

Marsh Mailing is also available in full color at www.friendsofmadronamarsh.com

Life Goes On.

Steve Ash, Acting Manager, Madrona Marsh Preserve



Melissa Loebl

It was late afternoon on Thursday, October 1st, when Melissa Loebl came into my office to let me know she had been offered the job as Manager of the Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve. To say the news came as a shock is an understatement. I can remember sitting there with the late afternoon sun streaming through the

blinds and not knowing what to say. I could feel her emotion as Melissa went on to explain the great opportunity the position offered to her career, but at the same time her sense of loss at thinking about leaving the Madrona Marsh. Our conversation continued for some time, but I can

tell you it was difficult to say "congratulations" when I really wanted to say, "please don't leave the Marsh". Nevertheless, my discussion centered on moving forward and not worrying about the

Marsh. However, I know Melissa and know that today she is still worried about the Marsh and the staff she left behind. You see, Melissa's biggest attribute is her concern for the



her. I can attest to that after working with her through

her through good times and tough times.

"Life..." continued on page 5

Membership Corner News

As we pause to reflect on 2020 and look forward to a New Year 2021 ahead, we are moved to thank our members who have given us such generous support, especially in a time of need, and we are reminded of the goodness in the world around us. Gifts from friends like you and our commercial partners like SkyOne Federal Credit Union and Marriott Hotels make it possible for us to serve our community and continue with habitat restoration initiatives, Friday Fun for children and our normal operational maintenance. Please know that, because of you, our programs will continue to enhance the lives of our visitors, while bringing education to the public and restoration to our precious Madrona Marsh Preserve.

On behalf of all of us at Friends of Madrona Marsh and the Madrona Marsh Nature Center, we are beyond grateful for your continued support.

Annual Zoom Meeting

Due to COVID-19 State and County guidelines, we will be holding our Friends of Madrona Marsh Annual Meeting via Zoom this year. The meeting will take place via Zoom on January 24, 2021 from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m. PLEASE SAVE THE DATE! (See Agenda, page 2.) An email will be sent to each member with an email address on file in our database, re-stating the date and time, with a link to this Zoom meeting and instructions to pre-register.

If we do not have an email on file for your membership, please feel free to drop me a note at members.fomm@wendelsworld.com. Follow-up emails will be sent weekly to remind you of the meeting along with providing you with an Agenda and any updates.

Here's looking forward to a bright and exciting future at the Madrona Marsh Preserve and Nature Center in 2021!

Sincerely. Donna Wendel, FOMM Membership Chairperson

Annual Meeting Friends of Madrona Marsh

Sunday, January 24, 2021

Zoom Meeting 1–2 p.m.

All members for whom we have an email address will be sent a meeting ID and password to join the meeting from Donna Wendel, Membership Chair. If we don't have a current email for you please send that information to **Members.fomm@wendelsworld.com**

- Welcome and Introductions President, Suzan Hubert
- Election of Board Members:

Candidates: Sarah Noddings Bob Shanman Lance Hill

• FOMM Annual Report: President Hubert

"Grants and Expectations for the Nature Center and Preserve" Tracy Drake, Park Services Director for the City of Torrance reports on new grants the City has received for the Nature Center and Preserve, the year's successes and plans for the future.

• Closing Remarks - President Hubert

Thank you for joining us!

Living in Harmony with South Bay Wildlife--Introduction

Suzan Hubert, President, FOMM

First in a 6 part series: Skunks, raccoons, coyotes, squirrels and opossums.

Some folks enjoy having local wild mammals visit their backyard gardens or open spaces; others not so much. I've lived in Torrance since the eighties and it is a bit startling to walk out to get the newspaper (yep, I still like print) and see a coyote saunter down the street, or two raccoons chase each other across my lawn. Like them or not, they have been here much longer than people. Skunks and covotes have lived in what we call the South Bay since the Pleistocene Era when saber-toothed cats and mastodons roamed. It seems to me if they dealt with those guys they can and are dealing with us just as successfully. Over the decades humans have tried trapping, killing and relocating unwanted wildlife to no avail. Poison was tried, too, and it has done extensive damage to earth ecosystems. Books are written about the damage poisons do to the whole of nature-so forget poison! What's left? Understanding these critters and living in harmony is the best strategy. "Whoa", you may think, "no way"! But, if wildlife can adapt to human roads, oil drilling, farming, housing developments and malls, why can't we adapt and live in harmony with wildlife?

