

AUDUBON CANYON RANCH



www.egret.org

Conservation in Action

The Bulletin | Number 63 | Fall 2018

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FALL 2018

It's a Dirty Job and We're Happy to Do It



About our cover: a gray fox travels along a boardwalk at Cypress Grove Research Center on Tomales Bay. Photo: Nils Warnock

Nobody goes into land conservation expecting to keep their hands clean.

ACR staff and volunteers will tell you stewarding our preserves is dirty, sweaty and backbreaking work. But they're not complaining.

It's also very satisfying to tear out invasive plants, replant native flora and undo other man-made habitat damage. (See inside for Ferguson Spring and McDonnell Creek restoration projects.)

These unglamorous but important jobs dovetail perfectly with our more far-reaching research efforts.

In other words, ACR's success depends on a symbiotic relationship between habitat restoration and ecological research. Each supports the other.

We strive for ecologically healthy preserves so wildlife can flourish here. When the habitat is rich with food, water and shelter, it attracts egrets and the other animals we study.

That's where projects such as our innovative egret and mountain lion GPS-tracking, annual bird counts and controlled burn leadership come in. We're conducting and sharing original conservation science that resonates well beyond our preserves.

Of course, none of this happens without your support. We're so grateful for your passion and action on behalf of our work and the future of our environment.



*John Petersen,
Executive Director*

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'John'.



photo: Michelle Cooper

In Your Community

MARTIN GRIFFIN PRESERVE

Join Us for Nine-Week Naturalist Training

ACR's Nature Guide program is an ideal opportunity for working professionals and college students to spend time in nature and gain hands-on field experience. Participants learn about birds, plants, aquatic critters, Bolinas Lagoon ecology and more!

Training also includes techniques for sharing natural history and leading guided nature walks. Our next training session will span nine Saturdays beginning March 9, 2019.

ACR nature guides interpret the natural environment of Martin Griffin Preserve and its many unique natural features for hundreds of visitors each year. Volunteer times are on weekends and holidays in spring, summer and early fall, and are flexible. ■

Check out all of our volunteer opportunities at <https://egret.org/volunteer>



BOUVERIE PRESERVE

Fisher's Legacy of Connection & Community Lives On

M.F.K. Fisher Last House was one of only two remaining structures on Bouverie Preserve after 2017's Nuns Fire. It now serves as a space for selected small events.

In September, docents returned to the Preserve for refresher training at Last House.

M.F.K. Fisher's youngest daughter, Kennedy Golden, and ACR Director Mark Tarpey-Schwed treated the docents to tours of the legendary food writer's home.

Kennedy peppered the tours with personal anecdotes of her mother's 20 years in the simple two-room "palazzino."

From 1972 until her death in 1992, Fisher enjoyed sharing the natural beauty of Bouverie with friends and other food and literary notables. Guests included Maya Angelou, Herb Caen, Julia and Paul Child, James Beard, Ann Lamott and many more.

While living there, Fisher published upwards of 12 books—about a third of her work.

The house is enlivened by many of her belongings and books, including a full set of her first editions. They were generously donated by Randall Tarpey-Schwed, owner of the largest private archive of works by and about M.F.K. Fisher and her circle.

Events in the house will continue, allowing ACR to reveal the life and legacy of this renowned author and her love of Bouverie Preserve with future generations. ■



CYPRESS GROVE RESEARCH CENTER

Winter Shorebird and Waterbird Counts Are Underway

Shorebirds and waterbirds are returning to the Bay Area for the winter, after spring and summer nesting as far north as the Arctic.

In winter, roughly 55,000 of these birds forage and shelter in Tomales Bay.

Compared to other California coastal wetlands, this region is particularly important to red-throated loons, common loons, eared grebes, horned grebes, black brants, surf scoters and black scoters.

Can you identify local shorebirds and waterbirds? ACR needs experienced birders for our annual Tomales Bay counts. If you're interested in contributing to our 30-year dataset, please contact GIS Specialist Emiko Condeso at emiko.condeso@egret.org or 415.663.8203, ext. 401. ■

Follow ACR's Facebook page for the latest news at <https://www.facebook.com/AudubonCanyonRanch>





ACR staff on site shows the human scale of a culvert reinforced by truck and tractor tires, installed when the Modini property was a commercial cattle ranch.



