



PETALUMA WETLANDS ALLIANCE

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

PWA NEWSLETTER January 2023



President's Notes

John Shribbs, President

Update

Looks like we are back in the saddle running a wetlands education program in the schools. Docent training started January 12 with 15 candidates lead by Anne Taylor.

While the education program was on hiatus these last two years due to COVID, we still managed to help with maintenance and bird research programs and we are working on a new set of posters for Shollenberger. A retired painter, Paul Alexander, with help from Marty Slonim, has refinished and painted the benches; you can see their handwork at the Shollenberger entrance area.



Earl Herr continues to cut down invasive plants and Craig Cherrstrom removes cattails to enhance our habitats. John Richards leads the effort on cleaning up after homeless and trail maintenance. We are going to have several workdays to pick up trash on the river starting with the Alman Marsh trail near the Sheraton. Look for emails for dates and times. The city is still positive we can get the new amphitheater completed before deadline this year to meet the grant deadline. This may take some extra volunteer effort for clearing the area and planting native plant garden. Look for an email later this Spring.

Argus Courier Article

For material for the recent Argus Courier article, Clark Miller, asked me to give a response to the phrase: “What PWA means to Petaluma. Here is my response.”

Petaluma Wetlands Alliance, an all-volunteer nonprofit, has the motto “Education and Stewardship”. For over 20 years this group of mostly retirees who are interested in birds and wetlands have educated the public, especially school children, about the importance of maintaining a biodiverse habitat while giving the opportunity for daily human interactions.

Shollenberger Park is ranked as the most popular park in Petaluma for good reason. Several hundred people take the 2-mile trek around flat path every day and are inspired by connection to sky, water, plants, birds, and animals. Many people finish feeling refreshed from this nature bathing in a near urban setting that seems to leave people with a sense of tranquility. The multitude of birds that call this home, several thousand strong with over 200 species, reminds us that we are a part of nature, which is bigger than us.

All PWA docents share this experience and vision. We survey birds monthly, maintain trails including benches and kiosks, remove invasive plants, and educate children and adults in the classroom and on twice-a-month bird and nature walks. PWA is a model of how a group of like-minded people become friends, assist the city, improve citizens daily life, and become regular stewards of our public shared habitat.

By the way, Shollenberger was and is an industrial waste site that has been turned into a multi-use landscape serving both animals and humans. We see this model being emulated for the protection of our local open spaces, especially River Park, Lafferty Ranch, West Hills Open Spaces, and North River Greenway. Our citizens have come together with this shared vision for more open space in and near our urban spaces that meets the needs of both nature and people. We all want to protect and promote our Petaluma River and Watershed for our great grandchildren, both ours and nature’s.

Benches for Al and Andy

In recent years Petaluma Wetlands Alliance has honored several of our founding members by sponsoring a bench at Shollenberger Park. The city limited the number of benches but recently opened up two cement pads that can be converted from prior memorials to new candidates. The PWA Board decided to acquire these two benches, one for a past President, Al Hesla, and another for our long-time birding leader and docent, Andy Lacasse. Both Al and Andy participated in docent-led Bird Walks, park improvements, and the Education Program. Andy in particular was an icon in the birding community for his vast self-taught knowledge of wildlife. Al wrote the grant application to build an amphitheater and new kiosk, which are still in the planning phase with construction expected this coming summer.

The city has two benches in stock and ready to construct. The cost of installation of bench and plaque is \$2100 for each bench, or \$4200 total needed. So far we have raised a little over \$1200 and need \$3000 to cover the costs.

We are asking friends, family, and all who knew Al and Andy through PWA, to contribute to the bench fund so we can commemorate and respect their long-term efforts to improve Shollenberger Park, wetlands in general, and birding in particular. All funds over \$4200 will go to park maintenance, which includes trail and bench maintenance, Bird and Nature Walks, and onsite Education Program.

You can write a check to PWA with memo line stating, “bench fund for_____” and send to our treasurer, Jerry Taylor at P.O. Box 2182, Petaluma, CA 949532183. You can also contribute through the [website donor page](#) using PayPal or by contacting Jerry Taylor through our [website contact page](#) and set up a time to use a credit card through the Square App. Thank you for your generosity and willingness to honor Al and Andy.

PWA EDUCATION PROGRAM

Education Committee: Nora Pearl, Anita Buckner and Boyce Quinn

As you may be aware, the Petaluma Wetlands Alliance Education Program was put on hold due to the Covid pandemic, but we are resuming this March. We haven't been in a third grade classroom since early March 2020. Some changes will, however, be necessary for the 2023 program.

We will be making a major, hopefully temporary, change in how our program is presented in the classroom. We realize that having an adult, particularly a senior adult, sitting around a table with six or seven kids would not be acceptable. We are planning

the following: Two docents would come into the classroom on Monday or Thursday. One would present our Power Point in a manner that would include response and comments from the students. The second docent would demonstrate a few of the activities, like demonstrating a bird's wing ability to shed water and repair its feathers. There would be no close contact between docents and students.

The Tuesday or Friday field trip to Shollenberger would remain essentially unchanged. We believe that we can continue the owl pellet dissection activity by allowing the docent to decide whether to wear a mask and/or maintaining an appropriate distance between themselves and the students.

We shall see what the future brings. We all hope for a return to normalcy.

Docent Development News

Anne Taylor, Chair

Good news! The school program is restarting, and we will need many docents to staff it. Did you see the great article by David Templeton in the Argus Courier on Dec. 30? It described our docent program, especially the school program, and the docent training. Due to the article, have about 15 trainees. Many are retired teachers and interested in the school program. Some of our previous school docents are no longer available, so we really need the new folks.

