

PETALUMA WETLANDS ALLIANCE

November 2025 Newsletter



Photo by Alan Butler

From the President: On Building Connections

by Mary Kadri

As we grow older, many factors can leave us feeling adrift—whether it's downsizing, losing work colleagues or loved ones, or relocating closer to grandchildren but farther from friends and neighbors. While I cherish the freedom of retirement, I also find myself seeking purpose and a sense of achievement. Joining PWA has truly enriched my life in countless ways.

Through PWA, reconnecting with elementary-aged children and focusing on nature has lifted my spirits and brought immense joy. I've also gained new adult friendships with a diverse group of intelligent, fun, and wonderfully quirky people. I've had the pleasure of working alongside some of you in the park, in the classroom, inspecting bird nests and chicks, and exploring the wetlands as we remove invasives and clean up the river. Working with our passionate and dedicated Board of Directors has opened even more doors for meaningful involvement.

If you know anyone who might enjoy forming these kinds of connections, encourage them to reach out—we'd love to meet and chat. Fall and winter in the wetlands are magical, alive with birds and bathed in soft, renewing light after rain. What better way to enjoy the outdoors than a walk in the wetlands? And to our new members: Welcome! I look forward to meeting you soon.

PWA Volunteer Training Starts in January

by Anne Taylor

Thinking about volunteering with Petaluma Wetlands Alliance—or know someone who would? PWA volunteers help by:

Teaching 3rd graders about wetlands, birds, and habitats

Leading bird walks

Restoring habitats

Conducting research on birds and other wetland wildlife

...and much more!

Schedule: Training begins Thursday, January 8 at 9:00 AM and runs for five consecutive Thursdays. Each session is 2–3 hours. Most sessions are at the Petaluma Community Center (Lucchesi Park), with some field sessions at Shollenberger Park.

Requirement: Training is required for all volunteers.

Sign up: petalumawetlands.org/become-a-volunteer

Questions? Contact Membership Chair --

Joanne Figone at jfigone@petalumawetlands.org.





Artwork by David, 3rd Grader

***If children don't grow up knowing about nature and appreciating it,
they will not understand it, and if they don't understand it they
won't protect it, and if they don't protect it, who will?***

--Sir David Attenborough



Al Hesla's Shollenberger Signature Project Completed

by Mary Kadri

On September 2, friends, family, and community members gathered at the new Shollenberger Gathering Circle—an outdoor amphitheater dedicated to the late Al Hesla, former president of the Petaluma Wetlands Alliance. Al's wife Amy and family attended, along with dozens of PWA members. Mayor Kevin McDonnell and Parks & Rec Director Drew Halter spoke, as did PWA leaders, recalling Al's energy, enthusiasm, and leadership. PWA member and musician Craig Cherrstrom honored him with one of Al's favorite songs.

Al joined PWA more than 15 years ago after retiring as a project manager. A passionate birder and nature lover, he completed volunteer training, took part in bird surveys, and supported the School Program. When longtime leader Gerald Moore fell ill, Al stepped in and served a little over one term as president. He modernized the bylaws, ran board meetings with efficiency and kindness, and helped shepherd the publication of the Petaluma Wetlands Field Guide.

It was Al who envisioned an educational amphitheater at Shollenberger Park. He pursued the idea vigorously, even attending a State Parks grant workshop where he successfully secured \$230,000 in funding for the project. Though illness prevented him from seeing it completed, the facility—delayed by COVID and design revisions—is now finished and open to the public.

Known for his motto, "Let's do it. I'll be there," Al would surely be proud to see the Shollenberger Gathering Circle serving both the community and PWA's School Program.

Stop by Shollenberger Park to enjoy the view—the stage and benches are open to all.



Volunteer Opportunity: Help Protect Our Wetlands Wildlife from Light Pollution

by Mary Kadri

Petaluma Wetlands Alliance is seeking a Project Manager to work with businesses surrounding the wetlands to help reduce excessive nighttime lighting. Artificial light projected into the wetlands can harm and disorient wildlife, but there are simple, effective ways to fix the problem.

Mary Kadri has begun this important work and has links, drafts, and background materials ready to get you started. If you'd like to make a difference for the wildlife that depend on our wetlands, this is a great project for you.

