



THE VALLEY OAK

Cosumnes River Preserve's Quarterly Volunteer Newsletter



A LETTER FROM THE VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

Spring is a time of transition and growth here at the Preserve. The natural environment sheds its winter skin and dresses itself in leaves of green and fields of grass and wildflowers. The sun is shining brightly and we are all yearning to get outside and enjoy the warmth. This month marks my eighth month of being the Volunteer Coordinator. I am immensely grateful for all the knowledge each of you has shared with me and the passion you've radiated through your words and actions. As staff and volunteers, we have the opportunity to set the Cosumnes River Preserve up for long-term success and ensure future generations have a restored and protected place to appreciate nature. We also have the ability to further our own knowledge through research and learning from other experts in the environmental field. This upcoming Fall I plan to provide all of you with as many opportunities as possible to learn something new. With the current global pandemic of COVID-19, I hope you all are coping well and staying safe and healthy. During these difficult times, I hope you are still finding moments of joy, growth, and peace. Until we know more, all activities are postponed. However, I look forward to the time when we can reunite and spend time at the Preserve, doing the things we love. For now, I hope you enjoy this newsletter and appreciate many of the stories and artistic creations that staff and volunteers have to share!

THE SPRING EDITION

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WELCOME OUR NEW VOLUNTEERS!

A talented new group of volunteers completed the Winter 2020 training



26 new volunteers completed the Winter 2020 Volunteer Naturalist Training on February 5th. All with unique backgrounds and a passion to learn more about the Preserve and share what they learn with visitors!



THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

How the pandemic has impacted Cosumnes River Preserve and what we're doing to help

COVID-19 (or Coronavirus) has spread across the world and we are all feeling the great impact it has made on society. Many of our local businesses, schools, restaurants, and even public parks have shut down and/or drastically changed the way they serve the public in order to help prevent spread of the virus. As you all know, the Preserve has had to suspend all public and volunteer activities, close the Visitor Center, and lock the gates until further notice.

Though this is a challenging time, I want to thank all of you for continuing to support and offer up your time and knowledge from afar. Because of you, we have been able to share inspiring and educational photos, articles, and videos with the public and help them stay engaged, even from a distance.

As many of you know, things are changing rapidly. We have gone from encouraged social distancing to mandated stay at home orders. For now, the Preserve will keep its gates locked. If things change, we will make sure to update you every step of the way!



Looking forward, we hope that the spread is limited and many more people recover in health. In time, we look forward to opening the Preserve's Visitor Center and picking up where we left off with volunteer and public programs. Until then, please stay safe, stay healthy, and utilize some of the resources below if you'd like to learn more.



RESOURCES:

National Recreation and Park Association: <https://www.nrpa.org/our-work/Three-Pillars/health-wellness/coronavirus-disease-2019/>

Center for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>



LOOKING UP OR DOWN

A story by Habitat Restoration Team volunteer, Joe Watson

What you see when you come out to volunteer with The Habitat Restoration Team (HRT) depends on whether you're looking up or down. A recent Saturday job description required looking up and trimming some overreaching branches along our public pathways. With loppers and pruners in hand, the crew headed out across the Savanna on a spectacular sunny day. Looking down, HRT members Vic and Jane pointed out some native wildflowers and grasses to our newer members only to be interrupted by a chorus of migrating Sandhill Cranes flying overhead.

As we approached the Cosumnes River, the canopy began to close in. It didn't take long before we came across our only "widow maker" for the day. A widow maker is a term used to describe a large broken branch of a tree or the tree itself that is about to fall on an unsuspecting passerby.

One of the jobs of the HRT is to make the Cosumnes River Preserve a safe experience. Living in harmony with Nature means making the relationship between Mother Nature and humans a safe and happy one. This dangerous broken branch was small enough for our experienced volunteers to take down without the aid and advice of our fearless leader Alex Cabrera. On this Saturday we were close enough to the Barn to enjoy our lunch sitting at our portable picnic tables. Our afternoon task was to hunt down the invasive alien, milk thistles, growing around the seasonal wetlands by the Barn. We maintain these wetlands for migrating birds like the Sandhill Cranes we saw earlier that morning.

Unwilling to be outdone by the cranes, the breeding swallows put on quite a display as they competed for the nest boxes we had erected on poles in the water near the edges of these 12-acre ponds.

The aerial acrobatics of the swallows looked more like the sorties of fighter jets than the muscle flexing of feathered suitors.

If you're interested in visiting the inner workings of the Preserve, you will have to sign up for a workday and get your hands dirty. If we opened all of the gates and trails throughout the Preserve for all of the nature tourists that visit, the wildlife would go somewhere else for the business of life. But, the restoration team does look forward to your company the next time you have a Saturday to give Mother Nature a helping hand.



COSUMNES RIVER PRESERVE AT HOME

A way for volunteers to stay in touch

A story and sharing platform by
Charlie Henderson

Last Saturday I was walking my dog, Bella, (following all CDC social distancing guidelines) at the local park a few blocks from home. Back behind the baseball fields, what do I see but a dozen great egrets! My thoughts turned to how much I miss Cosumnes River Preserve and how I'm sure everyone else misses volunteering at the Preserve. I miss the early morning walks along Grizzly Slough, seeing turkeys and coyotes, as Duane and I peek into wood duck boxes; counting egrets, cormorants, and herons in Tom's drone images; wrangling snakes with Harry. I even miss the stink and mess of walking the rookery while tracking carcasses. I'm sure other volunteers have similar thoughts and memories to look back on during our spring season of sheltering-in-place. With these thoughts in my head, we arrived back home from our walk to California poppies in the front yard.

