



THE VALLEY OAK

Cosumnes River Preserve's Quarterly Volunteer Newsletter



WELCOME BACK, NEWSLETTER!

The Preserve revives the Valley Oak and other new things

As we come to the end of another great year at Cosumnes River Preserve, we also begin a new chapter, with the revival of the Valley Oak newsletter, a new Volunteer Coordinator, and the potential for continued growth and progress within the Preserve. First of all, I'd like to re-introduce myself. I am Saige White, the new Volunteer Coordinator at the Preserve. I come to you with a passion not only for conservation and recreation, but a great love for this amazing valley landscape and all the natural wonders within it. Formerly, I worked with Sacramento Valley Conservancy, a non-profit land trust in Sacramento, and a partner here at the Preserve. I am excited to be a part of the collaborative efforts of all the partners to restore and maintain the land around Cosumnes River. Upon my first look into the past and present ways in which the Volunteer Program was run, I discovered the Valley Oak newsletter. I am looking forward to sharing this same, but also new, newsletter with you all and, hopefully, giving you a resource to know what various programs and projects are happening at the Preserve and ways you can get involved, or simply just become informed.

THE REVIVAL EDITION

- Introduction - 1
- A Year in Review - 2
- Ducks in Scopes - 3
- Raptor Surveys - 4
- HorseshoeLake - 5
- HRT - 6
- Memorials - 7
- Calendar - 7

A YEAR IN REVIEW

A look at the impact volunteers have made in 2019

Over **9,200** Visitor Center guests during weekends and holidays!

100 Volunteer-led activities with over **2,800** participants!



Monitored 202 wood duck boxes



Surveyed over 3,500 raptors



Led 46 guided walks and counts with over 280 participants



20 HRT workdays with over 180 volunteers

2019

2020



Monitored 210 swallow boxes



Guided 8 paddles with over 90 participants



Hosted 19 Ducks in Scopes with over 2,200 visitors

We simply cannot put into words our immense thanks for all that you help us accomplish. If ever in doubt of the great impact you make, refer back to this page to see just how much is accomplished with your help!



Photo by Ann Burris

DUCKS IN SCOPES

Giving visitors an up-close view of the Cosumnes River Preserve

The beauty of the landscape at Cosumnes River Preserve along the Boardwalk Trail has always struck visitors: the vastness of the wetland, the distant treescape of the oaks, the blue of the waters reflecting the sky as the ducks and geese graze the surface. One can't deny the magnificence of the bigger picture. But, what many don't get the opportunity to witness is the magnificence and beauty of the smaller picture-- the vastness of that wetland, magnified and appreciated with a keener eye. Ducks in Scopes is a volunteer-run program at Cosumnes River Preserve that does just that... provides the public with various scopes to view ducks and other waterfowl up close, as well as microscopes and hand lenses to get an intimate view of all the wonders lurking within the underwater world not accessible to the naked eye. Every weekend from late fall through early spring, our Ducks in Scopes leaders, Ann Burris and Cathie LaZier, spend their time along with many other volunteers to provide the general public with scopes to view birds up close, dishes of water dipped from the pond to reveal squiggly creatures that dwell in the water, microscopes and lenses to provide up-close looks, and their wealth of knowledge to share about each of these things. There are not many other programs in the area like this, especially not ones that are free. This past year has proven to be another great Ducks in Scopes season and the public has responded to this program with appreciation and praise. As a new year approaches, we want to provide visitors with an equally amazing experience as 2019 did.

UPCOMING DATES

January: 1st, 4th, 11th, 18th, 25th

February: 1st, 8th, 15th, 22nd, 29th

The great thing about volunteering with Ducks in Scopes is that you don't need to be an expert. Just being a presence, sharing your passion for the Preserve with visitors, and offering a hand with operating scopes is more than enough. Volunteering does not just limit you to helping, but it opens up the door for you to learn even more about ducks and all the other creatures that inhabit the Preserve. If you are interested in volunteering for Ducks in Scopes, contact the Volunteer Coordinator at 916-826-0927 or email at whitesa@saccounty.net. Also, a big thank you to Cathie and Ann for all their hard work and dedication, as well as the many volunteers that show up weekly to help make this program happen.



