

Winter 2011

Marsh Mailing

Madrona Marsh Preserve and Nature Center

What a Magical Night it Was ...

—Bill Arrowsmith

Have you ever heard over 200 people HOWL at the moon? No? Oh gee, then I'm sorry you must have missed "Moonlight Magic," our October fundraising event—the first one ever(!) to be held ON THE PRESERVE. It more than lived up to its magical name, starting with a disappearing act for the morning's storm. And the magic just continued all night. If you were there, you know. If not, you missed out on a most entertaining and exciting evening, and just to rub it in, we're including a few pictures in this issue and a short description of all the neat stuff you missed. But the good news is that 'Moonlight,' as a fundraiser, was so successful that you will no doubt get another chance at it next fall—that's plenty of time to practice your howl. (Hint: it's pronounced "How-WOO-LL".)

How Successful Was It?

Friends Treasurer **Ellen Peterson** and her staff of volunteers did a superb job of tracking the bids and collecting money during a three-ring circus of bidding at the event, and afterwards, Ellen prepared her final report: Net Profit from 2010 Moonlight Magic was over \$15,000!

For that, we owe a special thanks to Event Coordinator and Chief Magician **Suzan Hubert** and her committee of magic-makers: **Mary Garrity** and **Bobbie Snyder**, plus elves **Bob Shanman**, **Sarah Noddings**, **Ellen Peterson**, **Jeanne Bellemin** and **Carol Roelen**. It was your vision, courage, enthusiasm and tireless effort that convinced us all that Moonlight Magic could be a success. You made it happen.

What Happened that Night, Anyway?

Let's start with the music, a perfect mix of soft rock, oldies and surf music provided (gratis!) by the 'Vipers Band,' which calls Torrance its hometown. Their percussion-backed guitar stylings have a certain timeless quality which seemed to appeal to everyone there. And maybe even some who weren't: I led a group on a tour of the Preserve the day after 'Moonlight' which included a young family who lives nearby. "What was going on here last night?" they asked. I told them about the event and asked if the music had been too loud.

"Magical" continues on page 2.

Friends of Madrona Marsh Annual Meeting

When?

Sunday Afternoon, January 30, 2011, at 3 p.m.
(that's the Sunday BEFORE the Super Bowl!)

Where?

Madrona Marsh Nature Center

What's in the Program?

Election of Five Directors:

Candidates are: **Meena Nainan, Sarah Noddings, Connie Vadheim,**
Bob Shanman, Suzanne Gibson

Annual Report from Manager and Naturalist, **Tracy Drake**

Guest Speaker: Associate Professor **John Thomlinson**, Chair of the Biology Department, CSUDH and an expert on remnant habitat patches in the LA metropolitan area, will discuss **Our Local Wetlands and their Ecology.**

Light but Delicious Refreshments Will Be Served

“Magical” continued from page 1

“Oh, no,” they replied, “in fact, we opened all the windows so we could hear it better!” (btw, they’re coming next year.)



Pat Wren, the drummer for the Vikings, provides “punctuation” for emcee/auctioneer Paul Nowatka; as well as supporting guitars on groovy oldies and surf music.

But what’s music without food and wine? No problem for the night of magic. How about gourmet finger foods, from seared Ahi wontons to Maryland Blue Crab Cakes to BBQ’d pulled pork sliders, all catered by Torrance’s own Red Car Brewery. And, thanks to a very generous donation of ten cases of vintage wine by Mr. **Yogesh Shroff** and the Pernod-Ricard company, there was always a perfect pairing, no matter what one selected to eat.

The Main Event

All of which brings us to the main event, conducted with howling humor by our emcee and auctioneer, former councilman **Paul Nowatka**. With droll wit and precision timing (plus occasional drum-roll and cymbal punctuation by **Pat Wren** of the Vipers) Paul masterfully led a laughing and sometimes howling audience through bidding wars on auction items you wouldn’t believe—from **Mark Comon’s** iconic Moonlight Magic photograph, to an F-1 Rocket Plane ride, to a weekend at the Chudys’ Big Bear cabin. Threaded neatly amongst the bids were gift basket drawings and announcements of silent auction winners, and even a deft “double-down” on the bidding for the Canoe Ride with Tracy—resulting in a double win for the Friends, and the Preserve. Thank you, Paul, for a job very well done!

We were very pleased to be joined by **Mayor Scotto** and the entire City Council, not just as dinner guests, but as active participants in the bidding and drawing, and, dare I say? The howling.

