

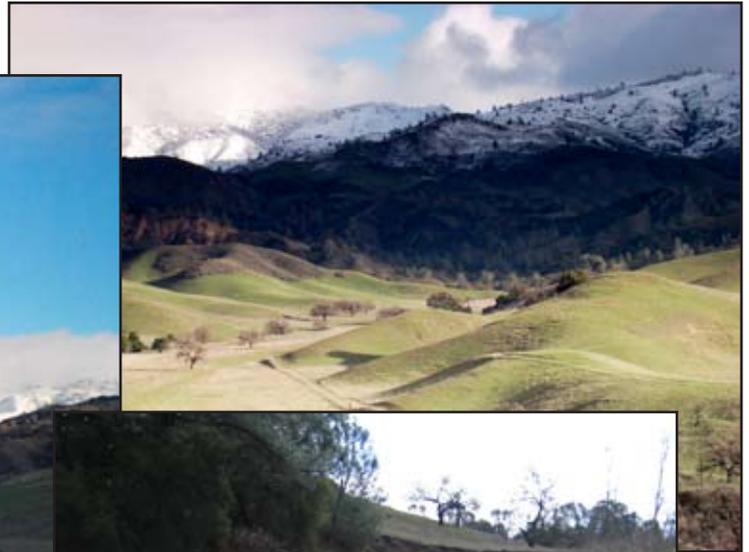
Sedgwick Field Notes

Occasional Ramblings for Volunteers and Friends of the Sedgwick Reserve

February 2008

Sedgwick Winter Green-Up January 24, 2008

By Kate McCurdy



Weather: We can all breathe a little easier now that rainfall amounts have surpassed the dismally dry year of 2006-2007. As of January 24, 2008, Sedgwick has received over 483mm (19.27") of rain. The Reserve is greening up spectacularly and we expect this last storm (that left 3" of snow on the top of the Reserve, allowed Figueroa Creek to gush and filled the Vernal Pools) will alleviate concerns for a fire season rivaling last summer's.

Observatory: Las Cumbres Observatory was issued their construction license on January 3rd. The project manager is now scheduling contractors to build the silo and install the telescope. His effort has been hampered by rain and muddy road conditions to the site. When completed, the mesa north of the solar panels will have a silo dome on a cement pad enclosed by a split rail fence, a three car parking area and a picnic table.

Tipton Meeting House: The comment period regarding the site and construction drawings closed on Jan 23rd; comments will then be reviewed by the Thompson-Naylor design team. The construction bid will be submitted in February. If all goes well the construction license could be issued in March. Kate McCurdy will be serving as the project's biological consultant. She will be conducting nesting bird surveys within 500 feet of the Tipton Meeting House over the next few months and could use volunteer help if docent birders are interested.

Prop 84 Grant Application: Sue Swarbrick has been working furiously on our proposal for February 1 submission. The proposal requests funds for approximately \$1 million to complete the following projects:

- Comprehensive utilities plan*
- Waste water treatment system*
- Distribution of potable water
- Figueroa Mtn. Rd. fencing
- New machine shop*
- Demolition of long Quonset hut
- Demolition of steward's house*
- * summer 2008

Cattle lease: Currently in Contracting Office, where it is under review for the 2008 grazing period of February 1-May 1. Paul Flum has donated funds to replace fences that are part of the grazing lease. Pastures that will be re-fenced for this year's agreement are the Airstrip and the Figueroa Pasture (beyond the pond on the left side of the road). The traditional "Heirs Pasture" east of the Field Station will not be grazed in 2008 but expect cows in Lisque and on the Airstrip for a few months.

Field Station projects: We will be working on the following projects in the upcoming weeks:

1. A split rail fence will be constructed around the green space between Rick's and the flag pole. Ten parking spaces and a trail head bulletin board will be created in the circular area in front of the studio.
2. The area north of the pool patio will become once again a restoration area.
3. A 20' x 35' shade awning will be built over the north end of the pool.
4. The cement pedestal will be moved from the flag pole to the 'V' intersection by Rick's and made into a decorative planter with painted text "Welcome to the Sedgwick Field Station".



