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PETALUMA WETLANDS ALLIANCE

(A COMMITTEE OF MADRONE AUDUBON)
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Providing Education in and Stewardship of Petaluma's Public Wetlands

Winter 2009-10

Dutra Asphalt Plant

by Mary Edith Moore

The latest hearing on the Dutra Asphalt Plant by the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors is scheduled for Tuesday, March 16, at 3:00 p.m. The meeting will take place in the Sonoma County Supervisors' meeting room, 575 Administration Drive, Suite 100A, Santa Rosa. This rescheduled hearing is the result of the Coast Guard submitting a letter to the Sonoma County Supervisors indicating a desire to further investigate Dutra's proposed barge off-load facility at Haystack Landing. The drawings for the barge off-load facility sent to the Coast Guard differ from those in the Environmental Impact Report. It is important that you join us and express your feelings about an asphalt plant being located next to an environmental asset, Shollenberger Park, and the adjacent wetlands, which citizens of Sonoma County and visitors alike have a right to enjoy.

New Housing at Shollenberger Park

by Gerald Moore

In October 2008 two PWA docents, **Andy LaCasse** and **Gary Compari**, erected the barn owl house at Shollenberger. Andy built this house to replace the owl's Alman Marsh barn that had been torn down. PWA docents **Andy** and **Len Nelson** erected another barn owl house, which Andy built, and nestled it in one of the big Eucalyptus trees in Ellis Creek. Several of the PWA docents have reported seeing a barn owl in residence at both the Shollenberger and Ellis Creek locations.

A green bat box was erected one morning in early December 2009, along the side channel in back of the Jandy building. Docent **Peter Colasanti** engineered the effort and was ably assisted by docents **Andy LaCasse** and **Len Nelson**. The box sits atop a 20-foot pole and can be viewed from the Shollenberger trail about 20 to 30 feet east of the barn owl box. **John Shribbs** and his **Casa Grande High School** students built the bat box and donated it to PWA. We'll see if the bats use it when they return in the spring, but it may have to age awhile before it is occupied.

Education Program

by Helen Heal

We are pleased to welcome a new group of eleven docents who just finished their eight-week training program. They bring an array of talents to our work. After they spend some time shadowing our seasoned docents in the classroom and in the park, we look forward to their participation in our spring program.

Let's express our appreciation to all who helped introduce this docent class to the education program during their training sessions in January and February. As always, **Kris Brook and Karen Johnson** were busy organizing materials and schedules, general problem solving, and introducing docents to activities. In addition, Bob Dyer, Boyce Quinn, Kay Quinn, Sally Rowland, Len Nelson, Nora Pearl, Matti Christensen, Susan Thompson, Tim Talamantes, Wayne Till, Jane Merryman, Gerald Moore, Mary Edith Moore, and Andy LaCasse helped preview the revised PowerPoint presentation, demonstrate activities, and act as guides for the new docents. Ron Smith was ever-present as a loyal and eager learner and guide.

Our spring program is packed with activities. Teachers are excited that we are returning. To-date, 21 teachers with their third graders at eight schools in the Petaluma watershed have signed up to learn about wetlands and watersheds and the creatures and plants that inhabit them. We will be busy!

The Petaluma Christmas Bird Count for Kids, Ages 9 to 15

by Al Hesla

Petaluma's first-ever Christmas Bird Count for Kids on December 29, 2009 was a great success, with 24 kids and their parents participating. Following some Binocular Boot Camp lessons by their birding team leaders at the Kenilworth Recreation Center, the five teams of kids, accompanied by their parents, set out on a cold, foggy morning to their assigned trails in the Petaluma wetlands. They identified 68 species in a total count of 2,610 birds. Eventually the teams returned to the center very cold, but energized about their discoveries.

During our brown-bag lunch and review of the species count, Bob Dyer projected images of the birds to reinforce the kids' knowledge of each species. After lunch, we were treated to a special presentation from the Bird Rescue Center of Santa Rosa with four of their live wild birds: a Great-horned Owl, a Turkey Vulture, a Merlin, and a Red-tailed Hawk. The kids learned about the care of injured wild birds and how the birds can inadvertently look upon the humans who care for them as their parents, a process known as imprinting. All-in-all, a great day was had by all!

Special thanks to all who helped out in the event: Marilyn Blume, Matti Christensen, Peter Colasanti, Bob Dyer, Janeann Erickson, Helen Heal, Andy LaCasse, Gerald Moore, Mary Edith Moore, Len Nelson, Sandy O'Hare, Connie Peabody, John Richards, Tom Rusert, Tommy Smith, and Bob Speckels. A very special thanks goes to co-sponsor Jan Mandrell, Recreation Supervisor in the Petaluma Parks & Recreation Department.

Rue Furch Helps Put Our Wetlands on the Map!

by Bob Dyer

Rue Furch was declared Environmentalist of the Year in 2005 by the Sonoma County Conservation Council. With her help the Petaluma Wetlands now has a page on the *National Geographic* web site, www.visitredwoodcoast.com. At the web site, on the right you will find a map. Bring it up and in the search box type "Petaluma Wetlands" to see the page. Rue was invited as a representative of Sonoma County to a meeting convened by BLM and *National Geographic* in order to create a list of spots in the county that should be featured on the next new *National Geographic* geotourism map.

The first paragraph on the web page reads: "Less than two miles from downtown Petaluma, California, the Petaluma Wetlands are 500 acres, with trails through or adjacent to a variety of habitats from tidal salt marshes to freshwater marshes. The contiguous wetlands are Alman Marsh, Shollenberger Park and Ellis Creek."

Birders and other naturalists from all over will be drawn to our wetlands as a result of seeing the web page. Birders spend \$32 *billion* dollars a year on their hobby and we hope they will spend some of that here to help our local economy.

How Great It Was!

by Mary Edith Moore

We are fortunate that PWA was a recipient of the Disney promotion, a one-day Disney pass for those who volunteer a day of service to a participating organization in their community. Through the Volunteer Center of Sonoma County, more than 350 volunteers signed up to work at Shollenberger and Alman Marsh. For six Saturdays and Sundays in January and February, rain or shine, volunteers (many parents with children in tow) met at Kiosk #1 to plant or weed. They worked hard and so much was accomplished: over 500 plants went into the ground; weeds were removed from established natives; and PWA made new friends.

PWA Contributes to World Diabetes Day Event

by Bob Dyer

On November 14, 2009, the Walk in Awareness of Diabetes, organized by **Grace Ceron** and **Genevieve Foster**, took place on the Ellis Creek grounds. According to them, the "idea is to plant a small seed of community education and involvement related to diabetes and healthy living." More than 260 residents participated in this, Petaluma's first annual World Diabetes Day event. The event included many health-related educational booths and displays, and PWA docents helped conduct walking tours for about 80 people. Afterward, PWA received a letter from the organizers thanking us for "your time and energy to make the day a success" and helping "make an important difference in the lives of our neighbors with diabetes and their families."