

# the FRIENDS of SAN PEDRO VALLEY PARK

## How Does Your Garden Grow??

Not just with vigorous native plants, no, now it's sprouting large signage, new easy to read labels, courtesy of **Ray Trabucco & Katie Antista**. The Sun garden has signs on most of its perennials like **flowering currant** and **ocean spray**. Many small placards are already out for some of the annuals, those being crafted on Ms. Antista's computer. Now numerous visitors are out there reading and certainly learning the names of our beautiful native plants.

## "SIDEWALK ASTRONOMER", JOHN DOBSON, TO PRESENT "THE UNIVERSE ABOVE S.F."

The famous **John Dobson** will speak at our Visitor Center on our solar system and the rest of the universe on **Saturday, May 26 at 8pm**. Mr. Dobson will bring some telescopes in case there is any clearing of the skies.

In 1943 Dobson graduated from Berkeley with a degree in chemistry. Soon thereafter he became a member of a monastery of the Ramakrishna order, a "career" which was to hold him for 23 years. Due to his evolving interest in astronomy, he surreptitiously built some of his first telescopes in the monastery, grinding the lens of one under water to avoid noise and thus discovery.

Years later he was finally thrown out for having too many hours AWOL. His "superiors" couldn't believe that helping others build his cleverly designed telescopes and introducing citizens of Sacramento to the wonders of space was all that he was doing. He "pulled up shop" and moved to San Francisco, where at the corner of Broderick & Jackson he taught thousands how to interpret astronomical images. (above-Dobsonian telescope)



Eventually he was hired by the Jewish Community Center and the California Academy of Sciences to teach classes in telescope making and astronomy. Finally he and some of his many students decided in 1968 to form the "Sidewalk Astronomers", helping San Franciscans and later those in other cities and even in National Parks interpret the space objects they were shown.



Please join us in learning from and celebrating this charismatic man with original ideas and a great deal of knowledge of our thrilling universe.



## JUNE CHILDREN'S "INSECT" PROGRAM

On **Saturday, June 30, at 1pm**, bring the family to see -LIVE- some exotic & some native arthropods. **Norm Gershenz**, the co-founder of the **Insect Discovery Lab** in S.F. and the presenter, says that the boys and girls will have a chance to touch most of the critters.. One of the 6-leggers will be the **Australian Walking Stick** (rt), another the harmless, but imposingly named, **Whip Scorpion** (above). We hope to see you & your children at the Visitor Center.



## FLIGHT IN BIRDS—RIDLEY and MCKENNA

On **Saturday, May 5 at 8pm**, **Allan Ridley & Helen McKenna** will present a fascinating program, exploring the anatomy of flight—how can birds lift bones and flesh on high? How do the acrobatic **Ravens** play in the breezes? How do **Kites** and **Hummingbirds** hover and **hawks** soar? What's the take-off strategy for different species of birds? Come with questions & curiosity. And don't forget their **follow-up hike on May 19 at 8:30am**, an intriguing addition.



Ridley & McKenna are known for their bird-watching walks at GG Park's Strybing Arboretum and for their winter trips to a densely avian part of the Pacific flyway, the flooded parts of the Sacramento Valley. They are also leaders of many world bird-watching tours to places as far away as New Zealand, Ecuador, & Madagascar.

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## JIM STEELE BIRD SONG HIKE

With a song in their heart—no, male birds do not sing just for the joy of it, but I can't help but feel that as they sing to warn off other males, they are saying "My voice and my love of life and my home are greater than yours; listen to my aria."

Join **Jim Steele** at **8am on Saturday May 12**, to hear the melodies of competing birds of many species—this is one time I will haul myself out of bed early, because Mr. Steele specializes in bird songs and calls; he has also taught classes in this "discipline". Bird hike leader, **Jim Mackey**, feels that he too always learns something from Steele, and enjoys his buoyant sense of humor. Jim Steele is the director of the San Francisco State Field Campus near Yuba Pass in the Sierras, & was a prize student of **Luis Baptista**, the late renowned master of bird song.



