

Point Lobos



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Cover photo: by Chuck Bancroft.
This Monterey cypress is located
on the northwest side of the Allan Memorial Grove.

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Message from the President

by Judd Perry



I have three exciting subjects to share with you in this issue.

POINT LOBOS Magazine. If you are a previous reader, you may have noticed that the covers of the past two issues have carried the masthead “POINT LOBOS” rather than the previous “Quarterly” title. That change has now been made permanent, and future issues of the magazine will proudly bear that POINT LOBOS masthead, which is what the Point Lobos Association is all about – Point Lobos State Reserve. In addition, we have added an additional four pages to provide even more articles and images for your enjoyment.

Five-Year Strategic Plan. In March, your Board of Directors approved the first Strategic Plan in the history of the PLA. The five-year plan was unanimously adopted by the Board after an intensive review of where we have been and where we want to go as an organization. That review included major input from current and past members of the Board, representatives of California State Parks, and members of the Point Lobos Docent Group. The purpose of this effort was to crystallize the goals and priorities of the PLA over the next five years so that our daily actions are part of a larger plan and our performance can be measured against defined goals and strategies.

The Plan establishes six high-level goals of the PLA: (1) A Docent Support Goal – To enhance the Point Lobos Docent Program to ensure it continues as a state model for interpretation, visitor service and docent satisfaction; (2) A Visitor Experience Goal – To foster the enjoyment, appreciation, conservation, protection and safety of Point Lobos State Reserve; (3) A Collaboration Goal – To establish and maintain open communications with State Parks and the Docent Council, engendering a collaborative relationship with each entity that results in shared priorities; (4) An Organizational Capacity Goal – To build the capability of the Point Lobos Association to execute the Plan; (5) A Point Lobos Ranch Goal – To participate in planning for the Point Lobos Ranch property that protects the character of Point Lobos State Reserve and enhances the visitor experience; and (6) A Financial Goal – To ensure the financial capacity to accomplish all Mission Goals, Strategies and Objectives while expanding PLA’s long-term financial reserves.

For each of these high-level goals, the Plan establishes specific strategies for achieving the goal and measurable objectives for achieving those strategies. Each year during the Plan period, an Annual Plan will be developed based upon the objectives to be achieved during that year so that we can measure our progress in meeting the goals we have set. The Plan will be updated every two to three years to provide for changes in circumstances and to maintain a “rolling” five-year Plan. In addition to developing the Plan itself, the Board also established, for the first time, a formal Mission Statement for the PLA and reaffirmed the Vision Statement established by the Board several years ago. These two statements form the core of the PLA’s purpose for being and its hope for the future of the Reserve.

Mission Statement: The mission of the Point Lobos Association is to support interpretive and educational programs that enhance the visitor’s experience and to assist California State Parks in preserving Point Lobos State Reserve.

Vision Statement: Our vision is to keep Point Lobos Reserve wild while inspiring all visitors to enjoy and appreciate this unique place.

Whalers Cabin. I am very proud to announce that the Whalers Cabin has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Thanks to Kurt Loesch and all who participated in this effort.

A Special Visit to Point Lobos

by Ranger Chuck Bancroft

I have always known Point Lobos is a world wide destination. During my twenty-six plus years at the Reserve, I've met painters, photographers, and poets. Students from universities and colleges and school children from all corners of California come to the Reserve to experience its beauty and wildlife. I've met executives from the Bechtel Corporation, Mrs. George Shultz and her entourage, and shook hands with Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, during a visit many years ago.

I've talked geology with a group of International Society of Core Analysts, and presented a program on our pine forests to the Population Genetics and Evolution group of the International Union of Forest Research Organization, which included 60 scientists from all over the world, including Spain, France, Australia, Finland, Japan, Sweden, Canada, Poland, Slovakia and the USA.

I've sat down with Ansel Adams to talk photography, and became friends with two of his well-known students now, leaders in the world of back and white photography, John Sexton and Bob Kolbrener. I knew Cole Weston and identified mushrooms for him. I studied mushrooms with noted author and fungi expert David Arora. I've compared notes with poets John Dotson and Elliot

Roberts and use their creations on my nature walks.

