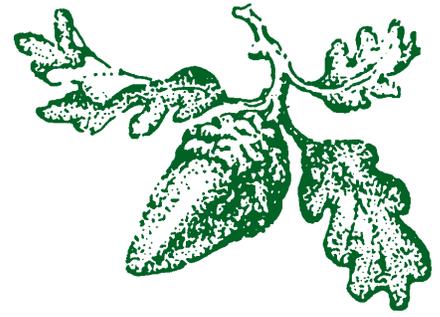


# The American River Natural History Association

# ACORN



Number 149

[www.arnha.org](http://www.arnha.org)

Fall 2009

## GREEN

*the color of primary producers*

*Essay and Illustration by William E. Avery*

Wild and green natural places are sources of inspiration for the artist, poet, musician and sensitive soul in each of us. For many people, nature serves as a source of solace. Connection with nature may play a role similar to that of a quiet, listening friend who reflects back the best in us and allows us to feel a sense of wholeness and thus inner peace.

While contemplating the question of how I should write this essay about nature's primary producers – the trees, shrubs, and other plants – I decided to take a walk in the parkway with Daisy, my newly-adopted Golden Retriever. I'd focus my attention on the plants with some degree of confidence that somehow those that we encountered would provide me with the seed of an idea and perhaps help it germinate into a growing theme.

Excited by the prospect of adventure, we set out over the levee and into the relative wilderness along the American River. Immediately, Daisy begins investigating recent scent postings, and I notice the tall carpet of golden-brown, dry grasses – native wild rye and introduced European grasses such as Foxtails and *Bromus*, the bane of longhaired dog owners – and their dogs as well! The

trail soon winds its way under towering Frémont Cottonwoods, California Black Walnuts, Interior Live Oaks, Black Locusts (an east coast native tree) and Oregon Ash. I encourage those readers not yet versed in plant identification to learn to identify these trees easily.

The trail curves close to the river

and now I am distracted by sprawling vines – grapes, and delicious Himalayan Blackberries. I think...the article could be about survival on the parkway by eating acorn mash, black walnuts, wild grapes, blackberries and elderberries. Hmmm. As the trail angles toward a

*see "GREEN", page 3*

### County Budget Crisis Impacts the Effie Yeaw Nature Center

*By Marilee Flannery, EYNC Director, & Jamie Washington, EYNC Volunteers Coordinator*

Beginning Tuesday, September 8th, 2009, the Effie Yeaw Nature Center will be closed on Monday and Tuesday afternoons (except holidays), one of the results of a 30 percent cut to the budget for staffing compared to last year. The reductions in staff will have an impact on the programs, events, and services that the Nature Center will offer.

It is certain that by the time that you are reading this there may be greater cuts to our budget and more staff reductions due to uncertainties with the California State budget and reductions in sales and property tax revenues.

The good news is that at this time, the Nature Center *will* remain open for the foreseeable future and will be able to offer free programs a few weekend days per month. Check our calendar online at [www.EffieYeaw.org](http://www.EffieYeaw.org), or call, to verify the times and subjects. In addition, we will still offer:

- Our day-long Maidu Cultural Programs in the Nisenan Maidu village for school field trips;
- Our wildly exciting educational Aquatic Programs which take place in other parks in the American River Parkway and are funded in part by grants from water agencies;
- Our Nature Tours to schools and other groups that introduce children to the wonders of nature;

*see "Budget," page 7*

September 30th Forum Features Parkway Farm (see next page)

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# President's Message

*"Avoid the temptation to filter out what you don't want to bear."* James P. Cramer

## Please Donate to ARNHA!

Thank you for being a member of this twenty-seven year old organization, and thank you for supporting all of the outstanding events and programs presented by the Effie Yeaw Nature Center (EYNC) and ARNHA.

Now more than ever, we need your support and donations. Due to the county budget crisis, the budget of the EYNC has been slashed, resulting in at least a 30 percent reduction in staff and programs. (See article on Budget Impact on EYNC, page 1). The most important part of an organization is its people. The EYNC has lost a very important part of their trained personnel, some of whom have been there over 10 years.

