

## JOSEPH MORLAN ON AVIAN TRAVELERS

On **Saturday, July 28, at 7:30pm**, Joseph Morlan will tell you a tale of birds that have 2 homes: the neo tropics and temperate zones. A special segment of his talk will feature the intrepid flyers that come to San Pedro Valley Park each spring.

Mr. Morlan is the penultimate teacher on birds in the Bay Area. Expert birders go to him to hone their "craft". He received the annual prestigious American Birding Association Ludlow Griscom Award for 2010, an annual prize "given to individuals who have dramatically advanced the state of ornithological knowledge for a particular region." He established the No. Calif. Bird Box, a telephone messaging system for alerting birders to rarities in the area, extending these efforts with his superb website (<http://fog.ccsf.edu/~jmorlan/>). This Pacifican presently teaches classes in Ornithology and Birding at San Francisco Community College.

And more about the subject of his talk: They are called "neotropical migrants" by we who are living in the temperate zones of this huge globe. When our winters descend and insects go dormant, these birds fly to Central and South American countries. One February I saw a **warbler** in Guatemala, a bird I thought of as "ours", and realized that it

had not just miraculously appeared in the tropics, but had taken the perilous journey with one pair on wings and one small body, and that it called Guatemala home too. (photo of Olive-sided Flycatcher, one neotropical migrant) (Brian L. Sullivan photo of this flycatcher) Thus, I'm quite enthused by the prospect of this talk, as I think you will be.



## LATE SUMMER BARBEQUE : SAT, SEPT. 8th

Time to have some fun and meet more of the Friends of San Pedro Valley Park. Meet the congenial people who attend the meetings and keep us involved in important doings: **Shirley Drye, Bing Huey, Jim Mackey, Istvan Puski, Carolyn Pankow and Jane Turrel**; Let us know if

you will attend, so that we can post your name in the next issue! Join us in the patio behind the Visitor Center at 12 noon on **Saturday, August 11**. Our delightful, competent and enthusiastic ranger, **David Vasquez**, will be there, as well as the head of the trail crew, **Joseph Piro**.



## RESEARCH IN MADAGASCAR- FRANK ALMEDA

**Dr. Frank Almeda**, chairman and senior curator of the Botany department at the California Academy of Sciences, will speak to us about his research in Madagascar on **Saturday, August 18 at 7:30pm**. (photo is of a younger Frank on an expedition-Greg de Nevers image)

Dr. Almeda studies and wonders most deeply about certain families of plants, especially the "princess flowers" (one shown below) and how the knowledge of them may teach us how to save some of the most endangered species in our besieged biome.



Lately, during his time on this off-Africa island, he and his group have been assiduous in prying out the secrets of drug-containing "wonder plants" used by the native people and eaten by the **lemurs** of Madagascar.



Frank is originally from Tampa, Florida, receiving his BA from the University of South Florida in 1968, and his PhD from Duke University in 1975. He was appointed Assistant Professor in the Department of Biology at the University of California, Los Angeles (1975-1978) before joining the California Academy of Sciences, S.F., as Associate Curator (1978-1985). One of his claims to fame now is his involvement in the vision & development of the Cal Academy's "Living Roof", composed mainly of 8 indigenous plants that were selected for their special support for native wildlife. (photo is of the Academy's "Living Roof") Dr. Almeda also served as the president of the CA. Botanical Society.



## ON THE TRAIL

On May 23, your editor saw a dark phase **eastern gray squirrel** dash across the lawn of the S. Walnut Picnic Area at 9am. **Jim Mackey** says this is a difficult time of year for them, the time before nuts & seeds develop. He also suggested that this color has a greater survival strategy in the shadows of the woods.



**Ray Trabucco** spied a **bobcat** the morning of June 26, in a field by the east Valley View Trail & a **grey fox** by the south Plaskon Bridge at 7pm that evening.

## THE SCOOP ON OUR HEAD RANGER, KEVIN SCOTT

Well, if the truth be told, **Ranger IV, Kevin Scott** of our San Mateo County Parks, is not just OUR ranger; he is also in charge of the Fitzgerald Marine Preserve, the Sanchez Adobe, and the Quarry Park. One look at Kevin and you can see that he is a young man of great physical strength, one I imagine could lift a log from the legs of a trapped person.



Upon engaging in conversation with this formidable man, my impression is that he is extremely focused on his job. You know he will take care of our Park and keep it as safe as possible for visitors. He has already started widening the curves in some of the trails so that emergency equipment can reach people in distress.

