

the FRIENDS of SAN PEDRO VALLEY PARK

DOUBLE-HEADER WEEKEND!!



HOW TO FIND BIRDS IN THE DESERT-FRIDAY, FEB. 8

Nature lover, Steve Hartman, will show us the **willow, mesquite, etc.** habitats in the desert and help us track our feathered friends in this natural history slide show set in the California Desert. (Bill Walker's photo- Sage Sparrow)

The show begins at **7:30pm** in our Visitor Center on **Fri., Feb. 8.**

Mr. Hartman graduated from UC Berkeley, but dwells in Southern California, where he was President of the LA chapter of the Calif. Native Plant Society. He is now treasurer of the State-wide entity. He has produced a line of CD's on the flora of Anza Borrego State Park and Death Valley.

PATTERSON'S SIERRA FLORA SAT,FEB. 9

Dr. Bob Patterson, Botany professor of San Francisco State University, has inspired a host of his graduate students to enter the world of

plants, to obtain higher degrees in this field. I should not be surprised because his passion for the mountain flora enthralled me during a week's program at the school's Northern Sierra Nevada field campus, where he often gives classes. (photo of a Linanthus, one of Bob's specialty groups, by Larner seeds online) Come to SPVP for the **7:30pm** for his floral show **Sat., Feb. 9..**



RANDY'S HAZELNUT HIKE on FEB 24

Randy Zebell, of the California Native Plant Society, has invited the "Friends of San Pedro Valley Park" to attend his yearly plant hike on the prolific Hazelnut trail.

He is always thrilled by the "intriguing red flowers of the **burning bush**, the pink flowers of the western wood **anemone**, the furtive yellow flowers of the **leatherwood**" (leatherwood photo by Gladys Smith © California Academy of Sciences), as well as the tiny red flowers of the trail's namesake, & the weird **slink pod**, which is unusually common on our trail.

Meet Randy at **10am** in front of the Visitor Center on **Sunday, Feb. 24.** The hike will be cancelled in case of heavy rain. Bring snacks & water.

BING QUOCK—NEWS FROM SPACE—JANUARY

Dr. Bing Quock will appear at SPVP Saturday, January 26 at 7:30pm. Since Dr. Quock is a long time teacher & lecturer on astronomy for the Morrison Planetarium at the California Academy of Sciences, he's a proven communicator. Dr. Quock will explain some of the new developments, new discoveries in our Universe.



Bing Quock taught Astronomy at

SF City College and was in charge of family classes for the Cal Academy, which has given him experience in making the content of space understandable to older children as well as adults.

After his initial teaching stint, he became the Morrison Planetarium's Assistant Chairman and Show Producer in 1982, writing and producing more than 100 astronomy presentations for a wide range of audiences. He was recently named Assistant Director of the Planetarium. He is still explaining astronomy to audiences, the media, and providing daily astronomy inserts for newspapers across the country.

Thanks to **Mila Stroganoff**, former science docent at the Cal Academy, who obtained this sought-after person as the presenter who will start our Natural History series for 2008.

(Photo above is not identified. Let's find out what it is with Bing Quock)

ON THE TRAIL-Sightings

Katie Antista is one of my favorite observers, and one who often hikes in the winter, rain or shine. Lately her best sightings have been of 2 mushroom species in particular. One is **Ranaria stricta, or Straight Branched Coral**, (photo at mrhykertripod.com/floraandfauna/id41) with branches that she says look like tufts of hair. The lovely yellow fades to a mustard color as they dry.



She's also intrigued by **Carbon Antlers, Xylaria hypoxylon**, which has stalked woody clubs which are white near the top & black near the base. Both came out at the end of some of the first rains, but are still here for now. (John Dorsey photo)

Three-year old, **Matilda Pankow**, had her second intimate encounter with **stinging nettle**. We had been trying to see several

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A DAY IN THE PARK

By Jack Dodson

Today, after a hectic morning and afternoon, I decided I needed the peace, quiet, & solace of San Pedro Valley Park. During a brisk walk through the Walnut grove, I enjoyed watching a woman doing tai chi alone (photo of Valerie Lee) in the picnic area, & wondered if that would be something I should do. But I was enjoying the exercise of my walk and, munching a pear, I continued on to the trail going back into the park. Not much activity among the varmints, I thought, as I said "hello" to the usual park suspects walking or jogging. I noticed in the big meadow lying down next to the foliage by the creek a suspicious animal, which through my binoculars I could see was the Big Daddy **Buck** of the Valley lying lazily alone on the ground. Despite the camouflage of the grasses I saw his white nose, broad head with black coloration, & a huge rack of antlers. Continuing on, I saw in the last little meadow 2 healthy **does**. Sizing up the situation & using my imagination, I surmised that the does were staying well clear of the buck.



