

## **An Important Bird Area on a watery ranch**

By Larry Hyslop



Two avocet parents, their chick and an ibis on a flooded ranch road

As Andy Boyd drove me around his ranch, I wished we had an outboard motor strapped to the pickup's tailgate. Most of the Boyd Ranch roads were under water and more Humboldt River water seemed to flow across than beside them.

Andy enjoys this year's abundant water, but probably not as much as some avian ranch residents. The Boyd Ranch near Elburz has been designated an Important Bird Area (IBA) based on providing critical habitat for shore birds, water birds and raptors.

As we crossed one of the few dry spots, Andy maneuvered carefully past American avocet chicks and irate parents. Groups of white-faced ibises flew off, snowy egrets strutted and Wilson's phalaropes swam past flooded hay grasses. When I remarked on how few birds we actually saw, Andy pointed out the ones flying over the meadow that suddenly fold up and drop into the grasses to reach invisible nests. The ranch's mile-wide river floodplain contains thousands of nesting birds each summer, and receives many migrants each spring and fall, including ducks, geese, and Sandhill cranes.

Important Bird Areas are an international program with 7,000 designated sites in 170 countries. Here, 46 states have IBAs and the Boyd Humboldt Valley Wetlands is one of 37 in Nevada. Other nearby IBAs include Marys River, North Ruby Valley, Ruby Mountains, and Ruby Lake.

Andy and Lynn Boyd are proud of their land's designation as an IBA and the lush hay meadows that provide good habitat. This is not a preserve but a working ranch, private land with water rights for 1,600 acres of native grass hay. A multitude of bird habitats are formed by the twisting banks of the Humboldt River, Lamoille Creek and Rabbit Creek, plus wet meadows, brush islands and dry side hills.

Such habitat is no accident. Russ Boyd, ranch partner, likes the recognition because he knows how much work has been done by the ranch crew. They constantly work on preserving the sinuosity of the river and creek channels. Minimizing both stream erosion and widening is both good for business and for birds. The ranch recently signed a conservation easement to ensure both ranching and quality wildlife habitat remains in place. The easement is held by Ranch Open Space Nevada.

Lynn Boyd said such work did not come from a government directive, but from the family's land stewardship. She sees no difference between work that benefits wildlife and work that maintains a successful ranch.

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