



# CURRENTS

NEWSLETTER OF SAN DIEGUITO RIVER VALLEY CONSERVANCY

Winter 2023

www.sdrvc.org

**SAN DIEGUITO RIVER VALLEY**



**CONSERVANCY**



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## GRATITUDE

San Dieguito River Valley Conservancy's "Conservation, Education and Recreation" mission reflects the great power of community support. Working together, our activities ensure that future generations can continue to cherish this beautiful landscape. Our shared dedication to preserving the River Valley binds us. For this, we are grateful.

We are grateful for our community's commitment to conservation. This year, our campaign to complete the remaining segments of the Coast to Crest Trail netted more than \$2 million in contributions. To our generous donors, we appreciate you.

We are grateful for the profound impact of our educational program, which introduces a diverse palette of ecosystems to visitors from near and far. We get kids excited about nature. For many students, our outreach provides their first exposure to the rich resources of the watershed. We show the important role students can play as environmental stewards.

Connecting with nature is good for mind, body and spirit, as reflected in the smiling faces of participants in our Coast to Crest Trail Challenge, monthly Walk N Talk hikes, Yoga at the Birdwing and other offerings from our recreation program. Thank you for sharing your infectious smiles.

Our mission is far from complete but we are loving the journey. Thank you for doing so much to support us along the way.



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Leila Akhondzadeh

*Intern*



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Wow! Massive gratitude to being named Nonprofit of the Year and for securing a whopping \$2.7 million in the state budget, thanks to the efforts of Senator Toni Atkins and Senator Catherine Blakespear.

A huge shoutout to everyone who made this year's River Valley Fest the most successful one yet, raising a staggering \$120,000! Our fantastic team put their hearts and souls into making it happen.

Working with the Board of Directors and staff of the Conservancy has been an absolute delight! Thank you all for being the most amazing and supportive board staff ever!

Wishing you all the happiest of holidays!

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

It's amazing to reflect on the 11 months that we have trekked in 2023. The Conservancy has much to be thankful for, and I want to express my deepest gratitude to each of YOU. If you're receiving this newsletter, YOUR unwavering support over the last 37 years has driven our mission to conserve, educate, and provide recreation opportunities in the San Dieguito River Valley. Your belief in our mission not only safeguards the environment but also enriches countless lives, offering solace, inspiration, and a connection with nature.

Our achievements wouldn't be possible without our dedicated Board, Advisory Board, staff, volunteers, partners, and the enduring support from our community. Your commitment reaffirms the importance of collective action in preserving the environment for future generations, and we thank you. Together, we've made and will continue to make a lasting difference in the river valley.

*May your holiday season bring more cherished memories while exploring and learning along the Coast to Crest Trail.*



## HEARTFELT APPRECIATION FOR BEING NAMED NON-PROFIT OF THE YEAR

### California Nonprofit of the Year

Nonprofits make California stronger



We cannot thank Senator Blakespear enough for recognizing the San Dieguito River Valley Conservancy as a Non-Profit of the Year. "The San Dieguito River Valley is a tremendous natural resource enjoyed and appreciated by thousands of Southern Californians each year," Blakespear said when announcing the recognition in May.

*"We have the San Dieguito River Valley Conservancy to thank for its bold vision and many years of work to preserve the valley and educate others about it. I am delighted to honor the conservancy as District 38's Nonprofit of the Year."*

—Senator Blakespear—

## MEET OUR NEWEST BOARD MEMBER, PATRICK MEEGAN, AND INTERN LEILA AKHONDZADEH



Meet **Patrick Meegan**, the latest addition to our distinguished Board of Directors. With a wealth of expertise in the financial sector, Patrick brings a unique blend of skills and insights that are poised to significantly benefit our organization. His commitment to environmental conservation aligns perfectly with our mission. We are grateful to Patrick for donating his talents to the Conservancy's efforts.