A portion of your membership dues and your donations goes to subsidize some of the staffing budget of the EYNC. We have pledged to *increase* that effort by more than \$12,000 this fiscal year. With this, there will be additional staff hours focused on ARNHA fundraising in support of the EYNC programs.

In addition, there will be no Salmon Festival in the fall this year which will result in a significant impact on ARNHA's budget. The Salmon Festival had produced close to 25 percent of ARNHA's annual income!

Now more than ever, we need your support. Please give generously!

## Ideas for Support:

- Donations • Volunteering at the EYNC
- Give ARNHA memberships as gifts (*available at the EYNC or online at [www.ARNHA.org](http://www.ARNHA.org)*)
- Give Park Passes as gifts
- Purchase *Outdoor World*, *American River Almanac*, *Biking and Hiking the American River Parkway*, and other ARNHA Publications as gifts
- Tell friends and neighbors about the EYNC, bring them to visit the Center, and encourage them to join ARNHA
- Call, write, or email your County Supervisors to tell of your concerns about the EYNC. (*see [www.ARNHA.org](http://www.ARNHA.org) for supervisors contact info*)



*Sincerely, Larry Washington, President, ARNHA*

## September Forum Features Parkway Farm

The story behind the story of an unusual community garden located on an historic site of the American River Parkway will be featured at an ARNHA public forum at 7 p.m., Sept. 30, at the Effie Yeaw Nature Center.

Shawn Harrison, executive director of the Soil Born Urban Agriculture and Education Project, will display baskets of fresh, organic produce raised on the historically-farmed American River Ranch in Rancho Cordova. The non-profit group maintains a farm stand year round on Saturdays from 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at 2140 Chase Dr., Rancho Cordova.

Besides discussing the origins and mission of involving youth and adults in an urban agriculture and education project, Harrison will answer questions on growing organic vegetables successfully in an urban setting. Light refreshments will be served at the free program. ■

*GREEN, from page 1*

sunnier, drier area, Daisy and I find tall stands of introduced European Fennel with heads of sweet, yellow flowers being gleaned by a small but vocal flock of tiny gray Bushtits. Suddenly the trail is overwhelmed by poky, invasive Yellow Star Thistle – loved by honeybees and later goldfinches but, nonetheless, a plant that seems intent on taking over drier areas of the parkway by smothering grasses and other herbaceous plants.

Nearing the river again, we pass under shady Western Sycamores with their beautiful pastel patchwork bark, broad fuzzy leaves and intriguing spherical seed pods. To our right is an orange-plastic, fenced-off re-vegetation area intended to mitigate riparian habitat damage caused by levee repairs. Within herbivore-resistant enclosures nestle transplanted Blue Elderberries, Valley and Interior Live Oaks, and Coyote Brush. Daisy notices that inside the fences scurry California Ground Squirrels and California Quail.

We follow a small side trail down to the river's edge and find shrubby Sandbar Willows – a favorite food of beavers. I often see willow branches floating faster than the current as they are pulled by the furry swimmers toward their lodges. But today I notice, perching on branch tips or hovering just above, hundreds of dragonflies. Dragonflies are predators, and even their aquatic larvae must eat other small aquatic animals. The dragonflies' prey must have been abundant this year and this implies a very productive year for aquatic plants such as Elodea and algae. Daisy perks her ears toward the sparkling blue water where several low-frequency quacks and grunts come from a mixed flock of Canada Geese, Mallards, and adolescent goslings and ducklings dabbling for the aquatic vegetation.

Continuing along the river's edge we pass fragrant California Mugwort, grass-green sedges and rushes, and wild

mustards with little yellow four-petal flowers that bloom almost year-round. The trail slopes up into a dry Black Locust woodland and then into the deep shadows of giant heritage oaks with last year's acorns still crunching underfoot.

As we approach one of my favorite little riparian woodlands at the river's edge, Daisy and I find ourselves shaded and hidden by the beautiful green foliage of White Alders, Box Elders and Silver Maples. Cool shadows, shady blue-greens, yellow-greens, and golden sunlight dapples shift in a light breeze. We reach the end of the walk at a tiny beach and sit at the sparkling water's edge among rushes, willows, Water Pepper, under overhanging alders. More Canada geese and Mallards dabble for Elodea. A Common Merganser hen swims by, clucking maternally to three minnow-fishing adolescents.

