

nature notes

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CENTRAL COAST STATE PARKS ASSOCIATION



*In the cycle of nature
there is no such thing as
victory or defeat; there is
only movement.*

- Paulo Coelho



Kristin and Charlie Howland

Winter on the Central Coast signifies movement with the migration of birds, whales and butterflies, but also with the shift in weather. I look forward to the fresh, new rain and signs of new life that spring from this change in seasons. I love the way the earth smells when the first rains have washed away the dust and leave a brighter, crisper and greener world. I enjoy the chill to the mornings and how the light dances and allows us to look at the world a little differently. The sunrises and sunsets seem more colorful celebrating the days behind and before us.

I remain grateful for the positive circumstances that sprung from this year. CCSPA staff, volunteers and board members were able to open our retail stores with new life. We were able to host *Get Outside!* Film events safely and host a very well-received Butterfly Ball: Monarch Masquerade. We launched the Western Monarch Trail project in collaboration with agencies and organizations throughout the western United States. We co-hosted traveling exhibits at our State Parks and kept the MindWalks lecture series going virtually. Once again, our State Park partners, staff and volunteers are busy planning and implementing programs and hosting Park visitors.

The CCPSA team is looking forward to the new year and all the positive change and outreach we can accomplish. We look forward to connecting with our community and local businesses more through programs, events and networking. We are excited to rebuild our volunteer and intern program. We are thrilled to harness and carry the momentum from this year and foster more growth in the coming year.

In 2022 I hope you find yourself embracing a quiet moment in nature to listen, smell and immerse yourself in the true beauty that surrounds you. Take note of how that beauty allows you to feel and look at the world as a result. I encourage you to share that passion with others as it is that deeper connection with nature that allows us to see and influence change and positive movement.

CCSPA is an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit. We are one of 85 similar cooperating associations across the state who work in partnership with State Parks. Tax ID #: 51-0198869.

Cover photo: Brady Teufel
Newsletter design: Brady Teufel

STAFF DIRECTORY

Kristin Howland

Executive Director

ed@centralcoastparks.org

(805) 548-0391

Monica Rutherford

Community Outreach Manager

programs@centralcoastparks.org

(805) 548-0385

Sheri Robesky

Retail Operations Manager

store@centralcoastparks.org

(805) 548-0392

Julie Lewis

Retail Operations Coordinator

retail@centralcoastparks.org

(805) 550-3784

Beca Martin

Operations and Events Manager

events@centralcoastparks.org

(805) 548-0393

BOARD MEMBERS

Marylou Gooden - Board Chair

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www.centralcoastparks.org

QUICK FACT

20,000

Roughly the number of shorebirds that stop to feed in the Morro Bay estuary each year



CCSPA'S YEAR-END APPEAL: SUPPORT OUR MUSEUM



We are fortunate to have a place right here in one of our Central Coast State Parks where families gather to reconnect with the earth's delicate and intricate layers. A place where your children and their children will come to play, explore, and understand that what we do matters, that we all play a crucial role in the Earth's future.

The Morro Bay State Park Museum of Natural History, with an expansive view of Morro Rock, sits perched above a diverse estuary, a constant reminder that what we choose in life has a direct impact on our natural surroundings. Interactive museum exhibits inform children and adults alike about the Morro Bay estuary's magnificent ecosystem. In the past year, CCSPA has honored the Museum by renewing its "spirit". Sea life murals, new exhibits, children's programs, and new educational merchandise are just a few of the new additions we have funded.

We ask you to join us in the museum's rejuvenation. We ask that you help us create and expand museum exhibits and programs that tell the story of our local environment and remind us all that the choices we make matter.

Plans for upcoming museum additions include:

- A walk-through kelp forest
- An "under-the-mud" experience
- An exhibit exploring biodiversity in the tidepools
- An exhibit describing the complex ecosystem of eelgrass

These and more ideas are in the works, including traveling exhibits and cutting-edge hands-on activities. With

your support, these additions to the museum will provide meaningful, memorable educational opportunities for the over 1-million visitors who come to the museum each year. When you walk into the newly renovated Morro Bay Museum of Natural History you and your family will see, hear, and feel all that we have created as a community. Your gift of \$50, \$125 or \$250 will help us keep the momentum going and create meaningful exhibits to teach future generations to care. You can donate to this fundraising effort by using your phone's camera to scan the QR code on the left, or text MUSEUMLOVE to 44-321. Or, mail a check to the address on the back of your Nature Notes newsletter and write "Year-end fundraiser" in the memo line.