Introducing **Leila Akhondzadeh**, our new Conservation and Education Outreach Intern. Leila, originally from San Clemente, California, is a senior at UC San Diego, set to graduate in June with a B.S. in Environmental Systems, focusing on ecology, behavior, and evolution. When she's not working, Leila enjoys hiking, experimenting with new cuisines, and playing the piano. Her enthusiasm to join the SDRVC team in preserving and restoring Southern California's beautiful native ecosystems is contagious!

# GRATEFUL TO CONNECT WITH NATURE, ENRICH LIVES

## DRAWING IS SEEING

In this class, the Conservancy provides an opportunity to immerse yourself in the natural world through focused attention, meditation, and, yes, drawing. It's not just about looking at a subject; it's about truly seeing. While looking is analytical and left-brained, seeing is about discovering, feeling, and being fully present in the moment. Seeing is tracing every nook of a leaf with your finger, feeling every ridge, sensing the curve, feeling the tip of a thorn, sensing the coolness of shadow and heat of sunlight.

Held at the San Dieguito Lagoon Birdwing Open Air Classroom, surrounded by nature's beauty, this experience encourages you to put pencil to paper and realize that drawing is indeed a form of seeing. It's a reminder of the intricate wonders of nature and a tool for deep appreciation of our watershed, for which we are profoundly grateful.



## NATURAL IMPRESSIONS: ART IN NATURE

In 2024, in addition to Drawing is Seeing, we will be offering more opportunities to unleash your artistic spirit in the heart of the San Dieguito River Valley. Our upcoming program, "Natural Impressions: Art in Nature," promises to be a creative and inspiring experience connecting people to the natural world. We are still in the process of finalizing schedules but are looking into classes that include a variety of creative expressions, such as botanical illustration, landscape painting, wildlife art, photography, nature crafts, and environmental writing including poetry and nature journals. These art forms capture the beauty and significance of nature in diverse ways. Whether you're a seasoned artist or just starting your creative journey, join us to discover new ways to connect with the beauty that surrounds us.



## YOGA AT THE BIRDWING

The Conservancy is excited to offer yoga TWICE a month at the San Dieguito Lagoon Birdwing Open Air Classroom beginning in January 2024. Sessions will take place the first and third Sundays of the month from 10-11am. The first Sundays will offer a yoga sculpt class. Yoga sculpt incorporates light hand weights (1-3 lbs) and high-intensity cardio bursts for a maximum full-body calorie-burning effect. The hand weights add a new challenge to traditional yoga classes. The third Sundays will remain a class for all experience levels, including kids. These yoga sessions are designed for individuals and families to stretch, bend, and have fun together.

Yoga at the Birdwing provides an opportunity to practice gratitude, breathe in fresh air, listen to the soothing sounds of nature, feel grounded, and enjoy a beautiful view of the San Dieguito Lagoon. This setting enhances mindfulness and fosters a deeper sense of presence. Following the yoga session, the Coast to Crest trail just steps away beckons, inviting you to continue your outdoor experience with a walk, jog, or bike ride.

## ELEVATE YOUR ADVENTURE: TAKE ON THE COAST TO CREST TRAIL CHALLENGE



The Coast to Crest Trail Challenge is a fun way to get to know the diverse landscapes and ecosystems throughout the San Dieguito River Watershed including coastal regions, valleys, foothills and mountainous terrain. This year's challenge takes you to the San Dieguito Lagoon, Santa Fe Valley, Sikes Adobe to the base of Bernardo Summit, Santa Ysabel Lower Truck Trail and Pamo Valley. You can learn more about each trail segment at [sdrvc.org/c2c](http://sdrvc.org/c2c). Complete the five trail segments, take selfies anywhere along the trail, and submit them to earn a C2C Challenge certificate and a Year 7 C2C iron-on patch. Grab a group of friends and head out to complete the challenge or join us for our monthly Walk-N-Talks. Your smiling selfies make our day. Thanks so much for every smile you send!

