

MS. MIDDLEBROOK'S NATIVE PLANT GARDENS

Alrie Middlebrook of the California Native Garden Foundation will teach us about gardening with California plants and how delicious some of them are, at our Visitor Center on **Saturday, June 2, at 7:30pm.**

Middlebrook is a committed advocate & practitioner of the sustainable lifestyle, a landscape professional & a Calif. native plant specialist. She has had a hand in designing & building over 150 native plant gardens in California.



She published the California native plant cookbook, "Eating California", and co-authored the groundbreaking new book "Designing California Native Gardens: The Plant Community Approach to Artful, Ecological Gardens", with renowned field botanist, Dr. Glenn Keator.

GLEN MARTIN TACKLES MESOPREDATORS IN A MID-WEEK PROGRAM

On **Wednesday May 16th, at 7:30pm**, **Glen Martin**, the former senior environmental reporter for the San Francisco Chronicle, will speak in conversation, on the medium-sized predators of the Bay Area wildlands, including SPVP Park, and the cities & and suburbs, highlighting the **grey fox, the opossum, skunk, raccoon, weasel, bobcat**, and even the seldom seen **badger**.

Glen has spoken for other environmental/nature groups, including the Natural History group at the Randall Museum in the city. He has written for National Wildlife, Science Digest, Audubon Magazine.... His newest book is titled: ..

"Game Changer: Animal Rights and the Fate of Africa's Wildlife" (NatureWorks photo of weasel photo)



WE DUG THEM JUST IN TIME!

By **Joseph Piro**

It was **Istvan Puski, Ralph Larson** and me for the March 10th Trail Day. With rainy weather supposedly returning in the next couple of days, we decided to head up the Hazelnut Trail behind the Visitor's Center and check on drain dips. We made it up to just a little past the bench at the start of the **eucalyptus** forest, cleaning out lots of dips and trimming back some low-hanging branches all along the way. Ralph and I returned by noon, but Istvan hiked the entire trail. Overall, though, the trail looks in good condition. (Piro photo of Istvan on left and Ralph on right)



JACK LAWS EXPLORES OUR COASTAL RANGE

Through an illustrated lecture, on **Saturday, May 5, at 7:30pm**, **John (Jack) Muir Laws** will lead us on a virtual walk across the Coast Ranges, exploring relationships between plants and animals as he goes. We will learn a three-step process that will help us see more & think more like naturalists. Jack will also discuss some of the conservation challenges in the region.



John Muir Laws is an artist and columnist for "Bay Nature" magazine, & an associate of the California Academy of Sciences. He received a glowing review on his "Field Guide to the Sierra Nevada" from the "Washington Post" newspaper for his amazing, unique nature drawings portraying the feelings of the critters he features, as well as showing their scientific details. "He cares about newts, has opinions about beetles, & if asked, can do an excellent imitation of a startled **vole**".

Laws has worked as an environmental educator for over 30 years, teaching classes on natural history, conservation biology, scientific illustration, and field sketching. In 2009, he received the Terwilliger Environmental Award for outstanding service in Environmental Education. Jack received his BA in conservation and environmental education from UCB and his MS in Wildlife Biology
© 2011, **John Muir Laws**: used with permission
from the University of Montana.



JIM STEELE BIRD WALK IN SPVP, Sun May 6

This will be Jim's 7th Spring bird song walk with us. We will meet at **8am** at the Visitor Center, where he will explain and show how he can "make the birds sing"—at least the male avians. Expect to hear **Black Headed Grosbeaks**, some of the species of **Warblers**, a **Song Sparrow**, maybe **Bewick's Wren**, and a variety of territorial protectors just off the Weiler Ranch & Trout Farm Roads. Bring binoculars.



ON THE TRAIL

Katie Antista saw one of our **bobcats** in the South Walnut on March 2 at 1:15pm. With the fertile gopher mounds in that area it's no wonder the cat was seeking a sign of dinner!

(Bobcat photo is from Felidae Cons. Fund w.s.)

