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Subject: January Along Putah Creek
Date: January 5, 2026 at 7:59 PM
To: mcbride.don@gmail.com

PC



January Newsletter





A lesser yellowlegs fishing along Putah Creek. (Leslie Allen)

January Journeys Along Putah Creek

The new year brings new opportunities along Putah Creek! Whether you're here for the critters, the conservation, or the community, we're so glad you're with us. Let's dive in!

Only have time to read part of this newsletter?

You can click on any of the sections below to jump immediately to that section!

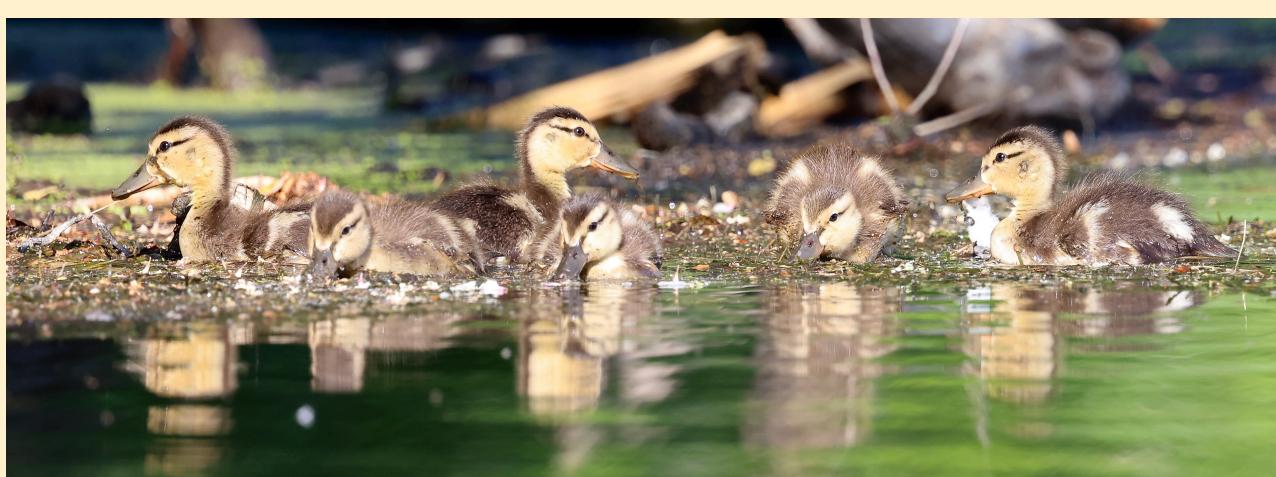
Here's what you can expect in this newsletter:

- [Announcements](#)
- [Upcoming Events](#)
- [December Recap & Photos](#)
- [January Wildlife Watch](#)

As always, you can support our work by attending events, sharing our mission with friends and family, engaging with us on social media, or making a donation today. Our work continues thanks to community members like you!

[Donate](#)

Your donation helps ensure Putah Creek continues to thrive for generations to come! Thank you!



Ducklings swimming in Putah Creek. (Leslie Allen)

