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PETALUMA WETLANDS ALLIANCE

(A COMMITTEE OF MADRONE AUDUBON)
P.O. Box 973, Petaluma CA 94953-0973

Fall 2011

Alman Marsh Trail

by Mary Edith Moore

Due to the economy, the Petaluma Parks and Recreation maintenance crew has been reduced from 17 employees to 7. In mid-September Ron DeNicola, Director of Petaluma Parks and Recreation Maintenance, asked the Petaluma Wetlands Alliance (PWA) if they would remove the nonnative plants on and along the Alman Marsh trail, the one-mile path between Shollenberger Park and the Petaluma Marina. PWA promised to do what it could in the wetlands. Initially two mornings, Sunday and the following Wednesday, were scheduled and a call for help went out to the PWA docents and the regular community volunteers.

Sunday morning, September 18, 13 volunteers worked from 9:00 a.m. to noon at the Shollenberger entrance to Alman Marsh. The bagged prunings were collected and trucked to the dumpster at the end of the Shollenberger parking lot. Wednesday morning, September 21, the city met us at the Marina entrance to Alman Marsh with a small motorized pickup (a "gator," which Andy LaCasse piloted) for negotiating the narrow trail to pick up bagged prunings and transfer them to the city's dump truck, which was parked at the entrance to Alman Marsh. About 15 volunteers worked from 9:00 a.m. to noon.

Momentum continued to build. Members of the North Bay Rowing Club and the Petaluma Small Craft Center Coalition came on board, spearheaded by Maggie Hohle. Rebuilding Together Petaluma (rtp) Executive Director Jane Hamilton took up the challenge and added Alman Marsh to their Volunteer Workday, Saturday, October 15. A team from Two Rock Coast Guard came at the end of October to clear the trail at the mid-section.

In six weeks 65 docents and volunteers worked a total of 315 man-hours to clear the Alman Marsh trail. It was worth it!

Judgment Day on the Dutra Asphalt Plant

by Gerald Moore

The lawsuit by the City of Petaluma, Madrone Audubon, and several other environmental organizations against building the Dutra Asphalt Plant was filed almost a year ago. The case is scheduled to be heard on December 9, at 2:20 p.m. in Sonoma County Superior Court by Judge Rene Chouteau. Either side has 30 days to appeal the decision. We strongly encourage everyone who is against building this asphalt plant 200 yards from Petaluma's Shollenberger Park to come to the courtroom for this hearing to "vote with your body" and show the judge that we care what happens with this case.

A Big Thank You to Our Special Projects Crew

PWA frequently gets involved in special projects like basking logs for turtles, bird box building and installations, bird surveys, owl pellet processing, weekend walks, weed pulling or spraying, and many, many other things. We have a special crew of PWA docents who enjoy doing these activities, even if they don't participate much in our outstanding third grade program. Without the help of these people PWA would not be nearly the organization it has become.

The list of docents who help us with these activities includes (in no particular order): Andy LaCasse, Elaine Pruett, Al Hesla, Tony Kamby, Len Nelson, Gary Compari, John Richards, Valerie Franklin, Tommy Smith, Marilyn Blume, Peter Colasanti, John Eliot, Judy Harris, Ingrid Larnis, and Steve Jette, plus a couple of "honorary" members like John Shribbs and M.L. Carle. A few people like Andy and John Richards bubble over with enthusiasm and help us do just about anything. If we have forgotten anyone, please forgive us. The extra efforts and special skills these people bring to PWA are greatly appreciated and contribute substantially to our mission of providing "education in and stewardship of Petaluma's public wetlands."

Thank you again.

Gerald, Mary Edith, and Kathleen

PWA Facebook Fall 2011

by Kathleen Garvey

The Petaluma Wetlands Alliance kicked off its presence in social media on October 3, 2011, establishing a Facebook page. The Facebook page will augment our PetalumaWetlands.org web site by providing frequent news, photos, and video of happenings at Shollenberger Park, Alman Marsh, and Ellis Creek. We focus on PWA activities and projects as well as the flora and fauna of these three wetland areas. Our Facebook page can be viewed by anyone and is now showing up in Google search results for Petaluma Wetlands Alliance.

Facebook members can help others know about the page by "like"-ing the PWA page, making comments on posts, and forwarding posts to other Facebook members. We are aiming for new content every day, so please feel free to send Kathleen Garvey photos, information, and videos about PWA doings or observations of nature in the wetlands. Kathleen's email: chairperson@petalumawetlands.org.

PWA Docents Track Nesting Activity At Local Heron/Egret Colonies

by Bob Dyer

Although the long-standing heron/egret colony across the river from Shollenberger Park remained empty again this year, other colonies in the area picked up the slack and were successful. PWA docents Len Nelson, Dennis Buss, and I made 35 field observations at two local colonies—one next to the wastewater holding ponds at Ellis Creek and the other by the Petaluma River, south of the McNear Peninsula. Reports were sent to Cypress Grove Research Center (CGRC), Audubon Canyon Ranch, which maintains data on all active colonies in the Bay Area.

The Ellis Creek colony produced 43 healthy chicks—26 Great Egrets, 11 Great Blue Herons, and 6 Double-crested Cormorants. The McNear colony had 33 chicks—26 Snowy Egrets and 7 Great Blue Herons.

