



www.petalumawetlands.org

PETALUMA WETLANDS ALLIANCE

(A COMMITTEE OF MADRONE AUDUBON)
P.O. Box 2182, Petaluma CA 94953-2182

Summer/Fall 2014

Ramsar International Convention on Wetlands

by Gerald Moore

Ramsar is the only world-wide treaty based on the preservation of wetlands. It started in 1971 in Ramsar, Iran, as a fallout of the Iraqi invasion of Iran in the 1960s and the spiteful destruction of Iran's wetlands by Saddam Hussein. These wetlands have been the home of the "Marsh People" for centuries. The Marsh People are still working to restore their wetlands and this dedicated effort has led to the creation of an international effort to preserve wetlands around the globe. The Ramsar Convention has expanded into thousands of sites, first in the Middle East, then Europe and North America. More than 200 countries have signed on the Ramsar preservation program and pledged to preserve their wetlands. There are no contracts or legal agreements to maintain a wetlands site forever, just a "gentleman's" agreement to try to preserve and restore their wetlands. By 2010 there were more than 30 major Ramsar sites in the United States represented by such places as Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, Everglades National Park, Bolinas Lagoon, Tomales Bay, Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve, and the Laguna de Santa Rosa. Over the last two years almost all of the San Francisco Bay has joined the Ramsar Convention. The big federal wetlands were taken in first, and now most of the small wetland sites are applying for admission, including the Petaluma public wetlands. The Bay Area Ramsar program is being managed by Beth Huning, long-time manager of the San Francisco Bay Joint Ventures group, at no cost to any of the Bay Area applicants. There are now 26 local major stakeholders in the Bay Area working together to make wetland restoration projects happen. Potential benefits to Ramsar affiliation include: increased public awareness, increased participation by stakeholders, greater support for protection of wetland sites, increased access to conservation funding, and enhanced opportunities for research and ecotourism. For more information, see www.ramsar.org; check on Twitter or Facebook; or contact Gerald Moore, Chair, Petaluma Wetlands Alliance, 707-763-3577, or Susan Kirks, Madrone Audubon Society, 707-241-5548.

Elim Lutheran Restoration Day

by Mary Edith Moore

What a pleasant surprise to receive a call from Athena Labberton at Elim Lutheran, who told me that some of their parishioners wanted to help with restoration at Shollenberger. We agreed that Sunday, September 7, 1 to 4 p.m., was a good day and time.

An email from Becky Schuerman Choi informed me that Athena had appointed her as the “point person” for the Elim crew. The day arrived and 17 parishioners came to Shollenberger Park and went to work. The crew joined Kathleen Garvey and Gerald and Mary Edith Moore to continue clearing the nonnative vegetation behind the four picnic tables and fence just inside the gate.

This was a great work crew and they kept us and each other entertained with humorous stories.

Meet a Great Group of People Who Enjoy Each Other’s Company

by Mary Edith Moore

Join the Petaluma Wetlands Alliance (PWA) docents. Our new-docent training begins Thursday January 8, 2015, and continues for eight consecutive Thursdays through February, plus the first two Wednesdays in March, 8:30 a.m. to noon. The 10 training sessions are held at the Lucchesi Community Center and Shollenberger Park. PWA has a very active wetlands program: teaching third grade hands-on activities in the classroom and in the field, nature discovery walks with the second graders, bilingual nature/bird walks for higher grades and adults, bird research, and stewardship and restoration at Shollenberger Park and Alman Marsh. Obviously, there is a niche for everyone. We ask that applicants pay \$40 toward the cost of materials and apply by Tuesday, January 6. For more information, visit www.petalumawetlands.org, click on “Education,” and then click on “Docent Program,” or call 707-763-3577.

Petaluma Wetlands Alliance Bird Surveys on eBird

by Peter Colasanti

Had a look at eBird lately? It’s an online database of international bird sightings that you can explore for free and contribute to if you choose. It’s a great resource if you’re planning a trip. You can look up Hot Spots for wherever you roam and generate checklists of the birds that have been seen there or learn of spots where certain “must see” species have been seen recently. Petaluma Wetlands Alliance has been conducting bird surveys for a decade now, first in Shollenberger Park and later in Tolay Regional Park and Tolay Creek Ranch, with some in Ellis Creek. The data from all these surveys, plus the annual Sonoma Valley and Cheep Thrills Christmas Bird Counts, is submitted to eBird under the name “PWA Data.” Have a look around and run reports on any of these sites or Sonoma County and you’ll see what we’ve been seeing. Here’s the link: <http://ebird.org/content/ebird/>

TREE SWALLOW NESTS IN THE PETALUMA PUBLIC WETLANDS, plus the Ellis Creek Oxidation Ponds and Tolay Park **by Len Nelson**

The birds nesting in boxes at Shollenberger, Alman Marsh, and Ellis Creek are tree swallows, *Tachycineta bicolor*.