Living in harmony with different people can be difficult, so doing the same with several different species such as skunks, raccoons, coyotes, squirrels and opossums, can be daunting. Start small; consider what all of these mammals have in common with all living things. We all seek water, food and safe shelter. Consider yourself on a family road trip: As evening approaches would you pull over along a deserted stretch of highway for the night, or would you choose a spot with a nice motel, maybe one with a pool, a market, a restaurant, a fuel station. My guess is we'd all choose the latter. As skunks, opossums, coyotes, raccoons and squirrels (i.e. our local wildlife) travel through the South Bay they make the same choice. Local wildlife is always on a road trip.

Walk into your backyard and consider what you are offering in the way of water, food and safe shelter. If you don't want any wildlife in your yard, pave it over with sand-set bricks or something similar. That allows water to seep into the ground but offers no surface water, food or safe shelter. You will likely only see wildlife passing through if any at all stop to visit. My neighbors did this and had complete success. Perhaps, for you, this seems extreme, a terrible expense and a big inconvenience. What you really want is to keep your garden and for the critters to just go away. Many people feel this way. Please consider this: As the South Bay was developed the wildlife was horrified; their habitat was taken away! Food was gone; water was gone, safe shelters all gone.... It took them a long time to adapt.

We are just as capable of adapting to changes as a skunk, a squirrel, a raccoon, a coyote or an opossum. I believe we are still in the early stages of adapting; we are learning about the habits of local wildlife and making life style choices that protect wildlife and people. It's both individual and community adaptation to a changing environment. Wildlife learned our habits and how to find what they need for life, and we can learn theirs just as successfully. Let's consider what you may want in your backyard garden and how that can be achieved in harmony with wildlife.

If you want trees and birds and offer seed for the birds, you will also get squirrels—as they nest in nearby trees. Sweep up any birdseed dropped during the day; this helps prevent mice and rats. Mice and rats themselves are snacks for covotes and owls. If there is any water source, raccoons will also visit. What if you have all brick and just want potted plants? You will get skunks, opossums and raccoons digging in the dirt of the pots searching for tasty grubs, larvae and other insects the plant attracts; add a few bushes, and that provides some safe shelter. Maybe a bush is only a two-star motel sort of shelter, but I have an opossum happily spending the day sleeping under my Star Jasmine. Here is a good question; what if I sand-set my yard in bricks but my crazy neighbor has a mini-ecosystem growing and attracting all sorts of animals I don't want? My yard will be a pass-through, or perhaps a complete pass-over, just like a deserted highway. It will be great for barbeques, lounging and parties, but will no longer have anything to offer a traveling critter.

Consider what you want in your backyard and make wise choices that work for you, not against you. Change is difficult but can also lead to more harmony with nature.

Next edition: Harmony with Skunks; it is possible!

See you on the Preserve Suzan, California Naturalist

Sofia and Baby



Sofia and Baby made a guest appearance at Friday Fun recently.

Hi. My name is Sofia. I was out riding my bike during my school lunch break when I passed what appeared to be a mouse in the street. I backed up to see what it was, and to my surprise it was a baby squirrel! I called my mom to come and help me figure out what to do with it and in the meantime I moved the squirrel out of the street and onto the grass.

When my mom arrived we took the squirrel home in a box. I took the squirrel down to our local animal experts (our neighbors) who had taken care of many orphaned or lost animals. They directed us to an expert on squirrels who told us to nail a box to the tree that the squirrel fell out of, to see if the mother would come get it.

So the squirrel waited in the box and I checked on it every so often (every 20 minutes). After over 5 hours I decided to bring the squirrel home. I did some research and found baby squirrels could drink whole milk as a substitute for squirrel milk. So I got out a kitten bottle and fed the squirrel warm whole milk.