Announcements

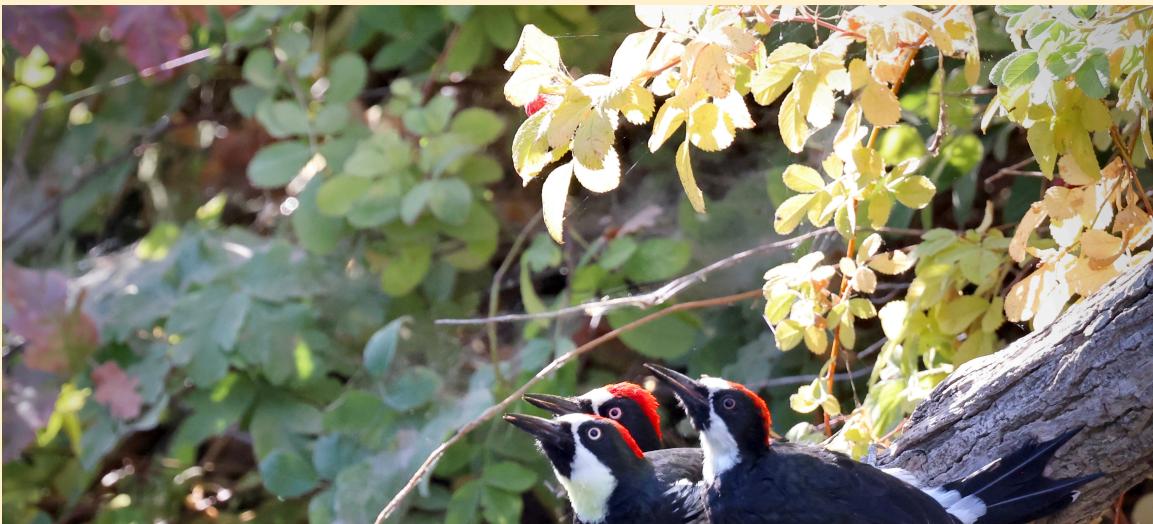
- [Honoring the Legacy of Elizabeth Eklund Tara](#)
- [Putah Creek Celebrates Record Salmon Return](#)
- [Putah Creek Sees High Monarch Count](#)

Honoring the Legacy of Elizabeth Eklund Tara

Putah Creek Council recently received a generous bequest from the estate of Elizabeth Eklund Tara. Although we did not know Elizabeth personally, we are deeply grateful for her trust in our mission and for the legacy she has left for our community and environment.

We want to honor Elizabeth with care and accuracy. If you knew her and feel comfortable sharing information about her life, please reach out — we would be grateful to learn more.

With heartfelt gratitude,
Putah Creek Council





Three acorn woodpeckers drink water along Pleasants Creek. (Leslie Allen)

Putah Creek Celebrates Record Salmon Return



Just a few months following the Winters Salmon Festival, we now have updated information on how many salmon spawned in Putah Creek this fall — and the news is incredible! Over **2,100 Chinook salmon returned to spawn**, marking the largest documented salmon

run in the creek's history.



Video news clip from KCRA covering the record number of Chinook salmon spawning in Putah Creek this fall.

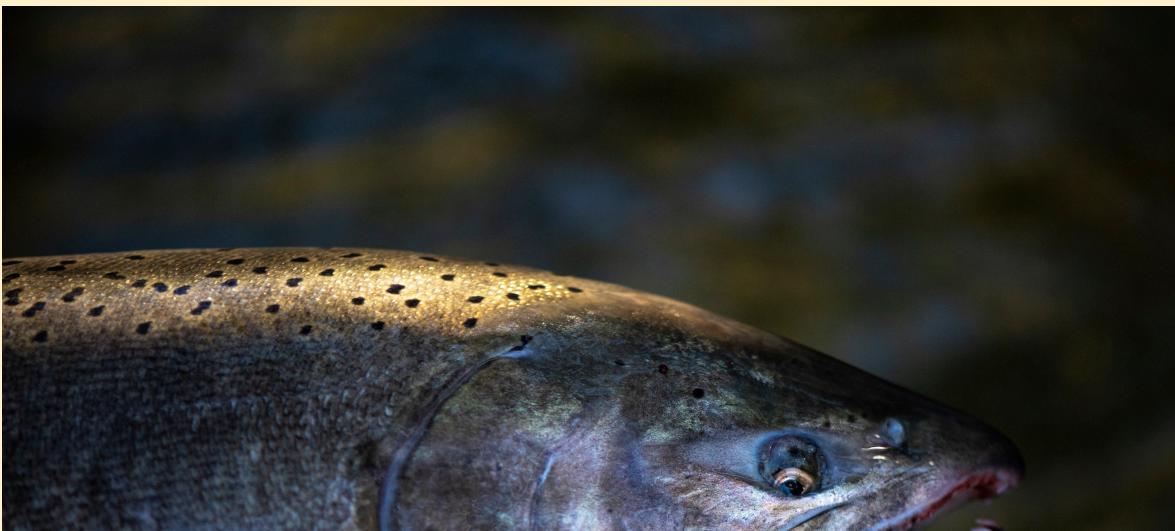




Sammuel Huang, a junior specialist in Nann Fangue's lab at UC Davis, returns a Chinook salmon to Putah Creek after being counted and measured in the fall of 2025. (Peter Aronson/UC Davis)

This remarkable milestone comes after 25 years of collaborative restoration work. Over \$20 million in grant-funded improvements — including habitat enhancements and water management — have helped make this possible.

