

## WILDLIFE ASSOCIATES PRESENT CHIDREN'S PROGRAM: : BAY AREA WILD

On Friday, April 9 at 1pm, Wildlife Associates of Half Moon Bay will offer the kid's program, "Bay Area Wild" to youngsters and their parents and seniors. Featured will be live animals, 2 raptors: the **Great Horned Owl** & the **Red Tailed Hawk**, the native **Grey Fox**, & the **opossum**.



Last year our program, "This Living Earth" was attended by 2 dozen children & quite a few adults, but the animal handlers felt the children were too close to the larger predators, so our scheduled show, with the **African Serwal** was cancelled in favor of the new program. The San Mateo Co. Parks Foundation is sponsoring this presentation.

## TRAIL DAY BARBEQUE & "Earth Day": Sat. Ap. 10 at 12 noon

Call or be called by **Jean Leonard** at 359-7485 for this fun and sumptuous annual event to honor our trail workers. We might get a few extra volunteers, so though we do supply the hot dogs and hamburgers, we need salads and desserts a plenty. As an early celebration of "Earth Day", **Judy Spitler** will lead a bird hike at 9am/ (clip art from Disc. Ed.'s **Mark A. Hicks**)



## TONI CORELLI FLORA OF MONTARA MT. LECTURE, APRIL 23; HIKE, APRIL 24

Notice that the pgm. Is Friday, the 23rd, at 8pm, & that the hike follows on the next day, Sat. morning at 9am.

**Toni Corelli** is probably better versed on the flora of our park than any other individual. She is well known for her checklist of the plants of Montara Mountain, which includes a fabulous variety of 253 plants, partly due to the "pristine nature" of our mountain. There are not only communities of coastal bluff scrub, coastal prairie, northern coast scrub, maritime chaparral and riparian, but also



a high number of endangered, rare and endemic species on the mountain. (photo of one of multicolored forms of the rare **blue bush lupine** from Montara Mt.in SPVP;Photo:-**Mike Vasey**) Toni says that much of this is due to the granitic nature of the soil. In short, we have an exciting flora here and she can bring it to life for you in her lecture on Friday evening & her follow-up hike on Saturday.

( Toni Corelli Flora of Montara Mt. Cont'd on Page 4)

## CRAIG NIKITAS' CROWS, RAVENS, & JAYS

On Saturday, March 20, at 7:30pm, amateur avian specialist, **Craig Nikitas**, will be speaking at our Visitor Center. Some of you may remember Craig's other SPVP programs: "Hawks" and "Owls", so you will undoubtedly be excited about this third program by Mr. Nikitas, which will focus on the remarkable intelligence of the **Corvidae**. Who are these "brainy birds"? Who else but the **Ravens**, **Crows**, and **Jays** of SPVP and the **Magpies**, and **Rooks** of other environments or countries. Besides discussing their "braininess" and antics, Craig will concentrate on the Bay Area species and how to identify them. (photo of Scrub Jay from **Mawlana Faizani's** free desktop wallpapers)



Mr. Nikitas is a long-time volunteer for the Golden Gate Raptor Observatory, studying and banding **hawks** on the dramatic "Hawk Hill" above the Golden Gate. He has also been a speaker at the Randall Museum for the SF Natural History Series and the SF Naturalist Society on these large predatory birds. In his professional life, Craig has a full time job as a senior city planner for San Francisco.



## ON THE TRAIL

On New Year's day **Katie Antista** showed **Christine Thatcher**, who was working loyally at the Visitor Center, that fancy **fungus**, the **earthstar**. There were several in the parking strip area just south of the building. (photo by **Beth Kinsey**)



Also seen in early Jan,— a great batch of the slimy "**witches' butter**" mushrooms on the Plaskon nature trail by Hazelnut trail entry. Thanks, **Catherine Antista**

Trail hiker, "**Michael**" reported in our VC book that he saw a "long blue-belly lizard (**fence lizard**) off the Weiler Ranch Road on Jan. 31. Rather a cold day to see a reptile! (continued on page 4)

## **MONTARA MOUNTAIN MANZANITA** **OUR MARCH-APRIL PLANT**

So restricted in range—found only on Mt. Montara—it's a wonder that this shrub has survived—the manzanita with heart-shaped leaves, *Arctostaphylos montarensis*.



