



# PETALUMA WETLANDS ALLIANCE

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

PWA NEWSLETTER

Summer 2017

Bob's Wetlands Legacy

Sharon Mansfield

**Norris Robert Dyer \* 1935-2017**



When Bob retired from his business life in 1996, he began walking Shollenberger Park, noting the passing of the seasons within the wetlands, marveling at the birds migrating north and south. Having a lifelong interest in nature, he found himself at home in the Petaluma wetlands, and his stewardship of the park began.

Being the social person that he was, he met up with other inspired wetlands folks, and the Petaluma Wetlands Alliance organization was formed. As an ever-present ambassador for the wetlands at Shollenberger, Bob was dedicated to promoting a docent program that would bring adults and children to nature here in Petaluma.

Bob leaves a long legacy of accomplishments. He is known as a photographer and writer of nature articles and as a promoter and protector of Shollenberger Park and Ellis Creek wetlands. Within the PWA organization he is "Senior Docent Bob." He will be greatly missed in our organization and in the community.

In his last email posting, Bob included the day's photos of the red-shoulder hawks that were nesting at Ellis Creek. Along with the photos, he left us with a message:

**"I will monitor the nest. I cannot avoid doing so, as how many future chances will I have? Senior Docent can be defined in more than one way. Will I see you out there? If not, why not? We are stewards of our wetlands. I believe that our role includes not only protecting its life, but loving all the creatures of the soil, the marsh and the trees – to cherish them and wonder at their existence."**

PWA plans to dedicate a memorial bench at Shollenberger Park to celebrate Bob's stewardship for our wetlands. It will be along the path where Bob walked with children as Senior Docent Bob Dyer.



## Annual Feather Fest

Peter Colasanti

Sunday, April 15, PWA held our annual Feather Fest at Shollenberger Park. Over 20 avid junior birders attended with parents, siblings, and other hangers-on in tow. President Al Hesla opened the affair with an explanation of our purpose and the introduction of four group leaders. We then formed coveys and headed off with two teams in Shollenberger Park and two in Ellis Creek.

Our plan has been to concentrate on documenting avian nesting activities, but this year the birds seemed to be a bit late in settling down to such domestic chores and many migrants were still in evidence. As a consequence, we were all a bit distracted by the spectacle. My own group was about halfway down the east trail at Shollenberger and facing the central pond when Autumn's mom, Janey Stewart, noticed a bittern perched high in some cattails. Luckily, Bea Pezzolo had brought her camera and was already taking pictures by the time I could tell the group it was a Least Bittern. This was just the fifth record of the species in Sonoma County and the second in the Petaluma Wetlands. They're more common to the south and seem to be establishing themselves northward with the warming of the climate. In the past couple of years they have bred successfully at Las Gallinas in Marin. The other groups all turned up special birds too. Andy Lacasse's had an adult Bald Eagle near Adobe Creek. At Ellis Creek, Marin and her dad, Alan Wight, found a Solitary Sandpiper, a mid-continental migrant that shows up in California as a vagrant in season. Monica's group had great views of an American Bittern and her charges all got looks at baby Barn Owls through the entry hole in the box Andy put up for them at Ellis Creek.

Every year the Fest turns up surprises, but there's always one constant: We return to lots of boxes of hot pizza. Some of us even brought home leftovers.



Least Bittern Photo by Bea Pezzolo

## Student Volunteer

## Donovan Walsh



I am a senior at Casa Grande High school and have attended school in Petaluma since the second grade, when my family moved here from Oregon. I have worked as a lifeguard for the City of Rohnert Park for two years. I like to surf, hike, camp, and play my banjo. I have a 1958 Volkswagen Beetle that I helped to restore. After I graduate from high school, I plan to attend SRJC, but I haven't decided on a course of study. I'm interested in the environment and that led me to volunteer at Shollenberger Park. I wanted to do a senior project that included cleaning and repairing the environment around local rivers and streams. I enjoyed the experience of doing habitat restoration at Shollenberger, one of Petaluma's most visited city parks because I felt I was making the park a better place for kids and families to visit and connect with the natural world.