I noticed a group of three adults and one ten year old child speaking Spanish and observing excitedly the two does. Curious and in mind of a little company, I asked them where they were from; two of them, who were the guests of the young mother of the 10 year old, turned out to be from St. Sebastian, Spain, and spoke no English. Using the mother as an interpreter, I led them to the meadow where the **buck** was taking his rest. They were happy to use my binoculars to observe him & were fascinated and asked many questions. Turns out they were interested in wildlife. I accompanied them (or they me) along the trail towards St. Peter's. In the process I spotted a **bunny** in a bush right off the trail which gave them, especially the little boy, great delight. I showed them the mostly hair scat left by some predator. We discussed **bobcats**, "**pumas**" & the ways of predators and prey. We came upon another bunny which delighted them all & waited while a covey of **quail** called to each other to cross the trail before us. The mother, who seems local, asked how I knew so much about wildlife? She wondered if I was the "naturalist" who led her son on a valley nature walk a day or two before. (**Fred Laughlin?**) I said, "adios" to them at the fork by the horse shoe rings and they said happily, "muchas gracias." "De Nada", I responded in my spotty Spanish. It was a good day at San Pedro Park.



HACKIN' AWAY at the HAZELNUT

I was happy to see all the regulars at the Visitor Center this morning — **Jim Pommier**, **Hal Jorgensen** & **Ed Decker**, & **Art Armstrong** showed up! [& this writer, **Joseph Piro**.] And **Ranger Doug** stopped by a bit to enjoy the usual donuts-and-coffee banter. Hal said his new knee still isn't quite up to tackling the trails and Ed said he was getting over a cold, so they wouldn't be heading out on the trails today. So that left **Art**, **Jim** and **myself** for the crew.

Considering the relatively small group, Doug recommended we hike up the Hazelnut Trail to trim low-hanging branches & whatnot. So the 3 of us grabbed some loppers, a small handsaw & a rake & headed up the trail behind the Center. We hiked & trimmed back quite a bit of stuff along the way & Art and I made it up to the big retaining wall near the top of the ridge.



We also cleared leaves & debris out of the end of the drainage pipe running under the trail there. After that, and with skies becoming greyer & a light drizzle starting — we headed back down & caught up with Jim. Once back down at the VC we chatted & I quickly raked all the leaves off the back patio. **Joseph**
~**Joseph**

RIGOROUS work by RIFLE RANGE

Hal, **Ed**, **Jim** and myself [Joseph] at the Park this morning, though with one notable exception — **no Art**. We enjoyed our usual coffee and donuts, but with **Ranger Doug out**, we weren't too sure what to do. I mentioned that I had been up the Montara Mtn. Trail a few weekends ago and that the trail up by the old rifle range was very overgrown and could use a good weed-whacking. Hal's knee still isn't up for big trail work, so that left me, Ed and Jim. I said I'd lug and run the blade-cutter up there if they'd come along for "clean-up". Everyone agreed, so **Hal Jorgensen** outfitted me (**Joseph Piro**) with a blade-cutter, helmet, etc. and **Ed Decker** and **Jim Pommier** rounded up rakes and a pitch fork & off the 3 of us went up the mountain via the Brooks Falls Trail.



Once we were up there, I went to town in true "gunho Hal" fashion with the blade-cutter and cleared way back both sides of the trail from the start of the old rifle range area all the way up around the bend overlooking Perez Drive — a good stretch indeed. Ed and Jim did an awesome job cleaning up and pitching the piles of cuttings over the side of the trail. Sure, it was a good hike up and down and a big job, but that section of trail is now much, much better. ~**Joseph**



A NATURALIST'S PERSPECTIVE

By Jim Mackey

An obsessed thrush. From November 15 to December 11 we have had a **Hermit Thrush** flying repeatedly, each day against our kitchen window. It also perches and pecks audibly on the vertical, plastic handle of our sliding glass door. Does it want in? No, it retreats when we approach. Does it want us to follow it (like a **honey-guide***)? Is it a reincarnated soul? (I need to get a grip on reality.)

