



TORREYANA

THE DOCENT NEWSLETTER FOR
TORREY PINES
STATE NATURAL RESERVE

Issue 488

April 2026

Signs Along the Trail

by Joan R. Simon

If there is anyone at Torrey Pines who can read the “signs along the trail,” it is longtime docent **Barbara Wallach**. For decades she has been teaching her fellow docents about everything that lives and breathes in the Reserve. Once again, she shared her incredible knowledge at the March 14 Docent Society general meeting, opening our eyes to the many sights and clues we can find on the trails if we just “slow down, stop, look and listen.” It’s all there for the observing from footprints in the sand to bird and insect nests in the bushes to scat on the trail to the markings and patterns of lizards, snakes, and insects.

Animals are aware of our presence on the trails, but we often walk right past them. Their colors are frequently camouflage, letting them blend in with their surroundings, so they are not always easy to spot. There is often a rattlesnake tucked under a bush or lurking around a cactus near unsuspecting Whacky Weeders. Can you see the squirrel in the middle of this photo?



Docent General Meeting

Date: Saturday, April 11, 9:00 am

Location: St. Peter’s Episcopal Church Parish Hall, Del Mar

Speakers: Mary Friestedt and Ariana Yanez

Topic: *Kumeyaay Botany and Archeology*

Docent Mary Friestedt (class of 2012) will talk about our glorious flora at TPSNR and how the Kumeyaay used some of these plants to prepare food and medicine. Ariana Yanez, Associate State Parks Archeologist for the San Diego Coast District, will make a short presentation giving the archeological perspective on cultural resources protection and general archeological history.

Refreshments: Docents with last names beginning with **M, N, O, P** will be responsible for providing snacks for this meeting.



(Cont. on pg. 3.)

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 Angela Bailey and 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**

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Sr. Park Aide: Hanna Nason

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FLASH - Don't forget to donate your nature and conservation magazines to the Museum Shop.

President's Message: Reserve Reopens

After a four-month closure for improvements, Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve officially reopened to the public on Sunday, March 1, welcoming hikers, nature lovers, and local residents back to one of Southern California's most iconic coastal landscapes.



The Reserve had been closed since early November 2025 while California State Parks started work on a series of infrastructure and accessibility upgrades.

During the closure, the park road, upper parking lots, and all Reserve trails were temporarily inaccessible so crews could begin the work of modernizing utilities, improving visitor facilities, and enhancing accessibility for people with disabilities. These improvements, which will be completed after phase two of the project next year, will include a new comfort station, improved parking areas, and new pedestrian pathways designed to make the park easier and safer for visitors to navigate.

On opening day, given the beautiful weather, visitors quickly returned. By 10 am, the line of cars to enter the South Beach parking lot stretched onto Torrey Pines Road. Parking areas filled early as hikers and beach walkers arrived to enjoy the dramatic ocean views, rugged sandstone cliffs, and winding paths that make Torrey Pines one of the most popular outdoor destinations in the San Diego region. Everywhere I looked I saw our docents, excited to be back in the park known to some as their "Happy Place."

The reopening marks an important step in improving the visitor experience while preserving the Reserve's fragile environment. State Parks officials emphasized that the upgrades are designed to protect the park's unique habitats while ensuring that future generations can continue to explore and learn from this remarkable natural landscape.

Thanks to all the program leaders and their teams for their efforts and patience in the planning process, including **Selma Torres, Dinah Carl, Valerie Thomas, Gabriele Wienhausen, Bob Friedman, Ed Saade, Lisa Kakone, Tony Mondini, Steve Neal, Dee Huang, Bob Glaser, Roger Isaacson, Lynne Truong, Mukesh Mehta, Lynne Small, Umesh Bellur, Gary McCook, Pao Chao, Paul Howard, Patty and Bruce Montgomery, Janet Ugalde, Susan Elliott, Barbara Wallach, and Medi Denker.**

