



# PETALUMA WETLANDS ALLIANCE

P.O. Box 2182, Petaluma CA 94953-2182  
[Petalumawetlands.org](http://Petalumawetlands.org)

## **PWA NEWSLETTER** **Fall/Winter 2019-2020**

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### **Notes from the President**

**John Shribbs, PhD**

Greetings PWA Members, Docents, Donors, and Fellow Petalumans,  
As the new President of PWA, I am thankful for the honor to serve this organization in a new capacity. As one of the long-time board directors, I have worked with past presidents David Yearsley, Gerald Moore and Al Hesla and so know I have some big shoes to fill. We have grown from a small volunteer organization of mostly birders to a good-sized local nonprofit focused on our Petaluma Wetlands with keywords “Education and Stewardship” and include large groups of birders, educators, and field workers.

Our new board meets for a regular monthly meeting (first Tuesday, 3 pm, Petaluma Community Center) when each chair gives a report of what we are doing, which is amazing in breadth and depth. We have active groups of volunteers continuing doing bird surveys, bird research, educating almost 30 classrooms of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders, and park maintenance. We also have a new Petaluma Wetlands Field Guide that a volunteer team produced this last year and is being marketed through author presentations and sold on our web site and local venues. Janice Austin stepped in for several months to spearhead the marketing of the Field Guide. Our website was upgraded two years ago with recent additions of drone video of our wetlands and monthly bird survey blogs from Miles and Teresa Tuffli, which resulted in a large uptick in traffic to our website. New volunteers joined the maintenance team and much work has been done including Alman Marsh trail cleanup, cattail removal from water channels, Stinkwort eradication, and refurbishing of several benches and entrance kiosk.

Following on our history of getting grants in the past, including procuring land for the ECWRF, building weirs in the Shollenberger central dredge spoils pond, and support for our education program, there is a new grant to the city from a proposal which Al Hesla wrote for over \$200,000 so we are currently working with the city to build an amphitheater and kiosk/viewing platform in Shollenberger Park.

As part of our recent board workshop we are going to develop binders for each chair/director and working on developing a master spreadsheet of what we do, who does it, who makes decisions, who in PWA to contact, who has the materials, and who in the city to contact. The beginning list of “what we do” is quite extensive and wanted to share it with you. We will continue to develop this list through the coming year.

We welcome members and docents to get more involved in anything on this list and can contact me to get direction of how to get started. We have some current needs for volunteers to step up to help with publicity/outreach/marketing, kiosk improvements, electronic media, and volunteer coordination.

### **Grants**

- Land purchase for ECWRF
- Education Program grants from Water Board, PEF, and others
- Weir replacement from Ducks Unlimited
- Amphitheater and Adobe Creek kiosk/viewing platform

- Website
- Facebook
- Kiosks posting with educational material
- Library
- Train student interns
- Bird List created, printed, distributed

### **Education**

- 3rd grade School Program – over 30 classrooms per year, 2-day program
- Bird counts with children – CBC, Featherfest
- Field Guide – created, marketed, author presentations
- Saturday Tours (2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> SAT, 9am)
- Tours on request
- Tabling at events
- Train and develop docents (JAN-FEB)
- Newsletter

### **Research**

- Monthly bird surveys
- Study of swallows when nesting in boxes
- Study of owls, owl pellets
- Study of nesting of egrets and herons
- Picture and video databases for birds, plants, animals, and wetlands

### **Restoration of Wetlands**

- Planting and maintaining native species
- Cleaning channels and culverts
- Invasive weed management

## **Maintenance of Park**

- Trash pick up
- Path maintenance
- Bench and kiosk repair
- Homeless encampment inspection and cleanup
- Feral cat and red fox reporting
- Cleaning and maintaining bird and bat housing

## **Construction**

- Build bird and bat housing
- Maintain storage unit at Shollenberger Park
- Create park setting with planting and vegetation management
- Fenced off peninsula to create habitat
- Native plant garden construction

