

The Friends of San Pedro Valley Park

May-June 2013

PAUL DONAHUE: SANDERLINGS AND SNOWYS

If our first talk by Paul Donahue is any indication of the quality of this one, you will be thrilled at his photos and his enthusiasm for his subjects on Saturday, June 1, at 6pm in

our Visitor Center. Remember the **Jaguar** and Brazilian Pantanal of last year? Now he will come home to your local land, our coastal scene, presenting “a Tale of Two Shorebirds”, the **Sanderlings** and the **Snowy Plovers**. (Paul Donahue photo of

Sanderling)

Our plovers can be found nesting in the upper regions, the dry, sandy area of our beach, especially at Linda Mar, but the Sanderlings have flown to the Arctic by May. The Plover has been listed as “threatened”, but the numbers of the Sanderlings has been waning. Therefore, since both are important inhabitants of Linda Mar Beach, Paul will make you aware of the problems they are up against.

Paul Donahue is a naturalist, wildlife artist, photographer, & environmental activist. As a child, Paul spent hundreds of hours bird watching in his home state of Massachusetts. During his high school years, he volunteered at the Manomet Bird Observatory in Mass., learning to band birds



and then left college, so that he could work at the bird observatory full time, first as an intern, banding birds and conducting the observatory's fall sea watch program, then as a research assistant with its shorebird project. Paul has also worked as a biologist/photographer

for the Canadian Wildlife Service. (Snowy Plovers on Linda Mar Beach by Paul Donahue)

JIM STEELE LEADS 2 BIRD SONG WALKS IN MAY

Starting with **May 4**, Jim Steele will take you on an **8am** stroll, to hear the birds of San Pedro Valley Park defending

their territory. He will play recordings of some of the songsters, who in the spirit of delightful aggression, will answer back, thus pinpointing the location of their species. Then it's time for you to home in on them with your binoculars. So that you can reinforce your skills in recognizing the singers, he will do

another bird song walk on Saturday, **May 18, also at 8am**. Jim is the former head of the SFSU Field Campus & “replacement” for the renowned **Dr. Luis Baptista** of the Cal Acad. of Sci. (at right- the **Song Sparrow**-a sure thing)



SHAYE WOLF EXPLORES THE HEALTH OF OUR WILDLIFE

Shaye Wolfe, of the Center for Biological Diversity, will be our guest speaker at San Pedro Valley Park on Saturday, May 11, at 6pm. In her presentation she will deal with the problems of the fast-moving climate change: the threat of sea level rise to the **Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse**, the threat of shifting rainfall to our **checkerspot butterfly**, and the effects of ocean acidification on the **Bay oysters**.

Shaye, who now has a B.A. from Yale & a PhD in ecology and evolutionary biology from UC Santa Cruz, started her life out in a rural setting, cavorting with or watching **snakes, water birds**, and **alligators** in Southern Florida. Her family had such pets as goats, pig, and even a cow, perhaps because of that her heart's desire was to become a wildlife veterinarian. In her second year at college she volunteered as a wildlife biologist for the Teton National Forest, setting up “bear poles” for hunters, and camping for the first time, waking in the morning to find **grizzly bear** tracks surrounding her tent.

Dr. Wolf continued to work as a wildlife biologist on conservation projects, often in remote places--with spiders on Barro Colorado Island in the Panama Canal, with endangered **Honeycreepers** on Mauna Kea in Hawaii, with seabirds on the Northwest Hawaiian Islands, the California Channel Islands, and the Northwest Hawaiian Islands, with **hawks & owls** in Northern California, and with **songbirds** in the marshes on the Everglades National Park in Florida. Her work has brought home to her that many species are in trouble, even the ones in remote places & she has become certain that without help we stand to lose them permanently.

ON THE TRAIL

Kirk and **Gary Pimentel** were delighted to see a particularly large bobcat crouched down hunting, and later sitting up in the back area of the South Walnut Picnic area on Sunday, March 10, at 5pm. **Barbara Kempster** saw probably the same critter, searching for quarry in late March..



Oh, the power of the devil to reinforce the crush of new euc trees, & their unfortunate beauty as the fruit & seeds come to life on the Valley View. Shot by **Joseph Piro**.



