

The Resourceful Burrowing Owl

By Roland Roberge

My first encounter with burrowing owls was along a road near the Salton Sea. I was amazed at their small size and the fact they were standing on the ground. All the owls I had been familiar with before were large birds who spent most of their time in trees or in flight. What intrigued me most however, was the fact that they lived in a hole in the ground. At the time, my ignorance led me to believe they actually dug their own burrow, recently I found this to not always be true.

The, apparent, misnomer of burrowing owl may cause one to believe they always dig their own house. Perhaps the first English speaking settlers, who saw and named the owls, thought they did. But, burrowing can refer to any animal that lives in a burrow, whether or not they actually created it. These owls will inhabit just about any hole they can find; small tunnels created by ground squirrels as well as drainage pipes put in by humans. Also, they will enlarge the cavity, if possible. They will only dig their own burrow if the ground is soft enough to excavate and there are no other cavities nearby. The main reason they live in a burrow is due to their early migration to grasslands, deserts and other open areas with low growing vegetation.

Burrowing Owl, continued on p. 4



Photo by Mike Wilson

**A Message From
Executive Director
Jay Wilson**

Visit Mission Trails for a spectacular hike up Cowles Mountain or a family walk down to Old Mission Dam, and don't forget to stop by the Visitor Center. Fine art and great music continue to enhance the sensory experience visitors enjoy as they tour the MTRP Visitor Center each and every month.

Our free concerts are the third Sunday of each month at 3 pm in the Visitor Center Theater. The second Saturday of the month, you may find a hands-on "Discovery Table" and for children, there is a fun-filled scavenger hunt available at the front counter.

We made a valiant effort to convince the City of San Diego to keep Kumeyaay Campground open for Friday and Saturday night camping and operating on a break-even basis. We were not successful. As of September 5, the gates to the campground swung shut for overnight camping. Kumeyaay Campground is open seven days a week for day-use.

Linda Hawley's "Nature Adventure!" classed for children three and up are underway for the 2011 school year. Additional information is available on our website at www.mtrp.org.

The MTRP Visitor Center is a unique location for a daytime business retreat for up to 65 people. For a private evening event for your business, nonprofit, or association, we can accommodate up to 350. The Visitor Center, and the 4,000 square foot Terrace overlooking the Mission Gorge, provide a truly memorable experience. For more booking information, go online to mtrp.org/booking.asp. You may also call Roland Roberge in the MTRP Foundation office at 619.668.3280.

We are continually updating our facebook page and we have new topical photo albums: butterflies and bugs, reptiles, landscapes, and flora and fauna. Like us on facebook and upload your favorite photographs into one of our albums.

Farewell



Senior Ranger Rick Thompson Retires

In September, Senior Ranger Rick Thompson retired from the City of San Diego after a 12 year career with the city's Park and Recreation Department. Rick was first here as a Ranger from 1999 to 2003. He returned as the Senior Ranger from March 2010 to September, 2011. As the Senior Ranger, Rick was instrumental in implementing the restoration of the Cowles Mountain Trail. Rick now has the time to enjoy his passion for surfing.

Welcome



**Matt Sanford Joins Mission Trails
as the New Senior Ranger**

A warm welcome for Matt Sanford, the new Senior Ranger. Matt joined the Mission Trails staff on October 1. He has been in the recreation industry for over 10 years, and the past four years as a Ranger for the city's Otay Valley Regional Park. Matt is a graduate of SDSU where he earned a bachelor's degree in Outdoor Recreation Management. Matt and his wife Andrea became parents for the first time on September 29, when they welcomed their new daughter, Keira, into the world. He takes multiple trips each year to Yosemite and the Sierras. Matt also enjoys playing soccer and playing and listening to music.

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**Find us on
Facebook**



Christmas in the Gift Shop

By Gift Shop Manager Patty O'Reilly

As the holiday season approaches, please remember the Mission Trails Gift Shop when you are doing your gift planning. We have a wonderful selection of books on history, geology, wildlife, and plants, as well as a nice selection of children's books that focus on the natural world.

We also carry a broad selection of Folkmanis puppets, featuring the animals of Mission Trails, some of which go nicely with some of our books. We particularly recommend our coyote puppet and "Way Out West Lives a Coyote Named Frank" and our tarantula finger puppet that goes well with "An Interview With a Tarantula".

Be sure to check out "Nico the Gnatcatcher and the Upside Down River" for an astonishing local book, written, illustrated, and published by 47 middle school students at San Diego's High Tech Middle Media Arts.

There are walking sticks from Whistle Creek in Colorado, Brazos Walking Sticks from Texas, and walking sticks made locally by Jim May of Lakeside.

If you are tall or small there will be one just for you.

