

CRAIG NIKITAS'S LESSER-KNOWN HAWKS of SPVP in APRIL

On Saturday, April 18th, at 6pm, one falcon and several hawks that now and then visit San Pedro Valley Park will come to life in the photography of Craig Nikitas, our popular presenter. As he discusses the taxonomy, field marks, and natural history of the **Northern Harrier**, the **Merlin**, **Per-egrine Falcon**, **Cooper's Hawk** and the **Red-shouldered Hawk**, you will be amazed at his knowledge. For instance, he told me this little known fact: "We learned from a previous SPVP speaker that **dragonflies** migrate. **Merlins** (small, fast falcons) follow that migration with their own to feast upon those dragonflies." (Merlin photo above by **Walter Kitundu**)



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Craig has long been active in the Golden Gate Raptor Society, capturing and banding hawks in the Pacific Coast autumn, on that high promontory overlooking the Bay in Marin county. Though he has always been fascinated by birds, as adult he became active as a volunteer at the Randall Museum in San Francisco, helping to care for captive hawks, owls and ravens. In the photo above you can see him with a banded **Ferruginous Hawk** (first one for him in 20 years), in a new role, assisting a researcher in his study of wintering raptors in the North Central Valley.



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APRIL BARBEQUE for REG. & PROSPECTIVE VOLUNTEERS

Be on the V.C. Patio by the creek at 12 noon on Sat, April 11. This Barbeque features stars **Joseph Piro** & brother, **Eric**, manning the grill, & also stars **Carol Martinez** & **Skeeter**, laying out the tables. Be ready with your favorite dish & maybe an idea as to how you might volunteer: Visitor Center desk, distribution of flyers, helping set up events, clean-up detail, trails & natives, phoning for events, newsletter.

WILDLIFE ASSOCIATES PROGRAM 'CREEPY CRITTERS'-APRIL

Save **Tuesday, April 7, at 11:30am** for a good time for kids with reptiles. This great organization in Half Moon Bay will present a **Mojave tortoise**, **alligator**, a **monitor lizard** and a **skink**—LIVE! We hope that an appreciation of these cold-blooded animals might awaken children's interest in reptiles in our Park.



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SHIRLEY DRYE PRESENTS the OHLONE ON SAT., MARCH 21

On Mar. 21st at 5pm, our local Pacifica expert on the Ohlone Indians, **Shirley Drye**, will present a program on this group in our Center. She plans to bring in some of the native plants of our Park, showing how these Indians used them in daily life, supplementing her Power Point program.



Shirley was the director of the Sanchez Adobe education program for many years, receiving accolades from teachers & students alike, especially for her knowledge of Indian crafts & her story-telling ability. Drye received her BA in Anthropology, emphasizing archaeology, from SFSU.

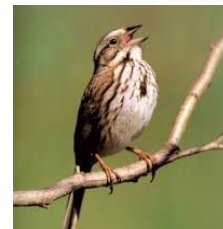
COMMON MURRE FILM FACILITATED BY JIM STEELE ON SAT., MARCH 7 at 4pm

This local film on the **Common Murres** of Devil's Slide, by **Kevin White**, takes up the problem of the decimation of this murre population due to the advent of gill netting and a famous oil spill in 1986. Jim Steele, former director of the San Francisco State University Field Campus will explain the film. Decoys of this sea bird, made by **Sharron Walker's** students, will be shown.



JIM STEELE BIRD SONG WALK APRIL 25TH at 8AM

Rise and shine & you might be able to hear the strong, high-pitched trill of the **Varied Thrush**, but certainly the music of the **Song Sparrow** (internet photo). On this Saturday, the **California Thrasher** may sing at the base of the Valley View. Bring binoculars as well as a ready ear. Jim will play recordings of male territorial songs, often hearing a challenging response.



ON THE TRAIL



Enjoy **Bing Huey's** Jan. 14, mid-morning photo of the **Downy Woodpecker** excavating his new home in SPVP in the trout farm picnic area.

Bing also captured this photo of the early bloomer, **hound's tongue**. at the east end of the Hazelnut. Watch for the white **milk maids** and **trilium** on this trail, as well as **slink pods** by the Hazelnut.



