



# THE ISLAND INSIDER

VOLUME 17, ISSUE #2: AUGUST 2019

A PUBLICATION OF CHANNEL ISLANDS RESTORATION



**Channel Islands Restoration**

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WHITE MOUNTAINS  
*Dennis Houghton*

## THE ISLAND INSIDER AUGUST 2019

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#### **The Island Insider**

Vol. 17, Issue #2: August 2019

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#### **Cover photo:**

Sheep grazing at the San Marcos Foothills Preserve

*Tanner Yould*





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## A QUICK THANK YOU FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This past Matching May, our generous donors set us a lofty goal of matching \$11,000 - nearly double what we were challenged last year. Thanks to you and supporters like you, we were able to rise and even surpass that \$11,000 goal - netting Channel Islands Restoration more than \$22,000 to be put towards our mission of restoring habitat and promoting environmental education on the Channel Islands and Central Coast, and we're excited to get to work.

Thank you so much for your support,  
Ken Owen

## 2019 VOLUNTEERS (SO FAR)

Marty Acree • Kimberly Alnwick • Stephen Alnwick • Rhonda Anderson • Craig Baker • Rane Baker • James Balsitis • David Becker • Daniel Begalla • Robin Birney • Anne Bittner • Myles Blanton • Kathleen Boehm • Angie Broennimann • Emily Bryan • Charles Buchanan • Tracy Buckingham • Tristan Bugayong • Robert Burtness • Christopher Calcara • Jacqueline Campbell • Rosie Campbell • Jane Carey • Anna Carrillo • Abigail Carson • Carol Celic • Russell Charvonja • Ernesto Chavez-Velasco • Michael Cheng • Rhonda Cole-Alvarado • Kathleen Connally • Mark Connally • Geoff Coster • Kali Cowgill • Chris Crabtree • Christine Crane • Patrick Crooks • Steven Crusinberry • Lance Davis • Laura Davis • John DeDonatis • Indre Deksnyte • Michael Delaney • Dennis DeMarco • Isabelle Doerschlag • Kenneth Donnelly • Thomas Donnelly • Owen Duncan • Cynthia Dunlop • David Dunlop • Aaron Echols • Teresa Eggemeyer • Zachary Eichert • Phillip Fanchon • Amy Fernandez • Elizabeth Flint • Tisha Ford • Natalie Friedman • Thomas Fusek • Bill Gadbow • Kathryn Gadbow • Michelle Gados • Kelly Garner • Arthur Gaspar • Ryan Gensert • Susan Gentile • Riad Ghalayini • Greg Giloth • Russell Goff • Eric Goldman • Anthony Gomez • Christina Gonzalez • Chris Goodrich • Tina Gorelik • Megan Gorey • Carol Gravelle • Marion Gregston • Patrick Gregston • Nolan Groom • Ashley Grupenhoff • Daniel Gualotuna • Shari Hammond • Tanis Hammond • Anthony J. Hanna • Caroline Hanna • Linda Haque • Oliver Harding • Cade Harris • Lindsay Hart • Nancy Hawkins • Shaina Healey • Janet Healy • Ann Henderson • Nicholas Hernandez • Sean Herron • Heather Heyerdahl • Larwrence Hickenbotham • Kelly Hill • Hunter Hogan • Harvard Horiuchi • Helen Horiuchi • Kelly Horiuchi • Scott Horiuchi • Dennis Houghton • Matthew Howard • Read Howarth • Heather Hubbell • Jon Huber • Teresa Huber • Monty Hudson • John Iwerks • Emily Jacen • Don Jackson • Sharon Jacob • Richard James • Filip Jankovic • Allison Jaqua • Angela Johnson • Benjamin Kanevsky • Debra Kaskus • William Kellar • Tacy Kennedy • John Kenny • Diane Kirchner • Aaron Kissel • Joy Kobayashi • Aaron Kreisberg • Emily Chase Kreisberg • Darin Kuida • Dennis Kulzer • Benjamin Kuo • Alexandra Kurtz • Andrew Lanes • Ryan Lawler • Varni Learned • Juowei Lee • Robert Leighty • Kip Leland • Deborah Leoni • Richard Liebert • Philip Lief • Jacquelynn Lockhart • Barbara Loomer • Donald Loomer • Brian Lopez • Linda Lundeen • Stephanie Ma • Lauren Manzo • Larry Marcus • Barbara McClain • Robert McClelland • Bruce McDonald • Sean McHugh • Brian McMurray • Toni McQueen • Siddharth Mehrotra • Kirk Meyer • Renee Meyer • Mieke Miller • Elise Minichiello • Tammy Minion • Dawn Mitcham • Jeanne Mohle • Kelly Marshall Monley • James Morrison • Seamus Morrison • Sarah Muccia • Carrie Mullen • Blake Munden • Sofia Munoz • Amir Nashat • Nancy Nazario • Thomas Nelson • Judith Oberlander • Robert O'Keefe • Scott Orlosky • Mike Ortiz • Laura Paine • Natalie Panaia • Dale Parks • Matthew Pass • Donna Passero • Diego Perez • Jean Pichler • Richard Pisor • Nicole Pizzuti • Jerami Prendiville • Alan Prichard • Jessica Quayle • Mariah Quinn • Leo Raabe • Lonna Radford • Michelle Rainville • Joseph Rao • Sarah Raskin • Angela Rauhut • Barak Raviv • Christopher Reed • John Reed • Brenda Rees • David Reid • John Buzz Reyes • JoAmy Rice • Jeffrey Richied • Patricia Ridenour • James Roberts • Danielle Rock • Jonathan Rock • Nicole Rorick • Erica Ruch • Omar Saleh • Don Sanders • Miles Sanders • Owen Sanders • Lauren Schauer • Terry Schuller • Dan Segna • Tami Sherman • Stephanie Shoemaker • Douglas Singletary • Deborah Snyder • Lisa Soldo • Mike Spellenberg • Rachel Spellenberg • Sarah Spellenberg • Julie Stark • Ann Steinmetz • Linda Stirling • Timothy Stirton • Matthew Straka • Caitlin Swalec • Elaine Sweet • Robert Trimble • Yvonne Tsai • Max Tyler • Jamie Uyehara • Julie Uyehara • Angela Valente • Ben Van Der Kar • Hans Van Koppen • Jo Ann Van Reenan • Noel Van Slyke • Glen Varcoe • Anthony Vasquez • Martina Vassileva • Janet Wall • Madison Walls • Sunny Watt • Spencer Westbrook • Bob Westwick • Kristine Mainland White • Phil White • Pam Wiebe • Tracey Willfong-Singh • Theodore Williamson • Doug Wilson • John Steven Witkowski • Julie Wood • William Worthington • Margery Zweizig

