

Private lands habitat programs benefit California's native birds

Ryan DiGaudio
rdigaudio@pointblue.org

There is considerable interest in how private lands can contribute to providing habitat for wildlife. Mechanisms for creating this habitat include voluntary federal and state programs that provide incentives to farmers, ranchers, and other private landowners who manage for wildlife habitat on their lands.

To evaluate the benefits of these programs for wildlife, we conducted bird surveys between 2001 and 2009 at private wetlands, postharvest flooded croplands, and riparian forests enrolled in habitat programs in California.

We found that private Central Valley wetlands supported 181 bird species during summer months (breeding season). During fall migration, postharvest flooded croplands supported a higher density of shorebirds than did privately-owned semipermanent wetlands (flooded only from winter or early spring through summer).

At the riparian sites, bird species richness increased after restoration, and continued to increase for at least 15 years post-restoration, probably due to ongoing vegetation growth and associated habitat improvement. Landowners could expect to see early successional riparian birds (e.g., Song Sparrow) recruit to restoration sites within the first few years after restoration.

Habitat programs provide a successful model of wildlife agencies, the agricultural community, nongovernmental organizations and private landowners voluntarily working together to help achieve conservation goals. Habitat programs are a win-win strategy; they support private landowners in maintaining productive farms and ranches while promoting wildlife conservation.

These programs are especially important during drought, when the cost of water may deter landowners from maintaining wetlands through

the breeding season or water on croplands postharvest. By providing financial assistance, private lands programs can help landowners provide much needed habitat during drought.

The future success of habitat programs will depend on maintaining their funding as well as the engagement of private landowners.

Main Points

Private lands programs provide habitat for the species they were designed to protect, including migratory and special status species.

Private lands habitat programs are a win-win strategy to maintain productive farms and ranches while promoting wildlife conservation.

Continued success will depend on maintaining financial incentives and engagement with private landowners.

DiGaudio, R.T., K. Kreitinger, C.M. Hickey, N.E. Seavy, and T. Gardali. 2015. Private lands habitat programs benefit California's native birds. *California Agriculture* 69:210-220.
http://ucanr.edu/repositoryfiles/cav_6904p210-159745.pdf