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MAGPIE CALLS

Newsletter of the Santa Ynez Valley Natural History Society
PO Box 794, Los Olivos, CA 93441
805-693-5683 www.syvnature.org synature@west.net

Dedicated to the study, exploration, and appreciation of natural history in the Santa Ynez Valley region.

Some Good News Stories For Naturalists

by John Evarts, SYVNHS Board Vice President

This past year brought a steady cascade of discouraging news about the natural environment, ranging from the meteorological impacts of global warming to the ongoing decline of biodiversity, often called the Sixth Extinction. Given that backdrop, it seemed like a good time to seek out some local stories that have a positive message for naturalists. I've picked six items to share. Some of these summaries are simply good news (at least to most); others are stories that represent a good outcome, given the circumstances. Any opinions expressed here are mine alone and do not necessarily represent the views of the Board of Directors of the SYVNHS.

Jack and Laura Dangermond Preserve

One way to think of naturalists is to view them as individuals who appreciate and study our planet's biodiversity, especially in places where native ecosystems are still largely intact. It was no surprise, then, that naturalists rejoiced at the news in late December that The Nature Conservancy had been given 38 square miles of undeveloped coastal land surrounding Point Conception for permanent preservation. As a result of a $165 million gift by Jack and Laura Dangermond—the single largest in TNC history—the former Cojo-Jalama Ranch will now become a crown jewel of conservation on the Gaviota Coast. Renamed the Jack and Laura Dangermond Preserve, this amazing property includes the entire Jalama Creek watershed. It also comprises approximately 9000 acres of annual and native grassland, 5000 acres of coastal scrub, 4500 acres of foothill woodland, and 2000 acres of coast live oak stands. As many as one million trees are growing on the preserve. It is also a sacred place to Native Americans, and the cultural resources on the property are significant. Without this gift to TNC, the ranch could have been developed into home sites. Perhaps we can look forward to a day when the Society can visit this wild property on a guided field trip to see the place the Chumash call the "Western Gate."

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Upcoming SYVNHS Films, Lectures, and Field Trips

Jan. 25	The Lone Woman of San Nicolas Island (film)
Feb. 8	Natural Resources of San Nicolas Island (lecture)
Feb. 22	Annual Members' Meeting (before the lecture)
Feb. 22	Bear Essential? Grizzlies in California (lecture)
Mar. 3	The Serpentine Landscape (field)
Mar. 17	Devereux Slough Restoration Revisited (field)
Mar. 30	Introducing the Trees of UCSB (field)
Apr. 12	Plate Tectonics in Southern California (lecture)
Apr. 21	The Lupines of California (lecture)
Apr. 28	Color After Ashes: Fire-Followers (field)
May 12	What Is a Perfect Field Guide? (lecture)

Upcoming Lectures and Field Trips

The Lone Woman of San Nicolas Island

Introduction, film screening, and Q&A with Paul Goldsmith
Co-hosted by the Los Olivos Library
Thursday, January 25, 7:30 p.m.
Santa Ynez Valley Grange
2374 Alamo Pintado Avenue, Los Olivos

Please join us in welcoming filmmaker Paul Goldsmith, who will introduce and screen his newest documentary, *The Lone Woman of San Nicolas Island*. His work helps to unearth and clarify some of the mysteries surrounding the life of the Lone Woman of San Nicolas Island, made famous by author Scott

(Continued next page)

San Nicolas Island foxes, photo by Chuck Graham

O'Dell in his 1960 book, *Island of the Blue Dolphins*. Segments of the Lone Woman's story are filmed on location, giving the audience rare views of San Nicolas Island—a U.S. military base with restricted access and perhaps the most remote of California's Northern Channel Islands. The film reveals how one person, a Native American woman christened Juana Maria, survived and lived for 18 years, alone, on the isolated island some 61 miles from the California coastline. Mr. Goldsmith traces the elements of her amazing journey by following her sandy, wind-blown footprints, backtracking into the past, and reaching out to distant San Nicolas. Her story is inspirational and true.

