

Sedgwick Field Notes

Occasional Ramblings for Volunteers and Friends of the Sedgwick Reserve

December 2006



Greetings from Kate

After living deep in the granite confines of Yosemite Valley, being island-bound on the Channel Islands, and most recently, living in a mossy dark redwood forest in Humboldt, it has been wonderful moving onto the Sedgwick Reserve. Everything here is big - the property, the views, the night sky, the house. I arrived on December 1st, just as the sun was setting and couldn't help but park at the Anderson Overlook to marvel at the splendor of the central valley receding into shadow while the eastern peaks blushed red. My dog Logan gave two paws of approval at his new home when he saw the first of many brush rabbits crossing the road. I've now had a week to settle into the house and my new post. My impression of Sedgwick's grandeur has been reiterated; everything here IS big - plans for the Reserve's future, the Reserve's potential as a world-class research site, and the enthusiasm of everyone involved in Sedgwick outreach and education. I'm still marveling, not only at the vastness of the Reserve and its programs, but at the dedication and pride the Reserve's volunteers, docents, employees, researchers, and neighbors express about Sedgwick. After a busy first week of meetings, phone conferences and site visits, I realized something else. Mike left big shoes for me to fill. What has been accomplished here in the past seven years has been remarkable given the Reserve's budget (the one thing about Sedgwick that isn't big!). I look forward to promoting the Reserve and the programs and functions that Mike adeptly developed during his tenure. And moving forward with grand plans, ideas and enthusiasm of my own!

Bird Walks

by Fred Machetanz

The Phainopepla, Bird of Mystery

A group of us were standing in front of the Sedgwick Studio the other day when a mellow, slurred “Whurp” announced the arrival of a pair of dark, crested, long-tailed birds in the top of a tall, nearby oak. Since several people had not seen these striking Phainopeplas before, I thought it might be helpful to provide some information about them.

The male, slightly larger than a sparrow, has lustrous black plumage, bright red eyes and a crest which can be raised when the bird is aroused. In flight, a large white wing patch contrasts starkly with the bird’s shiny black appearance. The female is gray, with a crest and exhibits a pale gray wing patch when flying. The Phainopepla’s flight is easy, buoyant and often in a zigzag path as it pursues insects. Its exotic name is derived from the Greek for “shining garment”.

The Phainopeplas’ diet consists primarily of small berries and flying insects. Favoring the berries of the parasite mistletoe, its specially adapted digestive system allows it to eat and process over one thousand mistletoe berries per day (Birds of North America). After the berries pass through the digestive system, the excrement sticks to branches of oaks and other trees where new clumps of mistletoe emerge. It would seem that Phainopeplas and mistletoe need each other. However, Phainopeplas also eat elderberries and



Phainopepla, adult male; Organ Pipe Natl. Monument, AZ



Phainopepla, adult female; Tucson, AZ

the berries of pepper trees. In warm weather, these birds capture insects by making darting sallies high in the air and then gliding back to their perch. Never seen on the ground except when gathering nesting materials, they are usually seen in a topmost location of trees and bushes.

The Phainopepla’s “whurp” call note often signals its presence before the bird is seen. Its song, though seldom heard at Sedgwick, is said to be a soft musical gurgling.

In the coastal area the male Phainopepla builds a shallow nest, either in the fork of an elderberry, sycamore or oak tree, or in a clump of mistletoe. The nest, four to five inches wide, is constructed of small twigs, plant fibers and leaves, all held together by caterpillar and spider silk. The female lays two to four grayish eggs, heavily marked with fine lavender and black dots. Both sexes incubate the eggs for about fourteen days and the young are fledged in nineteen days. Young birds are fed tiny insects and crushed berries.

The Phainopepla is a member of the family of Silky-flycatchers, unrelated to the Tyrant Flycatchers, the family containing our other flycatchers. It is most closely related to the Waxwings.

Phainopeplas breed in two separate habitats at two separate times of the year, a pattern unique in North American birds. From February to April the birds breed in the Sonoran Deserts of Arizona and California. As mistletoe berry supplies diminish in the desert mesquite, the birds migrate to the oak and sycamore canyons of Arizona and California, arriving in May. The exact routes of their migration are unknown and more importantly it is not known for certain whether the same birds breed in both locations. An additional unknown is why the birds show up in large numbers in some locations some years and are completely absent in other years. It is hoped that extensive banding, radio tracking and detailed genetic analysis will solve some of the mysteries of this unusual bird in the future.



Images and map are from the Cornell University Birds of North America website: <http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/BNA/>

Cuttings from the Nursery

By Steve Schulz

In this issue I have chosen a plant near and dear to our noses this time of year....Vinegar Weed.

Botanic Name: *Trichostema lanceolatum*

Common Name: Vinegar Weed, Turpentine Weed, Flea Weed and Camphor Weed.

