A LETTER FROM THE VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

You've all heard it said many times...this is a wild and unprecedented year. While I don't want to sound repetitive, I have to affirm that these past few months have been like no other I've experience before -- a myriad of ups, downs, and all the spaces in between. From COVID-19 to wildfires, our summer has kept many of us indoors and away from the people and places we care most about. And although it is difficult to keep your mind from going to negative places, I'd like to try my best to help all of us get a little glitter and glimpse of some inspiring and uplifting stories from our peers and friends. In this issue I am highlighting stories from all of YOU. This issue is about how you've all managed to take an extremely difficult situation and intertwine it with linings of silver and gold. I hope this issue brings you joy and reminds you that we can make it through almost anything with a little nature, art, storytelling, and community. Thank you to every contributor and to all of you for your steadfast support of Cosumnes River Preserve.
SNAPSHOTS
Recent photographs taken at the Preserve by staff and volunteers.

Great Blue Heron - Greg Robinson
Red-winged Blackbirds - Saige White
Wilson's Snipe - Mike Savino
Great Egret - Emily Anderson
Aerial Wetlands Walk - Tom Palmer
Sandhill Cranes - Emily Anderson
Bald Eagle - Tony Tiapen
Willow Leaves - Saige White
Killdeer - Mike Savino
"HOW I SPENT MY SUMMER"

By Mary Dubose

The pandemic has curtailed so many of our pursuits! But my husband Jonathan and I decided we would make the best of this period by spending time together, being active outside. Our ambitious goal was to schedule a hike, a bike ride, and a kayak trip each week. Here are some of the highlights of our spring, summer and fall adventures.

HIKING

Bobelaine: The Bobelaine Audubon Sanctuary is a hidden gem of a forest along the Feather River off 99. There are a number of trails, of varying lengths, and a lookout point where you can rest on a bench and commune with the Feather River. You’ll see lots of forest birds and hawks. There are two picnic tables near the trailhead if you want to picnic after hiking.

Hidden Falls Regional Park: What an awesome hike this was! We walked 10 miles through oak woodland, but if you want something shorter there are 8 different hiking trails. And although the pandemic has closed the lookout platform for the falls, the hike itself is worth it (you can still see them in the distance).

McCloud: We went much farther afield to see the three McCloud Falls. We camped at Fowler Campground, right next to the river—we could hear it rushing along all night. We took the trail from the Lower to the Middle to the Upper Falls, and all three were amazing. Best in the spring, but still very scenic in the summer. While on this trip, we also kayaked the McCloud reservoir and hiked to Heart Lake—which actually is shaped just like a heart! Lots to do here.

Point Mariah: This is a 5-mile out-and-back trail outside of Soda Springs. The trail leads to an overlook, with expansive views of the surrounding Sierras and down into the American River Canyon. Plus, at the end of the trail, you can swing out over the canyon on the swing that is there (if you trust it!).

Dead Truck: We were curious about the American River Canyon and Dead Truck Trail in the Auburn Recreation Area. It turned out to be shady and pleasant, with quite a few stream crossings and many ups and downs. It’s a loop, and it does have a dead truck (maybe from the 1940s) in an unusual spot, as well as spectacular views down into the American River Canyon. Take walking sticks, and avoid the poison oak!
"How I Spent My Summer" Continued...

**Fairy Falls:** The Fairy Falls Trail is a 5.2-mile loop trail in the Spenceville Wildlife Area. It wends through forest and meadow—when we were there, wildflowers were blooming and we saw coyote, deer, and a few cows. The falls at the end of the trail are tiered, and there’s a swimming hole at the lowest tier. Which is good, because it’s a hot trail in the summer!

**KAYAKING**

**Mokelumne River:** Our favorite kayak trip was on the Mokelumne and Cosumnes Rivers, with Lee Leavelle and his wife Linda, friends who are also Paddle Guides at the Preserve. We started at Wimpy’s Marina on the Mokelumne and headed upstream at a leisurely pace, stopping to inspect half-sunken boats, identify hawks soaring overhead, and remark on the flora we were passing. At the confluence of the Mokelumne and the Cosumnes, we followed the Cosumnes to Middle Slough and the Preserve dock, where we put in and had lunch on the picnic tables at the Visitor Center. The trip back to Wimpy’s was a breeze. The tide was going out, so we just floated down the river.

**Lake Clementine:** Lake Clementine, outside of Auburn, is a long lake that starts out as open to motorized boats. Just a short distance up, the lake becomes no-wage, with spacious boat-in campsites around the turn past the no-wage signs. We kayak camped there for a few days. It was hot, but that made for good swimming—the water temperature was comfortable. We also fished and picked blackberries, and later on, at home, made a yummy blackberry pie.