Green. What lessons are there for us humans amongst these green primary producers? There is the near miracle of photosynthesis itself: how green chlorophyll "a" and "b" molecules capture energy from photons moving at the speed of light and then pass that energy along through a cascade of other molecules embedded in trillions of plant cells' chloroplast membranes, eventually producing an energy-packing molecule called Adenosine Triphosphate or ATP – the very same molecule we use in our own human cells to transfer energy around. Then, using the energy stored in ATP, the plant cells convert water from the soil and carbon dioxide pulled from the air into sugar. Sugar molecules are linked into chains to make starches and the superstrong cellulose molecules that make up wood.

There is also the wonderful lesson of the balanced energy pyramid (see *The Acorn, Summer, 2008* at [www.ARNHA.org/newsletter/html](http://www.ARNHA.org/newsletter/html)) that applies not only to ecosystem management but also as a model for a balanced economy. Plants make up about 90 percent of a healthy

terrestrial ecosystem's biomass, herbivores about nine percent and carnivores about one percent. This pyramid-like distribution of numbers demonstrates the second law of thermodynamics. In every transfer of energy from one form to another, some energy is lost through entropy, as heat. Life at all levels uses the energy captured by the great diversity of primary producers, but energy is lost as it moves up through the food chain. Primary producers convert about one percent of the incoming solar energy, carbon dioxide, and water into plant biomass. It takes about ten times the weight of plants to feed a given weight of herbivores (vegetarians) and 100 times the weight of plants to sustain (after conversion to herbivores) the same weight of carnivores. This is why shifting our own diets to foods coming from lower on the food chain (e.g., eating more fruits and vegetables and less meat) is not only good for our health but also much more ecologically efficient. It can save energy and further reduce global warming.

Imagine an ecosystem instead filled with 90 percent lions, nine percent herbivores, and one percent plants – you can visualize an upside-down pyramid and in your mind's eye see it topple over. In a toppled ecosystem, animals migrate, starve and disappear and the remaining plants begin to regrow. A stable economy must ultimately establish the same pattern as a healthy ecosystem or its stability will be lost. Lately we have seen an economic pattern emerge in which there are more consumers than producers and at the very top there are many super-consumers with enormous economic footprints. Less and less, people are willing to be producers; rather they strive to consume and gather great wealth for little real productivity (e.g. skimming vast profits on the transfer of investments), all the while basing the economy on energy sequestered by primary producers over hundreds of

*GREEN, see page 6*

### New ARNHA Volume Honors Jo Smith

Jo Smith, widely respected naturalist, illustrator, and a founder of the American River Natural History Association, is honored in a new ARNHA publication. "An American River Journal: Art & observations of nature's rhythms." It will go on sale for \$9.75 at ARNHA's annual meeting, Wednesday, Sept. 16, 6-8 p.m., at the Effie Yeaw Nature Center.

The volume captures the beauty and peace of a walk along the river. It features Jo's meticulous drawings of plants, birds, mammals, insects, reptiles and fish, along with perceptive nature essays by retired newspaper editor Peter Hayes. ARNHA is publishing it in memory of Jo, who died Dec. 28, 2008, and as a tribute to both who, as longtime members of its publications committee, have been key to fulfilling ARNHA's mission of: "bringing nature to people and people to nature."

Jo created most of the drawings in ARNHA's "The Outdoor World of the Sacramento Region," a field guide based on work by revered teacher and naturalist, Effie Yeaw. Jo inspired, edited and illustrated nearly a dozen other ARNHA publications.

Pete Hayes was an editor with "The Sacramento Union" for many years and frequently wrote nature essays for the editorial pages. In 2001, ARNHA published 60 of the essays in "The American River Almanac: Reflections on nature throughout the year," with photographs by Tom Myers and George Turner. Since then he, too, has edited and contributed to numerous ARNHA publications.

The new volume, a pocket-sized gift book, can be purchased through arnha.org; at the Effie Yeaw Nature Center gift shop, and at selected book stores, or by mail, at ARNHA, P.O. Box 241, Carmichael, CA 95609.



