

The Friends of San Pedro Valley Park

Nov/Dec 2011

HOLIDAY PARTY WEDS, DECEMBER 14TH

On this special **Wednesday at 6:30pm**, you are as welcome as can be to join with the other "Friends of San Pedro Valley Park" in celebrating this time of deep shadows, rain and frigid temperatures in our beautiful Visitor Center. We will feature a honey-cured ham as well as all the delicious dishes "you all" can drum up.



The second highlight of the evening will be the "Gift Exchange" which has more than a touch of larceny. Good luck and crafty wiles may land you a jewel of a gift or you may be left holding a large ceramic disaster, but it's all in fun. Bring a unisexual present that costs you from 6 to 12 dollars. (please note the adjustment for inflation.)

Our center will be enlivened with a Christmas tree, poinsettias, and you? Questions? Call 355-7466, Carolyn.

THE BRAZILIAN PANTANAL: JAGUARS & BIRDS IN THE WORLD'S LARGEST WETLAND

Paul Donahue is a naturalist, wildlife artist, photographer, environmental activist, and tree climber who has been working in South America since 1972. He will come to our Visitor Center on **Saturday, Nov. 19 at 7:30pm**, to relate his studies & adventures with the **Jaguar** and the rich life of the Pantanal of Brazil.



Lately, much of his time in the tropics has been spent in these wetlands of southwestern Brazil, a paradise for **waterbirds** and home to the densest population of Jaguars in the world. There his focus has turned more towards these secretive felines, a species he finds infinitely more intriguing than any bird, perhaps too exciting, as he did when he was energetically charged by this spotted predator. (jaguar picture, courtesy of **Paul Donahue**; photo of Paul in Amazon treetops below)

As a youngster, Paul spent hundreds of hours **bird** watching in his home state of Massachusetts. During his high school years, he volunteered at the Manomet Bird Observatory in Mass., learning to band birds & left college, so that he could work at the bird observatory full time, first as an intern, banding birds & conducting the observatory's fall sea watch program, then as a research assistant with its shorebird project.

While still working at the observatory, in 1972, he had an opportunity to travel to Colombia to help with a bird research project, becoming hooked on the Neotropics and its tremendous biodiversity; he did bird survey work and recordings of bird vocalizations. Soon he became fascinated by the jungles of Peru, where he and his wife, Teresa, built walkways & observation posts in the habitat-rich treetops. Paul is a resident of Pacifica.



GREEN FIRE REMINDER

Don't forget the legendary Aldo Leopold, whose "flame is being relit" in the amazing Dunskey's film on Saturday, November 5, at 7:30pm, in our Visitor Center. Share your thoughts of this man "ahead of his times" with these 2 filmmakers.

ON THE TRAIL

Early September, and that sharp-eyed bird watcher, **Toni Gamlin**, was thrilled to see a **Belted Kingfisher** on a transmission wire by her Rosita Condo. After the disastrous chlorine spill into San Pedro Creek, over ten years ago now, no one had reported seeing one in the Park. However, **Istvan Puski**, does see them lately, coursing back and forth along our stream, calling out in their strident voices. (cont'd on p. 4)



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Note that **Joseph Piro** and company of our trail crew unearthed 2 small **scorpions** not quite 2 in. long, perhaps **Uroctonus mordax**, a common scorpion of the Bay Area's cooler woody spots.

VOLUNTEER JOB MARKET HOT at SPVP

The Friends of SPVP have openings for telephone workers for our Christmas Party. **NO COLD CALLS!** Phone **Carolyn Pankow** at 355-7466

The Visitor Center Desk offers on-the-job training for receptionists/ information center. All ages may apply. Recent satisfied hiree is **Bill Bigler**, who received his training from **Shirley Drye**, senior desk worker. Please call our Visitor Center Scheduler, **Doris Kelly** at 355-5153.