On April 5, 2007, I began monitoring 20 swallow boxes located in Shollenberger and Alman Marsh as part of a joint study called *Golondrinas de las Americas*, with naturalists ranging from Alaska to Argentina. Initially, Andy Lacasse built and installed 20 boxes in Shollenberger. This was expanded to 28 by 2011 and they were spread into Ellis Creek. In 2009, 10 were installed at the Ellis Creek oxidation ponds area (an area off limits to the public), and more recently (in 2011), Andy and Len installed 16 of Andy's houses at Tolay. The current total of nests being monitored is 54. Prior to this year, I monitored the Shollenberger houses quite regularly (weekly or more). This year, I decided to do weekly monitoring also at the oxidation ponds and at Tolay about every 10 days so as to get good data from those locations for comparison purposes.

Details on how these nests are monitored and any questions concerning the data below can be obtained by contacting me, Len Nelson, at lennelsn@comcast.net.

In last year's fall issue of the PWA newsletter, I provided the details by year for Shollenberger. This year, only the 2014 details are provided as well as the averages for the 7 years from 2007 to 2013 so you can get an idea of how 2014 stacks up on average.

In addition, this year the results for Tolay Lake and Ellis Creek oxidation ponds are provided in addition to a recap of all 3 locations.

	<u>Eggs</u>	<u>Chicks</u>	<u>Fledged</u>	<u>Mortality</u>	<u># of Houses</u>
<u>7-Year Cumulative (2007 to 2013)</u>					
1st nesting	876	737	571	166 (22.5%)	
2nd nesting	<u>511</u>	<u>442</u>	<u>266</u>	<u>176 (39.8%)</u>	
Totals	1,387	1,179	837	342 (25.5%)	20-28
<u>2014 Shollenberger and Ellis Creek area results</u>					
1st nesting	156	133	109	24 (18.0%)	
2nd nesting	<u>24</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>13 (43.0%)</u>	
Totals	180	163	126	37 (22.7%)	28

2014 Ellis Creek Oxidation Ponds results

1 st nesting	63	55	51	5 (9.10%)	
2 nd nesting	<u>28</u>	<u>23</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>2 (8.7%)</u>	
Totals	91	78	71	7 (9.0%)	10

The 10 nests at the oxidation ponds are adjacent to the treatment ponds that are always full. The area is well populated by flying insects that provide a ready source of food for the swallows, and they do not have to fly far to find it. This, I believe, accounts for the lower mortality figures for this location, and prior results for it, though not as good as this year's, also indicate a very low mortality rate here.

2014 Tolay Lake Park results

	<u>Eggs</u>	<u>Chicks</u>	<u>Fledged</u>	<u>Mortality</u>	<u># of Houses</u>
1 st nesting	77	64	55	9 (14.1%)	
2 nd nesting	<u>33</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>10 (35.7%)</u>	
Totals	110	92	73	19 (20.7%)	16

Combined 2014 results for Shollenberger, Ellis Creek, Ellis Creek Oxidation Ponds, and Tolay Lake Park

	<u>Eggs</u>	<u>Chicks</u>	<u>Fledged</u>	<u>Mortality</u>	
1 st nesting	156	133	109	24 (18.0%)	SP-EC
1 st nesting	63	55	50	5 (9.10%)	EC-OXI
1 st nesting	<u>77</u>	<u>64</u>	<u>55</u>	<u>9 (14.1%)</u>	Tolay
Totals	296	252	214	38 (15.1%)	
2 nd nesting	24	30	17	13 (43.0%)	SP-EC
2 nd nesting	28	23	21	2 (8.7%)	EC-Oxi
2 nd nesting	<u>33</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>10 (35.7%)</u>	Tolay
Totals	85	81	56	25 (30.9%)	

2014 Combined results for all 3 locations

1 st nesting	296	252	214	38 (15.1%)
2 nd nesting	<u>85</u>	<u>81</u>	<u>56</u>	<u>25 (30.9%)</u>
Totals	381	333	260	73 (21.9%)

A note of interest: In the first 7 years, we did not have any species of bird other than tree swallows inhabit the houses that we provided. In 2014, however, 2 pair of bluebirds nested in 2 of the houses in Ellis Creek. In 3 nestings (one first season and two second season), they produced 13 eggs, 10 of which hatched and 100% of their chicks fledged. Their results are included with those of the tree swallows above.

Observations:

Mites: These continue to be a problem and starting last year I began applying Diatomaceous Earth (DE) to the nests when mites were detected. Starting in 2015, my intention is to apply DE to all nests before the nesting period begins to see if that discourages mites more than applying it after they have arrived.

Nest cleaning: In prior years, nests were simply scraped and dusted out prior to the start of the nesting season. In the last two years, I brought houses home to be thoroughly washed. This resulted in a lot of work: taking them down, transporting, washing, drying and then replacing them. This year I took a new approach: using 2 pressurized containers, one with soap and some Clorox and the other with just a bit of soap, I cleaned them in place with brushes. Docent Ramie Roland, assisted measurably in this regard. Nest cleaning is a task that only a rare person steps forward for, so I am indeed grateful for her help.

Bluebirds: In 2014, 43 (16.5%) of the 260 birds to fledge were this species, 33 were from Tolay and 10 were from Ellis Creek (SP-EC).

Hours expended on this project at all 3 locations in 2014: 162 hours (15% Tolay)

Monitoring these nests takes a lot of time, but I find doing so quite interesting and mentally stimulating, and I continually strive to improve the mortality rates from prior years.