

## Getting to know the Jenner Headlands

by Sheri Cardo



Jason Martinez of The Wildlands Conservancy seines for fish during a fish survey in East Branch Russian Gulch. Once the fish are caught, they are measured, a small tissue sample is taken, and they are safely returned to the water. Photo by Kristin Martinez.

Becoming intimately acquainted with an ecosystem as rich and diverse as the Jenner Headlands is a dream come true for land stewards. With 13 habitat types and eight watersheds to explore, project manager Brook Edwards has been occupied since last December 17 — the day escrow closed — with putting together teams of specialists to document the full extent of the natural resources on the property. Along with Brook and Kristin and Jason Martinez, two hardworking staffers from The Wildlands Conservancy, additional experts have been busily conducting surveys of wildlife, bird life, fish, bugs, and more. Everyone is working toward the end goal of creating a comprehensive plan by the end of next year that will guide the management of the Jenner Headlands in a way that will protect and enhance its ecology. It's an enormous task with a lot at stake. It is a labor of love for the land.

### Up in the sky

So what have all these consultants and volunteers found out so far? Foremost, that even more species live on or move through the grasslands of the

*(Continued on page 3)*

## Help secure \$300,000 in matching funds

**December 31 deadline**

by Beverly Scotland



Hikers on Cougar Mountain at Sears Point. Photo by Scott Hess Photography.

The times we are living through require that we redouble our efforts to protect our threatened landscapes. Fortunately, in this season of gratitude, a wonderfully generous family has just come forward with an inspiring and challenging gift, for which we are thankful.

The Sebastopol family, which has asked to remain anonymous, pledged \$300,000 to be matched dollar for dollar. **Every gift we receive by December 31 will be matched by their extraordinary generosity.**

Please make a year-end donation and it will be matched by

*(Continued on page 7)*

## Who we are

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### SLT Mission

The Sonoma Land Trust protects the scenic, natural, agricultural and open landscapes of Sonoma County for the benefit of the community and future generations by:

- Developing long-term land protection strategies;
- Promoting private and public funding for land and conservation;
- Acquiring land and conservation easements;
- Practicing stewardship, including the restoration of conservation properties; and
- Promoting a sense of place and a land ethic through activities, education and outreach.

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## A note from the Executive Director

### This beautiful place

A friend asked me to name my favorite place in the county. I couldn't do it because it is the *variety* of beautiful landscapes we have that is so appealing. For an auto-centric kaleidoscope, try driving out Coleman Valley Road and then up the coast past the Jenner Headlands. Come back over King Ridge Road. Then head over to Knights Valley. Behold the Mayacamas. Drive down Highway 12 through the Valley of the Moon. It's hard to beat the expanse of the Baylands with its Diablo-to-Tamalpais views, but the San Antonio Valley and the Estero Americano are just as beautiful, maybe more so. A bike would be a more carbon-friendly way to take in these views. For me, I love to get out and hike, and in 2011, we will be opening up more of our lands to even more hikes and other uses. Watch for our "On the Land" program.

Our main job is "to protect the land forever." Today, our focus is on the ecological functioning of large, connected landscapes, whether they are coastal prairies, redwood/fir forests, oak woodlands, streams, rivers and wetlands, pasture, vineyards and farmland. It happens that they are all a feast for the eyes as well.

The land is the theater for our community life. Within the urban growth boundaries — now surrounding all nine Sonoma County cities — most of us work, go to school, play and live. And all around us, we have the beautiful land. If you are in Santa Rosa, look up and there is Taylor Mountain, protected by the Open Space District. In Petaluma, look over to Sonoma Mountain, where protection is a work in progress. We are so fortunate to live, work and be in this special place, especially with supporters like the Sebastopol family who so love this land that they have made the generous year-end matching gift noted on page 1.

A line from Rilke: "Now let us give thanks for the new year ahead which is given to us fresh, untouched and filled with things that have never been."

Best wishes for the holidays and the new year.

