



TORREYANA

THE DOCENT NEWSLETTER FOR
TORREY PINES
STATE NATURAL RESERVE

Issue 439

February 2022

Another World off the California Coast

by Dan Hammer

Why are so many plants and animals found on California's Channel Islands and nowhere else? And how was a somewhat ragtag group of researchers, explorers, and science-hungry teenagers able to including geology survey and catalog these flora and fauna with virtually no financial assistance during the depths of the Great Depression?

At the January TPDS meeting on Zoom, Corinne Heyning Laverty discussed her book *North America's Galapagos: The Historic Channel Islands Biological Survey*, which delves into these and other questions. Her entertaining and informative talk gave us a fascinating glimpse into evolution and evolutionary science at work.

The Channel Islands

Corinne began with a brief overview of the islands' geology and natural history. Hundreds of millions of years ago, the rocks that would become the Channel Islands were submerged on the ocean seafloor near what is now San Diego. Through complex plate tectonics and geological activities, some of these rocks were dragged as much as 150 miles north and rotated as much as 180 degrees clockwise.

About 2 million years ago, the islands rose in roughly their current configuration, with some exceptions – one notable difference being that the four northern Channel Islands were once joined together as one big island (which we call Santarosae) that was only five miles off the then-coast of California. As sea levels rose, this offshore land mass divided into four distinct islands. The southern Channel Islands have always been further out to sea and were never connected to the mainland or each other, which is why they have less biological diversity than their northern neighbors.

Separated from the mainland by a deep channel, about 150 endemic species of plants and animals either currently live,

Docent General Meeting

Date: Saturday, February 12, 9:00 am

Online via Zoom (link to the meeting will be emailed to all docents)

Speaker: Andrew Pignoli

Topic: Liverworts and Hornworts of San Diego County

This is an introduction to the largely overlooked botany of liverwort and hornwort plants in San Diego County. Most species in the county will be reviewed with guidance on identifying each of them and their habitats. There will be a particular focus on the 12 or more species that occur within TPSNR. Threats to these species will also be summarized along with a focused discussion on the two rare species that occur within the Reserve

Andrew Pignoli grew up in San Diego. Most of his career has been spent working as an archaeologist, but his lifelong interest in local flora led him to also work as a consulting botanist. He has focused mainly on liverworts and hornworts, but other interests include mosses, lichens, and entomology.

or once lived, on the islands – hence the moniker “North America's Galapagos.” Everything living there today



The Torrey Pines Docent Society publishes the *Torreyana* monthly, edited by Joan Simon and Dan Hammer on alternate months, and is formatted and produced by Roger Isaacson. Submissions are due on or about the 20th day of the preceding month and may be emailed to

Editors@torreypine.org.

Please send postal/
email address changes to:

Torrey Pines Docent Society
1155 Camino Del Mar #404
Del Mar, CA 92014

Attn: Membership or email to

Membership@torreypine.org

Web sites:

TP Docent Society: torreypine.org

TP Conservancy: torreypines.org

Visitor Center phone: **858.755.2063**

TPDS Executive Board Members:

President: Lynne Truong

Vice-president: Cres Torres

Treasurer: Janet Ugalde

Secretary: Matt Xavier

Directors-at-large:

Roger Isaacson

Mark Lippard

Harry Proctor

Rosemary Wareham

Gabriele Wienhausen

TPSNR Staff:

Supervising Ranger: Dylan Hardenbrook

Rangers: Stephanie Adams, Kyle Knox,
Dave Richards, Jesus "Chuy" Salinas
Rodriguez

Sr. Park Aide: Louis Sands

Park Aides: Krista DeBusschere, Ingo
Renner

© Torrey Pines Docent Society
Since 1975
All rights reserved

**FLASH - Don't forget to donate
your ZooNooz magazines to the
Museum Shop.**

had to get out there somehow and then evolve.

One endemic species to evolve on the islands was the now-extinct Pygmy mammoth, which stood less than six feet high. Somewhere between 20,000 and 200,000 years ago, its larger ancestors, Columbian mammoths, swam to the islands. Over the millennia, Pygmy mammoths evolved to occupy a unique niche: their small size and "4-wheel drive ambulatory ability" enabled them to climb and descend the islands' steep mountains in search of food.

