The Friends of San Pedro Valley Park

May / June 2025

Upcoming Programs

A May Zoom Webinar with John Kipping "There's a Whale in Your Backyard!"

On **Saturday**, **May 3rd at 7 pm**, the Friends of San Pedro Valley Park welcome naturalist John Kipping, who will present his talk, **There's a Whale in Your Backyard!** For untold centuries, California Gray Whales

have completed some of the longest annual migrations of any aquatic mammal, swimming from winter's mating and calving lagoons in Baja California to summer feeding grounds in the Bering Sea. These thirty-fiveto-forty-foot-long leviathans often pass very close to headlands such as

Pacifica's Pedro Point. Join former Shelter Cove resident, John Kipping, as he takes us on this remarkable journey from the northern polar region to Baja and back.

About the speaker: John Kipping is a naturalist who has led over fifty expeditions to Baja California

in search of these fascinating creatures. Kipping has worked at the Randall Museum and Golden Gate Park's Botanical Gardens, and later Audubon Canyon Ranch. He taught at the University of California Extensions at Berkeley, Los Angeles, Davis, and Santa Cruz. Currently, John spends his summers in Southeast Alaska, leading shipboard cruises in search of whales, bears and glaciers.

Please register in advance for this webinar using the following link: https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_g7OcRxLXS2SZXM5u_7CVvw

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.

A Natural History Walk in San Pedro Valley Park Sunday, May 4th, 2025 Time: 10 am - 12 pm

Time: 10 am - 12 pm

This is our Spring Nature Walk: Register for a 2-hour nature stroll with J.R. Blair on Sunday, May 4th at 10 am. We'll get started as soon as everyone has gathered, so please be on time. Remember to bring sunscreen, water, hat and a light jacket. This walk is for ages 12 years and older. If you attended the February Naturalist Walk, please do not sign up for this one to give others a chance to attend. We have a limit of 15 people.

Sign-ups are done using the following Eventbrite link:

https://www.eventbrite.com/e/1331488510979?aff=oddtdtcreator

About the leader: J.R. Blair received his Bachelor's degree at the Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington and obtained his Master's degree at San Francisco State University in 1999, studying with the accomplished mycologist, Dr. Dennis Desjardin. He was a lecturer of biology at SFSU for 21 years and the director of the University's Sierra Nevada Field Campus for eleven years until his retirement in December 2020.

The Friends of San Pedro Valley Park

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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 Summer Programs for Kids

A June Children's Program Wild Things Returns Again to San Pedro Valley Park!

Back by popular demand, the Friends will once again welcome Gabe Kerschner and his wonderful **Wild Things** show to San Pedro Valley Park on **June 23rd at 11:30 am** in the **North Walnut Grove Group Picnic Area**.

Last year's wonderful program of rescued animals captivated the audience of all ages and the ever affable Gabe again brought lots of smiles and laughs to all with his puns and jokes. Everyone loved the show! So do join us. You won't want to miss it!!

About the organization: Gabe Kershner



Gabe Kershner founded Wild Things in 1988 after graduating from the Exotic

Animal Training and Management Program at Moorpark College, with the goal of not only providing a home for animals in need, but also sharing with others a respect for wildlife and an understanding of wildlife conservation.

Conservation Ambassadors' Wild Things was founded to house and care for displaced wildlife. With the help of these animal ambassadors, they have been educating the public with a message of conservation and appreciation for natural wonders for over 35 years.

They provide a home for over 60 species of wildlife. These animals are shared in their wildlife education presentations to thousands of school children every year. Their hope is that through meeting these animals and hearing their stories, future generations will gain a greater appreciation for the natural world.

Photo Contest 2025 Now Closed to Entries Winners to be Chosen and Announced Soon!

The Friends' **2025 Photo Contest**, which had been open to all park visitors since February 1st, was **closed** to new entries **on May 1st**. We are now in the process of collecting and reviewing the fine images we have

received.

Judging is expected to take place shortly and be completed by May 10th. Look to the Friends' website shortly thereafter for the annoucement of the winners in each of the four contest categories. Thank you to all who entered this year's contest!!