Certainly the hot brush fires in its marine chaparral community take their toll on its numbers. Its lack of a restorative ground burl seen in other members of the genus, means it perishes after a fire, “hoping” its seeds will take hold. The other *Arctostaphylos* of our Park, the **brittle leaf manzanita**, more common on the Hazelnut trail, has these germinating

“footholds” & does not have to rely on seed germination. (Montara Manzanita photo with permission of **Mike Vasey**)

Manzanitas are fascinating—their artistry is undeniable—think of the “forest” you walk through on the Montara Mt. trail just before its highest sea-view bench, or the mysterious manzanita thicket behind the second bench on that pathway. Some of you recall the gnarled “root” stem that used to straddle the western Hazelnut trail. After a big burn, **Mrs. Gay** of Trout Farm fame & a friend gathered the limb skeletons & decorated these branches, selling them easily.

Run your fingers along the bark of an *Arctostaphylos* in areas where the outer “paper” covering has worn away; the red, gnarled hardness is like the arms of a hairless, muscular person. The leaves are thick and tough, but have their red, budding cluster of newborns at the tip of each branch. (see top photo) The flowers are stylized, perfect little white bells, blossoms that draw the **Anna's Hummingbird**, our all-weather resident, toward them for perhaps a thousand quick sips each winter “spring”—January through March.

There is just a slight edge to the Montara Mountain form in drawing in our permanent little hummer—the *A. montarensis* bloom a couple of weeks earlier than their *A. tomentosa* cousin, and that must render the calorie lover's survival more secure, and other native blooms are



not so common at that time. There is little else but the flowers of the more widely dispersed **pink flowering currant** to sustain these “Anna's” during the challenging time of the cold rain. (Anna's Hummingbird photo from [spindriftanddreams.blogspot.com/](http://spindriftanddreams.blogspot.com/))

## **ENERGETIC TRAIL TRIO ZIPS THROUGH JOBS**

Three of us -- **Jim Pommier**, myself & **Colm**, a new young fellow, kicked off the first Trail Day of the year on January 9th. We gathered a variety of hand tools and headed up the Brooks Falls Trail. Jim worked on the stretch up to the foot bridge, trimming and cutting back various trailside vegetation. Colm and I made it just about up to the Brooks Falls/Montara Mtn. Trail intersection, but spent most of our time cutting back a lot of **manzanita** on the stretch between the bench overlooking the falls and the ridge above it. We also cleaned out a few rain dips along the way. Definitely a good way to start the year ! (Brooks Falls Trail photo—Flicker) **Joseph Piro**



## **DEEP TRIMMING, DEEP CARVING**

**Jim Pommier**, **Carol Martinez**, **Rick Lopez** (a new fellow that came over from Montara, if I recall right) and I showed up for February's Trail Day. We headed up the Brooks Fall Trail again. Jim & Carol did a lot of trimming up to about the bench overlooking the Falls, while Rick and I made it further up the hill, working mostly from the bench up to the intersection of Brooks and Montara Mtn. Trails where we trimmed back more **manzanita** and re-worked several rain dips.

Also on the trail were 20 or so volunteers with Disney's "Give a Day, Get a Day" program. Led by **Ranger David Vasquez**, they re-worked several good lengthy stretches of trail by cutting back the uphill bank & spreading the dirt onto the trail surface. Ultimately, we all did a couple hours of good, long-lasting work. **Joseph Piro**

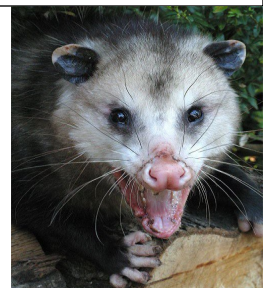
## **CLOSE CALL ON THE HAZELNUT!!**

**Jim Mackey** & **Jim Pommier** had to do some trimming on Feb. Habitat Restoration Day, but they finally reached a “euc” area where they cut many of the Australian invader's saplings. Mackey reported a lucky miss when a pair of trail hikers came along the pathway just as Jim felled a small tree. He yelled “*Timber!*” and they leaped out of the way barely in time to avert disaster!



## **FACIOD**

**Opossums** are immune to more diseases than most mammals, probably due to their lower temperatures & they seem to be quite resistant to many poisonous snake bites, including those of **rattlesnakes**.





