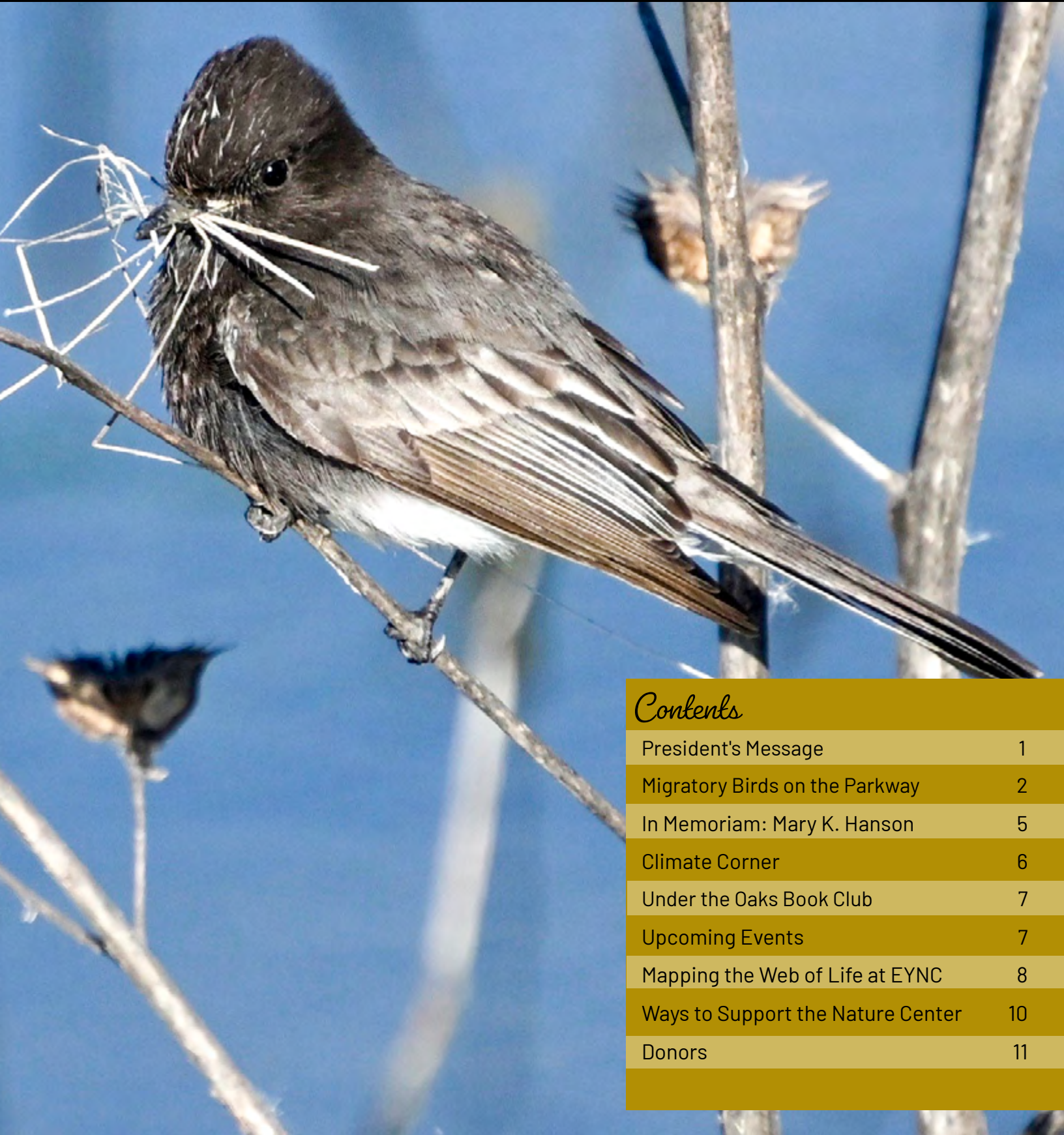


THE ACORN

American River Natural History Association Quarterly Magazine – Spring 2025



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President's Message, Spring 2025



Greg Dewey

This past year has been one of change at Effie Yeaw Nature Center. We suffered a financial crash. We saw an abrupt turnover of upper level staff. And worst of all, our community lost confidence in us.

