



In Memorium – Waldo Holt (1949-2007)

This issue is dedicated in memory of Waldo Holt, namesake to the Central Valley Bird Club's newly established "Waldo Holt Conservation Fund." Waldo is recognized for his outstanding accomplishments in conserving habitats and species, especially birds, in San Joaquin County and the entire Central Valley. He passed away on 11 July at age 58 after a long bout with cancer.

Waldo was born in Stockton, and lived there his entire life. He developed an appreciation for the outdoors early in life through the encouragement of his father, who passed away when Waldo was very young. Waldo was identifiable to many of us by his large 6'4" frame, which served him well in his younger years when he was a star basketball player at Stockton's Lincoln High School. Waldo was extremely well read and could engage in conversations on almost any topic, especially history. He also had a huge love affair with the arts. Both he and his wife, Sara, were regulars at live concerts in Stockton, with a leaning towards the acoustical genre. Waldo was an accomplished batik artist, and for many years did commission work and had showings. However, it was his childhood passion for wildlife and a commitment to preservation and conservation that led Waldo to perform some of his finest works.

Waldo joined the San Joaquin Audubon Society in the early 1980s. Like many who start birding as an adult, he found the finer points of bird identification very daunting (especially bird vocalizations), but his strengths as a student allowed him within a relatively short period of time to become one of San Joaquin County's top birders. As his knowledge of the status

and distribution of the county's birds grew, so did his desire to protect them. His "signature" species became the Swainson's Hawk, and his ability to delay or even deter developments that threatened its nesting activities became legendary. His heroics led to greater public awareness of wildlife and its habitats in an area known for its "good-ole boy" attitudes toward land use, which propelled the early adoption of a county-wide Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP).

Waldo was an original member of the San Joaquin County HCP Steering Committee. He was the perennial conservation chair of the San Joaquin Audubon Society and worked very closely with other high profile environmental groups. He became extremely adept with the legal aspects of the environmental process, and represented the interests of the Swainson's Hawk and other threatened or endangered species with the authority and expertise gained from many legal battles. He brought an unusual blend of qualities to his conservation work. Not only was he respected for his commitment and passion to conservation, but he was also almost universally liked by everyone on both sides of the issue. After several years on the working group and the HCP Steering Committee, Waldo served on the HCP Technical Advisory Committee up until his illness. He is sorely missed from this position, and even proponents of development speak of the group as "lacking balance" with Waldo's departure.

Waldo also was deeply committed to the conservation of the state threatened Greater Sandhill Crane, serving on the interagency working group that pursued a Sandhill Crane recovery plan. The Lodi Chamber of Commerce recognized him with their Conservationist of the Year Award at their annual Lodi Sandhill Crane Festival about 5 years ago.

Waldo always downplayed his many accomplishments as a conservationist/environmentalist. This was a direct result of his attitude towards this moniker. He was never motivated by a desire for the power, fame, or monetary gain occasionally associated with its "political" definition. He was motivated by its purer side; sacrifice, caretaking, and stewardship. He was never comfortable as a public speaker. All of his dealings with developers, planning commissions and public officials were true labors of love, and were girded by a strong sense of duty and humility.

Waldo was happiest as a field ornithologist, donating untold hours of time doing bird censuses, compiling Christmas Bird Counts, and leading field trips. He loved to write and authored or coauthored numerous papers on Swainson's Hawks, including ones on their urban nesting habits and their winter status in California and Mexico. He was at his very best birding like a madman in his beloved San Joaquin County, very often with fellow madman David Yee. They coauthored the Checklist to the Birds of San Joaquin County, and Waldo was devoted to keeping it up-to-date. Waldo rarely birded away from the county, so he restricted his bird listing game to keeping a county list. When David saw his 300th county bird some 10 years ago, Waldo made it a personal goal to also become a member of the 300 club.

His heart sank briefly when David told him that his list was NIB (non-introduced birds) only, and Waldo had to deduct five introduced species from his list. But he quickly made up for these losses and it was always apparent when he had added a new bird to his list by the twinkle in his eye. Waldo's untimely death caused him to fall just shy of his goal, a very impressive 298.

Waldo was one of the founding members of the Central Valley Bird Club and attended all of the conceptual meetings of both the CVBC and the CVBS. He was the Club's first Secretary and one of its strongest supporters. His lasting legacy will be one of a man who spoke boldly about his convictions, lived simply, and truly cared for the needy in this world. And above all for those who knew him well, he was a loving husband, a dear friend, and a man who had a wily sense of humor. He will be dearly missed.

(Compiled by David Yee, John Sterling and Dan Airola, with additional information contributed by James Estep and Dan Gifford).