THANK YOU!!

## NEW CIR TEAM MEMBERS!

We are very pleased to announce that we have several additions to our team.

**Lizzy Sorce** has joined us as our new Special Projects Administrator. Lizzy is proving herself invaluable as she assists us with a long list of administrative tasks, always with a happy demeanor and can-do attitude.

**Doug Morgan** has been promoted to Project Manager. Actually, he was promoted a few months ago, but we had yet to mention it. Doug is a fearless leader (though perfectly reasonable with lots of smarts) and has led Tamarisk surveys and eradication efforts in the wilderness and has led other restoration efforts in Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties.

**Riley Kriebel** has been hired as Foreman. Riley worked with us previously as a Field Technician and now returns to be a Foreman to help us restore habitats.

## SPECIAL THANKS...

Though we primarily conduct habitat restoration, from time to time we get to conduct botanical and wildlife surveys in an effort to understand the biological community of a place before we develop recommendations for restoration. On the Sierra Madre Potrerros, our Crew Leader **Michael Mulroy** conducted the bird surveys and organized the logistics on the potrerros, and our Field Technicians **Erin Merrill**, **Carolyn Welch** and **Sarah Spellenberg** conducted the botanical and vegetation surveys. Our Field Technicians **Brad Meiners** and **Nicholas Duenas** were a huge help conducting the surveys. We also give a big shout out and thank you to **Steve Junak**, **Vince Semonsen** and **Asher Semonsen** for conducting surveys with us on the potrerros and to **Tanya Atwater** and **Ken Owen** who helped us with logistics on our potrerros survey trips. Another thank you to **Tanya Atwater** and **Steve Junak** for leading the White Mountains trip. Another big thank you to our Volunteer Coordinator **Nancy Diaz** for all her work organizing the logistics of our recent natural history trip to the White Mountains. And thank you to **all of our volunteers and team members** who do excellent work day in and day out.

