



The Watch

Newsletter of the Watsonville Wetlands Watch
Spring 2007

Through the Eyes of an Intern

By Aria Benham, UCSC Intern at the Fitz WERC

Sitting. Hoping. Thinking. Waiting. Wondering. Wishing. Wondering. Observing. Learning. And wondering. Wondering when he's going to stop looking at me. Why does he have to use that expression? And the way he tilts his head. He's so intimidating with his long legs and robust body. Is he going to just stand there and look at me forever? The minutes pass, but as though he could understand my thoughts, he begins to walk away. Just as easy that, I watch as he uses his long legs to stride away speechless.

A skilled fisherman and a beautiful creature, the egret is found standing still in the water to catch fish or adventuring through the grassland after the rains in search of frogs. As the days get shorter and the rain becomes more frequent, the staff at WERC are gearing up for excitement. The WERC crew is watching and waiting wide-eyed at what surprises are in store for this winter. The WERC crew includes coordinators, workers, docents, volunteers, interns and the kids of course. Rachel Garrett coordinates hands-on wetland education in the form of field trips for kids grades six through eight. Although the after school field trips only include kids in grades six through eight, you'll see kids of all ages involved. High schoolers from the Pajaro Valley High School work and volunteer at the WERC, helping with the field trips or within the greenhouse. One can also find younger children in the wetlands from a charter school that come to help restore the wetlands once a month, which includes kids anywhere from age six to age sixteen. Jonathon Pilch coordinates these restoration field trips and leads the children in different restoration activities such as removing non-natives and planting natives. As an intern I have the opportunity to work in both the field and in the classroom. I have had the pleasure of

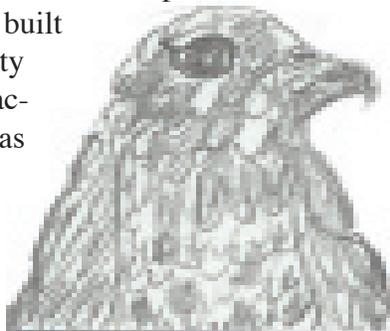
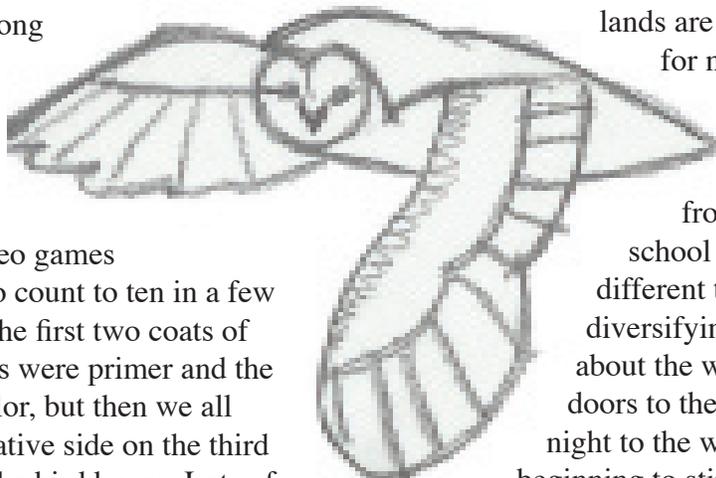
working with the children from the charter school, joining them in their restoration efforts. I have also had the pleasure of working with the after school programs, assisting Rachel in her efforts to educate and encourage middle schoolers to understand and appreciate our wetlands.

