



Lagoon Tidings

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
Wildlife Walks—Explore a new habitat each season, 9–11 am
March 9: Santa Inez Trail
April 13, May 11, June 8: Santa Carina Trail
July 13, August 10, September 14: Rios Ave Trail
October 12, November 9, December 14: La Orilla Trail
Every Saturday
10 am–11 am at the Nature Center

Family Discovery Days

“Spring EGG-ucation” March 23–24,
1–4 pm at the Nature Center

Volunteer Restoration Events

Third Saturday each month, 9–11 am
March 16, April 6, April 27, May 18 and June 15

To attend an event, register at SanElijo.org/restoration-events

Long-term volunteer opportunities available. Contact joel@sanelijo.org.

• • • • • **DON'T MISS!** • • • • •

Birds of a Feather Gala 2013

Saturday, August 17, 5–9 pm
Fundraising gala for SELC's Environmental Education Program
- Sponsorship opportunities available
- Volunteers welcome
- Auction items now being accepted

Contact Nichole Joseph, (760) 436-3944 x 711 or nichole@sanelijo.org

New Wildlife Walks Explore Unique Habitats

By Elizabeth Venrick, Board Member and Docent, and Debby Strauss, Program Associate

San Elijo Lagoon Ecological Reserve offers an exceptional range of plants and animals you can experience from seven miles of trails throughout the Reserve. While the six distinct plant communities that flourish here support a broad variety of wildlife, even more variety can be enjoyed by visiting in different seasons. Throughout 2013, you can get to know the Reserve with free docent-guided walks that feature a new trail with unique habitats every three *continued on page 4*



Overlooking the lagoon from Santa Carina Trail Photo: Debby Strauss

Is That Palm Tree a Pest?

By David Varner, Science Director

Many Southern Californians are not aware that palms are not native to coastal areas here. Since Europeans settled here, many different varieties have been brought to the region, and now many flourish here in our landscapes and wild riparian areas. Two palms in particular have naturalized to the area, meaning they grow and reproduce quite well here without the aid of humans: the Mexican fan palm (*Washingtonia robusta*) and the Canary Island palm (*Phoenix canariensis*). *continued on page 4*

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 tara@sanelijo.org
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 nichole@sanelijo.org
 Joel Kramer, *Associate Biologist*
 joel@sanelijo.org
 Debby Strauss, *Program Associate*
 debby@sanelijo.org
 David Varner, *Science Director*
 david@sanelijo.org

Mailing Address:

PO Box 230634
 Encinitas, CA 92023-0634

Office Address:

2049 San Elijo Avenue
 Cardiff-by-the-Sea (Cardiff Town Center,
 next to Seaside Market)

Contact Information:

T: 760 436-3944 F: 760 944-9606
 E: info@sanelijo.org
 W: www.SanElijo.org
 FB: www.facebook.com/sanelijo

Editor: Debby Strauss

Design: Artefact Design

President's Message

By Denise Stillinger, *President*

"It's an entirely different life when you step off pavement."

-Pioneer Protector and President's Council member Tom Clotfelter

These telling words not only begin a short video available on our website, but also inspired my New Year's resolution to "step off pavement" each day. I invite you to join me as I spend more time connecting with nature and less time on concrete or asphalt. This issue of *Lagoon Tidings* highlights the unique features you'll enjoy in the Reserve this time of year when you meander down one of our seven miles of trails: wintering birds, delicate wildflowers, and unique encounters around each bend.

This issue also provides updates on our *Campaign for Gateway Park*, our environmental education programs, and our habitat management and restoration efforts. This essential work would not be possible without members like you who support a hard working staff and a team of dedicated volunteers, including our board of directors. I would like to recognize one such devoted board member—Jim McCall. Jim joined SELC's board in September 1989 and has given 23 years of his time, treasure and many talents to the Conservancy. In addition to providing guidance on how to successfully grow this non-profit from a small group of volunteers to a well-respected organization, Jim also served as secretary to the board for many years. He will be missed at the governance table, but the lessons and practices he shared will help guide us well into the future. Thank you, Jim, for your dedication to SELC.