Ranger **David Vasquez** had this to say about Kevin, as I can best recall: “Kevin spearheaded, directed and saw the Quarry Park project to completion. Without his oversight and hard work, it never would have been done so quickly.” Ranger Vasquez and Ranger “Matt” feel lucky to be working with him.

In early June I met Kevin on the trail with **Jim Mackey, Ranger David, Jane Turrel**, and others. He has a vigorous interest in nature, and knew that Jim’s informative hike early in June would get him closer to knowing more about the denizens and intricacies of life in SPVP.

**Ranger Scott** became interested in the environment at an early age. “As a kid I spent many summers camping with my family and spending time in the fall hunting with my Dad. Investing that much time in the wilderness made me aware of how special the environment is and the need for protecting it. I have a deep passion for nature and spend as much time as I can away from work in the wilderness.



My hobbies include bow hunting, snow boarding, and fitness. My wife and I spend much of our time together in the outdoors; both of us love hiking & camping. We both work out”

“Working in District IV has been a great opportunity & it has some of the most beautiful land in the California, and that love for and inspiration of the land keeps me going. “

[The photo above shows one of the places Kevin has visited with his wife. Can you name this California landmark? Be the first to email your editor with the correct name and **you will win a great prize!**]

## FLOWER FOLD-OUT for SPVP A BIG SUCCESS

**Jane Turrel**, who along with **Sara Shaw**, masterminded the exceedingly popular flower brochure for our Park, obtaining a grant from the S.M.County Parks Foundation for its production, reports that it’s selling like hotcakes. It’s price is \$2 for these photos, common & scientific names of 33 Park-flowers.

Contributors to the production of the brochure, especially in providing or editing photos were **Katie Anista, Jim Mackey, Laurie and Craig Nikitas, Ray Trabucco**, as well as **Jane Turrel**. Also involved were **Shirley Drye, Barbara Kempster, Ed Peterson, and Will Trout**. In Jane’s words, “**Toni Corelli** provided invaluable assistance with plant nomenclature and identification. Our graphic designer is **Martie Sauter** of Montara who made this project go much more smoothly than I thought it would.”

We invite other Friends to make pictures and contribute to a potential pamphlet of SPVP shrubs as that will be our next project for the fall. (photo of Coast Paintbrush © 2003 Michael Charters)



## SPECIES SPARKLE ON MR. STEELE’S BIRD WALK

**By Sharron Walker**

Ten enthusiastic birders joined **Jim Steele** on his May 6 bird song walk. Although we brought along our binoculars, what we put to work were our listening skills. With Jim’s guidance we learned to listen not only for the song or the sound of the bird call, but for the complexity of the sound.

Spring is a wonderful time in San Pedro Valley Park, not only to see resident birds, but those transiting our area. There were sightings of a number of species, including **Cedar Waxwing (Jupiter Saturn photo at right), Black Headed Grosbeak, Orange Crowned Warbler, Song Sparrow, Wrentit, Oregon Junco, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Bewick’s Wren, Spotted Towhee, Robin, and Black Phoebe**. The **Western Tanager** made itself known only by its song, but since the focus of the walk was on listening as much as seeing, we were quite excited to know that the bird was even in our area. Perhaps the most fascinating sighting was that of the



fascinating sighting was that of the **Winter Wren**, especially since the previous evening in **Jack Law’s** presentation we all were charmed by footage of this darling little bird & its amazing song. It was quite a challenge for me to try to catch this little guy on camera as it darted in and out of the underbrush. The photo is not memorable, but the song is remarkable as was the walk with Jim Steele. (photo of Winter Wren by **Sharron Walker**).

[Your editor loves the quivering lower beak as the **Winter Wren** warbles his complex song!]

## A NATURALIST'S PERSPECTIVE

By Jim Mackey

July/Aug. 2012

**Bird Song.** On May 6, at 8 a.m., 10 of us joined **Jim Steele** at our Visitor Center for his annual hike to listen to bird songs.

