

nature notes

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CENTRAL COAST STATE PARKS ASSOCIATION





Interim Co-director Sierra Emrick



Interim Co-director Julie Lewis

As an outdoor enthusiast, surfer, and chronically cold person, winter is a humbling season for me. Yet, I love winter, because it forces me to slow down and relish the warm moments of the past year.

Mirroring nature's cycles, CCSPA too has been shifting focus to its essential life-sustaining processes. Since the transition of former Executive Director, Kristin Howland, to her next exciting opportunity, Julie, myself and the whole team have been working hard to ensure CCSPA continues on strong. With such a successful Giving Tuesday and Year-End Appeal, both Julie and myself are energized for the coming year and feel honored to continue connecting local communities to the incredible natural spaces, cultural heritage and experiences found in San Luis Obispo County's State Parks.

We want to thank all of you, for your continued support during this winter phase and plot a course for a fruitful spring!

We hope you enjoy the crisp air, revel in the spectacle of migrating species and reflect on the wonderful year we have had and one to come!

Thank you,

Sierra Emrick

CCSPA is an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit. We are one of 89 similar cooperating associations across the state who work in partnership with State Parks. Tax ID #: 51-0198869.

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Newsletter design: Brady Teufel

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QUICK FACT

2,400

Number of hours CCCMB volunteers have spent
building and maintaining trails this season

NORMA WIGHTMAN: 31 YEARS VOLUNTEERING FOR STATE PARKS



Norma Wightman began working for the State Park volunteer service in 1992 and was recently presented with the Volunteer Medallion Award after 31 years of service! Wightman was presented with the honor at the conclusion of her final Adventures with Nature program on November 4th at White's Point in Morro Bay (above photo).

What is your background, and what led you to becoming involved with State Parks?

I grew up on a farm in the Catskill mountains of New York State, so playing in brooks and exploring woods around my home really was my childhood playground. Nature was embedded in my psyche, I guess! When my husband and I moved to Morro Bay in 1988, it was second nature to get out and visit all the state parks.

What activities and arts do you enjoy to stay connected to nature?

I'm lucky to live near Morro Strand, so I walk the beach almost every morning and it's never the same from day to day. Montaña de Oro has my favorite trails and I kayak the estuary to enjoy the birds and other wildlife—so local state parks are a huge part of my life.

What is one of your most impactful moments volunteering? Is there a story you would like to tell?

Over the years I've interpreted many aspects of nature. Exploring tidepools with families has been a favorite. Often folks have no idea that anemones are living creatures and would otherwise step on them. When I share the mystery of their green color and stinging cells, people are fascinated. Kids especially love sea stars and when I describe their ability to digest a mussel by prying it open with tube feet and oozing its stomach into the mussel to digest it, the kids are grossed out! Hopefully the lessons of leaving living creatures in place are digested by the kids and parents, too. Recently I've focused on a geology walk at Estero Bluffs and hopefully opened some eyes about this unique coastline. People are astonished to touch rocks formed at mid-ocean floor and learn about their movement through plate tectonics and subduction forces to the Central Coast. To

me, state park walks are all about opening eyes and piquing curiosity about the natural world.

As someone who has spent a lot of time connecting our community to the rich natural and cultural resources we have on the Central Coast, what excites you about the current generation of park and environmental stewards?

I sense a deep concern among youth about our planet and the future facing dramatic climate change. It's a joy to see that concern and anticipate their contributions toward saving the earth.

What motivated you to volunteer with State Parks for 31 years?

I've enjoyed so many moments of discovery while leading walks or working with school groups to open eyes to the natural world. Living is about life-long learning and our state parks are fabulous classrooms. Thirty years have flashed by and there is still much to learn and enjoy!

