

# POINT LOBOS



**Volume 34 \* Number 2**

**Summer \* 2011**

# Point Lobos Foundation

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## Point Lobos Magazine

The mission of the Point Lobos Foundation is to support interpretive and educational programs that enhance the visitor's experience, and to assist California State Parks in preserving Point Lobos State Natural Reserve.



is printed on recycled paper and published four times per year by the Point Lobos Foundation. Copyright 2011. All rights reserved. PDF versions available at [www.PointLobos.org](http://www.PointLobos.org)

Cover: Black-crowned night heron courtesy Chuck Bancroft

5 km

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# MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT: MAJOR COMMITMENTS

*Skip Flohr*

By now most everybody knows California Parks and Recreation has announced the names of the 70 state parks that will be closed to help make the \$32,000,000 in budget cuts ordered over the next two years. It has been decreed that they will be closed by July 1, 2012. Fortunately for lovers of the Point Lobos State Natural Reserve, our favorite park is not on the list. However, two other parks in Monterey District parks are on the closure list. They are Garrapata State Park and Zmudowski State Beach.

Although Point Lobos State Natural Reserve will remain open, there will be additional pressures on maintaining operation and maintenance standards in the park.

Point Lobos Foundation is committed to doing everything it can to maintain standards at Point Lobos. We will continue to fund our school outreach program allowing over 5,000 students to visit Point Lobos every year. We will continue to fully fund training for our approximately 165 outstanding volunteer docents, and financially support trail maintenance and improvements including the building of trails meeting ADA specifications. Your Foundation also funds the eradication and replacement of non-native plants and has

even funded the maintenance of the Park's restrooms.

The Point Lobos Foundation Board of Directors is now studying ways to provide the additional financial support to the Monterey District of State Parks that will be required to maintain the high standards expected by our members and visitors.

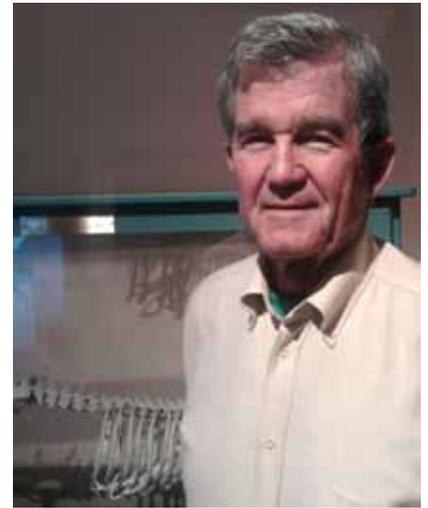
I know we are all disappointed that Garrapata State Park is slated for disclosure. Therefore I am asking the board of directors for a "Needs Assessment" for Garrapata State Park to help us determine if we can provide enough assistance to the Monterey District to keep this beautiful park open.

This is also an excellent time to reconsider your personal financial commitment to the Reserve by raising your membership level.

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A Memorandum of Understanding between state parks and the Point Lobos Foundation has been signed by both the state and the Foundation. This commits the Foundation to pay the lesser of \$250,000 or one half the cost of a new general plan (GP, see Spring 2011 issue for details). This is the largest financial commitment our Foundation has ever made.

A number of public hearings will be held to



solicit input on the GP. Times and dates for these hearings will be published in the local media. We will also include information about the hearings on our website, [www.pointlobos.org](http://www.pointlobos.org). It is important to remember that a general plan may include restrictions on what can be developed as well as what might be considered for development. To make sure your opinions and ideas can be heard and considered, we ask that if you possibly can, attend the public hearings. You may also let us know how you feel on this, as well as any other issues, by adding comments to our website or by mailing them to:

Point Lobos Foundation  
Route 1, Box 62  
Carmel, CA 93923  
Attention: Robert (Skip) Flohr



# Under My Brim

Spring is here at last, a time of renewal and rebirth. The hills are alive with multi-colored greens. The ocean has provided a variety of incredible blues. Clouds have filled the air with their giant pillow shapes. Warm sunshine has created an algae bloom that colors the waters of the bay and coves in various shades of green.



Even the fog has blanketed us with cool, wet, natural air-conditioning on occasion.

Yet the most dramatic change is the proliferation of color of the wild flower bloom. Areas on the north side of the Reserve are awash in fields of California golden poppy, Douglas iris has lined up along the Sea Lion Point parking lot, and the entrance station has seen its own iris as well as fragrant wild lilac. Big Mound Meadow, Little



Mound Meadow, and the grassy shoreline have produced hundreds upon hundreds of sea pink, and blue-eyed grass lines the roadway to Piney Woods.