The Walk-N-Talks align with the trail segments featured in the Coast to Crest Trail Challenge and are set for the second Thursdays of each month. They provide an opportunity to hike and chat with Conservancy staff and Board members while learning about flora and fauna and the history of the area. We hope the challenge presents you with a chance to explore new areas, have fun while staying physically active, boost your well-being through simply being outdoors, and create meaningful moments with friends, family, and fellow nature enthusiasts in a beautiful setting.



## VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

During the cooler months, the Conservancy will be ramping up volunteer cleanup and habitat restoration volunteer opportunities. This involves physical work, such as planting native species, spreading mulch and watering, removing invasive plants, or collecting litter. This engagement with the land provides a sense of accomplishment and physical well-being while developing a profound appreciation of the environment. As a volunteer, you become a steward of the land, responsible for its care and preservation. This role carries a deep sense of responsibility and satisfaction. Volunteering also brings people together who share a passion for conservation. It's an opportunity to meet like-minded individuals and build lasting friendships while working toward a common goal. We would be grateful to see you at one of the upcoming volunteer events.

## EVENT DETAILS AND REGISTRATION

For event details and registration, visit [sdrvc.org/events](http://sdrvc.org/events). Some events have limited spots and fill up quickly, so please check the events page regularly.



# Wings of Majesty

**THANK YOU TO OUR VERY GENEROUS AUCTION ITEM DONORS!**



RALPH OBERG FINE ART

JOE GARCIA FINE ART





## 2023 RIVER VALLEY FEST: WINGS OF MAJESTY

With so much to be grateful for, it's hard to emphasize how much we appreciate your generosity. It was on full display during our annual River Valley Fest, which netted a record-breaking \$120,000. Themed "Wings of Majesty," the event drew nearly 200 guests and was filled with reunions, smiles, meeting new friends, live music by Bill and Annette Fleming, silent and live auctions, and a successful Raise the Paddle. We heard inspiring words from Conservancy President Lee Haydu and guest speaker Senator Catherine Blakespear, which included recognition for our long-time dedicated Treasurer Peter DeFrancesca. Thanks to our Event Sponsors, Auction sponsors, and supportive guests, we achieved a record-breaking year, raising \$120,000.

Proceeds from this event will support the Conservancy's mission to conserve open space, provide educational and recreational programs, and foster environmental stewardship for all ages. Specifically, the funds will help organize engagement events, habitat restoration, outreach, and community science activities. This year's theme, "Wings of Majesty," celebrates the San Dieguito River Park's role in providing vital habitat and resources for numerous birds at the San Dieguito Lagoon, along the watershed, and for migrating bird species in the Pacific Flyway. It symbolizes beauty, transformation, and freedom. Over the past 37 years, the park has evolved, with 62% of the watershed now publicly owned, and 49 out of 71 miles of the Coast to Crest Trail accessible to the public, offering an escape from daily life.

Your support is invaluable, and we cannot express our gratitude enough. Without you, the Conservancy would not be able to carry out its mission.

### SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR RVF COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND SPONSORS

#### RVF Committee Members

Kim Godwin, Chair  
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#### Plated Dinners Hosted By:

Peter & Kathleen DeFrancesca  
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#### Violet-green swallow (\$500+)

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John & Nancy Weare

# STAY CURIOUS: NURTURING A PASSION FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

## WATERSHED EXPLORERS SUMMER DAY CAMP: A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY AND CONSERVATION



For five days, 23 adventurous kids immersed themselves in the wonders of the San Dieguito River Valley during our free Watershed Explorers Program jointly run by the San Dieguito River Park JPA and the Conservancy along with their partners. From nature art and water quality testing to historic farmstead activities and archaeological artifact hunts, the kids' curiosity sparked as they discovered the vital connections between the land and the water that flows through our watershed. The kids left with an understanding of their role in preserving the health of our waterways, flora, fauna, and ultimately, our precious oceans. Stay tuned for upcoming dates and opportunities to join us on another Watershed Explorers adventure. We love to feel the excitement kids and volunteers bring to our programming and are grateful they bring so much of it! Together, we'll continue nurturing a love for nature and conservation in the heart of San Dieguito River Valley.

