



Acorn Woodpeckers Take Care of Their Own

text and photo by Ed Harper

A characteristic bird of oak woodlands, the highly sociable Acorn Woodpecker is an easy bird to identify. For when it comes to woodpeckers, the ability of most of us to identify them was enhanced by the Woody Woodpecker cartoons of our youth. When this local species is first seen around its Ancil Hoffman Park colony, its behavior quickly identifies its family by its ability to hitch up a tree trunk using its stiff tail feathers as a brace. And often we're alerted to its presence by the sound of soft tapping on wood as it goes about its daily routine, or by drumming as it hammers on a resonating surface to interact with others of its species. A fascinating family, *Picidae*, woodpeckers are a nearly cosmopolitan family of birds, comprising some 216 species found on all continents except Australia and Antarctica.

It is a medium-sized bird with an all-black back, a black-and-white clownish face, and a red crown. The female shows less red, however, since there is a black band separating the creamy white forehead from the red cap, whereas the male lacks this black band. From below, the black breast band gives way to ragged black streaking extending down along the flanks of otherwise white underparts.

In flight, note the white patches in the wings, along with the white rump, markings that separate this species from the only other all black-backed species in the Sacramento area, the Lewis's Woodpecker. Its clamorous *whack-up, whack-up, whack-up* calls are distinctive.

Melanerpes formicivorus is the scientific name for the Acorn Woodpecker. The genus name, *Melanerpes*, means "black creeper," which fittingly describes the first view we often get of this woodpecker. The specific name, *formicivorus*, alludes to "anteater" which aptly describes one of its food preferences. Acorn Woodpeckers can often be seen "fly catching," as they sally out from a high perch to grab a flying insect, such as a termite or flying ant, and return to the perch, ready to fly again when prey is sighted. They also subsist on acorns, oak catkins, fruit, flower nectar and pollen, and sap, particularly when the

sticky sap wells have trapped insects. Acorns are critical for winter survival and are a major food component when insects are few.

Acorn Woodpeckers are noteworthy for living in closely-knit colonies that collectively prepare for lean times by storing acorns in soft porous bark or in the limbs and trunks of soft wood provided by dead trees.

These storage trees, or granaries, can consist of as many as 50,000 acorns. Even fence posts, telephone poles, and the soft eaves of homes have been used for granaries when dead trees have been cut down or are not available. An excellent place to see

Acorn Woodpeckers and their granaries is the American

River Parkway, especially the woods around the Effie Yeaw Nature Center in Ancil Hoffman Park with its mature oaks.

With a united front, they will defend a territory ranging from 4 to 20 acres.

see Woodpecker, page four



ARNHA Board of Directors

Noah Baygell
President

Lee Wilner
Vice President, Membership

Peggy Kennedy
Vice President, Newsletter

Pete Hayes
Vice President, Publications

Claudia Hulbe
Recording Secretary

Paula Baldi
Corresponding Secretary

Roberta Wilner
Treasurer

Members at Large

Bill Davis
Lou Heinrich
Molly Keller
Shirley Merrick
Greg Voelm
Larry Washington

Associate Members

Lisa Agoitia
Katie Baygell
Carol Doersch
Bud Getty
Ed Littrell
Pamela Maybury
Diana Parker
Kip Skidmore
Jo Smith
Lynn White

Representatives to other groups

Commission on History and Science
Greg Voelm

Parkway Advisory Committee
Noah Baygell

Parkway Master Plan Revision Committee
Lou Heinrich

American River Parkway Coalition
Lou Heinrich & Pam Maybury

Parkway Funding Group
Dodie Backus

Save the American River Ass'n.
Bud Getty & Pam Maybury

ARNHA

P.O. Box 241
Carmichael, CA 95609
(916) 489-4918 • www.arnha.org

The ACORN is published quarterly by
ARNHA, a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization

American River Master Plan Update Committee to Hold Community Workshops in January

The Discovery Park, Woodlake and Cal Expo areas of the American River Parkway are the focus of upcoming workshops organized by the Master Plan Update Citizens Advisory Committee (UCAC). Designed to engage the community in updating the area plans for this section of the Parkway, these workshops will be interactive and informative.

At the first workshop participants will tour the area, learn about the area's characteristics and share their ideas about how they would like this part of the Parkway to look in the future. UCAC and County staff and consultants will use these ideas to develop area plan concepts and alternatives. ARNHA Past President Lou Heinrich is a member of the UCAC.

At the second workshop participants can see how their ideas have been incorporated in the plan as they can review and give feedback on the concepts and alternatives. This feedback will help refine and synthesize ideas into a first draft of revised area plans for Discovery Park/Tiscornia, Woodlake and Cal Expo.

At a third community workshop, this draft will be reviewed. Refinements from this round will become a part of the UCAC deliberations and their ultimate recommendations to the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors and the Sacramento City Council for updating the American River Parkway Plan.

As The Acorn goes to print, the final dates/locations for the workshops have not been finalized. You can get workshop information by calling Sacramento County Planning (916) 874-6141, or by viewing the Parkway Update web site at www.saccounty.net/planning. ■

Tom Myers Slide Show

Tom Myers, whose beautiful wildlife photographs were featured in ARNHA's "An American River Almanac: Reflections on nature throughout the year," will give a slide program and book signing at the Effie Yeaw Nature Center Assembly Building at 1:30 p.m., Sunday, January 9th.

With a collection of 500,000 color transparencies, Tom and his wife, Sally, share a career in free-lance photography that includes photo credits in National Geographic and Newsweek.

*Save
this date!* BIRD AND BREAKFAST

ARNHA's annual
birding and brunching fundraiser at the
Effie Yeaw Nature Center will be
7 am, Saturday, March 12, 2005

Mercury in Our Ecosystem

By Ed Littrell

Another case of unforeseen consequences: We're pretty familiar with the era of gold mining in this area, but there are many unintended consequences of mining, of which residual mercury, or quicksilver, is one.

