

Petaluma Wetlands Alliance

July 2025 Newsletter



Great Egret, photo by Elaine Strong

Message from the President

Hello Fellow Wetlanders!

The small amphitheater at Shollenberger is finally finished, ready for your use!

Soon to be added will be the signage and commemorative plaque honoring Al Hesla, former PWA President and the prime force behind the amphitheater effort. Unfortunately, Al passed away before seeing his vision come to fruition, but we hope he would be happy with the results.

The rule for the amphitheater is no amplification and no drums, which rule was broken at the first event! Please keep the non-amplification rule in mind when thinking about any future events you might like to hold there. According to Drew Halter, Director of Parks and Recreation, there won't be a sign-up process for its use. However, PWA leadership is happy to serve as an informal check-in if you'd like to see whether anything is already planned for.



PWA at The Floathouse Petaluma

By Mary Kadri

PWA is helping to bring wetlands education to Floathouse camp children, aged 10-12. During camp week, the children try out different boats on the Petaluma River. One morning during each camp week, PWA meets that week's group at the Marina to walk them through Alman Marsh and Shollenberger. We provide binoculars and go with whatever we happen to see that morning. Linda Sheppard and I will be providing activity leadership for the five weeks of summer camp.



PWA Officer Elections

By Mary Kadri

This was an election year for our PWA officers, which takes place during our annual picnic. This year's picnic and elections were planned and overseen by Joanne Figone and Stephanie Sanchez. Mary Kadri will continue to serve for the next two years as president, John Shribbs will serve as Vice President in place of Cynthia Rathkey, and both Stephanie Sanchez and Jerry Taylor will continue to serve, respectively, as Secretary and Treasurer. Committee Chairs are appointed rather than elected, and they are: Gail Abrams, School Program; Linda Sheppard, NestWatch Research Program; John Shribbs, Restoration & Maintenance. None of us could do our jobs without all the help from school docents, nest researchers, and a dedicated maintenance crew. Other committee chairs are Cathleen Springer, Publicity and Newsletter; Laney Strong, Social Media, and Joanne Figone, Communications and Membership.

Tim Fleming continues to help us maintain and update our website, including routing communications for new member applications, volunteers, sales of merchandise and field guides, as well as updating research data.

We are looking for someone to back up Diane P-Stevenson for mailing out field guides, as her family obligations may pull her out of town for extended periods. If you can do this, please let us know.

This year the Board voted to extend the Board membership to up to 4 members-at-large. Current members-at-large are John Richards and Keith White. Please let us know if you would like to serve in this capacity. And let us know if you'd like to receive agendas for our meetings. Anyone is welcome to attend!

If everyone does a little, a lot can get done. Thank you!

Welcome Genoa Provencio, Our New Librarian

By Cathleen Springer

We're pleased to introduce Genoa Provencio as the new librarian for the Petaluma Wetlands Alliance, joining us in April 2025. Genoa brings a passion for nature's wisdom and healing with a deep appreciation for the unique ecosystems that define our wetlands. With a background in business office technology, she's already begun enhancing our resource center and developing creative ways to connect visitors, students, and volunteers with the rich knowledge our library offers. Please join us in giving Genoa a warm welcome—we look forward to the energy, ideas, and expertise she brings to our mission of protecting and celebrating the Petaluma wetlands.



MESSAGE FOR OUR LIBRARIAN

2025 Inventory: Books, CDs, DVDs, Field Guides, Magazines

The Petaluma Wetlands Alliance library—available to members and docents—is housed at the Petaluma Community Center.

Two designated cabinets at PCC contain a wide range of materials related to the Petaluma Wetlands Watershed. The collection includes resources on local geology, native plants, birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles, fish, and invertebrates, along with various reference materials and field guides

The inventory is currently being cataloged. Once complete, we'll share full details on available resources and how to check out materials.

Exploring the collection is an exciting journey into our region's biodiversity. Doing so is something that I have found to be personally enriching. It offers opportunities for learning through scientific texts, photographs, and beautifully illustrated guides.

A downloadable attachment will be shared when the catalog is finalized.

—Genoa Provencio, Librarian

Meet Elaine “Laney” Strong – Our New Social Media Monitor

By Cathleen Springer

Elaine Strong, known to many as Laney, is excited to step into the role of Facebook and Instagram monitor for the Petaluma Wetlands Alliance. A lifelong Petaluma local, Elaine graduated from Petaluma High School in June 2017.

