

Marsh Mailing

Madrona Marsh Preserve and Nature Center

Southwest Corner Gets a New Face

—Bill Arrowsmith

The southwest corner of the Madrona Marsh Preserve, the so-called “Chevron Corner” property, which was donated to the City of Torrance in the summer of 2008 is finally getting a new face. Gone is the old chain-link fencing with its unsightly (but informative) community posters.



In May, workers extended the same steel fencing that girds the rest of the Preserve across the corner property (see photo above), leaving a triangular portion outside the fence (see photo at right). In June a

new sign was installed in this southwest triangle— matching the other three corners of the Preserve. All that remains now is to landscape the area with California Native Plants.



Note to Marshans: The City Council did form a committee to investigate the possibility of installing an electronic sign along Sepulveda, at the east edge of the corner property. The idea was/is to use the electronic sign to take the place of all the community posters that used to ‘adorn’ the chain-link fence. The com-

“Corner” continues on page 4.

Getting to the Bottom of Things

—Bill Arrowsmith

For many years, going back to the days when Walt Wright was the Preserve’s Naturalist, we have been plagued by intermittent, but very severe, problems near Drain #1, which is just north of the southwest corner (old Chevron property). It is a point where several local storm culverts have historically been permitted to empty when they reach overflow conditions. These culverts meet at a point on the Preserve property, just east of Drain #1, and they come in from two directions: From the south, under Sepulveda Boulevard, and from the west, under Madrona Avenue.

On several occasions over the years, at least one of the incoming drains has dumped high levels of phosphates and other harmful chemicals onto the Marsh, so we must be constantly vigilant. In 2003, one such influx resulted in a three-month closure of the Preserve.

That year, the onset of the dry summer season enabled the Marsh to ‘clean up its own act,’ saving the City thousands of dollars. Efforts to pinpoint the source of pollution have been inconclusive.

On a recent field trip with Manager Tracy Drake to observe our tule maintenance efforts (see story, page 3) several City officials also were shown the Drain #1 problem, some for the first time. There was solid agreement that the current situation is unacceptable, and a corrective plan was forged.

The first step in that plan was to remove dirt from around the drains to fully expose them, and also dig an adjacent (temporary) hole big enough to allow the culverts to empty completely, so we can examine individual

“Bottom” continues on page 4.

In Review

—Tracy Drake, *Naturalist/Manager*

The fragrant grass beneath my feet bent as I nearly silently walked onto the Preserve. Like a reliable friend, the cool daily breeze was blowing through the leaves of the cottonwood trees and on to wherever wind goes when it passes by. The brass button flowers were almost dry and gone for another season. Young sunflower plants dotted the landscape and I could easily imagine these same plants in full bloom in just a few months—a sea of yellow will be present.

When I arrived at the edge of the water it was time for reflection—not only because the shadows had grown long and rippled on the water's surface, but also because it was the end of another month and nearly the end of the day. June 2010. In most ways it was a normal month—the usual programs were held, many people came to the Preserve to work, visit, learn, paint, and bird-watch. I think though, some people came for the same purpose I did—to reflect.

Months pass so quickly, seemingly unnoticed; but not this month. It was long. The process of cleaning up the storm drain nearest the Chevron corner was started, as was our summer watering program. Gray buckets can be seen sitting like silent sentinels near young seedlings, a tiny 1/8th inch hole in each one slowly drips precious water on thirsty young plants. Almost all of the young plants in the nursery that had grown into 4 inch pots have been replanted in one gallon containers where they can weather the hot summer and be ready for planting in the fall. Huge lines of mounded tules, having been cut in March and April and not yet picked up, have become habitat for young lizards and frogs.

While walking I thought about events of the day. Dawn Hendricks taught our first Jr. Naturalist class of the season and the students enjoyed it so much that they wanted to stay long after the program was scheduled to end. And in the early afternoon, one of the babies of our resident red-tailed hawks had landed on the east wall of the Nature Center and called for nearly 10 minutes—begging mom to feed him so he would not have to fly again. Reluctantly, when mom did not respond, he sort of flew onto the Preserve—calling/crying as he went. I still hear his calls and see him still sitting on the wall in my mind. He appeared large and statuesque, yet seeming so young and innocent.

Marsh Mailing is a quarterly newsletter designed to provide information about activities and upcoming events at or relating to the Madrona Marsh Preserve. Contributions are welcome and may be e-mailed to Diane Gonsalves at gonwild2@yahoo.com or Bill Arrowsmith, TheArrowsmiths@sbcglobal.net, or dropped off or mailed to the Nature Center.

As I rounded the east side of the wetlands, a family of five Black Phoebes was busy catching insects that would be their last meal of the day. Just beyond them three families of Mallard ducks (17 total) scooted silently though the water, eating all the while. I knew the duckweed and invertebrates in the water were providing important carbohydrates and protein for the youngsters to grow strong enough so that when the time came for them to fly they could. This year it would be by the end of July.