SHIRLEY DRYE’S “INTO NATURE”, PART 2

By Shirley Drye

After my childhood, after high school, came a time of college and work, and later romance, only a precious few days with nature: business school in Omaha, a job with the FBI in Washington, D.C., and a job with the U.S. Air Force in the Pentagon. Then there were the years of partying, exploring the East Coast, marrying Carl Drye, & having our 3 children: Tristan, Tom, & Diana. (family photo)



The next time I remember thinking seriously about the natural world was after we bought our house on Crespi with its expansive view of Montara Mt., Sweeney Ridge, & the other numerous hills. I knew that when my kids were older, I would climb every hill in Pacifica, and now I cannot think of one I have not “scaled”. In my need to be outside with these shaggy, dramatic mountains, I refused a clothes dryer offered by my husband, opting for hanging clothes outside in back of my hilltop home—anything to be in the great out-of-doors. But a time of torrential rains soon made me backtrack on that issue. (photo from Mike Weston Wikipedia)



Soon I began exploring the area on the south side of Fassler, taking my young children with me. Neighbors were horrified, warning me that there were rattlesnakes in the old quarry at the sight of the present Fassler Blvd; [disappointingly?]; we never saw one.

Now it was a time for supportive action for the natural Pacifica I loved. I worked long and hard for Sweeney Ridge, actually getting it into the GGNRA, I joined the Open Space Task Force. I wrote a number of parcel narratives for our report to City Council... I wrote the narrative on Mori Point, and in it I expressed its potential for inclusion into the GGNRA, and sure enough, years later it happened.

I have to tell you that I grew up in the middle of the United States and fantasized about the ocean. You can imagine how I felt about living by the wide Pacific! My husband was rather disgusted with me, because I would pick up and drag home seaweed, shells, rocks, and sea-smoothed glass I gathered at the beach. I could make mosaics out of the glass and rocks, and I dried the long “ropes of kelp with their bulb-like floaters. I circled them, hanging them on our picket fence to dry, which turned them to a very nice brown with a creamy crackle pattern and then wound them around a hanging plant. (Idora Design photo of kelp, other seaweed)



(cont’d on page 4)

I became curious about the pretty spring wild flowers, and in the 1970’s, when we had quite a drought, these shallow rooted plants flourished. The roadsides were filled with their blossoms, and on Fassler Road, beyond the “cut”, was covered with California poppies; I even photographed a double poppy flower. (photo dogpawr.com)



(continued on page 4)

DOWN TO THE NITTY-GRITTY

by Joseph Piro

We had Ed Swanson, Istvan Puski, Ranger David Vasquez and me for the October 8th Trail Day. David suggested we head up the Brooks Falls Trail and continue some bank-cutting and trail-widening where they last left off (a couple hundred yards below the bridge), so armed with McLeods, rakes and a few other hand tools, that's what we did (we also dug 2 rain dips). While digging in the dirt though, a highlight for us all was coming across 2 small scorpions (~1 3/4" long) that none of us really new much about (we took plenty of photos); if anyone knows what species they might be, we'd love to learn more! We also came across a big fuzzy caterpillar. Don't worry, all were carefully relocated away from where we were working. Between doing some good trail work, encountering some wild-life and a sunny blue sky; it was a good day.



PRIMPING THE PLASKON

By Joseph Piro

Our September 10th Trail Day was good all around—good people: Istvan Puski, Sara Shaw, new-comer Rosalie Damon LaMar and myself ; good sunny weather, and a good project. Last month Ranger Doug Heisinger suggested we start resurfacing the Plaskon Nature Trail, so that's exactly what we started. Starting at the bridge near the Hazelnut Trail intersection, he and “Ranger” Martin King delivered several loads of gravel base with the little trail trucks and we helped spread it out. I also cut back several low-hanging branches to help with headroom/clearance along the entire trail length. We only got about 1/3 of the trail done, so this will probably be continued next month. Stay tuned! (photo of Rosalie & Sara spreading the gravel) by Joseph Piro)



A NATURALIST’S PERSPECTIVE

By Jim Mackey

My wife, **Joyce**, enjoys feeding unsalted peanuts, in the shell,



to tree squirrels at our home in Park Pacifica. These animals have considerable brown mixed with gray, so are **eastern gray squirrels**, *Sciurus carolinensis*. This species is native to the eastern U.S. but has been introduced into parks, like Golden Gate Park, in western cities. The native **western gray squirrel**, *S. griseus*, which is entirely gray and larger, is not usually found in parks; apparently it has a wilder temperament. A

second species of alien tree squirrel, the **fox squirrel**, *S. niger*, is a rusty-colored animal that is native to the Midwestern U.S. but occurs in warmer parts of the Bay Area, like Berkeley. (Jim Mackey photo of E.grey squirrel)

