



[www.petalumawetlands.org](http://www.petalumawetlands.org)

# PETALUMA WETLANDS ALLIANCE

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

Chairman: Gerald Moore [glmemoore@comcast.net](mailto:glmemoore@comcast.net)      Tours: Bob Dyer [nrdyer@comcast.net](mailto:nrdyer@comcast.net)  
Newsletter Editor: Jane Merryman [jane@sonic.net](mailto:jane@sonic.net)      Secretary: Mary Edith Moore

Providing Education in and Stewardship of Petaluma's Public Wetlands

**Spring 2010**

## PWA News

by Gerald Moore

### Asphalt Plant

The Dutra Corporation is extensively revising the plans for their Petaluma asphalt plant after taking much heat over their project from government agencies at all levels. They are scheduled to present this new plan to the Board of Supervisors on **Tuesday, August 24**. No time is set yet, but this could possibly be the final meeting on this project since Supervisors Kerns and Kelly want to push it through before their terms end in November. It could be a nasty meeting and we beg all lovers of Shollenberger Park to attend and help us with one more round of defense of our citizens, wildlife, and wetlands. One has to ask what it is about the word "NO" that they can't understand.

### New Webmaster

After five years of being the PWA webmaster, **Carlos Chavez** is stepping down to work on other projects closer to home. Carlos has done an outstanding job of keeping our web site up-to-date and interesting. Carlos has a flare for colors that made the site very eye-catching. Thank you, Carlos, for the great job you have done for PWA. **Jeff Holtzman**, who also manages the Madrone Audubon web site, has agreed to take over the PWA site in the short term. We are looking for a more long-term person who will volunteer to take on our web site. We know that Jeff will do an excellent job with the PWA web site during this interim period.

### Awards to PWA

This spring several people nominated PWA for environmental awards via the Sonoma County Conservation Committee. We received a Certificate of Special Recognition from **Lynn Woolsey** in the U.S. House of Representatives for our educational program and a Certificate of Recognition for our environmental work from **Mark Leno** in the California State Senate and **Jared Huffman** in the California House of Representatives. Thank you very much. We stand proud of this governmental recognition.

## Customized Educational Props

The PWA docent program for third graders has a wetlands wildlife and model activity that has been using large Audubon posters of generic wetlands as a key visual component. This spring **Emily Roeder**, a PWA docent and artist, painted a poster specific to Shollenberger Park by using some visual license to realign the five major habitats of the park into a linear array. Onto this she painted more than thirty species of wildlife frequently seen there. This poster has been a huge success with the kids and the docents. A copy of it now also hangs in the Lucchesi Community Center for all to enjoy. Thank you, Emily!

## Birds of the Wetlands

by Bob Dyer

### Nesting Birds in Ellis Creek

Seven species are nesting in the Ellis Creek Water Recycling Facility property—birds that have not nested at Shollenberger for some time. The first three species listed below need freshwater habitat, which they have found in the recycled water of the four polishing wetlands.

1. **Pied-billed Grebe.** There are young in Ponds A and D and a nesting pair in Pond B. The latter is an interesting nest platform set right upon the water and easily seen. Hatching should occur in late June.
2. **Common Moorhen.** Young moorhens are in most of the ponds. Some weeks ago I counted seventeen young.
3. **American Coot.** Coot chicks were hatched in mid-June in Pond B. The chicks look like rodeo clowns—fluffy red with bald heads.

These four species are tree nesters:

4. **Barn Owl.** The owl box that docents raised on the northern-most eucalyptus tree opposite Pond B was used for raising two owlets. They were seen in the box as late as mid-June, but probably have now fledged.
5. **Bullock's Oriole.** They nested in one of the two eucalyptus trees near Pond B. Recently, two chicks were seen in the valley oak where the trail link from Shollenberger meets the Ellis Creek trail.
6. **Western Kingbird.** A pair has a nest in the same eucalyptus tree that has the barn owl box. No hatchlings were seen yet as of June 19.
7. **White-tailed Kite.** On June 18, five young kites were seen flying around their nesting tree—a tall Monterey pine just south of the southeastern corner of Shollenberger, east of the trail that links to Ellis Creek. Hopefully, the parents will keep them in the area so we can watch as they learn how to hunt small rodents and other animals.

### Heron and Egret Colonies

There are two heron and egret colonies in the wetlands and a third one a kilometer north. **Len Nelson** and I track colony activities for Cypress Grove Research Center (CGRC), Audubon Canyon Ranch. The designations below were assigned by CGRC. Only two of the three colonies are thriving this year.

Colony #121: From 2003 through 2009, this was the most active colony in the wetlands, directly across the Petaluma River from Shollenberger Park. Last year, for example, it produced more than seventy chicks that fledged. This year it was abandoned because of an aggressive pair of red-tailed hawks that

nested there and chased the herons and egrets away in the early spring. The hawks successfully raised three chicks, but by that time it was too late for the egrets and herons, many of which nested elsewhere, as we shall see. Perhaps the birds will return next year.

