

Fall 2021

Marsh Mailing

Madrona Marsh Preserve and Nature Center

Marsh Mailing is also available in full color at www.friendsofmadronamarsh.com

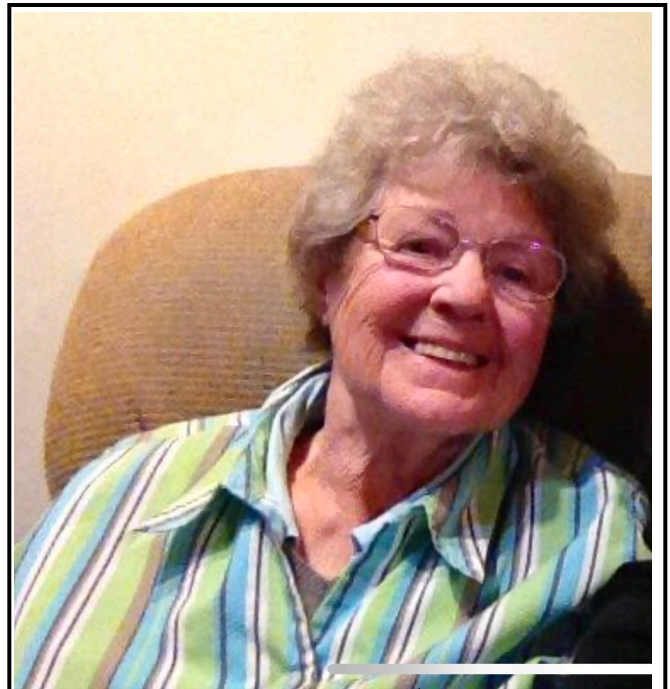
Planting Seeds for Generations to Come A Tribute to Venora Lee

by Tracy Drake

Everybody at the ceremony had headed home except me. As I wandered slowly along the paths I thought about the day's tree dedication ceremony in her honor and recalled with fondness the many lovely words that were spoken about Venora Lee. Her sons Brian and Steve, with his wife Mary, were present along with Bill and Fran Arrowsmith, Ruth Vogel, Jane Nishimura and several City Staff – all of whom helped plant a Fremont Cottonwood tree in the northwest part of the Preserve.

She was indeed a powerful force in helping to preserve the land, helping to ensure programs were in place to educate people about Madrona, and helping to ensure the board remained strong and current.

In my mind's eye I could see locations where programs she and the Friends developed had taken place; programs such as Junior Naturalist, Second Sunday Science, Fourth Weekend Walks, and Habitat Restoration. After the pandemic these programs continue again. It was fun to think back on those days and recall what a huge impact she had made. When I first started at Madrona she sat with me quarterly for several years, helping create the Seasons guide, helping plan programs and select instructors. It was during these times that she filled me in on the long, rich history of Madrona that spanned



Venora Lee helped apply for a \$1.1M state grant in 1981 and was president of the Friends 20 years ago, when the Nature Center was built. Photo by Tracy Drake.

many years and extended all the way to the political interests in Sacramento.

Rounding the bend at the Chevron corner I looked at the Willows. They were rich with both late-summer greens and the yellowing leaves of fall. There remained some of this spring's cotton-like seed fuzz draping over branches and stems. I had to smile while looking at that fuzz because I recall so clearly the summers that Venora helped to manage those trees. Every year we would trim them, she becoming draped in the same whitish fuzz as she volunteered

Mark Your Calendars--
ANNUAL PLANT SALE
See page 11 for details

“Seeds ...” continued from page 1

countless hours removing broken branches and trimming them so that new twiggy branches would be above the flood line, thus preventing stagnant areas in the marsh. This in turn reduced mosquito populations late into the summer. That white cottony material contained seeds for generations to come. That is the work that Venora did – she planted many types of seeds for generations to come.

Walking to the Preserve gate, I turned back to the south and scanned the landscape. In the east I noticed the Red-tailed Hawk gliding towards its usual perch in the blue gum eucalyptus tree, and how the oak grove stood dark green against the golden-brown grasses of the coastal prairie. Scanning in along to the south the blue-green hue of the PV peninsula made the remaining bloom of sunflowers stand out with a brilliant lemon yellow. The leaves of the sycamore, cottonwood and eucalyptus trees on the Preserve complemented the peninsula’s hue.

