



San Elijo Lagoon CONSERVANCY

ANNUAL



2009



REPORT

Cover photo: 'Egret Frenzy' by Elizabeth Venrick, taken Spring 2009. This photo captures both the complexity and vitality of the lagoon.

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Welcome by Denise Stillinger and Doug Gibson

“The first rule of intelligent tinkering is to save all the parts”

—Aldo Leopold

On June 16, 2009, we were privileged to participate in a very historic event: the release of sixteen Light-footed Clapper Rails into the San Elijo Lagoon Ecological Reserve. This secretive salt marsh bird, so called for its vocalization that sounds like someone clapping their hands, has been on the endangered species list since 1970 and remains one of California’s most endangered bird species. So to see sixteen of these birds at one time was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Similar in size to a chicken, the Clapper Rail is also limited in its ability to fly. This characteristic and the species reliance on salt marsh habitat, of which 90% has been lost to development, led to its federal listing. These sixteen individuals were raised at San Diego Zoo’s Wild Animal Park, SeaWorld and the Chula Vista Nature Center from eggs collected from Newport Bay -- one of the few stable populations of these birds.

Successfully rearing these chicks, however, is only half the challenge. As any conservation biologist will tell you, without suitable habitat efforts, bringing an endangered species back from the brink of extinction is a futile endeavor. As we stood along the shoreline in the east basin of the Reserve on that warm summer day, gently cradling these rare birds in our hands, we were struck by the historic significance of that moment; the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in partnership with the organizations responsible for rearing the chicks had designated our lagoon as their new home! Recognition that San Elijo could provide suitable habitat for these individuals of an endangered species reflects the positive work of San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy, in this case improving the scarce salt marsh habitat within the Reserve.



Denise Stillinger and Doug Gibson at Birds of a Feather Gala 2009. Photo: Janine Free

This momentous occasion is a highlight from 2009 that also embodies the essence of the Conservancy’s other accomplishments: enhancement and protection of the Reserve, its watershed and related ecosystems such as scarce salt marsh habitat, dedication to our environmental education program and continued public outreach.

In January, the Conservancy helped welcome the public to the County’s new San Elijo Lagoon Nature Center. We are fortunate to have access to the Nature Center for our environmental education program. Since shortly after the release day back in June, several of the Clapper Rails have been heard and seen nearby. The Conservancy’s education program utilizes the increased presence of these endangered birds, as well as a wealth of other wildlife examples in and around the Nature Center, to illustrate the importance of wetlands conservation.

At our annual Lagoon Day in May, our primary community outreach event, we held the first “BioBlitz” in North County where, with the help of a whole suite of experts and volunteers, over 700 different species of animals, plants, fungi and algae were cataloged in a frenetic 24-hour push. In addition to raising the public’s awareness that such a large number of species exist in the Reserve, this event also illustrated the

Reserve's rich biodiversity. The release of the Clapper Rails the following month added yet another species to an already extensive list of inhabitants.

In September, our successful biennial gala, *Birds of a Feather*, raised critical funds to continue our environmental education program. Last year alone our education program provided guided tours within the Reserve to over 2000 students. We would not be able to meet this demand without a solid core of dedicated volunteers



Light-footed Clapper Rail (Rallus longirostris levipes). Photo: Herb Knufken

who have committed themselves further by participating in our extensive docent training and education program. Such programs instill in the public the importance of the biosphere, that complex tapestry of life that supports us and provides us with a healthier environment. Conservation efforts such as the one that hatched and reared those sixteen Clapper Rails recognize the importance of biodiversity.

In 2009, the Conservancy secured the necessary funding to initiate the preparation of the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Lagoon Restoration Project, as well as apply for the required permits. Without such ongoing efforts to enhance and expand the critical habitats within the Reserve such as salt marsh and coastal sage scrub, the negative impacts of past and current human activities would cause them to degrade to the point where they would be unable to support such a rich diversity of life. The Light-footed Clapper Rail is just one example of a species that will only thrive in "high quality" salt marsh habitat.

2010 will no doubt present both rewards and challenges as the Conservancy remains true to its mission to preserve, protect and enhance the San Elijo Lagoon Ecological Reserve. Our environmental education and community outreach programs will continue to excel, community involvement will be solicited as the Lagoon Restoration Project transitions from the planning to the implementation phase, and we will remain vigilant with respect to acquiring open space to add to the Reserve. All of these efforts will in one way or another improve the quality of life for all the various life forms that call San Elijo home, including some of our newest residents, sixteen Light-footed Clapper Rails.