STEWARDSHIP OF THE MODINI MAYACAMAS PRESERVES

Restoring McDonnell Creek

by Michelle Cooper, Resident Biologist and Preserve Manager

On ACR's Modini Mayacamas Preserves we have protected and now actively steward the upper reach of McDonnell Creek. It provides critical habitat for native fishes, amphibians and reptiles—many of which are now threatened.

McDonnell Creek is a perennial tributary to Maacama Creek, which drains into the Russian River.

Years ago, a culvert had been installed on a McDonnell Creek tributary using old tires, back when the Modini property was a commercial cattle ranch and stacked tires were recommended for erosion control.

But now the creek bank is eroding, creating a steep head cut and contributing sediment into the stream. ACR has been focused on restoring creeks and decommissioning unnecessary roads on our preserves, so repairing this section of creek presented an ideal opportunity.

Protecting wildlife and water quality

To remove the culvert and prevent further erosion, ACR is partnering with the Natural Resources Conservation Service. This project will help restore the natural flow of the stream that drains into McDonnell Creek and enhance the environment for the wildlife that depend on it.

The restoration will improve water quality by reducing sediment released from the eroded bank and reestablish biodiversity and ecosystem function with native plantings.

Reversing the damage

The ACR team will pull out and properly dispose of the tires, laying back and stabilizing the creek banks with heavy equipment and rock according to engineered and permitted plans. We'll follow up with replanting native vegetation to reestablish the riparian forest community.

A year of planning becomes action

Thank you to super volunteer Denny Fujita, who built the native plant propagation tables. We also couldn't do it without Modini Mayacamas Preserves land steward Tomas Ruiz, who designed and built the irrigation system. And we recognize the vital efforts of the many volunteers who collected native seeds and cuttings on the preserve to propagate for the restoration. Our first seeds were planted in early spring and will continue to grow over the next year in preparation for transplanting into the freshly contoured banks of the creek. ■



The human scale of the steep head cut to the left of the culvert outflow, where storm water has carved an abrupt vertical drop causing sediment to flow into the stream.

Ferguson Spring Wet Meadow Restoration Continues

Stewardship staff and dedicated volunteers have made major progress in restoring wetlands at Ferguson Spring and the surrounding area. This spring the team focused on teasel (*Dipsacus fullonum*)—controlling its spread and reducing the cover of this non-native plant invading the adjacent grasslands and drainages.

A prolific invasive

Native to Europe, Asia and northern Africa, teasel is a sturdy biennial or short-lived perennial. It often outcompetes native plants, forming dense stands with broad rosette leaves, deep taproots and cone-shaped flower heads. Just one plant produces more than 2,000 seeds.

ACR manages teasel by removing young plants during the wet season and collecting and disposing of seed stalks before they can disperse in the dry season.

Although a sizable and tedious task, it's worthwhile to selectively remove this invasive species and make room for desirable plants. Removal improves the odds of success when we reintroduce native vegetation later in the restoration plan.

A magnet for wildlife

Ferguson Spring is a special place on the Preserves. Located close to the county road, the natural spring feeds a small wetland that draws wildlife during dry summer months.

Just beyond the spring, a road pull-out marks the head of the hiking trail. Complete the Modini Mayacamas Preserves orientation hike and you'll receive a permit to access this trail. (See the calendar on page 11 for upcoming orientation dates.)

From Ferguson Spring, the trail connects to other hiking routes in the Preserves. Old fencing and a walnut tree remain from when the Ferguson family lived here decades ago.

