

ENDANGERED HABITATS LEAGUE NEWSLETTER



We publish this newsletter four times a year to inform our generous supporters — and the many other friends of the Endangered Habitats League — about our plans, activities and successes throughout the ecoregion.

If you are not yet a member of the Endangered Habitats League, please join us in the ongoing effort to preserve and protect the Southern California ecoregion's irreplaceable plants, animals and places. Form is on page 3.

Dedicated to Ecosystem Protection and Sustainable Land Use +++ Vol. 13 No. 2 +++ Spring 2003

EHL files CEQA suit to block two developments in Trabuco Canyon

Despite letters from the **US Fish and Wildlife Service** and the **California Dept. of Fish and Game** stating that the **Saddle Crest** and **Saddle Creek** development projects would “preclude” a **Natural Community Conservation Plan (NCCP)** in Orange County, the Board of Supervisors approved the projects. County staff also took the opportunity to lower the protections of the **Foothill-Trabuco Specific Plan**, the result of years of community-based outreach.

This project had gained notoriety in the press for its wanton destruction of 500 mature oaks and sycamores, with indirect impacts to hundreds more. Local activists had led protests, but in the end, **EHL** was forced to file a suit under **CEQA**. We expect to be joined in the litigation by other environmental groups. Similar issues are at stake in our litigation over the neighboring **Saddleback Meadows** project.

Progressive ideas receive unanimous support of key committee at recent hearing on new General Plan

Riverside County moves closer to historic change of direction

Walkable communities of higher density rather than tract homes and strip mall parking lots? A transit framework within the worst sprawl in the entire nation? Assurance through a “**Certainty System**” that rural areas won’t be replanned for development except on a five-year, comprehensive cycle? All these ideas got the unanimous support of the **General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC)** at supervisorial hearings in March on the new **General Plan**.

EHL a key participant in new plan

EHL has been one of the key participants in **GPAC**, developing many of the progressive features of the plan. Along with building industry, affordable housing advocates, and other environmental groups, we presented decision-makers with a strong consensus for change. **EHL** also pointed out last minute policy changes that would reduce protections for streams and floodplains, and submitted com-

ments with alternative language.

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Staff told to adopt new course

On April 8, the **Board of Supervisors** gave direction to staff that embraces this change of course. Innovative “**Community Centers**” and density bonuses, in exchange for open space, were green-lighted. While supporting most aspects of the five-year **Certainty System**, the Board (on a 3:2 vote) acceded to pressure from the **Farm Bureau** and unfortunately **reduced the cycle from five years to two years for some farmlands**. **EHL** is still fighting to regain the stream and floodplain protections.

MAY MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

Throughout the month of May, **EHL** will be sponsoring our annual membership drive. We want to reach everyone in the region who shares our interest in preserving Southern California's natural heritage. As the scope of our work continues to grow we are working to improve our organization and expand our membership. Through the use of technology we are building an “action alert system” and creating efficient new ways to work and communicate.

RENEWAL NOTICES COMING

Personal renewal notices will be sent to our members within a couple of weeks. These notices will include the opportunity for you to join our e-mail alert system and to indicate your specific areas of interest or concern. You will also have the chance to apply part of your membership contribution as a gift membership. We ask everyone to give some thought as to others you know who may be interested in joining **EHL**. Your support and the support of others like you are very important for our continued success. We look forward to another year!

Subject: Beasts & Botany

Range Expansion

By Jess Morton

Everyone who reads these pages is already familiar with the wildlife-associated problems of habitat loss and the resultant range contraction of many native species. What may not be so evident is that other native species have done well by human-induced changes to the environment. Some like the mourning cloak butterfly and house finch are so much a part of our world



Great-tailed grackle: Can this recent avian interloper be called “native?”

we hardly notice them. Both are species that have always been widespread in southern **California** and are doing very well today. But there are others whose range is expanding in southern California that make us ask, “What does it mean to be a native species?”

Examples of “native” species with expanding ranges can be drawn from every group of plants and animals. Let’s look at a couple of them—the great-tailed grackle and giant swallowtail butterfly. The great-tailed grackle is a large blackbird “native” to **Mexico, Texas** and parts of the southwest. As its name implies, the tail is spectacular—a v-shaped bloom of tail feathers that gives me the impression that the male is dragging anchor when it flies.

A glance at past field data is instructive. The species is not mentioned in books on California birds from the 1920’s. Field guides from the 60’s show its range extending into **Arizona**, but still east of the **Colorado River**. By the 1980’s the lower Colorado was heavily colonized and today, the great-tailed grackle is common in coastal wetlands, much to the dismay of veteran local birders, who view these birds as nest robbers and a threat to many uncommon marshland species.