Yet as we progressed through the year, we have much to be thankful for.

First and foremost, we are thankful for our generous community of donors. They have stepped up in so many different ways. Six of our donors have taken a brave step. They went out on a limb and in the space of two weeks in December, we received \$300,000 in

unrestricted funds. It bought us the resources and time to bring the train back onto tracks.

Second, our volunteers and staff have stepped in to fill the staffing void. Betty Cooper, previously comfortably retired, filled the Executive Director position, one is which she had previously held a few years back. Jamie Washington, also previously comfortably retired, has stepped up to fill the Volunteer Coordinator position, again a position that she previously held. Both are serving in a volunteer capacity. Our staff, many of whom have worked under furlough, has performed admirably. Everyone has pulled together and brought us stability in a time of need.

We are thankful for the strength and engagement of our broader community. I have held a townhall meeting, several listening sessions and innumerable one on one coffees with members of our community. I am struck by the caring and concern of our people. I am getting plenty of advice on how to fix things and that is great! Everyone wants to help. Please be patient, we are listening to you.

Going forward, we have a significant "to do" list.

First, we have to re-do the 2025-2026 budget to ensure that we have a balanced budget. This new budget will cover the deficits in the first half of the fiscal year, support an Associate Executive Director position and maintain the reduced staffing that we created at the end of the year. The budget will allow us to be operational and continue our educational programming. However, we still need to be aggressive restructuring and re-visioning a sustainable EYNC.

We also need to focus on board development and governance. We must insure that both the guard rails and the leadership are in place so financial and staffing missteps of the past are not repeated. The Board is reinvigorated with new Board members with new talents and perspectives.

Finally and most importantly, we are engaging the whole community in a process to re-vision EYNC. This process will seek operational efficiencies, develop more innovative programming and refocus our community on our founding values. Despite all these changes, we remain a community dedicated to educating the next generation in the Maidu tradition of respecting and honoring our land.

The Acorn is published quarterly by the American River Natural History Association (ARNHA), a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that supports the Effie Yeaw Nature Center and Nature Study Area.

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Black phoebe with nesting material.
© Rich Howard.

Migratory Birds on the American River Parkway

By Rich Howard

Bird migration is one of the most spectacular and mysterious processes in nature. Migration can be defined simply as “a seasonal movement of birds between breeding and wintering grounds that occurs twice a year.” Ancient Europeans attributed the disappearance of birds in fall and reappearance in spring to such things as transmutations into other species or hibernation in hidden places like tree hollows or mud at the bottom of ponds. These ideas were not disproven until the early 19th century. It is now estimated that about 1,800 of the 11,000 bird species in the world migrate. The Arctic Tern [Figure 1] may be the champion; in one study of eleven birds breeding in Greenland or Iceland, the average flight distance to Antarctica and back was over 44,000 miles per year!

The common understanding of bird migration in North America is a north-south movement from summer breeding grounds in the temperate north to wintering grounds in subtropical and tropical Central and South America. While this may be accurate for many species of birds east of the Rockies, the picture for the Sacramento Valley and the American River Parkway is more complex. In fact, we have more birds in winter than in summer. According to data reported to eBird (a citizen science app and website for “all about birds”) for the Effie Yeaw Nature Center (EYNC), June is the month with the fewest species (61), while March has the most (89). Even more species appear in the periods labeled by eBird as “Spring Migration” (113 species in March-May) and “Fall Migration” (110 species in August-November). What’s going on here?