According to our partners at the Solano County Water Agency and UC Davis researchers, key factors behind the success include strategic placement of 500 tons of spawning gravel, adaptive water management with "functional flows" timed to mimic natural conditions, and ongoing salmon passage improvements in the lower creek.





A chinook salmon at Putah Creek. (Kit Kerlin/UC Davis)



UC Davis undergraduate Emily Bennett and junior specialist Peter Aronson measure and monitor a salmon at Putah Creek in Yolo County in the fall of 2025. (Joleen Lindog/UC Davis)

The native plantings and invasive species removal we do at Putah

Creek Council also support healthy salmon populations by providing food sources, shade, and stable stream banks that salmon need throughout their lifecycle.

As Putah Creek Streamkeeper Max Stevenson explains, “The future of salmon in California depends on supporting the entire salmon lifecycle; including spawning areas, food production, protection from predators, and availability of water. While much work remains to be done, 2025 is a historic success, marking a pivotal moment in our goals for native Chinook salmon.”

With potentially hundreds of thousands of baby salmon expected next spring, Putah Creek's natural production now rivals that of a small hatchery, and demonstrates what's possible when communities, agencies, and volunteers work together to care for the watershed.

Sources: [Solano County Water Agency](#) and [UC Davis](#), December 2025

Putah Creek Sees High Monarch Count





Location: Putah Creek Fishing Access. Species: Monarch butterfly. Plant ID: Narrowleaf milkweed. Photo courtesy of Yolo RCD.

This year California is seeing the lowest monarch butterfly population count since 1997, with numbers reaching less than 10,000 individuals and the monitoring period ending on January 31st.

While this is certainly cause for concern, the interdam region of Putah Creek (between Monticello Dam and the Lake Solano Diversion Dam) has actually seen relatively high populations of monarch butterfly caterpillars this year. At Lake Solano Park, near the Native Plant Demonstration Garden, Solano Resource Conservation District and Putah Creek Council counted about 30 monarch butterfly caterpillars on one patch of narrowleaf milkweed in August 2025. Additionally, Yolo Resource Conservation District counted over 80 monarch butterfly caterpillars on milkweed patches at the Putah Creek Fishing Access Sites in late spring through fall of 2025. Combined, the interdam stretch of Putah Creek has seen about 110 monarch butterfly caterpillars just this season.





Location: Putah Creek Fishing Access. Species: Monarch butterfly. Plant ID: Showy milkweed. Photo courtesy of Yolo RCD.

This “butterfly corridor” has been created and supported by the work of various habitat restoration organizations in the region, including Putah Creek Council. Starting in January 2024, Putah Creek Council has partnered with Yolo RCD to host three volunteer events where we planted narrowleaf milkweed, the preferred monarch host plant, and other native pollinator species at Putah Creek Fishing Access Sites #1 and #4. These volunteer-installed native plant patches are where a large number of the counted monarch butterfly caterpillars and adults were found! Our latest volunteer event with Yolo RCD was on Saturday, December 13th, where 11 volunteers came and planted 800 more butterfly-friendly species at Putah Creek Fishing Access Site #4.

This site was also featured in a CBS Sacramento news article, which you can read [here](#).



Location: Putah Creek Fishing Access. Species: Monarch butterfly. Plant ID: Coyote mint. Photo courtesy of Yolo RCD.

