



MAGPIE CALLS

Newsletter of the Santa Ynez Valley Natural History Society
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*Dedicated to the study, exploration, and appreciation of natural history
in the Santa Ynez Valley region.*

What's New at SYVNHS...

by Charlie Stauffer, SYVNHS Board President

As we emerge from the dog days of summer, the Natural History Society has prepared a lively list of offerings for the fall.

For the first time, we are pleased to offer a series of birding field trips. These four excursions are offered in tandem with a Cachuma Lake two-part introductory birding class. These classes and the SYVNHS field trips may be attended separately or together. Details on the field trips are found in this issue of "Magpie Calls," and members have already received information on the Cachuma Lake classes via email.

We are all set to explore Santa Rosa Island with our intrepid guide and island expert Steve Junak. The response to the Society's registration announcement was enthusiastic and the trip filled up fast. This may be something we can repeat -- perhaps next year after the really wet winter we are all hoping for!

I would also like to call attention to a few donations the Society has made to organizations that help foster natural history education for the youth in our community. First, to the Santa Ynez Charter School, which completed a long science unit on the Santa Ynez River watershed. The school's 4th grade class visited a number of sites along the river, conducted experiments and

Upcoming SYVNHS Lectures and Field Trips

- Sep. 20 **Birding for Beginners 1 (field workshop)**
- Sep. 27 **Birding for Beginners 2 (field workshop)**
- Oct. 4 **Birding at Nojoqui Park (field)**
- Oct. 9 **Water Capture and Conservation (lecture)**
- Oct. 18 **Birding at Hans Christian Andersen Park (field)**
- Oct. 23 **Influences of Grazing, Soil, and Climate (lecture)**
- Oct. 25 **Rancho Arbolado (field)**
- Oct. 26 **Birding on Quiota Creek (field)**
- Nov. 6 **Interesting Fishes of the Pacific Coast (lecture)**
- Nov. 8 **Birding on Lake Cachuma (field)**
- Nov. 15 **Looking for the Wild Side of Solvang (field)**
- Dec. 4 **Santa Ynez River Steelhead (lecture)**
- Dec. 13 **Geological Exploration of the Upper SY River (field)**

wrote about the whole water cycle in the valley. In addition, donations have been made to the Solvang Branch Library to purchase natural history-related books and to NatureTrack for its work acquainting young people with the outdoors. While your membership fees are primarily used to support our field trips, lectures, and workshops, these modest donations to other nonprofits and institutions are another way in which the Society can nurture the development of future generations of naturalists.

Upcoming Lectures and Field Trips

Fall Birding Series: Field Workshop and Field Excursions in the Santa Ynez Valley

Co-sponsored by Santa Barbara County Parks and the Santa Ynez Valley Natural History Society

Join local naturalists for learning opportunities and outings in the Santa Ynez Valley to learn about and enjoy the bird fauna of the Valley. This birding series has two separate components: One two-session workshop for beginning adult birders, and four field excursions to birding destinations in the Santa Ynez Valley. Registration is required separately for the Birding for Beginners Workshop and for each of the Field Excursions. Registration details are included with each description.

**Birding for Beginners: A Field Workshop for Adults
Age 15 and Up**

Workshop with Liz Gaspar and Tim Matthews
Saturday, September 20 & 27, 9:00 a.m.–12:30 p.m.
Cachuma Lake Recreation Area

"Birding" is an active way to sharpen awareness and knowledge of the outdoors, whether the out-of-doors is wild or "domestic." This two session field workshop offers the basics of birding and identification. Skills covered include how to "see" birds in the blink of an eye, bird observation, optimal binocular handling and use, and use of field

guides. We will cover basics of bird evolution and adaptation, and examine habitats and how birds live and move in them. We will spend time in a class setting and in the field the first session, and entirely in the field on the Cachuma Lake pontoon boat the second session.

Binoculars will be available for loan each day. To register, please call or email Liz Gaspar @ (805) 688-4515, Lgaspar@sbparks.org.

Fee: \$15 per person, plus \$10 park entry per vehicle. Workshop Limit: 20 birders

Birding at Nojoqui Park

Saturday, October 4, 9:00 a.m.–12 noon
Trip Leaders: Fred Emerson and Tim Matthews

Advance registration required at
synature@west.net or 693-5683
\$15 per person, members and nonmembers
Participation is limited to 15 birders

**Water Capture and Conservation in the Home
Landscape: a Holistic Approach**

Free lecture with Meg West
Thursday, October 9, 7:00 p.m.
Solvang Library, 1745 Mission Drive

Join landscape architect Meg West to learn how to make rainwater harvesting and water conservation an integral part of your garden. Her illustrated talk will examine the ways in which a man-made landscape can become more compatible with natural cycles, including the use of techniques such as rainwater capture, infiltration basins, and bioswales. She will also discuss the carbon and nitrogen cycles, and share ways to maximize their role in a holistic approach to the garden.

