

# the FRIENDS of SAN PEDRO VALLEY PARK

## WINTER SOLTICE CELEBRATION (OFTEN CALLED CHRISTMAS OR HANNAKAH)

As the days narrow down to fewer hours of daylight, as the cold creeps into our bones, we crave the warmth of hot food, good company and conversation, and yes, hit the parties. Here is one—on **Wednesday, December 10 at 6:30** where you can enjoy the camaraderie of the “Friends” of our Park—welcome to *all* members: active and those who have little time away from work and



need to relax. (Santa Claus image from the Hampton Inn w.s.)

We would love to meet all of you and share our turkey and ham and volunteer dishes. We only ask that you bring an offering of your favorite dish and a present between \$5 and \$10 for an unsuspecting recipient during our surprize gift game. If you can make it please call Jean Leonard at 359-7485.

## TRAIL WORKERS—We Want You; We Need You

Shouldn't there be some law? If you walk the trails, you work the trails? Well many of us truly can't wield the weapons of maintenance, those which carve out that miraculous strip that transports us into the inner sanctum of nature. Some of us barely have time to slip into bed at night after a demanding day's work, but then some of us are missing a special time of camaraderie, fresh air, beauty, and a work-out that surely beats the sweaty, repetitious labor of the gym. And you can pick your own personal work load for this emergency.

We have had one member severely disabled—I assure you not due to the trail work! And one member, our leader, **Hal Jorgensen**, is still recovering, so we really need you! Before our walk up the trail to that Saturday's work area, there is the difficult job of eating a donut and gulping some coffee, sharing the latest humor; well you get it—we want to have a good time. But it's no fun without YOU! So please meet us at the Visitor Center any second Saturday of the month, starting Saturday, November 8; meet us at 8am. All tools are provided by the Park or the “Friends of San Pedro Valley Park”. Pleas are from **Ed Decker, Hal Jorgensen, Jim Pommier, and Joseph Piro**, and all of us who love those trails. Hi, to Art!



## A PACIFICA NATURALIST VISITS KENYA

**Jim Mackey** is full of surprises, and you'll find many of them in his new program on **Saturday, November 1 at 7:30pm**. After sticking exclusively to telling us about wildlife in SPVP, he will now bring you his personal view

of Kenya, ( photo--<http://www.giraffes.org>) comparing the East African country's awesome creatures to the critters of Pacifica. (photo of one of our salamanders, *Batrachoceps attenuatus* courtesy of Gary Nafis)

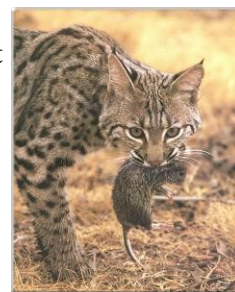
Jim has such a wide sphere of knowledge that it is hard to describe him by his doctor's dissertation:



work on the common **tree frog**. Mr. Mackey is an inveterate bird watcher who reports his annual bird count in San Mateo county on one particular day each year. He is also close to being an expert on the plants of San Pedro Valley Park, and has a good grasp of many other areas of biology, so we know his Kenyan/Pacifica study will be accurate. But more important to many, it will be intriguing and enjoyable!

## ON THE TRAIL-Sightings

On the morning of Friday, September 19, **Ranger Bernadette** and 2 of her workers: Dan and Lena, enjoyed seeing a **Bobcat** in the field behind the South Walnut picnic area. About one hour later, at 9am, they saw presumably the same Bobcat at the back of the field with what our Ranger thinks was a small **Brush Rabbit** in “his” mouth. After joining in on the starting session the feline decided to climb part way up a nearby tree with his prey. (photo of Bobcat with rodent is from [marystreetschool ws.](http://marystreetschool.ws))



Scat scoping—Exceptionally large cat scats were found by the **Rangers** and others near the giant **Sequoia** tree in the second week of October, back from **Ranger Tim Malone's** bench. Shall we say it or not?

In mid-October a **deer carcass** was found on the Trout Farm Trail just up the hill past the junction of the lower and upper pathways. **Katie Antista** noticed that the haunch and belly had been eaten. The **Rangers** covered this herbivore “kill” the next day.

