

# Mission Trails Regional Park News

Volume 21, Number 4

--A Publication of the Mission Regional Park Foundation--

Fall, 2010



Volunteer Pat Pawlowski showing visitors a king snake

## The “King” of Snakes by Ranger Heidi Gutknecht

One of Mission Trail’s less-often seen snakes is the California king-snake (*Lampropeltis getula californica*). Despite its name, this snake can also be found in Arizona, southern portions of Nevada, Utah and Oregon, southwest Colorado, northwest New Mexico, and northwest Mexico. This beautiful snake reaches lengths up to 48 inches and typically has horizontal bands of alternating chocolate brown to black and white to yellow, but, occasionally has length-wise stripes, or, a combination of bands and stripes. This dark and light coloration enables them to blend in when amongst patches of shade and sunlight. Because of its unique beauty, the California kingsnake is often confused as an “exotic” snake by people who have never seen them in the wild before.

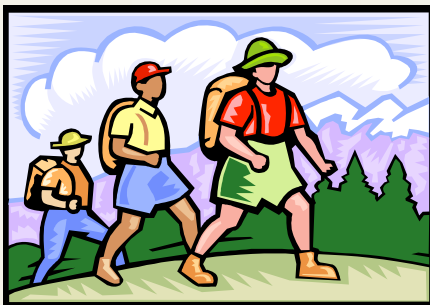
The kingsnake in the photo was recently brought in to the Visitor Center by a local resident who found it trying to crawl into a vent on the side of his home; since he had never seen such a snake in his neighborhood before, he thought it might be someone’s lost pet. A while back, I received a call on the radio from the police that there was “an exotic snake that must have been a released pet” loose at the Equestrian Staging Area off of Mast Blvd. I arrived

## Trail Guide Training

Do you love the many wonders of Mission Trails Regional Park? Are you interested in learning more about them and sharing this love with others? Well, then the MTPP Trail Guide Training program just might be for you!

This annual 10-week program trains volunteers to lead interpretive nature walks throughout the park. Classes begin in January and meet each Wednesday evening from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. for classroom instruction, and each Saturday morning from 8:30 to 11:30 a.m. for field studies.

Please note there is a \$25 materials fee due at the Orientation, scheduled for Saturday, January 8th, 2011. For more information, or to sign up, please call (619) 668-3279.



*King Snake, continued on p. 4*



## A Message From Executive Director Jay Wilson

I often walk into the lobby of the Visitor Center and enjoy engaging our visitors. For many it is their first visit and they are often amazed at all we have to offer at MTRP. "I never realized this building was here" is the most frequent response. Many are familiar with the park and may have hiked Cowles Mountain, but were not aware of the Visitor and Interpretive Center. If it is their first time at Mission Trails, they are very impressed at all of the many interesting things there are to see and do. It is difficult for them to comprehend the park is over 6,100 acres, covers 10 square miles and has 40 miles of trails. I feel very fortunate to work here at Mission Trails.

I also have the pleasure of talking to many of our volunteers who are always present in the park. Whether they are leading our free Trail Guide Walks, staffing the gift shop or front counter, completely rebuilding the reed-covered Ewaa on the Visitor Center Terrace, or removing thousands of stalks of non-native/invasive vegetation throughout the park, their interest and dedication to the park are really quite remarkable. Our volunteers are a vital part of the entire operation. And, of course, you are always welcome to become a volunteer.

On August 14, after numerous rain delays last winter and spring, the interior of the Cowles Mountain Comfort

Station was painted by the Grantville-Allied Gardens and the Lake Murray Kiwanis clubs. With a total of 35 community service hours, it was cleaned, primed, and then painted a much brighter color. The following week Life Deck Coating Installations re-surfaced the floors. Fortunately for us Paul Koury, the owner of Life Deck, is a frequent visitor to the park and donated half the cost of the project.

Activities and events with the MTRP Foundation for the fall are well underway. Our concert series began on September 19 with the San Diego Flute Circle playing a great variety of Native American Flutes. Please check our online calendar, [mtrp.org/events.asp](http://mtrp.org/events.asp), for the remainder of our fall concert series and other new and interesting events in the park and at the Visitor and Interpretive Center.

