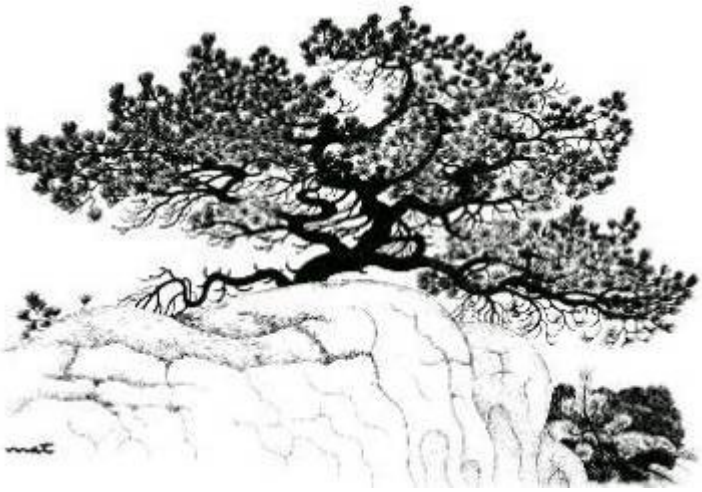


TORREYANA

THE DOCENT NEWSLETTER FOR
TORREY PINES
STATE NATURAL RESERVE

Issue 496 **December 2026**

CEED: Behind the Scenes at the Ramona Wildlife Center

by Deborah Jones

On November 20, a beautiful sunny day, 20 Torrey Pines docents (the limit allowed) enjoyed a rare behind-the-scenes tour of the San Diego Humane Society's Ramona Wildlife Center, an animal rehabilitation center not ordinarily open to the public. The 13-acre facility is part of the Humane Society's Project Wildlife program dedicated to rehabilitating injured, sick, and orphaned wild animals and returning them to their natural habitats whenever possible.

Our guide, Autumn, welcomed us with some impressive facts about the center's work. Across Project Wildlife's two rehabilitation campuses, approximately 10,000 wild animals are cared for annually. While the San Diego campus near Mission Valley handles smaller patients such as songbirds, hummingbirds, and squirrels, the Ramona facility specializes in larger wildlife, including raptors, coyotes, bobcats, mountain lions, and black bears.



Ramona is one of only two facilities in California permitted to rehabilitate mountain lions and one of just three that can rehabilitate bears. Some of these animals require many months of care before they're ready to return to the wild. Releasing such powerful animals is carefully coordinated with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), which selects appropriate release locations. Bears and mountain lions are fitted with tracking collars that transmit information about their movements and behavior for up to a year after release.

Autumn exclaimed, "The best part of our job is seeing the animals go back to the wild."

A Hospital for Wildlife

Our tour took us past rehabilitation enclosures, specialized aviaries, and the medical building where newly admitted animals are examined and treated. Autumn described how staff assess each animal's condition, determine whether treatment is possible, and develop an individualized care plan. Among the patients receiving treatment were raccoons that had suffered severe burns during a wildfire near Santa Clarita. (Cont. on pg. 3.)

You're Invited! Holiday Potluck

When: Saturday, December 12
11:00 am - 2:00 pm

Where: St. James Community Hall
625 S. Nardo Avenue, Solana Beach
Onsite parking available

RSVP: There's still time to sign up to bring either an **appetizer**, **main dish**, **salad/side dish**, or **dessert**.

1) Click here to go to the Sign-Up Genius page. Please include a comment with the dish you're bringing.
2) Email us at tpdocents2026@gmail.com. Tell us how many people are coming and what dish you're bringing.

Coffee, tea, and water will be provided.
Feel free to bring a beverage of your choice.

Hope to see you there! The Class of 2026

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 **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: Matt Xavier
Vice-president: Harry Proctor
Treasurer: Lynne Truong
Secretary: Ed Saade
Directors-at-large:
Robert (Bob) Friedman
Paul Howard
Mary Makowski
Mukesh Mehta
Jamee Patterson

TPSNR Staff:
Supervising Ranger: Stephanie Adams
Rangers: Kevin Escalante, Vince Gudenau, Kyle Knox
Interpreter I: Rowan Jackman
Sr. Interpretive Park Aide: Lila Beth Scott
Sr. Park Aide: Hanna Nason

© Torrey Pines Docent Society
Since 1975
All rights reserved

FLASH - Don't forget to donate your nature and conservation magazines to the Museum Shop when the Reserve opens in March.

President's Message: The Importance of Training New Docents Each Year



Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve is a remarkable natural treasure, but its preservation and educational mission depend on more than the beauty of its landscape. They depend on the people who welcome visitors, share knowledge, protect its resources, and inspire others to appreciate this special place. That is why training a new cadre of docents each year is so important.

Bringing in new docents ensures the continued strength, vitality, and sustainability of our volunteer organization. As longtime docents retire, reduce their hours, or move on to other commitments, we must continually replenish our ranks to maintain the programs and services that make the Reserve so special. Without a steady investment in new volunteers, we risk losing our ability to serve visitors and support State Parks effectively.