A little farther to the west the willow and cottonwood trees presented a mosaic of light green and yellow – true signs of the arrival of a season of change. And to the northwest I could see the newly planted Fremont Cottonwood tree standing tall amongst its older relatives – cottonwood trees planted long ago by Walt Wright.

The physical beauty of the land cause me to begin to wonder about the past and the future of the Preserve. The plaintive call of a Western Wood Peewee drew me out of the wonder and into the present. That moment made clear another form of beauty. Moral beauty.

It was that form of beauty, found in so many of the Friends of Madrona Marsh, including Venora, that allowed me to so deeply enjoy that moment. While I can still “see” the beauty of Venora’s smile and the twinkle in her eyes, it is her moral beauty that many, including me, will enjoy for generations to come.-T.D.

Rules and Hours for Preserve & Nature Center

September 2021

The Madrona Marsh Preserve:

Masks: Not Required.

Social Distancing: No

Family Groups: Allowed

Hours: Tuesday–Thursday: 10:00 am – 3:00 pm

Friday: 10:00 am – 4:00 pm

Saturday: 10:00 am – 5:00 pm

The Nature Center:

Masks: Required (over 2 years old)

Social Distancing: No

Hours: (Same as Preserve):

Tuesday–Thursday: 10:00 am – 3:00 pm

Friday: 10:00 am – 4:00 pm

Saturday: 10:00 am – 5:00 pm

Friends Gift Shop:

Masks: Required (over 2 years old)

Social Distancing: No

Hours: Friday: 10:00 am – 3:00 pm (or as set by Friends)

Saturday: 10:00 am – 4:00 pm (or as set by Friends)

Safer Wildlife; Safer Drivers

Bill Arrowsmith

Omar Durrani is a former Saturday volunteer at Madrona Marsh and graduated from West High School in Torrance in 2020. As he became familiar with the Preserve and its abundance of wildlife, Omar, who had lived just down the street from Madrona all his life, had a potentially life-saving idea. He knew that some Marsh critters – raccoons, skunks, mother Mallards and their ducklings, and others – occasionally left the safe confines of the Preserve, wandering across nearby streets. And Omar also knew how busy the traffic on those streets could be. So why not ask the City of Torrance to install wildlife warning signs around the perimeter of the Preserve? And so he did. And in May of 2020 he received a letter from the Public Works Department that reads in part:

Dear Mr. Durrani,

Thanks for your letter requesting traffic signs to warn drivers of wildlife near Madrona Marsh. Your request has been forwarded to the Public Works Department for consideration. We concur with your concern about driver and wildlife safety. In response, the City will install wildlife signs around the perimeter of the Marsh.

Thank you again for your concern and recommendations. It's people like you who make Torrance a great place.

*Sincerely,
Angel Lotus, PE
Associate Civil Engineer*

We couldn't agree more, Ms. Lotus. There are now 8 wildlife warning signs along the streets on all four sides of the Preserve. Omar Durrani, whose family moved to San Diego in 2020, is now a sophomore at the University of San Diego, majoring in Environmental and Ocean Sciences (!) and was able to visit the Marsh last fall and see "his signs" for the first time.

(See photo, compliments of his mother, Ana Durrani)



NO Summer Newsletter

We'd like to apologize to our regular readers. There was NO Summer 2021 Marsh Mailing due to an unfortunate combination of events. Primarily, our publisher received an update to her publishing software, but found it lacked some essential features. And both our editors were experiencing intermittent problems with ISP's and mail handlers. We resolved those problems and a later supplement to the software update provided the missing features. We regret the omission, our first in 15 years, and hope you were not inconvenienced.

Bill Arrowsmith & Diane Gonsalves

Living in Harmony with Coyotes

Fourth in a six-part series: Introduction, Skunks, Raccoons, Coyotes,
Squirrels and Opossums

by Suzan Hubert

KAPOW... a meteor falls, an earthquake strikes, a bulldozer passes... and your entire environment, everything you know and hold dear, is gone. You have no home. You have no water. You have no food.

If you're a human and you survive, you contact your insurance company. If cell phones still work. You try to find out what happened. Why did it happen? Who's to blame? Mostly you just want your world to return to normal. If you're a coyote or any other wildlife that survives such a strike, you would skip those steps. Wildlife will panic and run, but then will accept that something changed. If there is no food, water or shelter, they move on. Wildlife adapts to change -- or goes extinct.