P.S. I encourage you to take a moment to view our "We Saved a Place for You" video at SanElijo.org/gateway-park, produced pro bono for the Conservancy by Lyon & Associates. ♦



FEATURED PHOTO



Black Skimmer & Snowy Egret

Photo: Herb Knufken

Submit your own photos taken in the lagoon! Send as an attachment with a description and your name in the subject line to photos@sanelijo.org

Images for submission: We prefer RGB files with minimum pixel dimensions of 2100 x 1600, minimal image manipulation and no recompression before submission. Please see image submission info at SanElijo.org/lagoon-image-drop-box

A Patch of Habitat for Tree-nesting Songbirds



Black-headed Grosbeak Photo: Ray Spencer

By Mona Baumgartel, Docent

Starting in April and then throughout the spring and early summer, you will be accompanied by the cheery songs of Black-headed Grosbeaks as you walk along the trails around San Elijo Lagoon, especially the trails on the southern side of the lagoon east of I-5 and the eastern end of the Nature Center Loop Trail. These birds build their nests in the trees that grow near the streams that bring fresh water to the lagoon. Known as “riparian” areas, these are special habitats of native trees, mostly water-loving willow and sycamore trees, plus other plants that like extra water in the unique places surrounded by arid habitats in Southern California. The males guard the nest and announce their presence and protect their territory by singing lustily, often from the treetops. But they also help incubate the eggs and chicks, remaining more secretive on the nest—after all, the parents shouldn’t announce themselves to predators while sitting on the nest to incubate eggs or chicks!

The females may sing, too, but mostly they communicate with soft “chip” sounds.

Black-headed Grosbeaks, aside from having a lovely, recognizable song, are also good-looking birds. They do indeed have black heads and fat beaks (*gros* being French for “thick” or “big”) and the adult male bodies are orange- or cinnamon-colored. Females and males not yet in full adult plumage are orange- or cinnamon-tinged.

There are other birds nesting in our riparian areas, as well. Yellow-breasted Chats are even louder but less common than Grosbeaks at San Elijo Lagoon. They are much more secretive, mostly sticking to the dense thickets. They often hang out by the trail near the Nature Center, occasionally singing in the open. If you get a chance to see one, they’re quite spectacular, having bright yellow breasts which they stick out when they sing.

To learn more about the birds of the lagoon, and to hear the calls of the Black-headed Grosbeak and the Yellow-breasted Chat, visit the online Animal Guide at SanElijo.org/animalguide. ❖



Yellow-breasted Chat Photo: Ray Spencer

SELRP Update

The San Elijo Lagoon Restoration Project (SELRP) has submitted several chapters for review by the lead federal and local agencies, which in our case are the Army Corps of Engineers and County of San Diego, respectively. Since our last update we have focused on fine tuning the technical studies that will be attached to the environmental report. These reports help make up the analysis we use to determine what improvements and impacts any particular option might have. Some of the current ones we are continuing to finalize are the Surfing Study and the Material Disposal Plan. We have had several meetings with Surfrider Foundation to ensure that the project will not have a negative impact on the surfing resources in the area. We have also been looking at our existing habitat for the Belding’s Savannah Sparrow and California Light-footed Clapper Rail—two of our sensitive bird species. Our goal for these species is to ensure that preferred nesting and foraging habitat is not impacted overall and is enhanced throughout the lagoon, especially in the East Basin.

We continue to push to have a public draft of the document out in early July 2013. At that point, we really need all of you to read the document and make sure we have not overlooked anything. After comments are received, there may be minor alterations to the options before the final is released with the preferred alternative in Spring 2014. We hope to begin construction in late 2015. ❖

San Elijo Lagoon
RESTORATION
Reviving Your Wetlands

continued from page 1, New Wildlife Walks

months. The walks are held on the second Saturday of each month from 9–11am and meet at the trailhead of the scheduled trail.

March 9 is the last winter guided walk to the freshwater marsh and riparian areas of the Santa Inez Trail. The dike area of the trail was an early part of 1980s restoration efforts in the East Basin. This area received an Orchid Award for the creation of nesting islands and restored habitat for sensitive and endangered species. After winter rains begin, shallow ponds develop east of the dike, creating rich feeding areas for water birds. We'll be on the lookout for migratory and resident birds and have spotting scopes for up-close viewing.

In spring, April–June, we'll explore coastal sage scrub on the Santa Carina Trail as it passes through a broad swath of San Elijo history, from Kumeyaay midden remains to old farm sites. The Santa Carina overlook is one of the prettiest spots in the Reserve; last year it provided an excellent view of mule deer and nesting White-tailed Kites. Spring flowers at Santa Carina feature fields of blue-eyed grass and fuchsia-flowering gooseberry. The trail east offers windows into the fresh-water ponds where a wide variety of water birds have been seen.

The summer months, July–September, will feature the Rios Avenue Trail, perhaps the best for seeing the salt marsh and coastal sage scrub habitats. Known for excellent birding, rare and endangered Clapper Rails, California Gnatcatchers and Belding's Savannah Sparrows may be seen all year. We'll also have a feast for the senses with a wide variety of colorful spring and summer flowers, such as bush sunflower and Del Mar sand aster, as well as fragrant sages.