But, on April 11th I had one of the most rewarding experiences I've had in my career. Along with Sector Superintendent Dana Jones, we hosted a group of Mayors from

about using natural resources, especially in state and national parks, and how to attract tourism while still conserving the resources and beauty. Their visit would take them to various locations to compare approaches of tourism campaigns in geographically diverse regions of the United States.



Montenegro who were visiting the city of Monterey as part of a small town tourism and economic development project. As Montenegro prepares to enter the European Union, tourism is fast becoming an important component of its local and national economics. Several cities in the United States were on their agenda to learn more

The visting Mayors were Mr. Rajko Kuljaca from the coastal town of Budva, Mr. Milovan Jankovic from the mountain town of Cetinje, Ms. Marija Catovic from the coastal town of Kotor, Mr. Mileta Bulatovic from the mountain town of Kolasin and Mr. Isalio Sljivancanin of the mountain town Zabljak.

We greeted our guests on an overcast and rainy morning at Point Lobos State Reserve. The office conference room was well appointed with coffee and bagels to warm our guests as we sat down to talk about California State Parks. With the use of two translators, Superintendent Jones and I were able to create a wonderful dialogue and answer a variety of questions about organization, structure, funding, interpretation and education, resource protection and rehabilitation, law enforcement, and all the fun recreational activities in our premier park system.

When the weather cleared to reveal a magnificent day, we walked through the Allan Memorial Grove to be inspired by the beauty of the Reserve. The ocean provided a powerful background to look for gray whales migrating north, harbor seals in the coves with their new pups, and the sea lions barking from their offshore islands. The windswept and contorted Monterey cypress trees provided a canopy of protection in the light drizzle and the wildflowers dazzled us with their myriad of colors.

We could have spent all day with these enthusiastic representatives from Montenegro, but, alas, they had to leave for their next appointment with city officials from Monterey.



Donji Morinj (Lower Morinj), a small place in the Bay of Kotor, is also known as the Venice of the Bay of Kotor because of the numerous springs and streams which flow into the sea.

Tara is located between the mountains of Bjelasnica, Sinjajevina, Ljubisnja and Durmitor. Its fantastic views, the gentle valleys and wild forests, the rapids with black pine trees soaring up behind them, and the wonderful blue color of the water take away the breath of even the most hard-to-please world travelers.

Images from the official website of Montenegro <http://www.montenegro.com>



Under My Brim

by Ranger Chuck Bancroft

Point Lobos has long been a destination for groups of all ages to study, research, and provide community service time to help protect the resources of this beautiful landscape. During the past two months, several groups came to the Reserve to experience this unique landscape.

Carmel High School

On March 17, 38 students and 10 staff from Carmel High School visited Point Lobos State Reserve. The field trip was part of a Regional Occupation Program course titled "Natural

Resource Management." The course focuses on topics such as forestry, water resources, soil conservation, agriculture and outdoor recreation. Students are introduced to natural resource issues specific to the Carmel area. At Point Lobos, the students received a ranger talk from Chuck Bancroft where they learned

about the history of management issues at the park and then participated in a service project removing slender ice plant, an invasive species. The students removed enough slender ice plant to fill the bed of Ranger Chuck's 1/2-ton pickup. The field trip was a huge success and provided students with a valuable lesson about the importance of protecting special places like Point Lobos State Reserve.

by Brian Granberry, CHS

The Nature Conservancy

A workshop on Increasing the Pace, Scale and Effectiveness of Conservation in the Mediterranean Biome was scheduled in Monterey from March 20-23.



This group of international participants came to Point Lobos for a tour and presentation from various scientists and land managers. This group was assembled to strategize and develop a framework for effective conservation of plants, animals and natural communities found in the mediterranean regions of the



globe - the Mediterranean basin, South Africa, Chile, Australia, and California/Baja California. The group gathered at the Whalers Cabin for presentations by Ranger Chuck and Bill Leahy from the Big Sur Land Trust. Then the group took a long walk on the North Shore Trail to talk, ask questions, see the wonderful landscape, and ending at Sea Lion Point for incredible views of the Pacific.

by Rita Bunzel, TNC



Top: Students from Upward Bound

Bottom right: Upward Bound students find more broom than can be eliminated in one day.

Bottom left: CSUMB students identifying species in the maritime chaparral.