Denise Stillinger
President

Doug Gibson
Executive Director/Principal Scientist

Biological Management

Past degradation of the Lagoon and its watershed has made it critically important to actively manage the San Elijo Lagoon ecosystem. The Conservancy does this in four key ways: keeping the inlet open, controlling invasive plant infestations, adding important habitat to the Reserve, and planning for the restoration of the Lagoon on the ecosystem level.

Keeping the Lagoon inlet open to the ocean reduces the impacts of urbanization on the plants and animals in the Reserve. It improves water quality and has increased the diversity and abundance of fish and invertebrate species since the Conservancy started dredging the inlet 15 years ago. In 2009, the Conservancy obtained a grant that will pay the majority of the annual dredging and monitoring costs for three years – giving our Tidal Circulation Endowment a chance to recover from the economic downturn.



Inlet opening. File photo

In 2009, the Conservancy focused on treating invasive iris and purple loosestrife along Escondido Creek in the Reserve and mustard and fennel on the East Basin mesas. These plants cause extensive damage by transforming diverse wetlands and uplands into monotypic stands of vegetation that lack the habitat diversity that native animals depend on. The Conservancy also completed our sixth year of invasive weed control throughout the Carlsbad Hydrologic Unit, made up of seven coastal watersheds including San Elijo Lagoon's Escondido Creek Watershed.



Purple loosestrife. Photo: USDA Forest Service

Since 2000, the Conservancy has acquired over 100 acres of land to increase the size and viability of the Reserve. In 2009, the Conservancy worked on an acquisition that would add five acres of southern coastal bluff scrub habitat to the Reserve. Our goal is to have this completed in 2010. In 2009, the Conservancy also bolstered its land stewardship program by completing baseline documentation and management plans for all of its land holdings.

After many years of work by the Conservancy and its partners, a major restoration of San Elijo Lagoon is now in the final planning stages. Budgeted for over \$120 million, this project will restore both tidal circulation and a natural gradient of habitats. Contracts were signed in 2009, and work on the final Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (EIS/EIR) began in October. Development of the final EIR/EIS is expected to be a 36-month process and is being managed by Conservancy staff. The investigations leading up to the final document and restoration plan will involve numerous biological and engineering studies, including surveys of sensitive lagoon flora and fauna, water quality, tidal hydraulics and a sea level rise analysis to factor in the effects of climate change. The Conservancy will also oversee the public review process that will keep its stakeholders and interested citizens informed throughout this critical process.

Scientific Monitoring

2009 was a very busy year for field investigations in San Elijo Lagoon. The first-ever North County “Bioblitz” drew over two dozen regional science experts together to identify as many plant and animal species as possible in a 24-hour period. Among 729 species of living organisms found in the Reserve were four kinds of bats and a flowering plant not previously observed here.

Conservancy staff also participated with other scientists and technical personnel from over 60 different agencies throughout Southern California in the Bight '08 Regional Monitoring Project. This work addressed eutrophication in coastal wetlands and estuaries from Point Conception near Santa Barbara to Cabo Colnett south of Ensenada, Mexico. Eutrophication can result in fish-kills, lowered fishery production, loss or degradation of sea grass and kelp beds and poor water quality, affecting the health of both humans and marine mammals. According to EPA, eutrophication is one of the top three leading causes of impairment to our nation's water. Results of this study will contribute directly to better management practices for improving the health of our coastal resources.

During the fall of 2009, there was an intense effort by Conservancy staff to begin to gather baseline data to support the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) process for the major restoration of San Elijo Lagoon. Conservancy scientists were trained in the California Rapid Assessment Method (CRAM), a multi-metric protocol that assesses overall wetland health. Wetlands are valued because they provide services to society such as habitat, carbon sequestration, flood control and improved water quality. CRAM produces scores that put a premium on the diversity of services a wetland offers, comparing these values to reference sites throughout California. In a little over a month, Conservancy staff had assessed twenty-five sites in all three basins of San Elijo Lagoon. These scores, along with other more specific assessments, will provide a road map for adaptive management and continuing efforts to create and enhance habitat throughout the Lagoon.