I could go on and on with names and colors



and excitement, but you have to experience the floral display for yourself. Every part of Point Lobos is glorious with flowers. Make sure to see the harbor seals and their pups, watch for the nesting herons, gulls, and cormorants, and listen for the woodland and meadow birds filling the air with their songs.

Always at your service,

*Ranger Chuck*



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# Observations

## Sparky Starkweather, State Park Squirrel

Many of the Point Lobos Docents have been spending a great deal of time at Whalers Cove talking with visitors from around the United States and the world about harbor seal pupping season! Between April 9th and 25th, 26 new pups arrived. And Whalers Cove is just one of the eight beaches throughout the Reserve where harbor seals haul out to give birth.

Can you imagine the thrill youngsters experience watching a birth in the wild? One birth took only 4 minutes. Another lasted over 15. The variety of colors in both mom and pups was extraordinary. One mom we call Ginger has a rusty-red neck and head. The unique color is due to the amounts of iron and selenium found in the waters of San Francisco Bay. Her pup has a beautiful silver coat with black markings. Mom's coloration is common there but rare here. Did she come all the way down here from San Francisco?

The next few weeks and several months will be an exciting time to watch the new pups grow up and fend for themselves. And the mating behavior is like a ballet in the water as pairs get together to produce next years' pups.

❧ ❧ ❧

*Red-Pelaged Harbor Seals of the  
San Francisco Bay Region*

Sarah G. Allen, Mark Stephenson,  
Robert W. Risebrough, Lyman Fancher,  
Alan Shiller and Don Smith

*Journal of Mammalogy*

Vol. 74, No. 3 (Aug. 1993), pp. 588-593

Published by: [American Society of Mammalogists](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1382277>

Unlike most seals, which fast while nursing, harbor seal mothers leave their pups during the nursing period to forage at sea. Researchers believe they may do this because their relatively small body size cannot store enough fat to withstand a fast. On average, harbor seal milk is about 45% fat, 9% protein, and 45.8% water, with traces of lactose (milk sugar). These figures may vary among individuals and may fluctuate throughout the nursing period. The extremely high fat content of the milk helps

the pups more than double their weight by the time they are weaned. The female is an attentive parent during the nursing period. She noses the pup often. The pup may ride on her back, nip at her flippers, and chase



her through the water. Females recognize their own pups by vocalizations and by smell. After her pup is weaned, a mother shows no interest in the pup.

During the mating season, male harbor seals exhibit underwater vocal displays during short dives, which are probably associated with mating. These displays take place near haul-out sites, foraging areas, and travel routes between the two areas and also increase during times that females are more likely to be in the water. After the pupping season, males initiate true mating behavior by chasing, neck- and flipper-biting, and embracing. When approached, females respond by growling, head-thrusting, and flipper-waving. Copulation usually takes place in the water. A male harbor seal may mate with several females. “



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# 30-YEAR ALL STARS!

Profiles by Pat Bova

Visiting the Point Lobos State Natural Reserve is a special occasion at any time, any season, any moment. For many, a solo visit can represent peaceful meditation or the opportunity to enjoy nature at its most dramatic and inspirational. For others, assistance from a member of our skilled docent community (160 and counting!) provides answers to our questions or the enhancement of our joy while visiting.

On special occasions, your questions may be answered by one of our five “30-year-docents,” who essentially initiated the Point Lobos docent program in 1981. As “renaissance persons” they remain our noble specialists and expert interpreters. The following only begins to spotlight the docent careers of these special few. Look for them on your next visit to the Reserve.



## MARY BEACH



Mary uses her creative perspective to highlight the previously unseen, unfelt, or unheard treasures found at this natural reserve. So you never got to see an actual whale spout or breach? Just ask Mary, who is also known as our “Whale Whisperer,” and she will help you find them.

A talented artist and photographer, she co-produced a film of great beauty entitled *Lobos Legacy*, a collection of her beautiful photographs set to readings of Robinson Jeffers poetry read by Phyllis Kelley (call 831-625-1470 if interested in purchasing

a copy). It has proven to be an amazing outreach and training tool.

This 30-year-docent also proudly states that she visited the Reserve for many, many years before becoming a volunteer.

## NORMA DAVIS



Joining the Point Lobos docent program in 1981, Norma has established herself as a “taskmaster” and all-encompassing volunteer, as she enjoys all aspects of her docent life. She loves to greet visitors and loves to share her knowledge of the Reserve with visitors from around the world.