Matt Xavier

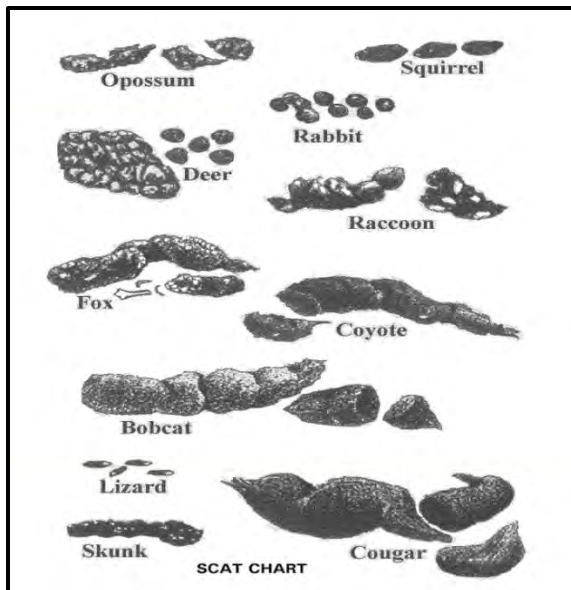
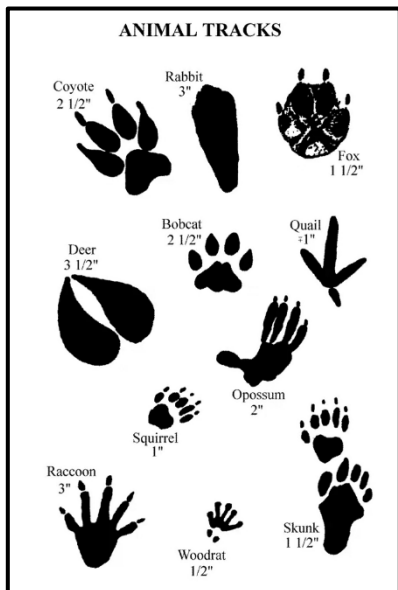
TPDS President

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(Cont. from pg. 1.)

The tracks of animals tell you that they have been here recently. Things to look for are the size and shape of the pad and whether or not there are claws. A bobcat (feline) footprint will have four toes, usually with no toenails showing (because felines have retractable claws), two bumps at the top of the pad and three little lumps at the bottom. In contrast, a coyote (canine) track will show toenails and have only one bump at the top of the pad.



Small rodents such as mice and shrews have four claws on their front feet and five claws on their back feet. A fence lizard will drag its tail along the trail. Then there are the Ravens, who leave their distinctive footprints in the sand when they “walk down the middle of the trail as if they own the Reserve.”



Scat is another way of knowing who’s been hanging around. Feline scat has separate sections; coyote scat usually contains hair and fur. Owl pellets are not scat but rather material that the bird is not able to digest. It collects in the esophagus and has to be disgorged before the owl can eat again. There’s plenty of evidence of its prey in the bones and teeth that can be found in the pellets.



You can usually make an educated guess as to which snakes have been around by the shape of the patterns they leave in the dirt: serpentine (back and forth movement) is typical of striped racers and rattlesnakes, and a straight line is likely to be a gopher snake. You might also come across a snake’s skin beside the trail, but only if it’s been recently shed; they are relatively rare since other animals snap them up quickly for a nice meal.



There are plenty of reptiles in the Reserve. Alligator lizards look like snakes and can grow to a tremendous length. Orange-throated whiptails can be found at the Broken Hill



Overlook, where the gravelly, sandy soil is to their liking. Their jerky movements leave a distinctive path. Fun fact: most whiptails are female; they can reproduce by parthenogenesis (asexual reproduction) so they do not need to mate with males.

All small lizards have the ability to detach part of their tails by constricting their muscles at multiple spots. The tail will regrow, but the newly grown part cannot be broken off again. The new tail can be detached only above the point where it was previously separated. Why do lizards do this? Because it distracts a predator when they are being pursued. The nerves in the detached tail are still active and it “flips and flops around” for up to 30 minutes. Detaching gave this alligator lizard time to get away and regrow its tail.



Insect trails are fun to find. Harvester ants leave long trails, with debris piles of seeds next to the entrance to their nest. They have huge jaws and they sting and bite, with some of the strongest venom of any creature on our planet. “We’re lucky they’re so small,” Barbara said.



Ant lions are all over the Reserve. Their holes demonstrate the “angle of repose” which means that once something comes to the edge of the pit, it starts to slip down and can’t get back up. Ant lions make a very wavy, irregular trail, as if “they’re coming home late at night, a little bit loopy.”