The coyote is a highly intelligent and adaptable animal. Various species of coyote have lived in the South Bay since the Pleistocene era. Those coyotes had a tough life; they lived with Saber-toothed Cats and mammoths. The major threats humans present to wildlife today are traffic and trapping. Many coyotes have learned to avoid traps, and are even learning to cross our streets and freeways, by observing traffic light positions and traffic patterns. Over the centuries coyotes have adapted to living in whatever location provides food, water and shelter. Over those same centuries humans have tried all sorts of ways to eradicate them, but to no avail.

Love them or fear them or choose to find harmony and coexist: it's your choice. Whichever choice you make, there is a long history and readily available research that proves trapping and killing coyotes is a losing battle and a huge waste of money. Why, you ask? That's an excellent question. Coyotes have learned to coexist with humans. Let's learn a bit about them.

Coyotes are like mice and rats, but bigger. Mice and rats have been with us forever. This makes sense in nature because 80 percent of a coyote's diet consists of rodents: rats, mice, squirrels and other small mammals. They also eat rabbits, chickens, bird eggs and pet food if it's available. The other 20 percent of their diet may include fruit, berries, some insects and animal remains. Note that the major portion of a coyote's food runs away. Coyotes instinctively give chase to anything that runs because it could be food. This is why cats and small dogs are sometimes killed, but not always eaten.

Coyotes are primarily nocturnal, and in cities and urban areas, for their own protection from humans, coyotes hunt alone or in pairs from around dusk to dawn. It's wise to keep cats and small pets indoors or in protected areas at night whenever coyotes are suspected to be around. In the wild, coyotes hunt around the clock when there are hungry pups to feed. Coyotes only attack large animals, such as humans, when they feel threatened. Coyotes are not looking for a fight; they are looking for food. This is why hazing works.

If you encounter a coyote, haze it: make yourself appear large and threatening; wave your arms, shout, throw something. Clearly clarify to the coyote that you are not food and not worth the trouble. We teach our children to stay out of the street, to be careful on the Internet and we can also teach them hazing as a means of protection against coyotes, large dogs and other wildlife. We can learn to coexist with coyotes and other wildlife while still keeping them away from our

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“Coyotes ...” continued from page 4

neighborhoods and without wasting money or sacrificing our pets.

Coyotes live in family groups; an alpha male and female which are a bonded pair, their pups, older offspring and others who have been accepted into the group. Family size varies, with but it's usually 3-7 adults. They make dens only to give birth and raise pups, also called kits. They choose a den location in the most isolated, safest area they can find.

Coyotes can mate at two years old, and mating season peaks in February-March. Gestation averages 58-63 days, and pups are born March-May. A coyote will give birth to 2-7 pups, which are adult size in 9 months. Some pups move on while others stay with the family group.

Coyotes usually have one litter a year, and the litter size and frequency is determined by the availability of food water and the need to maintain family size. The coyote's ability to maintain family size is a key reason why trapping and killing coyotes does not work. When food, water and shelter are available and a family member is killed, females may have more than one litter that year and they may also give birth to more pups in order to replace lost family members.

Coyotes communicate with each other. They are famous for howling, although urban coyotes have learned that howling attracts unwanted attention; so howling is limited in urban areas. Howling is one method coyotes use to attract mates and to keep in touch with their family. They have a wide range of sounds including short barks, yips and huffs. These sounds are particularly associated with raising their kits. It's mostly instructional but, having listened to these exchanges, I think some of the sounds are playful and affectionate. They also growl. Growls are universal to mammals and always mean, "GO AWAY. LEAVE ME ALONE." I've

heard growls from co-workers on Monday mornings and it means the same thing.

If you love coyotes, if you respect their right to live and you are happy they are around, keep in mind that your neighbors may not agree. Coyotes are wild, so don't leave food out. Feeding most wildlife is bad for your neighbors and it's bad for the animal. It teaches them dependency on humans and stops them from hunting their natural food. It also reduces their fear of humans, which is unwise for both the coyote and the humans. Respect their wildness; nature provides for them nicely. Respect your neighbors also, who may not want coyotes around.

If you are really committed to ridding your community of coyotes, then become an advocate with your city for coyote awareness education and wildlife corridors. Wildlife corridors are open, uninhabited spaces, such as the land along railroad tracks, freeways and under power lines.