Each new class brings fresh perspectives, diverse experiences, and new ideas. Just as important, training provides an opportunity to pass along the knowledge, traditions, and values that define our docent community. It allows experienced docents to become mentors and leaders, strengthening relationships across generations of volunteers.

Training new docents is about cultivating a shared commitment to stewardship, education, collaboration, and service. Every new docent represents another voice advocating for conservation and another opportunity to connect visitors with the natural world.

Ultimately, investing in a new class each year is an investment in the future of Torrey Pines. We are not just training volunteers; we are building the next generation of stewards who will help ensure that this extraordinary Reserve remains protected and appreciated for generations to come. New Docent Training for 2027 will begin in March, with classes held on Wednesday mornings.

I want to thank the Nominating Committee for their excellent work this year. Not only did they recruit a healthy list of potential board members, but for the first time in our Society's history, they conducted an on-line election! Let's thanks Chair **Lisa Kakone, Robert James, Roger Isaacson, Gary McCook** and **Rosemary Wareham**.

Matt Xavier
TPDS President

Contents

Ramona Wildlife Center	1
Construction Update	4
2027 Board Elected	4
Meeting Minutes	5
Docent of the Month	5
2027 Dues Are Due	6
What's On the Beach	6
History	7
Youth Program	7
CA Park Association Meeting	8
CEED: Cuyamaca Garden	8
Lodge Restoration	9
Bird of the Month	10
Bee of the Month	10
Book Club	11

(Cont. from pg. 1.)

Their injuries included burned paws, whiskers, eyes, and fur. The center relies heavily on dedicated volunteers, who assist with preparing specialized diets, bottle-feeding orphaned animals, and providing daily care.

Native Plants: More Than Just Landscaping

One particularly interesting initiative involves planting native vegetation inside and around the rehabilitation enclosures. Golden currant shrubs, for example, produce berries that young coyotes can discover and eat. Native sages provide opportunities for sniffing, marking, and rubbing. Similar native plantings are being used in the bear enclosures. The objective is to help animals recognize natural foods and practice behaviors they'll need after release.

As Autumn humorously reminded us, "In the wild, they're not going to get food from Albertsons!"

For Torrey Pines docents, this was a wonderful illustration of something we frequently emphasize: native plants are essential to healthy wildlife habitats.

Owl School: Learning to Hunt

The center's aviaries accommodate an impressive variety of raptors, including hawks, owls, eagles, falcons, and ospreys. We learned that young great horned owls are particularly curious and playful. After researching their natural behavior, the center's veterinarian introduced sticks and other enrichment objects into their enclosures. The youngsters practice grasping, manipulating, and carrying objects – skills that help prepare them for capturing prey in the wild. It's a fascinating example of how understanding animal behavior can improve rehabilitation techniques.

Coyotes, Mange, and the Hidden Dangers of Rat Poison

Another memorable discussion concerned mange, a debilitating skin disease caused by microscopic mites. Some coyotes arrive at the center almost completely bald, with thickened skin and painful sores. Fortunately, appropriate veterinary treatment can eliminate the mites, and the animals may eventually regrow their fur and return to the wild. Autumn also discussed the troubling association between rodenticide exposure and mange in coyotes. When coyotes consume poisoned rodents, the toxins can affect their health and potentially increase their vulnerability to disease. It's an important reminder that what we put into the environment can have unintended consequences throughout the food web.

Giving Orphaned Raptors a Second Chance

Not every young bird found alone needs rescuing. The center has developed a specialized program to reunite young raptors with their parents whenever possible. Specially trained volunteers investigate nesting sites and determine whether babies can safely be returned. Sometimes that means constructing an entirely new nest using a basket purchased from Michaels craft store! When reunification isn't possible, young birds may sometimes be placed with foster parents of the same species. Autumn explained that additional chicks can sometimes be accepted and raised alongside the foster parents' own young.

Some Very Special Animal Encounters

Of course, the animals themselves were a highlight of the morning. We met Copper, a rosy boa, who gave docents an opportunity for a close encounter with one of Southern California's native snakes.

Wildlife specialist Bradley introduced us to Kwa'Pai, a magnificent red-shouldered hawk who arrived at Project Wildlife as a hatchling in 2004. Blind in his right eye, Kwa'Pai could not safely be released into the wild and instead became an educational ambassador. His name means "chief" in a dialect of the Kumeyaay people.



Kwa'Pai, the red-shouldered hawk

We also met Brawley, a female coyote who was raised by a member of the public after being found alone as a pup. Having become too accustomed to human attention and care, she could not be returned to the wild.

Some docents even had the opportunity to feed Rita, a northern raccoon, through her enclosure fence. Rita arrived as an orphaned infant and, after requiring additional medical care and becoming habituated to people, found a permanent home at the center as a wildlife ambassador.