The following article was sent to me by my dear friend, Pegge Fields, the architect of the Native Shade Garden and one of our most persistent weeders, an inspiration to us all, and who, along with Susan Smith, hit the Australian fire-weed especially hard.

ENCOUNTERS ON THE BROOKS FALLS TRAIL

By Pegge Fields

On the trail lay a scattered mess of uprooted plants. Sunday afternoon hikers are trudging along looking a little perplexed at this oddity. Here then is a young woman busily yanking up plants and tossing those bedraggled remnants out onto the trail. Now and then steaming runners pass by, seemingly airborne, sailing over the discards, glancing at their watches. After this straight stretch, they are close to the finish.

A few Sunday strollers pass by, pleased with themselves to have spent their afternoon out in a beautiful park, breathing fresh ocean air, walking in nature's realm, surrounded by the beauty of the mountain's uniquely tight and tangled blanket of marine chaparral.

A lone walker, not the first, has paused to question the young woman who is bent over, gloved hands yanking on a plant. As the worker pulls up the plant she tosses it onto the one-person wide trail. The lone walker mentions that



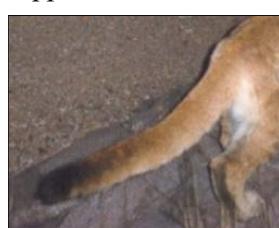
she walks the trail for her health three times a week. She is interested to know what plant the worker is pulling up.. Glad for the opportunity to take a break, the worker takes off her dirt-covered gloves. She says that due to ranger cutbacks she is doing volunteer work, pulling up an invasive plant, **Australian Fire Weed**.

Australian Fire Weed. She continues to explain that these offending plants are spreading here and that throughout the park wherever there is bare ground; seeds blow in, quickly germinate, anchor themselves securely, and soon crowd out the native plants. The visitor, **Lana**, seems satisfied with this oversimplified explanation, then in a friendly manner tells about a strange happening on her walk the previous week. This is her encounter:

She was descending this same path when she saw the back end and long tail of an animal as it disappeared into the brush; its color appeared orange.

She thought to herself, "What animal could it be?"

The park worker is silent a moment before she says, "How big? Big like a fox? Bigger than a coyote?" When the stranger says, "Yes", our worker, Pegge, thinks, "Not a coyote. Can't be a deer. Wrong place for bobcats. Do you suppose....?"



And the visitor, continues her story, "Another day, I heard something cry like a cat far away near Brooks Falls. I went home and called the animal professor at SF State. I told him what I saw and what I heard. I tried to make the sound I heard over the phone. The professor said, 'Sounds like a cougar; color is another indication.'"

The park worker in frozen amazement, thinks to herself, "A baby cougar calling its mother?" She asks, "Can you make the sound for me?". So the lady does, two or three times. Now the park worker tries to imitate the sound. It's not easy, but good enough to make a report to the ranger. The worker picks up the debris and returns to the visitor Center, where the ranger confirms her suspicions

So it happened that though the cougar was not seen, the could detect its presence, thus adding to the evidence of the mountain lions' ramblings, along with unmistakable scoops of scat and large footprints without claw marks seen by some.

But onto another day, another litter of fireweeds. Our worker, Pegge, begins to pick up the scattered debris of the infamous weed when she feels a strange sense of fear as goose bumps rise on the back of her neck. From the dense chaparral she senses an animal panting, its breath very close.



SPRUCING UP TROUT FARM

Istvan Puski and his crew of boy scouts, worked hard to further rid the Trout Farm picnic area of invasives, mainly **Cape ivy** and **vinca**. Tough workers were: **Ernesto Palacios, David Dyr, "Shane", Andrew and Kevin McCarron, David, Nicky, and Ace Demaray, Charles Havnar, Gerardo Borja, Evan Kilmaron, "Tom", and Ryan Varley**. All were members of troop 74. Typical Cape ivy takeover is shown in this photo from another park.



EARTH HAB RESTORATION AND POMMIER LIFE

For Earth Day, Apr. 20, a crew of over a dozen young people from the Student Conservation Association were guided by **Istvan Puski**, and **Rangers Cat & Matt Auda Capel** in clearing **vinca** and **Cape ivy** from the North Walnut Picnic Area. Afterwards they and Jim Pommier, the former, now deceased chairman of the native plant group, were honored at the barbecue. Jim's daughter, **Janise** and son and former SPVP volunteer, **Don Pommier**, and Jim's SF running club, & the Friends told many stories of Jim's accomplishments.