Finally, we are very grateful to all our sponsors

and donors and to the 200-plus attendees to Moonlight Magic. In the end, you were truly the magic that will allow us to continue building the educational and restoration programs of Madrona Marsh. Our sponsors at the Red-tailed Hawk level (\$2500) included ExxonMobil and Toyota, both of whom partner with us on many other Marsh events. At the Western Meadowlark (\$1500) level we have one of our newest partners in Torrance, Wells Fargo Bank. At the next level were the Say’s Phoebes: Providence Little Company of Mary Hospital, Supervisor **Don Knabe**, and **Mr. and Mrs. Larry Snyder**, and our Pacific Tree Frog sponsors were



“Sold!” Auctioneer Paul Nowatka ends another bidding war, perhaps again in Dan Portway’s favor.



Councilpersons Pat Furey (left) and Susan Rhilinger get in line behind Ron Melin to pay for their successful bids at Finance Table.

Mrs. Sarah Noddings and Southern California Edison. Thank you all for your generosity and support of the Preserve, and thanks to all the other members and local merchants who donated gifts and services for the gift baskets and auctions!

A special thanks also for the wonderful event volunteers whose efforts on the day of magic allowed everything to happen “as planned:” **Jeanne Bellemin’s** El Camino Students, **Robin Snyder**, **Chammara Nguyen**, **Shoji Imai**, **Duane Kitchen**, **Cassandra Espinoza**, **Anthony Nguyen**, **Yurika Neishi**, and **Kathy Benz**. And, as always, we were blessed to have the full support of Manager **Tracy Drake** and her fine staff, including **Daniel Marion**, **Beth Scott**, **Allie Blair**, **Mark Christiansen** and **Ron Melin**.

And a good time was had by all. —Yes, It really Was Magic!



New board member Meena Nainan, third from left, shares wine and laughs with friends.



Lisa Fimiani, Friends of Ballona Wetlands Executive Director, left, visits with Dave Roelen, middle, and Bob and Roberta Shanman.



Councilman Tom Brewer and wife, Caroline, left, and emcee Paul Nowatka and wife, Helen, smile for the camera.



Suzan Hubert, second from left and Mary Garrity, third from left, examine silent auction items with patrons.



The Torrance-based Vipers kept things rockin' through the evening.



Fran Arrowsmith, left, and husband Bill chat with Barbara Burgett, representative of ExxonMobil.



Director Jeanne Bellemin, right and fellow biology teacher from ECC, Jan Oyama.



Former **Marsh Mailing** editor Julian Chasin shares a moment with FOMM VP Connie Vadheim.



Councilwoman Susan Rhilinger draws a gift basket winner



City Clerk Sue Herbers visits with Paul Nowatka

Footprints in Time

—Tracy Drake, *Naturalist/Manager*

The season has been a bit wetter than usual on the Madrona Marsh Preserve. While much of the wetlands are now flooded, some areas of the Preserve that are normally dry this time of year are muddy or wet. Along the water's edge footprints are easy to find and follow.

If you are among the first people on the Preserve in the morning, raccoon and opossum prints can be seen on top of the previous day's visitors' shoe prints. Adults' and children's prints appear "pressed" into yesterday by the coming and going of nighttime mammals. Seeing footprints overlaid with footprints is an easy way to notice changes when days turn to months and you observe the same area over and over. It is also easy to see the changing seasons because falling leaves cover footprints, too. Later, maybe a month from now, both the prints and the leaves will be covered with water and neither will be visible.

It is hard to know though, what kind of winter we will have. So far, we have had Pineapple Express rain coming from the southwest and little to no real winter rain. Summer came and went according to the calendar but not according to the weather. That season was gray and cool when compared with those of the past. Fall, so far, has been wetter and cooler on some days and warmer than normal on other days.

The sycamore trees in the parking lot of the Nature Center started losing their leaves, stopped, started growing new leaves, and are now losing their leaves again—all in the past seven weeks! They are not the only plants confused—the California Poppies have already started blooming! They are supposed to bloom in February or March! If you are confused about the weather, you are in good company!

Because the Preserve is wet, there are a lot of footprints leading in and out of the Nature Center, too. Following these prints it is easy to see, by the abundance of small prints near the tortoise and turtle enclosures, that kids in particular like seeing the live animals. Adults, on the other hand, left footprints leading into the classroom—especially on the day Blake Massey spoke about the continuing Condor Recovery Project. In this class, he told the story of how, in prehistoric times, condors ranged from Canada to Mexico, across the southern United States to Florida, and on the east coast to New York.

