



## 2009 Annual Report

Many organizations proclaim that their people are their greatest asset. For the Newport Bay Naturalists and Friends (NBNF), this is resoundingly true. Through the end of 2009 our dedicated and talented Naturalists have contributed over 110,000 hours of volunteer service at Upper Newport Bay (UNB). We are grateful for the hands-on commitment of our many Naturalists and the financial contribution of our many Friends.

### Education and Restoration

Earth Day, Estuary Awareness Day and Clean Up Day were examples of successful outreach events that between them brought more than 3,000 members of the community together for a common purpose and gave us a chance to make new friends, form alliances and build trust. We know that only through cooperation and coalitions can we accomplish our mission. In conjunction with our partners, in 2009 we delivered education programs to over 12,000 students from kindergarten to college level from Orange, Los Angeles, Riverside and San Bernardino Counties. Most of our programs are free. The main exception is the outrigger canoe program. During these outings, which are aligned with state science content standards, high school students spend a couple of hours paddling in the Back Bay and get to see birds such as the great blue heron, great egret, black skimmer, brown pelican and least tern up close. NBNF was fortunate to receive sizeable grants from State Street and the California Coastal Commission to provide these all-day field trips for disadvantaged high school students at no cost. Underwriting both the program and the transportation to UNB continues to be a major funding priority.



The community-based restoration programs at UNB continue to grow. With our volunteer support and funding the Coastal Commission ROOTS program and the OC Parks Second Sundays program are flourishing. Together these program attracted nearly 5,000 participants in 2009. A vast amount of invasive vegetation was removed and more than 5,000 native plants planted. Most of the plants now come from the ROOTS nursery. The UNB Restoration Team is developing a 5-year plan that will identify specific acreages of coastal sage scrub and other habitats to be planted each winter, the plant palettes to be used and the rough number of each species needed. This will allow the nursery to propagate from local seeds and cuttings in an organized manner. The nursery shade enclosure was funded in 2008 by a grant from State Street and 40 potting benches were purchased in 2009 with money from the NBNF Restoration Fund.

### Research and Monitoring

A major component of the NBNF 10-year plan is the fostering of scientific research that will assist in adaptive management of UNB and its watershed. To oversee this, an NBNF Research Committee that includes some highly-respected scientists was formed. One of its initial activities was to establish a "mini-grants" program which will provide funds to university and other scientists to allow them to initiate new research projects of benefit to the Bay. Eight research proposals were accepted in 2009 under this exciting new NBNF program. Several of the funded projects will contribute to the development of the Back Bay Science Center (BBSC) as an active research site.

Volunteer Naturalists continue to organize and/or participate in a variety of monitoring programs. We are now also starting to see some results from an ambitious long-term program which expands upon the survival and growth monitoring of new community-based restoration plantings. A team of more than a dozen trained Naturalists has been conducting wildlife surveys every two months and/or monitoring percent coverage of native plants every six months at multiple locations around UNB. This is done along marked transects in mature native, degraded non-native, recently restored, and mature restored Coastal Sage Scrub habitat in accordance with rigorous written protocols. The results are entered into a database for scientific analysis.

NBNF continues to catalog the universe of information pertaining to the biology and water quality of UNB in order to establish the baseline data and support the development of a Comprehensive Resource Management Program (CRMP) for the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) Ecological Reserve, OC Parks Nature Preserve and adjacent City open space.

## Capital Projects

At the start of the year NBNF oversaw the installation of a new AV system in the Peter and Mary Muth Interpretive Center theater. This \$60,000 project was funded by Ray and Elsa Watson, in whose honor the theater is named.

Another Interpretive Center Capital Campaign supporter of note is the Board Foundation. A \$25,000 donation was used to create the Board Butterfly Garden on the slopes on the far side of the Interpretive Center amphitheater. An additional \$25,000 donation was used in 2009 to install a shade structure over part of the amphitheater.



In a joint venture with DFG, NBNF oversaw the installation of a state-of-the-art Audio-Visual (AV) system in the two classrooms at the BBSC. The project was funded partially by DFG and partially by a very generous donation from an anonymous NBNF member. The system incorporates video microscopes, wireless tablets and other features to allow either room or both rooms combined to be used in classroom, theater, workshop or conference mode.

NBNF was thrilled to be awarded a \$50,000 grant from Southern California Edison to outfit a new "Sharkmobile" aquarium on wheels to help DFG expand its educational outreach to local schools and community events. A reliable used shuttle bus will be permanently outfitted with three touch tanks and one viewing tank and associated life support systems. The viewing and touch tanks will be stocked with a variety of sharks, rays and other fish, and sea urchins, ochre stars and other invertebrates that are displayed at the Back Bay Science Center. We expect to get the show on the road in the next few months.

Another exciting project to be completed in 2010 is the transformation of the Interpretive Center entryway. NBNF is honored to have been entrusted with the design and construction of this important project that will include three stunning painted murals and state-of-the-art touch-screen electronic displays.

In 2010 we will also continue with design development and partnership building on several major restoration and water quality improvement projects around UNB. We have great expectations for these projects and for our many other endeavors.