Recently I helped with an after school education field trip about cavity dwelling birds. We start off each field trip with an in class activity. These activities introduce the kids to the topic we will be working on for the day. The activities consist of a worksheet filled with questions, facts, a sound portion, and a drawing section. The classroom activity for the day was a barn owl worksheet. Questions from this activity ranged from "what is the barn owl's habitat" to "how do you think we can benefit with more barn owls in the wet-



lands" to what barn owls look and sound like. This worksheet activity was a great introduction to barn owls. From the worksheet students learned where barn owls live and nest, which guided them

straight into our next activity. Wood + Nails + Hammers + Paint + Kids ages 9-12= bird boxes. Hmm..kids, paint and hammers?! I'm not going to lie, I was a little apprehensive at first. But as we proceeded, I realized that most of the kids were better at using a hammer than I was (let's make that our little secret). I was very impressed with their carpentry skills. After everyone got a shot at using the hammer, we got to get down and dirty with the paint. Of course we were all excited to paint. As we painted we talked about the wetlands, along with other subjects that interested the kids. They told me about their favorite wetlands animals, the latest video games and we learned how to count to ten in a few different languages. The first two coats of paint on the bird boxes were primer and the second was a solid color, but then we all got to tap into our creative side on the third coat and camouflage the bird boxes. Lots of splattering and throwing paint around, never a dull moment here at WERC. Jose, a student from Rolling Hills Middle School, told me why it was so important to paint the bird boxes so they blended with their surrounding environment. Jose explained to me that it is "important that we paint the bird boxes natural colors rather than hot pink, for example, because if the owls were to have babies, hot pink would stand out far more than a natural color and this might attract predators or hot pink wouldn't be an appealing house for the owls to live in." This is a great example of how a hands-on project of building and painting bird boxes can teach kids about different aspects of wetland life. As we finished up we were all excited that we had built new homes for cavity dwellers! What an accomplishment! It was almost a habitat for humanity project but for wetland species. Although the day wasn't



packed with classroom work, I know the kids left the WERC today with an understanding of cavity dwellers, specifically the barn owl-but they also got some handy day-to-day knowledge. Today was a learning experience the kids can use inside, but just as importantly, outside the classroom. As more kids come for field trips to the wetlands resource center I am hopeful for the future of the wetlands because these kids come for the field trips, but they walk away realizing they play a vital role in the wetlands' future. Wetlands are a crucial natural habitat for native species and they also reduce flooding and erosion, and filter sediments and pollution from the water. Each after school field trip is devoted to a different topic within the wetlands, diversifying the knowledge shared about the wetlands. So as we lock the doors to the classroom and say good night to the wetlands, which are just beginning to stir with night time species, we are still wondering. But it is a hopeful curiosity which leads us to encourage our fellow earthlings to learn and observe on their own.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

"They [American Kestrels] will help eat the insects and animals that will harm plants." - Rudy Perez, Cesar Chavez Middle School

"[Barn Owls] can eat gophers, which go into people's backyards... If there were no more owls the gophers would destroy the garden." - Jose Guzmán, Cesar Chavez Middle School

Drawings:

'American Kestrel' Taylor Krilanovich, Mt. Madonna School
'Barn Owl' by Maribel Gonzalez, Rolling Hills Middle School

Introducing the Wetland Stewards Program

By Rachel Garrett, Fitz WERC Educational Programs Director

Aria has done a beautiful job describing how youth experience our wetlands hands-on through Wetland Stewards, our newest educational program at the WERC. In August 2006, the S.H. Cowell Foundation awarded a WWC a \$100,000, 2-year grant to develop a summer and after school program for PVUSD middle schoolers. Students participate in Wetland Stewards from extended learning programs at Rolling Hills, Cesar Chavez, Lakeview, and Pajaro Middle Schools. Over the next two years, Wetland Stewards will engage nearly 250 middle school students in local, hands-on activities that relate to the surrounding wetlands and watershed.

Wetland Stewards also provides wonderful mentoring opportunities to Pajaro Valley High School students. Over the next year and a half, more than 20 PVHS students will engage in vertical mentoring opportunities with middle school youth. These PVHS students will each develop a unique "Teach" project - a thematic project of their choosing that combines research, leadership training, a hands-on teaching tool, and an activity of their own geared toward 6th-8th graders. Examples of teach project themes students plan to undertake this semester include composting, bird homes in the wetlands, and a grassed waterway learning model. College interns like Aria, from UCSC, CSUMB, and Cabrillo, also have the chance to build skills in environmental education while assisting high school and middle school students in the program. I would like to thank our dedicated interns for their hard work, creative ideas, and enthusiasm - Aria Benham, Brooke Schneider, Caleb Schneider, and Lindsay Goldberg.