Opposite page:
Top: Carmel High students at Sea Lion Point.

Bottom: The Nature Conservancy meets at the Whalers Cabin.



California State University Monterey Bay

In early March, CSUMB students in California Ecosystems (BIO 342) visited the Reserve and the Marks Addition east of Highway 1. The California Ecosystems class introduces students to the physical and biological diversity of California and spends time on each of the major natural communities found in the state. Students learn the primary indicator species found in each habitat type and develop their plant identification skills using the dichotomous key for Monterey County written by Mary Ann “Corky” Matthews. Point Lobos provides a mosaic of interesting habitats and is an ideal “outdoor classroom” where students can focus on both common and unusual plants and wildlife species. The Reserve hosts students from CSUMB each spring for field trips that highlight the forests of Monterey pine, Monterey cypress, Gowen cypress and some of the interesting associated plant species like the federally-endangered Yaden’s rein orchid and endemic manzanita found in the maritime chaparral.

by Nikki Nedeff, CSUMB

Westhills Community College Coalinga, CA

On April 1, thirty students from five different high schools in the Fresno area enrolled in the Upward Bound Math and Science Program, visited the Monterey area to participate in Science Day at CSU-Monterey Bay. While they were here the students, along with their program coordinator Oscar Villareal, decided to do community service work. Ranger Chuck and Senior Park Aide Mary Paul put them to work at Lobos Ranch removing French broom. Over the past four years, staff and volunteers have worked hard to remove the broom (an endless battle). Oscar and the students were thrilled at the chance to visit and work in an area that is closed to the general public. The students removed French broom from the quarry and then breathlessly hiked uphill to another area where they had a great view of the Pacific Ocean and more broom. During the day the students learned plant identification (especially poison oak), a little botany, and about nonnative plants and habitat restoration.

by Mary Paul, Senior Park Aide



Point Lobos by Moonlight

by Jean Grace
images by Ranger Chuck

Save the date for our 2007 PLA Members' Party

ADVANCE NOTICE!

Please join your fellow members (new and old) to celebrate the Harvest Moon with a light buffet and a walk in Point Lobos State Reserve. Set your calendar and reserve a place for **September 22, Saturday evening at 6:30 pm**. We know this invitation is three months in advance, but publication of the Fall *Point Lobos* will not give anyone much time to reserve for this grand annual gathering. So, you might keep this article and act on it now for your future enjoyment!

If you (or your friends) are not yet members, you may reserve a place and pay your membership upon arrival at the event. **TELEPHONE RESERVATIONS MUST BE MADE BY SEPTEMBER 12th (Wednesday) SO WE CAN PREPARE ENOUGH FOOD!** We cannot accept reservations any later, but we urge you to call anytime now. Please phone **(831) 625-1470** with your information that's outlined below; if you leave a voice message you'll get a call back to confirm your place on the list. Of course, if you aren't currently a PLA member, you can also apply for membership anytime in advance of this event.

Here's how it works: We will gather at the Bird Island picnic area. The Reserve will close to the public at 6:00 PM that day. At 6:30 PM the main gate will open for the free moonlight party and walk. You will be welcomed at the kiosk and given a pass only if you have a reservation on file there for everyone in your party. Thus, **when making your reservation, please include your name, phone, and the names and membership status of each person attending. (No children under ten years old, please!)** Then, when you get to the picnic area, we'll be happy to check you in as a member, or accept your membership application and payment to become a new member.

After dinner, people will move out to walk any part of the Reserve except the North Shore Trail (for safety's sake). Also for safety, please don't walk alone. And now, the **featured event** is the light of the full moon, even if it's filtered by fog!

In our lives below the high latitudes of the Arctic and Antarctic Circles, we can depend every day on the rising of the sun and moon, even if fog or storms should hide them. Each day, the full sun rises, but the moon is another matter. We enjoy the variations of the "wily coyote" moon as it goes through its lunar month (about 29 ½ days in reference to the sun) and through the long period of its yearly varying azimuths.



In much of the northern hemisphere, we call this time of the full moon the “Harvest Moon” (but it’s the “Planting Moon” in the southern hemisphere!). This is defined as being the closest full moon to the September equinox, when the sun crosses the equator heading south for the year. This year, the full Harvest Moon will be on Wednesday, September 26th. So, on our party evening, the moon will actually be waxing gibbous with 80% of its disk illuminated.

