

HABITAT HAPPENINGS



San Diego HABITAT CONSERVANCY

Welcome to the first edition of *Habitat Happenings*, a newsletter produced by the **San Diego Habitat Conservancy**. It's a new year and we have exciting news! We are changing our name from "Helix Community Conservancy" to "San Diego Habitat Conservancy" as a result of our 2008 Strategic Plan process during which it became clear we needed a name to which our constituents could better relate. As some of you may already know, the environmental consulting firm HELIX Environmental Planning, Inc. has been our largest benefactor since our inception in 2000. It has been with their support that this organization was able to get started and for that we are eternally, as "in perpetuity," grateful. Their commitment to conservation and desire to give something back to the community is the reason this land conservancy was launched.

For those of you that have not had the opportunity to meet us, here is some information about our organization. San Diego Habitat Conservancy (SDHC) is a 501(c)3 non-profit public benefit corporation focused on conservation and stewardship of native habitat and species, as well as environmental outreach and education. Our conservancy's mission is "to acquire, manage and protect land in perpetuity that supports sensitive habitats and species, and to educate and inspire people and communities as stewards and advocates of their natural environment."

Southern California is considered a national leader in the planned preservation of sensitive habitat and species. The Natural Community Conservation Planning (NCCP) program was a catalyst that combined regional conservation with smart growth. Please visit our website to learn more about our background and find links to NCCP and the various subarea conservation plans that provide the basis for the lands we manage: www.sdhabitat.org.

San Diego County is home to a great diversity of wildlife species and is the most botanically diverse county in the contiguous United States. Only the state of Hawaii has a greater diversity and that's across an entire state versus a county. Our unique ecosystems, including coastal tidewater lagoon, freshwater marsh, upland scrub habitat, mountains and deserts, are home to an incredible array of plants, insects, birds and mammals. It's no wonder so many people want to live in San Diego given its beauty and diversity. SDHC is here to help preserve and manage the native species and open spaces with the utmost sensitivity.

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Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land.
Aldo Leopold

Become a Member Today!

Our efforts to preserve native habitat and biodiversity in San Diego can only be accomplished with the support of donations. Whether it is by developer donors associated with mitigation lands, or citizens of San Diego donating towards our purchase of new preserves and funding our environmental outreach and education, your support is critical to our success and the success of conservation in San Diego. As a dedicated member, you are helping to preserve

open spaces and plants and wildlife species that are unique to San Diego, and you are helping to ensure that future generations may enjoy the same beauty that never ceases to astound and inspire us. Please make your voice heard by becoming a member today! Ask your family and friends to become involved. Go to www.sdhabitat.org to join for only \$10 a year. Make a \$15 or \$35 donation and receive an SDHC memento or t-shirt!

“Pondering Preservation”

A message from Ellen Miille, Executive Director

After a number of years in the environmental consulting and compliance sector, I was often asked “why are we spending so much money to protect a small, ordinary looking bird?” I’ve also received less polite comments, like “we wouldn’t want to harm the bugs and bunnies now would we?” These same questions and comments followed me into the conservation field and in the past year, the questions have become more pointed, with assertions that we have “much bigger problems at hand such as war, the economy, and poverty.” Even with improved awareness of global warming and the popular buzz around “going green,” local land conservation often takes a back seat to basic family needs and the crisis *du jour*.

So why *do* we conserve threatened species and habitats? Too often, our opinions on conservation are shaped by news coverage of a specific project, a conservation movement, or the result of living in close proximity to unwanted development. The tone in the coverage is usually passionate with intent to influence depending upon the author’s camp. All too often, the public isn’t sufficiently educated as to the value of open space and its native species, the ramifications of losing it forever, and our responsibility as stewards for future generations. We tend to get so embroiled in statutes and policies driving individual projects that the bigger picture is lost in the shuffle.

Without understanding the reasons for conservation, garnering public support for conservation of special places will truly

be an uphill battle. We need to recognize that there are multiple reasons for conservation, which do affect our lives. We conserve for ecological, aesthetic, economic, and ethical reasons.