Another species that found "smaller is better" was the Channel Islands fox, the islands' most iconic animal. This adorable creature is just two feet long, weighs four to six pounds, and is the smallest canid in North America. Though once nearly extinct because of "human-caused problems," the species was revived through conservation efforts including captive breeding – "one of the greatest conservation stories ever." Despite its small size, the Channel Islands fox is the islands' top terrestrial predator and one of its top tourist attractions.

Endemic island species include a number of plants, such as the Santa Barbara Island liveforever (*Dudleya traskiae*) and the subspecies of the Torrey pine that is found in two groves on Santa Rosa Island. One endemic bird species, the Island Scrub-Jay (*Aphelocoma insularis*), is today found on one island only: Santa Cruz Island. The islands provide important breeding habitat for between 12 and 15 species of sea birds that rely on them for predator-free nesting sites.

The Biological Survey

Despite the islands' unique biological riches – not to mention some of the oldest archaeological sites in North America – no one had ever undertaken an eight-island, multi-disciplinary scientific survey of the islands until the late 1930s.

Don Meadows was a Long Beach high school teacher and amateur lepidopterist who first proposed a survey to John Adams Comstock, scientific director of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. Meadows envisioned studying the moths and butterflies living on the Channel Islands as part of his UC Berkeley Ph.D. dissertation.

Comstock liked Meadows's proposal but wanted something much bigger: a full contingent of scientists from many disciplines – including geology, biology, paleontology, and archaeology – to systematically investigate all eight Channel Islands. He envisioned a team conducting five years of intensive field work to collect and analyze specimens, followed by

Inside

Channel Islands	1-3
Meeting Minutes	3-4
NDS Events	4
Docent of the Month	5
Exceptional Volunteer	5
80+ Conversation	6
Successful Maintenance	7
Torrey Pines Conservancy	7
Museum Shop Spotlight	7
TP Book Club	8
Bird of the Month	9
Bird Survey	9



peer-reviewed papers, articles for the popular press, and museum displays to show the public what they found.

There was one big obstacle: money. During the Great Depression, museum budgets were small and squeezed. To address this problem, Comstock promised the Natural History Museum's board of governors that the project would cost them nothing over and above the regular staff salaries of museum scientists. Volunteer citizen scientists would have to pay their own way, and the entire crew would have to pay for its own camping equipment, food (and a cook to prepare it), and transportation. On Christmas Eve 1938, the board agreed to sponsor the survey.

Comstock talked California Fish & Game into ferrying scientists and their supplies to and from the islands. He also got Allan Hancock, millionaire sportsman and amateur scientist, to assist the survey using his private research vessel.

Over the next three years, 33 people participated in the project, including women, men, immigrants, teenagers, and some colorful characters. Two of the latter were Jack van Bloecker, the survey's "bat-crazy" mammologist, and Art Woodward, the museum's archeologist and historian, a rabble rouser and a college dropout whose work on the Channel Islands has been credited with bringing a new scientific rigor to Channel Islands archaeological studies.



In November and December 1941, the survey's Expedition #13 was working on Santa Rosa Island. On December 7, two of the paleontologists had just unearthed some impressive mammoth bones when vaqueros from the island ranch rode up and broke the news: Japan had attacked Pearl Harbor.

The mainland was closed, and the researchers didn't know how they'd get home. The ever-resourceful Comstock commandeered Santa Cruz Island's cattle boat to pick up the scientific crew and all its equipment.

That was effectively the end of the Channel Islands Biological Survey, cut short by war. The crew had spent a

total of 1,612 working days on the islands, visiting every island at least once with a full contingent of researchers. They summarized their work with the publication of at least 49 scholarly articles. Today others are carrying on their pioneering work, but this unlikely crew started it all

If you missed Corinne Laverty's presentation or want to see the video again, you can [click here](#).

To order her book, *North America's Galapagos*, [click here](#).

General Meeting Minutes

January 8, 2022

The meeting was called to order by TPDS President **Lynne Truong** at 10:06 am. She welcomed the Torrey Pines docents to the meeting, which was attended by 96 docents via Zoom.

Invited Speaker

Corinne Heyning Laverty gave a presentation based on her book, *North America's Galapagos: The Historic Channel Islands Biological Survey*. (See article on pg. 1.)

TPDS Business

Lynne thanked the class of 2020 for organizing the holiday potluck and welcomed the new 2022 class of docents to the meeting.

