

Mendota Wildlife Area:



The Mendota Wildlife Area (Mendota) is a key habitat managed by the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) in the central San Joaquin Valley. Mendota, 11,825 acres in size, demonstrates how wildlife respond to habitat management changes directed at encouraging nongame wildlife. For Mendota, these management activities included the identification and

By Robert J. Huddleston

Above, wetlands.

management of wetland and upland habitats critical to many species.

Left, duck brood.

Of the many species supported and encouraged by DFG's management activities at Mendota, the white-faced ibis showed one of the most significant responses through increased nesting activity. In 1978, white-faced ibis established a rookery that has since occurred each year along with black-crowned night herons and snowy egrets. Prior to 1978, no record of nesting by white-faced ibis had been recorded in the San Joaquin Valley for about 20 years. Since 1978, the white-faced ibis breeding population at Mendota Wildlife Area has expanded from four breeding pair in 1978 to 7,120 ibis counted during the annual fly-out survey conducted as they left the rookery in 2001. The initial decline of white-faced ibis nesting throughout the 1950s was caused by changes in land use and loss of nesting habitat throughout the San Joaquin Valley. DFG credits the increase in semi-permanent wetlands and the irrigating of uplands which commenced in 1992.

Bottom, boat-tailed grackle.

Over the years, not only white-faced ibis have increased at Mendota. Great-blue heron numbers have increased and now Mendota Wildlife Area has five rookeries.

Opportunities abound at Mendota

DFG has managed Mendota for the benefit of the many wildlife and plant species that reside there, including people.



A key habitat in the San Joaquin Valley

Mendota abounds with outdoor recreational opportunities. The joint effort of the state, federal and private funds have enabled the DFG to establish key wetland habitat that can be used by the public for their recreational uses. A greater diversity of public use has developed in conjunction with increased diversity of wildlife populations. Twenty years ago, the principal management of the area was limited to hunting and fishing, but now interest abounds in nature study, photography, sightseeing, boating, swimming, picnicking, dog training, dog field trials, and birding.

Birders will find the Mendota Wildlife Area enjoyable. There are more than 165 species and sub-species known to occur or reside on the area, including shorebirds, songbirds, raptors, waterfowl and wading birds. Mammals commonly found on the area include coyotes, muskrats, beavers, minks, raccoons, weasels, black-tailed hares, cottontail rabbits, spotted and striped skunks, and ground squirrels.

Hunters and anglers will also find opportunities at Mendota. Game species include ducks, geese, snipes, coots, doves, pheasants, cottontail rabbits, black tailed hares and raccoons. The 600 acres that make up the Fresno Slough offer the angler a chance to catch crappie, catfish, bluegill, carp, and black and striped bass. Of course, all Fish and Game codes and regulations apply. Hunters should note that the use of firearms is limited to shotguns only. The area is open 24 hours a day for all recreational use from the close of waterfowl season in January to Sept. 16, though one portion of the area is closed to dog training during nesting season from April 1 to June 30. The area is open to fishing 24 hours a day, but only by boat during the waterfowl-hunting season.

Visitors should also be aware of snakes on the area, especially rattlesnakes.

DFG and partners maintain the key

The more than 11,000 acres that make up the Mendota Wildlife Area were



DFG photos by Robert Waldron

Above, mallards in dry barley.



Right, ground squirrel.

Below, snake trap, ongoing research study.



purchased by the Wildlife Conservation Board between 1954 and 1991. Development, maintenance and management of the area has been financed 75 percent by Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Program (Pittman-Robertson) funds derived from a federal excise tax on sporting arms and ammunition. The additional 25 percent of the funds comes from the Fish and Game Preservation fund, principally derived from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses. Other funds that support activities on Mendota Wildlife Area include the Comprehensive Wetland Habitat program, Duck Stamp program, Ducks Unlimited Matching Aid to Restore State Habitat (MARSH), California Waterfowl Cal-Marsh funds and federal Sportfish Restoration funds.

The mid-1980s were good years those concerned with the preservation of all wetland and wildlife species. Wetlands are the most productive of all the wildlife habitats, and only a fraction of the species that utilize wetlands are hunted. With the implementation of the 1984 Fish and Wildlife Habitat Enhancement Fund, the California State Senate concurrent Resolution 28, and the 1986 North American Waterfowl Management Plan and International Conservation Treaty, Congress enacted the 1989 North American Wetlands Conservation Act in 1989 to help fund wetland projects. The Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture, a component of that act, set goals for the protection, restoration and enhancement of wetlands. With the Central Valley Project Improvement Act coming on line, the future for the Mendota Wildlife Area efforts to maximize productivity and diversity of plant communities for selected natural marsh plant species looks bright. With good marsh management practices, we can provide habitat to a much wider variety of wetland and associated wildlife species. Providing habitat in the spring and summer along with semi- and permanent water in critical habitat are the main reasons wildlife on the area has done well.

Mendota Wildlife Area is located three miles southeast of Mendota in Fresno County. (Proceed south and east from Mendota on Hwy 180 to Whites Bridge entrance). Visitors must register and obtain a use permit at the entrance. For more information call (559) 655-4645 or write to P.O. Box 37, Mendota, CA 93640.

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Boat launch.

DFG photos by Robert Waldron



Above, kids enjoy the fishing. Below, the wildlife area offers great access for those with disabilities.