Photo by Ann Burris

2019 RAPTOR SURVEY

By Bruce Miller

An overview of the 2019 Raptor Survey and a look into the other upcoming bird surveys

This September we completed our seventh Raptor Survey season. The Raptor Surveys, like most programs at the Preserve, are run by volunteers who dedicate about 8 hours a month, March through September. This program is supervised by Patrick Moffett, one of the Preserve's biologists.

The surveys are conducted by eight teams of two to four volunteers, with each team driving a predefined route on land surrounding and adjacent to the Preserve. We collect various information on raptors that we see along the route, such as species, age, location, and habitat.

The data we have collected will soon be published. Patrick Moffett, Mark Ackerman, and Harry McQuillen are now in the process of finalizing a paper, covering the first five years, to be published in a leading birding journal.

In seven seasons, we have identified eighteen types of raptors, including: eight species of hawks, four species of falcons, three species of owls, bald eagles, ospreys, and white-tailed kites. Four raptors account for 85% of the raptors we have counted. They are Swainson's Hawk (45%), Red-tailed Hawk (31%), American Kestrel (6.7%), and Northern Harrier (2.6%).

While we take the surveys seriously, we also have a lot of fun doing them. More than one volunteer has said it is the most fun they have all summer. And a strange thing happens once you've done a few surveys... you start to notice raptors everywhere you go and you find yourself trying to identify them! This sometimes drives the people you are with crazy, but sooner or later gets them interested as well. The next raptor survey season starts in March 2020. Currently happening is the Waterfowl Survey. Similar to the raptor surveyors, volunteers help identify and count various waterfowl at the Preserve. Open to all volunteers, these surveys are a great opportunity to experience the Preserve outside of the normal public trails and learn about the wildlife.



JOIN THE SURVEY TEAM!

Interested in...

Waterfowl? Raptors? Wood ducks? Swallows?

You can join a monthly survey team or a weekly box-monitoring team. For information on both, contact the Volunteer Coordinator at: whitesa@saccounty.net or 916-826-0927

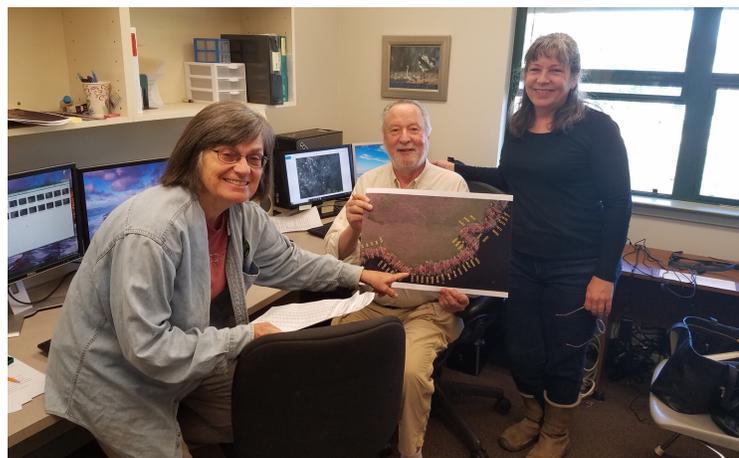
HORSESHOE LAKE PROJECT

By Chance Davis

Restoring natural habitat for the giant garter snake

Horseshoe Lake is a 110-acre freshwater wetland. The first photo to the right shows an aerial view of the lake during the spring season, showing off its horseshoe shape (the reason behind the lake's name). The current restoration project at this site is focused on improving habitat for the giant garter snake and greater sandhill crane, which are both listed as threatened by the state of California. The giant garter snake is also listed as threatened by the federal government. In addition, the project will benefit many other species of special concern (as designated by the state) and federal-trust species of waterbirds. This project has consisted of the removal of invasive Uruguayan water primrose along with its biomass and accumulated sediment to then create open-water, wetland habitat. With increased depth in the lake, it now holds perennial water and is home to fish and other aquatic life. Valley oak acorns were also planted in the surrounding oak woodland habitat as well as the egret/heron/cormorant rookery to replace the loss of older dying trees.