Contact: mkadri@petalumawetlands.org

Volunteer Opportunity: Petaluma River Water Quality Project

by Mary Kadri

The PWA Board seeks a Project Manager to help engage city, county, and regional water managers in improving the water quality of the Petaluma River. Despite past mandates, the river remains affected by manure and E. coli contamination.

Mary Kadri has background links and materials to help you get started.

Contact: mkadri@petalumawetlands.org

PWA Monthly Bird Walks

by Cynthia Rathkey

After taking the summer off, the monthly bird walks have begun again. These walks are led by PWA docents and occur twice a month:

Second Saturdays at Shollenberger Park

Fourth Saturdays at Ellis Creek Water Recycling Plant

The walks begin at 9am and end at 11am

From October through June

Meet up in the respective parking lots

Summer has been fairly quiet, but with fall's arrival, we're welcoming back familiar friends who spent the warmer months up north. Many migratory birds are returning to the Petaluma River and its surrounding wetlands—some to stay through the winter, others stopping briefly to rest and refuel before continuing their journey south.

We look forward to seeing you!



Photo by Patricia Brigham



Photo by Patricia Brigham



Photo by Patricia Brigham



Photo by Patricia Brigham

Welcome Our New Board Secretary – Mary Ashby

by Cathleen Springer

Mary Ashby joined PWA after she and her husband, Bob, moved to Petaluma to be closer to their grandson. A lifelong volunteer, she has supported children at Oakland's Children's Hospital, assisted at the Oakland Zoo, and spent 15 years at Sulphur Creek Nature Center caring for wildlife, teaching school programs, and editing publications. Most recently, she volunteered at the CNPS Native Plant Nursery in Berkeley.

At PWA, Mary has worked with the Restoration and Maintenance Team (a task that she especially enjoys), assisted with NestWatch monitoring, and helped organize our Google Drive archives. Beginning in October, she brings her dedication and organizational skills to her new role as Board Secretary. We're delighted to have her on the leadership team!





Ellis Creek Rookery Update

by Linda Sheppard

After learning that one of the three nesting eucalyptus trees at Ellis Creek Water Recycling Plant had blown down, monitors Len Nelson and Linda Sheppard worried that the great blue herons, great egrets and double crested cormorants would find another nesting location. To our surprise, these resilient creatures just cozied up and nested a bit closer together.

The chart below shows numbers from the last three years. Findings are reported to the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory.

YEAR	SPECIES	NESTS	FLEDGLINGS
3/23/23-6/8/23	GBHE	13	16
	GREG	17	25
	DCCO	29	Dnc
3/2/24-8/4/24	GBHE	14	24
	GBEG	24	33
	DCCO	31	56
3/9/25-8/3/25	GBHE	13	17
	GBEG	17	31
	DCCO	27	45
dnc-did not count			

Monitoring at Ellis Creek happens in the private area of the facility. PWA is exceptionally grateful for the administration and the staff for their support and cooperation.

Nest Box Monitoring Season Summary

by Linda Sheppard

PWA bluebird and tree swallow nestbox monitors had quite the season. Monitoring began in late March with checking each box to assure it was clean and ready for the birds to begin nesting. Soon thereafter the birds began to arrive and compete for the boxes, sometimes quite aggressively. Weekly monitoring offered a close-up look at the life cycle of these amazing birds. This year brought some odd weather challenges with lots of cool weather and wind. Not ideal when you are foraging for insects to feed your hungry brood. Tree swallows catch their prey in the air. Cold and windy days discourage flying insects, so their prey is unavailable. The bluebirds catch most of their prey on the ground. Cool windy days do not affect them as much.

Monitors witnessed predation of some nests. At Tolay one day, hikers alerted monitors Ray Cendana and Len Nelson to a weasel emerging from one of the nest boxes. Upon inspection, Len and Ray found the baby birds had been killed in the box. Fortunately for the birds, weasels are a rare sighting, while weasel sightings for people can be a cool experience.

Ray and Len also found a field mouse in one of the boxes. Ray caught this amazing shot as Len opened the box. Even mice need a cozy home, but they are removed if the nest isn't finished and there is no litter present.