Her journey with PWA began in a serendipitous way—after picking up a pamphlet at Shollenberger Park, she was inspired to get involved. She completed docent training in the spring of 2024 and has been an active and enthusiastic participant ever since. Community members may recognize her from participating in bird walks or assisting with owl dissection and feather activities during our school program days at Shollenberger—two of her favorite ways to inspire curiosity and appreciation for nature.

Outside of her volunteer work, Elaine enjoys wildlife photography and birdwatching, hobbies that align beautifully with PWA’s mission. She looks forward to sharing updates, photos, and upcoming events on the PWA Facebook page, and helping more people connect with the unique beauty of the Petaluma wetlands.

If you would like to post on the PWA Facebook page, please send your content to Laney at her email address: elainestrong10@yahoo.com

Welcome, Laney!



Notes from the PWA School Program

By Gail Abrams

Spring at Shollenberger Park brings blooming plants, returning birds, and basking turtles—and the excitement of PWA's 3rd Grade School Program!

This spring, 27 dedicated docents guided 396 third graders from 17 classes through 85 classroom and 51 park activities. The program spans two half-days:

- Day One: Docents visit classrooms with a Q&A slideshow and four rotating hands-on activities.
- Day Two: Students visit Shollenberger for three outdoor, docent-led activities.

Each session is personal and engaging, with small student-to-docent ratios (5–6 in class, 4 at the park). Activities start with introductions—each student is welcomed by name.

In the classroom, students:

- Use models to understand watersheds and wetlands
- Explore beaks and feet as adaptations
- Test real feathers for waterproofing
- Play a classification game

At the park, students:

- Learn to use binoculars for birding
- Observe habitat zones on a nature walk
- Dissect owl pellets from on-site barn owl boxes

Students learn how wetlands clean water, reduce flooding, and support biodiversity. And we get to see the magic through their eyes—like a fox on the trail or a gopher peeking out mid-lesson.

Teachers call this their favorite field trip, aligning perfectly with 3rd grade science on adaptation.

It takes a village to run this beloved program. Interested in joining us as a docent? Contact me at: gabrams@petalumawetlands.org



NestWatch Monitors Are Busy

By Linda Sheppard

Photo by Elaine Strong

Real estate comes at a premium when you are a cavity nesting bird. PWA has 60 nest boxes to help these birds, primarily Tree Swallows and Western Bluebirds, find a safe place to raise a family. Fourteen trained monitors are currently busy collecting data on each of our nest boxes.



We expect to see beautiful bluebirds and cute chicks, but sometimes we see unexpected wonders of nature. For example, monitors Linda Chute and Mary Ashby have also been observing a black phoebe nest as well.

Linda recounts this story:

“I always checked out the nest and the phoebes' presence. On a recent visit, I found a large pile of debris at the base of the tree.

There were chunks of thick outer bark, snapped off bark shards that had earlier hung down in front of the nest making it difficult to see, and to my horror, the entire nest in the middle of it all. Who ravaged that entire cavity so violently? I was brokenhearted by the sight of it.

Then I looked more closely into the now spacious cavity and saw another nest deeper inside. It appeared smaller than the first but looked to be in perfect condition. Fellow monitor, Mary Ashby, managed to reach the snake camera just high enough to peek into the box. To our absolute glee, it revealed 3 or 4 brand new pink babies! The jolt of joy we feel at the sight of new chicks is amazing.”



They're Baaaack

By Linda Sheppard

Photos by Elaine Strong

You may recall that the middle of the three eucalyptus trees at the Ellis Creek rookery was blown down in the December windstorm. Len Nelson and I waited somewhat impatiently to see if our beloved Great Blue Herons, (GBHE) Great Egrets (GREG), and Double Crested Cormorants (DCCO) would return to the remaining trees to nest. We began our monitoring season on March 15 and were delighted to find nesting herons and cormorants, 2 and 5 nests respectively. There were no egrets on that date but they are usually later nesters than the other two species. The first egret nest was spotted by March 30. As of June 1, the number of nests is comparable to years past, 32 DCCO, 13 GBHE, and 17 GREG. We are seeing healthy chicks at each weekly observation.

There has been a major solar installation project at Ellis Creek. Even that hustle and bustle doesn't seem to be disturbing the rookery. You can't keep a good bird down!

Restoration and Maintenance Report

By John Shribbs

Outdoor Classroom from a State Parks grant 7 years ago finally came to fruition and is now 95% complete. This amphitheater includes a small stage and bench system that was worked on cooperatively with City engineers to make the feature fit into the landscape. See MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT in this newsletter for more information.

Bench Cleaning Volunteer program has been working well. All the benches are now assigned to individuals to maintain. We're happy to say that all volunteers are doing a good job. John Richards is organizing these volunteers.

