



TORREYANA

THE DOCENT NEWSLETTER FOR
TORREY PINES
STATE NATURAL RESERVE

Issue 490

June 2026

Good News, Bad News

by Dan Hammer

With three appearances in the past 18 months, SIO marine ornithologist Dr. Tammy Russell has become a familiar guest speaker at our TPDS monthly meetings. At the May 9 docent meeting, she gave us another insider's view of seabirds and the scientists who study them. Her presentation, entitled "The Good and the Bad," focused on exciting new research taking place in La Jolla Cove and as far away as Antarctica and Greenland, progress on her ongoing Pelican Project, and the recent catastrophic seabird mortality event.

After thanking docents for supporting her work during these hard times for scientific research, Tammy reported that the bleak picture of federal funding had brightened a bit: She and her colleagues have received new grant funding from NASA to research how icebergs from melting glaciers affect seabird distributions in coastal Greenland and from NSF to investigate how seabirds and whales are distributed in the southern ocean surrounding Antarctica – research aimed at improving proposed conservation areas.

La Jolla Cove

Close to home, Tammy said, "One of the things that kept me going this past year was getting an influx of students who are obsessed with seabirds. It's exciting to have them injecting new energy and perspectives into the lab." The students started UCSD's first-ever Bird Club, and they are conducting regular seabird surveys of La Jolla Cove. "La Jolla Cove has issues" related to inundation by marine mammals and tourists, but it's one of the few areas in San Diego County where seabirds breed. A colony of Brandt's Cormorants and many Western Gulls use that cliff space, and there aren't many alternative sites elsewhere. Tammy had long wanted to survey this area, and now with all these students she has the personnel to do so. Throughout the year, they survey twice a month to document seabirds' use of the cove, including which species and how many birds.

Docent General Meeting

Date: Saturday, June 13, 9:00 am

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

Speakers: Jack Elstner and Zach Merson from the Scripps Institution of Oceanography

Topic: *Pancake Breakfast: Juvenile White Sharks and Their Interactions with Stingrays and Other Coastal Prey*

The speakers will discuss tracking and tagging juvenile white sharks at Torrey Pines and the relationship between these sharks and their prey: what they are eating, and how they select their sites.

Jack Elstner is a PhD student at SIO in the Biological Oceanography program. His research examines how overfishing, climate change, and other stressors impact ocean ecosystems. **Zach Merson** is also a PhD student in Biological Oceanography at SIO who is continuing his master's degree work at CSULB on the interaction between juvenile white sharks and prey species.

Refreshments: Docents with last names beginning with **U – Z** will be responsible for providing snacks for this meeting.

Once the birds start breeding, the students survey at least once a week to document the numbers of nests, eggs, and chicks in the cove so they can calculate reproductive success. (Cont. on pg. 3.)



The Torrey Pines Docent Society publishes the *Torreyana* monthly, edited by Joan Simon and Dan Hammer and 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

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

President's Message: We Are All Protectors of Mother Earth

While traveling though Iceland last summer, my wife and I visited the world-famous Gullfoss waterfall on the Golden Circle. On the trail to the falls, I came upon the story of Sigríður from Brattholt. Sigríður stands as a powerful symbol of stewardship grounded in daily responsibility and quiet respect for the natural world. Living close to the land, she understood that survival and sustainability were inseparable. The soil, water, animals, and weather were not abstract forces but living systems that required care, restraint, and knowledge passed from one generation to the next. Sigríður's stewardship was expressed through mindful use of resources, protection of what was fragile, and an understanding that today's decisions shaped tomorrow's possibilities. Her relationship with nature was defined not by dominance but by partnership. Her actions saved Gullfoss from powerful political and economic forces that envisioned a hydroelectric dam there.

This same philosophy is reflected in the work of docents at Torrey Pines. Like Sigríður, Torrey Pines docents serve as guardians of a rare and sensitive environment. They do not merely share facts; they interpret the land in ways that help visitors understand its value and vulnerability. By encouraging respectful behavior – staying on designated trails, protecting native species, and appreciating the interconnectedness of the ecosystem – docents help ensure that Torrey Pines endures for future generations.

As Torrey Pines docents, we embody stewardship as an act of service. Our influence is often quiet yet profound. Through example rather than authority, we teach that caring for the land is a moral responsibility as well as a practical one. We understand that nature thrives when humans act with humility and foresight. In connecting people to place, we demonstrate every day that true stewardship is not about control but about commitment – an ongoing promise to protect, educate, and preserve what cannot be replaced.

I'd like to extend congratulations to our Docent of the Month, **Barbara Gunning**. Lastly, I want to thank **Ed Saade, Harry Proctor, Lynne Truong** and **Bob Friedman** for stepping up to the plate during my leave of absence.

Matt Xavier
TPDS President



Contents

Good News, Bad News	1
President's Message	2
Earth Day 2026	5
Meeting Minutes	6
Docent of the Month	6
Science Fair Awards	7
Invasive Pampas Grass	8
Lodge Renovation	8
La Jolla Half Marathon	9
Volunteer Appreciation	9
Youth Program	10
Bird of the Month	11
Bee of the Month	11
Museum Shop	12
TPSNR History	12
Book Club	13
Bird Survey	13

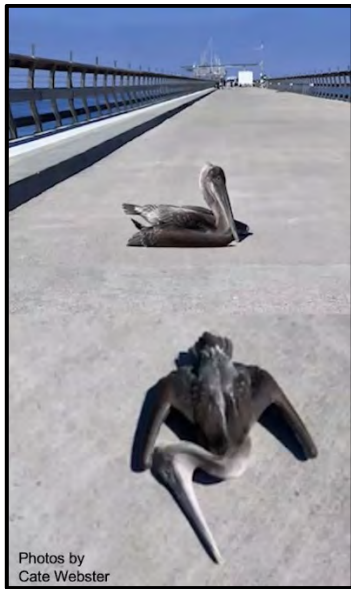
(Cont. from pg. 1.)

