

# The American River Natural History Association

# ACORN



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## Squirrels in My Bird Feeder!

By Ed Littrell

The native western gray squirrel *Sciurus griseus* is common along the American River Parkway and in backyards of the Sacramento area. It is so common in suburbia that it sometimes becomes a nuisance. Its bad qualities include taking birdseed in backyard feeders, digging up flowers and bulbs, and entering attics where it can damage household wiring and soft pipes. But even with that, many people like to watch squirrels as much as they like to watch birds.

There are few predators of squirrels in our area. In our backyards, probably only owls, dogs, and big domestic cats could catch a squirrel. We do see a lot of dead squirrels on local roads, however. Squirrels make nests in tree cavities or in nests made out of leaves.

These look similar to the stick nests that the local yellow-billed magpies make. Litter size is usually around four, and the babies are born in the spring. The babies are rather like baby kittens, in that they do not have hair or teeth and are blind for about six weeks. If the conditions are right there may be a sec-

ond litter in the middle of the summer.

We have two other species here that could be confused with this native tree squirrel, and one ground-dweller that could be, too. The eastern fox squirrel *Sciurus niger* and the eastern gray squirrel



*S. carolinensis* look very much like our native animal. Both of these squirrels were brought here as ornamentals for our parks, and have now spread far and wide. I have seen the fox squirrel north of Sacramento along the Sacramento River. The fox squirrel is reddish, but the eastern gray squirrel could easily be mistaken for the western, as its main difference is its slightly smaller size. All these squirrels are somewhat solid colored along their backs and sides

and lighter underneath. Colors can vary from gray to red to black. I have not seen the black phase in this area.

The California ground squirrel *Spermophilus beecheyi* is about the same size as our tree squirrels. As the name denotes, it mostly lives in the ground, in burrows. However, it will climb for food such as walnuts. It also has the bushy tail of the tree squirrels, but the ground squirrel's color is more of a mottled gray and brown. When scared, it will head for its burrow, while the tree squirrel will head up a tree and try to hide or escape.

The tree squirrel in particular has adapted to "us." While our activities and structures have reduced the numbers of some animals to what we call "threatened or endangered" status, apparently no such problem exists for the tree squirrel. In fact, the California Department of Fish and Game routinely receives calls asking for assistance in squirrel problems. The Department does offer advice on how to live with squirrels, but it does not have a program to remove or reduce tree squirrels. A written permit from the Department is re-

*see Squirrels, page three*

Every Saturday and Sunday at 1:30—Effie Yeaw Nature Center—FREE Nature Program

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# A Man and the River

By Peter J. Hayes

The prognosis for the health of the Lower American River's Chinook salmon and steelhead fishery took a turn for the better in September when the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation approved a plan promising increased minimum flows and more appropriate temperatures of the river.

The plan was crafted by the Regional Water Forum, an umbrella group of local government, business, agricultural and citizen groups. It calls for year-around minimum flow standards of approximately 800 to 1750 cubic feet per second (cfs) in the Lower American. Minimums of 2000 cfs or more were set for Chinook salmon spawning conditions, depending on upstream storage.

One cannot help but think that the late Rod Beaudry, a reporter for the old *Sacramento Union*, would have cheered the news of this decision.

Beaudry wrote numerous articles in the early 1970s sounding the alarm over adequacy of American River water that the Bureau of Reclamation was releasing from Folsom Dam into the Lower American to protect the fishery and web of plants, animals and insects that lived on the American River Parkway. Ominously, construction was underway on the Folsom South Canal that would divert even more water from the Lower American at Nimbus Dam near Folsom and send it south into the San Joaquin Valley and to East Bay Municipal Utility District.

"Rod was instrumental in opening people's eyes to the threat to the Lower American," said Jim Jones, Save the American River Association (SARA) Board member who was president then.

In its ongoing fight to protect the river and its fishery, SARA joined with the Natural Resources Defense Fund and won a lawsuit that stopped construction of the canal at the Rancho Seco nuclear plant in southern Sacramento County. And the State Water Resources Control Board in 1972 ordered the Lower American River summer minimum flows set at 1,500 cfs.

Jones said Beaudry's stories and those of *Sacramento Bee* reporter Doug Dempster helped pave the way for "the great victory" of the 1972 state's minimum flow decision. And that was surpassed by the recent action, he added, although many details remain to be worked out such as a system for monitoring the new minimums annually.

Beaudry, a New Englander of boundless enthusiasm, and his family lived next to the river, and he often walked the parkway trails. What was not known by most was that he was in the midst of a 2 1/2 year fight with cancer when he wrote his Lower American articles, some from his hospital bed.