Meg West owns and operates Meg West Design, specializing in designing and advocating for sustainable landscapes. She achieved her LEED certification and Landscape Architecture license while working at Arcadia Studio in Santa Barbara.

Meg West in a garden irrigated in part with captured rainwater.



Among the projects she has worked on are Patagonia's Holistic Campus Plan, Goleta Water District's Edible Garden, and UCSB's Ocean Sciences Center. Meg also teaches three courses in UCSB Extension's Green Building Program.

Birding at Hans Christian Andersen Park, Solvang

Saturday, October 18, 9:00 a.m.–12 noon

Trip Leader: Guy Tingos

Advance registration required at
synature@west.net or 693-5683

\$15 per person, members and nonmembers

Participation is limited to 15 birders

Influences of Grazing, Soil and Climate on California Grassland Composition

Free lecture with Carla D'Antonio

Thursday, October 23, 7:00 p.m.

Solvang Library, 1745 Mission Drive

Grasslands occur across a wide range of soil and climate conditions in California. Today, most are dominated by a small suite of non-native European annual grasses and forbs. Controversy exists over whether these “invaders” directly reduce the abundance of native annual species and whether livestock grazing can influence both the occurrence of native species and the dominance of non-native species. Dr. Carla D'Antonio will explore this issue and present results from a quantitative statewide survey of livestock grazing studies and from a long-term grazer exclusion study at Sedgwick Reserve.



Carla D'Antonio preparing a site for habitat restoration with fire at UCSB. (Maybe not a good idea this fall!)

Carla D'Antonio is a plant ecologist who has worked extensively on invasive plants and their dynamics and impacts in California as well as in Hawaii. She joined the UCSB faculty in 2005 after 14 years on faculty at UC Berkeley. She is currently Chair of the Environmental Studies Program at UCSB and Faculty Advisor at the UC Sedgwick Reserve.

Rancho Arbolado

Field Trip with Larry Ballard

Saturday, October 25, 9:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m.

Advance Registration required at
synature@west.net or 693-5683

Participation is limited to 24

Members free/nonmembers \$20

Rancho Arbolado is a private ranch located on the ridge between Highway 1 and Hollister Ranch. Wind and fog provide a favorable microclimate for huckleberry, Purisima manzanita, Santa Cruz Island oak and a rare mainland population of Santa Rosa Island manzanita. The land was part of the historic Las Cruces and San Julian land grants and continues the tradition of dry land grazing. Under one of the first Williamson Act (Ag Preserve) contracts in Santa Barbara County, the ranch proudly maintains the undeveloped raw and wild condition of those earlier

years. This devoted stewardship of the large, unspoiled nature of Rancho Arbolado makes it a rarity along the coast of California.

This trip is part of the SYVNHS series based on Joan Lentz's book, *A Naturalist's Guide to the Santa Barbara Region*. Participants may enjoy reading Chapter 6: Coastal Plains and Foothills. Dress in layers, also wear sturdy shoes and a hat. Bring water, lunch, and don't forget your binoculars. The trail is a 3 mile loop with an elevation gain of 600 feet. There are no facilities.

Larry Ballard has an interest in all aspects of the region's natural history, and has led many trips for our organization as well as for UC Sedgwick Reserve, Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary, Western Field Ornithologists, and the Wildling Museum.

Birding at Quiota Creek

Sunday, October 26, 9:00 a.m.–12 noon

Trip Leader: Tim Matthews

Advance registration required at
synature@west.net or 693-5683

\$15 per person, members and nonmembers

Participation is limited to 15 birders

Interesting Fishes of the Pacific Coast

Free lecture with Milton Love

Thursday, November 6, 7:00 p.m.

Solvang Library, 1745 Mission Drive

If you would like to learn more about our local marine fishes in a lecture that promises to be both highly entertaining and educational, please join Dr. Milton Love for his popular talk titled “Better Than a Swift Kick Where the Sun Don’t Shine – Interesting Fishes of the Pacific Coast.”

