

The

The American River  
Natural History Association

# ACORN



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## Coyote the Trickster

*clever, stupid, clownish, wise. . . ?*

by Ed Littrell

The trickster is among us. The first peoples here, the Nisenan or southern Maidu, as did many other North American native peoples, tell creation stories which feature the coyote as a key character. Native Americans tell many variations on coyote stories. He's capable of demonstrating several characteristics almost simultaneously. He can be clever, stupid, clownish, wise, al-

most all at the same time. Many cultures throughout the world, including our own, have stories which include a trickster or pre-human "beings." Today, our culture looks at the coyote with either an appreciation of its skills as a survivor or with anger at its taste for our sheep and pets. In the Great Plains and the West

of the United States, the coyote was considered the ancestor of the native peoples. In the time before humans, coyote lived.

Through various complicated activities, struggles, guile, and skill, he gave rise to the people we now know as Indians. The Effie Yeaw Nature Center (www.effieyeaw.org 916-489-4918) at Ancil Hoffman Park and the Maidu Interpretive Center in Roseville (www.roseville.ca.us

[then click the link to the Indian Museum page] 916-774-5934) will be good sources of information on the Native American populations originally living here. They'll have their coyote creation stories. Coyote had/has an interesting "life."

In the last couple of hundred years, after being more or less confined to the Great Plains of North America and the Central Valley of California, the coyote has increased its range to Central America, to the Arctic, and to the east coast of the United States. In a time when many wild animals are declining in number, coyotes, along with introduced wild turkeys, white-tailed deer in

*see Coyote, page 3*

## Oaks in Peril

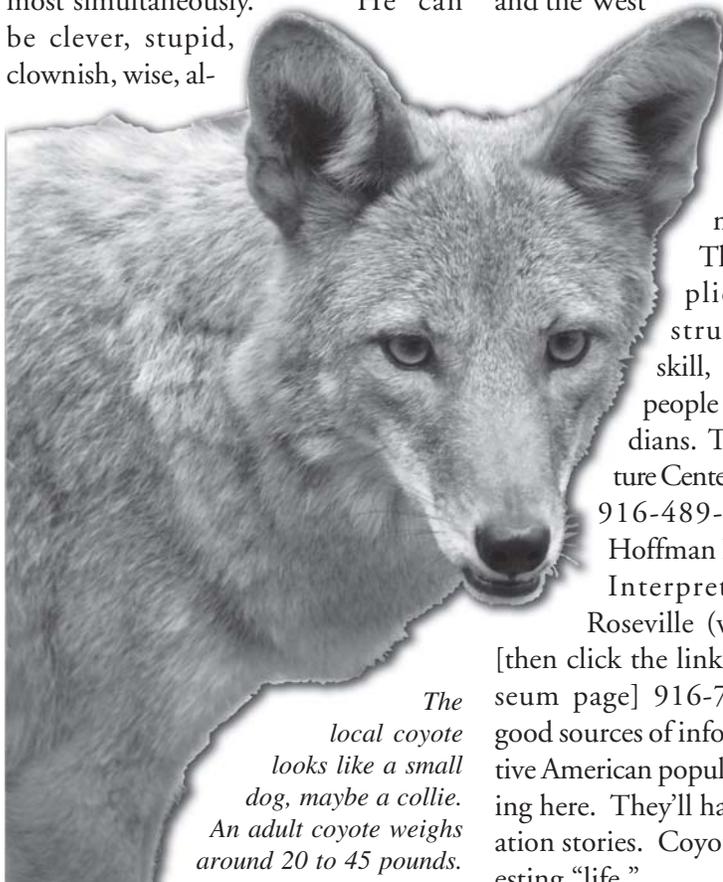
By Walt Wiley

When the casual observer looks at the forest of the American River Parkway, it's a view of a healthy woodland. Jack Hiehle, veteran naturalist specializing in the American River Parkway, might agree with that, but when he looks up through the majestic old oaks he gets an uneasy feeling.