Heading south now towards Sepulveda, I stopped. The young skunk never even paid any attention to me as she buried her head in the grasses surrounding the water's edge. She was looking for a meal. More than five minutes passed and she never stopped hunting. Not wanting to startle her, I waited for her to pass by before I continued. While waiting, I heard baby California Towhees calling from under the nearby shrubs. Farther behind them I could hear the young Say's Phoebes calling for food from their secluded nest. This was mama phoebe's second clutch this year! The winter and spring rains provided habitat for enough insects that she could safely raise two families this season. Yes, spring was bountiful.

The baby skunk having passed by allowed me to continue my walk. Tree frogs, smaller in size than a dime, were perched on many waterside plants—most napping with their legs tucked under them and their heads resting on the leaf or stem on which they were perched. A few were alert—waiting . . .

In the hour I was out there, I forgot about the issues relating to Vector Control that have happened over the past five months, I forgot about the many hours we spent writing a \$714,000 Prop A Nature Facilities Improvement grant application. I forgot how tired I was less than an hour earlier. And frankly, I forgot to go home.

Instead I remembered how incredibly special Madrona Marsh Preserve is. I remembered that this little place is the last of its kind in Los Angeles County—plants and animals live together here that live nowhere else in this same type of environment because it doesn't exist anymore. I remembered that there are families living out their lives on the Preserve doing similar things that we do—striving to raise young in a safe environment, making sure the next meal is a good one and taking the time to rest and relax. I reflected on the people who walked this same path last week, last month, last year and ten years ago. I thought about the people who were here long before Torrance was a city. I reflected about the people who have control over this special place—and truly appreciate the wide range of support we have. And I reflected that nature always changes, always endures hardship, always recovers and always remains beautiful.

Under the cool gray sky, I headed back to my car, grateful, for so many things . . .

from the president

What is Happening at the Marsh?(Continued)

—Bill Arrowsmith

In our Spring newsletter I reported an advisory the City had received in February from the L.A. County West Vector Control District expressing their concern that our tules, cattails and bulrushes had not been sufficiently maintained to allow them proper access. That access is necessary to assure that the mosquitofish (*Gambusia affinis*) which the District supplies are able to reach the still pools on the Preserve which harbor mosquito larvae. Access is also needed for District workers who may need to apply chemical sprays if the mosquito population has not been sufficiently controlled by our hungry *Gambusia*.

We had not been able to cut back our tules the previous dry season as much as planned, and we were paying the price. Cutting tules is a much more difficult and expensive task after the Marsh has filled with water. But the Friends immediately hired workers to begin the job in hip-waders and boats. When the District later said that even more clearing was required, the City took charge and even partially drained the Marsh to facilitate the work. It was a Herculean effort which lasted months, but at last we felt that we had achieved the level of clearance that the District had requested.

We were shocked to receive notice in late June that we were NOT in compliance, and that the District had observed a sharp increase in counts in the six traps they keep on the Preserve and sump. Tracy Drake and her supervisors, Rich Brunette and Community Services Director John Jones, decided to take a safe and pro-active step: Close the Preserve until we could meet with Vector Control and determine when and how it would be safe to re-open it, and they arranged for a meeting with Vector Control officials.

That meeting was held last week, and it was very productive. Vector Control confirmed that the notice of non-compliance was due to an increased mosquito count on the Preserve as well as their observance that we still needed some additional clearance: The 'channels' we have between stands of tules need to be six feet wide and bulldozed slightly below ground level to remove root balls and thus prevent rapid regrowth; our tule stands must be no more than 20 feet wide, so that spraying equipment can reach all points, if necessary. Since the needed bulldozing cannot be performed until the Marsh is dry, and since our fledgling birds are nearly ready to fly, it was decided to do the clearance work as soon as possible by draining what remaining water is on the Preserve and starting now (early July) to clear the channels properly.

The Vector Control officials were complimentary over the quick and cautious action taken by Director

Jones in closing the Preserve. They did confirm, however, that none of the recently trapped insects or sentinel chicken blood samples had tested positive for West Nile Virus or any other infectious disease; rather, it was the increase in the number of mosquitoes trapped that had prompted them to send a Notice of Non-compliance. They then told us something that was quite surprising: The types of mosquitoes that we have on the Preserve are nighttime biters; they rarely bite during the day. Hence, since the Preserve is closed each day at 5 p.m., two to three hours before sunset, our visitors are relatively safe from mosquito bites. Maybe that's how I've avoided a Madrona Marsh mosquito bite despite walking on and around the property for over thirty years.

So that's why we had a brief closure of the Preserve, why the tules continue to be cut, and why by now you may have even seen some bulldozing on the Preserve. But we now have a clear plan of action, agreed upon by City and Vector Control officials as well as the Friends. We may chase a few migrants away early this year, but in the long run we should all profit from the new agreement. I was very impressed with the positive and very professional manner in which this week's meeting was held. We are fortunate to have such a concerned and talented staff in the City of Torrance.