- Interview by Sierra Emrick

'ON MORRO STRAND'

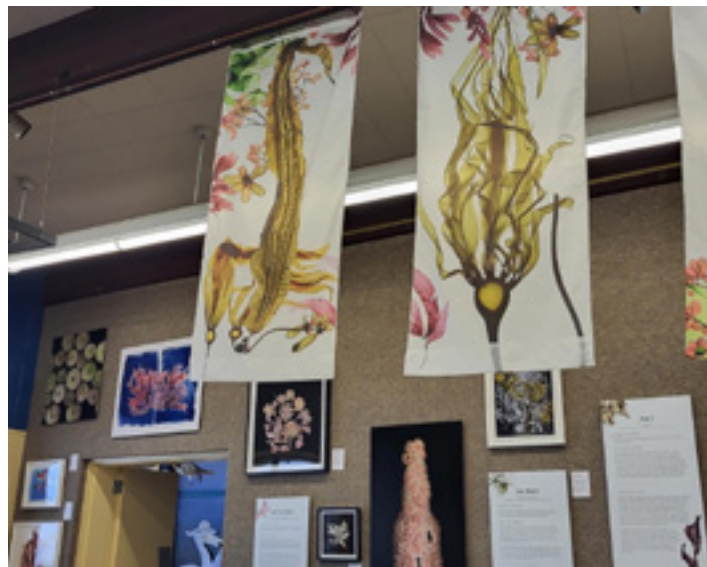
*This morning light is a laser
etching crisp golden hills
behind me; while ahead waves
crest with latte froth.*

*Hundreds of sandpipers fly
in unison. They turn and
twist, flashing dark, then
light in perfect symmetry.*

*Cold onshore wind shuffles
sand to my ankles; moves foam,
feathers, and dried kelp; clears
the flotsam from my mind.*

- Norma Wightman





UNVEILING THE DEPTHS: JOSIE ISELIN'S 'THE CURIOUS WORLD OF SEAWEED' EXHIBIT AT THE MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

On a breathtaking Central Coast fall evening, 50 people piled into the auditorium at the Morro Bay Museum of Natural History to listen to guest speaker, author, artist, and photographer, Josie Iselin. The museum's big glass windows offered the night's diverse audience of die-hard seaweed aficionados, nature enthusiasts, seasoned local fishermen, and the inquisitive locals a magnificent sunset show foreshadowing the presentation to come.

As the lights dimmed in preparation for Iselin's presentation, the crowd settled into their seats. Eyes still dazzled by the hanging seaweed portraits and captivating informational panels adorning the walls, we began our immersion into the curious world of seaweeds.

Iselin shared her personal journey and synthesized the scientific and cultural narratives surrounding seaweeds along our coast. From the historical use by Indigenous peoples to the European explorers who plucked specimens from our rocky shores during expeditions, Iselin painted a vivid picture of seaweed's rich historical and cultural significance. She also highlighted seaweed's role in opening a space in science for women. In the late 1800s, when seaweed was yet to claim its present-day spotlight, wom-

en scientists living in Pacific Grove, CA, grew the study of seaweed – "Phycology" – in what was at the time a male-dominated profession.

Her presentation culminated in a call to action for the conservation of our coastline, emphasizing the urgent need to understand and preserve the interconnected coastal ecosystem.



"What a heartfelt welcome to bringing the art and science of seaweed to The Morro Bay Museum of Natural History. The evening was a testament to this community and their curiosity and attention to our ocean universe," Iselin said of the experience.

Iselin's work, showcased on her newly launched website <https://bullkelp.info/> provides an interactive platform for learning about coastal ecosystems and their vital importance.

Iselin's presentation and enchanting exhibition made it clear that seaweed's story and ecological potential need not be exaggerated. Illuminating the world just off our shores, and through her gift of storytelling, Iselin's presentation left everyone with a sense of wonder, and in agreement, the world of seaweed truly is curious.

About the Exhibit and Author

Josie Iselin is a photographer, author, and designer of many books. Her newest book, *The Curious World of Seaweed*, features visually rich narratives of our iconic West Coast seaweeds and kelps. Released in 2019, it has been shortlisted for the Northern California Book Award and the Alice Award, recognizing illustrated books. Iselin's writing and art focusing on seaweed, kelp and sea otters puts her on the forefront of ocean activism, presenting and working with scientists and environmental groups working to preserve the kelp forests of our Pacific Coast. - Sierra Emrick

The Curious World of Seaweed is in partnership with Exhibit Envoy.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT: PARK MAINTENANCE CHIEF BLAKE THORIN



Blake Thorin is a park maintenance chief for the San Luis Obispo Coast District.

Tell us a little about yourself and your background.

I was born and raised in Southern California and moved up to the Central Coast about nine years ago. I am an avid outdoorsman and enjoy hiking, camping and fishing on my days off with my wife and two sons. I have held a variety of jobs including a background in construction and love working with my hands.

