President’s Message

What a winter this has been. After cleaning up from the aftermath of the stormy season, I hope you are looking forward to a beautiful spring and summer in the parks. I’m very happy to introduce this edition of our newsletter with a warm welcome to five new Directors on our Board - Eric Schmidt, Mike Kahn, Mujtaba Ghouse, Brian Smartt and Craig Vent. I am also pleased to welcome our new group of Volunteers, who have completed their training and are ready to help visitors on the trails and in the visitor center. I want to extend a thank you to everyone who participated in the Earth Day projects, and a special tribute to our recently retired Board member Judy Grote. Finally, I hope you enjoy the two articles written by Dianthe Skurko and Rose Nelson for this edition. Thank you for your continued support, and I hope to see you on the trails!
--James Rauen

PCRF Sponsored Earth Day Parks Clean-up at Portola Redwoods and Castle Rock State Parks

The Portola and Castle Rock Foundation sponsored a successful clean-up in both our parks on Earth Day 2017. PCRF Director Tracy Schwartz applied and obtained a generous grant from The California State Parks Foundation gave to purchase tools and material. Peet’s donated coffee, and Trader Joes in Cupertino donated snacks. PCRF Members and Directors took part, along with volunteers who signed up through the California Parks Foundation Earth-day website. The weather cooperated and it was a pleasant day in both parks.

Portola Redwoods State Park

In Portola Redwoods State Park, the main effort was cleaning up and repairing the campgrounds after the long rainy winter to prepare for the June 1 opening. The campground is closed during the winter months, so the debris resulting from the entire season of heavy rain had accumulated in the sites and on the roads. Park employees supervised and worked alongside teams of volunteers at the more than 50 campsites to create safe spaces around fire pits, tables and food lockers. Volunteers used pressure washers to clean out food lockers and trash bins. Special attention was paid to removing mud and debris from the handicap campground to ensure that it is safe and convenient for use. Volunteers also used leaf blowers, shovels and rakes to clear debris from the roads and paths in the campground. The drainage under the campsite faucets was shoveled clear to prepare for fresh gravel.

Funds from the grant provided by the State Parks Foundation had been used to purchase tools to help in the cleanup and repairs. Volunteers and park employees removed damaged wood and replaced it with new planks, and upgraded the construction in the process. Finally, the store in the Visitor’s Center was staffed to sell clothing, books and other convenience items to visitors and volunteers.
Castle Rock State Park

In all, 18 volunteers (some from as far as the East Bay) came to Castle Rock State Park to clean graffiti. The lead Ranger Tyler Knapp gave an initial safety briefing and Chief Park Aid Kenny Husin trained volunteers on the various graffiti-removal tools and equipment which included power drills (grinders), sanding blocks, chemical wipes and “goop”, along with a self-contained power washer (Eco-Blaster).

Volunteers split into three crews. One group went down to the bench and bridge on the Saratoga Gap Trail where they sanded down the heavily tagged structures. They also cleaned up park signs along the way. A PCRF Volunteer who is also a climber lead a group down the Saratoga Gap Trail to the waterfall overlook platform which had been heavily tagged last fall. They successfully removed the unsightly graffiti from the platform and surroundings.

Ranger Knapp and Aid Husin took a group and the power washer up to the Goat Rock plateau to remove graffiti from tagged rocks. Two volunteers wearing protective Tyvek suits, masks and goggles and painted on the ‘goop’ that came with the Eco-Blaster on rocks. The power washer was then used to finish the job.

It was a beautiful day in the park, and it was great to meet the many hikers who thanked the volunteers for helping to preserve this special place. We thank all who made this Earth Day event a success.

Spring into Green – Los Gatos 23 April 2017

On April 23rd the town of Los Gatos hosted their annual “Spring into Green” celebration by combining Keep Los Gatos Beautiful Month, Earth Day and Arbor Day activities into one big, family-friendly event. The timing coincided with the weekly Sunday Farmers Market.

The Portola and Castle Rock Foundation had a fun booth at the event that stayed busy for all three hours. Kids and adults alike came over to guess what animals belong to the different skulls of wildlife found in our two Parks. On display were a skull of a hawk, a rabbit, a bobcat and a coyote. Ever so gently the visitors felt the fur of a coyote and the skin of a 6 ft. long Diamond Back Rattlesnake skin!

Visitors were informed about our Foundation and the easy way to support Portola Redwoods and Castle Rock State Parks. It was explained how becoming a member of PCRF gives our Foundation the ability to fund infrastructure improvements, educational programs and volunteer training.