Colony #40: This colony is located near the Petaluma Wastewater Ponds in a blue gum (eucalyptus) tree just south of Ellis Creek. Last year there were five great blue heron nests in the colony. This year there are ten heron nests and twenty-three great egret nests. All the herons and about half the great egrets that had nested previously at #121 may have moved to this site to be free of harassment.

Colony #139: This colony is in several trees on the eastern shore of the Petaluma River just south of the McNear Peninsula. We are tracking activity there for the first time this year. We understand there were one or two nests at the colony last year. This year the colony has three great blue heron nests and thirteen snowy egret nests.

Summary, at this point we are tracking activity for

- 13 great blue heron nests
- 23 great egret nests
- 13 snowy egret nests

These numbers are subject to change, of course. In the next quarter I will report how many chicks were successfully raised.

## **Awards and Volunteers**

**by Mary Edith Moore**

### **Madrone Audubon Society Honors John Shribbs with a Special Recognition Award**

If you've been to Shollenberger Park and Alman Marsh, you've seen countless grasses, shrubs, and trees sporting a colorful ribbon or nearby flag. These native plantings were grown and nurtured at Petaluma's Casa Grande High School Plant Nursery. **John Shribbs**, a PWA board member and teacher at Casa Grande, designed the nursery and constructed it with the help of on-site teachers and students. He continues to upgrade and expand the nursery, always on the lookout for a helping hand—teachers, students, PWA docents, and community volunteers beware! The fruits of all this labor are seen in the healthy, beautiful plants that reside in the Petaluma wetlands. On weekends during the winter months, you might find John working with PWA restoration volunteers along the Shollenberger Park trails; and in the summer, you might see him helping to water the new plantings. We are fortunate to have John do so much for our wetlands restoration.

### **Hooray for Volunteers**

Word is getting around that we are restoring the habitat at Shollenberger/Alman Marsh, and we encourage and welcome volunteers. On a Friday afternoon in late April, employees from Agilent Technologies, Econscious, and Medtronic Vascular volunteered to remove thistles and mustards along the east trail at Shollenberger. In mid-May the youth group and parents from Calvary Chapel Petaluma tackled thistles, mustards, and Harding Grass seed heads along Shollenberger's north trail. So much was accomplished on these two days—a dent was truly made—but there is so much more to do. If your social or church group is interested in helping improve Shollenberger's habitat, give us a call at 763-3577. Individuals are encouraged to help us on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday and last Sunday of every month.

## PWA's School Program

by Helen Heal

During fall 2009 and spring 2010, PWA's school program served *690 students and 32 third grade classes* in the Petaluma River Watershed. With strong support from both seasoned docents and a crew of docents newly trained in January and February, we were able to take a slide show and activities into their classrooms and then bring them to the park for a morning of exploration and learning. We now have close to thirty docents who work very hard to carry out this program. Many work every week for one or more days and some have been doing this for two, three, four, or five years. They are truly dedicated to introducing children to the wonders of Shollenberger Park. We also have many dedicated teachers who work with us. They repeatedly express their gratitude for our work, especially in these times of reduced funding when science education is not a strong priority.

We will not be back in the schools until late September or October. Over the summer, we will review and replenish our materials and review our current activities at the park. This program could not happen without the constant hard work and reliability of **Kris Brook**, who has managed scheduling docents as well as overseeing the materials (and many other things), and **Karen Johnson**, who took on the large job of scheduling teachers and staying in touch with them. For the three of us, this has been our first year as a team, and it has gone well. We have enjoyed the mutual support and brainstorming. Many others have stepped forward to help us and bring forward ideas and suggestions to improve our program. Please feel free to be in touch with any one of us if you have questions or ideas as we move forward.

## The Big Green Box

by Jane Merryman

Visitors to Shollenberger Park might have noticed a recent addition at the far end of the field where the right channel curves to the right—a large green box on top of a tall wooden pole. This is our new **bat box**. We don't know if it's occupied yet and it's unlikely we would see any activity during daylight hours since bats are nocturnal creatures. We think the species of bat that would roost in the box is the California myotis (*Myotis californicus*), a species of vesper bat. Or it could be the little brown bat (*Myotis lucifugus*.) Both species are found throughout the western United States and British Columbia, as well as Mexico and Guatemala. These little mammals can be up to three inches long and weigh about half-an-ounce. At night they forage for moths and other small flying insects and during the day they roost in buildings, under bridges, beneath tree bark—or in specially-made bat boxes. Some individuals hibernate in mines and caves during the winter, while others remain active. A bat of this size can consume up to 600 mosquitoes in an hour, but the actual amount of insects eaten varies according to the size of the insects. Most North American bats prefer to live within a few hundred yards of water, especially streams, marshes, and lakes. They also need an area with an abundance of insects, so we think our bat box is well located. All bats that summer in Sonoma County are migratory and will move south in October and return in April-May. The Shollenberger bat box was built by John Shribb's students at Casa Grande High School with a Casa Grande grant. You, too, can build your own bat box; just Google "bat box plans" or you can buy a bat box at Amazon.com.