

# THE CALIFORNIA ACORN REPORT

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The Official Newsletter of the California Acorn Survey'  
Walt Koenig and Jean Knops, co-directors

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## THE MILDEW HAT' INVADES MINNESOTA

Yes, once again it s acorn time! This year s count began on the weekend off 25-27 August, when converged in Minneapolis for the annual Cedar Creek acornfest. I even took along my son Dale this time around, although upon arrival he was immediately whisked off by his Aunt Laurie until we met again later on at the State Fair. Unfortunately, this year s count did not start auspiciously, since Jean kept looking for me in some abandoned section of the airport and I, having totally forgotten that I d tatoored his cell phone number on my forehead, spent a good two hours standing around and pondering the charm of modern airports before finally getting through to Jean s wife Anne and being picked up just in time to go immediately to bed back at Anne s St. Paul apartment. Dinner consisted of some pseudo-Chinese food from one of the airport counters and was exactly what you d expect mid-western Chinese take-out food to be; I won t bore you with a review.

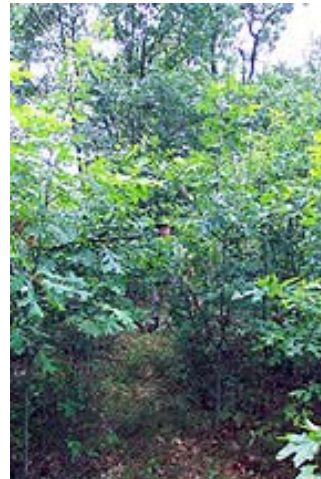
Sunday found us heading up to Cedar Creek and the start of another fun-filled acorn counting extravaganza. The big excitement was the unveiling of our new California Acorn Survey Official Vehicle sign, which I had carefully pieced together months ago using Sesame Street refrigerator magnets, being too cheap to have a set of real signs made down at Office Depot.



Left: the long-awaited, and quickly lost, California Acorn Survey sign. Right: the co-directors of the California Acorn Survey' along with the Minnesota rental car affixed with the sign, shortly

Unfortunately, the magnets were not strong enough to keep the damn thing on the car, and by the time we made it to Cedar Creek, it had long since blown off onto the roadside, there to be studied in detail by future scavengers in search of 21st

century Satanic relics. As for the count itself, there was, I fear, little exciting to report, other than the resurrection of one tree that we had written off as dead. We should all be so fortunate following our untimely passing. Jean did, however, have a new camera this year, so I can finally show you what real oak



You can hide, but we will find you!  
Jean only a few feet away in one of the Cedar Creek oak sites, not burned since 1994. He s there; keep looking. Alternatively, cross your eyes and a 3D image of the Teletubbies should pop out at you.

Yes, that is Jean hiding behind all those oak saplings. How they manage to be veritable weeds, in stark contrast to the situation in much of California, is an interesting question that someone should look into one of these days.

Sunday night I headed out to the wilds of Minnesota for dinner with my old grad school friend Bob Zink and his wife Susan Weller, the latter of whom had fled the country last year but did not manage to escape this time around. Bob s house is fairly easy to find: all you have to do is go the opposite direction from where all the deer are heading. Fortunately, some of the unlucky beasts that fail to keep a safe distance make for some mighty fine eating, and I can highly recommend Bob s ability to do great things with a whole range of formerly sentient creatures brought low by his arsenal of weaponry. Especially impressive was his new high-tech bow, with which he is planning to nail Bambi and all his descendants when the season starts in a couple of weeks. How they fit a DVD drive, 512 MB of memory, and a 15" flat-screen video monitor into that thing is beyond me.



*Bob and one of his many recently deceased friends on campus at the University of Minnesota. Note the expression of pure unadulterated satisfaction (on him, not the goose). Meanwhile, a few of the thousands of undergrads fleeing in terror can be seen in the reflection on his eye-glasses*

Monday we finished up the count, after which Jean dropped me off at the Minnesota State Fair, which is the real reason I go to Minnesota every August. The weather was fairly hot and muggy and, having lost my Hastings Reservation hat somewhere in my bag, I wore my inimitable blue-terrycloth Mildew Hat' (see last year's *California Acorn Report*), only to have a couple of rednecks in a pickup drive by shout hey mannn; time for a new hat. I assume they were jealous, or maybe the Dr. Pepper that I'd soaked the hat in earlier in the day had started to attract flies ?