The oaks appear healthy, but as he looks upward it just seems as if there is too much sky — as if the trees are missing the leaves they need to absorb all the sunlight that is falling on them.

The trees are getting old, and as limbs are lost from storms and other damage,

*see Peril, page 7*



*The local coyote looks like a small dog, maybe a collie. An adult coyote weighs around 20 to 45 pounds.*

**Free EYNC Program every Saturday and Sunday at 1:30**

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# “Be the change you want to see in the world”

—Gandhi

We all know that just being in nature is good therapy from our daily, frantic-paced lifestyle. We owe it to ourselves, our friends, and our family to step out of all the rigor of the world and spend some time in natural surroundings.

*But* unless we set our minds to get out in nature, we forget how important it is to our soul and spirit and how enjoyable it can be. We also forget how close we are to the American and Sacramento Rivers and all the natural beauty that surrounds us.

So as the New Year begins, let us all spend more time surrounded by nature. Bring a friend to the American River Parkway or to the Effie Yeaw Nature Center, and share the joy of nature: *the younger the better*. Let friends know about Ancil Hoffman Park and its great nature center and all of the fun programs that it provides. Tell your friends to leave the ipod at home and join us at the *Bird and Breakfast* and other up-coming events.

Remember that a walk in the park can lower your blood pressure, help you set your priorities straight, and put you a better mindset. It will create a better lifestyle for you and your family, *but be careful!* It can be addictive.

Sincerely,  
Larry Washington  
President, ARNHA ■

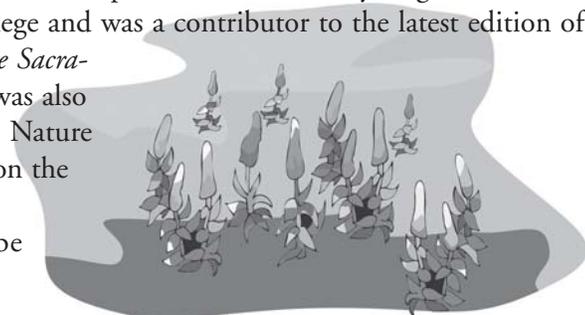


## ARNHA Welcomes Spring with Wildflower Program

Environmental scientist Tim Nosal will present an illustrated program on where to go to see Sacramento area wildflowers at their best in the Sacramento region in another in a series of ARNHA public forums Thursday, March 27, at 7 p.m. at the EffieYeaw Nature Center Assembly Building in Ancil Hoffman Park.

Nosal, who has bachelor's and master's degrees from California State University, Sacramento, is employed by the state Department of Fish and Game to provide plant advice for timber harvest operations. He formerly taught wildflower classes at American River College and was a contributor to the latest edition of *ARNHA's Outdoor World of the Sacramento Region* field guide. He was also a naturalist at the Effie Yeaw Nature Center and a ranger assistant on the American River Parkway.

Light refreshments will be served at the free event. ■



### *Coyote, from page 1*

the East, and bears, are doing well. Maryland and Delaware were the last of the 48 States to have coyotes show up: 1972 for Maryland.

The population levels of wolves, red foxes, and coyotes are connected. Although wolves were probably never widespread in California, with only scattered reports indicating a casual or “accidental” population level, they were widespread in the rest of the continent. Now, humans have suppressed most wolf populations.

Two hundred years ago before humans were so numerous, wolves probably suppressed coyote numbers in the plains. Coyote numbers in the plains and East have risen with the removal of wolves, and by the ability of the coyote to coexist with us. Mid-western red foxes originally may have been suppressed by coyotes, although our agricultural practices may have countered this and actually helped red foxes. Most authorities suggest California’s red foxes were originally found only in the Sierra Nevada, with Central Valley red foxes representing escapes from fox farms.