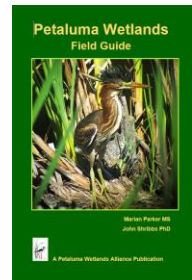
## **Organizational Maintenance**

- Created 501c3 Nonprofit
- Board of Directors meet monthly

- Keep financial records
- Maintain insurance
- Keep organizational records
- Annual meeting and picnic
- PWA Brochure created, printed, distributed
- Kiosk posting of what we do
- Historical Archives of PWA

## **Active Partnerships**

- City (Parks, ECWRF, Recreation, Police)
- Save Shollenberger
- STRAW
- Friends of Petaluma River
- Petaluma River Coalition (Access Petaluma River)
- Petaluma Watershed Consortium (RCD)
- Casa Grande Anglers



## **Petaluma Wetlands Field Guide**

Looking for the perfect holiday gift? Look no further than the Petaluma Wetlands Alliance's very own *Petaluma Wetlands Field Guide*. The field guides are available at many locations: Petaluma Copperfield's Book Store, Petaluma Historical Museum, the Seed Bank and Clavey Paddlesport. But if you want PWA to receive 100% of the sale price, buy your guides at the Petaluma Visitor Center by the Smart Train station, The Field Works, located at the corner of 4<sup>th</sup> and B St. and at Hampton Inn on Lakeville. In Novato it is selling at Novato Copperfields and Wild Birds Unlimited. Friends and family elsewhere can buy the book on-line at our PWA website. Shipping in continental US for just \$3.

The Guide was created by principal authors, John Shribbs and Marian Parker with the assistance of contributing editors Nora Lee Pearl and Pamela Williams and valuable input of Len Nelson.

### **ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL DUE OCTOBER 1!**

Yearly membership renewals are in progress for current members for the period of October 2019 – September 2020. Email reminders have been sent out to all members.

- During the past six months, our membership has grown from 74 members to 84 members.
- Members are invited to attend various PWA-sponsored events throughout the year. Members will be notified in advance of our Annual Picnic and other special events and activities.

We are also looking for new members to join the Petaluma Wetlands Alliance (PWA). Below are just some of the great things going on at PWA:

- Third Grade program – in the classroom and at Shollenberger Park where PWA docents teach children about birds, the wetlands, the Miwok people, and have lots of fun; this program is provided at no charge to the school and children
- Wetlands restoration – planting native plants and removing invasive plants
- Stewardship – maintaining trails
- Outreach – conducting bird walks for the public; posting information in the kiosks; giving presentations on the animal and bird life in the wetlands
- Christmas Bird Count for kids and Feather Fest for kids
- Tree Swallows – building & maintaining nest boxes, monitoring nests, gathering data, and reporting results

Please consider joining PWA and be part of conserving the wetlands resources for the community of Petaluma. Help keep our kids enjoying this great resource right in our backyard.

**You may join (and renew) on-line at**  
<https://petalumawetlands.org/become-a-member/>.

## **Christmas Bird Count**

**Sheryl Nadeau**

The Christmas Bird Count for children will take place January 4th, 2020, at Shollenberger Park, 9 AM. If you'd like to volunteer to help with this event, please mark this on your new 2020 calendar and contact me at: [33sheryln@gmail.com](mailto:33sheryln@gmail.com) or call : 707-778-6888. Looking for "Birders who would enjoy a fun morning sharing the great outdoors with children and their families for a morning of fun with birds and a pizza party after. Hope you can make it!

## **Library Corner**

**Hella Merrill, Librarian**

The PWA library has a new home and a new librarian, Hella Merrill. An attachment containing the contents of the library will soon be coming your way. To check out a book, DVD or whatever, contact Hella and let her know what you'd like to check out. She will leave it in a box on her porch at 151 Dublin Court, located off Windsor Drive between D St and Western.

Hella's contact information: 765-1035 or [hmart2@earthlink.net](mailto:hmart2@earthlink.net)

## **Schools Education Program**

**Helen Heal, Chair**

The PWA's schools program had a very busy and very productive 2018-2019 season. We brought our program to 11 schools in the fall of 2018 and 16 in the spring of 2019. In all, the program was experienced by almost 600 students.