The weather was warm, calm & sunny – ideal for male birds that were driven to expose themselves in order to proclaim their ownership of breeding territories. For a winter wren, a reclusive species, Jim played a recording of the species' song, which was answered by the song of a resident bird. This wren was so fixated on challenging an apparent rival that he approached, while singing, in spite of

our presence. (Tom Talbott photo of the Winter Wren.) [Please Look back on page 2 at **Sharron Walker's** photo of a singing Winter Wren in SPVP]

Most birds, of both sexes and all ages, tend to vocalize with various, simple "call notes" throughout the year. This enables birds within a flock to communicate with each other about such matters as the discovery of food or an enemy. During the non-breeding season, males wear a drab plumage, resembling females, & are not aggressive nor territorial. But, in the breeding season males appear in full, gaudy costume, singing to challenge rivals & attract mates, even at the probable cost of being more vulnerable to predators. So don't miss the performance, in full costume, of an auditory & visual presentation of a life-or-death drama, like grand opera!

Why do males become feisty and colorful in the breeding season? Because those that have made this change have produced more surviving offspring (with copies of their papa's genes). How does this seasonal change occur? A male bird's testes regress in size and function after mating but grow back ("recrudesc") by the start of the next breeding season, due to the stimulus of increasing day length—"photoperiod".

(Juncos in an aviary in Canada were exposed to an increased photoperiod of artificial light in winter, which produced testicular recrudescence, a pre-nuptial molt & a desire to migrate!)

It's hard not to be anthropomorphic and read human emotional content into various bird songs. The rooster's crowing is, indeed, aggressive, but so is the mournful-sounding cooing of a mourning dove. I spent two years mapping breeding territories of doves on the Ohio State University Campus and recording the number of coos sung by individual males during an early morning period. The objective was to determine the effect of season and weather factors on a bird's frequency of cooing, so that a census of the total number of coos could be converted into a number of birds. My study was



financed partly by the Ohio Division of Wildlife &, unfortunately, was derided by a hunters' group as a coocoo study. Henceforth our defensive reaction was to refer to "calls" rather than coos. (male **Mourning Dove** from Wikipedia)

Perhaps my most memorable recollection of a bird's song giving me a spine-tingling effect, like some music, was of one warm evening at Blossom Center, the summer home of the Cleveland Symphony. We were sitting on the lawn at dusk waiting for the start of the concert, and were entranced by the flickering fireflies and stridulating katydids: "She did, she didn't." Suddenly the penetrating calls of a whip-poor-will commanded our attention!... Then the Cleveland Orchestra took over, and the music was beautiful, but the wildlife concert that fronted for it remains sharper in my memory.

(photo of whip-poor-will from **Ronausting** web site)



## HEMLOCK, ANYONE? NATIVE PLANTS IN JUNE

The big winners were **Istvan Puski, Christine Guzman** and a new eradicator: they chose to touch and pull, not to taste, this famous alien poison plant. One hopes they were wearing gloves, as I believe that is a safer practice, just as it is better to keep from breathing its essence. Now the edge of Weiler Ranch Road, by the fields, is a safer place, one where native plants are free to grow if they can outgrow the alien **thistles!**

## BROOKS FALLS TRAIL WIDENING

by **Joseph Piro**

Our May 12th Trail Day crew consisted of **Istvan Puski, Bing Huey, Joann Kerns** and **me**.

Under a warm, sunny, blue sky, **Ranger David Vasquez** took us up the Brooks Creek Trail to the stretch just above the **euca-lyptus** forest where we'd continue cutting back the bank and widening the trail. So with our McLeods, rakes and a few other tools we did exactly that for an easily 150' or so stretch. And we even saw another little **scorpion** that, after getting its picture taken a lot, was safely relocated from our work area. It's another great little stretch of trail now -- enjoy it on your way up the canyon! We then came back and enjoyed a little BBQ lunch on the Visitor's Center patio (thanks David!). [periodic post trail barbeques are funded by the San Mateo County Parks Foundation.] (Joseph's photo shows from left: Bing Huey, Joann Kerns, and Istvan Puski.)





### ON THE TRAIL (continued)

**Bing Huey**, has a keen eye for beauty & the unexpected; on May trail day it was the fierce-looking scorpion that became unearthed during the dig. Time of sighting was in the morning hours.



(Bing Huey photo) He also reported an outstanding group of blooming **Yerba Santa** on the Hazelnut Trail the same day they thrilled your editor on the Montara Mt. Trail.



“Mid-month in June, at the top of the Hazelnut, where the **fence lizards** were wiped out by the trail work, I came across this one trying to lay eggs in the middle of the trail. Really good news, as this used to be an extremely active lizard area & it has been completely empty for 1 1/2 yrs now.

