

TRACKS

A Publication of the Newport Bay Naturalists & Friends

March–May

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Great Earth Walk and Estuary Awareness Day

Dear Naturalists and Friends,

I am excited to tell everyone about a fantastic opportunity for all of us to re-affirm our commitment to the protection of the environment, to the preservation of Upper Newport Bay as a precious resource, and to the important work of the Newport Bay Naturalists & Friends at the Bay.

Responsible environmental citizenship does not happen automatically. It stems from an appreciation of the fragile beauty of nature and an understanding of the ways in which we impact the balance of nature. Upper Newport Bay is an estuary—a place where salt

water and freshwater mix. The freshwater drains from the 154-square-mile watershed that includes Irvine, Lake Forest and parts of Newport Beach, Costa Mesa, Santa Ana and other cities. There are two main threats to the Bay. One is detrimental recreational use in and around the Bay that destroys habitat and threatens sensitive wildlife. The other is storm water run-off that brings with it the trash, pesticides and other pollutants from our watershed.

For the past 13 years we have held an annual Earth Day festival on Shellmaker Island in April. In 2000 we added an annual Ocean Discovery Day celebration in June. This year we are holding a bigger and more exciting single event on Saturday, May 1 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. We have named it Estuary Awareness Day to promote public awareness of the Bay as an estuary and to foster the link between the Bay and the upstream communities in our watershed. This free, family event is expected to draw over 1,500 people. There will be environmental exhibits, arts and crafts activities for the children and nature education stations where young and old alike can learn about the natural history of the Bay. Free boat tours will be given around the Bay. In addition, Estuary Awareness Day will serve as the main post-walk celebration for the Great Earth Walk in Orange County.

The Great Earth Walk, a statewide event to promote environmental education, will take place from 8 to 11 a.m. on May 1. It is expected to draw from 25,000 to 50,000 people throughout California, all walking to raise money for participating non-profits. Upper Newport Bay will be the primary walk site in Orange County. In addition to hosting, we are also participating in the walk with other local environmental organizations. There is no registration fee to walk. Pledging is done based on participation alone, not on the number of miles walked. Several easy three-mile walks have been identified at different locations around the Bay, but there is no requirement that this distance is walked. Also, the organizers have decided to allow walkers who are not free on the morning of May 1 to follow the honor system and walk any day the preceding week.

Our goal is to have 500 walkers taking part on our behalf to raise money for the restoration and education work we do here. We ask that each Naturalist and Friend walk or recruit a friend or relative to walk for us. Many of us work for organizations that support volunteerism and charitable giving in a variety of ways, including matching contributions and promotion of group involvement in events such as Clean-Up Day. We ask all Naturalists and Friends to see if they can promote the walk at work, at school, or within other organizations to which they belong.

For those Friends who have not been down the Bay for a while, use this chance to re-acquaint yourself with its beauty. And when you are done with the walk, stay and enjoy Estuary Awareness Day as a post-walk celebration. Have your family meet you for lunch. We will be offering a variety of fare ranging from hotdogs and hamburgers to health foods at our "Food Court." Renew old friendships. Find out how you can become involved again. Gus Chabre (our new president) graduated from our 1991 Naturalist Training Class, bowed out for a while, and returned to join our Board of Directors in 2003. Perhaps you will find something to stir your passion and increase your commitment to our work at the Bay. To find out more and/or register as a walker, please visit newportbay.org or call Rita McCoy at (949) 923-2296.

Great Earth Walk

May 1, 2004 8 – 11 a.m.

Main Registration at Shellmaker Island

Estuary Awareness Day

May 1, 2004 11 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Shellmaker Island



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Roger Mallett
Interim Executive Director
Newport Bay Naturalists & Friends

Big Canyon Restoration Plans

For those of us who spend many hours at Upper Newport Bay, Big Canyon Creek epitomizes the good, the bad and the ugly of the entire Upper Bay. At Big Canyon open water, mudflat, saltwater marsh, freshwater marsh, riparian and upland habitats meet allowing visitors to appreciate the beauty and diversity of the plants, birds and other animals found in each. A short walk from the Big Canyon parking lot on Back Bay Drive is all it takes. But the footbridge that provided the gateway to the nature trail is closed because of disrepair. The lookout over the freshwater pond is blocked by a wall of cattails and bulrushes concealing the fact that the pond is nearly filled with sediment and too hot to support native wildlife. And concrete banks along the mouth of the creek as it opens into the Bay have been washed away exposing the old dredge spoils on which the parking lot is built. Most of the damage was caused by massive flooding during the 1997 El Nino storms. This damage was inevitable given the decades of poor planning at Big Canyon.