What brought you to California State Parks and how long have you been working for Parks?

Because of my passion for the outdoors, I have grown up spending a lot of time in California State Parks and felt it would be a privilege to be able to work for the agency to help keep these special places for people to enjoy in the future. I started working for State Parks as a seasonal maintenance employee at Crystal Cove State Park about 12 years ago and have worked in the San Luis Obispo Coast District for about nine years. I started in this district as a park maintenance worker and after five years in that position, I was promoted to park maintenance supervisor. I held that position for two years before being promoted to my current position of park maintenance chief.

What is your favorite aspect of being park maintenance chief?

I really enjoy being able to fulfill my vision for the parks in this district. As the park maintenance chief, I get to help solve the biggest issues in the district and it brings me great satisfaction knowing I get to help make the parks more enjoyable and sustainable for future generations. I also get the opportunity to hold other duties in the district such as the district trails coordinator, district safety coordinator and district fleet manager.

What do you wish park visitors knew about the parks you maintain?

Winters can be a challenging time of year for my department. On trails, we are out checking the conditions of various structures. We are clearing culverts, reinforcing water bars, checking bridges, looking for hazards like landslides and clearing downed trees. The maintenance department is also in charge of all of the park infrastructure, so during storms we are constantly monitoring flood areas, checking buildings for leaks and responding to assist with emergencies.

What happens to our parks and trails in particular during the winter season and what kind of tasks do you and your teams do during this time of year?

It is hard for a visitor to know how much the maintenance department is responsible for. We are charged with the monumental task of maintaining six campgrounds, about 12 day use parks and around 100 miles of trails. We do everything from housekeeping, groundskeeping, plumbing, roofing, electrical, carpentry, and road maintenance, to interfacing with the public and answering questions from curious visitors. My talented staff are able to accomplish so much and help make the experience for visitors enjoyable.

As someone who works outside a lot, do you like winter on the Central Coast?

Winter is one of my favorite times of year on the Central Coast. I love being able to get out between storms and see the area after it has been cleaned from the rain. It is also a special time to be with my family to celebrate the holidays and go to all the fun seasonal events this area has to offer.

Do you interface with Central Coast Concerned Mountain Bikers (CCCMB)? If so, what does that collaboration entail?

Yes, I do get the pleasure of being able to work with the CCCMB. As the district trails coordinator, I get to oversee the trails volunteers we have working in our district. CCCMB has many people signed up as volunteers and the work they do helps keep the trails fun and safe for everyone to enjoy. - Sierra Emrick

TALKING TRAILS: CENTRAL COAST CONCERNED MOUNTAIN BIKERS

Though the Central Coast is known for its pleasant moderate weather, we still get our fair share of rain each winter. Last year's powerful storm left our community humbled, and with a super El Niño projected by some, we could be in for some more visits from those atmospheric rivers!

So, what happens to our parks during this time of year? In particular, what happens to trails and who keeps them in operation? Who are the mysterious trail fairies that keep our park trails alive during the winter and into the spring? The answer: a tag team duo made up of the State Park Maintenance team and the Central Coast Concerned Mountain Bikers (CCCMB).

- Sierra Emrick

HISTORY OF 3CMB

In 1987, amid rumors of an impending

closure of Montaña de Oro State Park to mountain bikes, a group of cyclists met with State Park staff to figure out a way to maintain their access. The result: CCCMB was formed and the group volunteered to repair erosion

**“The Super Bowl Trail
Work Day is our big event
of the year.”**

problems thought to be associated with mountain bike use. Ever since, CCCMB has expanded its volunteer efforts to include many levels of trail maintenance and construction, which has directly resulted in trails staying open to cyclists at Montaña de Oro

State Park and elsewhere in the region.

In 1989, the group decided to organize formally as the Central Coast Concerned Mountain Bikers (3CMB). They did so to support and affiliate with the fledgling International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) and to give themselves a cohesive presence here on our Central Coast home. They follow land access issues and try to prevent problems from developing to the point of closure by working with land managers and by offering positive suggestions and ideas.

TRAILS FOR ALL

Over the years, 3CMB has built new trails at Montaña de Oro including the Hazard Peak Trail, Oats Peak Trail, Beebe Trail and Canyon View Trail. They have also worked on reroutes of East Boundary and Valencia Trails.



