



Lagoon Tidings

There's Something in the Air...

Winter Migrating Birds Arrive at San Elijo Lagoon

By Maryanne Bache, Consulting Biologist



Calendar of Events

Bird Counts

Second Monday each month
7:30 am–Noon at Rios Ave trailhead
Contact birds@sanelijo.org

Docent Meetings

Regular monthly docent meetings
Second Tuesday each month
9–11 am at the Nature Center

Guided Nature Walks

Second Saturday each month, 9–11 am
Wildlife Walks—Explore new habitats
November 9, December 14,
La Orilla Trail
January 11, Rios Ave Trail
February 8, (check our website
SanElijo.org/walks for location)
Every Saturday, 10–11 am at the
Nature Center

Family Discovery Days

“Wings Over Wetlands”
January 25 & 26, 1–4 pm at the
Nature Center

Community Habitat Restoration

Volunteer Restoration Events
Third Saturday each month (Second
in December), 9 am–12 noon
November 16, December 14,
January 18, February 15
RSVP @ [SanElijo.org/restoration-
events](http://SanElijo.org/restoration-events)
Stewards Restoration Workshops
Every Wednesday 9:30 am–Noon
Contact Platoon@sanelijo.org to join

The cool dewy mornings and golden twilight evenings of autumn stir me. The subtle seasonal change surrounds us. There's something in the air...birds. Billions of birds are migrating across North America. They take to the skies day and night on their journeys to winter destinations. Here along the Pacific Flyway, San Elijo Lagoon is swamped with thousands of birds that fly here to rest up, refuel, change out some feathers, hang around or move on. As early as last June, shorebirds from the Arctic Tundra showed up. Now and into winter, ducks and geese will arrive. In fact, the greatest number and diversity of birds seen at San Elijo Lagoon occurs during the winter months.

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American White Pelicans taking a break at San Elijo Lagoon from a 1000-mile journey. Photo: Russ Strenk

Plant This, Not That!

By David Varner, Resource Management Director

Did you know that using native plants in our home landscapes is one of the most significant contributions we can make to improving local habitat for other native species? Not only do native plants attract birds and other wildlife, since they are adapted to local weather and soil conditions they consume very little water and require minimal maintenance. Many folks have asked about alternatives to some of the messy exotic plants that require copious resources to stay 'pretty.' We have decided to create a regular column in *Lagoon Tidings* which will feature one non-native, problematic plant to avoid using, and a suggested native alternative. Here we go!

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President's Message

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By Denise Stillinger, President

As the end of the year draws near, I'd like to thank those of you who have helped San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy become a well-respected non-profit land trust: hard working staff, engaged directors, generous President's Council and Legacy Circle members, enthusiastic docents, selfless volunteers, public and private granting sources and our faithful membership at large. The conservancy had humble beginnings in 1986 when a group of ambitious "lagoonatics" wanted to go beyond protecting this new reserve, to enhance it for current and future generations to enjoy. I became involved because of my passion for the place, but in this 27-year journey I've come to also greatly appreciate all the wonderful people I've met along the way who have shared this passion. In December I will step down as president of the conservancy and step off the board of directors. After dedicating over half my life to this amazing organization, it's time for me to take a victory lap and say "good-bye". I've truly enjoyed working with each and every one of you who helped make this organization what it is today. So on behalf of all the feathered, furry, scaly, slimy, and seedy natives of San Elijo Lagoon Ecological Reserve, "thank you" for being a member and for all of your support. Hope to see you on the trails! ❖



Volunteer Patroller Denise in 1987



Board President Denise today

SELRP Update

By Barry Lindgren, Associate Director

The conservancy and its consulting team are finalizing funding for Phase II of San Elijo Lagoon Restoration, which will improve tidal circulation and water quality for habitats in the watershed. Phase II addresses critical engineering tasks and the first public draft of the environmental document (EIR/EIS). This document will inform the team's analysis of the four restoration alternatives under consideration, and provide guidance for the construction phases.

In spring 2014, SELC will present a series of public meetings in surrounding communities about the EIR/EIS and discuss questions and concerns about the restoration process. These exchanges of information and ideas with the community are important. Each meeting will be an opportunity for public stakeholders to become better informed about the reasons for undertaking this complex project, as well as to voice personal views about what an enhanced San Elijo Lagoon might mean to them. The conservancy's board and staff look forward to your participation.

San Elijo Lagoon
RESTORATION
 Reviving Your Wetlands

Sunrise on the Horizon

Board of Directors President Transition

By Lydia Cobb, Communications



At the end of this year, Denise Stillinger retires from the conservancy's board of directors as a founding member and current president. There are many things we'd like to say about Denise in soulful gratitude for her 27-year commitment. She inspires many, not only at San Elijo Lagoon, but also as a biology professor and mentor to a generation of students, especially females and under-represented students entering science careers.