With the help of dedicated volunteer teams, post restoration monitoring occurs on a bi-weekly, monthly, and quarterly schedule. These surveys consist of a variety of subjects including: waterfowl, rookery, rookery carcass, giant garter snake, hydrology, vegetation, macroinvertebrate, and the use of fyke nets to survey fish. Volunteer help is extremely vital to this project's biological monitoring and long-term success. In the photos to the right, you will see the various ways in which volunteers can help with this project, both indoors with data management, and outdoors with surveying. As the new year approaches, volunteers will be provided with even more opportunities to get out into the field, learning and working on various special surveys and projects within Horseshoe Lake.



Photos provided by Tom Palmer

INTERESTED IN HELPING WITH THE
HORSESHOE LAKE PROJECT?

Email j1davis@blm.gov to get on the email list for upcoming opportunities.

HABITAT RESTORATION TEAM

Restoring natural habitat one Saturday at a time

The Habitat Restoration Team (HRT) is an inclusive volunteer group of the Cosumnes River Preserve that focuses on various ongoing restoration needs. Coordinated and run by Alex Cabrera of The Nature Conservancy, HRT meets twice a month on planned Saturdays to go into the field and tackle invasive species, pickup trash, cut down invasive and dead trees, prep the wetlands for the winter, plant native species, and a variety other special projects. Though it is known to be hard work, the regular Habitat Restoration Team members have helped create a fun, family-style group that allows you to not only get your hands dirty and spend time outside, but spend quality time with like-minded individuals that care deeply for the Preserve and all its habitat. Joe Watson, a dedicated volunteer of many years, has written a piece on one of his experiences during an HRT workday and gives us a glimpse of what it's like to volunteer with the team. Enjoy this story titled, "Searching For Plum Trees," below.



UPCOMING HRT WORKDAYS

January: 11th, 25th
February: 8th, 29th
March: 14th, 28th
April: 11th, 25th



"SEARCHING FOR PLUM TREES"

A story by Joe Watson, an avid HRT volunteer

Searching for plum trees is kind of like searching for wild game, but less exciting. Plum trees are not noted for their swiftness, their cunning, or their stealth, but they do manage to hide in the cacophony of foliage at the Cosumnes River Preserve.

After taking a poll of who knew how to identify the cherry plum, an invasive tree on The Preserve, Alex sent me ahead of the team to "flag" cherry plums along the levee.

Armed with a roll of brightly colored tape, I set out to mark them. I found a few of the cherry plums obscured by dense clumps of poison oak. Being careful to not touch poison oak with your skin is the best way to avoid the rash this pretty little shrub gives to the incautious. So, I gave it my full attention while approaching the cherry plum. Meandering along the luxurious levee path, occasionally clambering down its sides, I find plenty of cherry plums for the crew to cut. Following a sandy path, deposited by last years floods, I find deer tracks joined by smaller impressions left by birds and other creatures. By now I

am far enough ahead of the crew to lose the sound of their chainsaws. This is the immersion in nature that I find so satisfying at the Preserve. And then, I hear it. In my previous life, I worked with and around an imprinted mountain lion named Toby (Tobias de Cat). Toby made a distinctive low level sound when you approached him. This was that sound. I froze in my tracks. I looked around and reviewed the list of what to do and what not to do when encountering a mountain lion on a trail. I had a flashback of the fresh deer kill at Cougar Wetlands here in the lower Preserve. I strained my ears and looked behind me every 5 seconds. I stood perfectly still and I waited. An eternity later I heard it again. I picked up a mean looking branch and started banging and wacking trees, logs, and bushes. I was headed for the clearing, looking around and behind me as I walked, when I heard Alex calling my name. "Over here", I hollered.

