

Spring/Summer 2020

POINT LOBOS





Our mission is to protect and nurture Point Lobos State Natural Reserve, to educate and inspire visitors to preserve its unique natural and cultural resources, and to strengthen the network of Carmel Area State Parks. pointlobos.org



*The view from the Bird Island Trail on the last PLF-sponsored Moonlight Walk.
Photo by John Drum.*

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A sea otter swims off Point Lobos
after capturing some sea urchins
to eat. Photo by Don Blohowiak.

Center Spread, pages 10-11.
For a sea otter pup, mom is
a comfy waterbed.
Photo by John Drum.



Kathleen Lee spent over two decades in public service working in Monterey County, most recently as the district director for the local member of Congress. A long-time resident of the Monterey Peninsula, Kathleen has always enjoyed the beauty of the coastline and is an avid whale-watcher. Kathleen is a board member for the Monterey Peninsula Regional Park District. Her husband Rob is a partner in a local CPA firm, and they have two teens, Rory and Megan.

A message from the new executive director

by Kathleen Lee

What draws you to Point Lobos? The playful otters in the kelp beds? The harbor seals birthing on the beaches? The way the fog moves through the cypress trees?

With its rich human history from the Ohlone to the Portuguese whalers, Chinese fishermen to Japanese abalone divers to cinematographers, Point Lobos has many stories to share. For me, the ever-changing ocean and the rugged landscape keep pulling me to Point Lobos.

I remember the first time I came to Point Lobos with my family as a pre-teen, clambering around the rocks on the North Shore Trail and being in awe of the vista around me. Now, I have the pleasure of walking these same trails with my family and watching my two teens discover the beauty and wonder of Point Lobos.

As the new executive director of the Point Lobos Foundation, I am humbled to join an amazing cadre of staff, docents and supporters who work together to protect this amazing place for future generations and to share their love of the Reserve with visitors.

In this time of coronavirus, we are all challenged to slow down and shelter in place. I wonder what Point Lobos can teach us in these tumultuous times, as the shoreline has weathered many a great storm, and her inhabitants have hunkered down to endure the weather only to emerge and enjoy a changed landscape.

We too will weather the storm caused by the coronavirus and will undoubtedly have to adjust to changed landscapes. Prior to the closure, docents reported on active wildlife who were enjoying the trails without as many people in the Reserve. Undoubtedly,

the animals are enjoying the time with Point Lobos to themselves.

(Point Lobos closed down in stages in reaction to the coronavirus threat. On March 19, all volunteers such as docents were furloughed. On March 26, vehicles were barred and visitors had to walk in. On April 11, the Reserve was closed entirely.)

During the shelter in place, I hope your memories, paintings or photos of the Reserve bring you solace.

At the Point Lobos Foundation, our landscape has also changed as we lost a treasured member and president of our Board of Directors, Joe Vargo. Joe's love for Point Lobos, his love of the school outreach program and gentle and wonderful spirit will be deeply missed by all those who had an opportunity to know him.

In the spirit of Joe, the board established the Joe Vargo Memorial Fund as a way to honor and fund those efforts that Joe was particularly passionate about. Read more about Joe's work and his legacy in subsequent pages.

I would also like to thank Monta Potter for her leadership as interim executive director of the Point Lobos Foundation. Her guidance and expertise sustained this strong organization. For all of the docents and members who support and sustain the mission of the foundation, I thank you for ensuring that current and future visitors can enjoy the wonders of Point Lobos. I hope to see you soon on the trails and I would love to hear from you on what draws you to Point Lobos.



While Don Blohowiak holds a Ph.D. in Human Development, he finds himself increasingly drawn to creatures that live in and near the ocean. An avid hiker and nature photographer, Don has been training to serve as a Point Lobos Docent. He's always loved writing and was a journalist early in his career. Then he was a corporate executive before evolving into an academic program director, and executive coach. He lives in Carmel.

Sea otters: Fascinating, individualistic and still much threatened

by *Don Blohowiak*

Walking along a seaside trail at Point Lobos, you spy a raft of otters bobbing in kelp. A mother otter rides the tide on her back. She busily grooms the pup straddling her belly. Nearby, an otter vigorously washes its face. Its webbed feet point skyward. Another otter rolls over and over in the surf.

A piercing sound punctures the calm. Clack, clack, clack!

You peer into the otter collective. There, two arms swing up and down smashing a clam onto a big, flat rock balanced on the otter's tummy — as an anvil to crack the clam's shell. The otter eats the clam and slips underwater to find more.

Sea otters fascinate us. Their dexterous, tool-wielding front paws remind us of our own hands. Their faces seem remarkably human: expressive, smart, interested.

While interpreting otters as human-like clearly is anthropomorphizing, these captivating little marine mammals do share something in common with humans.

"Sea otters are idiosyncratic or individualistic," says Michelle Staedler, a scientist who manages the Sea Otter Program at the Monterey Bay Aquarium.

For nearly 35 years, Staedler has studied and published numerous scientific articles about sea otters. "What one individual otter may do or not do to be successful is different from another otter. There is variation in their behavior," observes Staedler.

