

TRACKS

A Publication of the Newport Bay Naturalists & Friends

September–November

2006

Successful Osprey Nesting at Back Bay

Excitement is in the air at the Upper Newport Bay Ecological Reserve. Thirteen years after building an osprey nesting platform, a pair of ospreys have stayed over from their winter migration and successfully bred and fledged two beautiful juveniles. I had been resigned to seeing the platform used only as a convenient dining table for osprey meals during the winter, but being patient has paid off. It's believed to be the first time in Orange County history, and perhaps only the second time south of Santa Barbara, that ospreys have successfully bred.

An osprey pair started exhibiting typical nesting behavior this March by mating and bringing sticks to complete a nest on the platform, decorating it with colorful pieces of plastic. By May a Fire Department crew was able to see from its ladder "3 white fuzzballs" to confirm the successful breeding. Two of these chicks have survived and fledged.

The male osprey was an outstanding hunter and provider, supplying almost all the meals from courtship through fledging. The female always let him know when it was time to eat, calling softly to him at first, and then quite loudly if he didn't respond. He would soon be seen in the bay circling and diving talons-first into the water, bringing a variety of fish back to the nest. Sometimes he would return in 10 minutes with a fish, but it often took an hour or two. Often he would return with his catch, proudly do a flyby over the nest, and then either bring it back to the nest whole or perch on a nearby pole and eat the head before bringing it back to share.

As the chicks were growing, the mom did all of the feeding by tearing off small pieces of fish and gently feeding it to a chick. When one chick was satisfied, it would usually step away, and the mom would feed the other one before feeding herself. Only about a week before fledging did the mom sometimes let the juveniles start tearing up the fish to feed themselves.

All during the nesting season, both parents were vigorous defenders of their nest. They would go into a series of high-pitched calls whenever a large bird would come near. Turkey vultures soaring high overhead seemed to especially trigger them, perhaps because of their large size. One time a visiting osprey was especially bothersome as it circled their nest several times, with mom and dad both racing to the nest and letting loose a chorus of sharp calls. This particular osprey approached to land on the nest with its talons down. Both parents then went into overdrive, calling and raising their wings, and the visiting osprey finally pulled up and away at the last second.

The offspring seemed slow to fledge, seemingly savoring the good life at home in Newport Beach, perhaps not unlike some other young adults. About two weeks before fledging, they started building up their flight muscles by flapping into the wind. As the flight muscles strengthened, they would flap vigorously and actually "catch air" while in the nest, rising up and down. After about eight weeks from hatching, they were finally both seen doing short flights around the nest and returning to it. This coincidentally took place the day after July 4th when they had endured a raucous evening of aerial fireworks next door at the Newport Dunes Resort. Perhaps that was the impetus to finally get moving out of their nest.

As the juveniles became stronger and more adept at flying, they would often perch on nearby poles or docks. But they would always remain in sight of the nest, as the parents continued to bring them fish. In an apparent effort to get the juveniles to fly more, the parents would not always bring the fish to the nest. Once the mom brought a fish back, flew around the juveniles, and landed on the sand. She then walked and dragged the fish along, checking to see if her kids would come join her, which they finally did after several minutes of begging.

With this successful fledging, there are now two more special reasons why this estuary is so important to preserve and protect. Perhaps a few more osprey nests are in the bay's future, and what a treat it will be to visit this jewel along the Pacific coast and listen to the high-pitched calls of ospreys circling in the air overhead.

Russ Kerr, Naturalist



Top: A juvenile osprey in flight.
Above: Mom osprey feeds one of her youngsters.

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ROOTS: A Year in Review

It has been another very successful year for the California Coastal Commission's ROOTS program. If you are not familiar with the ROOTS program, let this article be an introduction to the great restoration work that is being conducted by volunteers here at Upper Newport Bay (UNB). If you have joined us for a ROOTS event, please celebrate with us the success to which you have contributed.

First, the facts: Over the past year, the ROOTS program has hosted over 1,300 volunteers at our restoration events. These volunteers have contributed 3,600 hours, removing over 4,300 pounds of invasive plant species (not including material left to decompose on site) and planting nearly 550 native plants, most of which were grown in our very own native plant nursery on Shellmaker Island. A variety of native seeds were also spread on the restoration sites. All of these activities have contributed to restoring a viable wildlife habitat, increasing biodiversity while educating visitors to the value of the ecosystems at UNB.