Jake Mumma

Lynne said, "I want to address the concerns docents may have with Jake's departure. He is a well regarded and respected person by many of us. The board received clarification from our supervising ranger that park revenue is not tied to their budget. Jake's hours are covered and the rangers are hoping to add one or two park aides by the end of February so our current park aides can have an occasional full weekend off."

Docent of the Month

It was announced that **Zuzana Volny** was chosen as Docent of the Month. (See article on pg. 5.)

Rebecca Bogan was recognized as an "exceptional volunteer." **Lynne Small** spoke about Rebecca's two days a week weed-whacking. Lynne Truong stated that "we truly appreciate her work and efforts." (See article on pg. 5.)

Ranger's Report

Ranger Stephanie Adams reported that the indoor mask mandate is in effect through February 15; new signs are posted. All docents and volunteers are to do self-screening before their shift – remember to call in if you can't make it. Please, also contact Dylan to let him know.

Recent rainfall shows that the new trail repairs at Razor Point and Yucca Point were effective. The project was completed early thanks to helicopter funding from TPC. Rain runoff is now nonexistent, and the trails can be opened much sooner than in the past.

TPC also funded the new water fountain installation at Guy Fleming trailhead. We are hearing positive feedback from staff and visitors about it. (See article on pg. 5.)

The condition of the road section between the Discovery Trail and the west lot has worsened. The road repair process has started. The new repairs are temporary now, and a bid to repair permanently will go out soon.

Reopening the video room and TIK activities are still on hold because of COVID conditions.

During Ranger Adams's report, **Malana Tabak** reported a trip hazard in the west parking lot. Ranger Adams will check on it immediately.

Torrey Pines Conservancy

Donna Close asked everyone to keep February 27 on their calendar for the annual meeting at the Martin Johnson house at SIO – it will be held outdoors given COVID. **Ken King** presented slides on the similarities and differences between TPC and TPDS. In a nutshell, the main difference is TPC raises funds, and TPDS manages volunteer efforts.

President Truong stated that the Docent Society hopes to work more closely with TPC. Calendars will be shared between the two organizations. (See article on pg. 8.)

Children's Program (CP) update

Louis Sands sent out an email about a Wednesday, January 12 meeting at the Pavilion for docents interested in the CP. The Meeting will last two hours. We are trying to make it safe for everyone. CP will be opening up in a limited capacity. Group sizes will be reduced and walking groups will be five students per docent. The meeting agenda will consist of: COVID Implications, Program Content and Signup, and Requirements for new Children's Program docents.

For veteran Children's Program docents: Feel free to begin signing up via the website! We do NOT have many confirmed dates thus far as Omicron has not peaked and back-to-school challenges have taken center stage, but we're working with teachers to increase our reach.

Treasurer's Report

Treasurer **Janet Ugalde** reported on the draft end-of-year profit and loss statement for 2021. Basically, revenue was down, but because expenses for CP were zero we expect a sizeable surplus for the year. This will be put in the surplus account. Janet also shared the draft balance sheet for 2021.

Inventory of Taxidermy

President Truong reported that some taxidermy is in the freezer. The board approved funding for the bobcat "renovation." There is an inventory of museum items that started this week. It will take a few weeks. The staff are also assessing the collection. The staff are a crew from Old Town. Emergency plans will be developed, i.e., what to throw into the truck before evacuating.

Parking Pass/Membership

You can mail a check or drop one off in the Treasurer's box in the Library, or pay through PayPal. The mailing address is on the masthead on pg. 2 of the *Torreyana*.

Pay your dues and put in your hours by January 31, so we can process permits for 2022. Docents have until the end of this month. Starting in February, we will pass out new permits.

Committees Work

Maintenance under Chad Van Doren is doing well. There is not much work for Seabees right now. Ranger Hardenbrook sent out an email to the Seabees participants. The group is going from a weekly to a special project classification.

Lynne Small announced if you'd like to get involved in Whacky Weeders to please send her an email.

Janice Barnard reported on the TIK. The bobcat, coyote, and racoon skulls are being repaired. The skulls are very fragile and expensive to replace, so we appreciate that you handle them with extra care and not let visitors touch them. Janice is replacing the animal pictures that accompany the skulls. If anyone has a good photo that we can use, she would appreciate you sending it to her. Please store items properly on the shelves. She reminded docents to not leave personal items there. Janice thanked everyone again for working the TIK.