### Sale 'a Resounding Success'

Effie Yeaw Nature Center and ARNHA held their first ever "Huge Rummage Sale" on April 25 to raise money for their Cultural History Programs, especially the Gibson Ranch Living History Program. Despite the threat of rain, the sale generated a net profit of over \$3,500.

Jamie Washington, EYNC Volunteer Coordinator, said "The sale was a resounding success thanks to our marvelous volunteers and die-hard staff." Special recognition goes to volunteer and ARNHA board member Mojgan Fischer who organized the event. The Friday before the sale, a group of volunteers "brought beauty and order from the chaos," said Jamie. They received donated items, set up tables, and sorted and priced items. After the event, another crew of volunteers packed away remaining items and carried away the tables, tarps, etc.

The remaining stuffed animals (hundreds were donated by an anonymous woman from Vacaville) were bagged up and sent to charities that give them to foster children, children with cancer, and other children in crisis, and some of the merchandise was saved for use at the Nature Center or at Gibson Ranch. Jamie and ARNHA say "thanks" to the dedicated volunteers and donors for helping make the event such a success!

### Want to Make a BIG impact? Double Your Donation at No Cost to You!

Your employer may double or even triple the amount you donate! Over 7,500 companies worldwide match employee donations and membership payments to community-based non-profit organizations like ARNHA. Check to see if your company offers a Matching Gift Program. If you are not sure, check with your Human Resources Department. Some companies even match gifts from retirees and employees' spouses. The list below shows just a few of the companies doing business that offer a matching gift program.

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- Citicorp
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- Goodyear
- Hallmark
- Hewlett-Packard
- Home Depot
- H&R Block
- IBM
- Intel
- J.P. Morgan
- Motorola
- Sherwin Williams
- State Farm
- Subaru of America
- Sysco
- Toys 'r Us
- UPS
- Wells Fargo

If your company will match your gift, obtain a matching gift form from your employer, fill it out completely, and give it with your contribution to ARNHA. We will complete the form and mail it to your employer's matching gifts office for processing. The company will send its matching donation directly to ARNHA.

# EYNC's Inspiring Education Director Retires

Beth Etgen retired in July as education director of the Effie Yeaw Nature Center after a long career dedicated to helping children get in touch with their environment in ways that teacher-naturalist Effie Yeaw herself would doubtless have approved.

In her 15 years at the nature center, Beth's duties have included overseeing on-site children's nature tours and outreach programs based on science standards required by schools; Summer, Winter and Spring Fun Days; and Maidu Indian Day; and Gibson Ranch Regional Park activities.

"It's good for children's sense of place to know where they live," Beth says. "For example, textbooks always show eastern birds. When you introduce the environment to school children, you tie lessons to the bigger picture of what's going on around them. Academic scores go up, sick leaves go down."

Beth takes with her warm memories of meeting children as they arrive in buses at the center for a tour.

"We help them get in touch with their senses, with what they hear, smell, and see," she says. "They learn that the non-releasable animals like the opossum and Virginia the Great Horned Owl do not make good pets. They learn how important it is to take care of the animals and not to hit on the window of the animal enclosure. They tour the exhibit room and sit on a rug on the back porch, while naturalists and our wonderful volunteer docents invite them to touch live birds and snakes.

"Some are frightened, even ask, 'are there tigers out there, or anacondas?' But a deer walks by, a king salmon jumps, and they're thrilled by ground squirrels, ants, and worms. They're amazed at such a variety, themes that Effie Yeaw would have encouraged. And it's great when they come with their families. I hope their teachers are learning too."

Beth, a graduate of California State University, Sacramento, has authored numerous nature publications, including collaborating with the late Jo Smith on ARNHA's *Discovering the American River Parkway*, a teacher's manual that promotes the use of the parkway in the classroom.

Beth said she first discovered the exciting career of environmental interpretation when she observed Marilee Flannery, current EYNC director, doing programs with live animals at the Sacramento Science Center back in 1980. She began working there as a volunteer and then became a paid Interpretive Specialist, eventually becoming the head of the science center's education programs. Beth moved from the Science Center to the Effie Yeaw Nature Center in 1994 and began working there as the Park Interpretive Specialist and Education Director.