"One of the things we've discovered," using sophisticated tracking instruments, "is that while some otters stay close to home, some travel several miles from Monterey to Moss Landing."



Mom and her pup in the tide pool at the Monterey Bay Aquarium. Pups are born so fluffy and buoyant that they can't dive for months. Photo by Monterey Bay Aquarium.



Otters at Moss Landing haul out to rest or race on the sand. Photo by Chuck Bancroft.

All otters hunt at length for food — they must consume about 25 percent of their body weight each day to maintain their warmth-generating, rapid metabolism. But individual otter tastes vary. One otter may eat mostly urchins; others prefer mussels, crabs or abalone.

How individual otters hunt also varies. Most otters dive underwater searching for food for about a minute and a half. The record is about eight minutes, Staedler says. Some otters doggedly make as many as 10 to 15 dives to pursue a crab or dislodge a large abalone from a rock.

Individual differences aside, otters almost always look to our anthropomorphizing eyes like they're having fun. So we give otters cute nicknames such as clowns of the kelp and teddy bears of the ocean.

But another term applies to sea otters: threatened species. Sea otters once thrived throughout the Northern Pacific Rim, from Japan to Alaska, down North America's west coast to central Baja California, Mexico. But nearly all otters in America were killed by 18th and 19th century fur traders seeking otters' warm coats.

Unlike whales and seals, otters do not have a thick layer of fat to insulate them against cold waters. To keep warm, otters rely on their fast metabolism and the thickest fur of any animal on Earth.

Following the fur traders' purge, sea otters were thought extinct in California. It is often said they were rediscovered in the late 1930s down in Big Sur. Actually, it was earlier. In 1915, Harold C. Bryant with California's Fish and Game

agency reported the discovery the prior year of fewer than 50 surviving otters near Point Sur. All the sea otters in California today descended from that group.

Following their near-extinction, sea otters gained legal protection starting in 1911.

Yet, for the past two decades otters have not expanded the geography where they live. All otters in California are found from Año Nuevo to Santa Barbara.

Notably, there are fewer sea otters now than there were as recently as 2016, according to the federal agency that counts sea otters, the U.S. Geological Survey. The 2019 census of 2,962 animals is a small fraction of their peak of about 20,000.

So, there are not more sea otters in California, and they aren't moving to more places. This raises two big questions. First, should the otter population grow? Second, why isn't it growing?

"Yes, we want the number of sea otters to increase," concludes Staedler of the Monterey Bay Aquarium.

Marine scientists want to reintroduce otters to places where otters once thrived but exist no longer.

Growing the sea otter population in more places will help to improve more marine ecosystems, Staedler says. For example, otters positively affect the growth of seagrass beds. Importantly, these plants provide shelter for crabs that otters eat, as well as other marine life.



An otter cradles its face in its paws, assuming a pensive look, in the sea off Point Lobos. Photo by Don Blohowiak.

Why haven't otters increased their range and numbers? Put simply, the limitations are physical and political.

In the physical world, more otters die more often, and from a surprising cause: attacks by great white sharks. "Shark attacks once were 5 percent of total otter deaths and now it's over 50 percent," Staedler reports.

Otter hauled out on the rocky shore at Point Lobos. Photo by Paul M. Reps.



It's not that sharks eat otters. "They just bite them fatally," Staedler says. Otters are lean and furry. Great whites eat blubbery, calorie-rich prey such as seals. "We believe it's a case of mistaken identity," Staedler says, like when sharks attack — but don't eat — human divers they assume are seals.

The other main cause of otter deaths: disease.

What about climate change? Does a warming planet affect California sea otters?

"We don't know enough yet" to draw definitive conclusions, Staedler says. She does point out that so far otters have not been moving north to colder waters. But a warming Earth may still impact otters.

"This may be the shark's story," she hypothesizes, while noting she isn't a shark expert. Warming waters could be drawing more great whites to Central California, such as those observed in the Aptos area. "The water there is warming. This may draw sharks there."

Another physical reality that affects getting more otters to more places: Otters need a healthy ecosystem to thrive. That presents a chicken-and-egg conundrum. It takes a long time for an ecosystem without otters to improve enough to support the otters that make that environment healthy.

Moving otters into a new ecosystem, say to San Francisco Bay, does not magically transform the ecosystem of the otter’s new home. Staedler reminds us, “It took 20 years for Elkhorn Slough to become a fully effective ecosystem” after surrogate-reared pups from the Aquarium’s Sea Otter Program were reintroduced to that estuary.

In addition to the biological considerations, governmental restrictions impede extending the otters' range.

“No reintroduction to the historical range can be done without a great number of governmental permissions,” reports Staedler. For example, under current regulations, “We’re supposed to return otters within 40 miles” from where they were recovered as sick or injured animals.

“It’s a good idea to extend the otters’ range, and it will happen years in the future,” Staedler predicts. “First we need to assess many considerations: the risks, otters’ exposure to boats, the potential food supply ... And we need to get through the political challenges.” Once that happens, you may hear the clack, clack, clack! of more otters using tools in more places.