JIM STEELE'S NATURE JOURNEY Part II

Later in my junior year, I jumped at an opportunity to work at SFSU's Sierra Nevada Field Campus, located about an hour's drive north of Lake Tahoe. When John Muir said, "Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in,



where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul," I swear he was referring to the immense beauty surrounding the Sierra Nevada Field Campus. (See photo at left) But then

again it could have equally been Yosemite.

All around the country, universities were closing their field stations to save money, and SF State was considering doing the same. Studies in biology were increasingly dominated by genetics and models, and a thesis could be carried out in a lab. However **Dr. James Kelley** was the Dean of the College of Science and Engineering and held fast to the belief that students needed to be immersed in the environment. Witnessing my love for working at Sierra Nevada Field Campus, he appointed me the next director. I agreed before ever asking about my salary. Heck I was getting paid to do what I loved.

SNFC provided a wonderful outdoor educational opportunity. The mountain topography varies the effects of temperature, precipitation, hydrology, snowpack and length of growing season all of which combine to



form various microclimates. Each microclimate sustains a different community, or life zone, characterized by unique combinations of trees and shrubs. And each plant community is home to

unique combinations of animal species. (With eyes closed, I can describe the plant community by listening to the bird songs.) [Photo of the **pitcher plants** in Butterfly Valley--one field campus community]

Because the northern Sierra Nevada was such a biological treasure trove, I was able to attract some of the best biologists, naturalists and artists in the western USA to teach for SNFC's summer program. Students attending SNFC were treated to unparalleled beauty and unparalleled expertise, and they didn't need to be enrolled in the university. Anyone could attend.

Personally I felt blessed. Each summer I was surrounded by experts in **plants, mushrooms, insects, butterflies, bats, birds, mammals**, and watershed restoration. I convinced 2 knowledgeable ranchers to teach a medicinal and edible plant class, and ironically their class attracted local Washoe Native Americans who wanted to learn about local plants and their uses,

knowledge which they had lost touch with. For me, each class provided a report of how the weather had affected plants and wildlife. El Nino and La Nina years significantly modified flowering times and the birds' abundance and movements. After 25 years I began to feel a rhythm of the mountains and the remarkable resilience of nature. (I encourage you to visit <http://www.sfsu.edu/~sierra/> for more information about how you too can immerse yourself in John Muir's Range of Light at SNFC.)

Because SNFC is snowbound all winter, the SNFC director position was just half-time. But because it was my personal dream job, I decided to forego pursuing a PhD and chose to simultaneously teach science in underserved public schools in San Francisco. I started a Nature Study club and took students on hikes every other weekend. It was most rewarding to see kids' eyes light up just seeing a deer, or capturing a skink or a scorpion. I had students from the toughest housing projects buying hiking shoes. The students also made me a better biologist. When students sincerely didn't understand, it was because I was not clear. In order to convey the science, I had to understand it completely.

Although those 2 jobs were keeping me busy, I also wanted SNFC to be more than just an educational institution, but most professors were tied to their own research located far from SNFC and couldn't spare more than a week to teach a class. So I developed a bird-monitoring program funded by the US Forest Service. We established 6 monitoring stations in wet meadows in various life zones on the Tahoe National Forest. We captured birds in mist nets and banded them so we could track their comings and goings. Banding allowed us to estimate abundance and determine how well they were surviving. (above Jim's holding a **Western Tanager**)



My focus on bird populations took a new turn when one of our thriving meadows, suddenly suffered a population crash. Birds that usually remained all summer were abandoning the meadow in July. After researching several possible causes, it turned out railroad tracks, built a hundred years ago, but now removed, had altered the meadow's stream flow causing a chain of events that was now lowering the water table. The willows were dying and the birds were leaving. With the help of Pacifican **Paul Jones**, an EPA wetland specialist, we teamed with a local restoration outfit and the US Forest Service to restore the meadow's hydrology. Reinvigorated by a rising water table, willows quickly became more lush and bird life returned. Bird populations were now more abundant than we had ever observed, and the meadow became a refuge

