



# AUDUBON CANYON RANCH

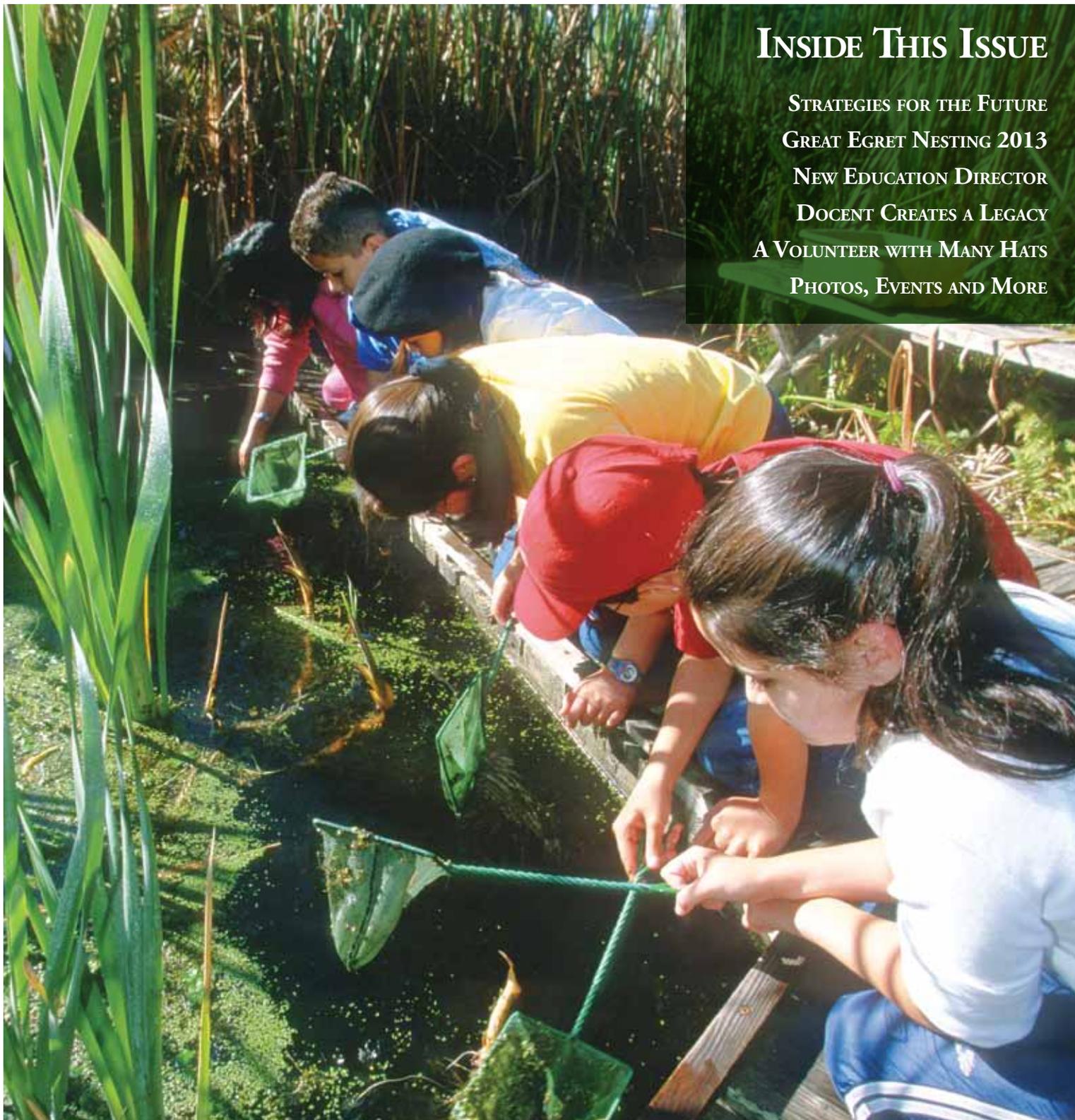
Number 53

## BULLETIN

Fall 2013

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Embracing the Winds of Change

## A Strong and Vibrant ACR STRATEGIES FOR MOVING FORWARD

by J. Scott Feierabend and Diane Jacobson

Change is in the air!

With the onset of crisp autumn nights in Marin and Sonoma counties, the hillsides have become a canvas of rich fall color. Migratory birds wend their way down the Pacific Flyway to reach their overwintering grounds in South America, and the pace of life quickens for spiders, squirrels, salamanders and all the denizens of ACR's preserves. In preparing for the cold and rainy winter, change is everywhere.

Change is afoot at ACR as we take stock of our 50 years of accomplishments in land preservation, nature education and conservation science and prepare for the many challenges ahead. Lending stability and direction to the organization and ensuring that we



**The Big Leaf Maple, a California native, offers fall color in our riparian landscapes.**

remain forward looking is the ACR strategic plan.