The Morro Bay State Park Museum of Natural History



Matthew Schwartz | Unsplash.com

FROM MONO TO MORRO: TRACKING OSPREYS ON THE MOVE

At Mono Lake, on the edge of the Great Basin Desert in eastern California, there is a fascinating population of nesting osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*). Osprey and Mono Lake are intriguing on their own, but the relationship between them is even more captivating. What is a fish-eating bird doing nesting at a fishless lake?

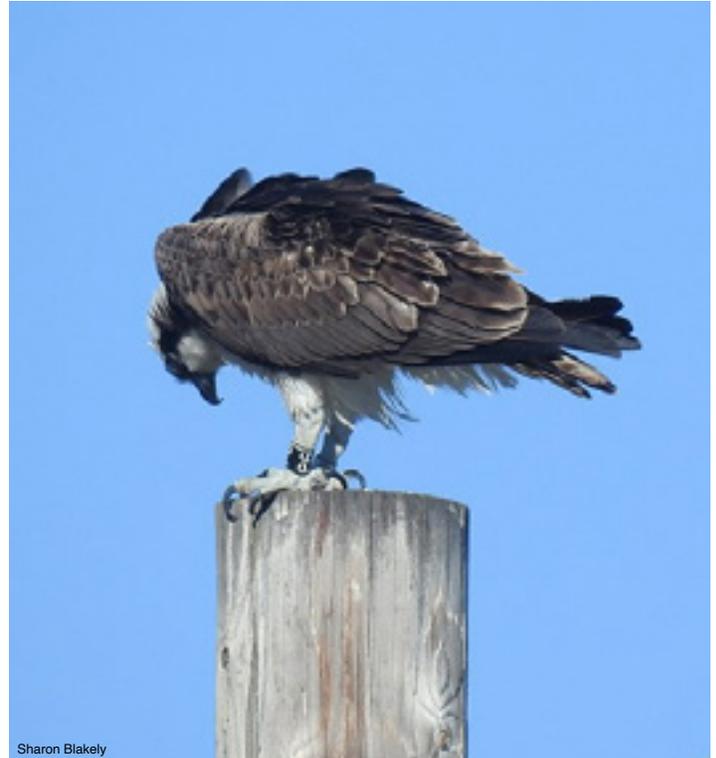
Osprey are well known on their breeding grounds from their large stick nests, which they build on the tops of trees, but also human-made structures such as light posts, utility poles, and channel markers. Really any location that has a clear view and is in proximity to fishable waters. Osprey exploit all types of waters: river, pond, ocean, estuary, etc. If there are fish, generally 0.5 - 1 pound in size, within three feet of the surface it is fishable for an osprey.

This was a real surprise in the data since bird migration generally follows a north-south orientation.

Mono Lake is a hypersaline, alkaline, naturally fishless lake in the eastern Sierra. The lake and part of the shoreline are protected as Mono Lake Tufa State Natural Reserve. As part of the Great Basin, Mono Lake is a terminal lake, meaning it has no natural outflow, water only leaves through evaporation. It has a very complex history, particularly related to Los Angeles Department of Water and Power diversions of the freshwater inflow streams. This began in 1941 and caused the lake to drop by 40 feet of elevation and double in salinity. Following protest and legal action, diversions have decreased but the lake is still about 12 feet below the mandated level.

Mono Lake is best known for the tufa towers: calcium carbonate that forms where freshwater springs bubble up through the hypersaline alkaline water. The towers only form underwater, so the size and number visible are directly related to the lake level. It is on these towers that the osprey nest. The first nesting pair was observed in 1985 at a tufa tower off Navy Beach, which is approximately two miles from the nearest fishable waters. Data has since shown Mono Lake osprey regularly traveling 5-7 miles to fish.

The rangers periodically observed the osprey, but it wasn't until 2004 that a scientific-based monitoring program was initiated. From the single nest in 1985, there were 6 breeding pairs in 2004 and has since grown to 15 pairs. In 2009 Dr. Pete Bloom joined the research, annually banding the nestlings, and in 2015 started using color bands (white text on black bands). To date, a total of 224 osprey have been banded at Mono Lake.



Osprey "P6" was originally banded in Orange County and has recently been spotted near Morro Rock.