Mortality

The current seabird mortality event began in late fall 2025, when unusually large numbers of dead birds of three species – Brown Pelicans, Brandt’s Cormorants, and Common Murres – appeared on the shores of southern California. The birds were emaciated, but most tests for avian flu and other diseases came back negative. The pace of mortality increased steadily through March, then leveled off. In recent months, dead loons and grebes have also appeared.

In response to this catastrophic event, seabird scientists along the west coast have developed a “gigantic e-mail chain” to share their observations, data, and analyses. This has been “pretty amazing,” Tammy said. “Sometimes science people want to be protective of their data, but now we’re all so concerned about this that we’re keeping each other in the loop about what’s happening.” Together they have been able to conclude that this is mainly a starvation event.

“This is unlike anything I’ve ever seen,” Tammy said. In Imperial Beach, a cormorant walked ashore and died in about 15 minutes. On Scripps Pier, a pelican landed and died within an hour, before a rescue team could arrive from SeaWorld.



So why are these birds starving? Local ocean temperatures have been rising, with record heat for most dates. This is part of a larger warming event occurring globally, particularly in the eastern Pacific. As ocean waters warm, the forage fish that seabirds eat migrate in search of cooler water – either down in the water column or northwards. Some seabirds can dive deeper, but most cannot, and so they starve. And if that weren’t bad enough, a potentially strong El Niño is on the way, bringing warmer water to the west coast this summer. When that happens on top of an ocean heat wave, there’s no way for seabirds to recover in the fall, so they may be in for another mortality event right after this one.

Pelicans’ Progress

Before updating us on her Pelican Project, Tammy briefly summarized her previous talk, which you can read about in December 2024 [Torreyana](#). Even though Brown Pelicans are familiar coastal birds, there is still a lot we don’t know about them including how individuals vary, where and when they migrate, and how they respond to environmental changes and catastrophic events. Past attempts to track them failed, chiefly because the clunky “backpack” tracking

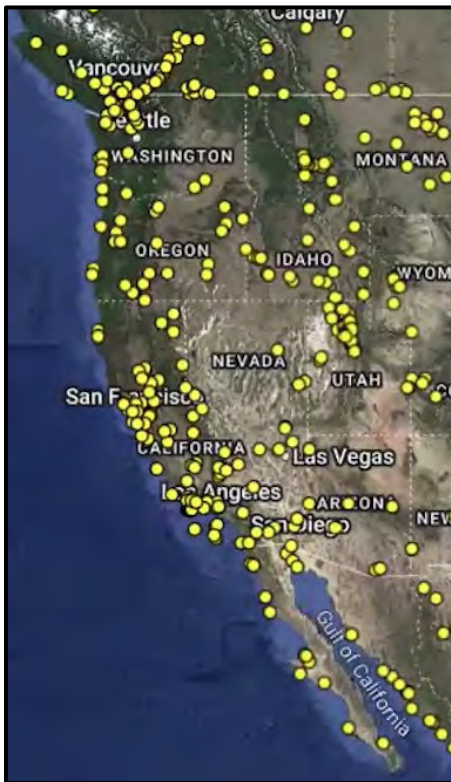
devices often fell off on impact when the pelicans dove from great height into the sea in search of food.



Established by the nonprofit Pelican Science, the Brown Pelican Tracking Project seeks to understand these birds’ habitat use and responses to the environment. One of the project’s main goals is to develop Brown Pelicans as the ideal coastal indicator species to guide marine sanctuaries, state parks, and others in their planning for affected areas.

This is the first-ever successful effort to track Brown Pelicans. Instead of clunky backpacks, this project uses eBands to track pelicans without impacting their behavior or survival. Developed in 2021, the non-invasive Pelican eBand holds a UHF radio microtransmitter with an internal antenna. Using hybrid power (with a solar panel and rechargeable waterproof battery), it is long lasting and can be detected day or night as far as 3 km from the nearest sensor station.





Data from the eBands is captured by a large network of Motus tracking stations along the Pacific Coast and in the Channel Islands. (For more on Motus or to access pelican data, click [here](#).)

After testing the eBands on pelicans in captivity, the project released its first two banded birds in the summer of 2023. Currently there are 45 banded pelicans in the wild: 22 rehabilitated birds and 23 chicks from colonies in the Gulf of California, on Todos Santos Island off Ensenada, and on Santa Barbara Island. Project

partners have tracked 43 of the birds (a 96% detection rate) and are still looking for two remaining chicks that were banded this season. In addition to the Motus detection, they make regular field trips to track birds, especially at roosting sites with no nearby sensor station. Pelican Science has built a new Motus station at Pillar Point on Half Moon Bay. Other new Motus stations are in the works in Alameda and on Scripps Pier.

Before the Pelican Project began, the conventional scientific wisdom was that pelicans go south to breed and then north in the non-breeding season. But that's not what the project is finding. Data from the eBands shows that rather than migrate, some individual birds stay within very small, specific areas. For example, between January 2024 and January 2026, the female pelican shown here was detected 159 times by 11 Motus stations – all within a relatively limited range from the Channel Islands to San Simeon. Other birds are making multiple migrations up and down the coast within short time periods.