And then there was Hannah Shirley, the center's extraordinary pygmy hippopotamus. Hannah, who was rescued from a private backyard in Escondido in 2002, holds the world record for the oldest pygmy hippo in managed care. She just celebrated her 53rd birthday and lives in a spacious habitat with a pond and pool. Seeing this remarkable animal up close was an unexpected treat. And when Hannah opened her enormous mouth, we got a memorable look at those formidable teeth!



Hannah Shirley, the pygmy hippopotamus

A New Appreciation for Wildlife Rehabilitation

Perhaps the most important lesson of the day was that wildlife rehabilitation involves far more than treating injuries. It requires specialized veterinary care, carefully designed diets, naturalistic habitats, behavioral

enrichment, and considerable patience. For those of us who spend time interpreting the plants, animals, and ecosystems of Torrey Pines, the visit offered a deeper appreciation for the challenges wildlife faces – and the dedicated people working to give injured and orphaned animals a second chance.

Many thanks to the Ramona Wildlife Center staff and volunteers for welcoming us and sharing their knowledge, enthusiasm, and remarkable animal ambassadors!

To learn more, visit: San Diego Humane Society — Ramona Wildlife Center

Construction Update

photos by Supervising Ranger Stephanie Adams

Here are two photos showing how the construction in the upper Reserve is progressing. The first is the ADA-accessible trail at the Lodge. The second is a new trail to access the upper Reserve trailhead from the top of the park road without walking through the West parking lot.





2027 Board Elected

by Lisa Kakone, for the Nominating Committee+

The Nominating Committee conducted this year's election for the Torrey Pines Docent Society Board of Directors between November 1 and 7. Ballots were sent to 227 eligible docents (active, lifetime, and associate). A total of 107 ballots were cast on "day one." A reminder e-mail was sent out on November 5, and an additional 30 ballots were submitted.

This is the first year our election was conducted using an e-ballot. In prior years, our by-laws required that we vote using a "show of hands" at our November general meeting. As general meeting attendance rarely goes above 70, we were delighted that our new methodology nearly doubled participation in the election.

Please note that the first term in which a person is elected to the Board is two years in length. Subsequent terms are for one year. There are no term limits.

Board Officers
Matt Xavier – President
Jamee Jordan Patterson – Vice President
Ed Saade*– Secretary
Wayne Kornreich – Treasurer

Directors at Large
Bob Friedman
Linda Brown
Mukesh Mehta*
Mary Makowski*
Paul Howard*

The Nominating Committee would like to thank all of the individuals who ran for offices; we recognize that any of these individuals would have made excellent Board members. We would also like to express gratitude to departing officers, **Lynne Truong** (Treasurer) and **Harry Proctor** (Vice President) and wish our new Board success in 2027.

**Board members returning for the second year of their first term.*

*+Members of the Nominating Committee are **Lisa Kakone** (chair), **Roger Isaacson, Gary McCook, Robert James,** and **Rosemary Wareham***

General Meeting Minutes: November 14, 2026

The speaker was unable to attend. President **Matt Xavier** led the business meeting. 75 docents attended.

Docent of the Month: **Elaine Vuong**, class of 2025, works at the Lodge, TIK, and BLIK.

Lisa Kakone, chair of the Nominating Committee, announced the results of the vote for the 2027 **Docent Society board**. **Linda Brown** and **Bob Friedman** won seats as at-large members in the competitive part of the election. (See article on pg. 4 for the full results.) **Bob Friedman** was thanked for facilitating the change in the by-laws to enable us to vote online.

Bruce and **Patty Montgomery**, coordinators of the **Youth Program**, encouraged docents to sign up for shifts before the program starts in March. (See article on pg. 7.)

Holiday Potluck Party: Julie Reynolds announced that invitations have been sent out for the Holiday Potluck on December 12. Docents can sign up using the QR code or by using the link that was sent out separately (see notice on pg. 1). 47 people have signed up already. There will be live musical entertainment.

Roving Interpreter: Gabriele Wienhausen announced a training for the program on December 4 via Zoom. This will be open to all docents, especially the class of 2026 and those interested in a refresher course. It will be recorded for later viewing.

Docent of the Year: Matt asked for nominations for this award, which will be presented at the Holiday Potluck. The board has already received 11 nominations.

Construction Project: Matt announced the creation of a trail beginning at the Stop sign at the top of the park road to connect visitors directly to the main trailhead without entering the West parking lot. Also the ADA ramp behind the Lodge has been completed. (See photos on pg. 4.)

Matt announced that we are currently in the process of renewing our cooperative agreement with State Parks for another five years. We are also working on our Standard Operating Procedures with Alexandra Latona, Interpreter III, and Lisa Adams, District Superintendent. When that document has been completed, there will be a Town Hall to share it with the Docent Society.

Jamee Patterson reported on her participation at the biennial meeting of the California State Parks Association. (See her article on pg. 8.)

New Docent Training will start in March on Wednesdays. Sign-ups will be available on the website.

The January general meeting will be over Zoom.

