

Petaluma Wetlands Alliance

March Newsletter 2026



Birds at Sunset

photo by Patricia Brigham

Message from the President

by Mary Kadri

Hello fellow wetlanders,

We're off to a running start in 2026!

First, we're making progress on the Night Sky project to reduce the amount of light from adjacent buildings that is currently projecting excessive light into Shollenberger. David Donnenfield and Stephanie Sanchez are working with Mike Brown Electric, who attended a meeting with Point Blue and other lessees. The MB electrician advised as to what would be necessary to bring their lighting into Night Sky compliance, and he also walked the Shollenberger path with David to see the other perimeter lights. The electrician will be writing up a proposal for the Point Blue, et al. PWA's role is as advocate and facilitator. Once this building is brought into compliance, we will leverage that to communicate with the owner group of the building to the right of the Shollenberger entrance, which is especially important due to the light given off by that building.

Toward improvement of the water quality of the Petaluma River, PWA is now engaged in strategies to lift the river out of its "impaired" status. Brynn O'Donnell, a PWA member and a Regional Conservation District Board member, is working with Keith White, John Shribbs, and me to identify current measures and points of leverage. Perhaps highlighting agricultural and dairy farms in the watershed that are using best practices could be a way of educating other farms in the watershed. We are working with City and County government, the regional Water Board, and other nonprofits.

Floating solar panels have been installed over a large oxidation pond at ECWRF (on a part of the facility that is not open to the public.) Because PWA has maintained a good relationship with the ECWRF's Deputy Director of Environmental Services, Steve Worrell, he mentioned to me that a researcher from UC Davis was studying the effect of the floating panels on bird behavior. We invited this researcher, Elliott Steele, PhD., to come to a Board meeting and tell us about his research. Subsequently, we decided to donate \$1,000 to his research at ECWRF. In a recent podcast, Elliott talks about his research, and kindly mentioned PWA as a partner. If you want to listen, here is the link to take you to the February 11, 2026, Clean Energy Today podcast:

[How Does Floating Solar Affect... - Clean Energy Today - Apple Podcasts](#)

And yes, we are working with Steve to fix the part of the path at ECWRF that floods every rainy season. He also got a project into the City queue to create a legal shortcut with a stairway or ramp where they have attempted to stop people from eroding the hill there by erecting the wooden fence. We convinced Steve that we think this is a more effective solution. Maybe by next rainy season? The path from Shollenberger to the ECWRF pathways and ponds is also underwater in several parts, and we asked that he add that to the project list.

A 10-year study of the Pacific Flyway by Point Blue was written up in SF Gate. Notably our beloved Avocets experienced the greatest decline of 10% or 40,000 birds.

Nesting season has officially begun! Please stay on the paths and gently advise others to do the same. We will now need to have an expert birder inspect areas prior to mowing, pulling, or weed whacking.

And finally, I'm very happy to report that we had 18 new volunteer/docents go through our training this year, and ten are interested in doing the school program! They are a great group of individuals, and will be of immense help to us in beefing up our active roster!

P.S. A couple of our superstars, Joanne Figone and Mary Ashby, are currently laid low by health issues. I know that you join me in wishing them a recovery to full health in the near future.



Gray's Marsh

photo by Mary Kadri

This and That From Your Editor

by Cathleen Springer

Even with a January that felt like it lasted for 90 days, can it be March 2026 already? My calendar says it is, so I'll go with that.

This month's newsletter is chock-full of things we've done, things we plan to do, as well as updates on works in progress. To kick off the amazing reports from PWA project leaders, here are a few bits of information to warm you up:

Upcoming Museum Exhibition

The Petaluma Wetlands Alliance is pleased to collaborate on *Time & Tide: An Artful Exploration of Petaluma's Wetlands*, a juried multidisciplinary

exhibition which will be on view April 9 through June 7, 2026, at the Petaluma Historical Library & Museum (20 Fourth Street). Blending art, science, and history, the exhibition will explore the rich story of the Petaluma River watershed—past, present, and future. Through interpretive panels and compelling artwork, visitors will gain a deeper understanding of how our wetlands sustain wildlife, support our community, and require ongoing stewardship.

Throughout the exhibition run, the Museum will host guest speakers, and PWA plans to offer posted bird walks and additional public presentations to further engage the community. Please mark your calendars.

