

# TRACKS

A Publication of the Newport Bay Naturalists & Friends

December-February  
2006-2007

## The Raccoon: An Omnivorous Carnivore

**Omnivore:** An organism that eats from both animal and vegetable sources; eats everything

Many of us have at least some impression of, or experience with, a raccoon. This may be based on the reading of a childhood book, such as the classic *Rascal* by Sterling North. Perhaps it comes from some adventure (or misadventure) at a family picnic or while on a camping trip. Maybe you have caught the eyes of one with your car lights on a dark night, had one nesting in your attic, or had to discourage one from raiding your garbage at some point. Despite the mischief this “masked bandit” can sometimes cause, the raccoon plays an important role in the ecosystem by helping to maintain healthy populations and distributing seeds, etc. from what they catch or forage.



The widely distributed common or northern raccoon (*Procyon lotor*) fills an important ecological niche, in and around Upper Newport Bay, as well as throughout much of the western hemisphere. In addition to *P. lotor*, there are actually two other species. These are the crab-eating raccoon (*P. cancrivorus*) and Tres Marias raccoon (*P. insularis*), species native to the tropics and the Caribbean, respectively. It is *P. lotor*,

however, with a range from southern Canada, through Central America and into parts of South America, that is most numerous and represents the species that most of us know. Indeed, the northern raccoon, with its distinctive black markings, fox-like face and bushy tail, is—at least by some accounts—the most easily recognized mammal in North America.

Raccoons belong to the genus *Procyon*. The genus name, from the Greek meaning “pre-dog,” reflects the lineage the raccoon shares with the dog. Most often the full scientific name, *Procyon lotor*, is translated as “washing pre-dog”. The common name, raccoon, is derived from the Algonquin word *aroughcoune* meaning “he who scratches with his hands”.

Despite what is best described as a wide and varied diet, the omnivorous raccoon is technically a member of the *Carnivora* order. Within the order, members are further classified according to foot structure. As such, the stocky, muscular but agile raccoon, along with the bear and man, is described as *plantigrade*, meaning that it walks on the sole, or plantar part of its foot. This is in contrast to dogs and cats, which are *digitigrade* (walking on their toes), and still further removed from seals, sea lions and walruses, which are *pinniped* (using fins).

As is so often the relationship between form and function, there is a good case to be made that much of the raccoon’s adaptability and characteristic behavior—notably, its ability to exploit its niche—is related to the unique structure of its extremities. For example, its thumbs, although not opposable, are adept, strong and functional enough to allow the species to open latches, twist off lids, open containers, etc. This trait also allow raccoons to “wash”, or, perhaps more accurately, inspect a potential meal with their highly tactile, discerning paws. In terms of survival, this may be an important strategy for a creature that will eat almost anything it can secure. Indeed, the raccoon regularly eats from all food groups: plant or animal; vertebrate or invertebrate; and marine, freshwater or land-based. This includes garbage and compost; grubs, snails, worms, frogs, turtles and shellfish; rabbits; waterfowl and other ground nesting birds (chicks, eggs); backyard garden fruits and vegetables; as well as wild seeds, berries and nuts.

Given such wide-ranging foraging habits, the only thing the inquisitive raccoon is known not to seek out is desert-like, arid environments. The Upper Newport Bay, with its mudflats, riparian and upland areas—as well as its rich species diversity—is an ideal habitat for this mammal. Still, it is not a regular occurrence to see a raccoon or a group of raccoons around the Bay. Like so many UNB species, the raccoon prefers to operate under the cover of darkness, or at least dusk, and tends to be solitary, except when mating or in a family way.

Mating between mature individuals usually occurs between February and March. Males, who are usually

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Naturalists  
& Friends

**Yes, I want to be a Friend in 2007 at the membership level noted:**

- \$1,000 Heron                       \$500 Osprey  
 \$100 Egret                               \$50 Tern (Family)  
 \$25 Pelican (Individual)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

My check payable to the Newport Bay Naturalists & Friends\* is enclosed.

Please charge my  Visa  Mastercard  Discover

Exp. Date \_\_\_\_\_

Card # \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

I wish to make an additional gift of:                      \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
to the Robinson fund.

