

# the FRIENDS of SAN PEDRO VALLEY PARK

## WITH A SONG IN THEIR HEART-May 3

A bit hard to believe that birds are so romantic *these days*, when we now realize that much of the bluster is an announcement to other males that "this" territory is theirs, but at least they are checked out by the females who apparently are listening for the males with the best voice or song. Well, don't ask me, because **Jim Steele** can tell you just about anything you wish to know about all the warbling, cooing and whistling that goes on, and he will do that on his walk through the best birding corridors of the park—**Saturday, May 3 at 8am**. Meet him at the Visitor Center with binoculars in hand. (Bird singing by **Catherine Clark** at [www.CatherineClarkStudio.com](http://www.CatherineClarkStudio.com))



Jim Steele, some of you will remember, was for a time, the substitute for that genius of avian song, the late

**Luis Baptista**. **Jim** is the head of the San Francisco State Field Campus near Yuba Pass in the Sierras. Some of you were at the **Bob Patterson** program, where you heard and saw more than little about one of the amazing programs there, or you might have talked to **Adrian & Mila Stroganoff**, who recently took a



class at the field campus. Presently Jim teaches biology in SF. This will be the 4th year he has volunteered to teach us about the birds of our park. (photo of Luis Baptista -Dong Lin, SFWeekly.com)

**Explore the Park Lowlands with James Mackey** on Saturday, May 31 from 10am– 12 noon, **Dr. James Mackey** has planned another easy family hike —(school age children); this one can include the grandparents! He will lead you to nature hot



spots in the most frequented areas of the park, looking for the hidden nests, a strange **fungus**, late spring blooming flowers, perhaps telling the stories of parental care, fungal

strategies, **insects** that assist the blossoms. While ambling through the habitats of various flora and fauna he is apt to ask you to share in discovering the unexpected and, looking at the often ignored.(photo latticed stinkhorn fungus from Pac Bell w.s.)

## JOE MORLAN , FAMOUS BIRD "DETECTIVE"

When you are tapped to teach expert birders how to I.D. our winged friends, you know you are good, and so it goes with Mr. Morlan. Joe will give us our May program "Looking at Birds through a Lens" on **May 17 at 8pm** in our Visitor Center. I heard about Joe from some religious birders at my former teaching job at Balboa High School; each of them had taken classes from him, and realizing that I was not very swift at matching bird name with appearance, I naturally took one of the evening classes that Joe teaches at Marina Mid. School in S.F.



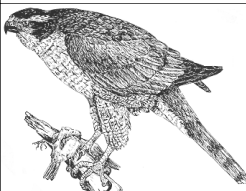
(photo of girl and scope from FledglingBirders.org Forum)

So Joe's name automatically came to mind as I thought about a new presenter on these feathered critters. Had I known of Joe's fame think I might have been intimidated. Joe has published dozens of articles on bird identification in birding journals, coordinates the No. Calif. "Birdbox," a voicemail system for reporting rare birds, & was even invited to Israel to attend the 1986 international bird identification meeting. He maintains a web site you might visit, which is devoted to Calif. birding at: <http://fog.ccsf.edu/~jmorlan/>. ( pygmy nuthatch copyright use permission from Smithsonian Zoological Park w.s. Terry Peterson photo)



## ON THE TRAIL-Sightings

Ranger **David de Vasquez** was on the Trout Farm when he heard the screeching of a **Cooper's Hawk**. Across the other side of the creek, among a grove of **Calif. live oaks**, was a large oak where the female hawk was in hot pursuit of a larger **Raven** who was snooping in her territory, perhaps by her nest. She fought him off ferociously and sent him into a quick retreat. A couple of days later, in mid April, **Ray Trabucco** was amazed to find a whole colony of **Cooper's Hawks** in the oak tree grove that had been the source of de Vasquez's discovery. (Alaska Dept Fish & Game photo of C.H.)