Community Outreach

Following recent conversations between Cathleen Springer and Community Programs Coordinators Amelia Martinez and Joanna Dimas, volunteers from Redwood Credit Union will be joining John Shribbs and PWA's Maintenance and Restoration crew for a post-winter marsh cleanup. We are grateful for this community partnership and the extra hands to help care for our wetlands after the winter season. The cleanup date will be announced soon.

Sponsorship Outreach

We are delighted to share that two of our newly graduated Petaluma Wetlands Alliance volunteers, Ray Cendana and John Rathkey, have stepped forward to take on an important new role for our organization.

Ray and John will be working together to identify potential sponsors whose values align with PWA's mission of wetlands stewardship, education, and habitat restoration. They will also help prepare and submit sponsorship requests on behalf of our nonprofit, building relationships that strengthen our programs and expand our impact.

Sponsorship support plays a vital role in sustaining our third-grade education program, public bird walks, habitat restoration efforts, and special events. By reaching out to local businesses and community partners, Ray and John are helping ensure that PWA continues to grow and serve the Petaluma community.

We are grateful for their initiative, energy, and commitment—and we look forward to the connections and opportunities their work will create.

SAVE THE DATE

Petaluma Wetlands Alliance members will soon receive a March sign-up email announcing a special PWA membership tour of the Point Blue Conservation Science headquarters adjacent to Shollenberger Park. The tour will take place on Earth Day, Wednesday, April 22, from 10:30 a.m. to noon, and will be led by Lishka Arata, Point Blue's Communications Manager. This behind-the-scenes

visit offers a wonderful opportunity to learn more about the important conservation science happening right in our wetlands backyard. Space is limited to 20 PWA members, so watch for the March email and be ready to reserve your spot.

Annual Holiday Party

by Cathleen Springer

The December 4, 2025, Holiday Party that PWA hosted was a joyful and well-attended gathering that brought together members, volunteers, and friends to celebrate another year of stewardship and community connection. It was a heartwarming evening that captured the spirit of PWA -- dedicated, welcoming, and united in caring for our wetlands and for one another.

Appreciation goes to Stephanie Sanchez and Mary Kadri for the abundant spread of eats and treats that was so beautifully presented, as well as to all who assisted in setup and cleanup.



Mary Kadri



Genoa Provencio and John Shribbs



Eats and Treats



PWA Party People



PWA Party People

2026 Volunteer Training

by Anne K. Taylor

Petaluma Wetlands Alliance now has 18 newly trained volunteers who are getting involved in many aspects of our program. The training occurred every Thursday morning from January 8 to February 5. The indoor sessions were held at the Petaluma Community Center (Lucchesi) and the outdoor session at Shollenberger Park.

The training included:

- 1) After an introduction to wetlands in general and the Petaluma wetlands specifically, there was an overview of the PWA programs: wetlands restoration and maintenance, Saturday bird walks, NestWatch research, and the 3rd grade School Program.
- 2) A Shollenberger Park nature walk.
- 3) The trainees experienced the 3rd grade classroom activities.
- 4) Trainees also participated in the 3rd grade Shollenberger Park activities.
- 5) New volunteer graduation: Each new volunteer received a name badge and hat from PWA. Drew Halter, Director of Parks and Recreation, thanked PWA and presented certificates to the new volunteers, after which the volunteers signed up for their future volunteering activities.

Congratulations to our 2026 Volunteer Training Grads:

Mary Ashby, Kathy Askin, Ray Cendana, Janet Clover, Cindy Gallagher, Anthony Gilbert, Tim Hanlon, Rose Keaton, Janis Lynne, Malati Murthy, Lisa Parreira, Sara Pimental, John Rathkey, Gail Reynolds, Dede Sabbag, Lydia Schindler, Dorothy Suarez, and Michael Tange.



2026 Docent Trainees at Shollenberger
photo by Mary Ashby



PWA Volunteer Grads
photo by Cathleen Springer

Notes from the PWA School Program

by Gail Abrams

I am writing this Feb 23, the first day of PWA's 2026 Wetlands for 3rd Grade program. Seventeen teachers and 397 students from 11 different schools in Petaluma have enrolled.

Twenty-nine volunteer docents, including nine newly-trained volunteers will work together to lead each class through eight different learning activities. In addition, there are two leader roles, one for the classroom and one for the park, to make sure everyone gets to the right place on the right day with the right lesson plan and learning materials. Scheduling is truly a labor of love. At least it's an interesting puzzle.