Milton Love is a research biologist at UCSB’s Marine Science Institute. He has conducted research on the

marine fishes of California for over 40 years and is the author of over 90 publications on the fishes of the Pacific Coast. He has written the books *Certainly More Than You Want to Know About the Fishes of the Pacific Coast* and *The Rockfishes of the Northeast Pacific*. For the past 15 years, and using a manned research submersible, Dr. Love has carried out surveys of the fish populations living around natural reefs and oil/gas platforms throughout the coastal waters of southern California. In 2007 the American Fisheries Society awarded Dr. Love the Carl R. Sullivan Award for Conservation Resources.



Birding on Lake Cachuma

Saturday, November 8, 8:30 a.m.–12 noon

Pontoon boat, Cachuma Lake Recreation Area

Trip Leaders: Liz Gaspar and Tim Matthews

Advance registration required at
synature@west.net or 693-5683

\$15 per person, members and nonmembers,
plus \$10 park entry per vehicle

Participation is limited to 15 birders

Looking for the Wild Side of Solvang

Field trip with Tim Matthews, Margie Popper, and John Evarts

Saturday, November 15, 9:00 to 11:30 a.m.

Advance registration required at synature@west.net or 693-5683

Members free / nonmembers \$20

The vast majority of SYVNHS field trips take us to destinations that are far removed from town, which allows us to explore environments that have not been so heavily altered by human activity. But our urban backyards, parks, and small pockets of undeveloped land can also be rich with interesting flora and fauna -- and these habitats are often just a short walk away. This moderate hike, led by Tim Matthews,

Margie Popper, and John Evarts will visit a wilder edge of Solvang, introduce some of the fascinating native and nonnative trees in our urban forest, and examine ways in which we can better appreciate natural history in the city. This trip complements the chapter titled "Urban Parks and Backyards" in Joan Lentz's *A Naturalist's Guide to the Santa Barbara Region*.

Tim Matthews has led many trips for the Society, and is an outstanding birder. **Margie Popper** and **John Evarts** are editors and publishers of several California native tree books; they also lead tree identification trips for middle-school students that are sponsored by the Society. This trip will entail less than three miles of easy walking, some of it on pavement. Bring binoculars, water, and a sense of adventure.

Santa Ynez River Steelhead: Past, Present and Future

Free lecture with Mark Capelli

Thursday, December 4, 7:00 p.m.

Solvang Library, 1745 Mission Drive

Will we ever witness the return of a steelhead fishery on the Santa Ynez River? Historian and biologist Mark Capelli will explore that question in this illustrated talk about the natural history of this seagoing rainbow trout. His lecture will focus on the historic Santa Ynez River steelhead fishery and the role of our local river in the recovery of the southern California steelhead, which once spawned in watersheds ranging from the Santa Maria River to the Mexican border.

Mark Capelli has spent much of his professional career working on behalf of the survival of southern California steelhead, which has been protected by the Endangered Species Act since it was listed in 1997. He is the Recovery Coordinator for southern California steelhead at the National Marine Fisheries Service.



Steelhead fishing near the mouth of the Santa Ynez River, from a Lompoc mural (now gone).

Geology Exploration of the Upper Santa Ynez River

Field Trip with Susie Bartz

Saturday, December 13 , 10:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m.

Advance Registration required at
synature@west.net or 693-5683

Participation is limited to 20

Members free/nonmembers \$20

This trip will be a combination of driving and walking. Starting with an orientation near the first river crossing on Paradise Road, we will continue, with stops along the way, to the area around Red Rock. The Santa Ynez River is a braided meander belt that finds its way along the north side of the Santa Ynez Mountain ridge, flowing west to the ocean at Lompoc. We'll be exploring the river near the harsh convergence of the Little Pine and Santa Ynez faults. There, the river cuts a sinuous route through rock layers whose steep folds reflect intense tectonic compression. Within the faulted area, springs and mineralization of fault-gouged rocks enrich both their color and their composition. The river's natural

meanders and its dam impoundments impact its flow patterns through this dynamic landscape. Up-tilted rocks expose algal limestones – rare for the Santa Barbara area – and marine fossils that record their ancient marine origin.

Plan for 8–10 miles of driving, round trip, and several miles of walking on mostly level terrain. Hiking poles are highly recommended, since any scrambling around the river rocks will make them useful. Also snacks, lunch, water, good solid shoes or boots, broad brimmed hat, and sunscreen.

Susie Bartz worked at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History to publish the maps of legendary geologist Tom Dibblee. She currently assists community organizations to help bring an awareness of earth sciences to children, teachers, and the general public.

