

the FRIENDS of SAN PEDRO VALLEY PARK

VOLUNTEERS ARE GRIEVED at the LOSS of our PHOTOGRAPHER & FRIEND, RAUL ORTEGA

At least 15 years ago now, a quiet man, Raul, stepped into one of our meetings, sitting at the back of the group, listening silently. After patiently sitting through several sessions, he entered into the discussions. And years later, **Raul Ortega**, agreed to be our next president. We chose him because he never seemed to "take sides", was calm, fair, and was willing to hear each person's point of view.



Up until his last meeting, Raul, our vice president, was enthusiastically involved in all the issues, participating in our planning for a gift for the Park, the grant for a new digital camera, and the social events, etc.

For his first "Friends" barbecue he volunteered to bring a homemade chile, and never felt put upon as we pleaded with him to cook again—hmm—he did finally tell us that one of his daughters was the chef.

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WILL the OWLS BE OUT on OCT. 18th?

Undoubtedly they will be coursing the night skies, but we "cave dwellers" will probably stay in, and I hope you will be one of us in the Park's Visitor Center watching that lover of predatory birds, **Craig Nikitas**, show his slides on these silent killers in the near darkness of our room. Craig gave us the exciting& popular "Hawks" program last year.

This year Nikitas, who has long worked banding daytime predators for the Golden Gate Raptor Observatory will present his photos and experiences with **Owls**. Craig has also volunteered at San Francisco's Randall Museum to help care for captive hawks, owls and ravens. (photo of Saw Whet Owl by **Jim Weaver**. These owls are inhabitants of SPVP)

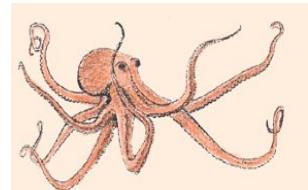
This man who is so enchanted with predatory birds has been eyeing them since he was 7 years old, procuring a set of binoculars & a bird guide while still in elementary school.



Since the program is scheduled for **Saturday, October 18**, you will find this a great way to get in the Halloween spirit. I hope to see you at **8pm**. in the near darkness of our Vis. Cntr.

UNDER COASTAL WATERS with MIKE BOOM

Mike Boom will entertain you with a magical marine program on **Saturday, September 13 at 8pm** in our V.C.



The fertile brown kelp and green and blue water of the California Coast hold a plethora of salt water denizens, creatures, who represent more main groups of animals (phyla and classes) than you will ever find on land. These coastal waters will be the focus of Mike's talk and video. (California Octopus is Crystal Cove Conservancy photo).

Mr. Boom has been scuba diving in the Earth's ocean waters for 15 years, and has been engaged in underwater photography, winning numerous competitions at underwater film festivals around the world. He's done professional video work for AT&T and ARC Associates, and has written about underwater video for Scuba Diving magazine. He just finished a four-month stint as the underwater video pro on the live-aboard dive boat Nai'a in Fiji. You can see some of his video shorts at www.laughingeel.com.

ON THE TRAIL-Sightings

Katie Antista found a "new" creature, the **Ceanothus Cecropia moth** by our horseshoe pits. Lucky for the rest of us, **Jim Mackey** and **Katie** have placed 2 specimens of this grand and beautiful moth with its 4 in. wingspan, on display in the Visitor Center. One is a male from Jim's old state of Ohio, the other a female from our own exceptional park. Jim's photo of the Park's moth is shown above. The larval feeding stage of this moth loves our **blue Ceanothus** as well as our **coffeeberry & willows**.



"On the Trail" cont'd on p. 4)

SUMMER BARBECUE ON SEPT. 13 AT NOON

On Saturday trail days we again honor our trusty and often dusty trail workers. Maybe we'll get some new folks on the trail or at the barbecue? We'd love to get to know more of our members who also enjoy our Park.



We'll supply hot dogs and hamburgers, you bring a salad or dessert. OK? For further info call **Jean Leonard** at 359-7485.

Our bulletin appears in color in the VC display case.