The 2019-2020 program does not promise to be quite as demanding, with several schools having one less third grade class than in previous years.

The Petaluma Garden Club provided a grant to the PWA so that every participating teacher in the 2019-2020 education program will receive the Petaluma Wetlands Field Guide. This will allow teachers to prepare their classes for our program in a way never before possible. Thanks Petaluma Garden Club!

## **Do You Know Someone Who Would Make a Good Docent? Encourage them to sign up for Docent Training in January and February!**

There are a number of different ways to serve as a wetlands docent:

- Teach 3<sup>rd</sup> graders about the importance of the wetlands
- Lead bird walks
- Restore the habitat
- Conduct research on birds and other wetlands animals

Note that some activities can be done by non-docent volunteers, such as habitat restoration (pulling weeds) and some bird activities. For those activities that require docent training (school program, most research activities), docent training starts on January 9 and continues for 8 consecutive Thursdays. More information is on our website at:

<http://petalumawetlands.org/become-a-volunteer/>  
*Remember, newly retired people make great docents!*



## DOCENT DEVELOPMENT

Anne Taylor, Chair

### Docent Enrichment: Learning Bird Songs with Lisa Hug



Twenty members and friends assembled at Shollenberger Park on May 20 for a bird walk with an emphasis on bird songs. The program was led by birding instructor Lisa Hug. The participants observed and discussed the sounds of each bird that we observed. Although it seemed like a quiet morning, the group saw many species. Among

them were the marsh wren and the Savannah sparrow, both of whom have distinctive and complex songs.

### Service Project: Tech Trek Students Visit Petaluma Wetlands



A STEM camp for 8<sup>th</sup> grade girls, Tech Trek, was held at Sonoma State University June 23-29. Sponsored by the women's group AAUW, Tech Trek encourages their interest in science and math-related jobs. One of their many activities was a visit to Petaluma to learn about both water treatment and wetlands ecology. On each of 2 days, half of the students visited Petaluma. When they arrived, half of the students visited the Water Recycling Facility (Sewage Plant) at Ellis Creek. The others went on birding walks at either Ellis Creek or Shollenberger Park. Later the groups switched places.

Petaluma Wetlands Alliance provided experienced docents for the bird walks, plus binoculars for each student. The participating docents were Deb Sheppard, JoAnn Freda, Julie Clark, and Sabrina Hearst. The photo shows one of the bird walk groups with their chaperones and a docent.

**Tree Swallows**



There are 28 Tree Swallow houses located in Shollenberger and Ellis Creek. I have been monitoring them for 13 years (since 2007) and in that time: 2,801 eggs were laid; 2,381 chicks hatched; 1,782 lived to fledge for a mortality rate of 25.2%.

Their nesting period lasts from mid-April through early August. They are no longer here having flown south for the winter. But they will begin to return in mid-January scouting for appropriate nesting sites to occupy and defend until they attract a mate.

This year, 247 eggs were laid; 213 hatched; 195 fledged for a mortality rate of 8.5%. Interested in knowing more? Let me hear from you. Len Nelson: [lennelsn@comcast.net](mailto:lennelsn@comcast.net)

**Barn Owls**



There are 18 Barn Owl houses in the Shollenberger – Ellis Creek wetland area. They are nocturnal birds and spend the evenings hunting for prey creatures to consume and to feed to their chicks. Unlike you and me, they have 2 stomachs. They swallow their prey whole and the first stomach does the initial digestion. Fur, feathers, skulls and most bones are not digested but are regurgitated in what is called a ‘pellet’. The rest of the consumed mass goes to its second stomach for final digestion.

At the end of each season (October or so...) their nests are literally one massive conglomeration of these pellets. By carefully picking through the mass, one can set aside skulls and lower mandibles, identify each to species, and count the remains of each species. By analyzing the nest remains, we can get a pretty good picture of what the Barn Owls ate and fed their chicks at the end of each year.