Paul Goldsmith is a member of the American Society of Cinematographers and has received a number of awards for his work as a director of photography. He has produced several television documentaries and worked as a cinematographer on collaborations that won Emmy, Peabody, and Oscar awards. He has produced work for PBS and National Geographic. Paul is married with four daughters and lives just outside Los Angeles, California.

Natural Resources of San Nicolas Island
Lecture with William Hoyer
Co-hosted by the Solvang Library
Thursday, February 8, 7:00 p.m.
Solvang Library
1745 Mission Drive in Solvang

San Nicolas Island is the most remote and mysterious of the Channel Islands, and is filled with carefully managed and diverse natural resources. This is an opportunity to learn more about life on the island from the island's natural resources manager William Hoyer. He will review the island's botanical, animal, and biosecurity programs as well as some of the land-use history of the island. Attendees will learn about charismatic marine mammals, sly island foxes, and rare plants all the way down to the more cryptic endemic snails.

William Hoyer, a northern California native, has a BS in Plant Science from Cornell University and has worked with the Navy as a natural resources manager on San Nicolas Island for over five years. He also serves on the board of directors for the California Invasive Plant Council and is a member of the Islands of the Californias Botanical Collaborative. William lives in Santa Barbara and spends his free time outdoors and practices wildlife photography.

William Hoyer on Guadalupe Island, Mexico, photo courtesy of William Hoyer

An endemic snail on San Nicolas Island, *Micrarionata feralis,* photo by William Hoyer

Annual Members' Meeting
Short meeting preceding the evening presentation
Thursday, February 22, 7:15 p.m.
Santa Ynez Valley Grange
2374 Alamo Pintado Avenue, Los Olivos

The Annual Members' Meeting will be held at 7:15 p.m. immediately before Dr. Alagona's lecture in the evening, see next page. We will elect and introduce new board members for 2018 and hear a brief Treasurer's report. SYVNHS members, please join us at the Grange.

Bear Essential? The Past, Present, and Potential Future of Grizzlies in California
Free lecture with Dr. Peter Alagona
Co-hosted by Los Olivos Library
Thursday, February 22, 7:30 p.m.
Santa Ynez Valley Grange
2374 Alamo Pintado Avenue, Los Olivos

Prior to the Gold Rush, California was home to as many as ten thousand grizzly bears. After 1849, the state's grizzly population plummeted, and the last credible sighting of a wild "chaparral bear" occurred near Sequoia National Park in 1924. Today, California's grizzlies are lost but not forgotten; they have been extinct in the state for nearly a century, but they remain our official mascot, and some Californians are beginning to wonder whether it is time to bring them back. This lecture will discuss the work of the California Grizzly Study Group, a project launched in 2016 at UC Santa Barbara that is conducting the first major study of the past, present, and potential future of grizzlies in California since 1955.

Pete Alagona is an associate professor of history, geography, and environmental studies at UCSB. Before coming to Santa Barbara, he studied at Northwestern University and UCLA, and held fellowships at Harvard and Stanford. An environmental historian by training, his work explores what happens when humans share space and resources—their habitats—with other species. He has published more than four-dozen books and articles on these and related topics, including *After the Grizzly: Endangered Species and the Politics of Place in California*, published by the University of California Press in 2013.

The Serpentine Landscape: Rocks, Soils, and Plants
Field Trip with Susie Bartz and Liz Gaspar
Saturday, March 3, 8:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.
Figueroa Mountain Area
Participation is limited to 20
Advance registration begins February 3 at
synature@west.net or 805/ 693-5683.
Members $10. / Non-members $25. / Children $5.

California's location on the continental plate boundry has resulted in a unique geologic history and unusual abundance of serpentine formations. These ultramafic rocks of astonishing beauty hold clues about their ancient marine origin. Soils derived from such rocks are typically inhospitable to plants, yet in these soils grows a startling proportion of California's endemic flora. We will visit sites in the Figueroa Mountain area rich in serpentine rocks and soils to learn about their formation in subduction zones, their metamorphic alteration, and weathering. We'll also look for corresponding plant species that have evolved remarkable adaptive traits allowing them to grow, and even thrive, in serpentine landscapes. We'll explore a huge shiny landslide near slopes of spring flora, as well as the Camuesa Fault near the Ranger Peak area, where the serpentine endemic, Leather Oak (*Quercus durata*) grows. We will visit additional sites as time permits.