Farm Education Center: Tom Shepherd and I are proposing a joint outdoor education center/produce stand across the main entrance road from the Observatory Trailhead. Pending approval of the Sedgwick campus Advisory Committee (meeting in early February). Tom has private funding to create the center; we would largely provide curriculum and use.

Barn renovation: Last fall a donor gave the University \$25,000 to produce an engineering report to determine the structural integrity of the barn and whether the existing foundation can support a new roof. Civil engineers began their investigation on January 10th. One engineer said the barn is in relatively good shape and that it appears that the historic hay barn could be restored (with new roofing support, some foundation work and a lightweight tin roof).



KIN: We have decided to take our outdoor education program in a new direction for the 2008-2009 school year. We are in the process of creating a new Sedgwick-centric nature-based program for elementary school students called "the Outdoor Classroom." Curriculum development and fund raising are underway. Stay tuned!

Bird Walks

by Fred Machetanz

Sedgwick's Remarkable Blackbirds

A Tempest of Blackbirds

In the spring and summer seasons our cattail marsh is a powerful magnet to huge flocks of black birds that darken the sky as they come to roost each evening at sundown. This spinning cloud of blackbirds and starlings, resembling a giant tornado, converges at last into the cattail growth of the pond, is noisy for a period and then is silent. Though starlings are in the majority in this assemblage, it is of the blackbirds that I write. Two closely related species of blackbirds nest at the pond, the Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) and the Tricolor Blackbird (*Agelaius tricolor*).

Red-winged Blackbird



Red-winged Blackbird

Agelaius phoeniceus | Order PASSERIFORMES

Family ICTERIDAE. Birds of North America, Cornell University

The male Redwing is a dark-eyed, glossy black bird, slightly smaller than a robin, with a red shoulder patch, bordered by yellow-orange. The smaller female is streaky brown above and below with a buffy eyebrow line and throat. Her wings and back have a reddish-brown cast due to rufous-edged feathers.

The Redwing feeds in marshes, pastures, cropland, feedlots and lakeshores. In non-breeding season its food is primarily plant matter while in breeding season it eats mostly insects. It often uses a gaping technique, opening its bill deep in grass and leaves to expose insects and other food. In foraging it hops and walks, sometimes with the tail held high. Its song is a musical “cong-ka-REE.”

The Redwing's flight, often in flocks, is strong, direct and undulating. When walking or perched it jerks its tail repeatedly. Perhaps the most polygynous of all bird species, a

male may have as many as fifteen females nesting in its territory (Birds of North America BONA). Research has shown that if the male's colorful shoulder patch is covered or dyed black, the bird's chance of successful mating is greatly reduced. BONA also indicates that the Red-winged Blackbird is the most numerous and most studied bird in America.

In addition to freshwater marshes, Redwings can nest in a variety of other habitats. Being strongly territorial, Redwings seem to require considerable space between nests, in contrast to Tricolor Blackbirds whose nests may be almost touching. The nest, built by the female, is of string-like material woven around vertical supports and layered with a platform of marsh material. Mud is added and fashioned into a cup which is lined with fine grasses.

The female lays 3-4 pale blue-green eggs, overlaid with streaks and blotches of black or brown. Eggs are incubated by the female 11-13 days and the young fledged in 9-12 days. Both male and female assist in the feeding.



Distribution of the Red-winged Blackbird in North and Middle America.

Tricolored Blackbird

The male Tricolored Blackbird is glossy black with faint blue or green reflections. Its shoulder patch is deep red bordered by a white transverse stripe. The female Tricolor is sooty grey with a white eyebrow line, whiskers and chin and pale streaks on the breast. Experienced observers are able to distinguish a slightly slimmer silhouette for the Tricolor as compared to the Redwing.