### PLANT OF THE MONTH

The eucalyptus was gone, but as I filled soil in over the stump, I was now standing on a “lost” corner of my yard where I had rarely tread. It was soon afterward, in the spring, that I spied my first **Rubber Boa** in that forgotten alcove, though it quickly made its sinuous exit. I would come to that “lost” corner many times that year and luckily so, as one day I noticed a mystery plant pushing through the nooks and crannies of the fence, a plant with soft verdant leaves and oval green fruit reminiscent of a miniature plum. I took a sample to my department chairman, **Allan Hummel**, who had helped me before in identifying neighborhood plants for a class “field trip”.

The words spilled out of his mouth right away—”**osoberry**”, *Oemleria cerasiformis*, a member of the Rosaceae, & therefore a plant related to the **wild plum**, the **wild rose**, & other shrubs, trees & herbs of the rose family—a plant to investigate.

I wish I could tell you that the ripe, dark-purple fruit of this plant is delicious, but it isn’t and covers the pit with only a scant bit of flesh, however it is preferred by many small mammals. **Dave Schooley** of San Bruno Mountain Watch insists that this bitter-sweet offering was a favorite of the **Grizzly Bear**—as some of you know “oso” is Spanish for “bear”.

Like the **leatherwood** and several other plants, the blossoms burst forth before the leaves, and several sources said that these floral sprays have the delightful odor of cat urine, whereas the leaves have a pleasant aroma of freshly crushed cucumber. Only one **butterfly** that I found, the **Brown Elfin**, uses the flower nectar; is this the equivalent of some people’s preference for Limburger cheese? (Ron Hemberger photo)

I know you can hardly wait to smell the flowers, and yes, I should have had osoberry in the Mar./Ap. bulletin, but circle the date “Mar. 1” on the 2008 extension of your calendar, & check out more photos. When the time comes wander halfway up the Brooks Creek trail. Just before the bridge—on your right—you can get your memorable whiff of tomatc...(osoberry spray from “Doug’s”; osoberry fruit Montara Mt. w.s.)



### POWERFUL POMMIER PLUNDERS PESTS

**Jim Pommier**, with his well-seasoned muscles, has probably uprooted more SPVP invasive plants, those non-native herbs & woody plants that spread far & wide once gaining a foothold, than any other individual. But his power also extends to his knowledge of just which plants he has some chance of controlling & where the best spot is to strike next. In March Jim dispatched a patch of **cotoneasters**, a patch of **acacias** and some small **pampas** grass on the Valley View. Then, not having done enough, he trimmed the native gardens.



Our usual native plant people, Jim P. and Jim Mackey, have to opt out of restoration on April plant day, as Pommier is recuperating after doing some fancy acrobatics, & J. Mackey is leading an am. bird hike. (Above is Carl Farmer photo of cotoneaster.)

### CONSCIENTIOUS CREW

**Hal Jorgensen, Joseph Piro, Art Armstrong, and Jim Pommier** cleaned up eucalyptus droppings, including stems, leaves, pods and bark, between the west entrance of the Valley View trail and the Weiler Ranch Rd. It’s not that the trees behave badly here and better in Australia, but that there just isn’t the correct complement of bacteria and other agents of decay that work full time on their litter, and in addition the bark of the euc. sloughs off continuously.

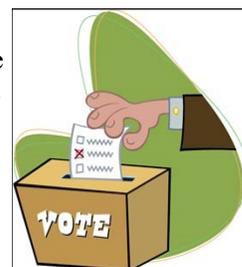


They hadn’t planned on taking a vacation on April 14th, but after finishing their coffee and doughnuts in the Visitor Center at 8:30 it commenced to rain, and our trail group: **Joseph Piro, Art Armstrong, Ed Decker, and Paden Grey**, decided to sweep the patio, and yes, ladies, vacuum the visitor center

### ELECTIONS AT MAY MEETING

It looks like it’s probably going to be President, **Valerie Patten**, Vice President., **Carolyn Pankow**, Secretary, **Shirley Drye**, and Treasurer, **Ed Decker**, as well as a repeat of **Jean Leonard** and **Chris Thatcher** as members-at-large.

However, if you would like to enter a name in nomination come to the May meeting—it wouldn’t hurt us to have a little competition. Otherwise there’s always next April! (cartoon by Mo. Education Commission.)