Susie Bartz grew up in rural Pennsylvania, and after college and graduate school, she married and came to Santa Barbara in 1974. She pursued a degree in geology from SBCC, and in 2009 she helped complete a project publishing the maps of legendary geologist Tom Dibblee, who was her friend and mentor, and in whose memory she dedicates her walks. As a geology educator, Susie has worked for over 20 years with schools and community organizations to bring an awareness of earth science to the general public in outdoor settings.

Dudleya species growing in serpentine outcrop, photo by Liz Gaspar

Liz Gaspar leads field trips for the Santa Ynez Valley Natural History Society and other organizations. She has a master's degree from UCSB, and her research topic included native grass species growing in serpentine soils. Liz worked for 20 years at Cachuma Lake as a park naturalist, teaching visiting school children, locals, and campers.

Devereux Slough Restoration Revisited
Field Trip with Darwin Richardson
Saturday, March 17, 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Participation is limited to 25
Advance registration begins February 17 at
synature@west.net or 805/ 693-5683
Members $10. / Non-members $25. / Children $5.

This trip will explore the Devereux Slough ecosystem, a wonderful coastal estuary on the south coast. The lower Devereux Slough is part of the Coal Oil Point UC Reserve and is designated by the Audubon Society as an Important Bird Area, based on its global importance to bird populations. The upper Devereux Slough had been bulldozed and filled in the 1960s to create a golf course and was acquired in recent years by UCSB. Last winter, a massive restoration project was begun to restore the historical conditions of the upper slough and adjacent mesa. This exciting project continues and is one of our region's largest restoration efforts. It is expected to be open to the public later this year. We will have the opportunity to tour the restoration and see many of our region's winter shorebirds and other coastal species as we explore the wetlands, beach strand, dunes, salt marsh, and upper reaches of the diverse habitats surrounding the estuary.

Darwin Richardson will lead a tour describing the plans to restore the upper extent of this estuary while we bird along the way, as well as explore the lower Coal Oil Point Reserve. Darwin is a restoration project manager with UCSB's Cheadle Center for Biodiversity and Ecological Restoration, which is implementing the restoration efforts.

Introducing the Trees of UCSB: Six Continents in Three Hours
Field Trip with Larry Ballard
Friday, March 30, 9:00 am to noon
Participation is limited to 25
Previously enrolled participants will receive priority registration. Advance registration begins February 28 at
synature@west.net or 805/ 693-5683
This field trip is free to all, and there is no UCSB parking fee on this date.

UCSB has more than 250 tree species from six continents growing on campus. This walking tour will take a look at the architecture of trees, discuss identification tips, and serve as an introduction to the urban trees of the Santa Barbara area. We'll see Weeping Pine, Queensland Kauri, Chilean Wine Palm, Abyssinian Coral Tree, and Manna Gum among others. Many of the trees were planted while Dr. Vernon Cheadle was Chancellor of UCSB (1962-1977). The Cheadle Center for Biodiversity and Ecological Restoration is a continuation of his botanical legacy.

Larry Ballard has an interest in all aspects of the region's natural history, and has led many natural history trips for our organization as well as for other groups and institutions in Santa Barbara County.

