



Valley Views

The Friends of San Pedro Valley Park

March / April 2025

Upcoming Programs

A March Zoom Webinar with Dr. Phoebe Parker-Shames “Coyote Research, Management, and Coexistence in the Bay Area”

On **Saturday, March 8th at 7 pm**, the Friends of San Pedro Valley Park welcome Dr. Phoebe Parker-Shames and Tali Caspi, who will explore with us the complex relationship between people and coyotes in the Bay Area. They will explain what coyotes eat, how individual differences affect their behavior, and why they thrive in urban areas. They'll also share how community science and tracking studies help them learn more about coyotes' movements and habits, offering practical tips for fostering coexistence. Finally, Phoebe and Tali will discuss real-world challenges and strategies for managing interactions between people and coyotes, drawing on the expertise of local agencies. Please join us for what should be a very informative presentation.

About the speakers: Dr. Phoebe Parker-Shames is the Wildlife Ecologist for the Presidio Trust in San Francisco. Phoebe holds a PhD in Environmental Science, Policy, and Management from UC Berkeley. Her work focuses on the role of humans within ecological systems to promote coexistence and ecosystem resilience.



Tali Caspi is an urban ecologist studying how carnivores adjust to city life. She is currently a PhD Candidate in the Mammalian Ecology and Conservation Unit at the University of California at Davis.

Please register in advance for this webinar using the following link:

https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_rDuMZiLKR-CU4m9z_OZ9jg

You will then get a confirmation email with further instructions, as well as reminder emails at one week, one day and one hour to prior the webinar.

An April Zoom Webinar with Dr. Patrick Robinson “Elephant Seal Research at Año Nuevo Reserve: a Life of Extremes”

On **Saturday, April 5th at 7 pm**, the Friends of San Pedro Valley Park welcome Dr. Patrick Robinson, Director of Año Nuevo Reserve, for his presentation on elephant seal research at Año Nuevo Reserve, which has been home to UC Santa Cruz's elephant seal research program for the past 50 years. During this time, researchers have led pioneering studies on fasting physiology, at-sea behavior, diving physiology, habitat associations, and demography. Elephant seals give us a glimpse into the open ocean mesopelagic zone - a region that is poorly understood, but is home to some of the most abundant fish species. The seals live a life of extremes by migrating thousands of kilometers each year, diving to depths that can exceed 1,700 meters, and holding their breath for nearly two hours. Join Patrick in a discussion of the research projects that led to these incredible discoveries. It should prove to be a very special evening for us all.

About the speaker: Patrick completed his PhD and post doc work in marine biology at UC Santa Cruz. His focus was studying the at-sea behavior of elephant seals using biologging devices. Specifically, he identified methods for identifying foraging behavior and characterized the extreme accuracy of the migratory movements. In 2012, Patrick was hired as the Director of Año Nuevo Reserve, where he facilitates a diverse array of research, teaching, and outreach activities. He has co-authored over 80 peer-reviewed journal articles on species around the world. Please register in advance for this webinar using the following link:

https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_bAMqj7z9ScSDhosVvkQpM9w

You will then get a confirmation email with further instructions, as well as reminder emails at one week, one day and one hour to prior the webinar.



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Visitor Center

The Friends provide volunteer hosts to staff the reception desk when the Visitor Center is open on Saturdays and Sundays (only) from 10 am to 4 pm. Our Trailside Store is open during those hours.