There is always a chance that eBird data are skewed by how many birders are out looking for birds. As the weather heats up on the Valley floor in June, many birders head to the mountains to find birds. In addition, March is the month of the annual Bird and Breakfast event at EYNC, when many expert birders scout the area for weeks looking for nests and then lead trips for the event itself [Figure 2]. With these caveats, let’s assume the numbers in eBird are accurate for our purpose of looking at migration patterns of birds on the American River Parkway.

We are fortunate to have a robust baseline of relatively common resident “sedentary” species representing many different bird families all year long (like California Quail, Great Egret, Red-tailed Hawk, Killdeer, Anna’s Hummingbird, Acorn Woodpecker, Oak Titmouse, Bushtit [Figure 3], White-breasted Nuthatch, California Towhee, and Lesser Goldfinch). Seen on a timeline of seasonal abundance from January through December, their pattern of seasonal abundance looks like this: [=====], with



Figure 1. Arctic Tern. ©Rich Howard.



Figure 2. Bird & Breakfast. ©Rich Howard.



Figure 3. Bushtit. ©Rich Howard.

the = symbol representing the months they are present and blank spaces indicating when they are scarce or absent. Other birds, like the Wood Duck [Figure 4], White-tailed Kite, Belted Kingfisher, Tree Swallow, and Brown-headed Cowbird, are present all year long but their abundance fluctuates with seasonal movements into or out of our area.

A few species of songbirds (“passerines”) follow the classic Northern Hemisphere model of breeding here in the summer and moving south into Mexico, Central America, and South America during our winter. These so-called “neotropical migrants” include Ash-throated Flycatcher, Western Kingbird [Figure 5], some swallows (Cliff, Barn, and Northern Rough-winged), Bullock’s Oriole, and Black-headed Grosbeak. Black-chinned Hummingbird and Swainson’s Hawk are two non-passerine birds that are common along the Parkway in summer but absent in winter, migrating to Mexico and South America respectively. The seasonal migration pattern for neotropical migrants looks like this from May through August: [==].

Our diverse winter birds include a group of migratory birds that breed far to the north and join our year-round resident birds for the winter. Sandhill Cranes and waterfowl (geese, ducks, and swans) come to mind first, filling our fields and wetlands by the thousands [Figure 6]. Diving ducks like Bufflehead and Goldeneye (Common and Barrow’s) and gulls are particularly noticeable on the American River. While Ring-billed, American Herring, and Glaucous-winged Gulls breed to the north, Western Gulls probably come over from the coast, while many of our California Gulls breed on islands in Mono Lake across the Sierra Nevada. Songbirds exhibiting this “winter visitor” pattern include Cedar Waxwing, Dark-eyed “Oregon” Junco, and “crowned” sparrows (Golden-crowned [Figure 7] and White-crowned). Their pattern looks like this from *January through March and from October through December*: [== ==].

Our proximity to the Sierra Nevada allows some birds to migrate into the mountains to breed and return to the Valley in winter. These “altitudinal migrants” are often “partial migrants,” in which only part of the population migrates. In a study by Professor Alice Boyle of Kansas State University, species showing “strong” evidence of altitudinal migration include Red-breasted Sapsucker, American Pipit, Purple Finch [Figure 8], and Fox Sparrow. Evidence of altitudinal migration is weaker for Sharp-shinned Hawk, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and Yellow-rumped Warbler. All these birds breed both to the north of us and in the Sierra Nevada, so they could be coming to the American River Parkway from both areas in winter. Their pattern would be similar to the “winter visitor” pattern above.

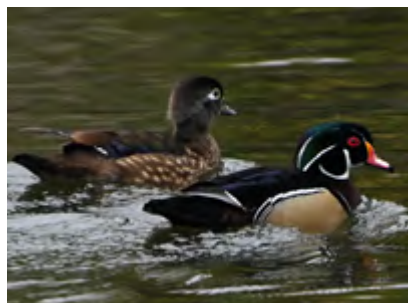


Figure 4. Wood ducks. ©Rich Howard.