One big question for the project is: what are the banded chicks doing? Where do they go? Do their migration patterns depend on their colonies of origin? Maybe they all have different foraging strategies.

During March 2025, the project's Mexican collaborators from Conservacion de Islas banded 14 chicks on Todos Santos Island, including this vigorous "pelican on a mission." One juvenile has been tracked as far north as San Francisco; now Tammy is waiting to see whether the bird maintains this long migration pattern as an adult.



This year the Pelican Project planned to band 35 chicks in Baja California and the Channel Islands. Collaborators were able to band five chicks on Anacapa Island early in the season, but then a rare massive breeding failure occurred across all the colonies. They found 1,500 dead chicks on Santa Barbara Island and abandoned nests elsewhere.

Over the next month, Tammy and her collaborators will travel to the Gulf of California and Todos Santos in search of nests and chicks. If the breeding failure is continuing, they will avoid further stressing the birds and pivot to tracking more rehabilitated pelicans. Depending on funding, they will try again next year to band more chicks.

The Pelican Project is now testing new technologies that may allow them to have smaller bands and get more data. One innovation is the first-ever eBand equipped with Bluetooth, which will enable any citizen scientist with Bluetooth to help them track pelicans.

Tammy responded to questions that several docents had asked since her November 2024 talk, when she reported on a pelican mortality event earlier that year. A group of researchers looking into potential causes of the event held a "necropsy party" and are now processing the results through stable isotope analysis.

Tammy is looking into the oceanographic evidence. The working group is planning a region-wide pelican survey at the end of May as well as a group meeting in January 2027 to understand the causes of past and current mortality events.

More good news: Shortly after Tammy's presentation to the TPDS, she and her collaborators discovered about 580 pelican chicks on a remote island in the Gulf of California. In the past, that island typically hosted thousands of nests, so it's still not great, but it's better than all the empty nests they had found elsewhere.

Tammy's passion for seabirds is infectious, her dedication to science is inspiring, and her ability to present her research to a lay audience is peerless. If you missed her lively and informative presentation or want to see it again, click [here](#). To learn more about Pelican Science, click [here](#); to support their work through tax-free donations, click [here](#).



Earth Day 2026: Discovering, Celebrating, and Protecting the Reserve

by Suzan Potuznik

This year's Earth Day celebration took place on Saturday, April 25. The 800+ visitors were greeted at the welcome booth by **Patty** and **Bruce Montgomery** and then followed a path toward the exhibits that were nestled in front of the Lodge. Adults and children, scavenger hunt cards in hand, headed for the first station: Jeff Nordland's always popular live reptile exhibit, where they could meet and hold some of the snakes and lizards found at the Reserve. Other guest exhibitors included Dr. Bob Gordon, a master falconer who shared his knowledge of raptors with the help of his live assistants "Meriah," a female American Kestrel, and "Hawkeye," a Harris's Hawk; the San Diego Woodturners and Turn Around Vets, who demonstrated how they use a lathe to make crafts from fallen Torrey Pine trees that are sold at the Lodge museum shop; and members of the



Nature Collective (which supports the San Elijo Lagoon), who showed visitors how to recognize the signs and tracks of wildlife.

TPDS docents, park aides, and WannaBees shared their knowledge of the Reserve using numerous interactive displays. At the Mammals and Birds of the Reserve exhibit, visitors learned how to identify a mammal by its fur and a bird-beak by its "job"; Native Bees (in partnership with the California Native Bee Society and Bee City USA) provided a glimpse into the variety of native bees at the Reserve; and the iNaturalist station offered tips and training on the use of the iNaturalist app to identify and share information about the fauna and flora in the Reserve.

Protecting the Reserve and the environment was a focus of the day. One station had an interactive watershed model to demonstrate the flow of water and pollutants from inland to the sea. There was a reduce-reuse-recycle exhibit showing how best to recycle. The Whacky Weeders were on hand to explain how invasive, non-native plants crowd our beautiful Torrey Pines natives. Interpreter I Rowan Jackman organized a Beach Clean-up crew to tackle the litter along the beach.

A festival could not take place without letting children express their creative streak at a craft table, this year with "Fingerprint Bug" works of art.

Visitors were also treated to guided walks on the Guy Fleming Trail and information on the fauna and flora of TPSNR at the TIK and BLIK kiosks. Resounding thanks to all docents, staff, and volunteers who made this event a tremendous success, with a special thanks to the lead organizers: **Lynne Truong, Mary Makowski**, and Rowan Jackman.



General Meeting Minutes: May 9, 2026

Dr. Tammy Russell from Scripps Institution of Oceanography gave a presentation on the recent seabird die-off and her continuing research with pelicans (see pg. 1). Approximately 70 docents attended.

President **Matt Xavier** led the business meeting.

Docent of the Month: Barbara Gunning, class of 2025, was a major organizer for the December holiday party. She is a frequent BLIK host, Youth Program leader, and Beach Walk leader.

Interpreter I Rowan Jackman gave us several updates:

*The volunteer appreciation event at South Beach will be on May 21 at 6 pm (see pg. 9).

*There are protocols for reporting marine bird and mammal injuries/deaths on the beach. Detailed information is being sent to all docents. Lifeguards will provide signage at the site of injured or dead animals to indicate if they have already been reported.

*Information on the several Jr. Ranger programs and their prizes is being sent to all docents.

*A new contractor has been hired for the second half of the utility project, which will begin as early as August 17.