Upcoming Event

~~~ JOIN US for a CELEBRATION of EARTH DAY in SPVP ~~~

The Friends of San Pedro Valley Park will once again celebrate Earth Day with a restoration work party. This year, it will take place on the actual commemorative Earth Day, which is **Tuesday, April 22nd**. And it will again be a rescue day for the plants in our beloved, but neglected, Native Plant Garden, as we go after removing the usual suspects of invasive plants, weeds and plant debris. We may also be planting some natives to enhance the garden and help bring it back to its former healthy and well-tended appearance.



This year's event will take place **from 10 am until 1 pm** at the Visitor Center.

Just bring your gloves and your sun hats... we'll supply the tools and the knee pads!

The two areas comprising the SPVP Native Plant Garden are ambassadors for the wild and wonderful biodiversity of our park, so we need to have the plants be able to show themselves at their best for our visitors.



We hope you can join us for this annual celebration of the native plant life in this, our tiny corner of the planet. And the Friends would also like to get to know more of the folks who, like us, will choose to help refresh a garden that welcomes native pollinators: bees, butterflies, beetles and others - a tiny microcosm of our struggling-to-be-healthy Planet Earth.



## Junior Ranger Program is Launched at SPVP

The Friends of SPVP are pleased to announce that the San Mateo County Parks Department's new Junior Ranger Program was launched at SPVP on February 15th. We are the first park in the County system to have the Junior Ranger booklet, which is specific to each of the County parks in the program (*Ranger Tracy Nappi holds up one of the booklets in photo at right*). The SMCP's Interpretive Planning group is hoping to have booklets completed for Huddart/Wunderlich, Memorial, Fitzgerald and Edgewood parks sometime this summer. Each park will have a booklet and a Junior Ranger badge that is unique to their park.



The 12-page Junior Ranger workbook contains information on getting to know SPVP, including park rules and safety tips, along with various games and activities to help learn about the park's habitats, watersheds, and the animals who live in the park. When an individual has completed the workbook, he/she must sign the pledge on the last page and recite it aloud to a representative of the Parks Dept.

(continued on page 8)

## Recent Program

### Dr. Emily Taylor's "The Secret Lives of Snakes"

by Bing Huey

Some in the audience may have yet to overcome their innate fears of these animals. To help them along, Dr. Emily Taylor's knowledge and enthusiasm can turn phobia of snakes into curiosity and respect. Dr. Taylor, Professor of Biology at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, joined the Friends on 9 November 2024 to give a webinar entitled, "The Secret Lives of Snakes." These animals have existed for some 90 to 100 million years and are actually the youngest of the reptilian lineages. There are some 4,100 species of snakes worldwide and of these, about 1,000 have been added since 2008, indicating how much active study is ongoing in the field. In California, there are about 50 species of snakes in five families, a fairly large number attributable to the many varied habitat types, large latitudinal range, and large amount of protected lands in the state.



Dr. Taylor showed wonderful images of the animals undisturbed in their natural habitats. Among these were the California red-sided garter snake and San Francisco garter snake, two subspecies found in the Bay Area, and both of striking blue and red coloration. In California and other places, the variety of snakes reflects the variety of their habitat types, from the beaches to the grasslands of the Central Valley, in the Mojave Desert, and in the Sierra, from the foothills to the mountains. There are the western black-headed snake, living underground and using venom to catch scorpions and centipedes, and the southwestern speckled rattlesnake, colored to match the lichens growing on the rocks they also occupy. The ring-necked snake has an orange-red underside, which it flashes when it assumes its coiled defensive posture. Gopher snakes are adept at climbing trees and raiding bird nests, while the small and underground dwelling western thread snake, with only vestigial eyes, is captured by owls and brought to their nests for the purpose of clearing them of insects.



Adult rattlesnake - San Mateo County