Unlike wolves and red foxes, coyotes interact with us and our domesticated animals and the food we leave outside for them. Before the advent of large numbers of humans, coyotes would have fed on rabbits and rodents, with side dishes of birds, berries and insects. They will even take deer. Now, when we place our cat and dog food outside, the coyote thinks we are feeding him! One of the major reasons behind coyote problems in our suburban area around the American River Parkway is the coyote’s attraction to the food we supply. Besides cat and dog food, they will also eat just about anything we also think of as food, including bird seed (even bears in the Lake Tahoe basin are attracted to bird feeders), and small dogs and cats.

So, experts always recommend eliminating all sources of food as an attraction. Fencing may keep coyotes out of

your yard, only if the fence is at least six feet high and goes into the ground six inches, so coyotes can’t dig under it. For additional information you can visit [www.dfg.ca.gov/keepmewild/coyote.html](http://www.dfg.ca.gov/keepmewild/coyote.html) on the internet.

The American River Parkway has plenty of coyotes. They’ve been seen at the Ancil Hoffman Golf Course. Coyotes are seen even on our surface streets. The local coyote looks like a small dog, maybe a collie. An adult coyote weighs around 20 to 45 pounds, occasionally heavier. They are brownish gray, with light undersides, and they can run at speeds up to 30 mph. Their muzzles are pointed. They have a bushy tail and a long muzzle. The Parkway also has gray foxes, a smaller member of the dog family (see *The Acorn Spring* 2007). Coyotes usually give birth to five or six pups. Coyotes may interbreed with domestic dogs, producing “coydogs.” Of course, adult coyotes howl at night, and yip. These vocalizations are pretty distinctive. They can’t be mistaken for anything else. The coyote’s scientific name, *Canis latrans*, means barking dog. The common name, coyote, comes from the Aztecs.

Coyotes have been hated by some agriculturalists for years. Many ways have been developed to kill them or, in some cases, just keep them away. In the 1980’s, after many discussions on whether certain methods were “humane” ways of killing them, most lethal chemicals for coyotes were taken off the market in California. Non-lethal alternatives still suggested are along the lines

of establishing protective fencing for livestock, or bringing livestock and pets in to shelter at night. Certain species of dogs such as Great Pyrenees, or even llamas, may be used as guard animals. In many cases, the adaptability of coyotes is demonstrated by reproductive rates increasing when humans kill some, and by new coyotes moving in from adjacent territories to replace those we’ve killed.

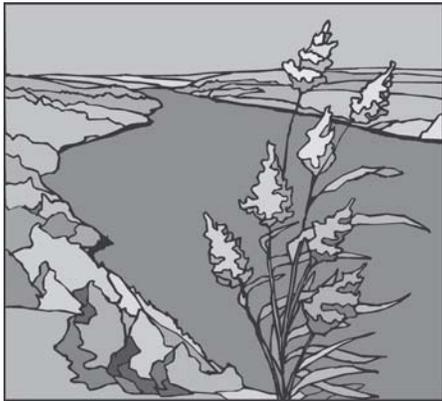
Coyotes can cause us damage. Besides livestock damage, there are documented cases of coyotes attacking humans, especially small children. Some of these attacks are associated with humans feeding coyotes in the neighborhood. Coyotes are so common at the Mammoth Mountain ski area in the central Sierra, that warning signs are posted, reminding skiers not to give them their lunch! **DON’T FEED COYOTES.** They do carry transmittable diseases such as distemper, parvo virus, and rabies. They also have mange (have you seen a mangy coyote?) and tularemia.

If coyotes are a problem in your area and causing damage, you may call the Sacramento County Agricultural Commissioner’s office (not animal control) at 875-6603 and ask for the trapper’s extension. For El Dorado County call 530-621-5520, in Placer County call 530-889-7372, and in Yolo County call 530-666-8140. All the county trappers deal with skunks, raccoons, possums, and other small wild animals, not domestic animals. None of these four animals require any sort of permit to remove. The native gray squirrel does require a permit from the California Department of Fish and Game.

But the best way is to discourage coyotes, and other wild animals, is not to leave food for them. Admire them in their native habitat without generating a problem for yourself or your neighbors. Coyote, the trickster that he is, will take advantage of you if you let him.