On the Sun Garden trail **Ms. Pankow** found one of our Volkswagon Beetle-shaped **iridescent brown beetles** (just under 1 cm. long) sitting on a mugwort leaf— 3pm, April 4. An instant later there was a slinky & swift **terrestrial garter snake** working its way past the **Dudleya** & back under the 2 small boulders. (W. Terrestrial Garter Snake photo by James Bettaso-US Fish and Wildlife Service)

(**On the Trail—go to p. 4**)



## MEET OUR NEW RANGER, DAVID de VASQUEZ

By Valerie Patten

David spent his entire childhood, at least from the time that he could walk, hiking and camping with his parents and spending as much time as possible outdoors. Naturally, he developed a love of nature. "I'm never bored with nature,"



David states, as he describes his childhood experiences ranging from trying to make friends with bear cubs, camping with his parents in many of California's parks, and hiking every single trail in the Pacifica area. His favorite hike from childhood was during middle school,

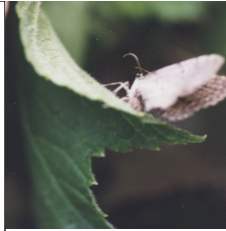
when he hiked with his parents to Glacier Point, down and around to Vernal Falls, then to Half Dome, at which point he hiked up the granite face of Half Dome with his father, all the way to the top. By the time he graduated from Terra Nova High School in 1997, he had already become familiar with all of the local trails and wilderness areas in the Pacific area: Old Pedro Road, Montara Mountain, Sweeney Ridge, etc. David attended SF State, spending time on field trips in the parks, and then discovered the rewards of volunteer work.

David volunteered to work on a number of important projects in SF and San Mateo County, trying out different types of positions. He then started donating his time in SPVP and recalls, "I learned the secret that volunteering can be more rewarding than anything else; when you go to work every day without pay, you ask, 'Why am I here?' Then you answer your own questions. You say to yourself, 'I'm here because I'm happy working in a niche that fits, that's comfortable. I'm here because I like what I'm learning'" According to David, finding the right volunteer job is "almost like a secret; you find out about your true passions, because you're not compelled to be here."

In a matter of months, in April 2007, an opportunity appeared for David to become a Park Aide. The Park Aide job is a seasonal position. Soon after that, a vacant Ranger position came up, David interviewed, and considers himself fortunate to have been hired. The Friends of SPVP consider ourselves extremely fortunate to have David assigned to our park. When the Friends need a connection with the county for any reason, David wants to work with us and wants to be the liaison for the volunteers. He wants us to feel that we have a contact person, and that we don't need



to go to other park rangers with our concerns. **Doug Heisinger** will return, but David wants to keep on working with the Friends, and states that he is always available for any assistance. (Top-David as child: Lft; Ranger David Photo by **Raul Ortega**)



When asked what he likes best about working in a natural setting, David states, "Everything is connected; I'm constantly learning about plants, animals, and seeing nature as a whole. I think about how we connect with the Park and its natural inhabitants, and I focus

on preservation, communication, and education." David cares most about endangered species or species that have been hindered or persecuted by humans, whether deliberately or inadvertently, & wants to address solutions for those species. (Pankow photo: moth on thimbleberry leaf Mont. Trail)

For fun, at home, he raises **African Mbuna Chichlids** from Lake Malawi, a freshwater species of brightly colored orange and yellow fish.

(Chilchlid photo by **David de Vasquez**)



## PROBLEM SOLVING-THE ENGINEERS 3/08

My friend, **Yvonne Malloy**, came again & joined me, **Hal Jorgensen & Jim Pommier** on this month's Trail Day. Hal said we were going to head up the Hazelnut Trail behind the Visitor Center and work on some rain dips and fix some sections of trail where run-off had



carved a channel down the center of the trail. So we gathered up some tools—shovel, McCloud, rake, etc., and headed out under a cloudy sky. We built a few new dips not too far up the hillside and greatly improved a badly channeled stretch of trail — maybe the 2nd or 3rd switchbacks up — by gently cutting back the uphill bank and distributing the dirt onto the trail and digging a new inside drainage channel along the entire length. It was a lot of dirt work, but it will all be long-lasting and help keep the trail in good shape.

~**Joseph Piro**

(Photo of McCloud from California State Website)

## Valley View Challenge

On this month's April 12th Trail Day, **Hal Jorgenson, Ed Decker, & Jim Pommier** & I set out early under a warm, sunny sky with hand tools and worked atop the ridge on the west end of the Valley View Trail. Near the top of the ridge where the trail starts to level out a bit, Hal, Ed, & I worked to repair a particularly bad section of trail where an approximately 30 foot erosion channel was running down the center of the trail. We carefully cut back the uphill bank & used the dirt to fill in the channel and grade the trail surface. We also built a new drain dip at the upper end of the stretch and cleaned out an existing one at the lower end. While we worked there, Jim worked on the trail further ahead.