Over a dozen band recoveries have been reported since the program began, more than half of which are photo recoveries. This data has supported a few hypotheses, such as confirming osprey fledged at Mono Lake have returned as adults, but there have also been several surprises. The most non-Mono reports, three, have come from the gulf coast of Texas. This was a real surprise in the data since bird migration generally follows a north-south orientation, not east-west. One bird flew even further, all the way to Alabama, and another was reported in Oregon.

Westward movement was confirmed in 2018 with a photograph of an osprey (73) on the Central Coast. Natural Resources staff from Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area photographed the banded osprey during a survey. The State Parks connection is great! Interestingly, a few days later an osprey that Pete Bloom banded in Orange County, also with the color bands (63), was photographed at Oso Flaco Lake. Recently, P6, who was also banded in Orange County, has been observed near Morro Rock. So keep your eyes open and cameras at the ready!

Please report any sightings to the USGS banding lab at www.reportband.gov. We rely on community scientists to report this information to provide more data points on where the Mono Lake osprey migrate, their dispersal, etc. Additional reports on these individuals are desired as well as sightings of all other banded osprey.

By Lisa Fields - Ecologist, Mono Lake Osprey Research Project



WESTERN MONARCH TRAIL PARTNERSHIP TAKES FLIGHT

November officially marks the beginning of monarch season where the beautiful western monarch butterflies arrive in our local overwintering sites. The Pismo State Beach Monarch Butterfly Grove received some early visitors this year; large amounts of monarchs showed up mid-October, with numbers 3,500% percent higher than the same time last year. We hope that we continue to see population increases for this species that is believed to be on the brink of extinction.

Since early this year, CCSPA has been working hard on a brand new project to support the conservation of the western monarch, and we are thrilled it has finally come to fruition. The Western Monarch Trail was born out of a brainstorm while planning our annual Butterfly Ball (more on that below). We were looking for ways to make a meaningful impact on the overall western monarch population that would go beyond just our local groves and overwintering sites. We took inspiration from the Whale Trail, a non-profit organization that highlights whale migration and educational resources across the whole west coast. After speaking with the Whale Trail's Executive Director, Donna Sandstrom, she gave us pointers and advice on how to kickstart a similar project for

the western monarch butterfly. The result is a one-of-a-kind partnership that's poised to make a positive impact.

The Western Monarch Trail is a multi-agency collaboration with representatives from federal and state agencies, non-profit organizations and private entities taking a grass roots approach to educating, advocating and making change in support of the western monarch. The Western Monarch Trail follows the migration route of the western monarch butterfly; sites along this route provide shelter for butterflies during the winter, nectar to feed migrating monarchs, and native milkweed which provides food for their larvae. Signage along the trail identifies crucial overwintering and nectaring locations for western monarchs, providing the public with consistent, up-to-date information on their status, as well as efforts to restore their populations. By providing information, education, outreach and resources, the Western Monarch Trail serves as an opportunity to learn what can be done to take action to help restore populations of healthy migrating western monarch butterflies.

CCSPA has been in collaboration with California State Parks, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Xerces Society, U.S. Fish and Wildlife

Service, California Native Plant Society, the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, and many more agencies and organizations across the western United States. Experts in the field and representatives of participating organizations have all collaborated on the creation of a beautiful and informative panel which will provide site-specific information for locations along the trail. The first panel will be installed within the next few months at the Pismo State Beach Monarch Butterfly Grove. Future funds will go towards the creation and implementation of additional panels, educational and outreach efforts in nurseries, gardens, and critical monarch locations, and restoration efforts at overwintering sites.

The Butterfly Ball was held at the Octagon Barn in San Luis Obispo on October 23rd. The event raised over \$13,000 to kickstart the Western Monarch Trail, but this venture needs your help in order to expand our efforts beyond our local sites. Check out our website at westernmonarchtrail.com to learn more about the project as well as ways you can support monarchs and donate to this important cause. And stay tuned for the first Western Monarch Trail interpretive panel that will be installed at the Grove in early 2022!

SPOTLIGHT ON PARK STAFF: ROUVAISHYANA, DISTRICT INTERPRETIVE PLANNER FOR SLO COAST DISTRICT



Tell us a little about yourself and your background.

I was born and raised in the Midwest, then came to California as a young adult. While studying natural history and marine science, I decided to work outdoors in Parks. I've also studied two other fields not related to natural or cultural history, and am studying Spanish and Japanese languages now.

How long have you been working for California State Parks, and what have your positions been?