Last September, the state issued an advisory urging people to limit their consumption of fish from Lake Natoma and the Lower American River because of toxic mercury that had built up in the food chain.

Said Dr. Joan Denton, director of the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment: "Fish are still recommended as part of a healthy, balanced diet. But an-

glers and their families—especially women of childbearing age and children—should be aware of the presence of mercury in fish from Lake Natoma and the lower American River, and follow our guidelines for safe consumption of these fish." (See box)

How did mercury get into the fish? The Forty-niners used the silver-white liquid element to extract gold from the ground. Finely ground gold ore mixed with water was passed over copper plates coated with mercury that attracted and captured most of the gold. The mercury was then boiled off and often released to the environment. Gold today is mostly extracted with cyanide and may also have unintended consequences, but that's another story.

Mercury can also leach out of its parent rock formations. Much of the Coast

Range from San Luis Obispo County to Lake County contains mercury. It includes famous mines such as the New Almaden in Santa Clara County. Areas around Lake Berryessa and Clear Lake (Sulfur Creek Mine) are rich in mercury. All these areas were mined for their mercury that then went primarily to the gold mines.

Some mercury was used as a fungicide on grain seeds. Waste may also have found its way downstream.

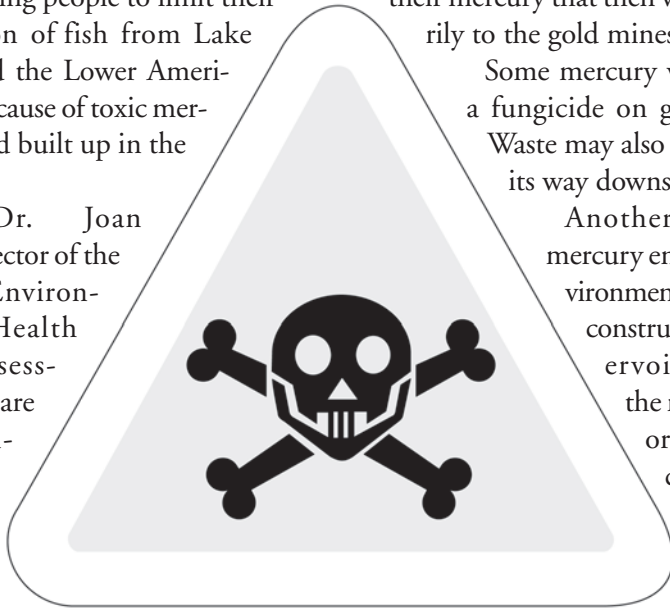
Another way that mercury enters the environment is through construction of reservoirs. Once the metallic, inorganic mercury is disturbed or refined it may travel

downstream to our foothill lakes or to San Francisco Bay. It settles to the bottom of these still waters and changes its form. Bacteria in the mud in the bottom of the lakes, San Francisco Bay or the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta transform the mercury into methylmercury, a form toxic to animals. It then moves up the food chain primarily in larger and larger fish in a similar fashion to what Rachel Carson described in "Silent Spring" for insecticides such as DDT and other organic chemicals. A big striped bass may end up with relatively high levels of mercury.

This author investigated a somewhat unusual case of mercury poisoning at Lake Berryessa some years ago. The California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) heard about a die-off of western grebes at the lake. The Depart-

ment first looked for DDT-type pesticides and their derivatives as a cause of the problem. These pesticide products had been proven to kill fish-eating birds such as herons and egrets. In this case, these compounds were not found at high enough levels to cause death. Mercury was suggested as another possible source of the problem and was found at levels sufficient to be considered the cause of death. This started a round of investigations into the effects of mercury on fish and wildlife in this area. Research continues to this day by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

see Mercury, page 10



CalEPA Guidelines

California Environmental Protection Agency guidelines for consumption of fish from Lake Natoma and the Lower American River include:

- For women of childbearing age and children age 17 and younger: Do not eat channel catfish at all; limit consumption of all bass, white catfish, pikeminnow, and sucker to one meal a month; and bluegill, sunfish and other species to one meal a week.

- Women beyond childbearing years and men: Limit consumption of channel catfish and bass to one meal a month, white catfish, pikeminnow and sucker to one meal a week; and bluegill, sunfish and other species to three meals a week.

More details can be found at the agency's Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment website, oehha.ca.gov/fish/hg/index.html

When you go fishing, recommendations from prior years can be found in the sport fishing regulation summary published by the DFG. Booklets may be picked up where you buy your fishing license.

Woodpecker, from page one

Their social and family bonds are evident as they collectively gather and store acorns for granaries that are jointly guarded from pilfering jays and squirrels, other Acorn Woodpeckers and Lewis's Woodpeckers.

Nesting and reproduction by the species can seem bizarre. A dozen or more adults may take part in mating, egg laying, and tending the young of a single nest. Although there is the traditional pairing of a single male and a single female, a group effort is more likely. This may be as simple as one breeding male and two breeding females or more complex arrangements involving two to four males pairing with two or three females.

In these colonies, core breeders are assisted in the rearing of the young by several non-breeding adults. Since normally all of the birds are related, even the non-breeders have a genetic investment in the rearing of the young. The non-breeding birds of the colony are most likely physiologically capable of breeding, but their status within the group limits their active participation in breeding. However by being in position to inherit a role as a breeder in a high quality territory, a non-breeding bird's chance for reproductive success in life is enhanced.