Total Amount given:                      \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please send me information on Planned Giving

\*A registered 501 (c) 3 non-profit organization. Your donation is deductible to the full extent of the law.

**Mail completed form and payment to:**

Newport Bay Naturalists & Friends  
P.O. Box 10804  
Newport Beach, CA 92658-5008

**Membership Benefits:**

**Heron: \$1000**

Two exclusive private guided walking, canoe, kayak or electric boat tours for up to 8 people. 11x14 signed color photograph by renowned photographer Russ Kerr. Scheduled kayak tours with 50% discount. Free scheduled canoe tours. Quarterly TRACKS newsletter. 10% discount on NBNF merchandise.

**Osprey: \$500**

One exclusive private guided walking, canoe, kayak or electric boat tour for up to 8 people. 8 x10 signed color photograph by renowned photographer Russ Kerr. Scheduled kayak tours with 50% discount. Free scheduled canoe tours. Quarterly TRACKS newsletter. 10% discount on NBNF merchandise.

**Egret: \$100**

Laminated color brochure, Local Birds of Orange County. Scheduled kayak tours with 50% discount. Free scheduled canoe tours. Quarterly TRACKS newsletter. 10% discount on NBNF merchandise.

**Tern \$50 (family) and Pelican \$25 (individual)**

Scheduled kayak tours with 50% discount. Free scheduled canoe tours. Quarterly TRACKS newsletter. 10% discount on NBNF merchandise.

## Letter From the President

We are fortunate to have a wilderness area in our midst right here in the city of Newport Beach. Not only raccoons but also coyotes, bobcats, skunks, opossums and other more common mammals are our neighbors. Protecting the native habitat at Upper Newport Bay is therefore very dear to our hearts. It is also something that requires considerable team effort on the part of many government agencies and other organizations both at the Bay and in the 154 square mile watershed that drains into Upper Newport Bay.

The roughly \$40 million US Army Corps of Engineers Upper Newport Bay Restoration Project, jointly funded by federal, state and local money is the most visible example of this team effort. The dredge, barges and scows used to remove sediment to restore and preserve critical habitat are now a familiar sight to those hiking, jogging, riding, and kayaking around the Bay.

We hope to soon see a major renovation of Big Canyon, which drains down into the east side of Upper Newport Bay. This project has just moved into the detailed design and planning phase, under the management of the city of Newport Beach. A large area that includes an overgrown freshwater pond will be restored to tidal saltmarsh as just one component of the makeover. In addition to funds from the city, other organizations including the California Department of Fish and Game and Newport Bay Naturalists & Friends (NBNF) have contributed to make this project possible.

In addition to these major capital projects, community-based restoration activities continue to blossom under the California Coastal Commission Restoration Education Coordinator and the County Harbors, Beaches and Parks groundskeeper, and we are glad to help organize and oversee these activities.

Important team efforts are taking place in Irvine and Tustin and other cities in our watershed to prevent sediment from being washed into the Bay with storm water. If sediment is reduced at the source or collected before it reaches the Bay, ongoing restoration is reduced. This holistic approach applies to trash too. We were thrilled to see this year a major cleanup in the watershed as part of the annual statewide Coastal Cleanup Day coordinated by the California Coastal Commission. I would like to thank all of the public agencies, non-profits, businesses and other organizations and individual volunteers who have helped to reduce the amount of trash upstream. I would also like to thank the many volunteers who came out on September 16 and helped County Harbors, Beaches and Parks, the Department of Fish and Game and NBNF to make our 16th annual joint event successful, and express my gratitude to our Cleanup Day sponsors.

One of the reasons we care about how the Bay looks is that it is our classroom. Education is the other prong to our mission. We provide school and scout programs and docent-led walking, canoe, kayak and boat tours. We feel privileged to be able to introduce inner-city students to nature in such a beautiful setting. And we are honored when we receive letters of thanks from whole classes whose passion we have stirred telling us with enthusiasm how they will be sharing their knowledge with others who have not yet been able to visit Upper Newport Bay.