In fall, October–December, we'll explore the riparian habitat of the La Orilla Trail. This is our only area of "forest", primarily



Winding toward Santa Inez trailhead. Photo: Debby Strauss

non-native eucalyptus which is slowly being replaced with native sycamores, cottonwoods and willows. The tunnel through the wild grapes provides a cool, green—almost magical—retreat. In addition to abundant migratory warblers, Coopers Hawks often nest here. East of this area, the trail passes along scrub oak-dominated chaparral on the south and freshwater marsh on the north.

The new weekend Wildlife Walks offer a year's worth of diverse experiences in nature. Join our trained docent-naturalists and see more of what makes San Elijo Lagoon so special. ❖

continued from page 1, Palm Pests

The seeds produced by these mature palms are viable and easily carried by wildlife to neighboring properties. We try to convince folks not to use these plants in their landscapes, especially if located near the lagoon or any other native habitats, for several reasons:

- Palms infest stream zones and are known to physically block and divert water flow, leading to flooding and increased erosion.
- Mexican fan palms can create monospecific stands in riparian areas, and the lower, old fronds are an extreme fire hazard.
- Canary Island palms have long, sharp spines on leaves that can easily pierce clothing, shoes, and skin—extreme caution should be used when handling palm leaves!

Perhaps the most important reason is the effect palms have on the limited amount of native habitat we have in San Diego County. Plants



Environmentally sustainable Queen Palm.

provide much of the food and structure that wildlife calls home. Native animals are adapted to and dependent upon the structure and nutritional value of native vegetation. One adult palm can create a carpet of viable seedlings that grow to further displace native vegetation. A study conducted on the San Diego River found lower abundance and diversity of insects and spiders on Canary Island palms than on native willow trees (Talley, T.S.; Nguyen, K-C; and A. Nguyen). Such differences have effects all the way up the food chain, resulting in lower quality habitat for native wildlife.

For those who prefer a tropical ambiance, there are palm trees that grow well in Southern California and do not reproduce, making them excellent candidates for the environmentally sustainable landscape. One such palm is the queen palm (*Syagrus* sp.), originally from South America, which can be seen growing in various landscapes in San Diego County. ❖

Docent in the Spotlight—Debbie Hannah

By Tara Fuad, Education Director

It's only been a little over a year since Debbie Hanna completed docent training, but in a very short period Debbie has become an integral part of the Education Program, leading walks weekly, serving on committees, and helping develop educational programs and props. She has gained the reputation as “the unflappable docent”, always able to reign in the kids, no matter how fidgety they might be, without raising her voice or showing signs of frustration. There's no doubt that Debbie's 20 years of teaching 3rd grade in the Del Mar Union School District prepared her well for the docent program, especially since nearly half of the elementary students who come to the lagoon are 3rd graders.

In fact, Debbie used to bring her own students to the lagoon, and continues to encourage her former colleagues to do the same. “When I was teaching third grade, I always enjoyed and got excited about teaching the wetlands unit.



Debbie with third grade students from Escondido.

Photo: Tara Fuad

So long before retirement, I already had a seed planted in my head that one day I would become a docent,” recalled Debbie. “Docent training was fabulous, but with little background in biology, it was at times challenging,” noted Debbie, “but many people welcomed and encouraged me along the way and that made all the difference.”

An active resident of the City of Encinitas, Debbie is able to give back to her community by fostering environmental stewardship among young people and helping them understand the importance of caring for and protecting our natural resources. A long-time member of the Conservancy and avid hiker, Debbie has always appreciated the outdoors. She is a certified scuba diver, and also enjoys reading, gardening, and cooking in her free time. Thank you, Debbie, for becoming a leader among our docents in such a short period of time and for helping us all better understand the art of kid management. ❖

Docent Graduation

Congratulations to our recent Docent Graduates. From Left to Right: Genia Ram, Gail Smith, Karen Fraser, Kris Godfrey, Sally Stoffel, Stu Ronsenwasser, Janice Bell, Sue Wilson. Not pictured: Anna Marie Howard and Jon Lea Fimbres.

Photo: Tara Fuad



Family Discovery Days

Face painting and binocular making were highlights at “Wings Over Wetlands” in January.

Photo: Tara Fuad



RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

THE CAMPAIGN FOR GATEWAY PARK CONTRIBUTE NOW. CONSERVE FOREVER.