Dr. Taylor saved a good part of her talk for explaining her passion for, and research with, rattlesnakes. These animals can survive dehydration and coexistence with urban environments. There are seven, or nine, depending on who is counting, species in California. There is the endangered red diamond rattlesnake, some of which are stranded in islands of natural habitat surrounded by urban development, and the well camouflaged Panamint rattlesnake. In the Bay Area, the western rattlesnake is widespread, living under junk and controlling rodent populations.

The prairie rattlesnake occurs in Colorado, where Dr. Taylor and her colleagues have established high quality webcams in their study. These snakes live communally in megadens, hibernating underground below the frost line. Use of the webcams have enabled Dr. Taylor, as well as the public ([rattlecam.org](http://rattlecam.org)), to observe behaviors such as live birthing and communicating actions such as head jerks. Baby snakes coil up to allow rainwater to collect on their backs, which they then drink. Observations also reveal the community of organisms they live with. Following their live birth, flies feed on the blood of the snakes while crickets eat the afterbirth. Magpies can be seen preying on the baby snakes.

The key message from Dr. Taylor is that, although snakes might make some people uncomfortable, they are vulnerable as well as beautiful. They are complex organisms with great diversity and need to be left alone and given space to survive. She has written a very fine book, "California Snakes and How to Find Them," designed to bring readers into their fascinating and beautiful world.

A recording of Dr. Taylor's talk is available for viewing through the Friends' website.

## A Beautiful First Day of 2025 on the Trails

by Joseph Piro

We had a great turn-out for our first Trail Day of 2025 (Jan. 11)! Under a beautiful blue, sunny sky, **Mary Larsen, Stan Jensen, Ken Coe, Jeff, Joe, Bonnie, Kalia**, my brother **Erik** and **I** headed up the Hazelnut Trail behind the Visitor's Center and did a variety of work all along the way up to the big wood retaining wall almost a mile up.



We mostly worked on clearing drain dips and ditches (and making a few new ones; on our way back down Mary counted about 30 spots we worked on)... dug up some "trip hazard" roots and rocks.... and trimmed back some bushes and branches.

Certainly a good way to start the new year off -- have a Happy New Year and enjoy the trails!

## Our February Trail Day was a Bit Chilly!

by Joseph Piro

**Stan Jensen, Ken Coe**, my brother **Erik** and **I** got together for our February 8, 2025 Trail Day. It was sure a chilly start to the day, but at least the sky was sunny blue as we headed off to check on the Valley View/Weiler Ranch trail loop.



Though soggy in spots along the way, things were in pretty good shape up on the hillside given all that heavy wind and rain we had earlier in the week. We raked away eucalyptus leaves,

shoveled silt out of lots of drain dips and ditches, and cut back a few branches that had broken off.

Enjoy the trails and views!

## ~ March / April '25 Calendar ~

### March Trail Day

Saturday, March 8 ..... 9 am

### Dr. Parker-Shames - Coyotes\*

Saturday, March 8 ..... 7 pm

### March Habitat Restoration Day

Saturday, March 15 ..... 10 am

### Dr. Robinson - Elephant Seals\*

Saturday, April 5 ..... 7 pm

### April Trail Day

Saturday, April 12 ..... 9 am

### April Habitat Restoration Day

Saturday, April 19 ..... 10 am

### Earth Day Event at SPVP

Tuesday, April 22 ..... 10 am

*\*Zoom webinar registration required*

## >> FACTOID <<

### Snake Skin Magic

Cavity-nesting birds like our park's Bewick's Wren have always had an imminent threat: invasive egg stealing and hatchling robbery by our dusky-footed woodrats, deer mice, weasels, and other hungry mammals. Strangely, these smaller "house-dwellers" rely on help from the slithering serpent world.

While walking up the first damp section of the Eastern Hazelnut Trail, a friend and I were startled by a zooming feather-rocket and soon realized that a bird had been heading for its cavity nest, perhaps shin-high in the upper part of the trail bank inches from us. We must have then heard the raspy call of the Bewick's Wren or seen it later.

Since it was not located up under the eaves of a house, I wondered how these wrens could protect their young from marauders.