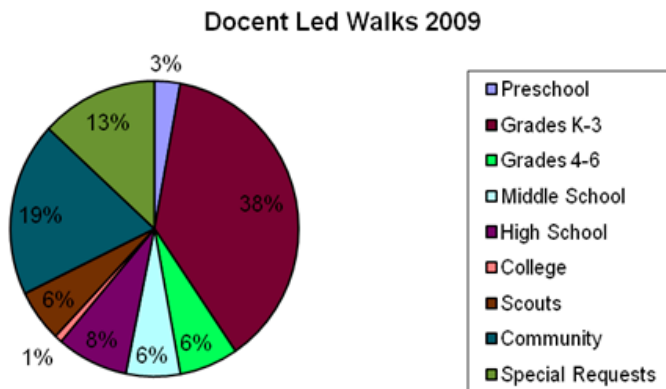
Besides our weekly forays into the Lagoon to monitor water quality related to the health of the inlet on the Pacific Ocean, the Conservancy also maintains a computer-controlled “datasonde” that remains submerged in the Lagoon, measuring dissolved oxygen, temperature, conductivity, turbidity and chlorophyll concentrations every 15 minutes. This has been producing data since December of 2008, supporting Bight'08 and the Restoration EIR. Data is retrieved and sensors are calibrated in the main channel monthly.



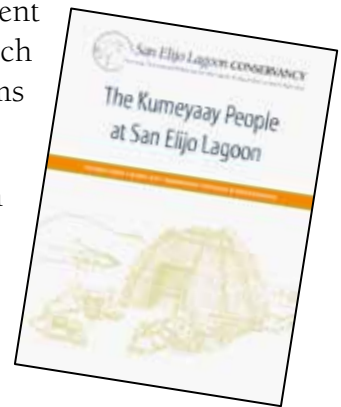
Student Intern Ben Stillinger provided invaluable field water data collection expertise. Photo: Geoffrey Smith

Environmental Education

With the opening of the San Elijo Lagoon Nature Center in January 2009, and the increased visibility that the facility has brought to the work of the Conservancy, it seemed the phone never stopped ringing for educational tours of the Reserve. We offered programs to all age groups, from preschool to senior citizens and every age in between, as evidenced by the pie chart shown below. In total, 2617 people participated in walks led by 33 docents in 2009.



A grant from the Union Bank of California Foundation supported the development of a Kumeyaay Teacher's Guide that was completed and posted on our website in December 2009. This is the first of a series of four teacher's guides that will be developed and made available on our website for teachers visiting the Lagoon. The guides follow California State science and social science content standards and match the school programs we currently offer.



Through a grant from the County of San Diego at the recommendation of Supervisor Pam Slater-Price, the Conservancy was able to develop and print an educational flyer listing the five distinct school programs we now offer, as well as the weekly and second Saturday walks offered to the public from two different trailheads. This grant also covered the development of a Wetlands Teacher's Guide, which will be completed in early 2010.

In order to maintain the pace of docent led walks, we again recruited and trained docents for our 7-week docent training that takes place in the fall. Twenty-two docents graduated from the training. To provide continuing education for our docents as well as to the community at large, we sought funding from the City of Encinitas to support a lecture series held at MiraCosta College. The first lecture was well attended and took place in 2009. The remaining three lectures will take place in 2010.



Graduating Docent Class of 2009. Photo: John Glascock

Communications and Outreach

The annual Lagoon Day celebration in May brought hundreds of community members together for a unique educational and recreational experience with activities for the entire family. As part of Lagoon Day, 'BioBlitz' allowed community members to observe teams of professional and amateur scientists performing original science in and around the Reserve. This productive, high-energy event not only highlighted the diversity of the Reserve, but created many professional connections and personal friendships. Much was learned, and a good deal of fun was had, as well.

In September, joining with the county-wide initiative headed up by I Love a Clean San Diego and San Diego Coastkeeper, and staged on the campus of MiraCosta College, the Conservancy fielded six teams totaling 130 volunteers who collected 400 pounds of trash from roadways and shorelines surrounding the Lagoon. In addition, volunteers removed and stacked over 300 feet of old peeler pole fencing on the Conservancy's Ford Wildlife Habitat Reserve in Olivenhain.



County Ranger Sue Bashore talks to restoration event volunteers.
Photo: Geoffrey Smith

Popular Third Saturday Restoration Events continued to draw crowds of energetic volunteers, averaging more than thirty volunteers per month, with peaks of more than fifty. The Conservancy's relationship with Volunteer San Diego and Volunteer Match continues to prove invaluable in getting the word out to the broader community about these worthwhile and fun events. The dedicated support of our County of San Diego ranger staff has been key to the success of this program.