A handwritten signature of Ralph Benson in black ink.

Ralph Benson



Jenner Headlands than originally thought — including a bald eagle that PRBO Conservation Science biologist Ryan DiGaudio saw eating a rodent on a rock! DiGaudio, who is conducting bird surveys on the headlands, has also found a number of “migrants” of notable mention, such as clay-colored sparrow, palm warbler, Lapland longspur, and chestnut-collared longspur, all very unusual birds to find in California.

In fact, DiGaudio and volunteers from the local Audubon chapter encountered so many birds they didn’t expect that he said, “I came away with a new appreciation for the Jenner Headlands grasslands because they are sustaining so many different species.”

DiGaudio noted that the number and diversity of raptors soaring through the property is also very impressive. See page 8 for more information on the surprise fall raptor migration that’s been taking place above the Jenner Headlands.

## On land and up in the trees

Wildlife biologist Michael Fawcett has been able to confirm the usual array of wildlife one would expect to find on such a large, intact landscape — deer, cougar, coyote — as well as several California species of special concern, including the American badger, northern harrier, Foothill yellow-legged frog, Sonoma tree vole and burrowing owl. He’s even located pairs of federally threatened northern spotted owls.

How do you verify the presence of owls that live up in the treetops and are nocturnal? You go out in the deep of night and call them up, of course. But owls are too smart to fall for humans attempting to imitate them — you have to use recordings of their actual calls — in this case, obtained from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The owls they found did perfect imitations of three of the types of calls on the recording, according to Fawcett. What’s especially exciting is that he and his team

found pairs of owls, which means that these rare birds are living and breeding on the Jenner Headlands.

These aren’t the only owls the biologists found. They also heard from barn owls, a western screech owl, a great horned owl and a northern sawwhet owl.

## In the water

You can tell how healthy a stream is by the species of bugs that are present because certain species need a particular temperature, oxygen level and water clarity. “Bugs are fun!” laughed Kristin Martinez in recounting how she does Benthic macroinvertebrate — or bug — sampling.

First, she gets in the water with a net, “mucks up” the sand, makes water flow into the net, and then dumps the sand and pebbles into a bucket — and she does this every 50 feet or so. Then she takes a sample of the bucket contents and sorts through the sand with a sieve and tweezers to get the bugs out. The bugs are then put in an ethanol



The fertile grasslands of the Jenner Headlands sustain myriad species. Photo by Stephen Joseph Photography.

sample that kills and preserves them, and they're then sent to the Sonoma Resource Conservation District's lab. We are currently awaiting the results of these studies, which will "give a snapshot of the ecosystem," said Kristin. "We'll monitor the streams over time to gauge whether our management strategies are improving the health of the stream."

Fish studies are also underway. The federally threatened Central Coast California steelhead have been located in Russian Gulch and, while no coho salmon have been found, since they lived there historically, we hope to enhance the habitat and improve the conditions to encourage their return.

### Keeping feet on the ground

More than 800 people have enjoyed a hike on the Jenner Headlands this year, thanks to regularly scheduled opportunities provided by the Land Trust, The Wildlands Conservancy, LandPaths on behalf of the Sonoma

County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District, Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods, Coastwalk, and others. All of these organizations are devoting considerable resources to organizing and running these guided hikes because we know how much people have been wanting to experience this spectacular landscape.

Even more is in store for next year. To provide a deeper experience of the headlands, the Land Trust will offer 10 stewardship workdays on the property starting in the spring that will involve invasive species removal and a hike. Plus, we'll be working with our partner groups to provide exhilarating themed hikes (botany, raptors, geology, wildflowers, birds) and a couple of longer 8–9 mile hikes, too. Stay tuned to our Web site ([sonomalandtrust.org](http://sonomalandtrust.org)) or become a Facebook friend to keep apprised of our outings schedule.

