

Four Rivers Association



Fall 2011 Newsletter



GO FISHING!

Fall is a great time to go fishing. With the milder temperatures and cooler waters the fish bite usually picks up. Also, the San Luis Reservoir begins to fill again. Normally there is a “fall run” on the striped bass at the SLR and O’Neill Forebay. Remember, the O’Neill Forebay and San Luis Reservoir have produced multiple world record striped bass. Los Banos Creek Detention Reservoir has some great large mouth black bass, sunfish and catfish. Many of the rivers have large mouth as well as small mouth bass, sunfish, striped bass, and catfish.



TULE ELK

The Tule Elk rut is in full swing in September and October. This is a great time to see the large males fighting for leadership of the harem and to hear them bugling. You can often see Tule Elk along the San Luis Reservoir’s Basalt Entrance road and around the park HQ while others live in Pacheco State Park. These are “free range herds” and can cover great distances in their wanderings. The San Luis National Wildlife Area has a large fenced area in which their Tule Elk are kept. Often they can be seen right next to the fence. The San Luis Nat’l Wildlife Area is accessed off of Wolfsen Road north of Los Banos. As a side note, the new San Luis National Wildlife Area HQ and Visitors Center will be opening on October 14. The Visitors Center will be a great asset for anyone who wants to know more about the wildlife areas.



TRAILS OF PACHECO STATE PARK, first in a series

I thought that I would try to give you an idea of what to expect when you hike the trails of Pacheco State Park. I will group the trails as they might be hiked, some linked together to form loops. Don’t forget to get a free trail map at one of the information kiosks before heading out.

One of my favorites begins on Spikes Peak Road at the parking lot. The trail heads due south, gradually rising until you finally crest the ridge. As soon as you are over the ridge almost all evidence of the modern world falls behind. The trail/road passes through a gate and immediately turns right. Pig Pond

Trail crosses within a short distance. Turn left onto Pig Pond Trail. From here it is only 0.3 mile to Pig Pond. Often in the springtime the hillsides around Pig Pond are blanketed with goldfields and shooting stars. Numerous other wildflowers paint the hillsides in colorful patches from March through May. If you are lucky you may actually see a feral pig wallowing around the shoreline of Pig Pond. Continuing south on Pig Pond Trail you will pass Tunnel Monument Trail and a short distance further Pig Pond Trail becomes Canyon Loop Trail. Continue straight on Canyon Loop Trail. Canyon Loop Trail is a 2.2 miles loop in which you pass through a more densely wooded area. You can see California Buckeye Trees, Blue Oaks, Canyon Live Oaks, Hop Trees, Willows, California Bay Laurel, Salmon Berry bushes, Hillside Gooseberry, and California Sagebrush. The Canyon Loop is a great place to do some birdwatching. With over 100 species of birds found within the park this is prime habitat for most. This is also a good place to see wildflowers, and is one of the areas with the most White Mariposa Lilies and Chinese Houses in late spring. Some areas along the trail have large patches of them, especially the ½ mile section from Salt Creek up to the South Boundary Loop connection. Turn right on South Boundary Loop and proceed 0.1 mile, then turn right again onto Canyon Loop and head north. Just follow Canyon Loop Trail until you reach Pig Pond Trail again and then turn left and retrace your route back to the parking lot. This is a very pleasant trail in the springtime, not too difficult, and totals 5 miles. If it is cold and windy this trail is one of the best since you will be in the leeward side of the hills most of the time and the winds will be much less. Remember, if you find a gate closed, close it behind you after you are through. If you find the gate open, then you can leave it open as you pass. And during the winter and spring months there are cattle grazing within the park and some areas have electric fencing/gates.

Next issue I will be reviewing Spikes Peak Road(Trail) where hikers have great scenic vistas from the ridgetops....