The Fair itself was, as always, a disgusting orgy of deep-fried greasy junk food on a stick. This year, with both Dale and his Aunt Laurie to help consume some of the offerings, we were able to sample not only minidonuts but deep-fried cheese on a stick, pork chops on a stick, more minidonuts, corn dogs, rootbeer floats, and a final helping of enough minidonuts to make any sane person toss his acorns. It was great. The fact that some of those trees up at Cedar Creek had already dropped a lot of acorns and that an earlier count might fit into Jean's schedule more efficiently may unfortunately spell the end of having the Minnesota Acorn Count overlap the State Fair. If so, it and that greasy, gross food will be sorely missed.

#### THE HASTING REVUE

The Hastings count itself began on 7 September, when Jean (who had succeeded in tricking one of his colleagues into teaching the first several weeks of classes for him) and I headed up Haystack Hill and began the count in advance of Bill Carmen's arrival late that night. Saturday, 8 September was the big day, with all three of us heading optimistically up to the Arnold, only to turn around and come back down the hill to get the calipers that Bill had left on the front seat of his

minivan. The remainder of the day improved, and we succeeded in counting all the acorns there were to count by mid-morning on Sunday, leaving Bill plenty of time to get stuck in traffic on the way back up to Marin County.

This, by the way, is year 22 of the Hastings acorn count, started innocuously by myself and Ron Mumme on 4 October 1980. As most of you are aware, the idea for a count stemmed from a long-standing, and mostly frustrated, desire to have data on the acorn crop which we could use to help understand and predict acorn woodpecker behavior at Hastings. Up until that time we had relied on a set of about 66 acorn traps (following a model used by Jim Griffin on some valley oaks since the late 1960s) that I set out under 30 trees of all 5 species back in 1974 and painstakingly checked every couple of weeks during the fall through 1979. Traps are used in many parts of the country for acorns, and god knows maybe other people get useful data out of them, but as far as I was concerned they were nothing but a pain. Then came the apocalyptic 1979 1<sup>st</sup> California Oak Symposium, where Walter Graves of the California Department of Fish and Game gave a paper describing a visual method of surveying acorns. We modified his method, primarily by making the focus of the visual survey a count of as many acorns as can be counted in 30 seconds and dividing the effort between two observers, but otherwise, we've never looked back.

There are definitely limitations to the survey. First off, it's good if both observers are reasonably sober and know what acorns look like. Avoid counting at night or during solar eclipses. Marking individual trees and surveying the same individuals from one year to the next is also good, primarily because it allows one to eventually look at production records by individuals rather than just the population as a whole. Observers should be unbiased, which, strictly enforced, requires that new naive counters, preferably unfamiliar with either the purpose of the acorn count or the decimal numbering system, be recruited for each tree following execution of all those counting at prior trees. In lieu of that, counters should be careful not to give away their numbers to each other, thereby potentially biasing the second person. Speaking of which, this is perhaps a good time to report on the results of the annual contest to see which one of us counted the most acorns during the survey. Jean, only getting to count 30 trees on Haystack Hill before Bill showed up, was the clear loser with a total of 26. Somehow, even with the head start I had on Friday, Bill came out the winner with a total of 580 to my 528. I've demanded a recount, and expect to hear from the International Acorn Counting Commission in due course.

#### FASHION TIPS: HAIR

Although hats are not the focus of this year's *Fashion Tips* from the California Acorn Survey' team, we have to note Bill's Santa Cruz Mystery Spot hat, which replaced



the hat he was apparently unable to lift from the bunkhouse this year. Would that we were all so trendily attired! Jean again sported his Midwestern prairie dog pelt hat, while I, as always, grossed everyone out with my Mildew Hat, still recovering from the ignominy it suffered at the hands of those insensitive Minnesotans.

What we do focus on this year is hair. And really, for a bunch of old farts, we still have relatively a lot of it on which to focus. This goes especially for Bill, whose pony tail remains the envy of us all, especially those parts that haven't progressed out of the 1970s.