By then I had already decided that the name of this squirrel should be Baby. So every 4 hours, including in the middle of the night, I fed Baby. Because he was so young I had to mix water with sugar and salt so that he got water with the nutrients he needed. The second day we had Baby, we put him back in the box nailed to the tree. Unfortunately, he crawled into a small hole in the tree where I was not able to get him out. Fortunately, he started squeaking, which meant his mother might hear him. So again we waited to see if his mother would come to get him. But sadly, at the end of the day, his mother had not come and he was still stuck. It took a little while, but I was able to get him and bring him home. He was happy to be in our warm house with all of his blankets and food.

Since we were stuck with him, we did some more research and got him some proper milk formula and discovered that we would be able to release Baby after 16 weeks. We also discovered that you did not have to feed baby squirrels during the nighttime, past a certain age. We were also able to get Baby a large cage so that he could climb around and use his muscles.

Baby is very happy in his new cage; he loves to be petted and scratched (especially on his belly), but as soon as you do something he doesn't like he'll chirp at you. Many times he's gotten stuck on top of something and then he'll start to squeak. This is not just a small little squeak; this is a loud, high-pitched squeak that you can hear from the other rooms of our house. But he's started to get used to the cage and climbing around.

Our plan is to slowly release Baby into our backyard. To do this we'll put out a squirrel feeder and a squirrel house, so that he has shelter and plenty of food. We hope that he will stay in our backyard so that we can still see him every so often.

I hope this story inspires you to help any animal in need. Thank you for reading!!

Editor's Note: Sofia is a 13 year old Torrance resident. Baby was successfully released in an open area near her neighborhood where he has a chance for a happy life.

The Palos Verdes/South Bay Neighborhood Bird Count

Vincent Lloyd

Another victim of the pandemic was the 2020 annual Christmas Bird Count. As a socially-distant substitute, PV/SB Audubon sponsored a



Neighborhood Bird Count on S u n d a y , December 27th, w h e r e o b servers were invited to count the birds in their b a c k y a r d , neighborhoods, a n d n e a r b y parks. The forty intrepid birders who participated

found an impressive total of 157 species, close to the average for the CBC.

"Life..." Continued from page 1.

Melissa became the Manager and Naturalist of the Madrona Marsh Preserve and Nature Center in September of 2017 after a lengthy and competitive search when previous Manager Tracy Drake accepted the position of Park Services Manager earlier in the year. During Melissa's 3-year tenure, staff came to know her as determined to do the best she could for Madrona Marsh and all Madrona's staff and volunteers.

Many times Melissa would express to me "this is my dream job". We talked frequently about how to improve the educational opportunities offered by the Marsh, about inspiring people to understand the importance of connecting with nature, plus discussing the problems of managing an urban preserve. I will miss those conversations because through that dialog many great ideas emerged, some of which we are moving forward with today.

During her stay, Melissa established our animal care program, helped initiate virtual learning programs, built relationships with other local preserves and nature centers, created a COVID response approach that allowed the Preserve to reopen, began the process of

Some of the interesting birds reported so far are a Long-tailed Duck on the Los Angeles River, a Little Blue Heron at Cabrillo Beach, an Eastern Phoebe and a Peregrine Falcon at Rolling Hills Landfill Loop, a Mountain Chickadee on the Willow Springs Trail in Rolling Hills, a Yellowbellied Sapsucker at South Coast Botanical Garden, ten Wilson's Snipes at Harbor Park, and three Loggerhead Shrikes. Tracy Drake and Lisa Fimiani birded Madrona Marsh, where they counted 54 species and 542 individual birds. Unusual birds on the Marsh included a Western Kingbird (usually in Mexico this time of year), a Loggerhead Shrike, a Black-and-White Warbler (perhaps the same one seen last year), two Myrtle Warblers, and two Black-throated Grey Warblers. (See pages 10, 11.)

PV Audubon thanks all of you nature lovers who contributed your time and enthusiasm! Photo Credit: Loggerhead Shrike by Tracy Drake.

digitizing our volunteer sign-up process, and encouraged staff to initiate projects oriented toward improving the Madrona Marsh experience. There are many others, but it would take up too much of the newsletter to list them all.