At Lake Solano Park, Putah Creek Council has partnered with Solano RCD and Solano County Parks to install a new Native Plant Demonstration Garden in the upper day-use area and restore the upland habitat that was burned in the [2020 LNU Lightning Complex Fire](#). This project is being funded by a grant from the [California Coastal Conservancy](#). Both the garden and the upland area restoration include installation of over 1,000 milkweed plants, and this is, again, in the area where monarch butterfly caterpillars were found just this year! You can support this effort by joining the [Friends of the Lake Solano Park Demonstration Garden](#) group on the [first Tuesday](#)

of each month, or at one of our upland restoration volunteer events on January 11th, February 7th, and March 7th. Please view the event flyers below to view more information and register.

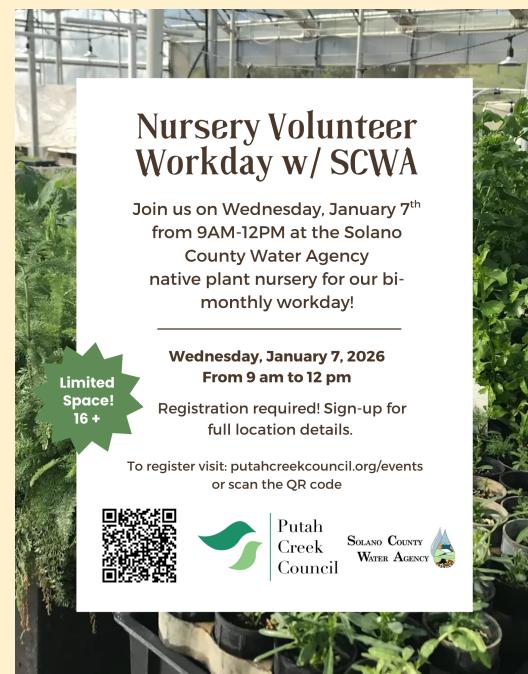
- Maddie Galal, Stewardship Coordinator

Upcoming Events

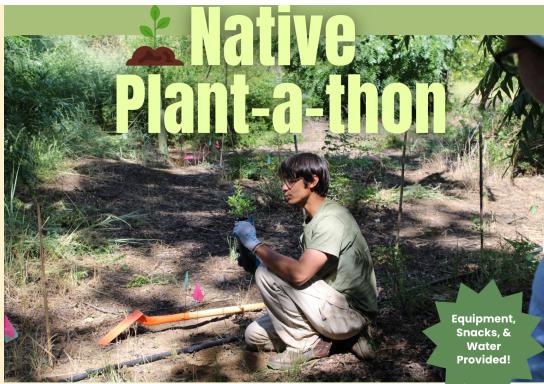
We have many opportunities to get involved with PCC this month! All of our events are **free to attend**, and we provide all necessary training and equipment. You just get to show up and have fun!

Visit our website to sign up:

Events Calendar



JOIN US TO INSTALL OAK TREES, PLANT NATIVE FORBS, SPREAD SEEDS, AND INSTALL IRRIGATION AT RUSSELL RANCH IN WEST DAVIS!



**Saturday,
January 10th**

9:00AM-12:00PM

Location: Russell Ranch (West Davis)

**PARTICIPANTS UNDER THE AGE
OF 13 MUST BE ACCCOMPANIED BY
AN ADULT**

**REGISTRATION IS HIGHLY
RECOMMENDED BUT NOT
REQUIRED**

A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT BETWEEN PUTAH
CREEK COUNCIL, UC DAVIS ARBORETUM AND
PUBLIC GARDEN, AND YOLO RESOURCE
CONSERVATION DISTRICT. THIS EVENT IS
BEING SPONSORED BY THE YOCHA DEHE
WINTUN NATION COMMUNITY FUND.



Nursery Volunteer Workday w/ SCWA

Join us on Wednesday, January 28th from 9AM-12PM at the Solano County Water Agency native plant nursery for our bi-monthly workday!

**Wednesday, January 28, 2026
From 9 am to 12 pm**

Registration required! Sign-up for full location details.