This intriguing puzzler - this unknown - prompted Vanya Rohwer and his colleagues at Cornell University to investigate the unsolved mystery and found that "cave" nest builders are 6 more times likely than tree-nesters to fortify the homes of their young with cast-off snake skins, presumably as protection.

*(continues on page 6)*



— Carolyn's Corner —

### BUSHTIT BUSYBODIES

In California, spring brings with it an assortment of industrious birds building the cozy creations we call nests. So why not follow the lives of an impossibly hyperactive pair, a *Psaltriparus minimus* couple, as they get down to their Bushtit business, building the most magnificent nest in all of San Pedro Valley Park.

As in most important matters, there is all that preparation: first the selection of a nest site by the pale-eyed female and the dark-eyed male; in this case, high in one of the Coast live oak trees\* of SPVP. They follow one strong branch to branchlets, deciding on an interlacing area of supportive twigs that will be the sturdy anchor for the imagined haven, the nest which will protect the family from huge (to them) marauders. Here, "out on a limb" has a healthy connotation. Now to produce the framework: a collection of myriads of spider webs, some say up to a thousand, are carefully attached to the multiple supports. This pair of nickel-weight parents must repeatedly descend onto the spider silk to lengthen the strong frame of their new home, gather more webs and stretch it, till, with their athlete-like dedication, it expands to become a "sock" at least one foot long.



But the work has barely begun. For their walls, they must hunt for, retrieve and carry back all the grass, leaves, roots, twigs and lichen they can: articles that are not a frivolous weight to carry for a feathered critter just barely larger than an Anna's Hummingbird. As each piece of the wood or brush is hauled in, there is more in mind than keeping the family from the cold, heat or wind: with this variety of interlacing choices, they are



creating a masterpiece of camouflage. For greater deception, they wisely incorporate some of the surrounding vegetation into the final composition (*see image at left*). Their artistry may even fool the keen brains and eyes of the ravens, crows and jays who will sometimes be a Bushit's downfall, as these Corvids can ruthlessly rip into their nest from the side, making short work of eggs or nestlings.

But let's be optimistic. Our couple builds a very small entryway and escape hole near to the top, one small enough to keep a Starling or House Sparrow from capably settling into their heavenly home. And there is more: to secure the insulation and comfort inside for the new arrivals the pair hauls in catkins, moss, heaps of feathers, plant down, and fur; this insulation should keep all family members snug from the "frosty" nights and cooler during a hot day; author Jack

Gedney\*\* says, maybe 25 °F cooler than the scorching heat of an Arizona day for this bird of the West. But for all the crafting of this ideal dwelling they have had to work non-stop for a month.

What a thrill when the female produces a gift of eggs, each about the size of marble! By 14 settings of the sun, cracks appear in the shells, and then yawning beaks excite our diligent pair. Both parents fly furiously to feed the crowd of often six nestlings. The starving little bushies' parents must be on the hunt for a variety of scale insects, white flies, leaf-hoppers, measuring worms and more rarely the feast of a fly - a high protein diet that supplies compounds for developing wing muscles and feathers.

In this foraging quest they often have help from some of their closest unpaired friends or their older family members, and in some states like Arizona, it's quite common to have unrelated, often young males (teenagers?), share in their gleaning for, and delivery of, the tiny arthropods. Because of this unusual bushtit sociability, our friends can ensure the success of the developing young and, as we shall see, a brighter future for one of the little nestlings.

\*Most bushtit nests are actually located in the brush.

Sources: "Birds in the Oaks" - book by \*\*Jack Gedney (most enchanting chapter is the one on the Bushtit). Audubon Society website, Cornell Lab of Birds website, All About Birds website, and many others.

(Carolyn's Corner continues on page 6)