However, through it all, Melissa found that living in Huntington Beach with its long commute to the Marsh, raising her two children under COVID restrictions, and ensuring her personal goal to perform and do her best was becoming increasingly difficult. As a result when the Bolsa Chica job was offered, she felt compelled for family reasons to accept the position, something many of us can relate to.

Even though we miss her bubbly personality and determination to succeed, we completely understand her motivation to make a life change for her family.

Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve is the lucky recipient of a well-grounded, kind and caring individual in Melissa Loebl. Good luck, Melissa, in your new job!

As they say, "Life goes on".

Here Comes the Fall, Again!

Steve Ash, Acting Manager, Madrona Marsh Preserve

About August each year, we begin to feel the pressure to start fall maintenance on the Preserve. Between late August and the first (hopefully) rains of the year, staff along with volunteers engage in this traditional period of work. The tasks are many, and include tree trimming, tule management and mowing. It's



Branches and limbs being chipped and loaded into the high side truck.

not the kind of work that is performed quickly —in fact the effort usually takes a few months, sometimes lasting well into November or early December.

Why focus on fall? Easy. There isn't any water in the Marsh! Can you imagine trying to trim trees or mow vegetation or cut tules while standing in several feet of water? Yikes, what a mess, not to mention being hazardous to one's health.

Why go through all this effort? Well, there are a lot of reasons, but the overriding objective is to help manage nature so it can continue to thrive within our urban setting. Mosquito management is a huge reason for removing plant material—before it provides a breeding area where they can lay eggs producing the larvae that eventually mature into mosquitos. Also, trees are trimmed and branches removed to keep the trails open. Weak and broken limbs that are a risk for causing injury to a visitor must be removed. Some branches are left as habitat for the birds and animals, and non-native or invasive plants are mowed or removed by hand before they can spread.

Starting August 28th staff at Madrona Marsh mowed for over 70 hours, trimmed and de-limbed trees for over 130 hours, hacked away at tules for 192 hours, and raked and collected debris and vegetation in excess of 300 hours. Our work crew consisted of five staff members, and for one week we brought in a crew of 6 to help with tule removal.



View of mowing operation, vernal pool 3. (Courtesy of Sky Ladder Drones)

This year, the work was far more challenging due to COVID-19. Unlike prior years, we could not use volunteers to assist with the work. It was a huge loss of manpower, amounting to many hundreds of hours of labor that we usually count on to complete our work. Nevertheless, we figured somehow we'll find a way, and we did by finding more efficient means of removing debris.

We used a chipper on branches, using the chips as ground cover at specific areas in the <u>*"Fall..."* continued on page 7.</u>

Past President Venora Lee

Bill Arrowsmith,, Past President

Venora Lee was one of the founding members of the Friends of Madrona Marsh, and a close friend of Grace Lear, our second president. She later served as president herself for over ten years, and she was president of the Friends in the early 2000's when the City obtained funding for, planned, and opened the Nature Center. She played an integral role helping to assemble local environmental experts for advice on what should be included in our Exhibit Hall, and

Donations of \$100 or More, Fall 2020

Date	Donor	Donation
October	California Native Plant Society	\$400.00
November	David & Janice Champion	\$100.00
November	Jim Justiss	\$1,000.00
December	Roberta and Bob Shanman	\$100.00
December	Karoline Snakenborg	\$100.00
December	Old Torrance Neighborhood	\$100.00
December	Derek & Mary Ann Kendall	\$100.00
December	Dorothy Austin	\$250.00

Editor's Note: the Summer 2020 Donor List in the Fall newsletter misspelled the name of our long-time and dependable supporters, Mayor Pat and Terry Furey. We truly regret the error, which was corrected in our on-line version. under her leadership the Gift Shop was planned and opened in 2001.

Much earlier, in 1981, while she was working on staff for the City of Torrance, she and coworker Edith Simpelaar worked with CSUDH Biology Professor David Morafka to write a successful application for one of the first grants awarded from the then new Environmental License Plate Fund. Torrance was awarded a \$1.1 million grant at a time when we had only about \$300,000, and were bargaining with Torrance Investment Co. for marshland valued at \$200,000 per acre. Without that grant, it is unlikely we would have saved enough land for a viable preserve.