*We may come from different cultures, but we all bow to the One, great Acorn Goddess. Yours truly, Jean, and Bill offer our hair, having failed to talk Her into taking the kids instead.*

As for the lineup, I grudgingly admit the presence of scalp here and there, but for the most part, admit it, those heads are about as good as they come, at least if you restrict yourself to the kind of guys who spend their time wandering around staring up into trees, ranting about Acorn Goddesses, visiting the Mystery Spot, and obsessing about the cosmic implications of driving around California clockwise vs. counterclockwise (yet to come).

## THE LATEST TREND: ACORNWARE

Next we bring up one of the up and coming trends in the world of fashion: acornware and acorn paraphernalia. Jean, as usual, led the pack in the first category with his acorn shirt, while the acorn plate, although antique, represents a kind of lost elegance that only acorns can offer. For more, check out [www.gottahaveacorns.com](http://www.gottahaveacorns.com).



*Left: acorns on Jean's shirt, only one of the many bizarre shirts he sported during this year's acornfest. Right: An acorn plate, painted by my grandfather Carl Koenig while working for E. W. Donath, 1910-1915*

## THE STATEWIDE ACORNFEST CONTINUES

But Cedar Creek and Hastings were, as usual, only the start of an entire week of celebratory acorn counting all around the state of California. Monday morning found Jean and me heading off at the bright-eyed hour of 6 am to check out the acorn crop in the rest of the state. I'll cut to the chase and immediately take up the question that I realize has been the center of all serious philosophical discussions over the past several months: which direction did we go?

It was a difficult decision. This was the third year that the survey has been condensed into one inclusive statewide sweep rather than the north and a south tours that we had been able to afford in prior years. Consequently, we are faced annually with the issue of whether to go clockwise, first to Jasper Ridge and finishing up at Pozo, or counterclockwise. Given that we have never actually attempted going counterclockwise in the past, there are several key reasons for going north first, the most cogent of which is that we get to go over the Golden Gate Bridge for free, saving \$3 each and every time we do the survey. There is also the issue of whether we could handle all that counterclockwise motion after so many years of going the other direction, not to mention the potential impact on the data itself: would all our counts come out negative?

On the other hand, Jean was getting kind of tired of the same old order so I came up with a plan for going counterclockwise and even set up a sign outside the gate to remind me to turn left instead of right as we headed out on Monday morning. And then, to make a long story short, I bought a fancy office chair from a failed dot-com company on eBay and had to pick it up, so not only did we end up going north as usual but I made us squander at least a good 1.5 hours navigating through Mountain View to first pick up the chair and then drop it off for storage at the house of my old college friends Robert and

<sup>3</sup> Tania in

Los Altos. I wish I could say the chair was worth it but it's still up in Los Altos and I probably won't get to pick it up and try it until after this gets published. In any case, it resolved this contentious issue this time around, and gives us one additional year to contemplate the potential global repercussions of doing the survey backwards.

Well, for those of you who aren't riveted by the question of polarity that resides at the heart of the California Acorn Survey', perhaps it's time to degenerate into what has, inexplicably, become one of the most popular sections of the *California Acorn Report*.

## THE° ANNUAL RESTAURANT° REVIEW

This year we expand our coverage to seven restaurants. Regretfully, we were unable to consummate the highly exclusive reservations we had managed to secure at *Chez Brad et Louise* in Davis and *Chez Merenlender/Heise* at Hopland (see 2000. *California Acorn Report* 4: 4), nor were we able to fulfill gracious offers of dinner companionship with either Kathy Purcell at San Joaquin or Eric Knapp at Three Rivers. Next year we hope to do better; in the meantime, many thanks and sorry for having let you all down. In any case, here they are, in random alphabetical order:

### **New Lu-Shan**, 403 J Street, Sacramento.

Remembering the great Chinese restaurant near Old Town that we ate dinner at in 1999, we mistakenly walked into the *New Lu-Shan*, which happens to be in the middle of enough Chinese eating establishments to befuddle all but the most organized of reviewers. The fishtanks looked familiar, but otherwise the slightly rundown atmosphere did not. *New Lu-Shan*'s motto is that different touch and taste in Chinese cuisine but I wouldn't expect much more than that from it. The buffet lunch included a range of dishes and appetizers and was certainly passable; my favorite was the fried won-tons that, in an audacious twist, were glazed with honey. At \$5.75 a pop, this is not a bad choice, although we still recommend going next door to the *Royal Hong King Lum*, where we had meant to go instead. Rating: 🍷

