

Sedgwick Field Notes

Occasional Ramblings for Volunteers and Friends of the Sedgwick Reserve

June 2009

The Outdoor Classroom and the First Ever Nature Olympics Final Visit of the Outdoor Classroom

by Sue Eisaguirre

On May 27th, the last Outdoor Classroom field trip for this school year, Ontiveros and Los Olivos Schools' fourth graders gathered for the first ever "Sedgwick Reserve Nature Game Olympics." Teams, consisting of students from both schools, competed in four challenges: Orienteering; Flora, Fauna, Rock and Chumash-uses Identification; Insect and Reptile Identification; and Science Vocabulary. In addition to the Olympics, students had time to see their natural history pages on display in the studio; enjoy a special falcon presentation and demonstration; and show their appreciation for classmates, teachers and docents at the awards ceremony.

Parents were invited and encouraged to come. They

were treated to a private hike in the morning, returning in time to see part of the Olympic Challenges, have lunch with their child, and enjoy the presentations.

Creating this new program has been exciting and very rewarding. It took many volunteer hours from a group of extremely dedicated people. Through this generosity of time and talents, the fortunate students who participated in the Outdoor Classroom program had the opportunity to learn in the *ultimate* outdoor classroom—the Sedgwick Reserve.



Early morning planning session.



Kate and Nick MC'd the Science Vocabulary Challenge.



Science Vocabulary Challenge contestants.



Students from Ontiveros and Los Olivos discuss observations during the Insect and Reptile Identification Challenge.



Vance gives instructions for the Orienteering Challenge.



Laura provides some assistance in compass reading.



Students working together at the Flora, Fauna, Rock and Chumash uses Identification Challenge.



Sue Swarbrick and Sue Eisaquirre review the answer sheets to the challenge questions.



Students and volunteers were treated to a falconry demonstration by Scott Timmons.



Mrs. Baublits and Mrs. Morris receiving their classroom binders and gifts from Kate and Sue.



The end to another great day at the Reserve.

Director's Page

By Kate McCurdy

It's all about the home this season. Being glad you still have one, for those living in the vicinity of the frightening Jesu-sita Fire in Santa Barbara; reusing old ones, like the red-shouldered hawks nesting in the Valley Oak just south of the Tipton Meeting House (from which three youngsters fledged recently); and welcoming new ones, as is the case with Barn Owls seen investigating the nesting boxes we put up over the winter, the new Director's residence currently being built in northern California, and a large, gold fish that is reportedly living in the pond (don't be koi, who put it there?!). The Reserve is home to many things beyond its remarkable flora and fauna. It is where ecological interests reside, we center ourselves spiritually and intellectually, and friendships dwell. Happy spring, Sedgwickians.



Site of new caretaker's cottage.



Model home of new caretaker's cottage on display at Xontah factory

A ground-breaking ceremony for the planned caretaker's cottage was held on March 19th. Michael Finney and Lisa Macker from the Land Trust for Santa Barbara County, Bill Murdoch and Sue Swarbrick from the UCSB Natural Reserve System, and Sedgwick Manager Kate McCurdy honored Jack and Judy Stapelmann for their generous sponsorship of the project. The house, shown above at the Xontah factory in Willow Creek, California, should be ready for occupation in late 2009. People have been asking what will happen to the main ranch house once I move into the caretaker's cottage. The long-term goal for the house is to serve as a research center for visiting scientists once electrical and septic systems can be upgraded.



Bill Murdoch, Lisa Macker, Judy and Jack Stapelmann, Kate McCurdy, and Michael Finney at groundbreaking ceremony

There are still quite a few active research projects underway but many will wind down as we head into the hot, dry summer months. Washington University researcher, John Orrock, will be here in May and June to work on his investigation into native consumers and their effects on native and exotic plant species. UCSB researchers, Carla D'Antonio, Claudia Tyler, Nicole Molinari and Karen Stahlheber, continue their wide-reaching grassland and oak investigations. Jonathon Levine's lab continues their fastidious experiment on ecological competition on the reserve's serpentine terraces. Claudia Boot and Sean Schaeffer from UCSB will be taking soil core samples throughout the dry season as part of Josh Schimel's work on summer biogeochemistry of grassland soils.

As a reminder, Sedgwick is a potentially dangerous place in the summer. Employees have to be especially vigilant when using power tools and in vehicles when conditions are dry. The roads have been well mowed and bladed this season, but hot tailpipes still pose a threat when vehicles are taken into tall vegetation (when parking, turning around, etc.). Docents may use the Reserve during summer months, but please check in at the office first, and take vehicles only to areas that have been well mowed. It is required that every vehicle on the Reserve carry a fire extinguisher, a shovel and a cell phone, just in case. Nick will be scheduling some evening docent hikes; I encourage you to join us for at least one. It's really beautiful here in the early morning and late afternoon.

