

Petaluma Wetlands Alliance

March 2025 Newsletter



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

By Mary Kadri

Hello PWA wetlanders!

It's a beautiful and abundant time out at our wetlands! I hope to see you sporting your PWA shirts and hats out there soon.

On one sunny Saturday in February, fourteen PWA docents were enjoying Shollenberger together in a variety of ways. They were either out on bird walks, pulling out the spreading poison hemlock, or removing dead branches. To promote the growth of native plants, California sunflower and narrow-leaf milkweed seeds were planted in place of the poison hemlock. And to keep our turtles happy, a sunning log for the western turtles was placed back in the side channel. Hopefully these delightful Testudine reptiles will make an appearance for the 3rd graders who will be out on their scheduled habitat walks March-May. The school program begins on March 2. The Cornell-based NestWatch Program will kick off in March, as well. On Thursday, March 20, a training and update meeting led by Linda Sheppard is scheduled to be held at the Point Blue offices.

A special thank you to the one inspiring young volunteer who is a freshman high school student from Healdsburg and comes to help with restoration and maintenance. It would be great to have more students out there with us.

And you!

Announcements

By Mary Kadri

New Publicity Chair

I'm very pleased to announce that Cathleen Springer, the same go-getter who had PWA gear made available for sale on our website, has agreed to become our Publicity Chair. Cathleen will manage our newsletter and heighten our social media profile with help from Meghan Stewart and Elaine Strong. We are working towards finally joining the Instagram crowd! Cathleen will also communicate with local newspapers.



Amphitheater

Construction is in progress on the small, handicap accessible amphitheater near the Shollenberger entrance. Rules for approved uses will be posted.



UPCOMING EVENTS

- Education Program gets underway in classrooms on March 3 and runs through to May 13.
- Children's Wetlands Children's Chorus. Auditions start March 3.
- NestWatch season is right around the corner. Training and updates session is scheduled for Thursday, March 20, at 9:30a, at the Point Blue Conservation Science offices.
- Bird Counts. Contact Len Nelson, lennelsn@comcast.net for information on monthly early morning counts, generally on Wednesdays, alternating between Shollenberger and Ellis Creek. Novices and experts welcome.
- Saturday Bird Walks, 9-11a. Second Saturday of each month at Shollenberger. Fourth Saturday of each month at Ellis Creek.
- Habitat Restoration and Maintenance. Ongoing TBA.



PWA MERCH

Another great way to support Petaluma Wetlands Alliance is to shop for some of our new merch. Click on SHOP at the top of our website HOME page. We now have cozy fleece quarter-zips, warm hoodies, and logo beanies -- all perfect for these chilly winter and early spring days while you are out enjoying our wetlands. Take along a Field Guide to enhance your birdwatching experience while you're at it.

Our vendor has notified PWA that the Very Light Weight Unisex Zip Hoodie will be discontinued as of March 3. If you'd like to order this item, do so before March 3.

INTERACTIVE WETLANDS EDUCATION: The PWA Cornerstone Program

By Gail Abrams

Did you know that most of our grants and contributions express a desire to support our 3rd Grade Wetlands Education Program? It is really through these early habitat experiences that nature comes alive, that children become inspired to become naturalists and ecologists. Our curriculum is a 2-day interactive experience for these youngsters. Over the years, students have created thank you cards expressing how much they enjoyed learning about the feathers, beaks and feet, the animals in the wetlands, and taking part in the owl pellet dissection. They also enjoyed learning to use binoculars on the habitat and bird walks.



This is a very popular program with teachers and students alike. Currently we have more requests from classroom teachers than we can handle. Rest assured, we offer training, practice, and ongoing guidance. No experience is necessary beyond enjoying children and feeling a love for the environment and for our wetlands.

If you are, or if you know someone who enjoys working with children and might enjoy bringing our awesome 3rd grade wetland curriculum to the classroom and to a park, please contact Gail Abrams: gabrams@petalumawetlands.org

Starting in
March 2025

For Sonoma County
children in grades 2-6
(no cost to participant families)



PETALUMA WETLANDS CHILDREN'S CHORUS

Choral songs celebrating environmental joy and care.