Moonlight Magic

October 23, 2010

6:00-11:00

On the Madrona Marsh Nature Preserve

Under the Full Moon

Enjoy supper, wine and musical entertainment

Gift baskets and unusual auction items

including

A canoe ride through the Marsh next spring

Personalized tours and art items

Tickets are \$50,

Available at Madrona Marsh Nature Center

(cash or check only)

And at Wild Birds Unlimited

(cash, check or charge)

All profits help protect and sustain the

programs of the

Madrona Marsh Nature Center and Preserve

“Bottom” continued from page 1.



Manager Tracy Drake (in background) and two city workers pump effluent from new “drainage basin” at southwest corner of Preserve.

outflow: Our own drainage basin. In order to get backhoe equipment in to dig those holes, it was necessary to cut down several mature Black Willows. None of us wanted to do that, but we must resolve the drain problem. We will plant more willows. After the ‘drainage basin’ was dug, pumps and hoses were brought in to pump excess water from our study area into the City’s storm drainage (at nearby Drain #1).



Our three incoming drains: large drain at lower left is from south, under Sepulveda; large drain at right is under Madrona from carwash; to its right is the smaller, ‘mystery’ drain.

What we have found to date is that there are three incoming drain pipes: Two large, 18-inch concrete culverts that we knew about, and another rusted steel pipe, about 8 inches, that is more of a mystery.

One of the large culverts comes from the homes on the south side of Sepulveda; the other comes under Madrona directly from the car-wash. Neither of those has thus far, in our current investigation, provided anything but nor-



Manager Drake places buckets under two drains to catch effluent.

mal runoff. That brings us to the mysterious steel pipe. It comes under Madrona from a west-by-north-west direction, but we don’t know from where; the City has no record of it. The effluent from it appears to be more contaminated. There is an inclination to stopper it in some fashion, but only after an attempt has been made to trace it to its source. Stay tuned.

But now you know why a few willows are missing from the southwest corner, and why there are large holes there, along with pumps and hoses.

—B.A.

“Corner” continued from page 1.

mittee did take public input and came up with a design for such a sign—and a price, around \$100,000 for one model. That project appears to be shelved for the moment due to lack of money or a sponsor. But be vigilant, the project may resurface.

If you don’t think a lighted, electronic sign advertising the latest community attractions is compatible with our nature preserve, be sure to let the committee and council know about it. It is by no means a *fait accompli*.

—B.A.



Wondering what to wear to Moonlight Magic?

*Formal wear with silver tennis shoes,
glitter hiking boots and top hats would
be great. Sequins with jeans would be
appropriate.*

**“WRAPS AND FLAT SHOES
RECOMMENDED”**

A Cryptic Native: Smooth Boisduvalia (*Epilobium pygmaeum*)

—Dan Cooper

Cooper Ecological Monitoring, Inc.

While collecting plants with me at the Preserve recently as part of our on-going biological survey, Andy Sanders (UC Riverside Herbarium) noticed something emerging in the small vernal pool between the entrance and the nursery.

“Well this is good. One of our persisting natives— ‘*Epilobium pygmaeum*’” he remarked, characteristically low-key.

I think my reply was something like “*Epilobium*, what?” I vaguely recognized the common name, “smooth boisduvalia,” from early plant lists of the Los Angeles area, namely Travis Longcore's and Rudy Mattoni's 1997 paper on the flora of the historical Los Angeles Coastal Prairie ecosystem.

As it turns out, this thing is really sneaky. For most of its life, it looks nearly identical to the unrelated (and non-native) “hyssop loosestrife” (*Lythrum hyssopifolia*); it appears in the same pools, is roughly the same size and has a nearly-identical growth form. But the loosestrife is really common—not just on the floor of pools, but also on wet paths and even on drier spots above the edges of pools. The boisduvalia is more particular, forming little patches only on the floor of drying pools.

This species wasn't on any early list of plants for the Preserve, and wasn't mentioned in the otherwise-comprehensive 2005 management plan. So where has it been? The answer is most likely: It was here all along. Its leaves are a sharper-tipped and rougher-edged, and it blooms later (starts in June/July rather than March/April), but otherwise, its flowers are strikingly similar to the abundant, weedy loosestrife, little pink specks in whorls around the stem, set down along base of the leaves.

But there are also differences, mainly in the ecology of the two. While the loosestrife has been collected in a variety of wetland situations around the county, from seeps up in the San Gabriel Mountains to Ballona Creek channel on the coast, the boisduvalia is restricted to natural vernal pools. An 1917 flora of southern Cali-



fornia (Abrams) listed just two known locations, Santa Monica and “Mesmer” (current-day Mar Vista) the populations from which are almost certainly extirpated. Though uncollected populations may exist today, the two known specimens from Los Angeles County are both from the same pool near Santa Clarita (Orange County also has just two specimens, also from a single pool).

So go see it while it lasts—it's just now starting to bloom (early June) in the dry pools. The accompanying photograph (from May 6) shows it growing side-by-side with loose-strife—and watch out for those pointy leaves!