A dramatic range reduction occurred about 10,000 years ago, coinciding with the late Pleistocene extinction

of large mammals that condors fed on, such as mastodon, giant sloth, camels, and saber-toothed cats. By the time Europeans arrived in western North America, condors had retreated to a stronghold along the Pacific coast from British Columbia to Baja California. The birds managed to maintain a strong population, perhaps due to a diet of large sea mammals that washed up on shore. However, with the increased settlement of the west, poaching, poisoning from DDT and lead shot (in the carrion the condors ate) egg collecting, and general habitat degradation began to take a heavy toll.

Between the mid-1880s and 1924, there were scattered reports of condors in Arizona, with the last sighting near Williams, Arizona, in 1924. By the late 1930s, all remaining condors were found only in California, and by 1982 the total population had dwindled to just 22 birds. The only hope was to begin captive breeding of California condors and to initiate reintroduction of the species. Reintroduction of captive bred condors began in 1992 in California, and 1996 in Arizona. Now, just a little less than 20 years later, and with the effort of hundreds of people, the population is up to just under 400 individuals. Blake's talk reminded us about how much of an impact we can have on a species, and how important natural areas are to all animals.

The day after Blake's program, Craig Torres, a local Tongva (South Bay Native American) held an incredible class under the shade of the willows that surround the meadow—the middle part of the Preserve nearest the northern water's edge. Thirty kids sat in quiet rapture as Craig told them about the "footprints" of his ancestors—how they lived, and how tules were a part of their everyday life. Craig held up a baby cradle that was intricately woven from tules—the tall reeds that naturally grow in wetlands.

After the talk all the kids and adults in the class harvested tules, and, with a little guidance, wove their own miniature cradles. Once the kids got used to harvesting tules and learned how to "work" them, Craig talked about how his Tongva ancestors made boats from tules, carried them as they walked from the wetlands to the beach, then used the seaworthy boats to travel up and down the coast to hunt and fish. You can imagine how much fun it was for the kids to make their own small boats – and share their stories of the adventures they would have playing with them. As a teacher and observer in this class, it was easy to imagine that not even 150 years ago, the exact event of teaching kids how to make needed things out of tules would have occurred in the exact

"Footprints" continues on page 5.

"The Botany of Desire..."

—A review by Shirley Turner

The Botany of Desire: A Plant's Eye View of the World, by Michael Pollan, published in paperback in 2002 and a national bestseller, was my Christmas gift this year, which I wish to share with you.

Pollan deals with co-evolution in his introduction. The ancient relationship between flowers and bees is a classic example. While planting seeds in his garden under a blooming apple tree that was fairly vibrating with buzzing bees, he conceived the idea for this book. The bumblebee plunders for a drop of nectar and the flower manipulates the bee into hauling its pollen from blossom to blossom.

The relationship between his planting and the potato are not much different as partners in co-evolution that has gone on since the beginning of agriculture. On the most basic genetic level, making copies of oneself is best done playing on animal desires. He chose desires, selecting apples for sweetness, tulips for beauty and potatoes for control. They have great stories to tell. These desires are what make us tick. He looks at them from a variety of lenses: social, natural history, science, journalism, biography, mythology, philosophy and memoir.

On apples he quoted Thoreau: "Seedling apples are sour enough to set a squirrel's teeth on edge or make a jay scream." Each of the five seeds in an apple produces a different kind of tree. The Chinese taught us grafting for pure reproduction. This eventually produces plants no longer resistant to pests. Johnny Appleseed was John Chapman whose journeys Pollan followed and researched. Chapman died a wealthy man from wealth gained from all the apple orchards he had planted. He was sure of a strong demand from settlers. For a deed to land, it was required that 50 trees be planted—which he supplied at 6.5 cents each. Chapman also brought fennel (carefully weeded out of the Marsh) to this country. The apple came from the mountains of Kazakhstan, where now 300 year-old trees can be observed.

In Geneva, New York, the Plant Genetic Resource Unit maintains the world's largest collection of apple trees, some 2,500. With a computer directory in hand, Pollan walked the aisles to observe trees and sample many fruits—his last encounter with Johnny Appleseed.

I have had some similar experiences to his with tulips and potatoes.

Pollan asks, "Why should plants bother to devise the recipe for so many complex molecules and then expend the energy needed to manufacture them? One reason is defense. One thing plants can't do is precisely locomote. Design in nature is but a consternation of accidents, culled by natural selection until the end result is so beautiful or effective as to seem a miracle. For a great many species fitness means the ability to get along in a world where humankind has become the most powerful force".

