



# Seeking Refuge: Birds and Landscapes of the Pacific Flyway (Weyerhaeuser environmental books)

*Robert M. Wilson*

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Each fall and spring, millions of birds travel the Pacific Flyway, the westernmost of the four major North American bird migration routes. The landscapes they cross vary from wetlands to farmland to concrete, inhabited not only by wildlife but also by farmers, suburban families, and major cities. In the twentieth century, farmers used the wetlands to irrigate their crops, transforming the landscape and putting migratory birds at risk. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service responded by establishing a series of refuges that stretched from northern Washington to southern California.

What emerged from these efforts was a hybrid environment, where the distinctions between irrigated farms and wildlife refuges blurred. Management of the refuges was fraught with conflicting priorities and practices. Farmers and refuge managers harassed birds with shotguns and flares to keep them off private lands, and government pilots took to the air, dropping hand grenades among flocks of geese and herding the startled birds into nearby refuges. Such actions masked the growing connections between refuges and the land around them.

Seeking Refuge examines the development and management of refuges in the wintering range of migratory birds along the Pacific Flyway. Although this is a history of efforts to conserve migratory birds, the story Robert Wilson tells has considerable salience today. Many of the key places migratory birds use - the Klamath Basin, California's Central Valley, the Salton Sea - are sites of recent contentious debates over water use. Migratory birds connect and depend on these landscapes, and farmers face pressure as water is reallocated from irrigation to other purposes. In a time when global warming promises to compound the stresses on water and migratory species, Seeking Refuge demonstrates the need to foster landscapes where both wildlife and people can thrive.

Robert M. Wilson is assistant professor of geography at Syracuse University.

"The author's skill in examining the interplay between wild birds, their increasingly manufactured habitats, and the varied human institutions responsible for altering them makes for a compelling story that readers will find fascinating." - William K. Wyckoff, Montana State University

"Wilson ranges across the entire refuge system of the Pacific Slope in order to observe the dynamics and management challenges associated with the whole flyway. The result is a tour de force of historical and geographical analysis that will surely become a standard work on its subject." - William Cronon, University of Wisconsin

"By surveying the complex history of the Pacific Flyway, Robert Wilson has provided us with the portrait of a win-win ecology, one where the needs of a bewildering variety of migratory waterfowl are met even amidst the surging activity, agriculture, and land transformations of humankind. More than this, he has shown us that such reconciliation ecologies are very political indeed. Eschewing environmental romances typical of conservation by stressing historical struggles over land and water, Wilson nevertheless preserves a wonder for a 'natural' world always in-the-making." - Paul Robbins, Professor of Geography at the University of

Arizona and author of Lawn People

"How do American farm policies reshape wild landscapes to produce food for people? How do American wildlife policies reshape wild landscapes to produce habitat for ducks? These may seem like quite different questions, but Robert Wilson's *Seeking Refuge* brilliantly reveals the interconnections between wildlife refuges and agricultural systems in the West. Wilson explores how the toxic waste water running off farm fields became integral to wildlife refuges. Irrigated agriculture fed a hungry nation while it created wetland habitat for migratory waterfowl. But the results poisoned both chicks and children. Clearly argued and wonderfully written, *Seeking Refuge* illuminates the intricate connections between wildlife and people...

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