"Sacramentans, blessed with the good fortune of having a pure river flowing within the confines of the county and city, want to assure that the river is preserved for fish and recreation," he once wrote.

Beaudry died in May, 1972, at the age of 31. The County Board of Supervisors later renamed the entrance road to C.M. Goethe County Park on the parkway off Folsom Boulevard as a memorial to Rod Beaudry. The state named a trail in his honor at the Ed Z'berg Sugar Pine Point State Park at Lake Tahoe.

(Peter J. Hayes, ARNHA Publications chair, worked with Rod Beaudry at *The Union* when he wrote his *American River* stories.)

### *Squirrels, from page one*

quired for an individual to kill western gray squirrels. It is illegal to relocate them, as they then could be a problem in the new area or spread a squirrel disease.

Another legal problem also comes up when dealing with the tree squirrel. The western gray squirrel is a native game animal. That's why a permit is required to kill one outside the hunting season. But the fox and eastern squirrels are introduced, not native, and therefore not protected. So no Fish and Game permit is required, but all other humane and local laws have to be followed. If you have squirrels bothering you, you do have to correctly identify them before taking lethal action.

But I think most of us are willing to put up with their antics. I know I like watching them run along the fence line—as long as they don't get into my attic!

*Ed Littrell is a retired State Fish and Game biologist and current member of the ARNHA Associate Board of Directors. ■*

## Can You I.D. These California Birds?

By Jack "Old Coot" Hiehle

1. What bird has the longest bill?
2. What four bird species have wing spans less than the length of the bird?
3. What is the smallest bird in length, wing span and weight?
4. Which bird stands the tallest?
5. In each of two genuses there are two birds, one of which is twice as heavy as the other. Name them.
6. What bird has the smallest bill in relation to its weight?
7. Which raptor has the greatest wing span in relation to body length?
8. What bird species has a wing span nearly as great as the California Condor?
9. What two California species are not found in other states?
10. What is the heaviest bird?

see answers, page 8

Winter 2005/6

## EYNC's New Wild About Wetlands Exhibit

There's all kinds of new stuff here, "the boy, aged about about 7, exclaimed to his mother as they made their way through the Effie Yeaw Nature Center's stunning new "Wild About Wetlands" exhibit.

He was so right. The exhibit offers a wide-ranging array of hands-on activities, educational games, beautiful photos and art, all underscoring the importance of this Central Valley ecosystem. They describe how water from rain, snow-melt, rivers and groundwater filters through stands of grasses, tules, willows and other vegetation. Wetlands create giant "sponges" that store rushing floodwater, break down or remove pollution, and provide shelter and sustenance for countless birds, mammals, reptiles and insects.

The accent is on interactive. Visitors watch through microscopes at various stages of tadpoles evolving into frogs, lift a window to learn that the last grizzly bear was killed in California in 1922, lift movable trays to demonstrate how much faster marbles (water) slide down a concrete surface, in contrast to through a wetland.

The exhibit depicts the steady loss of these biologically significant areas and how dedicated people are working to conserve and restore them..

The exhibit was under construction for six months by the nature center staff, under the direction of Betty Cooper, aided by EYNC director Marilee Flannery, Linda Maurer, Libby Harmor, and Marsha Schindler, mural painter. They were backed by many volunteers, including Richard Horgan, who spent several hundred hours constructing elements of the exhibit, Karinne Bauer, Walter Dong, and Colleen and Rich Draffin.

Funding came from a variety of grants, including those by ARNHA, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and the Intel Corporation.

Admission is free, as is parking in Ancil Hoffman Park in Carmichael for ARNHA members (others: \$4). Winter open hours at the center are 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. every day, closed Christmas and New Year's. The exhibit will continue for more than a year, after which it will travel to other museums throughout the state. ■

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### **It was the annual Maidu Indian Day at Effie Yeaw Nature Center** and some two dozen youngsters knelt on the grass, each industriously scraping a piece of abalone shell on a slab of sandstone, smoothing the edges and shaping it into a pendant. Satisfied with the result, each child approached docent Neal Walden, who attached to the mother-of-pearl-like pendant a necklace of tough string, representing the sinew from a deer leg ligament used by the Nisenan Maidu who once lived along the American River.

Walden, volunteering at one of the most popular of the craft demonstrations at the Oct. 1 event, said: "The kids think these pendants are wonderful. And they're happy to learn something about the early people who lived here."

The Maidu Nisenan obtained the abalone shell in trade from the Patwin/Wintun tribes who in turn had obtained it from Pomo Indians who lived along the coast.

Enthusiastic family groups—about 800 visitors in all—thronged the nature center on a mild, sunny day, enjoying Maidu dancing, and demonstrations of traditional food preparation such as a salmon roast and acorn preparation, beautiful basket-weaving, story-telling and native plant use.