(continued on page 4)



(Bob Gress photo of bobcat)

A Brief Autobiography Part 2

By Laurie Nikitas



Eventually a job opened up at the San Francisco Zoo, and I immediately moved into the great ape section, where I took care of **chimpanzees**, **orangutans** and **siamangs** (athletic siamang at left), which are long-armed, loud-voiced little apes who swing agilely through great distances from branch to branch. The six years spent with these animals were full of challenges, transcendent moments, fun, terror, and amazing primate-to-primate relationships. I still miss chimps **Cobby** and **Tallulah**, and orang **Thelma**, my best “friends” in the group. Tallulah, a chimp who had been raised by missionaries as though she were a human child, one day escaped from her enclosure (not on my shift), and walked across the zoo plaza, where she picked up the handset of the pay phone and held it to ear, as she had watched zoo visitors

do for years. One siamang family accepted me to the point of bringing their newborn to me to touch and examine. Memories of interactions with these creatures still delight and touch me. (Laurie & baby siamang at left)



I had to rotate out of the ape group, so for the next 6 years I worked in the bird department, primarily with **penguins**. Much to my surprise, I fell in love with these stinky birds. Being such social animals, they actually want to interact with their keepers, and they enjoy attention. While they look identical, I soon learned that each was not only identifiable by size, shape, and spots on the breast, but was a quirky, unique individual.

I also took care of **flamingoes**, dangerous **casowaries** (at left), **eagles**, **hornbills**, and many other species. The **Kookaburras**, Australian kingfishers, were great favorites. They were completely inept at feeding their babies, and were quite content to watch me do it.



Leaving the zoo because of an injury was painful. Soon I found yoga to deal with the injury, and it gave me a social nucleus. I then found San Pedro Valley Park. First I walked to condition myself for longer hikes. I didn't even notice the trailside plants, but over the years, all of that changed. I became interested in native plants when I became a children's docent at the S.F. Botanical Garden. Soon I was keeping a log of all plant and animal observations, sticking to the Hazelnut exclusively, because I wanted to know if and how one place might changeover the years. To learn the plants, (wild gooseberry at right -Bob Sikora)

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I started photographing them, and that, too, became an avid interest. The park and its hills are my church, touching my heathen soul deeply. The people I've met here have been wonderful bonuses. I look forward to returning to the trail with my new hip, to enjoy many more years of adventures here.

Remember Laurie's article on the “spaced out” chipmunk and buck, and her photo and article on the athletic banana slugs? Then recall her spying on the mating ball of garter snakes—some examples of why we featured Laurie in these 2 issues. And check on page 4 to find about Laurie's second hike since her operation.

FACTOID

What does a **mini spider** have to house a brain that is too large for its “head”? Neurons have a finite size. They can only be so small, and it takes space to house enough to run a fairly intelligent little guy like a complex web spinning spider. They merely shift part of the brain to the legs, which of course, are numerous!

(source: April/May 2012 “National Wildlife Magazine”)



MARCH HABITAT RESTORATION

Christine Guzman and leader, **Istvan Puski**, tangled with **Cape Ivy**, that unfortunate import from South Africa, to try to remove its encroaching tendrils from some of the creek vegetation along the first field at the side of the Weiler Ranch Road. Thank you from the **arroyo willows** in particular. Remember that the date of this gratifying work is the third Saturday of each month. You will be doing the Park plants a great service if *you participate even one or two times*. Istvan and Christine put in 3 hours of this meaningful labor, but should you choose two or even one, your help will be appreciated. By the way, those who are allergic to poison oak, may rest assured that Istvan tries to pick areas that are free of this native plant, and he can recognize it in a millisecond.

NEWS BRIEFS

Seeing the bind we are in, **Julia Bott** of the San Mateo County Parks Foundation, (She is, in fact, the main person who established this generous funder of Park events and structures), agreed to man our Vis. Center desk periodically.