DONATIONS—\$100 OR MORE

Second Quarter 2010

DATE	WHO	DONATION	COMMENTS
4-03-10	Evelyn Wisneski	\$100	
3-29-10	Brian & Joanne Bailey	\$300	
4-19-10	Ralph Rennie	\$100	
4-18-10	Sharon Angelos	\$120	Received Matching Funds from Sharon's company, ITG
4-20-10	Maxine Trevethen	\$100	
4-19-10	Fran & Bill Arrowsmith	\$500	
4-10-10	Bill & Doris Forrest	\$150	
4-29-10	Mr. & Mrs. Anthony Vinter	\$100	
4-29-10	Joan L. Roach	\$200	
4-19-10	Virginia and Bill Hilker	\$100	Donated in memory of Ed Finegold
4-20-10	James Pierson	\$150	
6-02-10	Ann Garrish	\$350	
6-06-10	Juno & Ethel Uyematsu	\$100	

—Ellen Peterson, Treasurer

Madrona Marsh Preserve and Nature Center

Schedule of Events*

July-October 2010

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1 10 am- Tyke Hike	2 10-11:30-am- Friday Fun***	3 8:45 am-12 n-Habitat Restor. 8:45am-Student Serv.Learning 10 am-12 n- "Promoting Pollinators"/Dr.Vadheim
4	5 CLOSED	6 8:30 am-Tour d'Torrance 10 am-12 n-Weeders 6:30-8:30 pm-"Promot- ing Pollinators"/Vadheim	7 10 am-12 n-Habitat-Weeders 10 am-12 n-Junior Naturalist class	8 10:30 am- 12:30 pm- Propagation Society	9 10-11:30-am- Friday Fun***	10 8:45 am-12 n-Habitat Restor. 8:45am-Student Serv. Learning 10 am-12 n-Annual Butterfly Count Class
11 2 - 4 pm-Second Sunday Science- "Butterflies of Madrona"/Ron Melin	12 CLOSED	13 10 am-12 n-Weeders 9-11 am-Mornings on the Marsh Christiansen/Drake Exhibit begins	14 8 am- Bird Walk/ Bob Shanman 10-12 n-HabitatWeeders 10 am-12 n-Junior Naturalist class 7:15-9 pm-FOMM Board Meeting	15	16 10-11:30-am- Friday Fun***	17 8:45 am-12 n-Habitat Restor. 8:45am-Student Serv. Learning 10 am-12 n-Annual Butterfly Count 2-4 pm- "Dark Matter-Dark Energy"
18	19 CLOSED	20 8:30 am- Tour d'Torrance 10 am-12 n-Weeders 7 pm- Audubon Mtg.	21 10 am-12 n-Junior Naturalist class 10-12 n-Weeders	22 10:30 am-12:30 pm-Propagation Society	23 10-11:30-am- Friday Fun***	24 8:45 am-12 n-Habitat Restor. 8:45am-Student Serv. Learning 10 am-12 n-Nature Walk
25 10 am-Nature Walk	26 CLOSED	27 10 am-12 n-Weeders	28 10 am-12 n-Junior Naturalist class 10-12 n-Weeders	29	30 10-11:30-am- Friday Fun*** 6:30-8:30-pm Christiansen/ Drake Artist Reception**	31

JULY

All activities and classes meet at the Madrona Marsh Nature Center, located at 3201 Plaza del Amo (between Maple and Madrona) on the north side of the street. **See Artists Corner, page 11. * No fee charged for Friday Fun , but reservations are required.*

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2 CLOSED	3 8:30 am- Tour d' Torrance 10 am-12 n-Weeders	4 10 am-12 n-Habitat Restoration-Weeders 10 am-12 n-Junior Naturalist class	5 10 am- Tyke Hike	6 10-11:30-am- Friday Fun***	7 8:45 am-12 n-Habitat Restor. 8:45 am-Student Serv.Learning 10 am-12 n- "Woodland Wonders"/ Dr.Vadheim
8 2-4 pm- 2nd Sunday Science- "Raptors-A Closer Look," Ann Lynch	9 CLOSED	10 9 am-Mornings on the Marsh 6:30-8:30 pm- "Woodland Wonders/ Dr. Vadheim 10 am-12 n-Weeders	11 8 am- Bird Walk/Bob Shanman 10 am-12 n-Weeders 10 am-12 n-Junior Naturalist class 7:15-9 pm- FOMM Board Meeting	12 10:30 am- 12:30 pm- Propagation Society	13 10-11:30-am- Friday Fun***	14 8:45 am-12 n-Habitat Restor. 8:45 am-Student Serv.Learning
15	16 CLOSED	17 8:30 am- Tour d' Torrance 10 am-12 n-Weeders 7 pm-Audubon meets	18 10 am-12 n-Weeders 10 am-12 n-Junior Naturalist	19	20 10-11:30-am- Friday Fun***	21 8:45 am-12 n-Habitat Restor. 8:45-Student Serv. Learning 7:30-9:30 pm-Night Hike
22	23 CLOSED	24 10 am-12 n-Habitat Restoration-Weeders	25 10 am-12 n-Weeders 10 am-12 n-Junior Naturalist	26 10:30 am- 12:30 pm- Propagation Society	27 10-11:30-am- Friday Fun***	28 8:45 am-12 n-Habitat Restor. 8:45-Student Serv. Learning 10 am- Nature Walk 2-4 pm-Natural History of the South Bay
29 10 a.m- Nature Walk	30 CLOSED	31 8:30 am- Tour d' Torrance Beth Shibata Photo Exhibit Begins**				