Pollan, born in 1955, teaches graduate students journalism at the University of California, Berkley. Author of 5 books and contributing editor for the *New York Time Magazine*, his recent work has dealt with practices of the meat industry. He has received the Reuters World Conservation Union Global Award in environmental journalism, James Beard Foundation Award for best magazine series in 2003, and Genesis Award from the American Humane Association.

Pollan co-starred in the documentary, "Food, Inc." for which he was also consultant. He writes extensively on food. Married to landscape painter, Judith Belzer, they have one son, Isaac.

"Footprints" continued from page 4.

same spot in the exact same time of year. It was as if time, just for a moment, stood still—no cars were heard, no planes flew overhead, only the joyous sounds of children's laughter echoing through the breeze and the trees as they learned new skills.

The numerous footprints of the kids in Craig's class have faded now, as have those of the raccoons and opossums. While new footprints can be found every day, it is nice to remember—and honor with respect—those whose footprints have long since been replaced.

In Memoriam:

John Olguin (1921 – 2011)

John Olguin passed away January 1, 2011, almost two months before his 90th birthday. Mr. Olguin, who lived in San Pedro, was legendary for his devotion to preservation of the environment and helping people, young and old, develop an understanding of, and appreciation for, our local marine environment. He was a founding member of the Cabrillo Marine Aquarium and worked tirelessly for it, the Pt. Fermin Lighthouse and for Whale Watch programs, among others. He will be missed by the South Bay Community.

Madrona Marsh Preserve and Nature Center

Schedule of Events*

January -April 2011

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1
2	3 CLOSED	4 8:30 am-Tour d'Torrance 10 am-12 n-Weeders	5 10 am-12 n-Habitat-Weeders	6 10 am-Tyke Hike	7 10-11:30-am-Friday Fun***	8 8:45 am-12 n-Habitat Restor. & Student Serv. Learning 10 am-TBA/Dr. Vadheim
9 2 - 4 pm-Second Sunday Science-Raptors-a Closer Look	10 CLOSED	11 10 am-12 n-Weeders 9-11 am-Mornings on the Marsh 6:30-8:30-pm-TBA/Dr. Vadheim	12 8 am- Bird Walk/Bob Shanman 10-12 n-HabitatWeeders 7:15-9 pm-FOMM Board Meeting	13 10:30 am-12:30 pm-Propagation Society	14 10-11:30-am-Friday Fun***	15 8:45 am-12 n-Habitat Restor. & Student Serv. Learning 10 am-Watercolor for Kids (fee)
16	17 CLOSED	18 8:30 am-Tour d'Torrance 10 am-12 n-Weeders 7 pm- Audubon Mtg.	19 10-12 n-Weeders	20	21 10-11:30-am-Friday Fun***	22 8:45 am-12 n-Habitat Restor. & Student Serv. Learning 10 am-Nature Walk
23 10 am-Nature Walk	24 CLOSED	25 10 am-12 n-Weeders Al Hagan Exhibit Begins**	26 10-12 n-Weeders	27 10:30 am-12:30 pm-Propagation Society	28 10-11:30-am-Friday Fun***	29 8:45 am-12 n-Habitat Restor. & Student Serv. Learning
30 3 pm-FOMM Annual Meeting	31 CLOSED					

JANUARY

All activities and classes meet at the Madrona Marsh Nature Center, located at 3201 Plaza del Amo (between Maple and Madrona) on the north side of the street. **See Artists Corner, page 11. * No fee charged for Friday Fun , but reservations are required. For the latest event information, consult website, www.friendsofmadronamarsh.com.*

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	CLOSED	1 8:30 am-Tour d' Torrance 10 am-12 n-Weeders	2 10 am-12 n-Habitat Restoration Weeders	3 10 am-Tyke Hike	4	5 8:45 am-12 n-Habitat Restor. & Student Serv. Learning 10 am-12 n- "Fabulous Ferns" / Dr. Vadheim
6	7 CLOSED	8 9 am-Mornings on the Marsh 10 am-12 n-Weeders 6:30-8:30 pm-"Fabulous Ferns" /Dr. Vadheim	9 8 am-Bird Walk/Bob Shanman 10 am-12 n-Weeders 7:15-9 pm-FOMM Board Meeting	10 10:30 am-12:30 pm-Propagation Society	11 10-11:30-am-Friday Fun***	12 8:45 am-12 n-Habitat Restor. & Student Serv. Learning 10-11:30 am-Plant Communication/Dr. Vadheim
13 2-4 pm- 2nd Sunday Science- Water Wonders/Bob Carr(fee)	14 CLOSED	15 8:30 am-Tour d' Torrance 10 am-12 n-Weeders 7 pm-Audubon meets	16 10 am-12 n-Habitat Restoration Weeders	17	18 10-11:30-am-Friday Fun*** Hagan Reception,6:30 pm**	19 8:45 am-12 n-Habitat Restor. & Student Serv. Learning 10 am-Natural History of South Bay (fee)
20	21 CLOSED	22 10 am-12 n-Habitat Restoration-Weeders	23 10 am-12 n-Habitat Restoration Weeders	24 10:30 am-12:30 pm-Propagation Society	25	26 8:45 am-12 n-Habitat Restor. & Student Serv. Learning 10 am- Nature Walk
27 10 a.m-Nature Walk	28 CLOSED					

