

# the FRIENDS of SAN PEDRO VALLEY PARK

## WE WANT YOU WE NEED YOU, and WE....??

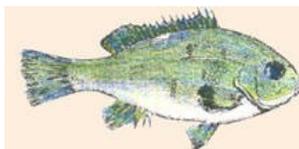
Well, we will anyway, IF you can spare some of your valuable time and talents doing something we hope you love. Please read our *pale green insert* that lists some of the jobs that the “Friends of SPVP” are looking to fill. Keeping a healthy organization together requires a lot of special people, and I think I might be writing to some of them now. Watch out, don’t throw away the green sheet into the recycling bin UNTIL you have read it. OK?

## TIME OUT IN AUGUST— TERRIFIC FALL TRIO

Whilst we volunteers are relaxing in June & August, between programs, don’t think we are totally asleep, just working behind the scenes. Programs start up with a whirl on *September 13*, when

**Mike Boom** gives us a look at his underwater photography of denizens of the California Coastal Waters & other Pacific

spots. (Opaleye fish ocparks.com/tidepools/animals)



Then on *October 18*, we once again have that lover of predatory birds, **Craig Nikitas**, bringing to us this time, Owls, with a great focus on those of our area. (Sawwhet Owl ©2008 Conservation Commission of Missouri.) “A Pacifica Naturalist visits Kenya” will reveal **Jim Mackey’s** view of a different world from our park in this game-rich land,



but will he contend that SPVP pales by comparison?—hmm, we’ll have to see. (lion wordpress Blog)



## ON THE TRAIL-Sightings

On May 16, **Katie Antista** witnessed a mass migration of ladybird beetles (ladybugs)—“perhaps millions”—going south to north back by the foundation of the “old house” and going down the Trout Farm Trail. The mass extended from a few inches above ground to over 15 feet high. They eventually went by the sequoia and redwood trees in the picnic area field & over the willows.



(photo-www.allergizer.com w.s.) **Jim Mackey**

saw a swarm of thousands of these Convergent ladybugs on Je 9 between 10am & 12 on a 70<sup>0</sup> day, the 1st warm day since the 90<sup>0</sup> day when **Katie & Ray Trabucco** had seen them.

**The Ladybird flies off....**

**Dividing her wings**

**Into two.**

**Suju-(1893-1976)**

(“On the Trail” cont’d on p. 4)

## BUTTERFLY BLOSSOMS—July

Love those people at the Strybing Arboretum, those who know that area of diversified and thriving plants in California section, with their serenading birds and colorful butterflies.

**Don Mahoney**, curator & horticultural manager of the Strybing Arboretum in Golden Gate Park, is one of the best people to familiarize you with some native plants you can place into your garden, ones that will enable you to see a host of “artistically” arrayed critters like this Pale Swallowtail sipping coyote mint nectar. (image from Las Pilitas Nursery website). Don is well-known for giving classes at the Arboretum and other venues, usually on the planting of gardens with natives and non-natives in order to attract wildlife.



## DONATIONS TO OUR NON-PROFIT TAX FREE

If you wish to help maintain & refurbish the displays in the Visitor Center, fund the nature programs & the bulletin, not to mention help us buy garden tools, you can now get a tax break on your donations & membership dues. Also look for a small donations jar on a special table in the Visitor Center at program time. Thank you for your support.

## DRAIN DIPS ON TRAIL—FOR RAIN?

My friend **Yvonne Malloy** came again and joined **me**, (**Joseph Piro**) **Hal Jorgensen** and **Jim Pommier** on this month’s Trail Day. Hal said we were going to head up the Hazelnut Trail behind the Visitor’s Center and work on some rain dips and fix some sections of trail where run-off had carved a channel down the center of the trail. So we gathered up some tools — shovel, McLeod, rake, etc. -- and headed out under a cloudy sky. (photo of a determined and tough **Hal** by **Raul Ortega**) (continued on p. 4)



## ERRATA

What’s in a name?—well, hopefully the correct letters—however, Ranger **David Vasquez’s** name has no “de” in it and Native Plant worker, **Istvan Puski’s** name is not “Ivan” as appeared in the May—June bulletin. Sorry folks, and especially to David and Istvan. And one of our Visitor Center volunteers, **Paula Martin** was inadvertently not named as one of the wild partiers at the barbeque.