### FACTOID

If you think someone with 8 legs is following you on the trail, walk a little faster than 2 mi./hr., & you can out-distance our predatory **wolf spiders**, who need their speed to get prey just as much as does the cheetah. If the spider’s stride is 1/2 in & yours is 24in, he’s moving his legs at your equivalent of your \_\_\_mi./hr. (if you could stride that fast)



## A NATURALIST'S PERSPECTIVE

By Jim Mackey

**Global cooling.** The evidence continues to mount that our planet is cooling: On April 21, several **giant trilliums** were still in bloom on the Plaskon Trail (much later than normal), 2. I finally heard a returning **Black-headed Grosbeak** on April 21 (at least a week later than normal); and 3. Because of snow in mid-April, the Cleveland Indians had to play 3 “home games” in the domed stadium at Milwaukee. (Confession. Actually I believe that long-term biological and meteorological data establish that the World is warming, and other data show that some of this is anthropogenic.) [your editor would say that almost all of the present global warming is due to human activity, as graphs dramatically show.] So why do I cite evidence to the contrary? Am I a perverse person? Do I disagree with my fellow native plant enthusiasts in not wanting to remove **for-get-me-nots**, just because they form such beautiful blue clouds around the Trout Farm picnic area or partly because of my perverse nature?



**“Cellular repulsion”** I borrowed this title from the April 21<sup>st</sup> column of the S.F. Chronicle’s “Earthweek” by Steve Newman. In it there is a report of research in Germany that showed that honey bees refuse to return to their hives when mobile phones are placed nearby. Of course honey bees, which are native to Europe, have been decreasing alarmingly across the U.S. for a number of years. This caused me some concern last year when we lost our last 2 **English walnut trees**, because each harbored a hive of **honey bees**. However I can report that we still have an active hive in the thickest **eucalyptus** next to the North Walnut Picnic Area. Meanwhile Ranger Doug Heisinger has planted 7 **California black walnuts** in the South Walnut Area, thus restoring the legitimacy of that name.



**Earth Day.** I enjoyed being joined by a fine group of inquisitive naturalists who ranged in age from about 8 to 93. The former was a bright-eyed girl who was looking for material for a report on **winter wrens**, while the latter was the bright-eyed, inspirational, **Huldah Williams**. We marveled at **octopus stinkhorn fungi** under a picnic table in the Trout Farm area. Another highlight was seeing **Chestnut-backed Chickadees** come & go from a nest-hole on the backside of the **apple tree** near there. (LaBar photo)



**Poor Jim’s Almanac.** I shall be anxiously listening and watching for additional neotropical migrant birds to check in, including **Olive-sided Flycatchers** and **Swainson’s thrushes**. Recently **Jane Turrel** and her fellow veterinarian **Nancy Craig** saw a **fence lizard** that had a pattern of blue diamonds on its back. (Charles R. Peterson photo)

This must have been a breeding male. Fence lizards are especially entertaining during May when males challenge each other with a series of push-ups and court females with a series of more-rapid push-ups. People often extol the beauty of wildflowers in our grasslands during April, but our coastal scrub plants often put on a more colorful show during May and June. Check out the Valley View and Brooks Falls Trails for the purple **coyote mint**, (at right) yellow **lizard-tail** & red **Indian paintbrush**.



## ON THE TRAIL-Sightings

Perhaps the biggest news lately has been the 2 **Grey Foxes** that were hanging around the visitor center area for several days. **Winnie Aldrich** was probably the first to see the fluffy-tailed hunters on March 23. She saw them gliding across the Hazel-nut bridge onto the ties, and then jumping onto the bank with graceful agility. Since that time many have seen the 2 foxes together, & **Ray Trabucco** has taken some great photos. **Judy Spitler**, who released a recovered Grey Fox less than a year ago, felt that one of these could be that male—so perhaps it is a mating pair?



**Laurie Nikitas** spied 2 “serpents” of note on March 19, on the Weiler Ranch Road: a **Western Terrestrial Garter Snake**, “The largest I’ve ever seen or thought possible”, and a moderate-sized (perhaps 3’) **Gopher Snake** with cloudy eyes indicating an “imminent shed”. (photo of W. Terrestrial Garter Snake above by Paul Slichter;)



(On the Trail continued from page 3

Your editor spied a bold & brave **Merriam's chipmunk** on her deck, who for about 10 minutes at a time was busily picking bits of "fleece" nesting materials from the dog's pad and stuffing them in his pouches. The backyard is contiguous with Park and SF watershed land.