As was done last year, the winning images will be printed and displayed in the Visitor Center, and all visitors for a period of about 60 days will be able to view them and vote on their favorite. The photo that garners the most votes will receive the 'People's Choice Award.'

So stay tuned to learn about and see the winners!



Recent Programs

Tanya Baxter's "Flora of the Northern Sierra Nevada: Botanical Encounters off the Beaten Path"

by Bing Huey

Tanya Baxter's webinar on 25 January is an introduction to a less familiar but nonetheless beautiful region of the Sierra Nevada north of Tahoe. Originally populated by the Northern Maidu and the nearby Washoe tribes, the region is still largely intact. Ms. Baxter, a botanist, field ecologist, and teacher, brings to her webinar an extensive collection of images of plants she has observed in the course of her work doing plant surveys in the area for the purpose of fire remediation. Recent high intensity fires have destroyed or altered large portions of conifer forests in the region. Botanical and wildlife surveys are conducted to inform future planning for fire prevention and evacuation.

The survey areas, which encompass the Sierra, Plumas, and Tahoe National Forests, and includes the Gold Lakes Basin, were subjected to glaciation during the Pleistocene Era over the course of 150,000 to 2.5 million years ago. Geologically speaking, the region is not granitic, but rather underlaid by volcanic clastic flows which slowly cooled. During periods of glaciation, freezing and melting resulted in the dramatic landscape. There are some 7,000 lakes in the region. Plumas National Forest, at about one million acres, is managed with an emphasis on timber. Farther south, the Gold Lakes basin is naturally not densely forested, allowing for natural fuel breaks and is managed for recreation. In the Sierra Buttes area, glaciers left behind moraines that are now ridges and rock gardens. Ms. Baxter's floristic surveys continued to the Yuba and Feather Rivers and those riparian corridors and characteristic plants, such as sedges. She showed a number of other wet-loving plants, like horse mint (*Agastache urticifolia*), *California damasonium*, and *Camassia quamash*, whose bulbs were tracked, dispersed, and harvested by native peoples.

The presence of intact plant communities makes for lots of pollinators. She highlights the diversity of flower anatomy in adaptation to pollinators, a process known as continental radiation, with examples from the large genus Penstemon, within which species have high degrees of endemism and diversity. Variability can be seen in characters such as stamens, shape of corolla, and manner of anther dehiscence.

Ms. Baxter showed us a number of rare plants. Some, like *Monardella folletti*, grow on ultramafic serpentine soils. These soils are inhospitable to many other plants, which leads to higher overall diversity of natives and exclusion of non-natives. Another example is the *Streptanthus polygaloides*, which grows on soil high in nickel content and has the ability to hyperaccumulate the element.

During the surveys, Ms. Baxter was witness to the origin of the Mills Fire in July 2024, first seeing the lightning strike and then safely evacuating. She discussed in her webinar how forests do not return for a long time following fires, while chaparral plants like Arctostaphylos patula colonize and remain a long time. She also spoke of concern for the loss of seed banks because of the erosion that follows fire.

The webinar is a rich survey of many other examples demonstrating the plant diversity of the northern Sierra. A recording is available through the Friends' website (FSPVP.org). Ms. Baxter also teaches a plant taxonomy course at the Sierra Nevada Field Campus of San Francisco State University.

Dr. Tom Parker's "How Much Does Chaparral Differ from Place to Place?" by Bing Huev

Dr. Tom Parker likes to call chaparral quintessentially California and he makes a good case for it in his webinar of 8 February. Chaparral plants comprise nine to 10 percent of all vegetation and 23 to 25 percent of the native species in the state. A large number of those are endemic, not found anywhere else. Chaparral is beautiful and diverse but, with its propensity to burn, has a fraught relationship with human populations encroaching this type of vegetation. Living with fire is part of the adaptation to a dry climate with regular periods of drought. Some plants adapt to drought by going dormant, others have specialized structures such as deep roots, modified vasculature, or thick leaves. There are direct adaptations to fire. Some plants can resprout after fires, while others have seeds that lie dormant until fire occurs. Others still are killed and rely on seed banks to continue, and some are just seed, specialized in appearing only after fires.