The training started on Jan. 12 at the Community Center. The trainees will learn about all the activities that PWA does, basic wetlands science, our bird research, and many other topics. The classes are casual - no exams – and can be fun. The participants get acquainted and enjoy their time together. Current docents are welcome to participate, as well.

PWA Membership Report

Kathy Cherrstrom

Membership as of 1/6/23: 164

During the past month, our membership has increased from **157** to **164** members.

New Members: (Individual/Family) 4

Craig Cheevers (Single)

Susan Pateros (Single)

Jerry Pozo (Single)

Joy Ruppensburg (Single)

Members Who Haven't Renewed as of 12/31/22 - 44

Forty-Four (44) members have not renewed. We will contact those members to ask if they would like to renew.

Len Nelson helped with the planning and setup for a small group ***December Docent Christmas Meeting***. This was held at the Petaluma Community Center on December 2, 2022. People enjoyed it, and the Board has decided to invite all docents next year and hold this as an annual event to augment the summer picnic event.

Shollenberger Park visits in January / February 2023

Jerry Taylor and Kathy Cherrstrom will be at Shollenberger Park to promote PWA and sell PWA Field Guides.

(weather dependent):

Saturday, January 28th 8:30 – 10:30 A.M

Craig Cherrstrom will be at Shollenberger for two Saturdays in February to promote awareness and protection of bird nesting needs. He has had some t-shirts designed with the help of a Petaluma High School student and will be handing them out on those days.

Future Meet & Greet Events

January 21st and/or February 28th 8:30 – 10:30 a.m. at Aquas Café at 189 H St.

New members will be sent an email invitation to attend with a follow-up phone call a week prior to the event. We will have sign-up sheets for Members who would like to volunteer out at the Park.

Lifetime Memberships have been approved by the PWA Board.

Individual - \$600.00

Family - \$1,000.00.

Information Chair Report

Kathy Cherrstrom

Donations Received as of 12-31-22

Total Donations	\$1,192.00 *
Donations designated for Benches honoring Andy LaCasse and Al Hesla	\$1,142.00
Funding Requirement for Benches	\$4,200.00



Tree Swallow – Western Bluebird House Monitoring

Last month, December, the first of the 2023 Tree Swallows began to appear in our wetlands. Why they come so early is anyone's guess, but I'd conjecture that it is in anticipation of the flying insect population that develops when our rains begin, and thankfully, they have. No doubt the early arrivals also use this opportunity to start looking for habitat in which they can nest, and once found it is likely they intend to defend it until a mate arrives with whom they can mate and raise their off spring. In anticipation of this, the 60 Tree Swallow / Western Bluebird houses located at Shollenberger, Ellis Creek and Tolay Regional Park were cleaned out last fall.

Other creatures also find these empty nesting boxes welcome places to seek shelter for the winter, like Field Mice and Paper Wasps. But, the boxes were built for the Swallows and Bluebirds so others are evicted starting in late January through March so the swallows are not dissuaded from occupying them themselves.

Also, needed house repairs that were not identified and addressed last fall are addressed now.

2023 will begin the 17th year from which I began monitored the Tree Swallow houses that our dear friend, the late, Andy LaCasse, established in 2006 when he erected 10 in Shollenberger. Over that period, I have recorded the hatching of 4,748 Swallows and Bluebirds and the fledging of 3,735 for a survival ratio of 78.7%. Each year brings new surprises, and each house that is monitored is like opening a Chinese fortune cookie...you just do not know what it is going to hold and reveal. One thing is pretty

constant though, the swallows that try to build their houses in mid-April - early May are most often destined to lose their young if they hatch then since the cold and windy weather that generally comes in mid-May stops flying insects from going aloft for the swallows to catch and feed their young, and the cold weather chills the featherless chicks. The combination generally results in a significant die off. Swallows that can wait until after mid-May for their chicks to hatch are generally offering their chicks the best of both worlds - a goodly insect population and warm, calm, weather.

Monitoring begins in early March. The western Bluebirds start nesting about 3 weeks ahead of the Tree Swallows and since most of their food resources are found on the ground they are not so adversely affected by winds as are the Tree Swallows. If you think you might be interested in getting involved with the monitoring effort, contact me so we can discuss.

CONGRATULATIONS JOHN SHRIBBS

On January 9th, PWA President John Shribbs was sworn into the Petaluma City Council. This will reinforce our efforts to steward our wetlands and open space. John will do a great job serving the Petaluma community. His term as PWA President expires in June and we will need new energy on the board. Please consider joining the PWA board.

John with outgoing
Mayor Teresa Barrett



John with wife Patty and son Albert



PWA OPPORTUNITIES

PWA currently has need of a Vice President, and in June, when John's term ends, we will need a President and Vice President. Please consider filling these posts. You will have many dedicated helpers. Your experience at PWA and communication and organizational skills are needed!

Additional PWA Opportunities

Education Chair on the Board

Restoration and Maintenance Chair

Member at Large to sit on the Board with voting rights

Lead various volunteer duties to do our many tasks and add new ones, e.g.:

Park Volunteer

Dogs Off-Leash

Homeless Encampments

Guided Walks

PWA Board

Officers:	
President	John Shribbs
Vice President	vacant
Secretary	Susan Kraemer
Treasurer	Jerry Taylor
Chairs:	
PR/Outreach	Mary Kadri
Docent Development	Anne Taylor
Education	vacant
Research	Len Nelson
Maintenance and Restoration	vacant
Electronic Media	John Shribbs (position available)
2 Members at Large	Keith White 2 nd seat vacant