Stewardship is fascinating and fun, and it also has its less appealing side. "After the first rain this fall, we had flooding on some of our roads,"

said Kristin. "Jason and Brook were outside almost nine hours, a lot of it in the dark, unblocking culverts that had plugged up and removing fallen trees. There's a lot of work to be done all the time." And we have the right people doing it. People who are devoting their lives to the land.

*Sheri Cardo is SLT's communications director.*

### \$16 million loan for the Jenner Headlands repaid

The Sonoma Land Trust celebrated the closure of Phase Two of the Jenner Headlands transaction in October when the State of California disbursed the \$16 million that had been conditionally granted to SLT by the State Coastal Conservancy and Wildlife Conservation Board. SLT used this long-awaited disbursement to repay the bridge loans provided by The Wildlands Conservancy, Save the Redwoods League and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation that enabled us to close on the \$36 million Jenner Headlands last December.



Volunteers count birds of prey during the fall raptor migration. Photo by Kristin Martinez.



Savannah sparrow. Photo by Ryan DiGaudio.

# Creating a new riparian forest along Tolay Creek

by Bob Neale



*The cattle on Tolay Creek Ranch promote the native biodiversity by helping to control exotic grasses and weeds. Photo by Scott Hess Photography.*

In 2007, the Sonoma Land Trust purchased the beautiful 1,665-acre cattle ranch that we now call Tolay Creek Ranch, which is nestled between Lakeville Highway and Highway 121 in the southern part of the county. In time, we will transfer the property to Sonoma County Regional Parks so it can be added to the adjacent Tolay Lake Regional Park.

Till then, we've been very busy identifying sensitive species, developing the Tolay Creek Riparian Enhancement Plan and, most recently, implementing the plan. For Tolay Creek, we intend to reduce erosion from the stream banks and create a lush, streamside woodland full of native trees and shrubs.

## Riparian corridors home to many forms of life

Why is it important to spend our limited resources on this effort?

Streamside forests and woodlands, also known as riparian corridors, have important value as wildlife habitat — for fish and aquatic species, many different kinds of resident and migrating birds, and mammals, such as deer, mountain lions and raccoons. When we lose vegetation, as has been the case at Tolay Creek, the wildlife lose important sources of shelter and food.

The stream banks also lose protection and become unstable and start to fall into the creek. All of that dirt and fine sediment causes changes in the in-stream habitat — burying the nooks and crannies where bugs and small animals live, where fish feed and where salmon lay their eggs. Over time, it can even change the way water flows and cause flooding downstream.

Additionally, these riparian systems are important places for storing water and recharging groundwater. Climate

change scientists predict that there will be less water for human and wildlife needs, even if precipitation increases. Restoring these areas to better hold water for longer periods of time, as they used to do, may become critical for our communities.

## Fencing cattle and growing a forest

Surrounding Tolay Creek are many acres of grasslands and a thriving cattle operation. The cattle are important for managing these grasslands and the lovely native wildflowers that live with them. They help control the exotic, European grasses and weeds that have taken over much of our native habitat and promote native biodiversity by reducing competition from these invaders.

The cows, however, can also have a negative impact on the creek. Their heavy hooves tear at the stream banks and they like to eat the riparian plants, especially the tender young trees.

Working closely with Glen Mohring, our livestock operator at Tolay Creek Ranch, we are changing the management of the cows. We have just completed fencing both sides of Tolay Creek as it winds 2.5 miles through the ranch. This will allow us to control when cows can graze near the creek. We can keep them out while the new trees are growing and during the rainy season when they might cause erosion. Then, in the early summer, we can allow them to graze quickly, but intensively, to help keep the weeds and exotic grasses in check.

While the barbed wire will keep the livestock out, we have also considered the wildlife as well, keeping the top wire relatively low so deer can jump over. In addition, the bottom wire is smooth, not barbed, so that deer, bobcats and other wildlife can sneak under it without harming themselves.

Our next step will be planting native trees and shrubs. This fall, we are collecting seeds and cuttings from native plants and trees (valley oak, native blackberry, wild rose, and more) that a local nursery, Nature's Acres, will grow in special containers for planting next fall and winter.