**Limited
Space!
16+**

To register visit: putahcreekcouncil.org/events or scan the QR code



Putah
Creek
Council

SOLANO COUNTY
WATER AGENCY



VOLUNTEER PLANTING EVENT AT LAKE SOLANO PARK

**SUNDAY, JANUARY 11
12:00 PM-3:00PM**

FUNDED BY A GRANT FROM THE CALIFORNIA STATE COASTAL CONSERVANCY. CULTURAL MONITORS FROM THE YOCHA DEHE WINTUN NATION ARE PROVIDING CULTURAL RESOURCE TRAINING.

SOLANO RCD, PUTAH CREEK COUNCIL, AND SOLANO COUNTY PARKS ARE WORKING WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO RESTORE SEVERAL HUNDRED NATIVE OAK TREES AS WELL AS NATIVE SHRUBS AS WELL AS CREATING LARGE PATCHES OF NARROW-LEAF MILKWEED PLANTS FOR MONARCH BUTTERFLIES.

CHILDREN AGE 10 AND UNDER MUST WORK CLOSELY ONE-ON-ONE WITH A PARENT OR GUARDIAN.

Register Now

Funded by California State Coastal Conservancy

To sign up, email:
katherine.holmes@solanorcd.org.



PUTAH CREEK CLEAN UP

Let's kick off the new year with a clean slate!

SATURDAY, JANUARY 31, 2024

**10:00 AM - 12:30 PM
WINTER'S ROTARY PARK
201 E MAIN STREET
WINTERS, CA 95694**



To register, visit www.putahcreekcouncil.org/events

Events Calendar

December in Action: Recap & Highlights

We were hard at work this December! Scroll down to see some top highlights from the month:

Volunteer Planting @ Lake Solano Park Upland Area



This month, 20 volunteers joined [Solano Resource Conservation District](#) and [Solano County Parks](#) to help restore fire-damaged areas at Lake Solano Park. Despite the misty, rainy weather, we planted native oak trees and shrubs in upland areas that were severely impacted by the [2020 LNU wildfire](#). A major focus of this restoration effort is creating large patches of narrow-leaf milkweed to support monarch butterflies and their caterpillars—over 1,000 milkweed

plants will be planted at the Park this winter! Cultural monitors from the [Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation](#) also provided cultural resource training for volunteers.

Thank you to everyone who braved the weather to help restore this beautiful, ecologically important space! If you're interested in joining us, we'll be back at Lake Solano Park on [January 11th](#) for another [volunteer planting event](#).





Creek Explorers at the Davis Public Library



Throughout December, we met at the Davis Public Library for our Creek Explorers: Putah Creek Through the Seasons program!

Over three weeks, participants discovered how local animals survive the winter — learning the differences between hibernation, torpor, and brummation, exploring how animals like squirrels and woodpeckers cache food for later, and investigating the clever ways winter camouflage helps wildlife stay hidden in the cold months. We had a great time observing the critters of Putah Creek and uncovering the creative strategies they use to survive (and thrive) during winter!

This program was fully funded by the Friends of the Davis Public Library in collaboration with Yolo County Library, and we're excited to be back at the Davis Library this spring for another seasonal series!

Stay tuned for more information!







3rd Annual Native Plant-A-Thon @ Putah Creek Fishing Access Site #4





On December 13th, we celebrated our 3rd Annual Native Plant-a-thon at Putah Creek Fishing Access Site #4!

Working alongside [Yolo Resource Conservation District](#) and 11 hardworking volunteers, we **planted over 800 native plants** to support the creek's biodiversity and provide habitat for local wildlife. Thank you to all the wonderful volunteers who joined us and to the [Yocha Dehe Community Fund](#) for sponsoring this project as part of the [Yolo Creek and Community Partnership](#)!





Sackett Ranch Demo Garden Workday





We gathered at Sackett Ranch on December 20th for a workday at our Native Plant Demonstration Garden, which is now almost 4 years old! The morning started with a tour of the garden before volunteers got to work with invasive species removal, mulching, and general garden maintenance. Thank you to everyone who joined us and to the [Solano County Water Agency](#) for partnering with us on this ongoing project!