*Repairs on the Lodge have been temporarily delayed recently but will begin again on June 1 (see pg. 8).

Lynne Truong: Reorder forms were available for docent shirts and name badges at the meeting. The La Jolla Half Marathon will come through the Reserve in the early morning of May 16 (see pg. 9). Volunteers are needed to monitor the event.

Mary Makowski and **Lynne Truong** were thanked for organizing a very successful Earth Day event on April 25 (see pg. 5).

We will no longer be selling the green plastic water bottles once we are out of stock.

The members of the **2026 Nominating Committee** for Board members are: **Rosemary Wareham**, **Robert James**, **Gary McCook**, **Roger Isaacson**, **Lisa Kakone** (chair), and **Janice Barnard** (advisor).

Rosemary Wareham was thanked for her leadership in cleaning out and organizing the shed at the North Beach parking lot.

Finance Committee: The Board voted to hire a bookkeeper. The Finance Committee will be developing funding priorities for 2027. Please send your suggestions to **Matt Xavier** or **Lynne Truong**. The annual financial report will be presented at the June meeting.

The **Youth Program** will be over at the end of May (see pg. 10).

Graduation for the 2026 docent trainees will be held at the June meeting.

Additional Notes from the TPDS Board Meeting

Water Fountain Update:

A water-bottle filling station will be replacing the water fountain in front of the Lodge. A new fountain has been purchased for the North Beach parking lot and will be

here in a few weeks. The West parking lot (TIK) water fountain will be replaced with a new one when the construction of the new restrooms is completed next year. The TPC has provided a water-bottle filling station at the head of the Guy Fleming Trail.

The **Native American artifacts** on display in the Lodge are being assessed; if any docents have information about the existing items, please send the information to sdcd.archaeology@parks.ca.gov by June 1.

Docent of the Month: Barbara Gunning

Photo by Herb Knufken

Torrey Pines Beach was always calling me home - a ribbon of coastline stitched into my life long before I ever wore a docent badge.

I am a native of San Diego, raised on amazing sunsets, playing in the sand, and a good book balanced on sandy knees.

For years, I joked that Torrey Pines Beach was my second office, and the parking pass qualified as a business expense on my taxes.

As I designed workshops to help teams work better,

I came to the beach to think, to breathe, to listen.

The rhythm of the waves untangled problems more gently than any conference room ever could.

The ocean became both refuge and inspiration.

Then the pain in my hands forced me to retire, and life suddenly changed shape without asking my permission.

One afternoon, I sat quietly on Torrey Pines Beach, watching the tide fold itself endlessly onto the shore.

And somewhere between the surf and the sunset, the thought arrived softly, but with certainty:

This is my happy place.

Not long after, I joined the next docent class.

Now I stand beneath the rare Torrey pines, sharing stories of sea creatures and wildflowers, of sandstone cliffs carved by wind, water, and time, of hidden tides and shifting seasons.

I welcome strangers into the same wonder that carried me through my own turning point.

Some people retire from work.

I simply changed my office address - to a place where every shift begins with gratitude for the view.

- Poem composed with the help of ChatGPT



Science Fair Award Recipients

by Wayne Kornreich

The 2026 Greater San Diego Science and Engineering Fair entries had some very notable projects. The judges this year (**Wayne Kornreich, Robert James, Karen Lisi, and Leigh Fenly**) selected a grand prize winner, a first place winner, and three projects for honorable mention. The grand prize and first place winners will present at our June 13 general meeting.

Grand Prize: Adhara Sethee (The Rhoades School, grade 6)
Eyeing Swinhoe's White-eye as Invasive Competitors

First Place: Andy Feng (The Bishop's School, grade 9)
Mapping Invasive Pampas Grass Through Drone-Based Photogrammetry and Machine Learning

Eyeing Swinhoe's White-eye as Invasive Competitors

by Adhara Kaur Sethee

Swinhoe's White-eye (*Zosterops simplex*) is an invasive bird species from Asia. Research suggests they feed on non-native ornamental plants. The purpose of this project is to document and explore potential effects of White-eyes on native species. With increasing numbers, it is crucial to discover if these birds are in areas such as local preserves and try to identify their potential impact on native flora and fauna. I hypothesized that I would observe White-eyes utilizing not only non-native ornamental plant species but also vital native plants of the Coastal Sage Scrub community.

Using the Merlin app and binoculars, I documented and verified the bird species at my school, the San Elijo Lagoon, and Cottonwood Creek Park. I also documented the plants on which they were residing.

I recorded observations for four months and documented more than 45 bird species. Results revealed White-eyes were present at my school on non-native trees. At the San Elijo Lagoon, I observed White-eyes on native trees. At Cottonwood Creek Park, I observed White-eyes on toyon shrubs.

Cottonwood Creek Park is where White-eyes were first spotted in Encinitas. There I observed flocks of White-eyes on toyon shrubs. Toyon berries ripen in the winter and are a critical food source for native resident birds and migratory birds.

