

## BULLETIN IN "LIVING COLOR" ON YOUR EMAIL



Please assist Jim Steele, the new membership chair of "the Friends of SPVP", who has agreed to send your newsletter as a colorful PDF file attached to an email. You can download the newsletter and read it on your computer, or print it if you still prefer holding a paper version. You'll be saving us the cost of printing & posting the black & white version, not to mention saving trees! Please add Jim's email to your address book, so that our bimonthly bulletin does not get blocked as spam. To make sure we have your correct email address, email **Jim Steele** at: [jsteele3@ix.netcom.com](mailto:jsteele3@ix.netcom.com). You'll get your first color issue online in November, but during the changeover, you'll also receive both the paper copy and color email copy. Thanks for your help.

## CHASING THE HOLIDAY SPIRIT—PARTY TIME



Winter solstice, Christmas, Hannukah; let's celebrate by coming with your tempting side dish, to the Visitor Center at 6:30pm on Weds, December 10th. Your dues help us provide the tempting ham & turkey.

Bring a unisexual gift for between \$5 and \$15 for the savage gift stealing game—beware of developing a fondness for what you receive. **Carol Marinez, Carolyn Pankow, Judy Bacon, or Bing Huey** will be calling you soon. **Jennifer Alpaugh & Rob Hughes** will be your hosts.



## HIGH COUNTRY "CLEAR-CUT"

We had a good turn-out for our October 11th Trail Day -- **Istvan Puski**, my brother **Erik** and new-comers **Keith, Raphael, Gabe** and I went up with Rangers **Cat Allen** and **Joel Cervantes** to do brush work up on the Montara Mtn. Trail. We went up the Brooks Falls trail to get to the work area just above the intersection of Brooks and Montara Mtn. Trail and worked our way trimming branches and whatnot with handsaws and loppers up to the start of the switchbacks. Then we took Montara all the way back down. What a nice hike and work session!

## CORKY QUIRK'S LIVE BATS & TALK ON NOV. 15; 3pm

**Corky Quirk** is the founder and executive director of NorCal-Bats, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the rescue & rehabilitation of **bats**, the winged mammals that have a nonstop appetite for masses of insects. Corky will be speaking on these Chiropterans, & bringing 3 little disabled bats to our Visitor Center as ambassadors, on Sat, Nov. 15th, at 3 in the afternoon.



Since Corky has been providing educational programs including field trips, for the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area since 2005, often for school groups, she is well qualified to speak to a wide range of ages. She says, "I've always liked things that can fly and the underdog", including the little pallid bat, (Daniel Neal photo—see below) She also taught Campfires Girls in 1989 and taught for the Yolo Basin Foundation.



Ms. Quirk holds a B.A. degree in Natural Resources with an emphasis in Environmental Science from Humboldt State University. Thanks go to **Jane Turrel**, our former treasurer, for leading us to Corky & her bats.

## ON THE TRAIL

**Katie Antista** had a long encounter with a bobcat who emerged from behind the garbage cans near the Plaskon bridge, and who acted quite casual as he regarded her, sauntering on. **Barbara Kempster** talked quite a while to a bobcat relaxing in a cool, fur-ruffling breeze by a Visitor Center redwood, who was unfazed by the grinding of a wood chipping machine—Sept. 15th, 5pm.



**Ron Wilson**, Hazelnut trail, at 2:30pm on Sept. 18—day of our first rain — "the perfect conditions were available for the emergence of thousands of **Western subterranean termites** (*Reticulitermes hesperus*): warm, humid, September. They erupt in numbers from single small ground holes." (Ron's photo at rt.)



Bing Huey's **California aster & syrphid fly** are seen at left. But it was only one of the 3 insects Bing found getting food from this flower on the Montara Mt. trail, all within a few minutes of time. Check bulletin boards to see a large version of all 3.

In mid-October, **Ray Trabucco** was delighted to hear the piercing rattle of the **Belted Kingfisher** over the creek by the So. Walnut.