As a non-profit organization, NBNF operates with the financial support of individuals and families, corporations, foundations, event sponsors and partnering organizations such as the Southern California Plein Air Painters Association who raise money for us through the sale of their fine art.

If you are a "Friend", thank you for your past support. We look forward to your continued generosity as you renew your membership in 2007. If you are not yet a Friend, please join us by completing and returning the form on the left. For additional information, please call (949) 640-1751 or visit us at [www.newportbay.org](http://www.newportbay.org).

If you are interested in Gift Planning with the Newport Bay Naturalists and Friends in mind, please indicate on the attached 2006 Friends membership form or call me directly at (949) 759-7591 to talk about this. Gift Planning can be beneficial both to you and NBNF.

Think about what more you can do this year to help in our efforts to preserve and restore this estuary and to educate ourselves and future generations of its value to us all.

*Regina Fodor, President  
NBNF Board of Directors*

**For additional information, please call  
(949) 640-1751 or visit us at  
[www.newportbay.org](http://www.newportbay.org).**



# Upper Newport Bay Calendar of Events

December 2006 – February 2007

## Steward Days—Every Wednesday, 9:00–11:00 a.m.

Support the Bay's unique genetics at our restoration sites by collecting seeds & propagating plants. Learn how to grow natives in your backyard, attract wildlife and conserve water. For information call (949) 640-0286. Location code: BBSC

## Kayak Tours—Every Saturday, 10:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

Join a trained naturalist for a guided kayak tour of the Back Bay. Meet at the Newport Aquatic Center. \$15/person, 8 & up. \$10/NBNF members. Be prepared to get wet. Reservations (949) 923-2269. Location code: NAC

## Kayak Tours—Every Sunday, 10:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

Join a trained naturalist for a guided kayak tour of the Back Bay. Meet at the Newport Dunes Resort. \$20/person. \$10/NBNF members. Parking fee. Reservations (949) 729-1150 or 729-3863. Location code: NDR

## Scout Programs—Tuesday through Saturday upon request

Join a naturalist for our 2-hour Brownie or Junior Girl Scout Try-it or badge programs; or join us for Tiger Cub, Bear Cub or Webelo badge programs. Call (949) 923-2269 or email scoutssi@sbcglobal.net. \$7/child includes patch. Location code: BBSC

## Walking Tour—Saturday, Dec. 2, Dec. 16, Jan. 6, Jan. 20, Feb. 3, Feb. 17, 9:00 a.m.

Join a trained Naturalist for a 2 hour walk along the bay. Bring binoculars and sun protection. Free. No reservations needed. For information and location call (949) 923-2269.

## ROOTS Restoration work—Saturday, Dec. 9, Jan. 27, Feb. 24, 9:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

Help restore Back Bay habitat by installing and maintaining native plants while learning about wetland ecology. Reservations required. Refreshments and tools provided. (949) 640-0286 for information, reservations and location.

## Friends of Newport Bay Walking Tour—Saturday, Dec. 9, Jan. 13, Feb. 10, 9:00, 9:15, 9:30, 10:00, 10:15 a.m.

Walk along the Back Bay listening to Naturalists and visiting Interpretive Stations featuring natural history specialists. Free. No reservations required. Information (949) 923-2269. Location code: EB

## Marine Life Inventory—Saturday, Dec. 9, Jan. 20, Feb. 17, 8:15–11:30 a.m.

Marine biology students ages 8 and up are invited to participate in a variety of hands-on marine life monitoring programs in Newport Bay. Under 18 must be accompanied by an adult. Free. Reservations (949) 640-9956. Location code: BBSC

## Electric Boat Tour of the Bay—Saturday, Dec. 9, Jan. 20, Feb. 17, 11:30 a.m.

Join a Naturalist on a 2 hour guided tour of the bay on our comfortable electric pontoon boat. \$10/person. Reservations (949) 923-2269. Location code: BBSC

## 2nd Sundays Restoration—Dec. 10, Jan. 14, Feb. 11, 9:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

Join the staff at the MIC to enhance the Nature Preserve habitat with non-native plant removal, native plantings and Butterfly Garden maintenance. Reservations (949) 923-2297. Location code: MIC