January Wildlife Watch

While many of us are dusting off our planners and writing our to-do lists, January is still very much winter — a time for hibernating, stocking up on snacks, and searching for wintering birds along Putah Creek!

This month, we're spotlighting three seasonally significant species: [cedar waxwings](#), [common goldeneyes](#), and [yellow-rumped warblers](#).



Cedar waxwing. (Jerry Herman/USFWS Volunteer)

One winter resident to look for along Putah Creek is the sleek, masked [cedar waxwing](#). These nomadic, medium-sized songbirds are highly social and are often seen perched high in trees or flying in flocks as they search for berries — their favorite winter food. In fact, cedar waxwings are considered true [frugivores](#) and can live almost entirely on fruit for months at a time! They're also [cooperative](#) eaters, often observed passing berries to one another or taking turns feeding at a shrub.

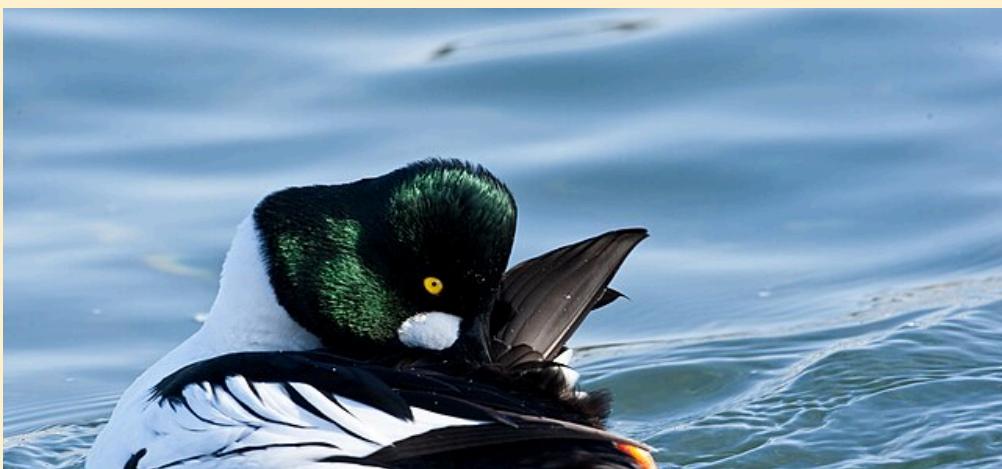
While many birds that eat fruit separate out the seeds and regurgitate them, [cedar waxwings](#) simply let them pass through — making them important seed dispersers who help transport plants to new areas. Toyon, a native plant known for its bright red berries, provides a wonderful winter food source for cedar waxwings visiting Putah Creek. We fully support the work waxwings do to help spread important native species like toyon!





Three cedar waxwings. (Michael Schramm/USFWS)