**Laurie Nikitas**. [Notice the angle of the lower

body as the fence lizard lays eggs in the pebbles] (Laurie Nikitas photo)

On June 10, **Judy Spitler** reported on her sightings: “**Calif Quail** with tiny, tiny young in the Trout Farm picnic area. **Olive sided Flycatcher** still singing, so hopefully it's nesting: lots of **Pacific-slope Flycatchers**, **Black-headed Grosbeaks** & **Swainson's Thrush** singing; & out in the open; singing, **Winter Wren**- always a treat to actually see them; several **Wilson's Warblers** feeding fledglings & of course, our residents were in abundance-**Hutton's Vireo**, **Chestnut-backed Chickadee**, **Bushtits**, **Dark-eyed Juncos** & **Lesser Goldfinch**.” (Hutton's Vireo photo by Peter La Tourrette)



In June the field mower surely slaughtered tons of **mice**;

**Katie Antista** saw an impressive group of 12 **Turkey Vultures** the next evening on the “meadow” by the E. Valley View on June 26; on Je. 25 at 5pm, she had seen 1 **coyote** there. “browsing” around.



### FLORA

The slopes of Montara Mountain support a relict plant community more like those of Santa Barbara & the Channel Islands than its neighboring natural areas on the Peninsula.

(source--“Madrono” newsletter; photo from a Channel Is land)



more hours than we can count, working on restoring the beauty of this little arboretum & giving SPVP's heralded originals a chance to show off their innate beauty. Above is our garden's lovely **wood mint**; to the left its invasive **sheep sorrel**.

### JULY—AUGUST 2012 CALENDAR

#### JULY GENERAL MEETING

Wednesday, July 11.....7pm

#### JULY TRAIL DAY

Saturday, July 14.....9am

#### JULY HABITAT RESTORATION DAY

Saturday, July 21.....9am

#### JOE MORLAN'S NEOTROPICAL BIRDS

Saturday, July 28.....7:30pm

#### AUGUST GENERAL MEETING

Wednesday, August 8.....7pm

#### AUGUST TRAIL DAY

Saturday, August 11.....9am

#### AUGUST HABITAT RESTORATION DAY

Saturday August 18.....9am

#### FRANK ALMEDA'S MADAGASCAR

Saturday, August 18.....7:30pm

For all events, meet at the Visitor Center.

### NEWS BRIEFS

Thank you to 30 workers from Gilead Sciences, who are volunteering to weed out some of our invading plants from SPVP. **Julia Bott** has originated and organized this work day & a barbeque for these stalwart souls for Sat., July 14.

### DESTRUCTION DRAMA ON TRAIL DAY

by **Joseph Piro**

The June 9th Trail Day was all about “de-construction” -- as in removing the approximately 45' or so railing near the start of the **eucalyptus** grove on the west end of the Valley View Trail in preparation for work with the trail machine later this summer. **Ranger David Vasquez** made a few strategic cuts with a chain saw and **Istvan Puski**, **Lavey & Janeth**, 2 fellows that came with David and me, tackled digging, banging & prying up sections -- posts and all -- and carrying everything down to the truck. Luckily it wasn't too far, as we all made several trips up and down the hillside!

### ANTISTA & TURREL WEED THE REALLY BAD

Our Native Sun Garden, largely the conception, design & work of **Nancy Jewett Jim Pommier**, & **Ranger Doug**, grows weeds in addition to its valued representative “old-timers”.. In late May & early June, **Jane** spent 4 hours weeding, & **Katie**, the unsung membership chair of the “Friends”, spent



Questions or letters to the editor? —email **Carolyn Pankow** at [carolynjunepankow@yahoo.com](mailto:carolynjunepankow@yahoo.com) or write **Carolyn Pankow**, Editor of, “Friends of San Pedro Valley Park”, 600 Oddstad, Pacifica, CA 94044. She is the writer of all uncredited features.

### The Leaders of “the Friends of San Pedro Valley Park”:

President, **Jim Mackey**; Vice President, **Carolyn Pankow**; Secretary, **Shirley Drye**; Treasurer, **Jane Turrel**; members at large, **Istvan Puski**; *Visitor Center staffing-open-* **Jane Turrel**, thank you; Habitat Restoration Leader, **Istvan Puski**; Trail Leader, **Joseph Piro**; Membership, **Catherine Antista**; Programs, **Carolyn Pankow**; Trailside Store, **Jane Turrel**.