Linda Hawley's children's fun nature classes -- known as "Nature Adventures!, Afternoon Nature Adventures, and Nighttime Nature Adventures", -- are in session, offering a new and exciting topic each month for these 90-minute programs. The classes are for children of all ages. The cost is \$5.00 per child and adults are free. Our three part Sempra Energy Foundation (SEF) educational program, under the direction of Education Program Instructor Alicia Berg is also underway for school classes and organized youth organizations. The SEF program can also assist with transportation costs. Information on both programs is on our website under "Children's Fun Nature Classes."

There is always something to do at Mission Trails. For instance, at 7:30 am, I met Terry Gaughen, a key volunteer who spends hours every week removing invasive plants from the park and maintaining hiking trails. We worked at the entrance to the Equestrian Staging Area removing non-native vegetation and filled an entire pick-up truck, and then some.

Don't forget to sign up for our free e-Newsletter in the top left hand corner of our website.

## Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation

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## Lunar Eclipse, December 2010

By George Varga, Trail Guide

In order for a Lunar Eclipse to happen, the Sun, Earth and Moon must be in perfect alignment so that the Earth is between the Sun and Moon. Then the Earth's shadow, also called 'umbra', will fall on the Moon and a Lunar Eclipse will occur. During a Full Moon the Earth is always between the Sun and Moon, and of course a Full Moon happens every month. However, a Lunar Eclipse does not happen each month. Why is that? The reason for this is the fact that the orbit of the Moon is tilted about 5 degrees to the Sun-Earth orbital plane. A Lunar Eclipse will only occur when the plane of the Moon's orbit intersects that of the Sun-Earth orbital plane.

During the late evening of 20 December 2010 into the early hours of 21 December, the night of the Full Moon, there will be a Total Eclipse of the Moon. The Moon will enter the Earth's umbra (shadow) at about 10:32 p.m. Totality will be from about 11:40 p.m. on the 20th to 12:52 a.m. on the 21st. Then the Moon will begin to leave the Earth's umbra and the whole event will be over around 2:02 a.m. While the Moon is totally eclipsed it will be visible in dull shades of red, orange, and even brown depending on the amount of pollution in the atmosphere.

The reason for being able to see the Moon even when it is totally embedded in the Earth's shadow is the fact that some sunlight is diffracted (bent) around the Earth's edge into the shadow and hits the Moon. Then a little of this light is reflected back to us on Earth, enters our pupil, hits the optic nerves in our retina and our brain says something like "Oh my, how beautiful, glad I stayed up instead of falling asleep in front of the TV."



Photo by Wendy Esterly

## Exceptionally Productive Year for Cavity Nesting Birds at MTRP

by Richard Griebe

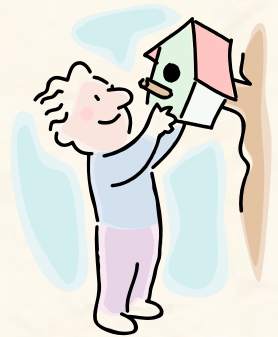
Eighty-eight nest boxes located throughout the park provide homes for birds that breed here. Nest boxes supplement natural cavities, a scarce resource that results in strong competition for nest sites. Even feral bees compete for available cavities as they claimed two large nest boxes intended for kestrels. Mission Trails Nest Box Project was the recipient of 15 new houses thanks to Zac Ames' scout project which donated 15 houses allowing us to replace dilapidated houses and add new ones. Our two Barn Owl boxes haven't been used so far although we keep a close eye on them for signs of activity. Fifteen volunteers, including four girl scouts who earned merit badges, dutifully monitored their assigned boxes for the three-month nesting season.

Over two thirds of our boxes were used this year whereas usage in past years was below fifty percent. The higher nesting rate is possibly explained by the County finally receiving a normal amount of rainfall last winter. Monitors recorded 78 nesting attempts (one or more eggs laid) which resulted in 237 babies fledging, a record number for this eleven-year-old project.