Sign up today by 1) Mailing a completed membership brochure or 2) By logging onto www.portolaandcastlerockfound.org.

Look for our Portola and Castle Rock Foundation booth next year as we celebrate environmental consciousness while listening to fabulous music in the Park and purchasing local fruits, vegetables and gourmet food.
Volunteer Training for 2017

During the April and May, Santa Cruz District State Parks trained a new batch of Volunteers who are now Docents and Wilderness Patrol.

The Docents were trained to enhance visitor experiences in both Castle Rock and Portola Redwoods State Parks. The Portola and Castle Rock Foundation helped sponsor the training. New interpretive programs to introduce school groups to the natural beauty of these parks are being developed. Docents will also help in Portola by hosting the Visitor Center and the PCRF store the proceeds from which support capital and educational projects in the Parks.

The Wilderness Patrol Volunteers will initially support the Park staff at Castle Rock, Rancho del Oso and Nissan Marks State Parks. These volunteers will enhance visitor experiences through interpretive hikes including natural and human history of the parks and helping park staff locate and clear potential trail hazards.

The Portola and Castle Rock Foundation welcomes these individuals whose invaluable help will contribute to the Parks outreach and enhance the visitors experience. For more information: portolaandcastlerockfound.org

Portola and Castle Rock Foundation Salutes Judy Grote

In December, Judy Grote stepped down after over twenty years leading the Portola and Castle Rock Foundation. Her many years of Park support were honored at the most recent Portola and Castle Rock Foundation Annual Member Meeting.

During her two and a half decades of State Parks support, Judy contributed in many ways. She served on the Board of Directors for nearly twenty years and served as President for many years. Most recently Judy provided critical organization and supervision of the Visitor Center store at Portola Redwoods State Park. As a trained California State Parks volunteer, she hiked many miles on the trails of Portola Redwoods State Park as a Trail Ambassador, greeting and guiding park visitors.

Judy logged more volunteer hours over recent years than any other volunteer at Portola Redwoods and Castle Rock State Parks. In addition to her long stewardship of State Parks, Judy has been President of the Board of the South Skyline Association and in leadership of the local water company. A UCLA graduate, Judy managed a worldwide engineering lab for a global technology leader where her focus was on virtual machines, transaction monitors and database systems for both large and mobile devices. Judy lives with her husband Ingemar and their animal family in La Honda near Portola Redwoods State Park.

You may run into Judy hiking the trails of Portola Redwoods State Park!
Trail Running in Castle Rock

By Dianthe Skurko, Castle Rock, Portola Redwoods, and Big Basin State Parks Volunteer

After a wet winter in the Santa Cruz Mountains, with almost record breaking rain levels, May has opened up to clear, blue skies with lots of sun. And because I’m tired of running in nothing but mud the last 3 months, I grabbed my running shoes and headed to my favorite trails at Castle Rock State Park. On this day, I was planning on a 19 mile loop run and seeking solitude. Because the main entrance to the park has been closed due to mudslides, I parked at the Skyline to the Sea trailhead where Hwy 9 and Hwy 236 meet. Knowing that a brilliant, sunny, weekend day would bring out the masses, I arrived early, just before 7am, and was rewarded with, mostly, empty trails. And, mostly, silence and solitude as well. But as I went off down the familiar trails, I thought of the storms, and the rain, and the chaos they caused my community. I thought of the mountain roads peppered with potholes large enough for an adult person to hide in, of the houses that were lost due to mudslides. Knowing there was too much room in my head for thinking of the difficulties left us by Winter, I decided instead to concentrate on the beauty around me, which is easy because beauty is everywhere at Castle Rock.

Here’s a little of what I saw: a Peregrine Falcon drafting on the wind then dropping down in a spectacular stoop; two Mountain Quail swiftly slipping through the brush in response to my quick steps; blue skies over the tree-covered Santa Cruz Mountain ridges and peaks all the way to the Monterey Bay; a sleeping baby in a backpack; a turkey vulture making wobbly circles in the sky; yellow blossoms on the Scotch broom; Pileated Woodpeckers whacking at a dead tree; Douglas firs moaning as their leaves catch the morning breeze; Orange Crowned Warblers singing their sweet song; two giggling girls nervously looking over the edge of Goat Rock; a Sage Sparrow’s nest in the chaparral; rock climbers scaling the waterfall; an Allen’s Hummingbird swinging like a pendulum; Pinto Violets, Western Thimbleberry, Fernald’s Iris, Stinging Lupine, and Yerba Santa; a Stellar Jay agitatedly squawking; a father and son learning their new GPS device; a trail sign guiding me to turn uphill at the next junction; a downed log covered in green moss; blue skies, clear views, and a bright world opening to the day ahead.