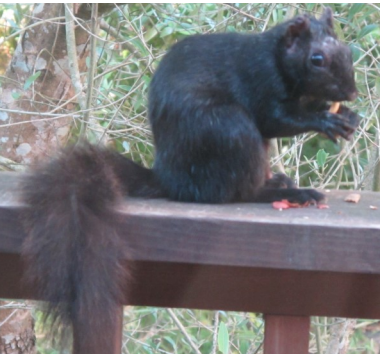
In Pedro Park I have seen western gray squirrels in conifers along the Upper Trout Farm Trail, and eastern grays coming from a large nest of sticks in a broadleaf tree behind the latrine in the Walnut Grove Picnic Area. On



April 22, 2010 I was in the Trout Farm Picnic Area when I was attracted to vigorous movement of a branch of the apple tree. A black squirrel was hanging by its hind feet and grasping the blossoms with its hands! It stuffed 2 or 3 of the blossoms into its mouth and then pulled itself up onto a branch and munched on them. (West Grey Squirrel from Grizzley ranchconservancy.com)

Joyce has since had a stunning, shiny-black squirrel come for her peanuts. It is the same size as the eastern gray squirrel which is a regular visitor, so we think that the black individual is a melanistic color phase of the eastern gray squirrel. Also the black squirrel chases the gray one, which has the normal 3 pairs of tits of a female along her abdomen, while the black one seems to have an enlarged scrotal region.

How widespread are black individuals of the eastern gray squirrel and how recently have they appeared? I grew up in north-eastern Ohio and saw plenty of gray individuals. My Mother



threw stones at them when they feasted on our cherries, and Dad fashioned sheet metal baffles to thwart them from reaching our bird feeder. But I never saw any black ones. However, in “Animals of America” (1917) a northern variety of gray squirrel is recognized that ranges into Canada and includes black individuals that are “not uncommon.” (photo of black phase of

Eastern grey squirrel by Jim Mackey)

I did a Yahoo-search of “black squirrels” and was amazed at the first finding: “Black Squirrels in Ohio.” Last March Ohioans celebrated the 50th anniversary of the introduction of black squirrels from London, Ontario into Kent, Ohio. The black squirrel name is used by a brewery, radio station and 2 bed-and-breakfast inns in northern Ohio! So, indeed, a lot of water has gone over the dam since I left Ohio.

If black squirrels are increasing, could it be an example of industrial melanism – e.g. as the evolution of dark moths in England? I remembered that our eastern grays were introduced into England during the 19th century, so I yahoosed “English Squirrels.” Lo and behold there are about 2.5 million eastern greys (note British spelling) in Britain, compared with a declining number of 140,000 native **red squirrels** (*Sciurus vulgaris*).

Red squirrel and bird-lovers sponsor periodic mass shootings of eastern grays, whose carcasses provide fur for hats and gloves and meat for London restaurants, where even the “heart, liver, kidneys and front paws are chopped and made into a pie filling.” And while it is reported that melanistic & albinistic greys are rare nationally, they may be common locally. Indeed, blacks are increasingly common in locales between London and Birmingham, where they may outnumber greys.

Will black eastern grays increase at the expense of the gray phase in the Bay Area? Black-haired male mammals often seem to have an advantage in sexual selection (including



male-to-male competition) as in **sable antelope, black-maned lions & baseball players** (see Brian Wilson below, right.) I also think that the black

squirrels are better adapted than the grays to cool, moist, dense, shaded forests – through camouflage. So they may be hurt by global warming. But the black pelt may furnish better protection against ultra violet & so be a better adaptation against the decrease in atmospheric ozone. What do you think?

Poor Jim’s Almanac.

Watch for squirrels collecting and burying acorns; and watch for the cores of pine and Douglas fir cones that are left after squirrels chew off the scales to get at the seeds. What kind of squirrel are you seeing?