## Learning from the Miwok Culture

September 18, 7 pm, Petaluma Public Library

Nora Pearl

Petaluma Wetlands Alliance is proud to co-host with the Petaluma Public Library this free presentation by Nick Tipon, an elder of the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria. A retired high school teacher, he has served as Chairman of the Tribal Education Committee and Chairman of the Sacred Sites Protection Committee. He is a board member of the California Mission Foundation and the Historical Society of Santa Rosa and was an archaeological monitor for the tribe. He often speaks on the effects of climate change on spiritual and sacred sites. Please join us for this program about our local Miwok culture.



## **A Spring Workday at Shollenberger 22 April 2017**

**Mary Edith Moore**

Shortly before 8:00 a.m. the volunteers recruited by Rebuilding Together Petaluma (RTP) arrived at Shollenberger Park. Jane Hamilton, Executive Director of RTP, managed to recruit 25 volunteers in spite of it being Earth Day, draining the volunteer pool. We were ready for them. The Daunells, father and son team, had dropped off the tables, registration supplies, water jugs, and fruit along with tools, gloves, etc. Craig Cherrstrom volunteered to pick up the donated coffee from Starbuck's.

**Project Captain:** Mary Edith Moore

**Registration:** Olin and Erik Daunell

**Show-and-Tell** (nonnative invasive plants): Steve Ayala and Kathleen Garvey

**Driver:** Lisa Shiffrin

**Dump Truck/Additional Cutting Tools:** Petaluma Parks & Recreation

After the volunteers selected their tools, Steve led the Guardsmen down the asphalt trail to remove branches of lemonadeberry that had extended over the trail. Kathleen took the other group of volunteers, each with tool and bag in hand, to remove mustards and thistles along the gravel road, parallel to the asphalt trail. Repeatedly, bags of invasive plants were loaded onto Lisa's truck and emptied into the dump truck, parked near the toilets. At last lunch had arrived: hot burritos from El Roy's, cold beverages, and cookies.

## **Monthly Bird Survey: Ellis Creek, May 17**

**JJ Harris**

Breeding birds were observed all during our two-hour survey: Double-crested Cormorants, Great Blue Herons, and Great Egrets made trips to and from their nests in the rookery on the edge of the creek. Black-crowned Night Herons were in plain view in the tules and flying overhead. Cliff Swallows and Tree Swallows were present in abundance, thanks to this excellent habitat (and the nesting boxes provided for the Tree Swallows). We had a glimpse of a Barn Owl in the box on the dead eucalyptus tree. Savannah Sparrows, Marsh Wrens, Red-winged Blackbirds, and House Finches were seen and heard everywhere. A few less common birds were heard but not seen, Dark-eyed Junco and Black-headed Grosbeak among them. Other birds we don't see every month: Pacific Slope Flycatcher, Downy Woodpecker, and Brewer's Blackbird. A big surprise: Not one Northern Harrier! That was unusual for Ellis Creek. We did see a few Red-tailed and Red-shouldered Hawks, but those were the only raptors this sunny day. I think it's safe to say we are all grateful for the nesting boxes put up by PWA members such as Andy LaCasse and monitored by Len Nelson and others. Cavity-nesting birds (and there are many besides the Barn Owls and Tree Swallows: American Kestrel, Wood Duck, Western Bluebird, etc.) often have a hard time finding suitable nesting places as many hollowed or dead trees are removed by humans.

## PWA Trains 11 New Docents

Anne Taylor

At the beginning of December no one had signed up for the docent training that was starting on January 12. After newspaper notices, flyers at the wetlands, and recruitment by current docents, we had 11 enthusiastic trainees who completed the 7-session course. The group includes a physician, a retired wildlife biologist, a retired science teacher, several devoted birders. Here is an introduction to our new people and what they are doing for PWA:

**Julie Clark** is involved with the school program, specializing in owl pellets and bird walks, and has been "collecting garbage by foot and kayak."

**Patti DiLuzio** has joined the research team doing bird surveys and volunteered for the Feather Fest in April. She came all the way from San Anselmo to train and volunteer.