Norma has a broad spectrum of experience gained by volunteering at the Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History, the Monterey Bay Aquarium, Elkhorn Slough, and Point Lobos State Natural Reserve.

She has been a frequent passenger on special Zodiac boat tours at the Reserve. Her joy and excitement is contagious!

## WAYNE KELLEY



Visitors that have been fortunate enough to attend one of Wayne's public walks certainly always have a memorable experience.

From observing his "rope presentation" about marine mammal size comparisons to listening to his rich voice reciting Robinson Jeffers poetry, the experience is always a memorable one. His portable scope allows all to see whatever Wayne discovers in the coves, the rocks, and the plant communities.

Wayne was proudly part of the first "Otter Count," a program that still continues at the Reserve. He was also a very important influence in the "Adopt a School" program to aid out-of-district schools, introducing many children to the beauties of Point Lobos State Natural Reserve.

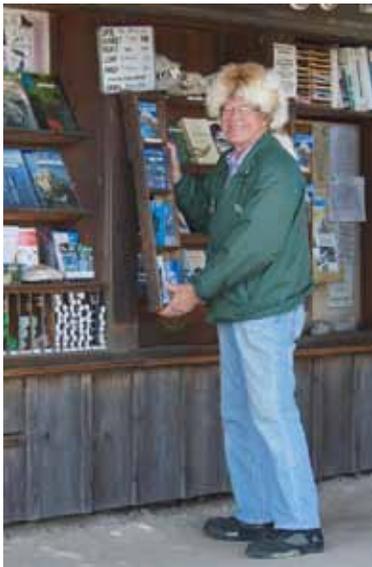
## JOY OSBORNE



Joy has been an active and lively volunteer vital to establishing and archiving information for the Reserve. From its

beginnings in a very small, damp, and older shack, the collection has evolved into a remarkable functioning library. Beginning with only 50 donated books, the collection has now grown to over 600 books, DVDs, and tapes. It has become an important resource for Point Lobos docents, staff, and trainees. Joy has an impressive background of leading many visitors on nature walks, as well as assessing perfect tidal conditions for a tide pool adventure at Weston Beach. Many visitors have had their first intertidal experience under Joy's watchful eye.

## REID WOODWARD



Not only was Reid Woodward among the first to graduate from the newly formed docent program, he also proudly became the first lifetime member of the "Point Lobos Natural History Association," now referred to as the Point Lobos Foundation.

Reid's accomplishments include being appointed to be

the first docent administrator, responsible for the interface of the volunteers and the State of California. He was instrumental in the redesign

and opening of our Information Station. Following this accomplishment, he played a role in the development of the "easy access" trail at Sea Lion Point. This Americans with Disabilities designation allowed all future visitors access to the beauty of one of our most popular trails.

His sense of wonder, science, and humor (witness that Davey Crocket hat!) have been a source of enjoyment and learning to over 3,000 local 3rd grade students, parents, and teachers. Teamed with Ranger Chuck Bancroft, Reid has been instrumental in providing a first class outdoor learning experience at Point Lobos, for the past 20 years.



In honor of their 30 years of service to the Point Lobos State Natural Reserve, a new pin was designed to present to our five special volunteer docents. Created by noted silver jewelry artist Pete Irish, the sea lion symbol has never looked better (see opposite page).

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# 30 YEARS 4 MONTHS 6 DAYS

by Dana Goforth

## Interview: Senior Ranger Chuck Bancroft

Tucked in a forest of Monterey Pines, Chuck and I settle in old, metal, government-issue chairs. We're in his office surrounded by years of trailside findings; a stuffed kestrel in flight, skulls of small rodents and other interesting objects. Beside me, a worn radio crackles with static. I place a small recorder between us, hoping Chuck isn't intimidated.

Inspired by the San Francisco rock music posters, Chuck headed to college in 1966 intending to study commercial art. That was a short-lived dream. As he says, "I couldn't see myself sitting in front of a drafting table, all day, every day." As he leans back, the metal chair squeaks affirmation. "I left school to explore the world. While my best friend and I were camping, we met a number of rangers who loved their job. Wow, I thought, what an idyllic lifestyle, I could do that."

"I attended night school and found a job making plastic light fixtures. All to save money so I could go to school fulltime." Can you imagine? I look at the handsome, uniformed man with twinkling eyes and can't imagine him any place other than this magical part of the world. "In 1971, I enrolled in the Forestry Tech program at Santa Rosa Junior College. I volunteered at several parks in Santa Rosa and got my first park job in 1973 at the Petaluma Adobe SHP [State Historic Park] and Sugarloaf Ridge State Park."