The lower west side of the Hazelnut trail has been thoroughly cut and widened by the county trail machine. Happy running and hiking.
(continued on page 4)



A NATURALIST'S PERSPECTIVE

By Jim Mackey

May/June 2012

Retraction. In our last issue I discussed how a walk in a woods might provide more health benefits than a walk of equal effort in a city. I confessed that one of my motivations for hiking in our Park is to escape interactions with people. One of my examples of an interaction with people outside the Park was spotting a good friend at Safeway – and wondering if I had time to talk. Well, on March 26, **Joyce** and I were leaving the Safeway as **Ralph Larson** was about to enter. We all smiled broadly and stopped, then Ralph said that he had read my column so he would be moving along. We laughed, but parted anyway, with me thinking that there was something that I had wanted to ask Ralph. So I realized that the frequency of my encountering a friend is nowhere near high enough to be stressful, and I hope that when I encounter any of you, that you will not hesitate to engage me in conversation.

However I continue to be stressed by another aggravation that I mentioned: having difficulty backing out of a parking space when a huge SUV beside me blocks my view. Now I feel less misanthropic about my aversion to this situation because **Katie Antista** told me that she feels the same way. Thanks Katie. (pictured above is a Ford Explorer space hog)



Wildflower brochure. **Jane Turrel** and **Sara Shaw** have selected 20 photos of wildflowers that were taken in our Park by our Volunteers. They are assembling them into a brochure which we expect to offer for sale in our Store. Incidentally the project is being financed by a grant that Jane and Sara received from the San Mateo County Parks Foundation. In addition to the photos, they have included a brief description of the Park.



Poor Jim's Almanac. As of April 10, **Barbara Kempster** and I have not been seeing **fence lizards**. These little ectotherms (animals that derive their body heat from their environment) need more sunshine to raise their body temperature to their normal activity level of about 93 degrees F. Then the males will do push-ups to flash their abdominal patches of blue to rivals and potential mates. A lot needs to be accomplished before the females lay eggs in early June! Watch along the Valley View Trail to see the show. (photo of Western Fence Lizard from: wildherps.com)



TRAIL CHAMPS FACE STORM AFTERMATH?

By Joseph Piro

We had a nice little group for the April 14th Trail Day -- **Sara Shaw, Bing Huey, Rob, Bob, Istvan Puski** and me. With that impressive storm that blew through on



Thursday night -- with incredible thunder and lightning, heavy rain and a little hail, too; **Ranger David Vasquez** asked that we head up the Brook's Falls Trail and check for any storm damage and see how things are. There were certainly a few soggy spots we tried to help, but fortunately the trail looked in pretty good shape. Along the way, we pulled vines off the little bridge rail-

ings and removed a big pampas grass (below—go **Istvan!**). We eventually made it up to the old rifle range via Montara Mtn. Trail & ran into some super-soggy spots up there. Perhaps the best part though was admiring Brook's Falls could easily see all 3 tiers of it! And the creek looked and sounded just beautiful with all the water rushing in it. (Top photo composed & snapped by **Bing Huey** — bottom photo composed and snapped by **Joseph Piro**)



APRIL HABITAT RESTORATION DAY

fell on Pacifica's observed Earth Day this year, and because of that, 8 or 9 people besides the leader, **Istvan Puski**, and regular, **Christine Guzman**, set to tackling and removing all the annoying **scotch broom** and **cotoneaster** from the hill by the entry to the Park. Eventually people exited one by one, but **Ranger David Vasquez** appeared with 2 court workers, and later "**Holly**" came and worked an hour past the 12 noon cut off time.

While the workers labored to eradicate the foreign, invasive flora, 2 reporters, one from the San Mateo Times and one from the San Jose Mercury News, documented the energetic labor of our "heroes".

ON THE TRAIL-Sightings

On my second walk on the Hazelnut (yay!) , just to the west of the Euc forest, where the little wooden bridge used to be, I was startled by a small **lizard** hurling itself off the low embankment on the uphill side. It landed on the side of the trail, where it darted back and forth in a panic, so fast I literally couldn't grasp anything about its appearance. It finally scrambled up the embankment and under overhanging moss.



