

## Avian Graduation

by Philip Robertson, Lincoln, CA

Meet Pat and Terry Marmon, their daughter Sherry, and trusted hound Bo of District 10's egg salvage operation. Beginning in March they collect duck eggs (mainly mallard) from the rice fields of several cooperative farmers in the vicinity of Marysville. As many as 3,000 eggs are incubated at the ranch, turning every three hours, for 24-30 days. As the eggs hatch, the chicks are placed in small warming areas and eventually moved into larger pens. This series of photos will carry you from the banding to the "graduation" day.



Birds are separated into groups of 20-25 in the pens. Since older birds tend to bully younger ones, several pens are needed. Pen mates cannot have an age difference of more than five days. Visiting friends Mary, Don, Ruth and Fran watch the process.



Each bird visits the banding station. Pat holds the bird while Terry places a band on its left leg. Pat determines the sex of the bird, and Terry records data for the banding records.



After banding, the ducks are released back into the pens where they head straight for the water to cool off and relax. Bo keeps a sharp eye on the flock, and they don't seem to mind.



After resting for the night in the pens, the ducks are loaded into carriers, put on the back of a pickup, and driven to one of several wetland release areas. Here Pat gets help unloading from Jim Perry.



The door is opened and graduation commences. Here is their first taste of freedom! The birds are held at the salvage facility approximately five weeks to ensure a good survival rate. Within a week they will be old enough to fly. For now, there is plenty of food and cover until they fledge. Some will consider this their home and return year after year.



Proud parents! This makes all the work worthwhile! We owe much to people like Pat, Terry, Sherry, and Jim. We also owe much to California hunters, without whom we would have few ducks and even fewer wetlands.

Natural, safe nesting habitat is always the first choice for both nesting hens and California Waterfowl. While we constantly strive to create partnerships for more wildlife-friendly agriculture, egg salvage operations provide important rescue efforts when the only option is to disturb the fields.

**Contact your local egg salvage program for more information:**

**Durham:** (530) 891-8455 | **Marysville:** (530) 742-5080 | **Colusa:** (530) 458-2620

**Live Oak:** (530) 695-1769 | **Courtland:** (916) 448-6338