Docent of the Month: Elaine Vuong

photo by Herb Knufken



My family came from South Vietnam and settled in San Diego in the late 70s. While attending UCSD, I minored in Visual Arts and often came to TPSNR to sketch or hike. I fell in love with everything about this beautiful sea bluff: botany, geology, lagoons, and pre-contact history. After graduation I moved to New Jersey to work for AT&T Bell Labs as a systems engineer and attended graduate school. I then relocated to Colorado for over 16 years and spent two years on O'ahu, returning to San Diego frequently to visit family. I moved back to the Carmel Valley area 15 years ago to work at UCSD and raise my 2 children. By then, thanks to social media, TPSNR had become a popular destination attracting millions of visitors annually, and the heavy impact was sadly visible everywhere. I came to appreciate the Torrey Pines docents' interpretive work and efforts to help care for the Reserve. After retiring I joined the docent training program in late 2024, finally realizing my dream of lifelong learning through volunteering alongside our amazing group of docents.

Having traveled around the world and lived in different time zones, I learned how cultures can live more sustainably in harmony with nature, particularly from indigenous groups' respectful stewardship of natural resources. Four decades of backcountry camping and skiing in the northern Appalachians, Rockies, and Sierras, and canoeing on many rivers, have given me glimpses of how land development has altered so much in such a short time. I hope to learn about and share with visitors, especially the younger generation, how we all can get involved and make a difference.

Being a newly minted docent, I am grateful to our many senior docents for their guidance. It has been a fun and rewarding learning curve volunteering regularly at the Lodge, TIK, and BLIK and participating in the many continuing education events. ***Barbara Wallach***, ***Pao Chau*** *and* ***Ingo Renner*** *have been especially helpful in satisfying my obsession with plants and their medicinal uses. My mentor* ***Mukesh Mehta****'s geology talks have inspired a fascination with the earth's "stories" all around us. The BLIK team leaders have been very encouraging of new docents. After just over one year I feel more confident being on "solo" shifts. I consider myself very fortunate to have the opportunity to volunteer alongside fellow docents at a place we all love.*

2027 Dues Are Due!

by Lynne Truong, TPDS Treasurer

It's time to pay dues to renew your membership with the Torrey Pines Docent Society. Dues are **$25** if by **cash** or by **check** payable to TPDS; or **$26** by PayPal**.** Dues are waived for Lifetime members.

You can bring your check to the holiday party on December 12 or mail it to: TPDS, 1155 Camino Del Mar #404, Del Mar, CA 92014-2605.

It is important to pay your dues and log your hours in Better Impact by Dec 31. Your 2026 service hours determine your 2027 membership status within TPDS.

Active: 42 hours

Associate: less than 42 hours; an Associate Member Application must be filled out

Friends: no service hours required; no parking sticker

If your current status is Active and you won't have 42 hours by the end of this year, you must fill out an Associate Application for 2027 and pay your dues to get your parking sticker for 2027.

If your current status is Associate and you won't have 42 hours by the end of this year, you do not automatically qualify for Associate Status for 2027. You must fill out a request for an exception to remain as an Associate for 2027 and pay your dues to get your parking sticker for 2027.

State Park Volunteer (VIP) passes, when applicable, will be mailed to you by State Parks.

VIP District park pass: 100 hours; free day use to all State Parks in the San Diego Coast District.

VIP State park pass: 200 hours; free day use at all California State Parks.

What's on the Beach? Tidepools

by Kathy Dickey

This article will tell you about some places to find the best tidepools in San Diego. Future articles will focus on the creatures and plants found in those tidepools. Remember: wear good shoes with a strong grip for those slippery rocks covered with algae. And tell everyone: "*don't mess with the fragile creatures!*" Always look for good low tides (minus numbers are best) and check weather conditions. El Niño conditions may wash up some rarely seen organisms, although warmer water and air may move some creatures away if they feel they are evaporating.

If you are walking on Torrey Pines State Beach at low tide, tidepools can be hard to find. Check out Flat Rock (a.k.a. Bathtub Rock) and look down inside or at the ocean sides of the rock. You might find some surprises. About half a mile south of Flat Rock are some large boulders that shelter tidepools.

One of the best places for tidepools is La Jolla. Dike Rock area is north of Scripps Pier. It is a formation of dark rock that looks similar to lava rock and is 10 to 12 million years old. You have to climb over the large dike to get to the tidepools on the other (ocean) side.

South of the Marine Room restaurant in La Jolla is an excellent area of large, flat outcrops such that you can see many organisms without getting wet. Other La Jolla areas include Hospital Point, near Coast Boulevard north of Pearl Street, and Rockpile, at the corner of Fern Glen and Neptune Place. Continuing south in La Jolla are the Big Rock tidepool areas, accessed from Camino de la Costa between Cortez Avenue and Via del Norte. The Bird Rock and False Point tidepool areas can be seen after going down the stairway at the corner of Sea Ridge Drive and Linda Way and walking north.

The area from Ocean Beach Pier south to Cable Street has numerous tidepools with a wide variety of sea life.