By Fall 2008, through the Wetland Stewards pilot program, Watsonville Wetlands Watch will produce a set of site specific middle school activities designed to appeal to Watsonville youth. Maggie Caldwell, our curriculum assistant, is working diligently with WWC staff, interns, teachers and students to adapt existing activities while adding new, creative, Watsonville twist to each activity. Activities will focus on the thematic areas including physical science, flora, fauna, and surrounding landscape.

Outdoor activities, such as Wetland Stewards activities and our restoration program, engage students in learning in ways the classroom cannot, by providing meaningful, hands-on connections. Studies indicate that hands-on environmental education helps build language skills among ELD learners. According to the USEPA Environmental Education Training and Partnership (EETAP) Program and Project Learning Tree, "Environmental education's constructivist orientation, which is active, hands-on, and student centered, embodies

instructional conditions that are highly compatible with the needs of ELD students."

To give you an idea of middle school students' work, with Aria's article you'll find a few quotes and a couple of works of art from students learning about cavity dwellers. I invite you to come by the WERC and learn more about Wetland Stewards, or check out our newly updated website for more information on the program and how you can become engaged as a docent volunteer: www.fitzwerc.org.

For more information on Wetland Stewards, contact Rachel Garrett at 831-728-1156.



New Volunteer Coordinator: Kathy Fieberling

by Ann Jenkins

“The docents make the job so rich,” said Kathy Fieberling who joined the WWW in August 2006. Kathy sees her charge as “re-energizing the existing docent groups.” To date, there have been three Wetlands Watch docent classes. On March 14, the 2007 docent class will begin a six week course to prepare them for assignments that are already stockpiling at WERC.

“We have specific things to do now. I initially needed docents to help with the many school field trips to the wetlands areas. Happily, we have a dedicated core group stepping up to the plate to assist with these continuous assignments”, she added.

Besides docent scheduling, Kathy sees her primary tasks as docent enrichment and docent recruitment and training. To further enrichment, she invited the WWW “family” (docents and families, staff and board members) to a festive Holiday pot luck featuring a world class stargazer from NASA-Ames.

Docent management is not unknown to Kathy. She admired her mother-in-law’s long term involvement as a docent with Long Marine Lab, Seymour Center. Kathy enrolled in and completed the docent training program for Wilder Ranch within the State Park system. After working some time as a docent, she decided she would enjoy paid employment with the state parks. From 2002-2004, she was the docent coordinator and interpreter for Henry Cowell State Park. Coincidentally, she and husband Karl were married in 1986 in front of the biggest redwood tree at Henry Cow-

ell. “I never knew then that one day I would work there,” she laughed. As docent coordinator, she tailored a docent program for some 100 docents which included recruiting, training, scheduling, communications (newsletter), docent recognition and docent enrichment. In her interpretive role, she coordinated all big events. As one example, she coordinated the 100 year anniversary of Teddy Roosevelt’s visit to Big Trees. Kathy continues with state parks as a ‘rover’ or substitute interpreter.

Kathy grew up on the Colorado plains. She graduated from the University of Colorado, and in 1982 she received an MBA from the business school there with an emphasis on information systems. As a single mom with a young son to support, she completed assignments for the computer industry from 1982-2002. For the last 10 years she worked as a technical consultant and trainer. “I taught technical people at places like Sun Microsystems and Netscape the internals of software and the internals of the internet technology and traveled all over the world.” In 1984, she moved to Santa Cruz “because I loved the natural landscape and the wildness here.” Later, after five-years in San Francisco, they moved back to Santa Cruz. “We reassessed and decided it was time to

simplify our lives and reduce the stress.”