### **Sierra Nevada Brewery**, Chico.

After years of blasting through Chico on the way to Sierra Foothills and doing nothing more than dragging Jean screaming into the collectibles mall, we finally searched out the Sierra Nevada Brewery for dinner. The restaurant, located in the corner next to the brewery itself, is very nice and filled with happy, half-drunk people. Jean ordered his usual steak, which was apparently on the tough, stringy side, while my bacon cheeseburger was above average, both in proportions and taste. The best part of this place, however, is definitely the drinks. Jean happily downed a pint of SN's Octoberfest beer, while I drowned my beer-allergy sorrows with a fine vanilla malt. We

also liked the view of the brewery that you get from inside the restaurant, which consisted of two huge shiny copper vats shaped like giant alien mushrooms. If you come earlier in the day, you can presumably tour the place and see how they make such good beer out of those mushrooms. Rating: 🍷🍷

### **The Wawona**, Yosemite National Park.

Every year we pass *The Wawona* on our way from Yosemite to San Joaquin Experimental Station and invariably suggest to each other that we should stay there next year. This time, as always, our finances called for a cheaper lodging option (the Wawona campground), but the timing was right for checking it out for dinner. And I must say that its 1930's WPA elegance, although faded, makes it a fun place to hang out. As for the food, it smacks of what I imagine upscale 1930's WPA cuisine to have been. Jean's steak was good (better, he assures me, than the one he had the night before at the Sierra Nevada Brewery), but my corn chowder was unnecessarily heavy and my stuffed trout, although good, was not in a class with what we've come to expect in a *nouvelle California cuisine* world. Nonetheless, it beats campfire cooking, so what the heck, stop by next time you're in the vicinity. Rating: 🍷🍷

### **San Luis Fish & B.B.Q.**, 474 Marsh Street, San Luis Obispo.

After failing to find a motel with an empty room on the last night of the survey in San Luis Obispo, we happened across this promising hole-in-the-wall not too far from the Madonna Inn. It's the kind of place that mainly sells fish and cheap wine over the counter, but has a few tables for down-and-out types such as ourselves who are willing to eat off styrofoam plates and have only a night of sleeping on a heat vent over by the Mission to look forward to. Jean ordered oysters on the half-shell, which turned out to be gigantic. And I mean gigantic: I've seen smaller oysters that have devoured small cities. Unfortunately, all that extra volume tends to be made up of body parts that aren't that appetizing to even look at, much less slurp down one's throat.

The dinners themselves were better. Jean liked his shark and chips mainly because the coating on the shark was not very greasy. To my mind, this puts it so far out of the running in terms of great fish and chips that I wouldn't even mention this place except for my cajun catfish and rice, both of which were very good, and the fact that they had Zima, which I greatly appreciate ever since allergies made my beer-guzzling days a distant memory. All in all, not what I'd call a gourmet choice, but definitely a step up from chain fast-food. Rating: 🍷🍷

### **Sizzler**, inside the Econo Lodge, Gorman.

Speaking of chains, we ended up in a *Sizzler* after failing to finish Liebre Mountain on Thursday afternoon. The *Sizzler* is the in-house restaurant of Gorman's Econo

Lodge, which was full of that *je ne sais pas* quality of only the finest post-apocalyptic inns: pink doors, windows with paint inadvertently sprayed all over them, and small yapping dog-like creatures tied up outside peeing on the signposts. I had the Fisherman's special, which involved enough deep-fried fish and shellfish to put me off seafood for a couple of days. Meanwhile Jean, after having ordered steaks at just about every restaurant we've been to over the past three years, took the opportunity to order grilled shrimp, which apparently were not nearly as good as they looked. Rating: 🍷

**Piatti**, 101 S. Westlake Boulevard, Thousand Oaks.

On our way through Thousand Oaks we spotted Piatti, an upscale Italian restaurant at the corner within a shopping mall and the kind of place where the waitresses are all dressed in button-down shirts and wide neckties. In retrospect we probably should have realized that the location shouted chain, but the fact is, if it is a chain, which we think but aren't sure is true, it could definitely be worse. After all, who can argue with a chain that serves good bread along with spiced olive oil/Balsamic vinegar, not to mention a fine *panino con salmone*? The open kitchen inhabited by at least three Japanese-looking chefs was an especially intriguing multicultural touch. Unfortunately, Jean's *pizza special* had an inferior crust and was covered with marginal cheese, reducing its potential. Nonetheless, it's a big step up from *Denny's*.

