

LIFE MEMBER PROFILE

Creating Paradise and a Legacy on Just 10 Acres

Story and photos by **ANDREW CREASEY**, ASSOCIATE EDITOR

David and Tina Ventura stand in front of the largest pond on their property – a 2-acre pond with islands for nesting waterfowl.

David Ventura was just 5 years old when he had his first hunting experience, tagging along with his older brothers in 1960.

He got his first hunting license at 9 and was hooked, enthralled by the strategy of calling and decoy placement, the comradery of the blind, the bond with the dogs.

That passion carried him to today, where he put the stamp on a lifetime of conservation by bequeathing a portion of his estate to California Waterfowl, ensuring that the work he holds dear – the expansion of habitat, the protection of hunting rights – will continue after he's gone.

Ventura discovered CWA in the early 2000s, and since then he said it's taken over both his and his wife Tina's lives.

In 2011, they decided to add CWA to their will, giving the organization 30 percent of their estate. This spring, Ventura said he planned to up that to 60 percent.

The arrangement is part of CWA's Planned Giving program, which offers donors a way to transfer assets including stocks, bonds, real estate and retirement accounts to CWA.

"They're always going to need the money," Ventura said of CWA. "They're so ingrained in everything we do in California, and there's not a negative thing about them."

Ventura's hunting education started at a young age, at the hands of his brothers, who were about 20 years older. As a boy, Ventura would look forward to the next hunting season as soon as the previous one ended.

And while that education included the usual hunting know-how, Ventura also learned the ethical side of hunting – the importance of habitat and leaving no footprint on the land.

"The biggest thing with hunting is the conservation of the environment, to keep it out of the hands of people who want to develop," Ventura said. "California had the wetlands, and we lost it." Estimates put those losses at 90 to 95 percent.

To see evidence of Ventura's love of waterfowl and habitat, one need go no farther than his backyard at his home in the Calaveras County foothills near Camanche Reservoir.

There you will see mallards, wood ducks and Canada geese mingling

with turkeys and doves, all attracted to Ventura's property because of his efforts to transform his 10 acres into habitat.

There is a 2-acre pond with islands for nesting sites, next to a half-acre pond with elevated tubs for geese to nest in. Three smaller ponds are used by wood ducks, which also benefit from 27 CWA nestboxes peppered throughout the property.

The Venturas' passion for waterfowl and wetlands was immediately apparent to CWA's Vice President of Conservation Programs Jake Messerli when he first toured their property.

"Their hearts are absolutely all in for supporting the resource, and their trust in California Waterfowl to pass it forward just flat out makes me feel good," Messerli said. "They're good people and their generosity can't be overstated. We're proud to have such dedicated and enthusiastic members representing our organization."

For Ventura, it all circles back to hunting.

"Once you start to hunt, it's part of you. You're not going to turn your back on it," Ventura said. "When you look at CWA and what they've done, they deserve to get something from everybody." 🦆

The Venturas' property is full of habitat for ducks and geese – from ponds to tules to vegetation for nesting cover.

