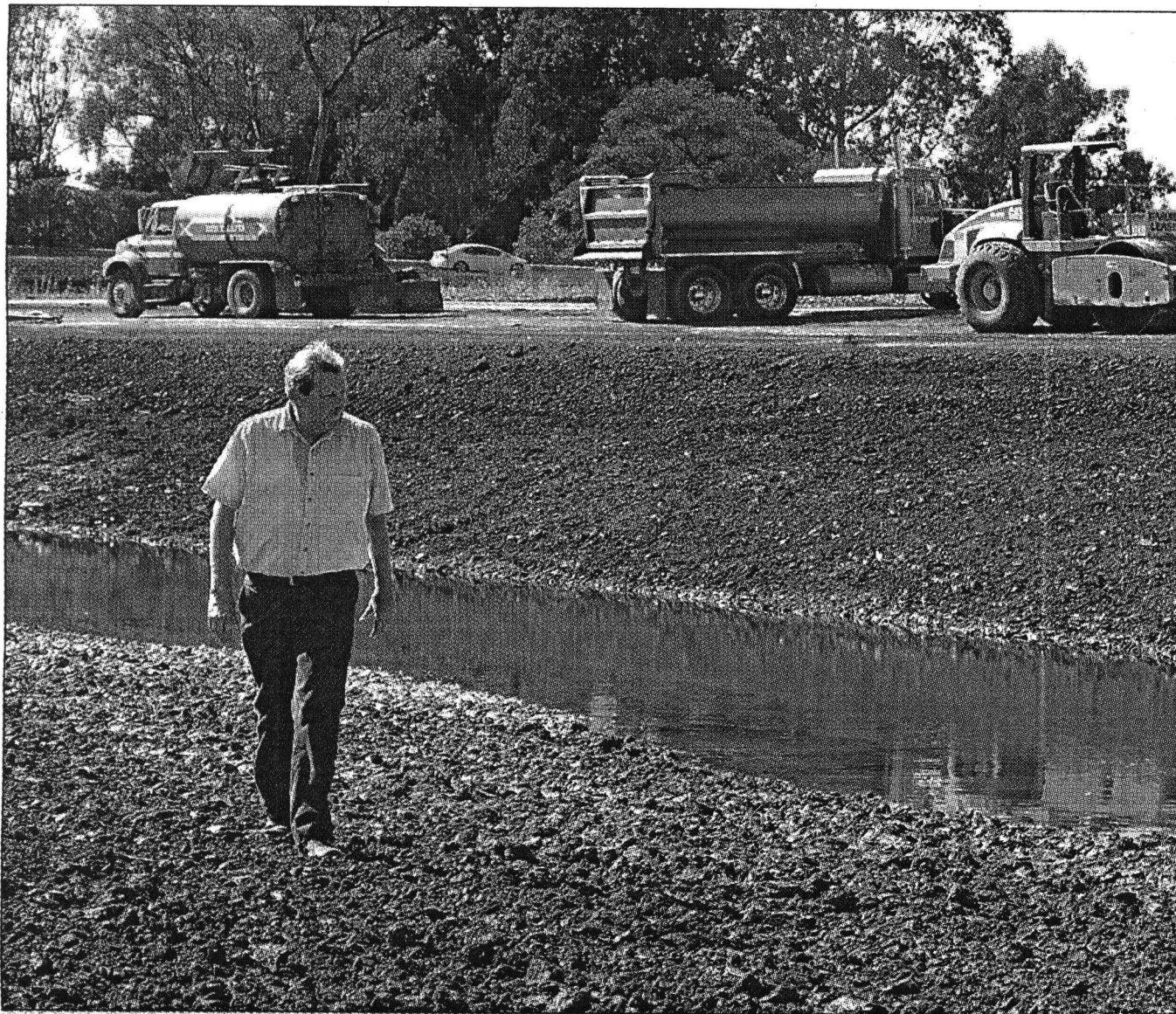


# Wetlands restoration a boon to birds, people

Transportation agencies help fund latest Watsonville project



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

Project Director Tom Sharp walks along the expanded waterway of the Wetlands Restoration Trail.