## Shellmaker Discovery Tour—Saturday, Dec. 16, Jan. 20, Feb. 17, 9–10:30 a.m.

Join a Naturalist to learn about Shellmaker Island's rich history; the future of the Back Bay Science Center; and discover unusual and endangered plants, birds and crab habitats. No reservations required. No latecomers. Free. Information (949) 640-9956 on Wednesdays and Thursdays. Location code: BBSC

## "A Wintry Wetland"—Saturday, Dec. 16, 3:30–5:00 p.m.

Join the staff at the MIC for an afternoon of "cool" activities including a nature walk and creation of a craft to take home. Recommended for ages 5–10 but all ages welcome. Dress warmly. \$5 per participant. Reservations (949) 923-2275. RAIN CANCELS. Location code: MIC

## Monthly Naturalist Meeting—Thursday, Jan. 7, 6:30–8:30 p.m.

Join the Naturalists for Dr. Jack Skinner's presentation on "Threats to the Watershed". Refreshments are at 6:30 p.m. and presentation is at 7:00 p.m. Free. For information call (949) 923-2269. Location code: MIC

## Night Hike—Saturday, Jan. 20, 6:00–7:30 p.m.

Join the staff at the MIC for a night hike and learn about the wonders nighttime brings to our nature preserve. Learn how animals see at night, what animals become active and the effects the moon has on wildlife. Recommended for ages 8 and up but all ages welcome. Dress warmly. \$5 per participant. Reservations (949) 923-2275. RAIN CANCELS. Location code: MIC

## Train for a Day and Become a Volunteer!—Saturday, Feb. 24, 9 a.m.–3 p.m.

Become a part of this dynamic estuary! Learn about the habitats and wildlife of the bay. Participate in habitat restoration and special events. Assist with tours. Greet and educate visitors. Registration (949) 923-2275. Location code: MIC

## Toddler Time (Ages 2–5)

Join a Park Ranger for a parent—child experience with stories, movement and hands-on fun. \$5 per child. Call (949) 923-2275 to register. Location code: MIC

## "Quack, Quack, Waddle, Waddle"—Wednesday, Dec. 6, 10:30–11:15 a.m. (ages 3–5)

Learn all about ducks in the Upper Newport Bay.

## "Walkin' in a Winter Wetland"—Thursday, Dec. 14, 9:00–9:45 or 10:30–11:15\*

Learn all about winter in the Upper Newport Bay.

## "Nature's Night Light"—Thursday, Dec. 28, 9:00–9:45 or 10:30–11:15\*

Learn all about astronomy at Upper Newport Bay.

## "Animal Senses"—Wednesday, Jan. 3, 10:30–11:15 (ages 3–5)

Learn about how animals see, smell and hear.

## "Migration Musings"—Thursday, Jan. 11, 9:00–9:45 or 10:30–11:15\*

Learn all about migration and the Pacific Flyway.

## "Woof! Woof!"—Thursday, Jan. 25, 9:00–9:45 or 10:30–11:15\*

Learn all about canines in the wild.

## "Let's Go Bird Watching"—Wednesday, Feb. 6, 10:30–11:15 a.m. (ages 3–5)

Join us for parent/child bird watching nature hike. One child per adult is recommended. RAIN CANCELS.

## "Bosom Buddies"—Thursday, Jan. 11, 9:00–9:45 or 10:30–11:15\*

Learn all about symbiotic and parasitic relationships.

## "Nature's Detectives"—Thursday, Jan. 25, 9:00–9:45 or 10:30–11:15\*

Learn all about animal evidence.

\*First program: ages 2–3; second program: ages 3–5

## Bayside Buddies (Ages 5–7)

Join a Park Interpreter for a science discovery class and make a nature craft to take home. \$5 per participant. Call (949) 923-2275 to register. Location code: MIC

## Winter's Wonders"—Friday, Dec. 8, 3:00–4:00 p.m. (ages 5–7)

Learn about how our wildlife friends and native plants prepare for winter.