Sponsors included ARNHA, Rumsey Community Fund, Cache Creek Indian Bingo, and Mooretown Rancheria. ■



# Tanner Makes Progress Slowly

*(A story in the fall issue of The Acorn told about the behavior modification project designed by CSUS graduate student Kristen Spencer. Here Spencer recounts the progress she and Tanner, the Red-tailed Hawk that lives at the Effie Yeaw Nature Center, are making.)*

Tanner has made tremendous progress, and at the same time the progress has been very slow and taken much longer than expected. We had hoped to be finished by now, but as anyone who has ever worked with animals will tell you, they have their own schedules. Tanner has been in no hurry!

The first phase of our training was to introduce novel objects to Tanner by leaving them in his cage. We hope that by exposing him to novel objects every two or three days Tanner will learn to deal with new items in his environment

quicker. This phase is still ongoing.

The second phase is to develop the use of edible reinforcement; basically we use food as a reward. This is the phase that has taken a long time, as Tanner was initially very nervous about eating near us, let alone while he was being handled. Tanner will currently take food out of my hand when conditions are calm. When he will take food from the hand regardless of what is going on around him we will know that he accepts food as a reward. Then we will work on changing his behaviors gradually using reward.

A final phase will include using a hood, a blindfold, to see if this helps Tanner stay calm. Researchers and volunteers are at the nature center on almost a daily basis, and everyone is invited to come visit us any time! ■

## Need to File EIR Upheld in Sacramento County Superior Court

Recently, **Save the American River Association (SARA)** was successful in its lawsuit contending that the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors abused its discretion in approving a project near the Lower American River bluff without the preparation of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR).

The impetus for filing the suit was that in September 2004, the Board of Supervisors ignored the recommendation of its own Planning Department, County Parks staff, and the Parks Commission, and, on a 3-2 vote, approved a project for three large homes, a project for which no EIR had been prepared. SARA filed suit and demanded that an EIR be filed.

The Sacramento County Superior Court held that the Board of Supervisors erred in approving the plan without an EIR. Judge Judy Hersher's opinion stated, "There is substantial evidence to support a fair argument that the project may have significant adverse aesthetic impacts, and because there is substantial evidence of a fair argument that the project is inconsistent with the American River Parkway Plan and the Parkway Corridor Combining Zone."

If you wish to read more about the decision and the ramifications for future development that is inconsistent with the American River Parkway Plan and the Parkway Corridor Combining Zone, you can find a recent article that discusses the decision in greater detail by going to the SARA website ([www.sarariverwatch.org](http://www.sarariverwatch.org)). ■

## ARNHA 2006 Calendar of Events

- **Forum on Bats** - March 1 - Wednesday
- **Bird and Breakfast** - March 11 - Saturday
- **Nature Bowl Semi-final** - Nimbus Hatchery, April 6 - Saturday
- **Spring Fun Days** - April 10-14 - Monday through Friday
- **Earth Day** - April 22 - Saturday
- **Nature Bowl final** - May 20 (at CSUS) - Saturday
- **Memorial Day Community Outreach** - May 29 - Monday (ARPF)
- **Rex Cycles S. T. P.** - June 10 - Saturday (ARPF)
- **Annual Meeting and 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Party** - June 14 - Wednesday
- **Summer Fun Days** - June 12 to August 18
- **Fourth of July Community Outreach** - Tuesday (ARPF)
- **Labor Day Community Outreach** - September 3 - Monday (ARPF)
- **Great American River Clean-Up** - September 16 - Saturday (ARPF)
- **Maidu Indian Day** - October 7 - Saturday
- **Salmon Festival School's Day** - October 13 at the EYNC - Friday
- **Salmon Festival** - October 14-15 - Saturday and Sunday
- **Annual Fund Appeal** - November 16 - December 31
- **Discovery Shop Holiday Sale** - December 2 - Saturday
- **Wild Animal Count** - December 2 - Saturday
- **Winter Fun Days** - December 19, 20, 21 & 26, 27, 28

# Indian Ways Described at September Forum

“Smoke ‘em out!” That’s how Diana Almandariz described the way native people who lived along the Lower American River obtained a meal from an underground wasp’s nest. They set fire to the grass around the nest hole, the wasps would come flying out, and someone would reach in and grab plates or combs containing larva.

Ms. Almandariz, who teaches about the Wintu people at the Woodland-based Cache Creek Conservancy, and Warren Wulzen, associate state archaeologist, were the speakers at a well-received ARNHA program on Indian life at the Effie Yeaw Nature Center on September 21.

A native American who identifies with numerous tribal groups, Ms. Almandariz worked at the nature center in the late 1980s, building an acorn granary in the center’s Indian village area. She said much of her information about early Indian life came from her grandmother, Bertha Norton, a Maidu-Wintu.