Yet by some measures, the great-tailed grackle has to be considered a “native” species. As the **US Fish and Wildlife Service** points out, the bird did get here on its own. At least partly. Its rapid range expansion has been facilitated by human activities. This grackle is a bird of marsh and riparian wetlands. Hence, the long stretches

of desert that once existed in the southwest were effective barriers to its spread. Now, as we have dotted the desert with cities

and towns, the barrier has disappeared. Great-tailed grackles moved westward, leaping from place to place.

Another relatively new species to southern California is the giant swallowtail butterfly. This is our largest lowland butterfly, with a wingspan stretching well over five inches. The wings are bright yellow below.



The giant swallowtail butterfly is “native” to the southeastern US, where it is occasionally a pest species. Known there as the “orange dog,” its larvae feed on citrus.

This story continues on page 3

News from Around Our Southern California Ecoregion

Riverside County

EHL seeks improvement of Riverside habitat plan

Endangered Habitats League has submitted comments to the County of Riverside outlining improvements to its draft Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP). These improvements arose from the "Bio Working Group," a group of biologists convened by EHL to review the adequacy of the proposed plan. Their technical report recommended that already fragmented areas be eliminated, that important regional linkages be added, and that the two main core habitat areas be expanded and strengthened. Remarkably, this biologically superior configuration would also be more cost-effective than the original proposal. EHL has met with County staff to discuss the practical aspects of implementing these changes.

Legal settlement adds to French Valley open space

The failure of the Riverside County Board of Supervisors to rein in new General Plan amendments while revising the old General Plan has meant that the new General Plan will never achieve all it might have achieved. Due to these concerns, EHL began filing litigation against some of these General Plan amendments.

In the case of one project, we were able to work with the applicants to protect more open space between the French Valley and Menifee areas while simultaneously providing a wider range of housing products on smaller lots. It is still incumbent upon the County to accept this beneficial solution, however.

San Bernardino County

EHL helps Chino adopt progressive land use plan

On March 25, 2002, the City of Chino approved a land use plan for its annexation of thousands of acres of land in the former San Bernardino County dairy preserve. Due to water quality problems and other factors, the land is going out of dairy use. Over the last several months, EHL was able to work with the City and Lewis Homes on a beneficial outcome. While EHL's first priority is infill and redevelopment, these environmentally degraded lands are adjacent to existing infrastructure and relatively appropriate for development. Furthermore, the proposal for a higher density, mixed use town center would produce a model for less land-consumptive and more pedestrian-friendly community designs in the Inland Empire.

At EHL's suggestion, strong land use controls were placed over more thousands of acres of environmentally valuable lands in the 200-year floodplain of Prado Dam. These agricultural and natural open space uses can be a bridge to a permanent conservation area. In addition, modeled after our agreement with the City of Ontario, mitigation fees will be collected from new development on a per acre basis. These fees can be applied to off-site or on-site habitat acquisition, restoration, and management. A prime acquisition target is a linkage connecting the Chino Basin to Chino Hills State Park. A restoration and management priority is long-term habitat for the burrowing owl.

San Diego County

Habitat Planning for North County advances

The San Diego Association of Governments approved the framework and programmatic EIR for the North County Multiple Habitat Conservation Program, or MHCP, on March 28, covering the cities of Solana Beach, Encinitas, Carlsbad, Oceanside, Vista, San Marcos and Escondido. Also, Carlsbad recently approved their subarea plan after finalizing changes required by the Coastal Commission that set a new standard for protecting sensitive resources in the coastal zone. These changes are undergoing final review by the state and federal wildlife agencies prior to permitting. Escondido's plan is likely to be next in line for processing.

Meanwhile, in the unincorporated area, the County of San Diego recently issued a draft habitat map for discussion and comment for their North County area—covering Bonsall, Twin Oaks, Fallbrook, DeLuz, Rainbow, Pala, Pauma Valley, Valley Center, Palomar Mountain, Rancho Guejito and Ramona. Comments and ground-truthing will follow to help form the

final basis for the "MSCP-North" plan.

A new factor for North County will be the habitat value of some agricultural areas—studies indicate that some endangered species thrive in the riparian area groves established along the floodplains in North County. Where habitat has become fragmented, agricultural areas offer opportunities to create corridors that would otherwise be lost. EHL looks forward to new partnerships with farmers who are passionate about the land's life force.

Coalition to save regional aquifer formed with EHL help

In Borrego Springs, EHL has been working to help organize a grassroots group concerned about the overdraft of the aquifer.

Planning and Building More Livable Communities

June 27-28, 2003

U.S. Grant Hotel ■ San Diego

On June 27-28, 2003, the Local Government Commission will present a statewide multi-disciplinary Smart Growth conference entitled **Planning and Building More Livable Communities**.