### INTO NATURE WITH CAROLYN PANKOW—Part III

We'll start off at Aptos Junior High, in San Francisco, where our fearless Alaskan adventurer is now crying in the classroom, trying to restore order with a rambunctious and mischievous set of 8th graders. She is newly separated, with 3 little boys in diapers: one 2 years old and twins 7 months old, and all her family in SoCal. Woe is me, what to do? A wonderful fellow, **John Bissett**, believes in her, & pulls strings, keeping her from being transferred to a less desirable school by the cruel & incompetent principal, who shall go unnamed.

Due to good friends, due to a fighting resolve that we all learn to cultivate if we are to survive this existence, I went on



to become an inspired teacher, refining especially, my student-activities & labs.

I studied Environ. Education with **Dr. Frank Schiavo** (at left), who was later inducted into the Santa Clara Co. Environ. Hall of Fame. He had me develop a 9th grade Biology course, one that my students responded to with vigor! As they

started reading the Reinow's "Moment in the Sun" one weekend, I was startled when one group of gifted girls stormed into my classroom at the end of lunch on a Monday, obviously upset: "Does the United States really use half of the World's resources?" How could you tell us such a thing!", cried, **Teresa Sanchez**, the girl who was the most shocked and upset. I assigned "Never Cry Wolf" by **Farley Mowat** and we wrote letters to the Canadian government and others about their stupidity in killing these "balance of nature" predators. (Now, in 2014 the state of Idaho, especially, led by Gov. Butch Otter is slaughtering wolves wholesale, "to help save the elk & deer.") The students gave dollars to help save a beach, worked on an oil spill at Ocean Beach, scooping up oil with hay. A big thrill for me and 8 of the girls in my class, was our backpacking trip I planned to Wildcat Campground, at Pt. Reyes and our hike to Alamere falls. **Linda Burmeister**, a math teacher, joined us by dinnertime that first night—later the law suit mentality kept me from such endeavors.

**Gary Nakagiri**, later a curriculum specialist for SM County, introduced me to the hands-on ISCS "chemistry" program.



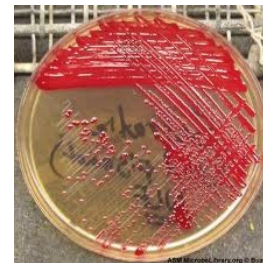
With another teacher, we planned tide pool field trips to Pillar Point. I really can't recall whether it was there or on the backpacking trip that I was carried by girls & dumped into the ocean. Gary, like me, had had his breakdowns—his after class—but emerged even more victorious, setting

up cutting edge curriculum and fairs for SM Co. In the 90's I worked with him again, pioneering a new "Pets in Biology" unit for high schoolers, skillfully weaving in the basic science course.

Change was in the wind in 1979: 9 graders & my Biology classes were transferred to high school. A mentor urged me to apply to Balboa High in the Outer Mission, for a 10th grade Biol. position.

I was warned that this would be no picnic and it wasn't. I worked with many underprivileged and at risk kids, and was so gratified when for the most part they liked their activities, labs, and field trips: tide pools, Elephant Seals, Butano State Park, and yes, we took public transportation to get to SPVP; the young guys wanted to get to the top of Montara Mt. Some loved quadrat studies as much as had the gifted students at Aptos, sifting through the litter of leaves to find snapping springtails, flea-like flippers, the amphipods. millipedes, centipedes: "Mrs. Pankow, there are so many different things living here!"

I was happy that they took pride in learning the sterile technique after growing bacteria from their cafeteria, washrooms, garbage cans, etc., finding the bacteria-loaded parts of the school, streaking sterile nutrient agar plates with red *Serretia marcescens*, *E.coli*, and other microbes that could have been dangerous if sterile methods had not been adhered to solidly.



But my favorite lesson was on the 2nd day of Biology when I "bio-blitzed" with a fascinating animal or plant from my backyard on each desk—looking back, there were probably a couple of traumatized **endangered San Francisco garter snakes** released back into Pacifica. And a runner-up was my hard thought-out lesson on meiosis or reduction division. Instead of learning those phases just through the microscope, I parsed out the meaningful part of this wondrous phenomenon. I had similar "chromosomes" of yarn, beads, etc., which had to be shaken in a jar and then one of each kind removed blindfolded. The resultant baby was sketched by the partners after the egg was combined with a sperm from another group.

