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# **PETALUMA WETLANDS ALLIANCE**

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

## **Winter 2012**

### **Special Project**

**by Gerald Moore**

In September 2011, the Petaluma City Park's staff asked PWA if they could assist with a clean out of the weeds along the Alman Marsh trail. We agreed to do this and applied pulling and cutting techniques to remove weeds along this one-mile trail. Because the process would be labor-intensive, we requested help from the Two Rock Coast Guard, Rebuilding Together Petaluma, the Volunteer Center of Sonoma County, and several other local groups. Four three-hour work parties in September and October removed five large truckloads of weeds from the site.

Four pieces of this trail were handled in different ways to achieve a natural-looking finish while opening up the trail to better public access. Native plants along the trail were encouraged while being pruned back as necessary for access. This opening up of space for the natives will allow them to expand in future years.

### **Certificate of Appreciation to PWA**

On November 16, 2011, the Recreation, Music, and Parks Commission of the City of Petaluma presented Petaluma Wetlands Alliance with a Certificate of Appreciation for answering the call to help in the removal of weeds along the Alman Marsh trail.

At the monthly Petaluma Parks & Recreation Advisory Board meeting, Gerald Moore accepted the certificate, which recognized PWA's commitment, dedication, and performance. Gerald was also given an hour to present an overview of the wetlands habitat project to the board and visitors. The habitat restoration program was well received.

## **San Francisco Flyway Festival**

**by Dennis Buss**

The 16th San Francisco Flyway Festival was held February 10 to 12, 2012, to celebrate the annual wildlife migration through the San Francisco Bay Estuary. Exhibits and presentations took place at Mare Island in Vallejo. Dennis Buss, Gary Compari, Tony Kamby, Andy LaCasse, John Richards, and Wayne Till led two PWA tours at the Ellis Creek Water Recycling Facility on February 10 and 11.

## **PWA Education Program Establishing Special Relationship with Valley Vista School**

**by Helen Heal**

The third-grade educational program is underway again this spring, with sixteen third-grade classrooms on our schedule. In addition to our regular program, some special things are happening at Valley Vista School in Petaluma. The teachers at Valley Vista have always been strong supporters of our program, and this year they have teamed up with an energetic parent group to take it to a new level.

The school is painting a mural of Shollenberger Park on one of their most visible outside walls. The children are participating in the painting, and parents have already begun making cutouts of the animals at the park to include in the mural. As a kick-off event, Sharon Mansfield and Bob Dyer presented a short program on Shollenberger for an all-school assembly on March 14. The unveiling of the mural will take place on Saturday, May 5, as part of a community festival at the school.

In the meantime, the principal, staff, and parents of Valley Vista will be meeting with representatives of our educational program. Together, we will explore how the school and PWA can form an ongoing partnership to support the infusion of Shollenberger Park wetlands, habitats, and inhabitants across the school curriculum. This is an exciting venture, and more information will be available as we move forward with this work. Meanwhile, put May 5 on your calendar for a great day for Shollenberger at Valley Vista School.

## **Loss of Park Partners**

**by Gerald Moore**

In early March 2012 it was suddenly announced that RNM Properties had sold all their buildings in Petaluma and regrouped around their original holdings in San Jose. RNM has worked well with us on restoration projects and provided one of our first educational grants, which helped fund development of our outstanding third-grade educational program. In the past six months, they have worked with us to create several upgrades to the Shollenberger entrance, including a new kiosk that is being finished now. We will miss Paul, Jamie, and their staff and we wish them

well in San Jose. Lindsey and two others on the clerical staff will stay on with the new management.

It was also announced this week that Chris Samson, editor of the Argus-Courier, will retire this month. During 35 years Chris produced an excellent local newspaper and was a strong believer in what we were doing in the public wetlands. Happy retirement, Chris.

## **Cattail Removal**

**by Mary Edith Moore**

Because surface water runoff was allowed to be piped into the Shollenberger freshwater channel, cattails became very invasive and discouraged the diversity of wildlife. PWA decided there should be selective cattail removal to allow “windows” into the freshwater channel so the children could see the birds, turtles, muskrats, and river otters. Also, by opening “windows” into the jungle of cattails, wildlife would be encouraged to be there, and this would allow a research study to begin in late March on the Western Pond Turtle, a species of concern.

We emailed our friend Chief Petty Officer Sabrina Hearst, instructor at the U.S. Coast Guard Training Center Petaluma (Two Rock), and asked for help in the cattail removal. She contacted other Coast Guard instructors, asking for volunteers to help with this project. Petty Officer Christopher Clark answered the call, saying that some of his students were interested and Seaman Lukowiak would be in charge of the volunteer group.

On the afternoon of February 25, Sabrina with the eight volunteers entered Shollenberger’s freshwater channel with five PWA docents to cut and remove cattails. The cuttings were laid on the levee banks to act as a mulch to kill perennial pepperweed (*Lepidium* species). At the end of three hours, the channel had a new look—and we saw the rare American Bittern, the first sighting in two years. The next day six PWA docents put two more basking logs into the marsh, replacing the two old ones that were waterlogged and no longer working.

## **The Third Annual Petaluma Christmas Bird Count for Kids**

**by Al Hesla**

Thanks to the tremendous support of 19 PWA docents and others, Petaluma's Third Annual Christmas Bird Count for Kids in Winter 2011 was a great success with 18 kids and their parents participating in the event that was actually held on January 7, 2012. Following Binocular Boot Camp lessons by their birding team leaders at the Kenilworth Recreation Center, three teams of kids, accompanied by their parents, set out to their assigned trails in the Petaluma public wetlands for 90 minutes of birding. They identified 61 species for a total count of 1,741 birds. The teams then returned to the center to warm up with a cup of Mary Edith Moore and Sally Rowland's famous hot chocolate.

The group enjoyed a brown-bag lunch followed by Gerald Moore with a history of the Audubon Christmas Bird Count. Each team reported its favorite bird observations during the tabulation celebration. The kids then enjoyed a rousing game of Bird Bingo—including prizes—where they

matched bird names on their bingo cards with Bob Dyer's bird photographs projected on a screen. We were then treated to a special presentation by the Bird Rescue Center of Santa Rosa with two of their captive wild birds: a Turkey Vulture and a Great-horned Owl. The kids learned about the care of injured wild birds and what harm humans can do by “imprinting” on the birds when attempting to care for them.

Special thanks to all the docents who helped make this a great event for the kids: Marilyn Blume, “Sparky” George Cave, Peter Colasanti, Bob Dyer, Kathleen Garvey, Larry Johnson, Tony Kamby, Andy LaCasse, Gerald Moore, Mary Edith Moore, Len Nelson, Nora Lee Pearl, Elaine Pruett, John Richards, Sally Rowland, and Wayne Till. Also thanks to Madrone Audubon Society president Bob Speckels and past president Janeann Erickson for leading a team of kids. As always, we had great support from Jan Mandrell and the City of Petaluma for donating the use of the Kenilworth Recreation Center.