

MOUNTAIN LION LADY: ZARA MCDONALD

Zara McDonald will present the ecology of **mountain lions**, their future in their increasingly unfriendly world & the attempt to save them via her brainchild, the Felidae Conservation Fund. The date is **Sat. Feb. 25, at 7:30pm.**(left-Zara with baby puma)



Zara's interest in Mountain Lions came first by way of her being a competitive marathoner & trail runner. She encountered these cougars twice on two of the more secluded pathways, which gave her a yen to know more about these elusive felines & how they might have a place on this human-centered planet.

Then she underwent another mental and emotional transformation when she came in contact with wild **tigers** while visiting India. The realization that these animals were at the point of vanishing from this Earth, coupled with her love of the mountain lion, caused her to take premed classes with the goal of becoming a veterinarian technician, and launched her into wildlife ecology graduate work at UC Berkeley.



Ms. McDonald holds an MBA from UCB and started Volcano, a company putting GPS devices on the wrists of runners. (mountain lion photo by **Jim and Jamie Dutcher**)

BIG INSECTS FOR LITTLE CHILDREN

Norm Gershenz's amazing Insect Discovery Lab will be at our Visitor Center on **Saturday, February 11, at 1pm.** SPVP's "real" world of insects will be magnified by the presence of our **darkling beetle**, a giant **walking stick**, huge **hissing cockroaches**, and the **Eastern lubber grasshopper**, as well as that insect relative, the **giant millipede**. Children will learn more about the anatomy of the insect post-talk. We will point out the beauty of the butterflies of our park, & our own huge millipede via **Ray Trabucco's** V.C. photo display. Children will be seated in front so that they can see & touch the critters.



Adults will have seating in the rear. Come early so that your kids can be one of the "inner circle". Park outside for a free day! (hissing cockroach at left)

Ogden Nash's Ode to an Insect: "the Wasp"

The wasp and all his numerous family
I look upon as a major calamity.
He throws open his nest with prodigality, But I distrust his waspitivity.



ALLEN FISH'S COOPER'S HAWK & THE CREEK

Why are the **Cooper's Hawks** so prolific, why do they do well in creek habitats, and are they a flagship species in creek ecosystems? These are 3 of the questions Allen will try to answer about this **bird-eating** predator in his talk at our Visitor Center on **Saturday, January 14th at 7:30pm.**

Allen has been the director of the Golden Gate Raptor Observatory since its inception in 1985, among other things, managing the surveys of raptors passing over Hawk Hill in Marin County and the banding of those caught in nets. (**Lloyd Spitalnik** photo of **Cooper's Hawk**)



Mr. Fish studied ecology and evolution at UC Davis and did avian field work for the Bureau of Land Management, the US Forest Service, and the National Park Service. He has held board/committee positions for such organizations as the Marin Audubon Society and the Raptor Research Foundation. He was given the Maurice Broun Award from the Hawk Migration Association in 2003 for his contributions to raptor migration research and conservation. From 2003 to 2011, he taught upper division Raptor Biology at UC Davis.

ON THE TRAIL

Christine Guzman's back hill between Banyan and Crespi is animal hot! At 7am on November 12, she saw a **coyote** on the hill above her and soon realized that it was pulling a rib cage of what was probably one of our **black-tailed deer** (rib cage from blogspot.com). As she moved closer to the coyote, it quickly pulled the carcass behind a cypress tree. Several hours later, sitting in the same tree, she noticed a **Turkey Vulture**, one which seemed to hang around the "rib" area. About 3 days later the smell of rotting flesh on the hill bombarded



Christine's odor receptors.

In earlier November, **Christine** spotted a **red-tailed hawk** (from flicker) flying low on Banyan Street, actively positioning wings and tail rudder as it zoomed by. Soon 2 **crows** joined the raptor, getting aggressive with their "interloper"; they were probably the cause of the hawk's 3 rolling maneuvers, apparently to get its sharp talons in position. All 3 left the scene, the crow pair returning in a few minutes sans hawk. (photo of hawk & crow)



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**GRACEFUL FLYER, STRANGE GOURMAND:
THE TURKEY VULTURE**

By Jack Dodson

Of all our birds there is none that's bigger, flies higher, or has a better sense of smell & sight. Usually seen high in the sky, wings outstretched in soaring circles, the **Turkey Vulture** is distant, far away. Rarely does it land, since with vestigial webbing on its feet it's not designed for perching or walking. But thanks to a kindly couple who live on promontory overlooking Pedro Pt., I've been able to witness our Turkey vultures up close & personal. It's why I'm writing this report. (vulture photo by **Steve Borichevsky**)



Peacefully sharing food together, they fear no wild predator. They don't kill to eat but eat what's already killed. Unlike smaller birds they go longer between feedings. But when they do eat they're gluttons, and they hang around extending their wings out for the sun to heat and dry. (photo by **EugeneMorito**) Up close they're magnificent.