~**Joseph Piro**

## A NATURALIST'S PERSPECTIVE

By **Jim Mackey**

**What eats toyon berries?** Toyon has been aptly called **California holly** because of its glossy, spiny green leaves and red berries. Our movie capital was named Hollywood because of the abundance of toyon there. In Pedro Park there are some large specimens of **toyon** in the vicinity of the east end of the Valley View Trail.



One tree here that is near the edge of the meadow is so large that when I first viewed it from the Weiler Road I mistook it for a **Coast live oak**. These toyons have been decorated with many red berries this winter, but on February 16 I noticed that most of the berries

were gone. I remembered that, in Ohio, the Division of Wildlife encouraged farmers to plant **multiflora rose** along their fences. It was believed that the **birds**, including **quail**, did not like the taste of these red berries, so they avoided eating them until other foods were gone, then finally avoided starving by eating them near the end of winter. (National Park Service, Presidio of S.F. photo)

**Sullivan** and **Eaton** reported, in the S.F. Chronicle last December 19, that the cyanide-producing glycosides in the young foliage of toyon has been known to kill a goat! The unripe, green berries also contain this toxin, but in the ripe, red berries it is confined to the seeds within. Sullivan and Eaton also reported that the **Pomo people** north of the Bay picked the berries off of the bush “where they keep for months” and “wilted them in hot ashes.” They were then ready to be eaten by the handful, but “Everybody spat out the seeds...” (Toyon leaf photo—John Goude)



Many species in the rose family, like **toyon**, **multiflora rose**, **pyracantha** and **cotoneaster**, have a mutually beneficial relationship with birds, which disperse their seeds. I would guess that all of these plants have toxins in their berries that wane as they age on the plant. This thought makes me reflect on the elegant, highly social **Cedar Waxwings** and their remarkable, occasional behavior of perching side-by-side on a branch and passing a berry down the row. Some people have thought that this behavior might be altruistic, but I am now wondering if each bird might rather be subconsciously preferring that another test the berry for toxins?



(Cedar Waxwings are from **Blueridge Collar Girl** website and Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License)

Rather like **Adelie penguins** that march from the rookery to the edge of the ice but don't immediately dive into the water. Instead they push and shove each other until one is forced in.



If it is not immediately seized by a **leopard seal** they all dive in.

(Adelie Penguins  
www.virtualantarctica/  
downloads)

**Poor Jim's Almanac.** Our Park's avian chorus should be in full force when the last returning members, our **Swainson's thrushes**, begin singing in early May. We may first hear their call-notes a couple of weeks earlier, followed by their flute-like songs in May. Also, I will be listening especially for the “What peeves you?” call of an **olive-sided flycatcher** – a species which seemed to be missing from our Park for the first time last year. Overall – warming, lengthening days will combine with persistent moisture to produce our liveliest season. Don't miss it!

(Olive-sided Flycatcher photo from Nova Scotia Museum of Natural History.)



## OUT WITH THE BAD; IN WITH THE NATIVES

In March **Jim Pommier** led **Istvan Puski** & **Jim Mackey** in digging and eradicating some of the festering wounds of **Pampas Grass** above the Falls view bench; no “antibiotic” to apply so it's a bet the tiny seeds had already spread like a bacteria during the fall season. That's why our attackers need you to help them keep one step ahead, especially before the summer crop of seeds blows in from the survivors.

In the meantime **Kate Antista** aided our team in placing our natives in the Sun Garden—**coffee berry**, **chinquapin**, and **osoberry**; she then watered the shocked root systems. Later Jim Pommier saw her pulling “bushels” of interlopers from the native Shade Garden.

April saw **Sara Shaw** joining **Pommier**, “chief pampas grass assassin” & **Puski** for another siege against the firmly rooted **Pampas** plague, this time at the old rifle range off the Montara trail. Thank you, Jim Pommier for the information. (photo—Weeds of Shoalhaven, Austral.ia)



**ON THE TRAIL-**(continued)

In **Pegge Field's** Shade Garden the **slim Solomon's seal** sported little white starburst blossoms dotting their way down the stem. Time was early April.(The parallel-veined leaves are the ones that belong to the slim Solomon's seal)



**John Murphy** and **Sue Granville**

gave me the first sighting report of a **Bobcat** this spring—there was a large “fellow” with lots of white under his tail in the late afternoon of mid-March in, where else?— the South Walnut picnic area. (bobcat image is unfortunately from the Montana Trappers Association)



**Ray Trabucco** sighted and snapped a picture of the **lattice stinkhorn fungus** that is on an island in the lower parking lot. (For a photo of this fungus see page 1)

**Mila Stroganoff** was delighted in mid April by a chase in and out of the bushes involving **2 Brush Rabbits**. Maybe a little romance?—or an unwilling partner.

