



PETALUMA WETLANDS ALLIANCE

P.O. Box 2182, Petaluma CA 94953-2182

www.petalumawetlands.org

PWA NEWSLETTER

Winter 2017

The Gerald and Mary Edith Moore Bench

Sharon Mansfield



All PWA docents and friends are invited to gather at Point Blue (PRBO) on **Wednesday, January 11, 2017, at 2:30 p.m.**, to dedicate a commemorative bench in recognition of Gerald and Mary Edith Moore for their leadership in the Petaluma Wetlands Alliance. Scientists during their working years, Gerald and Mary Edith established docent training workshops held yearly beginning in 2003. Those docents have delivered educational opportunities to the citizens of Petaluma since 2005, particularly through the hands-on learning opportunities offered to every third grade class in the Petaluma Watershed. Many docents have been trained to monitor and study bird activity at Shollenberger Park and Ellis Creek, valuable studies often passed on to local and national organizations. Still other docents dedicate time and expertise to the maintenance and planting of important species to encourage diversity among the animals who visit or live in our wetlands.

Gerald and Mary Edith, thank you for your leadership and dedication to the Petaluma Wetlands Alliance.

PWA is Moving Forward

Al Hesla, PWA President

PWA is moving forward with several new initiatives. These include renewing our relationships with the City of Petaluma and forming a new relationship with Petaluma Water Ways. We have recently met with Assistant City Manager, Scott Brodhun, and Parks & Landscape Manager, Ron DeNicola, to align our Shollenberger Park habitat restoration and maintenance work with the City's priorities. We have also met with the Ellis Creek Water Recycling Facility Environmental Services team to collaborate on mutual interests in the Ellis Creek area. We continue to work with the Petaluma Police Department to assist shelterless people found to be camping in the wetland areas. PWA is interested in building a new relationship with the Petaluma Water Ways group, which is comprised of organizations focused on pedestrian and bicycle trails, river access points, and water trails. These organizations include Friends of the Petaluma River, North Bay Rowing Club, Save the Trestle, Foundry Wharf, Petaluma Small Craft Center, and the Chamber of Commerce. Petaluma Water Ways has identified 34 projects along the Petaluma River. This include 4 projects in the Alman-Shollenberger Reach that PWA may choose to sponsor. For more information, please see the Petaluma Water Ways website at <http://cityofpetaluma.net/parksnrec/partners.html>.

Ellis Creek Bird Survey, Nov. 14, 2016

JJ Harris

We began before dawn, in dense tule fog—Andy LaCasse, Craig Roth, Gene Hunn, Len Nelson, John Richards, Al Hesla, and I. We think the sun came up, but the fog was so thick you could hardly tell. The most excitement of the day was seeing or hearing 5 members of the Family Rallidae (Rails). We saw the Virginia Rail, Sora, and Gallinule. The Black Rail and Ridgway's Rail were heard loud and clear. Winter ducks are starting to arrive, but there wasn't a huge variety. We saw Gadwall, a lone Northern Shoveler, a few Bufflehead, Mallards, and Green-Winged Teal. Two Western Grebes were spotted in the river, busy diving for fish and avoiding rowers. An American Bittern presented itself, up close and very still. At the end of the day we had the pleasure of watching an adult Sharp-Shinned Hawk and a White-Tailed Kite both perched in the same tree.



Do you love Shollenberger Park? The Wetlands?

Become a Petaluma Wetlands Alliance DOCENT!

What kind of things do Docents do?

- Teach 3rd graders about the importance of wetlands
- Lead bird walks
- Restore the habitat
- Conduct research on birds and other animals, and
- Do many other activities!



HOW CAN I BECOME A DOCENT?

By participating in our training program and observing other docents. Training starts January 12, 2017, for eight consecutive Thursdays. You can sign up now.

**<http://petalumawetlands.org/docent-program/>
email: akt1208@bellsouth.net - *Petaluma Wetlands Alliance***

Why do you watch birds? An Interview with Andy LaCasse

JJ Harris

This begins a regular series of short interviews with PWA members who love to watch birds in the Petaluma wetlands. I recently spoke with Andy LaCasse.

At what age did you begin? I was 5. We had just moved from the city to the New Hampshire countryside where there were woods, ponds, and lakes. I saw a bird I later learned was a yellow-shafted flicker. It was feeding its young. That got me started. I was amazed by the colors: blue jay, scarlet tanager, rose-breasted grosbeak. And I still am.