Tricolored Blackbird

Agelaius tricolor | Order PASSERIFORMES

Family ICTERIDAE. *Birds of North America, Cornell University*

Tricolored blackbirds eat what is available, gleaning from the ground locally abundant insects, including grasshoppers, seeds and snails. They are often seen fly-catching above the breeding colony. Like Redwings, Tricolors walk and hop while feeding. They fly in compact flocks in a shallow undulating motion. Their flight call is a distinctive “wuk,” lower in frequency than the flight call of the Redwing. Both the song and call of the Tricolor are more nasal than those of the Redwing’s vocalizations.

Tricolors nest in dense colonies and may travel many miles to get food for their young. They are perhaps the most gregarious of all bird species. William Dawson wrote of this bird, “Every major act of its life is performed in concert with its fellows”. BONA notes, “Even in (large)...breeding colonies all first eggs will be laid within one week of each other.” Tricolor males mate with one to four females.

The female constructs a bulky cup nest anchored in tules or bushes near water. Three to four pale blue or olive colored eggs, scrawled with black, blue or purple grey are laid. The female incubates the eggs for 12-14 days and both parents feed the young until they are fledged in 11-14 days.



Distribution of the Tricolored Blackbird.

Final Words

Red-winged Blackbirds are found nationwide in huge numbers that have not changed appreciably through the years. Tricolored Blackbirds, however, are found almost completely in California. “Recent population censuses ... indicate that continuing population declines warrant active management of this species and its breeding, foraging habits, and possibly unstudied winter range.”(BONA)

At Sedgwick it is believed that territorial Redwings nest first in the Spring in small numbers. Then, greater numbers of Tricolors arrive to nest and dominate the marsh. Stay tuned to observe and perhaps verify our assumption.

You may have noted that many of the characteristics of these two species can be described only with superlatives. They are remarkable birds, and their beauty and behavior furnish us much pleasure.

Come Celebrate!

Sedgwick Reserve Docent Class of 2007-2008 Graduation

Friday, February 29, 2008 – 11:00 a.m.

*Award presentation followed by
a Santa Maria Style Tri-tip BBQ on the patio.*

Please RSVP to Sue Eisaguirre by February 15
686-1941 or eisaguirre@lifesci.ucsb.edu

Cuttings from the Nursery

By Nancy Stearns

Common Horehound



Photo from: calphotos.berkeley.edu
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Botanic Name: *Marrubium vulgare*

Common Name: Common Horehound, Horehound, White Horehound, Hoarhound

Family: Lamiaceae or Labiatae (Mint Family)

Horehound is common along roadsides and flourishes in waste places, such as overgrazed pastures. White horehound is a perennial herbaceous plant, found all over Europe and indigenous to Great Britain. The Franciscan friars introduced this medicinal herb in the late 18th century, and it was made into a tea drunk to relieve asthma, colds, and jaundice.

The plant is bushy, a foot or more in height, producing numerous annual, quadrangular and branching stems on which whitish flowers are borne in crowded, axillary, woolly whorls. Like other members of the mint family, try rolling the stem between your fingers. The stem is, indeed, quadrangular or four-sided. The roundish, gray-green, leaves are much wrinkled, opposite, petioled, about 1 inch long, covered with white, felted hairs, which give them a woolly, hairy appearance. Leaf margins, or edges, are coarsely-toothed. Horehound flowers from June to September and produces numerous seeds, the kind that stick like a bur to fur, fleece, even shoelaces!

Marrubium is said to be derived from *Maria urbs*, an ancient town of Italy. Other authors derive its name from the Hebrew *marrob* (a bitter juice) and state that it was one of the bitter herbs the Jews were ordered to take for the Feast of Passover. Egyptian priests called this plant the 'Seed of Horus', or the 'Bull's Blood', and the 'Eye of the Star'. It was a principal ingredient in Caesar's antidote for vegetable

poisons. The name horehound is of unknown origin, but the first part 'hore' is derived from "hoary" or "hairy". *Vulgare* means common, which this weed certainly is.

Infusions or extracts of horehound in the form of syrups, beverages, or lozenges are popular in the U.S. as remedies for coughs. In 1989 USFDA banned horehound from cough drops due to insufficient evidence of effectiveness. In Mexico, horehound is used for diabetes; in Germany, for heartburn and lack of appetite. One early study shows it may lower cholesterol. It may be used for intestinal disorders. Santa Ynez Chumash stated that a tea was formerly drunk to induce abortion.