ON THE TRAIL (continued)

On September 21, at 1pm, **Katie Antista** was a lucky viewer of a **Great Blue Heron**, who was standing in front of the Visitor Center. There certainly has been a lot of gopher activity on the former “lawn”, so perhaps it was “easy pickins” for the tall fellow. (heron photo-shrimsher.com)

And from Jim Mackey: “On Sept. 23, at about 1pm, I came upon a **rubber boa** that was sunning on the Hazelnut Trail, uptrail from the 1/4-mile stake from the west end”.



Jim Mackey has been noticing the strange **chinquapin** galls, red and round, that many people mistake for a nut, on the Hazelnut Trail. The gall is generated by a wasp who stings the male parts of the flower! (Joyce Gross photo)



Katie Antista reported the first blooms of the **pink flowering currant** on the Weiler Rd. near the E. Valley View in early October. (californianursery.com)



FACTOID

The mostly nocturnal **scorpion** has a bad reputation and some potent poison glands, but only about 35 of the scorpions have venom lethal to humans. (poison gland & stinger at left) the scorpion of the Mojave Desert—Wikia.com)

(Shirley Drye’s “Growing into Nature”)

Dema Savage was City Historian at the time, and she had a Pacifica History show on our local cable channel. She asked me about doing a wild flower show since Pacifica was awash in them. We decided that we would exhibit and talk about the ones you could see on the roadside. I have always been surprised that I did not wreck my car that spring I spent so much time looking as I drove.

That spring did it for me: from then on I was obsessed with our wildflower community. I spent so much time in San Pedro V.P., before there was a park center or group of volunteers, that then ranger, **Dave Moore**, recently retired Superintendent, gave me a name badge, which I still have & treasure. Finally, I joined the Friends of SPVP, & here I am today.

NOVEMBER—DECEMBER CALENDAR-STEVE & ANNE DUNSKEY FILM on A. LEOPOLD
Saturday, November 5.....7:30pm
NOVEMBER GENERAL MEETING
Wednesday, November 9.....6pm
NOVEMBER TRAIL DAY
Saturday, November 12.....9am
NOVEMBER HABITAT RESTORATION DAY
Saturday, November 19.....9am
PAUL DONAHUE’S “JAGUAR”
Saturday, November 19.....7:30pm
DECEMBER TRAIL DAY
Saturday, December 10.....9am
DECEMBER HOLIDAY SEASON PARTY
Wednesday, December 14.....6:30pm
DECEMBER HABITAT RESTORATION DAY
Saturday, December 17.....9am

For all events, meet at the Visitor Center
Coming soon.- “the Red-Shouldered Hawk & the Creek”
“Mountain Lions”

CHRISTINE AND OUR LIONS

Christine Guzman used to hike the Hazelnut trail alone and fearless—this was a time before **mountain lions** had eaten a couple of people for dinner in California: the Sierra foothills, in Cuyamaca State Park near San Diego, and in Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park in Orange County.

Once Christine, a woman of average height, came upon a rather small specimen of this feline predator on, arguably, this, our most wild trail. The cougar & she faced off until our intrepid **Homo sapiens** took one step forward. In a flash, the mountain lion streaked into the brush*

Now, several years later, in fact this May of 2011, Ms. Guzman wondered why a neighbor’s **dog** kept up a steady stream of barking. It was then that she sighted a large puma, tail flowing downward, on the lower branch of a **Monterey Pine**, half way between Crespi and Banyan, behind her house.

Taking out binoculars, she found it was collared and busily grooming itself, then quietly resting for over half an hour in that early morning coolness. This time, Christine was the first animal to depart. (Mt. Lion photo by Jack Luke on Pixdaus web site) *Do Not Approach a Mt. Lion.



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

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

President, **Jim Mackey**; Vice President, **Carolyn Pankow**; Secretary, **Shirley Drye**; Treasurer, **Jane Turrel**; members at large, **Istvan Puski**; Visitor Center staffing, **Doris Kelly**; Habitat Restoration Leader, **Istvan Puski**; Trail Leader, **Joseph Piro**; Membership, **Catherine Antista**; Programs, **Carolyn Pankow**; Trailside Store, **Jane Turrel** . . .