With California's population expected to grow significantly in the near future—putting additional pressure on our water supplies, agricultural land, open space, air quality, housing supplies, transportation system, energy supplies, and public health and safety. The June 2003 conference will bring the burgeoning support groups for planning and building more livable communities together. The conference will examine the barriers to working together and determine how to overcome them. Conference sponsors, to date, include the California Department of Transportation, California Department of Health Services, U.S. EPA Region IX, and the Irvine Foundation.

To receive more information about this exciting event, please contact Michele Kelso, Sr. Program Manager at 916-448-1198 or mkelso@lgc.org

Save Our Aquifer Coalition (SOAC) was formed and has begun advocacy in Borrego Springs and across the larger San Diego Region. The *Union-Tribune* has printed SOAC letters and recently published an editorial calling attention to the groundwater crisis in Borrego and pushing the State of California to update its archaic groundwater law. The County of San Diego is currently forming a working group to consider aquifer recharge issues in the backcountry as well as the groundwater well permitting process. SOAC and EHL will host a legislative summit on groundwater in May. The meeting will bring together concerned east and north county community leaders—including agricultural interests—to discuss various legislative, conservation, and regulatory strategies to address this important issue. If you are interested in this issue or statewide groundwater legislation, contact Lynne Baker at lynnebaker@cox.net.

Land use map protecting countryside is paramount

Of all the components of the San Diego County 2020 General Plan Update, the map containing designated land uses is paramount. EHL's goal is to preserve rural landscapes from estate lot and other residential subdivision, and focus growth in towns. The map that came out of the "Interest Group" of stakeholders achieved this goal. County staff then produced a compromise map, called the Working Copy, that reflected community input. While not as good as the Interest Group map, it still made great strides in preserving the countryside and was endorsed by the Interest Group as a basis for further analysis.

After extensive public hearings in March, the Planning Commission asked staff to review numerous property owner requests for changes, but nevertheless unanimously recommended using the Working Copy as the basis for an Environmental Impact Report. This vital step forward will be considered by the Board of Supervisors in May.

Much work remains to be done on resource protection standards, rural design guidelines, and landowner equity mechanisms, but we are encouraged by the progress to date.

The preservation of Crestridge has been a high priority for EHL

EHL's Earth Discovery Institute will be located in the MSCP Crestridge Reserve

The Earth Discovery Institute (EDI) is a project of the Endangered Habitats League located on the 2,800 acre MSCP Crestridge Preserve in the community of Crest in eastern San Diego County. This project will include the development of a nature center, research field station and environmental education programs. EHL will also be responsible for oversight of preserve monitoring and management in partnership with the California Department of Fish and Game.

The preservation of Crestridge has been a high priority for EHL and due in large measure to our efforts, became an MSCP acquisition several years ago just ahead of the proposed development of a 92-lot subdivision. As a primary and strategic objective



EHL's Earth Discovery Institute will include a nature center, research field station and education programs. Crestridge will also become a model for the development of environmental education, community involvement, and sustainable building design. "Green" structures will be integrated into the landscape.

in San Diego, EHL is using Crestridge as a model to establish "gold standards" for MSCP monitoring and preserve management.

Crestridge will also become a model for the development of

environmental education programs, community involvement, and sustainable building design. By setting such standards, EHL intends to influence the quality of long-term MSCP monitoring, management, and implementation.

Renowned artist and architect James Hubbell and his son Drew Hubbell designed the buildings



Renowned artist and architect James Hubbell and his son Drew Hubbell designed the Institute.

that will house the Earth Discovery Institute. These "green" structures, integrated into the landscape and sitting lightly on the ground, will be built within the footprint of several buildings that previously existed on site.

Environmental education programs are under development with Granite Hills High School under the leadership of Leslie Reynolds, EDI program manager. Ground breaking on the first component of the Earth Discovery Institute will commence this Spring. Future editions of this newsletter will focus on specific aspects of the Earth Discovery Institute project as well as conservation on the Crestridge Preserve.

Membership Signup

If you are not yet a member of the Endangered Habitats League, please join us in the ongoing effort to preserve and protect the Southern California ecoregion's irreplaceable plants, animals and places.

Fill out the form below and mail it with your donation. Please print.