**BIKING**

**The American River Bike Trail:** For biking, we never tire of the ARBT. We live in Natomas, so we can get from home to mile 1 of the ARBT in about ten miles, almost all of it on a path. We generally ride to Folsom and have lunch at Karen’s Bakery (her spinach salad is the best ever!).

**Winters:** For a change of pace, we rode our bikes from Natomas to Davis and on to Winters. That route is a little dicey going through West Sacramento, because you have to ride in places with no bike path and lots of truck traffic. Once you get past Davis and onto the farm roads, it’s quite scenic.

**Sloughouse:** Lee Leavelle gave us a bike tour from his home near the American River in the Watt Avenue area out to Davis Ranch in Sloughhouse, where of course we got corn for dinner. That was a fun ride with lots to see. And smell, when you pass the rendering plant.

"All in all, we found that staying active during this pandemic took some research and planning, but it was well worth it. We’ve enjoyed all of our adventures, and we’re always planning more!"
Dear Friends and Lovers of the Cosumnes River Preserve,

Our wedding anniversary was remembered by each of us in our own way. My wife remembered to get me a greeting card. I remembered to make a supper reservation at our traditional restaurant. We've been doing this now for 34 years. But today's was the most memorable anniversary sunrise ever.

October alarm clocks are not set very early, but my 06:58 arrival at the Farm Center gate was still well in advance of the sun's appearance. The drive south from Sacramento had been into a stiff breeze and beneath a solid overcast stretching from the western horizon nearly to the eastern one. But that "nearly to" was key. Not only was the spine of the Sierra thrown into stark outline but in that gap in the cloud cover was the possibility of a nice sunrise. After locking the gate behind me, I drove to the east side of the Tall Forest. I got out of my car at 07:06.

The eastern margin of the clouds advanced slowly eastward, but not at a pace that would block the early sun. It might have done so had I been farther south or farther north. But I was in luck. The wind was steady and out of the southeast, strong enough to depress the autumn dawn chorus of birds. In its place was the moaning of trees and chattering of leaves, especially the cottonwoods thereabouts. Still, a few Lincoln's and song sparrows called from the dry, dense Scirpus stands and a hermit thrush and spotted towhee from the forest behind me. A thin margin of pinkish orange graced the easternmost clouds. A few Brewer's blackbirds flew east overhead. There was a "dust devil" of eight turkey vultures wheeling over the south portion of Cougar Wetlands well before sunup. This species usually basks in the first rays of the sun, but takes early flight on windy days.

The rugose bottom of the somber gray cloud bank drifted steadily north, seemingly slowly in the distance and smartly so overhead. Patches of verga slid by. The most amazing clouds were bright white and about halfway between the ground and the gray. These materialized out of nothing and dissolved to nothing over the course of a few minutes each. One of these, directly up wind, appeared off the heronry site on the east side of the Tall Forest. It grew rapidly in size on approach, slowly rotating counterclockwise, looking something like an on-coming special effects ghost in a 1940s movie. But just before if reached me it fell apart and vanished. As sunrise approached, a few hundred red-winged blackbirds flew west. Sandhill cranes, mostly silent and in pairs and small flocks, labored into the wind to their breakfasting grounds south and east of the river.
Then the pace of change quickened. Sunrise was just a few minutes away when the colors on the clouds raced westward. Briefly everywhere a lovely pinkish-purple, the cloud bottom steadily turned a gorgeous saffron. This color charged the air everywhere. Immediately before sunrise, the easternmost clouds turned a bright yellow-orange. Over the Accidental Forest there was just then a “tornado” of some 55 turkey vultures.

I turned and looked behind me. The tops of the trees were getting sunlight that I was not yet. The line of light steadily descended to the ground, and these trees then looked completely luminescent, with glittering green, yellow and “red” leaves. The shimmering reds were really browns set afire by the first rays of dawn.

Above the trees part of a rainbow appeared, intensifying over a few minutes and growing in completeness from south to north. Then most of a double rainbow intensified. The upper rainbow faded away, but as it did so, the lower one grew still brighter, and when closely inspected was four rainbows crowded together, the outermost the brightest and successively paler inside the curve. I don’t understand the physics of such adjacent rainbows. That’s something that I will investigate.

At 07:39, the colors in the sky disappeared. A minute late and they were gone from the trees. The sun had ascended above the edge of the clouds. Almost immediately I was in a light rain.

The magical sunrise was over. But I still see it in my mind’s eye. It’s a personal Top Five Ever sunrise.