By Janie DeCelles, Gateway Campaign Committee Co-Chair

As members of San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy, you've been with us from the beginning. Only a year ago, *The Campaign for Gateway Park* was launched. Now, we have some extraordinary news to share with you.

We're pleased to announce that we have secured the naming rights to the park for \$1 million. It's not yet saved—but we're now a lot more than halfway there!

That puts our fundraising efforts to date at \$2.4 million towards our goal of \$3.75 million. We've been able to do this with a grass roots campaign comprised of donations from nearly 800 individuals, businesses and foundations.

However, we still have a gap to fill and are reaching out to members for the first time. One of our long time supporters, Frances Hamilton White, has pledged a matching gift of \$100,000 to help inspire you to donate. This allows you to leverage your donation by immediately doubling it, and giving you a chance to have an even greater impact! So your gift of \$500 will net us \$1,000, and your gift of \$1,000 will net us \$2,000, etc. All gifts over \$2,500 will be permanently recognized at the site.

We're ready to finish *The Campaign* by raising the remaining 40% of the money needed so that we can pay off the loan on the property and begin the restoration process.

We truly feel that this acquisition is a generational opportunity to really make a huge difference. This project evokes passion from everyone who learns about it and we're hoping that you will take advantage of this opportunity to leverage your donation.

If you would like additional information or to make a donation on line, please visit our website link to Gateway Park: SanElijo.org/Gateway-Park

Thanks always for your continued support.



Sunset across Gateway Property

Photo: Peggy Martin

Corporate Partnerships



agradis



Municipal Water District



Introducing Our New Tagline

Connecting communities. Protecting nature.

Our newest tagline was inspired by research, board discussion, and online voting: *Connecting communities. Protecting nature.* We thank our members who cast a vote last December for a new tagline to represent the Conservancy beyond our 25th Anniversary.

Read the 2012 Annual Report online at SanElijo.org/membership.

Each year, we highlight donors to the Conservancy, and included in 2012 are donors to *The Campaign for Gateway Park*. Thank you, members, for continuing the journey of connecting communities and protecting nature with San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy.



Ways of Giving

Your Lagoon. Your Legacy.

By Elaine Dodge, Development Director

In our Annual Report we recognize our Conservancy members, whose annual donations made a difference to San Elijo Lagoon Ecological Reserve in 2012.

But what about a lasting legacy? Have you considered what you might leave behind to continue preserving, protecting and enhancing the Reserve?

Thoughtful estate planning is one means we have to help others recall our values. Consider the effect of a plan that not only includes provision for family members, but resources for charitable purposes as well. By leaving a charitable legacy we leave positive impressions behind, we enhance the lives of our friends and loved ones. We encourage others to do the same.

An estate gift makes a positive statement.

When you include San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy in the final disposition of your estate, you demonstrate to your family and friends that you believe in and care about conservation, protecting endangered species, and raising the next generation of environmental stewards. Your parting gift becomes a declaration of your values.

An estate gift provides enduring support.

Estate gifts are especially valuable, not only because they tend to be larger than annual gifts, but because, unless otherwise directed, your legacy donation will be preserved in our endowment funds at The San Diego Foundation or the Rancho Santa Fe Foundation. Endowment funds ensure the long-term existence of vital Conservancy programs.

An estate gift encourages imitation.

There's something about a well-planned estate gift that influences others to "go and do likewise." As friends and family members plan their own estates, they may recall your generosity and thoughtfulness. Your gift may be the motivation to unlock resources from others.

Estate gifts may be made to *The Campaign for Gateway Park*

You may indicate that your estate gift be directed to the acquisition, restoration, or long term conservation of the Gateway property.

Contact Elaine Dodge, Development Director at (760) 436-3944 x 708 or elaine@sanelijo.org to discuss meaningful ways to leave a lasting legacy.



Our Legacy Donors

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San Elijo Lagoon CONSERVANCY

Connecting communities. Protecting nature.

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Membership Renewal

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



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GO GREEN!

Conserve resources by opting for e-delivery of *Lagoon Tidings*.

Simply send an email to newsletter@sanelijo.org with 'Subscribe' in the subject line and your mailing address in the message.

Thanks for helping to save paper!



Save the Date *San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy's Biennial Gala*

Birds of a Feather

**Saturday, August 17, 2013
5-9 pm**

Join us for an evening featuring live music, natural and organic cuisine, and auction opportunities. Proceeds benefit the Conservancy's Environmental Education programs.



SanElijo.org • (760) 436-3944

San Elijo Lagoon CONSERVANCY
Connecting communities. Protecting nature.



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