Point Loma also has some excellent tidepool areas. At the north end of Sunset Cliffs is Osprey Point, between Adair Street and Osprey Street. Follow a steep path just north of Hill Street to some large boulders to see the tidepools. Another area is at the end of Sunset Cliffs Boulevard and Ladera Street, with a long stairway leading down to boulders and cobbles and a flatter area with tidepools.

A popular tidepool spot is Cabrillo National Monument at the south end of Point Loma. Take the right-hand turnoff before the Monument entrance. The protected tidepools there are easy to see, and there are more of them to the north and south. There are also some signs that give information about the plants and animals.

Heading north from Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve on Highway 101 is Cardiff State Beach. Go to the south parking lot and head south on the beach to see the flat rocks and tidepools covered with diverse creatures.

Further north, south of K Street in Encinitas, is Swami's Reef. After taking the long stairway down to the beach, head to the north where flat, tablelike rocks can be found covered with sea life.

Enjoy finding tidepools and their amazing creatures! Watch also for shorebirds that often come along to enjoy a low-tide feast.



San Diego Tidepool source: https://globalmunchkins.com/

Horsing Around at Torrey Pines

by Judy Schulman, TPDS Historian

It's hard enough on a busy day to get up the hill at the Reserve. We have to contend with bicycle riders, hikers, and automobiles. But what if we had to also contend with horses?

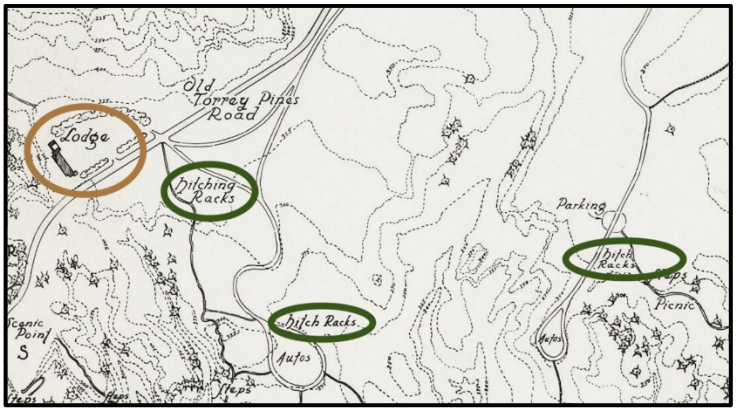
The earliest reference to having riding trails in our park was part of Mayor Edwin M. Capps's June 19, 1899 statement in favor of creating a Torrey Pines City Park. He recommended clearing the brush away from the pines, laying out roads and bridle paths through the tract, and putting up a good barbed wire fence around the area. Torrey Pines would officially become a city park on August 10, 1899.

Riders came from both Del Mar and La Jolla. The Hotel Del Mar featured horseback rides through Torrey Pines in its 1927 ads. There was even a *Los Angeles Examiner* feature showing horses in front of the hotel. The headline read "Life's Just a Joyride." The photo caption read "Every morning a group of equestrians assembles at Del Mar Hotel for a jog over bridle paths that run along the Pacific and into Torrey Pines."

The first mention I could find of equestrians from the La Jolla area was in 1924. After riding to Torrey Pines, the La Jolla Bridle Paths Association had a dinner of steak, spaghetti, and coffee. Over the years, the group had rides that featured dinners, BBQs, lunches, teas, and breakfasts. Some of meals were supplied by the Lodge. For others, they brought their own food to cook in the outdoor BBQs to the side of the Lodge (south of the current-day Pavilion). There were even moonlight rides (sounds dangerous to me). Guy Fleming presided over a few events where a steak fry was offered. One time he even invited some of the riders into his home for an impromptu songfest. In 1927, a group of them held their business meeting in his home. The main item on the agenda was the promotion of bridle trails along the Torrey Pines road, La Jolla Canyon, and other scenic venues.

So this brings to mind two questions. First, where did they get food and water for the horses? I assume they nibbled on the vegetation available to them in the park. But what about water? The second question is where exactly did the riders "park" their horses while they were eating? It might be a bit smelly and unsanitary if it was near the Lodge. I found a 1931 map that answers that question. There were at least five hitching racks around the park. The nearest one to the Lodge was just north of where the bathrooms (porta potties) now are. The same map also showed where the bridle trails were. I have included a section of it for this article. If you would like to see the entire map, google "1931 Improvement Map for Torrey Pines Preserve." In 1939 the park was closed to the public for six weeks so that bridle and foot trails could be reconditioned. Work was provided by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) with materials supplied by the estate of Ellen Browning Scripps.

With the building of World War II's Camp Callan, there were fewer rides in the park and only a few newspaper mentions of rides between 1945 and 1949. Now the only horses in the park are Ford Pintos, Mustangs, and Broncos.



Improvement map for Torrey Pines Preserve
San Diego County, 1931

Spring is Right Around the Corner! Claim Your Place in the Youth Program

by Patty and Bruce Montgomery

On Tuesday, October 6, teachers from around the county went online to reserve one of the 28 dates open for classroom visits to Torrey Pines. By Friday, teachers had reserved all of those spots. The program will run from March to May on Tuesdays and Thursdays, plus two Fridays a month.