Figure 5. Western kingbird. ©Rich Howard.



Figure 6. Snow geese and Ross's geese. ©Rich Howard.

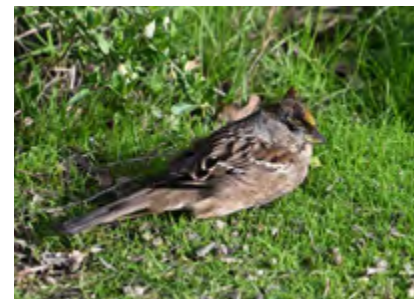


Figure 7. Golden-crowned sparrow. ©Rich Howard.



Figure 8. Purple finch. ©Rich Howard.

Another category of migrants adding to the diversity of birds in the American River Parkway are the birds who pass through in spring and fall but do not stay. These “passage migrants” breed as far north as Alaska and winter as far south as South America. Even the tiny Rufous Hummingbird makes an amazing journey from Alaska to Mexico. Birders thrill at finding these sometimes elusive species, including shorebirds, flycatchers, and warblers. The passage migrants’ seasonal abundance looks like this from April through June and August through October: [=== ===].

The Phainopepla has a unique migration route. This lovely bird, whose name means “shining robe,” is the only member of the Silky-flycatcher family in North America [Figure 9]. After decades of uncertainty, GPS tracking has recently shown that some birds breed in the desert in the spring, then migrate over 140 miles to oak-sycamore woodlands on the central coast of California to breed again in summer. They return to the Sonoran Desert in September and October. This rare documentation of “itinerant breeding” has been shown to be the result of a high degree of flexibility in migration, breeding and social behavior not documented in any other North American bird. Sacramento is near the northern extent of the Phainopepla’s breeding range, and it is present here all year long, so it is unclear what the migration pattern of the local birds might be. Some may be migrating to the Sacramento Valley over 750 miles from the Sonoran Desert. In both locations, they show an affinity for mistletoe, although their diet is more varied in California woodlands. Interestingly, a comparison of the 2009 and 2023 checklists of local birds shows their numbers have increased, so they are now present all year long.



Figure 9. Phainopepla. ©Rich Howard.

Acknowledgements

Research sources used for this article were the online *Birds of the World* from the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology (birds.oftheworld.org); *Sacramento County Breeding Birds* by Edward Pandolfino, Lily Douglas, Timothy Manolis, and Chris Conard; W. Alice Boyle, *Altitudinal bird migration in North America*, *The Auk*, Volume 134, Issue 2, 1 April 2017, Pages 443–465; and *Checklist of the Birds of the Sacramento Area* by Sacramento Audubon Society (2009 and 2023 revisions (available at the EYNC Discovery Store and online at <https://www.sacramento-audubon.org/sacramento-birds-checklist>). Helpful comments from David Harlow. Eric Ross and Joey Johnson improved the article; any remaining errors are mine.

Rich Howard is a long time volunteer at the Effie Yeaw Nature Center and conducts birding workshops of all levels in the Nature of Things series at the nature center.

A Special Thanks...

The entire Effie Yeaw Nature Center community wants to send their heartfelt thanks to the anonymous donors and to the Sierra National Construction for their generosity that has enabled the center to continue providing wonderful education programs while the organization goes through a major restructuring.

THANK YOU!!!!

In Memoriam: Mary K. Hanson

By Eric Ross



Mary "Mare" Hanson.
Courtesy Tuleyome 2017.

Many of us in the extended EYNC community had the pleasure of knowing and spending time with Mary "Mare" Hanson, a long-time volunteer who passed away last year having lived for some time with terminal cancer. At the Nature Center, she was active as a Trail Steward, led hikes through the Nature Study Area (NSA) focusing on a wide variety of life-forms, provided "Mushroom, Fungi and Slime Molds" trainings to our docents using her own prepared slides, and wrote several informative nature articles for *The Acorn*.