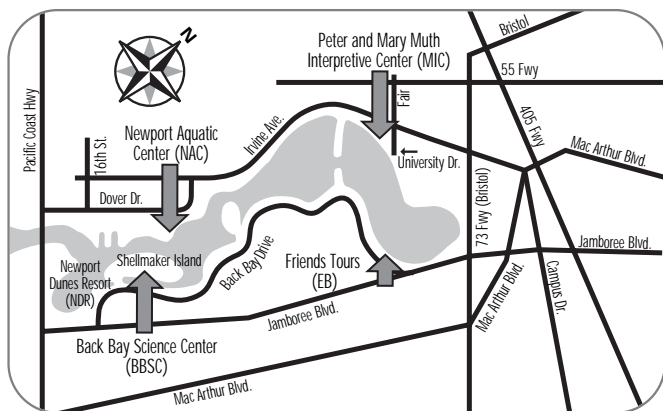
## "Shake, Rattle and Roll"—Friday, Jan. 19, 3:00–4:00 p.m. (ages 5–7)

Become a junior geologist and learn about volcanoes, earthquakes and landslides.

## "Hide and Seek"—Friday, Feb. 16, 3:00–4:00 p.m. (ages 5–7)

Discover how our local critters hide themselves for protection.

*Special notice regarding BBSC programs*—Because of construction of the new BBSC on Shellmaker Island we are unable to publish a full schedule for marine programs and electric boat tours at this time. Please call (949) 923-2269 for latest information.



**WEB SITES**

Newport Bay Naturalists & Friends: [www.newportbay.org](http://www.newportbay.org)  
 Peter & Mary Muth Interpretive Center:  
[www.ocparks.com/unbic](http://www.ocparks.com/unbic)  
 Back Bay Science Center: [www.backbaysciencecenter.org](http://www.backbaysciencecenter.org)  
 California Coastal Commission: [www.coastal.ca.gov](http://www.coastal.ca.gov)

**TRACKS CREDITS**

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**LOCATION KEY**

Peter and Mary Muth  
 Interpretive Center (MIC)  
 2301 University Drive  
 Newport Beach, CA 92660

Back Bay Science Center (BBSC)  
 600 Shellmaker  
 Newport Beach, CA 92660

Newport Aquatic Center (NAC)  
 1 Whitecliffs Drive  
 Newport Beach, CA 92660



**Name the Stingray Contest Winners**

The 2006 “Name the Stingray” contest winners were honored at the October 21st Shark Camp held at the Back Bay Science Center. Holding certificates that commemorate the “Living Award” that each winner received (L-R) are: Santa Ana’s Eduardo Avalos who named his stingray, S.O.U.P. (Special Ocean Unique Pal); Newport Beach’s Sullivan Long who named her stingray, Upper Bay Ray; Santa Ana’s Tyler Aguillon who named his stingray in honor of the late Steve Irwin, The Thunder From Down Under; and Yorba Linda’s Nicole Traboulsi, who named her stingray, The Shadow of the Blue Bay. The awards were presented by DFG staff Paul Gregory and Naturalist Marilyn Frenz. The 2006 judges included Stan Ashbaugh, Sue Lau and Uyen Tran.

**Raccoon** *(continued)*

larger than the females, do not participate in raising the litter. Young are generally born in April or May, although this can vary by a month or more. Litters range from three to six young, producing young that are initially blind but furred. In terms of coloring, raccoon are generally the familiar gray with black and white markings; still, pure white and pure black individuals can occur. Family groups stay together for up to a year, although they typically vacate the original den within six to eight weeks. The young usually become fully independent when displaced by the arrival of a new litter.

**Legal and Management Considerations**

The California Department of Fish and Game prohibits relocation of live raccoons (and other wildlife) without their written permission. “Exclusion” by removing or preventing access to possible food sources and/or nesting sites is considered an effective, longer-term choice. In addition, raccoons are known to carry disease (such as rabies and distemper) as well as internal parasites. Handling wild raccoons (even when young) is best left to professional animal control or wildlife managers.

For references and additional information, please visit [newportbay.org/raccoon.htm](http://newportbay.org/raccoon.htm)

*Rosemary Flynn, Naturalist*