What a great first day! Excited hands in the air, students happy to share what they know and to learn more. Just a few comments from today's closing circle:

I thought all feathers were alike. Today I learned about three different types of feathers!

Looking at different beaks helped us figure out what the birds eat.

We're lucky to live in Petaluma! Our wetlands clean our water for us.



Gail Abrams, PWA School Program Chair

photo by Malati Murthy



School Program



School Program

Caring for Our Tree Swallows: A Labor of Love

by Len Nelson and Cathleen Springer

For many years, approximately 50 tree swallow/bluebird houses have been part of the landscape at Rooster Run Golf Course in Petaluma. Originally installed by Boy Scout troops, these houses have served our feathered friends well. Over time, however, they no longer met the higher standards we now use for the tree swallow nest boxes we place throughout our local wetlands.

We are happy to share that all of these houses have now been replaced with new, high-quality structures—each nest box carefully constructed by dedicated, long-time PWA member Len Nelson. **Thank you, Len!** The final 15 were recently installed. Much to Len's relief, the job is now complete.

A special thank you also goes to **Sheryl Nadeau**, who faithfully monitors these houses and keeps watch over the well-being of their tiny residents. We also appreciate the Rooster Run staff who remove the nest boxes each year for cleaning and then reinstall them in late February.

In addition to the 50 houses at Rooster Run, we maintain 60 tree swallow nest boxes at Shollenberger, Ellis Creek, and Tolay. That brings our total to 110 homes -- each one providing much needed shelter for our local and visiting tree swallows.

This ongoing effort reflects our shared commitment to protecting wildlife and nurturing the natural beauty of our wetlands.

Len with New Nest Boxes



Rookery Opens for Business

by Linda Sheppard

The first required visit to the Ellis Creek Water Recycling Facility heron and egret rookery was February 7, 2026. SF Bay Bird Observatory required this date for Great Blue Herons only. Egrets typically don't show up until later in the spring. In 2025, the first nesting herons were seen in early March.

Monitors Len Nelson and Linda Sheppard did not expect to see any birds yet, but they were fooled! After watching for about 30 minutes and seeing only a red-tailed hawk and two turkey vultures, they spotted one heron way at the top of one of the nesting trees. A few minutes later they spotted another heron at the top of another tree. The birds flew off at the same time, circled around, and landed in a nesting tree. They didn't land close to one another and no mating behavior was observed, but we are betting this is the first breeding pair of the season to arrive. Stay tuned!



Great Blue Heron at Ellis

photo by Len Nelson

In all things of nature there is something of the marvelous.

—Aristotle—

NestWatch Begins Another Season

by Linda Sheppard

Nine new NestWatch monitors are joining the nine returning monitors as we begin the 2026 nesting season. With the warm and dry days we have had in January and into February, the tree swallows are already swooping around the nest boxes at Shollenberger Park. We hope they don't begin the nesting season too early as they need lots of hatching insects to feed those hungry chicks.

The teams will be monitoring 60 boxes again this year. Thank you to John Shribbs and David Donnenfield for moving two unproductive boxes from the entrance to the park. We relocated these boxes close to the Point Blue entrance, so there are now three nest boxes in a row at this location. You can watch the antics of our beloved tree swallows, or maybe a beautiful bluebird pair, from the Shollenberger trail.



NestWatch Discussion for Trainees
photo by Malati Murthy



Tree Swallows at Nest Box
photo by Len Nelson

Maintenance, Restoration, and More

by John Shribbs

King Tides

Extremely high "king tides" hit Petaluma and the Bay Area on January 2-3 causing the Petaluma River to reach record levels of 8.33 feet at the D Street Bridge. These tides, combined with heavy rain, brought water to the brim of the Turning Basin and created significant flooding in neighboring Marin County coastal areas. The Petaluma River reached 8.33 feet by 1 p.m. on Friday, January 2, breaking the previous 1998 record of 6.4 feet. While the river did not immediately overtop its banks in downtown Petaluma, it came extremely close. The combined effect of the king tide and heavy rain caused minor flooding in the area. The high tides were caused by the alignment of the sun, moon, and Earth, enhanced by a "supermoon" and storm surge.