*Ed Littrell is a retired State Fish and Game biologist and current member of the ARNHA Associate Board of Directors. ■*





**Rivers Festival Set For March 15**

“Preserve, Restore, and Sustain” is the theme for the state-wide Friends of the River’s California’s Rivers Festival to be held Saturday, March 15, from 10 am to 6 pm at the Sacramento Waldorf School, 3750 Bannister Road, Fair Oaks, overlooking the American River.

The event will feature films, discussions, and presentations, along with booths of vendors with an environmental focus. ARNHA will have a display table with information about membership and the Nature Bowl. The non-profit Friends of the River (FOR) works to preserve wild rivers, restore rivers that have been damaged, and promote sustainable water management to ease pressure on all rivers.

For further information, call FOR at 916-442-3155.

**Holiday Sale Sets Record**

The annual Discovery Shop Holiday Gift Sale at the Effie Yeaw Nature Center took in \$3,798 on December 1, a record for the annual ARNHA event. About 230 people visited the nature center during the five-hour sale, the busiest day of December

Lynne Pinkerton, EYNC staffer who manages the Discovery Shop, said especially popular sale items offered by the shop and invited vendors included Guy Galante’s color photography of river scenes, whimsical ceramics from Libby Marmor and friends, note card collections in colorful tins, pendant necklaces with Celtic-style bird designs, and the *Girls’ Book and Boys’ Book of How to Be the Best in Everything*.



**AAA Great Battery Roundup: April 9-19, 2008**

Each year in honor of Earth Day, the American Automobile Association (AAA) organizes a roundup of old and discarded batteries so they can be recycled in an environmentally-friendly way.

The “AAA Great Battery Roundup” is designed to encourage motorists to take old automotive or marine lead-acid batteries to a local collection point where they can be safely recycled and formed into new batteries.

With the help of employees, AAA members, and the public, more than 41,831 batteries were collected and removed from neighborhoods and communities in Northern California, Nevada, and Utah in 2007. In addition, 717,480 pounds of lead, 119,580 pounds of plastic, and 39,860 gallons of sulfuric acid were recycled. As an added bonus, \$79,720 received from recyclers was donated to local non-profit environmental organizations.

Used vehicle batteries are a toxic danger to humans and the environment - as well as a potentially dangerous fire and safety hazard. Unfortunately, every year more than 7 million of them are disposed of improperly in the United States. Many are illegally dumped in rivers and streams or end up in landfills. More are simply sitting in a forgotten corner of someone’s property where they can contaminate soil and ground water, explode in a fire or become a source of lead poisoning to humans and animals.

By going to [www.batteryroundup.com](http://www.batteryroundup.com) you can find a list of local battery drop-off sites for 2008. For the past few years the Effie Yeaw Nature Center has been the local non-profit environmental education organization that benefits from funds received from the AAA battery drive. Please spread the word to your neighbors, friends, and business associates that this is a great way to get rid of old batteries and benefit the Nature Center. Hand-outs with a list of the battery drop-off sites will also be available at the Nature Center.

## Nature Trail Honors Jo Smith

A mile and a half stretch of the path along winding, tree-lined Arcade Creek near American River College was renamed the “Jo Smith Nature Trail” in honor of the co-founder of the American River Natural History Association.

“It was just because I like creeks,” said Jo with customary modesty.

Of course, the reason for the recognition was more important than that. Jo was a co-founder with the late Frank Cruzen of the Sacramento Urban Creeks Council, established in 1988 to encourage public appreciation and protection of the many creeks in the Sacramento region.

With funds from a state parks bond issue, the Arcade Creek Park District resurfaced the path, constructed a bridge, and posted interpretive signs on the nature trail starting at Arcade Creek Park at the end of Omni Drive near Garfield Avenue. Access is via Hackberry Lane off Madison Avenue. The trail follows the creek downstream to a point near the College.

At dedication ceremonies on November 24, park district administrator Jane Steele said the trail was renamed for Jo to honor her “for her long involvement in the environmental community and with the Arcade Creek Recreation and Park District, Sacramento Urban Creeks Council, and the community.” Jo served on the Park District Board of Directors from 1990 to 2001.