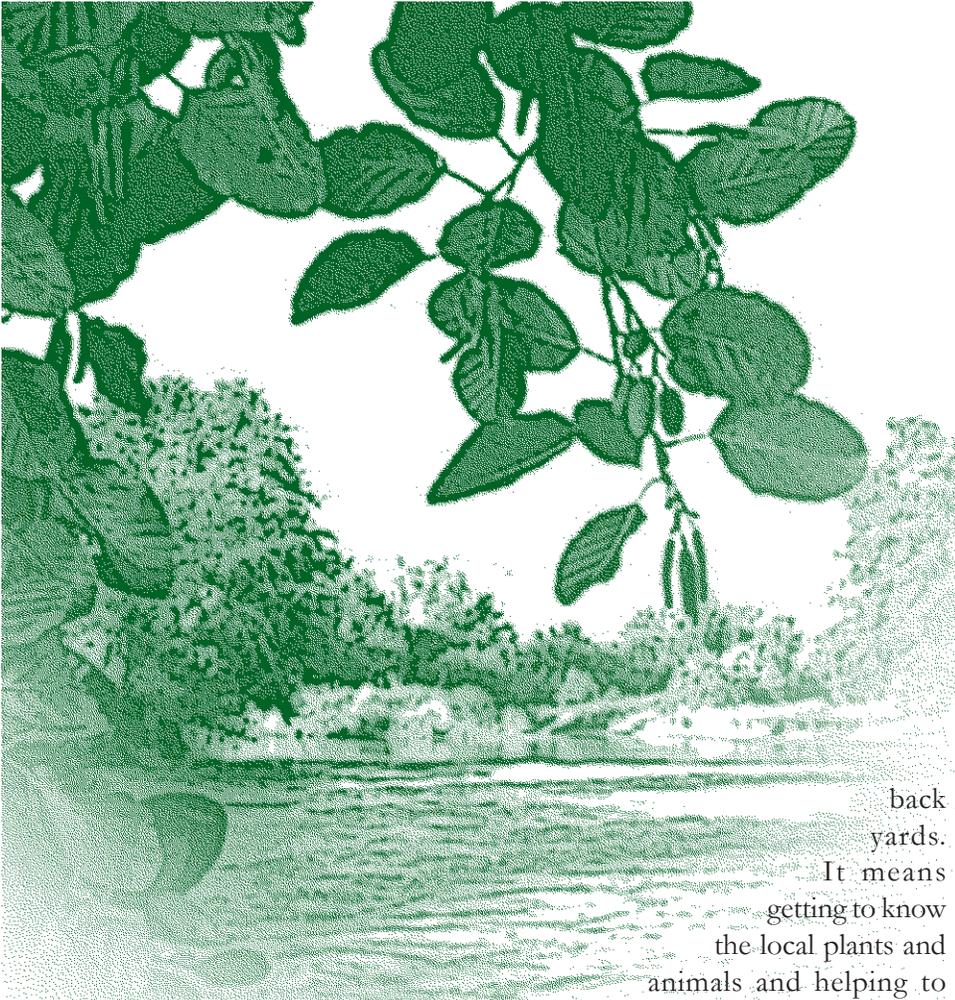
"She has been my co-worker and dear friend for 26 years and I can affirm all of the wonderful things that are said about her are true," Marilee said. "She is a dedicated environmental educator and throughout her 26 year career she has taught, motivated, informed, inspired, led by example, and touched the hearts of children, teachers, co-workers, peers, friends of Effie Yeaw such as Jo Smith, and the public."

"Beth has brought professionalism and heart to the Effie Yeaw Nature Center's programs. Her generosity ranges from her volunteer work for many environmental programs (including her work as a board member of the Urban Creeks Council) to her sharing her entire collection of 500 children's books with staff so they can read to children enrolled in classes or attending programs."

Since Beth's career began as a volunteer, her post-retirement plans should come as no surprise. "I plan to volunteer at the nature center," she said with a smile.



The burned area at EYNC is the result of a controlled burn, a cooperative effort of County Parks and the California Fire and Rescue Training Authority. Look for more details in the Winter ACORN!



millions of years (i.e., burning fossil fuels) the economic pyramid becomes top heavy and sooner or later topples because it is not sustainable. If the pyramid of the global biosphere and the global economy are inverted simultaneously, then we will have created the conditions of a “perfect storm” for a global human disaster!

