



The Watch

Newsletter of the Watsonville Wetlands Watch
Fall 2009

Watsonville Wetlands Watch Conducts Grazing and Grassland Restoration on Ecological Reserve

Over 300 sheep and goats from Star Creek Ranch in Aromas recently joined Watsonville Wetlands Watch in its grassland and slough restoration efforts.



“Appropriately timed rotational grazing is a part of mimicking the historically important grazing of herding animals such as elk which were once common and important to local native grassland health,” says Jonathan Pilch, Restoration Director. “Goats, sheep, and other animals can remove invasive plants and improve the soil so that native grasses, wildflowers, and habitat can thrive. Grazing also keeps the grass short. Many of our native species, such as the burrowing owl, the marsh hawk, and the short-eared owl, favor short grass for nesting and habitat.”

The animals grazed on the Reserve for about a month. Jonathan noted that plant

population data was collected prior to the grazing as part of WWW’s new Wetlands Biodiversity Monitoring Project (WBMP), to understand how grazing affects grassland restoration efforts. The grazing project is a multi-year project, and data will be collected again next June, prior to the next round of grazing, to enable a year-by-year comparison of changes in the grassland. Students will be involved in next year’s data collection.

If you would like to help with restoration efforts or volunteer with the WBMP, contact jonathan@watsonvillewetlandswatch.org.



Juan, a Star Creek Ranch herder, talks to Conservation Corps members about grazing as a tool for grassland restoration. The Conservation Corps came for a tour of the grazing program and assisted with restoration of the coastal prairie and wet meadow by removing invasive plants and planting native ones.

Message from the Executive Director

Two is Better Than One...

Watsonville Wetlands Watch continues to partner with various agencies to provide opportunities for the students and the community to learn about the wonders and value of our precious wetlands. Currently we are working with Monterey Bay Aquarium, Shennan Labs at UCSC, United States Fish & Wildlife Service, and the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County to expand our restoration and education programs. We'll highlight these programs in our next newsletter. Thank you to the Pajaro Valley community for your support and interest in our work!



~ Kris Beall

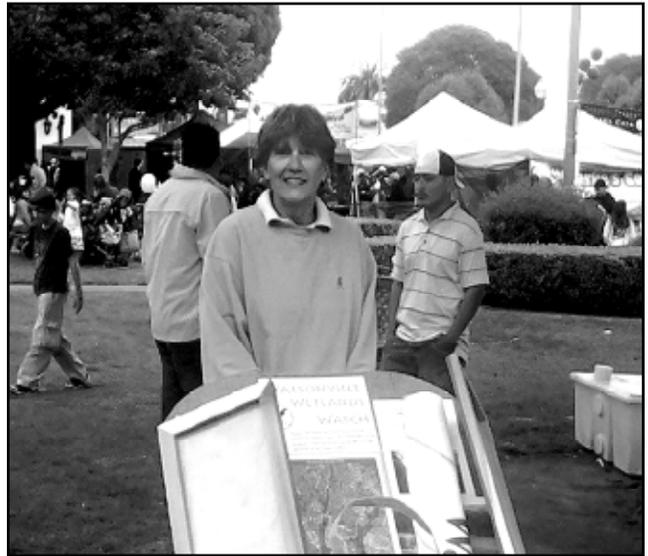
WHAT IS A NORTHERN HARRIER?

According to the Cornell Ornithology Lab, the Northern harrier is "A long-winged, long-tailed hawk of open grassland and marshes [which] forages by flying slowly low above the ground looking for small rodents.....the male is white below with a light gray back and hood, the female is mottled in browns. Northern harriers are native to the Watsonville wetlands and often seen by birders.

But to the Watch, "Northern Harrier" also has a special meaning. This is the designation given to those special donors who have made a substantial financial gift to the Watch and/or a five-year pledge of support. WWW has 35 Northern Harriers and they are key to our new program to ensure a long-term future of restoration, protection, and appreciation of the wetlands. To find out more about this program, contact genie@watsonvillewetlandswatch.org or 728-1156, ext. 7.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

by Kathy Fieberling, Volunteer Coordinator



Linda Youmans is my "go-to" docent; she is available and willing to do almost anything. When we need lots of field trip assistants in a given month, Linda will say, "I want to help and am willing to fill in the slots that are still open after everyone else is scheduled." This, my friends, is a volunteer coordinator's dream!

Linda Youmans is a native of Watsonville and went to Watsonville High. Her family spans four Watsonville-area generations, starting with her husband's parents and extending to their 3 children and 4 grandchildren. She also includes her "grand-dogs" in her family.