## PLANT OF JULY-AUGUST—POISON OAK

My solo sojourn at to what my sister and I called “Deer Creek” turned out a bit different from what I had planned. In Southern California any trickle of water that draws wildlife is a real prize, a change from the dusty dries of summer and fall, so on this Spring day I was drawn like a damselfly to a gnat, to the top of a chaparral covered hill above the stream.

I found an animal path in the shrubby growth, & since I was aware even at this tender age, how to recognize **poison oak**, *Toxicodendron pubescens*, I made my way slowly & carefully downward, brushing against harmless *Artemesia*, etc. while the 3 leafed threat loomed on the opposite side. (photo is from [www.emeraldmagic.com](http://www.emeraldmagic.com))



As I reached the bottom, the thrill of the fresh stream of water was a natural conduit to follow, until I realized I was feeling a little too alone. Backtracking slowly, I looked for the entry to the animal trail, which was nowhere to be seen. Feeling trapped in my first rather long, lonely adventure, I started to panic; I knew I had to get out, and the only way was through the thick “toxic” brush. Giving in to the confusing maze of tough growth, I pushed my way upward in a climb of surrender, as “poison” twigs raked my legs in raw stripes below my capris.

Since those memorable days when I experienced a ghastly itching, dripping set of dreadful lesions from my adventure, I have learned to declare a truce—I behave with respect towards poison oak, and in turn am rewarded with appreciation for the new, pretty leaves, the lovely little white blossoms and later the artistic, small, dry pumpkin shaped fruits, and something we all love, the beauty of the red leaves as the dry season sears our flora. Especially, I marvel at the flurry of **insects** that besets the blossoms; unfortunately I must say that the best feeding frenzy of bugs on *Toxicodendron* I saw was at Edgewood Park, one of our San Mateo County “neighbors”. (Drawing of poison oak fruit Britton & Brown, 1913)



Insects, deer, and all the animals of our chaparral have to be immune to its allergens that cause the suffering in *Homo sapiens*. In fact poison oak is listed as the # 3 favorite shrubby browse for wildlife in the USA: **Wrentits** & many other birds feed on the dry fruits, & undoubtedly the **insects** that the flowers draw. Yet, to us every part of this plant, except for the pollen produces an allergen that causes our terrible reaction. A sign that says “Stay on the Trail” certainly has more than one implied cautionary, as most of us have learned.

## A LUCKY FEATHER DAY FOR JUDY SPITLER!

On one fine morning in May, the 25th, **Judy** told me that she observed lots of good feathered “stuff”. Here is what she saw & heard: Yea!, an **Olive-Sided Flycatcher**, (©2008 **John Muir Laws** sketch, used with permission.) a bird that **Jim Mackey** and other birdwatchers couldn’t find or hear in the Park last year. (song sounds like: “Quick three beers”) so **Judy** hopes this one will stay around this year to breed. Then she saw



a couple of **Yellow Warblers** who were “singing and showing off”. She saw a **Townsend’s warbler**, a very late showing this season, **Black-headed Grosbeaks**, **Pacific Slope Flycatchers**, **Swainson’s Thrushes** (photo-Jack Bartholmai) “everywhere”, singing in their plaintive



notes, families of **Chestnut-backed Chickadees**, and the even- smaller **Bushtits** everywhere. In addition, flitting among the foliage were the **Orange-crowned Warblers** that **Judy** had seen since **March**, & who had full sized young in their families. Her first baby **quail** of the year were frisking in the grass & too well camouflaged to count. Then, on the Valley View, she saw our **California Thrasher**, (©2008 **John Muir Laws**, used with permission.) with its elegant down-curved beak. “Really fun—I know they breed in the Park, but I hardly



ever see them.” (Info & sketches on other birds in “**Shirley Drye’s**” reorganized and

refurbished library.) For **Jack Law’s** book with sketches, check out our Trailside Store.)

## PHILIP POSKI, POMMIER, etc, PUNISH POISON OAK

I must admit that I was shocked when I heard that our native plant group spent their July day cutting the lush **native plant** that is loved by so many—wild ones, that is—but they did—**Jim Mackey** also joining in the pruning on the E. Hazelnut in order to help the runners that *may* use the trail during an event. Most of the work was done with a scythe-like hand trimmer.