President Truong adjourned the meeting at 11 am.

Nature Discovery Series: Upcoming Schedule

The February NDS event will be "Animals and Habitats" by Bruce and Patty Montgomery. Join us at the Pavilion on **Saturday, February 19 at 3 pm**. This event is free and suitable for families with children.

On **March 5 at 3 pm**, Jane Barger will give her "Gray Whales" talk, originally scheduled for January but postponed because of rain.

Contact Kathy Dickey for more information.

Docent of the Month: Zuzana Volny

Photo by Herb Knufken

Since I was little, I have had a strong connection with nature. I had dreamed of one day becoming a Park Ranger while playing in my mother's backyard, or a nature-documentary filmmaker in my early 20s. My husband and I even got married in Yosemite in a meadow under El Capitan.



In 2018, my husband and I packed our bags and moved to San Diego looking for a change of pace. It also doesn't hurt that the weather here makes it more conducive to me spending time outside. I took a job as a Project Manager at a marketing company but couldn't stand sitting for 9+ hours a day in fluorescent lights. I decided to look for ways to volunteer that would put me outside and discovered the Docent Society at TPSNR.

Before the first day of class, I had never been to or seen TPSNR in my life. I remember my first drive up the hill: I was in awe of the beauty surrounding me and felt like I had come home.

Spending time at the Reserve fulfills me and gives me a sense of purpose. I mostly love capturing macro-photography of our native plants and flowers and getting visitors excited about the rare biodiversity we have here.

I've never met a more welcoming community eager to teach and absorb knowledge. **Johnson Jou** is a continuous teacher about the magical happenings at TPSNR. **Pao Chau** has taught me about the different plant life around the Reserve and how to maintain our website for **Roger Isaacson**. The Docent Society is truly a beautiful community of people, and I am honored to be recognized by everyone this month.

Exceptional Volunteer: Rebecca Bogan

Photo by Herb Knufken

Growing up on the Alabama Gulf Coast, I admit it: I was a terrible beach snob. If it didn't have sugar-white sand, I was unimpressed! But after moving to San Diego with my family in 2002, I absolutely fell in love with the Reserve, and it will forever be my favorite!! Having spent years enjoying the incredible trails, marveling at the ever-changing cliffs and bluffs, appreciating both the dramatic and subtle flora and fauna, watching



extraordinary sea life, etc., etc., etc., I was very eager when an opportunity to give back presented itself three years ago. One morning, I happened upon **Lynne Small** and her merry band of Whacky Weeders along the Guy Fleming Trail, and I was instantly hooked - whatever they were doing, I wanted to do it! As a landscape architect and someone who LOVES to play in the dirt, weeding out invasive non-native plants was something I could happily do! Also, I have a truck, which occasionally comes in handy.

I am very grateful to **Lynne, Pao Chau, Gabriele Wienhausen, Diane Russell, Roger Isaacson, Darby Lewis, Steve Neal, Debby Sherman, Tsaiwei Olee, Joe Meyer**, and all the other Whacky Weeders not only for sharing their infinite wisdom and love of all things TPSNR but for their friendship as well. I have seriously never met a smarter, more interesting group of people! My volunteering at the Reserve has been the perfect thing, at the perfect time for me. Thank you for the acknowledgment - the pleasure has been all mine!

80+: A Conversation with Tony Summers

Interviewed by Kristine Schindler

Why did you become a docent?

I retired 20 years ago from a career with the Office of the Attorney General, eight years in the LA office and well over 30 years here in San Diego. Upon retirement, I worried a bit about what I was to do. No sitting behind a desk anymore. A bike ride with a friend led me to become a docent.



Living in University City, TPSNR was a natural idea for a docent match, and I did my training in 2002. Some of my classmates, including **Ken King** and **Rick Vogel**, are still active as well.

What have you enjoyed the most?

When you go through training, you get a little taste of almost everything the docents do, like the gift shop, going out on the trails, etc. I thought I did *not* want to be involved in the Children's Program, but we had to be trained on it. At that time **Barbara Wallach** and **Margaret Fillius** ran the program, and I was really impressed by them – they had a great way to educate, and they enchanted the children. Such a variety of kids: those who live in the area and then the inner-city kids who had never even seen the beach. I was super-excited to be part of their new experience and got a lot of satisfaction out of the program. I wound up supporting the Children's Program for about ten years and was here almost every week.