FEBRUARY

Nature Center (310) 782-3989
 Gift Shop (310) 320-8255

Brought to you by
 Friends of Madrona Marsh

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		8:30 am-Tour d' Torrance 10 am-12 n-Weeders		10 am-Tyke Hike		8:45 am-12 n-Habitat Restor. & Student Serv.Learning 10 am-12 n- "More Monkey Flowers"/ Dr.Vadheim
6	CLOSED	10 am-12 n-Weeders 9-11 am-Mornings on the Marsh 6:30-8:30 pm- "More Monkey Flowers"/Dr. Vadheim Fiesler Exhibit Begins**	8 am- Bird Walk/ Bob Shanman 10 am-12 n-Habitat-Weeders 7:15-9 pm-FOMM Board Meeting	10:30 am-12:30 pm-Propagation Society	10-11:30-am-Friday Fun***	8:45 am-12 n-Habitat Restor. & Student Serv. Learning 10 am-Watercolor for Kids (fee) 9 am-Bird Songs of the Season(fee)
13	CLOSED	8:30 am-Tour d' Torrance 10 am-12 n-Weeders 7 pm- Audubon Mtg.	10-12 noon-Habitat Restoration-Weeders		10-11:30-am-Friday Fun*** Emile Fiesler Reception,6:30 pm**	8:45 am-12 n-Habitat Restor. & Student Serv. Learning
20	CLOSED	10 am-12 n-Weeders	10-12 n-Habitat Restoration Weeders	10:30 am-12:30 pm-Propagation Society	10-11:30-am-Friday Fun***	8:45 am-12 n-Habitat Restor. & Student Serv. Learning 9 am-3 pm-Environmental Fair 10 am-Nature Walk
27	CLOSED	8:30 am-Tour d' Torrance 10 am-12 n-Weeders	10-12 n-Habitat Restoration Weeders			

MARCH

*All activities and classes meet at the Madrona Marsh Nature Center, located at 3201 Plaza del Amo (between Maple and Madrona) on the north side of the street. **See Artists Corner, page 11. *** No fee charged for Friday Fun, but reservations are required. For the latest event information, consult website, www.friendsofmadronamarsh.com.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					10-11:30-am-Friday Fun***	8:45 am-12 n-Hab.Restor. & Student Serv.Learning 10 am-12 n- "The Cutting Garden"/ Dr.Vadheim
3	CLOSED	8:30 am-Tour d' Torrance 10 am-12 n-Weeders 6:30 pm-"The Cutting Garden"/ Dr.Vadheim	10 am-12 n-Habitat Restoration-Weeders	10 am-Tyke Hike	10-11:30-am-Friday Fun***	8:45 am-12 n-Habitat Restor. & Student Serv.Learning 1-3 pm-Tea & Garden Party-(donations) 6:30-8:30-Night Hike
10	CLOSED	9 am-Mornings on the Marsh 10 am-12 n-Habitat Restoration-Weeders	8 am-Bird Walk /Bob Shanman 10 am-12 n-Habitat Restoration-Weeders 7:15-9 pm-FOMM Board Meeting	10:30 am-12:30 pm-Propagation Society	10-11:30-am-Friday Fun***	8:45am-12 n-Habitat Restor. & Student Serv.Learning 9 am-12 n-Earth Day 1-1:30 pm-Storytime for Kids
17	CLOSED	8:30 am-Tour d' Torrance 7 pm- Audubon Mtg	10 am-12 n-Habitat Restoration-Weeders		10-11:30-am-Friday Fun***	8:45 am-12 n-Hab.Restor. & Student Serv.Learning 10 am-1 pm-Turtle & Tortoise Day 10 am-Nature Walk
24	CLOSED	10 am-12 n-Weeders	10 am-12 n-Weeders	10:30 am-12:30 pm-Propagation Society	10-11:30-am-Friday Fun***	8:45 am-12 n-Hab. Restor. & Student Serv.Learning 9 am-12 n-Arbor Day 10 am-Watercolor for Kids (fee)

APRIL

Unknown Grasses of Madrona Marsh

—Daniel S. Cooper, Cooper Ecological Monitoring, Inc. www.cooperecological.com.

