



PETALUMA WETLANDS ALLIANCE

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www.petalumawetlands.org

PWA NEWSLETTER

Spring 2017

Moore Bench Dedication

Boyce Quinn



On Wednesday afternoon, January 11, what had been intended to be the dedication of a bench honoring the work of Gerald and Mary Edith Moore became something more: a celebration of the life and work of Gerald, who died December 29.

The event, which took place at the Point Blue offices on the edge of Shollenberger Park, was planned and organized by PWA docents. The crowd of approximately 75 included docents past and present, friends, the Moores' son Michael, Mary Edith's brother and niece, Petaluma's mayor as well as several members of the Petaluma City Council. PWA president Al Hesler opened the festivities and introduced Sharon Mansfield, who presented an overview of the

Moore's work with the Petaluma Wetlands Alliance. After 13 years of their leadership, Mansfield said, PWA continues to reach out to the community through its educational program and the stewardship of the land. PWA is a living tribute to and legacy of Gerald and Mary Edith. With the ongoing training of new docents each year, their influence will be felt for years to come.

Major David Glass spoke about his relationship with Gerald over the years and pointed out the importance of Gerald's persistence in the establishment of the park and adjoining water treatment plant. He also read the proclamation honoring the Moores' work and contributions to the city of Petaluma. Fellow docent and long-time friend, Kathleen Garvey, concluded the tribute by reading an eloquent and moving eulogy that captured not only Gerald's work but his passions and character.

The bench site, personally selected by Gerald and Mary Edith, offers a view of the ebb and flow of Gray's Marsh looking toward Ellis Creek. It is a place to pause and reflect on the mysteries and marvels of the wetlands and all of its inhabitants. It is also a place to remember the lives and contributions of Gerald and Mary Edith Moore.



Michael Moore Mary Edith Moore, Larry Bowles

In the 1960s and '70s Gerald and Mary Edith both worked in the Department of Defense (DOD) medical research laboratory at Fort Knox, Kentucky. Although in the same department, they worked in different buildings and knew each other only as colleagues. In 1974 they, along with other members of the department, were transferred to the Presidio in San Francisco. It was there that a chemical reaction not found in a test tube took place. They married in 1977 and moved to Petaluma. In July 1993 they retired from the DOD and immediately enrolled in the California Academy of Sciences docent class and began more than twenty years as volunteers in Natural History at the academy.

Gerald's lifetime interest in and enjoyment of nature found a natural home in Petaluma. Mary Edith had grown to share that love of nature, and, being scientists, their response was not simply to enjoy it, but to do something about it, to enhance and protect it. And that is exactly what they did.



Gerald and Mary Edith worked with other wetlands enthusiasts and bird watchers to establish the Petaluma Wetlands Alliance (PWA), an organization of volunteers who would bring to the public an opportunity to learn about and enjoy the unique habitats of flora and fauna found in our local wetlands.

The Moores established docent-training workshops held yearly beginning in 2003. Many docents have been trained to monitor and study bird activity at Shollenberger Park and Ellis Creek. Those valuable studies are often sent to local and national organizations. In addition, dozens of docents received training about the importance of our local wetlands and have then gone on to share that information with others. Those docents have delivered educational opportunities to the citizens of Petaluma since 2005, particularly through the hands-on learning offered to every third grade class in the Petaluma watershed. Still other docents dedicate time and expertise to the maintenance and planting of important species that encourages diversity among the animals that visit or live in our wetlands.

It is a tribute to Gerald and Mary Edith that a strong volunteer organization of PWA docents continues to move forward to provide a healthy environment for all life in the Petaluma wetlands through study, teaching, research, and . . . weed pulling.

Visitors are invited to walk along the south path of Shollenberger Park and to sit on the Moores' Bench contemplating the beauty and intricacies of our wetlands. While you're there, tip your hat in gratitude to Gerald and Mary Edith.

PWA Docent Profile: Wayne Till

Bob Dyer

What led to your volunteering to be a docent in the wetlands, and when was that?

I've been interested in birds ever since high school. My biology teacher was the first president of the Detroit Audubon Society and a big influence. Before retirement I had limited opportunity to birdwatch, but I enjoyed short trips to coastal Sonoma and Marin counties and the Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge. Then I discovered Shollenberger Park and was hornswaggled by Bob Dyer and became a docent in 2004.



What activity at the park for the children is your favorite? I enjoy taking the students on bird walks and introducing them to the myriad birds in the park.

You became a docent in 2004. Is Shollenberger Park different now?

When I became a docent, Shollenberger Park was just the park and Alman Marsh (with little emphasis on Alman Marsh). The primary activity for docents was bird tours. With the formation of PWA, the park became an outdoor classroom and an important educational program for the schools. The addition of the Ellis Creek facility expanded the scope of the wetlands and provided more opportunities for educating the public about the importance of the Petaluma wetlands.

Do you recall a memorable bird walk or event you witnessed? A few years ago there were Golden Eagles nesting on a nearby farm road. I had a group of students walking on the south trail, and we had just mentioned that fact to them when an eagle flew right over our heads not more than 35 feet away. Another time, we were taking new docents on a bird walk when we saw a Peregrine Falcon attack a Marbled Godwit in the central pond. The falcon was unsuccessful and, almost immediately, a Northern Harrier attacked the same godwit. Then the falcon and harrier treated us to an aerial battle lasting ten minutes. The godwit snuck into the reeds while the two predators battled and it got away!