Her passion for San Elijo Lagoon began in the '80s. She was an enthusiastic volunteer patroller before county rangers were assigned to the reserve. Since that time she has led thousands of school children on science-based field trips, and has been active on the board of directors from the day it was founded.

She and Scott Griffiths, current vice president, collaborated this year in preparation for the new president's role moving forward. As the board of directors votes on her replacement in December, we are grateful for the strength of the conservancy.

While 27 years ago there were only volunteers, today the conservancy has a robust staff that manages stewardship and land acquisition, environmental education, habitat restoration and scientific monitoring. Our growing organization employs talented biologists, development and education professionals. The organization provides green jobs, volunteer opportunities, and intern positions in technology and natural sciences.

Next year the conservancy is fortunate that 13 of 15 directors have committed to remain on the board, and there is a strong group of candidates to fill the vacancies in January. Frances Hamilton White will

chair the President's Council, ensuring continued strong leadership of our community leaders and most committed supporters.

"There is a positive momentum to this organization which will carry us forward," said Scott Griffiths. "Our vision is to be the guiding model for the stewardship of wetlands. It is an ambitious goal, but I have seen us make progress toward it every year." Scott was introduced to San Elijo Lagoon when he took docent training in 2007. He's been an active member of the board since 2009.

Next year holds major milestones. In early 2014, it is expected that *The Campaign for Gateway Park* will complete Phase I of the land acquisition fundraising initiative. Once secured, the conservancy begins Phase II by improving trails and providing amenities that will enhance the public's enjoyment of the property. The restoration of San Elijo Lagoon won't begin until late 2015, but planning is under way to host community presentations in advance of the EIR/EIS public comment period mid-year. This summer's gala raised needed funds for the continuation and expansion of school and public programs.

"Our success is based on our ability to collaborate well with our county and state partners," said Denise Stillinger. "Together, we are stronger than any one entity could be on its own." It is Denise's opinion that one person can make all the difference in the world. Add a dedicated core support group, which includes board of directors, staff, volunteers, members, sponsors, agency and government partners, and there is synergy.

We honor Denise for everything she has done to protect San Elijo Lagoon. With her legacy at its roots, the conservancy grows. We invite our members to continue the rewarding journey with your community-spirited nonprofit land trust.

"These are a few of our favorite things" about San Elijo Lagoon: Snowy Egret (Egretta thula) chosen by Scott Griffiths, vice president, and Baby Blue Eyes (Nemophila menziesii) that show in Spring, chosen by Denise Stillinger, president.



Photo: Chris Mayne



Continued from page 1, **Birds Arriving at Lagoon** San Elijo Lagoon is a recognized birding hot spot. Over 330 bird species have been sighted at the reserve and adjacent beach. That is roughly 66% of the birds recorded in San Diego County, 48% of California birds and 40% of the birds of North America. We know these impressive numbers thanks to prominent avian consulting biologist Robert Patton who has been monitoring birds at the reserve for three decades. Robert, a former conservancy board member, organizes volunteer citizen scientists, aka birders, on monthly bird counts and annual Christmas bird counts and compiles the data for national, state and regional records.

The richness of avian species evident at San Elijo Lagoon is an indicator of the reserve's environmental health. There must be plenty of food in the water, mudflats, and vegetation to support so many birds. With over 90% of wetland habitat destroyed worldwide, there are fewer and fewer places left where migrating birds can land undisturbed to rest and fatten up before continuing their journeys. Places like San Elijo Lagoon are critical to their survival.

As winter rains fill the basins, more waterfowl arrive. What were drab ducks in September (they weren't all females) transform into fresh iridescent plumage of Green-winged Teals, Cinnamon Teals, Northern Shovelers, American Wigeons and Mallards. A flock of Canada Geese roosts in the freshwater marsh of the east basin, leaving at dawn to forage in nearby fields and returning at dusk for the night.

In the coming months, gaze across the mudflats and you're likely to see hundreds of sandpipers, plovers and shorebirds, an expanse of gray and brown that explodes into shimmering flight when a

Peregrine Falcon strafes over trying to catch a meal. Dispersed from their breeding grounds and prowling for food, more raptors, including Osprey and Northern Harrier, can be seen in winter than other seasons. There's the chance of sighting a Burrowing Owl or Short-eared Owl in the marsh. A young, perhaps off course, Bald Eagle flew in one winter and was counted on the Christmas bird count. If birds delight you, as they do me, a visit to the lagoon will not disappoint you. We've seen it's easier to destroy a wetland than resurrect one. Witnessing this great migration gives us a chance to appreciate our efforts. ❖



Cinnamon Teal and Black-necked Stilt sort it out.