Then there are spiders. On rainy or dewy days, you’ll see spider webs everywhere; their egg sacs show up really well on cactus. The trapdoor spiders dig their tunnels six to eight inches deep. They are lined with silk, one of the toughest materials in the world. Funnel web spiders make a big, wide funnel web and then hide down in the bottom of it.



The green lynx spider, a real beauty, shows up later in the summer because she lays her egg sac on the goldenbush, which doesn’t bloom until late summer. The egg sac looks a lot like the dried flower of the goldenbush, helping to disguise it. “How does the spider know that?” Barbara wondered.



Like insects, spiders produce millions of eggs. This is why they are some of the most successful creatures on earth. “They say you are never more than three feet away from a spider,” Barbara promised. “I guarantee if you turn over any bench at the Pavilion, you will find the egg sacs of the brown or black widow spiders.” And by the way, feel free

to squash a brown widow spider if you find one; they are not native to the Americas.

Galls, which are growths that you find on bushes and small trees, are insect egg sacs. The insect will pierce the bark of a bush, lay its eggs, and produce a material which causes the



plant to produce more cells that form a protective covering to the insect eggs. When the eggs hatch, the material surrounding the insect babies provides their first food. Galls are commonly found on scrub oaks, which can be seen on the Beach Trail.

The Reserve supports a tremendous amount of life, providing food, shelter, and nests for eggs. This is just a small sampling of the fascinating things you can find on the trail. To watch a video of the full presentation, [click here](#). And if you ever get a chance to walk the trails with Barbara, grab it – she will show you a world you didn't even know was there.

From the March 2024 *Torreyana*:

In February 2024, Barbara Wallach was presented with the Superior Achievement Award from CA State Parks for her significant contribution to interpretation and education at TPSNR. This long-overdue award recognized Barbara's tireless work in many areas since she first became a docent in 1993. She was instrumental in formalizing the Children's Program with Joan Nimick in 1993 and organized the Whacky Weeders some years later. She has led countless docent and public educational walks and presentations and is frequently the go-to person for all sorts of TPSNR questions and issues. And she is well loved for just being her inimitable feisty self.



Early Detection Rapid Response

by Alyssa Sandino, California State Parks Forestry Aide

With the rainy season behind us, invasive plants are emerging. The San Diego Coast District Natural Resources team is taking action to help control new invasions of exotic invasive species by conducting Early Detection Rapid Response surveys (EDRR).

EDRR surveys are a tactic for managing invasive weeds that focuses on mapping priority invasive plant populations in high-traffic areas such as roadsides, trails, parking lots, and park maintenance yards. Detecting and eradicating these occurrences while they are still small prevents their spread and establishment. As time passes and an invasive weed occurrence grows larger, the amount of time and effort to control it increases, and it may not be possible to eradicate it. Managing introduced plants through EDRR helps us protect biodiversity before invasive plants crowd out native species.

District environmental scientists select target species for EDRR by reviewing the County of San Diego Weed Management Area EDRR list and considering the size of existing occurrences, likelihood of spread, and invasiveness of each species.

Many EDRR plants start as escaped ornamentals. Some plants you may have seen in your back yard have a tendency to spread and can make their way into the Reserve. Examples include sweet alyssum (*Lobularia maritima*), pride of Madeira (*Echium candicans*), and century plant (*Agave americana*). When deciding what to plant in your yard, it is good practice to avoid invasive plants along the boundary to help keep TPSNR beautiful. It is also good practice, when entering and leaving the

Reserve, to fully brush off your shoes and pants to prevent the spread of unwanted plants.

A great resource to learn more about the invasive plants across California is the California Invasive Plant Council (cal-ipc.org).

To learn more about native plants that grow in our region, with a list of local nurseries that sell them, visit calscape.org.

Docent of the Month: Bob Nydam

Photo by Herb Knufken

My connection to Torrey Pines began back in the summer of 1969, when I visited for the first time. My brother worked part time at the Reserve while attending San Diego State. I remember the various trails and checking out the surf fishing and body surfing.