Best,
John Trochet
By early October I finished up with the testing, sorting, packaging and cold storage of this year’s crop of acorns from the valley oak tree in our Martinez garden. That oak tree came from the store of acorns planted in 1988 at the Cosumnes River Preserve, making it almost 33 years old. In December of this year, I plan to add this crop to the store of acorns to be planted at Cosumnes. It will be the first year that our tree will contribute its crop to the conservation efforts that gave our tree its start in life back in the winter of 1987.

I am particularly interested in this “return of the native” to its wild beginnings because it represents how urban gardeners all over the world can contribute to the preservation of species simply by participating in that process on a personal level. We have watched our tree grow to an astounding 36 feet in height without any special treatment or protection other than being watered year round along with the rest of our garden. Our tree began dropping acorns about three weeks before I finished and we began collecting the ones without holes before taken by the local squirrels and insects. The rejects were left for the wildlife (including the bugs and worms) to feast on. The net harvest now sitting in black plastic bags of 200 each in our refrigerator came to 880 of “most likely to succeed” for next generation. These 880 acorns were 91% of all the acorn we picked up for this harvest. The biomass of our tree of 36 feet with a “breast height” circumference of 56 inches is testament of how successful our native plants can be if given a chance.

"The California valley oak is an anchor species for the Cosumnes River Preserve. It is only one of the many native trees and hundreds of native plants we actively propagate, encourage, and protect. It makes me grin ear to ear when I look at our Oak tree and imagine how good life can get."
I started volunteering at the Cosumnes River Preserve in October 2017. I was looking for natural resource volunteer opportunities and I knew about the preserve, so I decided to browse the preserve website. I picked the Habitat Restoration Team since I could just show up and volunteer without attending any trainings. When I arrived on my first Saturday morning I discovered that Alex Cabrera, the Nature Conservancy lead for the HRT, brings doughnuts for HRT volunteers and I was hooked. But seriously, the volunteers at the preserve are great people, the work is rewarding, and you get to see many areas of the preserve that aren’t open to the public. Since that first Saturday in 2017 I’ve had the chance to do great habitat restoration work and I eventually got involved in the Maintenance and Repairs Team as well. In 2020, I started volunteering more time and by the time that COVID-19 restrictions shut down volunteering in mid-March, I had put in over 100 hours. Since I had been dedicating so much time to the preserve, I knew that I would have to find a way to keep myself occupied until I could return to volunteering. Vegetable gardening is something I’ve been doing almost my whole life, so I decided to focus on that.

Since I had more free time, I decided to plant my vegetable garden earlier than normal, which is usually Memorial Day weekend. I also wanted to grow more varieties of chile peppers because they are my favorite thing to grow. I took some of my stimulus money and invested it in chile pepper starters, pots, and potting soil. While we have a large garden space, I needed additional growing room, and pots are a perfect solution. Growing in pots also allows you to move plants around for optimal lighting conditions as the sun moves farther south as the year progresses. In the final count, I had 36 chile pepper plants from 4 different continents, with about 12 of them in pots. Some of the new chile pepper varieties like the Aleppo and Zimbabwe Bird were a success and I will be growing them again next year. Others were not what I was looking for and they’ll end up in the compost pile. The other fun project I did in the garden was to convert the sprinklers on one of my garden beds into drip irrigation. Sprinklers are not always the most optimal watering method since they spray water over a large area, which is less efficient than applying water at the base of plants. I had been looking for a solution to this for a while and I found a sprinkler to drip conversion kit online and purchased it. After converting the sprinklers, the watering in that bed was much improved. I still have to find the emitters with the optimal gallons-per-hour rating, but I’m happy with the way things turned out.

“Gardening and habitat restoration have a lot in common. You have to remember that nature is always in charge. Despite your best knowledge, planning, and execution, something can always go wrong and you have to accept the results with a little patience (and maybe a good sense of humor)."
PLANT SPOTLIGHT

Soap Plant
(Chlorogalum pomeridianum)

This wavy-leaved perennial is part of the lily family and grows a lovely display of white or pinkish flowers in the spring. While you may assume the flowers open during the day with sunlight, these flowers open as the sun goes down — their pollinators are night-flying moths. The Miwok, who originally inhabited the land around the Cosumnes River, utilize this as soap, hence it’s name. Another important use for soap plant is in catching fish. Miwok people crush the leaves and bulb and then throw it into the water. The plant releases a toxin that enters the fish’s gulls and “stuns” them, making it easy to catch the fish!

CAN I STILL VOLUNTEER FROM HOME?

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

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

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

Share your nature art and creativity to inspire others!