## COLLECTIBLE PINS COMING SOON!

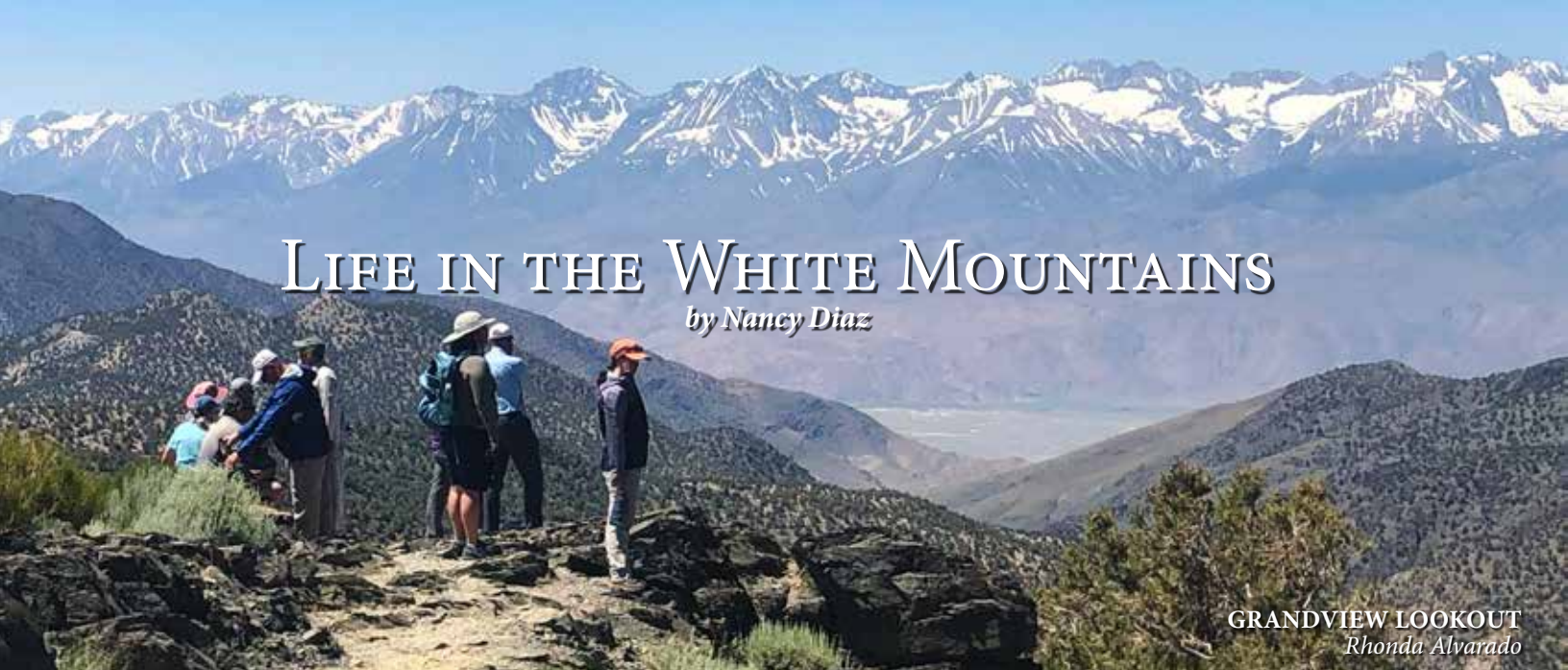
Thanks to the help of Jamie Chin, who recently graduated from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo with a Bachelor's of Science in Graphic Communication, we will soon be offering collectible pins to volunteers participating in select projects as a way of saying thank you! We currently have three pins for different jobs: San Marcos Foothills, backcountry tamarisk, and San Nicolas Island.

Many of our veteran San Nicolas Island volunteers may have already collected the original and wildly popular San Nicolas Island 'Order of the Thorn' pins made and distributed by one of our very own volunteers. We love the idea, and have been looking to extend this program to reward volunteers for helping us out on projects beyond just San Nicolas Island. So when Jamie Chin, reached out to see if she could help CIR in any way, we were excited to make these pins a reality.

We're thrilled with the new pin designs and we can't wait to start giving these out!