Rating: 🍷🍷

**McPhee's Grill**, 416 Main Street, Templeton.

Last year you may remember that we finally made it to *McPhee's* for dinner, where it was the first and only restaurant ever to attain the coveted California Acorn Survey's 5-acorn rating. This year, after having camped at Pozo the night before, we came here for Sunday brunch just to make sure that we hadn't been suffering from hallucinations when we ate here last year. And we weren't. *McPhee's* is a fantastic restaurant, all the more so for being in the middle of nowhere. Brunch consisted of a wonderful selection of cold *hors d'oeuvres* including several great cold salads along with more traditional fare such as lox and cream cheese. One then gets to walk up to the grill and order any of about eight different dishes along with appropriate sides, which are then put together for you on the spot. I'm not sure what Jean had (I think it was some sort of eggs benedict kind of thing), but frankly I could care less having gone for a life-changing combination of tempura soft-shelled crab, garlic mashed potatoes, and grilled baby squash. We were then offered a choice of several deserts; all of which looked great, a suspicion we were able to confirm for the cheesecake and *baclava*. At \$18.75 a pop, we aren't talking cheap, but heck, this is the kind of place that makes life work living, even in the midst of death, mayhem, and a half-witted President hell bent on leading us all into chaos. Don't miss it.

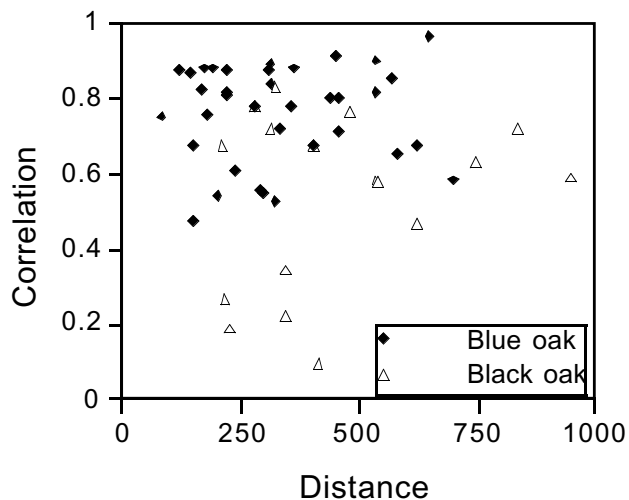
Rating: 🍷🍷🍷🍷

## BACK TO THE COUNT

There is much to report on this year's count. First off, we added a few valley oaks at Sierra Foothills, yielding a grand total (including Hastings) of 991 trees of 7 species covered by the survey, including 234 valley oaks (L), 253 blue oaks (D), 139 canyon live oaks (C), 175 coast live oaks (A), 123 California black oaks (K), 19 Engelmann oaks (E), and 57 interior live oaks (W) at 16 different sites. Sites are (in standard clockwise order, followed by the species surveyed) Hastings (LDCAK), Jasper Ridge (LDA), Hopland (LDCKW), Whiskeytown (Tower House Historic District) (LCK), Dye Creek (LDW), Sierra Foothills (LDW), Yosemite Valley (CK), San Joaquin Experiment Station (DW), Kaweah Oaks (L), Kaweah River (DCW), Liebre Mountain (LDK), Switzer's (San Gabriel Mtns)(CA), Santa Rosa Plateau (AE), Mount Palomar State Park (CK), Sedgwick Reserve (LDA), and, last but not least, Pozo (LDA). Please note: if your favorite site is not listed, it's probably because we weren't offered enough of a bribe; please check immediately with your treasurer or banker to rectify this oversight before it's too late.

The goal of counting acorns is to determine patterns of acorn production by California oaks at all levels. However, the main reason we spend a week of our lives every year driving madly around the state, much to the annoyance of our families, is to determine the geographic extent of synchrony in acorn production. Oaks are in general a classic masting taxon, which means they produce a highly variable seed crop from one year to the next. Masting is particularly interesting because it's a population phenomenon: a single tree may produce a variable seed crop from year to year, but only a population of trees masts by virtue of the fact that most or all of the trees in the population produce lots (or few) seeds synchronously in different years. The obvious question, then, is: how geographically widespread is synchrony, and what are the proximate and ultimate factors causing it?