For authentic Native American items from rattles to hand fashioned baskets and pots, we are your source. Our beautiful pots come from the Pai Pai Kumeyaay of Baja California and are outstanding examples of how lovely and useful items can be fashioned from humble materials.

For low cost stocking stuffers we have a wide variety of small toys that will please the youngsters while being easy on the wallet. We will have Fundanas to shade your head and neck from the sun, playing cards that teach about local birds and mammals, stones and arrowheads, for the young collector. And be sure to purchase one of our large color trail maps of the park, filled with detailed information on all our points of interest.

Please visit the MTRP Gift Shop web page at mtrp.org/gift_shop.asp for photos and more information on some of the choices. We look forward to seeing you during the holiday season.

2012 Trail Guide Class



First of all, what IS an MTRP Trail Guide? It is a special volunteer trained to lead interpretive nature walks throughout the park, for both the general public as well as organized groups. Each year MTRP conducts a training program for people interested in learning about the natural and cultural history of the park and sharing that knowledge with the public.

The curriculum covers ecology, botany, geology, history, birds, mammals, reptiles, insects, Kumeyaay culture and more! This 10-week program involves a three-hour classroom session every Wednesday evening, from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m., and a three-hour field study session on Saturday mornings, from 8:30 to 11:30 a.m.

The 2012 Trail Guide Training program begins in January and runs through March. Please note there is a \$25 materials fee due at the Orientation, which is scheduled for Saturday, January 9th, at 8:30 a.m. Space is limited in this once-a-year training, so please sign up early. For further information, please contact Ranger Heidi at hgutknecht@mtrp.org or (619) 668-3279.



Photo by Wendy Esterly

Winter Solstice Hikes on Cowles Mountain

The Mission Trails Regional Park Trail Guides will lead pre-dawn hikes to the area of the solstice observatory on Cowles Mountain on the 21st and 23rd of December. The Canyoneers of the San Diego Natural History Museum will lead the hike on the 22nd. 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.

Time: 6:00 a.m. December 21, Thursday, December 22 and Friday, December 23, 2011.

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

Burrowing Owl, *continued from p. 1*

Never having seen the owls this side of the mountains, I assumed their range was more into the desert to the east, and was recently made aware their range extended to the coast, north to San Francisco and south along Baja. The reason we see no burrowing owls in San Diego is due to habitat loss. Even in an open space park like Mission Trails, this species is lacking. Fortunately, various organizations are working on introducing the owl back into San Diego County open space land.

Although often active during the day, they do most of their hunting from dusk to dawn in order to take advantage of their excellent night vision. They will perch on any raised elevation, such as a boulder or fence post, in order to have a better vantage point for spotting prey. Being a smallish bird, they will eat smaller prey, including insects and smaller rodents. Unlike the larger raptors, they will often chase their prey, on foot, along the ground. They have also been known to eat fruits and seeds, including the fruit of the prickly pear and cholla cactus.

Let us hope that some day the burrowing owl will return to Mission Trails so we can better appreciate this resourceful little creature. If you should ever be fortunate enough to run across a burrowing owl within the park, please inform our park staff immediately.

Nest Boxes, *continued from rear cover*

A highlight this year was a first-time nest box use by a pair of Barn Owls living near Kumeyaay Lake. While largely unobserved while nesting, the pair successfully reared about six owlets. Inspection of their abandoned "nest" revealed about a half inch of fur and bones covering the floor of their box, residue from when owls regurgitate indigestible parts of their food. Baby owls are always hungry, consuming dozens of rodents every night and in the process decorating their home with discards.

Nesting success usually varies from year to year; however, this year's bird production was comparable to 2010 with eight Bewick's Wrens, 210 House Wrens, 58 Ash-throated Flycatchers and a dozen Tree Swallows fledging. Tree Swallows have used our boxes only in the past three years even though they commonly nest in hollow limbs atop trees along the San Diego River.

Just as each bird species has a distinct shape and unique coloration, their eggs and nests are also very different. Each species also has a preferred nesting period between early March and late June with Bewick's Wrens nesting the earliest followed by House Wrens and finally Ash-throated Flycatchers which are active into early summer.

Since birds abandon their nest once the young fledge, monitors dutifully remove old nests thereby allowing box reuse. Careful monitoring enables as many as three or four pairs of birds to occupy the same house in a single nesting season.

Creatures other than birds find our nest boxes to be convenient homes. Larger boxes, sized to accommodate Barn Owls and American Kestrels, often attract feral bee swarms that quickly establish a new colony. Since most bee swarms found in San Diego County recently carry the more aggressive Africanized bee genes, they are exterminated. Deer mice are also nest box users, building massive nests from dried grass. During spring cleaning, they are served eviction notices. However, after late June when birds have finished raising young, mice are allowed to stay and enjoy rent-free living throughout the winter. Unsuspecting monitors are often startled when opening a box only to catch a fleeting glimpse of a rodent hurling itself into space as it escapes.