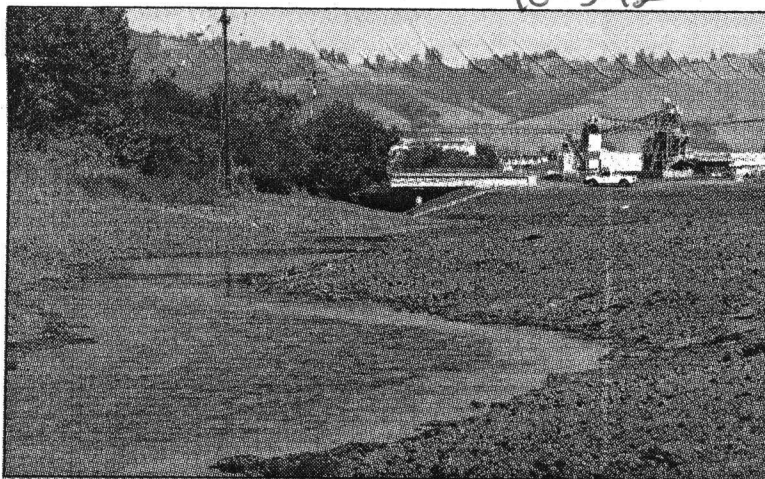
*Wetlands*  
By DONNA JONES

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WATSONVILLE — Crews are wrapping up the restoration of a section of Watsonville Slough that's been little more than a drain-age ditch for years.

The work along a stretch of the slough between Ohlone Parkway and Highway 1 is the final phase of a 25-acre wetlands restoration project mandated when the city annexed the 94-acre Manabe-Ow property at its western edge for a business park.

The projects, which also include construction of a trail system, appear to be paying off in environmental and recreational benefits. The initial sighting of a common cuckoo, rarely seen in the U.S., was at the site of the original 2008 restoration near Ford and



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

What used to be a trickling creek is now an expanded waterway along the Wetlands Restoration Trail.

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# WETLANDS

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Kearney streets on Friday. Hundreds of local residents and out-of-towners have visited the slough since then to see the bird.

Watsonville's restored wetlands and trail system is a "hidden little jewel," said Michelle Templeton, coordinator of the city's nature center at Ramsay Park. "Sometimes it takes a marquee species and then you see so much more."

Numerous bird species live in the area or stop by during migration, and about 7,000 people visit the nature center annually, Templeton said. Guided walks on Sundays draw people from nearby neighborhoods and from places farther afield like Gilroy and Hollister.

The cuckoo, a member of a species that breeds in Europe and Asia and winters in Africa and has only been reported once before in the lower 48 states, has brought more attention. Templeton said Tuesday she's talked to people from 47 states since the bird sighting set off a stampede of visitors.

Monday, Tom Sharp, manager of the latest project, walked along the newly dug channel, widened from about 20 feet to 100 feet. Killdeer scattered at his approach. The restored slough will hold more water, providing some measure of flood protection, he said. The bare ground will be replanted with native vegetation to provide wildlife habitat.

The project also showcases partnerships between government agencies and nonprofits.



DINUK MAGAMMAN/CONTRIBUTED

**A common cuckoo, well off its usual migratory path between Europe, Asia and Africa, perches on a willow tree in Watsonville Slough.**

The \$562,000 project is being jointly funded by the city, the Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County, Caltrans and the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission, Sharp said. The transportation agencies alone dedicated \$400,000 to the project to fulfill off-site mitigation requirements for the Highway 1 widening project

between Soquel Drive and Morrissey Boulevard.

Templeton said in the early years of wetlands restoration the city took care of its portion of the larger system that includes Watsonville, Harkins, Hanson, Struve, West Branch and Galligan sloughs while Watsonville Wetlands Watch managed projects on the west side of Highway 1. Now, they're

working together to ensure a consistent approach that recognizes the wetlands as a system but also that sections bordering diverse land uses, including agricultural fields, residential neighborhoods and urban industry, have unique requirements.

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