Our volunteers are our most valuable assets and the ROOTS program has been fortunate to have great volunteer turnout at each month's event. In particular, the Newport Bay Naturalists and Friends (NBNF) has been a source of excellent, hard-working volunteers, including many site leaders and event planners, in addition to hands-on workers. We are very grateful to NBNF for the knowledge, passion, and leadership that these volunteers bring to each ROOTS event. In addition, Master Gardeners, school groups, church groups, corporate groups, and individual volunteers have all been very helpful during our restoration events.

Our overall restoration effort has covered a wide swath.

At the Newport Valley restoration site (also known as John Wayne Gulch), we have planted coastal sage scrub and riparian habitats, beginning a long-term project that will result in the restoration of one of the largest natural "gateways" to UNB. By removing invasive plants from this space, we hope to prevent them from spreading into the open spaces directly abutting the Bay.

The Eastbluff Vista restoration site (corner of Back Bay Drive and Eastbluff Drive) has shown great potential as a restored area as well as a native plant demonstration area for visitors to the Vista Point. The basic structure of the coastal sage ecosystem has become established there. We have also seen results from our wildflower seeding efforts including California poppy.

We have recently installed over 300 plants at the Bayview West restoration site (near the shady Brazilian pepper tree on the bike trail). Volunteers have made a Herculean effort to install these plants in very hard soil and remove a wave of black mustard that threatened to drown those native plants.

We are also conducting a watering experiment at the Bayview Mesa restoration site (near the Mesa Drive entrance to the Nature Preserve). In the second year of a three-year plan, this experiment is testing four irrigation methods—drip irrigation, hand watering, overhead spray, and Rain Bird Irrigation Supplement (a time-release gel)—on the restoration of four coastal sage scrub plants: deerweed, California sagebrush, California buckwheat, and California encelia.

In addition to ecological restoration, education is the other main goal of the ROOTS program. With the release of the Our Wetlands, Our World curriculum in 2005, the California Coastal Commission now offers a site-specific high school curriculum that includes classroom work and hands-on field work for students at UNB. Workshops to facilitate teachers' use of the curriculum are planned for the fall of 2006 and winter of 2007. With this educational effort, we hope to bring students to UNB to find their own reasons to protect this natural gem and its habitats from further degradation.

We are looking forward to an exciting year ahead. The ROOTS program will be partnering with the Bolsa Chica Land Trust to propagate native wetlands plants at Bolsa Chica in Huntington Beach. In addition, ROOTS volunteers will aid the planting effort on the berms and demonstration wetlands once the new Back Bay Science Center building is completed. The ROOTS model is also inspiring further restoration work at UNB. The County of Orange will sponsor regular restoration workdays for volunteers on the second Sunday of each month to complement ROOTS' monthly effort. Please contact Jennifer Naegele at 949-923-2297 for more details on this new opportunity.

We are extremely happy with the restoration work that has been completed and the direction of the ROOTS program. Certainly, there is much more we can do to build upon our past success. We hope that you will find a reason to work with us soon. You are welcome to join us on the fourth Saturday of each month from 9 a.m.–12 p.m. Please contact Matt Yurko at 949-640-0286 or myurko@coastal.ca.gov for details specific to upcoming ROOTS events.

By Matt Yurko, California Coastal Commission

Stingray Open House—

Saturday, September 23, 9–11 a.m.

Come view the soon-to-be newest mothers of the Upper Newport Bay and, if you're lucky, the newborn stingray pups in a special open house. You can also enter the "Name the Stingray Contest" by including a name you'd recommend, the reasons why this name should be chosen and coloring a drawing available at the BBSC and the MIC. All entries must be delivered to the BBSC by 11 a.m. Reservations required for groups of 10 or more at (949) 640-9956. Free. Location code: BBSC

Scout Programs—Tuesday through Saturday upon request

Join a naturalist for a 2-hour Brownie or Junior Girl Scout Try-it or badge program; or for Tiger Cub, Bear Cub or Webelo badge programs.