Otter with clam. Photo by Chuck Bancroft.



Docents will likely tell you that the question most asked by visitors to Point Lobos is this: Where are the sea otters today?

That’s a question not easily answered because those wascally water weasels travel about and do not take instruction well. The simple answer is they are probably hanging out in the kelp beds. The question raises some others: What are the chances of a visitor seeing a sea otter? How many otters are there at the Reserve at any one time?

While sighting an otter is not guaranteed, the chances are quite good. We know this because docents have counted them once a month – weather permitting – since at least the mid-1980s.

The count is usually held on the first Tuesday of the month. Docents arrive at 9 a.m. and break up into three teams that go searching for otters in the northern, southern and middle shoreline of the Reserve. The results are posted on a website maintained by the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Foundation (sanctuarysimon.org), which works with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary (part of NOAA).

The following are the counts for the first three months of this year together with the counts for the same months in 2019:

	2020	2019
MARCH	90 adults 11 pups	58 adults 15 pups
FEBRUARY	73 adults 16 pups	66 adults 11 pups
JANUARY	42 adults 7 pups	51 adults 4 pups



Gena Bentall is the director and senior scientist for Sea Otter Savvy. She has worked as a sea otter biologist in locations such as the Aleutian Islands, Russia's Commander Islands, San Nicolas Island off Southern California and along the Central California coast. She studied zoology and marine biology at Oregon State University in Corvallis and obtained her master's degree in ecology and evolutionary biology at the University of California, Santa Cruz. In 2014, together with members of the Southern Sea Otter Research Alliance, she began organizing a program to alleviate sea otter disturbance through education. The Sea Otter Savvy program serves Monterey, San Luis Obispo and Santa Cruz counties.

The importance of being sea otter savvy

By Gena Bentall

As educators, biologists and naturalists, we lament society's increasing disconnection from the natural world — the insistent drift from all that's wild and green in response to the lure of a virtual world framed inside our screens. We encourage our audience to get outside, get on a boat, see something wild; we provide suggestions for the wild places they can visit.

Nature-based tourism is on the rise and we feel content to have diverted at least a portion of human-use activities away from more extractive practices like hunting and fishing toward seemingly gentler activities like nature viewing, exploration, and photography.

With eagerness we have laid out the welcome mat at the entrance to parks, beaches and sanctuaries such as Point Lobos, and our guests are arriving in record numbers. Worldwide, there is an emerging theme in wildlife research: a focus on the effects of human-caused disturbance.

What we have discovered — perhaps late in the game — is that guidelines for visitor conduct around wildlife are a vital partner to invitations to wild places. Transforming visitors into stewards is more than enriching; it is an essential measure in ensuring the wild residents they come to see are kept wild and safe.

Sea otters are a case study. They are threatened, abundantly popular with the public and accessible. A paddler may muse, "A few otters dive or swim away at my approach; what harm is that?" Part of the answer lies in the nature of disturbance, particularly in disturbance hot spots like Moss Landing, Monterey and Morro Bay where hundreds of kayakers may take to the water on a single day.

At these locations, disturbance to sea otters happens chronically with incidents

peaking in summer, on holidays and during good weather. Human-caused disturbance poses an especially high risk to sea otters because of their unique physiology.

Anyone who has lived paycheck to paycheck can understand the perils of balancing a checkbook: Sea otters are capital spenders, not savers, and must balance that account every day. Lacking the blubber layer of most other marine mammals, they rely entirely on the record-setting density of their fur coat insulating a hot-burning metabolism to maintain body temperature in the cold ocean. Without the energy reserves of a fat layer, that metabolism must be refueled continuously, resulting in the sea otters' notorious appetite and need to consume an average of 3,500-5,000 (kilo) calories, or 25 percent of their body weight in food every day.

With energy at a premium, sea otters must conserve energy for the business of survival — grooming, foraging, swimming and pup rearing. Resting time is especially vital as it is the time they digest and convert prey into energy, while minimizing heat loss by keeping parts of their body dry.

People approaching resting sea otters too closely risk provoking an escape response — swimming and diving activity — that wastes energy and interrupts sleep. When you find your sleep disrupted, think of the sea otter! Motherhood doubles the nutritional burden, and sea otter mothers rearing pups are especially put at risk by disturbance.

An inquisitive otter crowned with eelgrass surveys its realm. Photo by Joe Tomoleoni, ecoexposurephotography.com

Sea otters are a highly charismatic species with a cuddly visage that has been well-featured by the internet. People want to get close to sea otters, perhaps more than any other marine mammal. The good news is that the solution is within all of us. Unlike threats from white sharks and oil spills, human disturbance is a burden we can assuage.

It is within the power of every person entering the sea otters' home to make a difference. In a world where an individual person can feel powerless to combat a multitude of threats against nature, in a single afternoon on the water, they can be the sea otter's hero.

At Sea Otter Savvy, we passionately believe in outreach as the strongest force for change. By providing the groundwork for stewardship — guidelines for conduct and a sense of empowerment — we work towards a goal of transforming every visitor to the sea otter's home into an active steward. Most who visit the sea otter's world care about their health and survival and wish to leave no trace.