# LIFE IN THE WHITE MOUNTAINS

by Nancy Diaz

GRANDVIEW LOOKOUT  
Rhonda Alvarado

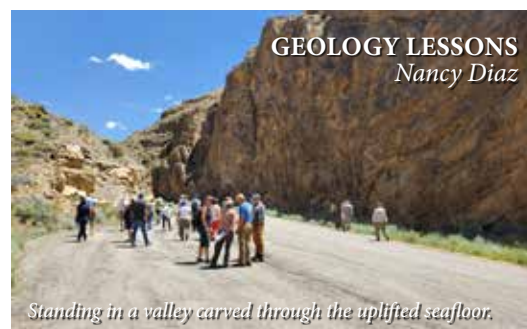
Channel Islands Restoration held our highly anticipated White Mountains Educational trip during the 4th of July holiday weekend. At first, I was reluctant to go because I'd have to give up the typical barbecue and firework events that help us celebrate our nation's freedom and independence. But the White Mountains were calling to me and I was happy to set out on this adventure with my CIR family.

We stayed at the Crooked Creek Station, a facility of the White Mountains Research Center, a UC Natural Reserve research station run by UCLA, at an elevation of 10,150 feet. This collection of buildings felt alive despite how removed it was from the rest of the world.

Each morning, the common areas

were buzzing with our group and researchers gearing up for the day. Our hosts, Aaron and Tim, cooked up hearty breakfasts and set out lunch options for everyone to grab and go. Each evening, everyone returned to share stories and compare notes over another incredible meal provided by the cooks before retreating to the dorm-style accommodations.

As we set out each day with our anticipation and sack lunch, we caravanned to various destinations throughout the White Mountains to learn from several knowledgeable guides. As one of the foremost experts on the formation of California, geologist Dr. Tanya Atwater was an incredible and captivating guide. She shared about the formations of the California



GEOLOGY LESSONS  
Nancy Diaz

Standing in a valley carved through the uplifted seafloor.

mountains and even showed us evidence of the seafloor that had been uplifted as the mountains formed. Her passion for geology was infectious, and I absolutely loved her expressed glee when we all felt the magnitude 7.1 earthquake that centered in the Mojave Desert near Ridgecrest, CA on July 5th. It interrupted the Rock Art presentation of David M. Lee, author of *Rock Art East of the Range of Light*. Without missing a step though, he



CROOKED CREEK STATION  
Rhonda Alvarado

continued sharing his interpretation of Native American petroglyphs in and around Owen's Valley.

Steve Junak, the recently retired Herbarium Curator for the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden and one of the most renowned botanists in our area, led hikes to explore the unique plant life that was specially adapted to grow in the harsh conditions of the White Mountains. Each day he introduced us to the rare and endemic plants of the area, drawing on what must be just a fraction of his total botanical knowledge. As someone who is lucky to live in an area with mild temperatures year-round, I was amazed how life has adapted to the biting winds and extreme cold of harsh winters in the high altitude of the White Mountains. The evidence of unique adaptations was at work wherever I looked. From the White Mountains buckwheat (*Eriogonum gracilipes*) huddled among the rocks for shelter, to the longest-living (non-clonal) species in the world, bristlecone pines (*Pinus longaeva*), which stood tall and defiant against the harsh conditions, yet showed the wear of millennia in their gnarled branches. I loved the motto of the bristlecone pine tree, "Grow slow; Grow old."

Our birding expeditions were led by Santiago Escruceria, an Outdoor Education Manager in California and the Republic of Columbia. He led a birding tour around the area of the Station and gave a presentation on the history of the imperiled Mono Lake. The group welcomed his expertise of birds, the night sky, and his candid humor that kept us entertained and interested.

Life in the White Mountains exceeded my expectations. From the daily hiking opportunities to the casual evening get-togethers, I was thankful I had the opportunity to be with an amazing group of people. We enjoyed the musical talents of CIR Board Member, Phil White and his guitar, CIR Members Julie Wood with her recorder, and Harvard and Helen Horiuchi with their ukuleles.

Before we arrived at the station, Tanya told me a story of



BRISTLECONE PINE  
Rhonda Alvarado



WHITE MOUNTAINS BUCKWHEAT  
Dennis Houghton

Campito, the legendary stallion of the White Mountains. Back in the mid-1990s, this wild stallion was caught by a cowboy and taken to a ranch to break and train him. But Campito, with his wild strength, escaped the clutches of the cowboy and disappeared into the wilderness of the White Mountains. Despite the adversity of the high altitude and harsh winters, Campito adapted and persevered, and to this day he still roams the mountains, wild and free. At first I took this story to be a fun myth – a story that had been exaggerated throughout the years. But driving between destinations on our last full day in the mountains we saw a dark shadow in the distance, just a smudge against the pale green landscape – but unmistakably an unbridled horse placidly grazing the short grass. It was unmistakably Campito. His presence was poetic, as he seemed to embody the tenacious, wild, and free nature of life in the White Mountains. Our sighting of this near-mythological creature cemented the feeling that this was indeed a magical place, an ageless and ancient world – overlooking, yet far removed from the busy highways and cities that surrounded it.