Call (949) 923-2269 or email scoutssi@sbccglobal.net. \$7/child includes patch. Location code: BBSC



photos by Matt Yurko





Upper Newport Bay Calendar of Events

September–November 2006

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 of the Back Bay with a trained naturalist

Every Saturday, 10:00 a.m.–Noon—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

Every Sunday, 10:00 a.m.–Noon—Meet at the Newport Dunes Resort. Be prepared to get wet. \$20/person. \$10/NBNF members. Parking fee. Reservations (949) 729-1150 or 729-3863. Location code: NDR

Walking Tour—Saturday, Sept. 2, Oct. 7, Nov. 4, 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 call (949) 923-2269. Location code: BBSC

Campfire Program—Saturday, Sept. 2, Oct. 7, Nov. 4, 7:00–8:30 p.m.

Wetland Wonders Join a Park Ranger for a campfire talk about the amazing world of wetland ecosystems. Geared for K–6, all ages welcome. Dress for the weather. Rain cancels. Free. Registration (949) 923-2275. Location code: MIC

Twilight Canoe Tour with Barbecue—Saturday, Sept. 16, Oct. 14, 4:00 p.m.

Join Naturalists and Sea Scouts for a beautiful tour of the Reserve followed by a cookout at the Newport Aquatic Center. Fee is \$25. Reservations required (949) 642-5031. Location Code: NAC.

ROOTS Restoration work—Saturday, Sept. 23, Oct. 28, Nov. 11, 9:00 a.m.–Noon

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

Train for a Day, Become a Volunteer!—Saturday, Sept. 23, 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

Marine Life Inventory—Saturday, Sept. 23, Oct. 21, Nov. 18, 8:15–11:00 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, Sept. 23, Oct. 21, Nov. 18, 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

Shark Camp at the Bay—Saturday, Sept. 23, Oct. 21, 6–9 p.m.

Learn about the lives of sharks and rays, help a Department of Fish and Game biologist tag fish, enjoy a Shellmaker Island barbecue. Fee is \$25. Information and reservations (310) 427-7845. Location code: BBSC

Friends of Newport Bay Walking Tour—Saturday, Oct. 14, Nov. 11, 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

Astronomy Night—Friday, Oct. 20, 7:00–9:00 p.m.

Join members of the O. C. Astronomers for an inspirational tour of the night sky including observation with telescopes. Family program. No fee; suggested donation of \$2/person. Registration (949) 923-2275. Location code: MIC

Shellmaker Discovery Tour—Saturday, Oct. 21, Nov. 18, Dec. 16, 9–10:30 a.m.

Learn about Shellmaker Island's history, the future of the BBSC, endangered plants, birds and crab habitats. No reservations required. No latecomers. Free. Information (949) 640-9956 on Wednesdays and Thursdays. Location code: BBSC

"Boo! Bay"—Friday, Oct. 27, 7:00–8:30 p.m. (contents for ages 5–10)

Join us for a special night of "no scare" spooky fun! Become a nature detective and take the "spooky" out of critters. \$5 per child. 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

"Ugh, It's a Bug"—Wednesday, Sept. 6, 10:30–11:15 a.m.

Learn all about those creepy, crawly critters. (ages 3–5)

"Nature's Hip Hop"—Thursday, Sept. 14, 9:00–9:45 or 10:30–11:15*

Learn about the sounds of nature.

"Native Americans"—Wednesday, Sept. 20, 9:00–9:45 or 10:30–11:15*

Learn about native Americans who once lived in the Upper Newport Bay.

"Scamperin' Squirrels"—Thursday, Sept. 28, 9:00–9:45 or 10:30–11:15*

Learn all about the ground squirrels that live here at the Upper Newport Bay.

"Those Hungry Animals"—Wednesday, Oct. 4, 10:30–11:15 a.m.

Join us for an exploration of the food chain. (ages 3–5)

"Nature's Cleanup Crew"—Thursday, Oct. 12, 9:00–9:45 or 10:30–11:15*

Learn all about turkey vultures that live here at the Upper Newport Bay.

"Batty Bats"—Wednesday, Oct. 18, 9:00–9:45 or 10:30–11:15*

Learn all about bats including some that live near the Bay.