Over 31 years, I've been a Seasonal Interpreter, Interpreter Assistant, Maintenance, and State Park Interpreter II. I was Museum Manager of the Morro Bay Museum of Natural History for 14 years, then was assigned to COVID-19 work when the museum closed due to the pandemic. I am currently District Interpretive Planner for the San Luis Obispo Coast District. Away from Parks, I've worked for California Department of Fish & Wildlife, Department of Health Services doing plankton sampling, Audubon Society, California Native Plant Society, Road Scholar, and have been an environmental educator, bus tour guide, and naturalist/boat captain for whale and wildlife watching tours.

What are some of your current projects?

I think about the future of Parks. My main project is the Montaña de Oro Interpretation Master Plan (IMP). The Hearst San Simeon State Park IMP will be next. I am and have been the Park liaison to the Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival, which is ongoing.

What has been your favorite part about being an interpreter?

Pretty much everything--using my training, being in the field a lot, building whale skeletons and other exhibits, working with docents, putting on interpretive events for visitors, writing a resource document, interacting with visitors, watching birds and marine mammals, working with museum collections, and team-building. It's a charmed life.

Tell us about your role as a Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival representative.

I'm on the program committee and help organize field trips and leaders, the keynote speaker, and boat and van trips. I'm on the board as the State Park liaison, carrying information in two directions. At the Festival, I lead bird programs every morning, afternoon, and evening. It wears me out by the end of the Festival, and I love every minute of it.

What is your favorite subject or topic to interpret and why?

Every topic can be amazing. Birds are a huge favorite--any kind of birds. Marine mammals as well. I used to work at a park where I was at the harbor seal rookery every Sunday during summer. Whales, sea lions, sea otters, botany and wildflowers, and medicinal plants, too. I'm not a geologist, except for marine geology, but the topic fascinates me. The night sky. I'm very interested in Native American languages and California tribal efforts to reconstruct them. Storytelling. These days I really love doing bilingual wildlife programs (not at Parks, but maybe that's in the future). And I enjoy the challenge of interpreting controversial topics such as climate change, sea level rise, and the effects of forced relocation on Native American people, and on Japanese-Americans during WWII. These are all important topics. - Interview by Monica Rutherford



PISMO CLAM RESEARCH AND REPOPULATION

Pismo clams made a splashing return to the shore this summer, capturing the attention of locals, beach goers, scientists, and staff at the Oceano Dunes District of California State Parks. With notice of increased Pismo clams, State Park staff headed to the shore, taking part in exciting collaborative opportunities focusing on Pismo clams. State Park staff and volunteers worked with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and a team of research students from Cal Poly State University, SLO.

The first collaboration opportunity began this past June when State Park interpreters and volunteers, alongside California Department of Fish and Wildlife, headed to the shoreline taking part in the first ever Pismo Clam Outreach Program. During this program, groups of interpreters and volunteers walked along the shoreline sharing information with beach visitors about Pismo clams, the rules and regulations of harvesting clams, and also demonstrated how to rebury a surfaced clam. This newly developed program created and led by Mallory Claassen, a California State Park Interpreter II for the Oceano

Dunes District, was a great success with many positive interactions with visitors along the shore.

Another collaboration took place in July, this time in the early hours of the morning with headlamps and measuring equipment at the ready. With the glow of the moon still reflecting upon the ocean waves, a team of Cal Poly research students made their way to the shoreline during the lowest tides of the year to study Pismo clam population size and individual clam size for our area.

The research team counted and measured 35,000 Pismo clams, which is the most clams ever counted in a survey since this research began. After the Pismo clams were measured and data was recorded, the researchers properly reburied them.

In addition to this research, the team is conducting a new study tracking the movement and growth of Pismo clams. This “mark and recapture” study involves tagging individual Pismo clams to track their movement over time to learn more about their growth and mortality rates. Researchers collected clams

and placed small, non-invasive QR code tags on the outside of their shells. The research team will return to the beach monthly to find the tagged clams and collect and record data. The Oceano Dunes District is sharing this team’s ongoing research and findings through social media posts on the district’s social media channels.

The research team is also asking for community members to participate in this study because the QR technology allows the public to help aid in this exciting project. If you find a tagged clam along the beach, scan the code with your smartphone camera to be directed to an online digital form. This form will ask questions regarding the location of where the clam was found. After finding a clam with a tag, the public is asked to always properly rebury the clam in the area in which it was found.