Hermit Thrushes are primarily insectivorous, but our bird is not plucking spiders or insects out of the spider webs. I notice that it flicks its wings and raises a small crest on its head in an aggressive manner, so I conclude that it mistakes its reflection for a rival. But why does it do this in the non-breeding season and in an area that is never a breeding territory?

(Hermit Thrushes are present locally only in the winter.)

And why do it every day for a month? Is the poor bird incapable of learning anything? Maybe I should put it out of its misery and, in so doing, cleanse the gene pool of the local population of Hermit Thrushes. (Jack Laws drawing of Hermit Thrush)

An obsessed terrier. By the way, our neighbors have a small dog that has yapped aggressively six days a week, for about five years at our mail-person. Have dog-breeders ever tried to select the yapping out of small breeds? If not, why not?

Why not join a flock? The **Hermit Thrush** seems to have been well-named, because they don't flock together. In Pedro Park you might see one perched in the willows by the Horseshoe Courts and another in the willows on the other side of the creek in the South Walnut Grove. In

contrast, flocks of **Robins** (which are in the same family: Turdidae) may occur in either area. And can you imagine seeing only a solitary **Chickadee**—especially in winter? Indeed, in winter many perching birds form multi-species foraging flocks. Birders in our Park feel that they have hit a jackpot when they encounter such a flock of **Chickadees, Kinglets, Warblers**,

et al. Ecologists believe that

flocking may have evolved as a defense against predators. The reader can refer to pg. 19 in Ehrlich & Dobkins' "The Birder's Handbook" (which is available in our Trailside Store). Here(Chickadee drawing by Catherine Clark)



there is a discussion of **W.D. Hamilton's** theory of the "Geometry of the Selfish Colony" It assumes that a predator will attack the closest animal, so that if an animal is one of a pair it will be only half as likely to be killed in an attack as when it is alone.

One day in February, 1990, we had several **Robins**, several **Cedar Waxwings** and one **Hermit Thrush** gorging on berries in a **Cotoneaster** bush in our yard. Our cat killed the Hermit Thrush. It had been somewhat apart from the main flock, but it was also more vulnerable because it fed from the ground to the lowest branches. As to why Hermit Thrushes don't flock: maybe their usual insect food, especially in wintering regions, is sparse & widespread, so they defend feeding territories.

Poor Jim's Almanac. Last January we had **Varied Thrushes** in the vicinity of the Horseshoe Courts.

Watch for the resurgence of life, with **Giant Trilliums** blooming along the Plaskon Trail in late January! (giant trillium photo from Ore. State U. ws)

*the Honey Guide is an African bird who leads the honey-loving Badger-like Ratel to a hive which the latter opens, releasing plump, tasty bees..



NURTURING NOVEMBER NATIVES

Removing some invasive space hogs was the productive job of **Sara Shaw, Jim Mackey, & Jim Pommier**.

They worked by the Water Dep't gate of the Trout Farm Rd to remove eucalyptus "shoots" with large diameters; one was a tree in itself, so the team tried to get it to fall on the road, as they knew they had to cut it into sections with hand saws! Alas, our lumberjacks watched helplessly as the tree crashed into the forest. But now there are fewer new Euc.Trees in this locale shedding bark, leaves, etc., covering up nascent natives .(info- Jim P.)

FACTOID

Listen closely to birds & you get an idea of what's going on in their world. The raucous call of the **Steller's Jay** can have more than one meaning. When low in pitch like the sound you usually hear, (which is lower than that of our more common jay, the **California Scrub Jay**), **Steller's Jays** are calling their neighbors to assemble together. When louder, it is a warning call to jays and other species that there is an intruder. If the intruder is a predator, the loud call rises to a power-packed shriek, which invites other birds to mob the killer & drive it away. (Oakland Museum of Nat. Hist. web site)

(**Jack Laws** drawing from his **Sierra Nevada Wildlife** book which is on sale at the Trailside Store.)