Congratulations to the Graduates

Sixteen Docents Graduate



2008-2009 Docent Class – Graduation 2009

Front row: Rahimah Marchi, Jolie Chain, Joan Reden, Suellen Stewart, Sandi Owens, Jan Hubbell, Karin Roser, Sam Burke, Tom Carlyle, Sue Eisaguirre [Outreach Coordinator]. Back row: Kate McCurdy [Reserve Director], Vance Matzke, Derek Marchi, Jim Rohde. Class members not pictured: Bob Baehner, Vickie Baehner, and Cathy Hodgson

On April 26th, we celebrated the graduation of the 2009 Sedgwick Reserve docent class. Class members and docents arrived at 4:00 for a short hike while others arrived as appetizers were being served. Although it was a chilly evening, we enjoyed tri tip grilled to perfection by Bill Thomas and Don Layton complemented by a variety of delicious side dishes proving that the docents are equally skilled in the culinary arena. During dessert, certificates were presented to the class members, champagne bottles were uncorked, and we toasted Sedgwick and the new docents.

Then on to class, we heard briefly from the Cal Poly students who built the telescope mount for their senior project.

Tommaso Treu from the Physics Department at UCSB enlightened us about “Dark Matter and Black Holes over Cosmic Time.” [Tommaso’s presentation is posted on the Sedgwick website.] Jessica Barton and John Martinez from Las Cumbres Observatory Global Telescope Network then spoke about the telescope and the future plans for the Observatory. What a treat it was to actually look through the telescope! Viewing of the night sky continued back at the field station with Chuck McPartlin and Dennis Nord. While it was a long and nippy evening, those who stayed enjoyed a private star gazing show.

Restoration at Sedgwick

By Dennis Nord

Plant more poppies, stalk the elusive mimulus seeds, bag some ceanothus pods before they eject their seeds, pull out that horehound, and make more compost. These are some of the tasks undertaken by the restoration and nursery volunteers at Sedgwick. Every season brings new tasks, and they all lead to greater understanding of the botany of the local flora.

As a hiker, I got to know several wildflowers, the same ones, year after year. In between springs I had no idea where they went or what the entire plant looked like once the bloom was gone. Were they annuals or perennials? I didn’t know. It was the rest of the story that comes from working on restoration projects.

If you go on a seed safari, you learn that next part. What do the seeds look like and how do they disperse? Some seeds

we have to look up to find out what we are looking for and even when we see them we might not be sure if it’s the seed or the left-overs from an insect that got there before us.

When we plant seeds in the nursery, we see how easy or difficult it is to propagate. Some have to be left in the cold before planting, others require other strategies to optimize their germination. Masquerading young plants throw off the budding botanist in the field. Their foliage might be significantly different in the early stages from the adult.

What difference does it make if non-natives take over the habitat? It affects wildlife and what there is for them to eat. It affects erosion and what is left to stop it. This mystery story has many subplots and no certain ending.

Learn the rest of the story. Share it with some students on their field trip. Volunteer for restoration at Sedgwick!

Bird Walks

by Fred Machetanz

A Remarkable Bird

The White-breasted Nuthatch *Sitta carolinensis* is a small, stubby-tailed bird with black cap, white breast, bluish gray back and a long, thin, chisel-shaped bill. A beady black eye contrasts with its white face. In flight, note the white flashes on the tail and chestnut color under-tail. It is often seen rapidly hitching along the larger branches and down the trunks of oaks at Sedgwick. Its long, strong, hind claws allow it to manifest this unique head-downward movement on oak trunks. On occasion it stops and, in frozen display, raises its bill perpendicular to the surface on which it is traveling. Although the bird normally needs no aid in visual identification, its nasal call note often announces its presence in the trees long before it is seen.



The nuthatch's name seems to be a corruption of the word "nuthack". The nuthatch fixes a nut or seed in a crevice of the bark and hacks at it until the shell breaks. I've seen a nuthatch repeatedly take sunflower seeds from a feeder, then fly over to its bark anvil and hammer the seeds open.

Although the nuthatch's flight has been characterized as "weak, with quick wing beats followed by a glide" the bird is agile in the air. On one occasion I saw this bird catch a falling seed that it had been pecking. I could scarcely believe my eyes. The idea of a bird flying down and catching a falling seed with its tweezer-thin bill was truly amazing to me. In the "nothing new under the sun" department several references document the nuthatch's ability to catch falling nuts. It is perhaps of note that birds' cerebellum, the part of the brain important for flight and balance, is large relative to other parts of the brain, when compared to mammals.