Thanks to **Carol Martinez, "Skeeter", Isabel Ebert, Sharron Walker, Bevan Jones, and Terry Sherar** for all their work in staging the event, & for all cooks, esp. barbecue man, **Joseph Piro**, for a delicious time.

A NATURALIST'S PERSPECTIVE
By Jim Mackey

May/June 2013

An April hike. On April 17 at 11:30 a.m. I started up the Weiler Ranch Road. It was sunny, cool and breezy. After passing the eucalyptus grove I crossed over to the Handicap Trail and reversed direction.



Immediately I flushed a small butterfly that fluttered about 6 feet before landing back on the trail. I recognized this behavior as typical of buckeye butterflies, (Charles Montford photo) but thought that this individual was too small to be a buckeye. However when it spread its wings in the sun I saw the unique pattern of eyespots on all 4 wings so

knew that it was a buckeye. (Later, at home, while transcribing my field notes into a more coherent narrative, I looked up buckeyes in **Shapiro** and **Manolis**, "Field Guide to Butterflies of the San Francisco Bay and Sacramento Valley Regions.") They state that early spring individuals are very small and have probably hibernated. Other, larger, individuals migrate from the south in late spring. Incidentally, in one study, 10% of early spring individuals were found to have damage in the vicinity of their eyespots, suggesting that birds had targeted these wing spots rather than the more vital body of the butterfly.

Horseshoe courts. I proceeded along the service road by the row of holly-leaf cherries when I became aware of vigorous movement on a branchlet overhead. I trained my binocs on a dark, flat, 2 – 3 inch object that appeared to be a piece of bark. A pygmy nuthatch was attacking it and continued to hammer and jab at it for about 30 seconds. Finally the bird extracted a naked, succulent-looking caterpillar that dangled from its beak. (Later, at home, I looked up



pygmy nuthatches in **Paul Ehrlich**, et al, "The Birder's Handbook.") They say that the only North American bird known to habitually use tools is the brown-headed nuthatch. These birds forage on long-leaf pines in Louisiana where they tear off a piece of bark and use it as a lever to pry up other parts of the bark that are sheltering beetle larvae. I continued on the service road

and was happy to see 4 adult quail (2 males and 2 females) foraging in the gravel on the bridge. Farther along I heard "chi chi chet chet!" – the song of a Wilson's warbler. Then the bright yellow male moved up into the sun and repeated his challenge. It was satisfying knowing that he had survived winter in the neotropics & a trip back to breed in our Park.

(Peter LaTourette photo of **Wilson's Warbler**)



12:30 Plaskon Trail. I was impressed by the lanky vines with rows of red flowers: giant vetch (Garber Park Stewards photo). Hazelnut Trail. There were 2 clumps of plants that might well have been called adder's tongues



when in bloom but now had seed pods like grappling hooks on long prostrate stalks (their fruit by **Zoya Akulova**), evoking the alternate name: slink pods. Up trail in a grassy opening there were about 40 blue and 3 mission bell lilies (on 1 plant)! A spot of red caught my eye and as I focused on the Franciscan paintbrush an Anna's hummingbird buzzed in and hovered at one of the flowers!!



Returning down trail I suddenly heard a loud, bouncing ping pong ball song from the shrub right beside me – a wrentit! (Elva Paulson) He moved higher into view and sang again; then something else moved lower in the bush into a

sunlit spot where I could see with my binocs that it was another wrentit. Suddenly she was mounted, by the singer, and they copulated for a few seconds!!! He dismounted and perched against her and arched his back and neck. I could see bluish sheaths around the bases of separated feathers on his upper back, where she preened him. A mutual preening orgy ensued. (You might like knowing that wrentits mate for life.)



1:00 Trout Farm Picnic Area. A few yellow-rumped warblers (A. Morris photo) in bright nuptial plumage were foraging in the willows. (These birds winter with us but should leave soon for breeding areas, such as the Sierra Nevada.) About 9 adult quail were scattered, foraging among the picnic tables and giving their gathering call, "Chi-ca-go!" Finally, I noticed the face of a deer that was calmly gazing at me from just above the ground cover. The face was just below a set of half-grown forked antlers that were in velvet, & the buck was lying down. Ah, spring.