## CREEKSIDE CRITTERS: "A HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE FOR KIDS AND FAMILIES"

A memorable morning unfolded at the San Dieguito Lagoon Birdwing Open Air Classroom in early November, offering families a unique chance to explore and learn about the diverse critters inhabiting our creek sides. Biologist Jeff Nordland led this engaging, free family event, providing both adults and kids with insights into local snakes, lizards, and other reptiles and amphibians. The presentation was interactive; participants were able to hold various live animals, such as snakes and lizards. In addition to learning about these critters, Jeff's talk emphasized the importance of habitat conservation and protecting our water sources—all against the breathtaking backdrop of the San Dieguito Lagoon's stunning vistas.



## CONNECTING CREATURES, CLIMATE, AND COMMUNITIES SPEAKING SERIES: "A LIFE IN THE WATERSHED LEARNING EXPERIENCE"



The Education and Outreach Committee is busy finalizing details for an exciting new monthly speaking series launching in January 2024. Held every first Wednesday, 6:30-8:00pm, at the Del Mar Town Hall, the series will cover diverse topics such as wetlands, pollinators, geology, extinction prevention, history and culture of the indigenous peoples of the river valley. In April, we'll host a special session at the Santa Ysabel Nature Center, featuring an accompanying hike.



## OUTDOOR SAFETY PRESENTATION WITH SAN DIEGUITO RIVER PARK JPA AND KIT FOX OUTFITTERS



The San Dieguito River Park JPA recently partnered with Kit Fox Outfitters to host an outdoor safety presentation. The Conservancy encourages all trail users, regardless of their background, experience level, skills or abilities, to attend these free safety presentations. David Shorey, certified as a Wilderness First Responder and Wilderness First Aid Instructor, led the presentation, covering the essentials for an enjoyable outdoor experience. From basic tools to preparing for diverse environments in San Diego County, this session served as a valuable reminder to be well-prepared and cautious during adventures, so that you may create lasting enjoyable trail memories to share with others.



## OUTREACH AND COMMUNITY EVENTS

We are grateful for many in-person opportunities this year to engage nature lovers face to face. Not only are Conservancy staff busy planning engaging programs and events, you can also find them at booths during community events across the watershed. We're always excited to share a booth with our wonderful San Dieguito River Park JPA partners. Together, we engage with event attendees, sharing the significant work being completed by both organizations. Our tabletop watershed model, generously funded by SDG&E, illustrates the expansive watershed from Julian's mountains to Del Mar's beaches. We provide maps, pamphlets on the 71-mile Coast to Crest Trail, details on upcoming events, and interactive displays on the local birds and animals of the watershed. Keep an eye out for Sage, the beloved rosy boa, at our next tabling event.



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**FOR MORE INFORMATION ON EDUCATIONAL AND OUTREACH EVENTS PLEASE CONTACT KIM YINGST, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MANAGER, [KIM@SDRVC.ORG](mailto:KIM@SDRVC.ORG).**

## BIOLOGICAL SURVEYS ON OUR 117 ACRE DEL DIOS PROPERTY



Our Del Dios property, located along Del Dios Highway, overlooks beautiful Lake Hodges. We continue to implement the Resource Management Plan for the property. The Resource Management Plan will be reviewed every 5 years and updated, as needed, to reflect changed conditions and improved understanding of the onsite resources and land management practices.

Surveys for rare plants, herpetology, birds, and bumblebees have been completed thanks to our knowledgeable volunteers and experts including Jeff Nordland, Patti Koger, Stacy McCline, Jessie Vinje, Ed Ketner and the San Diego Tracking Team. We continue to find numerous species of

interest like the growing Encinitas baccharis (*Baccharis vanessae*) population, various snakes and lizards, mule deer, coyote, and bobcats. Our staff and volunteers stay on alert actively identifying and addressing invasive plant species such as pampas grass (*Cortaderia selloana*), fountain grass, and stinkwort (*Dittrichia graveolens*).