Animal of the month: Hummingbird

By Rose Nelson, Parks Interpreter

Hummingbirds are one of my favorite animals to watch in the parks. They are so small, yet so tenacious. The Rumsien Ohlone have a story that exemplifies their courageous traits...

**Adapted from “How Hummingbird Got Fire” A Rumsien Ohlone Story as told by Linda Yamane

Once, a very long time ago, the oceans of the world rose higher and higher until they covered the land. The Eagle and Hummingbird stood together on a mountain top surveying the destruction in great sadness. Eagle decided he would use his magic to heal the world. And so, he worked feverishly to dry up the waters. Then, he became very hungry. There was food to be found, but they needed fire to cook with. Eagle knew the one place where fire could be found, and he sent his little nephew Hummingbird to get it from the Badger People underground. The Badger people refused to share. “Cover the fire!” they shouted when they saw Hummingbird. They hid their fire by covering it over with a deer skin. But the deer skin had a hole in it, where an arrow had gone through. Hummingbird reached in with his long narrow beak. He took out a hot ember and carried it away. Before he could put it safely into his armpit, it flamed, turning his throat brilliant red. That is why Hummingbird has a red throat. And that is how there came to be fire in the world again.
Allen’s Hummingbird with the fiery red throat also known as a ‘gorget’

Photo by: Alan Wilson

The napoleon-esque attitude of the hummingbird is not the only reason they have captured the curiosity of many. It seems as though every aspect, from flight to food, is an intriguing facet of these animals.

So, where to begin with these creatures? Let’s consider the story of how they got their iridescent neck plumage, aka, their gorget. Was it fire? Or maybe the fire has presented itself in some other way... The pigmentation in the feathers is made up of prism-like cells within the top layers of the feathers. When sunlight hits these cells, it is split into wavelengths that reflect back to the observer. By merely shifting position, feather regions of a muted-looking bird can instantly become fiery red or vivid green. This quick transition of appearance can be best seen during their unique flying abilities.

These birds get their name from the humming sound created by their rapidly beating wings. Hummingbirds flap their wings at a rate of 50-200 times per second and travel at a speed of 34mph!! Wowza! This takes a heart rate 1,200 beats per minute and a respiratory rate of 250 breaths per minute to sustain their flight. Compare that to human’s average heart rate of 60 to 100 beats per minute and a respiratory rate of 12 to 20 breaths per minute.

How do they have enough energy to sustain their extremely active existence?!?

They eat a ton! Hummingbirds have to eat ½ of its weight in sugar daily and will feed 5-8 times per hour. They mostly eat nectar, but will also eat small insects, spiders, sip on tree sap or juice from broken fruits. The nectar they forage usually comes from very specific flowers that are in shades of red, orange and bright pink. These flowers reflect colors that are near-ultraviolet that hummingbirds can detect, but insects may not.

These flowers produce weaker nectar, but it contains a high proportion of sucrose, whereas insect-pollinated flowers typically produce more concentrated nectars dominated by fructose and glucose. Hummingbirds digest natural sucrose in 20 minutes with 97 percent efficiency for converting the sugar into energy.

So what happens if they cannot find enough food? The hummingbirds enter a hibernation-line deep sleep state known as torpor. The body temperature falls, heart and breathing rates also slow dramatically. During torpor the birds will also convert all their food and water into dense energy and can lose 10% of its body weight in one evening!

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**Membership**

Will you support our community’s cherished parks by accepting this invitation to become a Member of the Portola and Castle Rock Foundation? As a member, you will receive hiking and climbing maps for both Parks, a discount at the Visitor Center store, and organized hikes led by experienced docents. You’ll also be invited to our annual Member Appreciation Event, a wonderful opportunity to enjoy the beauty of our community with friends and neighbors.

As a neighbor and member of our community, we would love to welcome you to the team that stands up for our two Park jewels. These precious local resources deserve your support. You may join for $35 as an Individual Member or up to $1,000 as a Patron Member. To learn more and join, visit our website at www.PortolaAndCastleRockFound.org.

**Nature Moment ....**

*Castle Rock State Park .... Photo by Patrick Harte*

**Donations**

The Portola and Castle Rock Foundation depend on donations from supporters like you. Please consider making a donation now to help us fund future projects.