Monitors report findings to Cornell's NestWatch citizen science project. We reported 101 nesting attempts in our 60 boxes, 433 eggs laid, 266 fledglings. Tree swallows were more abundant than bluebirds, as there were 81 swallows and only 18 bluebird nesting attempts.

Monitors celebrated our season with a luncheon at Mary's Pizza. A huge thank you for all the hard work goes to Mary Ashby, Ray Cendana, Linda Chute, David Donnefield, Wendy Johnson, Gary Liarmore, Nancy Merrick, Sheryl Nadeau, Len Nelson, Stephanie Sanchez, Ted Shultz, Cathleen Springer, and Robert Tucker.

We need monitors for next season. If you are interested in engaging in this close up, educational, exciting experience with nature, contact Linda Sheppard, lsheppard@petalumawetlands.org. Volunteer Training, which commences on Thursday, January 8, 2026, is a prerequisite.

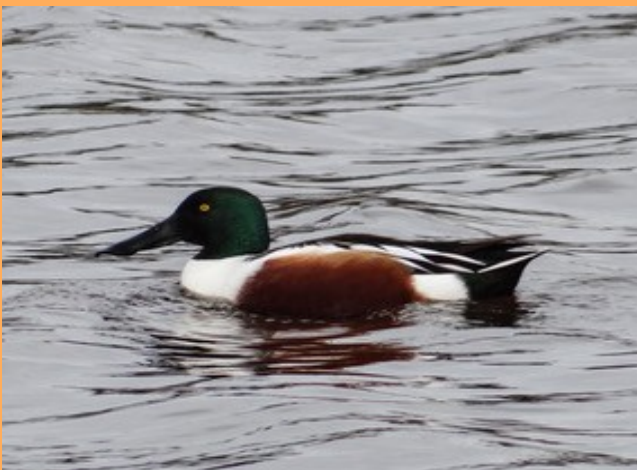


Photo by Len Nelson



Photo by Len Nelson

Fall & Winter Bird Migration at Shollenberger Park & Ellis Creek

by Len Nelson

Fall & Winter Bird Migration at Shollenberger Park & Ellis Creek

October and November are prime migration months at our local wetlands. As days shorten and temperatures drop, thousands of birds arrive to rest, feed, or spend the winter.

What's happening now (Oct–Nov 2025):

- Shorebirds: Sandpipers, plovers, and dowitchers are easy to spot on exposed mudflats.
- Waterfowl: Northern shovelers, pintail, teal, and wigeon are returning to ponds at Ellis Creek, the central pond at Shollenberger and the broader tidal marsh area.
- Raptors: Harriers, kites, hawks and the occasional peregrine patrol the wetlands.
- Songbirds: White- and golden-crowned sparrows are back, along with yellow-rumped warblers.

Winter into early 2026:

Geese and ducks settle in large numbers, bufflehead, coots and ruddy ducks appear on deeper ponds, and secretive rails call from the cattails. On clear days, you may even hear cackling geese, passing overhead.

Best viewing tips:

- Check Shollenberger's north and west overlooks or the ponds at Ellis Creek.
- Early mornings and low-to-mid tides bring the most activity.
- Please stay on trails, keep dogs leashed, and give resting birds space.

PWA volunteers lead seasonal bird walks—watch for announcements in this newsletter. If you'd like to get more involved, our next Volunteer Training begins in January.

For details, visit petalumawetlands.org



Photo by Patricia Brigham

PWA Library and Archives Organized

by Genoa Provencio

Two PWA cabinets at the Petaluma Community Center are now organized for the lending library and historical document storage.

Cabinet 1 contains historical articles and documents, educational materials for teacher and volunteer training—including environmental books, curriculum binders, classroom pocket guides and manuals, presentation photos, and laminated field guides.