Nesting Season is here. The City hired Jennifer, a bird biologist with Swift Biology, who goes out at request to survey for nests in any area City staff or PWA docents plan to do work. Work must be completed within one week of the survey, and in only those areas without nests. This year's legal nesting season is in play until August.

Owl Cam stopped functioning just at the beginning of nesting season, so we decided not to disturb the pair in the ECWRF eucalyptus tree. A new Verizon phone chip will be installed in August to get it back up and running. Owl boxes are cleaned out in the fall, usually in October. This annual cleaning is organized by Len Nelson.

Swift Biology Birder went out to both Shollenberger Park and Alman Marsh to survey for nests and found a few next to the path. City and PWA volunteers followed up by giving each path a 2-3 foot expansion in all areas except for a few with nests which are designated by pink flags. We still need to finish some work in Alman Marsh. That path is officially closed due to the walkway slanting from erosion.

Alman Marsh Path Improvement Project Thanks to the support of the City of Petaluma, 14 yards of base rock were delivered to improve the Alman Marsh pathway. A group of PWA volunteers—using pickup trucks and even a bike trailer—transported and spread the rock over wet and muddy sections of the trail. In addition, a drainage pipe was installed to redirect water runoff from the nearby apartment complex, helping keep the path drier and more accessible year-round. This project was organized and led by John Shribbs.

Logs were added to the freshwater channel and chained down after some clearing of reeds and tule to give our native western pond turtles some sunning spots, thereby allowing students to view them as the weather becomes warmer.

As mentioned in the most recent newsletter, a team of volunteers lead by David Donnenfield worked with City staff and Ghilloti, who donated backhoe, dump truck and drivers, to remove two clumps of nonnative invasive pampas grass and a palm tree.

A few volunteer docents go out regularly to clear out invasive weeds along the pathways, clean out tules and reeds from the freshwater channel, survey for encampments, replace doggie bags and pamphlets, clean out kiosks.





On a sunny May morning, Quinn B. strummed her ukulele and sang with heart to the dabblers and divers at Shollenberger.

SFEI Selects Alman Marsh for Sea Level Rise Adaptation Study

We are excited to share that the San Francisco Estuary Institute (SFEI) has selected Alman Marsh as a promising study site for sea level rise adaptation strategies. As part of their research, SFEI is examining sediment flows from Adobe Creek and exploring innovative ways this natural resource might be used to benefit the marsh.

One strategy includes converting Alman Marsh into a fluvial sediment depository—creating an ecotone barrier that could help buffer the impacts of rising sea levels. This forward-looking concept would enhance the marsh’s ecological resilience while serving as a model for nature-based climate adaptation.

PWA is actively collaborating with SFEI’s environmental engineers. Together, we are envisioning a long-term redesign of the marsh, including moving public walkways inland to accommodate future tidal shifts and restoring native vegetation closer to the river’s edge.

While this is a multi-year planning and restoration effort, we’re proud to be contributing to a project that places Alman Marsh at the forefront of regional climate adaptation.

PGE completed the installation of new gas pipes from Shollenberger Park going under the river to the west side to ensure good flow of gas to Novato customers. PGE is still responsible for restoring native plants to the construction area.

Anyone interested in helping with any of this work, please contact John Shribbs, VP and Chair of Restoration and Maintenance at: jshribbs@petalumawetlands.org

