Foundation) and Tim Barton (CWA) review data on a Foundation habitat project.

In fiscal year 2023-24, we supported both a Fall 2023 program and a Spring 2024 program. In both seasons, the Foundation supported the programs by hosting them on our Bid4Birds web platform to process bids and implement our analytic process for prioritizing projects. This modeling tool was developed from our past work funded by NRCS (2020-2023) to develop this open-source model. The Fall program created over 1,875 acres of valuable habitat from July through October 2023. This effort was funded by significant contributions from DWR using the last of drought mitigation

funds. The Spring 2024 program created over 1,500 acres of valuable habitat from February to April. This effort was funded by significant contributions from DWR, as well as funding from our individual donor funds.

Testing New Approaches to Nesting Habitat

In fiscal year 2023-24, we continued our work piloting a new way of establishing cover crops for the purpose of providing nesting habitat for upland nesting waterbirds. Normally, a cover crop is planted in the fall after rice harvest and then grows over the course of the winter, thus the field could not be winter-flooded. Based on our previous year's testing, we believe it is possible to establish the cover crop after winter-flooded rice fields have begun drawing down in late-winter if the grower is planning to idle the acres the following season. These kinds of innovative approaches warrant further study because our future will likely include a greater frequency of planned idling. This creates an opportunity to provide much needed upland nesting habitat for locally breeding waterfowl and to engage interested farmers who would benefit from other revenue streams when idling.

This fiscal year, we again worked with one of our producer partners to fly-on the cover crop seed into winter-flooded fields in Butte County in February 2024. Results were mixed with one field being more affected by spring rains and having patchy clumps of good nesting habitat and the other field ending up offering robust nesting habitat. Both fields saw use by nesting waterfowl and our partners at CWA and CDFW were very excited about the results of this practice.

Additional Programs supported by our Web-based Platform

California Winter Rice Habitat Incentive Program—State funding investments into core winter flooding of ricelands continued this fiscal year using the remainder of the original \$5 million set in place in 2018. CDFW funding was used to facilitate this effort using our Foundation website and implementation resources provided by CRC to administer the Program. Through this CRC-managed rollout, we are also able to offer an enhanced cost-share on the west side of the Valley where prohibitive water costs have been limiting winter-flooded rice acreage. Using this flexibility, we were able to bring back a significant amount of those west-side acres into the winter-flooded habitat mix this year. Just over 63,000 acres of winter-flooded rice were successfully enrolled into winter flooding contracts.

Fish Food Program—As part of this continuing project, funded by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, California Trout and RD108 (one of the rice area water districts) again looked to our Bid4Birds platform to help advertise the practice specifications and host the application process for landowners. This practice strategically floods fields to grow highly nutritious “fish food” using the plentiful carbon sources in winter-flooded rice fields, and then subsequently drains this food back to the river through coordinated drain releases to provide a food subsidy for juvenile salmon confined to the river channel where zooplankton foods are severely limited. And because some growers can drain more than just one time per season, the program achieved 89,000 drainage cycles of nutritious fish food into the Sacramento River using these 43,000 acres of specially managed ricelands.



Jacob Montgomery (CalTrout) monitoring zooplankton levels in a fish food project rice field.

Scenes from the Foundation's 2024 Donor Field Trip



CALIFORNIA RICELANDS WATERBIRD FOUNDATION

BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2023/24

Mark Biddlecomb, Director

Paul Buttner, Chairman / Executive Director

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Xerónimo Castañeda, Director

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California Ricelands Waterbird Foundation Supporters

Fiscal Year 2023/24
September 1, 2023 – August 31, 2024)

Patrons (\$10,000+)

California Rice Commission
Mary's Gone Crackers

Visionaries (\$5,000+)

American Commodity Company
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Reclamation District 108
Saddleback Ranch/Ned & Carol Spieker
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Grow West
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Summary of the Foundation's Financial Statement