**SPARKS FLY AT VISITOR CENTER**

Owls weren't the only thing flying on the night of October 18, when **Craig Nikitas** came to do his owl show for an overflow crowd. Friends of the San Pedro County Park were driving into the parking lot while a drama was unfolding on the margins of the visitor center. I noticed a **doe** and her **yearling** running nervously away. I parked immediately & looked in the direction they were fleeing from. In the parking lot were two large **bucks** preparing to fight a lethal battle for dominance, & a shot at mating with any & all does they could get. I and several others watched as these 2 testosterone-charged combatants began to fight, attacking with their large antlers in head to head combat. We heard the sound of bone against bone, of antlers colliding. I've seen it on television but nothing prepared me for experiencing 2 large bucks jousting in fierce, potentially mortal fight. The headlights of cars entering the parking lot only highlighted this drama. (sketch-Dan's taxidermy ws)



Not surprisingly, these two bucks so well matched gave all their concentration to the fight, oblivious to people or cars. One finally broke and ran away. He would have run into a car or a person had either been in his path. They were a real problem for anything nearby, not to mention each other. I have a feeling that the buck that escaped the fight will return to continue their combat, and soon. We were fortunate to have escaped either hitting these two raging bucks or being ourselves hit by one of them. No wonder the doe and her yearling were nervous, sensing the hostility in the air. October and November are the months of "rut", when male deer are crazy with steroids, and very horny. Please take special care when driving to look for bucks doing stupid things in the streets of Pacifica, and to avoid any physical proximity to them during this time.

To give a fair analysis of this embarrassing sexual behavior by an animal of my own gender, I make this observation in their defense. As fathers they do more than impregnate females. I have a small social group of male deer that hang out in the canyon below my house & are frequently seen in the neighborhood. When young male deer are inevitably kicked out of their maternal units (who could blame their mothers?) they join an

(photo of young male-Eileen Nauman blog)



aggregation of male deer & are accepted—except during the rut. But after four years of observing This society of bucks I've come to understand that the older bucks are teaching the younger ones not only how to be a buck, but how to survive. A young male will avoid the big ones during this season of mating, and they learn the values of a black-tailed buck deer, in good times & in bad.

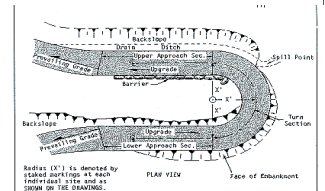
**Jack Dodson**

**OUR TRAILS ARE READY FOR RAIN, HIKERS—**

**Hal Jorgenson, Jim Pommier and I** made it to *September 13's Trail Day*. Hal's back was still bothering him, so it was Jim& I heading up the near end of Valley View to re-do some sections of trail. We re-worked 1 switchback and an approximately 25' section of trail leading to it that had a bad erosion channel running down the center of the trail. We fixed both by carefully cutting back the bank to gain soil to fill it in and properly graded the new surface. These upgraded pieces of trail should be in good shape for foot traffic & rainfall for a long time again.

A nice and sunny but pretty chilly morning greeted **\*Hal Jorgenson\***, **\*Ed Decker\*** and **\*me\*** **Joseph Piro** for the *October 11th Trail Day* (**\*Ranger Doug\*** stopped by to chat and enjoy some coffee and a donut, too). Hal's back was still bothering him, so it was just **Ed** and I who headed out. We did the Trout Farm/Brooks Falls loop, clearing out drain dips and raking **eucalyptus** leaves and acorns off the trail. He had to leave a bit early, so I continued & raked some spots on the Plaskon Nature Trail & then hiked up Valley View Trail to check on that switchback we worked on last month, which packed down nicely & looks good.

**~Joseph Piro**



in the sun

**FACTOID**

Long ago now, I was astonished to find that the alligator cared for it's young; now I find that ***Ensatina escholtzii***, a **salamander** of our park, which once I inadvertently stepped on, is one of the rare amphibians to care for its young. Don't get too excited, as it is the eggs for which they stay nearby, and often curl around to brood like a bird. Since these eggs are laid in the summer one wonders whether the closeness of Mom to eggs in this lungless, "skin-breathing" critter, is not also of advantage in retaining her body moisture. Once the fully formed salamanders emerge they presumably leave "the nest".