Each nest tells observant monitors a story. By studying nesting materials, experienced monitors identify the species without ever seeing the occupants. Also, since egg coloration varies with the species, this provides a second identification clue. For example, Ash-throated Flycatchers construct nests using fur gathered from coyote scat and other available sources then lay creamy white eggs blotched with brown, features unique to this species. This year we found large chunks of skunk fur in two flycatcher's nest linings, probably remains of an animal eaten by a Great-horned Owl or other large predator. A wren's nest in Suycott Wash contained a Common Poorwill feather identified by its unique mottled brown coloration. Poorwills are rarely seen in the Park but often heard on

Nest Boxes, continued on p. 5



Range map from circleoflife.wikispaces.com/

Burrowing Owl with burrow by Mike Wilson



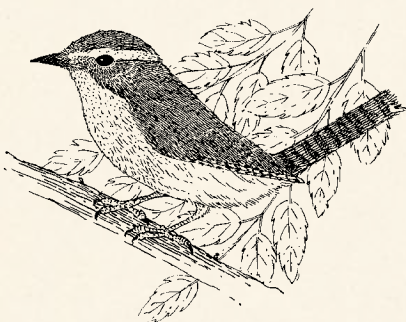
Nest Boxes, *continued from p. 4*

warm nights and the feather attests to this species' presence in Suycott Wash. Unhatched eggs sometimes remain in the nest after young fledge or, if a baby dies, a skeleton remains. These clues help us compute nesting success rates. This year monitors recorded 394 eggs laid with 288 hatching and successfully fledging (73%), a rate somewhat higher than the 65% observed in years past.

Nest failures are often caused by House Wrens who indiscriminately destroy other birds' eggs and frequently even those of another wren. Rachel Borders who monitors six boxes along the San Diego River, reported eight nesting attempts where eggs were laid in a completed nest. However, on later visits she found all the eggs were either missing or abandoned, almost certainly the work of territorial House Wrens. Several nests failed after they were invaded by ants, causing the adults to abandon their eggs or babies, leaving them to feed a stream of hungry ants.

In spite of these challenges and disappointment, most volunteers plan to return in 2012 to experience new surprises and joys. After turning in her monitoring records for 2011 Terry Hurst said, "My experience was a heart-warming one that is very tough to put into words. The high point was seeing my first Ash-throated Flycatcher chick. That took my breath way."

People interested in participating in next year's Nest Box Project should contact Ranger Heidi at (619) 668-3279.



Volunteers from Lake Murray Community Church in La Mesa

Lake Murray Community Church Service Project

On Sunday, August 28th, though the heat was blazing, twenty-eight willing souls ventured to the Tierrasanta side of Mission Trails Regional Park to volunteer their time and support by brushing off several voluntary trails and planting native vegetation. These highly motivated individuals of all ages came together representing Lake Murray Community Church in La Mesa (LMCC). The Outreach Pastor, Seth, and Ranger Mel Naidas were pleased with the great work the group accomplished on such a hot day that Mother Nature provided. Mission Trails Regional Park has many authorized trails, but sometimes people trail blaze in places that have fragile habitats. The group was able to eliminate some of this unauthorized trail activity. They moved

and placed native brush disguising the trail as if it was never there and planted native vegetation to enhance the area of destruction. Rocks were also gathered and staged in certain locations along a fence line that was in need of repairs.

The volunteers from Lake Murray Community Church were able to do their tasks with the blessing of a breeze. After all was said and done, several people look forward to doing more work at MTRP in the future.

We at LMCC are grateful for the opportunity to serve and are glad that this is becoming a tradition within our faith community. All people have the responsibility to take care of creation, and we are happy to help in any way possible.

Arbor Day in Mission Trails

This year's Arbor Day is being celebrated at the picnic area near the entrance to the Visitor and Interpretive Center parking lot driveway, December 3, 2011, 9:00 a.m. The public is invited to take part in the donation and/or planting of Engleman Oak trees and other native plants. Volunteers may help with the planting, or act as cheerleaders. Volunteers are also needed to help with general landscape maintenance of the area. Some shovels will be available, but it would be helpful if you could bring your own. Gloves and comfortable shoes are recommended. To make a donation, please complete and mail the Arbor Day Donation Form, accessible at the Visitor Center, on-line at mtrp.org, or call 619-668-3280.

VISITOR CENTER ART EXHIBITS

October 8 – November 4, 2011

Reception: Sunday, October 9,
1:00 – 4:00 p.m.

Paradise Textile Artists:

Kathleen McCabe

Noreen Ring

Lori Anderson

Heather Urquhart

Mary Tabar

Barbara E. Friedman

Janice Pennington

November 5 – December 2, 2011

Reception: Sunday, November 6,
1:00 – 4:00 p.m.