AUGUST

Nature Center (310) 782-3989
 Gift Shop (310) 320-8255

Brought to you by
 Friends of Madrona Marsh

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1	2 10 am- Tyke Hike	3 10-11:30-am-Friday Fun***	4 8:45 am-12 n-Habitat Restor. 8:45am-Student Serv.Learning No Native Plants Class
5	6 CLOSED	7 8:30 am-Tour d' Torrance 10 am-12 n-Weeders No Native Plants Class	8 10 am-12 n-Habitat-Weeders	9 10:30 am-12:30 pm-Propagation Society	10 10-11:30-am-Friday Fun***	11 8:45 am-12 n-Habitat Restor. 8:45am-Student Serv. Learning Star Party, 7:30-9:30 pm-
12 2 - 4 pm-Second Sunday Science- "Bird Flight. . . for Kids," Tara Chklovski	13 CLOSED	14 10 am-12 n-Weeders 9-11 am-Mornings on the Marsh	15 8 am- Bird Walk/ Bob Shanman 10-12 noon-Habitat Restoration-Weeders 7:15-9 pm-FOMM Board Meeting	16	17 10-11:30-am-Friday Fun*** Beth Shibata Reception, 6:30 pm**	18 8:45 am-12 n-Habitat Restor. 8:45am-Student Serv. Learning 8-11 am-Plein Air Workshop (fee) 10-11 am-The So. Cal. Water Crisis
19	20 CLOSED	21 8:30 am-Tour d' Torrance 10 am-12 n-Weeders 7 pm- Audubon Mtg.	22 10-12 n-Weeders	23 10:30 am-12:30 pm-Propagation Society	24 10-11:30-am-Friday Fun***	25 8:45 am-12 n-Habitat Restor. 8:45am-Student Serv. Learning 10 am-12 n-Nature Walk 2-4 pm-Universe-The Grand Tour
26 10 am-Nature Walk	27 CLOSED	28 10 am-12 n-Weeders	29 10-12 n-Weeders	30		

SEPTEMBER

*All activities and classes meet at the Madrona Marsh Nature Center, located at 3201 Plaza del Amo (between Maple and Madrona) on the north side of the street. **See Artists Corner, page 11. *** No fee charged for Friday Fun , but reservations are required.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1 10-11:30-am-Friday Fun***	2 8:45 am-12 n-Hab.Restor. 8:45am-Student Serv.Learning No Native Plants Class 10am-1 pm-Turtles & Tortoises 10am-12 n-Watercolor for Kids-fee
3	4 CLOSED	5 8:30 am-Tour d' Torrance 10 am-12 n-Weeders No Native Plants Class	6 10 am-12 n-Habitat Restoration-Weeders	7 10 am- Tyke Hike	8 10-11:30-am-Friday Fun***	9 8:45 am-12 n-Habitat Restor. 8:45am-Student Serv.Learning 6:30-8:30-Night Hike
10 2-4 pm-2nd Sunday Science- "Fall Migration," Ron Melin	11 CLOSED	12 9 am-Mornings on the Marsh 10 am-12 n-Habitat Restoration-Weeders	13 8 am-Bird Walk /Bob Shanman 10 am-12 n-Habitat Restoration-Weeders 7:15-9 pm-FOMM Board Meeting	14 10:30 am-12:30 pm-Propagation Society	15 10-11:30-am-Friday Fun***	16 8:45am-12 n-Habitat Restor. 8:45am-Student Serv.Learning Star Party, 7-9 pm
17	18 CLOSED	19 8:30 am-Tour d' Torrance 10 am-12 n-Weeders 7 p.m.-Audubon Mtg. Paul Blieden Exhibit**	20 10 am-12 n-Habitat Restoration-Weeders	21	22 10-11:30-am-Friday Fun***	23 8:45 am-12 n-Hab.Restor. 8:45am-Student Serv.Learning 10 am-Nature Walk 10am-12n-Watercolor for Kids-fee 6 pm-Moonlight Magic on Madrona Marsh
24 10 am- Nature Walk	25 CLOSED	26 10 am-12 n-Weeders	27 10 am-12 n-Weeders	28 10:30 am-12:30 pm-Propagation Society	29 10-11:30-am-Friday Fun***	30 8:45 am-12 n-Hab. Restor. 8:45 am-Student Serv.Learning
31						

OCTOBER

A Great Year for School Tours

—Sarah Noddings

This was an amazing year for school tours and our docent program. Over 1750 students and 375 adult chaperones toured the Marsh and Nature Center, learning every step of the way about animal and plant life. They experienced first-hand the excitement and wonder that comes from each tour. They learned about Scooby, the gopher snake, which many actually touched. They felt the pelts of the raccoon, opossum and skunk and saw all the local wildlife as displayed in the Nature Center Exhibit Hall. They saw the tiniest of creatures through microscopes in water labs.