Family: *Lamiaceae* (Mint and Sage)



Vinegar Weed—Sedgwick Reserve



Vinegar Weed — calflora website: www.calflora.net



Vinegar Weed flower

The *Lamiaceae* Family consists of about 200 genera and 5,500 species worldwide. You will find 11 species on the Reserve, 2 of which are non-native, Horehound and Henbit. A common characteristic of the Family is the production of aromatic oils in the leaves and flowers. Other family members include Lavender, Basil, Rosemary and Thyme.

Vinegar Weed is an herbaceous annual found on disturbed soils, such as dirt roads and heavily grazed rangeland; from central Oregon to northern Mexico. It forms a small open to sprawling mound 8" to 2' in height and spread. It prefers heavy clay soils and full sun. The growing period for Vinegar Weed is in the heat of summer, from June to November.

The leaves of Vinegar weed are opposite, simple, lanceolate to narrowly ovate to 2" in length with an entire margin. The leaves and stems are covered in fine dense pubescence, are glandular and pungent. The inflorescence is a raceme with dark blue to lavender petals. There are 5 fused sepals attached to the superior ovary. The corolla consists of 5 fused petals to 1/2" in length, forming a straight tube and opening upward. The 4 stamens are exserted and have a definite arch.

Vinegar Weed was widely used by local Native Americans as a medicinal herb. It was made into a tea or poultice and used as a remedy for fever and respiratory ailments. The Native Americans also used the fresh foliage as an insect repellent and in their bedding to ward off fleas.

K.I.N.

by Susan Brooks



Kids in Nature (KIN) is a 9-month program for underserved 4th-6th grade students in Santa Barbara's North County. The program's goals are to excite students about science, teach them to care about the environment, and encourage them to attend college.

KIN is now in its 6th year, hosting 130 students from participating 5th grade classrooms in Los Alamos, Santa Ynez Valley, and Santa Maria. There are 18 Sedgwick teaching docents participating in the program, allowing for a 1:6 docent to student ratio. In addition, the Sedgwick Native Plant Nursery provides expertise, teaching demonstrations, and plants for the students' work.

Seven field trips are planned for 2006-2007: four to UCSB Sedgwick Reserve, one to Goleta's West Storke Wetlands, one to Arroyo Hondo Preserve, and one to UCSB's Cheadle Center for Biodiversity and Ecological Restoration (CCBER). Celebration Day, the culmination of the program, will be held at the Reserve in late May.

The year started off with our docent and teacher orientation at CCBER, hosted by Jennifer Thorsch and her staff. Next was the KIN plot work party in early October. The new plots were rolled, readied, and mulched. Thanks to all who came out. Special thanks to Rick Skillin for the big truckload of mulch and to Steve Schulz and Nancy Stearns for their guidance.

The Reserve was ready for the students' arrival in late October. On their first field trip, students explored "their ranch", mapped out their KIN plots, and then nature printed their own Kids-in-Nature T-shirts. On their next field trip, students will start their restoration plantings with native

grasses, grey pines, acorns, long stemmed buckwheat and California fuchsia. The KIN plot area is a beautiful location along the Figueroa creek, directly east of the Director's home. The old KIN plots are worth visiting to look for all the success from previous years' KIN plantings. Next time you are out at the Reserve, come take a look!

This year, KIN is fortunate to have two new opportunities for the program:

For the January 2007 field trips, KIN will visit the West Storke Wetlands in Goleta. Lisa Stratton, Ecosystem Director at CCBER, obtained funding for the visits to learn about the importance of wetlands and to participate in a restoration project. In February, Jane Murray, Volunteer Coordinator for the Arroyo Hondo Preserve (AHP) and a Sedgwick docent, has arranged for classrooms to visit AHP. The students will learn about watersheds and fresh water stream ecology. The focus will be on steelhead and hands-on water testing for factors important to a healthy habitat. In November, AHP hosted Sedgwick docents together with the AHP docents for training with Tim Robinson on steelhead habitat.

This year's KIN is generously funded by UCSB's Office of Academic Preparation and Equal Opportunity, the Hutton Foundation, and the Santa Barbara Land Trust for Santa Barbara County's Arroyo Hondo Preserve. Bus transportation to Goleta's West Storke Wetlands is funded through a South Coast Wetland Recovery grant.



Equestrian Tours

By Carolyn Rathbun

Equestrian activities at Sedgwick date back to Duke Sedgwick and his family's passion for horses. The Sedgwicks hosted many trailrides, foxhunts and brandings during their stewardship of the ranch. The land lends itself to exploration on horseback, and when the first Reserve Manager, Virginia "Shorty" Boucher, and members of the Santa Barbara Land Trust were fundraising to purchase the heirs' parcel in the late 90's, equestrian tours of the ranch were an excellent means to that end. The equestrian community was very interested in riding the Reserve, and generous in their financial support.

Jane Murray was also instrumental in those early tours, and in 2001 she pioneered the Sedgwick Reserve's equestrian tour program. With help from other equestrian docents, Bill Davidson, Ellen Waddell and Dale Moody, various groups were invited to participate in natural history themed rides.