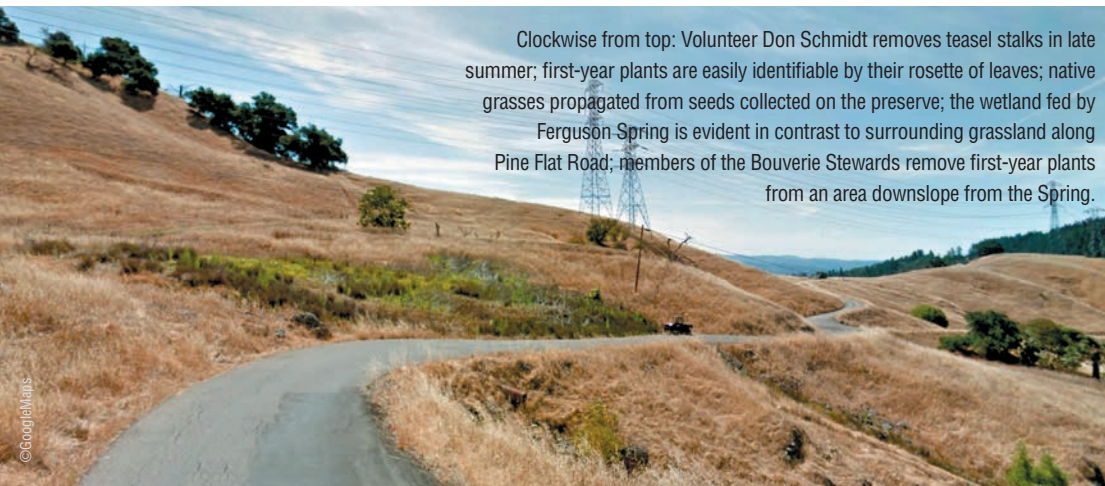
Restoration—love and hard work

Approved by ACR's science staff in 2016, the wetland restoration site was ideal, featuring native plants competing with aggressive non-native species.



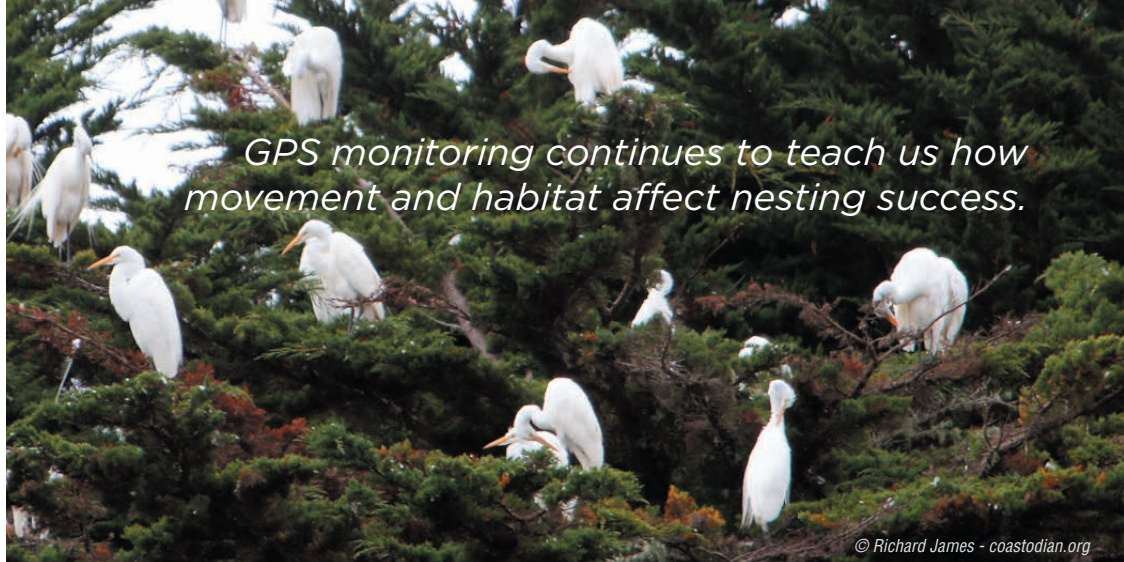
The parts were there—native sedges, rushes and wetland forbs—but they needed some love and hard work. We conducted a pre-management plant survey in early 2017 and have focused on invasive species control. Future work will further support the plant and habitat diversity of the marsh area, as well as address hydrology concerns of the hillside site. ■

If you'd like to assist with this or other ongoing stewardship projects at Modini Mayacamas Preserves, please contact Resource Ecologist Julianne Bradbury at 707.431.1217 or julianne.bradbury@egret.org.



Clockwise from top: Volunteer Don Schmidt removes teasel stalks in late summer; first-year plants are easily identifiable by their rosette of leaves; native grasses propagated from seeds collected on the preserve; the wetland fed by Ferguson Spring is evident in contrast to surrounding grassland along Pine Flat Road; members of the Bouverie Stewards remove first-year plants from an area downslope from the Spring.