Research has shown that Swinhoe's White-eyes feed primarily on ornamentals. According to my observations, White-eyes are well established in Encinitas, even in preserves, and appear to also be feeding on native plant species



Honorable Mention:

Maya Goel and Shanmei Lee (The Rhoades School, grade 6):
Investigating Regrowth in a Coastal Sage Burned Habitat

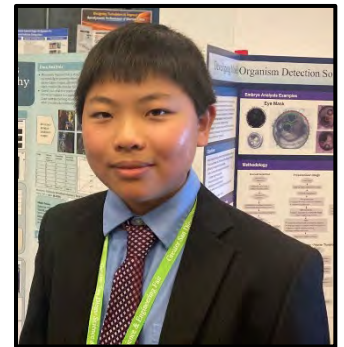
Solomon Chan and Nathan Lee (The Cambridge School, grade 9):
Low-cost AI Powered Microplastic Detection Kit

Vihaan Kulkarni (Oak Valley Middle School, grade 6): *Can Spatial Patterns in Environmental Stress Indicators (pH, Nutrients, Temperature, Turbidity) Be Used to Infer the Epicenter of a Harmful Algal Bloom?*

Mapping Invasive Pampas Grass

by Andy Feng

In San Diego, invasive plants such as pampas grass and giant reed are detrimental to the ecosystem of native species, since they outcompete and displace native plants for resources and threaten the fragile native biodiversity. Of these invasive plants, pampas grass is the most detrimental in San Diego, but the task for restoration workers requires extensive effort initially to locate the widespread grass. This project aims to use drone-based photography to implement an Artificial Intelligence model to identify and map pampas grass on a large scale.



To conduct the experiment, I went into the field and collected data samples of pampas grass across San Diego (at Miramar Lake and Rose Canyon). I programmed and trained an AI algorithm based on the YOLO (You Only Look Once) AI model on the Python program. Using hundreds of images, the algorithm was trained to correctly identify and map pampas grass clumps from drone-taken images.

Of all the photos, 70% were used for training, 20% to validate, and 10% to test the model. Testing was split into two iterations to show improvement in the results. The first iteration showed some success but also revealed errors. The second iteration used more photos in the training size and had an 88% rate of success in correctly identifying the majority of pampas grass.

The results indicate that combining the speed and large-scale capture from a drone with the accuracy of the AI model proves the process is highly effective in identifying and mapping pampas grass. However, possible errors may have occurred due to the small rate of error of the AI model.

In summary, the methodology used is highly effective in identifying invasive plants and has high potential for assisting in the removal of invasive weeds and for conservationists. By successfully finding pampas grass automatically, the step of manually finding pampas grass can be skipped, leaving more time for removing the invasive weed and restoring native ecosystems around San Diego.

In Pursuit of Pampas Grass

by Alyssa Sandino, SDCD Natural Resources

Pampas grass (*Cortaderia selloana*) is a large perennial grass native to the lowland plains and grasslands of Argentina, Brazil, and Chile. The term *pampas* is derived from the Quechua language, often translated as “treeless plain” or “plain.” Pampas grass was intentionally introduced to Santa Barbara around 1848 as an ornamental plant, and its showy white plumes made it a popular landscaping choice in the 1880s. Since then, pampas grass has become ubiquitous on bluffs along the California coast.



At Torrey Pines, pampas grass is found where fresh water is available, including Los Peñasquitos Lagoon and ravines downstream from stormwater infrastructure. Pampas grass spreads by producing large amounts of seed; in fact, each plume can produce 100,000 seeds that can disperse up to 20 miles by wind. The California Invasive Plant Council (Cal-IPC) has given pampas grass a “High” rating because of its severely negative ecological impacts on physical processes, plant and animal communities, and vegetation structure.

Mature stands of pampas grass are difficult to remove due to their size. Pampas grass grows through underground rhizomes to form large, dense clumps 6 to 10 feet wide, and each plant can grow between 6 to 13 feet tall (including the height of the plumes). The leaf edges are sharp enough to cut through skin, so workers must wear safety glasses or goggles, neck protection, long sleeves, pants, and gloves. Masks are



April 28, 2026

recommended for hauling out dead pampas grass. Removing this material is necessary to allow for reestablishment of native plants.

The Coast Natural Resources staff recently completed the removal of an extensive pampas grass occurrence adjacent to the former National University on North Torrey Pines Road. This four-year effort was accomplished by staff and contractors, using a combination of herbicide and hand pulling. Several hundred cubic yards of dead pampas grass was hauled out to green waste dumpsters. Natural Resources staff will continue to remove pampas grass in the Extension this fall.

Work to Resume June 1 on Lodge Renovation

by Corbin Schuppert, CA State Parks Restoration Specialist

Restoration on the Lodge entryway will resume Monday, June 1. Expect high work activity if you arrive for opening shifts as we will be taking advantage of the early-morning sunrises and good working conditions. Noisy and dusty work will take place between 5 am and 9 am while less intrusive tasks will make up the later morning hours and afternoons.

Work will take place from June 1 through 10 with several technical hurdles that will be addressed and completed with the help of Old Town State Historic Park recruit Wes Stoudor. Wes was a maintenance employee at Torrey Pines when the porch stabilization project first started and participated in all of the most skilled efforts during the column extractions and replacements. Wes is a proficient plasterer and an experienced chainsaw operator who made the technical cuts for the log supports; his participation during this early June work push will be greatly appreciated.

The electrical repairs to the historic light features will be completed during this time, as well as sash restoration on two windows. Plastering will also re-commence on the porch walls, and we will soon see further progress as SDCD Restoration focuses its efforts back to the Lodge.

Though you may not have seen us so much of late, please trust that we have been hard at work growing our young program, and I will have several special announcements to be shared in the coming months.

June CEED:

Barona Cultural Center and Museum

Date: Thursday, June 18

Time: 10 – 11:30 am

Place: Barona Cultural Center, 1095 Barona Rd., Lakeside 92040

RSVP to Rachel Scherba. Limited to 25 docents.