So looking deeply into the primary production of a healthy ecosystem we can actually learn all we need to know to save our planet and save our economy simultaneously. As we each become more enlightened perhaps we will become more motivated to go GREEN. Going green means supporting the wonderful biodiversity of our local and global primary producers. Support any and all efforts to maintain healthy, non-invasive, plant life in parkways, national forests, national parks and wilderness areas, marine reserves, even urban areas and

back yards. It means getting to know the local plants and animals and helping to protect them. It means lowering each of our own ecological footprints to below the global average.

Imagine yourself embedded in an energy and economic pyramid, and think of ways to bring your life’s consumption patterns closer to the foundation. Produce more and consume and acquire less.

We can each commit to installing solar panels, using a solar cooker, driving a fuel-efficient car, bicycling, recycling, gardening, composting, conserving water, and conserving energy. We can each resolve to eat lower on the food chain, “buy locally,” use organic cotton canvas (or hemp) shopping bags, replace incandescents with compact fluorescents. Let’s also look closely at our vocations, avocations and investments. Can we make any changes in them to better support sustainable energy production and agriculture and global conservation efforts? Is there any more that we can do specifically for

the wild places that we love?

Here is a seed I’d like to plant – that, if we don’t already know them, we can each resolve to learn to recognize the parkway plant species, understand the basics of food web biology and ecology, contemplate the relationship between ecology and economy and share this knowledge with others so that, with awareness, they too will learn to love the natural wildness of the parkway and the biosphere and find their own motivation to help protect it.

Along with checking off the “green” action items listed above, we can resolve to buy a field guide such as ARNHA’s *The Outdoor World of the Sacramento Region* and begin learning to identify the most common native trees, shrubs, and herbaceous plants. We can make this a New Year’s goal starting with trees during the fall and winter, and then as new plants sprout and bloom in the spring we can identify them as we encounter them. To be of even greater service we can commit to teach a child or a small group of children how to identify parkway plants. This could become a fun and challenging game to play on parkway walks. Here is the real value of this activity: we humans will rather fiercely protect what we love, we will love what we understand, we will understand what we take the time to learn and know.

Primary producers capture sunlight and carbon dioxide and provide food for all herbivores, shelter for all creatures, and renewal for our souls. Let’s return the favor by learning their names, cultivating awareness of their presence, and helping others, especially children, get to know them. Let’s promote the producers – the very foundation of a sustainable green ecology and a green economy and be as GREEN as green can be.

*William E. Avery, Ph.D., is an associate professor in the Department of Biological Sciences, California State University, Sacramento, and a frequent contributor to 'The Acorn.'* ■

### *Budget, from page 1*

- Our Birthday Parties and Group Tours when staff is available;
- Our popular Gibson Ranch Living History program during the Spring only;
- Free entry into the Nature Center and the trails, because in these rough economic times, it seems more in the spirit of Effie Yeaw to keep our doors and trails open to everyone.

We will not be able to offer as great a variety of special events and programs as we have in the past. For example, we will not be able to host the very popular and educational Maidu Indian Day this year. The Maidu Indian Day which takes place on the first Saturday in October has been an annual event for 21 years. This year we will not have enough staff to present our traditional celebration of the Maidu people.

Other impacts from the budget cuts will include:

- A reduction in our hours of operation, which will result in less oversight for the Nature Area and lack of easily accessible restrooms;
- A limited number of hours to provide a Naturalist on Duty at the front desk to provide information and maps and to assist the public when they come in the front door of the Center;
- As of the mid-point of summer our five full-time staff will be reduced to four, and six of our twenty part-time staff will be out of a job. The reductions in staff will result in a loss of individual talent and knowledge. We are losing an incredible resource; we are losing expert birders, photographers, and gardeners, as well as experts on owls, plants, aquatic invertebrates, and environmental education. These Naturalists all have a passion for teaching children, families, and adults about the wonders of the natural world. They are irreplaceable.
- There will also be a 25 percent increase in fees for our Nature Tours and a 15 percent increase for all our other programs. The price of tours for a

classroom will go from \$95 to \$125. We have to increase our fees because of the costs of our programs and the supporting overhead, such as invoicing and bill collecting which cost more than we collect in program revenue. To raise revenues and reduce the behind-the-scenes paperwork and bill collecting, we have put into effect a new “incentive” pricing system. So, even though the price of our Nature Tours is increased by about 25 percent, if the tours are paid for *immediately upon booking*, the price is reduced to last year’s prices. The pricing of many other programs is similarly structured. If you are an educator and would like to book our programs, you can go on-line ([www.effieyeam.org](http://www.effieyeam.org)) to check our new prices and policies, or come to the Nature Center and pick up our updated programs brochure.