"I eventually enrolled at Sonoma State and graduated with a degree in Environmental Studies. I loved it." Chuck chuckles. "They didn't require math or chemistry for graduation." I could relate. Math still sends shivers down my spine.

In 1976, he was offered a park ranger position. After two years of ranger training, Chuck pitched for job openings in Southern California. He landed at Topanga, then moved to Will Rogers Historic State Park.

"I drove a Dodge four-wheel-drive and rode a horse. We patrolled over eight

thousand acres of territory. At Will Rogers, I was doing historical interpretation. It was nice but something was missing."

Fortunately, Chuck got itchy feet after three years down south and wanted to come back. He applied for a position, first at Mt. Tamalpais in Marin and then Point Lobos. He was turned down for both. However, a call came in mid-December. A position was open at the Reserve, would Chuck like the job?

"I remember my first night at Point Lobos: January 6, 1981. I moved into the Whalers Cabin and was sitting on the front step at dusk. Wow! I've landed in paradise. I drove out to the south shore and watched the sunset over the Pacific. Idyllic!" He leans forward and puts his hands together in emphasis. "The next morning I got up early to watch the sunrise. Beautiful shades of pink in the clouds drifting over the ridges of the Santa Lucia Mountains. How did I get so lucky? And I still have those same wondrous feelings every time I see a sunrise or sunset, or a harbor seal or sea otter pup with its mom."

Many adventures were waiting for Chuck. He met amazing artists, including Ansel Adams and John Sexton. "One of my greatest joys was seeing Ansel drive to Pebbly Beach (now Weston) in his big, long, white Cadillac. He was wearing a cowboy hat and John was usually riding shotgun. He'd sit out there and talk to people. They would bring their Instamatic cameras, and he'd tell them about taking pictures. He loved people. And he loved to share. It was incredible."

Chuck smiles at the memories. "I've met painters and poets, photographers and naturalists. We walk the trails and explore. But my best experiences are ones of learning. And amazing people to learn from. Jud Vanderveer, Vern Yaden, Alan Baldrige, Brian Weed, and so many others. I am humbled when I think about all the inspirational people I met."

Voices from the radio interrupted our conversation. Chuck picks up the chipped, grey

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microphone. His voice is even and professional. I look out the window and watch several docents talking to guests. "When I got here," he continues "the first docent group, about 25 people, were training with two amazing women, Helen Lind and Sister Anna Voss. Anything you needed to know you asked them. And I was learning too. I'd never seen an otter before I moved here! We had an information trailer filled with material that we literally hauled out in the morning and put back at night. Today, we have professional, well-educated people with a passion for this place. Honestly? We can't do without them."

I wondered what changes he's experienced in his 30 years, both at Lobos and with the state park system. "I'm not supposed to be political in uniform." He crossed his legs. The ancient chair screeched as he leans back and plucks imaginary lint from his green trousers. Uh-oh, I thought, not a good direction to take the interview. Chuck continues anyway, "When I first got here, there were four rangers and two trucks. When we weren't driving on patrol, we walked trails, carried a spotting scope and spoke with people. We were encouraged to develop educational programs. Back then, we only covered Carmel State Beach and Point Lobos. Now we work Garrapata to Zmudowski. Now, like then, we are responsible not only for educational programs, but public assistance and law enforcement as well. Ignore the drama, smell the flowers." Enough politics.

Chuck is articulate and not the least bit shy. I think he's forgotten about the recorder. I want stories! Chuck describes his love of birding and a few of the amazing sightings he's witnessed over the decades. His eyes shine with excitement. "Prior to January of 2009, I'd never seen an osprey at the reserve. Now we have one that's here almost every day and there are reports of a second one down by Whalers Cove. They hunt between Carmel River lagoon, where the water's brackish, and at Whalers, which is salty. So I guess they decide, do I want steelhead trout today or blue rockfish? What's on the menu?"

"You see things like this everyday. One day, a couple of deer ran out of the Piney Woods picnic area, jumped into the ocean, swam out to the rocks, and then jumped back into the water, swam ashore and disappeared. Had no idea why that happened."

Chuck continues with enthusiasm. His hands are gesturing toward the woods as he leans

forward. The government chair is ominously silent. "There're a number of us who love to photograph the wildlife. I picked up a camera for the first time in 1978. Part of my ranger training at Asilomar included a slide show on local wildlife. I chose sea urchins. My photos were pretty bad back then so I borrowed some slides and passed live urchins around for emphasis. But I was very interested in photography. When I transferred south, I attended Pierce College in LA. I started with color slides and moved to black and white images. I loved doing my own processing! Then I moved up here and decided to stick with color. Everything was so beautiful, especially the mushrooms! Several years ago, I switched to digital. I was so driven to take pictures of birds and the digital format was perfect for capturing them in flight. I've been fortunate enough to be in the right place at the right time."