In 1978, my girlfriend (now wife) and I moved to San Diego and started spending a lot of time at the Reserve. We hiked the many trails, never tiring of the views and diverse plants and animals. Also, my brother and I fished often, especially for corbina.

When our two daughters were growing up, Torrey Pines was a great hiking spot for everyone. Our favorite trail was down to the beach and back up. I remember the precarious ledge at the bottom of the trail prior to the stairs' installation. We worried some at that spot, but our girls always took it in stride. Often, we walked south past Flat Rock during low tide. After hiking, we relaxed in the cool Lodge watching the slide show or video. I don't recall the format, but do remember an occasional nap. Even today, when our daughters come to visit, the Beach Trail is on their to-do list.

Since I retired in 2014, my wife and I frequently visit Torrey Pines. We spend time watching birds, especially the thrilling Peregrine Falcon. I also volunteer at Cabrillo National Monument, focusing on the tidepools. There are fewer falcon sightings at Cabrillo since their nests are located in a closed cliff area.

While onboarding at the Reserve in 2024, I easily felt at home and continue familiarizing myself with the flora and fauna. Learning many details, I am very grateful to the experienced docents ready to share their knowledge. Working with **Coach Vance** at the TIK and **Robert James** in the WannaBees really exercises my brain. It seems like it needs more and more exercise.



General Meeting Minutes: March 14, 2026

Barbara Wallach gave a presentation on Signs Along the Trail (see pg. 1). 55 docents attended.

The previously announced speaker, Dr. Young from SIO, will be giving his talk at a later date.

Docent of the Month: Bob Nydam, class of 2025, works at the Lodge, TIK, and BLIK and is a member of the WannaBees.

Secretary **Ed Saade** led the business meeting. He thanked everyone for all that was done to restart activities at the Reserve on March 1. "Business" (visitors) is booming! He encouraged docents to read over the FAQ regarding the construction project in order to give visitors the correct information. The State Parks website will be updated ASAP. We are working to update Google, which still lists the Reserve as "closed." The next closure of the Reserve is tentatively scheduled for mid-August.

Hours Required in 2026: The total number of volunteer hours required to maintain active membership will be reduced to 42 hours in 2026, half the usual requirement of 84 hours. In order for 2026 to be counted in the 10 years needed for Lifetime Membership, 10 of the 42 hours are required at either the Lodge or with the Youth Program.

Bench Program Update: 18 benches have commitments, and 5 have been installed so far.

Marine Mammal stranding. California State Parks is anticipating an uptick in marine mammal strandings this year due to avian flu. They will be offering training to VIPs, docents and other stakeholders to ensure the health and safety of visitors and animals.

State Parks Week is scheduled for Wednesday, June 10 to Sunday, June 14. This is the fifth anniversary of State Parks Week, and San Diego Coast District has been selected as the kickoff location. Interpreter I Rowan Jackman will be leading the event at the Reserve.

Earth Day will be celebrated at the Reserve on April 25.

New Maintenance Supervisor. Steve Petix started work in early March as the new Maintenance Chief at Torrey Pines. He replaces Chad Van Doren who has been promoted to Supervisor at San Elijo in addition to other responsibilities..

Logging Hours on Better Impact. There was an extended discussion on the pros and cons of logging hours manually vs. automatic recording as is currently done for hours worked at the Lodge, TIK, BLIK and public walks. A survey was recently sent out to docents asking for their preference.

Susan Elliott spoke about the need for the new trainees to get a Live Scan, which is required by the state. Specific information will be sent to the trainees when available. She also said that during the next month the trainees will be asked to shadow docents in various activities, such as the Lodge, the TIK, and the BLIK.

What's On the Beach? Shore Crabs

by Kathy Dickey

Shore crabs on the beach sand are unusual, but more prevalent on some occasions than you might expect. Of course, the most common shore crabs are the small, burrowing Pacific sand crabs that we had fun digging up as kids (see my article in the [January 2024 Torreyana](#)). This article will focus on two other shore crabs you might see: the striped shore crab (*Pachygrapsus crassipes*) and the “red squat lobster” or “tuna” crab (*Pleuroncodes planipes*).

