

Tracking the Refuge

a publication for Friends of Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge

Winter 2025



Winter 2024/2025 has been busy for The Friends of the Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge. In November, we hosted our annual “Brunch with the Birds” event to introduce the community to the Refuge and its staff. The weather was great and over 150 people attended the event.



Our January 11 docent led Wildlife Walk was a great success. High winds kept the small birds low to the ground, but guests were treated to the sight of 50,000-60,000 geese (a blend of Snow and Greater White-Fronted) flying overhead. Farther along the trail, about 2,000 Snow Geese lifted up from the pond and flew directly overhead. Check the Friends’ or Refuge websites for future Wildlife Walks.

A great group of volunteers helped us replant Little Green Heron Playscape at the Refuge. Continued volunteer involvement will be needed to water and weed the Playscape in coming months. Please let us know if you would like to help.



Species Spotlight: Who am I? (Answer on the back)



This creature is a crustacean found in vernal pools (seasonal ponds). It has 11 pairs of appendages for swimming, breathing, and feeding. They eat algae and plankton and lay their eggs in vernal pools before they dry up. When the water returns, the eggs hatch and the cycle starts again. They are an important food source for waterfowl. They are a Federally Endangered species found in the Central Valley. Their threats come from habitat loss, non-native plants, bullfrogs and mosquito fish, climate change and drought, and pesticides.



Our Conservation Committee continues a multi-year effort to evaluate and speak out on potential threats to the integrity of the Refuge and the surrounding farmlands. This includes projects that would convert agricultural lands to urban uses, thereby eliminating important foraging areas for migrating waterfowl. The Committee also continues to monitor developments in the Delta Conveyance project on the Refuge and mitigation measures needed to address the impacts. With the “down-sizing” of the water project to a “single tunnel”, the Friends have continued to focus on the need for appropriate mitigation measures to be incorporated in the project to ensure protection of the Refuge.



The board was briefed by Refuge staff on Refuge operations, including the progress on the contract for repair and reconstruction of the Refuge access roads as well as updating walking bridges in Blue Heron Trails. We were pleased to learn of the hire of a new Wildlife Specialist, Autumn Turner, who has already started working.

The Refuge budget and the status of future hiring for the depleted staff remain uncertain pending action by the new administration. Efforts to hire an Administrative Assistant and a Tractor Operator, both of whom were to be shared with other Refuges, have been frozen, leaving Stone Lakes NWR severely understaffed to protect and maintain the 6500 acres of wetlands and wild lands that comprise it.

The staff reported that the last survey counted around 800 roosting Sandhill Cranes on the Refuge.

The Board is looking to reenter discussions with the Cosumnes River Community Services District to create an “open space and recreation” partnership. Much still needs to be done to work out the details of this partnership. Stay tuned.

Did you know . . . ?

Stone Lakes NWR was established as the Nation’s 505th National Wildlife Refuge in 1994. Blue Heron Trails was completed and opened in 2011 and has been open free to the public from dawn to dusk, 7 days a week, 365 days a year ever since, with exceptions only when required.

This is a continuation of our periodic reports from the Friends and the Refuge which is intended to keep you up to date on both. We hope you enjoy some of the inside insights that we will send your way. A giant **THANK YOU** for your support from the Friends, the Staff and most of all, the Wildlife!