To inspire appreciation and stewardship of the wetlands in local youth, the Wetlands Watch docents assist teachers during wetlands-related field trips.

Volunteer Spotlight: Alice Weigel

by Kathy Fieberling

When Alice Weigel retired from her teaching job in 2003, she knew that she wanted to get involved locally with an organization that shared her interest in wildlife preservation and habitat restoration. An outdoor sports enthusiast, she is an avid hiker who has a deep love of nature. Alice fulfilled her post-retirement dreams by becoming an early member of the Watsonville Wetlands Watch, and a docent in 2004 when she attended the first docent class.

As a docent, Alice has always shown initiative in finding projects to work on. Alice has taken it upon herself to perform trail cleanup, where she goes out with a partner and picks up trash on the trails. This is an unglamorous job that no one has asked her to do, but Alice does it because it greatly increases the quality of the experience for everyone who visits the wetlands.

Through the Wetlands Stewards afterschool program, local middle school students go on field trips to the wetlands and the Fitz Wetlands Education Resource Center (WERC). Watsonville Wetlands Watch docents were solicited to find a dedicated assistant for each teacher involved in the program, assisting that teacher's class every time they have a field trip. Alice volunteered and was assigned to Jay Trexler's class.

Jay Trexler is a teacher at Lakeview Middle School, where he runs an afterschool science program. Alice assists with his group's outings to the Fitz WERC, where they perform activities such as testing different kinds of soil for their water retention qualities, learning about composting creatures, and re-potting native plants from the greenhouse.

Yet once again, Alice decided to go above and beyond the basic requirements, and has volunteered to help Jay with his afterschool science program on-site at Lakeview Middle School every Tuesday. At the middle school, Alice assists the students working in the school's garden, where they are growing vegetables and native plants. They also plan to clean up the area around the lake near the school.

Alice is one of the key (and much needed) docents that help with field trips. She is also helping to organize the library at the Fitz WERC by entering data into the database and organizing books and shelves by call number.

Alice Weigel is the kind of person who goes that extra mile, which is typical of the dedicated people that are in our docent family. Thank you, Alice, for your contribution to Watsonville Wetlands Watch, the wetlands, and the community.

✓ DOCENT TRAINING PROGRAM

Enrollment for the Watsonville Wetlands Watch 2007 docent class is now open. The six-week training begins March 14 on Wednesday evenings and Saturday mornings at a cost of \$35.

Docents will be treated to an inside look at the Pajaro Valley and its wide network of wetlands. Training covers the ecology, history and restoration of the wetlands, and will prepare new docents to lead walks and assist teachers during field trips. In addition to supporting field trips, docents have the opportunity to help with wetlands restoration projects, work in the library or greenhouse at the Fitz Wetlands Education Resource Center, or host the WERC, on the Pajaro Valley High School campus.

The ideal docent is comfortable with young people, loves nature, and is a good communicator.

The Watsonville Wetlands Watch is a nonprofit community-based organization dedicated to the protection, restoration and appreciation of the wetlands of Pajaro Valley. To inspire appreciation and stewardship of the wetlands in local youth, the Watch oversees the development of wetlands-based curriculum in cooperation with local teachers. Through the docent program, the Wetlands Watch provides docents to assist teachers during wetlands-related field trips.

For more information or to enroll, please contact Kathy Fieberling, Volunteer Coordinator of the Watsonville Wetlands Watch, at 831-427-0654. The deadline for enrollment is March 7.

The Tale of Tar Plant Hill

by Jim Van Houten

January 2007 marks the first anniversary of the acquisition of Tarplant Hill by Watsonville Wetlands Watch.