Then when the stairs and such became a bit much for me, I led Special Walks and worked at the TIK in lieu of the Children's Program and enjoyed those activities as well. Now, with the pandemic in the mix, I have not been in the Reserve much.

Tell us about your childhood.

I was born in London, England just before the Second World War. No recollection of the war whatsoever. My father had been a London taxi driver before the war, but there was a great need for people who knew their way around London, and as a result he served as a fireman during the Blitz and afterwards. I remember VE Day very well. My parents then decided to move to the United States since the economic conditions in England were very poor. We settled in Santa Monica.

Where did you go to school?

I went to Santa Monica High School, then UCLA undergraduate, and got a law degree at UCLA. Then I went to work for the Attorney General's office in Los Angeles.

How did you end up moving to San Diego?

We had taken a vacation to San Diego when our daughter was about two. We had a wonderful time doing all the touristy things – the Zoo, Sea World, Mission Bay, and so on. Then I took a second week off work and spent it in LA. It did not work out at all: too smoggy, congested, paid a lot for parking – a total disaster. Just before that, the Attorney General had opened up a San Diego office and asked me to transfer. I had declined, but after that vacation, the next time they asked (in 1971), I said yes. Never regretted the move.

Our kids went to school in San Diego. Their college choices were UC campuses far away from San Diego – Davis (our daughter) and Santa Cruz (our son). They now both live in Northern California. At least they are in the same time zone, and it's an easy flight to see them.

Piece of advice for a new docent?

Advice for nature walks: Don't try to turn visitors into docents in a day. See what they are interested in and don't overwhelm them. If you don't know the answer to a question, you can always say, "I don't know, but I'll try to find out for you."

As a docent you have the opportunity not only to contribute to the conservation of one of the last open areas, but to put it into perspective for visitors – historically, geologically, and socially. There is so much here.

You and I are in a special subgroup in the docent society: We ride our bikes to the Reserve.

I appreciate the beauty, recreation, and fitness of riding a bicycle. I now have an electric-assist bicycle. Feeling my age (83), but walking around the Reserve does keep you in shape, physically and mentally. Even just sitting and looking at the ocean is special and tranquil. Ocean and the sound of the waves. And seeing some animals.

Do you have a bucket list?

For about 20 years, I had been spending a month in France each year. I continued to do so after my wife passed in 2015. Last year's plans were canceled due to COVID. I hope to return to France to see friends and indulge in the food, particularly breakfast and pastries.

A final story to share?

One day I led a group of kids from the Children's Program out on the Parry Grove Trail. I heard someone say "He stepped right over it." Sure enough, there was a rattlesnake stretched across the trail. I was on one side and the kids were on the other, but we sorted the situation out. I was a bit embarrassed that I had not noticed the snake, but the kids were really funny. In their minds, I had rescued them. The kids really do get excited about wildlife, and rattlesnakes do not come out very often, so it was a treat.

Successful Maintenance Projects at Torrey Pines

by Dylan Hardenbrook, Supervising Ranger

Razor Point and Yucca Point Repairs

Repair work at these two overlooks was accomplished by the maintenance crew this summer using materials that were helicoptered in. The December rains put these repairs to the test, and they proved successful in diverting water away from the Razor and Yucca overlooks, preventing trail erosion and reducing the time trails were closed after it rains. Thanks to TPC for funding the project and to the maintenance crew for its hard work!



Helicopter dropping fill material; photo by Herb Knufken

[Ed: For more photos [click here](#)]



Razor Point Trail after repairs

Guy Fleming Water Station

The 80-year-old water line that fed the hydrants and drinking fountain on the north side of the Guy Fleming Trail had outlived its lifespan and was regularly leaking. We eliminated the old line and installed a new hydrant, drinking fountain, and bottle-filling station at the trailhead, where it can be used by trail-goers as well as visitors walking up the road. Thank you to the TPC for providing the funding for the water station, to the maintenance staff for their labor, and to the state for funding the rest of the project.