Auditions and rehearsals held at: Petaluma Community Center
320 North McDowell Blvd., Petaluma 94954

*Music reading skills not required. Singers can learn the songs and voice parts
through at-home YouTube rehearsal recordings.*

Auditions (walk-in): Monday, March 3rd, 3PM-5PM
Tuesday, March 4th, 3PM-5PM
Wednesday, March 5th, 1:30PM-3:30PM
Weekly rehearsal: Wednesdays starting March 12th, 1:30PM-3:30PM



For more information
or to be added to our e-mail list, contact:

Tom Benson, Volunteer Music Director

tbenson@petalumawetlands.org

(707) 481-1074



The Petaluma Wetlands Children's Chorus is part of the Education Wing of the
Petaluma Wetlands Alliance, a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit, Federal Tax ID: 81-1516247

Eradication of Pampas Grass at Shollenberger Takes a Village

By Joanne Figone

Pampas grass, an invasive non-native species, has taken root in the Petaluma Wetlands. Our plan was to eradicate this grass before it spread further. Large clumps measuring over 8 feet tall and 6 feet wide were beginning to interfere with the water channels at Shollenberger Park. David Donnenfield of Petaluma Wetlands Alliance, assisted by John Shribbs, Petaluma City Council member and Petaluma Wetlands Alliance Board member, spear-headed an effort to address this problem by bringing together members of the community to successfully complete the project. Mike Ghilotti, Ghilotti Brothers Construction, donated equipment and manpower (Matt Valceschini, Grady Kimball, Mark Dolcini, and Ed Amoto) to remove the two large clumps of pampas grass. The Petaluma Public Works Department provided the location for the removed materials, the dirt for backfilling in the channel, and the clean-up. Petaluma Wetlands members worked together to initially cut back the pampas grass fronds and to assist with the clean-up.



A big THANK YOU goes out to all the individuals who worked on this project. By catching it early, we can minimize pampas grass spread throughout our wetlands. It truly does take a village to maintain our wetlands for the future. As we know, wetlands are crucial for cleaning the water, for minimizing the effects of rising water levels, as well as for providing food and a haven for the many mammals and birds who live and visit here.

If you are interested in more information on how you can help, go to petalumawetlands.org



NestWatch Gears Up for Another Season

By Linda Sheppard

Soon the bluebirds and tree swallows will begin claiming one of PWA's sixty nestboxes at Shollenberger Park, Tolay Regional Park, and Ellis Creek. Last year we transitioned to recording our data on NestWatch, the Cornell Laboratory citizen science project. Our team of thirteen volunteers made weekly visits to the boxes, recorded data, and uploaded it to the NestWatch site. We also pulled bodacious amounts of stickers from our socks and checked for ticks after each visit.



The monitoring season runs from about late March through June. On April 1, 2024, our first recorded chick was hatched. Forty-nine of our boxes had a 100% success rate, meaning all eggs hatched and the young fledged. Two boxes were taken over by very cute *field mice*! Quite a surprise when you are expecting to see birds in the box!



Training for NestWatch volunteers will be held mid-March at the Point Blue Conservation Science office, 3820 Cyress Drive, Suite 11, Petaluma. If you are interested in joining the NestWatch team, contact Linda Sheppard: lsheppard@petalumawetlands.org

Will the Herons Return to Nest?

By Linda Sheppard

For many years, Great Blue Herons, Great Egrets and Double Crested Cormorants have been nesting in three eucalyptus trees at the Ellis Creek Water Recycling Plant. The nesting area is not visible to the public from the Ellis Creek trails because the birds prefer the south, more protected, less windy side of the trees. Unfortunately, the winds were not kind to the birds this past December. The middle, and the largest of the trees was blown over during a ferocious windstorm. Pictured below is the pile of logs that remains from the tree.



When the landscaping crew cleaned up the area, they saved one of the nests. Long time bird monitor Len Nelson can be seen in the next photo with the very large, saved nest. We surmise it is a Great Blue Heron nest. That's amazing construction!