Biodiversity, and the preservation thereof, is believed to be necessary to maintain human life as we know it. It is argued that the loss of individual species in our ecosystem will jeopardize the entire system and it’s unknown how many losses can occur before the system collapses.

We also conserve land for aesthetic reasons, to preserve scenic views of fields, mountains and water. Nature and its beauty have been cherished by humans since the beginning of our existence and it enhances our quality of life.

Economics and conservation are often billed as mutually exclusive goals, but in reality, smart conservation results in positive economic returns. Whether it’s sustainable extraction of resources, or conservation of native genetic material to support agriculture, economics and conservation can work hand in hand.

Finally, we conserve for ethical reasons. I think it’s safe to say that most individuals would not knowingly make a decision that results in the extinction of another species. With our ever expanding human population, we are encroaching into the living space of other species, and the conservation of key habitats is necessary for species preservation.

Our vision is a healthy natural environment that engages the commitment of people and communities, creates a legacy, and improves the quality of life for all living things.

Vision Statement, SDHC

Beyond the reasons noted above, there are other resounding benefits of conservation, including recreational and educational opportunities, improved water quality and offsets to global warming. The consequences of ignoring conservation are all too real as evidenced by such events as coastal flooding (loss of wetlands), collapse of fisheries, and water rationing to name but a few.

This is why the SDHC exists – to preserve important habitats for all of the above reasons, and to make people aware of these reasons through our education programs because in the end, people will only want to protect what they love and understand.

You can help by supporting the SDHC in our efforts to conserve our native habitats and species. You can also help by adding your thoughts to the public discussion of conservation in the San Diego community. Please feel free to submit an article to us at SDHC@sdhabitat.org, which may be posted on our website. Articles can include general philosophical thoughts, science-based papers, or personal experiences that you believe build the case for conservation. We look forward to expanding the dialogue by sharing your ideas with other SDHC members and the community at large.

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT!



Least Bell's Vireo (*Vireo Bellii*)

Careful planning and adaptive management can produce **real results** in conservation. Most biologists and agency representatives in California can agree that the “poster child” for adaptive management is the least Bell’s vireo. While the results aren’t necessarily news, SDHC draws inspiration from this success story and fully employs adaptive management in annual stewardship plans for each preserve.

Excerpts from an article by Gary Polakovic in the Los Angeles Times follow. Please join us at www.sdhabitat.org for the full article.

“Once common in California, least Bell’s vireos were noted by Gold Rush-era naturalists from the Mexican border nearly to Oregon, and from Monterey to Death Valley. They thrived in shady, wet woodlands, picking grasshoppers and caterpillars off bark and leaves... As America rapidly developed after World War II, the vireos fell into serious trouble. Moist woodlands were cleared for crops. Dikes and dams prevented flood waters from replenishing riparian habitat. Livestock grazing damaged stream-side vegetation and brought with it a deadly avian enemy, the brown-headed cowbird, which ravaged vireos.... A non-native species, cowbirds forage in livestock feedlots and prey on the nests of vireos and 129 other bird species. They either toss out vireo eggs or peck holes in them—a single female cowbird can displace 40 eggs in a season—and replace them with their own...As a result of the twin threats of urbanization and cowbird predation, the vireo declined to 268 pairs in 1986, when it was declared endangered. “Every nest I saw had a cowbird egg in it,” Greaves recalled...More than any other strategy, cowbird removal has benefited the vireos, scientists say...Habitat protection efforts have helped, too.”



“The results have been remarkable. For example, at the Camp Pendleton Marine Corps base, where nearly half the vireo nests were disrupted in the 1980s, just 1% were vandalized by cowbirds in 1990 and none have been harmed since then, Greaves said. Similar gains are reported along the Santa Ana, San Luis Rey, Sweetwater and San Diego rivers.”

SDHC Permanent Preserves

SDHC is actively managing three open space preserves in San Diego County and is under contract to manage several more preserves following completion of habitat restoration programs. Below is a summary of the open space preserves currently under our stewardship, with more detailed descriptions and maps found on our website.