Website: baronamuseum.com/

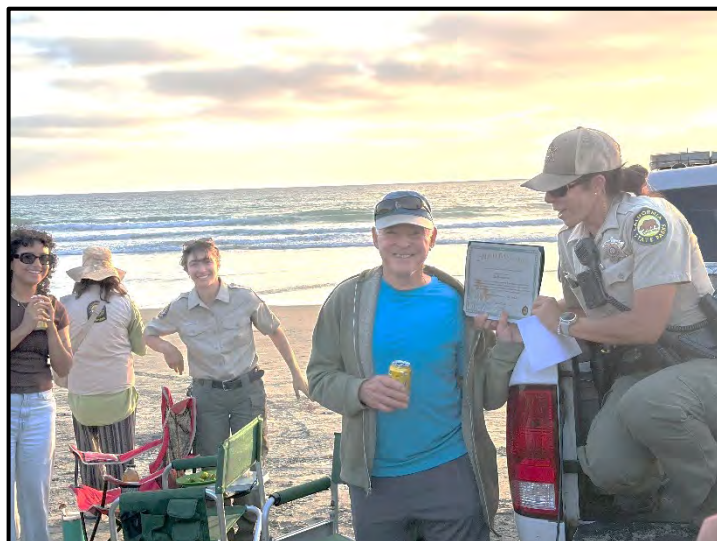
La Jolla Half Marathon Comes Through Torrey Pines

Nearly five thousand La Jolla Half Marathoners ran through Torrey Pines in the early hours of Saturday, May 16, and were cheered on by **Denise Davis, Marian Edelbrock, Medi Denker, Mary Makowski, German Cervantes, Darlene Farnes, and Jack Makowski.**



Volunteer Appreciation Beach Party

After weeks of May Gray, the sun was shining as more than 70 docents, their guests, and state park staff gathered at South Beach on May 21 to celebrate the thousands of hours Docent Society members have volunteered at the Reserve. Interpreter I Rowan Jackman and the interpretation team feted them with pizza, salad, and drinks. Ranger Stephanie Adams presented **Stu Rosenwasser** with the California Poppy Award for his decade-long leadership of the Special Walks program as well as his participation in many docent activities, including the Youth Program, Lodge hosting, and Seabees, and his four years serving on the Docent Society board. He has regularly engaged visitors on the trails as a Roving Interpreter and participated at the inception of the Wannabee native bee identification program. In 2022, Stu was honored as the Docent of the Year.



Youth Program

by Janet Ugalde, Program Co-Leader

The TPDS Youth Program completed another school year in May. Enthusiastic and engaged students brought smiles to our faces as we guided them through the Reserve with pointers and picture books in hand.

Thirty amazing, awesome docents donated over 630 hours of their time in just 3 months. Team members doubled or tripled their service commitments, so that we were able to offer field trips on as many days as possible during March, April, and May.

Please join me in an ovation for all who contributed! Extra applause for those who participated 10 or more times:

Wayne Kornreich, Bruce Montgomery, Patty Montgomery, Annette Ring, Rachel Scherba, Alberto Trujillo, Janet Ugalde, and Christie Zilberman. Hooray for our seven outstanding walk leaders from the Class of 2025. We couldn't have done it without you.

A ginormous THANK YOU to this year's committed and knowledgeable co-leaders, **Bruce & Patty Montgomery.** Thanks to all who contributed to our success, including Lodge hosts and TIK Talkers.

See you on the trail.



Bird of the Month: Hutton's Vireo

by Robert James; photo by Trent Stanley

Many birds spending the entire year at the Reserve are frequently heard but not often seen. For example, the Wrentit (*Chamaea fasciata*), also known as the “Voice of the Chaparral,” frequently sounds like a bouncing ping-pong ball slowing down. (Probably all of us know that one!)

Another bird heard but not well known is Hutton's Vireo (*Vireo huttoni*), which also sings year-round. The [song](#) is described in the *Sibley Field Guide* as a simple, two-syllable, whistled phrase repeated every 1-2 seconds. You have likely heard this bird and not known what it was.

Vireos are small songbirds with stout hooked bills chiefly living in the New World tropics. The name is derived from Latin, referring to the greenish colors that many species have. Hutton's Vireo, named after William Rich Hutton (the naturalist who first collected it), is a bit different and widely distributed, ranging throughout much of California and north into British Columbia in coniferous forest and streamside habitats. The species also occurs in the higher mountains of Mexico and parts south. It can be found among our scrub oaks in both the main Reserve and the Extension. A fun fact is that it is the only non-migratory vireo in California.

Hutton's Vireo can be seen actively gleaning insects in tree foliage, and an impressive variety of insects consumed by this species has been documented in the literature. These insects most commonly include true bugs (hemipterans), butterflies and moths, beetles, and spiders. Insect galls, fruits of elderberry and poison oak, and even tree sap have been on the menu. As a generalist feeder, Hutton's Vireo is well poised to persist with changes in insect availability over time.

Being a resident bird, Hutton's Vireo has been detected throughout the year. Fortunately, it is not a recognized conservation concern. The number of observations at the monthly bird counts in the Reserve have averaged one to two for the past two years (though in recent years the numbers appear to be increasing). It is possible to mistake them for the similar-appearing Ruby-crowned Kinglet (*Corthylio calendula*), but kinglets have very small bills and there are other differences in wing pattern and behavior. By using the [link above](#), as well as the Merlin phone app to identify bird sounds, you will have an easier time finding this interesting, and often overlooked, species at the Reserve.