Striped shore crabs are most frequently seen around rocks, estuaries, and tide pools in the early morning and evening, but you might see one running quickly on the sand to eat items on kelp such as algae, worms, barnacles or limpets. (They use their claws alternately to eat.) They are about two



inches across, purple or green with reddish claws if adult. They have horizontal stripes across their back and also gills, so they can spend about half their time in the water. It is common to find their shells (carapaces) on the sand because they periodically molt and shed them. They live up to three years. Their predators include gulls, rats, large fish, and racoons. One evening on Harbor Island, on the rocks next to the bay, I saw a pack of feral cats eating these crabs.

As the weather changes from La Niña to El Niño as expected this year, we need to watch out for swarms of lobster-like two- to four-inch, skinny-looking bright red pelagic crabs on our beaches, both dead and alive. Hundreds of thousands of these fascinating creatures can wash ashore, as they did in 2016 and 2024. These are also called “tuna crabs” because tuna eat them and they attract the tuna in closer to shore for fishers. Other predators include sharks, octopuses, sea lions, rays, seabirds, and whales. They are also heavily preyed upon by fish like garibaldi, sheepshead, and bass.

These are not permanent residents but usually live in deeper waters near Baja California. “It’s not that the crabs are deliberately making their way to us,” said Dr. Charlotte Seid, manager of the Benthic Invertebrate Collection at Scripps Institution of Oceanography. “They live in those

waters and get swept up sort of like birds outside of their migration route, and they find their way to California, even further north than us.” Seid described tuna crabs as “opportunistic eaters,” feeding on what they can find, including other local invertebrates – and sometimes each other.



Tuna crabs are not “true crabs.” They are a species of squat lobster more closely related to hermit crabs. They belong to a different crustacean group, characterized by having a more elongated body and only three pairs of walking legs rather than the four seen in true crabs. Their mosaic, compound eyes are on short movable stalks, allowing them to quickly detect predators. They can live for up to three years.

References available upon request.

BLIK – Learn at Lunch

Date: Thursday, April 2

Time: 12 noon

Location: North Parking Lot Shed

Speaker: Mukesh Mehta

Topic: The Geological Formation of Los Peñasquitos Lagoon

Bring your lunch, a chair, your curiosity, and any questions you may have about the geology of the lagoon. No need to register. You may claim one hour on Better Impact under Training, Continuing Education (up to 12 hours per year).

BLIK Learn at Lunch is the first Thursday of every month at noon at the North Parking Lot Shed. All docents, park employees, and visitors are welcome.



CEED: Birding Adventure at Tijuana Estuary

by Matt Xavier

On February 28, a sunny coastal morning, 20 docents gathered for a special field trip dedicated to one of our shared passions: birds. Armed with binoculars, scopes, field guides, the Merlin app, and plenty of curiosity, the group headed south to the beautiful Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve (Tijuana Estuary), one of Southern California's most important coastal wetlands and a haven for birdlife.

The outing was both educational and social – a chance for the volunteer educators who guide visitors at Torrey Pines to deepen their knowledge of local ecosystems. As we arrived at the estuary, the tide was beginning to shift, exposing mudflats that quickly filled with activity. Shorebirds darted along the water's edge while about 65 snowy egrets stood motionless in the shallows.

Led by a State Parks Interpreter, a Tijuana Estuary docent, and a few experienced birders in our group, we spread out along the trails. Almost immediately, we began spotting species that thrive in the estuary's unique mix of salt marsh, mudflat, and coastal lagoon habitats.

A Willet probed the mud with her long bill, a Greater Yellowlegs flashed its distinctive wings in flight, while a Double-crested Cormorant (with crested feathers clearly visible!) stood watch atop a piling.

One highlight of the morning came when the group spotted a Northern Harrier gliding low over the marsh. The raptor's distinctive owl-like face and buoyant flight drew everyone's attention as it searched for prey among the grasses. Interestingly enough, these birds construct their nests in marshy areas and on the ground. We also spotted an Osprey flying low over our group, seemingly unafraid of our presence. A highlight and a first for many in the group was spotting a few Ridgway's Rails, a notoriously shy and elusive bird, on the shore taking their morning baths.