Behind the Scenes at Ellis Creek Water Recycling Facility

By Cathleen Springer

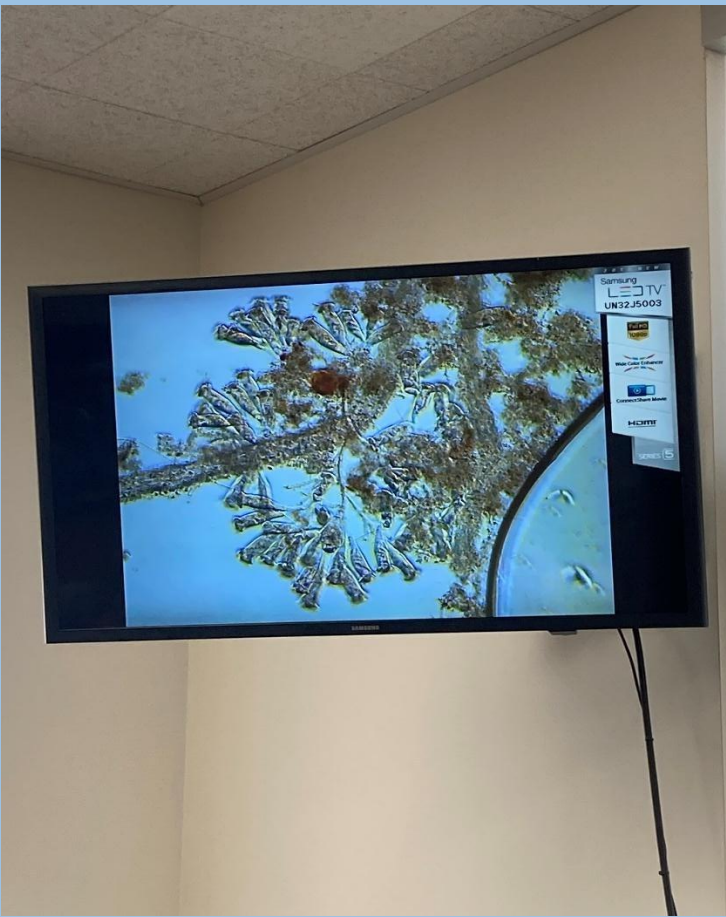
Our thanks to David Donnenfield for organizing a special PWA tour of the Ellis Creek Water Recycling Facility. Eighteen or so PWA members attended and were treated to a fascinating behind-the-scenes look at one of Petaluma's most vital public works.

The visit began with an engaging overview of the facility's operations. PWA's John Shribbs added valuable context by sharing the history behind the planning and creation of the Ellis Creek polishing ponds and trails.

Participants split into smaller groups for guided tours. The group led by Recycled Water Operator Anthony Scerri—who grew up in Petaluma and graduated from Petaluma High School—appreciated his deep knowledge and thoughtful responses to our many questions.

Opened in 2009, the Ellis Creek Water Recycling Facility (ECWRF) is a state-of-the-art plant owned and operated by the City of Petaluma. It treats all wastewater from Petaluma and Penngrove, recycling it for reuse in ways that support both our community and the environment.





Thank You, Tim Fleming

By Cathleen Springer

The Petaluma Wetlands Alliance extends a heartfelt thank you to Tim Fleming for his invaluable contributions to our organization. Tim designed and continues to maintain the PWA website, ensuring it's a useful and accessible resource for our community.

He was also instrumental in setting up our website merchandise shop, bringing our supporters an easy way to show their love for the wetlands.

Tim's patience, reliability, and long-standing commitment as a dedicated PWA member since 2012 make him an indispensable part of our team. We're deeply grateful for all he does.



Photo by Tim Fleming

The wastewater ponds at Ellis Creek Water Recycling Facility are periodically emptied for maintenance. When this happens a bonanza of crayfish, frogs and insects become easy meals for the resident waterfowl such as this Blue Heron.



Spreading the Word About Wetlands

By Cathleen Springer

Since our March newsletter, John Shribbs and Mary Kadri have given three engaging PowerPoint presentations—at the Petaluma Senior Center, the Kiwanis Club, and the Petaluma Garden Club—reaching over 100 community members. These talks are helping to raise awareness of our mission and programs. More speaking opportunities are in the works as we continue sharing the importance of wetlands conservation with the broader community.

A Perfect Day for the Annual PWA Picnic

By Cathleen Springer

Saturday, June 7, brought mild sunshine and a great turnout for the annual PWA picnic. With 45 attendees, the event was filled with good company, delicious sandwiches, and a generous spread of side dishes.

During the gathering, members elected our 2025–2026 Board officers by a show of hands:

- President: Mary Kadri
- Vice President: John Shribbs
- Secretary: Stephanie Sanchez
- Treasurer: Jerry Taylor

A warm thank you to all who came out to share food, laughter, and community spirit.



SAVE THE DATE

What: Sonoma Land Trust & Petaluma Wetlands Alliance Guided Outing

When: Saturday, October 18 | 9:30–11:30 AM

Where: Baylands Restoration Project (San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge, Lakeville Highway at Highway 37)

Join us for a special guided outing exploring the Baylands Restoration Project. This event is ADA accessible and limited to 30 participants.

Registration is required.

A signup email will be sent to PWA members around Labor Day.

New Summer Merch is Here

Stay cool and show your support for the wetlands with our fresh summer gear—now available on the PWA website. Check out our new white caps, visors, and comfy tank tops. As requested, a fleece zip vest is also available now. Perfect for sunny strolls at Shollenberger and Ellis or just repping your love for PWA and nature around town.

Whether we and our politicians know it or not Nature is party to all our deals and decisions. She has more votes, a longer memory, and a sterner sense of justice than we do.

Wendell Berry, American Novelist and Poet. (Born 1934)