White-breasted Nuthatches feed on a wide variety of insects and plant matter including acorns and nuts. . With their chisel-like bills they pry under bark for insects. In addition to foraging in trees they occasionally search leaf litter on the ground for insects and seeds. During fall and winter these birds cache food at various locations, often in deeply furrowed trees and just one item at each location. Females are said to cache more than males.

Apparently monogamous, pairs remain together from the time they establish a territory until one of the pair disappears. The female builds a nest in a natural cavity or old woodpecker hole. The nest is crafted from grass, moss, bark fibers, feathers and hair. Although the monograph on nuthatches in *Birds of North America* (BONA) lists cavity heights all greater than four meters the two nesting nuthatch

cavities which I have seen at Sedgwick have been less than two meters high.

BONA cites two methods which these birds use in defense of their nest. The first is a "distraction display" where the nuthatch spreads its wings, keeps a fixed position and sways back and forth, hoping to startle an invader. The second is the interesting method of "bill sweeping". Here the birds sweep the nest, often inside and out, with a crushed insect. It is believed that the defense secretions of the insect will dissuade predators from entering the nest.

When the female has completed the nest building, 5-8 eggs are laid and incubated by the female for about 12 days. Nestlings are fed mostly insects by both parents. I watched a pair feeding young

a year ago. One parent would arrive with food every two or three minutes. With such care the young are fledged in 14 days.

Having just read a book on albatrosses, I was struck by individual differences. The mother albatross may be gone for eight days and return to her youngster after having flown 2000 miles. In the one case, a meal is an insect and a spider; in the other, a rich cod-liver-oil-like broth derived from squid. What a difference a bird makes.

Although White-breasted Nuthatches breed only once per year, they may start breeding in the first year of life. At this time their numbers in the United States seem to be stable. May you enjoy this topsy-turvy woodland sprite.



Map of the White-breasted Nuthatch's range.

Photo and map are from *Cornell University's Birds of North America* web site: <http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/bna>

Finally, the Long Awaited Telescope has Arrived



The crane was needed to help make the turn near Bone Canyon.



This is not an Apollo landing but the mirror being moved into place.



The telescope is finally off the truck.



Bit of a tight fit.



Final placement.

K-12 Field Trips Winding Down

We not only fulfilled the mission of the Reserve—to contribute to the understanding and wise management of the Earth and its natural systems—but—we also did our part to reconnect children to the outdoors and heal “the nature deficit disorder” of today’s youth. September, 2008 to April, 2009, over 350 students plus instructors and parent volunteers visited Sedgwick as part of an organized K-12 field trip. Add the Outdoor Classroom to that number and we are well over 400. Wow! I know first hand that if school’s transportation budgets had not been cut, we would have had even more students at Sedgwick this school year.

We saw a record number of students visiting the Reserve in the month of May alone; over 225 students with a total of 260 visitors when you include the instructors and parent volunteers. A month this busy is only possible because of the dedication of the docents. My heartfelt thanks to the many docents who volunteer their time and talents to ensure students have the opportunity to experience Sedgwick.

Sedgwick Reserve Event Schedule

June

12 Fri. Docent only hike – 4:00 p.m.

July

11 Sat. Docent only hike - 4:00 p.m.

17 Fri. Docent communication meeting 11:00 a.m.

August

6 Thurs. Docent only Full Moon hike – [time TBA]

September

9 Fri. Docent only hike – 4:00 p.m.

Sedgwick Reserve Docents and Volunteers Visit Other UC Reserves

Stunt Ranch, Santa Monica

On February 27th, seven docents along with Sedgwick Staff members Sue Eisaguirre and Barbara Huebel visited the UCLA Stunt Ranch Santa Monica Mountains Reserve. Sedgwick docents had the opportunity to observe the Cold Creek docents presenting their Chaparral and Early Chumash Culture program to a Los Angeles fourth grade class. Note: Public and K-12 hikes/programs at Stunt Ranch Reserve are led by the Cold Creek Docents of the Mountains Restoration Trust.



Cold Creek Docent met us at the parking area.



Final look around before we head home.

Santa Cruz Island



Docents hiked the interior canyon on the way to the Field Station



Docents took advantage of the other transportation option offered by Kate McCurdy and Brian Guerrero.



A talk about restoration in the nursery.

Then on March 27th, 25 docents, Kate and six guests hopped on one of the many Island Packers’ ferries and headed to Santa Cruz Island – Prisoners Harbor. The weather was spectacular! With the assistance of Brian Guerrero, docents were able to visit the Santa Cruz Island Reserve field station.