Jo likes to recall how she grew up living near a creek filled with fish. It flowed out of the foothills in Santa Clara County between Los Altos and Cupertino.

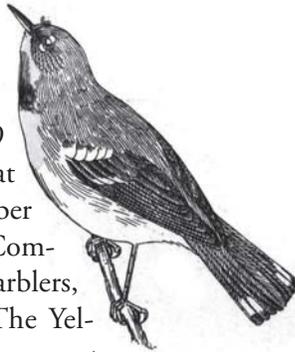
“I loved to wade in the creek and go fishing with my friends. It was like something out of the No Child Left Inside movement and Richard Louv’s *Last Child in the Woods* book.”

## Two Rare Warblers Found on Count

A record sixty-two participants found 109 bird species in ARNHA’s 23<sup>rd</sup> annual Great American River Wildlife Count on December 1. For the first time, the count recorded Common Yellowthroat and Northern Parula warblers, according to coordinator Jack Hiehle. The Yellowthroat, reported by Bill Griffith’s waterborne spotters, is often found elsewhere in the region. The Parula, found by Jeri Langham’s group, is an eastern bird and is considered a vagrant in the West in migration.

On a sunny but cold day that turned windy in the afternoon, the 109 bird species were just one short of the previous high for the census covering the Lower American River and parkway. Other notable sightings included Bald Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Sora Rail, White Pelicans, and Common Loon.

Jack’s non-bird report was notable for what were not seen – beavers, muskrats and coyotes. And very few Ground Squirrels were seen, probably because of the chilly weather. But there were many deer, especially at Ancil Hoffman Park, along with Fox Squirrels.



Jo Smith rejoices after cutting ribbon dedicating Jo Smith Nature Trail along Arcade Creek. With her is Margi Herzog, chair of Arcade Creek Recreation & Park District. Photo by Randy Smith.

## Creek Week Activities Set

Volunteers will clear trash from more than fifty creeks in Sacramento County from 9 a.m. to noon, on Saturday, April 26, in annual Creek Week activities. At some sites, volunteers will remove landscape plants that overpower native plants and choke local waterways.

“Clean up activities help to maintain or improve the environmental habitat along many streams and creek corridors and to reduce flood risk,” said Alta Tura, president of the Sacramento Urban Creeks Council, sponsors of the event.

The clean-up will be followed by a celebration, with food, music, interactive exhibits, and contests at the Sacramento Discovery Museum Learning Center, 3615 Auburn Boulevard.

Creek Week begins Friday April 18, with recognition of participating school groups and sponsors, and a variety of nature tours that showcase creeks.

Information on Creek Week activities, including signing up for the April 28 clean up, can be obtained at [www.creekweek.net](http://www.creekweek.net).

# A Fond Farewell to Peter

By Betty Cooper

Peter the opossum was found on June 1, 2006, by a resident of Marysville in the garage of his home where Peter had crawled into a sack of grass seed. He was approximately three inches long, and the resident thought that the mammal was a rat at first, but when he realized it was a baby opossum, he decided to keep it as a pet. Peter lived in a large ferret cage in the house where he slept in a little hammock and often used a litter box, which is very unusual for an opossum.

The man soon learned that it is illegal to have an opossum as a pet. He called the Nature Center and was directed to Wildlife Care Association (WCA). Veterinarians working for the WCA determined that Peter was too tame to be released to the wild, and because the Nature Center had space for Peter, Peter came to live at the Nature Center on August 29, 2006.

Peter amused visitors when he emerged from his little house to lap up yogurt with slurping sounds. His plate of food often looked delectable to humans, including his favorite, avocado. He would also walk on his exercise wheel, a demonstration for visitors as to why these slow-moving animals often don't make it across the street. Peter was declared by the U.S. Department of Agriculture inspector to be "the best-looking opossum" he had ever seen in captivity. His patient, docile personality made him an excellent educational ambassador.