Females may engage in a dramatic form of competition: egg demolition. As nesting begins and females start depositing eggs in the communal nest, they may snatch an egg of a rival female. Such eggs frequently are cached in nearby trees and are eventually consumed by all members of the group. Each female seems bound to an axiom to "destroy an egg of a rival and replace it with one of your own." But ultimately this behavior settles down when females start to occupy the nest cavity at the same time and lay eggs simultaneously.

The eggs are white and unmarked. Unable to discriminate maternal from nonmaternal eggs, a female leaves her co-breeder's egg alone. Although this "egg

demolition derby" would seem to be an activity of violence and destruction, a useful consequence is the synchronization of the egg laying by communal-nesting females. If a female simply added her eggs to those laid several days earlier, her late developing young would be less likely to survive. By eradicating eggs laid before their own, a female gains an advantage in egg ownership, promotes synchrony of hatching, and improves the chances that some of the surviving offspring will be their own rather than those of a co-breeder.

Both males and females share equally in incubation, a period of about 11 days. After the young have hatched, females spend more time caring for the young than do the males—and breeders spend more time caring for the young than non-breeders. Offspring fledge after 30 to 32 days and become independent at about two months of age. Insects are fed to the young in the nest with all members of the colony contributing. After fledging, young birds learn to flycatch and feed on sap. It takes about six weeks for juvenile birds to become skilled in handling and cracking acorns.

Acorn Woodpeckers can be considered pests at times by growers of nuts and fruits. As consumers of large numbers of insects they can also be deemed beneficial.

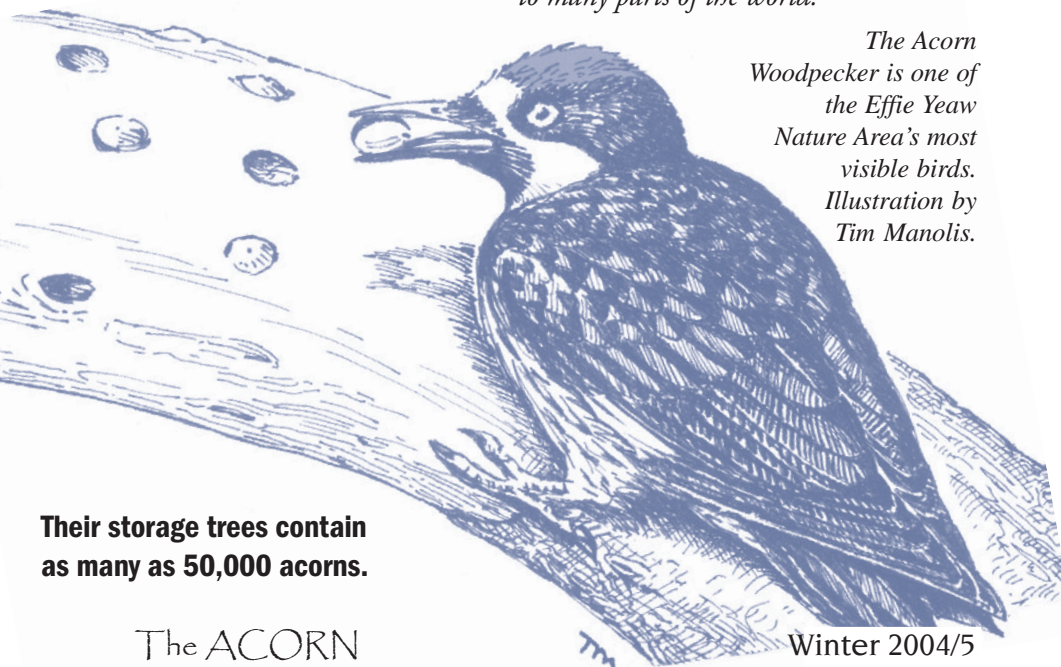
Populations seem to be stable in spite of increased competition by Starlings for nest cavities. Perhaps the greatest threat to Acorn Woodpeckers is the continuing decline of mature oaks in our area. In many locations, heavy grazing is impeding oak trees from regenerating. Old oaks are succumbing to old age or disease and are not being replaced. In other areas development is removing or replacing oaks with other trees. Since the Acorn Woodpecker is a species so intimately associated with oaks, this could lead to declines.

Next time you're in the field, take time to enjoy this species and speculate about its interesting natural history. Can you differentiate between males and females? Have you ever seen it foraging on the ground? What does it appear to be eating? How big is its granary? Do you see defense of the granary? What birds might be the breeders? And do they really have egg demolitions? ■

Ed Harper is a widely traveled birder and photographer. Although he retired from teaching mathematics at American River College from 1969-2003, he continues to teach field ornithology classes at the college through its Community Education Services. He and his wife, Susan Scott, operate Sandpiper Journeys and lead birding and natural history tours to many parts of the world.

The Acorn Woodpecker is one of the Effie Yeaw Nature Area's most visible birds. Illustration by Tim Manolis.

Their storage trees contain as many as 50,000 acorns.



Bill Pond: *Father of the Parkway*

An
Acorn
Extra

by Fred Gunsky

Bill Pond used innovation, persuasion, and goodwill to develop an American River Parkway plan that affords a lesson in leadership for those seeking to safeguard this local treasure

In these critical times for the extraordinary preserve called the American River Parkway, it is instructive to recall its origins and how it came to exist. A half-century ago it was still a gleam in the eyes of Sacramentans who valued the remnants of the natural riparian habitat that John Sutter and other early settlers encountered.

Gold partners had come and gone. Huge dredges had scooped up the remaining precious metal and left mounds and ridges of boulders. There was some farming along the river. Sand and gravel were being harvested on a large scale. A housing boom was scattering suburban homes on the bluffs and near the river. What were the prospects for long-term public access to the wooded and open spaces, the hiking and riding trails, the fishing spots and nature study areas?