Will the birds spread over to the other trees? Will they abandon their rookery? Monitoring begins in March. We are keeping our fingers crossed for our beloved birds!



(Left to right above) Nancy Merritt, Genoa Provencio, Gary Lairmore, Joanne Figone, Robert Tucker, Linda Chute, Tom Benson, Pamela Cratty

Introducing...

By Mary Kadri

Meet the eight new docents who graduated from our Docent Training Program on February 6, 2025:

- **Tom Benson.** Tom rides his bike through Shollenberger and ECWRF nearly every day. As a retired music therapist from UC Benioff Children's Hospital in San Francisco, Tom has been working to put together a wetland children's choral group. This choral group will perform songs written by Tom that highlight the joy of nature, particularly focusing on the wetlands.
- **Linda Chute.** An avid birder who is interested in restoration and maintenance, Linda has worked with Audubon Canyon Ranch for many years.
- **Pamela Cratty.** Teaching primarily in elementary school, Pamela taught for 38 years. Her classes were involved in different environmental programs including the STRAW Project, Steelhead in the Classroom, and our Petaluma Wetlands Alliance 3rd grade school program!
- **Joanne Figone.** Joanne, who has been our Membership and Communications Chair for a year and a half, is a familiar face for many of you. Over the past year, she was a force behind the creation of the beautiful, new interpretive signage at Shollenberger and Ellis Creek. Joanne can be found out in the early morning hours for our monthly wetland bird counts, as well as participating in a coastal bird count program. Before she retired, Joanne was a pediatric occupational therapist.
- **Gary Lairmore.** Gary and his wife, Nancy Merritt, recently moved from Ventura. They've both been involved in chimp research in Uganda where they trained under Jane Goodall.
- **Nancy Merritt.** See above. Nancy worked as a physician before she retired. Gary and Nancy have both signed up to help with our education program.
- **Genoa Provencio.** Genoa has experience as a volunteer at PRBO in Bolinas and the Marine Mammal Center. Genoa would like to monitor and research birds and wildlife, do wetlands restoration and maintenance, as well as be available for administrative support.
- **Robert Tucker.** Robert and his wife moved to Petaluma in 2022. Robert shows up to events on his bike and, like Tom Benson, frequently visits the wetlands on two wheels. Robert would like to monitor and research birds and wildlife, help with wetlands restoration and maintenance, publicity and marketing, and administrative support. Robert has extensive docent training and volunteer experience at Armstrong Redwoods, and with the Gray Whale Watching at Bodega Head.

Thank You to Our PWA Volunteer Members

By Joanne Figone

In 2024, our PWA members generously volunteered over 3,314 hours. Volunteer hours were spread over:

- Educational activities

The educational component of PWA, which includes Saturday bird walks, educational posters, and the popular 3rd grade school program, accounted for 1,696 volunteer hours.



- Restoring and maintaining our wetlands

Volunteers contributed 491 volunteer hours maintaining and restoring the wetlands, including the clean-up of the commemorative benches, stocking doggie bags, removal of invasive species, and clean-up of debris.

- Research activities

Bird and salinity research volunteer hours numbered 642, and included bird counts, nest box monitoring, rookery monitoring of egrets, herons, cormorants, as well as salinity testing.

- Publicity activities

Several of our members work diligently on publicity and marketing (194 hours), to promote the sale of field guides and PWA merchandise, as well to create and maintain the newsletters and social media.

- Board activities

Lasty, our Board members put in 501 hours accomplishing the PWA mission, as well as coordinating with all City and other pertinent environmental agencies regarding wetlands matters.

THANK YOU to all of you who volunteer your time, knowledge, effort, and manual labor for our wetlands. The added bonus of the beautiful photographs that many of you have provided to enhance our newsletter is also appreciated.

Before You Go

As our goal is to inform and educate our PWA members, your comments and feedback are always welcome. Drop any suggestions you may about our newsletter to Cathleen Springer, cspringer@petalumawetlands.org