Adobe Wall repair

The adobe wall on the far west side of the Lodge, which was knocked down by a falling Torrey pine in February 2019, has been repaired. State Parks staff secured a resources grant and hired adobe specialist Mark Sauer to complete the work using authentic adobe blocks and mortar. It was finished off with the appropriate stucco coating to protect adobe and painted to match the rest of the wall.

Fallen tree; photo by Medi Denker



Lodge adobe wall after repairs

Museum Shop Spotlight

by Nancy Walters

We are sad to announce that we have lost one of our favorite vendors in the shop. Laird Plumleigh, beloved ceramics artist, passed away in December. His gorgeous tiles depicting Torrey pines have been a mainstay in our shop for at least a dozen years. With the future of his studio unknown at this point, we are uncertain about the ability to continue carrying his work. So if you have always wanted one of his beautiful art tiles, this is the time to bring one home! As of this printing, we should have a fresh influx of Laird's work for sale in the shop. Come and appreciate what a talented artist he was!



Torrey Pines Book Club

We will continue to meet via Zoom at our regularly scheduled time. Please notify Ken King if you plan to participate and if you need any extra help getting connected.

When: Tuesday, February 8, 1:00 pm

What: *The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek* by Kim Michele Richardson

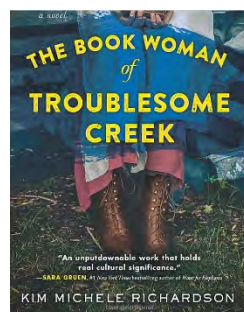
Amazon says:

The hardscrabble folks of Troublesome Creek have to scarp for everything – everything except books, that is. Thanks to Roosevelt's Kentucky Pack Horse Library Project, Troublesome's got its very own traveling librarian, Cussy Mary Carter. Cussy's not only a book woman, however; she's also the last of her kind, her skin a shade of blue unlike most anyone else. Not everyone is keen on Cussy's family or the Library Project, and a Blue is often blamed for any whiff of trouble. If Cussy wants to bring the joy of books to the hill folks, she's going to have to confront prejudice as old as the Appalachians and suspicion as deep as the holler.

Inspired by the true blue-skinned people of Kentucky and the brave and dedicated Kentucky Pack Horse library service of the 1930s, *The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek* is a story of raw courage, fierce strength, and one woman's belief that books can carry us anywhere – even back home.

All TPDS docents are welcome. Meetings usually last a couple of hours.

March 8: *Project Hail Mary* by Andy Weir



News from Torrey Pines Conservancy

Torrey Pines Conservancy would like to invite all interested docents to join their mailing list and receive TPC's newsletter, alerts and e-blasts. You may sign up here: torreypines.org/subscribe/.

You are welcome to join TPC outings and lectures, some of which overlap with similar events of the Docent Society's and/or are led by docents! Stay up to date via our emails, and you'll find some don't-miss opportunities for ongoing education well suited to your interests.

This year's TPC annual meeting takes place Sunday, February 27 from 3 to 5 pm outside the Martin Johnson House on the S.I.O. campus. The main speaker will be former state lifeguard Ed Vodrazka, who is a TPC board member and author of *Stories from Sea Level*. Ed will speak on what life was like in the Fleming House, where he and his family resided for almost two decades. All docents are invited to attend.

As a thank you for all the hard work the docents do in the Reserve every day (year 'round!), Torrey Pines Conservancy is delighted to announce your discount code for TPC's new online shop. Type in SUPERDOCENT at checkout and receive a 20% discount.

Find the TPC shop at torreypines.org/shop/

Thank you! See you at our meeting or on the trails!

Bright Light Volunteers Help Weeders

by Lynne Small

In the long, slow process of getting nonnative highway ice plant (*Carpobrotus edulis*) out of TPSNR, the Reserve had some unlikely help. On December 20, a dozen high school students with Bright Light Volunteers came all the way from Chico, in Northern California, and joined the Whacky Weeders in cleaning up dead ice plant from the Extension. In two hours the combined group removed bag after bag – enough to fill three quarters of a large greens dumpster.

The group also made a donation of \$100 to the Docent Society. Bright Light Volunteers is a service organization for students that does a variety of service projects in a variety of places and likes to make a donation to the projects at the same time. Following their morning at Torrey Pines, their leader, Catherine Greenberg, said on Instagram that the group helped “remove invasive and non-native plants from the area in order to preserve the habitat” and summed it up: “Doing good feels so good!”