As far back as 1915, a city planner had shown a proposed parkland strip on a map of the river, and called it the "American River Parkway." In a statewide study of potential parks in 1929, the late famed parks architect Frederick Law Olmsted's successor firm wrote in favor of establishing parks and nature preserves along both the Sacramento and American rivers. It took the urban and suburban population explosion of postwar years to arouse the interest and concern of recreationists and environmentalists, and to awaken attention from citizen groups and community leaders.

The decade of the 1950s brought a series of official actions. A River Beautification Commission, with representatives of city, county and chamber of commerce, outlined a program to develop recreational areas on the American River. The State Park Commission had set aside funds for land acquisition if local groups could provide matching funds or property. As a result, Paradise Beach, a mile below the H Street bridge, was dedicated "for park, general recreational and swimming purposes." In 1955 the completion of Folsom and Nimbus dams reduced the danger of massive floods and led to levee building that opened up many areas for housing development.

In 1959 the county established its first department of parks and recreation. Civil service procedures called for appointment of a director. Dozens of applicants sought the position. One of them was William B. Pond, who was urged by Charles DeTurk, California State Parks director, to take

the examination. Pond was selected. He came to the position after several years in a similar role in Beaverton, Oregon, where he carried out a program of park acquisition and development financed through two successful bond issues. Previously, he had worked for a recreation district in Renton, Washington, and had been supervisor of recreation for the Washington state parks and recreation commission.

Bill Pond reported for duty in Sacramento on November 1, 1959. As a newcomer he had two immediate needs. He had to learn his way around the physical terrain of the county, and he had to become acquainted with community resources and leadership.

Members of the North County Chamber of Commerce held a meeting to introduce him to officials of the various bodies and groups involved in parks and recreation. Soon he got permission to establish an advisory Parks and Recreation Commission. He was careful, he later wrote, "to provide for the Director to make independent recommendations which might be in opposition to those of the Commission."

At the same time he began a thorough study of existing county properties and areas worth considering for future acquisition and development. "I spent a great deal of my time during 1960 exploring every inch of the 5,000 acres within the flood plain." He hiked and rode horseback up and down both sides of the American River, "trespassing when I couldn't get permission."

Earl Frazer, the county planning director, pointed out that public access to the riverbanks and the streams itself depended on its being proven navigable. With a member of the plan-



Bill Pond, shown here visiting the William Pond Recreation Area at the foot of Arden Way, a key unit in the American River Parkway Plan spearheaded by the former county parks director. Photo by Ann Doersch.

William B. Pond, now in retirement with his wife Eloise in their south Sacramento home, recently shared with ARNHA the journals and memories of a fruitful career.

“The people of the Sacramento region and the American River are most fortunate to have such a visionary on behalf of the American River and Parkway as Bill Pond.. As first Director of the Sacramento County Recreation and Parks Department, and long before many understood the importance of the American River to Sacramento’s future quality of life, he provided the guiding hand and leadership in the transformation of the American River Parkway from dream to reality.”

Jim Jones, a Save the American River founder

ning staff, Pond took a canoe ride. State Fish and Game certified the river’s navigability.

Recreational sites in other areas were not ignored, but, Pond says, “My main interest and focus remained the potential for a unique environmental and recreational opportunity offered by the American River.”

Many in the public had high hopes for what was about to be proposed. “The horsemen dreamed of a capital-to-capital trail-Sacramento to Carson City. The bicyclists wanted a paved path from the confluence to Nimbus Dam. Hikers wanted the same, and the Audubon Society and the environmentalists wanted access to all of the natural elements, and the fishermen and canoeists and kayakers wanted access to the river.”

When a formal American River Parkway plan was up for adoption by the County Board of Supervisors, the chamber was full to overflowing with supporters, Pond recalls. There were, however, more than 12 government agencies with some jurisdiction over the river and its channel. More than 20 property owners were involved. The department budget for the fiscal year was a mere \$15,000.

Keystone of the 23-mile greenbelt plan was Discovery Park, at the confluence of the Sacramento and American rivers. Negotiations with the Corey family resulted in a lease of their 40 acres of farmland on a yearly basis until federal funds became available. Next was the adjoining Tiscornia property. The owner requested a friendly condemnation action, and a court hearing took place; the land was purchased with a combination of state and federal funds.

Highway Interstate 5 was being built then. The state wanted to place a bridge across this county property, and in return for the easement agreed to convert the old Jibboom Street Bridge into what is now the access to Discovery Park. Pond and his colleagues could turn their attention to the properties upstream.

An easement for trail purposes was obtained from owners of a soil excavation operation. The North Sacramento Land Company controlled a large acreage extending a mile-and-a-half upstream; an easement here provided for trails almost 25 years until a county purchase was possible. As a result of these arrangements, the first section of paved trail led from Discov-

ery Park to what is now Capital City Freeway.

The next step was to obtain an easement through the flood plain of the new Cal Expo grounds. Assemblymen Ed Z’berg helped on this, and also was responsible for legislation allowing set-asides by developers for park purposes in exchange for development rights. Thus the county was able to secure title to flood plain lands all the way to Arden Bar.

Bicycle enthusiasts, including Federal Judge Thomas J. MacBride, campaigned for extension of the bike trail, and with some federal funding it now reached Ethan Way.

There was a Teichert sand and gravel operation around Watt Avenue, with a bridge providing access to their trucks. A right-of-way was negotiated for the about-to-be construction of the Watt Avenue Bridge. Abandoning the gravel activity, the company gave all the property within the flood plain to the county—including the old bridge, which was removed as a hazard to boaters.

By this time development of the Parkway was proceeding well along the north side of the river. Through purchase, gifts and easements, the trail had reached from Discovery Park to Watt Avenue. Trail rides and hikes brought publicity and additional support for the project. The newly surfaced bike trail traversed the Cal Expo property.

