



Audubon CALIFORNIA

Audubon Blue Oak Project Seeks Volunteers for Citizen Science Oak Monitoring

In the spring of 2010, the Audubon Landowner Stewardship Program will begin a pilot-study to try to learn more about the factors that influence successful Blue oak habitat regeneration. To collect enough data, we need the help of volunteers - training and equipment will be provided for a fun and informative experience!

Oak woodlands are one of the most extensively distributed habitats in California, covering about five percent of the entire state. In addition to high species diversity (300 vertebrates and 3,000 plants), oak woodlands provide a number of ecosystem services such as preventing soil erosion, regulating water and water quality, and sequestering carbon. Oak woodlands also supply critical breeding and wintering habitat for a number of sensitive bird species such as Lewis's and Nuttall's Woodpecker, Yellow-billed Magpie and Oak Titmouse.

However, oak woodland habitat is severely threatened by suburban development and has recently been identified by the State of California as a conservation management priority. One of the Audubon Landowner Stewardship Program's goals is to conserve and restore Oak woodland habitat on private and public lands throughout the region, but in order to do so effectively, we need to understand more about how the habitat functions.

Currently, Blue oak (*Cuercus douglasii*) woodland habitat that does still exist in the foothills of Napa, Yolo, Solano and Lake counties suffers from lack of seedling regeneration. Instead of a diverse community of trees of different ages, these woodlands consist primarily of a single generation of mature trees, with few to no saplings or young trees. Should a catastrophic event occur, such as a blight (i.e., sudden oak death), drought, invasive species or a fungus, the entire ecosystem could suffer severely.

There are a variety of factors that may influence whether Blue oak seedlings reach adulthood. Private lands are a key piece of the puzzle in understanding Blue oak populations. Our pilot study will focus on the ways in which ranch management practices such as grazing and burning may enhance seedling growth and survival.

We hope to collect information about Blue oak habitat on several private ranches throughout Yolo and Solano counties. This process will include conducting transect surveys of Blue oak stands and collecting data about landscape features such as soil type, slope, elevation etc. Audubon staff and UC Davis researchers will also interview participating landowners about their ranch management practices.

We can't do this alone - We need the help of interested and motivated volunteers! Please come join this important effort!

Participation in our pilot study will include: one day of training at Audubon's Bobcat Ranch on **Saturday April 10, 2010 from 9AM-3PM** and one to two days of Blue oak data collection on private ranches in the region in the late spring (dates to be determined by volunteer availability).

Interested volunteers can also enjoy a guided bird walk at Audubon's newly acquired Bobcat Ranch. Food and research supplies will be provided. Volunteers will work in groups with trained ecologists from Audubon and UC Davis – no prior scientific experience is needed. All volunteers will have the opportunity to work on further research and monitoring projects with partner scientists.

Please contact Erin Hardie, UC Davis graduate student and project partner, at (eehardie@ucdavis.edu) or 530-204-8603 to sign up for our training session or if you have any questions. To learn more about the Audubon Landowner Stewardship Program, please visit our website: <http://ca.audubon.org/lsp/>