The Dawn Pollinators: Meet the Squash Bee

by Gabriele Wienhausen; photo by Craig Chaddock

Do you like zucchini bread, roasted butternut squash, or pumpkin pie? If so, you've already benefited from one of North America's most underappreciated pollinators – the squash bee.

Zucchini, pumpkins, and even the buffalo gourd (coyote melon) all belong to the Cucurbitaceae family, genus *Cucurbita*. Their sprawling vines produce bright yellow flowers that open before sunrise, offering up heavy, sticky, oil-rich pollen – then wilt by mid-morning. It's a tight window, and one perfectly matched to the squash bee.

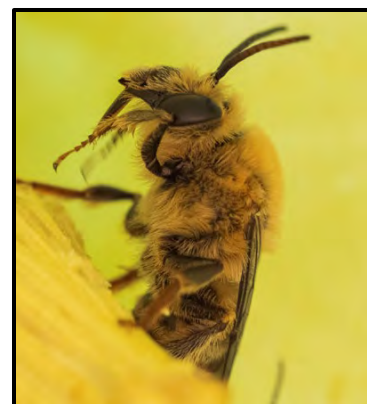
Long before honey bees arrived with European settlers, about 20 species of squash bees were already at work. Native to the Americas, they co-evolved with *Cucurbita* plants and played a vital role in the domestication and spread of squash and gourds by Indigenous peoples.

Squash bees are slightly larger and more robust than honey bees, with longer antennae, reddish legs, and muted yellow-and-black striping. They are up at dawn, often an hour before honeybees even stir. The hind legs of females are lined with dense, brush-like hairs (*scopae*) that grab and hold the plants' coarse, sticky pollen with ease. Honey bees, by contrast, rely on smooth pollen baskets that struggle with such heavy grains.

Squash bees are solitary. Each female digs her own nest – a vertical tunnel in the soil with a cluster of small chambers, each stocked with pollen for her young. They often nest close together, more like neighbors than hive-mates. Males, identifiable by a pale patch on the face, tend to remain inside flowers later in the day, often resting in blossoms that have already closed.

If you want to spot squash bees, visit squash or buffalo gourd flowers in the first hours after sunrise. At that time, females are busy gathering pollen, while males dart between blossoms in search of mates. By noon, the flowers – and the bees inside them – have closed for the day. The best place to spot squash bees in the Reserve is in summer along the Marsh Trail and occasionally at the Extension. All reported observations have been in flowers of the buffalo gourd/stinking gourd (*Cucurbita foetidissima*), so when you next see one of these plants in flower, especially in the early morning, look carefully and you may be rewarded with the sight of this special bee.

For the gardeners among us: if you want a strong harvest of cucurbit crops, support squash bees. Avoid tilling, which destroys their underground nests; limit pesticide use, especially systemic types that reach pollen; and leave patches of bare soil for nesting.

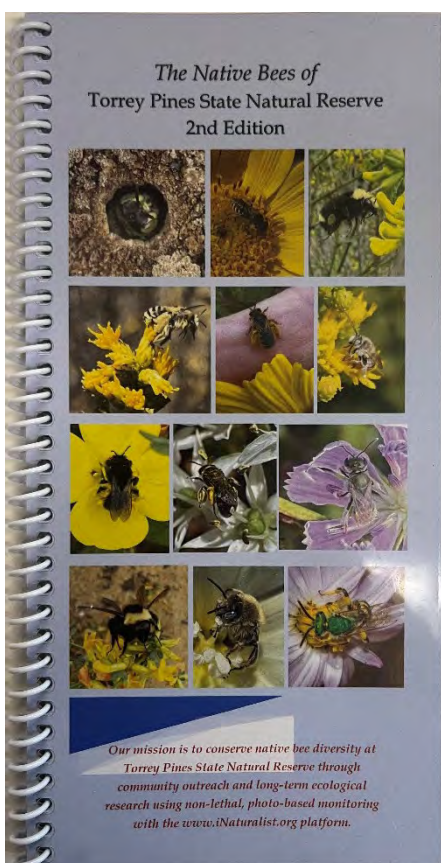


Museum Shop Spotlight: The Native Bees of Torrey Pines

by Gabriele Wienhausen

European honeybees are the best known and most widespread bees in the world, but they are not native to the Western Hemisphere, and they represent just one species among more than 20,000 bees globally. California is a bee biodiversity hotspot, with over 1,600 native bees, and nearly 100 of them live right here at Torrey Pines. Native bees have coevolved with native plants and are essential for their reproduction. Consequently, identifying our native bee species contributes to the conservation of the Reserve. This is why a group of Torrey Pines docents started a native bee monitoring group last year known as the *WannaBees*.

The *WannaBees* have produced a native bee field guide specifically for the Reserve: *The Native Bees of Torrey Pines* (\$11.95). It visually describes 40 of our native bee species, highlighting the most commonly observed ones. The booklet outlines their physical and behavioral characteristics, shares brief field observations, and includes flight seasons, size, and shape graphics. The booklet also includes QR codes that allow the reader access to many questions asked by visitors, along with tips for discussing native bee conservation.



Past Hantavirus Scares at Torrey Pines

by Judy Schulman, TPDS Historian

Given the recent hantavirus outbreak on a cruise ship, I thought it might be interesting to remind docents about our own hantavirus scares at Torrey Pines.

The first one occurred on December 29, 2007. Two mice caught in the Flintkote Road area tested positive. It must have been a slow news day because the print and TV media made it sound like we were being invaded. Some of the headlines read “*Mice with hantavirus found in Torrey Pines.*” I remember fielding phone calls soon after from concerned people asking if it was safe to visit the park. Further testing by San Diego County health officials in January 2008 found no more evidence of hantavirus.