In December of 2007, Peter stopped eating and appeared to be short of breath. The veterinarian discovered he was suffering from congestive heart failure. In spite of the best efforts of staff to provide veterinary care and a demanding medication routine through the holiday, Peter passed away on December 26<sup>th</sup>. Even though Peter lived just 1 ½ years, he helped to educate thousands of children about wildlife. Visitors were given the opportunity to write down their thoughts about Peter; here are some of their comments:

"You were just so furry and cute even though opossums are usually ugly."

"My family is going to miss you for always. Thank you for warming our hearts."

"I hope you are happy in heaven."

"Peter really knew how to relax! We should learn from him." ■

## FROM THE ALMANAC

### Tough Bird

In a thicket of cottonwoods, a menacing form perches on a branch. Deep shadows conceal the coloring, but the cat-like silhouette is a giveaway. Two feathery tufts project upward and outward from its massive head, heralding the presence of the great horned owl.

This is one of the biggest and baddest of predators, but in the late morning hours it is somnolent. In Northern California, the great horned owl is often found in the same areas as the red-tailed hawk. But the big birds don't get in each other's way since the hawk hunts in the daytime and the owl takes the night shift.

Now, as someone approaches it, the owl spreads wings that have rust-brown undersides and span four or five feet. An intruder watching it silently through the trees would appreciate the fact it was retreating in the opposite direction.

Consider the tools that the great horned owl brings to the task of checking the rodent population in the course of finding its food. For one, its large, yellow eyes are on the front of the head rather than on the sides as are the eyes of most other birds, permitting it to focus on an object with both eyes. It depends more on its remarkable hearing equipment to find its prey in the dark. Here the owl's wide head comes in handy, enabling the owl to detect the direction of a sound by determining the differences in intensity with which the sound strikes each ear.

And a great horned owl can swoop soundlessly down on unwary prey, thanks to its billowy flight feathers that are muffled by comb-like projections and fringes. Finally, it is equipped with sharp talons and beak.

Perhaps because of their wide-eyed appearance, owls around the world have been regarded as symbols of wisdom since the days of ancient Greece. Alas, experts tell us that geese, crows and ravens all have more smarts than the "wise old owl." Still, when the great horned owl sits on a branch uttering its four-or-five-hoot calls, it's a rare and foolhardy creature that ventures into its territory.



*Reprinted from ARNHA's "An American River Almanac: Reflections on nature throughout the year," with essays by Peter J. Hayes and color photographs by Tom Myers and George Turner. This book of photographs and essays can be purchased at the EffieYeaw Nature Center and selected book stores. ■*

*Peril, from page 1*

their canopy starts to get thin. The older trees are beginning to die, not producing many acorns, and to Hiehle's way of thinking now is the time to get started doing something to assure an orderly replacement as the old-timers are lost.

To that end, there are hundreds of young oak trees growing up in wire cages beneath the old trees around the Effie Yeaw Nature Center. Some of the trees have sprouted from acorns, and some are the result of a recent planting program.

The cages, paid for by ARNHA and built by Hiehle and his volunteers in the Habitat Improvement Program, seem to be doing the job.

"Some of these little trees are 20, 30 years old, but the problem is the deer. They just don't let the little trees grow," he says. "Deer will eat a young oak as soon as the annual vegetation starts turning brown. And a little more mature tree—a springy young oak—an antlered deer will rub all the bark off rubbing its antlers."

But protected in a cage, some of those stunted oaks have grown six feet in two years.

Building a cage is not easy on the stony soil of the Nature Center. "You have to drive in a steel fence post, then attach the cage wire to it, but you can almost never drive the post in. You have to dig out the rocks, place the post, then put the rocks back to hold it up," says Hiehle.

The soil of the parkway is just a thin veneer over a thick deposit of large cobbles all the way down below the water table.

Hiehle, 86, was the supervising ecologist for California State Parks when he retired and took an active role with outdoor activities of ARNHA, the California Native Plant Society, and the Audubon Society.