Teachers love to learn, and in those days of the 80's and 90's, the SF Schools had cutting-edge profs teach us about discoveries in the Galapagos, the genetics of **tomato plants** in the Andes, etc. in the Biology Teachers Forum. And some of us applied for the Biology Teachers' Institute, allowing us to explore some of the natural science of the Bay Area including the Geysers; later we had a chance to do recombinant DNA at SF State University and to introduce it to our youngsters.

Summers offered time to back pack to the Western Sierras, Trinity Alps, Ventana Wilderness Area, etc, time to go on exploratory field trips with the California Native Plant Society and the Audubon Society, time to read "Cry of the Kalahari" and "A Sand County Almanac", etc.; retirement allowed me to meet some nature lovers at SPVP, and some really good friends, to write this bulletin, and to search for natural history programs for Pacificans. *The End*





# A NATURALIST'S PERSPECTIVE

By Jim Mackey

Nov./Dec. 2014

Keystone species are so important that their loss would result in the loss of other members of their communities. In San Pedro Park some keystone species might be pocket gophers, earthworms, and brush rabbits.

Botta's Pocket Gopher (*Thomomys bottae*). (photo from ProjectNoah) This species' bare earthen mounds reveal its presence. Many of us have seen bobcats poised by such mounds in a meadow by the Weiler Road or in the South Walnut Picnic Area. I was once on duty in the Visitor Center on a sunny afternoon and was startled to see a bobcat poised by a gopher's mound near



the flag pole! Gophers eat roots, bulbs and bases of growing plants. I believe that we stopped watering the former lawns at the Walnut Picnic Areas, the Visitor Center and horseshoe courts last year - in order to save water. The resulting open, weedy fields are not all bad because some of these weeds - like growing dandelions, filarees and wild radish are good food for gophers. But **Jameson** and **Peters**, in California Mammals, say that the breeding season for gophers is prolonged where land is irrigated, so that varying this factor may result in annual reproduction varying from one to four litters of two to 12 young. I realize that our summer fog is a source of moisture to the soil and that this could be a significant amount dripping from trees, or shrubs in our maritime chaparral, but I doubt that it would be enough in our meadows to produce enough plant growth to keep gophers breeding or even active. So I expect fewer keystone gophers, resulting in a stress on our populations of bobcats, coyotes, foxes, gopher snakes (Dave Harper photo of snake) and barn owls (if we have any). (I have found gopher skulls in barn owl pellets from well-watered areas in Cypress Lawn Cemetery and Golden Gate Park as well as irrigated farm land south of Half Moon Bay.)



Cemetery and Golden Gate Park as well as irrigated farm land south of Half Moon Bay.)

Earthworms may be a keystone species in our Park. They Digest organic matter and tunnel up to excrete material in casts at the surface. They are preyed upon by moles and robins. I have watched robins hunting in the So. Walnut Area. They run (not hop) up to a spot & cock their heads toward the ground as if listening. (In fact earthworms may make slurping sounds as they move through their

tunnels.) However a student at SFSU watched robins hunting (miracleofnature.org photo) on the women's softball field (near 19th Ave.) & thought that the traffic noise must drown out the worms' sounds. He also put plastic, dummy worms on the field that the robins were fooled into picking up. Robins have 2 foveas-- focal points, in each retina - one for looking ahead with both eyes & the other for close-up vision with one eye.



Brush rabbits (*Sylvilagus bachmani*) may also be a keystone species in Pedro Park. Intense predation from redtailed



hawks, coyotes, foxes, bobcats, et al has selected for their habit of never going more than a few feet from thick brush. Sometimes, at this point, you can see an abrupt transition from the shorter lawn-like grass that the rabbits have grazed to the taller grass beyond. (Walter Colquhoun photo of one of our bobcats with unlucky brush rabbit-Aug '11)



Poor Jim's Almanac. Watch for our first "spring" blossoms - on the currants (photo--WildflowersWest).

### FACTOID\*

**Bats** (insectivorous ones—California species) eat a lot of "bugs" — up to two-thirds of their body weight in insects daily for some species. There's an unexpected side effect of all that insect eating, as "exoskeletons are a chitinous candy bar wrapper around a delicious protein meal". Bat scat sparkles with insect exoskeletons. It's a diet of insects that puts the shine in bat guano. Insects' exoskeletons, or hard outer coverings, are made of chitin, and are chewed up by bats, but still difficult to digest; If you eat a lot of shiny insects, you are going to make Twinkle Turds. (sparkly poop photo from *Wired* magazine) Many insect-eaters shuck off some of the skeleton, or don't chew it up, thus no shine. (\*This article is almost totally by **Gwen Pearson**, writing for *Wired* magazine.)