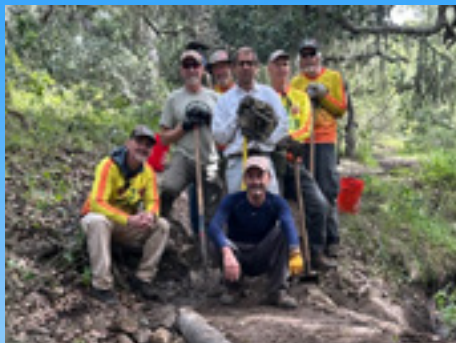
All of the group's trail building and maintenance work is done with the support and supervision of the State Parks staff and the approval of the State Parks Trail Committee. The Trail Committee consists of mountain bikers, equestrians, hikers and park docents.

"CCCMB is a huge asset to our local parks in San Luis Obispo County," said Kathy Longacre, treasurer for Coast Mounted Assistance program. "Working in collaboration with State Parks, CCCMB spent over a year laying out the new Canyon View Trail at Montaña de Oro State Park and they were able to build the trail in just two months," Longacre said.

The group also work closely with the Morro Bay State Park Maintenance staff on larger maintenance projects and we have great communications with Blake Thorin, the maintenance supervisor. Their trail work also includes the trails at Cerro Cabrillo where they do regular maintenance

TAG TEAM TRAILWORK

3CMB has regular trail work days weekly and monthly, and an annual Super Bowl Sunday Trail Work Day. The weekly Friday trail crew consists of 5 to 10 regular unpaid volunteers. They crew is made up of all age



The 3CMB crew is made of mountain bikers, trail runners and equestrians.

groups, some who show up weekly, others who come when their schedule allows. The group consists of mountain bikers, hikers, trail runners and equestrians who love the trails and

are interested in keeping them in top shape. In the fall, they concentrate on getting ready for winter by clearing and cleaning trail drainages, brushing, and looking for projects to work on after it rains.

During the rainy season, they start working on the trail tread itself by rebuilding old trail drainage and reestablishing grade reversals. In the spring, they start the brushing program. Their monthly weekend trail work days are for special projects that involve all 3CMB supporters. The Super Bowl Trail Work Day is the big event of the year which includes breakfast, swag and t-shirts. Work is completed by about noon to leave plenty of time to watch the game. We usually have 100+ volunteers on pre-planned projects throughout the park. - Paul Reinhardt

HOW DO I JOIN?

Interested? Visit CCCMB's website cccmb.org for more information or email info@cccmb.org to get involved.



WHAT'S IN THE TREES AT THE PISMO BUTTERFLY GROVE?

If you have been to the Pismo State Beach Butterfly Grove lately, you might have noticed something that looks like PVC pipe with a device on the end in several trees. These devices are anemometers: wind speed and direction detectors. Placed there in mid-October, the hope is that they will help determine the wind flow through the Eucalyptus and cypress trees and give clues as to where the monarch butterflies land and cluster.

MAPPING THE WIND

Kyle Nessen, a Cal Poly graduate student, is the program manager for this study. He is working with an environmental consultant company, Althouse and Meade (www.althouseandmeade.com) out of Paso Robles, which describes itself as “working towards sustainable solutions.”

Kyle has placed 11 anemometers in carefully selected Eucalyptus trees throughout the grove to see how the trees impact the wind flow, and if this makes a difference. He will leave the devices in place until the end of March when the butterflies are gone. Then, he will use LiDAR technology (light detection and ranging — a remote sensing method used to examine the surface of the earth) on a drone to fly through the grove, creating a 3D model of the area. This model combined with the anemometer data should give a good picture of how the trees protect the butterflies, and supply information on where to plant new trees within the grove.

Another study by Nessen at Vandenberg Space Force Base focuses on the wind speeds that disturb the butterflies. Researchers believe they only leave their clusters when they need to cool down or are blown away. Combining this information with data about wind speed and direction through the grove will give a better idea of how to manage and protect the butterflies.

INFORMING THE FUTURE

The monarch butterflies are seeing an increase in numbers overwintering in the grove since the devastatingly small numbers (about 3000) in 2020. At that time, researchers feared the species was close to extinction. In January 2022, the number increased to 22,000 and as of December 1, 2023, the number was just over 16,000. Counts are made often, and the hope is that this number will increase before the end of the season.