As a result of the community-based efforts of the Restoration Opportunities, Outreach, Teamwork and Stewardship (ROOTS) program organized by Kristina Finstad, Restoration Education Coordinator for the California Coastal Commission, and the Naturalists' Restoration Team, the Big Canyon kiosk area has been renovated and reopened to the public. Unfortunately these remediation efforts are only cosmetic. They do not stop the eroding dredge spoils from adding to the sedimentation of the Bay, they do not address the underlying reasons for the flooding, and do not prevent further damage from future storms.

Big Canyon Creek drains a two-square-mile watershed extending east towards San Joaquin Hills. Historically tidal wetlands extended into the canyon where the freshwater pond is today. When Back Bay Drive was built in the 1930's, wetlands were filled in and the creek was dammed, severely restricting drainage in Big Canyon. Urban runoff from streets, homes and landscaped areas brings fertilizers, pesticides and other serious pollutants into the creek. Slopes

are eroding causing sedimentation. During storms Big Canyon often carries fecal bacteria into the Bay. Dredge materials from the Bay have been dumped in Big Canyon wiping out large areas of natural habitat and replacing them with infertile, salty fill. Hardy non-native plant species such as pampas grass and Brazilian pepper have taken over much of Big Canyon crowding out native plants that provide food and shelter for native wildlife, including endangered birds.

The Big Canyon Creek Restoration Project, funded by the City of Newport Beach and the California Coastal Conservancy, was undertaken just over a year ago to address these problems. Newport Bay Naturalists & Friends worked closely with California Conservancy International (CCI) to initiate this project. CCI led the research, scientific and technical analysis and community involvement efforts to develop a comprehensive Restoration Plan with conceptual designs for a functioning mosaic of wetland and upland habitats and improved public access in Big Canyon. CCI assembled a highly-qualified team to address biological, hydrological/geotechnical and landscape architecture/public use constraints and issues. They are working together to meet a complex set of goals holistically. The project goals are to:

- Restore tidal influence to Big Canyon, adding tidal wetlands, enhancing freshwater habitats and allowing natural transitions between habitats
- Address decades of degradation and effects of urbanization in Big Canyon
- Remove dumped dredge materials and enhance infertile and saline soils
- Improve drainage patterns
- Repair flood damage and provide non-structural flood control
- Reduce erosion in Big Canyon and sedimentation into the Bay
- Improve water quality in Upper Newport Bay by addressing contaminated urban runoff before it reaches the Bay
- Remove invasive, non-native plants and restore native habitats and species diversity
- Develop a system of habitat-sensitive public access trails and scenic overlooks, including disabled-accessible trails
- Emphasize long-term sustainability of the renovation.

By the time *Tracks* reaches you, the Restoration Plan showing how these goals will be accomplished will be available for review on our website. Go to newportbay.org and follow the Restoration Projects link to the Big Canyon page. We hope this will be just the first of several comprehensive restoration projects in and around the Bay that will showcase how we can work proactively to better protect and preserve the Bay's fragile ecology and allow the public to enjoy its beauty.

Shark-mobile is available for your school

Shark-mobile is an outreach program that will bring sharks, rays, sea stars and other marine animals to you. Participants will enjoy learning about local marine habitats through hands-on activities. For more information or to reserve the Shark-mobile please call 949-640-9956.





Upper Newport Bay Calendar of Events

March–May 2004

SCHEDULED ACTIVITIES

Steward Days—Every Wednesday, 9:00–11:00 a.m.

Encourage the Bay's unique genetics by collecting seeds & propagating plants. Meet on Shellmaker Island at the Exotic Hut. Reservations required for 5 or more. For information call (949) 640-0286. Location Code: MSC

Canoe the Back Bay—Every Saturday, 8:30 a.m.

Join a trained naturalist for a guided 2-hour canoe tour of the Back Bay. Fee is \$10 per person. For reservations call (949) 923-2269. Location Code: MSC

Kayak Tours—Every Sunday, 10:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

Join a trained naturalist for a kayak tour of the Back Bay. Meet at the Newport Dunes Resort. Fee is \$20 per person. NBNF members pay \$10. For reservations call (949) 729-1150 (weekends only) or (800) 585-0747. Location Code: NDR

Walking Tour—Sat., Mar. 6 & 20; Apr. 3 & 17; May 15, 9:00 a.m.