On November 11, docents were invited to sign up as walk leaders or presenters. By the time of our general meeting three days later, docents had already signed up for 84 out of 197 of those spots. The children attending are 7 to 11 years old, and all of the topics and grade levels are still available.

Whether you are an experienced or new docent, we encourage you to survey the diversity of topics we offer and the grade levels coming to the Reserve.

If you have participated in the Children's Program in the past, go on Better Impact to the Opportunities List, and select Youth Program Walk Leader under the Guided School Programs. You will see a detailed chart of the 28 scheduled visits and can sign up for your favorites.

If you have not volunteered before in the program, you can still see the dates, schools, grades, and topics by logging into the docent website (torreypine.org). Once there, select Volunteering, then Docent Login and scroll down to Guided School Program. Look for "Detailed Schedule is available HERE…" and click on the word HERE to see the details.

If you are new to the program, contact us to shadow a walk or two this March and then lead a walk with a seasoned docent who can answer questions, offer tips, and certify you as a walk leader.

Reach out to us if you have questions. We'll see you on the trails.

Meeting of the California League of Park Associations

by Jamee Jordan Patterson

I had the honor and pleasure of representing the Torrey Pines Docent Society at the biennial meeting of the California League of Park Associations (CALPA) in Santa Rosa, on November 3 to 5. CALPA is the umbrella for organizations working to support California State Parks and its 280 park units, one of which is Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve. For 35 years, CALPA has worked to improve access to protected lands and waters, adapt to the real challenges ahead, and share resources and knowledge about our precious state parks. CALPA provides opportunities for Parks-related organizations to network, share ideas, and discuss what works (and, frankly, what doesn't work). The conference theme this year was "*Common Ground: Connecting People, Parks, and Purpose*."



The Water Wheel at Bale Grist Mill Historic State Park

Representatives from numerous Parks associations attended, including members of cooperative associations (such as ours), nonprofit park operators, and nonprofit fundraising organizations. Armando Quintero, Director of California State Parks, who participated in all three days of the conference, noted that a large percentage of state parks are co-managed with nonprofits and that volunteers are greatly valued. He said that State Parks is strongly focused on indigenous peoples and climate change, as well as on interpretation and education as the keys to getting people to care about the State Park system.

Importantly, State Parks is working on a "Interpretation and Education Strategic Plan" to be released at the end of this year. I also attended a number of breakout sessions including ones on cooperative association agreements, nurturing volunteers, and bridging the gap between nonprofits and State Parks.

Also attending the conference was **Gabriele Wienhausen**, representing the Torrey Pines Conservancy, one of the supporting fundraising organizations.

It was a rewarding experience. I came away with a greater appreciation for all that we in the TPDS do for our park and how truly lucky we are, as Californians, to have such precious and beautiful state parks to enjoy. Having visited several state parks during the conference, I have a new goal: to visit as many of the 280 state parks units that I can and, just maybe, all of them.

CEED: Cuyamaca Water Conservation Garden

by Rachel Scherba

On a beautiful sunny morning in late October, 14 docents traveled to El Cajon for a very interesting and informative tour of the Water Conservation Garden at Cuyamaca College. This garden was established in 1999, and its goal is to educate the public about water conservation and the sustainable use of natural resources. It was interesting to learn that four water districts provide financial support for the garden: Helix, Otay, Sweetwater, and Grossmont-Cuyamaca.

Our guide, Carol Stevens, a volunteer with over 2500 hours of service, took us through a series of demonstration gardens with drought-tolerant plants from around the world. There was an extensive California native plant garden, a backyard makeover area, a bird and butterfly garden, a succulent garden, a design loop, erosion and rain garden exhibits, a sustainable kitchen garden, a very informative "firewise" exhibit, and exhibits of composting, grey water, turf, and mulch. As residents of San Diego County, we were especially interested to learn how to create more sustainable, water-wise gardens, as well as the best ways to prevent erosion and create a fire barrier around our homes. The trip offered us ways to explain to our Torrey Pines visitors, especially the young ones, how we all can contribute to the sustainable use of our natural resources.

I highly encourage all docents who haven't yet visited the Water Conservation Garden to make time to explore its many exhibits. It is well worth the trek. The Garden is open from 9 am to 2 pm on Tuesday through Thursday and from 9 am to 4 pm on Friday and Saturday.



Lodge Restoration Update

by Corbin Schuppert, CA State Parks Restoration Specialist

November has brought both good and bad news to the San Diego Coast District. A new member of the District's restoration program, Juan Salinas-Guerro, finished his introductory week which included an intensive tour of the district's adobe structures and a crash course in various failures and successes of the past decade's restoration attempts. Juan's enthusiasm for historic buildings and respect for environmental preservation will be a perfect fit in the continued development of our district's conservation efforts.