Venora Lee was another strong-willed and dedicated woman, just like her friends Grace Lear, Betty Shaw and Shirley Turner –giants all in the history of Madrona Marsh.

"Fall..." continued from page 6.

Preserve. Teams raked behind the mower to expedite removal of debris. Tules were trimmed by a contract crew and removed by backhoe into staged roll-offs, allowing us to complete almost 90 percent of the work in a single week. These and other approaches allowed us to complete the work. It was a solid team effort.

Our toils came to an end on Saturday, December 26, when the last piles of vegetation along the east shore of the middle wetland were picked up and deposited in our roll-off bin for sanitation to deliver to green waste recycling. Whew. That was cutting it close! Just a couple days later our first significant rain of the season arrived, a whopping 1.87 inches!-**–S.A.**

Tule, or Not Tule, That is the Question

Steve Ash, Acting Manager, Madrona Marsh

Tules (Schoenoplectus acutus) are a giant species of the sedge family, an important food material and habitat source for scores of aquatic and terrestrial birds, amphibians, reptiles, fish and mammals. Tule seeds are one of the more important food resources for ducks, marshbirds and shorebirds. Tule rhizomes are preferred by geese. Tule stems are important nesting and roosting resources for wetland birds.

Native Americans used tules for food—the rhizome is sweet when eaten cooked, raw or dried. Pollen was used as flour; seeds were ground into flour; and young shoots were eaten cooked or raw. Additionally, they used tules for construction and craft material—rhizomes were used in basketry; stems were used in house and canoe construction, in mats, for insulation and thatching, and in clothing such as shoes, skirts and capes.

Makes you think we should prioritize the growth of tules, doesn't it? Well, here's the rub: Tules have a very aggressive root system with many rhizomes (underground stems). The roots and rhizomes grow fast, more than one foot a year. Tules have 10 times more roots in the same volume of soil than an upland grass plant. Above-ground stems grow to 9 feet and more, all within 3 or 4 years.

Each tule stem lives for approximately one year. As the stems grow and die they can lay over creating a dense vegetative mass providing safe haven for mosquito larvae to thrive. Control of the tules is thus very important to the management of the Preserve.

Tules can easily take over a confined water source such as Madrona Marsh and choke out the wetlands, eliminating open water necessary for waterfowl to thrive. It's the nature of, and a problem for, a habitat many times smaller than its historical size; the dynamics of a complete system are no longer there, only a micro system is present today. As stewards of the land, our task is to find a balance that considers all the above elements culminating in a well thought-out objective, one that ensures the natural dynamics are enhanced, not reduced. What are we looking to achieve?

We aim to create a pattern that controls growth, whereby tule beds are spaced to provide sufficient open water for the many species of waterfowl that call



Aerial view of south pond tule beds. (Courtesy of Sky Ladder Drones)

Madrona Marsh home. Interspersed upon the open water, we form a patchwork of beds, sufficient to provide a safe haven from predators for many species of invertebrates and birds plus serve as nesting habitat for birds such as our iconic Red-winged Blackbirds.

A good distribution of well-spaced beds provides opportunity for the tules to do what they do best: support natural filtration of the water in the Marsh and still maintain the beautiful esthetics of the wetlands we have come to enjoy.

The next time you visit the Marsh, ponder the tules, and know what an important role they have in the life of your Marsh. You may wish to spend some time wondering how **you** might manage the tules.

Extinct Aldabra Makes a Comeback

From an article by Thomas Shambler for **Esquire East Magazine**, 18 May, 2020. Submitted by Bill Arrowsmith.

An extinct bird just 'evolved itself' back into existence. The Aldabra hasn't existed in almost 100,000 years. Now it's back.

The Aldabra white-throated rail bird was declared extinct, a victim of rising sea levels almost 100,000 years ago.

However, the flightless brown bird has recently been spotted—leaving scientists scratching their heads as to how—and why– the species has come back to life.

According to research in the *Zoological Journal of Linnean Society*, the re-incarnated Aldabra bird is a product of 'iterative evolution'. That's when old genes thought to have died out re-emerge at a different point in time.