A significant challenge was posed by the more than 180 acres of the Deterding ranch in Carmichael, which included the extensive natural area made available for years to teacher Effie Yeaw and her volunteer associates for field trips with students and boy and girl scouts. Mrs. Yeaw was one of the first advocates of the parkway and made sure that Bill Pond kept his focus on this piece of the puzzle.

The three Deterding heirs agreed that the ranch should



Recalling his first year on the job as county parks director, Pond said, “My main interest and focus remained the potential for a unique environmental and recreational opportunity offered by the American River.” Photo by Ann Doersch

become parkland, but funding was not available. With the help of County Counsel John Heinrich, a method was devised whereby the county could buy the property in a series of parcels over a seven-year period. State and federal matching grants made it possible to complete the transaction. The result was the present Ancil Hoffman Park, including the natural area and the interpretive center named for Effie Yeaw.

All the protected land within the levees from what is now Goethe Park to the Nimbus Dam was owned by the Natomas Land Company. It was still being harvested for its gravel deposits. Discussions with the company president, Chandler Ide, led to another use of the lease-purchase plan. During a span of eight years, state and federal funds were provided. The Goethe Park portion was the first to be acquired; the new park was named for C.M. Goethe, whose generous financial contributions helped to establish the Jedediah Smith Memorial Trail.

Easements or gifts from property owners made it possible to extend the trails from Watt Avenue to the Arden Sand and Gravel operation at the foot of Arden Way. The Carmichael bluffs blocked the way on that side of the river. On the other side the trail was continuous from Goethe Park to what would

become the Sunrise Avenue Bridge. The two were later connected by the “bike bridge” from Arden Bar Park to Goethe Park, funded by a 1972 bond issue. Arden Bar Park is now the William Pond Recreation Area, named in honor of the director who organized and implemented the parkway plan.

In March of 1968 the county controlled by ownership or easement more than 3,000 of the 5,000 acres included in the plan. It was at this time that Bill Pond resigned to accept a senior position with the National Recreation and Park Association in Washington, D.C. He was succeeded by James Malcolm, who continued the work.

Pond would be the last person to claim responsibility for the success of this prodigious achievement. Colleagues at every level of county government, state and federal officials, and a wide and varied complement of enthusiastic citizens supported his efforts. A few of their names are familiar to current parkway visitors.

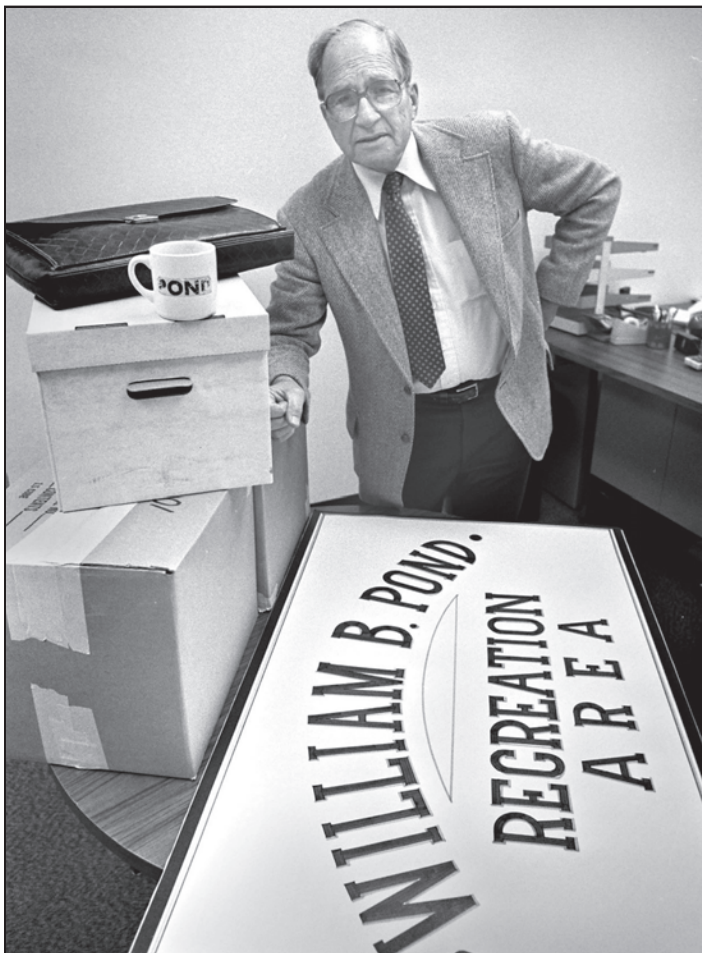
The bridge connecting the trail between Goethe Park and the William Pond Recreation Area is named for bicyclist Harold Ritchey, who campaigned so long for it. Jim Jones, a founder of the Save the American River Association, led the fight to preserve the pedestrian bridge at Sacramento Bar and Lower Sunrise; his name is on that structure. An oak grove near the river was dedicated in memory of Ed Mullaney, another founder of SARA, who promoted the documentary film “STAR” to raise funds and pass a crucial bond issue.

Hundreds of others staffed and volunteered for the groups that were organized to promote the countywide efforts to plan, fund and develop the 23-mile parkway. They established the Save the American River Association, the American River Parkway Foundation, and the American River Natural History Association. They appeared before the Planning Commission, the Park and Recreation Commission, and the Board of Supervisors to advocate the preservation of natural values and adherence to the plan that was updated and amended from time to time. They continue to form a strong and loyal body of community support for this unique Sacramento asset.

Bill Pond served the National Recreation and Park Com-

“In his quiet, unspectacular fashion, he was a master of coaxing cooperation out of the disparate agencies that had jurisdiction over the river. He was Sacramento county government’s first grantsman. The county’s application for federal money to begin land purchases was the first submitted west of the Mississippi under an open-space program begun in 1961. That grant was the first of many from federal and state governments.”