**Katie Antista** and **Ray Trabucco**



were delighted to see our **red columbine** (at left) blooming in late March. Katie also noticed the white fairy bells in the rivulet area on the back part of the Weiler Ranch Rd. Ray found a rare fairy bell cluster of 4 flowers.

**Judy Spitler** writes:[After a humdrum morning on Ap. 14]"I was headed back out, when I ran into this sweet little flock in the willows by the bridge between Walnut Grove and the horseshoe pits."

She says that in this group were these **Warblers: Yellow-rumped, Orange-crowned**, several **Wilson's**, 2 **Black-throated Grey** (at right), and one **Hermit**—also **Purple Finches**, **American Goldfinches**, 2 male **Black-headed Grosbeaks!** During



the morning she also saw her first **Warbling Vireos** of the season. On 3/25 she had seen her first **Pacific Coast Flycatcher** (at left) of spring..



"Flight in Birds" (continued from page one)

Allan studied marine biology in Florida and then earned a master's degree in physiology at the University of Oregon, and a PhD in physiology at the University of California, Berkeley. He taught high school students at the small, private "Urban School" in San Francisco for 30 years, designing classes in Marine Biology, Urban Ecology, and Botany, which were approved by UC Berkeley.

Helen McKenna-Ridley, attended UC Berkeley and SF State, graduating with a degree in biology and has a Master's from U. of Oregon. She was science teacher, science department head and assistant principal at George Washington H.S. in SF She then spent 8 yrs as principal of Raoul Walenberg HS in S.F.

### MAY—JUNE CALENDAR

**RIDLEY—MCKENNA—FLIGHT IN BIRDS**

Saturday, May 5.....8pm

**MAY GENERAL MEETING**

Wednesday, May 9.....7pm

**MAY TRAIL DAY**

Saturday, May 12.....8am

**JIM STEELE BIRD SONG HIKE**

Saturday, May 12.....8am

**MAY NATIVE PLANT DAY**

Saturday, May 19.....9am

**RIDLEY—MCKENNA FLIGHT HIKE**

Saturday, May 19.....8:30am

**JOHN DOBSON—SPACE ABOVE SF**

Saturday, May 26.....8pm

**JUNE TRAIL DAY**

Saturday, June 9.....8am

**JUNE GENERAL MEETING**

Wednesday, June 13.....7pm

**JUNE NATIVE PLANT DAY**

Saturday, June 16.....9pm

**GERSHENZ:INSECT DISCOVERY CENTER**

Saturday, June 30.....1pm

### NEWS BRIEFS

**A donation of furniture by an anonymous**

"**Friend of the Park**" is the reason why we have the spiffy corner seats at our Visitor Center. I noticed especially heavy use by parents with little children.

**Rochelle Sterling** and **Jane Turrel** just started

working at the Visitor Center. Trainer, **Jean Leonard** says they were good students. Rochelle is a graphic artist and Jane is a veterinary oncologist.

### THANKS for SPARKING UP the BARBEQUE

**Jean Leonard** feels the barbeque could not have

gone on had it not been for the loyal cook, **Ed Decker** and the energetic **Marissa Shaff**, who together did most of the set up, but we mustn't forget all who came & sparked things up with their conversation, & the appearance of **Nick Ramirez**, the county Head of Volunteers & our own **Huldah Williams**.



**Questions or letters to the editor?** email: carolynpankow@comcast.net, or C. Pankow 600 Oddstad Blvd: Pacifica, CA

**The Volunteers:** **Valerie Patten**, President; **Carolyn Pankow**, V.P.; **Shirley Drye** Secretary; **Ed Decker**, Treasurer; **Christine Thatcher**, & **Jean Leonard**, members at large; **Hal Jorgensen**, Trails; **Katie Antista**, Membership; **Carolyn Pankow**, Programs & Editor; **Mila Stroganoff**, Trailside store; **Jean Leonard**, Visitor Center; **Jim Pommier**, alien plant removal.