I/we are enclosing a donation in the amount of

\$ _____

Your Name (s) _____

Address 1 _____

Address 2 _____

City/State/Zip _____

Home phone _____ Fax _____

Office phone _____ Fax _____

E-mail _____

Gift Membership

I/we would like to give an EHL membership in the amount of \$ _____

To: Name (s) _____

Address 1 _____

Address 2 _____

City/State/Zip _____

Home phone _____ Fax _____

Office phone _____ Fax _____

E-mail _____

Please mail this form with your donation(s) to:

Endangered Habitats League

8424-A Santa Monica Blvd., #592
Los Angeles, CA 90069-4267

Great-tailed grackle now "native" (continued from page 1)

The upper surface is dark brown, with broad stripes of yellow running from wingtip to wingtip and angling from back to front. First recorded in California in 1963, its range has been expanding steadily. It is now common along the coast from San Diego to Los Angeles (where it was unknown ten years ago). This species is "native" to the southeastern US, where it is occasionally a pest species—the "orange dog's" larvae feed on citrus.

Is this a native species? As with the great-tailed grackle, the answer is yes and no. Both arrived here on their own, so are "native". But both were materially assisted by human intervention. The black-bird by man-made desert oases, and the butterfly by the introduction of widespread citrus farming. Whatever answer one may choose, both species are here and their populations are growing.

The Endangered Habitats League is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. All contributions are tax-deductible to the full extent allowed by law.

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EHL in the News

In a March 2, 2003 article titled, "Housing Action Network seeks to build public support," the *San Diego Union Tribune* described the Network's efforts to foster high quality, infill development, thus providing an alternative to sprawl. EHL's **Lynne Baker**, co-chair of the Network, was quoted as saying, "The region needs more compact housing development."

EHL's **Dan Silver** was the subject of a feature article in the *Wall Street Journal* on February 12, 2003. It chronicled Dan's years of work with building industry stakeholders in **Riverside County** to change development patterns to reduce sprawl and, through the **Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan**, to save endangered species.

On March 3, 2003, **Dan Silver** was quoted in the *San Diego North County Times*, criticizing a proposal for a new growth-inducing freeway east of the I-15. "The problems would be overwhelming," he said.

During the first week of March, both the *Orange County Register* and the *Los Angeles Times* reported on EHL's lawsuit against the **Saddle Crest** and **Saddle Creek** projects. Approved by the Board of Supervisors, these projects would bulldoze hundreds of oaks and sycamores and block a critical wildlife corridor.

On Water

As if walking on water, on air
by canoe on the blue skin of earth;
our paddles stilt into the brown depths,
storm-stirred and relapsing from the light.

The rank flowers of water primrose
climb through heat to seat the dragonfly.
The leaves and stems brake our sliding in
as the great egret stills his golden blade.

Lucid and shining this cross-eyed atman.
Thoughts tangent on spheres of awareness,
the silence braids our eyes to each other.
We should make much with such pure feathering.

But we are scavengers in this world,
lifting those joys to be found in weeds:
the build of leaf, the density of life
amid the flotsam from distant streets.

The heron turns, wisdom unsafe with us,
and the lope of legs and golden toes
stride him away toward the sun-tuned reeds,
primrose scarcely dipping to his weight.

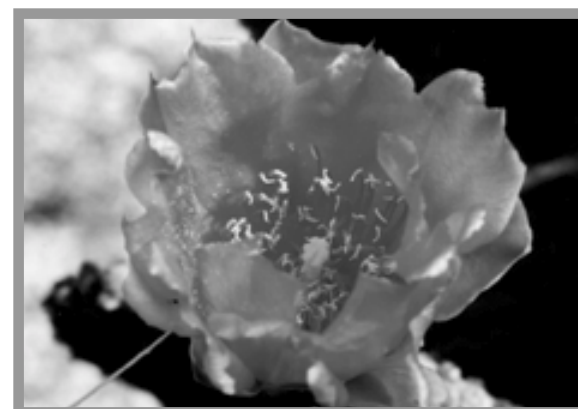
Jess Morton

Southern California wildflowers are in full bloom in April and May



Wildflowers and California Poppies in the Antelope Valley between Gorman and Palmdale ... Head inland, away from the southern coast, to California's rolling hills, interior valleys and deserts ... between March and June, they are awash in colors of every hue and shade ... Nothing quite outshines the golden fields of California's state flower, that native Americans said warmed the hills and drove out winter's chill ... We know (it) today as the California Golden Poppy!

Photo and text courtesy of www.lnholt.com/wildflowers.



© DAVID HOGAN

Red Rock Canyon State Park (Western Mojave) Eroded rock formations rise from the brilliant carpet of wildflowers below, and surround the Red Rock Canyon State Park with walls of green, lavender, white and vibrant red. As if that were not enough to send senses reeling, nature added crimson blossomed beaver tail cactus and forests of white blooming Joshua trees and yuccas. The area offers so much to do and see that (you) could spend the entire spring at this site without any risk of boredom. Take Highway 14 to Mojave and go north on 395. You'll spot it from the highway. For more information call the Mojave Desert State Park Information Center at (805) 942-0662.

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