An Unusual Oak In the Neighborhood

by Larry Ballard

Palmer Oak (*Quercus palmeri*) is an uncommon scrub oak that is readily identified by its roundish gray-green leaves with undulate margins and the stiffest spines of any oak species. It was named for Edward Palmer, a major plant collector throughout the western United States and northern Mexico in the late 1800s. He was the first to collect the plant in 1875 at a location no more precise than “80 miles east of San Diego.”

Palmer Oak is most common in northern Baja and central Arizona in areas that experience summer rainfall. It is less common on the desert-facing mountain slopes of San Diego and Riverside counties at elevations of about 3000 feet in areas that receive slight summer precipitation. From there the range extends north through California to Colusa County, but only as small, widely scattered relict populations or even individual plants. This disjunct distribution is likely the result of range contraction as summer rains diminished with a strengthening mediterranean climate.

In Santa Barbara County, a few isolated small populations of Palmer Oak are found in the Purisima Hills between Ballard Canyon and Cebada Canyon. They grow mostly on ridge tops at elevations of 700 to 900 feet where fog drip ameliorates the effects of summer drought. A few tree-sized oaks reach a height of 20 feet on shadier west-facing slopes where the topography concentrates the fog-laden westerly breezes. Lichens flourish on the oaks at both sites. (The Society recently hosted a trip to visit one of these Palmer Oak populations, located on private property.) To the north, the closest

Palmer Oaks grow in the southern Santa Lucia Mountains on the south slopes of Cuesta Ridge, about 60 miles away; to the south, the closest are 100 miles away, near Moorpark.

Multiple stems, abundance of aborted acorns and the absence of any seedlings are indications that the Palmer Oaks in our area are clones. Although they continue to flower prolifically, their isolated occurrence makes it impossible for them to cross-pollinate, but they are able to increase vegetatively by crown sprouting. A few fully developed acorns have been collected from one site for attempted propagation at the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden.

An isolated population of Palmer Oak found a decade ago near Jurupa in Riverside County was first thought to consist of 50 plants. Genetic sampling of several stems revealed that this five-foot-high shrub was instead a clone measuring nearly 1900 square feet. By averaging growth rates at this site, botanists determined that this oak could conservatively be estimated to be about 13,000 years old, placing it among the oldest living plants. (Although bristlecone pines were long considered the oldest living plants -- exceeding 4500 years for an individual -- a growing body of research on species that can reproduce by clones indicates they may achieve even greater ages; DNA analysis shows that plants such as creosote bush, aspen, and some oaks may live more than 10,000 years.) Prior to the discovery of the Jurupa Oak, a Palmer Oak clone near Cebada Canyon was estimated to be of similar size. Without a detailed study, the age of our local Palmer Oaks cannot be determined, but they are likely much younger than the Jurupa Oak.

Past SYVNHS Programs:



(Clockwise from upper left) Charles Stauffer, SYVNHS board president, presents the Society's Student Education Award to teachers at Santa Ynez Charter School; Larry Ballard points out an unusual Palmer oak while on a field trip at the Gregersen Ranch; looking close at the leaves of Palmer Oak, showing undulate margins and stiff spines; exploring the beach between Arroyo Hondo and El Molino Point with Susie Bartz; hiking over ground burned by the White Fire in Paradise on the Aliso Loop Trail with Liz Gaspar. (Photos by John Evarts, Susan Brooks, and Lynn Watson.)

Marc's Stumper

All insects and spiders have an *exoskeleton*, like a suit of armor. So how can these critters move when their muscles can only attach on the inside of their external frame? Our bones are inside us, and our muscles work in pairs. Grasp your upper arm. You can feel your *bicep* (on top) work when you pull your arm in, and your *tricep* (on back) work when you extend your arm. Muscles can only contract. So how can butterflies uncurl their tongues with such precision to enter a flower, and how can spiders move with such speed to seize their prey?

About last issue's stumper: There's still no consensus about the causes of our extended drought. Maybe it's just the swing of the weather pendulum? As for unexpected consequences of the drought, I'm most impressed with how *normal* everything in nature looks. Our garden wouldn't last for a week without summer watering, but the natives are hanging on. Sure, some plants and insects didn't appear this year, and others didn't flower or only flowered for a short time. I've seen a few dead trees, but not many. A stumper remains. What will this year bring – drought or deluge?

(Left to right) The mighty **Tarantula Hawk** (genus *Pepsis*, Hymenoptera) is a spectacular late summer insect, even in this drought year. How do they manage to move? Uncommon native **Ojai Fritillary** (*Fritillaria ojaiensis*, Liliaceae) flowering last spring, and **Golden Fleece** (*Ericameria arborescens*, Asteraceae) flowering now in September – despite three years of drought. (Photos by Marc Kummel.)



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