Ribbon Gum tree, photo by Owen Duncan

When the Plate Tectonic Revolution Met Coastal Southern California
Free lecture with Dr. Tanya Atwater
Co-sponsored by the Solvang Library
Thursday, April 12, 7:00 p.m.
Legion Wing, Solvang Veterans Memorial Building
1745 Mission Drive in Solvang

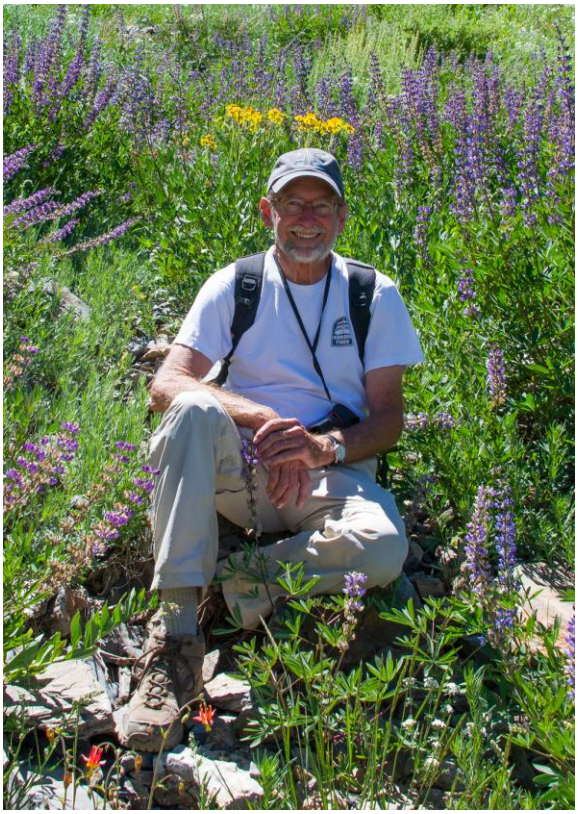
Geoscience educator Dr. Tanya Atwater has concentrated her land research on the tectonic evolution of western North America. During the last 100 million years, this continental edge was first a major subduction zone and then changed, gradually, to the plate-shear boundary of the San Andreas Fault. Dr. Atwater studies this geologic evolution, integrating and comparing the global plate motion record with the regional continental geologic records. The emerging relationships reveal the origins of many major geologic features, with exceptionally interesting implications for Southern California and our local landscapes. Dr. Atwater has created geological animations that are used extensively by teachers, museums and the media. She'll share these animations in this evening's presentation.

Tanya Atwater is a professor emerita at UCSB. She was educated at MIT, UC Berkeley, and Scripps Institute of Oceanography, earning her PhD in 1972. She was a professor at MIT before joining the UCSB faculty. Atwater's research in tectonics has taken her to the bottoms of the oceans and to mountains on many continents. She is especially well known for her works on the plate tectonic history of western North America and the San Andreas Fault system. In her retirement she is devoted to science communication, working with the media, museums, civic groups, and teachers.

The Lupines of California
Free lecture with Stuart Wilson
Saturday, April 21, 7:00 p.m.
UC Sedgwick Reserve, Tipton House

Lupines appear in California from coasts to mountaintops, from humble roadsides to wildland hills, and in every floral color. Photographer Stuart Wilson has had a love of lupines for many years and recently spent two years traversing California on a quest to photograph all 104 species and varieties of the genus *Lupinus* in the state. He is working on a book, *Lupines of California*, with the help of Teresa Sholars, the author of the genus *Lupinus* section of the *Jepson Manual of California Plants*. Join us in welcoming Stuart Wilson and his lupine presentation at Sedgwick Reserve on this Earth Day weekend. Come early and bring an informal picnic dinner starting at 5:30 p.m.

Stuart Wilson attended Brooks Institute of Photography and has traveled extensively to photograph rain forest flora and fauna as well as that of the American West. He has taught photography classes at Santa Barbara Botanic Garden and the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History and has been widely published in books, calendars, magazines, and DVDs. He is the principal photographer of *A Naturalist's Guide to the Santa Barbara Region* by author Joan Lentz.



Stuart Wilson with his subjects

Color After Ashes: Following the Fire-Followers
Field Trip with Larry Ballard
Saturday, April 28, 9:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
Participation is limited to 20
Advance registration begins March 28 at synature@west.net or 805/ 693-5683
Members $10. / Non-members $25. / Children $5.