The answers are not all yet in, partially because we're too busy writing the *California Acorn Report* to figure them out, but also because this is only the eighth year of the statewide survey and eight years is not nearly enough to really know for sure what's going on in all the species. However, there is certainly good evidence already to suggest that synchrony is very high, at least for some of the species. For example, considering the nine sites where we survey blue oaks, a plot of synchrony (measured by the correlation coefficient between the annual means) and distance between all pairwise sets of sites is plotted by the solid diamonds:



The basic idea is that synchrony is positive and relatively high between all pairs of sites, even those 700 km or so apart (Dye Creek and Liebre Mountain). This covers virtually the entire 1.2 million hectare range of blue oaks. At something like 187 trees/ha, this means we're talking on the order of 224 million trees, all of which tend to either produce a good crop, or a bad crop, more or less synchronously. At, say, 1000 acorns per tree in a good year, this would be 224 billion acorns pumped into the state's economy, which, even at only about 2 grams (dry weight) of cotyledon per acorn, comes to 448 million kilograms of acorn meat. That's a lot of deer, quail, jays, woodpeckers, pigeons, turkeys, and everything else that eats acorns, and remember, that's just for blue oaks.

Although such dramatic synchrony does not appear to be characteristic of all the species, so far there's even a fair amount of synchrony across California in species like the black oak, plotted by the open triangles in the above graph for the six sites where it's surveyed. Oddly enough, synchrony in both species, and particularly for the black oaks, seems to increase the farther apart sites are. That, in case you're wondering, is one of those results that ecologically almost can't be true, so we may have to hold back publishing some of this until those positive correlations between distance and synchrony either go away of their own accord (which is what they should do) or we become resigned to explaining them. Rest assured, it won't be easy.

#### ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE COUNT

This year's survey involved a grand total of 2,189 miles over 7 days, which included the tour of Silicon Valley to get my chair, one scenic detour that took what seemed like 3 or 4 days driving north from Hopland to Garberville and then east on Alderpoint Road and eventually Hwy 36 to Whiskeytown, and a 20 mile backtrack to the Beacon station in Redding to recover the notebook containing my permits and all the information about where sites are and who to contact. I'd left the notebook on top of the car, only to have it spread out over the street during the morning's light rain when later customers, apparently

worried about rumors of terrorist notebooks scattered throughout the city, carefully drove over and demolished it. Hopefully the startling frequency of such—senior moment events during this year's counting season doesn't portend greater difficulties in the future, assuming we remember to do the count in the first place.

Speaking of the car, this year we once again drove my 1989 Camry, stylishly outfitted with a Rocket Box in which I stuffed all our camping gear.



*Yours truly and the Camry, now a veteran of 2 surveys, at Tower House in Shasta Co. So what if we had to push part of the way: we made it.*

The car still clunks (we're still waiting on those responses to last year's quiz), the air conditioning is marginal, the automatic seat belt on the rider's side broke somewhere around Yosemite, and the timing is apparently off yielding some pretty pathetic pickup. But hey, it made it, the mileage was pretty good, and it didn't flip over once or lose the tread on any of its tires, so I'm not complaining. On the other hand, the survey inflicts quite a beating on an old car like that and even I'm pretty much ready to rent a car next year, even if we don't have any money specifically earmarked for the cause.

We again collected leaves on valley oaks this year for our developing project on valley oak leaf galls. For those of you still working on your submissions regarding this project that we announced in last year's *California Acorn Report*, be on notice that time is running out! Lauryn Benedict, my woodpecker assistant last winter and now a full-fledged grad student up in Berkeley, was kind enough to identify and sort through all of 2000's material during last winter's rains. The total included 2,743 galls of 12 species from 6,000 leaves of 141 trees. I'm not sure what it means yet, but there was at least enough diversity to keep me interested in the project, whatever it ends up being. Along the way this year, I couldn't help but notice that the galls on blue oaks look even more diverse and bizarre, so once we're convinced there's something interesting in all this we'll perhaps expand the study.