Given any alternative to living around humans, the coyotes will take it and move away from residential neighborhoods. Coyotes regard humans as something to be avoided; over the centuries they have learned that we are more dangerous than saber-toothed cats and mastodons.

I have positive experiences with coyotes. My bird feeder was attracting rats and mice, and these rodents were tunneling into the insulation around my spa. Soon after I noticed that, I began hearing a coyote family nearby and, not surprisingly, my rats and mice began disappearing. I now feed the birds, keep my cats inside at night and happily coexist with a local coyote family.

See You on the Preserve, where coyotes do not live but sometimes hunt, and help keep the ecosystem in balance for which we are grateful.

-Suzan Hubert, President, Friends of Madrona Marsh, California Naturalist

Backyard Bees

Jeanne Bellemin

During this summer the native bees dominating my native plant garden were the leaf-cutter bees in the genus *Megachile* (family *Megachilidae*). They were particularly attracted to my sunflowers, *Encelia californica*, that I let proliferate everywhere, including my vegetable garden. If it was sunny, the bees flew from one flower to the next, often bumping one another off the flowerhead.

These leaf-cutter bees are about the same size as a honeybee, only broader and fuzzier with large mandibles. Another difference is that the females gather pollen on the underside of their abdomens rather than on their hind legs. These pollen-collecting hairs, or scopa, cover the ventral abdomen and, when they're successful, their abdomens reveal a thick pad of bright yellow pollen.

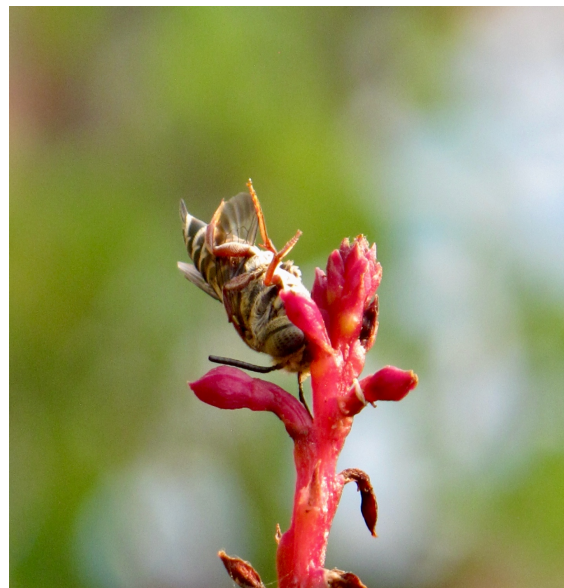
I have not discovered where they are nesting but they have not yet occupied my bee house. I know they are nesting because of the tell-tale circular holes in the thin leaves of Redbuds and roses. These bees line their nests with the circular patches of leaves or petals that they cut and remove using their large mandibles and transport to their nests. In fact, the large mandibles are the namesake of both the genus and the family.

In mid-August I discovered another native bee in my yard, resting upside down while grasping onto the small purple *Epidendron* orchids with his prominent mandibles (see photo). It was also interesting to note he stayed in this position from late afternoon until evening, at times kicking his reddish legs. The following night there were two, and currently, on this last day of August, there are four bees that have positioned themselves on the orchid for the last two weeks.

I assumed they were males and perched like this to release pheromones to attract potential mates, but now I see both males and females. In the literature they are called Red-footed Cuckoo Leaf-cutter Bees, *Coelioxys rufitarsis*. They are specialized parasites on the leaf-cutter bees, although I have not seen any interaction. They are also termed

cleptoparasites, because they steal and consume their host's food. Now, if I could only find those nests!

At Madrona Marsh there are numerous long-horned bees in the genus *Melissodes*. They also are attracted to the *Encelia californica* and have the same behavior as the *Megachile*, flying around bumping each other off the flowerheads. *Melissodes* males have also been reported to cluster together in the evening for sleep. Perhaps that is what the *Coelioxys* are up to as well, though it looks rather uncomfortable upside-down.



Red-footed Cuckoo Leaf-cutter Bee posing on Epidendron orchid to attract mate?

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 Editorial Advisor, Bill Arrowsmith, FrandBill@att.net or Editor, Diane Gonsalves at gonwild2@yahoo.com or may be dropped off or mailed to the Nature Center, P.O. Box 5078, Torrance, CA 90510.