## The Friends' Website Gets an Update!

Thanks to our Director of Promotion/Outreach, Shane Kadlecik, who is also our very talented "IT Specialist," the Friends' website has just received a significant "refresh" and update. You will now see the same basic layout with a number of improvements and additions that expand the available information about the park and its inhabitants, as well as make some new connections with our site users. For example, we are now connected with social media users on the Facebook, YouTube and Instagram platforms and links to our home pages on each of those sites are posted at the very top of our website pages. You will also note that our new 'bobcat face' logo now appears to the left of our home page name banner, as well as the upper left corner on every webpage.

Among the latest additions to the site are two new links under the 'Discover' section of the site navigation menu. 'Tree Plaques' take the user to a page providing information about these new tree signs which are now in place at 10 trees located around the south parking lot, along with one tree at the Walnut Grove Group Picnic area. The other new link, 'Educational Activities,' takes the user to a page describing an activity involving the tree plaques. Other activities, including the recently completed Junior Ranger Program, will be added as they become available.

Another new addition is the 'Latest Sightings' page that is accessible via a link in the 'What's Happening' menu category. This page shows recent observations people have made at SPVP using the iNaturalist application. The user can click on each observation to obtain more information on that individual item or click on the link for 'more observations from SPVP on iNaturalist.'

The Trails pages are also updated with new interactive maps including AllTrails, Caltopo and Google Maps, as well as more trail information, such as Distance, Gain, Minimum estimated time, and Difficulty for all trails and common loops. There are more changes to the look and content of our revamped website for you to see and use, so take a few moments to check it out! And let us know what you think!

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### Snake Skin Magic *(continued from page 4)*



Now detailed research has proven this hypothesis to be a substantial theory: Little mammals that might find it easy to crawl into the bundle of eggs or hatchlings are likely repelled by this cast-off covering of one of their top predators.

The method: Vanya's group realized that extensive and time-consuming research was not necessary. Instead, the group sifted through "Egg record cards" "scripted" from about 1890 to 1955, which contained detailed information on the nest construction, bird species and location of the nests.

The evidence revealed that cavity nests, including bird houses, had that super supply of snake skins; skins that are often tucked right under the eggs. The collection of fine journal work of old had revealed the ingenuity of the cavity nesters.

*(photo courtesy of Audubon Society)*

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### Carolyn's Corner *(continued from page 5)*

#### WHAT to LOOK FOR in MARCH/APRIL

Look for the nests of the Anna's hummingbird in March and some swelling of pregnant does. Then, in April scan the trailside for the showy little, white woodland star, especially on the east end of the Hazelnut Trail. On April nights - if you're lucky - you'll hear the raspy call of the tiny Saw-whet Owl.

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#### WE NEED VOLUNTEERS!!

The Friends of SPVP are continually looking for new volunteers. If you are interested in learning more about how you can help us out and give something back to the park you enjoy so much - whether it's being a host at the Visitor Center on weekends, helping to maintain the trails and the Native Plant Garden, removing invasive plants, or working on special projects - **please contact us** by talking with one of our Visitor Center Hosts or by dropping us a note via email: [FriendsofSanPedroValley@gmail.com](mailto:FriendsofSanPedroValley@gmail.com) We'd love to talk with you!

## On The Nature Journaling Trail

by Sharron Walker

After a break during December, the San Pedro Valley Nature Journalers met on Jan 23. There were 14 of us present, including two new members. If anyone is interested in joining us, we request they connect with me first. It is important they have an understanding that we are not a Nature Journaling class and nature journaling is not about fine art! An understanding of nature journaling and having supplies to journal is best. I usually send out handouts about NJ ahead of time to new members.