We very much appreciated the students' help and donation, and we enjoyed their enthusiasm.

Bird of the Month: Western Grebe

by Jack Friery; photo by Herb Knufken

Our highlighted bird this month is the **Western Grebe**, *Aechmophorus occidentalis*. This aquatic bird is about two feet long and weighs from 40 to about 60 ounces. At Torrey Pines, we see Western Grebes during wintertime in large rafts – sometimes numbering hundreds of birds – just offshore. These birds normally retreat to inland freshwater lakes and reservoirs to breed. The accompanying photo shows a mated pair “rushing,” or performing an elaborate balletic mating dance. (See <https://youtu.be/AkshIwdw7DY> for a video of this wonderful ritual.) Locally, Lake Hodges in Escondido is an excellent place to see their mating routine.

The Western Grebe’s generic name, *Aechmophorus*, is from the Greek words for “spear bearer,” which seems fitting, given its long bill. Its common name in French is *Grèbe élégant*, which seems especially appropriate for this fascinating bird.

Sources: Choate, *The Dictionary of American Bird Names*

Unitt, *San Diego County Bird Atlas*

allaboutbirds.org/guide/Western_Grebe/id.



Torrey Pines Docent Society Bird Survey: December 30, 2021

Number of species: 82
(+3 other taxa)

Blue-winged Teal 2
Northern Shoveler 2
Gadwall 12
American Wigeon 203
Mallard 72
Northern Pintail 45
Green-winged Teal 13
Canvasback 2
Lesser Scaup 34
Surf Scoter 1
Bufflehead 26
Red-breasted Merganser 14
Ruddy Duck 12
Pied-billed Grebe 2
Eared Grebe 1
Western Grebe 213
Mourning Dove 49
Anna's Hummingbird 66
Allen's Hummingbird 23
hummingbird sp. 7
American Coot 27
Whimbrel 3
Long-billed Curlew 7

Marbled Godwit 1
Least Sandpiper 6
Willet 4
Bonaparte's Gull 3
Heermann's Gull 60
Ring-billed Gull 6
Western Gull 156
California Gull 5
Herring Gull 1
gull sp. 3
Red-throated Loon 3
Pacific Loon 4
Black-vented Shearwater 1450
Brandt's Cormorant 750
Double-crested Cormorant 5
Brown Pelican 36
Great Blue Heron 4
Great Egret 6
Snowy Egret 15
Osprey 2
White-tailed Kite 3
Northern Harrier 2
Cooper's Hawk 1
Red-shouldered Hawk 1
Red-tailed Hawk 10
Nuttall's Woodpecker 4
Northern Flicker 11

American Kestrel 5
Peregrine Falcon 2
Black Phoebe 6
Say's Phoebe 8
Cassin's Kingbird 8
California Scrub-Jay 4
American Crow 10
Common Raven 30
Bushtit 79
Wrentit 71
Ruby-crowned Kinglet 4
California Gnatcatcher 2
House Wren 3
Marsh Wren 1
Bewick's Wren 7
wren sp. 2
European Starling 38
California Thrasher 19
Northern Mockingbird 2
Western Bluebird 8
Hermit Thrush 7
House Sparrow 5
American Pipit 7
House Finch 61
Lesser Goldfinch 31
White-crowned Sparrow 56
Golden-crowned Sparrow 1

Song Sparrow 39
California Towhee 53
Spotted Towhee 15
Western Meadowlark 11
Red-winged Blackbird 7
Orange-crowned Warbler 4
Common Yellowthroat 4
Yellow-rumped Warbler 152

Observers: Karen Messer, Robert Turner, Gary Grantham, Anonymous, Andy Rathbone, Nancy Richardson, Lori Waller, Marty Hales, Tsaiwei Olee, Gabrielle Wienhausen, and David Walker.

This was conducted as a segment of the Rancho Santa Fe Audubon Christmas Bird Count, as well as the monthly Torrey Pines State Reserve Bird Count.

View this checklist online at ebird.org/checklist/S100674018

Herb Knufken's amazing photo gallery, including many birds, may be found here: pbase.com/herb1rm



Torrey Pines Docent Society
1155 Camino Del Mar #404
Del Mar, CA 92014
(858) 755-2063
torreypine.org