### HABITAT GROUP SPIFFS UP WEEDY AREA BY PLASKON BRIDGE

Istvan Puski reported that he and the rangers planted several silk tassel plants in the old **African Cape weed**-infested area in September. After the weeding, a plastic tarp, and then a bark mulch was placed down, followed by holes for these dominant native plants. Then, later, other natives will be added.





**ON THE TRAIL** (continued)

**Coyotes!** Holly (from Dr. Kobori's office) and husband, Bob, were walking toward the Valley View trailhead from the summit one evening in mid October, when they heard a siren in the distance; so did a group of young coyotes in the bushes nearby, who completed the musical prompt with high-pitched yipping.

**Laurie Nikitas**—mid Oct.—"How gorgeous is this??[coyote] It crossed in front of my car on the entrance drive, went up the slope and just stood there as I gazed at it. Then it crossed again, and stood on the curb until I moved the car, at which time it crossed AGAIN and posed for me, never

flinching as I lowered the window and raised the phone (Laurie's photo of Mr. Handsome at left). Very calm, seeming to want to look at me as much as I wanted to look at it.



I've never seen a coyote more beautiful than this."

**Laurie** photographed this probably ill **bobcat**: "Saw this guy last week (mid Oct)—WWR Ranch Rd, first meadow. It was



crouched right near the road & let me take the picture without moving. It doesn't look right. That eye is definitely odd. Considering where it was, I'm assuming this is the cat we've all seen recently in Walnut meadow & around the horseshoe pits, so I hope to see it again soon to check out its condition."



A Pacifica mom & daughter: Amanda & Lisa, sighted a **Great Horned Owl** in the afternoon one day in Mid Oct.. It flew from the trees at the w. edge of a WWR meadow down to the field & then back up to the trees.

**NOVEMBER—DECEMBER 2014 CALENDAR**

**NOVEMBER TRAIL DAY**

Saturday, November 8.....9am

**BOARD MEETING OF THE FRIENDS OF SPVP**

Wednesday, November 12 at Shirley's.....7:30pm

**NOVEMBER HABITAT RESTORATION DAY**

Saturday, November 15.....9am

**CORKY QUIRK'S "BATS"**

Saturday, November 15.....3pm

**HOLIDAY PARTY**

Wednesday, December 10.....6:30pm

**DECEMBER TRAIL DAY**

Saturday, December 13.....9am

**DECEMBER HABITAT RESTORATION DAY**

Saturday, December 20.....9am

*For all events, meet at the Visitor Center; exceptions posted*

*Look forward to these in 2015: Nature in Pacifica, Common Murre, Beavers, Water Dynamics, Less-known Raptors, etc.*

**VALLEY-VIEW MAKEOVER**

We had a nice turn-out for our September 13th Trail Day -- new-comer **David, Stanley, Istvan Puski**, my brother **Erik Piro** and I worked with **Rangers Miranda Holeton** and **Cat Allen** doing brush work up on the east end of the Valley View Trail. Miranda and Cat ran the gas-powered hedge trimmers while the rest of us cleaned up using rakes and pitchforks and trimmed heavier coyote brush with loppers. With today's good-sized crew, we easily cleaned a couple hundred foot section of trail just above the eucalyptus grove there... and enjoyed the sunny view across the valley as well. Enjoy!



The Leaders of "the Friends of SPVP": President: **Jim Mackey**; Vice President & Editor: **Carolyn Pankow**; Secretary: **Shirley Drye**; Interim Treasurer: **Bing Huey**; member at large: **Istvan Puski**; Visitor Center Staffing: **Mila Stroganoff**; Habitat Restoration: **Istvan Puski**; Trail Leader: **Joseph Piro**; Membership: **Jim Steele**; Programs: **Carolyn Pankow**; Interim Trailside Store Manager: **Sharron Walker**; Mobile Display Board: **Katie Antista**