The PWA has the good duty of cleaning out the 18 owl houses in our wetlands once a year. In that process, we weigh the contents of each before disposing of the material

which last year cumulatively weighted over 50 pounds. However, from one of those 16 houses we retain the contents and totally dissect it to determine exactly how many and what species of prey creatures the owls and their chicks ate that year.

Here is what we discovered in 9.6 pounds of animal hair and feathers in that one house located in Ellis Creek in 2018. The remains of: 483 Voles, 172 Gophers, 27 Mice, 8 Birds, 2 Moles, 1 Shrew and 1 Rat. Total number of creatures consumed by the Barn Owls in this one house: 694! Quite amazing, huh?!

Any questions or wish to see full report, email me: Len Nelson [lennelsn@comcast.net](mailto:lennelsn@comcast.net)

## **Current Park Maintenance**

Our two long-term, mainstay volunteers, John Richards and Craig Cherrstrom, continue to go out weekly to do a variety of jobs. They have been joined by John Shribbs, Earl Herr, and Harley Christensen to increase this effort. Here is what the team just completed and is working on currently:

The **Alman Trail**, from the Sheraton entrance to the bench just before the bridge over the first creek, was cleared on both sides. The giant gum plant was growing into the path from both sides near the boardwalk so people could not pass without brushing against both sides. They only ran into one yellow jacket nest.

Earl went around the park on his bike and trailer set up and used his hedge trimmer to **clear around all the benches** so people could sit and view without vegetation blocking their view or path.

John Shribbs began working on **Kiosk and Bench Refurbishing** and was joined by Earl for several days. One large kiosk and 7 benches were cleaned, wire brushed, sanded, hardware tightened, and wood sealed. This will give them a longer life. We are working with an Eagle Scout who is proposing to work in the north trail benches and kiosks for his Eagle Scout project.

John R., Earl, and John S. have been working on **Stinkwort Eradication** along the north trail of Shollenberger Park. It is a very invasive weed that arrived in the US in 1989 and has been spreading around the world. It has a unique life cycle and life strategy that makes it competitive. It is light green color due to its very waxy coating and is about to flower now, much later in the season than most of the plant species out there. Foliage is very waxy and aromatic and is very toxic if eaten and can cause rashes to any exposed skin, so workers must cover up. Three large patches have been pulled, shredded, and/or mowed. Several more patches have been found around the park and we will work on them over the next few weeks.



Craig and Harley **cleaned out the Cattails** near the culvert so the students joining us on educational field trips can view the freshwater channel. They also worked on cleaning up the area around the picnic benches the students will use to do owl pellets.

John R. and Craig **inspect the homeless camps** and adjoining trash weekly, contact the police, and cleanup what they can.

John S. met with **STRAW** (student and teachers restoring a watershed) project managers and plant team to consult on their future restoration work at Shollenberger. They will start with the transition zone between wet and dry zones along the south trail. These transition zones are very important to birds for food, shelter, and predator avoidance.








## Do you love Shollenberger Park? Do you love the Wetlands?

**Become a Petaluma Wetlands Alliance DOCENT!**



### What do docents do?

-  Teach 3<sup>rd</sup> graders about wetlands biomes and habitats
-  Lead bird walks
-  Restore habitats
-  Conduct research on birds
-  And much more!

### HOW CAN I BECOME A DOCENT?

Participate in our training program and observing other docents. Training starts January 9, 2020, continuing for 8 consecutive Thursdays. To sign up, go to:

<https://petalumawetlands.org/become-a-volunteer>

More info: email: [Akt1208@bellsouth.net](mailto:Akt1208@bellsouth.net) or call: 707-774-6586





### PWA Board of Directors

John Shribbs	President
Boyce Quinn	Vice President
Al Hesla	Past President
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Open	Publicity & Marketing
Helen Heal	Program in the Schools
John Shribbs	Electronic Media
open	Restoration/Maintenance
open	Historian/Librarian/Archivist
Len Nelson	Research
Kathy Cherrstrom	Membership

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

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

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Newsletters are sent via email.

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