GPS monitoring continues to teach us how movement and habitat affect nesting success.

HERON & EGRET TELEMETRY PROJECT

Following Egret 2's Path to Motherhood

by Scott Jennings, Lead Investigator, Heron & Egret Telemetry Project

Egret 2's Breeding Season Maps

April 20: For 10 days, Egret 2 spent nights at the Blakes Landing colony and foraged once a day at the eelgrass beds around Toms Point. This was likely courtship and egg-laying time.

May 12: For about a month she spent alternating nights in the colony, apparently trading incubation duties with her mate. Her "nights off" were at the Ocean Roar roost, about 1.5 miles north of the colony.

June 5: The chicks are about a week old and Egret 2 is bringing food to them twice a day.

June 13: Chicks are larger and hungrier, and Egret 2 is making three to five daily provisioning trips. She must forage in intertidal and upland habitats to find enough food.

In the spring of 2018 we tracked Egret 2, one of our tagged birds, as she nested in the Blakes Landing colony on the east shore of Tomales Bay.

Her lightweight, solar-powered GPS backpack transmitted her location every five minutes, providing there was a solid cell connection. We found out where she foraged and when she visited the colony through the nesting season.

Egret capturing can be slow

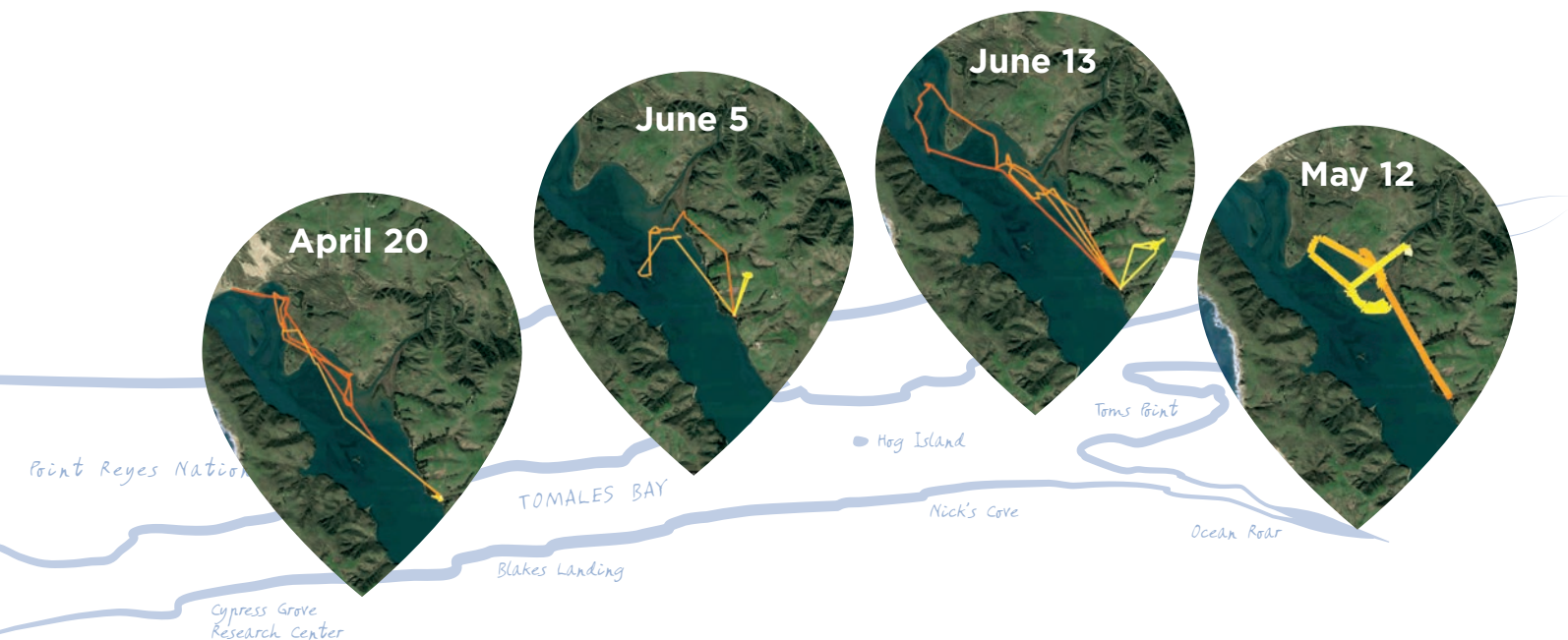
My fellow ACR avian ecologist David Lumpkin and I admit that capturing Great Egrets requires luck, long hours and a massive pile of gear. But the painstaking work delivers a slow, steady drip of information.