**Sharon Donovan** is doing bird surveys and habitat restoration. She is also helping Tim Talamantes gather owl pellets.

**Urszula Dziri** is learning how to monitor bird boxes.

**Elaine Ellsworth** is training for the school program.

**Liz Esteves** is working with Wayne Till on the new Miwok School Bird Club.

**Carol Homrighouse** has become a Beaks and Feet docent in the classroom and a Habitat Walk docent at Shollenberger Park. She is also working on the Docent Directory for the Docent Development Committee and helping with revisions to the curriculum for the school program.

**Eve O'Rourke** is working on the owl pellet activity at the park and collecting garbage with Julie.

**Diane Paleczny-Stevenson** is a school docent and will be working on the curriculum revision for the school program.

**Deb Sheppard** is helping the research team with bird surveys and heron/egret monitoring. She is also involved in the school program with habitat or bird walks and has volunteered for Feather Fest.

**Pam Williams** helped Nora with the PWA Library, edited the plant list for the website, analyzed 2016 Barn Owl nest contents, and helped Len Nelson with orientation for the heron and tree swallow monitoring. She will be working on the curriculum revision with Helen Heal's group.

All the new docents are an asset to our organization. It has been fun getting to know them. As Julie said, "PWA is an awesome organization. I've been really inspired by the outdoor class components."



## **PWA Program in the Schools Completes Another Successful Season**

**Helen Heal**

From early March to mid-May, PWA docents provided our program for third graders to 16 classes in schools in the Petaluma River watershed. Our docent teams this spring included some of the new docents who had just completed the training series in January and February. All new docents are asked to shadow in the school program through the in-class morning and the morning in the park so they can get a good sense of what the school program does. Then 5 new docents continued their experience in the school program with ongoing shadowing and participation. We are thrilled to have new energy, expertise, and ideas, and look forward to further enriching our program in the schools.

We will not be back in the schools until early October, but work will continue over the summer as we tighten our curriculum to ensure that we are consistent with third grade science standards in California. About 10 of our school program docents have volunteered to work on different phases of that, as we continue to operate in a team-based and collaborative mode.



## **PWA Helps a School Start a Bird Club**

**Wayne Till**

Helen Bond, the After-School Coordinator at Miwok Valley Elementary School, contacted PWA to see if we could assist them in developing a bird club for the students. Helen Heal, who coordinates programs in the schools, sent out an email asking for volunteers and Wayne Till, John Richards, Joann Freda, Liz Esteves, and Sabrina Hearst signed on.

By using or modifying some of the materials that PWA uses in its programs in the schools, Wayne created some lesson plans and a list of birds that students might see at school or in their own backyards. He also created short slide shows to introduce each topic and provided books, field guides, and other materials to the aide coordinating the club.

The first meeting covered "What is a Bird?" The second asked "How are Birds Different from one Another?" The third meeting was a field trip spotting birds in the schoolyard and adjacent park. Although mid-afternoon is not a time when birds are very active, the groups saw half a dozen species. Binoculars were provided by PWA, the school, and several individual docents. The fourth meeting was "How to Observe Birds Scientifically." We discussed the use of lists

and field guides, and introduced students to the use of journals. The following week two third grade classes from Miwok, including all of the bird club students, participated in the PWA education programs in the classrooms and at Shollenberger Park. In our meeting that week we taught the bird club students "How to Attract Birds to Your Yard."

The next week our meeting recapped their park visit. The students were very enthusiastic about their experiences at the park and described the birds they liked best. Several told about birds that came to the feeders in their backyards. The final meeting was "How to Build a Birdhouse." Liz Esteves recruited her husband, Bob, who volunteers at a school woodshop. Bob prefabricated a birdhouse similar to the ones at Shollenberger, and the students assembled the birdhouse and erected it in the schoolyard.

The volunteers who worked in the program felt that it was quite successful. Miwok School would like to continue the bird club next year, and if you would like to participate in next year's program, please contact Wayne (wrtill@aol.com).

### **PWA Board of Directors**

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**Join Petaluma Wetlands Alliance – “Education and Stewardship”**

Please support our free 3<sup>rd</sup> 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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