While we enjoy our buffet, the sun will set at 7:05 PM PDT, and twilight will end about 7:30 PM. The tide, pulled by the moon (and sun), will be at the day’s high (5.4ft). Meanwhile, the moon will have risen at 4:54 PM, but, since our eastern view from Point Lobos is blocked by the beautiful Santa Lucia Mountains, we won’t see the moon for another hour or so, actually about the time we gather for our buffet. This moon will be highest in our sky (at transit) around 10:00 PM and close to the earth, perigee being in a few hours. It will sink beyond the Pacific about 3 AM on Sunday.

So to recap:

What: An evening gathering of Point Lobos Association members for the Harvest Moon. A buffet of the famous McGowan chile, sandwiches, salad, and water. For other beverages, please bring your own. Also, bring warm clothes, a flashlight, and sturdy shoes.

Why: To celebrate and thank our members for their support of Point Lobos State Reserve through membership in the Point Lobos Association.

Where: Bird Island picnic area and the trails. (Bird Island trail and Whalers Cove are two of the best places to enjoy this moon.)

When: Saturday, September 22, 2007, from 6:30 to 10:00 PM.

Who: PLA members and people becoming new members at our gathering; please, no children under ten years old.

How: Call **(831) 625-1740** to reserve by Wednesday, September 27 at the latest!

Come and enjoy!

Observations

by Sparky Starkweather, State Park Squirrel

I try to use my position at the Reserve to experience all things great and small. Recently, at the office, I saw a *Ceanothus* moth land on a pile of fallen lace lichen. What a treat! The following description is from the website <http://waynesword.palomar.edu> and is used with permission of the author, Wayne P. Armstrong, Life Sciences Department, Palomar College.

“*Hyalophora euryalus* belongs to the wild silk moth family *Saturniidae*. This family includes some of the largest and most spectacular moths in the world, particularly the tropical rain forest. The *Ceanothus* silk moth lives in the nearby chaparral-covered hillsides. The larva (caterpillar) feeds primarily on species of California lilac *Ceanothus*. The larvae are also known to feed on other native shrubs, including laurel sumac and manzanita species.

At maturity in the fall, they grow to a length of up to four inches (10 cm) and resemble fat, light green sausages with stubby legs. The back (dorsal) side is decorated with yellowish or reddish projections (tubercles). After feeding all summer, the larva spins a flask-shaped silken cocoon that hangs from the host shrub.

Within its cocoon, the larva transforms into a pupa. During the fall and winter months, the pupa gradually undergoes metamorphosis and by late winter or early spring, an adult moth emerges from its pupal case. This is a large moth with a wing span of over five inches (13 cm). As an adult, its primary purpose is to find a member of the opposite sex and hopefully copulate. Females emit a chemical scent (pheromone) that attracts a male suitor. Adult moths have atrophied mouthparts and do not feed. They soon die after completing their sole function, which is to mate and lay eggs, thus passing on their DNA and perpetuating the species.”

A note from Sparky: With *Ceanothus* so abundant in the Reserve....look closely to find the caterpillar pupa, especially along the Bird Island Trail above China Cove.



Quotes from the Docent Log

edited by Stan Dryden

images by Ranger Chuck

March 9

Joy Osborne

A lovely day, and Bird Island had seals out at low tide, a sea otter with a baby aboard, poppies, cormorants playing for dibs on nest sites. Two were displaying blue gular pouches. A visitor spotted a deep orange thing clinging on the rocks



near the water surface. It was a gumboot chiton (cryptochiton), the largest of our chitons.

March 12

Connie Dallmann

One could smell the *Ceanothus* on the Carmelo Meadow Trail all of the way to the Entrance Station. Lots of bird songs

this morning – I could hear pygmy nuthatches, juncos, Bewick's wren, mourning dove, and scrub jays, plus several I couldn't identify by sound.

March 13

Dione Dawson

The otter count for March was 26 adults and 7 pups. The bulk of the count came from the North Shore, so it would be advisable for docents to direct visitors in that direction if they wish to see otters. Of course, the sea has been choppy of late, and very heavy fog kept blowing in and out, making any sightings a real challenge. The count was definitely well below that of last year's 61 adults/10 pups for February (it rained in March). The surface canopies of the giant kelp, *Macrocystis*, were much reduced in size and extent, contributing to the lower count this year.