Just before Alex broke through the thick brush, the source of "that sound" ran out from their hiding place. It was a bevy of quail. Quail!?

I was never so happy to see a flock of game birds in my life.

HONORS AND MEMORIALS



Terry Ronneberg

An avid volunteer since the 80s, Terry was one of the first to run the monthly bird surveys at the Preserve. He is remembered by friends and other volunteers as a wonderful, friendly, and helpful person. We are honored to have had him on our volunteering team and will always remember him as a dedicated supporter and friend of the Preserve.



Michel Mathis

A dedicated and hard worker, Mike contributed an invaluable amount to Cosumnes River Preserve. He found his volunteer family within the Habitat Restoration Team and strived to help make the Preserve an even better place. He will be missed by staff and volunteers and will be honored by the HRT's continued dedication to restore Cosumnes River Preserve, a place he truly cared for.



Jim Grimes

As a long-time Volunteer Naturalist, Jim offered his passion, care, and knowledge to the Preserve. He was always willing to jump in whenever there was a need and is remembered as being a great friend and presence to the Preserve's volunteer family. If he wasn't helping in the Visitor Center, you could find him on the river as a docent for the guided paddles, sharing his love for the outdoors with visitors. Jim will be missed and forever remembered.

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

A look at the next 3 months of activities at the Preserve

January

- 1 Ducks In Scopes—10am-2pm, located on the Boardwalk
- 4 Guided Walk—9am, meet at the Visitor Center Deck
- 4 Ducks In Scopes—10am-2pm, located on the Boardwalk
- 11 River Walk Bird Count—6:45am, meet at the Visitor Center
- 11 Ducks In Scopes—10am-2pm, located on the Boardwalk
- 18 Tall Forest Bird Count—6:45am, meet at the Farm Center
- 18 Ducks In Scopes—10am-2pm, located on the Boardwalk
- 25 Habitat Restoration Day—9am-3:30pm, meet at the Barn
- 25 Ducks In Scopes—10am-2pm, located on the Boardwalk

February

- 1 Guided walk—9am, meet at the Visitor Center Deck
- 1 Ducks In Scopes—10am-2pm, located on the Boardwalk
- 8 Ducks In Scopes—10am-2pm, located on the Boardwalk
- 15 Tall Forest Bird Count—6:45am, meet at the Farm Center
- 15 Ducks In Scopes—10am-2pm, located on the Boardwalk
- 16 River Walk Bird Count—6:45am, meet at the Visitor Center
- 22 Guided Photo Walk—8am, meet at the Visitor Center
- 22 Ducks In Scopes—10am-2pm, located on the Boardwalk
- 29 Habitat Restoration Day—9am-3:30pm, meet at the Barn
- 29 Ducks In Scopes—10am-2pm, located on the Boardwalk

March

- 7 Guided walk—9am, meet at the Visitor Center Deck
- 14 River Walk Bird Count—6:45am, meet at the Visitor Center
- 14 Habitat Restoration Day—9am-3:30pm, meet at the Barn
- 21 Tall Forest Bird Count—6:45am, meet at the Farm Center
- 21 Guided Paddle - arrive at 8:30am, meet in Visitor Parking, must provide own gear and PFD.
- 28 Guided Photo Walk—8am, meet at the Visitor Center
- 28 Habitat Restoration Day—9am-3:30pm, meet at the Barn
- 28 Vernal Pools Guided Hike—8:30am, meet at Howard Ranch Trail head in Rancho Seco Recreation Area (\$12 parking fee)