Much of his district tour included observing and recording water-driven damage from the first significant rainstorms of this winter's "Super el Niño." Water is both a key ingredient of adobe construction and the main driver of its destruction. Building corners, walls, windows, roofs, details, and more are already showing signs of weakness across our district as the first rains of this historically wet season have unfolded. Covering and protecting vulnerable parts of the district's adobe structures have become a priority, but additional variables such as high winds have already deterred protective efforts. Temporary coverings at the Torrey Pines Lodge were shredded to pieces by the high winds of the storm front in early November and have sent the restoration team back to the drawing board to contemplate more robust fixes to a potentially destructive season ahead.

Although seasonal crises bring new challenges, the saga of conservation unfolds over decades, and on the whole, I am sure a commitment to learning the strengths and weaknesses of our precious adobe structures will move us in the right direction.



Failed "canale" or "gargoyle" on the Lodge roof



Previously repaired wood rot on the rear of the Lodge delaminates and invites more water damage



Rear wall behind the Lodge continues to present hazards and worsen with every rain event

Bird of the Month: Ring-billed Gull

by Robert James; photo by Ohio Department of Natural Resources

The Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*) is definitely not a "***sea***gull." Instead, it can be found mostly along the immediate coastline and throughout much of the interior U.S., southern Canada, and Mexico, with increased numbers at the Reserve in the winter. In fact, it is the most widespread gull in San Diego County. The mature (at least three-year-old) adult has a distinct dark ring around its bill and yellow legs that can be easily seen in good light.

This species is a prime example of an omnivore, eating natural food (including fishes, rodents, fruit, and insects), grains, and even garbage. Regarding garbage, adventuresome birders looking for interesting species have taken advantage of the gull's propensity for landfills. Gulls' webbed feet are often underappreciated as an adaptation; the webbing makes these gulls excellent swimmers as they acquire food in an aquatic environment.



The Ring-billed Gull is one of four gull species frequenting the Reserve whose mature adults can be identified – even if one has limited experience. Two of the other species, the Western Gull (*L. occidentalis*) and Heermann's Gull (*L. heermanni*), have been the subject of past articles. The California Gull (*L. californicus*), a species with an interesting historical story, will be covered in a future article. At the BLIK, there will be a new *Common Gulls of Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve* with photos of adults and juveniles, including helpful identification tips to share with visitors.

Learning about the status, distribution, and movements of birds allows for conservation as well as educational efforts on their behalf. Banding birds with metal and/or auxiliary markers such as color bands, which has been done since the early 20th century, has increased understanding. With the help of these data, the Ring-billed Gull has been found to be widespread and abundant, with its movements well known. As a student, I learned to use radio telemetry, another tool adding information, but it is limited by its short range and the challenges of receiving signals in hilly terrain. Radio transmitters of the time were also heavy, hampered by limited battery life, and prone to malfunction.

With recent reductions in transmitter weight, it has become possible to put them on the smallest birds and even butterflies, with acceptable battery duration (or the use of a small solar panel). You can see here the movements of Ring-billed Gulls in greater detail than was possible before. While in Cape May (NJ) recently, I visited a company that manufactures these specialized devices. They are also deploying the next advancement, which is to link to cellular networks, which will provide more granular data on movements and habitat use. The MOTUS (Latin for movement) is an international radio tracking network of over 2,500 stations that can receive these telemetry signals and makes the data publicly available for research and conservation efforts. The two closest locations to the Reserve are in Carlsbad and at the Cabrillo National Monument. A new MOTUS station will be opening soon on Scripps Pier.

Bee of the Month: Blood Bee

by Robert James; photo by Phil Roullard

You probably have never seen anything like the blood bee (*Sphecodes*), which is uncommonly reported at the Reserve and in our region. Its common name arises from the striking reddish coloration on the abdomen of most species. It may have arisen as a warning coloration to make them look more like wasps. The Latin name is also apt, referring to their wasp-like body, and they do not collect pollen, only visiting flowers for nectar. A closer look, however, identifies them as bees due to the presence of branched and feathery hairs. Also, their wing venation pattern shows their sweat bee lineage.

Blood bees, as brood parasites, lay their eggs in the ground nest of their hosts, which are commonly other related sweat bees such as *Lasioglossum* and *Halictus*. Both bee genera occur in high numbers at the Reserve. Blood bees are one of the cuckoo bees – the name refers to Old World cuckoo birds that lay their eggs in other species' nests. There are about 350 *Sphecodes* species around our world, and since their taxonomy is not resolved, there may be more. Only one, *S. arvensiformis*, has been identified in San Diego County.

Blood bee adults prefer to enter unguarded nests to eliminate eggs from the host nest but sometimes are attacked by the hosts and must fight back and defend themselves. An adaptation is that blood bees have hardened exoskeletons that help deflect the stings and mandibles of their angry hosts. Since bees do not see red, they may not be seen well by host species and gain an advantage. Females of some blood bee species also can stay in the nests of their hosts and become "social parasites" by continuously laying eggs in place of the host species.