Facing her situation, Mary responded with courage, grace and determination. She wrote, as "MKH Naturalist," on her Flickr page: "I am a 60-something Certified California Naturalist, author and nature photographer living with terminal cancer. I figured I could spend my last years going through operations and being made sick by chemotherapy, or I could get out more into nature, connect more with the planet, and be happy. Nature heals."

Mary was my instructor when I took the UC California Naturalist Program with Tuleyome, a nonprofit conservation organization in Woodland. She was a kind and humorous teacher. As an EYNC docent starting in 2019, I happily joined hikes she led and learned a lot. During the pandemic, I would see her taking pictures when I birded along the American River. As she wrote in 2022, "despite my diagnosis, I continue to volunteer where and when I can. In 2021, I completed my first #52Hike-Challenge, and I'm doing it again this year."

"Mare" who had degrees in journalism and law will be remembered for her prolific writing and great photography. She authored numerous books, many for Tuleyome, including "A Species Guide to the Berryessa Snow Mountain Region." Her photography and nature writing were regularly found in local newspapers. The White House website displayed her photo of mule deer for Earth Day 2015. Starting in late 2015, she wrote and published a series of three books, *The Chubby Woman's Walkabout Guide to Cool Stuff on the American River, Volumes 1 through 3*, containing her own photos and descriptions of notable flora and fauna.

Dennis Eckhart, a Habitat Restoration Team leader, has written: "Mary...posted 1,117 observations in [iNaturalist](#) that are collected in the Effie Yeaw NSA & Ancil Hoffman Park project, which puts her atop the leaderboard for the project. She'll be at the top for a while, since the number 2 user has just 671 observations."

Mary famously wrote "Get outside and LIVE!" which should be her epitaph. She was an inspiring mentor, naturalist, writer and photographer. Her knowledge, enthusiasm, kindness and humor will be truly missed. We thank you!



Mary Hanson discusses fungi with a group of EYNC naturalists.
© Rachel Cowan 2020

Eric Ross is an ARNHA Board member and volunteers as a docent and with the Habitat Restoration Team.

Gardening to Make a Difference

How many of you are concerned about the effects of climate change on our planet? It seems overwhelming at times, but there are steps we can take as individuals that make a difference. Being mindful about what we plant in our yards and how we use water are two important areas to consider.

Fifty percent of the water we use in our yards goes to water lawns. If we reduce the amount of grass we have, we save water. Sacramento County has a program called "Cash for grass." Water Agency (SCWA) has a program called "Cash for Grass." If you live in that water district, the county will pay you up to \$2000 to replace the grass you have with sustainable plants. If you are not in the SCWA district, check with your local water district to see if they offer a similar program. If you are wedded to grass, the California Native Plant Society has information about native grasses that are drought-tolerant and still create a green carpet in your yard. Here's the [link](#).

If you are wedded to grass, the California Native Plant Society has information about native grasses that are drought-tolerant and still create a green carpet in your yard. Here's the [link](#).

As we move into spring, a prime time for planting in the valley, there are many resources that can help you decide what native and drought tolerant plants might work in your yard. The Fair Oaks Horticultural Center, under the umbrella of the UC Cooperative Extension program, not only has lists of water-efficient plants, but also has an extensive garden in Fair Oaks at Fair Oaks Blvd. and Madison. There you can see and learn about a variety of native (and some non-native drought-tolerant) plants. Check it out [here](#). An added bonus to replanting is to include flowers and bushes that attract pollinating insects and hummingbirds. California fuchsia and milkweed are two plants found in the Nature Center's Garden next to the buildings. The fuchsia blooms during the summer, brightening up the dry landscape. Its red flowers attract hummingbirds and bees.