"Unknown grass"

It's one of the most common plants in California, if not the world, judging from species lists. Thin little stems. Microscopic flowers. Seeds digging into socks. "But they all look the same," you cry. Well, they're not going away. Might as well learn them.

The ecological story of Madrona Marsh, and maybe anywhere else, is told in its grasses. Giant, marsh-dwelling, reedy invaders from South America popping up in summer. Delicate vernal pool natives. Hundreds of filamentous plugs planted by volunteers, their prickly awns flickering menacingly in the afternoon breeze.

Don't be afraid—they're just grasses

(As a note, I'm using Latin names as well as common/English names here, since each species of grass has between two and ten or more common names, sowing confusion). Forty-one species of grasses (family Poaceae)—representing 26 genera—have been reported from Madrona Marsh Preserve over the years. Through recent fieldwork with Andrew Sanders, collections manager at the University of California, Riverside herbarium, we can probably eliminate 15 species, since there are no photographs or specimens to support their occurrence on past lists, and we have not located them present in the past year of intensive collecting. Another species, foothill needlegrass (*Stipa lepidota*), has been reported as planted throughout the preserve, but we could only identify purple needlegrass in same plantings (the two are closely related).

This leaves only a couple dozen species, a workable number. Most are annuals, and fall into two main groups: Winter annuals, which emerge in fall and set seed in spring, and summer annuals, which grow in spring and summer and are fruiting into fall. It's the winter-annual species that stick to your socks in summer and cover dry hillsides, while the summer-annual grasses live in wet, marshy areas and are visited by flocks of birds in fall.

Starting with the toughest winter annuals first, the oats, bromes, and fescues on the Preserve are almost all non-native, mid-sized species that likely make up the vast majority of the grassland biomass in California each year. Madrona Marsh supports two non-native oats (*Avena*), both called "wild oat" (*A. barbata* and *A. fatua*), recognized by the dangling fruiting structures. Three brome grasses (*Bromus*), represent a group of large,

grain-like grasses, with the California brome (*B. carinatus*) our only native. The other two, rescuegrass (*B. catharticus*) and riggut brome (*B. diandrus*), are noxious invasives difficult if not impossible to fully eradicate.

Similar in stature and ecology to the above species are wheat-like "foxtails" (*Hordeum*), also non-native, and here represented by two species, Mediterranean barley (*H. marinum*) and foxtail barley (*H. murinum*). Confused yet? Don't be—look for stiff, upright awns (perhaps the nastiest of the sock-stickers) on stalks that resemble wheat. Two other mid-sized, non-native winter annuals are perennial ryegrass (*Lolium perenne*) and rattail fescue (*Festuca/Vulpia myuros*).



Hordeum murinum

All of these upland grasses tend to go dormant by the middle of spring, but will persist year-round with sufficient moisture.

The summer-annual grasses are often found in wet soil and irrigated areas. From smallest to largest, we have a puny, non-native species, swamp timothy (*Crypsis schoenoides*) which occurs on the floor of drying vernal pools. Careful though. The same pools also support the grass-like (but unrelated) toad rush *Juncus bufonius*, a diminutive native.

Most people can recognize—if not the name—the familiar (and non-native) invaders, Bermuda grass (*Cynodon dactylon*) and crabgrass (*Digitaria sanguinalis*) with their finger-like spikelets at the tips of the stems (note Latin names). Another lawn grass, actually the main component of most lawns, is annual bluegrass (*Poa annua*).

Reminiscent of crabgrass is saltgrass (*Distichlis spicata*) a common, mat-forming native found on the floor of several vernal pools (just taste a bit if you're not sure) and also watch for knotgrass (*Paspalum distichum*) found in moist spots during summer.

Continued . . .

Continued. . .

A group of mid-sized "rice-like" grasses, with sprays of tiny spikelets around the main stems include two non-natives, Mediterranean lovegrass (*Eragrostis barrelieri*) and smooth witchgrass (*Panicum dichotomiflorum*). Troublingly, two similar native species have not been seen at the Preserve since originally collected here by Zembal (1976), and may be gone: Mexican lovegrass (*Eragrostis mexicana*) and sprangletop (*Leptochloa uninervia*).

