



www.petalumawetlands.org

PETALUMA WETLANDS ALLIANCE

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

Fall 2012

Christmas Bird Count for Kids

by Al Hesla

Bring your kids, grandkids, and neighborhood kids on January 5, 2013, to the Fourth Annual Petaluma Christmas Bird Count for Kids, a half-day of bird watching and related activities designed for kids ages 9 to 15. We are cosponsoring this event along with the City of Petaluma Parks and Recreation Department. Check-in is at 9:00 a.m. at the Kenilworth Recreation Center, 150 Fairgrounds Drive, Petaluma 94952.

Activities include:

- Binocular Boot Camp
- Birding in teams of six kids, each team accompanied by experienced PWA birders in assigned areas such as Shollenberger Park, Ellis Creek Water Recycling Facility, and Alman Marsh—parents are responsible for transporting kids to and from sites and are welcome on the walk to observe the young birders from a distance
- Brown-bag lunch (drinks provided)
- Tabulation Celebration
- Bird Bingo with prizes
- Guest presentation

What to bring:

- Binoculars (if you have them)
- A hat and layered clothing
- Comfortable shoes or boots
- Brown-bag lunch
- \$5 registration fee per child, collected at check-in

To sign up, contact Al Hesla: 765-9411 or a.hesla@comcast.net.

Third Grade Education Program

by Helen Heal

November 9 was the last morning of our fall session with third grade classes in the Petaluma River watershed. This fall we served 13 classrooms in 4 schools for a total of 296 children. Some of our docents were not available for reasons of health, work, or continued education, and we have not fully replenished our numbers. In spite of this, we were determined to serve all teachers in this 2012–2013 school year who requested our program. Because of this, we tried a model with Valley Vista Elementary School, a strong partner of this program, which required fewer docents to provide the classroom component. We will be evaluating that model in the next few weeks.

As our program moved along, we also worked on updating and systematizing the manual for the education program, as well as instituting a “docent connections” program to keep docents connected and more able to know and support one another. The docent connection program held two sessions to review our classroom activities as well as give docents a chance to hear what others are doing and to get to know one another better. They are also developing a directory as a way for docents to know each other better. We ended the season with a great lunchtime get-together.

So many docents have contributed ideas, creativity, flexibility, and hard work to this program over the past few months that it is truly inspirational. We look forward to including new docents in our work as they complete the training in January and February.

Don't Forget to Enrich Your Life— Become a Petaluma Wetlands Docent

by Mary Edith Moore

Petaluma Wetlands Alliance (PWA) new-docent training begins Thursday, January 10, and continues for eight consecutive Thursdays through February, 8:30 a.m. to noon. Training sessions are held either at the Lucchesi Community Center or 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.

You would be joining a great group of docents who enjoy each other's company and are always ready to pitch in and help when the call comes. Teachers sign up quickly for a space in our program.

Because of the economy, the Education Committee asks that applicants pay only \$20 toward the cost of materials. For more information, call Bob at 763–2934 or Gerald at 763–3577, or visit www.petalumawetlands.org.

Clearing the Shollenberger Decant Channel

by Gerald Moore

As many of you Shollenberger users know, the decant channel, that skinny, marshy channel which connects the dredge pond to Adobe creek, has experienced a cattail invasion. The invasion was caused by runoff from the Southgate Subdivision that contained excessive levels of fertilizers. Too much fertilizer causes cattails to become huge and invasive. The results are an almost total take-over of the marsh habitat by the cattails to the exclusion of other habitats that used to support ducks, grebes, herons, kingfishers, otters, muskrats, and numerous other species.

In an effort to reduce cattails and restore open-water areas in this marsh, we decided to reduce the cattails by 50 percent in the part of this channel that extends from the park entrance to the first bend in the north trail, a point about 200 feet from where the water drains into Adobe Creek. We removed a wide swath of cattails down the middle of the channel, opening up many viewing areas on the trail side of the marsh while not bothering the cattails on the opposite (back) side of the channel. Cutting was done with a chain saw and loppers. This clearing job has restored about 60 to 65 percent of the open water that used to be in that section of channel. The project was accomplished by 13 PWA docents and community volunteers who contributed a total of 91 "person" hours to the project. Our special thanks to Andy LaCasse, Sparky George, and Steve Jetti, who led the work teams.