March 20

Stan Dryden

After last week's dismal otter count, it was Otter Day at Point Lobos today! Several were seen in Headland Cove,

more at the mouth of the Cove, more yet along the ocean side of the Cypress Grove Trail, and still more in Cypress Cove, including a mom with her pup. We saw 15-20 otters just in this small corner of the Reserve. Later, acting on a bird-sighting tip from the Park Aide, I went down to Whalers Cove. The reported American bitterns were not to be seen, but there was an otter foraging very close to the boat ramp. After a while he came up with a HUGE rock – not your basic round otter-tool stone, but a big chunk of granite. That seemed odd. The next dive produced the big rock on its belly plus a large broken abalone shell, which the otter proceeded to pound against the rock. Why was he doing that? The shell looked like it had long been empty. Then I saw something lodged in the corner of the shell and finally was able to see that it was a smaller abalone attached inside the larger shell. It turned out that he knew what he was doing all along. He finally dislodged the live abalone and had a tasty meal.

March 24

Connie Dallmann

Gave a guided walk with an interesting group from the Naval Postgraduate School. Among them a Georgian (from Europe), an Israeli, and a German. They enjoyed contrasting what they saw with their native habitats. We spotted whales, cormorants in breeding plumage, deer, quail, and a merry purple finch. One visitor spotted a wood rat in a tree! I saw my first Footsteps-of-Spring of the wildflower season.





March 25

June Banks

I was doing shift at the Information Station and met a very excited family who had seen 50+ orcas on the bay Saturday! This is a huge number, very unusual; luckily for them, they were on a whale-watch boat with a very knowledgeable naturalist, and they shared her excitement as she took dozens of pictures to compare with known pods. This was very big news, since these animals were members of the K and L pods – resident killer whales of Puget Sound, and there was a baby in the group. According to the web site of the Center for Whale Research (http://www.whaleresearch.com/thecenter/News_KsLs_CA_March24.html), the story was carried on over 60 news outlets throughout the world. (These orcas are fish eaters, not the gray whale predators first assumed when we heard about the large numbers of orcas hereabouts. Ed)

those gorgeous Douglas iris! Wildflowers adorned every trail. Very pregnant harbor seals were in evidence in every cove, and I spotted my first pup of the season nursing quietly on the little beach in Bluefish Cove. The Reserve



March 31

Brandi Katz

The Reserve was a study in abundance today, spring having sprung in all its glory. *Ceanothus* was in bloom every-



Star lily

where, swaying in the breeze, its delicate scent enticing me to do “just another few minutes” of trail watch for, oh, a good two or three hours. If there is anything more beautiful than Point Lobos blanketed by *Ceanothus* in the spring, I don’t know what it might be. Star lilies! Sun cups! Painted cup! Oh,

was bustling with good-natured and inquisitive visitors, many accompanied by children bursting with energy and excellent questions! Docent coverage was also abundant, with every post staffed all day long, lots of trainees out finishing up training requirements, and four-count ‘em FOUR! public walks offered and taken in the course of the day. No whales today, but we know they’re on their way, mothers guiding their new calves northward to their summer feeding grounds. My own nine-to-five “work” day in paradise was over before I knew it today. Point Lobos in April is as perfect as it gets!

April 7

Ann Muto

We knew that our monthly guided walk would be different because several Point Lobos Docent trainees had asked to come along and learn as much about the wildflowers as the Cypress Grove Trail would offer. Art and I agreed that I would focus on any visitors who joined the walk while he used his Flower Catalog to “educate” the trainees. Two visitors joined our walk, an eighth grade boy and his plateau of Bird Island. They liked the idea that the walk



would have a heavy wildflower emphasis. As we began the walk, I asked the boy to be responsible for the Catalog I was going to use to identify the wildflowers. Almost immediately he began to act as if he were the sixth trainee, flipping through the pages, looking for the wildflower that Art pointed out. It tickled us both when Art pointed out a chickweed plant near the steps leading to South Point for the trainees. As seriously as any adult, he asked, “Is that the common chickweed or the field chickweed?” We were

amazed that he continued that level of interest throughout the entire walk.



