



PETALUMA WETLANDS ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER

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Providing Education in and Stewardship of Petaluma's Public Wetlands.

Summer 2006

What's Happening at PWA

by Gerald Moore

Third Grade Art Contest

During the 2005-06 school year, PWA wetlands docents worked with several hundred third graders by going to their classrooms for a morning of hands-on activities, followed a day or two later with a visit by the class to Shollenberger Park for more interactive education. Many of these students have traditionally gone back to the classroom and made a drawing of their experience. This year we invited them to submit the drawings to a "Wetlands Art" contest.

The contest drew 216 entrants from Petaluma and Cotati schools. On 27 May we hung all the entries in the Petaluma Public Library Forum Room and had them judged by two art teachers. We awarded 13 ribbons and 13 prizes (mostly nature books) to the top entries. We did not judge them as first, second, etc., but just as the top 13 of the 216. The art was on public display throughout the day and refreshments were served to all visitors. The prizes were given out the following week in the classrooms. The art was returned at the same time. We had so much fun doing this, and the kids got so excited, we are going to repeat it next year.

Course for New Docents

PWA will hold a course for people wishing to become Wetlands Docents, starting on Friday, 8 September, 8:30 a.m. to noon, and running for six consecutive Friday mornings. Topics will include basic wetlands biology, birds, other wildlife, plants, and teaching techniques. There will be a \$40.00 fee for the training materials. Please contact Bob Dyer, 763-2934, or see our Web site for details. Please register by 1 September. People not able to attend all the classes may complete the course by special arrangement. Docenting at Shollenberger Park is lots of fun and gives one a great sense of satisfaction. Exposing eight- and nine-year-olds to nature is an important and rewarding experience. Docents can also specialize in adult tours or stewardship activities. We have a great group of docents who are a joy to know and work with. Please join us if you like nature and have a little free time.

Major Weed Management Project Started

A year ago we realized that our public wetlands (Shollenberger Park and Alman Marsh) were being overrun by several species of very invasive weeds from Europe and Asia. When this happens the native plants are pushed out, causing a major reduction in usable habitats for native wild animals. These native animals either die or look for new homes elsewhere. Native plants and native animals coevolved to create the habitats where they can comfortably function, and when the plants diminish, the animals follow.

We decided to eliminate these invasive species and replace them with natives over a ten-year period. Gerald Moore and John Shribbs wrote a 200-page weed restoration plan and presented it to the city staff in January 2006. The city approved the plan in February, except for a memo of understanding (MOU) and a mechanism for covering liability issues. This last step is expected to be completed soon and will allow us to invite the public to join us in the project. In the meantime, the PWA docents worked on initial weed removal from April through July. We took about 300 4x4-foot bags of assorted thistles from the park and planned our strategy for the next weed season. We hope to start, with public support, in February 2007 and manually remove many weeds when they are small young plants that pop out of the ground with a simple flick of a dandelion digger. We have two species that spread by underground stems, called rhizomes, and will have to be removed by a combination of mechanical means and spraying or wiping with Roundup.

When the final MOU and liability mechanism is obtained, PWA will hold a public meeting on the project to explain the details to everyone over cake and coffee. Invitations will be sent to the media and the community since we want everybody to understand why and what we are doing. The major species to be removed are Star Thistle, Italian Thistle, Cardoon (artichoke thistle), Bull Thistle, Hardinggrass, and Perennial Pepperweed. We are watching several other potential invasives like Prickly Lettuce and Poison Hemlock.

PWA Docents Become Volunteer Wildlife Monitors at Tolay Park

The new Tolay Lake Regional Park, four miles south of Shollenberger Park, is being designed and developed over the next two to three years. In the interim, the Sonoma County Parks Department has asked about ten PWA docents and birding leaders, as local representatives of Madrone Audubon, to run frequent surveys of the birds and other mega fauna at the Tolay site and provide the data to the parks department. We look forward to helping the county in this project.

Those working on the Tolay project include coordinator Gerald Moore; experienced bird survey team leaders Peter Colasanti, Lisa Hug, and Andy LaCasse; plus experienced birders Gary Compari, Bob Dyer, Len Nelson, Elaine Pruitt, Maureen O'Reilly, and John Richards.

Other Recent Activities

1. On 7 June PWA docents toured the PRBO banding station at Point Reyes National Seashore and learned about mist nets, banding, and long-term bird studies.
2. On 8 July some of us attended a native grass workshop at Bouverie Preserve given by Jeanne Wirka, the Bouverie biologist and a grass expert.
3. The evening of 9 August saw several of our docents join the Laguna de Santa Rosa docents for an evening walk to Delta Pond with biologist Denise Cadman.