## A NATURALIST'S PERSPECTIVE

By Jim Mackey

March/April 2010

Recently I was working at our Visitor Center when a man asked me if there were any **rattlesnakes** in our Park. I replied that although we have **rubber boas**, **racers**, **gopher snakes** and two species of **garter snakes**, I knew of no credible reports of rattlesnakes. He said that he guessed that it wasn't hot enough for them here. I said that I preferred to think that our Park doesn't have enough rock outcrops. (This opinion came from a long familiarity with a rattlesnake den at the top of a rocky pinnacle in the outer Coast Range of Mendocino County.)

If rattlesnakes did occur here I would expect them to be at the scenic rock outcrop on the south-facing slope through which the Valley View Trail rises from the eastern-most bench. This outcrop is also notable for the few specimens of the succulent **bluff lettuce** (*Dudleya fari-nosa*) (at right—photo from Flickr). (If you are not familiar with this plant you can see one that is labeled, by a large rock in our Native Plant Garden.) Also the Hazelnut Trail makes an attractive right-angle turn by a rocky cliff near its eastern end. However this is on a north-facing slope so would probably not be suitable for rattlesnakes. But it is favored by the attractive, white **woodland stars**



(*Lithophragma affine*)

— which are blooming now! Incidentally the meanings of the Greek roots forming this scientific name are quite fitting for this setting: *affine* – next to, *litho* – stony, *phragma* – hedge.



Why else might we lack rattlesnakes? In much of their range their chief predator is red-tailed hawks. We have these and

red-shouldered hawks, which are often seen carrying snakes. Rattlesnakes often prey on **California ground squirrels**, which we lack. Why? They are abundant along the levee by the Sharp Park Golf Course.

Would you prefer that we had rattlesnakes? They are one of the pinnacles of the evolution of snakes and are found only in the Western Hemisphere. The late great herpetologist **Archie Carr** wrote that they provided one of the

“novel terrors” for European colonists. (rattlesnake from Silverwood Lake ws website)



Or is your adrenalin already high enough when you round a bend on one of our trails and reflect that there is a possibility that you might come face to face with a **mountain lion**?

**Poor Jim's Almanac.** Once again 'tis the season, as the late Cliff Richer said, to “Listen to the Park.” **Warblers, wrens, finches, grosbeaks, thrushes**, et al will be singing! See the **trilliums** on the Plaskon Trail and the **adder's tongues** and **irises** on the Hazelnut Trail. Appreciate our biological spring season of March through May when the Park is at its best! (fetid adder's tongue from [www.fprespa.org/hiker](http://www.fprespa.org/hiker))



## NEWS BRIEFS

**Nolene Bucini**, is one of our aides who is working here 2 days a week. She aspires to become a ranger, & is already in her 3rd year of college, having taken many biology courses, choosing classes to give her a specialty in plants. Now she is working to get a fire certificate at SMCC. Our head ranger for SPVP, **Scott Lombardi**, says that this petite brunette is an energetic soul, who's done a great job here for several years. She hails from Half Moon Bay, so we wish the best of luck to our local lady.

**Head Ranger of SPVP, Scott Lombardi**, erected a sign that was long missing—a sign for traffic going south on hwy 1, pointing to SPVP. Kudos to an industrious Scott.

## HOW DISNEYLAND CAME TO THE AID OF OUR NATIVE PLANT CHAMPIONS

Strange it was, **Jim Mackey** and **Jim Pommier** found not only “Friends” member, **Ralph Larson**, but at least 17 people, awaiting them when they showed up for habitat restoration on January 16. Turns out that the theme park had offered a free ticket for one day at Walt's place, If they would present evidence of having volunteered a certain number of hours for a worthy organization—”Give a Day, Get a Disney Day”. **Ranger Jonel** had all sign the volunteer agreement form.

Then the question was, “what to do with all of them?” Unfortunately for the cancerous **Cape ivy**, the answer was obvious—no tools would be needed if they enlisted the team in pulling out the South African native with their hands. So out went the ivy by the “ton”.. Out went the ivy across from the rangers' shop and near the horseshoe pit and on the banks of San Pedro Creek, giving a new lease on life for many of our natives.



### ON THE TRAIL (continued)

**Katie Antista** showed me not only a beautifully constructed **Wood Rat** nest Between the Weiler Ranch Bridge and the turn-around at the end of the trail, but also one elevated in a tree off the Trout Farm, a probable secondary “escape nest”. Look for more such nests before spring foliage masks them.