His experience with the oaks leads him to think it might be smart to increase the oak habitat in the American River Parkway by flattening the piles of

rock left behind by gold dredging operations and covering them with mulch which would eventually become soil.

"The idea would be to start with just a small area and level it out with a bulldozer, then start trying to establish soil on it—maybe with the compost from yard waste," he says.

To Trevor Burwell, Hiehle is on the right track even though Burwell doesn't agree that the oaks are actually dying. Burwell, a private practice ecologist, was, until August, Sacramento County's natural resources specialist. He does agree the oaks could use some planning for the future.

"Any time you have a mostly mature forest, you can predict its future by the number of seedlings and young trees

available to provide regeneration," Burwell says. "If we want to avoid a long time without trees after some disaster, we need to plan for that."

Planting young oaks to take the place of lost mature trees seems wise, he says—unless someone prefers open grassland instead.

"There are more oaks in the parkway now than there were on that land in aerial pictures I've seen that were taken more than 50 years ago," he says. "And there are plenty of people who prefer open grassland to forest."

"Think grasslands and the burrowing owl or the northern harrier. In woodlands it's the red-shouldered hawk and the wood duck. Take your pick." ■

## Bird and Breakfast

Is that a dirty sock hanging in that tree? No, it's a bushtit nest! And that tiny cup the size of a quarter, built with lichen and spider webs? A hummingbird nest!



Explore the miracles of spring in the beautiful oak woodland and meadows of the **Effie Yeaw Nature Area**, in small groups guided by Audubon experts. Return to a delicious breakfast prepared by your hosts, the **American River Natural History Association**. This event is a fundraiser for educational programs on the American River Parkway.

*Saturday, March 15th, 2008*

*7:30 – 10:30 a.m.*

*Effie Yeaw Nature Center, inside Ancil Hoffman Park  
California Avenue and Tarshes Drive, Carmichael*

**Reservations are required**, \$30 per person, ages 12 and older please. Call **489-4918** for information and reservations by March 5th.

*Don't forget your binoculars!*



Your Name \_\_\_\_\_

Name(s) of Your Guests \_\_\_\_\_

In order to help us ensure your enjoyment of the breakfast, please check one of the choices below:

Standard breakfast fare       Vegetarian fare       Vegan fare

Telephone number where you can be reached in case of fire, storm, overbooking \_\_\_\_\_

Amount Enclosed @ \$30/person \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (you may consider \$20 of each \$30 a donation to ARNHA)

Please make checks out to: **ARNHA** and mail to P.O. Box 241, Carmichael, CA 95609-0241

**THANK YOU!**

## American River Natural History Association

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# ARNHA Calendar of Events

- **Bird and Breakfast** (see page 7)  
Saturday, March 15, 7:30 am to 10:30 am, at EYNC
- **Rivers Festival** (see page 4)  
Saturday, March 15, 10 am to 6 pm  
Sacramento Waldorf School, 3750 Bannister, Fair Oaks
- **Spring Fun Days**  
March 17-21 (pre-registration required)  
phone 916-489-4918 for more information
- **Wild Flowers Public Forum** (see page 2)  
Thursday, March 27, 7 pm at EYNC
- **Earth Day, April 22**
- **Creek Week** (see page 5)  
April 18-26
- **Walk on the Wild Side - Beech Lake Preserve**  
Saturday, May 10, 10 am to 4:30 pm  
(www.stonelakes.org)
- **ARNHA Annual Meeting**  
Wednesday, June 11, 6:30 pm at EYNC

EYNC: Effie Yeaw Nature Center

# Thank you Donors!

Fifty-eight donors gave a total of \$3,600 to ARNHA in the 2007 Annual Holiday Appeal. They and other donors are as follows:

- George and Susan Abbott  
*In Memory of George Abbott*
- Sue Adams
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- Susan and Arvin Arthur  
*In Memory of Kemp Doersch M.D.*
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## Welcome New Members

Tell Your Friends About ARNHA – Recruit a New Member Today