

Tracking the Refuge

a publication for Friends of Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge
Summer 2026

On August 13 we had the pleasure of enjoying an evening of Nature Trivia with almost 50 people. We met at A Seat at the Table in Elk Grove with our hosts, Nature Experts Aaron and Gabrielle guiding us through 5 rounds of questions and answers on nature and environmental topics.

We hope we can do this again and invite all of you to come participate if you get a chance!



The Refuge staff used several tools this year to try and control the spread of aquatic weeds across the Stone Lakes Basin.

- Water hyacinth and water primrose are the two primary invasive plant species the Refuge staff and their partners are targeting.
- The Refuge worked with several neighboring landowners to hire a local Uncrewed Aircraft System (UAS) pilot to conduct four drone missions that treated over 90 acres of infested waterway and slough.
- The Refuge also used a long-reach excavator to remove aquatic weeds along the shore of South Stone Lake to provide access to airboats to treat thick sections of primrose that have clogged the flow of water.
- California Department of Parks and Recreation's Division of Boating and Waterways continued to help support the Refuge aquatic weed control programs this year by deploying their fleet of airboats throughout Lower Beach Lake and South Stone Lake.
- 250 acres of aquatic weeds were treated in 2026, with 150 acres more to treat.
- Refuge management is working with Regional leadership to acquire a harvester that can be launched into the lake and manually remove aquatic weeds over the course of the summer, greatly increasing the amount of open water habitat for birds, fish, reptiles (turtles & snakes) and other wildlife.



Tules are native reeds that have been used by Native Americans for at least 4,000 years. They have been harvested in late summer or early fall to create baskets, mats, thatched houses and tule boats. The Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians and the United Auburn Indian Community have permits to harvest Tules on the Refuge in order to continue creating these ancestral items. Since wetlands are shrinking nationwide, this is an important plant to protect, and the tribes have great respect for them.



Tules often grow 6' to 8' tall from spreading rhizomes and make light and buoyant vessels, which are raced in festivals. Besides being an important part of Native American heritage, they are an important part of wetland ecosystems since they create a buffer for wind and rain and are known for reducing erosion and removing pollutants and heavy metals from soil and water. They also provide food, shelter, and nesting habitat for birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians, as well as being a food source for muskrats, water fowl and perching birds.

Painting by Linnea Fronce



*Make a plan to join us for our annual **Brunch With The Birds** at the Refuge November 15, 2026. FREE Event See the website below for details.*

Species Spotlight – The California Vole

The California Vole might be mistaken for a mouse with a short tail.

These rodents are social animals who live in extensive burrow systems, living underground and foraging on the surface. Voles are strictly herbivorous, feeding on grasses, seeds and roots. They can cause significant damage to plants by gnawing bark and roots.



Voles are a foundational keystone species within the grasslands and wetlands of the Refuge since they are a high-value food source for predator ecosystems. Voles are primary targets for raptors, coyotes, raccoons, skunks, and even Great Blue Herons, Sandhill Cranes, and Egrets. Populations can fluctuate dramatically with sudden increases occurring every few years since they reproduce rapidly. The females are capable of producing from 5 to 10 litters of 4 to 8 young per year.

Volunteers have been planting and tending a Native Plant Garden at the Refuge and it has proven difficult to keep the plants from becoming feasts for voles. 2026 has been a banner year for vole populations, so the Refuge is considering putting up owl nesting boxes around the garden to limit damage from the voracious little critters.



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