These biological surveys provide crucial insights into species diversity, population dynamics, and ecosystem interactions. By monitoring these factors, the Conservancy and our regional partners can assess ecosystem health and make informed conservation decisions.

## SCHOLDER CREEK – A PRIVATE/PUBLIC/NON-PROFIT PARTNERSHIP THAT IS A WIN-WIN-WIN



Near the top of our watershed, the Scholder Creek restoration project is a collaborative initiative involving private landowners, the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under their Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, and the Conservancy. The primary objective of this project is to enhance the habitat for the western pond turtle (*Actinemys marmorata*) and the California red-legged frog (*Rana draytonii*). To date, large stands of invasive Himalayan blackberry (*Rubus armeniacus*) that were suffocating the creek have been treated and removed. Since removing these invasive stands, both the California red-legged frog and the Baja California tree frog (*Pseudacris hypochondriaca*) have been observed utilizing the newly

available habitat space. Surveys conducted by US Geological Services and USFWS have documented increasing populations of the California red-legged frog and western pond turtle.

Additionally, efforts have been initiated to manage the invasive Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*). Despite its innocent name, this invasive tree species is very challenging to control. When a trunk is cut or falls, signals are sent to the roots, prompting the growth of more shoots or saplings. Hence, it is often referred to as the “Tree of Hell.” Careful and diligent management of this species is crucial to curb its spread.

This private/public/non-profit partnership is a triple win for habitat conservation. Private landowners receive funding from a federal grant, and the Conservancy efficiently administers the grant, ensuring the preservation of native habitats and promoting environmental sustainability.

## GONZALES CANYON/SWORD WAY TRAILHEAD – ONE SMALL SPECIES SHOWCASES OUR IMPACT



At the Gonzales Canyon/Sword Way Trailhead, our staff and volunteers have planted and maintained hundreds of San Diego native plant species, including those that attract pollinators to support the local pollinating species. One species we particularly love incorporating in our plantings is the narrowleaf milkweed (*Asclepias fascicularis*). This plant plays an important role in supporting the migration of the monarch butterflies (*Danaus plexippus*). During one of our planting events, we were thrilled to spot a monarch butterfly caterpillar making good use of one of the narrowleaf milkweed plants that was installed last season. This small yet significant encounter highlights the impact of our work alongside our dedicated volunteers. We invite you

to join us this planting season to help install more native plants, contributing to the support of the diverse wildlife that relies on healthy habitats.



**FOR MORE INFORMATION ON VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES FOCUSED ON STEWARDSHIP INCLUDING HABITAT RESTORATION AND COMMUNITY SCIENCE, PLEASE CONTACT JOSEPH RIVERA, CONSERVATION MANAGER, [JOSEPH@SDRVC.ORG](mailto:JOSEPH@SDRVC.ORG).**

### MEMBER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Donations from May-October 2023

#### \$25,000+

Bruce Mengler

#### \$20,000+

Zable Foundation

#### \$5000+

Del Mar Foundation  
Gary & Jerri-Ann Jacobs

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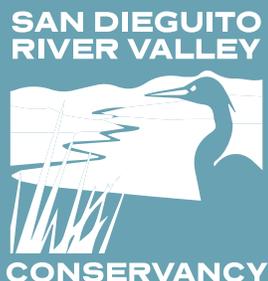


## SUPPORTING THE PILLARS



San Dieguito River Valley Conservancy is on a mission to advance conservation, education and recreation. We remind nature lovers that every gift of every size directly supports our mission. Thank you!

If you would prefer to receive this newsletter electronically, please email [sdrvc@sdrvc.org](mailto:sdrvc@sdrvc.org).



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