In Marin County, these high-tide events resulted in water overtopping low-lying areas, impacting Highway 101 and Highway 37. They caused severe, historic inundation near Corte Madera Creek and the Manzanita area.

The boardwalk in Alman Marsh was overtopped.

SFEI Sediment Solutions Project

SFEI shared their report with us with proposals for major sediment and soil movement to protect us from future sea level rise. Read this 66 page report at: <https://www.sfei.org/documents/adobe-creek-baylands-vision>

Erosion from Atmospheric Storms

The oxbow at Adobe Creek near the bridge continues to erode with strong downstream flows from our atmospheric storms. Nov-Dec storms took out another 3+ feet of bank on the Alman Marsh side of the bridge and we expect the trail guide sign for station 4 to be taken out on the next set of storms.

Trail Guide

The 16 Trail Guideposts with QR code plaques at Shollenberger Park were painted (wood cracks filled, primed, and then painted with exterior acrylic paint) and QR codes replaced, as well as new QR codes placed on the PWA kiosk near entrance. Someone put pennies on these posts. Placing pennies (and other coins) on top of posts, headstones, or plaques that contain information is a tradition primarily used to show respect, honor the deceased, and signify that someone has visited. This custom is most commonly associated with military graves, but it has evolved into a general act of remembrance for historical markers, memorials, or informational posts. Would someone like to replace the pennies?

Kiosk bird protection

Tom Benson has been cleaning the kiosks at ECWRF and noticed the top edge of certain kiosks were favorite roosting sites. He decided to discourage bird roosting by adding a loose string above the top edge. This technique seems to be working, so Tom added the string to a second kiosk as a pilot study. Both kiosks have temporary tape, wire rod, and package string. The ECWRF staff will be looking at these over time and come up with a more permanent solution. We want to avoid putting up more hazardous materials like spikes. Should we add a separate perch for the birds that like these spots?

Cleanup at ECWRF

Before the river trail closed at ECWRF, we went out to pick up trash on the south shore of Gray's Marsh. On first outing John went out with his bike and trailer and Mary K., Mary A., Keith, and Rose helped pull out more than 25 gallons of tiny bits and bottles. On a second outing John brought out his truck and a larger team, who filled the truck bed with small and large bits including a lost water ski. We put a full layer into the dumpster. The trail is now closed to protect the endangered bird species', Ridgeway's Rail, nesting area.

Trail maintenance

A Tuesday group goes out regularly now to do maintenance on and near the trails and gathering areas. They remove invasive herbaceous weeds such as Prickly Lettuce, Stinkwort, Poison Hemlock, and Harding Grass. They also trim back bushes, and mow around benches. Another set of volunteers also cleans the 30+ benches around the trail, and cleans the kiosks in both Shollenberger Park and ECWRF. Nesting season means less work can be done Feb-August. Trail maintenance can be done after inspection for bird nesting.

Planting natives

A small team of volunteers did a pilot study after being given 90 super cells of Soft Rush (*Juncus effusus*) by planting them in groups from high to lower elevations. I went out after 2 months and counted 27 survivors, all at higher elevations. 30% survivorship for a first-time pilot study is a good beginning for a fledgling restoration effort. A photo below shows David Donnenfield planting which includes adding a little fertilizer, compost, and water retaining gel with top coating of straw.

Electric equipment

California's Assembly Bill 1346, effective January 1, 2024, prohibits the sale

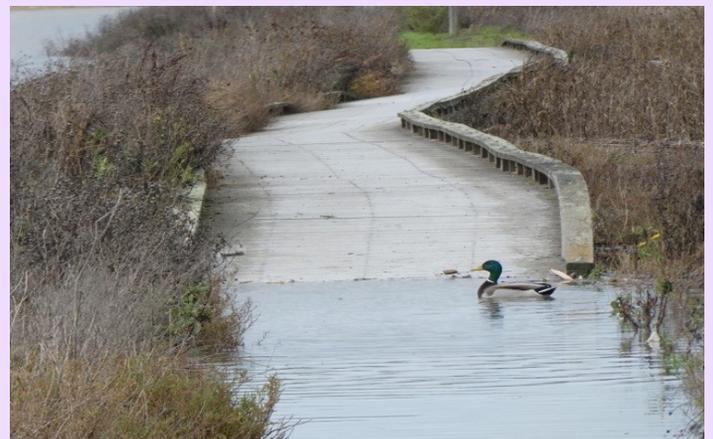
of new gas-powered equipment with small off-road engines (SORE) under 25 horsepower, targeting lawnmowers, leaf blowers, and chainsaws. It requires the California Air Resources Board (CARB) to enforce zero-emission standards, driving a shift to electric alternatives to reduce pollution, though existing equipment can still be used. The law does not ban the active use of existing gas-powered equipment, only the sale of new units. The City, professional landscapers and our crews are forced to transition to electric/battery tools, which often have higher upfront costs, limited battery life, and require new charging infrastructure. The law also prompted the creation of state rebate and incentive programs to help businesses and residents transition to zero-emission equipment.