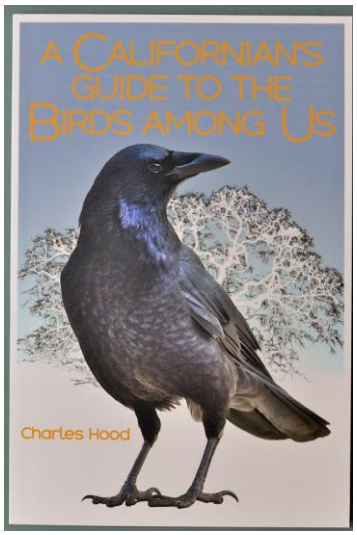
The profuse floral display of fire-followers is one of the most impressive sights in the California flora. Locally, tuberous plants like *Marah* have already sent up their first leafy tendrils. Annuals with long-dormant seeds will flourish with just a few inches of winter rain. In the Whittier fire area, chaparral shrubs that sprout from root crowns are already 5' tall, even though they've gone ten months without a trace of rain. Unfortunately last year's fires have left us with too many places to visit. The hike location will be determined later depending on displays and access.

Yuccas and Mariposa Lilies after fire, photo by John Evarts

Larry Ballard has an interest in all aspects of the region's natural history and has led many natural history trips for our organization as well as for other groups and institutions in Santa Barbara County.

What Is a Perfect Field Guide, and Why Don't We Already Have Them?
A free lecture and book-signing with Charles Hood
Saturday, May 12, 7:00 p.m.
UC Sedgwick Reserve, Tipton House

This informal talk and book-signing with California author and naturalist Charles Hood will take us on a tour of current field guide offerings and explore the pleasures and challenges of trying to write, illustrate, produce, and market the perfect field guide. Charles will start with birds but also discuss mushrooms, trees, insects, and even lichens. Along the way he will consider the origins of field guides, going as far back as Shakespeare's time, when naturalists of that age asked, "Can a good enough field guide help keep away the Devil?" Join him for a lively discussion as we think about the answers and look ahead to what we can expect in the years to come.



Author Charles Hood

Charles Hood grew up near the Los Angeles River, but his parents' subscription to *National Geographic* made him eager to explore wider vistas. Since then he has been to over 50 countries, seen 5,000 species of birds, been lost in a whiteout in Tibet, been charged by a musk ox in Alaska, graduated from survival training at the South Pole, and sailed to within 600 miles of the North Pole. A prize-winning poet, Charles is the author of the new title, *A Californian's Guide to the Birds Among Us*. He is currently working on a guide to the mammals of California, a book about urban nature (in collaboration with the Los Angeles Natural History Museum), and a memoir about his father's service in WW II.

Some Good News Stories For Naturalists *(Continued from page 1)*

Whittier Fire Regrowth

Over the years, the Society has hosted lectures by some of California's top fire ecologists. Most of these experts point out that when fires are periodic—but not too frequent—they are key agents in ecosystem restoration for various plant communities that are adapted to specific burning regimes. The Whittier Fire, which began on July 8th and was not officially contained until October 5th, was clearly not a good news story for employees and campers at Rancho Alegre, Camp Whittier, and the Outdoor School, or for the people who lost their homes (16 homes burned). I wish them all the best as they rebuild. Much of the 18,430-acre burn did not create long-lasting impacts on humans and our infrastructure. The fire charred chaparral and oak woodland vegetation that had not burned since 1955, which places it within a time frame that some consider a natural cycle. More importantly, the Whittier Fire zone has seen a rebound in plant growth that is amazingly robust. Blackened oaks are sending out new shoots from the base of their trunks up to their highest limbs. A variety of stump-sprouting shrubs, such as chamise and manzanita, are surging back with new growth. A host of annual (native and nonnative) grasses and forbs have germinated and have helped stabilize the denuded slopes—all during one of the hottest and driest autumns and early winters on record for California. Next time you drive through the burn area on Highway 154, you might think of this sight as good news. Quite a few plants in our local ecosystems are dependent—in various degrees—on the impact of fire, and the ongoing regeneration in the aftermath of this burn is a reminder of the resilience of nature.