Conservancy media outreach continues to evolve with the times. The Lagoon Tidings newsletter reaches over 2,000

households and businesses every quarter. The *Lagoon eNews*, an electronic publication available to members and non-members alike, currently supports a subscription of over 1,400 recipients who receive regular updates about upcoming events, current projects, and reports of recent successes. The Conservancy has 'gone viral' with social media, having launched a facebook page, www.facebook.com/sanelijo, which has attracted over 100 'fans' since inception – and growing!

Recognizing that 'public relations = customer relations + media relations', in 2009 the Conservancy developed a media contact management system, which has proven very effective in developing relationships with existing media outlets, while facilitating a systematic approach to targeted media outreach. News of Conservancy events is regularly appearing in growing numbers of publications throughout the region.

Development

In many ways the health of the Reserve is tied to the health of the Conservancy. And the Conservancy can be healthy only with sufficient financial support. In 2009, as in every year, the single largest contributor to the Conservancy was its membership. Donations for the year totaled nearly \$315,000 – funds that went to support our education, outreach, restoration and stewardship programs, and increase our endowment. The biggest fundraising event of the year was our *Birds of a Feather Gala*, held at Clear Spring Farm in Rancho Santa Fe. Thanks to the generosity of our hostess Elizabeth Keadle, guests had a fabulous time being wined and dined on the grounds of her world class sport horse training center.

In 2009, the total number of contributions received declined slightly from the preceding year. We attribute this drop to the poor economy and anticipate that as the economy improves so will our



Nearly 300 guests enjoyed the tranquil beauty of Clear Spring Farm at Birds of a Feather Gala. Photo: Janine Free

membership donations. On a more encouraging note, our Legacy Circle grew with the addition of three members who chose to include the Conservancy in their estate plans. Our President's Council, too, added three new members and raised over \$71,000 for the Conservancy's Operating Endowment. Their impact was enhanced considerably by matching gifts from **Ilse Epprecht** and **Frances Hamilton White**. Our Council Chair **John Seiber** stepped down after two years of stellar service, but not before transferring the leadership to the capable hands of **Neil Hokanson**.

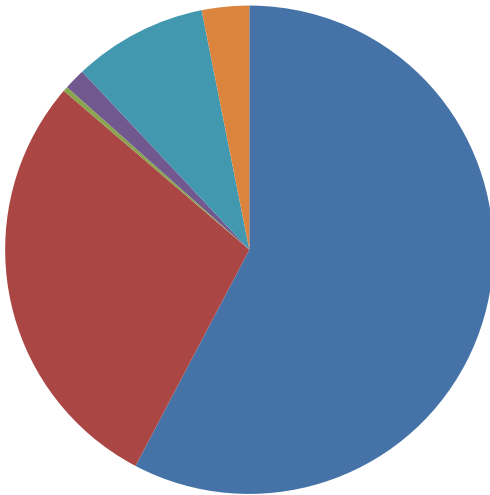
We are especially grateful for the support through corporate grants we received from Union Bank of California Foundation, Sempra Energy Foundation and Qualcomm Corporate Giving. These grants were a major factor in the on-going development and expansion of our environmental education program in 2009.



Financials

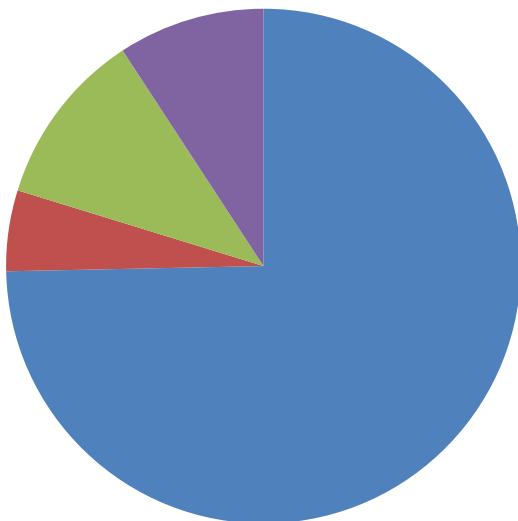
Total Budget: \$1,100,165
Program Services & Reserves: 80%
Operations, Development & Membership: 20%

Where the money came from



- Program Grants - 58%
- Contributions - 29%
- Interest Income - < 1%
- Endowment Disbursements - 1%
- Income from Prior Years - 9%
- Corporate Sponsorships - 3%

Where the money went



- Program Services - 75%
- Transfers to Operating Endowments - 5%
- Development & Membership - 11%
- Operations - 9%