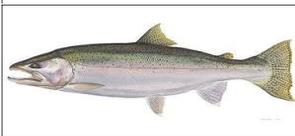
I lifted the moss to see about 2/3 of its body, and had a bare second to identify it as a **Western Skink**. (photo courtesy of G. Nafis) Why it panicked as I merely walked by is beyond me. Then again, I'd never have seen it otherwise. *So*

good to be back!!! [Laurie Nikitas has recently recovered from a hip replacement]

Ranger David Vasquez saw our first **fawn** on April 2 at 3:30pm. It was hanging out with Mom in the field past the one half mile mark on the Weiler Ranch Road. Mom looked to be pregnant with a little brother or sister. Hmm, is this possible; let's ask Jim Mackey!



Ranger David also saw a ,perhaps, 2 foot long **steelhead** on the second of April, in a pool in our San Pedro Creek by the far bridge on the Weiler Ranch Road. Glad those rains finally came.



One of our favorite Jane Goodalls, **Barbara Kempster**, likes to listen to the **Red-tailed Hawks** on the service road that is the beginning

of the Weiler Ranch Road. "They seem to make an announcement, with their high-pitched calls when humans come in and a different call when we leave. They seem to be facing the road, undoubtedly noticing each human interloper." (**Red-tailed Hawk** photo from: "fcps.edu")



Istvan Puski enjoyed watching a **Bobcat** hunting for **gophers** in the lawn area by the beginning of the Trout Farm road after the program on Tuesday, Ap. 10. Neither he nor



a car who drove closer to have a gander at the feline, managed to deter the fella from his lunch hunting. (David V. Mitchell photo)

Your editor saw her first **wild rose** of the year on the Hazelnut trail, just past the fallen oak and 2 ma-drones, on the left.



MAY—JUNE CALENDAR

- JACK LAWS' WALKING THE COASTAL RANGE**
Saturday, May 5.....7:30pm
 - JIM STEELE BIRD SONG WALK**
Sunday, May 6.....8am
 - MAY GENERAL MEETING**
Wednesday, May 9.....7pm
 - MAY TRAIL DAY**
Saturday, May 12.....9am
 - TALKING TO GLEN MARTIN-MESOPREDATORS**
Wednesday, May 16.....7:30pm
 - MAY HABITAT RESTORATION DAY**
Saturday, May 19.....9am
 - ALRIE MIDDLEBROOK'S NATIVE GARDENS**
Saturday, June 2.....7:30pm
 - JUNE TRAIL DAY**
Saturday, June 9.....9am
 - FRIENDS' GENERAL MEETING**
Wednesday, June 13.....7pm
 - HABITAT RESTORATION DAY**
Saturday, June 16.....9am
- For all events meet at the Visitor Center*

VISITOR CENTER CLOSED?

Despite the best efforts of our esteemed treasurer, Jane Turrel, the Park Visitor Centr remained closed for much of the afternoon of Ap.15. Jane is trying to find time midst her efforts to create our new plant brochure with **Sara Shaw**, to struggle with the scheduling job, but with fewer people to pick from, it's a difficult proposition. Please consider giving 3 hours a month, or at the least being put on a emergency list of those who might be available when we run into trouble. A real hero would be someone who would do the scheduling. Thanks for reading this!

NEWS BRIEFS (continued)

David Vasquez concerning our new young ranger. "He is **Matt Auda-Capel** and he came to us from Memorial Park as his first unit, but he was actually introduced to the rangers while working as a Student Conservation Association crew leader on Hazelnut trail over the last two years."

Ranger David also tells us that the new Park Aides that we have are 1) **Ralph Staben**, a continuing park aide who had in the past predominantly worked at Fitzgerald Marine Reserve and 2) **Rob Cala**.

Martin King worked for the court system for many years but is now enjoying his retirement from that entity and from working as an aide for SPVP as well. I have to tell a story about Martin, whom we will all miss, esp in the entry kiosk. A few months ago he lovingly planted the very invasive forget-me-not in one of the Park's native plant areas. I told him I was against it , but did not molest his pretty flower. However, I notice it disappeared a week later—always hoped he didn't think I had destroyed it.