When we finally descended the winding mountain



LEGENDARY CAMPITO  
Nancy Diaz

road, each of us brought down learned lessons of the beautiful and diverse world in which we live, but also lessons learned about ourselves. For me, the main lesson I learned was that I couldn't see it all in such a short period of time. I vow to return to learn more about life in the White Mountains.



## SHEEP AT THE SAN MARCOS FOOTHILLS PRESERVE

Hikers at the San Marcos Foothills Preserve in late March and early April were treated to an unusual sight – more than 400 sheep grazing near the trail. Fortunately, we had volunteers step up to serve as docents and help explain what was going on. The sheep were being grazed in a series of 2-acre pastures. They would be in each pasture for a day or two, and then moved to an adjacent pasture, and then again over a 30 day period. Our goal is to restore the grassland so that it provides habitat for birds such as western meadowlark and burrowing owl. The population numbers of both of these species have declined dramatically in North America over the past 100 years.

The San Marcos Foothills Preserve supports about 50 acres of grassland. There is much less grassland in California than there used to be due to urban expansion and farming, and most of what's left has been taken over by invasive annual grasses from Europe and the Mediterranean region. As a result, many of the species that rely on healthy grasslands have been displaced.

In the distant past, ground sloths, mastodons, wild horses, mammoths, and other prehistoric megafauna inhabited this region. In more recent time, elk and deer were common grazers in the Santa Barbara area grasslands. The grasses native to California evolved in the presence of these grazing animals. Thus, the grasses themselves are adapted to withstand trampling and grazing by large numbers of animals in small spaces over short periods of time.

In an effort to re-create the effects of herds of grazing animals, we are bringing a large number of sheep to these grasslands for short periods of time. Grazing can be helpful or destructive. The results depend on the timing (when they start and stop), the type and number of animals, the density of those animals, the food (grass and shrubs) available, the state of the vegetation (with or without seeds), and the weather. If it goes well, non-native annual grasses will be suppressed, perennial grasses and associated plants will thrive, and thatch will be reduced.



Sunset among the oaks.

For almost a month, we moved the sheep from pasture to pasture and gradually grazed most of the grassland on the Preserve. Now (summer 2019), a few months after the sheep were removed, we are observing that the native perennial grasses that were not grazed are alive but brown at the top; whereas the native perennial grasses that were grazed are very much alive, vibrant and green. We are also noticing that there seems to be less thatch in the grazed areas. This is a good thing for many native animals and plants. We plan to bring the sheep back to the Preserve after the next few rains, when the annual and perennial grasses turn green (often in December). The sheep grazing brought lots of interest from the community and a large number of people showed up to volunteer to help move the sheep from the east side to the west side of the Preserve. Everyone had a good time, and maybe the sheep did too. Well... maybe not, but they liked where they ended up anyway, in a nice patch of tasty grass and shrubs. We also got a lot of positive feedback from neighbors who expressed gratitude for the reduction of vegetation in this fire prone area, and for the way it was done – with animals rather than machinery.

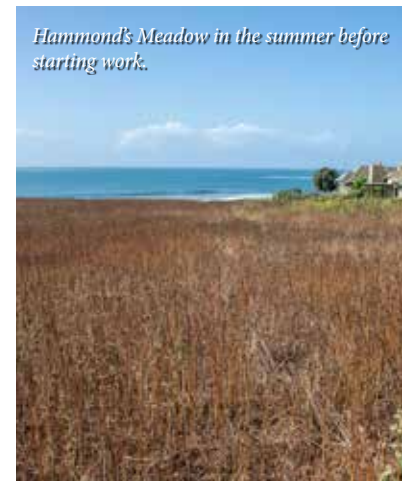
Thank you to the many people that volunteered to be docents near each pasture to help answer passersby's questions, and to the many, many people that joined us in helping to herd sheep from one end of the preserve to the other. Funding is needed to support next year's grazing program, so please consider making a contribution to support the effort.