AVIAN DISCOVERIES WITH JACK

After giving up on a noisy Walnut Grove replete with picnickers, and one **robin** (photo-Coffee Creek Watershed Preserve) determined to find a meal despite the noise, I walked over to the horse shoe clearing past the bridge over San Pedro Creek. There I stopped to watch with my binoculars, a family of **California Quail** feeding in the dry, cut grass. On the lawn was a cock, a hen and nine little baby quail, or chicks. In the trees were two more males keeping an eye and ear out for trouble. The baby quail seemed to react to their mother's movement and she, I suppose, was in turn reacting to the cocks' calls. "Soon", I thought, "the chicks will learn the calls for themselves." If they live long enough.

I continued onto Weiler Road and turned west on the trail back toward my car, which was parked in St. Peter's parking lot. Just past the big **eucalyptus** trees that overhang the trail I heard loud alarm calls in the **pine trees** up the hill. I knew that something wasn't right with the local birds and figured it might be a cat or a hawk in the area. Following the loud cries, I saw some **robins** mobbing a **large hawk** in a pine tree. The hawk jumped from limb to limb and seemed to be wagging its tail in reaction to the aggressive swoops of the robins. I wondered if the hawk was a **Cooper's or a Sharp Shinned Hawk** as I scrutinized him with my binoculars. "Probably a Coopers", I thought, as there was no sign of a squared tail. I was confused by the bright reddish chest of this hawk, whose head looked more like



that of an eagle. Eventually, the hawk flew away to perch on the top of a **cypress tree** (thanks Heather Ellison-SF Arbor.) where it was more easily observed and, which I noticed, caused the robins to have to fly at the hawk without benefit of foliage. Though exposed now to the hawk, they continued their harassment with much vigor but with little success. As I wandered onward I came upon a couple who were also aware of this avian drama. The man, who was tall & lean & had better eyesight than I, commented that it was a **Red Shouldered Hawk**. I was immediately convinced the man was right. "So this is the legendary Red shouldered Hawk **Ray Trabucco** described to me", I marveled. Sure enough, about that time the hawk took flight and displayed the red shoulder and the bright white feathers against its dark back. This also explained its very rich, red chest and a size larger than either a Cooper's or a Sharp-shinned Hawk. I looked at

photo by Tom Hince



the man and the lady as they disappeared and thought to myself, "I wonder if he knows he just gave me a 'random act of kindness' " in identifying this magnificent hawk, a bird I shall not forget. **Jack Dodson**

*Out of the peak's black angularity of shadow,
Riding the last tumultuous avalanche of
Light above pines and the guttural gorge,
The hawk comes.*

*His wing
Scythes down another day, his motion
Is that of the honed steel edge, we hear
The crashless fall of stalks of time*



(photo by Trevor Gregg)

From "Evening Hawk" by **Robert Penn Warren**"

CUT, CLEAR and CLEANUP QUARTET

It was *Ed Decker*, *Jim Pommier*, *Alex Dezfouli* and *me* at this month's July 12 Trail Day. Without **Hal's** expert guidance, we were a bit unsure what to tackle. Around 8:30 Ed called **Ranger Doug**, who said he'd be in shortly, so in the mean time I trimmed branches that were hanging over the little deck over the creek on the back patio and swept everything. By 9 we still hadn't heard anything, so I suggested we get a blade cutter and hike up Brooks Falls and cut back stuff. I ran the cutter -- which worked wonderfully -- and the others did cleanup. We got a good stretch of trail from just outside of the **eucalyptus** forest to about half-way up to the bridge cleared on both sides -- a lot of **manzanita** branches, small bushes & grasses cut back. It should be in good shape for a while again. ~**Joseph Piro**

FACIÖID AND MORE

New research finds that the **water strider's** legs are covered with layers of microscopic hairs that trap tiny air bubbles, allowing the insect to simply float. Previously scientists had thought that surface tension created by the attraction of water molecules to each other on the top of the water was the total answer to the puzzle (of the "Jesus Christ bug"), but how could it have explained the ability of the strider to stay afloat carrying 15 times its own weight, and its expertise at staying afloat in rough water and rain storms? The "microsetae" hairs are about 1/30 the diameter of a human hair. (drawing from cleanwater.uwex.edu)



To read the whole story, google "Walking on Water: Insects Secret Revealed". To see the bugs striding away, seek out calmer spots on the creek, like the water beneath the Weiler Ranch Rd. bridge.