That means that while a bird's ancestors might have disappeared, that DNA still remains and, provided the environment is right, there's nothing to stop those ancient genes from replicating in modern times.

So identical species can indeed produce multiple, slightly evolved offshoots, throughout the course of their species' history.

But don't get your hopes up that this means dinosaurs and wooly mammoths will be popping up next. This scientific phenomenon occurs only within species that are nearly identical to their ancestors.



While iterative evolution has previously occurred in species such as turtles, it has never been seen in the realm of birds.

"We know of no other example in the rails, or of birds in general, that demonstrates this phenomenon so evidently," said paleobiologist David Martill.

"Only on the Aldabra, which has the oldest paleontological record of any oceanic island within the Indian Ocean region, is fossil evidence available that demonstrates the effects of changing sea levels on extinction and recolonization events."

2020 was already an interesting and confusing year. Looks like now we have to contend with re-materializing birds, as well.

Lance Hill - Prospective New Board Member

Lance spent most of his pre-adult years growing up around the docks, cliffs and tide pools of San Pedro. After graduating from the University of Southern California, Lance worked in the aerospace industry as a research and development engineer. He later switched careers to academia when he started managing the teaching and research laboratories of the Civil Engineering Department at the University of Southern California. His job duties caused him to hang out, and try to keep up, with hundreds of undergraduate engineering students, with many of whom he still maintains friendships.

Along the way, Lance married and bought a house in the Old Downtown area of Torrance. He has two children who were raised in Torrance and graduated from Torrance High School. Lance retired from USC in 2016 and now has three granddaughters.

Lance discovered Madrona Marsh around 2010. A life-long hobbyist photographer, visiting Madrona Marsh turned into a wonderful place to further develop his photography skills and relieve work stress. Over many seasons, Lance has learned the rhythms and cycles of the Preserve and how all the different species work together to make Madrona Marsh such a unique and historic place.

Species Seen on Madrona Marsh December 27

By Tracy Drake and Lisa Fimiani

Mallard (11) Ring-necked Duck (5) Pied-billed Grebe (1) Eurasian Collared-Dove (2) Mourning Dove (13) White-throated Swift (3) Anna's Hummingbird (3) Allen's Hummingbird (7) American Coot (8) Ring-billed Gull (2) Western Gull (12) California Gull (6) Snowy Egret (1)



Green Heron (1) Red-shouldered Hawk (2) Red-tailed Hawk (2) Downy Woodpecker (2) Northern Flicker (Red-shafted) (1) American Kestrel (2) Black Phoebe (3) Say's Phoebe (2) Cassin's Kingbird (2)



Western Kingbird (1) Loggerhead Shrike (1) American Crow (8) Common Raven (3) Bushtit (68)



Ruby-crowned Kinglet (4) Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (6) House Wren (2) European Starling (22)

"Birds..." continued on page 11

Tracy Drake also states that, in the 19 years she has done a late December bird count at Madrona Marsh Preserve, this is the first year there was no water on the preserve at the time of the count. But, as she also observed, "Interestingly it rained the next day (almost 2 inches) and now we have quite a bit of water there! I do hope we get more."

Editor's Note: So do we all, Tracy! Thank you for your twenty years of support for Madrona Marsh, as Preserve Manager & Naturalist and as an avid birder.



Hermit Thrush (2)



Cedar Waxwing (68) Scaly-breasted Munia (17) Pin-tailed Whydah (12) House Sparrow (18) House Finch (15)

American Goldfinch (29) Chipping Sparrow (2) Lark Sparrow (4)



White-crowned Sparrow (36) Savannah Sparrow (14) Song Sparrow (3) Lincoln's Sparrow (3) California Towhee (5) Western Meadowlark (1) Red-winged Blackbird (10) Black-and-white Warbler (1) Orange-crowned Warbler (1) Orange-crowned Warbler (3) Common Yellowthroat (5) Yellow-rumped Warbler (Myrtle (2) Yellow-rumped Warbler (Audubon's (58) Black-Throated Gray Warbler (2)



Lesser Goldfinch (25)

Friends of Madrona Marsh

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