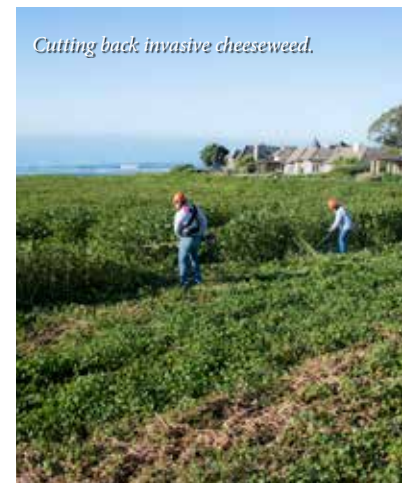
Sheep being herded from one pasture to the next.

## RESTORATION AT HAMMOND'S MEADOW

For the past few years, Channel Islands Restoration has been working hard to lay the foundation for a very special coastal meadow habitat restoration project; and in April, we received approval to start moving forward. Located in Montecito, Hammond's Meadow is a beautiful, open space overlooking the ocean and a Chumash cultural site. The property is owned by Santa Barbara County and has the potential to become thriving native habitat, restored from its current state as



Hammond's Meadow in the summer before starting work.



Cutting back invasive cheeseweed.

little more than a weedy lot between homes. After years of collaboration with Barbareño Chumash, neighbors and others, we received approval from the County of Santa Barbara to help bring this meadow back to its former glory.

Currently, the meadow is dominated by invasive plants. Of the 24 plant species found in the meadow, only three are native. After each rain event, thick stands of black mustard, cheeseweed, and other invasives spring out of the ground, drop more seeds, and then die off. This is detrimental to the habitat quality of the meadow, is unattractive, and creates a fire hazard.

We're working to control the weeds and reduce their presence within the meadow by weeding them before they have the chance to produce or drop seeds. As a sacred Chumash site, we're taking care not to disrupt the soil. After a rain event prompts new growth at the meadow, we come in and remove the non-natives, cutting them near the ground level, without disturbing the soil.

The Hammond's Meadow – Shalawa Preservation and Management Plan calls for protecting Chumash heritage, providing space for Chumash ceremony, preserving the trail to the beach, and planting more than 4,000 native



Native Datura thrives once the invasive plants are removed.

## SERCAL POSTER CONTEST



College conference attendees holding Rio Vista Middle School students' posters.

Last April, Channel Islands Restoration sponsored the California Society for Ecological Restoration's (SERCAL) 26th annual conference, this year held in Santa Barbara. It was three great days of learning from colleagues, experts in their fields and making new partners and contacts.

As part of each conference, SERCAL has a poster presentation competition for college students across the state. This year, CIR helped to help younger students from Oxnard to also take part. Sixth Graders from Rio Vista Middle School (RVMS) created presentations on three topics; their trout in the classroom project, endangered species of California, and solutions to plastic pollution. This project was entirely a team effort!

As well as all the students, special thanks go to RVMS teachers John Franckowiak and Ronda Plomteaux who gave time in their packed weeks to help their students make the posters. Many thanks also to SERCAL and its Admin Director Julie St. John and all the staff at Rio School District in Oxnard. Awesome teamwork helping the next generation have fun whilst learning about protecting nature and the environment for all wildlife including humans!



# BOTANICAL SURVEYS OF THE SIERRA MADRE POTREROS

Did you know Channel Islands Restoration not only does habitat restoration, but also conducts research to best inform the where, what, and how of habitat restoration? This past spring we set out to do a biological inventory of the Sierra Madre Potrerros - a unique set of open grasslands set along the Sierra Madre Ridge - to determine if habitat restoration is necessary and how it would best be done.

The Sierra Madre Potrerros are located in northeastern Santa Barbara County, California, about 30 miles north of Santa Barbara as the condor flies (or about 100 miles as the backpacker trudges) and approximately 10 miles south of New Cuyama. The potrerros are situated atop the ridge of the Sierra Madre Mountains in the Los Padres National Forest, San Rafael Wilderness. The potrerros support more than 1,500 acres of grasslands. ("Potrerros" means an enclosed piece of pasture land, coming from the Spanish word "potro," meaning a male horse.) These potrerros include Santa Barbara Potrero, Logan Potrero, Round Potrero, Salisbury Potrero, Pine Corral Potrero, Montgomery Potrero, and others. The potrerros are on the edge of the Zaca Fire scar that burned more than 240,000 acres between July 4 and October 29, 2007.