Now, we can gather a vast amount of data via GPS tracking, and it's greatly advancing our understanding of egret behavior.

Egret 2 revealed

The maps below tell a comprehensive story of Egret 2's 2018 breeding season—reddish-orange for her morning route, orange for midday and yellow her destination in the evening for four sample days, mid-April through mid-June. Notes about her movements on those days are included in the sidebar at left.

By early July, Egret 2's nest successfully fledged at least two chicks. GPS tracking will continue to teach us how movement and habitat affect nesting success, as well as ways to protect these birds and their critical habitats. ■



Seven More Egrets GPS-Tagged

This spring we had several misses—and a couple of face-plants in the salt marsh muck—trying to capture Great Egrets to add to our GPS study.

But we hit our stride in early June when we tagged three Great Egrets in quick succession on Toms Point near the mouth of Tomales Bay.

A generous offering of bait fish during incoming tide seemed to increase our odds. Foiled several times by egrets that foraged aloft, skimming the water's surface and avoiding the traps, eventually we were successful.

In August, we tagged Egret 7 near Walker Creek, southeast of Toms Point. Then we caught three more in September as they foraged in Livermore Marsh, a few hundred feet from our Cypress Grove Research Center.

All of the captures and tagging went smoothly. After release, the birds flew off unencumbered, their lightweight solar GPS backpacks collecting a range of movement and behavioral data.

For a detailed look at the movements of Egrets 1–3, see the 2018 edition of *The Ardeid*, <https://egret.org/ardeid>



photo: David Lumpkin



Clockwise from top right: Egret 9 preens on the dock at Cypress Grove Preserve several weeks after it was tagged by the team; Preserve Manager Barbara Wechsberg holds Egret 5 while Lead Investigator Scott Jennings measures the bill; Avian Ecologist David Lumpkin releases Egret 9 after capture; the movements of Egret 7 recorded July 3–August 3, 2018; David fits Egret 5 with a tiny solar backpack that weighs the equivalent of an egret's egg.



photo: Jared Childress

NUNS FIRE: STEWARDSHIP

Time-Lapse Shows a Land in Recovery



Barkhouse Overlook, Bouverie Preserve



Cougar Pond Overlook, Bouverie Preserve

No Project Too Tough for ACR's Stewardship Volunteers

The strengths and passions of our volunteers have been employed overtime this year. In addition to their regular plant-focused activities, the stewards of Bouverie and Modini Mayacamas preserves built bridges, retaining walls and propagation tables, as well as cleared trees and trails and installed wattles in advance of winter rains. ■

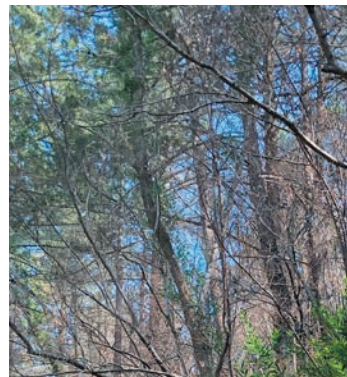
We invite you to lend a hand. See details on <https://egret.org/calendar>.