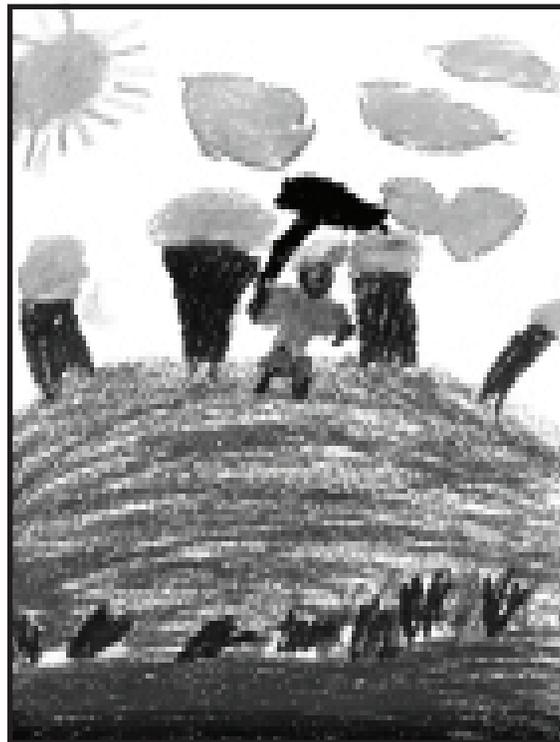
Tarplant Hill is a 6 acre parcel of land in the City of Watsonville that is one of the last remaining natural habitats in the area. It is bordered on two sides by dense residential subdivisions, on another by a major traffic artery, and on the fourth side by a branch of Struve Slough - a part of the Watsonville Slough System, 800 acres of prime fresh water wetlands. The property is home to a number of threatened or endangered species including the Santa Cruz tar plant, once thought to be extinct but re-discovered in the early 1970's. Of the 45 colonies eventually found, all but a dozen or so have been completely removed or destroyed. The property is also one of the few locations in the Watsonville Slough System that supports native grassland as well as providing an amphibian mitigation corridor. This critical habitat also supports California red-legged frogs and burrowing owl. Other species likely to be found on the property are marsh harriers, short-eared owls, white-tailed kites, peregrine falcons, and nesting cinnamon teal.

Tarplant Hill was originally part of the property that became the Bay Breeze Subdivision, the first major residential development in the immediate vicinity of the Watsonville Slough System. WWW had several major objections to the subdivision, as originally proposed. We ultimately sued the City of Watsonville and the developer, and in July 2000, won a partial victory in court. This led to a negotiated settlement that gave us a 3 year op-

tion to buy the property. The State Department of Fish and Game and their companion agency the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) expressed interest in the property and offered to assist us in acquiring it. We attempted to negotiate a purchase of the property with the owner, who is an experienced real estate developer and had very definite ideas about the worth of the land. We insisted that the price of the property should be based on an appraisal. We got an appraisal and submitted it to the owner. He felt it was too low. He got his own appraisal. We felt it was too high. We then had the option of going to arbitration but, instead, entered into a new agreement with the owner that called for both parties to agree on a neutral third appraiser and to accept the new appraisal as the true value of the property. When we took the new agreement, with the now agreed upon price, back to the WCB, they said they were bound by the first appraisal (that was much lower) and couldn't exceed that amount. They also said they didn't have money, at that time, to fund the acquisition. We ultimately went to Sacramento to meet with

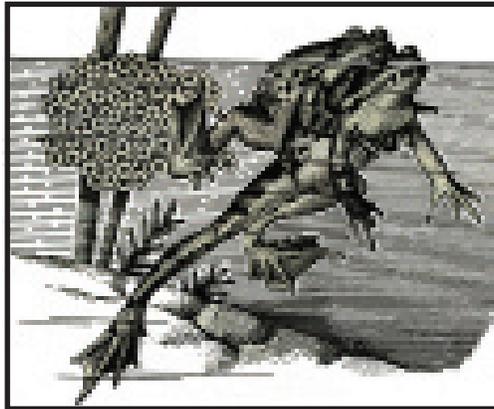
the WCB staff, Assemblyman John Laird's staff and with Fred Keeley. Eventually, we prevailed. The WCB approved funds for the acquisition and the sale of the property to WWW was completed in January of 2006.