Donations of \$100 or More

Fall-2021

Date	Donor	Donation	Information
April	Otto Cache	\$217.00	Scholarship Fund
April	Alice & Douglas Thomas	\$100.00	
April	Alice Sasaki	\$100.00	In memory of Robert Sasaki
April	Frances & John Hunter	\$100.00	
April	Constance Vadheim Roth	\$1,000.00	Happy New Year!
April	Kenneth & Doris Nakakura	\$500.00	
May	Joann & Alan Miyamoto	\$500.00	
May	John & Louise Bye	\$100.00	
May	Jim & Sylvia Rothman	\$100.00	
May	John & Cynthia Kondon	\$100.00	
May	Virginia Massey	\$100.00	
June	Elsie Inase	\$100.00	
June	Ted Kotzin	\$250.00	
June	Barbara & Bill Ailor	\$100.00	
June	LaVonne Wuertz	\$100.00	
June	Brian & Joann Bailey	\$100.00	
June	Robert E. Martin	\$100.00	
June	Karen & David Greenberg	\$100.00	
June	Dorothy & Anthony Vinter	\$150.00	
June	Torrance Teachers Association	\$300.00	
July	Betty Halley	\$200.00	
July	Elias Altenes	\$100.00	
August	Roxanne Brown	\$500.00	In Memory of Maryanne Brown
August	Alfred & Barbara Sattler	\$100.00	
August	Patrick Brown	\$100.00	
August	Jeanne Bellemin	\$250.00	In behalf of Anne Bellemin

Sudden Branch Syndrome

*by Steve Ash, Acting Manager
Madrona Marsh Preserve*

A loud crack, a whooshing plummet, and jarring thwack! Seemingly, without warning, mature trees that appear in good health lose a limb or even a crown. It happens in calm balmy weather, usually during summer. Under severe wind conditions, it's easy to understand why tree limbs come crashing to the ground, but when it's calm and quiet, with little or no wind; what's that all about? A likely cause of spontaneous limb loss is a phenomenon known as sudden branch syndrome.

Sudden branch syndrome, also known as sudden limb failure, occurs without warning. Suddenly during nice quiet summer days, healthy tree branches simply snap and fall off. Some species are more susceptible to sudden branch failure; aging trees, eucalyptus, oak, sycamore, beech, among a few others.

After much scientific debate, there appears to be no strong consensus as to the cause. Most scientists think it has something to do with humidity levels within the tree. As trees absorb soil moisture and distribute it through the trunk, branches, and leaves; moisture is released through the leaves, thus helping cool the tree. This process is called evapotranspiration and is similar to humans' sweating in order to cool the skin. Scientists think this process may be triggering sudden limb loss.

A leading theory holds that under higher humidity conditions, on calm days trees hold the moisture in the canopy -- limiting evapotranspiration, causing moisture retention and stress, and eventually leading to limb failure. Basically, sudden branch drop is the tree's response to a warm and dry environment where transpiration needs



Loss of eucalyptus branch and crown in July 2021 at Madrona Marsh.

exceed the vascular capabilities of the tree. When it gets too warm to keep all the tree's tissue properly circulated, the tree responds with its own form of amputation, letting go of a branch.

According to scientists, other possible causes include: heat-induced tissue shrinkage, moisture changes in the air and soil, drought stress, and internal cracking of the tree limb, among others. Whatever the cause, the loss of a crown or even a branch is a dramatic event. At the Marsh, we have our share of sudden limb losses, yet I haven't been ringside to actually observe a sudden branch failure, only the end result. Sudden branch syndrome is and will likely continue to be one of those mysteries of nature we humans just can't figure out. Somehow, I like the thought that nature holds many unsolved mysteries.

Madrona Marsh and Nature Center Bioblitz - iNaturalist and the 2021 City Nature Challenge

Have (Phone) Camera, Will Travel -- for Urban Nature

By Dr. Katie Mika

One of my favorite times of year has always been Spring for a variety of reasons, but in recent years, participating in the City Nature Challenge (CNC) has been a particular highlight. CNC was established in 2016 as a friendly competition between LA and San Francisco, spearheaded by community science staff at the LA County Natural History Museum and the California Academy of Science, respectively.