Milkweed is well-known for being the singular plant that Monarch butterflies use to lay their eggs. Planting some in your yard won't guarantee the presence of Monarchs, but it will increase the number of potential sites for the butterflies when they arrive in the valley. The Davis Arboretum on the UC campus is a wealth of information about pollinator plants as well as drought-tolerant ones. Go [here](#) for more information.

We are fortunate in Sacramento to have many resources for sustainable gardening. Start small or redesign your entire yard. Remember that every step you take is one toward reducing water use and encouraging pollinators.

Mary Howard is a long-time docent at Effie Yeaw and is always in the process of making her garden more sustainable.



Sleeping bees on sunflower. ©Joey Johnson.



California Poppy. ©Joey Johnson.



California Fuchsia©Mary Howard.



Milkweed. ©Joey Johnson.

Under the Oaks Book Club

By Carrie Sessarego



Effie Yeaw Nature Center welcomes adult readers to Under the Oaks Book Club! This book club reads a wide variety of fiction and nonfiction, all connected to our area and our mission as a nature center and nature study area. Past reads have included popular science books such as *An Immense World*, by Ed Yong, historical fiction about the area including *How Much of These Hills is Gold* by C Pam Zheng, and a collection of stories, poems and memoirs by California Native Americans (*The Way We Lived*, edited by Malcom Margolis). The program is facilitated by Carrie Sessarego, a former Fund Development Associate for the nature center and who is also a freelance author, co-facilitator of Sacramento Public Library's Romance Book Club, and past facilitator of the Arden-Dimick Book Club.

Our group prides itself on stretching our minds to read things we might not otherwise try. Recently we read a graphic novel memoir (*A Fire Story* by Brian Fies). For some members, this was their first exposure to an adult work in graphic novel

format. Our 2025 selections include a poetry anthology (*You Are Here: Poetry in the Natural World*, edited by Ada Limon). We are also fortunate to be visited by local authors including Shelly Blanton-Stroud, author of our January selection, *Copy Book*.

Under the Oaks Book Club meets on the first Sunday of every month from 11AM – 12:30PM at Effie Yeaw Nature Center. Bring your own beverage! Snacks, often matched to the book of the month, are provided. This is a free program, but donations are enthusiastically welcomed! We also welcome sponsors – for \$50, you can be a Patron of the Arts and cover Book Club expenses for one month! For more information or to be added to the mailing list, contact sessarego1@gmail.com. Happy Reading!

Carrie Sessarego is a former Fund Development Associate for the Nature Center. She is also a freelance author, co-facilitator of Sacramento Public Library's Romance Book Club, and past facilitator of the Arden-Dimick Book Club.

Upcoming Events at the Nature Center

March 15 – Bird and Breakfast

Ongoing Events

**Mighty Acorns – second Tuesday
of the month 9:30 am – 11am**

**Nature of Things – speaker series –
stay tuned**

**Under the Oaks Book Club – 1st Sunday
of the month 11am-1pm**

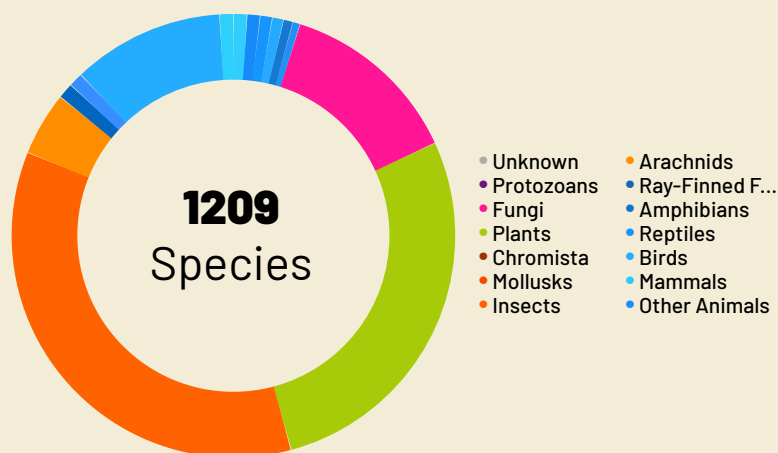
**Follow us on Facebook and Instagram for
current information on events.**