I rubbed my chin and said to myself,
“Self, we should start a volunteer photo sharing site for CRP at home”.

The next morning as I was feeding the dog, the accompanying photo was taken. The two Canada Geese landed right on the storage shed in the backyard. At that point, it was a done deal! I spent that evening searching for a photo share service. I've never done Facebook or other such nonsense but came up with using a free Flickr account.

Email me, chendu@comcast.net for the Flickr password so that you can view or share CRP-inspired photos in your neighborhood.



ART AND CULTURE



"Winter at the Preserve", 2019
by Allison Spreadborough



Carved Wood Sandhill Cranes
by Dexil Rold



Recycle Wood Sprouted Acorn
by Joe Watson



Horseshoe Lake Aquatic Prey Survey
Photography by Heather Hayashi

A WALK ON THE COSUMNES RIVER PRESERVE

An essay by Marita "Goose" Nath

On a great blue pond, amid the glittering diamonds of the sun's reflections rest many thousands of Tundra Swans. They look like a great flotilla of glistening white feathers and fluff. Now and again a few will rise from their swan-like boats and open those large wings allowing them to dry in the sun. I can see their long elegant necks reaching back and forth as they preen their feathers. Their guttural music fills the air with clucks and chatters,

Voices, that do not seem to fit inside so majestic a bird. They reminded of crickets, picking their way through a starry night. The lilt and rise of so many voices talking to each other is so mysterious. Perhaps they are telling tales of their migrations that are full of so much peril and determination. I am drawn into their journeys and my imagination basks in my pale gestures to try to understand the enchanted beauty of this tundra swans migration. I feel like I have stepped into an ancient fairy tale.

I have moved past the swans and my eyes rest on a field of Sandhill Cranes feeding and foraging for food. The sun is very bright and a slight haze rises from the fields they are in. They raise their long necks and look about periodically and slowly, carefully moving through the field. I watch their silky grey bodies moving along the edges of their adventures like creatures in a slow-motion movie. Cranes choose their mates for life, a stealthy and noble ambition for any living thing. They can be observed dancing amongst each other, teasing and whirling about, jumping and rising into the air full of joy and excitement. All too quick they are quiet again, yet who can pretend to know what this artistry of happy entanglements is exactly about? Although I am sure it has all been discovered by some wise biologists, I still like to play with the grand tales of love and devotion and all that romantic mush that the lovely Sandhill Crane evokes in my mind as they dance.

I look up into the sky that is filled with great flocks of white-fronted geese. They are looking for a pond to rest on. Their frantic flutter and noisy clucks fill the air and you know a ruckus of acrobatics is soon to come. How do they find enough room to fly so close together, much less land? I watch them flying in a great circle over the pond, a whirlpool-like vortex of thousands of geese and as they get near the water they drop out of the circle, taking turns to land on the water, squeezing and tickling their way into a place. Frantically but with some sort of mysterious leadership and magic, they seem to fall from the sky like leaves from a tree on a windy day.

Soon the great flock settles into the pond covering the water like a puffy down quilt.

In the distant sky I see a large dark vulture cruising, making invisible pockets in the sky, clinging to the passive air with clenched fists, looking with those stealth eyes for leftovers. I will leave him and move a little further down the field.

I see a large flock of greater Sandhill Cranes standing at some sort of attention. Their long necks are fixed on something near them. They are all alert and posturing some sort of warning to each other. All of their heads and long beaks are staring in the same direction. Wow, I thought, now this is a sight to behold. What is it that has caught their attention. Then I see what they are staring at. A long and hearty-looking coyote is slowly cruising toward them. He is not stalking or crouching low. He is also at full attention with his head turned directly into the group but he seems to be fully aware that all those eyes, those beaks, those long strong legs have him in their radar and are ready to pounce if need be. I believe that he knows by now that his adventures have taken him on the wrong course and into danger. He seems to lower his head and tries to look inconspicuous, but they are not letting him off the hook for one second and the big flock of cranes watches his every move. I believe that by now they have made some sort of a mysterious truce, some hasty gutsy mental words have been communed but those cranes on tippy toes and dangerous beaks are taut and ready if need be. The coyote ambled on by as quietly as he could, still arrogant and full of grit but much subdued inside of his humbleness. Than he disappears into the corn stubble and I continue watching the drama, perhaps, just a lick smarter for the encounter.

PLANT SPOTLIGHT

Vernal Pool Goldfields

(Lasthenia fremontii)



This beautiful, yellow flower is native to the Rancho Seco Vernal Pools. What may seem to be a flower with just a few petals on the outer rim is actually a tightly packed head of up to 100 individual flowers. The ones on the outer rim look like a single petal, while the ones in the middle barely have petals at all. Goldfields are annuals and tend to bloom around the end of spring, though this one was pictured in early March! An important plant in the vernal pool grassland, solitary bees rely on them to collect pollen. Though our guided hikes for vernal pools have been canceled this year, we look forward to seeing these and others bloom next year in the spring!

CAN I STILL VOLUNTEER FROM HOME?

While all in-person volunteer activities have been suspended, we can still use your knowledge and skill from home!



Research a subject and write an article to share on our website!

Share your photography to be posted on the website, social media, and used for reference in educational articles!



Share your nature art and creativity to inspire others!