What an exciting summer of seeing Pismo clams along the shore and wonderful collaboration opportunities! If you would like to learn more about the Cal Poly Pismo clam research, please visit: tinyurl.com/3n8h6cxf
By Kristen McNally - State Park Interpreter I

Join the CCSPA Team!

We're looking for staff, volunteers, and board members!

Use your skills and passions to help make a difference in your local State Parks.

Email your resume and cover letter to Kristin at ed@centralcoastparks.org

Visit our website for position descriptions & more info



centralcoastparks.org/volunteering-ccspa

Photo by Mike Baird

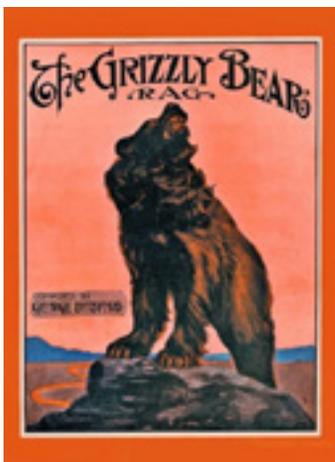
MORRO BAY WINTER BIRD FESTIVAL - 25TH ANNIVERSARY

The Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival is planning its 25th anniversary event for January 13-17, 2022. The Festival is expanding this year to a four and a half day event starting on Thursday the 13th, with a day of Master Classes and walks for those who wish to come early. We are closely monitoring public health guidelines related to the COVID-19 pandemic and considering how best to handle proof of vaccination for participants. At this point the Festival is moving forward, and there is a lot of excitement about it.

The Festival will offer more than 160 walks, workshops, lectures, and related events during its four and a half days. These range from fairly short bird walks to Big Days and condor searches lasting all day, workshops, bird house building, combination birding/winery tours, and much more. Saturday the 15th will be Family Day at the Morro Bay Museum of Natural History as in the past. This year, it is being planned and carried out by State Park staff. This event is aimed at families with children, with the goal of introducing young people to birding and nature learning in general.

Several years ago, the Festival began offering programs accessible to people with mobility limitations; that has been continued and will be part of this year's event. For the first time, we are reaching out to the Latinx community and plan to offer a few events in bilingual English/Spanish format, possibly including Family Day. Also for the first time, we are developing a smartphone app that will allow participants, leaders, and Festival staff to access information about events, changes, locations, and related information. More events will meet at their field locations and fewer at the Morro Bay Community Center, in order to reduce crowding and exposure as a precaution during the pandemic.

New fees have been set for the Festival: \$25 for Monday only (half day), \$45 for any full day, \$95 for three days, and \$125 for the full Festival. The Festival needs to offset some of its costs, and we are now offering a fourth full day. Comparing these fees to other bird festivals, ours is still a very good value. Festival registration opens soon. For more information, please visit www.morrobaybirdfestival.org



BEAR IN MIND: THE STORY OF THE CALIFORNIA GRIZZLY

CCSPA and the San Luis Obispo Coast District of California State Parks are thrilled to share the arrival of a brand new traveling exhibit at the Morro Bay Museum of Natural History.

Bear in Mind: The Story of the California Grizzly will be featured at the museum from November 21 to January 16. This compelling exhibition tells the story of one of California's most beloved and feared animals - the grizzly bear. The relationship that Californians have had with the grizzly bear over the centuries is one of dualities, expressed in fear and fascination.