Six Bewick's Wren and four Tree Swallow pairs used our boxes compared to past years when only one pair of each species nested. A key field mark for Bewick's Wrens is the white line over the eyes differentiating them from the more common House Wren which lacks this distinctive marking.

Ash-throated Flycatchers continue to be particularly productive in the Park, producing 73 fledglings compared to 53 last year. Since these flycatchers nest later than most other species, the higher number of babies fledged is largely due to the diligence of monitors who removed House Wren nests soon after young wrens fledged, providing an opportunity for the flycatchers to reuse the box.

*Nest box, continued on p. 4*



**Kingsnake, continued from p. 1**

to find five nervous police officers hanging back a safe distance from the mystery snake. When I calmly walked over and picked the snake up, they all yelled and jumped back – “It’s just a kingsnake!” I told them, laughing at their reaction. I then gave them an impromptu lesson, after which one officer remarked, “That’s why you’re the Park Ranger and not us!”

So, why are they called, “king”snakes any way? Well, kingsnakes actually prefer a diet of other snakes; they eat all types of snakes, including other kingsnakes and even rattlesnakes! The reason they can get away with eating rattlesnakes is not because they are “immune” to the venom, as was once believed; they actually have a special enzyme that is able to break down the venom, minimizing its damaging effects. This makes the kingsnake a superhero among snakes and is how it got its appropriate name. They will also eat small rodents, birds, eggs, amphibians, and whatever else they can find in the wide variety of habitats in which they live. Like other non-venomous snakes, the kingsnake constricts its prey, by coiling tightly around it until it suffocates, and then swallowing it whole, head first.

When captured, kingsnakes often vibrate their tail, hiss, bite and excrete a foul-smelling musk to discourage predators; however, they become tame quickly and make good pets. Of course, it is illegal to take any animal from the wild, but, due to their popularity, California kingsnakes are bred in captivity (under special permits from the Department of Fish and Game) for sale as pets. Keep your eyes open while hiking here in the park and you just might be treated with a “royal” sighting.

See Star Party dates on page 6.

**ART EXHIBITS**

**OCTOBER 9 - NOVEMBER 5**

“IN THE JEANS”  
CANDY RICHEY  
PHOTOGRAPHY  
MELODY BRUNSTING  
PASTEL  
COLLEEN BAKER-HUBER  
OIL AND ACRYLIC

**NOVEMBER 6 - DECEMBER 3**

“FINE LINE ARTISITS”  
LOUISE SACKETT  
PASTEL, COLORED PENCIL  
KATHERINE TERRELL  
COLORED PENCIL  
GAYLE MASON  
COLORED PENCIL  
NICOLE CAUFIELD  
COLORED PENCIL  
VIVIAN BLACKBURN  
ACRYLIC AND OIL

**DECEMBER 4 - DECEMBER 31**

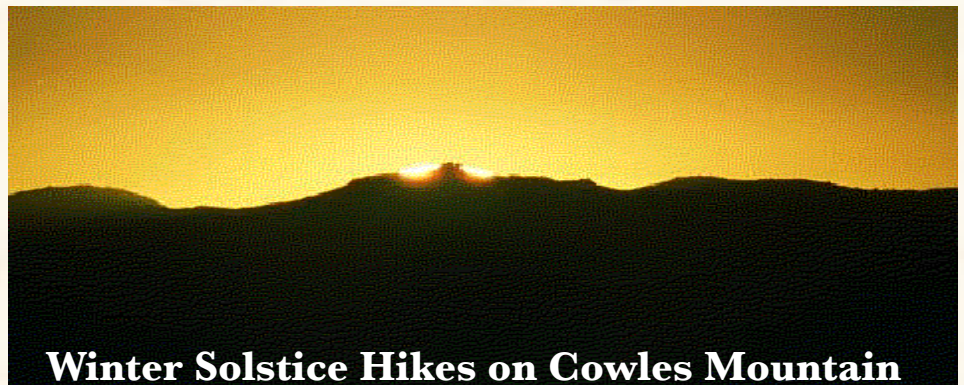
“THREE PERSON SHOW”  
ANN SLATER  
WATERCOLOR  
MARK SMITH  
OIL  
LINDA GILBREATH  
WATERCOLOR

**Nest Box, continued from p. 3**

Twenty boxes were reused compared to only three in the 2009 nesting season. Many birds return to nest in their birthplace and thus most of the Ash-throateds seen in the park fledged here in previous years, returning from their wintering grounds in Baja and Central Mexico.