I purchased a highly rated, battery-operated hedge trimmer, a mini chainsaw, and a weed whacker with metal blade from Wood Ranger with exchangeable batteries, and a new self-propelled 10A battery lawnmower from EGO. They are not expected to be as powerful as the gas models, but are very good for the lighter work we do on trail maintenance.

Our old gas-powered mower did die a slow death and was not worth repairing. We have a similar situation for the gas-powered weed whackers in the shed. The City landscape department is working on this transition also. Citizen advocates have asked for a ban on the use of gas-powered leaf blowers, not just the sale.



2026 King Tide Downtown



Alman Marsh During King Tide



Painted Post with QR Code



PWA Member Kirsten Williams checking out QR code at Shollenberger



Newly Mowed for Easy Access



Maintenance Crew



Planting Native Grasses

Happiness for me is having a right relationship with nature.

—Sangay Rinchen, aka “The Happy Farmer”, Punakha, Bhutan



PWA-SLT Bird Walk

photo by Sheryl Nadeau

PWA Docents Host Bird Walk for Sonoma Land Trust Members

by Cynthia Rathkey

On Saturday, February 21, Petaluma Wetlands Alliance hosted a guided bird walk for our friends at Sonoma Land Trust (SLT). The weather cooperated—cool but comfortable, with no rain—creating ideal conditions for a morning on the wetlands. Our knowledgeable leaders, Cynthia and John Rathkey, Cheryl Nadeau, John Richards, and David Donnenfield, guided the outing.

Eighteen SLT members attended, along with SLT Event Coordinator Ingrid Stearns. Many participants were seasoned birders, while several were new to the pastime—making for a wonderful mix of experience and enthusiasm.

We divided into two groups and set off in opposite directions around the central pond, reconnecting midway to compare sightings. With the tide out, shorebirds were actively feeding in the shallows. Among the highlights were numerous American Avocets, as well as Western and Least Sandpipers. An almost constant chorus of Red-winged Blackbirds and Song Sparrows provided an uplifting soundtrack to the morning.

We were delighted to observe a pair of White-tailed Kites building a nest and engaging in courtship behavior. A pair of Northern Harriers soared overhead in search of prey. The ponds also hosted an impressive variety of ducks, including American Wigeon, Ruddy Ducks, Northern Shovelers, Scaup, Green-winged

Teal, Gadwall, and, of course, Mallards.

All in all, it was a rewarding and enjoyable day of birding—shared in good company and in celebration of our ongoing partnership with Sonoma Land Trust.

PWA Members Tour:

Casa Grande High School Fish Hatchery

by Cathleen Springer

Petaluma Wetlands Alliance members enjoyed two engaging tours of the United Anglers of Casa Grande (UACG) Fish Hatchery on February 24 and 25. Many participants shared that they had long been curious about the important work taking place at this unique, state-of-the-art, student-run facility, and that they were delighted to finally see it firsthand.

Senior students Eden Sheeks and Grace Tidwell, UACG Community Educators, led the tours with knowledge, enthusiasm, and approachability. They offered a clear look at how Casa Grande High School Students are actively involved in capturing, raising and caring for, and releasing steelhead trout and salmon as part of local watershed restoration efforts in Adobe and Lynch Creeks.

The experience left our members impressed and inspired by the dedication of these young environmental stewards and the meaningful role they play in supporting the health of our regional waterways.

Photos by Cathleen Springer and Malati Murthy.





UACG Hatchery Students at Lynch Creek

The earth does not belong to us; we belong to the earth.