This cattail cutting was done after the channel had dried-up from lack of spring rain. After clipping off the cattails close to ground level, we painted their stumps with Aquamaster to retard new sprouting. Rain came shortly after the last cutting day and made us realize that we had left an excessive amount of cut cattails in the channel. We removed the cuttings by raking them to the bank and carrying them up the levee to the trail. These dead cattails were stacked in four large piles along the asphalt trail. Each pile resembled a beaver lodge. One day after their creation, the lodges of cattails were relocated to the dump by city maintenance staff via a dump truck. This was a great example of community-city cooperation to cleanup a park and improve wildlife habitat.

Two weeks after completion of the project we are starting to see the return of wildlife species that like the more open-water habitats that used to characterize this channel.

City Council Awards Contract For Shollenberger Site Plan

by Bob Dyer

The Petaluma City Council has authorized up to \$155,000 for Ross & Associates to draw up a Management, Maintenance, and Monitoring Plan (termed a "3M" plan) for the "Shollenberger Dredge and Disposal Site."

Those who have visited Shollenberger Park for a decade or more may recall that the Corps of Engineers periodically paid for dredging the Petaluma River and that the "spoils" were pumped into the park. Shollenberger has been a dredge spoils site since the 1970s. Walking trails were added in the 1990s.

The river was last dredged in the fall and winter of 2002–2003. A biological opinion issued in 2002 by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) then required the city to develop a "3M" plan before further dredging would be allowed. The concern of NMFS was a 48-acre mitigation area in the western part of Shollenberger that has a heavy growth of pickleweed vegetation and annual grasslands considered Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse [SMHM] habitat." The SMHM is endangered. While it has not been identified at Shollenberger, it is known across Adobe Creek in Alman Marsh, in similar habitat.

A study will be made of the hydrologic and vegetation trends. The goal is to ". . . create a cost-effective Plan that the City can commit to implementing, while obtaining authorization for the future site utilization in support of U.S. Army Corps of Engineers dredging of the Petaluma River, currently anticipated in 2014."

Once the plan is approved we will let the public know what actions will be taken.

Cheep Thrills—The Original PetWet CBC

by Peter Colasanti

For about a decade commencing in 1979, there was a Christmas Bird Count centered on what Stuart Johnson named the "Arroyo Cheap Thrills" in Novato. It was compiled by Dave Shuford back then; last year Sue Kelly and Mark Forney of Marin Audubon Society started it back up again as the Cheep Thrills CBC. The count picks up where the Sonoma Valley CBC leaves off, and PWA covers the Sonoma County section, including the marshes of the Petaluma River, diked-off baylands, and territory along Lakeville Highway from Lakeville to Highway 37. This year it takes place on a Thursday, December 20. If you'd like to spend a day playing hooky from Christmas shopping, come on out and help us count birds. Send an email or give me a call to join the group.

Peter Colasanti

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A New Website for PWA

by Mary Edith Moore

We are fortunate that Santa Rosa Junior College (SRJC) is building us a new website that will be online mid-December. Time had taken a toll on our website. PWA's current webmaster defined the site as a beautiful garden full of weeds, very difficult to negotiate. It was she who suggested we get in the queue for a website rebuild at SRJC; we did and were one of six applicants accepted into the program.

A website team, consisting of a designer, three programmers, and a project manager, was assigned to rebuild the PWA site. Because problems had erupted in the past with multiple people meeting with a website team, a policy was established where only one person was allowed to interact with the team. However, Gerald and I both met the team, as a fused entity, in August and work began. A separate PWA committee was formed that included the Education and Vice Chairs.

The designer logged countless hours and eventually presented options for the Home page. Three PWA docents were independently shown the options and asked for an artistic opinion. Each chose the same format without hesitation. The designer continued with the flowchart, tweaking it now and then. Following the flowchart, I updated, copied and pasted text from our current website, and sent it, more than 23 MB, to the website team, which began inserting it into what would become the new website. Galleries were setup, and the team searched for photos on our current website plus input from others.

In summary, all is coming to fruition in a somewhat orderly fashion.