In addition, we will be working with the North Bay Conservation Corps this winter to plant willow stakes collected from our property and other nearby sources. With a good winter, this will be the beginning of our new riparian forest.

### Partnering for success

To gauge whether our efforts are successful, SLT is also working with UC Cooperative Extension to develop a monitoring plan. Using both professionals and volunteers, we will collect data over the years

about the numbers and kinds of native and invasive plants, birds and other natural resource indicators. We will share this information with the community and other groups to demonstrate the strategies that work best so others can learn from our work and create more effective restoration projects throughout the area.

SLT couldn't do our work without the help of many partners. We'd especially like to thank Sonoma County Regional Parks, Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District, the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, the Carneros Land Stewardship Foundation, UC Cooperative Extension, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, and our many volunteers and community members who have been joining us in the care of this remarkable landscape.

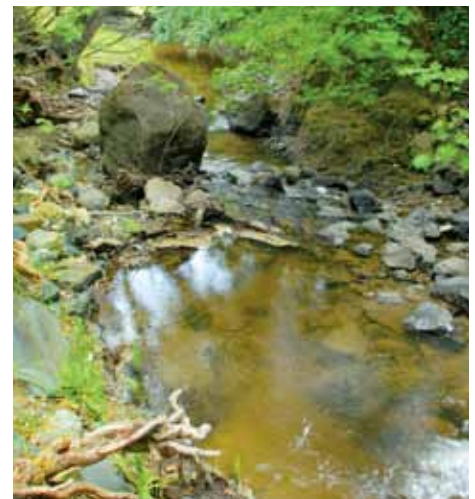
Keep your eyes open for one of our upcoming hikes so you can come and visit Tolay Creek Ranch yourself. Who knows, maybe you'll be lucky enough to be greeted by the golden eagles that look after the property.

*Bob Neale is SLT's stewardship director.*

One day this past summer, board members of the Carneros Land Stewardship Foundation (CLSF) visited Tolay Creek Ranch to see firsthand our plans for restoring the creek. Impressed with both the restoration vision and SLT's commitment to using collaborative partnerships and educational programs to make this vision come true, CLSF generously granted \$20,000 to SLT to support the native species plantings, invasive species control and riparian fencing in the heavily impacted lower reaches of the stream. CLSF is active in the area, supporting projects that conserve, restore, protect and preserve the Carneros regional coastal ecosystem. We hope this collaboration will lead to others in the area as we tackle our mutual goals of conservation and environmental education. For more information about CLSF, visit [carneroslandstewardship.org](http://carneroslandstewardship.org).



The 2.5 miles of wildlife-friendly fencing will help us better manage the livestock around Tolay Creek. Photo by Sheri Cardo.



A healthy segment of Tolay Creek. Photo by Scott Hess Photography.

our donor to support our conservation work throughout Sonoma County. If you would like to donate, please use the enclosed envelope.

Year-end donations will ensure that we can move forward —

- at Bohemia Ranch near Occidental where we are working with partners to create an 862-acre regional park with an innovative management plan;
- in the Sonoma Valley where we are acquiring a key stretch of creek and restoring and opening the historic Glen Oaks Ranch to public use;
- in Knights Valley where we are acquiring the 500-acre Live Oaks Ranch and restoring a stretch of Bidwell Creek;
- at the Baylands where we are restoring the northern reach of San Pablo Bay to a tidal marsh

and building an education center; and

- at the Jenner Headlands where thousands will hike and camp, and the trees will grow tall and the creeks will run clear.

Two years ago, we launched *Redwoods to the Bay*, a campaign to raise \$18 million to protect Sonoma County's signature landscapes. To date, \$13 million in campaign gifts has greatly accelerated the pace of our land conservation. This campaign made possible not only the Jenner Headlands acquisition, but also the purchase of the 263-acre Sonoma Mountain Ranch at the top of Sonoma Mountain.