"Spooky Spiders"—Thursday, Oct. 26, 9:00–9:45 or 10:30–11:15*

Learn all about spiders.

"Birds of Prey"—Wednesday, Nov. 4, 10:30–11:15 a.m.

Learn about the birds of prey that inhabit the Upper Newport Bay. (ages 3–5)

"Harvest Hoedown"—Thursday, Nov. 9, 9:00–9:45 or 10:30–11:15*

This program has an autumn theme.

"Birds"—Wednesday, Nov. 15, 9:00–9:45 or 10:30–11:15*

Playtime with a bird theme.

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

Bayside Buddies (Ages 5–7)

\$5 per child. Registration (949) 923-2275. Location code: MIC

"Playin' Possum"—Friday, Sept. 22, 3:00–4:00 p.m.

Come learn the amazing adaptations of our opossum friends.

"Secret Burrows"—Friday, Oct. 6, 3:00–4:00 p.m.

Come see which animals love the dirt holes they live in and how they build them.

"Nature's Bounty"—Friday, Nov. 17, 3:00–4:00 p.m.

Fall is here so come see how nature has provided plentiful food for estuary animals.

Estuary Explorers (Ages 8–10)

Join a Park Ranger for these fun discovery events. \$5 per child. Call (949) 923-2275 to register. Location code: MIC

"Stinky Smelly Science"—Friday, Sept. 8, 3:00–4:00 p.m.

Discover how bay animals use their noses for survival.

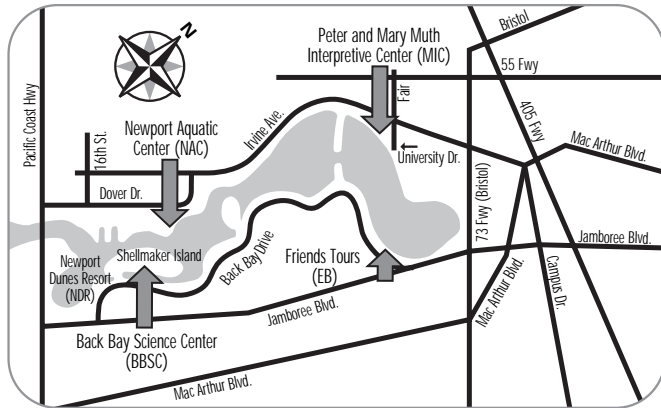
"Slitherin' Tales"—Friday, Oct. 13, 3:00–4:00 p.m.

We take the "scare" out of snakes by examining their behavior.

"Estuary Edibles"—Friday, Nov. 10, 3:00–4:00 p.m.

Become an herbivore! Discover how wetland wildlife utilizes plant for food.

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
 Peter & Mary Muth Interpretive Center:
www.ocparks.com/unbic
 Back Bay Science Center: www.backbaysciencecenter.org
 California Coastal Commission: www.coastal.ca.gov

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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

22nd Annual Coastal Cleanup Day at Upper Newport Bay

When: Saturday, Sept. 16 from 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Where: Peter and Mary Muth Interpretive Center
 2301 University Drive (at Irvine Ave.)

Organized by Newport Bay Naturalists & Friends; Orange County Harbors, Beaches & Parks; and California Dept. of Fish and Game. This is the one day of the year we are able to enter many sensitive areas of Upper Newport Bay to remove harmful and unsightly trash. Please come and help us.

Free lunch.
 Families welcome.

General Information: (949) 923-2269 or newportbay.org

Group (10+) Registration: (949) 923-2295

Water Cleanup Registration: (949) 640-9956



4th Annual SOCALPAPA Paints Back Bay

When: Saturday & Sunday, October 14 & 15 from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm

Where: Peter and Mary Muth Interpretive Center
 2301 University Drive (at Irvine Ave.)

Organized by Newport Beach Arts Foundation; Newport Bay Naturalists & Friends; Orange County Harbors, Beaches & Parks; and Southern California Plein Air Painters Association—sponsored by Newport Beach Marriott Bayview. Includes the show and sale of original artwork of 60 or more artists. 30% of the proceeds go to the Naturalists & Friends.

More information: Call (949) 923-2269 or visit newportbay.org or www.socalpapa.com



Ron Hill's first-place-winning painting from 2005