Welk Preserve

Lying adjacent to the Lawrence Welk Resort along the I-15 corridor, north of Escondido, the preserve consists of Diegan coastal sage scrub, chaparral, and non-native grasslands, as well as a small wetlands area on the south fork of Moosa Creek. The preserve totals approximately 31 acres and merges with existing open space to the north and east. Species of interest include the California gnatcatcher (pictured), turkey vulture, and orange-throated whiptail lizard.



Emerald Pointe Preserve

The Emerald Pointe Preserve consists of 10.1 acres of upland habitat in the city of Carlsbad. The site consists primarily of Diegan coastal sage scrub, with recorded California gnatcatcher presence within the past year. One sensitive plant species, San Diego thornmint (pictured), is found in a small portion of the preserve. This open space preserve abuts another eight acres of open space, the Encinas Creek Preserve, that SDHC will begin managing in 2012, after the five-year wetlands restoration program is complete. The Encinas Creek Preserve is an east-west wetlands corridor with contiguous upland habitat to the north and south, including Emerald Pointe to the south.

Woods Valley Ranch Preserve

Management of the Woods Valley Ranch Preserve began in November 2008! The preserve borders the Woods Valley Ranch Country Club, with natural buffer areas designed between the active play areas and the preserve.

The preserve includes several historical and archaeological easements as well. The Moosa Creek corridor is rich with Native American and early San Diego settler history.



Most of these resources are buried and preserved in place; however, a few resources enhance the visual setting such as this historic stone out-building (pictured).

The preserve consists of the Moosa Creek Open Space riparian/wetland habitat and the Hillside Open Space upland habitat. The preserve is home to extensive coast live oak woodlands, including approximately 140 Engelmann oak trees, and the threatened least Bell's vireo.

~ Pending Preserves ~

SDHC is under contract to manage three other preserves following five-year restoration programs. Prior to our long-term stewardship, some preserves require substantial restoration, enhancement and sometimes habitat creation to meet the mitigation requirements from the previous entitlement process. Preserves waiting in the wings include: Lowe's Preserve (city of Santee), Eureka Ranch Preserve (city of Escondido), and Encinas Creek Preserve (city of Carlsbad). A number of other open space preserves are being considered for stewardship and/or are in the property or easement transaction process. Visit our website for current news throughout the year!

Meet the Board

David Claycomb, President, Chairman of the Board of Directors, HELIX EPI

Keith Colestock, Vice President, Brandes Investment Partners

Kenneth Little, Treasurer/CFO, Brandes Investment Partners

Jeffrey D. Opdycke, Secretary, Assoc. Director of Operations, Conservation & Research for Endangered Species Zoological Society of San Diego

Patricia Gordon-Reedy, Botanist, Conservation Biology Institute

Robert Canace, Land Preservation Consultant, Morris Land Conservancy

Teresa Wilkinson, Senior Project Manager, CH2MHill

Visit our website for full biographies and photos.

Announcements

Pride of Ownership

In October 2008, SDHC closed escrow on the Emerald Pointe preserve in Carlsbad. SDHC closed the deal with RWR Homes' Brendan Farrelly (pictured right with Ellen Miille, SDHC's Executive Director) to take fee title of the preserve and manage the sensitive habitat and species on this preserve in perpetuity. Baseline studies are underway, with spring surveys planned for April 2009.



It's Official

Come One, Come All Get Your T-shirt!

Log on to www.sdhabitat.org to donate and receive an official SDHC t-shirt. Show your pride as a member of our organization and share the spirit of conservation with friends and family.

Partners and Memberships

SDHC is a Non-profit Partner with the San Diego Foundation and a member of the Land Trust Alliance. Visit our website for links to these organizations.

Volunteer

Come join us in the field. SDHC has several volunteer opportunities in stewardship and outreach and education. Make the call!

San Diego Habitat Conservancy

Mailing address: 8130 La Mesa Boulevard, #705, La Mesa, CA 91941
Phone: 619-668-7474 ~ Fax: 619-462-0552 ~ Email: SDHC@sdhabitat.org



San Diego
**HABITAT
CONSERVANCY**

8130 La Mesa Boulevard, #705
La Mesa, CA 91941

mailing label