Another aspect that makes chaparral such a California vegetation is how there are multiple types adapted to the varied geographic zones of the state. This is the theme of Dr. Parker's webinar. A map of the distribution of chaparral in California shows its widespread occurrence, except for the Central Valley and the deserts.

(continued on page 6)

A Busy Day on the Trails

by Joseph Piro

Mary Larsen, Ken Coe, my brother Erik and I got together for our March 8, 2025 Trail Day.



We headed up the Brooks Falls Trail (via the Old Trout Farm Trail) and made it up to the bench overlooking the falls. Along the way, we pulled some hefty branches away from the side of the trail, cleaned up a few drain dips (and made one or two new ones), raked out some small piles of dirt that fell down and dug up a "trip hazard" rock or two.

Enjoy the trails!

Two Trail Day Teams are Better than One?

by Joseph Piro

We had 2 teams for our April 12, 2025 Trail Day -- Mary Larsen, my brother Erik and I arrived at our usual 9am

start time.... and Ken Coe and Stan Jensen arrived a little later.

The three of us headed out to the end of Weiler Ranch Road and then went a quarter mile or so up the east end of the Hazelnut Trail -- where things looked good and we trimmed some stuff back in a few spots along the way.





Ken and Stan hiked the entire Hazelnut Trail and said things looked good there, too.

Enjoy the trails!

~ May /June '25 Calendar ~
Kipping - Grey Whales*
Saturday, May 3 7 pm
J.B. Blair Walk in the Park
Sunday, May 4 10 am
May Trail Day
Saturday, May 10 9 am
May Habitat Restoration Day Saturday, May 17 10 am
June Trail Day
Saturday, June 14 9 am
June Habitat Restoration Day
Saturday, June 21 10 am
Children's Show - Wild Things
Monday, June 23 11:30 am
*Zoom webinar registration required

>> FACTOID <<

"SOLAR-POWERED SALAMANDER"

Our California *Ambystoma californiense* salamander or tiger salamander (*pictured to the left*), has a cousin in the Eastern United States with the same charming "smile", but also with an

s a a i

unusual trick of the trade: this fancy species, *Ambystoma maculatum* (at right), the spotted salamander, usually has

a special algae living in the egg sacs, algae

that are picked up more often in this salamander's later embryonic stages.



Most of you know that algae carries on photosynthesis, by which they produce energyrich carbon compounds. But in this case, much of the power-packed compounds get into the bloodstream of the Eastern tiger salamander, giving it a big energy advantage! On the left you

can see a spotted salamander embryo in its yolk sac, which is studded with algae.

Sources: *Sierra* magazine: "Solar-Powered Salamander" by Julia Sklar (fall, 2024); Abstract from research paper: "Photosynthetic carbon from algal symbionts

peaks during the latter stages of embryonic development in the tiger salamander, *Ambystoma maculatum*," by Graham, ZM McKie, and RW



— Carolyn's Corner —

A BUSHTIT "BOY" LAUNCHES INTO THE WORLD

(continued from Bushtit Busybodies: March/April issue)

Our Bushtit's parents evict our nestling feather ball from the supportive sock-nest — so it's out of bed and into the cold, cruel world; what to do? His little feet instantly grip onto a branchlet like a baby's hand grasping its mother's finger. A bracing breeze wafts along, but

patches of bright light shine through to warm his wing muscles. Amazingly, he makes his solo first flight/fall: a glider pilot on a forced landing, drifting towards some poison oak shrubbery on the slope of the trail. The nursery school parents are hovering about, on the watch.

Soon, as he "gains his wings", he can fly along with his ready-made club, whose non-stop chatter sounds like a crowd of pre-teens at a party. The twenty fidgety soul mates emit more scratchy and wispy twitters and high pitched buzzing, somehow agreeing to flutter into a toyon and then toward a more fertile feeding station: a coyote brush. Alarm! One high trill and everybody pops away and "ducks for cover", one unified bunch of

feathers. They're nimble and quick, but a sharp-shinned hawk could zip in as fast as a guided missile with its primed, sharp talons abducting you for dinner.