The field trip provided a chance to appreciate the broader coastal ecosystem. The Tijuana Estuary is one of the few remaining natural coastal wetlands in Southern California, and its protected habitats support hundreds of species of birds throughout the year. For educators dedicated to protecting and interpreting natural spaces, being immersed in such a vibrant environment was both inspiring and grounding.

Special thanks to **Robert James**, who compiled our eBird List documenting 150 birds from 27 species.



Plan Your Own Visit to the Tijuana Estuary:

The [Tijuana Estuary](#) offers bird walks at 9:30 on Saturdays and nature walks on the 1st, 2nd & 4th Saturdays of the month at 11:00 a.m. Walks are for all ages and free of charge, and binoculars are provided for the bird walks as available.

The Tijuana River Estuary is a United Nations RAMSAR Wetland of International Importance because of its vibrant bird habitat. Join a trained docent to learn about and observe the birds that call the Tijuana Estuary home or are just passing through, including the Ridgway's Rail, a marsh hen that is on the endangered species list.

Youth Program Update

by Janet Ugalde, Program Co-Leader

Thank you to all who contributed to the success of our Youth Program in March! We are thrilled to be back walking along the Reserve's trails, followed by curious and enthusiastic students.

All available March spots were quickly filled, but we still have plenty of openings for walk leaders in April and May. Note that our program will operate only through May this year. Youth Program team members: please sign up on Better Impact to join us soon.



Bird of the Month:

Rufus -crowned Sparrow

by Robert James; photo by Herb Knüpfen

With the arrival of spring, our wintering sparrows are departing, and the resident Rufous-crowned Sparrow (*Aimophila ruficeps*) is more conspicuous. This bird is aptly named as it has a reddish crown and eyeline, along with dark throat stripes and a gray breast. This distinguishes it



from other sparrows in our area. Rufous-crowned Sparrows mainly eat insects in spring and summer and chiefly stems, shoots, and seeds in winter. Although typically occurring on the ground, and often hidden in the vegetation, males can now be seen singing from shrub tops, with the [commonly heard song](#) described as “husky, mumbled” and similar to our co-occurring Northern House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*).

This songbird is primarily found across the Southwestern United States, through much of the interior of Mexico, and to the Pacific coast. As with many other birds, various subspecies have been described; the one occurring here is *canescens*, a California Species of Special Concern. Rufous-crowned Sparrow populations are isolated and may have diverged enough in appearance and by their vocalizations to be unique species. Fortunately, our birds have been a conservation focus of regional planning efforts such as the Multiple Species Conservation Plan (MSCP).

This stocky, long-tailed sparrow is limited to coastal sage scrub and other similar habitats and does not disperse far. A former colleague at U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service found that they require large habitat patches: Rufous-crowned Sparrows are not present in areas less than about 40 acres (roughly 17 hectares). Varied open patches are also important as this species has adapted to disturbances such as fires. Large, interconnected habitats are more likely to have this suite of characteristics and are crucial for survival of

this species. Much of the Reserve provides appropriate habitat, especially around Yucca Point and Razor Point and along the Guy Fleming Trail. We have also detected them in the Extension and along the park road between the beach and the Lodge.

At the Reserve, monthly bird counts for the past two years have averaged about two Rufous-crowned Sparrow observations; as a resident bird, it has been observed throughout the year. However, as you would also expect, the highest numbers were in the spring and summer months. Going back further to 2022 and 2023, which were below-average rainfall years in San Diego, the number of bird detections dropped at the Reserve as conditions limited vegetation growth and insect abundance. This may have temporarily impacted their population and curtailed breeding.

Like others posting to iNaturalist.org, I have quietly stood on the trail and photographed these birds at close range as they forage on the ground in grassy openings amongst the shrubs. Next time you are on the trail, I encourage you to “let nature come to you” and experience one of our most humble and uncommon sparrows for yourself. Even better, share your observation with visitors!

Lodge Renovation Update

by Corbin Schuppert, CA State Parks Restoration Specialist

The Coast District Restoration Program welcomes docents back to Torrey Pines now that the initial phase of the utilities upgrade project has been completed. Plenty of work has continued at the Lodge during the winter closure. The main run of electrical repairs to the Lodge entryway's historic light features has been finished, although there is still some more work to be done.