Out on the Marsh, they caught little tree frogs, held Harlequin bugs, watched lizards scurry for cover and ants building homes in the sandy soil. They smiled as the ducks went by with their little ducklings and stood in awe looking at the larger, majestic birds such as the Great Blue Heron. They watched the butterflies, hummingbirds and other birds fly overhead and played in the "snow" (actually lots of white willow seeds blowing in the wind).

Each tour brought a different experience and some precious memories for students, chaperones and docents alike. One docent told me that one of the first grade teachers was as excited as her students, getting down on her knees in the mud catching tree frogs and yelling "I got one." Another told the story of holding up a picture of a Western Tiger Swallowtail butterfly for the students to look for—and suddenly one immediately appeared on the scene doing aerial loops before them! Then there were the students telling of seeing the California "Doom Poppy" (Dune Poppy). So much fun for all!!!!

Approximately 50 tours were given from September through June with the busiest months being March, April and May. In fact in May a tour went out every day (Tuesday-Thursday). A big "thank you" to the teachers who were flexible in their scheduling during this very busy time. The ages of the students ranged from 18 months (with parents, of course) to adults. Students came from as far away as Pasadena and Whittier, although the majority (27 tours) came from Torrance Schools. Over three-fourths of the students were either preschool, or first or third graders.

Fortunately this year we had quite a few docents who led the tours. Docents from Friends of Madrona Marsh were Bill Arrowsmith, Mary Garrity, Suzan Hubert, Jack Knapp, Cindy Reid and Bobbie Snyder. Docents from the staff included Bruce Brown, Bob Carr, Mark Christiansen, Daniel Marion, Ron Melin, Chris

"School Tours" continues on page 9.

Shirley's Turn

—Shirley Turner

Birdscapes: Birds in Our Imagination and Experience was written by Jeremy Mynott who has been watching, listening to, and thinking about birds and birders for much of his life. He lives in Suffolk, England when he is not birding in New York City's Central Park, or Russia, Greece or Australia. Jeremy Mynott is the former chief executive of Cambridge University Press. This book is my Mother's Day gift from my daughter, Professor Teresa Turner, University of the Virgin Island, that I would like to share with you. Princeton University Press published the book in 2009.

Of the book, Peter Mattiessen says, "An astonishing compendium brimming over with book lore and theory, pertinent quotations, and avian miscellany, all of it is well-written and much of it is amusing. A classic birder's bedside book if there ever was one."

The comments which follow are provided by Christopher Leahy, author of **The Birdwatcher's Companion**.

"Reading the book is like having a leisurely conversation about a favorite subject with a close, widely-read, articulate friend. We are shown that becoming intimate with the natural world, and especially with birds, touches many aspects of our common humanity—from our passion for making lists to our responses to color and music."

Illustrations include such things as the score of Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony, Quetzal Coin from Guatemala, Tyrant flycatcher from Venezuela Field Guide, Jane Eyre's Thomas Bewick vignette, Cranes of the world stamps, Starling flock with Peregrine in Sky Chase, the U.S. Seal of 1782 and a Red-eyed vireo.

There are four appendices: One is a listing of birds seen by Thomas Jefferson; another is about ladies' bird hats in New York. Each chapter begins with a quote. Chapter 3's title is "Seeing a Difference."

"You can observe a lot just by looking,"—Yogi Berra, U. S. baseball player and manager.

"**Birdscapes...**" is a unique meditation on the variety of our responses to birds. For me, I remember watching birds on rooftops from my hotel window in London. My husband points out birds on the power line from his upstairs bed. Memories of the Marsh are seeing and photographing nine Great Egrets in the sump, the returning three years of a Solitary Sandpiper there, and observing nesting Hummingbirds from a canoe. What birdscapes do you remember at the Marsh and elsewhere?

As I write this I realize I hear no singing birds in my back yard after Rick Wheeler trimmed trees and removed grasses and weeds. Where are the Bushtits that picked spiders from the window? What native plant

"Shirley" continues on page 9.

Council Targets Alaska Open Pit Mining

—Kathy Benz

On Tuesday, May 18, Ron Melin and I attended an NRDC (Natural Resources Defense Council) meeting in Santa Monica regarding blocking what would be one of the world's largest open pit mines that three foreign countries want to dig in Alaska. The area is situated at the headwaters of Bristol Bay, in a pristine tundra area of lakes, rivers and streams—a true wildlife Eden.