Join a trained Naturalist for a 2-hour walk along the Bay. Bring binoculars and sun protection. Free. No reservations needed. For information call (949) 923-2269. Location Code: MSC

Low Tide Tour of the Bay—Sat., Mar. 6; Wed., Mar. 17

Join a Naturalist on a 2-hour guided tour of the bay at low tide on our comfortable electric pontoon boat. Migrating birds should be highly visible at these times. Fee is \$10 per person. For reservations call (949) 923-2269. Location Code: MSC

Our Feathered Friends—Sat., Mar. 6, 1:00–2:30 p.m.

Meet some of our feathered friends at this hands-on program and learn all about birds and why they have become such an important part of our lives. \$10 per child ages 5 & up. Call (949) 923-2275 to register. Location Code: MIC

Friends of Newport Bay Walking Tour—Sat., Mar. 13

Walk along the Back Bay listening to Naturalists and visit Interpretive Stations featuring specialists addressing different natural history topics. Tours leave every 15 minutes between 9:00 and 10:15 a.m. Free. No reservations required. For information call (949) 923-2269. Location code: EB

Astronomy Night—Sat., Mar. 13, 6:30–8:30 p.m.

Join members of the Orange County Astronomers for an inspirational tour of the night sky. Open to all ages and includes observation with telescopes. Suggested donation of \$2.00 per participant. Call (949) 923-2275 to register.

Crafty Camouflage—Sun., Mar. 14, 2:00–3:30 p.m.

Join us and see "Dr. Sue, The Bug Lady's" wonderful walking sticks show off their camouflage talents. Make your own stick insect model and habitat, and then dine on an edible walking stick you make yourself! \$10 per child ages 5 & up. Call (949) 923-2275 to register. Location Code: MIC

Electric Boat Tour of the Bay—Sat., Mar. 20; Apr. 17; May 22, 11:30 a.m.

Join a Naturalist on a 2-hour guided tour of the bay on our comfortable electric pontoon boat. Fee is \$10 per person. For reservations call (949) 923-2269. Location Code: MSC

Marine Life Inventory—Sat., Mar. 20; Apr. 17; May 22, 8:30–11:30 a.m.

Marine biology students of all ages are invited to participate in a variety of marine life monitoring programs in Newport Bay. Fee is \$10. For reservations call (949) 642-5031. Location Code: MSC

Toddler Time "Bird Watching Hike"—Wed., Mar. 17, 11:00 a.m.–Noon

Join a Park Ranger for this parent/child bird-watching nature hike. One 3–4 year old child per adult is recommended. Maps and instructions will be provided with registration. RAIN CANCELS. \$4.00 per child. Call (949) 923-2275 to register.

Family Plein Air Painting—Sun., Mar. 21; Sat., Apr. 17; Sat., May 15

Experience the joy of painting outdoors. Learn Plein Air painting techniques, develop your skills and take home your completed oil painting. Best suited for ages 8 and up. Fee \$15 per child 8–18, \$20 per adult. Call (949) 923-2275 to register.

The Animal Guys—Wed., Mar. 24, 6:30–7:30 p.m.

Come explore nature's diversity with two enthusiastic biologists! Get an up-close look at some very special animals from around the world. Meet an African Fennex Fox, a North American Porcupine, a Burmese Python, American Alligator and more! \$10 per child ages 5 & up. Call (949) 923-2275 to register.

SCHEDULED ACTIVITIES

ROOTS Restoration Teamwork—Sat., Mar. 27; Apr. 24; May 22, 9:00 a.m.–Noon

Restore the Bay by replacing invasive non-native plants with coastal sage scrub and salt marsh communities. Reservations required for 5 or more. Refreshments and tools provided. Call (949) 640-0286 for more information. Location code: MIC

Toddler Time "All About Burrowing Critters"—Wed., Mar. 31, 10:30–11:15 a.m.

Come join us for story time and hands-on fun and learn all about the burrowing critters that live here at Upper Newport Bay Nature Preserve. \$4.00 per child ages 3 & 4. Call (949) 923-2275 to register. Location Code: MIC

Crazy Crustaceans—Sat., Apr. 3, 1:00–2:30 p.m.