"My obsession with birds holds true for wildflowers and mushrooms too. But there's something special about getting that one shot of a bird in flight that keeps me going and going. I often think, what new thing will happen today?"

"It's been tremendous. I couldn't have imagined how good this career would be. Idyllic? You bet. Especially the people I've met and the experiences I've had... it's been really, really good. I would hope that the next generation feels the same and I hope that the state parks will continue with the generalist aspect where we can do a little bit of everything. As Sister Anna taught me years ago to 'Pass it on with wonder!'"

Our interview was wrapping up when a volunteer popped into the office. A lone harbor seal just gave birth on the small beach in Whalers Cove. Ranger Chuck was out of the chair in a heartbeat. "Come



on." We jumped in the truck and headed out. At the edge of cliff were several photographers with impressive lenses angled toward the shoreline. Chuck pulled the truck to one side and with a casual excitement, walked to the gathering. I watched as he conversed with the people, peered through lens, gesturing toward mother and pup. Naturalist, photographer, teacher, and birder; Ranger Chuck is in his element. Idyllic lifestyle indeed.

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Of all the threats to the ecosystems of Point Lobos State Natural Reserve, the greatest is probably that of invasive plant species. Fast-growing and reproducing quickly, these species out-compete native species, thereby reducing biodiversity and potentially altering forever the Reserve's natural beauty. They also can harm the Reserve's animals by restricting their cover,

such as mustard and thistles. But in the second year, both Carl and Wayne took the training required by the State and became "licensed to spray." The Point Lobos Association (Foundation) provided protective clothing and the necessary gear and our weedbusters augmented the State staff (particularly Mary Paul) in an assault on the invaders. Today, they continue to attack the

# Weedbusters

## Ed Clifton



food resources, and freedom of movement.

Non-native species have probably existed at Point Lobos for nearly as long as non-indigenous humans have been here. The composition of grasses in coastal meadows that graced this area for centuries changed markedly following the arrival of persons of European descent. Most non-native plants are not invasive, but a few can have a disastrous effect. Mary Paul and Dida Kutz provide an excellent description of the invasive species of greatest concern to the Reserve, on pages 8 and 9 of the Winter 2008 issue of Point Lobos Magazine (see [http://www.pointlobos.org/sites/default/files/magazine/pdf/2008\\_Winter.pdf](http://www.pointlobos.org/sites/default/files/magazine/pdf/2008_Winter.pdf)).

In 2005, then-docent coordinator Ranger Matt Buonaguidi began an invasive weed-pulling program for the Point Lobos docents, and in 2006, growing awareness of the problem led the Point Lobos Natural History Association (our name then) to initiate an invasive weed mitigation program. As President of the Association at the time, I asked Carl Voss, a new board member with an extensive agricultural background, to chair a new committee dealing with this problem. Carl enlisted the help of a neighbor, Wayne Cipperly, in mounting a counterattack against the weeds. Both had connections to the Reserve. Carl was the nephew of legendary early Point Lobos docent Sister Anna Voss, and Wayne was a Point Lobos docent.

In the first year of the program, weeds could only be removed by hand, a laborious approach that is effective with certain weeds,

weeds once a month. Their effort continues to be supported by the Point Lobos Foundation, as do other weed-killing efforts in the Reserve.

Poison hemlock is one of the dominant weeds in the coastal scrub and has taken over large tracts of this community. Wayne notes that, if left to itself, the Reserve could be renamed "Point Hemlock." During the February weed busting, Wayne discovered poison hemlock in an area where it had not been seen before: the tract of coastal scrub enclosed by the wheelchair-accessible loop to Sea Lion Point. Carl and Wayne have tried to keep this enclave of native vegetation free of the



*Invasive French broom*

invasive weeds. That particular stand of poison hemlock will never reach maturity, but the seeds will continue to be blown in from adjacent areas.

The state, with financial support from Point Lobos Foundation, is attacking the thick growth of poison hemlock south of the Information Station. Matt Buonaguidi has cut a set of barely-passable paths through the poison oak to allow the state's natural resource maintenance staff, under the direction of Amy Palkovic, access to the hemlock. (Amy is an environmental specialist who oversees all the invasive weed spraying in the Reserve.) Carl led me through this maze of newly budding poison oak and showed me a couple of stands of young poison hemlock that the sprayers had missed. Bright green foliage densely blanketed the ground in these stands, which will soon, themselves, be obliterated. I could only imagine how this whole area would appear without the spraying—indeed, how the entire coastal scrub tract at Point Lobos would look if this weed spread unabated.