Armed with a few knowledge tools — 1) an awareness of sea otter vulnerability, 2) mindfulness of the cause and effect of disturbance, and 3) familiarity with simple strategies for respecting sea otter spatial requirements — visitors and residents become the solution. Fill your knowledge toolbox at www.seaottersavvy.org

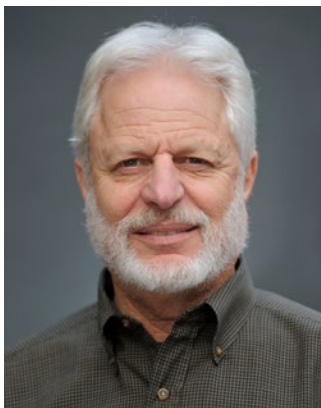


Kayakers come too close for otters' comfort at Elkhorn Slough. Photo by Gena Bentall.









Chuck Bancroft spent 31 of his 35-year career as a State Parks Ranger at Point Lobos. In retirement, he still does programs and nature walks for members of the Point Lobos Foundation. His email address is sparkystarkweather@gmail.com.

The rambling ranger and the roving otters

by Chuck Bancroft

Over the years as a ranger at Point Lobos I was able to capture some wonderful pictures of sea otters in a variety of situations. Sometimes it was a chance encounter while on patrol. Other times I would get a call from a docent advising me of a unique occurrence. Obviously, I have way too many images in my files. As I sat down to contemplate writing this article and searching my files for just the right pictures, I realized it was no easy task. After much time considering, I chose these as memories to share.

One day I was patrolling the road below the Carmel Meadows subdivision. We call that area Middle Beach, the central portion of Carmel River State Beach. Naturally, I had the windows down so I could not only see but hear waves breaking on the rocky shore. I faintly heard the unmistakable shrill cry of an otter pup.

I parked and ran down on the beach. After finding the pup wedged in the rocks, I scanned the bay to see if mom was about. I called for aquarium rescue and waited for a long time before collecting the pup and taking it up the staircase, where I met one of the rescue staff and transferred the pup to his care.

I was walking the South Shore Trail behind Sand Hill Cove. I always looked to the island in the cove to see who was out and about. I had my old Nikon camera with me, loaded with Kodachrome 64. There were several harbor seals hauled out on the rock and just below the big gray one was an otter comfortably hanging out with the big guys. People were on the trail, and when I pointed out the sight, unfortunately the exclamations were too loud for the otter. He made a mad dash back to the edge and slipped back into the cove. The harbor seals were pretty used to the noise and just looked around and went back to a resting posture; flat out like a big slug.



Ranger Chuck Bancroft with a pup he helped save at Carmel River State Beach.



A sea otter and harbor seal share a rock close to the South Shore Trail. Photo by Chuck Bancroft.



The pup nicknamed for a Bob Hope sidekick because of his big whiskers is with his mom in Whalers Cove (above) and by himself (below). Mother otter and pup deal with a large abalone at Whalers Cove (at right). Photos by Chuck Bancroft.

On a wonderful winter day I was on patrol and stopped at Whalers Cove. I parked and got out to walk along the rock rip-rap when I spotted an otter with a pup. I grabbed my camera with the telephoto lens and watched for her to come back up after a dive. She came up with one of the largest abalones I have ever seen. For the next half hour she worked hard getting the food and feeding her pup. Back and forth they would go with the pup eating and swimming back to mom to get the next morsel.

I was retired and relaxing at home when I received a telephone call from Docent Paul Reps. He was at Whalers Cove following up on a report of an otter with twins. I immediately grabbed my camera bag and drove to the cove. I met with Paul and went up to Cannery Point. Mom and pups were nestled in the rocks. Mom would groom one pup and then the other. One pup eventually slid down more into the rocks. Mom was so intent on the one pup I guess she didn't notice. Eventually she slid into the water with the one pup and disappeared further into the cove.

A rescuer from the aquarium arrived and, using a kayak, went to the rocks below the Point. He brought the pup back and off to the aquarium they went. For a long time after, we were able to follow the progress of 696 on the aquarium website. Eventually 696 was released back into the wild. I was able to watch the Whalers Cove mom and her pup for several months. Mom had a very distinctive nose scar and was very easy to spot. Eventually they were both off to their own spots in the Reserve.

My favorite mom and pup image came when patrolling Whalers Cove. The otters can be so close in you don't even need binoculars to get a good look. This mom and pup were just off the rock rip-rap. What a show they put on. I named the pup after Jerry Colonna, an American musician, actor, comedian, singer and songwriter and trombonist best remembered as the zaniest of Bob Hope's sidekicks in Hope's popular radio shows and films of the 1940s and 1950s. The mustaches of both the pup and Jerry were just too big to believe.

I hope you enjoyed this rambling and will be encouraged to share your special otter moments on the Point Lobos Foundation website with its wonderful members!