One of the most distinctive wet-soil grasses on the preserve is the (non-native) rabbit's-foot grass (*Polypogon monspeliensis*) its fluffy, fuzzy inflorescences visible at some distance away. Potential confusing species is the delicate marsh bristlegrass *Setaria parviflora* a native confirmed on-site for the first time in 2010.

A few summer annuals are large and conspicuous, including barnyard grass



Echino

grass (*Echinochloa crus-galli*) a cane-like bruiser with long, bamboo-like leaves, and dallis grass (*Paspalum dilatatum*) similar in structure to Bermuda grass but much larger. Both are visited by blackbirds, goldfinches and other seedeaters in fall, when their seeds ripen.

Finally, two introduced California-native plants should be easy to spot on the Preserve—the purple needlegrass (*Stipa pulchra*) is being planted widely around the Preserve (look for flags marking the plantings), and a few individual giant wild-rye (*Elymus condensatus*) have been planted on the slopes of the sump.

This is what we have so far—of course, new species could arrive each year, and there are probably a few species we've missed; reports of melic grass, smilo grass and veldt grass persisting on the Preserve await our confirmation, but are probably valid.

Moth identification, anyone?

Board Member Runs for the Birds

On March 12th, board member **Bob Shanman** will be running for the birds, figuratively speaking, on Catalina Island. Bob ran his first marathon in March 2009, raising over \$11,000 for South Bay Wildlife Rehab and the Friends of Ballona Wetlands. He is training now for this year's marathon, and is doing it as a fundraiser again. You can help raise money for FOMM by pledging to support Bob.



Bob takes a break.

Pledge Support Cards are available at his store, Wild Birds Unlimited. The minimum pledge is \$26, and you can support up to four groups (Friends of Madrona Marsh, PV Audubon, the rehabbers, and the Friends of Ballona Wetlands). Bob asks that the pledge for each group be \$26. Checks should be made out to the group or groups you support, and brought to Wild Birds Unlimited after the Marathon.

By the way, the Catalina Marathon is considered one of the most difficult in the country, running from Two Harbors to Avalon. The course has an elevation gain of over 4300 feet. Last year, Bob said the highlight (besides finishing) was seeing a bison running along a ridge as he ran downhill to Little Harbor.

Let's get behind Bob and see how much money he can raise for the Friends!



Cooling off from previous run.

South Bay Native Plant Corner

—Dr. Connie Vadheim, CSU Dominguez Hills



Spikerush

Eleocharis macrostachya

Water has returned to the Marsh. The December rains were unusually heavy and tropical; but they began anew the cycle of growth typical of Southern California's native plants. This is an exciting time of year! Seeds are germinating and fall-dormant plants are starting to grow and leaf out. Among the more interesting plants beginning their cycle are the Spike Rushes (*Eleocharis species*).

Common Spikerush (*Eleocharis macrostachya*; formerly also called *Eleocharis palustris*) grows across much of North America from Alaska to Florida. You can see it in seasonally wet areas like stream banks, lake shores, marshes, vernal pools and wet meadows as well as in shallow lakes. It commonly grows where the water remains latest in the spring. Like many native riparian/marsh species, the perennial Spikerush spreads via underground stems called rhizomes. These allow the plant to spread into new territory, often forming dense mats in favorable conditions (like a sod lawn).

Spikerushes begin growing while the plants are covered with water. This is actually rather unusual—a characteristic shared with a small group of riparian plants like cattails, Tules and some other rushes. If you see a bright green grass-like plant growing in the water on the Preserve it's likely Spikerush (see photo). The seeds of Spikerush actually germinate in the water—a most unusual characteristic that allows this plant to survive in wet and dry years alike.

Spikerushes look like small rushes (they have

round stems) which gives them a grass-like appearance. They grow one to two feet tall and continue to grow as the water rises. In late spring they form lush, bright green meadows that look like grass. They typically bloom in late spring or early summer on the Preserve (see photo below—hence the name 'Spikerush'). By late summer they turn an attractive golden brown that gleams in the sunlight.

Spikerushes play an important role in wetland ecosystems where they improve the soil and help filter contaminants from the water. They are commonly used in treatment wetlands as natural filters and for erosion control.



Spikerushes make a lovely addition to the home garden. You can grow them in/around a garden pond or other moist area. They are a great choice for the rain garden or vernal swale. You can also grow them in containers or use them as a grass substitute (with some water they remain green). Easy to grow—just clip/rake dead stems. Birds eat the seeds and use plants for cover.

Learn more about local native plants at our "Out of the Wilds and into Your Garden" series on the first Saturday of each month. Plant Information Sheets and Plant Lists are also available at the Nature Center.