ON THE TRAIL-Sightings (continued)

from page 1)

cute little quail in a family. As she screamed at the throbbing of her thumb, her Grandma pointed out a **Bobcat** who had sighted her and the quail. Sunday, Dec. 2 at 4:30pm (no drawing credits available)

John Murphy & Sue Granville report that they have seen possible "Mountain Lion-sized" scats on the WRR, the most recent being on about Nov. 10. "The scat we last saw was 5/8 in. in diameter, 5 in. in length, with a hairy consistency. If this photo of Mt. Lion scat (web-images) is correct they might be right, but this width is exactly that given for a **Bobcat**, in Murie's Animal Tracks, showing how difficult it is to match feces to animal. Wisely, they made careful observations.



Fred Laughlin, that sturdy senior citizen hiker, warns others to be on the watch for our **Black Tailed Deer** that are at the turn-around on the Weiler Ranch Road. He says that they have been coming out of the bushes unexpectedly, and has never seen them there before this year.



One wonders if someone is feeding them. He sighted them a couple of times at the beginning of Dec.

"FRIENDS" HOLIDAY PARTY a DELIGHT
Annette Goldman spent most of her time at the party as a surrogate grandma holding and comforting a very good baby **Austin**, 6 weeks. There were 2 new members, **Connie** & xxxx. A new Santa Claus appeared when county volunteer leader, **Nick Ramirez**, surrendered the "reigns" and hat to our new young ranger, **David de Vasquez**. Some strange gifts were opened, (a short folding basketball table???)—on the bright side the piece de resistance was an original **Lorquin's Admiral** Butterfly photo by **James Mackey**, (Lorquin's Admiral photo



from Las Pilitas w.s.) one of our best photographers. **Isabel Ebert** had had "her" other Mackey photo stolen last year, so an empathetic but disappointed **Marissa Shaff** responded to a sad and frightened Isabel, mercifully letting it go. A crafty **Mila Stroganoff** hid her stolen pottery

under the table till the end. Best dinner dish—all of them; best desserts were homemade: **Istvan**'s chocolate mousse cake, the **Ortega** family's giant holiday cake, & there was pecan pie, etc, etc. Santa's helper was **Joy Decker**, who packaged ham & turkey take homes for those who couldn't get enough. See you next year?

JANUARY—FEBRUARY CALENDAR JAN-

JANUARY GENERAL MEETING

Wednesday, January 9.....7pm

JANUARY TRAIL DAYS

Saturday, January 12.....8am

JANUARY NATIVE PLANT DAY

Saturday, January 19.....9am

BING QUOCK'S NEWS OF SPACE

Saturday, January 26.....7:30pm

STEVE HARTMAN'S DESERT BIRDS

Friday, February 8.....7:30pm

FEBRUARY TRAIL DAYS

Saturday, February 9.....8am

BOB PATTERSON'S SIERRA FLORA

Saturday, February 9.....7:30pm

FEBRUARY GENERAL MEETING

Wednesday, February 13.....7:00pm

FEBRUARY NATIVE PLANT DAY

Saturday, February 16.....9am

RANDY ZEBELL'S HAZELNUT HIKE

Sunday, February 24.....10am

(For all events meet at the Visitor Center)

FULL FORCE ATTACK—December 7

Amazingly we had 5 people present for our native plant day weed-out: **Sara Shaw**, **Jim Pommier**, **Jim Mackey**, as well as 2 high school students from the City: **Tim** and **Nick**, who helped us pull out **pampas grass**, the eternal enemy, and the deep rooted **cotoneaster**, with its infernal bird-dispersed berries, after having reached the tilted flat area several switchbacks up the Valley View. We stripped out **Cape ivy** near the bridge, where we piled a huge mass of this South African immigrant west of the North Walnut Picnic area. This field information was related to the editor by Jim Pommier.

NEWS BRIEFS

Friends of the Park members—the **Shaff family**—has expanded. **Marissa** and **Greg**, and their 2 youngsters who often come to our barbeques—**Hannah-10** and **Wayne-3 1/2**, welcomed **baby boy, Austin Shaff** into their family on October 25, 2007.

Visit our office in the V.C. where you can see 2 members' contributions: the inspired painting by **Pegge Fields** as well as the prize-winning photo of the alien, **Salsify**, (*Tragopogon Parvifloris*) by **Raul Ortega**, that formerly graced our Vistor Center foyer for about 5 years.

New SPVP aide, **Robert Owens** and long-time aide, **Martin King** have been busy blade-cutting and lopping trailside vegetation from the North Peak Access Road all the way down past the old sport's club this December. **Ranger Jonel Ishida**, has nothing but praise for our new young aide, as well as for Martin!