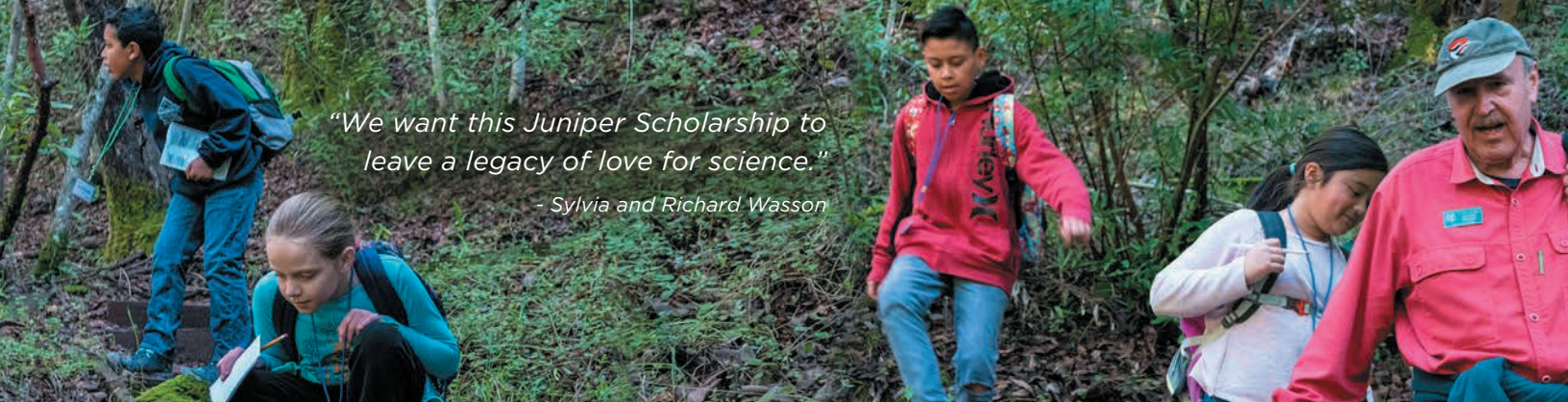


photo: Michelle Cooper



photos: Jared Jacobs





"We want this Juniper Scholarship to leave a legacy of love for science."

- Sylvia and Richard Wasson

A FOCUS ON PHILANTHROPY

Young Naturalists Inspire Docent to Create Natural Sciences Scholarship

by Jeff Woods, ACR legacy giving expert

Richard Wasson's ancestors settled near the Russian River in the mid-19th century, so his Sonoma County roots run deep.

Richard attended Sebastapol's Analy High School, served the Army in Vietnam during the Tet Offensive and in Germany, where he met his future wife Sylvia.

After the military, Richard attended Santa Rosa Junior College and Sonoma State University. He graduated with a bachelor's in microbiology and became a land surveyor for Sonoma County.

Outdoor volunteering

When Richard retired he went looking for volunteer opportunities. "I was fortunate to be outdoors as a surveyor," he says, "and I enjoyed many outdoor hobbies. When I learned of the 24-week training course to become a docent at ACR, it immediately appealed to me."

Richard started working with ACR's Junior Naturalist (Juniper) Program in 2006. This program puts conservation into action by teaching fifth graders to be junior naturalists—how to understand, protect and care for the environment.

How to lasso a lizard

Richard recalled working with Pedro, a budding naturalist. "I taught him to use a blade of grass to lasso a lizard and that caught his attention," he said. "He caught one and it promptly jumped up and bit him on the ear."

In the years since, Richard and Sylvia, a recently retired Santa Rosa Junior College professor, have enjoyed watching Pedro grow up and graduate with a degree in civil engineering.

New scholarship for science students

Now, through a charitable bequest to ACR, the Wassons have created a Juniper Scholarship. It will support Juniper Program graduates who major in the natural sciences. Recipients will be eligible for the scholarship all four years of their undergraduate studies.



Sylvia and Richard Wasson

Ultimately, four students will be awarded each year. The Wassons hope this endowed scholarship will inspire recipients to pursue the natural sciences, while also strengthening their special bond with ACR.

Awakening a love of nature

"A love for the wonders of nature is not innate in children," Sylvia added, "but this love can be awoken and grow by leaps and bounds. We want this Juniper Scholarship to inspire that affinity for the natural world, and leave a legacy of love for science."

ACR is honored to recognize Richard and Sylvia Wasson as members of the Clerin Zumwalt Legacy Circle. For more information about the Legacy Circle, please contact Naomi Sultana Young at naomi.young@egret.org, or 707.938.4554 ext. 311. ■

ACR Membership

Audubon Canyon Ranch members, supporters and corporate sponsors *think globally and act locally* through ACR's land preservation, nature education and conservation science programs. **Thank you!** Together we protect wildlands in Marin, Sonoma and Lake counties and inspire the next generation of nature lovers.