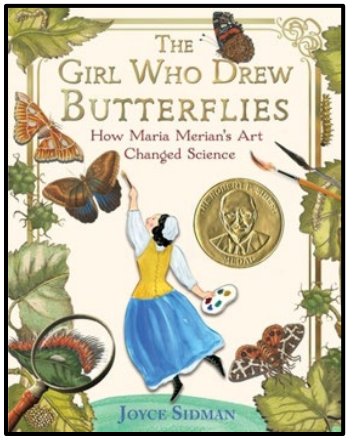
Blood bees are mostly seen here in the spring to early summer but are easy to overlook as they are small to medium-sized. In addition, they superficially resemble the common grass skipper (*Paragus haemorrhous*), which is a small, often-seen hoverfly. The oval-headed sweat bee (*Lasioglossum ovaliceps*) that WannaBees have observed at the Reserve also looks similar. Another challenge is that it can be expected that cuckoo bees occur in smaller numbers than other bee species that raise their own broods; it is therefore reasonable there would be fewer to find. That said, carefully looking in the spring for patrolling blood bees flying low over groups of ground-nesting sweat bees could allow you to spot these unusual bees.

Torrey Pines Book Club

We will continue to meet via Zoom at our regularly scheduled time. If you have any questions or need help getting connected on Zoom, please contact **Annette Ring**.

When: Tuesday, December 8, 1:00 pm

What: *The Girl Who Drew Butterflies: How Maria Merian's Art Changed Science* by Joyce Sidman



Amazon says:
In this beautiful biography, the Newberry Honor–winning author Joyce Sidman introduces readers to one of the first female entomologists and a woman who flouted convention in the pursuit of knowledge and her passion for insects. One of the first naturalists to observe live insects directly, Maria Sibylla Merian, who was born in 1647, was also one of the first to document the metamorphosis of the butterfly. It is richly illustrated throughout with full-color original paintings by the author.

In Merian's day, bugs of all kinds were considered to be "born of mud" and to be "beasts of the devil." Why would anyone, let alone a girl, want to study and observe them? *The Girl Who Drew Butterflies* answers this question.

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

January 12: *Wild Dark Shore* by Charlotte McConaghy

In reference to last month's book about John Muir, **Ken King** found a quote that perfectly sums up Muir's mission:

"*In the end, we will conserve only what we love; we will love only what we understand; and we will understand only what we are taught*." ~ Baba Dioum, Sengalese forestry engineer and conservationist in 1968.

Torrey Pines Docent Society Bird Survey: November 2026

Number of species: *80 (+5 other taxa)*

Gadwall 12
American Wigeon 40
Mallard 82
Northern Pintail 11
Green-winged Teal 5
Surf Scoter 7
Bufflehead 2
Red-breasted Merganser 3
Mourning Dove 14
White-throated Swift 17
Anna's Hummingbird 21
Allen's Hummingbird 23
American Coot 23
Hudsonian Whimbrel 7
Long-billed Curlew 2
Prairie Willet 26
Sanderling 6
Heermann's Gull 2
Ring-billed Gull 1
Western Gull 7
California Gull 7
gull sp. 1
large tern sp. 4
tern sp. 5
Pied-billed Grebe 4
Eared Grebe 7
Western Grebe 12
Clark's Grebe 2
Western/Clark's Grebe 7
loon sp. 1
Brandt's Cormorant 2
Pelagic Cormorant 1
Double-crested Cormorant 7
Snowy Egret 3
Great Egret 6
Great Blue Heron 9
Brown Pelican 20
Turkey Vulture 1
Osprey 2
White-tailed Kite 1
Cooper's Hawk 1
Northern Harrier 3
Red-shouldered Hawk 2
Red-tailed Hawk 4
Belted Kingfisher 1
Nuttall's Woodpecker 10
Northern Flicker 10
American Kestrel 11
Black Phoebe 16
Say's Phoebe 7
Cassin's Kingbird 9
Hutton's Vireo 1
California Scrub-Jay 10
American Crow 35
Common Raven 15
Bushtit 57
Wrentit 53
Swinhoe's White-eye 27
Ruby-crowned Kinglet 1
Red-breasted Nuthatch 3
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher 3
California Gnatcatcher 2
Northern House Wren 17
Bewick's Wren 5
California Thrasher 13
Northern Mockingbird 3
Western Bluebird 6
Hermit Thrush 15
Scaly-breasted Munia 27
House Finch 125
Red Crossbill 3
Lesser Goldfinch 53
Fox Sparrow 1
Dark-eyed Junco 4
White-crowned Sparrow 30
Golden-crowned Sparrow 5
Savannah Sparrow 2
Song Sparrow 46
California Towhee 39
Spotted Towhee 12
Western Meadowlark 15
Great-tailed Grackle 6
Orange-crowned Warbler 7
Common Yellowthroat 21
Yellow-rumped Warbler 211

Participants: *Donna Mancuso, Nancy Richardson, Paul Mulholland, Dinah Carl, Robert Turner, Karen Messer, Manolo Turner, Stephan Freeman, Debbie Regottaz, Andy Rathbone, Steve Neal, Robert James*

Christmas Bird Count is scheduled for January 3, 2027.

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

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