“Working with and taking care of the environment was essential, but you could stay in your area and have everything you needed,” she said,

“They made boats of tules and after two years when the tules broke down they used them for beds.

“And when there was an over-abundance of insects, it was time to eat them. Children would form a circle around a field and, singing and banging on rocks, would chase the grasshoppers toward a hole in the ground. Burning material was thrown in to set fire to all but the insects’ abdomen. It also kept the insect population down.”

Archaeologist Warren Wulzen said it’s likely that at least a half million Indians lived in California before the arrival of EuroAmericans. He added that the local Nisenan usually found high ground near the river, although John Sutter brought in Miwoks and took over

the best high ground where Sutter’s Fort is presently located, at 27th and L streets. To villages along the river, Indians would return from gathering resources from as far as five miles away.

“Many village sites have been bulldozed away or been covered by levees,”

he said. “But many of the middens (refuse heaps) remain.”

And they have yielded many artifacts to researchers. Bones, bristles, shells and antlers are tell-tale indicators of the roles played by deer, rabbits, rodents, fish, birds and shellfish. Sand was used to leach acorns, robes were made of rabbit skins, and flicker feathers provided colorful headbands. ■

## PAGES FROM THE ALMANAC

### Droll One

The Ruddy ducks, the goldeneyes and the Canada geese are among the thousands of waterfowl loafing through the winter on valley ponds, rivers and lakes. Paddling among them is a slate-gray little bird we’d be tempted to call an odd duck except it isn’t a duck but a funny old coot.

People can’t help laughing at the American coot, its head and white bill bobbing backward and forward as it chugs across a pond. Its croaking call has been compared to an ungreased wooden axle. And when it takes flight, its enormous feet skitter across the water and its stubby wings flap frantically before it staggers into the air, recalling the line from World War I air combat movies: “You’re not going to send a kid up in a crate like that, are you?”

The coot is a member of the rail family that is usually found in marshy areas. It’s also called a mud hen and if one wants to get fancy, an ivory-billed mudpecker.

With spring, most of the ducks, geese and swans will have headed back to the north country to raise their families. Not the coots. Most of them will hang around the valley, build nests of shallow baskets among the reeds and produce baby coots that are even funnier-looking than their parents. A bald crown surrounded by a muff of orange-tipped feathers, an even brighter shawl over the neck and shoulders, a reddish bill and those snowshoe feet add up to what seems like a Walt Disney creation.

The gregarious coot may not have the grace of a swan, the rainbow hues of a wood duck or the flying skill of a pintail. Nor is it popular with farmers. But give it high marks for its ability to adapt and its entertainment value.

*From ARNHA’s “An American River Almanac: Reflections on nature throughout the year,” with essays by Peter J. Hayes and color photographs by George Turner and Tom Myers. It can be purchased for \$19.95 at the Effie Yeaw Nature Center and selected bookstores.*



## American River Natural History Association

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### UPCOMING EVENTS

- **Forum on Bats**

March 1 - Wednesday (see story on page 4)

- **Bird and Breakfast**

March 11 - Saturday (see story on page 4)

- **Nature Bowl Semi-final**

Nimbus Hatchery, April 6 - Saturday

- **Spring Fun Days**

April 10-14 – Monday through Friday

### Answers to Bird quiz (page 3)

1. White Pelican (certainly the largest!\*)
2. Western Grebe, Clark's Grebe, Greater Roadrunner, and Ring-necked Pheasant.
3. Calliope Hummingbird
4. Greater Sandhill Crane
5. White Pelican outweighs Brown Pelican, and Common Canada Goose tops Cackling Goose, newly designated species.
6. A tom Wild Turkey.
7. Osprey (2.739 X)
8. White Pelican
9. Yellow-billed Magpie & Island Scrub-Jay
10. California Condor (23 lbs.)

\* Recalling Dixon Lanier Merritt's ode to the Pelican:

A wonderful bird is the **pelican**,  
His bill will hold more than his **belican**,  
He can take in his beak  
Food enough for a week,  
But I'm d—— if I see how the **helican**.

(Statistics from David Allen Sibley's "Guide to Birds.")

## Welcome New Members

Robert Beers  
The Brown Family  
The Bustamente Family  
Dale Claypoole  
Patrick Cody  
Paul Cordero  
Mark & Leigh Ann Crosby  
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Mojgan Fischer  
Jennifer Hart-Mora  
Nadine Hintz  
Charlene & Mike Hogan  
Renee Hudgins-Lopez  
Madeline Hunt  
Joey Johnson  
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Back issues are now posted on [www.arnha.org](http://www.arnha.org) on the membership page.**

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