Did you have a mentor? The adults were working too hard to stop and take much notice of wildlife or birds. They called every raptor a "chicken hawk." I could tell these birds were different and wanted to know their names. An aunt heard me always asking about birds and gave me a *Little Golden Nature Guide to Birds*.

What guides do you like? Books or apps? I moved to the *Peterson Guide*, then *Sibley*, and now I use *National Geographic*. I use my iPod to consult maps and listen to bird songs and calls. I'm always learning. I use the library and consult other people who know more than I do.

What was a memorable sighting? I have traveled a lot—when I was in the service and since then on many camping trips all over the states and in other countries. One sighting that comes to mind was a Pearl Kite, seen on the border of Guyana and Brazil.

Why do you watch birds? I'm in awe. It's the same thrill for me as seeing a sunset, or an aurora, a lightning strike or a snowflake. I'm in awe of evolution. Some species are getting scarcer, and I want to see them while I can.



Servicing the Ellis Creek Barn Owl Box

Len Nelson/Bob Dyer

The photo below shows Docent Len Nelson cleaning out the PWA Barn Owl box at Ellis Creek (situated on the dead eucalyptus tree). The box originally was built and placed on the tree by Docent Andy LaCasse. Erecting and maintaining bird boxes is one of the activities of PWA docents.



Baby Barn Owl looks out at its future world -Ellis Creek. *File Photo*

Len's work is not yet done. He explains:



In 2014, we cleaned out this same Barn Owl box and I saved the nesting debris it contained. As noted in a prior report, it contained the bones of 139 mammals (voles, mice, and rats) and 31 birds.

This year I again saved the debris and plan to dissect it to determine what the contents have to tell us about the 2016 nesting season.

Are you interested in helping?

Let me know. This needs to be done before the next newsletter so I can draw up a report detailing what the Barn Owls had on their menu. *Len Nelson*



Kay and Boyce Quinn talk about birds with Shollenberger Park visitors last November.

Docents Kay and Boyce Quinn, John Shribbs, Jane Merryman, and I met with hundreds of the public during information table events at Shollenberger Park on Sept. 20, October 12, and November 6. It gave us an opportunity to answer questions about PWA and provide information on the many ways we support Shollenberger and local schools. Those to whom we spoke were universally grateful for our school programs for third graders, as most had witnessed our work with this at the park. We stressed our goals of Stewardship and Education. During the last two table events, we decided to ask everyone where they lived. We were surprised to find out that many came to Shollenberger from locations other than Petaluma. Here is a list:

Cotati	Fairfax	Garberville	Napa
Novato	Penngrove	Redding	Rohnert Park
Sacramento	San Francisco	Santa Rosa	San Jose
Sonoma	Sausalito	Washington State	Salem, Oregon

Although the majority of people we spoke to *were* from Petaluma, we were delighted so many others were aware of the wetlands and chose to spend time there.



Did you know PWA had an intern this fall? Vince Schwartz is a student at Santa Rosa Junior College interested in transferring to a four-year college to pursue a bachelor's degree in Environmental Studies. In his Community Involvement class he was allowed to choose a community agency or nonprofit to work with in an area of special interest. Vince met with Al Hesla, John Shribbs, and myself in early October at Shollenberger Park to walk and talk about what he would be doing and learning as an intern. One of his main objectives was to learn what the various native and non-native plants are at the park. Most Wednesday and Friday mornings this fall he's been helping Craig Chresstrom remove bristly ox-tongue, harding grass, tarweed, and prickly lettuce with hand tools or by hand. He also cleared cattails near the entrance with Tony Kamby and assisted Rebuilding Together with trail maintenance from the Sheraton toward Alman Marsh on their mid-October work day. He has now completed the required outdoor work with us.

Vince attended Old Adobe Elementary, Kenilworth Junior High, and Casa Grande High (class of 2013), where he was a member of United Anglers. He enjoyed playing baseball and basketball and now likes to hike and bike, and snowboard or ski in Tahoe during the winter.

It's been a pleasure to work with Vince. We are encouraged that he and others of his peers will pitch in do what they and we can for one of the special or last best places on earth. (My apologies to Luther Burbank as I know those aren't exactly the words he used.)





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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:
Petaluma Wetlands Alliance, P.O. Box 2182, Petaluma CA 94953-2182

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