Lacking other birds' voice box (syrinx), they can't sing or call. When not roosting or eating they lounge about waiting for an uplifting breeze to take off. With minimal effort they sail into the sky; rising on warm winds they spiral quickly into their familiar

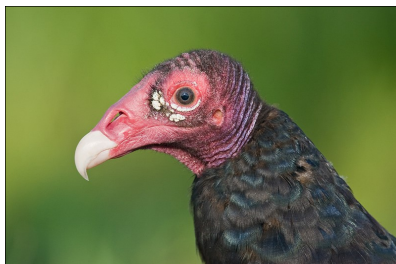
graceful pattern. Soaring effortlessly, they are the ultimate in flying surveillance.

Its name, Turkey vulture, is a misnomer we applied to this bird because we knew so little of it. True, its red naked head looks something like that of a male wild turkey and their size is similar, but turkeys can only envy the flight of a vulture. Unique to any bird is the Turkey Vulture's acute sense of smell. From great distances it can smell ethyl mercaptan, a gas produced by decaying flesh. Up close one can see through the vulture's nostrils located just above their ivory tipped beaks. (photo above) For vision it has around its eye a circle of "eye black" (as applied by baseball players)



Photo by **Gerald Hood**

(photo of vulture eyeblack by **Arthur Morris**) with the same function; to absorb sunlight and protect their eyes. This black and red beauty lives twenty plus years and its evolutionary roots go not to **eagles**



or **hawks**, but to **storks**. [an early DNA sequence study was based on erroneous data and subsequently retracted. Consequently, there is a recent trend to raise the New-World vultures to the rank of an independent order **Cathartiformes** not closely associated with either birds of prey or storks or herons—BUT the jury is still out.]

How little we know of our vultures. Do they migrate during winter? Where do they nest? In our visitor center we have no exhibit, no photograph or book devoted to the Turkey Vulture. They seem always on the horizon far away, wheeling high above in lazy circles. But as all our wild animals, they serve notice that our presence is not necessary. Yet on Pedro Point they come daily to dine on fresh pork and chicken. Like good guests they wait patiently until they're fed, respectfully taking their turns, never overstaying their welcome. And they eat everything on their plate (including bones).

HABITAT RESTORATION GROUP SPRINGS TO LIFE

On Saturday, December 17, a trio of **Istvan Puski, Christine Guzman and Bing Huey**, were pulling **cotoneaster, broom** and other invasives near the slope by the Park entrance.



That was a tough job to undertake, as those two plants in particular have long, tenacious roots! The day was cool but the sun on their backs kept them warm. (photo is of the legendary and teacherous **Scotch Broom**)

HOIDAY GIFT GRABBERS RUN AMOK

It was not a pretty picture when **Steve Robinson, Isabel Ebert** and others were caught red-handed nabbing valued gifts such as the twittering bird clock from devastated victims. **Nancy Jewett** held on tightly to her peanut-filled pretzels, but strangely, was not threatened. **Carl Baldwin** appeared underwhelmed by his gift of a utilitarian flashlight—alas, bought by your editor.

But the gourmet goodies gave all great pleasure: **Jack Dodson's** fresh fruit salad was a real favorite, **Istvan's** raspberry bars, **Shirley Drye & Mila's** candied yams, & turkey gravy from a can by **Carolyn P.** were appreciated by everyone or else. .

Ranger **Dave Vasquez's** early exit, smashing our hopes for a repeat of his sterling performance a few years ago as Santa Claus, was also a let-down. Dave had a pre-sunrise wake-up call the next day, as he will appear in a much-talked-about film, "Of Men and Mavericks"—along with other stars such as **Gerard Butler** and **Elisabeth Shue**.