On April 19 **Judy Spittle** led new “Friends” member, **Philip Posk**, & family on a morning bird walk. The best finds were: the **Warbling Vireo** & the **Hooded Oriole**—neither being park nesters. Judy found the usual migrants like the **Wilson's Warbler** and the **Black Headed Grosbeak**, who have settled here for family time. (Warbling Vireo Powdermill Nature Reserve ws) website-Bob Mulvihill)



**FACTOID**

Most of us would suspect that the **Western Fence Lizard**, like many of his ilk, would change color according to his surroundings—for instance when seen on a light rock they would be lighter in color; if they go to a darker

rock, they would turn a darker color. Interestingly, some of these lizards remain dark when placed on a light background, mimicking a shadow cast by an imperfection or crack in the rock surface. Different styles for different folks—an example of the variety within one species in nature—not just in our species. (photo of Western Fence Lizard by **John Bowersmith**—many thanks for his special efforts to send this clear copy.)

**MAY—JUNE CALENDAR**

**JIM STEELE'S "BIRD SONG" HIKE**

**Saturday, May 3.....8am**

**MAY TRAIL DAY**

**Saturday, May 10.....8am**

**MAY GENERAL MEETING**

**Wednesday, May 14.....7pm**

**MAY NATIVE PLANT DAY**

**Saturday, May 17.....9am**

**JOE MORLAN'S BIRDS THROUGH A LENS**

**Saturday, May 17.....8pm**

**JIM MACKEY'S NATURE IN THE PARK**

**Saturday, May 31.....10am**

**JUNE GENERAL MEETING**

**Wednesday, May 11.....7pm**

**JUNE TRAIL DAY**

**Saturday, June 14.....8am**

**JUNE NATIVE PLANT DAY**

**Saturday, June 21.....9am**

*For all events meet at the Visitor Center*

**NEWS BRIEFS**

Please take notice of the new and vigorous **buckeye tree** planted in the memory of **Tim Malone**. It's on an island in the lot where it's easily visible from his bench.

The “Friends” nominated these officers for our election: Pres., **Carolyn Pankow**; V. Pres., **Raul Ortega**; Secretary, **Shirley Drye**, board members:**Jean Leonard**, **Christine Thatcher**,**Jim Mackey**, & **Hal Jorgensen**.

New help is always needed at the visitor center, so thanks to **Jack Dodson** and **Philip Posk**, who are in training with visitor center leader, **Jean Leonard**.

Thanks again to **Ed** and **Joy Decker** for manning the **Barbeque on Earth Day**. 22 friends “chowed down” including **Cheryl Broock**, **Shirley Drye**, **Steve Robinson** & **Isabel Ebert**, **Nancy Jewett** (all the way from Turlock), **Jean Leonard**, **Raul Ortega**, **Carolyn P**, **Valerie Patten**, **Jim Pommier**, **Philip Posk** & wife, **Istvan Puski**, **Marisa Shaff** & family of 4, **Sara Shaw**, **Judy Spittle**, **Ray Trabucco**, & **Huldah Williams** with her friend **Jean**. Best food—all—including **Ivan's** famous raspberry bars, **Valerie** & **Cheryl's** fruit displays, fresh green salads, **Shirley's** winning dill potato salad. . Honors to Earth Day workers: **Sara**, **Jim**, and **Ivan** in the field; **Judy**, **Fred** & **Shirley** for volunteering programs; **Judy** & **Shirley** at the desk, and **Jean Leonard**.

**Questions or letters to the editor?** email: carolynpankow@comcast.net, or Carolyn Pankow 600 Oddstad Blvd: Pacifica, CA. 94044. Carolyn will also review submitted articles if they are short and deemed important to the Park news.

**The Volunteers:** **Valerie Patten**, President; **Carolyn Pankow**, V.P.; **Shirley Drye** Secretary; **Ed Decker**, Treasurer; **Raul Ortega**, & **Jean Leonard**, members at large; **Hal Jorgensen**, Trails; **Katie Antista**, Membership; **Carolyn Pankow**, Programs & Editor; **Christine Thatcher**, Trailside store; **Jean Leonard**, Visitor Center; **Jim Pommier**, alien plant removal.