

Hastings Natural History Reservation



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A Biological Research Station of the
Museum of Vertebrate Zoology
University of California, Berkeley
and a part of the the University of
California's
Natural Reserve System



Weather Report

April 1993

April showers? Sort of: 0.419" was the total for the month and this might end our rain season. We've seen 27.02" of rain this winter which is remarkable. Big Creek continued to bubble down through Madrone Canyon and Headquarters until the last day of the month. Finch Creek continues to flow around Haystack Hill. Grasses grew slowly and not as tall this year, and our lupines are not nearly as abundant as in previous drier years. By the last days of the month, many fields of annual grass were turning brown. Most nights cooled to the 30's (°F), daily highs were near 50 and a few days reached the upper 70's. Most oaks were finished flowering by the 20th-25th, when most had leafed out completely. Many bluebird boxes throughout the reservation and valley have active nests; it will be a good year for bluebirds. A Townsend's Solitaire was regularly around the Stucco House for the first week of April.

Research and Education

April is one our most active research months. Just about every building was occupied for a while and people are coming and going every day.

Walt Koenig and Mark Stanback (Univ. Washington) found breeding acorn woodpeckers as early as March, but most of the nests started at the beginning of April. Mark continued working with the field assistants and watching effects of various hormone levels on woodpecker behavior. Eric Doer and Veronica Johnson are working with Walt and Mark while living in the Bunk House.

Walt's work on oaks included visits from several colleagues. Jean Knops (Duke and Ariz. State) spent a week to collect soil samples for studies of N and acorn production. Bill Carmen and family spent a weekend at Hastings to update data. Larry Riggs also spent a weekend working on sampling genetic material from Hastings oaks.

Janis Dickinson is working with field assistants Kelly Gordon, Sergio Harding and Marni Koopman. Together they continue to document behavior of Western Bluebirds. Kelly, Sergio and Marni are also living in the new Bunk House. Our little 1970's vintage Datsun 510 is a common sight on Carmel Valley Road near the bluebird study sites on Oak Ridge Ranch.

Jenella Loye (UC-Davis) comes and goes, based in the Hastings Cabin. Working with remarkable independence, her field assistants are taking data on parasites in nests of western bluebirds on Rana Creek Ranch and Rancho San Carlos. Ron Kim and Kris McIntyre mostly work at Rana Creek Ranch while Chris Chan is often at Rancho San Carlos. Geoff Pease and Scott Carroll are also working out of Hastings on this project, but on a less regular basis. Any of this crew can be found in the lab at times, making slides of blood or looking at tiny wasps or flies under the microscope.

Visiting researchers included Dr. Richard Hemmes, Ben Hart and Kelly Cliff from UC-Davis. They spent a couple of days checking out interiors of woodrat nests for leaves which might repel parasites. Dr. Hemmes is using a video camera on a flexible rod which can nondestructively look into cavities. Gordon Frankie (UCB) spent a day sampling bees. Carlos Garza (UCB-Integrative Biology) spent several days collecting specimens from live-trapped voles (*Microtus*) on various isolated habitats. John Barthell (UC-Davis), spent a day collecting bees with Jean Knops and revisiting many of his old study sites. Frank Schliecher, our volunteer bird photographer, spent five days here, and delivered four really great 8 x 10 color prints of California Tiger Salamanders. Steve Bailey (Director, Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History) and three PGMNH colleagues spent the 6th taking notes on our resident birds. Gretchen LeBuhn (UCSB-Botany) spent several days monitoring her populations of *Lupinus formosus* on the Robertson Saddle and Haystack Hill.

Several groups visited Hastings. I gave a tour to the Point Lobos Docents on April 22, and the Carmel Valley Manor Hikers were out on April 15. Robert Haller (UCSB, Botany) brought his class here for an overnight stay at the Robertson House on the 17th. Sam McGinnis (Cal. St. Hayward) had an enthusiastic class here on the 30th.

Grassland Research

April was a big month for our native grass work. John Menke (UC-Davis) was here with Karen Rasmussen (UCD, grad. student) to check our plantings on Carmel Ranch Company, Rana Creek Ranch and Oak Ridge Ranch. Karen spent 3 weekends in April monitoring the plantings done in January on the uplands. Our strip spraying and very low seeding density defined the lower limits on successful seedling establishment costs. (That is, we had only partial success). Paul Kephart, John Menke and I spent many hours devising a planting plan for Rana Creek Ranch. On April 14 and 20, I spent days with Judie Telfer from the Monterey Herald to prepare a story on the native grass work on Hastings and cooperating ranches. It appeared on the 23rd and was very helpful. On the 20th, 27th and 30th, over 80,000 plugs of native grasses were planted on tilled, irrigated land on Rana Creek Ranch. Paul Kephart arranged for the work crews, Brian Heneks got the irrigation system going, and I prepared maps, computer databases and installed a series of soil moisture and irrigation moisture monitors in these fields. Most grasses were looking pretty good by the end of the month. These large (4 ac.) plots include many native Carmel Valley species and plans for further plantings will be derived from data taken on the performance of these plants. Brian Heneks and I attended a field demonstration day (CNGA) on the 16th at ConservaSeed (Rio Vista, CA) to learn about native seed production reality. Continued irrigation on the Rana Creek Ranch plots will be the minimum required.

People, Places and Habitations

Mark Johnson opened the Arnold Road, and we are once again indebted to our neighbors for the use of some equipment. Mark winched one particularly large boulder off the road and then graded the lower stretches, filling some very impressive cuts in the soft soil. Mark and I planted some native grass around the Bunk House where it is sprinkled regularly. Our phones and power were knocked out again for a couple of days. We now have a backup emergency radio phone. Mark had his hands full with the regular routine and all the little tasks that come with folks moving in and out of all the buildings. Mark arranged for PSTS to arrive in early May to start the replacement of the septic system at the Red House which is literally falling down the hill. A standard septic tank and new drain line are planned.

John Boekenoogen and I continued to work on the legal, planning and bidding processes for installation of a new electronic gate on Martin Road which would be shared by Boekenoogen Ranches, Ltd., Palo Escrito Ranch and Hastings. Violet Handelman has been preparing legal documents for John and his contractors. Bids were requested from four local contractors. The low bid was received from Richard Evans, Evans Construction, here in Carmel Valley. Negotiations will continue with our neighbors, the US Postal Service, etc. Construction may start in a month or two.

Carmel Valley Natural History Lecture Series...

Hastings, the Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History and the Hidden Valley Music Center are pleased to announce a series of public lectures to be given in Carmel Valley and Pacific Grove. Grants from a local benefactor and the Rancho San Carlos Foundation have made these possible. Lectures will be at the Hidden Valley Music Center on night, and Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History the following evening. Refreshments to be served. Details to follow. Tentative Schedule:

- July 13-14. Professor Brad Shaffer, UC-Davis. California Tiger Salamanders
- July 20-21. Dr. Mike Evans, Tree of Life Nursery, California Native Oaks
- July 27-28. Professor Reg Barrett, Mountain Lions and Man, Central Coast of California
- Aug. 3-4. Professor Bob Lane, UC-Berkeley. Lyme Disease, Ticks & Other Parasites....
- Aug. 10-11. Professor Luis Baptista, Cal Academy. Bird Songs, Whistles and Translations
- Aug. 17-18. Professor Rocky Gutiérrez, Humboldt St., Spotted Owls Conservation & Biology