Mapping the Web of Life in the Nature Study Area and Ancil Hoffman Park

By Dennis Eckhart

Hundreds of citizen scientists, like prolific iNaturalist contributor Mary Hanson, have been mapping living organisms in Ancil Hoffman Park for 10 years. Under the pseudonym “simpyimare55,” Mary added 1177 observations of 337 different species—the most of any contributor to our local iNat collection project “Effie Yeaw NSA & Ancil Hoffman Park.” (See Eric Ross’s article about Mary in this issue of *The Acorn*.)

Worldwide over 221 million observations populate the iNat database, the work of over eight million observers recording a half million species. Our local iNat collection project, which includes every observation made anywhere in Ancil Hoffman Park, has more than doubled in size since June 2021, to over 13,000 observations. Even more impressive, the number of species represented in the project has grown by 55% in that same timeframe, from 781 to 1209. And almost 72% of those observations qualify as “research grade,” which means at least two iNat users have agreed on the identity of the species depicted. That’s the kind of data that scientists can use to study anything from individual species to whole ecosystems.¹



There’s a wealth of information in our local project’s observations. A visit to the project’s [home page](#) yields interesting, as well as some unexpected, results, from the rarely to the commonly seen.



Twin fawns about two weeks old. Photo ©Dennis Eckhart.

The organism most often observed—also the largest mammal that lives in the NSA—is the Columbian black-tailed deer, aka mule deer, with 564 observations.

Other mammals frequently observed include native California ground squirrels (142 observations) and Western gray squirrels (28), along with introduced Eastern fox squirrels (113) and the



Eastern fox squirrel, black morph, observed just five times in Ancil Hoffman Park. Photo ©Dennis Eckhart.

coyotes (111) that prey on squirrels and other small mammals. But there’s only one observation of a gray fox that was captured by a trail camera, and we’re still waiting for our first observation of a bobcat, although this elusive critter has been observed elsewhere on the American River Parkway 15 times.

Not surprisingly, birds are among the most and the least frequently observed species, with wild turkeys the most frequently observed (284), followed closely by acorn woodpeckers (275), and red-shouldered hawks (233). Among the least often observed birds are the great horned

¹ For more information about how iNaturalist and its “sibling” Seek can help you identify wild organisms and help map the web of life, check out Krystin Dozier’s excellent article on page 6 of the [Fall 2021 issue of The Acorn](#).

owl (6) and the bald eagle (6), while several birds are represented by just a single observation each, for example, the Barrow's goldeneye and the hairy woodpecker.



Great-horned owl.
Photo ©Dennis Eckhart.



Twofer: a bald eagle and a red-shouldered hawk soar above the Pond Trail.
Photo ©Dennis Eckhart.



Western fence lizard, aka blue-bellied lizard. Photo ©Dennis Eckhart.

The most-observed reptile is the western fence lizard (230), a cooperative poser on rocks and logs, while Northern Pacific rattlesnakes, with 50 observations, and the American bullfrog, with 48, are less common. Southern alligator lizards (18) and Gilbert's skinks (10) are seen from time to time. But the valley garter snake and the California king snake are rare, having been observed only once and twice, respectively.

Among flowering plants, white horehound (171) and California mugwort (133) have the most observations. And, not surprisingly, interior live oaks (169) and California-endemic valley oaks (151) are the most often observed trees.



Elegant clarkia, 37 observations.
Photo ©Dennis Eckhart.



Anise swallowtail.
Photo ©Dennis Eckhart.

Among invertebrates, the pipevine swallowtail is the leader with 238 observations. There are 50 observations of monarch butterflies (mostly caterpillars); but only 14 observations of Western tiger swallowtails and just 6 of anise swallowtails.