*Doug Dempster,
Sacramento Bee, writing
3/27/83 on Pond’s
retirement as county
General Services
director.*



Bill Pond’s years as parks and recreation director fill boxes of memorabilia. But part of his major work — the American River Parkway — is marked by signs like this. Photo by Mitch Toll

mission in various top roles from 1968 to 1971, then left Washington, D.C., to return to Sacramento, planning to start a consultant business. Instead he accepted an offer to head the County Housing Authority. After reorganization, this became the Community Development Environmental Protection Agency. As agency administrator he included the park department under his supervision. He retired as director of General Services at the end of March, 1983. Pond had won the admiration and respect of all who knew his service to the county. The American River Parkway remained an outstanding achievement, as recognized by the Supervisors on the occasion of his retirement, when Board Chairman Ted Sheedy praised him as “Father of the Parkway.”

“Capable, understanding, supportive — there is no end of adjectives with which to describe Bill Pond. However, if I had to choose one word it would be ‘friend.’ As the man at the top he always treated those who worked under him — professionals as well as volunteers — with the greatest kindness and respect. When I joined Effie Yeaw’s gang to help with some of the early school tours in the nature area, Bill Pond was there with the encouragement that enabled the development of a more formal interpretive program, now grown into highly respected service. Also, many of us had the opportunity to volunteer under his leadership when he returned to Sacramento from Washington and served for a time as director of the Sacramento Science Center. Again his encouraging and calm ways inspired staff and volunteers alike to do their best to further environmental education and help the facility grow. He was always a friend, one who would listen, support and advise.”

Jo Smith, an ARNHA founder

“I remember one morning arriving at the Effie Yeaw Nature Area to give a school tour. I spotted one of our ancient oaks leaning quite badly. We had had a particularly wet winter and the soft soil was unable to hold the roots. This was what we called a “Woodpecker tree,” used by Acorn Woodpeckers to store their acorn food from one harvest to the next. . . . Realizing that if the tree fell, woodpeckers could starve. I called Bill Pond and asked ‘What can we do.’ ? He immediately sent several men in a truck with posts and possibly cement to stabilize the tree. It did not fall that year. . . the harvest was saved.”

M.B. Goodier, founder, Wildlife Care Association

“Nine years ago, Pond took over the newly established parks and recreation department, facing a future pockmarked with special districts and little evidence of good planning. He leaves behind one of the more admirable examples of taxpayers getting something in return for their money. Pond, to me, established himself as one of those rarities in bureaucracy. A whiter than white hat guy. He deals in people, not just cost surveys and feasibility studies. He always seemed to search for other means of accomplishing something; not grasping ever-available excuses why something could not be done.”

Tom Horton, Sacramento Union columnist, writing March 9, 1968 on Pond’s farewell dinner.

Retired once again, after a four-year stint as director of the Sacramento Science Center, Bill Pond continues to be concerned about the future of the parkway. In a time of budgetary constraints and uncertain priorities, he ponders the alternatives. Most promising, in his opinion, is the model of the East Bay Regional Park District, where for more than 65 years Alameda and Contra Costa counties and their many urban and suburban entities have pooled resources to maintain an array of parks and recreation sites of distinction.

“Parks affect the overall economy,” he says. “They attract industry. They are how you measure the quality of life in a community.” ■

Fred Gunsky is a founding member of ARNHA and author of “Effie Yeaw, a Sketch of Her Life,” published by the Sacramento County Historical Society in cooperation with ARNHA.

Effie Yeaw’s role in creating the parkway

Years before William B. Pond reported for duty as director of the county’s new Department of Parks and Recreation, a small group of educators had discussed the idea of setting aside natural areas along the American River. It was in 1950 that J. Martin “Mike” Weber formed a steering committee to guide his work as science consultant in the Sacramento County Office of Education. Members included Effie Yeaw and other teachers in local schools.

Effie and her corps of volunteer docents were leading field trips of youngsters in the Deterding woods and other primitive areas, and she was among many who feared the booming home and commercial development would wipe out surviving riparian sites. The science committee led to formation of a wider group that Effie entitled “Committee of Concern.”

The idea of an American River Parkway was not new. The name and a proposed parkland strip appear on a map prepared in 1915 by a city planner. A national planning firm advocated parks and natural areas along the two local rivers in a 1929 state survey.

As city and suburban expansion grew in the decade of the 1950s, Effie and her colleagues found allies among many others who sought health and diverse recreational opportunities on the river. She was a founder of the Save the American River Association and served as its secretary. She appeared before hearings and took part in efforts to broaden public support for parkway preservation.

So, when the new county park director arrived in town, she didn’t waste time. She summoned Mike Weber and the two walked into Bill Pond’s office— “before there was a chair to sit on.” They urged him to begin parkland acquisition with the natural area on the Deterding property. Pond came to value their support and, over time, sites Effie had proposed became dedicated portions of the American River Parkway.

—Fred Gunsky

ARNHA BRIEFS

Intel Grant

The Intel Corporation has awarded, through ARNHA, a \$15,000 grant to the Effie Yeaw Nature Center for development of a major wetlands exhibit. The money will pay for dioramas, interactive information panels and artwork for the exhibit, which is expected to be open next September. Lynne Pinkerton of the nature center staff submitted the application.



Donors

Anonymous member of Effie Yeaw's Family, \$3,000 for entrance sign to the main Effie Yeaw Nature Center building to be placed over the front door.

Carl Stillman, grandson of Effie Yeaw, \$500 for entrance sign to Effie Yeaw Nature Center.

Wells Fargo Bank, \$1,500 for transportation of school children to Effie Yeaw Nature Center. Grant application by Noah Baygell, ARNHA president.