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

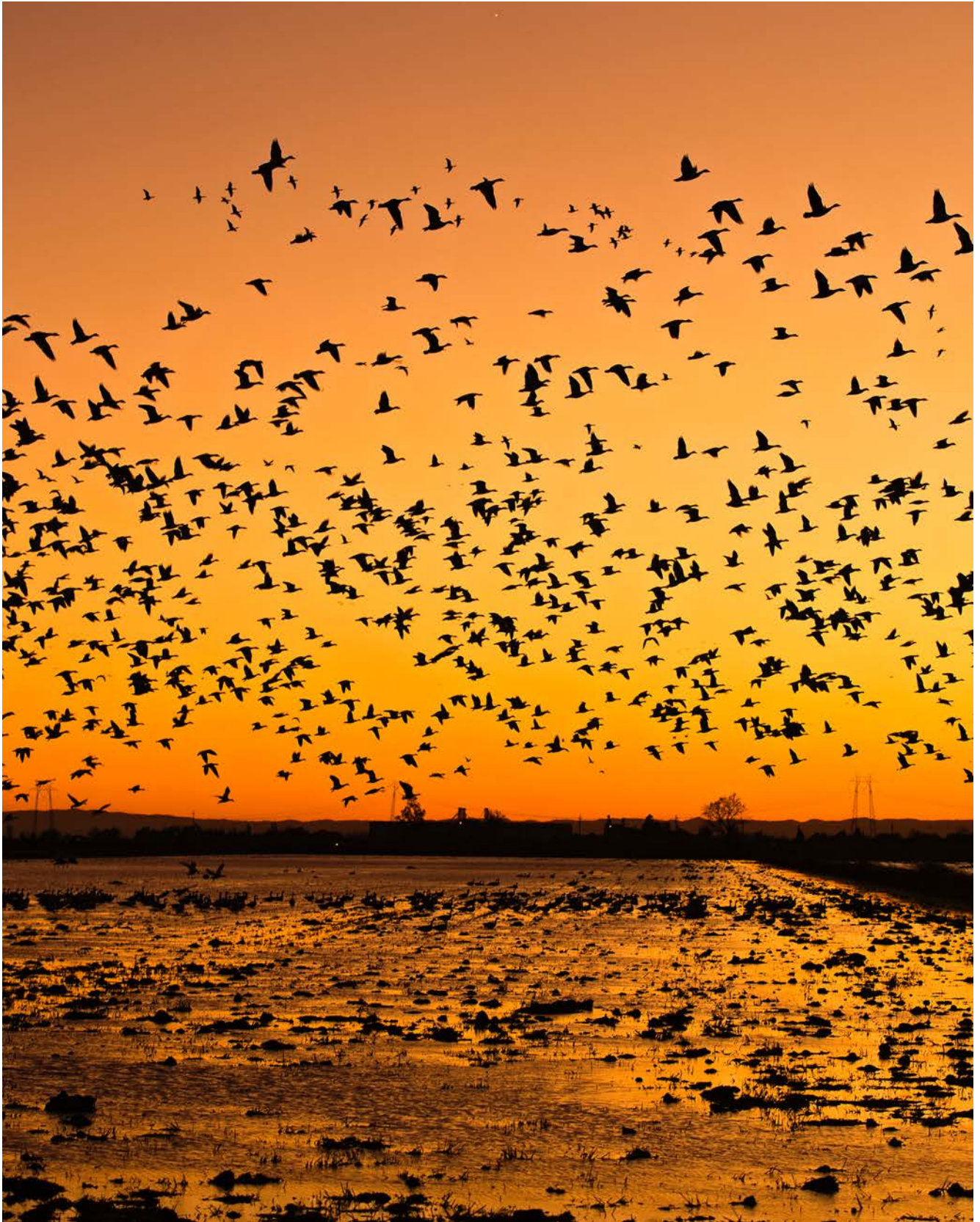
AUGUST 31, 2024 AND 2023

	2024	2023
<u>ASSETS</u>		
Current Assets		
Cash and cash equivalents	323,506	278,521
Total Assets	323,506	278,521
Current Liabilities		
Accounts payable	50	50
Total Liabilities		
Net Assets		
Donor Restricted	0	0
Unrestricted	323,456	278,471
Total Net Assets & Liabilities	323,506	278,521

STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES FOR THE YEARS ENDED AUGUST 31, 2024 AND 2023

	2024	2023
<u>SUPPORT AND REVENUE</u>		
Contributions	131,745	229,262
Pledges	21,250	21,250
In-Kind Contributions	0	8,926
Total Support and Revenue	152,995	259,438
<u>EXPENSES</u>		
Program expense	30,788	121,503
Management and general	31,307	40,208
Fundraising	45,915	16,797
Total Expenses	108,010	178,508

Changes in Net Assets	44,985	80,930
Net Assets - Beginning of year	278,471	197,541
Net Assets - Ending of year	323,456	278,471





California Ricelands Waterbird Foundation
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*Enhancing the ecological value of California rice fields to help
sustain the millions of waterbirds and other wildlife in the
Pacific Flyway for future generations*

CalRiceWaterbirds.org

California Ricelands Waterbird Foundation is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization.
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