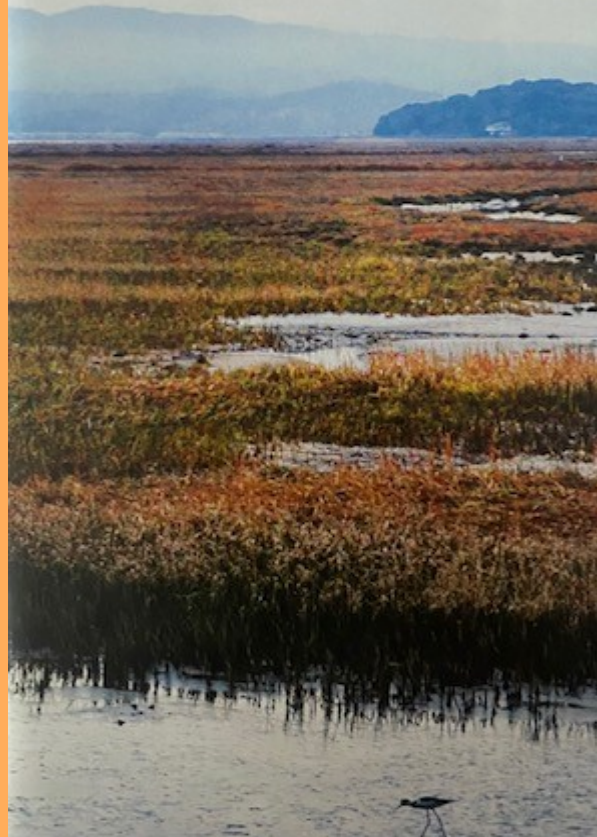
Cabinet 2 holds more than 130 books, magazines, and digital media available for loan.

Access to either cabinet is provided by front desk staff, who will unlock the cabinets upon request. Please notify staff when you're finished so they can lock them again.

A turquoise clipboard is available to record library checkouts and returns, as well as a reference catalog binder with updated spreadsheets.

WELCOME TO THE BAYLANDS!

SAN PABLO BAY NATIONAL
WILDLIFE REFUGE



Petaluma Wetlands Alliance and Sonoma Land Trust Partner for Baylands Outing

by Cathleen Springer

On Saturday, October 18, Cathleen Springer of Petaluma Wetlands Alliance (PWA) and Ingrid Stearns, Public Programs Manager for Sonoma Land Trust (SLT), co-planned and coordinated a guided outing at the Baylands, off Highway 37. The weather could not have been more agreeable for the morning walk enjoyed by an enthusiastic group of PWA members, along with Ingrid and SLT interns Iris and Rae.

PWA participants included: Linda Chute and her husband Jim, Jerry Pozo, Jan and Steve Miyano, Mary Ashby, Wendy Johnson, Kathy Askin, Sheryl Nadeau, Cindy Mathiesen, Gail Abrams, Genoa Provencio, John Shribbs, David Donnenfield, Alan Butler, Christyne Davidian, Cynthia and John

Rathkey, and Cathleen Springer. During the walk, Ingrid described how SLT has reclaimed wetlands at the Baylands and Dickson Ranch through a variety of restoration efforts. These include land acquisition, levee breaching to restore tidal flow, construction of new levees and pumps for water management, and planting of native vegetation. Among their major achievements are the breaching of a levee to create a 1,000-acre tidal wetland at Dickson Ranch, the installation of water management systems at Sears Point, and the protection of properties such as Camp 5 Ranch for future restoration.

There's more to look forward to: Cathleen and Ingrid are now in early discussion about another partnership — a community outing in winter 2026, during which PWA will serve as the guide for a migratory bird walk and habitat stewardship talk at Shollenberger Park. The collaborative event will be open to both PWA members and SLT's broad membership.



Photo by Cathleen Springer



Photo by Cathleen Springer



Photo by Cathleen Springer



Photo by Cathleen Springer



Photo by Roger Elliott

Upcoming 2026 Exhibition: Tide and Time: An Artful Exploration of Petaluma's Wetlands

by Cathleen Springer

Plans are underway for an exciting 2026 exhibition at the Petaluma Historical Library & Museum, with the working title Tide and Time: An Artful Exploration of Petaluma's Wetlands. The exhibition will explore the beauty, history, and ecology of the Petaluma River and its wetlands through art, science, and storytelling.

The project is a collaboration between our museum, the Petaluma Wetlands Alliance (PWA), and author/artist Alan Butler, whose book *The Petaluma River: A Sketch Journal and Brief Historical Overview* has inspired much of the concept. Under the guidance of Museum Director Stacey Atchley, PWA representatives Cathleen Springer and John Shribbs are contributing ideas and materials to ensure that the exhibition reflects PWA's mission of education, stewardship, and long-term care of our local wetlands.