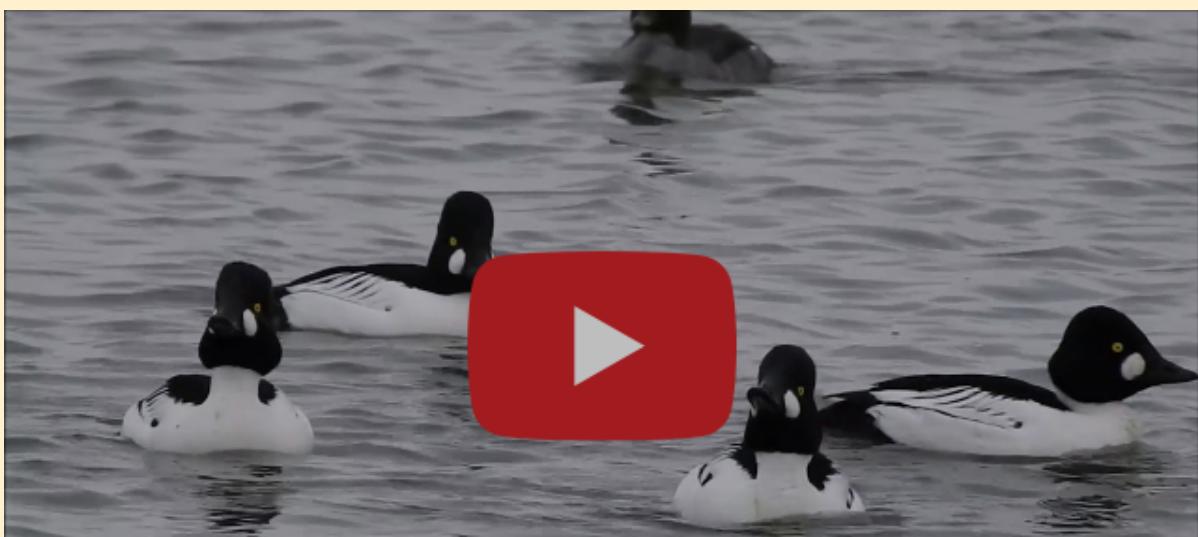
[Cedar waxwings](#) migrate south from Canada and the northern U.S. in search of winter food, but as [facultative migrants](#), their movements are flexible and unpredictable — they simply go wherever the berries are. Their [name](#) comes from the tiny red “waxy” tips on their wing feathers, a feature that may even play a role in courtship. In warmer months, overripe berries can sometimes ferment, leaving waxwings a bit dazed — and even [intoxicated](#) — after feeding! This January, keep an ear out for their high-pitched calls and look for flocks feeding among the winter trees and toyon.





Adult male common goldeneye in breeding plumage, Sacramento. (Rinus Baak/USFWS)

Common goldeneyes are striking winter ducks that spend the colder months diving for aquatic invertebrates and small fish in the shallow waters of Putah Creek. They're fast flyers — so fast that their wings make a distinctive whistling sound in flight, earning them the nickname "whistlers." Winter and early spring are also courtship seasons for goldeneyes. If you're lucky, you may spot males performing dramatic displays, throwing their heads backward before snapping them forward to impress nearby females (as depicted in the video below). Many of the common goldeneyes we see here spend the breeding season in Canada and the northern United States before migrating south for the winter. These bright-eyed birds begin returning north as early as February, so January is a wonderful time to see them while they're still here along Putah Creek!





Common goldeneye courtship displays.



A yellow-rumped warbler perching on a branch. (Eve Turek/USFWS)

North America's most common warbler, the [yellow-rumped warbler](#), is a frequent [winter visitor](#) along Putah Creek. In winter their plumage is more muted than in summer, but you can still spot their trademark yellow rump when they take flight — a cheerful pop of color on gray winter days! Unlike most warblers, [yellow-rumps](#) can digest the waxy coating on berries, allowing them to winter farther north than most of their relatives. In fall and winter, they're often seen traveling in flocks

through open woods and shrubby areas, feeding on berries and insects when available. Like cedar waxwings, yellow-rumped warblers practice [facultative migration](#) — meaning they stay as long as local food and conditions allow, and move only when needed. Keep your eyes peeled for flashes of yellow, and you might just spot one of these beloved “[butter butts](#).”



A yellow-rumped warbler perching on a branch. (Courtney Celley/USFWS)

Winter along Putah Creek may feel quiet at first glance, but a closer look reveals a season full of life. We hope you bundle up, slow down, and enjoy watching these seasonal visitors — and year-round friends — all winter long.

Special thank you to Leslie Allen for providing so many wonderful

Images of Putah Creek wildlife!



A great blue heron with a fish in its beak. (Leslie Allen)

Thank you for reading!

Thank you for subscribing to our monthly newsletter and for being a member of Putah Creek Council. If you like what we do, and want to continue seeing our work continue, please consider donating to Putah Creek Council today.

Donate

Your support allows us to continue our mission of environmental

education, community-powered stewardship, and instilling a profound love of Putah Creek.



A California ground squirrel. (Leslie Allen)

If you have any questions, or are interested in a future collaboration or partnership, please email info@putahcreekcouncil.org





Thank you!

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