A NATURALIST'S PERSPECTIVE

by Jim Mackey

Should we mow the “weeds”? It has appeared to me that this last winter and spring were very poor for **butterflies**. Perhaps it has been too cold and dry for them. However on July 23 it was sunny and warm so I took my camera and hoped to find some butterflies. I decided to try the Trout Farm road because it has been a good site for butterflies, and **dragonflies**, in past years. But as I headed south from the picnic grounds I was startled to see that both sides of the road were close-shaven. I admired how low and even the cut was, especially where it followed the contours in and out of the ditch on one side. The road looked well-tended & park-like, but there were no stands of **yarrow, poison hemlock, thistles, stinging nettles nor wild radishes** to examine, so I reached the Water District's boundary line in record time, without having seen a single butterfly. (wild radish photo by Stephen Lea)



What is a weed? A standard definition is that it is a plant that is growing where it is not wanted, e.g. a rose in a field of wheat or a stalk of wheat in a rose garden. However most plants that pop up where they are not wanted share characteristics, such as being annual and producing a prodigious amount of highly dispersible seeds, that equip them to be first to colonize recently disturbed habitats. Ecologists refer to these kinds of plants as **pioneer species**. In the absence of a disturbance, such as fire, flood, grazing, or mowing, such plants are soon succeeded by larger, longer-lived plants such as shrubs and trees (depending on the climate and topography).

The great productivity of flowers and seeds by pioneer (weedy) plants makes them valuable components of the habitats of seed-eating birds and mammals (such as **quail** & **chipmunks**) (Merriams Chipmunk photo copyright Don Roberson, used with permission) as well as butterflies. Our thistles and



wild radishes are sources of nectar for our butterflies and **bees** throughout their long period of blooming, from spring through September.

So the Trout Farm Trail runs through a canyon that is sheltered from on- and off-shore winds. It features a year-around stream! And it sports a remarkable diversity of plant communities: including common northern coastal scrub, mesic northern coastal scrub, maritime chaparral (after **Mike Vasey**), riparian woodland, oak woodland, & groves of **eucalyptus, pines & Douglas fir**. And please include the patches of pioneer weeds along the trail as part of the mosaic of vegetation, all of which translates into a great diversity of wildlife.

Epilogue. I appreciate the complex of factors that must be considered in deciding when and where to mow in our Park. These include fire hazards, water drainage in ditches, and esthetics. Did the trail look better after the mowing? Perhaps one person's weeds are another's wildflowers.



Poor Jim's Almanac. Watch for **Lorquin's admirals, anise swallowtails, skippers** (permission granted by Ron Wolf for his copyrighted photo of Woodland Skipper), **blues** and **bumblebees** on **asters, trefoil** (yellow),

thistles and poison hemlock along the Weiler Ranch Road throughout September.

(anonymous internet photo of trefoil)



No More Rollin' on the Euc Fruit

A cool, grey, misty fog greeted **me, Hal Jorgenson, Ed Decker and Jim Pommier** on this month's Trail Day. After our usual catching up over donuts and coffee in the Visitor's Center, we headed out for the am work, raking the trail going through the **eucalyptus** forests on both ends of the Valley View Trail. We started on the far end first, pushing huge amounts of leaves and "ball bearing" "acorns" off the trail and leaving a well-groomed surface behind us. We then headed back & went up the trail through the trees near the start of Weiler, where we did the same. It's pretty simple work, but it makes our trails a little safer & a lot more beautiful & enjoyable. ~**Joseph**

NOBODY DOES IT BETTER

than our plant crew: **Istvan Pushki, Sara Shaw, Boris, Jim Mackey & Jim Pommier**. Almost like a house-cleaning blitz, our team took tons of dirty devils out: **euc sprouts, cotoneaster, vinca & English ivy**. The Eucs were growing on the sub-Montara Mt. trail area, including the hill opposite the kiosk; & unlike tidying up one's domicile, you cannot just vacuum them away—especially because the trees pop up out of the sawed off trunks.

Jim Pommier gave our **Black-tailed Deer** credit for doing a good deal of pruning on the cotoneaster, but no denizen of our scrub liked the English ivy or the vinca that has intruded into our Park, especially into the old foundation on the Trout Farm—they will always be there to steal the land from native plants unless we get more people out there. Loppers, Pulaski, pruning shears and determination are all you need; we supply the tools!