Planned displays may include interpretive signage, historical context, and artwork illustrating both the natural and human influences that continue to shape the Petaluma landscape. The show is scheduled for late spring 2026, offering our community an engaging look at the story of our wetlands—past, present, and future.

Stay tuned for updates as the exhibition plans take shape.

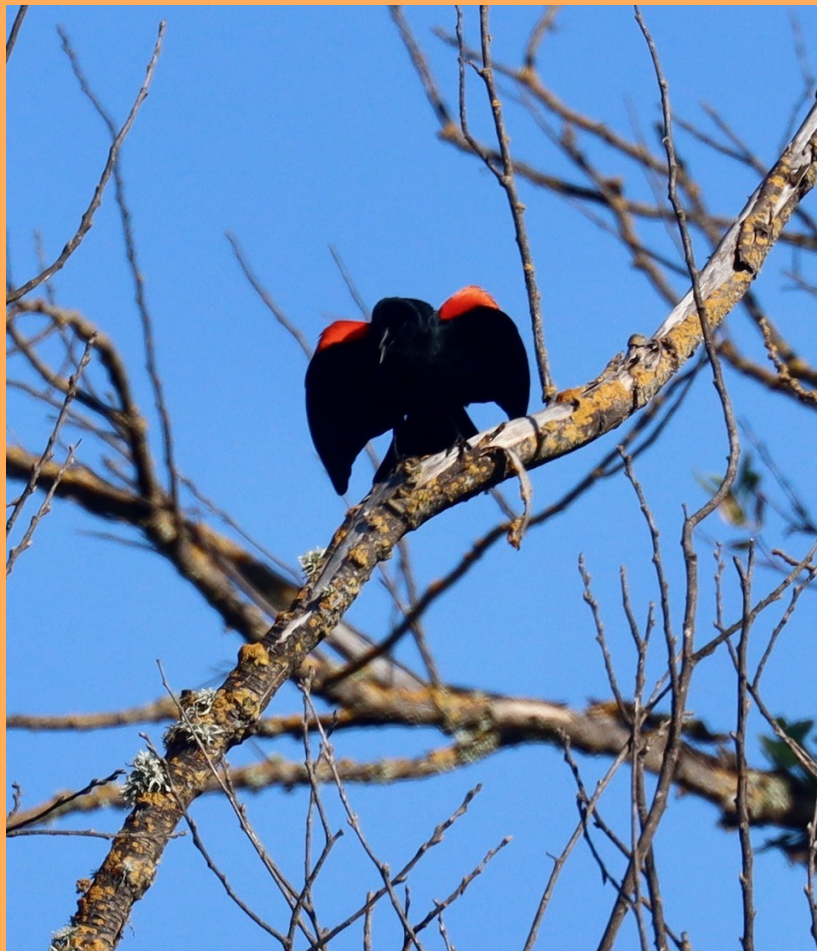


Photo by Elaine Strong

Shop PWA's Online Store This Holiday Season

New Items Just Added!

By Cathleen Springer

Support Petaluma Wetlands Alliance as you shop this holiday season. Every purchase from our online store helps fund PWA's education programs, habitat restoration, bird research, and community outreach.

Our new logo items are perfect for gift-giving—or treating yourself:

40 oz stainless steel travel mug with handle

Cotton bucket hats in beige or blue

Red knit beanie

Red visor

High-end Columbia unisex jacket in gray

All items, the new and the tried and true, feature the distinctive PWA logo. Your purchase directly supports our mission to protect and preserve the Petaluma Wetlands.

Visit our store today and show your support:

<https://petalumawetlands.org/shop>



Photo by Edie Van Hoose

SAVE THE DATE
PWA HOLIDAY PARTY on
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4, 5:30p
LUCCHESI COMMUNITY CENTER
RSVP: to Evite you've received or to:
jfigone@petalumawetlands.org

*Some old-fashioned things like fresh air and sunshine
are hard to beat.*

--Laura Ingalls Wilder

*You cannot get through a single day without having an
Impact on the world around you. What you do makes a
difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference
you want to make.*

--Jane Goodall