CNC has grown by leaps and bounds every year, resulting in a ton of valuable citizen science data to help us better understand the presence of wildlife in urban areas and identify organisms spreading into new territories. In its first year, CNC took place in 2 cities, with about 20,000 observations of 2,500 species made by 1,000 observers. Just 6 years later, despite COVID restrictions preventing large gatherings to document wildlife, CNC took place in 419 cities (in 44 countries!) resulting in about 1.2 million observations of more than 45,000 species by 52,000 observers.

This year, I decided to focus my efforts during CNC weekend (April 30 to May 3, 2021) at Madrona Marsh and the adjacent Nature Center, to see how much wildlife I could observe at just one location. I spent a couple hours wandering the Marsh on Friday April 30th and another couple of hours cruising and lingering at various spots in the garden at the Madrona Marsh Nature Center on Sunday May 2.

Both times, there was a ton to see and hear, although I couldn't capture everything in photos based on speed or proximity. As it has been such a dry winter and spring, much of the water in the wetlands area has dried up but some water still remained, harboring Snowy Egrets, sleepy Canada

Geese, and Red-winged Blackbirds. Some of my favorite observations are those that go by too fast to photograph – a hawk in a tussle with another bird, hummingbirds swooping in their mating dances, and lizards and rats streaking across the path into shadowy undergrowth.

Coincidentally, I made about 18 observations on Friday and 17 observations on Sunday, mostly birds and insects (western honeybees and California Harvester Ants in particular) both times. I was happy to be greeted by a couple of desert cottontail rabbits browsing on the path for my first observation on Sunday morning by the Nature Center.

Some of these critters (like the Red-winged Blackbird and most Snowy Egrets, are merely passing through on long migrations while others are based in Southern California year-round. One of my favorite things to do while researching images to identify observations is to learn about the lives of the animals around us. For example, many miniscule hummingbirds complete long migrations; Rufous Hummingbirds migrate about 4,000 miles along the west coast of North America.

To provide some perspective, this is equivalent to a 6-foot-tall human going around the globe (under their own power, not in a plane or with other assistance) 3.6 times! Anna's hummingbird is a non-migratory bird that can be found in Southern California year-round; some Allen's hummingbirds migrate while others stay in Southern California.

One interesting impact of human development is that some species of birds

"iNaturalist ..." continued on page 10

“iNaturalist” continued from page 9

which used to migrate no longer need to, as flowering species or water are available year-round due to human landscaping practices.

CNC happens every year, so hope to see you out there next spring at Madrona Marsh capturing some wildlife photos and building up our knowledge about all the critters we share space with in LA County.

Tips and Tricks:

Find a water source and get it framed with your camera for pics of whoever shows up

Look down for plants, and take pictures from multiple angles of the leaves, flowers, nuts, roots - anything that may help others ID the plant later in iNaturalist

Jot down observations in the field as well as photos to help you ID later, especially with critters that are too far away or moving too quickly to photograph well

If you can hear a bird or insect but can't see it, you can record and upload sounds to iNaturalist.

There are apps where you can play bird songs to help yourself ID a bird, but if you use them in the field play so softly only you can hear or use headphones so you don't disturb the actual birds present.

Editor's Note: Dr. Katie Mika grew up in the South Bay, learning a love of nature with her mom, partly through tidepooling in Palos Verdes and nature walks and bird-watching in Madrona Marsh. She got her Ph.D. at UCLA, with a focus on water quality and microbiology, and did research while at UCLA for the City of Los Angeles.

She helped the mayor's office write the City's 2019 Sustainability Plan and has worked to make LA's water more sustainable and to support urban nature and habitats. What a great success story, with early roots right here at Madrona Marsh!

20 Years Ago . . .

We passed a very somber and sad anniversary this month. It's been twenty years since 9/11/2001 and the horrible events of that day. I will not address that tragedy here, nor do I want to in any way diminish the importance of remembering it.

But I wanted to remind my fellow Friends of two much more positive events that also happened 20 years ago, albeit months earlier. Each event involved an arrival of something or someone new, and each of those entities continues to contribute to the success of the Madrona Marsh Preserve and improve our understanding of it to this day.

Well, we're out of space in this issue. Stay healthy, and perhaps we can continue this discussion in the Winter newsletter.

NATIVE PLANT SALE

- Fall is the best season to plant natives
- Plants for birds, bees and butterflies
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Friends of Madrona Marsh

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