Nights this time around were spent at Hopland, Sierra Foothills, Wawona, the Gorman Econo Lodge, Mt. Palomar State Park, and, for the first time, the American Canyon campground at Pozo. We saw nice golden eagles at Jasper Ridge, where they are busy building what I assume is the new International Acorn Counting Center (see full report below), and otherwise were relieved to see no notable increase in yellow star thistle or any evidence of sudden oak death at our sites. Given how good last year's crop was, it wasn't surprising that acorn

woodpeckers seemed to be everywhere, while the annual Face Fly Survey' was won by Pozo, hands down.

#### A DIGRESSION INTO THIS YEAR'S ACORN CROP

Although it's traditional for me to avoid saying anything substantive in the *California Acorn Report* about the acorn crop, for the first time we kept track of how many acorns each of us counted separately, and can thus resolve the continuing debate as to whether it's better to count acorns in English or Dutch. Jean pulled ahead on the first day with 1,255 acorns to my 987 and stayed ahead through day 5 with a total of 5,663 to my 5,612. But then on day 6 he lagged, allowing me to pull ahead with 6,012 acorns to his 5,928. A fabulous finish at Pozo gave me a clearly superior final total of 6,618 to Jean's 6,370. I don't mean to gloat, but after my humiliating loss to Carmen at home the week before, it was a gratifying on-the-road victory.

This gives a grand total number for the count of 14,122 acorns at the 991 trees in California, which is not much more than the number we counted at Hastings alone in 2000. In other words, it's mostly a pretty mediocre year.

<i>Species</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>Long-term mean</i>
<i>lobata</i>	13.6	38.3	20.3
<i>douglasii</i>	7.2	43.8	22.3
<i>chrysolepis</i>	6.8	26.8	18.6
<i>agrifolia</i>	9.9	28.3	18.2
<i>kelloggii</i>	46.2	11.9	18.6
<i>engelmannii</i>	8.0	1.8	10.5
<i>wislizenii</i>	11.9	55.7	

*Data? You want data? I'll give you data: the mean number of acorns counted in 30 seconds per tree in 2001 compared to last year and to the overall long-term mean.*

The only species for which this wasn't true was California black oaks (*Q. kelloggii*), which were generally much better this year than last, and Engelmann oaks, which weren't very good but were terrible last year, bucking the general trend. None of these values are, however, anywhere close to as bad as they can get. Overall, 55% of blue oaks had at least one acorn on them, which is way down from 90% in 2000 but a far cry from the low of 26% recorded in 1995. The bottom line is, there are acorns out there, but it's not what you could call a good year. On the other hand, if your home range includes a stand of black oaks, you should be sitting pretty.

#### SPOTLIGHT ON: JASPER RIDGE

With some space to burn, it's time to add a new section to the *California Acorn Report* focusing on one of the sites we cover in the survey, and what better one to start out with than Jasper Ridge. Jasper Ridge is a 1,189 acre field station run by Stanford University and located just behind campus on some of the most valuable real estate in the world between Palo Alto, Portola Valley, and Woodside. I first got acquainted with it as an undergraduate when I spent time censusing birds in the

blue oak woodland next to the serpentine outcrop where Paul Ehrlich did his famous checkerspot butterfly work. The butterflies may now be gone, but the blue oaks are still there, so when we at the California Acorn Survey' first cast our net for sites beyond Hastings, Jasper Ridge was an obvious choice. Mark Stanback and I first went there to set up a count on



*Mark Stanback, one of the founders of the California Acorn Survey©, on site at Jasper Ridge during the inaugural 1989 survey*

4 October 1989, and, looking upon it as a nice excuse for an annual excursion up to the Bay Area, we marked 99 trees on a loop going all the way around the reserve and divided more or less equally among valley, blue, and coast live oaks. The survey has been conducted every year since then, although since 1994 it's been done not on its own but as part of the larger statewide effort.

Nona Chiariello was and still is the Scientific Coordinator, while Philippe Cohen has recently taken over as the Administrative Grand Pooh-bah. Philippe's big coup has been to raise the millions of bucks needed to replace the fairly pathetic facilities (toilets are still in the old bathhouse left over from the days when Searsville Lake was the local swimming hangout) with a state of the art Acorn Counting Center and Multiplex Cinema, currently under construction.