“Nature Journaling is collecting and organizing observations, questions, connections and explanations on the pages of a notebook using words, pictures and numbers,” according to John Muir Laws, and we find sharing and learning from one another in our park is an added benefit! Our most recent prompt was “Signs of Winter.”

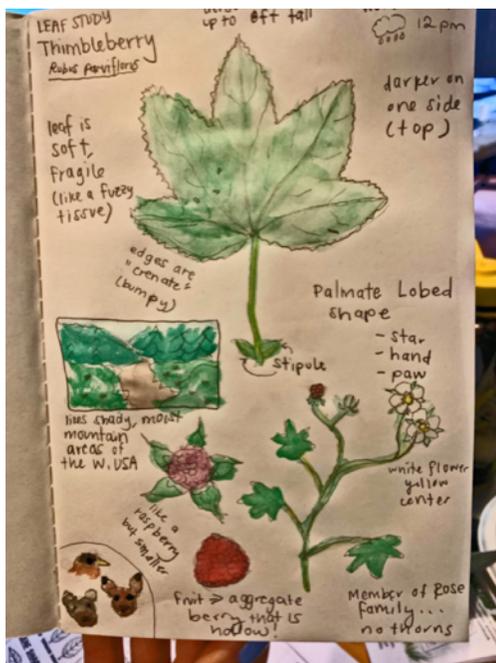
BTW, to join the Nature Journaling group, it is not required to be a SPVP Friend, but several of our group are members, as well as hosts at our Visitor Center, such as Melanie Heisler, Paula Martin and Carl Schwab our Host Coordinator.



On Feb 6, I was invited to give a Nature Journal workshop at Wunderlich Park by Kym Teppo (Executive Director of Wunderlich’s Friends group) to docents from Wunderlich/Huddart and Edgewood Parks (see photo at left). Sixteen people showed up in the rain to attend the 3-hour workshop. The presentation was met with enthusiasm and interest. Included in the group were the SM County Parks’ Interpretative Planning group’s two new interns, Kaitie Soto and Carmen Brogoli, who were recently hired for a one-year program.

“Leaf Study” was the NJ activity prompt at the workshop – the leaves used were from our park! The initial NJ pages completed by Kaitie and Carmen are shown below. Kaitie’s is on the left, Carmen’s on the right.

For more info on the San Pedro Valley Park Nature Journalers – contact [sharronlee@aol.com](mailto:sharronlee@aol.com)



# Memorial Park Celebrates 100 Years!

by Sharron Walker

On July 11, 2024, employees and volunteers, present & past, along with local dignitaries, gathered together at Memorial Park to celebrate 100 years since the park was founded in 1924 as San Mateo County’s very first county park! Surrounded by majestic redwoods – for which Memorial Park is well known – San Mateo County Parks hosted a grand gathering, including a buffet lunch and activities afterwards for the attendees!



Nicholas Calderon, San Mateo County Parks Director and Michele Beasley, Executive Director of the SMC Parks Foundation, were among the speakers at this celebrated event.



Memorial Park was named in memory of the military lives lost during World War One. The park holds lots of history.

A wonderful poster of all San Mateo County Parks and when they were established was on display (*at right*). San Pedro Valley Park joined the County park family as the 11th park in 1972. There are now a total of 24 parks in the San Mateo County Parks system, with Tunitas Creek being the last one to join in 2024.

After the formal program and an impressive luncheon under the redwoods, we joined Natalie, SMCP Arborist, on a Redwood Walk. It was very informative and a great talk!

If you have not visited or camped at Memorial Park, find the time to do so. It is a magical and wonderful place, and relatively close to us!



## Junior Ranger Program *(continued from page 2)*



The pledge reads: “I, \_\_\_\_\_, promise to help take care of the parks! I will abide by the Leave No Trace principles and respect the plants and wildlife. I will continue to explore and learn more about nature and history and share my discoveries with others. I will encourage my family and friends to help protect the parks and all of our natural resources.” A pretty good pledge for all of us to take, I’d say!

Finally, the young person who completes all the requirements and becomes a Junior Ranger receives a wooden Junior Ranger pin that is unique to San Pedro Valley Park (*image at left*).

We’re looking forward to seeing lots of new Junior Rangers getting their pins at SPVP!

**Capturing the Blooms of Early Spring Along the Hazelnut Trail**  
by Sharon Walker



Fetid adder's tongue  
*Scoliopus bigelovii*



Close-up of Fetid adder's tongue blossom



Giant white wakerobin  
*Trillium chloropetalum*



California red-sided garter snake

## Images of Early Spring in SPVP

by Bing Huey



Budding *Trillium ovatum*  
along the Plaskon Nature Trail  
taken on 02/23/2025



Spider on Trillium petal  
along the Plaskon Nature Trail  
taken on 02/24/2025



Aphids on vetch  
along the Weiler Ranch Road Trail  
taken on 02/13/2025



Franciscan paintbrush  
along the Valley View Trail  
taken on 02/24/2025

**More Images of Early Spring in SPVP**  
by Bing Huey



Linyphiid spider  
along the Hazelnut Trail  
taken on 2/24/2025



Huckleberry blossoms  
along the Valley View Trail  
taken on 02/23/2025

Scat with fur and bone  
along the Valley View Trail  
taken on 02/23/2025