Award winning photographer Robert Glenn Ketchum presented a slide show of the beautiful wilderness area that is proposed for digging an open pit mine 2 miles wide and 2,000 feet deep. His photos also included the surrounding areas showing the many rivers and streams flowing to Bristol Bay. All are salmon runs that provide one-third of the world's wild Alaskan Salmon.

Native Alaskan spokesperson Bobby Andrew told us of the impact the mine would have on native villages and the lifestyles of the hundreds of fishermen and villagers living in the area. A coalition of the Alaskan people is against the Pebble Mine, whereas the Alaskan State Government says "go ahead and dig." The coalition has asked NRDC to help them out.

Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. spoke of the Pebble Mine itself and what it would do. The mining giant Anglo-American (out of Africa, headquartered in London) known for its disastrous polluting mine results in Zimbabwe, Nevada, Ireland and South Africa, has been joined by Mitsubishi of Japan and two other companies from Britain and Canada to dig the open pit mine.

A probe found not oil, but gold and copper ore. They guess there is perhaps 480 ounces of gold in a rich vein. The Pebble Mine would be 2 miles across and 2,000 feet deep to extract the ore. The sludge would be dumped in the nearby large Iliamna Lake, a home to freshwater seals and freshwater fish. Being in a tundra region, the open pit would continually fill with toxic water which would require being pumped out twenty-four-seven. To where???

The pristine streams and rivers are salmon spawning grounds. They are home to one-third of the world's wild salmon. Picture a child eating a salmon from the polluted waters. Picture that child now in 4th or 5th grade unable to solve a simple math problem, or unable to read easily because of the toxic substances now in her brain.

The Bristol Bay true wildlife Eden could be destroyed and permanently contaminated as the area of the Exxon Valdez spill is, and most likely as the Gulf spill will be. It has been 20 years since the Exxon Valdez spill and fish have not yet returned, fishermen are out of work and several species of birds have also

not returned. The Gulf spill is already larger than that of the Exxon Valdez and is being shoved under the table because it is affecting Louisiana and Alabama, two of our poorest states.

We all need to stop the Pebble Mine before the greedy companies get started. They will leave a big hole in the ground, destroying a pristine ecosystem of Alaska, leaving the area contaminated forever, all for maybe 480 ounces of gold that they will remove from United States ground, take to their own countries and only pay a 3 percent tax to the state of Alaska.

Please go to www.NRDC.org and click the site on the Pebble Mine. Sign the letter of protest to Mitsubishi, add your own words (if you wish) and submit it. NRDC stopped Mitsubishi from building a salt mine in Baja, California near the gray whale nursery; please help them win the fight against the Pebble Mine, too!

"School Tours" continued from page 8.

Noddings, Debbie Ovadia, and Beth Scott. Thank you all for so freely giving of your time for a most worthy program.

[Editor's Note: and a huge "Thank You!" to Sarah Noddings for coordinating all our school tours—obviously an immense and long-term task. The great success of this program is proof of a job well-done!]

"Shirley" continued from page 8.

should I buy from the Propagation Society? Bill Arrowsmith showed me the Say's Phoebe nesting at the Marsh shed and also his native plant front yard.

Jack Knapp's native plant front yard is looking great, too.

Tara Chklovski, an engineer with expertise in aerodynamics, was a speaker for an Audubon Society meeting. They meet the third Tuesday of the month at the Nature Center. Tara has developed a special program for children on bird flight. Tara will be presenting "Aerodynamics for Kids" on Sunday, September 12 from 2 to 4 p.m. at Second Sunday Science Friends program. The fee is \$5 per person or \$10 per family. You will learn and enjoy this experience.

The Moonlight Magic Planning Committee would appreciate donations for gift baskets, live and silent auction items. Contact Bobbie Snyder at 310-532-8493 or Suzan Hubert at suzanhubert@sbcglobal.net

South Bay Native Plant Corner

—Dr. Connie Vadheim, CSU Dominguez Hills



& Bullrushes –*Schoenoplectus* species

Among the more conspicuous plants on the Preserve are the large, grass-like plants we call Tules or Bullrushes. These plants are blooming now and their conspicuous flowers and seed-heads are attracting lots of attention. Tules are an important source of food for pollen-eating insects; later on, their seeds are eaten by a variety of birds. Large numbers of birds and animals hide and live in the tules. So it's worth a trip to Madrona Marsh to check out these interesting plants and their inhabitants.

The common names 'Tule' and 'Bullrush' are used interchangeably for plants in the genus *Schoenoplectus* (formerly *Scirpus*). Along with the Cattails, Tules are among the most common plants of freshwater marshes throughout the world. Of the several species local to western Los Angeles county, *Schoenoplectus maritimus* (Alkali Tule) is common at Madrona Marsh.

Tules are not grasses at all but actually large members of the sedge family (*Cyperaceae*). Like other sedges, Tules grow in or near water—in fact their success depends on the ebb and flow of water throughout the year. Tules begin their growth cycle in the early winter, with the first rains, when you will see the new green shoots emerging. The young shoots and their stout roots can be eaten raw or cooked as a vegetable. Tules grow quickly in standing or moving water. Their tough roots allow them to succeed in

this watery environment. Tule roots filter and clean the water; they also bind the marsh soil.