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A NATURALIST'S PERSPECTIVE

By Jim Mackey

Jan./Feb. 2012

“See, Touch, Learn.” We are indebted to our treasurer, and semi-retired veterinarian, **Jane Turrel**, for a new exhibit in the Visitor Center. It invites children to handle several specimens:



a deer jaw and antlers, a tree branch with a large, circular hole in it, some nuts and cones, and a bird's nest. Questions are asked about each item, and the answers are provided but covered up in order to encourage the budding naturalists to answer them by themselves. One of the accompanying photos shows the exhibit under several stuffed animal-toys that are offered for sale by our Trailside Store. It also shows a man & his daughter examining the exhibit.

Another new feature at the Visitor Center (V.C.) is a display of photos of animals and plants that can be seen currently in the Park. The photos are being contributed by Volunteers and are displayed on an easel by the same Jane Turrel. (What a dynamo!) The easel is placed outside on weekends, when the V.C. is open (see photo). Jane attempts to up-date the photos as needed, such as when a species of **mushroom** newly appears. Hosts at the Visitor Center should attempt to be prepared to answer questions such as where such a species can be found.

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Struggling with invasives. Last December 6 I stood on the bridge by the horseshoe courts and looked upstream. I was pleasantly surprised to see about 20 large (8 to 10 inch), red pendant, bugle-like flowers on the **Angel's Trumpet** shrub on the north bank (see photo). Last spring, on a habitat-restoration Saturday, **Istvan Puski** and I could not see the shrub from the bridge. We slid down the bank, through the **stinging nettles**, and found the greatly reduced trumpet under a tangled canopy of **blackberry** and **Cape ivy vines**. We knew that the trumpet was an alien, but thought that it was not invasive (unlike the blackberry and Cape ivy) and was beautiful and interesting, so we spent an hour cutting and pulling the ivy and blackberry away from it. I consulted the



“Sunset Garden Book” and found that our trumpet is probably the “rare” *Brugmansia sanguinea* (Solanaceae). It is native to Peru, and its flowers and seeds are poisonous, but I saw

honeybees walking on the flowers. So our little California park was a theater where a struggle occurred, in which an Ohioan and a Hungarian took the side of a Peruvian shrub & European bee against an invasive African ivy and California vine. (photos—J. Mackey)

Poor Jim's Almanac. San Pedro Valley Park is sometimes visited by varied thrushes and tortoise-shell butterflies in winter. More dependable, on the few sunny, warm days are mourning cloak butterflies. Enjoy the trilliums on the Plaskon and Hazelnut Trails!

NEWS BRIEFS

Jane Turrel would like your best photos to highlight winter & spring wonders of our park to be shown on her easel at the Visitor Center; bring them by on a weekend!

Look for the **Jean Leonard** bench behind the Visitor Center that she kept open each weekend and holiday. Thanks to **Ranger David Vasquez** for its installation.

Our Visitor Center staffer for 3 months was **Doris Kelly**, but now due to a broken hip. she is in the Pacifica Nursing & Rehab.Cntr.—Ph.993-5576; 385 Esplanade.

TRAIL SCHOOL AND BARBEQUE

by Joseph Piro

Well, we had enough people -- including **me, Istvan Puski, Sara Shaw, Bing Huey** and about 5 others -- for our November 12th Trail Day, but unfortunately yesterday's rain and the resulting somewhat wet trail conditions today forced a change of plans. So, instead of tackling some trail work, **Rangers David Vasquez and Martin King** led us on an educational/scouting hike up



Valley View Trail a little bit, along the Plaskon Nature Trail and then up the Brooks Falls Trail. For all the newcomers, we identified work needed on some switchbacks and explained how drain dips and bank cutting projects are done (as well as some good examples we've done). And then we all arrived back at the Visitor's Center around noon to enjoy a BBQ lunch David organized (thanks!). Hopefully we'll have another good turn-out and a little better weather next month so we can do some work. (crew photo by **Ranger David Vasquez**)

ON THE TRAIL (continued)

Judy Spitler couldn't resist checking out the winter birds: "Definitely some of our wintering birds are back - **Hermit Thrushes, Ruby-crowned Kinglets** (photo at right from greennature.com), **Golden-crowned Sparrow**, [with its series of 3 plaintive, whistled tones] **Fox Sparrows** (photo from tgreybirds.com), and **Townsend's Warblers**. And the **California Quail** are forming their larger post-breeding cov-
eys." Best place to see many of these bird is by the **willows & alders** along the creeks, especially the trail by the WWR, & for the quail, always try the South Walnut area.