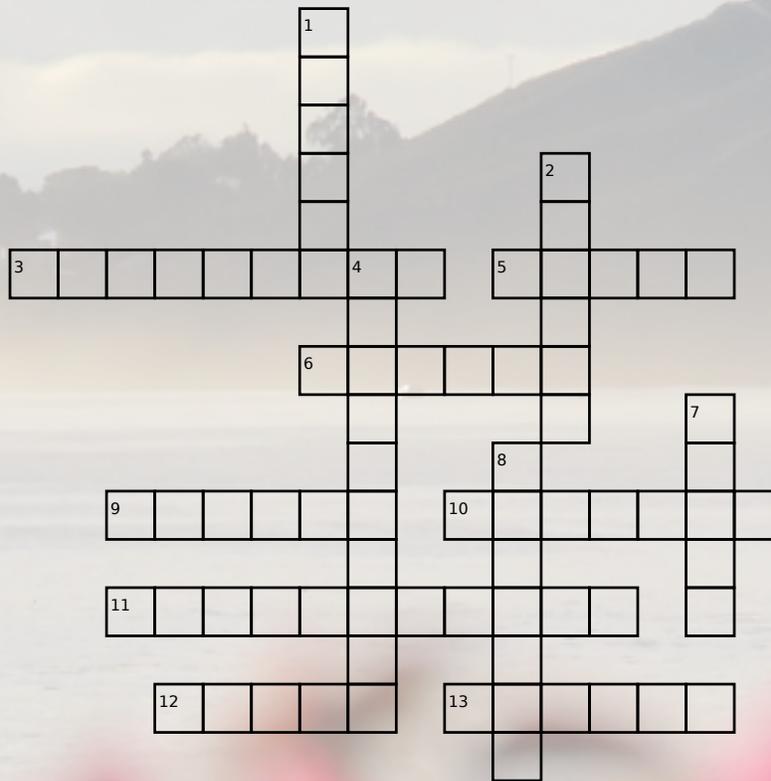
Now extinct in the state, the grizzly has been a central character in California's history. Check out the exhibit that shows how the grizzly was seen as the embodiment of California's "untamed" wilderness, used as a symbol of freedom

and power by the Bear Flag Rebellion and later the state itself, driven to extinction as California was settled, and used in advertising and propaganda to sell products and ideas.

The exhibition also presents scientifically accurate information about grizzly bear biology, dispelling some of the myths about this top predator. It includes special sections for children and interactive elements to engage visitors of all ages. *Bear in Mind* is based on the Heyday Book publication *Bear in Mind: The California Grizzly* by Susan Snyder, and the Bancroft Library exhibition of the same name.

Join us for the exhibit launch event in person at the Morro Bay Museum of Natural History on November 30 from 4 PM - 6 PM! Dr. Peter Alagona from UC Santa Barbara will join us for an intriguing, interactive talk about the history of grizzly bears in California.

CCSPA CROSSWORD PUZZLE



Down:

1. CCSPA supports the SLO Coast and _____ Dunes Districts of CA State Parks
2. The long-billed _____ is a large shorebird with a thin, curved bill used to probe for food in the mudflats
4. The Central Coast is home to 3 types of _____: Brandt's, pelagic, and double-crested
7. The turkey vulture uses its sense of _____ to find its food
8. The California brown _____ has a throat pouch that can hold over 2 gallons of water

Across:

3. A local landmark location where some peregrine falcons nest
5. The common raven has the largest _____ of any bird species
6. The color of a black oystercatcher's bill
9. The western snowy _____ is a small shorebird listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act
10. The great horned owl can rotate its neck 270 _____ around
11. The only type of bird that can fly backwards
12. CCSPA stands for Central Coast State _____ Association
13. The red-_____ hawk is the most common hawk in North America

The holidays are coming!

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Coastal Critter: \$30

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Virtual Mind Walks Lecture Series

California State Parks, in collaboration with the Central Coast State Parks Association, brings a new type of learning right to your living room: **Virtual Mind Walks**. These free, online presentations focus on recreational, natural, and cultural history topics as they relate to the Central Coast.

For a schedule of upcoming lectures, an archive of past lectures and to pre-register for the live Zoom program, visit the Mind Walks page on CCSPA's website:

centralcoastparks.org/mind-walks

The Mind Walks Program is underwritten by the Thomas E. and Mary Kathryn Eltzroth fund and supported by the Central Coast State Parks Association.



Central Coast State Parks Association
 202 Tank Farm Road, Suite H2
 San Luis Obispo, Ca 93401
 (805) 548-0380
www.centralcoastparks.org

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 When you become a Friend of CCSPA, you support interpretation and education in the California State Parks in San Luis Obispo County.

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- Personalized **CCSPA Friend card** to present at stores for discounts
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- Free admission for two adults to the **Mind Walks Lecture Series**
- Subscription to our quarterly newsletter, **Nature Notes**
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- CCSPA Friend **sticker**
- 25% **holiday discount** at CCSPA nature stores
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- **Weekly emails** about State Park events, volunteer opportunities, nature store sales, educational programs, and more

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Guided Interpretive Experiences | <input type="checkbox"/> Morro Bay Museum of Natural History |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Western Monarch Butterfly Outreach | <input type="checkbox"/> Continuing education for interpreters & volunteers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation Outreach Support | <input type="checkbox"/> Area of greatest need |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cultural and Living History | |

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