Outdoor Writers Association of California, \$500 for EYNC trail signs. Grant application initiated by former ARNHA Board member Bill Dillinger and submitted by Lynne Pinkerton, EYNC staff.

Coca Cola of Sacramento, 20 cases of bottled water for the Salmon Festival; facilitated by John McNamee.



Long-term Funding Need

Sacramento County Parks Director Ron Suter is cautiously optimistic about the possibility of a ballot measure that could provide stable, long-term funding for regional parks, including the American River Parkway.

"Anything we try or attempt is a good thing," he told the Acorn. "The question is, does the county want regional parks as part of the county mission? Can it afford regional parks?"

County general fund outlays for parks

have been hit hard since fiscal 1991-92, falling an overall 28.4 percent from \$6.4 million to \$5 million in 2004-05. The reductions have forced 43 percent cuts in staffing (132 to 75 employees), while county population has increased by 25 percent (1 million to 1.3 million), the cost of living has climbed 28.38 percent, and the parks department's responsibility for maintaining open space acreage has increased by 23 percent (from 10,350 acres to 14,589 acres).

A poll underwritten by a coalition of American River supporters indicated

that two-thirds of Sacramento County voters would support a \$40 per parcel annual tax to maintain and improve regional parks. A joint powers agreement among the county and its cities drew the most support as the ideal government organization to do the job. Coalition members are sounding out elected officials to determine how to go forward with the plan, according to Michele McCormick, County Parks Commission Chair.

Asked what citizens can do about solving parks' funding difficulties, Suter said: "People need to be involved, to keep abreast of what's going on, to stay on top of things."



NEW 'OUTDOOR WORLD' GUIDE ISSUED

A revised and expanded edition of "The Outdoor World of the Sacramento Region," a natural history field guide originally authored by revered kindergarten teacher and environmental activist Effie Yeaw, is now on sale.

The 230-page volume, published by the American River Natural History Association, contains descriptions and drawings of more than 600 native plants, birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish and insects.

In a testimonial on the back cover, Eva Butler, CNPS Chapter past president, writes, "This expanded new edition of this time-tested guide throws open more doors to the Sacramento area's outdoor world. It is one of a kind!"

"Outdoor World" is on sale for \$14.95 at the Effie Yeaw Nature Center, with a 10 percent discount for ARNHA members, and at selected bookstores.

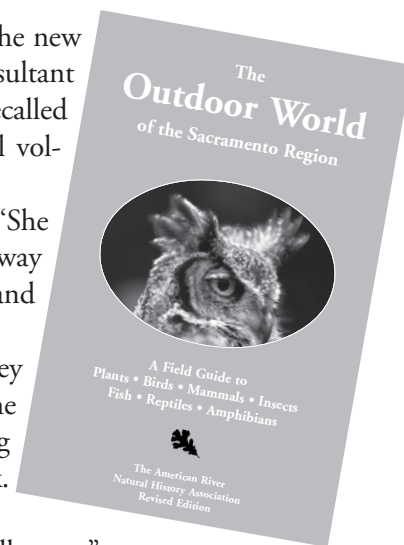
The guide, co-edited by Jo Smith and Peter Hayes, is the latest in a series of editions of the volume first published in 1963 titled the "Natural History Guide for the Sacramento Region." Principal author was Effie Yeaw, the Carmichael teacher who introduced thousands of children to nature on walks near the Ancil Hoffman Park center that is named in her honor.

At a reception Nov. 9 to thank contributors to the new edition, J. Martin (Mike) Weber, retired science consultant for the Sacramento County Office of Education, recalled how Effie Yeaw sparked publication of the original volume in the late 1950s.

"Effie came to us with two missions," Weber said. "She pushed for the concept of the American River Parkway and for the need for a nature center for children and with it a book, a natural history guide.

"Our superintendent was always thinking of money and said that if we got people to do it for nothing he would approve it. We split up the contents, among local college people, who were anxious to do the work. Our office print shop printed it.

"Effie was pushing it all the way. We were just followers."



Mercury, from page 3

Until recently, most of these investigations have been conducted in the Coast Range, where the mines were located. However, recent studies were conducted on the west slope of the Sierra, where mercury from the gold extraction process would be expected to have been released. And sure enough, mercury was found in the American River and Yuba River drainages.

Excessive exposure to mercury can attack the nervous system, resulting in decreased learning ability, loss of co-

ordination and even blindness. Women can pass mercury on to their fetuses through the placenta and to infants through breast milk.

Mercury continues to have an impact on our local human population. Once sought after as a method of developing riches, it is now scorned as a poisonous legacy of a previous day. ■

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

Indian Museum Site Studies

Studies are underway to identify natural resource, traffic and other environmental issues before a firm recommendation is made on location of a major state museum of California Indian culture and history in the American River Parkway.

A California Indian Heritage Center task force voted 5-3 Oct. 1 to express preference for a 201-acre site near Northgate Boulevard and Highway 160 opposite downtown Sacramento. As a backup, it proposed a 27-acre Folsom site on the south side of Lake Natoma. Final approval would be given by State Parks Director Ruth Coleman.

The proposal envisions a 60,000-square foot building with exhibit galleries, a theater, meeting room and research facilities. The grounds will include a village, native plant gardens and be used for tribal gatherings.

The city of Sacramento supports the Northgate site because of its potential for spurring tourism and, with its activities, discourage homeless camping and its attendant public safety problems. Others, including the Save the American River Association, have opposed it as being incompatible with the master plan of the parkway, which emphasizes retaining its natural environment. Flooding also is seen as a threat. Other civic groups, including ARNHA, requested more details of the proposal before stating a position.