Know any park or bird jokes? On the bird walks at the park I enjoy telling the attendees that I can demonstrate the call of the Mute Swan. As they wait for the demonstration, I wait for a few moments in silence and then ask if they want to hear it again!

8th Annual CBC for Kids

Al Hesla

We had five intrepid birders on our 8th Annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC) for Kids. We had a short, but fun outing this morning under light to moderate rain. The highlight was the observation of two bald eagles, one adult and one juvenile, seen flying from Alman Marsh to Shollenberger Park. The adult came to roost on one of the pilings in the middle of the central pond. Good looks were had by all.

Many, many thanks to Helga-Marie Breyfogle and the company she works for, Marmot, for providing Gore-Tex raincoats for the bird team leaders and warm hats for the kids. Everyone loved them and they came in especially handy this morning!

Look for an invitation to a Spring Feather Fest for Kids in early Spring.



Barn Owl House Discoveries

Len Nelson

To learn what our local Barn Owls are consuming, we collected the nest remains at the end of the nesting season. Barn Owls regurgitate the indigestible skeletal remains of their prey in the form of a hairy pellet. So their nests at season's end are one massive conglomeration of these pellets. By carefully picking through the mass, we were able to set aside each skeletal piece and later analyze it and categorize it to the species it once was. This task was accomplished by PWA docents Nora Lee Pearl, Tim Talamantes, Pam Williams, and Len Nelson, PWA Research Chair.

Twice we have removed the nest remains from the Barn Owl house located in a eucalyptus tree in Ellis Creek near Pond B. In 2014, we discovered the remains of 170 prey victims and we were happy to note that there were no dead Barn Owl chicks in the nest. In 2015, the Barn Owl house remains were not saved when the house was cleaned out. In 2016, however, when the house was cleaned out the remains were again saved and analyzed. Unfortunately, among the litter of skeletal parts were the emaciated remains of three juvenile Barn Owl chicks. We cannot know for certain how they met their fate, but it is likely that they starved to death based on a comparison of the remains from the 2014 nest analysis and that of 2016. See comparisons below.

<u>2014 nest remains</u>	<u>2016 Nest remains</u>	
81 Voles	131	63% more
6 Birds	31	417% more
1 Rat	7	600% more
0 Mouse	1	
1 Gopher	0	
1 Shrew	0	
90 total	170 total	88.9% more prey

We can only speculate as to the reason for the starvation of the three chicks. Based on what we know about Barn Owls, however, it is likely that one or even both of the parents were killed by a Great Horned Owl, by flying in front of an on-coming vehicle, or colliding with a fence line or power line. Barn Owls do not live long in any case. A five-year-old Barn Owl would be considered to be old. It is a sad reality that only 60 percent of Barn Owl chicks survive to their first year.

So, if you happen to see a Barn Owl chick looking out from one of the many Barn Owl houses in our wetlands – wish it good luck!

Bird Surveys

JJ Harris

Shollenberger Park, February 22

Rain, rain, more rain but the day began pretty clear, if cold and damp. It was great to have all of this water in the park and our count was the highest it's been for February since 2010. Ducks in

the hundreds: Ruddy Duck, Greater Scaup, Northern Shovel,er and Northern Pintail. Many other divers including Bufflehead, Canvasback, Lesser Scaup, and Common Goldeneye; And dabblers: American Wigeon, Gadwall, Mallard, and Green-Winged Teal. Other species in the hundreds were American Coot and American Avocet. The dawn flyout had over 5,000 gulls, and we counted more than 2,000 Red-Winged Blackbirds. A flock of Band-tailed Pigeons flying overhead was a first sighting for this location. Another rarity was a Black Rail, heard but not seen; it has a very distinctive call. These are just a few of the species we saw.



Ellis Creek, March 8

Spring is upon us. A pair of Belted Kingfishers flew over our heads. Hope they find good nesting space. We had a good look at an American Bittern and when it took off, we saw a second one, maybe its potential mate. Tree Swallows are here, they like this habitat for breeding. We saw long strings and V's of geese high above, heading back north, Cackling Geese and Greater White-Fronted Geese. Some cacklers stopped by Ellis Creek for a little R&R before continuing their migration. It was close to high tide so we didn't see a whole lot of "peeps" (small shore birds), but there were a few Least Sandpipers, plus one lone Black-Bellied Plover. We heard several Virginia Rails, and one very loud Sora. The big surprise of the morning was the Tricolored Blackbirds. They are very rare here. A Merlin falcon isn't rare but was a treat to look at through the scope. These are just a few of the highlights as we saw 79 species this morning under clear skies. Large group of 13 people counting!



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Join Petaluma Wetlands Alliance – “Education and Stewardship”

Please support our free 3rd grade education program for all schools in Petaluma, free public walks and presentations, monthly bird counts, bird research, and the preservation of Shollenberger Park and Allman Marsh.

I would like to join PWA:

_____ \$25 Individual _____ \$40 Family Donation: \$_____

Make checks payable to: Petaluma Wetlands Alliance. Print this form and mail checks to:
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