Membership benefits:

- you make an immediate and enduring impact on regional conservation initiatives
- bi-annual editions of the ACR *Bulletin*
- invitations to exclusive members-only events
- complimentary copy of *The Ardeid*, our journal of conservation science and stewardship
- member's discount on seminars and fundraisers
- 10% discount in our bookstore and more

For more information, contact Development Manager Jen Newman at 415.868.9244 ext. 119. Not a member? Become one today at www.egret.org/membership.





CYPRESS GROVE RESEARCH CENTER

Meet Dr. Nils Warnock, ACR's Director of Conservation Science



Help us welcome Nils Warnock to ACR, to serve as only the second director of conservation science in our history.

Dr. Warnock will lead and implement ACR's core science agenda. Among the issues are challenges to dwindling biodiversity and habitat loss, threats to wetlands, effects of climate change, and the protection of natural systems surrounding North Bay communities. Nils takes the baton from John Kelly, who retired in July.

Nils returns to West Marin after eight years as executive director of Audubon Alaska. His career began in Point Reyes, where he was Point Blue Conservation Science's co-director of wetlands from 2000 to 2008.

A fellow of the American Ornithological Society, Nils brings us 30 years of experience in the ecology and conservation of Pacific Flyway birds.

He is among the first ecologists to use radio trackers and satellite tags to follow shorebirds' movements. His research in Marin and San Francisco Bay is far-reaching, and also extends to the Pacific and East Asian-Australasian flyways. ■

Get to know ACR staff: <https://egret.org/key-program-staff-bios>



photo: Jared Childress

FIRE FORWARD

Gifts to ACR Will Improve Forest and Grassland Health

Audubon Canyon Ranch's preserves encompass a wide range of ecosystems that co-evolved with human-managed fire over many millennia. Our goal is to reintroduce prescribed fire to improve ecological health and lower the chances of catastrophic blazes.

ACR is thrilled to announce two new grants recently committed to our Fire Forward initiative. The Farley Family Charitable Foundation awarded \$660,000 over two years and the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria have granted \$100,000 over three years.

These very generous gifts will allow us to work collaboratively to address a critical topic. We aim to change both culture and practice to enable a future of fire-adapted landscapes and communities. ■

If you would like to support ACR's leadership in this community-wide effort, please contact Naomi Sultana Young at naomi.young@egret.org or 707.938.4554 ext. 311

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Martin Griffin Preserve (MGP)
Bouvier Preserve (BP)
Cypress Grove Research Center (CGRC)
Modini Mayacamas Preserves (MMP)

Join us for a range of natural history and ethnobotany guided hikes.

Registration required for all events: www.egret.org/calendar

Suggested donation: \$20 per person

Modini Mayacamas Preserves

📍 Orientation to Modini Mayacamas Preserves + Optional Hike

**Required for independent hiking access.*

Saturday ~ December 15

Saturday ~ January 12

Saturday ~ February 9

📍 Mountain Lions of the Mayacamas with Quinton Martins, Ph.D.

Saturday ~ December 8

📍 Salamanders and Newts with Elliott Smeds

Saturday ~ January 5

📍 Wildlife Camera Walk With Ginny Fifiel

Sunday ~ January 6

📍 Nature Photography

Saturday ~ January 26

Saturday ~ February 16

📍 Wildflower Tour of the Mayacamas

Saturday ~ February 23

Saturday ~ April 27

Bouverie Preserve

📍 Guided Nature Walks

Saturday ~ March 16

Saturday ~ April 13

Saturday ~ May 4

📍 Twilight Hike

Friday ~ May 31

Western pond turtles resting in one of the ponds of Cypress Grove Preserve on Tomales Bay. Photo: Nils Warnock



Martin Griffin Preserve

📍 Nature Guide Training

Saturdays ~ March 9 – May 4, 2019

9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

ACR Nature Guides interpret the natural environment of Martin Griffin Preserve and its many unique natural features for weekend visitors. Our next nature guide training will occur over eight Saturdays beginning March 9, 2019. Learn about birds, plants, aquatic critters, Bolinas Lagoon ecology and more! Training includes techniques for interpreting natural history and leading guided nature walks.

Contact Weekend Program Coordinator Claire Seda at claire.seda@egret.org or 415.868.9244 ext. 110

Modini Mayacamas Preserves

📍 Habitat Protection & Restoration Stewards

2nd and 4th Thursdays ~ 9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

The Modini Mayacamas Preserves stewards provide essential hands-on assistance to our land management team, including trail maintenance, invasive plant removal, native plant propagation and other special projects.