ROBERT J. EDMINSTER 1925-2011

Robert Edminster, a former Four Rivers Association Director and longtime friend of State Parks passed away August 27. Bob was a retired college professor and was extremely knowledgeable in many facets of the natural history of California, especially botany. He was the person to call whenever you had a plant to identify. He spent three years doing the original plant survey of what is now Pacheco State Park, during which he identified over 500 species of plants growing there. He re-discovered what was thought to be an extinct plant—the delta coyote thistle—growing within the boundary of Great Valley Grasslands State Park. In the early years of developing the popular Path of the Padres hikes Bob was very involved in training a group of volunteers to help with the hike.

Bob wrote four books. His “Streams of the San Joaquin” covers all of the waterways within the San Joaquin Valley, discussing all aspects of their being and also includes many of the plants and animals found within the valley. This 350 page book can be purchased from the FRA at the San Luis Reservoir HQ or the Romero Visitor’s Center.

Bob was always there to help whenever he was asked. He was a great friend and will be greatly missed.

EXCITING NEWS FROM THE FOUR RIVERS SECTOR

By Betty Wong, State Park Ranger

Please welcome State Park Rangers Jacque Burke and David Hermite to the Four Rivers Sector. Ranger Burke and Hermite started their ranger career at Four Rivers Sector on September 5, 2011.

Ranger David Hermite is the new ranger at McConnell State Recreation Area (SRA). Ranger Hermite is taking over for Ranger Danny Rizzo who transferred to Monterey. Ranger Hermite will be responsible for Hatfield State Recreation Area and Great Valley Grassland State Park as well.

Ranger Burke is the new ranger at Los Banos Creek Detention Dam or the "D" Dam to you other folks. Ranger Burke is taking over for Ranger Jason Stora who transferred to Sacramento. Ranger Burke, wife of San Luis Reservoir State Recreation Area's Ranger Vince Burke, was self-employed in the restaurant business and had a real estate company in Sacramento.



Ranger Burke was looking for a career change and started looking for careers in the outdoor. She went on a ride-a-long with state parks and she knew it was the way to go. She started her state park career in 2009 as a seasonal park aide at Prairie City Off-Highway Vehicle Area (OHVA) in Sacramento.

As a seasonal park aide at Prairie City OHVA, she worked closely with the ranger staff and responded to medical incidents for two years. She applied to the ranger cadet program and was accepted to the Mott Training Center in 2010 to start her ranger training.

Please stop by McConnell SRA and the D Dam and meet Ranger Hermite and Ranger Burke respectively.

SOME WILDLIFE DATES TO NOTE:

By FRA Director John Fulton

January

- Numbers peaking for geese, cranes, and ducks.
- Wetlands fully flooded.
- Foggy weather prevails.

February

- Elk bulls drop antlers.
- Great-horned owls hatching.
- Large numbers of wintering waterfowl and cranes visible.

- Hummingbirds migrate north.

March

- Waterfowl are migrating north.
- Vernal pool wildflowers begin blooming as do wildflowers in the surrounding hillsides
- Pelican Island NWR, the first National Wildlife Refuge, was established by Teddy Roosevelt on March 14, 1903.
- Department of the Interior established March 3, 1849.
- Hawks and herons begin nesting.
- Elk antlers begin to regrow. They are in 'velvet.'

April

- Songbirds are migrating.
- Wildflowers are abundant around vernal pools. Peak time for viewing large showy areas of wildflowers in the valley and hillsides.
- Tule elk are calving.
- Spring is in the air! Good air quality with spectacular views of the mountains.

May

- Shorebirds are migrating with breeding plumage.
- Songbirds singing.
- Celebrate International Migratory Bird Day this month.
- Wildflowers still spectacular. Late spring wildflowers bloom is peaking.

June

- National Fishing Week.
- Tule elk are rubbing the velvet off their antlers.
- Shorebirds migrate north.
- Hummingbirds migrate south.