Anna Bonnette is employed by the Point Lobos Foundation as a restoration ecologist. She works closely with State Parks, community volunteers and docents. Anna is originally from Minnesota, but has happily made California her home. A graduate of Oregon State University with a degree in botany, plant systematics and plant ecology, she spent 13 years working for the Forest Service in a variety of positions.

Restoring Point Lobos

History can show us the way to repair degraded ecosystems

by Anna Bonnette

Walking through Point Lobos State Natural Reserve, you'll notice that many locations are closed to the public for ecological restoration. But why do we restore and what does that entail?

Ecological restoration is the act of undoing damage to a natural setting that is often caused by humans. In order to restore a landscape, we must know the history of how the environment became degraded. Knowing the factors that produced the disturbance will determine the path of action needed to reverse the damage.

Point Lobos has a long and action-packed history that created much of the disturbances in the natural systems that we see today. People from all over the world began arriving to partake in the rich natural resources that are unique to Point Lobos, starting in the 1600s.

A booming period of industrial activity began with abalone harvesting, whaling and granite quarrying. Many immigrants built homes and began living at Point Lobos.

With more and more people arriving in the area, habitat destruction became apparent. Trees were removed to create grazing lands for cattle, off-trail hiking was allowed, vegetable gardens were planted to sustain the inhabitants, an abalone commercial cannery began production at Whalers Cove, non-native plants were introduced from the inhabitants' native countries, and later large-scale film sets were built for movies. The area also served as a military base in World War II.



Lower Sea Lion Point project, closed to the public for restoration. This restoration is to stop soil erosion, revegetate native species, remove invasive plant species, create animal habitat and to protect ancient geological features. When finished, a viewing area will be built at the top to better observe wildlife.



The Native Plant Patrol, the volunteer restoration group at Point Lobos, removes crystalline ice plant at Lower Sea Lion Point.



One of many restorations along the South Shore Bluff trail. The photos show what the area looked like in 2017 before restoration (left), and then after restoration in 2020 (right). Soil was imported to replace soil lost to erosion, jute netting and certified weed-free straw wattles were installed to hold soil in place and native plants were reintroduced with seed collected at Point Lobos. All photos by Anna Bonnette.

Point Lobos is truly unique, in all aspects. It is a place of great ecological importance, especially so in a region where much of the natural resources have been utilized and natural landscapes have been developed into homes, roads and shopping centers for the quickly increasing human population. Point Lobos became a state natural Reserve in 1933, to begin protecting and preserving the natural environment that is so special to the Monterey Peninsula.

It is a small Reserve, at 550 acres, but it is mighty. It has rare plant communities, a wide variety of bird and animal species, tidal pools, a large marine sanctuary, a fascinating geological history, California coastal prairies and sensitive invertebrates and mollusks. This area is an ecological hot spot; people from all over the world visit Point Lobos to observe these unique habitats. The Reserve has 650,000 visitors annually.

Many areas throughout the Reserve were drastically disturbed by human visitation, particularly along the South Shore Trail and the North Shore Trail. The act of humans repeatedly walking on native vegetation and delicate soils caused many of the habitats to be reduced to bare ground. Without healthy soils, there cannot be healthy plants; and without healthy plants, animals and invertebrates will leave in search of more suitable habitat.

Ecological restoration at Point Lobos is incredibly important. Restoration was necessary to save the sensitive habitats of the coastal bluffs, and also to reduce soil erosion from the bluffs that were washing into the tidal pool ecosystems and causing harm.

Restoration sites scattered along the South Shore Trail bluff, the Bird Island Trail loop and at the lower Sea Lion Point Trail all followed the same restoration prescription: A protective fence barrier had to be installed along the trails and all the restoration areas required soil imported to replace the soil lost to erosion.

The sites needed jute netting and straw wattles to hold the soil in place, removal of invasive plant species and reintroduction of native vegetation where there wasn't any. Native plant seed that was collected at Point Lobos was used to revegetate the restoration sites.

Our beloved monarch butterfly is a good example of why healthy habitats matter. There are other invertebrate species that are in worse shape than the monarch at Point Lobos. Habitat loss and degradation are big factors in why species like the monarch are in serious decline, illustrating the importance of restoration.

The restorations that began in 2017 have come a long way. Native vegetation has considerably returned, insects and birds are frequently observed back in these sites and animals are also taking advantage of these restored areas. It makes a difference to have balanced ecosystems.



Notes from the Docent Log

Compiled by Beth Kurzava

Today was one of those days in the park... I arrived around noon for my trail watch and headed out from all the kids at Piney Woods (thanks to the school walk team!!) towards China Cove. I was stopped twice before arriving there by visitors who were concerned about a harbor seal pup just born and apparently taken off the beach by the surf.

I hurried there and sure enough the pup was in the water, very near the cave and barely visible. He/she was near that edge for some time before coming out more towards the middle of the cove. About that time a sea gull decided to get the placenta that was still attached, and for more than an hour, the gull tried and succeeded to remove some of it. However, not without a toll on the pup, who literally was fighting the entire time (according to the information I received, it was little over an hour old). I watched this entire scene and stayed with the pup until it took its last breath.