Channel Islands Restoration recently completed a biological study of the plants and animals in the potrerros in order to establish a baseline inventory. Having this knowledge helped us form preliminary recommendations for ecological restoration in the future. The study was funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, working in close cooperation with the Los Padres National Forest through the Southern California Forests and Watersheds - Wildfires Restoration Grant Program. The major goals of this competitive grant program are to:

1. Increase the pace and scale of restoration to address impacts from the Zaca and other fires;
2. Provide sustainable and lasting ecological benefits to the forest;
3. Engage in efficient, strategic, and innovative solutions to improve forest health and resilience;
4. Encourage 'shared-stewardship' of Forest Service lands through expanded partnership and cooperation.

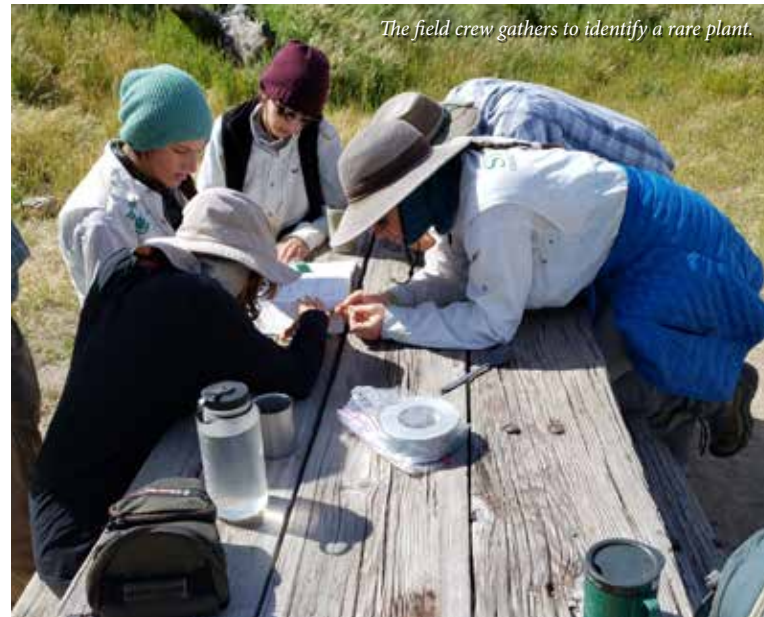
We conducted an analysis of recent and historic aerial photography and found that the aerial extent of the grasslands has been stable over the past 80 years, with no noticeable change in the extent. Any changes in the species composition cannot be determined by viewing aerial photography.

We surveyed approximately 1,285 acres of grasslands in the potrerros this spring and found that they are dominated by non-native annual grasses but there are many species of native grasses and wildflowers growing there as well. In fact we found seven species of native grasses and more than 100 species of plants. In some of the potrerros, 80 percent of these are native. While there are more

natives than non-natives, the non-natives dominate the landscape and take up most of the space. Nevertheless, the presence of so many natives is encouraging. We were delighted to observe three rare plant species in flower but we were disappointed to observe nine invasive plant species, including hundreds of thousands of the invasive grass, Medusa head (*Elymus caput-medusae*).

On the Potrerros, we observed more than fifty invertebrate species, two amphibian species, eight species of reptile (including a number of rattlesnakes), fifty species of birds, and at least eight mammal species. Future surveys during other seasons are expected to result in additional observations.

Our report includes preliminary recommendations for next steps. These include beginning to tackle the invasive weeds. We've submitted a grant proposal to start controlling some of the non-native weeds and hope that we will be successful. If you can help, either financially or physically, please let us know. We're going to need it!



The field crew gathers to identify a rare plant.

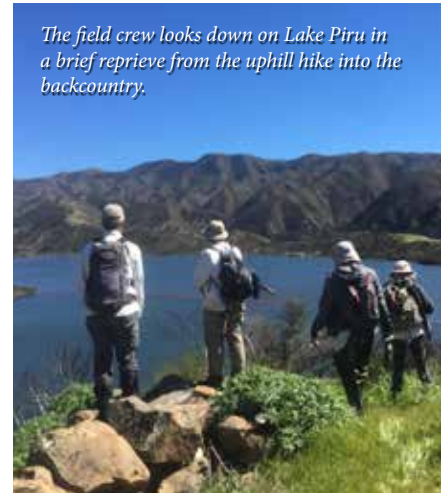


Michael Mulroy and Brad Meiners set up to identify bird species at dawn.