## A NATURALIST'S PERSPECTIVE

By Jim Mackey

July – Aug. 2008

**Chickadees at work.** Did you ever see a chickadee that did not appear to be busy? This spring I watched a pair of **Chestnut-backed Chickadees** (photo by Greg Gillson) that were especially busy, at rearing their young. Their nest was discovered by **Ray Trabucco**; it was behind a teardrop-shaped opening, about three feet above the ground, in the trunk of a **willow**.

(The tree is near the southern-most table in the **Trout Farm Picnic Area**.) At 10 a.m. on May 6 I had just taken a position 10 feet from the nest, camera in hand, when a chickadee arrived, with an **insect** in its beak, and darted into the hole. About 30 seconds later its mate appeared, also with an insect in its beak. This bird perched near the hole and called, “chick-a-dee”. Immediately the first bird appeared at the hole with a large white **fecal sac** in its beak and flew away. Its mate then darted into the hole. This pair must have made more than one visit per minute until 10:45, when I left. (A **Steller's jay** had flown silently nearby and I was afraid that my presence might alert it to the presence of the nest.)

**Joel Welty**, in “The Life of Birds”, states that **altricial** species (like chickadees), in contrast to **precocial** ones (like quail), “... are born stupid and sluggish, but hurry through the vulnerable period of infancy by eating and growing at a furious tempo.” Chickadees eat seeds and insects that they glean from bark and foliage. And it is amazing how much food they can collect during all of the hours of daylight, to feed some six nestlings during about two weeks before they fledge. Then for many days after that you may see the busy family of eight chickadees flitting through the trees, with the juveniles begging by gaping their beaks and fluttering their wings whenever they spot a parent with food. So by the time that the adults' parental instincts have waned the young birds will have learned how to find food. This suggests a happy ending to the breeding season.

Sorry. Next spring there probably will be only one pair of chickadees, again, in that same territory; & they are likely to be this year's adults, which can live for several years. (photo of Chickadee & bugs by **James Mackey**)

**So the high reproductive rates** that we witness throughout the animal kingdom, when viewed against the relative stability of populations, reveal stunningly high rates of mortality. Welty (ibid) mentions that a carp may lay four million eggs

a year; a **tapeworm**, 120,000 eggs a day, and two **American Robins**, producing two broods of four young each per year – assuming no mortality and that each descendant lives 10 years and reproduces at the same rate –

would produce 19,500,000 robins in 10 years! But – good news – higher reproductive and mortality rates are correlated with higher rates of evolution, so

lower probabilities of extinction! (photo --robin eggs by Denis Lepage)



**Poor Jim's Almanac.** After a very poor spring for butterflies, hope for a resurgence this summer; look for **Lorquin's admirals**. In early August watch along



the Weiler Ranch Rd. & the Valley View for **hatchling fence lizards**. (Las Pilitas w.s. photo of Lorquin's Admiral)

## POMMIER, Hal, & PIRO FACE FLYING BRUSH

It was just me, **Hal Jorgenson** and **Jim Pommier** for this month's June 14th Trail Day. We headed up the Hazelnut Trail behind the Visitor's Center and continued both-sides-of-the-trail brush-cutting where we left off last month, working our way further down the hill. Hal took a blade cutter, I took a **string trimmer**, and Jim helped clean up the mountains of stuff we cut with a **rake** and **pitchfork**. I also took a quick pass along both sides of the short little Plaskon Nature Trail with my trimmer.

~**Joseph Piro**

## FACTOID AND MORE

“Increasing the carbon dioxide in an intact forest ecosystem is like **putting poison oak on steroids**: Not only does its growth rate and girth go crazy, it also produces a mega-dose of the allergen that makes people itch.”, this according to **Audubon** magazine, May-June 2008. And most of us can guess why this may happen, right?—the present human activity, especially the using of our Earth's stored carbon in the form of gas, oil, and coal. Let's hope they find a better treatment than calamine lotion for this pest—and speaking of the unwanted, more CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere increases the growth rate of many of the fastest growing weeds and invasives. (photo of SPVP Park poison oak leaves from photo by **Raul Ortega**)



**ON THE TRAIL** (continued)

On the afternoon of May 13th, at about 2pm, **Katie Antista** saw the smallest **new born deer** she had ever seen; it was on the east side of the native sun garden, on the trail behind the Visitor Center. (fawn from "Tom Bread Network" coloring page)