Poplar bells. Photo ©Dennis Eckhart.

If you're into fungi, lichens, mosses and molds, there are hundreds of observations of these fascinating organisms, like these poplar bells.

If you haven't already downloaded the iNat app to your smartphone, do so soon and then go out to the NSA

and start adding observations to our local project. You can also join a bioblitz, such as the annual California Biodiversity Day in early September or the City Nature Challenge in mid-April. Or start reviewing observations added by other citizen scientists. We especially need help with insects, fungi and lichens. No matter your level of participation in iNaturalist, it's guaranteed you'll learn a lot about the natural world, and you'll be contributing to our shared knowledge of the web of life.

Dennis Eckhart volunteers at EYNC as a member of the Habitat Restoration Team and is team leader for invasive plant removal in the NSA. He is also an active member of the American River Parkway Foundation's Invasive Plant Management Program, a nature lover, and photographer, and he coordinates the Effie Yeaw NSA & Ancil Hoffman Park project on iNaturalist.

There are More Ways than One to Support the Nature Center

By Diana Wallace

AHNHA (America River Natural History Association), which operates EYNC (Effie Yeaw Nature Center), does not have guaranteed funding sources; only 30% of its income is from fees for school field trips, special programs and specific fund-raisers. For the other 70% of income, EYNC relies heavily on individual donors, local businesses and corporations, and local government, and cannot continue to operate without them. Donations from these sources can and does vary significantly in amount from year to year.

EYNC particularly needs donations for operating costs such as electricity, heat and air conditioning, animal care (food, vet and licensed animal care provider), office supplies, insurance, naturalist and other employees' salaries, among other categories. Grants for updating the facility and exhibits typically do not cover operating costs.

There are many ways you can donate to EYNC so that it can continue to provide nature education programs to our community. First, **please encourage your children, grandchildren, friends and neighbors with children to visit EYNC often AND become regular contributors to ARNHA**. Second, please consider using at least one of the following methods to contribute financially to EYNC (Bonus: you get an income tax deduction for donations to charity):

- 1) Donate cash in amounts up to \$18,000 in 2024, or up to \$19,000 in 2025. You get a charitable deduction on your income tax return, and there's no federal gift tax on those donation amounts. (But you can always donate more than that).
- 2) Donate cash through automatic monthly payments from your bank account (lower transaction fees for ARNHA) or through your credit card (much higher transactions fees for ARNHA). **Any amount is appreciated**, and will help ARNHA and EYNC by providing a source of regular income.
- 3) If you don't need a required minimum distribution (RMD) from a retirement account, you can redirect it to ARNHA (subject to certain requirements and limits) and claim a charitable deduction on your income tax return.
- 4) Establish a Donor Advised Fund (DAV), which functions like a philanthropic savings account but with significant tax benefits to you (subject to certain requirements and limits) and name ARNHA as a beneficiary.
- 5) Donate assets such as stocks, bonds, mutual funds or even a life insurance policy as alternatives to cash donations. You can claim a charitable deduction for the value of the donated asset on your income tax return.
- 6) Donate cash to EYNC's endowment fund. The endowment fund will be invested to provide a consistent income over a long time to fund EYNC and the programs it offers.
- 7) Leave a bequest to ARNHA/EYNC in your trust or Will. The bequest can be a percentage of your estate or a specific dollar amount.
- 8) Name ARNHA as a "remainder beneficiary" on your Individual Retirement Account (IRA) or other qualified retirement plan. ARNHA would receive the balance remaining in your account after your death.
- 9) Name ARNHA as a beneficiary of a life insurance policy.

Be sure to consult your financial advisor or your estate planning attorney regarding requirements for the options you are considering and advice about which one best suits your financial situation. Any gift that you choose to give to ARNHA now or later will benefit today's children and future generations.

Diana Wallace is a member of the ARNHA Board of Directors and an attorney who handles trusts, wills, trust administration and probate matters.



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