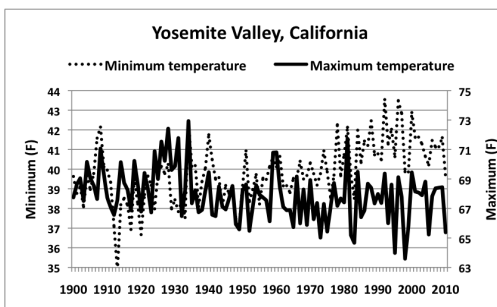
(Jim Steele's Nature Journey, continued)

for forest and desert species seeking food and a safe haven from typical summer drought conditions. It was empowering to know although humans can disrupt the environment, we also can repair it. We can be good environmental stewards, even engineer increased biodiversity.

My endeavors to understand the factors that had caused the crash in my meadow's bird populations, required an understanding of climate change, and that took me down another unexpected path. I became a global warming skeptic. Although it is wise to think globally, all organisms react locally, and it was clear that local landscape changes had the most powerful impact on wildlife. I was amazed how quickly some biologists had suggested the drying out of my meadow was due to global warming, especially because maximum temperatures in the Sierra Nevada were warmer in the 1930s. (see graph below of maximum temperatures In Yosemite Valley.) Only rising maximum temperatures could have increased drying or heat stress. So I began researching many other claims that global warming was killing species or that the heat was forcing movement northwards and upwards. But time & time again landscape changes & natural cycles such as El Nino, proved to be the most important factors.



It became apparent that blaming global warming was usually just a convenient answer, that unfortunately misdirected efforts from a better understanding of complex ecological problems. Premature assumptions were obscuring real possibilities to act locally and heal habitat. So recently I published the book *Landscapes and Cycles: An Environmentalist's Journey to Climate Skepticism* [available at Florey's Book Store]. Because climate change has become so politically charged, such a stance made me less than popular in



some circles, but I needed to speak the facts as I had experienced them. I believe I am honoring my vision quest to be an honest liaison between humans and nature. But sometimes it has been as lonely a position, as sitting on a blanket on a remote hilltop. Nonetheless, my advice remains: to be effective

environmental stewards, we must first think and act locally.

When not in the Sierra Nevada, San Pedro Valley Park was my nature connection. I hiked the trails several days a week. When my wife was pregnant, we walked the Weiler Ranch Road nearly every evening. Now retired, I hike the park nearly every day. In Pacifica, the seasons are not experienced in the same dramatic way that I felt in Massachusetts. But subtle seasonal changes are witnessed nonetheless. Flowering times or antler growth on the deer all have their unique rhythm. But most of all I hear the seasonal change. Waves of bird species returning from their wintering grounds begin to signal each month starting around Valentine's Day. Their late summer and autumn departures are also noticeable, as are the replacement sounds from new species that bred in Canada but winter here on the coast. San Pedro Valley Park is a treasure I greatly appreciate, and to show my gratitude I now volunteer to help the Friends of San Pedro Valley Park.

[editor: **Jim Steele** has taken over as our membership chair, emailing via large in-color format PDF file your newsletter. Send Jim a request for this copy: jsteele3@ix.netcom.com]

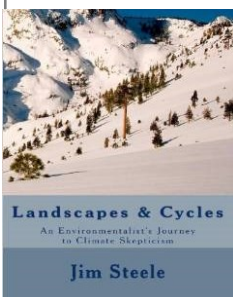
Your editor does agree with the overwhelming majority of scientists in believing that there is a serious global warming going on, however, she vows to read Jim Steele's book.

RANGERS SEEM POSITIVE ABOUT DRAIN DIP USE

For our unusually sunny and warm February 14th/Valentine's Day Trail Day, **Istvan Puski** and I joined Rangers **Greg Escoto** and **Rob Cala** and Park Aide **Steven Clinton** to give some TLC to the drain dips on the west end of the Hazelnut Trail. We made it up to just after the bench at the start of the eucalyptus forest, mostly using rakes & McLeods to clear out debris (silt, leaves, etc.) & rake copious amounts of acorns & leaves off the trail surface. Happy hiking! **Joseph Piro**



From left to right: Aid Steve Clinton, Ranger Greg Escoto, Ranger Rob Cala, Istvan Puski, and leader, Joseph Piro.