In addition to these efforts, the Foundation funds a professional landscape contractor who sprays specific targets 12 times a year. Carl, Amy, and the contractor periodically walk the properties to review the progress and to chart future activity. The process is complex: different areas require different treatment at certain times of the year, depending on the growth of the weeds.

The weed killer of choice is *Roundup*, a glyphosate that does not persist or spread through the soil. Spot targets are carefully treated under conditions of low wind to avoid dispersal that could impact native species. The weedbusters are careful to not to spray anywhere where the herbicide could enter the Reserve's waters (creek or ocean).

Will this effort succeed? It is a never-ending battle that, at times, seems discouraging. But it is making an impact. Wayne notes soberly, "I'd hate to think what this place would look like without the work of the past five years."

Continuity is essential. The weedbusters' dedication is phenomenal. Carl, after five years, is retiring from the spraying part, but still oversees the Foundation's weed-mitigation efforts. Wayne continues to make the 300-mile round trip from his home in Manteca every month, and with Carl's support, hauls the 30 pounds of sprayer and weed killer through the brush to reach selected targets. The two find additional rewards, however, beyond the knowledge that they are making a big difference. Because the spraying requires



*Weedbuster Carl eliminating ice plant on Granite Point. Photo by Wayne Cipperly.*

them to go off-trail, they have seen the Reserve in a way privileged to few others.

Foundation members and docents alike can help with this effort in several ways. First, we can learn to recognize the worst invasive species and alert State Park personnel to new infestations. Identifying targets is important. During the February spraying, Ranger Chuck Bancroft showed Carl and Wayne a substantial outbreak of cape ivy along the road near the Bird Island parking lot. Wayne applied the *Roundup* and that stand of ivy will disappear. For an excellent description of the worst weeds, see the article by Mary Paul and Dida Kutz mentioned earlier in this article.

If you are interested in participating in this important work, or want to know more about it, please contact Carl Voss, the current Foundation board member in charge of the invasive plant mitigation program, at 831-442-0964 or by e-mail [CarlFVoss@aol.com](mailto:CarlFVoss@aol.com).



*Wayne sizing up an ice plant infestation on Weston Beach. Photo by Carl Voss.*



**March 5: Phyllis Kurtz**

On this day, 20 young women, 16 to 18 years old participating in a leadership program, visited Point Lobos. Only two of them, most of whom are from the Salinas Valley, had ever been here. We took them for walks on Bird Island Trail and China Beach. Then we ended the afternoon reading the poems that each girl had been encouraged to write while on Gibson Beach. It was inspirational! [ed.]

*Swishing, swirling,...briefly  
silent  
Our stay so short  
Voices mixed  
With those of the birds  
Here, then gone.  
The waves hit soft  
The wind blows  
smooth  
Nature calls out  
To seek the beautiful  
view*

**March 12: Stan Dryden**

On my last chance to walk the Bird Island Trail before it is closed for conversion to being fully wheelchair-accessible, I came across someone who looked like a serious photographer. It turns out that he is indeed a

**March 13: Connie Dallmann**

On a family walk my son spotted two black oystercatchers apparently building a nest in a cleft in the rocks above Sea Lion Cove. That was a first for me.



March 14: Marty Renault  
I hate good-byes but just had to visit Bird Island one last time before the area closes for a year's

## *Quotes from the Docent Log*

***Elephant seals rescued, the art of summoning whales,  
a tricky harbor seal pup, and several fond farewells—  
until next year—to the Bird Island Trail***

note: the following excerpt is a piece of the collective poem organized from the girls' writings by Matt Buonaguidi – trails chief, walk leader, and poet.]

*There's a breeze that feels  
Like the happiest place in the  
world.  
The view makes me believe.  
Point Lobos is the place  
To leave your worries behind.  
With the blowing breeze  
And waving waves that hit you  
With relaxing.  
Eternal sea*

professional photographer and wildlife tour leader from San Francisco. He told me that he had seen and photographed a very rare green hairstreak butterfly. When asked, he offered to send me the photo. However, after going home, he decided that it was not the extremely rare coastal green hairstreak, but the relatively commonplace bramble variety (*Callophrys perplexa*). In any case, it is uncommonly beautiful, no?

worth of renovation. Whatever the weather, this special place never disappoints. Ceanothus blossoms splashed some blue into the cloudy gray skies. Waves crashed against the rocks, adding to the mist. Golden poppies, wood mint, seaside painted cup, pearly everlasting, wild cucumber, zygodene lilies, and footsteps-of-spring brightened the path. Cormorants in breeding plumage socialized on the islands while a few gulls watched. All who love this spot will miss it

keenly, even as we look forward to the opening of the new ADA accessible trail next year.