Contact Resource Ecologist Julianne Bradbury at julianne.bradbury@egret.org or 707.433.1217

Coexisting with an Iconic American Carnivore

Join ACR's Dr. Quinton Martins, who will talk about Living With Lions, our community conservation project. Learn how you can become a conservation ambassador for the iconic cats with whom we share our habitat.

📍 Occidental Arts & Ecology Center

Tuesday ~ December 4, 2018, 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

15290 Coleman Valley Road, Occidental

Registration requested: <https://oaec.org/events>

Suggested donation: \$5 per person

📍 Sonoma County Forum

Thursday ~ December 6, 7:30 – 8:00 a.m.

Flamingo Hotel

2777 4th Street, Santa Rosa

Must be a member of the [Sonoma County Forum](#) to attend.

📍 Sonoma County Regional Parks

Wednesday ~ December 12, 6:30 p.m.

Windsor Library

9291 Old Redwood Highway, Building 100, Windsor

📍 Sebastopol Rotary

Friday ~ March 22, 12:30 – 1:30 p.m.

Community Church of Sebastopol

1000 Gravenstein Hwy N, Sebastopol

Bay Area Prescribed Fire Council Meeting

Prescribed Fire Specialist Jared Childress will co-facilitate this meeting for private landowners, fire science professionals and others interested in safely getting "good fire" back on the landscape.

📍 Orinda City Hall

Wednesday ~ November 21, 10:00 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.

22 Orinda Way, Orinda

ACR protects our natural and human communities through
land preservation, nature education and conservation science.

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INSIDE:

Long-awaited restoration
project underway at
Modini Mayacamas Preserves

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Refreshed Bunkhouse for Overnight Program

received a much-needed facelift over the summer. ACR engaged Bolinas carpenter Bobby Heffelfinger to replace the roof, install an on-demand water heater, upgrade the electrical panel, frame and install new windows, and replace siding and battens.

We purchased and, with the help of ACR land stewards and volunteers, constructed 16 beautiful pine bunkbeds with new mattresses.

The bunkhouse is looking better than ever and we've already welcomed several groups of Bay Area schoolchildren this season!

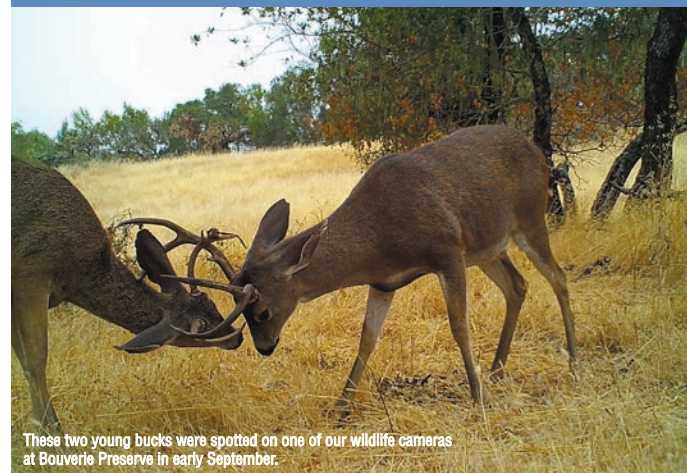


Visit Us

Bouverie Preserve
Woodlands in the Valley of the Moon
Martin Griffin Preserve
Sweeping coastal views in West Marin
Modini Mayacamas Preserves
Wilderness in the Mayacamas Mountains
ACR Conservation Center
Garden and gallery near the Healdsburg Plaza

By appointment only

Cypress Grove Research Center
Call 415.663.8203 to schedule



These two young bucks were spotted on one of our wildlife cameras at Bouverie Preserve in early September.

The ACR Bulletin is published twice yearly as a benefit to our members, supporters and volunteers.

Managing Editor Wendy Coy
Edited by Bonnie Ayers Namkung
Printed by O'Dell Printing

Printed locally with vegetable oil-based inks, using 100% post-consumer waste fiber. Unless otherwise indicated, photos are property of ACR. If you'd like to opt out of home delivery, contact us by phone, 415.868.9244 ext. 110, or email support@egret.org.

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