WWW is planning extensive restoration work on the property using volunteers from the community, local school programs and Watsonville Wetlands Watch's corps of trained volunteers.



Where have all the frogs gone?

The Watsonville Wetlands Watch is sponsoring a talk about the endangered California Red-Legged Frogs on Wednesday March 7th, 6:30 to 8:30pm at the Fitz Wetlands Educational Resource Center, on the Pajaro Valley High School campus. The red legged frog was once common in the Watsonville wetlands. Where have all of these frogs gone? In his talk "Red Legged Frogs and Landscape Changes in the Pajaro Valley", wildlife biologist Gary Kittleson will tell us about



the known populations of frogs in the wetlands today, and will provide tips for identifying these slippery creatures by sight and sound. Gary will take us on a tour of the landscape changes of the Pajaro Valley and talk about how they have impacted amphibian populations over the last few decades. With over a decade of experience as a wildlife biologist in the Watsonville wetlands, Gary's insights and slides are not to be missed! For more information contact Jonathan at 831-728-4106.

LETTING DOWN THEIR ROOTS

by Jonathan Pilch

The Pajaro Valley has become green again and the plants are letting down their roots. Dark evenings, hard frosts and dry spells over these winter months have kept all of our native plants dormant, waiting for the first notes of spring. Elderberry and Dogwood branches lay leafless like arms outstretched, without a hint of green. But the days are warming and the light is lengthening and the world is beginning to change again. The wildflowers and native grasses and sedges that we've planted this year are awakening and some are already beginning to show their flowers.

We've planted over three thousand plants this past winter in the meadows and uplands of West Struve Slough, and for a while I thought that we were going to be in trouble. The weather was harsh and we had hardly any rain in January. But now that spring is coming, our plants have rebounded strong. Their capacity to keep their energy in their roots while their leaves dried out and withered was astounding; it seems that they were knowingly waiting until the right moment to send out tender new growth and reach for the sun. A great thanks to all who have contributed time and energy to the restoration of these meadows, uplands, and wetlands. We've had over 400 students and community members out planting this year, and we'll continue to plant for a while longer. May the rains continue, at least for a while, and spring wildflowers be bountiful.

See the calendar for opportunities to help the restoration projects.

Join Watsonville Wetlands Watch

and help protect our wetlands! Membership of \$25 a year/\$15 student or senior, supports efforts to preserve and protect slough systems in the Watsonville area. You will also receive *The Watch*, our quarterly newsletter.

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The Watch



The Watch

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Our mission:

The Watsonville Wetlands Watch is dedicated to protecting, restoring and appreciating the wetlands of the Pajaro Valley.

Calendar

Restoring our Wetlands: Upcoming dates are:
March 10 • March 24 • April 14 • April 28. Join other community volunteers to plant native plants, remove exotic invasive plants, and work in our native plant greenhouse. Meet at the Fitz Wetlands Educational Resource Center at 9am. We work until 12 noon - and always make time for a short walk around the wetlands. We supply the gloves, tools, and a snack. No experience necessary & people of all ages are encouraged.
For more information please call Jonathan at 728-4106 or email Jonathan@watsonvillewetlandswatch.org.

Red Legged Frog Talk: Wednesday March 7th
6:30 - 8:30pm at the Fitz Wetlands Education Resource Center. *See article on page 7.*

Earth Day/ Day of the Child: Saturday April 21
- Celebration at Ramsey Park.

A Fitz WERC Garden Party: Saturday April 28
9am - 12 noon

Once the weather has warmed the weeds will be sure to be growing. All are cordially invited to a garden party hosted by WWW's native plant garden committee. Join us to weed around the new native plant demonstration garden of the Fitz WERC. These events are always a lot of fun and are some of the best catered garden parties west of the Sierras. Let us know if you

would like to bring a dish, or simply come with a smile and join us to weed this new and beautiful educational garden.