("http:share3.esd105.wednet.edu/rsandelin/Fieldguide/Animalpages/Amphians/Salamanders.htm is source for idea)

(*Ensatina* salamander courtesy of **Michael R. Clapp** at [www.nature.net](http://www.nature.net))



## A NATURALIST'S PERSPECTIVE

By Jim Mackey

Nov./Dec. 2008

**Watch your wake.** Tom Stienstra discussed how to stalk wildlife in his "Outdoors" column in the S.F. Chronicle on September 21. He quoted **Jon Young**, of the Wilderness Awareness School, who said, "When we walk in the woods, we create our own wake, just like a boat on a lake." (So both waves of sound and water can startle fish and wildlife.) Better yet, don't move at all! I just finished a very entertaining book (on loan from **Carolyn Pankow**) by **Craig Childs** titled "Crossing Paths. Uncommon Encounters with Animals in the Wild" (Sasquatch Books). He advises "To see the animal you must first remain very still. You may have to huddle in the dark of a street culvert for three nights before the raccoon comes."

Once I settled back against the base of a large **Douglas fir**, ate a bag-lunch and dozed off. I awoke to see a large **buck deer** foraging through the leaf litter and moving slowly directly toward me. He occasionally stopped and stared directly at me, and as there was no obstruction between us, I could not believe that he did not see me. However when he was only about 20 feet away he abruptly stiffened, threw up his head and gave a snort that turned into a whistle as he wheeled around and bounded away. Perhaps he caught my scent. (photo of Douglas Fir from U. Oregon ws.)

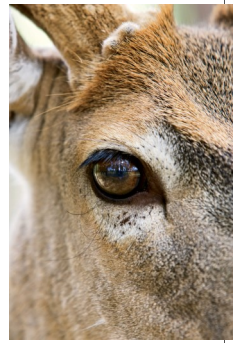


**Where to wait in Pedro Park.** When looking for birds or butterflies, visit places that are sheltered from the wind and in the sun.

Windy days are anathema to **woodland birds, butterflies** and baseball! But they cause the birds to move to predictable spots, like down into thickets and to the lee side of windbreaks. If the wind is sweeping up or down the Middle Fork of Pedro Creek, try the South Fork. I like to walk, from the upper parking lot, south on the Trout Farm Road until I have passed the first clump of willows on the right. I position myself in its lee and look back at it. In the middle of most days there will be sunshine at my back. Many birds forage in the **willows**, and **dragonflies** and **butterflies** perch and bask here. **Winter wrens** are usually in constant motion in the shade, but I once photographed one that was posed on the ground facing the sun – with its milky-colored, inner, third eyelids (nictitating membranes) closed. (photo by **Bill Hilton**)



**Habituation** is a common type of learned behavior in most vertebrates. It is a waning alarm response to a repeated stimulus. **Deer** are habituated to people moving along the Weiler Ranch Road but are concerned if they stop and point cameras at them. Mammals in Africa are habituated to safari minibuses and appear to behave fairly normally in their vicinity. (photo of deer head from generationwild w.s.)



**Vision.** Most mammals are at least partly nocturnal so their retinas feature light-sensitive rods more than color-discriminating cones. So an observer need not worry about the color of his clothing but about moving. However most birds, and humans, are very responsive to colors, especially reds. Why? Red is not so widespread in nature as blue or green & it signaled something important to evolving humans, maybe ripe fruit or a poisonous animal. So red has the power to excite us, & thus is a persuasive color in advertising, but it would be a poor choice for painting your bedroom!

### Poor Jim's Almanac

Watch for mixed-species flocks of foraging woodland birds. These are typical of winter, but **Judy Spittle** has already seen one - on Sept. 20. And it included a beautiful **Townsend warbler!** (photo thank you, **Peter La Tourette**)



### PLANT WORKERS "SAVE" PRAIRIE

**Pacifica's Terrace Prairie** is an environment that often slips off the map, but our Chinquapin Trails team of native plant workers helped to give it breathing room by plucking out those alien hogs: **eucalyptus** seedlings and saplings, **black acacia**, and even invasive **pine seedlings** from the grassy area over the park entryway. **Istvan Puski, Sara Shaw, Jim Mackey & Jim Pomnier** supplied the force.

### NEWS BRIEFS—gossip

**Steve Durkin**, head ranger at **Fitzgerald Marine Preserve** and SPVP resident was seen taking notes on the **Craig Nikitas Owl** slides at October's program, **lying down in the front aisle!** (standing or lying room only)

**Dominic Marconi**, former SPVP aid & Marine Science graduate, is getting experience with Marine animals at the Fitzgerald Marine Preserve & loves working with kids!—seen at Vallemar's Guerrero's Taco House.