For the second year Western Bluebirds did not use the boxes around the Visitor’s Center but we have hopes they will return in 2011. Our nest boxes will be cleaned and awaiting them.

The MTRP Bird Nest Box Project needs volunteers to help out during next spring’s nesting season. Volunteers are assigned different nest boxes throughout the park, which they are responsible for monitoring on a weekly basis (from March through July). If interested, please contact Ranger Heidi, at (619) 668-3279.



**Winter Solstice Hikes on Cowles Mountain**

**Time:** 6:00 a.m. on Monday, December 20; Tuesday, December 21; and Wednesday, December 22, 2010.

**Starting Point:** Trailhead adjacent to the parking lot at Golfcrest Dr. & Navajo Rd.

**Description:** The Mission Trails Regional Park Trail Guides will lead pre-dawn hikes to the area of the solstice observatory on Cowles Mountain on the 20th and 22nd of December. The Canyoneers of the San Diego Natural History Museum will lead the hike on the 21st. The solstice site is approximately one mile up the trail. The age of the site is unknown. It is known that the Kumeyaay used similar sites in Southern California. For all three hikes, we hope to see the rising sun split by a peak on the eastern horizon. The ascent will be in the dark. Good shoes and a flashlight are recommended. These hikes continue to be among the most popular events in the park. A word of caution for anyone joining the hikes or hiking on their own: there is danger of eye damage if you stare directly at the sun. You can observe the sunrise safely for a very few seconds through narrow slits (such as between your fingers held together) or smoked glass. Plan on a two-hour hike.

**Groups, continued from back page**

**FBI – Evidence Response Team**

On June 17, 2010 in partnership with Mission Trails Regional Park Rangers, the FBI Evidence Response Team (ERT) and San Diego Sheriff's Crime Scene personnel conducted a field training exercise at Mission Trails Regional Park. The ERT is the FBI's equivalent of CSI. Twenty-one members of the FBI ERT participated in the exercise which was staged at the Equestrian Staging Area.

**Animal Rescue Team**

On June 20, 2010 in partnership with Mission Trails Regional Park Rangers, members of the Technical Rescue Team from the San Diego Humane Society and SPCA's Animal Rescue Reserve (ARR) took part in a rescue training exercise at Mission Trails Regional Park. ARR was organized by the San Diego Humane Society and SPCA after the Laguna Fire of 1970 so that animal could be safely evacuated from dangerous situations

**Scouts**

On July 10, 2010 boys and leaders from combined Cub Scout Packs 306, 370, and 399 convened at Mission Trails Regional Park for their third round of service to the park. Two boys and four adults worked for three hours filling and placing 90 to 100 sediment bags along the Grassland River Crossing and Grasslands Loop Trail to prevent erosion and applied water run-off control measures.

**And More High School Students**

On August 4, 2010 eleven High-School and Jr. High students from Recycled Youth Group of Calvary Chapel El Centro, CA came to Mission Trails Regional Park for a morning of community service. The project was put together as part of the youth group's Summer Camp. With a theme of "An Outward Faith Should Be...", community service was a natural focus of the camp.



# GIFT SHOP

## WE LOVE PUPPETS

Puppets are not only cuddly and soft they are also great fun to play with, giving children the opportunity to express themselves through creative play. They are educational and can provide a link to research on various animals and their lives and habitats.

In the Mission Trails Gift Shop we have a wide selection of high quality animal puppets from FOLKMANIS, a California company in Emeryville that has led the world of puppets for decades. Their puppets are cleverly and safely constructed, manufactured to higher standards than required by law. Purchasers can always know that their Folkmanis puppet is the very best available.