On the August native plant day **Sara Shaw & Jim Pommier** wrenched out the Euc. Sprouts and Pampas Grass growing near the first bench on the Montara Mt. Trail.

ON THE TRAIL (*continued*)

The sunny Native Plant Garden trail should have plenty of treats for you in early September. In mid August **Catherine Antista**, who nurses this garden, and **Jim Pommier**, who prunes it, probably reveled at the beauty of the flowers in bloom: the rich orange of the **sticky monkey**; the saturated yellow of the majestic **goldenrod**, the bright white of the flat topped **yarrow**, a thick, fluffy collection of pink-violet **coyote mint**, with its fragrant leaves, a few brown-headed **rosillas** (photo courtesy Mike Vasey) with dainty ray-flower petals, the white dryness of **pearly everlasting**s. Also in mid Aug. she saw some clusters of muted dark blue **Mahonia** berries (common name—**barberry**) on the side of the path by the Visitor Center, that are usually especially abundant on Montara Mt. Do not miss the pear-shaped fruit of our small but wide tree, the **California Buckeye**, which can be found in the wild in San Bruno Mt. Park, etc. No, they are not edible. (Mahonia photo courtesy of **Mark Laurence**, is of species related to ours)



Well, it's nice to find the lovely coyote mint, but how about a **Coyote**, *Canis latrans*? **Ray Trabucco** and **Fred Loughlin** were ambling along the Weiler Ranch Rd, a few yards this side of the last bench before the bridge, when they saw our

howling canine walking along the field near the creek. (photo of the prowling coyote by **Tom O'Neil**)

"He" then turned towards the throughway, crossing over the road at the point of a small culvert & walked up the hill.

Ray said that the coyote had an extremely healthy looking coat. Must be lots of plump **rodents** and **rabbits** in his territory.



Katie Antista found fresh berry scats of a **grey fox**, and just ahead on the Trout Farm/Brooks Falls loop, she sighted the producer, just a few yards away. "He" turned to look at her twice as he ambled away. It was Thurs, Aug. 14—12pm. (photo Maryland Dept. of Resources)



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.

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER CALENDAR

SEPTEMBER GENERAL MEETING

Wednesday, September 10.....7pm

SEPTEMBER TRAIL DAY

Saturday, September 13.....8am

BARBEQUE

Saturday, September 13.....12noon

MIKE BOOM'S SEALIFE of the SHALLOWS

Saturday, September 13.....8pm

NATIVE PLANT DAY

Saturday, September 20.....9am

OCTOBER GENERAL MEETING

Wednesday, October 8.....7pm

OCTOBER TRAIL DAY

Saturday, October 11.....8am

OCTOBER NATIVE PLANT DAY

Saturday, October 18.....9am

CRAIG NIKITAS' OWLS

Saturday, October 18.....8pm

For all events, meet at the visitor center.

(Raul, continued)

I found Raul to be intriguing—he had a unique view of the world and he loved to spar. You had to be on your toes with Raul when he started talking about the classic Greek Myths, Shakespeare, & politics, but especially the former. Some people, like **Valerie Patton**, were closer to him & I envy them. Raul seemed to value his coffee clatches and dinners with Valerie so much; both had and have a sparkling intelligence, with a little edge to their wit. Only lately, as we became closer and as technology improved, did I experience the generosity of Raul as he sent me photos for our bulletin.

Thoughts from others: **Shirley Drye** of the Pacifica Historical Society told me that **Raul** was a descendent of one of the first Europeans to scout S.F. Bay. **Ranger Jonel Ishida** and **Jean Leonard** said that they always respected him for his loyalty and work in keeping the Visitor Center open. **Hal Jorgensen** had a very good opinion of Raul and always enjoyed his company. Raul, we all miss you very much.

NEWS BRIEFS

Rangers Vasquez, Heisinger, Ishida are stoked with the new plans and work going on in our Park:

1. Reconstruction of patio observation area
2. New skylights in Visitor Center solarium
3. New drinking fountains
4. Repaving of bumpy back walkway to VC
5. New raccoon-proof garbage cans—etc.

The Volunteers:

Carolyn Pankow, President; **Open**: Vice President **Shirley Drye**, Secretary; **Diane Poston**, 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**).