As an "all clear" is agreed on, it's back to picking away at the little branches, bushes, etc. for scale insects, aphids, etc. — other, less acrobatic species will lunch on the branches and trunks, so their niche is mainly crowded with their own familiar feathered unit of restless hyperactivity, always on the look-out for a new arboreal diner, "careening through the woods with all the volatility of an unleashed basketful of ping pong balls". One savvy fella may remember a different bug haven, and in an instant all the feathered, quick but short range flyers follow suit as quickly as a noon-time mob rushing for the taco wagon.

Later, as the night closes in, the whole cuddly group finally settles, snuggles down; they are together below a dark, overcast sky for happiness, warmth and security. So go the days, months and maybe even years of a Bushtit guy and his gregarious little gang of high-strung hunters.

Main sources: "The Birds in the Oaks" by Jack Gedney; "The World of Birds" website

RAVENS - FEEDING PLUNDERERS?

Munching down on a sandwich can be tricky when two huge dark cloaks of feathers, with a great love for picnics, come in to appeal or demand a portion. Not too bad, but one day, several weeks later, I was startled by a conspiracy of 15 Ravens under the trees, furiously grabbing morsels from a slew of garbage. Later, I found the source: a couple of soft-hearted *Homo sapiens*, who carried heavy bags of left-overs to dump on the terrain so they could be friend the intelligent beings or just enjoy the spectacle. I felt like asking them to try casting out a meagre sprinkling of bread crumbs, thinking that might keep the ebony beast's burgeoning population a bit more under control, preventing a mammoth raid by a swelling army of *Corvidae* in SPVP nests.

The park's cup nests are so exposed and are one special preference of these huge-beaked, well-armed corvids, who have helped* decimate populations of thrushes and American Robins in some locales. Imagine yourself a mother thrush with an uninvited threat at your door - best to chase him away thinking you're protecting your home; in the meantime a partner grabs the eggs or nestlings to devour or share with a mate or its own babes.

*Besides other corvids, additional "help" comes from natural predator populations and prowling cats.

Sources: Jim Mackey, our biology expert emeritus and "Cottonwood Post" website, which lists many studies.

WHAT to LOOK FOR in MAY/JUNE



If you'd like to hike up to the mountaintop, early May is a perfect time to see the cobweb thistle, a wine-colored beauty set in a spiny silver receptacle. Supposedly, this stunning forb can also be found in some lower sandy habitats.

But if you prefer the lower creek, keep an eye out for fledgling activity; birds are at their most visible time, just trying to find out about the world of flight. And look in the fields for the first fawns in late May and early June.

Park Notes: There's a New Amphitheater in the Park!

Thanks to the diligent and skilled work of Ranger Darrick Emil (recently retired), along with the talented and dedicated SPVP staff, our park now has a beautiful new amphitheater located immediately behind the Youth Group Overnight Area (and the Old Trout Farm historical location) that you pass when you walk up the Trout Farm Trail from the Visitor Center. You enter the amphitheater by walking through a handmade wooden

archway (at left) with a hanging sign announcing its location. The entrance arch was designed, crafted and assembled by the rangers without bolts or nails, instead using wooden dowel joints.

instead using wooden dowel joints.

The two rows of seats (shown at right) in the amphitheater are made from logs obtained from the County's Memorial Park, which were cut to size and planed on top by the rangers using hand planing tools to provide a flat seating surface. Sitting on these logs with the sun filtering through the surrounding large trees is a very pleasant experience.

The adjoining group camping area has

also been completely updated, with new wooden picnic tables, a food preparation table, new grills, a sink & faucet within a prep/cleaning table, a new drinking fountain, and a new fire ring. All were installed by the rangers, under Darrick's direction. Have a look when you're in the park!