Eileen Mandell Photography

December 3 - 30, 2011

Group Show

Shant Beudjekian, Oil and Acrylic

Loretta Deczynski, Multi-Media

Pat Silver, Multi-Media

Vita Sorrentino, Watercolor and
Acrylic

Wilma Lopez, Encaustic

Pamela York, Photography

January 1 – 20, 2012

Group Show

Diane Burch, Watercolor

Greg Red Elk, Acrylic

Karen Howard, Pastel

Kathleen McCabe, Fabric

Kalju Kotka, Photography

John Sabin, Oil

Wilma Lopez, Mixed Media

Upcoming Events at Mission Trails

**Star Party
with George Varga
Returns**

This popular evening out with the family has returned for another season of star gazing.

*Saturdays, November 12,
December 17 and January 14.*

**Pacific Southwest
Wildlife Arts, Inc.**

Several world-class wildlife wood carvers will be at the Visitor Center to display and demonstrate their craft.

*Saturday, November 19,
11:00 am to 3:00 pm*

Free Sunday Concerts

The San Diego Cello Choir
November 20

Pomerado Brass Quintet
December 18

Flute concerts every second Sunday

Work Crews Return

Habitat Restoration Crew
Second Saturday of the month

Trail Improvement Crew
Third Saturday of the month

Park Beautification Crew
Fourth Saturday of the month

To view details on these and other events at Mission Trails Regional Park, visit our events calendar.

mtrp.org/events.asp

Notable Donations

July 1 – September 30, 2011

Steward - \$5,000 to 10,000

City of San Diego -

SpecialPromotion program

County of San Diego -

Community Enhancement Program

Founder - \$1,000 to \$2,499

Alan Hunter

Arthur & Ruth Savage

Judith Springer -

in memory of Arthur Springer

Kiwanis Club of Tierrasanta

Trailblazer - \$500 to \$999

Dreamin' Inc.

Soroptimist International of San Diego

Path Finder - \$100 - \$499

Lynn Baer -

in memory of Brad Baer

Susan & Richard Braun

Curtis Carlson

Ted Daub

Heartland Coalition and

East County Magazine

Patricia Knobloch & Bruce Harley

Lindsay and Dianne Hill

Ideal Plumbing and Heating

Henry & Shirley Mann

Jim and Suzan McNeil

Jodi Roisman

Stephen Seaborg

Team Northcutt Realtors

Luann & Brian Wright

Special Dates to Remember

Explore Mission Trails Day

Saturday, May 19, 2012

Come and see what all the
fun is about.

Photo Contest

Friday, April 27, 2012

This year's annual photo contest deadline is coming up fast. If you haven't yet done so, bring your camera to the park and start taking pictures.

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 organizations, and foundations to support a variety of programs and projects within the park. Community support is important to 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. Sponsorships 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 its location in the park. Contact Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation at 619-668-3280 or mtrp@mtrp.org 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.

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.

Contact 619-668-3280 or mtrp@mtrp.org for further details.

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.

Friends 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 library books and supplies..... _____

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

Mtrp Foundation staff use only: Date of check _____ Check# _____ Database _____ Letter _____ Newsletter _____ Web _____



**Mission Trails
Regional Park Foundation**

One Father Junipero Serra Trail
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Mission Trails Regional Park News is a publication of the Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation, Inc., published four times a year.

Roland Roberge, Editor.

A COPY OF THIS AND PAST NEWSLETTERS ARE AVAILABLE ONLINE: mtrp.org/newsletter.asp

Barn Owls Confirmed Nesting at Mission Trails

by Volunteer Richard Griebe

Spring nesting season calls Mission Trails Regional Park Nest Box Project volunteers into action to monitor the 94 nest boxes or “bird houses” used by the Park’s cavity-nesting birds. Birds, animals and insects all compete for these scarce resources. Decaying trees that might otherwise provide natural nest sites are removed since they pose a danger to Park users but shortchange birds that nest in hollow tree cavities. Many of the fourteen volunteers who participated this year have been involved for several years and a few started twelve years ago at the project’s inception. Volunteers return each year to experience the excitement of finding surprises in each nest box and the joy of knowing they played a small part in helping the next generation of birds come into being.



Nest Box project Volunteers: front row from left: Rachael Borders, Daniece Moden, Wendy Esterly, Nancy Brophy; back row from left: Richard Griebe, Maulik Trivedi, Doug Fenske, Jeanne Raimond, Terry Hurst, Terry Esterly, Betty Mathews. Not pictured: Dawn Rucker, Debbie Giambuzzi, Ann Sixtus

Nest Boxes, continued on p. 4