**Laurie Nikitas**, our former zoo keeper, and constant hiker and explorer, found some intriguing footprints outside the Park. She knew they were quite close in shape and size to that of the **black bear**. Biol. Prof., **James Mackey**, thought it was a definite possibility they were bear tracks. She discovered the impressions on the old Montara Rd. in early January. (Note that the bear prints to the right, though from a **grizzly**, show the front claw mark that does appear moderately in the black bear’s feet.



After **Judy Spitler** did her stint at the Visitor Center on Feb. 6, she did some excellent birding, reporting a nice male **Kestrel** in the top of a **pine tree** in back of the Visitor Center, a pair of **Hermit Thrushes** in a brush pile by the picnic area, some **Golden Crowned Kinglets** hob-knobbing with a different species, the **Ruby Crowned Kinglets**, as well as the “usual” winter visitors. (Hilton Pond photo of **Golden Crown Kinglet**) Then on the 15th of February, the **Kestrel** was on the WWR, and she saw a **Little Brown Creeper** elsewhere in SPVP! (Don’t miss Judy’s hike on Ap. 10)



(Toni Corelli Flora of Montara Mt. Cont’d from p. 1)  
**Toni** is the author of the **Illustrated Field Guide to the Woody Plants of the Santa Cruz Mountains** and co author of **The Rare and Endangered Plants of San Mateo and Santa Clara County**. She is an environmental consultant botanist and is the Chairperson of the Rare & Endangered Plant Committee for the Santa Clara Chapter of the California Native Plant Soc. (A rare & endangered plant on Montara Mountain is **Hickman’s cinquefoil**, at left—photo by **Mike Vasey**.)



### MARCH—APRIL CALENDAR

#### **MARCH GENERAL MEETING**

Wednesday, March 10.....7pm

#### **MARCH TRAIL DAY (please note time change)**

Saturday, March 13.....9am

#### **MARCH HABITAT RESTORATION DAY**

Saturday, March 20.....9am

#### **CRAIG NIKITAS’ CORVIDAE**

Saturday, March 20.....7:30pm

#### **BAY AREA WILDLIFE PROGRAM FOR KIDS**

Friday, April 9.....1pm

#### **APRIL TRAIL DAY (please note time change)**

Saturday, April 10.....9am

#### **JUDY SPITLER BIRD HIKE**

Saturday, April 10.....9am

#### **FRIEND, VOLUNTEERS BARBEQUE**

Saturday, April 10.....12noon

#### **APRIL GENERAL MEETING**

Wednesday, April 14.....7pm

#### **APRIL HABITAT RESTORATION DAY**

Saturday, April 17.....9am

#### **TONI CORELLI PLANTS OF MONTARA MT.**

Friday, April 23.....8pm

#### **PLANT HIKE ON BROOKS CREEK TRAIL**

Saturday, April 24.....9am

*For all events meet at the Visitor Center*

#### *COMING ATTRACTIONS:*

*Sun. May 2—Bird song walk with Jim Steele*

*Sat. May 15, at 8pm—Beetles & Global Warming  
with Dave Kavanaugh of the Cal Academy*

### GIORNI AND PYLE HIT THE JACKPOT

**Chris Giorni’s** Treefrog Treks program on Jan. 23 netted over 80 children & parents, who were enthralled by a huge **Burmese Python**, who climbed over the kids, a very large **Tortoise**, and....well you should have been there to see the 8 amphibians & reptiles! Thanks to **Jim Mackey** (J. M. photo of Burmese Python, Chris & crowd) & **Margaret Goodale** for helping the children see and handle the animals.



**Peter Pyle** drew a huge audience of almost 100, who were impressed with the 1000’s of miles of “empty ocean” traversed by the **albatrosses & Great White Sharks**, in order to reach breeding and feeding grounds—one of the latter right off our coast.

**Questions or letters to the editor?** —email: carolynjunepankow@yahoo.com or write **Carolyn Pankow**, “Friends of San Pedro Valley Park”, 600 Oddstad, Pacifica, CA 94044. The editor is the writer of all uncredited features.

#### The Leaders of “the Friends of San Pedro Valley Park”:

President, **Carolyn Pankow**; Vice President, **Shirley Drye**; Secretary, **Jim Mackey**; Treasurer, **Jane Turrel**; members at large, **Jean Leonard** and **Istvan Puski**; visitor center staffing, **Jean Leonard**; Habitat Restoration Day Leader, **Jim Pommier**; Interim Trail Day Leader, **Joseph Piro**; Membership chair, **Catherine Antista**; Program chair, **Carolyn Pankow**; Trailside Store, **Jane Turrel**.