Different Chaparral from Place to Place (continued from page 3)

Dr. Parker has delineated the coastal and montane distributions of chaparral and considers them in view of the long north-south span of the state. There are marked gradients of both temperature and precipitation going from the north to south. The coastal distribution can be divided into those right at the coast, with its reliance on fog, and those located more interior. The montane types can be those found in lower elevations or be those above the winter snow line where cold is extreme and the only water available is what the soil retains from snowfall.

Dr. Parker provides a number of examples of species, both widespread and localized, to illustrate adaptive characteristics of chaparral plants. Ceanothus and Arctostaphylos(manzanitas) are both speciose genera which are adapted to fire with dormant, fire-released seeds. Following fires Ceanothus can overgrow burnt areas before conifers such as pines can return. Their ability to fix nitrogen both gives them an advantage as well as allowing them to condition soil for other plants. Arctostaphylos rely on their close relationship with mycorrhizal fungi for root absorption. Arctostaphylos is the most diverse woody genus. While some species, like the Eastwood manzanita are widespread, other are local endemics, adapted to specific soils and terrain. About half of all Arctostaphylos species, 52, are found just on the California coast. Similarly, Ceanothus can be widespread, as with C. cuneatus, or have specific climate or soil endemics. Their size and shape can vary with location.

Oaks (Quercus) have a number of species that can also be widespread or localized. They are deep-rooted and have modified vasculature for drought tolerance. Toyon is another widespread, drought resistant species. Where chaparral meets the edge of the desert in Riverside County can be found oaks and chamise.

In Northern and Central California, chamise rather than manzanita can be more predominant in inland chaparral away from the coast. In Southern California, Ceanothus, instead of manzanita, is predominant on the coast and chemise is prominent inland. In Bay Area chaparral there are also many Ceanothus species, as well as trees such as Sargent's and McNabb's cypresses and knobcone and Bishop's pines. Dr. Parker showed pictures of these, as well as a number of other plants that make up chaparral vegetation. His webinar was recorded and is available through the Friends' website (FSPVP.org).

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* We'd love to talk with you!

SMCP Foundation's Poster Artist Reception at SPVP

On Saturday, March 22nd, the SPVP Visitor Center was host to the San Mateo County Parks Foundation's Poster Artist Reception. A large group of invited guests turned out to meet and greet the three artists, Calene Luczo, Damon Belanger and Hollis Callas, who were selected by the Foundation to create posters for the second set of three SMC Parks. It was great to be able to see their artwork up close and fascinating to learn about what inspired them as they embarked on creating unique images that capture the essence of San Pedro Valley (Luczo), Sawyer Camp Trail (Belanger) and Wunderlich Park (Callas). Each artist first spoke about how they collected information about their respective park and learned what aspects most attracted visitors and were enjoyed by them. A Q&A session then followed with the audience able to ask questions specific to each artist. Afterwards, the posters were available for sale and signing by the artist. It was quite an enjoyable event.



Calene Luczo speaks about her journey in learning about SPVP and coming to understand what inspires visitors when they experiece the park, and then how she chose what to include in her poster.





The three newest posters have been hung in the VC on the wall opposite the reception desk. The first set of three posters had been moved to the row above. To learn more and purchase the posters, go to https:// supportparks.org/news/posters/

Tabling Season Has Arrived! by Melinda Moses

The Friends of San Pedro Valley Park kicked off the 2025 community outreach event season on Wednesday evening April 16. We were invited to participate in a newly resurrected Science Night at the Ortega Elementary

School on Terra Nova Blvd. in Pacifica in conjunction with San Mateo County Parks. The school set up stations for students and their parents to explore the science behind a catapult, how a parachute works, earthworms and soil decomposition, flower dissection, pollinators and fossils.

Along with FoSPVP Board members Judy Bacon, Melinda Moses and Shane Kadlecik, there were also local groups present, such as the

Pacific Beach Coalition and a County Parks table staffed by Interpretive Rangers Katherine Wright and Tracy Nappi.