The Restoration Program pivoted and spent this winter working with the Torrey Pines interpretive staff to dive into the records and archives in the Reserve. What an exciting opportunity this was! In studying the countless documents and paraphernalia stashed away in all corners of the Lodge, we came to appreciate all of the documentation that was done by docents in the past. In the Library, we are proposing to showcase the history of the construction, repair, redesign and restoration of buildings at Torrey Pines. A trove of reports, handcrafted photo albums, and artworks have been pulled from storage in the rangers' garage, the backs of filing cabinets, and various closets, with the idea of sharing them in some way in the coming months. I would like to personally commend the efforts of the docent community at Torrey Pines for their meticulous and thoughtful documentation, which is directly shaping the efforts of the renovation project.

I am happy to say the Restoration Program is working on creating its first staffing addition with a new seasonal apprentice position in 2026. I look forward to spearheading the continued restoration activity at Torrey Pines.

Bee of the Month:

Tansy Mustard Sweat Bee

by Jess Mullins; photo by Craig Chaddock

Both the Latin and common names of the Tansy Mustard Sweat Bee (*Lasioglossum sisymbrii*) suggest that this bee specializes in pollen from tansy-mustard (*Descurainia* spp.). The first known specimen of this bee was collected from tansy-mustard flowers, which is how the species earned its name. In reality, however, this bee is far less picky. Like most bees in the sweat bee genus *Lasioglossum*, it has a broad diet, collects pollen from many different kinds of flowers, and can be found along most trails at the Reserve.



Despite belonging to a large and sometimes difficult-to-identify group of bees, this species is easier to recognize than many other sweat bees. It is a bit smaller than a honey bee and has a black body with thin white hair stripes. Its most distinctive feature is a bright white hair band at the very top of the abdomen, closest to the thorax. No other sweat bee in this region has this upper band, making it a helpful field mark. This striking feature may well have caught the eye of the taxonomist T. D. A. Cockerell when he collected the first specimen in New Mexico in 1895.

Theodore Dru Alison Cockerell was a remarkably prolific naturalist who described more than 5,000 species during his lifetime. He began studying natural history at just 12 years old and continued working until his death at age 81. Although he is best known for his work on bees, he also described mollusks, fungi, fish, plants, and many other insects. Cockerell is regarded as an “extreme splitter,” meaning he tended to describe many closely related forms as separate species. Later taxonomists have since combined, or “lumped,” some of those species together. In his

obituary, it was noted that Cockerell would examine a specimen with a hand lens (not a microscope!) and quickly write and publish a description. This rapid approach helped lay the groundwork for future taxonomic research.

Today, insect taxonomists usually specialize in a single family – or even a single genus – and may examine thousands of specimens from across a species’ range before publishing a comprehensive study. Taxonomy provides the foundation for nearly all biological research and conservation. Most organisms still remain unnamed, and without knowing what species exist and how to recognize them, it becomes much harder to study ecosystems, track environmental change, or protect biodiversity. Every species description, whether written in 1895 or today, adds another piece to our understanding of the living world.

In Memoriam: Molly McConnell

Molly McConnell, a class of 1994 docent, passed away at the end of 2025. She was a children’s librarian who loved entertaining kids. She was active in the Children’s (now Youth) Program and always dressed with some theme in mind. The children loved her stories and visual aids. She enriched the classes with her keen sense of humor. She also was a Master Gardener and had a colorful yard. There will be a celebration of life for Molly on April 19 at a friend’s home.



Torrey Pines Book Club

We will continue to meet via Zoom at our regularly scheduled time: the second Tuesday of each month at 1 pm. Please notify **Annette Ring** if you plan to participate or need any extra help getting connected.