Chickweed

April 8
Rosemary Foster
 Whalers Cove, 5:30 PM. A dead harbor seal pup was on the beach with gulls beginning to feed on it. A female seal came out of the water and made straight for the pup. She nudged its hind flippers, trying for a response. She then nudged its side – quite

vigorously – and nudged its head several times. She then moved to the other side of the pup and sniffed the wound, then moved around and nudged the flippers again. After a few minutes, she turned and rapidly returned to the water.

April 10 **Dione Dawson**
 The otter count for April was 26 adults and 5 pups, almost identical to last month’s, but certainly a bare minimum. The day was clear, but windy with whitecaps, a churning sea in some places and huge waves crashing over the rocks outside of Moss Cove. All this was perhaps enough to send the otters elsewhere, but who knows where?! The Bird

Island area yielded the biggest treat – four otters hauled out on a small flat rock where we had seen them in February. Headland Cove had three adults with a pup, and docents commented on having seen otters there quite regularly of late – a handy spot for visitors to find.

April 13 **Jon Dungan**
 The Granite Point/Moss Cove area was quiet this afternoon. I enjoyed the poppies, the checker blooms, blue dicks, bush lupines, and seaside painted cups. I noted that the blue heron nests on Coal Chute Point appeared deserted, but the Pelagic cormorants are nesting on the north side of the point, overlooking the Pit.



Seaside painted cup

April 16
Rosemary Foster
 Saw a turkey vulture on an old pine tree along the Granite Point Trail. Then about 50 feet from the intersection with the Carmelo Meadow Trail, I saw the badly chewed remnants of a harbor seal pup’s skull.

April 20 **Joy Osborne**
 The sun came out about 10 AM and the Bird Island walk was exciting – so much to see! Seals had hauled out for an earlier -1.3-foot tide and were hanging onto rocks as the tide came back in. China Cove was a delight – pup and mother pairs of harbor seals were bonding and 2 adult otters, one with a pup, rafted in the kelp. Nesting Brandt’s cormorants were still not covering the whole plateau of Bird Island. But they were on other rocks close to see.

would have. Below them were 4 Black-crowned night herons. Two were silently standing close together – one on a nest with eggs and one that just seemed to be surveying its domain. There was also a Canada goose nesting on the near island.

April 22 Stan Dryden

Many visitors were celebrating Earth Day in the most beautiful place on earth. And the otters were holding their own celebration with a little gathering of at least 9 adult otters and one pup in Headland Cove. Our loaner binoculars were a hot item. A group of 3 young women borrowed a pair and went off to take in the sights. On their return they reported seeing sea lions and harbor seals but no otters. Since I had checked out the cove while they were out with the binoculars, they were sent back for some remedial otter watching.

April 26 Don Watson

While approaching the Whalers Cove parking lot before 9 AM, I noticed with some concern three turkey vultures standing near the boat ramp. As I entered the parking area, I spotted a relatively small harbor seal next to the rocks, mother above the water line on the ramp with a newborn pup and all the evidence of its recent birth. As I passed, as far away as I could, the vultures continued cleaning up the afterbirth and did not seem to bother the new mother. I quickly parked my car, made my way to Whalers Cabin, and passed the word to the ranger on duty. I also wanted to warn any arriving visitors to avoid disturbing the seals. The ranger and I agreed that the mother



Harbor seal and new pup



Gopher snake

and pup appeared healthy and needed to be left alone. I posted a small sign on the road near the Cabin and also stopped cars to caution the visitors to avoid disturbing the seals. Fortunately, all arriving visitors were cooperative, including two fellows with an inflatable dive boat, and everyone kept their distance. With binoculars, I observed the mother seal slowly come around the rocks onto the upper end of the boat ramp, encouraging the pup along with her. The pup had a mind of its own and left the ramp, hiding in an opening in the rocks on the north side. The mother seal would have none of that and, using her mouth “with gentle persuasion,” grabbed the little bugger, brought it back to her side, and slowly moved down near the water line. After a minute or two, a wave surge briefly inundated the pair, and the next surge launched them into the cove. Off they went, with the pup learning quickly how to swim and obey mom’s orders. I trust they will live happily ever after.