ON THE TRAIL (Continued)

Jim Mackey enjoyed a “balmy” morning January 7th, scanning with binoculars to enjoy the sight of a round of about 80 **Robins** wading through the beak-high grass, **filaree** & **English daisies** of the So Walnut. He had hoped to see one of the red breasts pull a **worm**, but he did see 2 **Varied**

Thrushes in the mix, one a male “in nuptial plumage”. (AIK NPS photo of Varied Thrush)

Jim Mackey saw & heard a **Lincoln’s Sparrow** at the cross-over road by the water company land. Jim has been seeing a

beautiful **Kestrel** (at left) by the utility road into the park. He saw him fly to the top of a tall pine in mid Feb. in the late am. **Katie**



Antista had seen a **Kestrel** in early January in the afternoon at

the top of a tall tree on the WRR past the 1/4 mile mark.

Bing Huey photographed this perfect set of **fetid adder’s tongue** on the Hazelnut trail in mid. February.



MARCH—APRIL 2015 CALENDAR

- COMMON MURRE of DEVIL’S SLIDE: FILM & JIM STEELE**
Saturday, March 7.....4pm
- MARCH BOARD MEETING AT DRYE HOME**
Wednesday, March 11.....7pm
- MARCH TRAIL DAY**
Saturday, March 14.....9am
- MARCH HABITAT RESTORATION DAY**
Saturday, March 21.....9am
- SHIRLEY DRYE’S OHLONE LIFE**
Saturday, March 21.....5pm
- CREEPY CRITTERS REPTILES—WILDLIFE ASSOC. for KIDS**
Tuesday, April 7.....11:30am
- APRIL BOARD MEETING AT DRYE HOME**
Wednesday, April 8.....7pm
- APRIL TRAIL DAY**
Saturday, April 11.....9am
- “EARTH DAY” BARBEQUE**
Saturday, April 11.....12 noon
- APRIL HABITAT RESTORATION DAY**
Saturday, April 18.....9am
- CRAIG NIKITAS’ LESSER KNOWN HAWKS of SPVP**
Saturday, April 18.....6pm
- JIM STEELE’S APRIL BIRD SONG WALK**
Saturday, April 25.....8am

For all events, except board mtg. meet at the Visitor Center

MOUNTAIN LIONS? AND DRAIN DIPS

Happy New Year 2015 everyone! For our January 10th Trail Day, **Istvan Puski, Raphael**, my brother **Erik Piro** & I went with **Ranger Greg Escoto** to do some work at the intersection of the Brooks Falls and Montara Mtn. Trails. With a post-hole digger & bar, Greg and I installed a new signpost at the intersection notifying folks they’re entering **mountain lion** territory while Istvan, Raphael and Erik took shiny new McLeods & dug a few new, much-needed drain dips just a little further up on the



Montara Mtn. Trail. It was a nice morning -- a little sun, a little fog & not too chilly, and we chatted with lots of other folks hiking along, too. Certainly a good way to start the year off!

Joseph Piro

CLIMATE CHANGE FUTURE PROBLEM for ALLEN’S HUMMERS

Allen’s Hummingbird is a seasonal visitor to our Park; now, in the Sept.-Oct ’14 issue of *Audubon* magazine they state that it is one of many birds that will probably lose 67% of its breeding range, because of global warming. The nectar for this bird will probably not be available in the area it will likely seek out. (John C. Avise photo)



FACIOM

Dusky-footed woodrats build wooden stick houses that have been known to last over 20 years, though floods can be a problem; is that why they often make axillary nests in trees and are known to be quite arboreal? (Kenneth W. Fink photo)



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 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 leader: **Istvan Puski**; Trail Leader: **Joseph Piro**; Membership: **Jim Steele**; Programs: **Carolyn Pankow**; Trailside Store Team Manager: **Sharon Walker**; Mobile Display Board: **Katie Antista**