**March 16-18: Fred Brown**

Carmel Valley Middle School's seventh grade held their nature science camp at Point Lobos from March 16 to 18. Divers brought up various sea creatures from Whalers Cove—crabs, octopus, abalone, sea stars, sponges, nudibranchs—for the youngsters to examine. Then they all went on a hike along the North Shore Trail. We observed dolphins, a gray whale, cormorants, and sea otters. The shore was being pounded by large surf, creating spectacular sprays off the rocks below—probably the highlight of the walk.

**March 21: Fred Brown**

I was leading eight twelve-year-olds on a walk on the North Shore Trail, and desperately trying my best to keep them focused on the plants they were required to identify for their class project. Knocking fish senseless with manroot (wild cucumber) was helpful, as poisons and easy fishing tend to keep a young boy's mind from wandering. I did emphasize that they should not touch the plants, as they are all protected in the Reserve. Then we came upon a large batch of miner's lettuce, "that indigenous peoples ate and the Forty-Niners munched on for their health. If you were hungry and lost in the woods you could just pick these and eat them." I walked on ahead thinking about the next plant encounter when I turned around and saw that

half of them were chewing on the leaves of the miner's lettuce. What can you say? They got their vitamin C and A, and their attention improved. I made them repeat *Claytonia perfoliata* a few times—they didn't see my broad smile as we continued our walk.

**March 24: Celie Placzek**

No harbor seals lolling on rocks today, or sea otters snoozing in kelp beds along South Shore, or even sounds of sea lions. All I could hear was the clamor of crashing waves tumbling and roaring and colliding up against the rocky



shore. My heart pounded with pleasure as I was blown down the path, dodging rain drops and puddles along the way.

**March 25: Rick Pettit**

A week of storms has left the forest thoroughly sodden; a slender waterfall cascades onto the beach below. Whalers Cove is topped with thick foam, through which harbor seals poke their bewhiskered heads. A double-crested cormorant stands on Window Rock, spreading its

wings to dry. Otters, at least three of them with pups, throng the cove. Calla lilies at the cabin steps announce the spring, and an undaunted white-crowned sparrow concurs, singing from atop a sage bush. A slowly descending great blue heron draws my attention to the pines on Coal Chute Point, where something else, hard to identify at this distance, is perched. Hauling out the cabin's spotting scope reveals a preening osprey. Soon a brazen crow shows up to harass it with figure-eight maneuvers; eventually he leaves, apparently satisfied with having made his

point. And then a class of high-schoolers arrive at the cabin, all of whom get their first look at this fierce and majestic bird.

**March 26: Dave Evans**

Driving to the Reserve, looking

forward to Ed Clifton's walk on trace fossils, an email lets me know the walk must be re-scheduled. Rain is imminent. Disappointment lasts but a moment ...to my right, a rainbow frames Ichxenta Point. The next few hours in the Reserve are soggy to be sure, but "tinted" by yet another Point Lobos memory. Such memories must be as numerous as the rocks and sand in the Carmelo Formation conglomerate!

**March 28: Paul Reys**



**March 29-30:  
Gretchen Evans**

Two juvenile elephant seals that needed help were found at Point Lobos on successive days. A team of volunteers from the Moss Landing Marine Mammal Center arrived after an alert visitor

noticed a seal in distress. The veterinarian determined a rescue was needed—the young weaner, nicknamed “Chip,” was malnourished. He was hauled all the way up the stairs from Gibson Beach and then to

I was scoping on this brisk and sunny afternoon, when docent Mary Beach came walking by with a couple of friends. I told the group that was standing around that Mary is fondly referred to as the “Whale Lady,” so be prepared, we may now finally see some whales. Before I knew it, Mary looked out at the ocean and said “Breach!” After about five seconds a gray whale breached directly in front of us! People didn’t know how to react or what to say. All I could do was nod my head with approval.