When: Tuesday, April 14, 1:00 pm

What: *The Reign of Wolf 21: The Saga of Yellowstone's Legendary Druid Pack* 9 by Rick McIntyre

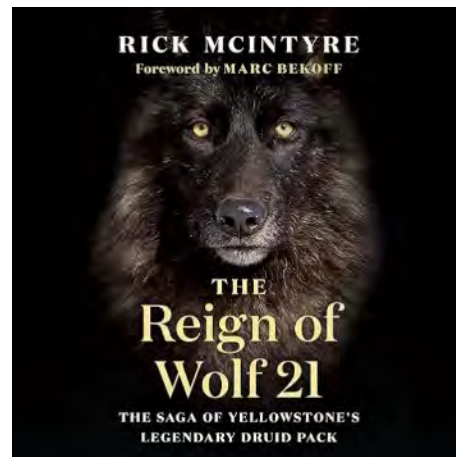
Amazon says:

The Druid Peak Pack was the most famous wolf pack in Yellowstone National Park. This is the dramatic true story of its remarkable leader, Wolf 21, whose compassion and loyalty challenges commonly held beliefs about alpha males. Wolf 21 was known for his unwavering bravery, his unusual benevolence (unlike other alphas, he never killed defeated rival males), and his fierce commitment to his mate, the formidable Wolf 42. After an explosive insurrection within the pack, the two wolves came together at last as leaders of the Druid Peak Pack, which dominated the park for more than 10 years. McIntyre recounts the pack's fascinating saga with compassion and a keen eye for detail, drawing on his many years of experience observing Yellowstone wolves in the wild.

To watch author Rick McIntyre speak about Wolf 21, click [here](#).

All TPDS docents are welcome. Meetings usually last an hour and a half.

May 12: *Beyond the 100th Meridian* by Wallace Stegner



Torrey Pines Docent Society Bird Survey: March 2026

Number of species: 89
(+4 other taxa)

Blue-winged Teal 2
Gadwall 7
American Wigeon 7
Mallard 2
Lesser Scaup 5
Surf Scoter 7
Bufflehead 3
Hooded Merganser 1
Red-breasted Merganser 1
Eurasian Collared-Dove 2
Mourning Dove 53
White-throated Swift 8
Anna's Hummingbird 41
Allen's Hummingbird 19
Rufous/Allen's Hummingbird 2
hummingbird sp. 2
Virginia Rail 1
American Coot 2
Hudsonian Whimbrel 4
Long-billed Curlew 6
Willet 3
Dunlin 2

Heermann's Gull 2
Ring-billed Gull 2
Western Gull 12
California Gull 3
Royal Tern 1
tern sp. 2
Pied-billed Grebe 1
Western Grebe 280
Red-throated Loon 1
Brandt's Cormorant 1
Double-crested Cormorant 6
Black-crowned Night Heron 2
Snowy Egret 7
Great Egret 6
Great Blue Heron 2
Brown Pelican 28
Turkey Vulture 1
Osprey 4
Sharp-shinned Hawk 1
Cooper's Hawk 1
Red-shouldered Hawk 3
Red-tailed Hawk 11
Belted Kingfisher 1
Downy Woodpecker 1
Nuttall's Woodpecker 18
Northern Flicker 3

American Kestrel 5
Peregrine Falcon 2
Black Phoebe 14
Say's Phoebe 5
Cassin's Kingbird 13
Hutton's Vireo 10
California Scrub-Jay 14
American Crow 31
Common Raven 63
crow/raven sp. 3
Tree Swallow 2
Northern Rough-winged Swallow 3
Bushtit 68
Wrentit 118
Swinhoe's White-eye 5
Ruby-crowned Kinglet 4
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher 2
California Gnatcatcher 5
Rock Wren 1
Northern House Wren 30
Bewick's Wren 44
California Thrasher 25
Northern Mockingbird 5
Western Bluebird 3
Hermit Thrush 1

Cedar Waxwing 26
Scaly-breasted Munia 5
House Sparrow 1
House Finch 102
Lesser Goldfinch 58
Dark-eyed Junco 2
White-crowned Sparrow 28
Golden-crowned Sparrow 6
Savannah Sparrow 2
Song Sparrow 27
California Towhee 121
Rufous-crowned Sparrow 7
Spotted Towhee 36
Western Meadowlark 5
Red-winged Blackbird 3
Brown-headed Cowbird 1
Orange-crowned Warbler 41
Common Yellowthroat 12
Northern Yellow Warbler 1
Yellow-rumped Warbler 33

Participants: Robert Turner, Manolo Tutner, Pam Burdt, Donna Mancuso, Nancy Richardson, Robert James, Dinah Carl, Janet Ugalde, Gail Darling, David Walker

Herb Knufken's photo gallery includes many birds: <https://pbase.com/herb1rm>



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