The Folsom site, although smaller, has the advantage of being owned by the state and would be available, whereas Northgate would involve several owners. The Folsom site is on high ground and less vulnerable to floods. But there could be traffic problems from nearby Folsom Boulevard and U.S. 50. ■

In Memory of John Harvey Carter

Sacramento architect **John Harvey Carter**, 82, who died Oct. 2, wrote in "The Acorn" of July-August, 1994, that formation of The American River Parkway in 1967 was a "historic moment for Sacramento" and, for him, an opportunity that rarely happens to anyone. .

At the time, he was chairman of the county Planning Commission. He recalled that there had been growing concern that the lower American River was being increasingly threatened by diverse interests and claims, with at least a dozen groups claiming authority and interest regarding the river. Planners, in cooperation with the department of Parks and Recreation, began extensive studies toward creation of the American River Parkway.

In a series of public hearings, representatives of organizations and others raised such concerns as ownership, zoning, fishing, water rights, flood control and access. Prominent among support groups was the Save the American River Association.

The hearings concluded with a consensus for approval and the proposal was submitted to the Board of Supervisors. Formal parkway plans were adopted in 1968

"The credit goes to many public and private citizens whose foresight and vision made the nationally recognized parkway possible," Mr. Carter wrote. "In retrospect, it seems that if we had waited until today to create what is the Sacramento area's greatest recreational asset, it would not be possible."

The article concluded with this editor's note: "For decades, John Harvey Carter has crusaded for protection and preservation of Sacramento's natural assets and he has long been a strong advocate for attractive and livable communities."

Mr. Carter was an exemplar of those who pursue great causes in addition to a livelihood. With his passing, he leaves a legacy that includes an implicit warning to the community to be alert to safeguard the integrity of the American River Parkway. ■

—Peter J. Hayes

Coach A Nature Bowl Team

Orientation workshops are underway for new and returning Nature Bowl Team coaches. Team coaches can be teachers, parents, youth leaders, senior citizens, high school seniors, student teachers—anyone who wants to guide young team members through the exciting discovery of nature. ARNHA is one of several sponsors including the State Department of Fish & Game.

Now in its 20th year, the Nature Bowl is a cooperative team competition for 3rd through 6th grade students. Teams compete in small groups, usually three students. They answer questions and do nature activities based on regional environmental issues that reflect the State Science Framework and the new Science Standards.

Team coaches take their team to one of the regional Nature Bowl Semifinals, beginning March 1 and ending April 5. Top scoring teams will advance to the Nature Bowl Finals held at California State University, Sacramento, Saturday, May 14.

Coaches' orientation workshops are given annually at various regional sites starting in late fall. Participants learn how to organize a team and coach practice sessions using workshop materials with sample questions/answers.

You still have time to register for the Coaches' Workshop from 4 to 5:30 p.m., Thursday, Jan. 20 at the Effie Yeaw Nature Center. Call (916) 489-4918 for more information. An Extended Coaches' Workshop is scheduled for Saturday Jan. 22 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Placer Nature Center, 3700 Christian Valley Rd., Auburn. for new and returning coaches. Call (530) 878-6053 for more information. ■

PAGES FROM THE ALMANAC

Animal Engineers

We don't often see the largest of rodents in daylight, but we know it's been around. A white alder lies flat next to the river, and around its chiseled stump lie piles of wood chips. In the nearby shallows is a dome-shaped structure made of twigs and mud. It's the comfortable lodge of the beaver, the workaholic of the animal kingdom.

It's said to be the only animal that changes its environment, thanks to large front teeth that keep growing even as they wear down. The beaver uses its teeth to cut trees and branches for its lodge, to throw up a dam to impound water, to strip the inner bark of trees for its food.

And when there are no longer trees near the water's edge, this animal engineer digs canals in which to float food and building materials to river or lake.

The breed is a descendant of animals that played a key role in the opening of the West. Their lush brown fur was the magnet that attracted hardy mountain men such as Jedediah Smith to the American River and other hunting grounds in the 1820s in quest of the rich pelts destined to become fashionable hats for men.

February is the mating season for beavers, most of which are believed to stay together for life. Most litters are born in April or May, averaging four kits to the litter. They will be raised in the upper chamber of their lodge, accessible via an underwater entrance out of reach of predators. As the young near their second year, their parents nudge them out of the lodge in a not-so-gentle hint to go start their own new colonies of eager beavers.

From ARNHA's "An American River Almanac: Reflections on nature throughout the year," with essays by Peter J. Hayes and full-color photographs by George Turner and Tom Myers. It can be purchased at the Effie Yeaw Nature Center and selected bookstores.



photo by Jim Louthian

American River Natural History Association

P.O. Box 241
Carmichael, CA 95609-0241
(916) 489-4918
www.arnha.org
Address Service Requested

Nonprofit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 226
Carmichael, CA

EVENTS CALENDAR

- **January 9, 1:30 p.m.** — Tom Myers, photographer for "American River Almanac: Reflections on nature throughout the year," slide show/book signing, EYNC Assembly Building.
- **March 12, 7 a.m.** ARNHA Bird and Breakfast at EYNC

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

The Ball Family • Joyce M Bishop • The Bradshaw Family • Susan Ferguson • The Galgani Family
The Gimmett Family • The Halberg Family • Lorie Hammond • The Kosmatin Family • The Ly Family
Karen Mc Reynolds • The Menschel Family • The Mosher Family • The Owens Family • Elisa Reuter
The Taylor Family • The Thompson Family • Nancy Tronaas • The Wechler-Azen Family
The Wheeler Family • Glenn Tarr

Natural History Books • Wildlife Jewelry • Field Guides & Maps
Kid's Nature Study Tools

The Nature Discovery Shop

Inside the Effie Yeaw Nature Center
489-4918 • Proceeds to ARNHA