The Science Fair provided a venue for our inaugural tabling activity in 2025. Melinda, our Trailside Store manager, repurposed a magnetic whiteboard into a flora & fauna habitat matching game using the several

dozen magnets County Parks Interpretive Rangers sent to FoSPVP late 2024. Shane, the Friends' webmaster and all-around IT specialist, printed up labels for the magnetic board with the categories: "In the

Stream," "Along the Trail," "In the Sky," and "Underground." (See photos)

The children were initially shy about placing a few magnets on the board, but once they saw some of their fellow students enthusiastically placing all the magnets under various habitat labels, more walked up to participate. For their efforts, students were given a County Parks Junior Ranger sticker, along with County Parks pencils and coloring pages.





Celebrating Earth Day 2025... Native Garden Weeding & PelicanFest!

by Mark Golembiewski & Sharron Walker

Some TLC for our Native Plant Garden on Earth Day

The Friends of San Pedro Valley Park have celebrated Earth Day for the past several years by weeding & planting in our Native Plant Garden and other areas immediately around the Visitor Center. This year, another

small but determined group once again showed up on the official Earth Day, Tuesday, April 22 to concentrate on rehabilitating a small portion of the garden.



Shane Kadlecik, Istvan Puski, Judy Bacon, Raquel Iverson, and your editor spent a few hours on a beautiful spring day tackling some of the invasive plants (weeds) that are overtaking the native plants there. We enjoyed each other's company while we worked to make a small improvement in the health and apperarance of our neglected garden.



In order to maintain the garden the way it should be cared for, we would like to make this a regular, periodic event rather than just once a year for Earth Day. So, if you have an interest in helping us manage and maintain the Native Plant Garden, please let us know. The garden is a wonderful resource for learning about the native plants that grow in our park and it needs our continuing support and TLC! Join us if you can!

FoSPVP Tabling at the PBC's PelicanFest!

The Pacific Beach Coalition's PelicanFest on Saurday, April 26th in celebration of Earth Day was a great representation of Pacifica. Not only from the environmental community but of the city as well. And of course, the PelicanFest immediately followed the city-wide clean-ups of beaches,

creeks, and neighborhoods that took place earlier in the morning.

On my way down to Linda Mar, I saw a woman weeding, solo, along Francesco Boulevard. Another group of people along Highway One near

Rockaway was removing invasive plants. It is wonderful to see what the Pacific Beach Coalition has achieved in Pacifica since its formation in the mid 1990s!

The south parking lot at Linda Mar State Beach was filled with booths representing various environmental groups and the Friends of San Pedro Valley Park joined the San Mateo County

Parks Foundation, as we have for several years! Melinda Moses, Shane Kadlecik, and Istvan Puski from the FoSPVP Board represented the Friends. We brought our white board with the picture magnets of animals, birds and reptiles that kids can arrange according to how they live in the natural environment.





Activities for all ages, a presentation by Lynn Adams and the PBC team (at right), honored speakers, booths and music were enjoyed by all among the large turnout of folks at the event. And the Pelican was definitely celebrated during the day's festivities. This year's event motto was "Trash in the Bin, Not the Pelican."

It's great having the pelicans back!



The Finer Images of Spring in SPVP by Bing Huey



Ossoberry near Walnut Grove picnic area taken on 03/15/2025



Purple sanicle along the Valley View trail taken on 03/18/2025



Hound's tongue blossom and fruit along the Montara Mountain Trail taken on 03/30/2025



Slender false Solomon's seal along the Montara Mountain Trail taken on 03/30/2025

The Finer Images of Spring in SPVP - continued

by Bing Huey



Slender wooly heads along the Montara Mountain Trail taken on 03/30/2025



Pitcher sage along the Brooks Creek Trail taken on 03/30/2025



San Francisco lacewing along the Hazenut Trail taken on 04/01/2025



Fat false Soloman's seal along the Hazelnut Trail taken on 04/01/2025



Woodland strawbewrry along the Valley View Trail taken on 04/11/2025

The Finer Images of Spring in SPVP - continued

by Bing Huey



Pacific sanicle along the Valley View Trail taken on 04/11/2025



Blue dick - white color variant along the Hazelnut Trail taken on 04/11/2025



Milk wort along the Valley View Trail taken on 04/11/2025



Long-horned orthoptera on suncup along the Valley View Trail taken on 04/11/2025