I was struck by the sheer extent that each player contributed to the event. In the natural world it truly is life and death for each of them every day... All the while I spoke with visitors who wondered “why didn’t mom take care of it”? I may have said more than once that “those are human thoughts/emotions.” Mom is doing what she needs to do. This was a day.

Janet Beaty, 02/25/2020

The people I meet doing trail watch never fail to make my day. Like the enthusiastic young birder I helped to ID the osprey above China Cove. He was delighted to have spotted the fish hawk and could hardly wait to enter this new bird on his life list.

I urged him to list not just the date of the sighting, but to add a few notes. In 20 or 30 years when he is looking back over his life list, the memory of the day will come rushing back: the majestic bird perched high in the dead tree against the blue sky and the scent of California lilac in full bloom, on this sparkling spring day at Point Lobos.

Marty Renault, 02/25/2020

While waiting for the start of Docent Peter Fletcher’s public walk from Whalers this last Wednesday, we met a couple from Sunnyvale celebrating their 51st wedding anniversary. It also marked their 51st annual visit to Point Lobos. Every year they stay in Carmel at the same inn in the same room and always spend the day at Point Lobos — their happy place. ❤️

Patti Monahan, 02/23/2020



Photo by Katherine Spitz.

What a great day pulling veldt grass in Cypress Grove. It’s like a quilting circle, sitting on the ground pulling out grass and observing what small gifts the forest reveals. Today PLF Restoration Ecologist Anna Bonnette found a bird skull and beak; Docent Mary Conway, with her school walk in tow, thought it was a cormorant. A native snail put on a show for another school group, stretching out its four antennae to investigate the hand holding it and the strange animals (children) observing it. I tell you, it had charisma, that snail!

Katherine Spitz, 01/28/2020



Photo by Peter Fletcher.

Last Sunday, Nov. 24, a group of six docents conducted a very successful group-guided tide pool adventure, attended by more than 100 visitors. We joined together to host an adventure for visitors from 2:00-3:30 p.m. during a very low (minus 0.25 feet) tide. We had well over 100 visitors stop by (I stopped counting around 115!).

Attendance was helped because high swells forecast that day did not materialize as predicted, so although the rest of the South Shore was closed off, State Parks allowed an exception for the docent-guided tide pool event (as long as we kept visitors in the protected area on the south side of Weston Beach). So lots of people looking to get closer to the water came down to our tide pool event and all had a great time.

In fact, for the first time we tried leaving a small donation box next to Weston Beach Tide Pool brochures that visitors could pick up, and ended up collecting \$50 of donations for the Point Lobos Foundation.

Group-guided tide pool events are relatively new, present a good opportunity for interested but inexperienced docents to learn more, and also for some docents who prefer to stay in the shallow areas to focus on the younger kids (and get the reward of squeals of excitement when a hermit crab starts walking around on a young girl's hand!).

Peter Fletcher, 12/02/2019



Photo by Carol Greenstreet.

Strolling along the Carmelo Meadow Trail, I encountered a flock of birds foraging in a dense tree canopy. As I stood silently, the birds flitted through the branches above and around me, seemingly unconcerned with my presence. I quietly observed the avian ballet in the leaves, lace lichen, and branches of the surrounding foliage. Townsend's Warblers would perch merely feet above my head (photo), so close that I felt that I could almost touch these beautiful and delicate creatures.

The air was filled with chirps, chips, and calls. The numerous warblers were accompanied by a Pygmy Nuthatch creeping down the tree trunks, in a reverse dance with a Brown Creeper spiraling up. Wrens bickered; a Steller's Jay and Nuttall's Woodpecker announced their presence. Eventually the flock dissipated; I remained in the sheltered arbor, quieter now, but no less magical.

Carol Greenstreet, 11/06/2019



Knowing today was the last day Point Lobos was to be open till some undetermined future date, I went to the Reserve for one last visit. Early enough to be mostly alone, I saw two pairs of Great Blue Herons building nests, two ochre sea stars in the mussel beds off Coal Chute Point, large sea anemones, mother and baby harbor seals on the beach and in the water of Whalers Cove and brilliant sunlight and puffy clouds.

I also saw other docents with the same desire to say goodbye to Point Lobos for however long, and to take the beauty home to quarantine.

Robert Grace, 4/10/2020

Iwent to the Reserve today just to see how things were set up now that cars weren't allowed in. I hadn't walked into the Reserve from the highway in a long time and I was surprised to see how overgrown with poison oak that pathway had become. A young man, about 15 feet ahead of me, pointed out some poison oak to the young woman with whom he was walking. "No, it isn't," she said.

Daniel Turner, 03/28/2020



Photos left and above by Fred Brown.

Possibly 30 visitors at the Reserve at 1p.m. Quiet. No one fighting for parking. Good for the wildlife... grasping for silver linings.

Fred Brown, 03/26/2020



An egg in a night heron nest. Photo by Werner Ju.