The February 2008 *Torreyana* had a brief reference that read: “*Currently no hanta virus has been found in mice near the Visitor Center, although hanta virus has been detected in mice taken from the Flintkote Trail. There should be no problem for visitors.*”

The second scare occurred on December 8, 2010 in the Reserve, where one infected mouse was found. This time it was a different species of mice that was infected. Previously it had been deer mice; this time it was a harvest mouse. There was a significant rise that year in infected mice.

Just in case you are worried, there have been no publicly released notices of hantavirus infected mice at Torrey Pines as of May 2026. The closest one caught was in the Los Peñasquitos Ranch House area in January 2026.

BLIK: Learn at Lunch

Date/Time: Thursday, June 4, 12 noon

Location: Docent Shed at the North Beach parking lot

Speaker: Rosemary Wareham, TPDS docent

Topic: *Alien of the Tide Pools: Meet the California Two-spot Octopus*

Bring your lunch, a chair, your curiosity, and any questions you may have about how the environment at Torrey Pines is monitored. You may claim one hour on Better Impact under Training, Continuing Education (up to 12 hours per year).

BLIK Learn at Lunch is at noon on the first Thursday of every month at the North Beach parking lot shed. All docents, park employees, and visitors are welcome.

Torrey Pines Book Club

We will have a hybrid meeting this month: you can attend either via Zoom or in person. If you need any help with directions or need any help getting connected on Zoom, please contact **Annette Ring**.

When: Tuesday, June 9, 1:00 pm

Where: At the home of Annette Ring

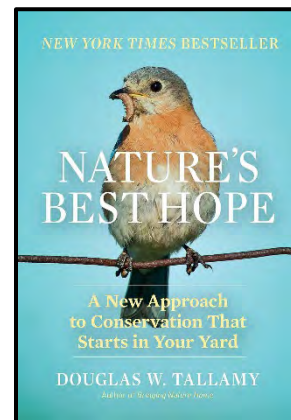
What: *Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation that Starts in Your Yard* by Douglas W. Tallamy

Amazon says:

Douglas W. Tallamy's first book, *Bringing Nature Home*, awakened thousands of readers to an urgent situation: wildlife populations are in decline because the native plants they depend on are fast disappearing. His solution? Plant more natives. In his new book, Tallamy takes the next step and outlines how homeowners everywhere can turn their yards into conservation corridors that provide wildlife habitats. It's practical, effective, and easy – and because this approach relies on the initiatives of private individuals, it is immune from the whims of government policy.

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

July 14: *California Against the Sea: Visions for Our Vanishing Coastline* by Rosanna Xia



Torrey Pines Docent Society Bird Survey: May 2026

Number of species: 83
(+4 other taxa)

Gadwall 2	Brandt's Cormorant 5	Hutton's Vireo 7	Song Sparrow 30
Mallard 3	Double-crested Cormorant 3	Western Warbling Vireo 2	California Towhee 85
Red-breasted Merganser 2	Black-crowned Night Heron 2	California Scrub-Jay 16	Rufous-crowned Sparrow 3
California Quail 2	Snowy Egret 5	American Crow 20	Spotted Towhee 36
Mourning Dove 45	Green Heron 1	Common Raven 38	Yellow-breasted Chat 14
Vaux's Swift 12	Great Egret 8	Violet-green Swallow 5	Western Meadowlark 6
White-throated Swift 19	Great Blue Heron 3	Northern Rough-winged Swallow 20	Hooded Oriole 8
Anna's Hummingbird 22	Brown Pelican 6	Barn Swallow 2	Red-winged Blackbird 2
Allen's Hummingbird 20	Turkey Vulture 1	Cliff Swallow 9	Orange-crowned Warbler 39
Hudsonian Whimbrel 1	Osprey 1	swallow sp. 1	Common Yellowthroat 18
Long-billed Curlew 3	Cooper's Hawk 2	Bushtit 46	Northern Yellow Warbler 3
Willet 4	Red-shouldered Hawk 1	Wrentit 102	Townsend's Warbler 1
Heermann's Gull 7	Red-tailed Hawk 4	Swinhoe's White-eye 1	Wilson's Warbler 5
Ring-billed Gull 12	Great Horned Owl 2	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher 6	Black-headed Grosbeak 15
Western Gull 21	Belted Kingfisher 1	California Gnatcatcher 2	
Elegant Tern 28	Downy Woodpecker 1	Northern House Wren 20	Participants: Donna Mancuso, Leslie Allen, Dinah Carl, Luz Chung, Gail Darling, Nancy Novak, Tsaiwei Olee, Alberto Truillo, Juliet Nussbaum, Dave Rimlinger, Lily Tang, Manolo Turner, Robert Turner, Robert James, David Walker
Royal Tern 7	Nuttall's Woodpecker 15	Bewick's Wren 26	
tern sp. 10	American Kestrel 2	European Starling 1	
Pied-billed Grebe 2	Peregrine Falcon 4	California Thrasher 13	
Western Grebe 3	Western Wood-Pewee 3	Swainson's Thrush 1	
Pacific Loon 2	Western Flycatcher 6	Scaly-breasted Munia 7	
Common Loon 4	Empidonax sp. 1	House Sparrow 1	
loon sp. 4	Black Phoebe 3	House Finch 74	
	Ash-throated Flycatcher 17	Lesser Goldfinch 58	
	Cassin's Kingbird 1	Dark-eyed Junco 6	

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



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