Wildflowers at Carrizo Plain

Those who went on the Society's field trip to Carrizo Plain National Monument last March were treated to the beauty of vast flower-covered hills and basins. The timing and abundance of last winter's precipitation were perfect for Carrizo Plain's annuals. Dormant through years of harsh drought, they sprang to life in a glorious but ephemeral display. Their blooms in turn produced a new seed bank that will be ready the next time the stars align to produce another super-bloom. Although under consideration for reductions to its acreage, the national monument has not yet been downsized by the Department of the Interior. Meanwhile, the Carrizo Plain Conservancy continues to acquire inholdings within the monument that will further protect this unique California landscape.

Santa Barbara Christmas Bird Count

Santa Barbara has long been a participant in the annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count, which began over a century ago. This year, the Santa Barbara Circle count recorded 202 species, including about 49 in the Paradise Road area, which is within the circle. While this total is not as high as recent counts, it was an encouraging number because the count took place just after the worst period of the Thomas Fire and during a time when our region of California entered its sixth year of serious drought. A number of Society members also participate in the neighboring Cachuma Circle count each year (which includes Sedgwick Reserve), and some of their observations provide glimmers of good news. For example, our organization's mascot, the yellow-billed magpie, has perhaps stabilized its numbers after years of decline. There have also been sightings of magpies in places where they had been absent during past counts. Positive news sometimes comes in small packages.

Sea Lion Populations Rebound

Our regional focus has always included field trips and lectures about the nearby environment of the Gaviota Coast. California sea lions are a common and iconic marine mammal found from Alaska to Mexico, and we often see them during our outings along the shore. Recent surveys and studies of these creatures have provided us some good news: after several declines in recent years, biologists with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration report that the sea lion population has rebounded and it now totals over 250,000 individuals. This is about triple the number of 39 years ago. Sea lions were given federal protection beginning in 1972, and they are perhaps the first protected marine mammal to have fully recovered to match the natural carrying capacity of its range. As with other large animals, such as black bears and coyotes, there are occasional conflicts with humans and we are still learning new strategies for contending with "problem" sea lions.

NatureTrack Docents and Students

Last year, Sue Eisaguirre and her nonprofit organization NatureTrack offered outdoor education to over 3800 students. Many of Sue's docents who lead hikes and nature activities with the students are members of the Society. Quite a few of her docents are regular attendees at our lectures and field trips. NatureTrack's work with (mostly local) students is vital and appreciated. For many of the participants, a hike at a place like Midland School is something they had never done before taking a NatureTrack outing. There are future naturalists among those kids who get excited about their NatureTrack experience!

Marc's Stumper

Winter is the time for big waves at local beaches like Rincon, but how does this actually happen? Santa Barbara beaches seem pretty well guarded against any real surf. Look at a map of SB County, the Channel Islands block any summer south swells and Point Conception blocks any winter north swells! The occasional swells from the west must come in parallel to our local beaches. They may bring waves to C-Street in Ventura, but they would miss us. So why do local beaches like Rincon, Campus Point, Refugio, and "The Ranch" ever get waves?

About last issue's stumper: The eastern Pacific has as many hurricanes as the Atlantic, but there is no record of a hurricane ever striking California. Our cold ocean is not close to the 80°F that these storms need. The Earth turns on its axis from west to east, moving under the oceans and atmosphere. The spin causes the east to west trade winds and warm ocean currents across the tropics that carry hurricanes west and away from us. The east coasts of the continents get the worst of it. On the other hand, Hurricane Ophelia made it to Ireland last October, so outliers are possible!

Here is an unknown surfer dropping into an overhead wave at Rincon Point taken on December 22, 2005. My photo notes from the day say that "We had gale-force winds and clouds in the mountains today, but there were rumors of big waves, so I went to the beach at Rincon to get some photos..." How do the big waves sneak past Point Conception and the Channel Islands to reach our south-facing beaches?

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