# THERE IS NOTHING QUITE LIKE A CIR BACKCOUNTRY TRIP

by Michael Mulroy

On each CIR trip, an assemblage of tamarisk mercenaries systematically surveys the designated watershed, leaving no trace aside from a path of tamarisk skeletons in its wake.



The field crew looks down on Lake Piru in a brief reprieve from the uphill hike into the backcountry.

Aside from our destructive tendencies, our group shares a passion for the natural areas our work is helping to restore. On any given trip, our team probably includes people very knowledgeable in local plants, birds, mammal tracks, geology, topography, regional trail systems, and on and on. Our combined knowledge of an area's natural history is formidable, and we learn from one another. Each trip can be approached not only as work, but also as a sort of field course. My favorite aspect of backcountry trips is learning from my fellow CIR employees and volunteers; at

the end of each week, I feel like I have learned so much, and possibly made people more enthusiastic about birds and mushrooms (two of my main areas of interest). At the end of a trip, on average I've probably learned about several new plants, a few new bird calls, a new star or constellation, local geological features, topography, and a better appreciation for the place we call home. Each trip gives to me the gift of the soul-cleansing, purpose-clarifying power of being out in the wilderness, away from the distraction of technology and the hustle and bustle of my civilized life.

This is not to say that our backcountry trips don't offer their share of minor trials and tribulations. I've learned the hard way to "double bag" with two sleeping bags after spending multiple semi-sleepless nights with chilly feet. I've had a tent totaled by ridiculously strong winds, removed my fair share of ticks, and accustomed myself to having a dirty face and gross fingernails for days at a time. But anyway, I remind myself each time that if my main worries have to do with comfort or appearance, then I'm probably in a good place.

By Day 5 of each trip, I am usually ready to get back home, take a shower, and do a thorough check for ticks. But I always leave with a smile, and within a week I am ready for the next trip. It's amazing to me that within an hour's drive of civilization and a few miles of hiking, you can find yourself completely isolated with a low to negligible chance of seeing a stranger for days on end, and with a high probability to see something incredible that you've never seen before. The places we work might not have the sort of in-your-face beauty or grandeur that attracts hordes of sightseers to Yosemite and other places, but it doesn't take long to come to love and appreciate our backcountry areas for their subtler brand of beauty. They are pristine, quiet, and inspiring places that have so much to offer. Let's keep them that way.



Santa Ynez River backcountry

# WESTERN POND TURTLE (*Actinemys marmorata*)



PONDERING LIFE  
Mark Gunn via Flickr

On May 23rd, Channel Islands Restoration joined the Association of Zoos & Aquariums in celebrating World Turtle Day. For this day, we hosted information about our native western pond turtles and how you can protect them!

The western pond turtle is the West Coast's only native freshwater turtle species and they range from Southwestern British Columbia to northwestern Baja California. These turtles live in ponds, marshes, streams, and slow moving rivers, often basking on logs and mud banks.

With a shell length of only four to nine inches, western pond turtle hatchlings are only the size of a quarter. Adult turtles come in various shades of browns and hints of olive green, have marbled patterns on their shell and skin, and can live for up to forty years in the wild. They feed on a wide variety of animals, including aquatic insects, grasshoppers, flies, beetles, fish, worms, crustaceans, and amphibians as well as water plants.

Western pond turtles are threatened by many factors, including habitat destruction, fragmentation, degradation, and competition from non-native species. One such species is the red-eared slider - a turtle native to the southern United States. These turtles are commonly kept as pets, but unfortunately people release them into the wild. So please, don't release your pets into the wild! They are also vulnerable to climate change, because the gender of offspring is determined by the incubation temperatures of the eggs (a trait found in many other turtles and some other reptiles).

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife service considers the western pond turtle a species of special concern (currently under status review), and they are protected under California state law. The northern populations have virtually disappeared in some ranges, with turtle populations in Southern California in precipitous decline.

By restoring riparian habitats in the Sisquoc River, Santa Ynez River, upper Piru Creek, and Santa Clara River, Channel Islands Restoration is working to provide healthier habitats for our native turtle to thrive.

by Daniela Schwartz





Channel Islands Restoration

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