



## **PETALUMA WETLANDS ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER**

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**Providing Education in and Stewardship of Petaluma's Public Wetlands.**

### **Autumn 2005**

#### **Recent and Upcoming Events**

**by Gerald Moore, Chairman**

##### **Shollenberger Park Bird Surveys**

On September 17 we performed the last of our weekly bird surveys, which have been happening weekly for one year. During that time we observed 149 species and counted over 115,000 individuals (a few of them 52 times). The five team leaders and many of the participants enjoyed the surveys so much they decided to continue surveying on a monthly basis. We will survey on a weekend near the middle of each month starting on October 16. If you are interested in helping, please call Bob Dyer at 763-2934.

##### **September PWA Public Meeting**

At our September public meeting, PWA recognized the hard work of our five bird survey team leaders. We also belatedly awarded city-generated diplomas to our new-docent class of October 2004. The main speaker of the evening was Ellie Cohen, executive director of PRBO Conservation Science. Ellie told us about the history and mission of PRBO (formerly Point Reyes Bird Observatory). She explained their operating philosophy of using long-term bird surveys to monitor the health of ecosystems to assist their many partnering organizations in making responsible decisions about conservation and habitat management issues. We also discussed partnering among PRBO, PWA, and the Petaluma community. PRBO will move into their new national headquarters at Shollenberger Park next April. We are all very excited to have them at our wetlands and look forward to working with their scientists on public education programs and wetlands stewardship issues.

##### **Next PWA Public Meeting: November 9, 2005**

Our next public meeting will be on 9 November 9, 7:00 p.m., at Lucchesi Community Center. PRBO biologist Leonard Liu will talk about birds in the Petaluma Marsh. Please mark your calendar for this excellent talk.

##### **Gray's Ranch Project Starts**

Finally, after seventeen years of talk and planning, the new wastewater treatment plant construction has started. In the first days of October, heavy equipment arrived on the site and construction is now in full swing.

Some of it can be observed from the south trail at Shollenberger Park. A ground-breaking ceremony was held on October 17. The project should be finished by early 2009. The official name of the new site is now the “Ellis Creek Water Recycling Facility.” PWA strongly urges that two words be added to that title to reflect the mission of the entire 270 acres. We encourage modifying the title to “Ellis Creek Water Recycling Facility and Wildlife Sanctuary.” This name would be in keeping with the name of the Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary, which is the model on which our project is based. We encourage everyone who supports the public wetlands to ask the city to add the words “and Wildlife Sanctuary” to the site name.

### **Public Walks at Shollenberger Park**

1. In October we started our **monthly nature walks for the public** at Shollenberger Park. These are scheduled for the second Saturday of each month, starting at 9:00 a.m., from October to June. The walks last about two hours and begin at kiosk #1, just above the parking lot. Rain cancels. Call 763-2934 for details.
2. On November 19 we will start **monthly nature walks focused on children, second grade and up, and their parents**. These walks will occur on the third Saturday of each month and run through the month of May. We will start at 9:00 a.m. from kiosk #1, but rain will cancel. The walks will be one to two hours long, depending on the ages of the children. Call 763-3577 for details.

**New Web master for our Web site:** [www.petalumawetlandspark.org](http://www.petalumawetlandspark.org)

In October Carlos Chavez took over as our new Web master and he’s doing an excellent job. We will always be indebted to Ron Storey who created this excellent site in April 2002 and maintained it until this October. Ron also taught us a great deal about being responsible Web site owners.

### **New Docents in Training**

**by Sharon Mansfield**

A five-week training course for new docents is currently being conducted at Lucchesi Park on Saturday mornings. Our eight docents-in-training bring new background, knowledge, and excitement to the Petaluma Wetlands program. Gerald Moore, Bob Dyer, and other current docents have provided information about the biology, plants and animals (particularly birds), history, and future plans of the Petaluma Wetlands. The course will be completed by the end of October with training the docents to conduct hands-on activities in elementary classrooms and at Shollenberger Park.

Great emphasis has been placed on educating the public, particularly third-grade students, about our Petaluma watershed and wetlands and the dependence of plants and animals on each other in specialized habitats. The hands-on activities in the classroom and at the park are intended to gently lead students into the excitement of the beautiful wetlands in their community. Docents are trained to create an atmosphere of wonder and discovery so that children develop a sense of their own place in this natural wonderland. We hope they leave Shollenberger Park with a desire to return again and again. After all, it’s nature in their own backyard. The future of wetlands is in the hands of our children.

*Listen carefully; nothing children say is unimportant; do not let their words run by unnoticed. One must carefully establish a situation which lends itself for learning . . . and the child will do the rest. You may have planted the seed—but you must wait for the response. (Docent Training 2005)*

## **Casa Grande Native Plant Nursery**

**by John Shribbs**

We are about to complete the construction of a native plant nursery at Casa Grande High School. Students from Sonoma Mountain High School will be finishing the irrigation and plant media storage bin. The educational goals of this program are to

- connect students to the natural environment
- give students hands-on learning experiences that lead to career pathways
- bring students into contact with community, business, and government members
- incorporate real-life experiences into the classroom curriculum
- connect theories and information learned from text formats with actualities
- Think Global, Act Local!

Our mission is to bring together Casa Grande High School and Sonoma Mountain High School students and community volunteers to collect seeds and grow native plants for restoration of the Petaluma River Watershed including wetland, riparian, and upland habitats. The teachers involved with the project are John Shribbs and Sten Mander from Casa Grande HS and Danny Bever and Lois Santero from Sonoma Mountain HS.

We have received much help from our partners: Bay Institute, Sonoma Ecology Center, Circuit Rider, Golden Gate National Recreation Area, Milo Baker Native Plant Society, Petaluma Wetlands Alliance, the City of Petaluma, and the Sonoma County Water Agency (SCWA). We have received grants from several sources and could not run this program without this help. The initial grant for \$14,500 came from the City of Petaluma, and we have also been supported with \$1,000 grants from Beyond Petroleum (BP Solar) and Petaluma Education Foundation. We are currently working with SCWA in a cooperative agreement that will lead to the finishing of Phase I construction (greenhouse, shade house, and media bin), start the first year of operation (growing media and containers), and provide funding for a weekend and summer maintenance worker, teacher training, student training and field trips, field study, and restoration tools. In return for this \$18,000 investment, SCWA will receive:

- vegetation and water survey of Petaluma creeks
- 1,000 trees grown for SCWA over three years
- cooperative work on the Petaluma Watershed

Our vision beyond current funding includes expansion of operations to grow more plants, a demonstration garden, and GIS, PDA, and WIMS Database System. Anyone who is interested in helping collect seed, grow plants in the shade and green houses, and work with high school students to restore wetlands should contact John Shribbs, Casa Grande High School, 333 Casa Grande Avenue, Petaluma CA 94954, 707-778-4677. We will be working with the Petaluma Wetlands to help restore Shollenberger Park and adjoining wetlands.