*You saw it here first: the foundation for the new Acorn Counting Center at Jasper Ridge takes shape. Jasper Ridge is the only one of our sites surrounded by a chain link fence. However, the one you see here isn't it.*

After 13 years, only one of the original trees has died (#32, a blue oak in the woodland next to the serpentine area), while this year Jean finally convinced me to abandon tree #65, located in a spot where it's never possible to see a thing. This leaves 97 trees on a route that takes almost 3 hours, especially if we stop after the blue oaks for a snack overlooking the haze of the Peninsula.

7 Jasper Ridge has some invasive plant problems including a lot of yellow star-thistle. The traffic getting up there can

be brutal, the noise from Hwy. 280 deafening, and there s something surrealistic about looking down into Woodside at the mansions that have sprung up in recent years. But it s a lovely place, and we look forward to it every year. Thanks to Philippe, Nona, and Stanford for letting us molest its acorns.



*Jasper Ridge, looking toward Woodside. The Peninsula doesn't get any more serene than this*



*Searsville Lake at Jasper Ridge. Displacing the town of Searsville when it was built in 1888, it is held back by a 60 foot concrete dam using an innovative design that has withstood everything including the 1906 earthquake*

*on the neighboring San Andreas fault. A local swimming hole until 1976, the lake is now quickly silting in, presenting some interesting management problems. In the meantime, it's still scenic and allows us to tick off lots of ducks and herons early on in the survey*

## A PUBLICATON, SORT OF

Best I can tell, the only paper to come directly out of the California Acorn Survey' this year is Annual variation in xylem water potential in California oaks (*Madro o* 47: 106-108 [2000]). The notable feature of this paper, whose bottom line is in part that oaks have access to more water in wet years (come again? you get *paid* to write this drivel?) is that it gives us a good excuse to never again drag the pressure bomb around in the middle of the night measuring xylem water potential. It seemed like a good idea at the time, or then again, maybe it didn t. In any case, it s over, and I don t want to talk about it anymore. Jean and I also coauthored one more substantive paper ( Seed-crop size and eruptions of North American boreal seed-eating birds , *J. Anim. Ecol.* 70: 609-620 [2001]), although what, exactly, that study has to do with the California Acorn Survey' is, I fear , obscure at best.

Perhaps instead of writing papers on acorns this year we were engaged in other useful activities ? I, for one, spent the spring banding a record number of acorn woodpeckers, which were practically coming out of our ears following last year s excellent crop by all three primary species at Hastings (valley, blue, and coast live oaks). Jean, meanwhile, continues to work

up at Cedar Creek recycling those nutrients and smoking out biodiversity problems wherever they are hiding.

## BAD NEWS, GOOD NEWS

First the bad news. With the recent economic downturn, our subscriber base has fallen just a tiny bit behind the projection made in the 1999 issue of the *California Acorn Report* (actually 99.3% behind and dropping fast). In fact, rather than the 10,000 or so subscribers we predicted by 2001, we re at about 70, and that includes my friends, neighbors, family, and the guys in Minnesota who insulted my Mildew Hat'. Thus, I fear we may have to resort to layoffs later this quarter. Or at least we would if we hired anyone, which of course we don t. So the good news is: despite the fact that the world is falling apart, it s business as usual at the California Acorn Survey'.

However, it also means that it may be harder than anticipated to find a copy of the *California Acorn Report* when you want it, and many of your friends will be trying to steal yours. Please be thoughtful and don t press charges unless your evidence is good. Alternatively, our Director Mark Stromberg usually puts this baby on the Hastings Reservation web site in the vicinity of <http://www.hastingsreserve.org/OakStory/OakIntro.html>. In fact, assuming you don t have a pornography filter on your browser, you can even peruse prior volumes of the *California Acorn Report* there, although you should hurry because they are available free for an unlimited time only.

And with that, we are at the end of this year s report. As usual, remember that this is *your* California Acorn Report and we always welcome your comments, even if our editorial policy is to completely ignore them. Our international offices remain:

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Have a great year and keep those acorns counted!

*The California Acorn Survey© was founded in 1980 and is made up of a vast, nationwide array of, oh, about a half-dozen people dedicated to understanding patterns of acorn production by California oaks. Members (with years of participation) include*

Ron Mumme (1980-83)  
Mark Stanback (1989-90, 1992)  
Elizabeth Ross-Hooge (1991)  
Bill Carmen (1981-88, 1990-92, 1994-98, 2000-01)  
Jean Knops (1993-2001)  
Walt Koenig (1980, 1984-2001)