Our challenge is to raise the remaining \$5 million by the end of 2011. The \$300,000 pledge from our friends in Sebastopol, together



Drawing of the Sonoma Baylands Center by architect Olle Lundberg.

with year-end gifts, will provide a tremendous boost!

Knowing we are on a trajectory to complete *Redwoods to the Bay* will enable us to carry on our effective work to protect the stunning landscapes of Sonoma County in these challenging times. Please donate a year-end gift today and watch it double in value.

To make a stock donation or for more information, please contact Beverly Scotland at (707) 526-6930, ext. 108 or email [beverly@sonomalandtrust.org](mailto:beverly@sonomalandtrust.org).

## Join the Legacy League

Please remember to include the Sonoma Land Trust in your will. A gift of any size helps guarantee that funds will always be available to preserve the beauty, wild habitat and signature landscapes of Sonoma County. Donors who make planned gifts are welcomed into the Legacy League, which celebrates future gifts to the Land Trust. For more information, please contact Beverly Scotland at (707) 526-6930, ext. 108 or email [beverly@sonomalandtrust.org](mailto:beverly@sonomalandtrust.org).

*Beverly Scotland is SLT's development director.*



We've begun construction! Last month, staff and friends celebrated the beginning of construction of the Sonoma Baylands Center at the site of our Sears Point Habitat Restoration Project. The Center will serve as a gathering place to explore and learn about the diversity of activities and life forms at the Sonoma Baylands. Pictured here are the major funders of the center standing in front of the construction site. (From left to right) Charles Casey of the Bothin Foundation, architect Olle Lundberg, Tammie Fraser and Brook Halsey of the Rockey Fund, Mendel Stewart of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Ralph Benson, Sonoma Land Trust executive director. Photo by Sheri Cardo.



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*Seasons Greetings!*

## Raptor rapture Newfound flyway at the Jenner Headlands

by Sheri Cardo



Juvenile cooper's hawk. Photo by Steve Miller.



Female northern harrier. Photo by Ryan DiGaudio.



Ferruginous hawk. Photo by Ryan DiGaudio.

Much to our surprise, the Jenner Headlands is a prime spot for documenting the fall Pacific Coast raptor migration. The last few months, the sky above has been filled with soaring hawks, kites, kestrels, falcons, eagles, vultures, osprey and harriers. “This is an exciting aspect of the property we didn’t know about,” enthused Brook Edwards, Jenner Headlands project manager.

Volunteers led by local raptor expert Larry Broderick have spent several days this autumn studying the birds of prey as they journeyed to their winter habitat, stopping off at the headlands to nab the rodents they relish and scoop up a bit of freshwater.

“On peak days, we saw 90 hawks an hour,” raved Broderick. “The

Jenner hawk outlook is a vast expanse that rivals the view of Marin’s Hawk Hill.”

Some of the astonishing sights captured by Broderick and his crew included a number of merlins “shooting by, sometimes flying below us. Often they would dart right in front of us to chase prey birds into the trees and bushes. And the resident red-tailed hawks were always on the prowl, looking to knock the juvenile ferruginous hawks off their perches.”

Adding to the red-tails’ bad rap, volunteer Steve Miller said, “The resident red-tails defend their territory very aggressively, especially against the hapless ferruginous hawks. Everyone picks on the FEHAs!” (A little raptor humor.)

Wind currents seem to create

avenues that funnel the raptors to the Jenner Headlands, according to Kristin Martinez, program coordinator for The Wildlands Conservancy. “We were shocked at the diversity of raptors — there are days when you can see six different species swirling at once.” (Swirling is raptor-speak for riding the thermals.)

“We knew that many of the species were out there, but have been surprised by a few sightings, including a bald eagle and a golden eagle,” said Brook.

SLT plans to offer raptor-watching adventures next fall. We’ll hike to the overlook that provides a sweeping 360-degree view of the estuary and the ocean, and have experts on hand to help us identify the many different species. Expect to be held rapt.

T O P R O T E C T T H E L A N D F O R E V E R