Kyle's research and data analysis could help implement changes in the grove for the 2024 season. “We will have an updated, high-resolution LiDAR dataset of the site, and a state-of-the-art wind study of the grove. This should prove helpful in future grove management decisions,” Nessen said at a recent presentation to State Parks. - *Fayla*



Cal Poly researcher Kyle Nessen





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An adventure in Wonderland



ONCE UPON A TIME

The 4th annual Butterfly Ball - An Adventure in Wonderland, hosted on October 14th at the Octagon Barn, was an evening filled with fun and excitement in support of the Western Monarch Trail.

SETTING THE STAGE

Master of ceremonies and San Luis Obispo Chamber's own Jim Dantona led the attendees through an adventurous evening starting with a cocktail hour and silent auction followed by electrifying performances by local members of Ryan's American Dance and speeches and presentations of awards. An intricately painted giant cheshire cat leered over the proceedings.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Over plated dinners, supporters heard from Krystin Dozier from the Effie Yeaw Nature Center who outlined the importance of expanding the Western Monarch Trail to the Central Valley. Also celebrated was Michele Roest, who received the prestigious 2023 John Laird Lifetime Achievement Award, and Regena Orr, honored with the 2023 Metamorphosis Award for Conservation Leadership.

Special recognition was also extended to the dedicated volunteers behind the book *Pismo Monarch Butterflies: Magic, Myths and Mysteries*. Authors Cheryl Powers, Peggy Burhenn, Jan Ojerholm, Richard Simpson, and editors Elaine Rosenfield and Susan Gaer were celebrated for their tireless efforts.

The night reached its crescendo, raising over \$12,000 towards the \$25,000 goal. Celebration broke out on the dance floor with live music from the fun and talented Imua. We cannot thank our attendees and sponsors enough for making the event and its impact possible!

Together, we're creating a transformative ripple in the realm of monarch conservation. Join us in applauding these remarkable individuals and please continue to be part of the magic that sustains the Western Monarch Trail's vital mission.

Continue supporting the Western Monarch Trail and the monarch conservation efforts that CCSPA has spearheaded in collaboration with several other agencies! You can still donate and share the link with your friends by texting "Butterflyball" to 44-321

If you would like to help the Effie Yeaw Nature Center meet their fundraising goal to become the first inland Western Monarch Trail site, please consider contributing and sharing with friends and family near and far. Simply text "EYNC" to 44-321.

Special thank to the 2024 Butterfly Ball Sponsors:

- Jerry Stanley
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- Justin Vineyards and Winery
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- BHE Renewables

“I believe that if people learn about the natural world, they’ll want to protect it too.”

- Michel Roest

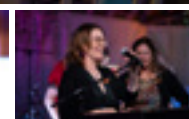
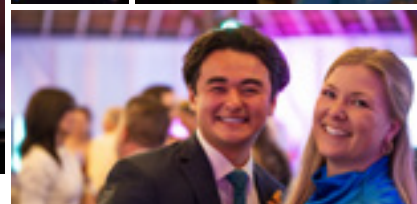
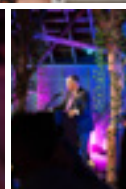
Michele Roest (right) was the 2023 recipient of the John Laird Lifetime Achievement Award that honors those who have dedicated their lives and careers to supporting the conservation of the State of California’s natural and cultural resources, parks and open spaces.

IN HER OWN WORDS

“I was born and raised in San Luis Obispo. I’ve lived here nearly all my life because it’s such a special place to me. As a child, I remember going to an open space where my parents used to take us to play, and watching it be converted into an apartment complex.

I knew from a young age that I wanted to do everything I could to protect the special places where I live. I believe that if people learn about the natural world, they’ll want to protect it too. It’s why I’m a biologist and science educator: I teach people about nature every way I can.

The Central Coast State Parks Association (CCSPA), in partnership with the California State Parks in San Luis Obispo County, have done so much to conserve and protect. They work cooperatively with other local partners to expand our local green spaces. They support training for volunteers to be impactful interpreters of our natural and cultural resources, touching the lives of millions of people every year. They are role models for responsible stewardship and visionary planners for the future. We are so lucky to have such an effective and committed group in this community and I am very grateful.”





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