--Chief Seattle



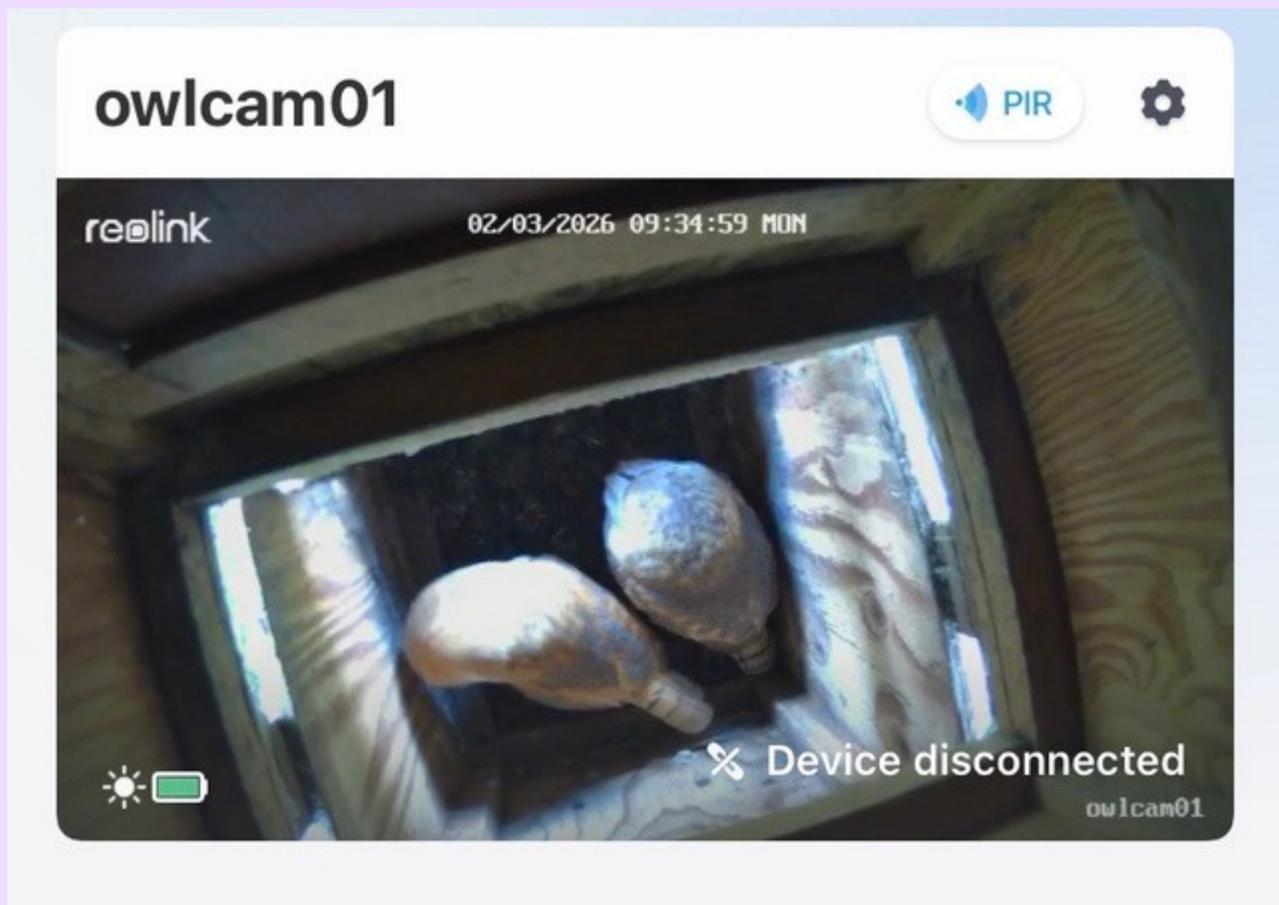
Sunrise Bird Count Group-Shollenberger



Gadwall
photo by Malati Murthy



Red-Shouldered Hawk
photo by Patricia Brigham



OWLCAM UPDATE

by Cathleen Springer

The owlcam in the Ellis Creek eucalyptus grove owl box has gone offline again. As nesting season is underway, we will not be able to reset the camera until the fall of 2026. In the meantime, for your viewing pleasure, here is a photo we captured of the new male and female residents of the nest box.

***There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature,
the assurance that dawn comes after night
and spring comes after winter.***

--Rachel Carson