**ON THE TRAIL-Sightings (continued)**

Patricia Robinson’s yard on Higgins Way is part of the land that “feeds” our park.



For the first time she sighted a **black squirrel** in one of her trees—in early September. This color morph has also been seen in San Pedro Valley Park. Please let us know if you sight one. Reportedly these are a “color morph” of the Eastern grey squirrel. (photo

from My Space)

Yes, you need not go farther than the pathway of our native sun garden to find wildlife. As **Jim Pommier** was perusing his handiwork on Tuesday, September 30, a **doe** rounded a corner and was startled to see this tall predator just a few feet away; she retraced her footsteps in haste. In early October **Katie** was startled by a **buck** who didn’t seem aware of her presence as she weeded the Native Sun Garden.

**Katie Antista** sighted a **Cooper’s Hawk** with a tiny snake in its talons as he flew to a tree at the upper side of the Weiler Ranch Road near the shop, transferring the snake into



his mouth “as though it were a piece of spaghetti”. All this happened on Monday, October 6th. (photo of Cooper’s Hawk- Thank you, **Lloyd Spitalnik**)

**SEPTEMBER TRIPLE TACKLE**

Three tough men: **Jim Mackey**, **Jim Pommier**, and **Istvan Puski**, tangled with an equally tough Pampas Grass for almost one half an hour before bringing it down, thus ending its days of spreading its “evil” seed. The Argentine plant may be taking over our coasts, but we’re holding the line here on the Montara Mt. trail & elsewhere in SPVP. This team also played offense against the invasive Australian fire weed, & placed a new Chinquapin in our garden. We need more strong people on our team—maybe you?

**NOVEMBER—DECEMBER CALENDAR**

- MACKEY’S A PACIFICA NATURALIST in KENYA**  
Saturday, November 1.....7:30pm
  - NOVEMBER TRAIL DAY**  
Saturday, November 8 .....8am
  - NOVEMBER GENERAL MEETING**  
Wednesday, November 12.....7pm
  - NOVEMBER NATIVE PLANT DAY**  
Saturday, November 15..... 9am
  - CHRISTMAS PARTY**  
Wednesday, December 17 .....6:30pm
  - DECEMBER TRAIL DAY**  
Saturday, December 13.....8am
  - DECEMBER NATIVE PLANT DAY**  
Saturday, December 20.....9am
- For all events, meet at the visitor center.*  
**Sat., Jan. 17, at 7:30pm —Melissa Peabody Coyote Prog.**

**CHILDREN RULE IN FEBRUARY AND APRIL**

If you have a child or grandchild in the Bay Area they would undoubtedly be thrilled to see our repeat program from the Insect Discovery Center that includes a close-up look at a live **Walking Stick**, as well as “pass arounds” of other Arthropods. Save Sat., Feb. 7 at 1pm.(Lacy Atkins Chronicle photo)



Then during Easter vacation on Tuesday, April 7, we will have a live **Bobcat** and **Snowy Owl** & a **Coatimundi** in the Visitor Center presented in the “This Living Earth” program given by “Wildlife Associates”. This is a new program that will be given in the same manner as the other popular ones shown at our libraries. (Bill R. Lucy photo of Coatimundis)



*"A child's world is fresh and new and beautiful, full of wonder & excitement. It is our misfortune that for most of us that clear-eyed vision, that true instinct for what is beautiful, is dimmed & even lost before we reach adulthood. Rachael Carson*

**Questions or letters to the editor?** New email: carolynpankow@comcast.net, or Carolyn Pankow 600 Oddstad Blvd: Pacifica, CA 94044. Writer of this newsletter is your editor, unless otherwise indicated.

**The Volunteers:**

**Carolyn Pankow**, President; **Open**: Vice President **Shirley Drye**, Secretary; “**Jane Do**”, interim Treasurer; **Jean Leonard**, **Jim Mackey**, & **Hal Jorgensen**, members at large; **Jean Leonard**, visitor center; **Jim Pommier**, alien plant removal; **Hal Jorgensen**, Trails; **Kate Antista**, Membership chair, **Carolyn Pankow**, Program chair; **Open**: Trailside store manager.