A major matter of concern to us is the cost of the care of our resident animals. The Nature Center is home to four different owls, a red-shouldered hawk, a red-tailed hawk, a kestrel, an opossum, two Western Pond Turtles, two salamanders, one rattlesnake, two king snakes, and three gopher snakes. The food bill alone for these animals tops \$5,000 a year. This does not include the cost of veterinary care and staff to oversee the care of these wonderful animals. You can help us with these costs by giving gifts of “Animal Adoptions,” to family and friends.

*If you would like to support the Nature Center, there are several possibilities:*

- Donate—change, cash, checks, credit cards. You may donate to Effie Yeaw Nature Center through the American River Natural History Association or through the County of Sacramento. You *will* probably hear us asking for donations and see our donation boxes more prominently displayed.
- Renew your ARNHA membership at a higher level.
- Buy a Parks Pass for \$50 and gain entry into any of the County Parks for 12 months.

- Participate in any of the fundraisers that we will be organizing, hosting, or publicizing to raise money for the Center. You, your friends, and family can host a fundraiser to benefit the Nature Center.

- Give gifts of ARNHA memberships and Park Passes, or buy environmental gifts from our Discovery Shop.

- You can write or call Sacramento County Supervisors to encourage them to support the Effie Yeaw Nature Center (*see [www.ARNHA.org](http://www.ARNHA.org) for contact info*). You can also share this article with friends, co-workers and family to rally their support for the Nature Center.

Only with your help, can we continue to offer meaningful and fun environmental and cultural history programs to the families of Sacramento. ■

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### **Owl Forum – A Great Success**

Ask Denise Booth to name her favorite critter among the many she formerly dealt with as an Effie Yeaw Nature Center naturalist, and she’ll tell you quickly, “owls.” And her favorite among the center’s four resident owls is “Luna,” the pale Barn Owl with the distinctive, heart-shaped face.

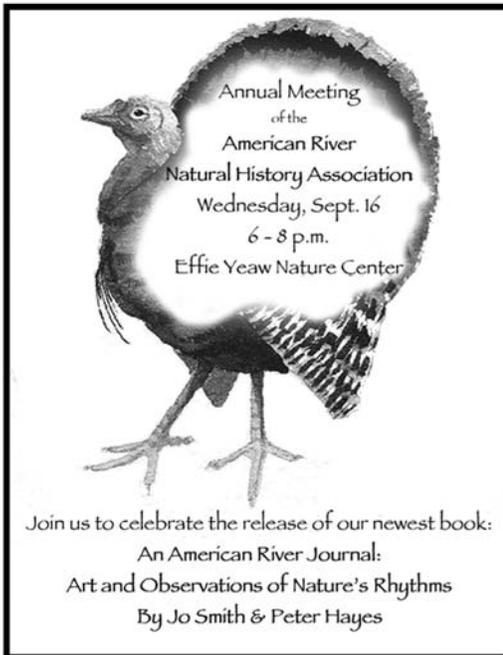
Speaking at an ARNHA public forum June 6, Denise said Luna usually lays two clutches of infertile eggs each year, but since they’re infertile, they can’t be left under the bird, or they’ll spoil. So staff members replace them with wooden eggs. “After a month she’s ready to get off,” Denise said.

At dusk, many of the 72 people in attendance, largest crowd yet for the quarterly forums, joined Denise on a walk through the nature area in hopes of hearing one of the owls calling. No hoots or whistles were heard, which Denise attributed to the presence of the extra-large crowd. However, just as the last participants headed back to the parking lot, a Great Horned Owl flew across the trail, to the delight of all. ■

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