Four years ago, after the death of her husband, a newspaper story about the docent program caught Linda's eye. She decided to give it a try and was delighted by the lovely people and upbeat spirit she found. Today she is one of the pillars of our program. She says, "It is great to feel needed, and it is a blessing that I get to be a part of this".

Thank you, Linda, for being such a wonderful member of our docent family!

Restoration Team Volunteer Ashley Ciglar

by Mary Paul, Restoration Specialist

Ashley has been volunteering for WWW since her junior year of high school at St Francis Central Coast. She joined the ecology club there, found out about our restoration events, and decided to volunteer to gain service hours.

Ashley helped to install the grassed waterway planting. Little did she realize at the time that she would be using the concepts she learned as the basis for a greywater system for the Solar Decathlon sponsored by the U.S. Dept. of Energy. In this competition, 20 teams of college students compete to design, build, and operate the most attractive, effective, and energy-efficient solar-powered house. She and her team from Santa Clara University will be flying to Washington, D.C. for the competition and hope to place 1st; in 2007 SCU placed 3rd.

Ashley's role in the Solar Decathlon has been to work on the greywater system. The team's design is based on the natural water filter system she has come to know so well here in Watsonville. The greywater from the shower, bathroom sink, and washing machine is filtered through native wetland plants and several layers of sand and soil and then passes through a UV filter before it is recirculated to the home's irrigation system where it is used to water the native plant garden. The preliminary testing on the system has shown an 80% decrease in organic matter, necessary prior to running the water through the UV filter.

Ashley is majoring in civil engineering; she is hoping to do restoration work after she graduates and is mostly interested in waterways. Thanks, Ashley, and good luck!



The "Pacific Garbage Patch" was the topic of the August docent meeting. Ximena Waissbluth of the Surfrider Foundation shared distressing news of the effects of our plastic waste on the oceans and its inhabitants. She noted that many Americans do not know that plastic is a petroleum-based product and few of us grasp the scope of plastics use. Of 24 million tons of plastics generated each year, less than 5% is recycled, according to the CA Waste Management Board. Even more alarming, there is evidence that plastic is making its way into our food supply.

One solution proposed is for the public to support Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) legislation, which would make producers pay for the cost of non-degradable items. To learn more about this growing problem, see the following article in Yahoo News at http://green.yahoo.com/news/nm/20090804/us_nm/us_ocean_plastics.html or go to this article on the Algalita.org website: <http://www.algalita.org/pdf/plastic-in-the-environment.pdf>.

The Watch Goes to the Strawberry Festival



(L) Visitors have their photo taken with one of the walking “strawberries”
(R) Jim Hagan, docent, staffs the WWC booth and answers questions about the wetlands

On August 1st and 2nd, WWC sponsored a booth at the downtown Watsonville Strawberry Festival. Many thanks to docents Marcia Burns, Jim Hagan, Nancy Scarborough, Valerie Stewart, and Linda Youmans who staffed the booth, along with staff members Kris Beall, Genie Dee, and Kathy Fieberling. About 400 people stopped by our booth, judging from the brochures taken and candy consumed, and staffers enjoyed answering questions and sharing information. About 30 people signed up for our e-mail newsletter, and a fun time was had by all!

Opportunities to Get Involved and Meet Others

Monterey Bay Birding Festival

Volunteers are needed for September's Monterey Bay Birding Festival. To learn more, consult: www.montereybaybirding.org. If you would like to work a few or many hours, please call Dobie Jenkins, 722-4722.

Restoration Saturdays

Restoration days are the fourth Saturday of every month; we meet at the Fitz WERC at 9 AM. Volunteer days are dedicated to augmenting restoration projects or improving the garden and grounds of the Fitz WERC: mulching, light weeding, some planting of native shrubs, and caretaking of the WERC's landscape. We need all of the hands we can gather to make the projects thrive. Gloves, tools, and snacks will be provided. We'll work until noon, with time for birding over the sloughs. Restoration Saturdays for the next 3 months are: September 26th, October 24th, and November 21st.



You Can Help!

Your contribution to Watsonville Wetlands Watch supports our work to protect, restore, and foster appreciation of the wetlands. Just fill out the form below and send it with your check to:

Watsonville Wetlands Watch
P.O.Box 1239
Freedom, CA 95019-1239



You can also contribute online by going to our website, www.watsonvillewetlandswatch.org. For information about our pledge program, contact Genie Dee, Outreach and Development Director, at 728-1156, ext.7 or genie@watsonvillewetlandswatch.org.

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Freedom, CA 95019-1239