Donations of \$100 or More

DATE	WHO	DONATION
November 2010	Hermosa Garden Club	\$300
December 2010	Rebecca Moore	\$300

—Ellen Petersen, Treasurer

PV Bird Count Deemed Successful

—Tracy Drake, *Naturalist/Manager*

The group was smaller than usual, maybe forty but it is hard to know because some people were on boats—two boats in fact, one moving from the south part of the circle, and one moving in from the west.

None of us fully knew where everyone was on that day—that is, not until the end, during the compilation meeting in the evening at the Preserve. It was the 44th Annual Palos Verdes Peninsula Christmas Bird Count, which took place on Sunday, December 26, 2010.

Our count circle is centered at the Palos Verdes Reservoir, and has a 15-mile diameter. This basically covers an area from a couple of miles out in the ocean (west and south) north to Hermosa Beach and Alondra Park, east to Cal State Dominguez Hills and south to Los Angeles Harbor. The circle is broken into 10 parts, and a different group covers each part.

Forty may seem like a lot of people but is too few to adequately cover 177 square miles in 24 hours. Nonetheless, and with the weather against us—it was cold, windy and cloudy—and with nearly 20 people fewer than normal, the count was a huge success. Es-

Artists' Corner

Works of local artists and photographers inspired by the beauty of the Madrona Marsh are regularly on display at the Nature Center. Everyone is invited to attend each artist's reception where the artist talks about his/her work or gives a demonstration. Snacks and beverages are served.

If you would like to display your art at the Nature Center, please call for more information: 310-782-3989.

January 25-March 4 - Al Hagan and the Pacific Arts Group, "Pacific Arts Group Paints the Marsh." Various mediums. Artist Reception, Friday, February 18, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

March 8-April 22 - Emile Fiesler, "Secrets of the Madrona Marsh Preserve," A Photography Exhibit. Artist Reception, Friday, March 18 6:30-8:30 p.m.

pecially successful considering that everyone was a volunteer—everyone was, for that day, a citizen scientist. Everybody worked hard.

Highlights of the count included a Palm Warbler found outside the Palos Verdes Country Club. It became the first verified record of the bird in our count circle. A Hooded Warbler was located in San Pedro at someone's residence! It is by far the rarest bird of the count and is only the second time one has been found wintering in our area. The top of Palos Verdes held two singing California Thrashers, and a Tropical Kingbird was counted on the Madrona Marsh Preserve.

Farther in the east of the count circle, an extremely uncommon Snow Goose was found, as were a few Greater White-fronted Geese.

On the ocean, it was rough! The swells were huge and a few of the waves washed over volunteers clinging to the sides of the boat as they counted birds in the southernmost part of the circle. But good birds were found out there, including Bufflehead ducks and a Rhinoceros Auklet, as well as Black and White-winged Scoters.

For more information about the Christmas Bird Count and to understand the importance of it, please go to the Palos Verdes South Bay Audubon website at <http://www.pvsb-audubon.org/index.html>

Many Happy Anniversaries!

Welcome to another year on the Madrona Marsh Preserve. It's been 39 years since the Friends of Madrona Marsh was founded, so we have a "big 40th birthday" coming up next year... to go along with the City of Torrance's Centennial Celebration.

This year, 2011, marks 25 years since the City received title to the Preserve (for the second, and final, time in 1986). So we've got a Silver Anniversary this year, too. And let us not forget that April, 2011 is the Tenth Anniversary of the Nature Center's opening.

Let the parties begin!

Marsh Mailing is a quarterly newsletter designed to provide information about activities and upcoming events at or relating to the Madrona Marsh Preserve. Contributions are welcome and may be e-mailed to Diane Gonsalves at gonwild2@yahoo.com or Bill Arrowsmith, TheArrowsmiths@sbcglobal.net, or dropped off or mailed to the Nature Center.

Friends of Madrona Marsh

a non-profit organization est. 1972

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO.214
Torrance, California

P. O. Box 5078
Torrance, CA 90510

(310) 32MARSH

Return Service Requested



Membership Application

We appreciate your support. Thank you!

Annual Membership: _____ New _____ Renewal

Individual _____ \$10 Family _____ \$20 Youth (under 18)/Senior (over 65) _____ \$5

Patron _____ \$35 Club/Organization _____ \$50 Business/Industry _____ \$100

Amount Enclosed _____

Please send your donation or offer of services to:

Friends of Madrona Marsh, P.O. Box 5078, Torrance, CA 90510

FOMM is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation. Your donations are tax free within the law.

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____

E:Mail _____

I will volunteer for: (Gift Shop, Reception Desk, other) _____