Ranger **David Vasquez** saw a **Great Blue Heron** near the horseshoe pits on about May 20th. Many of us know by now that they love to hunt **gophers**—who wants fish every day? (Heron photo from Janet Ringuette "limited use only")



[Lady bugs seen again on hot Fri. Je 20]

**VINCA, IVY, VENGEANCE**

Three men: **Istvan Puski, Jim Mackey, Jim Pommier**—each knew the task they faced—loosening the tenacious grip of the 2 "tough guys": **vinca**, also known deceptively by the sweet name of **periwinkle**, and **English ivy**, whose name was foolishly used for certain institutions of higher learning. The truth is they are guilty intrusives—vinca roots grip the natives' soil like a pit bulls closing their jaws onto the innocents. Ivy grows around & into the bark of a tree like a patient but persistent anaconda.

Oh, how we love our shady Trout Farm Trail where it joins the enchanting Brooks Creek pathway! What a daunting job—to clear this occupied zone near the old stone wall & give the natives a chance to return. But our loyal workers had their weapons—the muscles & tendons of their hands gripped & pulled the stems of this renegade **vinca** from the soil. Then came the final assault, as they slashed into the long body of the **ivy**, cutting its lifeline at the bottom of the redwood trees. Our team knew that these thrusts would cut the arteries of the "snake" of stems and leaves, and that with this final blow the detested "creature" would perish; all that was left was to pull down the limp remains.

There is always another cause, another enemy, another battle ground, but we need recruits, and in each fight you have a chance to be part of the winning troops! You missed May, 2008, but come to the Visitor Center **at nine in the morning of any third Saturday of any month**, and you can help make a difference. (Boyd Nursery Co. photo of Vinca)



(Boyd Nursery Co. photo of Vinca)

**JULY-AUGUST CALENDAR**

- JULY GENERAL MEETING**  
Wednesday, July 9.....7pm
  - JULY TRAIL DAY**  
Saturday, July 12.....8am
  - JULY NATIVE PLANT DAY**  
Saturday, July 19.....9am
  - DON MAHONEY'S BUTTERFLY GARDEN**  
Saturday, July 19.....8pm
  - AUGUST TRAIL DAY**  
Saturday, August 9.....8am
  - AUGUST GENERAL MEETING**  
Wednesday, August 13..... 7pm
  - AUGUST NATIVE PLANT DAY**  
Saturday, August 16.....9am
- For all events, meet at the visitor center.  
For coming events see article on page 1.*

**SATURDAY IN THE PARK,  
I THINK IT WAS THE...31st of MAY**

When you have people of all ages & volunteers **Hulda Williams, Ray Trabucco, Katie Antista, Jim Pommier, Raul Ortega, Sara Shaw, Mila and Adrian Stroganoff, Isabel Ebert & Steve Robinson, & Robbin Mackey** together—such an assemblage of the "Friends of San Pedro Valley Park"—tripping along after a man in a slightly-used brown hat, you can bet they are following our



**Aldo Leopold, Jim Mackey**, enjoying the captive **fence lizard**, the **octopus stinkhorn fungi**, a ground nest with **Bumble Bees**, & a recently occupied nesting hole. (photo by Raul Ortega)

*(Drain Dips on Trail—For Rain?—continued)*

We built a few new dips not too far up the hillside and greatly improved a badly channeled stretch of trail—maybe the 2nd or 3rd switchback up — by gently cutting back the uphill bank and distributing the dirt onto the trail and digging a new inside drainage channel along the entire length. It was a lot of dirt work, but it will all be long-lasting & help keep the trail in good shape.

~Joseph



**Questions or letters to the editor?** New email: carolynpankow@comcast.net, or Carolyn Pankow 600 Oddstad Blvd: Pacifica, CA 94044. Writer of this newsletter is your editor, unless otherwise indicated.

**The Volunteers:**

**Carolyn Pankow**, President; **Raul Ortega**, Vice President **Shirley Drye**, Secretary; **Kate Antista**, (interim) Treasurer; **Jean Leonard, Jim Mackey, & Hal Jorgensen**, members at large; **Jean Leonard**, visitor center; **Jim Pommier**, alien plant removal; **Hal Jorgensen**, Trails; **Kate Antista**, Membership chair, **Carolyn Pankow**, Program chair; Trailside store (**OPEN**).