**March 29: Jeff Johnson**

Although officially closed for renovation, the Bird Island Trail was open on this day. I jumped at the chance to visit China Cove, my favorite place in the Reserve, and to do some scoping. I spotted an osprey in a Monterey pine tree, set up the scope, and was pleased that this beautiful bird posed for several visitors. Then I set up the scope on the bluff above and to the right of Pelican Point, where I was able to view a nesting pair of strikingly beautiful black-crowned night herons, several Brandt’s cormorants in brilliant breeding plumage, and a half-dozen dozing harbor seals. I’m looking forward to next year when the new ADA-conforming trail will be more heavily used than ever.



the Bird Island Parking lot. The next day brought a similar problem at Weston Beach. As with Tuesday’s seal, this youngster, nicknamed Dale, appeared to have been born some time in January. Eventually, with a bit of a struggle, the insertion of the elephant seal into carrier was successful, and a few Weston Beach steps later, Dale was on the way to Moss Landing for medical attention.: several elephant seals were released 4/21 at Weston, and among them was one of the seals mentioned by Gretchen. Hurrah!]

**April 13: Connie Dallmann**

While leading a walk out toward Moss Cove, we sighted a black-crowned night heron—

it was fishing, not nesting, but there could be a nest near-by. And the poppies out toward Ichxenta Pt. are spectacular.

**April 20: Greg Crawford**

My wife Nancy and I have greatly enjoyed setting up two scopes and doing “team scoping” at Sea Lion Point. Guests have loved learning about the nuances of these marine mammals as we compare and contrast their features and adaptations while using our scopes as teaching tools. It is not unusual for us to hear from the guests that “Point Lobos is our favorite place in the world.”

**April 26: Pat Sinclair**

Peering through a scope at the delightful sight of nursing pups at Whalers Cove, we noticed a thin, silvery-gray baby seal, a long distance from its mother, who appeared to have abandoned it. We then observed this lone pup make its way to an obviously new mom. Her pup, still sporting a bright pink umbilical cord, was just reaching up to nurse, but the silver pup nosed its way in, latched on to the mother’s teat and began to nurse. We stood there, astonished as the mother allowed it to stay on for a good twenty minutes!

When the older pup got its fill, the mother rolled over and began to make nose-to-nose contact with it. She seemed confused, and continued to sniff and paw the silver pup, but didn’t harm it. Then her own small pup cried out, and she moved quickly toward it. I learned afterwards that while harbor seals typically do not tolerate other pups, there are documented instances where an older unrelated pup will nurse off a seal other than

its mother. This can happen when the mother has only recently given birth, and has not yet fully bonded to her own pup. Mystery solved.

#### **April 29: Paula Johnson**

There were lots of people at the Information Station asking questions, wanting to know all about the seals, and showing me pictures on their cameras so I could help identify



she was now relaxed and at peace, and realized that she needed

to plan more trips to Point Lobos. She lives nearby, but hadn't realized the beauty that was so close to her.

#### **May 4: Rick Pettit**

A notably warm morning at the Reserve, with a calm sea, and the tide low enough to reveal the vivid green of surf grass among the rocks north of Cannery

Point. A cormorant with its beak crammed full of seaweed sprints westward toward its nesting spot on Guillemot Island. The high cries of unseen oystercatchers echo among the exposed rocks. Violet-green swallows dart and chatter overhead, and a hungry

Western gull settles in nearby and eyes me hopefully. Just offshore an otter surfaces, grooms, rolls, then rears up and dives again. After a minute or two she returns, empty-pawed, and goes through the same routine. Then again. And yet again. Always with nothing to show for her efforts. Intrigued, I count eleven such dives and resurfacings before my wristwatch indicates (these darned appointments!) that it's time to leave. Descending the stone steps to the parking lot, I imagine this admirably persistent otter finally coming up on dive number twelve or thirteen with something really tasty.

#### **May 18: Rick Pettit**

Update: impressive progress is being made on the transformation of the Bird Island Trail into a fully accessible route to Pelican Point, the Reserve's prime spot for seeing nesting Brandt's cormorants, western gulls, and black-crowned night herons. An early phase is the construction of a viewing platform—the stone work is exacting and time-consuming, but the result should be well worth the wait.



flowers. One lady came along and said she was the daughter of a former ranger, and had thus spent a lot of time as a teenager at Point Lobos. She had been all over the Reserve as a youngster, and was greatly enjoying her return visit.

#### **May 2: Duffy Johnson**

I was shadowing a school walk, and took the trail sweep position, keeping the stragglers up with the rest of the group. One of the parents had been coming to Point Lobos since he was a kid. As we walked along he remarked that he was learning things from this walk that he hadn't known even after all his visits. Another parent mentioned that although she started the day in a bad mood, complaining about everything,



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