Come, commune with "Dr. Sue, The Bug Lady" and live crustaceans from her traveling arthropod zoo. Enjoy a crabby crustacean story. Learn how crustaceans are related to insects. Make your own artistic crabs—one to display and one to eat. \$10 per child ages 5 & up. Call (949) 923-2275 to register.

Toddler Time "Let's Play Opossum"—Wed., Apr. 7, 10:30–11:15 a.m.

Come join us for story time and hands-on fun and learn all about opossums! \$4.00 per child ages 3 & 4. Call (949) 923-2275 to register.

Our Big Backyard—Thurs., Apr. 8, 1:00–2:30 p.m.

Join staff members of Wild Wonders Inc. for a hands-on look at animal ambassadors from North America—Our Big Back Yard. Come face to face with a porcupine, arctic fox, opossum, tortoise and more! Learn the importance of each to its environment. \$10 per child ages 5 & up. Call (949) 923-2275 to register.

Train for a Day, Be a Volunteer—Sat., Apr. 17, 9:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m.

Be a part of this dynamic estuary—Volunteer at Upper Newport Bay! Learn about the habitats and wildlife of the bay. Participate in habitat restoration. Assist with canoe, kayak, walking, and school tours. Help us greet and educate visitors. There are many ways to get involved! Call (949) 923-2295 to reserve a space.

Toddler Time "Crazy Coyotes"—Wed., Apr. 21, 9:00 a.m. or 10:30 a.m.

Join a Park Ranger for this parent and child playtime with a coyote theme. Enjoy stories, movement and hands-on fun for 2- to 4-year-old junior naturalists. \$4.00 per child ages 2-4. Call (949) 923-2275 to register. Location Code: MIC

Astronomy Night—Sat., Apr. 24, 7:00–9:00 p.m.

Join members of the Orange County Astronomers for an inspirational tour of the night sky. Open to all ages and includes observation with telescopes. Suggested donation \$2.00 per participant. Call (949) 923-2275 to register.

Great Earth Walk & Estuary Awareness Day

May 1, 2004 8 a.m.–4 p.m., Shellmaker Island

Toddler Time "Animal Senses"—Wed., May 12, 10:30–11:15 a.m.

Join us for story time and hands-on fun all about the way that animals touch taste and feel. \$4.00 per child ages 3 & 4. Call (949) 923-2275 to register.

Beginning Nature Journaling—Sun., May 16, 1:00–2:30 p.m.

This workshop covers basic journaling skills for the novice including fun tools and activities for parents and children (ages 7 and up) alike. Children need to be accompanied by an adult. Fee includes sample journal booklet. If it is raining, the program will be re-scheduled. \$5 per person. Call (949) 923-2295 to register.

Toddler Time "Wet Wetlands"—Wed., May 19, 9:00 or 10:30 a.m.

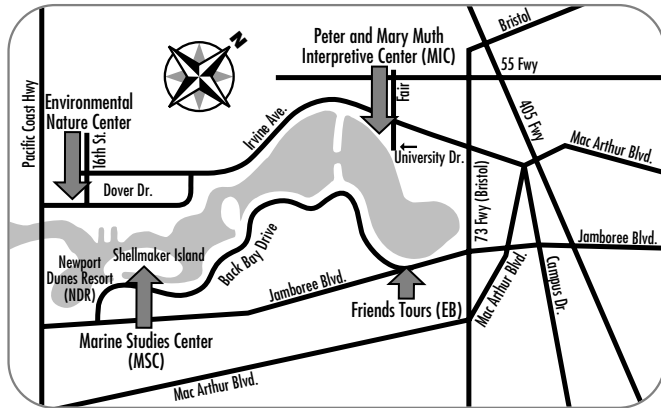
Join a Park Ranger for this parent and child playtime with a wetlands theme. Enjoy stories, movement and hands-on fun for 2- to 4-year-old junior naturalists. \$4.00 per child ages 2-4. Call (949) 923-2275 to register.

Monarch Butterfly Migration—Sat., May 22, 10:00–11:30 a.m.

Did you know birds aren't the only creatures that migrate? Learn about the beautiful Monarch Butterfly and the fascinating, 1,000-mile journey it takes every year. Come and join us for a pollination relay, a migration activity, to plant butterfly plants and more. \$5.00 per person ages 5 & up. Call (949) 923-2275 to register.