Iwas at Bird Island on Friday and saw three Black-crowned Night Heron nests. There was a Pigeon Guillemot nesting in a fourth site where I have previously seen night herons. I call the nesting spot at the top of the diagonal crack "the loser spot" because the eggs or chicks invariably end up in the water. There was a single egg in that nest. Hopefully more were added in the next day or two.

Deborah Ju, 04/05/2020



Photo by Lyle Brumfield.

A Douglas iris loving the spring rain...

Lyle Brumfield, 03/29/2020



*Reg Henry, a docent,
is editor of the Point
Lobos Magazine.
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regwriter43@gmail.com*

The sea otters take us to calmer waters

by Reg Henry

As you may have noticed, we have rafts of sea otters in this edition of the Point Lobos Magazine. This edition is a veritable otter-a-rama. We have big ones and small ones and every size inbetween.

In the last issue, the focus was on painters whose art has been inspired by the stunning natural beauty of the Reserve. For the spring/summer issue, we needed to return to the animal world and so we decided to feature one of the main attractions for visitors – the Southern sea otter.

Otters inspire artists too, but usually the ones carrying cameras. So many cameras are pointed at these marine mammals at Point Lobos they probably think human beings are the paparazzi. At this rate, their behavior may soon evolve into hiring press agents.

Otters are known as a keystone species, which means that in an inter-connected environment they have a major effect on other species and plants. You might think that the term keystone is what inspired us to build this magazine around sea otters.



Photo by Fred Brown.

In fact, we are just smitten like everybody else. Not only do they have extraordinarily thick fur and the ability to use a tool in gathering their food, sea otters are also very cute, perhaps a little surprising in a member of the weasel family. As humans, most of us are doomed to grow out of cuteness but the otters seem to be cute all their lives, even making old and grizzled into a beauty statement.

But how are the otters doing? That is what Don Blohowiak, the author of our main article, set to find out for this issue. Sea otters in California were hunted almost to extinction for their fur and what we have now are a still threatened remnant. His brief was to report on the state of the sea otter — their past history, present situation and future prospects.

And I hope you read the sidebar by Gena Bentall, director of Sea Otter Savvy, which educates people about the importance of not disturbing sea otters by coming too close.

As a further bonus, retired Ranger Chuck Bancroft wrote about his otter-related adventures. He saw many otters on his patrols and was called upon sometimes to save their pups.

Of course, this issue is not all about otters. The harbor seals would complain if that were so. I hope you agree that ecological restoration at the Reserve and Notes from the Docent Log make interesting reading too.

But the focus on sea otters turned out to be timely, although inadvertent. The magazine was planned months ago, before the coronavirus brought us a world of troubles, and nobody knew then that docents would be furloughed and the Reserve closed.

And now we have a magazine full of these amazing and amusing creatures to cheer us up. By the time you read this magazine, the Reserve may be open again. As we went to press, the tentative plan was to start opening Point Lobos gradually in mid-May.

Whatever happens, we could all do with an otter boost. They are the ultimate survivors who beat the odds against them. While we have been absent from the Reserve, they have remained as courtiers polishing the jewel, the living reminders that Point Lobos, their home and ours, will soon be back too, refreshed and full of life.

Virtual Donations Save the Day

We count on the donation boxes and merchandise sales from Point Lobos State Natural Reserve. While sheltering in place, you can help us keep our programs funded by donating from home.

....
It's easy!

pointlobos.org/support-point-lobos

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CELEBRATING JOE

Our hearts are heavy with the recent passing of our beloved Point Lobos Foundation President, Joe Vargo. All who had the honor to have known him remember the soft-spoken gentleman with a kind and generous spirit who was devoted to service and to his community. He led by example and selflessly immersed himself in the needs of the Foundation, engaging with Point Lobos docents, walking the trails, serving as Chair of the Partnerships and Collaboration Committee, and as President of the Board in 2020. Joe also worked tirelessly on initiatives to alleviate overcrowding at the Reserve and improve safety on Highway 1.

To honor Joe's memory, the Point Lobos Foundation has established the Joe Vargo Memorial Fund. Through gifts made in memory of Joe, we will carry forward his passion, energy, and love of Point Lobos. He is deeply missed by all, and he leaves a strong legacy of service at Point Lobos.

JOE VARGO MEMORIAL FUND

*Donations made to the fund,
and the income generated by it,
will be unrestricted.*

In memory of Joe Vargo

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Acknowledgements

Memorials, tributes and grants October 16, 2019 – May 1, 2020

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For the birthday of Karen Judkins
Steven Wade

For the birthday of David Kirkpatrick
Clifton & Diane Kirkpatrick

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In celebration of our engagement
Chris & Jennifer Clark

In celebration of Norah and Dave Miller's
40th anniversary
Miller Family

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Donita, Robert, & Rowdy Grace
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Jesse Thompson and Alice Glasser

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In memory of Rockbottom Dive Club (RIP)
Stephen Stoffer

In memory of Lorna Shoemaker
*Marcella Spears
Whitney Smith*

In memory of Mary "Patch" Williams
Ann Wall & Ralph Williams

In memory of Peter J. Wong
Evelyn Wong

SISTER ANNA VOSS FUND

Donations made to the Sister Anna Voss Memorial Fund, and the income generated by it, are restricted to the education and direct support of the Point Lobos Docent Program and the school education outreach programs.