May 2 Connie Dallmann

Took a group of schoolboys to Bird Island. They were so excited to see seals and their pups at China Cove, a sea otter and her pup, and hundreds of cormorants on their nests. I loved the wildflowers – even a globe lily and a large star lily. And we saw a gopher snake snoozing on the side of the road.

May 4 Helena Greenwood

The day started out misty but became sort of sunny and very pleasant by 10 AM. The light was enhancing the beauty of the flowers along the South Shore Trail and Bird

Island. All of the flowers on our wildflower poster were on exhibit. Stupendous! Pelican Point was ablaze with orange. The tender silver screen of the fresh beach sagewort contrasted with the yellow lizard tail yarrow – a treat for the eyes. A bunch of Turkey vultures were having a meal of a dead seal pup on the beach at China Cove. One could see a bloody trail going from water's edge to the half-consumed carcass.



Turkey vultures at ChinaCove

bobcat, those pups must have been getting plenty hungry. (Milt and other docents observed the seals over the ensuing week and found that they were not seen back on the beach in any numbers to nurse their young, except for a brief period on May 9. In that instance, five or

six mothers hauled out onto the beach and the pups immediately started suckling vigorously. This lasted about 20 minutes then, all of a sudden, the small group seemed to panic and, as if on signal, they all rushed into the water again. One can only hope that most of the mother seals were able to take their pups to another beach, and that this year's experience will not prevent them from using this beach next year. Ed.)

May 6 Milt Jines

Just before 6 o'clock, my wife and I were enjoying the gorgeous weather at Point Lobos and as we strolled past Whalers Cabin on our way back to our car, we noticed that all the seals and their pups had vacated the beach directly in front of the cabin and were in the water swimming a few yards off-shore. There was excitement amongst the several visitors standing along the roadside so I asked them what was going on. One couple told me they had just seen a bobcat grab a baby seal by the throat and shake it. The mother seal attacked the bobcat, causing it to release the baby seal, but the bobcat turned its attack to the mother, injuring her (she was bleeding). She pushed the baby into the water and positioned herself in the surf between her baby and the cat. The bobcat retreated and disappeared into the brush along the bluff. The young couple from the UK said there were numerous crows circling overhead during the attack and they were causing quite a commotion, squawking loudly. My guess is, they were anticipating their share of the bounty.

May 7 Milt Jines

I went out to the Reserve early to check on the seal situation. Much to my sad surprise, there was a dead pup on the beach, and all the seals and their pups were still swimming offshore. None were on the sand. About 3 hours later I returned to Whalers Cove and found the seals were STILL swimming offshore! I could not help wondering if that cat might have been still lurking about. What bothered me most was that the mother seals nurse the pups on the beach, and since they seemed intimidated by the

May 9 Dione Dawson

Good news for all our otter fans as the otters are back, at least this month. We had the best count in over a year – a total of 64 adults and 9 pups. Perhaps it was the weather, which was in the 70s and glorious, but the rafts south of Sea Lion Rocks were so thick that it was difficult to count and almost impossible to designate male, female, or pup. The counters were in ecstasy but showed a great deal of patience in getting the count right while at the same time thinking this was too good to be true! The North Shore was practically bereft of otters, but other treats were in store as a large gathering of Risso's dolphins spent most of the morning cruising Carmel Bay. There must have been dozens and dozens leaping out of the water, gliding along, just enjoying a beautiful day. However, the largest bonus was seeing, exactly in front of the opening to The Pit, three or four gray whales acting very normally with regular spouts and typical movement. It might well have been a mother and calf accompanied by two "aunties" for safety. The only reasoning we could come up with is perhaps they took a detour from the ocean to avoid any encounters with killer whales. As the Reserve was rather full of visitors, it was fun to share the sighting and see a large crowd standing on Cannery Point with binoculars focused directly across Whalers Cove to the Pit. To add to our pleasure, we also had a very good annual count of harbor seals, a total of 167 adults and 58 pups. What a wonderful day!



Image by Ranger Chuck, taken at the Carmel River Lagoon and Wetlands Natural Preserve. Looking east to Palo Corona Ranch Regional Park, the beginning of the Santa Lucia Mountains.

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