Tracking season started in February and ended in late July. We tried to observe at least every 8 or 9 days (weather permitting), as CGRC asks for data on all stages of nesting, from pair-bonding to when the young fledge.

Enrich Your Life— Become a Petaluma Wetlands Docent

by Gerald Moore

The Petaluma Wetlands Alliance Committee has a very active wetlands docent program that serves not only the community, but offers its docents many rewarding experiences.

The program is so popular with grade school teachers that we are booked up for the year within 30 days of opening our schedule in the fall. Our major focus is a third grade, hands-on program with both classroom visits and wetlands exploration. We also do children/family nature walks and bird/nature walks for adults. In addition, our docents have the opportunity to participate in educational workshops, field trips, and stewardship activities at the wetlands.

Meet and work with some great, enthusiastic amateur naturalists in our community. Our annual new-docent training will start on Thursday, January 5, 2012, and run for eight consecutive Thursdays from 8:30 a.m. to noon. Training sessions are held either at Lucchesi Community Center or Shollenberger Park.

Please join us in this rewarding, fun, educational adventure. We ask docents to make a minimum two-year, 20-hours-per-year commitment spread out in any way among the many activities we support. There is a \$40 charge for course materials. For more details contact Bob at 763-2934, Gerald at 763-3577, or see our great web site: www.petalumawetlands.org.

Petaluma Christmas Bird Count for Kids

by Al Hesla

PWA is currently planning for the Third Annual Petaluma Christmas Bird Count for Kids. The City of Petaluma has reserved the Kenilworth Recreation Center for us again this year. The event is scheduled for Saturday, January 7, 2012, from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Last year's Bird Count was a success with 14 kids participating in the event. We had an enthusiastic response to the Bird Bingo game that included prizes for all. The Bird Rescue demo of a Turkey Vulture, a Red-tailed Hawk, a Merlin, and a Great-horned Owl was a hit for everyone. Bird Rescue has already committed to providing a live-bird demonstration again for this winter's event.

We are looking for docent volunteers to serve as Team Leaders and Recorders and assist in other ways. For instance, we need three people to staff the check-in desk the morning of the event. We also need someone for compiling the data. Ideas are welcome.

Please call Al Hesla at 765-9411 or send an email to a.hesla@comcast.net if you are interested in participating.

Businesses Partner with PWA

by Gerald Moore

Shollenberger Park and Alman Marsh, the two main wetlands areas where Petaluma Wetlands Alliance operates, lie between the Petaluma River and the Southgate Business Park. We are proud to share with you that several businesses in the park periodically partner with PWA to help support our educational and habitat restoration projects, which in turn makes the business park a more interesting, pleasant place to work.

RNM Properties, our first corporate sponsor, donated generously to help PWA get our third grade wetlands science program started several years ago. RNM is back again, building a deluxe kiosk at the entrance to Shollenberger Park that will replace the old, small, dilapidated one that is sliding down the hill into the pond. This new eye-stopper is modeled after the kiosk that was installed in front of the Yosemite National Park Visitor Center two years ago. It will have lockable cabinets with glass windows to display lots of information about the wetlands. There will also be a new display board to hold all the ongoing signs regarding park policies. Several warning signs in the area are also being upgraded.

Since 2008 Econscious, an environmentally conscious women's sportswear company, has also donated annually to PWA to help with our educational needs. Bridget McCoy, the CFO and our contact with the company, has also been a friend on environmental and conservation issues.

The Athleta Company, now owned by Gap, has partnered with us on restoring the space in Alman Marsh in front of their building with trees and shrubs. Athleta also assisted with weeding and watering the site. Two years ago Athleta gave us a grant for restoration work in the marsh.

Camelbak Corp. has brought their employees out to help remove thistles and other weeds in the marsh fronting their building. At the end of the day Camelbak gave us a case of military-style gloves that are still the favorites of many of our regular weed workers.

PRBO Conservation Science is also partnering with PWA to restore the marsh channel in front of their building to weed-free native plants. We have also partnered with PRBO's education team at several public events and we appreciate their input in training our new docents.

Mrs. Grossman's Sticker Factory and Barbara's Bakery have donated products for some of our events. The list goes on and on, even in these economic hard times. PWA really appreciates the help of these businesses. Without their assistance a big portion of our educational and stewardship programs would have to be cut.

All of this support along with grants from the Petaluma Educational Foundation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are what make our program possible.

Children in the Wetlands

by Helen Heal

In September and October of 2011 the PWA education program docents helped children in 13 third grade classrooms discover the wonder of the habitats and plant and animal inhabitants of Shollenberger Park. This included 318 children plus their teachers and numerous parents and family members, and they came from Corona Creek, McDowell, Valley Vista, La Tercera, and Penngrove schools.

Our program will pick up again in March and continue during the spring months. We already have a full schedule. We continue to hear from teachers how much they love PWA's program and how meaningful it is for the children in their classes. In this time of increased class size and little time for science education, PWA's program is a welcome encounter with the natural world for children, teachers, and parents. We always encourage families to return and continue to enjoy the wonders of Shollenberger.