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Kim Fraser

In honor of Kit Armstrong,
Christine Bertko, Peter Fletcher,
Donita, Robert, Rowdy Grace, Pat Sinclair
Kim Fraser

CARL F. VOSS (1935-2019)

Carl served on the Point Lobos Foundation Board of Directors from 2006-2012 and received the California State Parks Poppy Award for his outstanding contributions as a volunteer. All gifts directed to the Sister Anna Voss Fund

*Brianne McGrath
Roger & Jeane Samuelsen
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Carol Voss*



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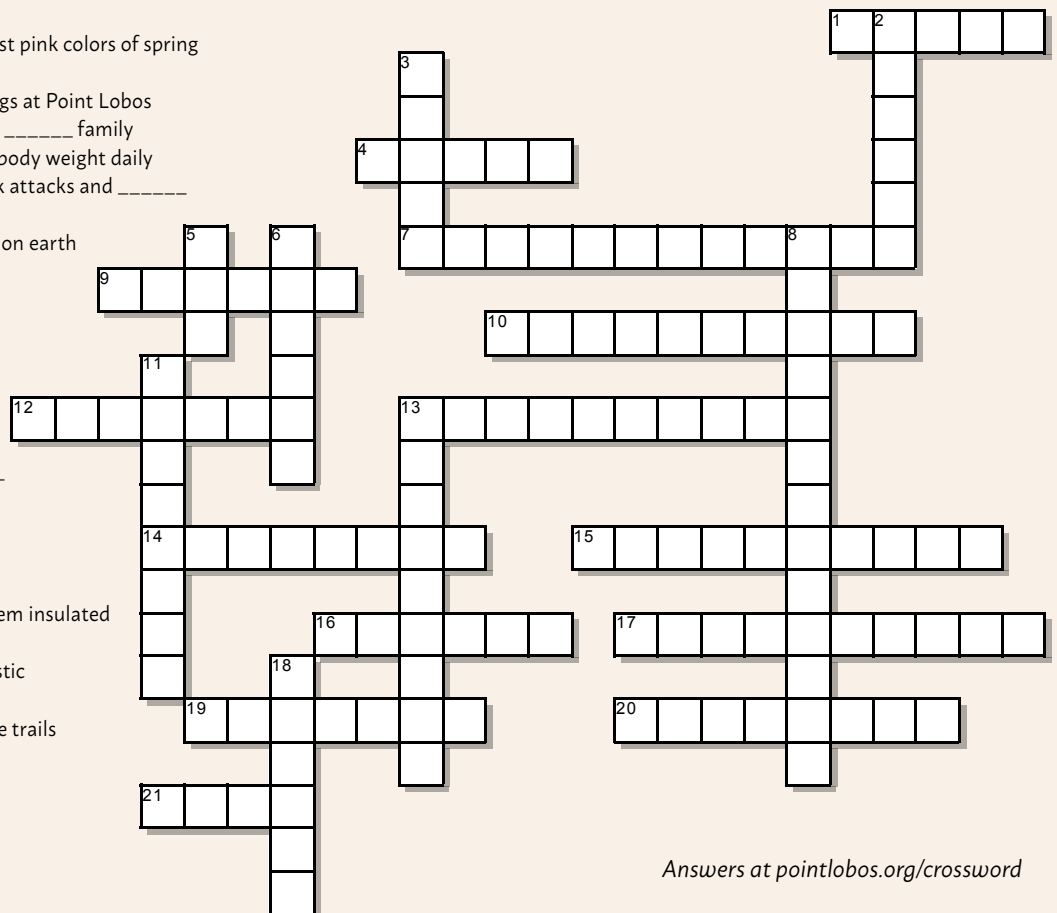
Puzzle by Ann Pendleton

Across

- 1 Checker _____ is one of Point Lobos's first pink colors of spring
- 4 CA _____ is CA's state flower
- 7 There have been _____ (2 words) sightings at Point Lobos
- 9 The sea otter is the largest member of the _____ family
- 10 Otters eat _____% (two words) of their body weight daily
- 12 2 main causes of death for otters are shark attacks and _____
- 13 Otters have their own food _____
- 14 Otters have the _____ fur of any animal on earth
- 15 Otters have had legal _____ since 1911
- 16 _____ (2 words) is a low growing, yellow, wildflower at Point Lobos
- 17 Otters are listed as a _____ species
- 19 _____ Irises are found at Point Lobos
- 20 The population of otters has _____ since the 2016 census
- 21 Otters floating together is called a _____

Down

- 2 Lace _____ is one of CA's state species
- 3 Otters seem to _____ constantly
- 5 Whales and seals have _____ to keep them insulated
- 6 Otters have _____ feet
- 8 _____ describes otters being individualistic
- 11 Otters are considered a _____ species
- 13 _____ (2 words) helps keep people on the trails at Point Lobos
- 18 Otters were _____ almost to extinction



Answers at pointlobos.org/crossword