Horehound was introduced to southern Australia in the 19th century as a medicinal herb. It became a weed of native grasslands and pastures where it was introduced with settler's livestock, which found it highly unpalatable. It is now an invasive plant in many areas around the world, including California, a state with a high number of endemic species.

Please help us remove horehound from Sedgwick! Why? Harvard Biologist, E.O. Wilson, ranks invasive species, such as horehound, as one of the biggest threats to biodiversity, second only to habitat destruction and loss. Think: HIPPO—Habitat, Invasives, Pollution, Population, and Overconsumption.

The Public Hikes

By Nick Di Croce

The hikes got off to a “dry” start in October despite the Zaca and Sedgwick Fires which fortunately did not affect the Public Hiking Program. We had a reasonably good public turnout for the first two hikes but then had to cancel the December hike because of muddy conditions. January was superb: a beautiful clear, crisp day, a green covering all over Sedgwick from the recent rains, and a nice turnout with a lot of very interested hikers—one of the best hiking days I have observed in four years of hitting the Sedgwick trails. January included the introduction of a new trail which we are tentatively calling the “Main Gate Trail.” We have Kate McCurdy to thank for developing and leading this hike. We even had one participant inquire “if all the docents are really that nice all the time.” We must be doing some things right!

We were fortunate to escape without much damage to our hiking trails from the Sedgwick Fire in October. A few of us hiked the burn area with Rick Skillin to assess the damage and to observe the recovery possibilities. As a result of the speed with which the fire moved through the area, we observed trees with burned trunks whose tops were still green with growth. We were also amazed to find fresh green plants growing on the ground within two weeks after the fire. It is anticipated that recovery will be pretty fast. We certainly escaped a bullet.

It is good to see so many docents who are willing to help out on hike days. We have even had the pleasant “problem” of almost a 1:1 ratio between hikers and docents on a few of the hikes. Nothing wrong with that. I hope that will continue and that we begin to see more of the docent trainees on the hikes.

The recent January rains almost guarantee a beautiful spring cover for the Reserve and will produce wildflowers like we haven’t seen in a few years. Get the cameras ready. The Vernal Pools should be holding water and will provide a nice alternative hike for the moderate hikers.

Here’s a sample of what the rains will probably bring us soon:



Sedgwick Reserve Event Schedule

February

- 8 Friday, Docent Class – Mammals & Hike Techniques
- 9 Saturday, Public Hike
- 9 Saturday, Carolyn Rathbun Memorial 2:00 p.m.
(Please RSVP C. McCowan 688-7611)
- 15 Friday, Docent Class – First Aid & CPR
- 16 Saturday, *Operation “Warm Hearth” wood cutting & bundling*
- 22 Friday, Docent Class – Chumash Material Culture
- 29 Friday, Docent Graduation!

March

- 1 Saturday, Sedgwick to Scotland Hike (SYVHS
Drama Dept. Fund raiser)
- 5 Wednesday, KIN – Olga Reed – Arroyo Hondo
- 8 Saturday, Public Hike
- 12 Wednesday, KIN – Arellanes – Arroyo Hondo
- 18 Tuesday, Docent Communication Meeting
(1:00 – 2:30 p.m.)
- 19 Wednesday, KIN – Ontiveros – Arroyo Hondo

April

- 5 Saturday, 10th Anniversary Celebration – *Invitation only*
- 9 Wednesday, KIN – Olga Reed Sedgwick Reserve
- 11–13 Friday–Sunday, *Gamache Photography Workshop*
- 12 Saturday, Public Hike
- 15 Tuesday, KIN – Arellanes – Sedgwick Reserve
- 16 Wednesday, KIN–Ontiveros Sedgwick Reserve
- 27 Land Trust Wildflower hike at Sedgwick



Mike Delgado helps in K.I.N. restoration of the creek.