On the E. Valley View and by Weiler Ranch Road, in sync, there is prolific blooming of the **pink flowering currant** — still with small leaves, & the **Anna's hummingbird** males, who are busy setting up mating territories in bountiful areas, warding off other fellows with their aggressive diving and loud terminal "pop". Also in winter bloom for the Anna's, and therefore its pollination, were the **Montara Mountain manzanita** shrubs on the Brooks Creek Trail. (photo from a blogspot) **Jim Mackey** observations on Dec. 24th and 27th—



As **Mackey** was working in the V.C. on the 24th, Two men told him of their **mountain lion** sighting. They were out in the darkness of 12:30 in the morning when they saw a huge cat with a long tail walking up the hill to the Alma Heights Church at Seville & Linda Mar. As they moved, it went along its stealthy way.



(Holiday Party Continued from page 1)

Our youngest attendee, **Gregory Huey**, read the raffle numbers for the el primo prizes: Rite Aid poinsettias. **Huldah Williams**, our most senior attendee, had not known that she could make it, but voila! She and friend, **Maxine**, were a delight to have with us. **Mila Stroganoff** was a jolly Santa; **Jane Turrel** kept the "show" moving, and everyone mentioned plus the following took part in an energetic cleanup: **Jennifer Alpaugh** and **Rob Hughes**, **Eileen Baldwin**, **Nancy Craig**, **Barbara Daley**, **Bing Huey** and wife, **Jim Mackey**, **Roger Mascio**, **Elizabeth Parent**, **Sara Shaw**, **Adrian Stroganoff**, **Christine Thatcher**, **Sharron Walker** and **Bevin**, & **Dick Weisgerber**. See you all next year?

JANUARY—FEBRUARY CALENDAR

- JANUARY GENERAL MEETING**
Wednesday, January 11.....6pm
- JANUARY TRAIL DAYS**
Saturday, January 14.....9am
- ALLEN FISH- COOPER'S HAWK & THE CREEK**
Saturday, January 14.....7:30pm
- JANUARY HABITAT RESTORATION DAY**
Saturday, January 21.....9am
- FEBRUARY GENERAL MEETING**
Wednesday, February 8.....6pm
- FEBRUARY TRAIL DAYS**
Saturday, February 11.....9am
- INSECT DISCOVERY LAB PROGRAM FOR KIDS**
Saturday, February 11.....1pm
- FEBRUARY HABITAT RESTORATION DAY**
Saturday, February 18.....9am
- ZARA McDONALD'S MOUNTAIN LIONS**
Saturday, February 25.....7:30pm

Coming Attractions:
Indians of California, Mark Hylkema—with emphasis on those Indians of our area
On March 17 at 7:30pm
Children's program-Wildlife of California: live animals: grey fox, red-tailed hawk, Great Horned Owl & opossum
On April 10, at 1pm

HARD LABOR FOR A HEARTY BUNCH

By Joseph Piro

Finishing up the year, **Istvan Puski** and I arrived for the December 10th Trail Day. **Ranger David Vasquez** said he finally had the top finish material for our Plaskon Nature Trail resurfacing project, so we decided we'd tackle that. After we cleared the leaves that had built up on the base rock previously put down, he and "Ranger" **Martin King** took turns delivering a few loads of the material while we spread it out. Mid-morning they brought some more help -- **Paul, Rick** and **Bill** -- who helped us tackle another task: removing the big stout signpost at the intersection of Plaskon and Hazelnut Trails. After a lot of digging dirt and chipping concrete, we finally got it out. By noon we had good progress and they were probably going to work on it more in the afternoon. Be sure and check it out, it's super nice. **Happy holidays to all!**

FACTOID

According to "bestfunfactscom" The little **grey fox** of SPVP, can run a swift speed of 42mph, while that lithe sprinter, the **greyhound's** top speed is 41mph; not a happy thought for dog fanciers..



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-open-* **Jane Turrel**, thank you; Habitat Restoration Leader, **Istvan Puski**; Trail Leader, **Joseph Piro**; Membership, **Catherine Antista**; Programs, **Carolyn Pankow**; Trailside Store, **Jane Turrel**.