Photo: Russ Strenk

continued from page 1 **Plant Toyon, not Brazilian Pepper!**

Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolius*) is a large tree from South America that produces many seeds which often end up sprouting in our wetlands. Since our local ecosystems did not evolve with this plant, there is no natural level of resistance to it. Seedlings thrive, outcompeting our native vegetation for resources and the result is degradation of habitat for our native species. In addition,

Brazilian pepper tree



Toyon



Brazilian pepper trees require annual pruning to keep them from growing too densely and, once established, are difficult and sometimes costly to remove.

Toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*) is a native shrub or small tree that makes an excellent landscaping plant. It is evergreen, highly prunable and can be shaped into a wide variety of sizes. It has attractive clusters of small, white flowers in summer, and beautiful red berries to enhance the green foliage in winter. The flowers and berries attract birds and pollinating insects. Alternative names for Toyon include Christmas berry and California holly, because it displays festive colors during the winter holiday. Like many native plants, once established it requires no additional water to thrive! Toyons are fairly widely distributed in the reserve, and you can find a mature Toyon at the west end of the San Elijo Lagoon Nature Center parking lot. You can acquire a young Toyon for your landscape at Cedros Gardens, Moosa Creek Nursery, or any other nursery that carries native plants. ❖

Docent in the Spotlight—Joyce Pickersgill

By Tara Fuad, Education Director

A PhD economist, Joyce Pickersgill spent much of her career as a full professor at Cal State Fullerton before launching her own successful consulting firm. With more free time on her hands after retirement, Joyce became involved with San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy. A docent and SELC board member, Joyce has been leading walks in the lagoon on a monthly basis for over two years, even during the summer months when the school programs come to a halt. A lover of all animals, Joyce is always surprised by how fearful the general population is of snakes. “I try to address this fear and put people at ease about being in nature,” notes Joyce. “I explain why an encounter would be unlikely, but I also provide a few safety tips should they come across a snake.”

In addition to being a reliable second Saturday walk leader, Joyce serves on two Conservancy board committees:



Governance and Nomination and Habitat Acquisition and Restoration. She also volunteers with the County of San Diego at the San Elijo Lagoon Nature Center, greeting guests, pointing out the various trails and simply sharing her knowledge and appreciation of the lagoon with visitors. To further fulfill her love of nature and animals, Joyce volunteers at the San Diego Safari Park and Zoo, dispensing interesting facts about a wide range of animals including orangutans, condors, and elephants. Joyce is a competitive bridge player, and enjoys scrabble, reading, and socializing with the Newcomers of San Dieguito. Thank you, Joyce, for your contributions as a board member and docent, and for ensuring that our second Saturday walks at the Nature Center are always an enjoyable experience. ❖

Joyce Pickersgill

Photo: Tara Fuad

What are the Next Generation Science Standards?

By Tara Fuad, Education Director

The Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) is the new benchmark by which science will be taught in the State of California. The framework was developed by the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences to ensure that K–12 students are grounded in the most current research on science and science learning. The NGSS was developed collaboratively with states and other stakeholders in science, science education, higher education and industry.

Since its release in spring 2013, seven states including California have adopted NGSS. The NGSS are based on a three-dimensional framework that emphasizes the importance of scientific inquiry, interdisciplinary connections within science, and key organizing concepts. Using current scientific research, including research on effective science learning methods, the framework identifies the core scientific concepts and practices all students should learn by the end of high school. Year-to-year continuity is encouraged with one year building on the next.

Over the next two years, California will be transitioning towards implementing NGSS in grades K–12, while phasing out the State Science Content Standards adopted in 1998. Research suggests that personal interest, experience, and enthusiasm are critical to children’s learning of science at school or in other settings, and that it may also be linked to later educational and career choices. This is where the conservancy’s education program will help implement NGSS. By offering multi-year programs that make science relevant, and providing experiential learning opportunities delivered by enthusiastic docents, we are well poised to inspire, one program at a time, students’ scientific knowledge and eventual pursuit of careers in science.



Education Coordinator Hired

Elayna Flanders joined the conservancy staff this summer as education coordinator. She assists the environmental education department by coordinating and

leading school field trips and public walks, assisting in annual docent-naturalist training, and developing teaching materials for all K–12 and public programs. Elayna previously interned with San Dieguito River Valley Conservancy and San Diego Zoo’s education department.