Tules flower in late spring or summer. You can see the dangling flower clusters in the picture below. The plants produce lots of pollen, which is eaten by Native Californians. You can also eat the seeds, but usually after they are dried and ground into flour.



Tules dry out in the summer and turn a nice golden brown. If you cut a Tule stem open you may be surprised that much of the stem is composed of air. Tule stems are very light and buoyant. Native Californians used bundles of stems to construct tule boats. Tule stems were also used to thatch houses, make mats and clothing – even for making baskets, shoes and dolls. The roots were also used in basket-making and as a dye source.

Although Tules are used in constructed (water treatment) wetlands, they are too large for most home gardens. They spread by underground stems (rhizomes) and quickly take over a pond or marsh. That is why we cut back the tules every fall at the Preserve.



Learn more about local native plants at our “Out of the Wilds and into Your Garden” series on the first Saturday of each month. Plant Information Sheets and Plant Lists are also available at the Nature Center.

Student's Project Attracts National Interest

—Tracy Drake

Over the past six months Bob Carr and I have been working with Levi Griffith on his science research project. He is a quiet and introspective 12 year-old who is both bright and tall for his age. With a fascination of frogs and a love to catch them, he started his research on Chytrid disease—a fungal disease that has caused a serious world-wide decline in most amphibian populations. His question: **Do the Frogs at Madrona Marsh Have Chytrid disease?** His hypothesis: nil, or no, frogs at the Marsh have the disease. His work is important because there has been little or no research in our area to determine if the frogs along California's coast have the disease. Unfortunately, initial tests indicate that our Pacific Tree Frogs, recently renamed Chorus Frogs, *are* affected. Research shows that while the disease is fatal to frogs in alpine lakes and colder climates, Chorus Frogs tend to be simply vectors, or carriers, of the fungus and are not as likely to die from it. But more research is necessary to determine if this tendency holds true here in Southern California.



South Dakota University Professor, Dr. Jake Kerby, left, Levi Griffith, center, and Preserve Manager and Naturalist Tracy Drake discuss Levi's fungal disease research.

Levi has been working with Dr. Jake Kerby, Assistant Professor at the University of South Dakota—a leading expert on the topic. Dr. Kerby helped determine the sampling protocols and provided the sampling supplies; and when he received Levi's samples, he tested for the presence or absence of the disease. The cool thing is, today he came all the way from South Dakota to discuss Levi's research and assist in determining which direction the project should take in the future. He is particularly interested because he grew up nearby—in Redondo Beach.

It is so great that this happened at our little Marsh, which by any standards is tiny, and located in Torrance, California—not known as a think-tank of science minded people. But it is a place where people, be-

cause of the number and variety of opportunities in which kids and adults can participate—can and do make a difference. That is why a curious, bright and quiet 12 year old boy named Levi and his mentors, Bob, a retired biology teacher and I have already, and will continue to, contribute to the body of knowledge that is true scientific research.

Walser's and FOMM: A Win-Win Combination!

—Bill Arrowsmith

After Torrance's first Environmental Fair in June of 2009 I reported to you that Jack Walser approached the Friends with an offer we couldn't refuse: If we would help publicize his company's program to refurbish and recycle computers, monitors and other electronics, he would donate 25 percent (!) of his proceeds to the Friends of Madrona Marsh. We couldn't lose. We completely supported the concept of re-use, as well as his programs for recycling and proper disposal of hazardous waste.

I am pleased to report that Jack is a man of his word. He has given us a quarterly check each quarter since last fall. And Walser's seems to be doing better than the rest of the economy; his quarterly check of \$819 on July 2 was over three times as much as the previous one! Thank you, Jack!

You can support Jack's refurbishing effort and FOMM at the same time—and maybe save yourself some money. He has computers for \$100 and flat screen monitors as low as \$20—a great way to pick up an extra computer for school or home use. All electronics are tested and there is a 7-day like item exchange policy. For more information and directions, see: www.walsers.com

Artists' Corner

Works of local artists and photographers inspired by the beauty of the Madrona Marsh are regularly on display at the Nature Center. Everyone is invited to attend each artist's reception where the artist talks about his/her work or gives a demonstration. Snacks and beverages are included.

Through July 9 - **Bill Wassenberg**, "Watercolor of the Marsh," An Exhibit of Paintings.

July 13-August 27 - **Mark Christiansen and Tracy Drake**, "A Study of Spring," An Exhibit of Paintings and Photography. Artist Reception-Friday, July 30, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

August 31-Oct. 15 - **Beth Shibata**, A Photography Exhibit. Artist Reception-Friday, Sept. 17, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

Oct. 19-Dec.3 - **Paul Blieden**, A Photography Exhibit. Artist Reception, Friday, Nov. 5, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

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