Financials (continued)

Assets

| | |
|--|-----------------------|
| Tidal Circulation Trust | \$2,044,202.12 |
| Conservation Land | \$2,142,970.83 |
| Investments Held for Programs | \$449,965.43 |
| Operating Endowment | \$857,322.51 |
| Reserve | \$162,052.09 |
| Cash Balances | \$113,190.31 |
| Property & Equipment (net of depreciation) | \$28,053.27 |
| Scholarship Fund | \$13,792.85 |
| Pre-Paid Expenses. | \$10,125.81 |
| Accounts Receivable | \$410,503.14 |
| Total Assets: | \$6,232,178.36 |

Liabilities & Net Assets

| | |
|--|-----------------------|
| Accounts Payable & Deferred Revenue for Programs . . . | \$758,099.93 |
| Net Assets | \$5,474,078.43 |
| Total Liabilities and Net Assets: | \$6,232,178.36 |

Board of Directors

Denise Stillinger - President

Celesd F. Willoughby – Vice-President

Craig Olson, Ph.D. – Treasurer

Barbara Moore - Secretary

Stephen Fitch

Sally Foster

Mark Huffman

Kevin Johnson

Peter Johnson

Michael Luther

Andy Mauro

Jim McCall

Bob Moore

Elizabeth Venrick, Ph.D.

John Seiber - Chair, President's Council

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Tara Fuad - Education Director

Barry Lindgren – Staff Scientist

Geoffrey D. Smith – Communications Director

Debby Strauss - Program Assistant

Amy Trujillo – Biologist

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Elizabeth Venrick
Marjorie Waldroop
Col. Harold Wright (ret.) (deceased)
Art & Sandy Yayanos

President's Council

Members of the President's Council are marked by an asterisk

Guardians Of The Lagoon

Great Horned Owl - \$10,000+

Carol Childs & Peter House*
County of San Diego
Ilse Epprecht*
Jimbo's ... Naturally!
Sempra Energy Foundation
Frances Hamilton White*

Protectors Of The Lagoon

Calif. Brown Pelican - \$5,000+

ACS Habitat Management
Robert & Mary Engman
Wendy Globe Tsien
Yoko Heath
Mike & Dawn House*

Jocelyn Jenks
Elizabeth Keadle*
Brys & Rita Myers*
Qualcomm Corporate Giving
Union Bank of California Foundation
Elizabeth Venrick
Zachs-Adam Family

Clapper Rail - \$3,000+

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Henry Herms Jr.
Las Olas Mexican Restaurant
Michael & Julie Luther
Andy & Kathleen Mauro*
Metropolitan Water District of Southern California
Craig & Jeanne Olson*
John & Patricia Seiber*
Dave & Denise Stillinger*

Great Blue Heron - \$2,500+

Dudek
Hokanson Associates
Synthetic Genomics
Dr. John & Mrs. Marcia Trombold*

Red-tailed Hawk - \$1,000+

Gladys Baird
Magie Biehl
Jeffrey & Sally Busby
Cardiff Seaside Market, Inc.
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Tom & Karen Clotfelter*
Stan & Gloria Craig
Elaine Dodge & Martin Staibus*
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Mayme Kline
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Pfizer Foundation Matching Gifts Program
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RF Products
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Darrell & Jill Shrader
Janet, Joy Marie & Peter Simon*
Tim Tully
Mike Varney & Jennifer Ball
Jan Wier
Celesd F. Willoughby & Heather Kinch
Paul & Jane Woody
Paul Worthington*
Yogi's Beach Bar & Restaurant
John & Valerie Zagara*

White-tailed Kite - \$500+

John & Linda Alspaugh
Chris & Devron Averett
Steve Barker
Alan & Cheryl Barnebey
Mona Baumgartel & John DeBeer
Keith & Nicki Brandt
Andrew & Joan Chithea
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Elizabeth Winant

Western Scrub Jay - \$250

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B. Buechler
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Donna Blackman
Nancy Bloch
Rennie Block & Debbie McGraw
Katherine Blumberg & Peter Delmonte
Robert, Lanci & Katie Botton
Braille Institute
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Bill & Willi Caylor
Bill Chenoweth
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Diane Sachs
Kevin & Deborah Sagara
San Dieguito Woman's Club
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Leland & Debbie Sandler
Rich & Lindy Schermerhorn
Rick Schlesinger & Judy Nakatomi
Andrew Schmidt
Jeff & Deb Schmidt
Doug Schnorr
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