A native of Encinitas, Elayna is passionate about her local environment. Her love of hiking and running in San Elijo Lagoon deepens an appreciation that conservation and education are key to restoring natural reserves. Elayna holds a bachelor’s degree in Biological Sciences with a concentration in Ecology from CSU San Marcos. She anticipates completing her graduate work in December 2013.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS



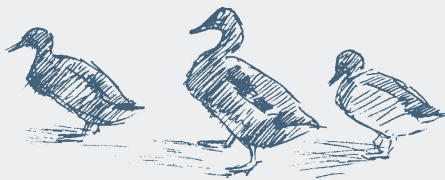
Honorary Gala Chairs Carol Childs and Peter House
Photo: Jennifer Nelson

The sold-out *Birds of a Feather* gala exceeded our fundraising goals for conservancy environmental education programs at San Elijo Lagoon. This fun and festive evening makes all school and public programs possible. We thank each and every one of you who attended, and were a very special part in *Growing Future Stewards*, the theme of the 2013 biennial gala. With heartfelt appreciation, we recognize Honorary Gala Chairs Carol Childs and Peter House, along with major sponsors ACS Habitat Management, Ki's Restaurant, and Aardvark Safaris, Inc. All sponsors and auction donors are recognized online at SanElijo.org/Gala.



Gala program speakers, front row left to right, Education Director Tara Fuad, with Central Elementary teachers and students Beth Bernstein-Tabor, Andrea Escobedo, Jimena Soria, Sarah Jerotz, and Debbie Iannizzotto. Back row, SELC docent-naturalist Debbie Hanna.

Photo: Jennifer Nelson



Brett Fisher and Dave Roberts
Photo: Jennifer Nelson



Rita and Brys Myers
Photo: Jennifer Nelson



Lisa Shaffer with Charles and Diane Smith
Photo: Jennifer Nelson

Ways of Giving



Legacy Donors

Announcing the Benson Family Trust

Our newest Legacy Donor is the Benson Family Trust, whose estate has provided \$82,000 to the conservancy. The Bensons included San Elijo Lagoon in their estate plans to support their passion for protecting nature. Russell and Betty Benson mostly lived in Orange County. About eight years ago they moved to a retirement community in Carlsbad. They did not have children and were interested in leaving their estate to charity. Russell Benson died in 2009. Betty remained active until months before her passing in January of this year. Her last holiday card showed her in a wetsuit floating among icebergs in Lapland—she loved to explore. The Bensons directed funds to nearly 20 causes representing library, medicine and university, environment and youth. We are grateful to the late Russell and Betty Benson for their generous gift benefiting the resources and public enjoyment of San Elijo Lagoon Ecological Reserve.

Our Legacy Donors are treated to private lagoon tours to view fall bird migration and spring wildflowers. We recognize the following planned gifts:

- Russell & Betty Benson Family Trust (realized)
- Patty Cornelius
- Isle Epprecht
- Marc & Lynne Friedmann
- Doug & Lauren Gibson
- Bill Gish
- Tom & Donna Golich
- Pastor Bill & Patti Harman
- Tom Heywood & Stephanie Wilde
- Robert Jensen & Erin Thomas
- Mayme Kline
- Peter & Marge Kohl
- James Lauer
- M. Alberta Kruger Declaration of Trust (realized)
- Andy & Kathleen Mauro
- William E. Miller & Ida Houby
- Brys & Rita Myers
- Craig & Jeanne Olson
- Mariette Pinchart
- Janet Placido
- Martin Staubus & Elaine Dodge
- Dave & Denise Stillinger
- Elizabeth Venrick
- Paul Worthington
- Ret. Col. Harold Wright (realized)
- Art & Sandy Yayanos

San Elijo Lagoon CONSERVANCY
Connecting communities. Protecting nature.

Donate Now

Give a gift you can land your feet on.

Please consider a Year-End Donation, a Gift Membership, or supporting *The Campaign for Gateway Park.*

Snow Goose Photo: C. Mayne

Membership Campaign

Thank you to all our members who renewed during the fall members' campaign. There's still time to give! End-of-year gifts are meaningful ways to show your support of wetlands, special places set aside for wildlife and for community.



Stakes at Gateway Park

donor recognition site. The low stonework and mosaic walls will be embedded with donor tiles in a style similar to the Coastal Rail Trail welcome arch in Solana Beach; both are designed by local artist Betsy Schulz. We're still working to secure the property, but we're getting close. Contact us today about donor tiles at Gateway Park.

Your Name in Tile at Gateway Park

Onsite Recognition for Donations \$2,500+

If you've driven by the Gateway property lately, perhaps you've wondered what's being staked out. Don't worry: these are not commercial project story poles. We're changing that story.

The conservancy and design consultants are staking out conceptual plans for the entrance to the new community overlook and major



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Change Service Requested

Membership Renewal

Please check your renewal date. If it is soon or expired, please use the enclosed envelope to renew your membership. Thanks!



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WANTED

Conservancy needs new office space!
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