July

- Tule elk rut begins.
- Habitat irrigations grow food for wintering animals.
- Fall shorebird migration begins south.
- Young birds fledge.

August

- Swainson's hawks have fledged and will form "kettles" over prescribed burned areas.
- Irrigated pastures attract ibis and long-billed curlews.
- Elk rut and bugling peaks.

September

- The elk rut continues.
- Songbirds and Cinnamon Teal migrate south.
- Valley oaks drop their acorns.

October

- Come celebrate National Wildlife Refuge Week!
- Sandhill Cranes begin returning in mid-October.
- Waterfowl hunting season opens.
- Elk still in harems and bachelor herds.

November

- Aleutian Canada Geese arrive mid-month in Stanislaus County.
- Over 15,000 Sandhill Cranes are in the Grasslands by Thanksgiving.

December

- Snow geese begin to arrive at Merced NWR.
 - Ross' and White-fronted geese have already arrived.
 - Swans may arrive in small numbers by month's end.
 - Watch for eagles, falcons, and ferruginous hawks
-

Jack Sparks, Outdoor Recreation Planner for the US Fish & Wildlife Service, San Luis NWR Complex sent the following:

Below is information about our annual Crane Day event at the [Merced National Wildlife Refuge](#). We'd love to see you there!

[Saturday, October 29, 2011](#) - Bus trips at 10:00am and noon

Location: Merced National Wildlife Refuge, [Merced, CA](#) - 7430 W. Sandy Mush Road, [Merced CA](#)

Celebrate the return of Sandhill Cranes to [Merced County](#) by visiting the Merced National Wildlife Refuge [on October 29, 2011](#) for the Crane Day birdwatching tours.

Refuge staff will lead guided bus tours to view and discuss the Lesser Sandhill Cranes that make the Merced National Wildlife Refuge their winter home. The Refuge and surrounding area are home to the largest wintering concentration of Lesser Sandhill Cranes along the [Pacific Flyway](#), with as

many as 20,000 cranes using the Refuge.

As with last year, tours will be by bus and space is limited (we'll get off the bus several times to view the cranes and other birds). The first tour will depart at **10am** and will last approximately 1.5 hours. A second tour will depart at noon. Space is limited on the bus, so reservations are encouraged; seats remaining after reservations have been called will be filled on a first-come, first-served basis. Please call **(209) 826-3508** to reserve your spot.

Meet at the Merced NWR main entrance kiosk off of Sandy Mush Road approximately 8 miles west of Hwy 59. From **Fresno**, travel north on Hwy 99 to Hwy 152 east to Hwy 59 north and turn left on Sandy Mush Road. If travelling from the north, take Hwy 99 south to Hwy 59 south and turn right on Sandy Mush Road and follow for 8 miles to the Refuge entrance.

Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Jack Sparks
Outdoor Recreation Planner
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
San Luis NWR Complex
PO Box 2176
Los Banos, CA 93635
Phone: **(209) 826-3508**
Fax: **(209) 826-1445**

DIRECTOR'S MEETING UPDATE;

1. Our Annual Members Meeting has been tentatively scheduled for February 18, 2012. The finalized date will be dependent on when the guest speaker is available. As of now we have not chosen a guest speaker.
2. Quite a bit of discussion about possible future "Park Closures" that have been in the news. Supervising Ranger Denis Poole said that nothing has been decided yet. Some ideas being tossed about are possibly closing some parks completely, some parks may have seasonal closures, some may have certain activities such as camping banned, or maybe none will close. It is not clear what will be done with the affected parks staff but his best guess is that they would be moved around within the sector parks that remain open. If parks do close then we will see a drop in income as well due to reduced firewood sales.
3. We are looking into developing a web page for the Four Rivers Association.
4. Four Rivers Association Vice President Eva Mae McClelland has notified the board that she is retiring. We will be looking into finding a replacement for her vacant position.
5. Our next meeting will take place November 15, 2011

--Your newsletter editor, David Milam