The Games People Played—Sun., May 23, 10:00–11:30 a.m.

Come join the Ranger as we explore the games Native American children of the Back Bay might have played while learning important life skills. Make authentic toys to take home. \$5.00 per person ages 5 & up. Call (949) 923-2275 to register.



LOCATION KEY

Interpretive Center (MIC)
 Peter and Mary Muth Interpretive Center
 2301 University Drive
 Newport Beach, CA 92660

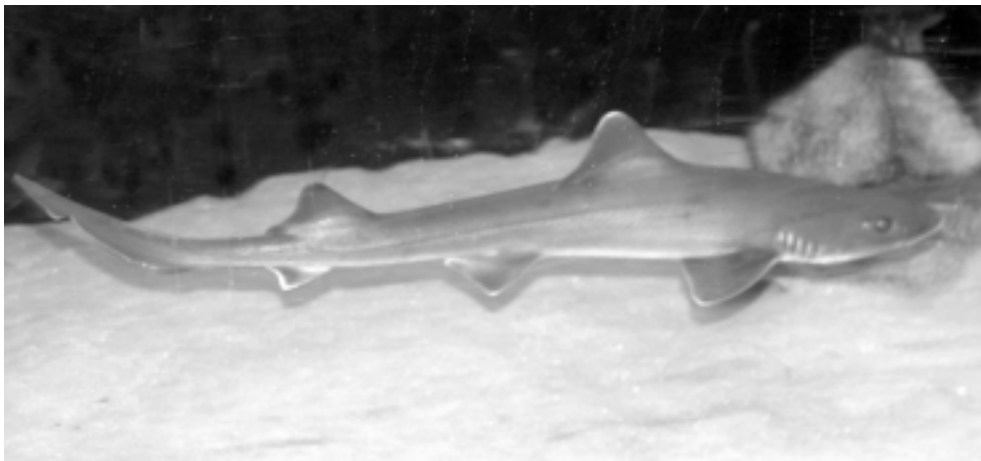
Marine Studies Center (MSC)
 600 Shellmaker
 Newport Beach, CA 92660

WEB SITES

Newport Bay Naturalists & Friends: www.newportbay.org
 Peter & Mary Muth Interpretive Center:
www.ocparks.com/unbic www.newportbay.org
 Department of Fish & Game: www.dfg.ca.gov
 Environmental Nature Center (ENC): www.ENCenter.org
 County of Orange: www.ocparks.com/uppernewportbay/
 California Coastal Commission: www.coastal.ca.gov

TRACKS CREDITS

Contributing Writers: Roger Mallett,
 Matt Neilson
 Design & Layout: Debora Brown
 Event Calendar: Marilyn La Bollita,
 Sue McIntire, Candice McIntyre,
 Jean Whitaker



Sharks and Rays of Newport Bay

Around the world, most sharks have an undeserved “bad” reputation. For some, the mention of the word “shark” brings up images of a silent killing machine, waiting to strike at unsuspecting swimmers and surfers without warning. However, of the thirty species of shark that are commonly found off Southern California, only four are considered to be dangerous to humans. Most of the sharks in our coastal waters are harmless to man.

There are two species of sharks that are commonly found in Newport Bay. The leopard shark and the grey smoothhound shark are both members of the houndshark family. This harmless family of sharks contains about 40 species worldwide. They are small,

mainly coastal dwelling sharks. Juvenile leopards and smoothies are found in the Bay year around, but more commonly during the spring and summer months. They feed on the abundant worms, crustaceans, and mollusks that are found along the mudflats and sandy bottom.

Along with the sharks, there are six species of rays that are found in the bay. Four of the six are members of the stingray family, having a sharp barb near the base of their tail. The round stingray is probably the most abundant cartilaginous fish, (all sharks and rays have cartilage) found in Newport Bay and Southern California. The bat ray, truly a beautiful fish and a graceful swimmer, can be seen in the bay “flying” through the water with its wing-like fins. Diamond and butterfly stingrays are not as common as the others with their names describing their shape. Lastly, the shovelnose guitarfish and the thornback ray are not stingrays at all, making them harmless, as they also look exactly as their names describe.

All of these wonderful fishes are important parts of a healthy, functioning bay ecosystem. Take some time to see and learn about these marine animals and, perhaps, you too will come to appreciate our cartilaginous cousins.