ON THE TRAIL**(continued)**

Laurie Nikitas opened her eyes wide when she saw a totally white version of the royal blue **hound's tongue** on the hazelnut trail on April 2. Laurie's photo is to the right.



Judy Spitler heard her first **Pacific Slope Flycatcher** singing on the 30th of March. (Bob Steele photo of this flycatcher appears at left.) Three days earlier she reported another sighting of the **Varied Thrush**, as well as hearing **Wilson** and **Orange Crowned Warblers** "in full song" and the "swan song" of a migrating **Townsend's Warbler**.

Laurie Nikitas found 2 **fence lizards** mating on the large Weiler Ranch Bridge on April 23.. "They scurried around for awhile", said Laurie, "'and finally the female arched herself into a U and there was an apparently successful mating. The male was 2/3 her size, smaller than I would have thought. He did push-ups after she shook him off--very full of himself."

**PICNIC PERFECT PATH**

By Joseph Piro

For the March 9th Trail Day, **Istvan Puski**, **Rob** and **I** worked with **Ranger Tony** and his crew widening the path leading to the picnic tables in the North Walnut Grove area. The grass had rather significantly crept over the edges and we needed to re-establish the ADA-required 4' width, so we cut it back and made a nice edge again. Then Rob said he had recently spotted a large patch of **Cape Ivy** not far up from the east end of the Hazelnut Trail, so we decided to go and tackle it.



However, when we got there, it was a case of mistaken identity -- Istvan confirmed it was actually a big patch of **wild cucumber**, so we left it. But we got a nice walk out Weiler Ranch Road & saw several deer in the big meadow.

MAY—JUNE 2013 CALENDAR**JIM STEELE'S FIRST MAY BIRD SONG HIKE**

Saturday, May 4.....8am

MAY GENERAL MEETING

Wednesday, May 8 at 7pm at Shirley Drye's house

MAY TRAIL DAY

Saturday, May 11.....9am

SHAYE WOLF'S ENVIRONMENT BAY AREA

Saturday, May 11.....6pm

JIM STEELE'S SECOND MAY BIRD SONG HIKE

Saturday, May 18.....8am

MAY HABITAT RESTORATION DAY

Saturday, May 18.....9am

PAUL DONAHUE'S "A TALE OF TWO SHOREBIRDS

Saturday, June 1.....6pm

JUNE TRAIL DAY

Saturday, June 8.....9am

JUNE GENERAL MEETING

Wednesday, June 12 at the Visitor Center....7pm

JUNE HABITAT RESTORATION DAY

Saturday, June 15.....9am

For most events meet at the Visitor Center.**BANK CUTS by PIRO, PUSKI, CAT, & LUJAN**

By Joseph Piro

Our April 13th Trail Day was all about doing bank-cutting work on the west end of the Valley View Trail. (just above the horseshoe pits and Weiler Ranch trailhead). **Ranger "Cat," Istvan Puski, Thomas Lujan & I** made our way along, transforming some nearly-vertical edges on the trail's uphill slope to a more moderate angle, which should help slow run-off a bit and hopefully prevent collapses onto the trail. Definitely some good work.

**FACIOLID**

The little brown bat, *Myotis lucifugus*, one of California's most numerous bats, is between 3 to 5 inches long, but weighs between 1/16 and 1/2 an ounce, the females being larger, but even more amazing is that the moms give birth to a baby that would be the equivalent of 30 pounds in relation to our mom/baby size. No wonder they do not birth in litters! More facts on this common but uncommon species in later bulletins. (Animalsnorthwest.org and Animal Factoids) (photo of *M. lucifugus* from Natureworks)



Questions or letters to the editor? —email Carolyn Pankow at carolynjune@pankow@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, **open**; members at large, **Istvan Puski**; **Visitor Center staffing—open** thank you all for helping staff it; Habitat Restoration Leader, **Istvan Puski**; Trail Leader, **Joseph Piro**; Membership, **Catherine Antista**; Programs, **Carolyn Pankow**; Trailside Store: **open . . .**