What Is That Sound?

by Sharon Mansfield

From Shollenberger Park comes a distant but familiar sound. . . . Could it be a new bird not yet listed on Bob's bird list? Oh yes, it's the Schoolbell Bird, echoing and calling docents to be prepared for another year of eager students and inquisitive minds. A new updated docent manual has been prepared, new docent training begins 8 September, and classrooms will no doubt be scheduled for our Educational Outreach Program before the end of September.

It is exciting to begin our second year with curriculum ready and experienced docents prepared to meet the kids. Our program was highly successful last year and we had many opportunities to share our love of nature in the wetlands with students. Teachers are receiving information now concerning the 2006-07 program, and Bob Dyer is beginning to accept requests for dates. We expect a high return of teachers from last year's program and we are making extra effort to contact schools and teachers not yet familiar with our wetlands curriculum.

Along with the familiar third grade hands-on classroom and field visits, we are extending opportunities to second grade classes for a slide presentation and one-mile nature walk. In addition, opportunities are available for third and fourth grade classes to visit Shollenberger during the months of January and February for a full walk around the park to observe migratory birds. The third grade hands-on program will be silent December, January, and February.

Gerald Moore has sent out a Docent Course Schedule to all docents. We are meeting for six Fridays beginning 8 September (see above). Current docents are welcome to attend any and all sessions.

Details of the 2006-07 program will be provided for all docents on Friday, 13 October, 8:30 a.m. at Lucchesi Community Center. We need all docents present to meet new trainees. We want our new folks to know what a great group we have and that we welcome them to our team. Please plan to be present.

Last Child in the Woods

by Senior Docent Bob Dyer

This recent book—*Last Child in the Woods* by Richard Louv (Algonquin Book, 2006)—is about “saving our children from nature-deficit disorder.” It is relevant to our wetlands activities program that we direct to local schoolchildren.

While we cannot recreate for them such nostalgic-bound pleasures as building tree houses or camping out, we can provide access to the outdoors and nature in the Petaluma Wetlands.

Today, while youngsters are provided access to vast amounts of processed information about the world via the Internet, little is being done to help them explore nature directly. Many of them actually fear the outdoors because of ignorance (“Are there bears at the park?”) or because of exposure to mad-slasher movies about adventurous young people being killed while exploring the woods.

Louv's book defines the problem and offers numerous opportunities to break the isolation of young children from the natural world and the “atrophy of the senses” which results from that isolation. It provides practical concepts and advice in a nonpedantic, easy-to-absorb style. I highly recommend this book and offer the following quotations for you to get a feel for its subject matter.

“...a growing body of evidence indicates that direct exposure to nature is essential for [children’s] physical and emotional health. For example, new studies suggest that exposure to nature can reduce the symptoms of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and that it can improve all children’s cognitive abilities and resistance to negative stresses and depression.”

“Nature-deficit disorder describes the human costs of alienation from nature, among them: diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties, and higher rates of physical and emotional illnesses.”

Quoting Robin Moore, director of the National Learning Initiative: “Children live through their senses. Sensory experiences link the child’s exterior world with their interior, hidden, affective world. Since the natural environment is the principal source of sensory stimulation, freedom to explore and play with the outdoor environment through the senses in their own space and time is essential for healthy development of an interior life. This...is what we call free play.”

“Encourage children to play outdoors in green spaces, and advocate recess in green schoolyards. This may be especially helpful for renewing children’s concentration.”

“Plant and care for trees and vegetation at your residence, or encourage the owner to do so.”

“Value and care for the trees in your community. Caring for trees means caring for people.”

“Every school district in America should be associated with one or more wildlife-and-childhood preserves in its region. Creating and nurturing such places would be far less expensive than building more brick-and-mortar science labs (though we need more of these, as well) and more needed than the purchase of the newest generation of soon-to-be-obsolete computers. These preserves could also become the focus of higher education’s recommitment to natural history.”

“I like to play indoors better ’cause that’s where all the electrical outlets are.” -4th grader

**There was a child went forth every day
And the first object he look’d upon, that object he became,
And that object became part of him for the day or a certain part of the day,
Or for many years or stretching cycles of years.**

**The early lilacs became part of this child,
And grass and white and red morning glories, and white and red clover,
And the song of the phoebe-bird,
And the Third-month lambs and the sow’s pink-faint litter,
And the mare’s foal and the cow’s calf...”**

Walt Whitman