Currently, a team of docents — Christine O'Keefe, Carolyn Rathbun, Jane Murray, Marion Schlinger, Carlos and Dottie Spencer, Marc Trubitz and Becky Reid — conduct 4-6 tours per year. The tours are limited to 20 riders with a minimum of 3 docents. Different routes are taken; the rides are usually two and a half hours in length. Guest riders are enthusiastic about experiencing the Reserve and appreciative of the opportunity to learn more about the natural history of this special place. And the docents love sharing it with them!



Water trough stop midway through the ride.



Jane Murray telling us about our little woodpecker buddies.



Neighbor Sarah Chamberlin with Sue Tobin in front of the barn.

THE HIKING PROGRAM

By Nick Di Croce

We are off to a great start for the public hikes this season. The first one in November included about 45 hikers as well as a large contingent of the new docent class. What a good start!

A couple of notable changes for the program this season:

- Weather permitting, we will always try to run a couple of the hikes into the upper reaches. These trails – the Blue Schist, the Ehrenspeck, the Pistol Club, and similar ones – make for more interesting hiking, better interpretation opportunities, and beautiful vistas to surround us.

- So long as we get a good turnout, we will probably be running two moderate hikes each time. We can probably do a better job of interpretation with the smaller hike groups that this will allow. The only downside is that we will have to carefully manage the vehicle traffic to get into position for the hikes without traffic jams on the Reserve or in the parking areas.

- Rick Skillin will lead the strenuous hike and he promises to give the hikers a good workout. We are fortunate that Rick can substitute for his old friend and hike leader, Jacques Poirier, who unfortunately passed away recently. See the picture of Jacques below.

- We will continue to advertise a hike for disabled folks and parents with children in “wheelies.” These hikes will be led by our own wheel chair hot rod, Steve Schulz.

Andy Lentz has “invented” a new hike that he calls the “Earthquake Fault Trail”. It is a moderate hike of about 4 miles with some healthy elevation changes and it keeps the hikers near the Little Pine Fault most of the way. He used it on the November hike and will undoubtedly use it again in the future. He reports sightings of deer, bobcats, bear and mountain lion tracks and some tracks from the giant hairy Sedgwick mammoth reported to be lurking in the hills. On



Jacques Poirier leading one of the special docent hikes near Surf.

the more serious side, we will also be running a special geology hike on January 6th with geologist Susie Bartz, and it will be along this trail. No mammoth sightings planned!

We urge all the volunteers – especially the new docents in training – to join us on the monthly Public Hikes as well as the special docent hikes that we sometimes schedule between the Public Hikes. Those special hikes will be announced by email usually a week or two prior to the selected date. Join us if you can.

Where on the Reserve???



Most of the new docents class should recognize this place even if the photo was taken in the spring.

Last issue's Where on the Reserve?



This photo was taken on the “Ridge to Ridge” trail above the ranch compound.

In Memorium

Margaret Ross passed away on October 28. Many of you will remember Margaret as a friend of another one of our volunteers, Ellen Waddell. Margaret was a lover of nature, in particular wildflowers, and had attended a number of our volunteer trainings and events over the years. She occasionally assisted Ellen on leading groups, and will be missed.

The other volunteer, **Jacques Poirier**, passed away on October 27th. You will remember Jacques as the leader not only of our strenuous public hikes on occasion, but also the leader of “Hikido”, his own version of a meditative cross country hike. His philosophy on nature was one of total immersion. If you saw something you wanted to explore, then you just went for it, whether it meant hiking through chapparel or across a mountain of grasses. Jacques was formerly a park ranger at Mission La Purisima, and lead some off-site hikes especially for the volunteers, including one to Burton Mesa at La Purisima, and another to the dunes near Surf.

Calendar

- December 28. . . . Christmas bird count (contact Mark Holmgren, maholmgren@yahoo.com) for more information
- January 5. . . . Docent training (Chumash Material Culture--Karen Osland)
- January 8. . . . Santa Ynez Charter School 3rd grade (21 students)
- January 9. . . . Montessori School 7th-8th graders (12 students)
- January 12. . . . Docent Training (Techniques: Safety & First Aid--Tina Collins & TBA)
- January 13. . . . Public Hike
- January 18. . . . KIN at UCSB — Santa Ynez
- January 19. . . . Docent Training (Working with Children in Nature--Gwen Phillips)
- January 22. . . . Keep the Momentum Meeting 1:00 p.m.
- January 24. . . . KIN at UCSB — Arellanes
- January 25. . . . KIN at UCSB — Ontiveros
- January 26. . . . Docent training — (Mammals-Paul Collins)
- January 27. . . . Suzie Bartz — Geology Hike
- February 2. . . . Docent Training — (Techniques: Working with Children--Gwen Phillips)
- February 9. . . . Docent Training and Graduation
- February 12. . . . KIN at Arroyo Hondo — Santa Ynez
- February 14. . . . KIN at Arroyo Hondo — Olga Reed
- February 21. . . . KIN at Arroyo Hondo — Arellanes
- February 26. . . . KIN at Arroyo Hondo — Ontiveros