Happily, they make many puppets that represent our animal neighbors in Mission Trails Regional Park, from the Coyote and Bobcat to the ever-popular Tarantula. Better still, many of our puppets match beautifully with some of our excellent children's books from "Way Out West Lives a Coyote named Frank" to "An Interview With A Tarantula" wherein Katydid from radio station KBUG asks a tarantula questions about his abilities and life style. Our newest puppet is the Pack Rat, a jolly fellow who is ready to hike the trails of Mission Gorge, with his removeable backpack filled with water and healthy trail snacks. Watch for him both in the gift shop and on the trail.

In addition to the large puppets we also carry a vast selection of Folkmanis finger puppets, reasonably priced to please the pocket while delighting small hands. We invite you to visit the gift shop and become acquainted with our fuzzy friends. We are sure you will find that adults love puppets, too.

## Save the Dates

### October 16 and 17

Enjoy the art of decoy, fish and wildlife carving presented by the Pacific Southwest Wildlife Arts, Inc. This two day event will include carvings by world champion wildlife wood carvers.

### October 24, 3:00 to 4:00 pm

The second fall/winter concert will be on in the Visitor Center Amphitheater featuring the Silver Wood Music Ensemble. This versatile ensemble will be performing up-beat American and Celtic music.

### STAR PARTY

With George Varga

### November 13, 5:00 pm - 8:00 pm

The Moon will be waxing and be at First Quarter. Jupiter will be high up in the South. The Andromeda Galaxy (M31) and its companion M32 are well in position for viewing. Come out and view these two objects whose light takes about 2.5 – 2.9 million years to reach Earth!

### December 11, 5:00 pm - 8:00 pm

The Moon is waxing and almost at First Quarter. Jupiter will be high in the Southern sky tonight. Views of the Andromeda Galaxy (M31) and its companion M32 should be wonderful. Also up for viewing are the Pleiades, the Double Cluster in Perseus.



## Notable Donations

July 1 – September 30

### Steward

\$5,000 - \$10,000

### Patron

\$2,500 - \$4,999

### Founder

\$1,000 - \$2,499

Thomas Springer

### Trailblazer

\$500-\$999

Pat Abbott

### Path Finder

\$100-\$499

Lynn Baer -  
in memory of Bradley Baer  
Barbara and Michael Carr

Bill Casper

Peter Cuthbert Trust

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Mary Jo Grubbs

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Howard Runk

Stephen Seaborg

Dan and Katie Sullivan

Mr. & Mrs. Leonard Trentacosta

George & Nancy Varga

Mark & Robin Wade

Joy Winter

### Business Donors

AT&T

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Ideal Plumbing

# Mission Trails Regional Park Donor Opportunities

*By Donating to Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation, you are preserving the past and investing in the future.*

Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation provides opportunities for individuals, businesses, community organization, and foundations to support a variety of programs and projects within the park. Community support is important too ensure adequate funding to maintain the award winning Mission Trails Regional Park Visitor and Interpretive Center and the multiple amenities the park has to offer.

Special event and project sponsorships are also available. Sponsorship for Explore Mission Trails Day, an annual event held each May, range from \$500 to \$5,000. Exhibit sponsorships begin at \$2,500. Bench and table sponsorships range from \$1,500 to \$4,000 depending upon the item and location in the Park. Call Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation at 619-668-3280 for additional information.

Names of contributors of \$1,000 or more will be engraved on the donor board displayed at the Visitor and Interpretive Center. Yearly donations of \$100 or more are accumulated from year-to-year for donor recognition purposes.

## Become a Business Friend of Mission Trails

Business Donors making contributions of \$100 to \$500 are eligible for a web site link from the Mission Trails web site for a period of six months. Business Donors making contributions of \$500 and above are eligible for a period of one year.

**Our Funds ...** You may designate your donation for one or more of the following funds:

- Friends of Mission Trails* - General support for all Park programs.
- Trail Maintenance*
- Tree and Habitat Maintenance*
- Education Programs*
- Library Books and Supplies*
- Lake Murray*
- Endowment Funds*
  - General Endowment Fund*
  - Library Endowment Fund*

## Other ways you may donate ...

- Memorial or In Honor of Gifts** - Honor a friend or family member with a donation.
- Matching Funds** - Identify Mission trails Regional Park (MTRP) Foundation for a matching funds contribution if your employer has a policy of matching charitable gifts.
- Gifts of Securities** - To allow donors to realize full tax deductions for appreciated stock, MTRP Foundation accepts gifts of stock. Call 619-668-3280 for further details.
- Wills** - Remember MTRP Foundation in your will.
- Charitable Remainder Trusts** - With a CRT, highly appreciated assets are placed in an irrevocable trust. Those asset proceeds provide income to the donor and/or the donor's beneficiaries for life. Contact your financial advisor for information.

### Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation, Inc. One Father Junipero Serra Trail, San Diego, CA 92119-1008

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Business Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

You may designate your donation for one or more of the following funds. Please indicate the amount.

Friend of Mission Trails - General support for all Mission Trails programs and projects. \$ \_\_\_\_\_

MTRP Foundation Endowment Fund - Earnings used for programs and projects..... \_\_\_\_\_

**Special Funds**

Education Program Fund - Funds used for education program..... \_\_\_\_\_

Library Fund - Books and supplies for the library..... \_\_\_\_\_

Library Endowment Fund - Earnings used for books and supplies for the library. \_\_\_\_\_

Trail Maintenance - Trail maintenance and improvement projects..... \_\_\_\_\_

Tree and Habitat Maintenance - To help maintain the park's habitat..... \_\_\_\_\_

Lake Murray - Special projects at Lake Murray..... \_\_\_\_\_

Total Donation - Make check payable to MTRP Foundation and mail to address above..... \$ \_\_\_\_\_

- Donor Levels**

  - \$25 Individual
  - \$50 Family
  - \$100 Pathfinder
  - \$500 Trailblazer
  - \$1,000 Founder
  - \$2,500 Patron
  - \$5,000 Steward
  - \$10,000 Sponsor
  - \$25,000 Benefactor
  - \$50,000 Trustee
  - \$100,000 Director

Charge my donation to VISA \_\_\_\_\_ MC \_\_\_\_\_ Card No. \_\_\_\_\_ Expiration Date \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

Card holder's signature \_\_\_\_\_

**To donate online, visit our web site at [mtrp.org/donors.asp](http://mtrp.org/donors.asp)**

*MTRP Foundation staff use only: Date of check \_\_\_\_\_ Check # \_\_\_\_\_ Database \_\_\_\_\_ Letter \_\_\_\_\_ Newsletter \_\_\_\_\_ Web \_\_\_\_\_*



**Mission Trails  
Regional Park Foundation**

One Father Junipero Serra Trail  
San Diego, CA 92119

Non-Profit  
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San Diego, CA  
Permit No. 658

Visitor and Interpretive Center: 619-668-3281  
MTRP Foundation: 619-668-3280  
Email: [mtrp@mtrp.org](mailto:mtrp@mtrp.org)  
Web Site: [mtrp.org](http://mtrp.org)

**Address Service Requested**

**Mission Trails Regional Park News  
Volume 21, Number 4, Fall**

*Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation, Inc., established January 1988, is a non-profit public benefit corporation organized for the purpose of preserving, improving and maintaining Mission Trails Regional Park.*

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*Editor: Roland Roberge*

A COPY OF THIS AND PAST NEWSLETTERS ARE AVAILABLE ONLINE: [mtrp.org/newsletter.asp](http://mtrp.org/newsletter.asp)

## User And Volunteer Groups Enhance Our Park

Numerous groups come to the park to perform volunteer activities or training exercises, which help the park and the community. For information call Ranger Mel Naidas, 619-668-3277, or email [mnaidas@mtrp.org](mailto:mnaidas@mtrp.org).

### High School Students

On July 29 and August 4, 2010 eight High-School and Jr. High students with Ms. Biersbach from The Preuss School UCSD, CA sponsored by Surf N' Serve came to Mission Trails Regional Park donating two hours of their time to a community service of Erosion Control and Prevention Measures on Father Junipero Serra Trail and Kumeyaay Lake/Campground. The students on July 29, 2010 with smiles and the grimaces of hard work removed over 100 deteriorated gravel bags along Father Junipero Serra Trail and disseminated the gravel evenly along the side of the road.

*Groups, continued on p. 5*