### *Planning for new opportunities*

The five-year plan adopted in 2008 has served Audubon Canyon Ranch

well, and we have accomplished much since its inception. But today we are a much larger and more complex organization and must embrace new and exciting opportunities as we prepare for the next half-century. Building on the original plan, we have launched a focused and efficient update process which will be completed by early next year. The new plan will set the stage for 50 more years of community service and program excellence!

### *Renovating and restoring*

By the time you read this letter, we will have also launched a number of renovation and restoration projects. They will be funded, in part, by a second major organizational undertaking, the ACR Strategic

please turn to *Strategies for Moving Forward*, page 10

### Audubon Canyon Ranch

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## 2013 Great Egret Nesting Season at Martin Griffin Preserve

### THE NATURE OF CHANGE

by Sarah Millus



Photo by Wyn Hoag

**Great Egrets, like those pictured from a past season, have been raising their young on the Martin Griffin Preserve for decades.**

Looking out the window of my office cabin at ACR's Cypress Grove Research Center, a group of dunlin moves across Tomales Bay, flashing white with each turn of the flock. "Dunlin are arriving already?" I think to myself, lamenting the end of summer.

I am already counting the days until spring begins, when I can return to charting the progress of heron and egret nests at colonies scattered throughout the North Bay.

One of the things I love most about living and working close to the natural world is feeling connected to the cadenced cycles of nature. After four seasons of monitoring the heronry at the Martin Griffin Preserve, I cannot help but feel in tune with the rhythms of the nesting cycle there.

Every year I am mesmerized by the courtship displays and behaviors of Great Egrets. I revel in the quiet ambiance of the preserve's Picher

Canyon while adults faithfully incubate their eggs, tethered to their nests by some unseen force. And I delight in watching each chick grow from tiny fuzz ball to gawky "teenager."

But things were different in the canyon this year.

#### *A change of rhythm*

In the 2013 nesting season, there was an unmistakable change in the rhythm of the nesting cycle in Picher Canyon. There was no cacophony of begging calls from hungry chicks, no clumsy fledglings taking their first awkward flights. Surprisingly, not one egret chick fledged from the colony this season.

A complete failure of the nesting colony has not occurred since regular monitoring of it began in 1967. This year, we also saw considerably fewer egret nests initiated than we have seen before. The combination of total reproductive failure and a low number

of nests has caused concern regarding future nesting seasons at this heronry.

#### *A silent spring*

The egret nesting season started normally, with birds slowly coming in around late March, followed by a steady increase in the number of nests. Around mid-May, however, it was apparent that the seasonal nesting activity would be dramatically low, as fewer nests were established at this point than in past years.

In June, as I made my way up Kent Trail to the Henderson Overlook, I should have been greeted by the relentless begging calls of egret chicks, but I heard only the familiar melody of songbirds. By this time, most egret nests had failed and were unoccupied, although a few still cradled adults, incubating eggs apparently long past their due date.

Based on the behavior of some adults, it appeared that a small number



Photo by Wyn Hoag

continues on page 4

continued from page 3

of nests did hatch chicks, although no egret chicks were directly observed.

The chicks that did hatch apparently died shortly after hatching, for unknown reasons. The majority of the nests either incubated inviable eggs for a period much longer than is required, or they failed and re-nested, and the second attempt also failed.

### *Unexpected visitors*

There were several unusual sightings by staff and volunteers in Picher Canyon this season that give us some clue as to what

may have caused the poor nesting performance this year.



In early June a large group of adult egret feathers was found in the parking lot. A couple weeks later, an adult Bald Eagle flew over the colony, causing all the egrets to flush off their nests.

An hour or two after the egrets were flushed, most nests were still unoccupied.

The depredated remains of a Great Blue Heron chick was found below a telephone pole at the end of the Osher Volunteer Center in Picher Canyon. Guano near the remains appeared to be from

owls, based on its thick, slightly gritty and even consistency.

### *Natural disturbances*

We were not alarmed by these events, however, because such disturbance from predators, scavengers, or even humans, is normal and expected every year in heronries.

Disturbances do not necessarily lead to colony abandonment or cause overall nest failure, as long as the frequency and intensity of disturbance remains low. When it exceeds some invisible threshold, the egrets can take drastic action, which may include abandoning their nests. It is unclear if this is what happened at Picher Canyon this year, but observations point to some



Photo by Wyn Hoag

**Egrets have a wide field of vision and good depth perception, allowing for the capture of swiftly moving prey.**

disturbance at the colony coinciding with widespread nest failure.

### *One pearl on a string*

Standing in Picher Canyon, spending hours with my eyes fixed only on the colony, it is easy to forget the world beyond the canyon walls. But the nesting colony in Picher Canyon is just one breeding site used by a large egret population, which includes numerous other nesting colonies throughout the San Francisco Bay Area, and possibly beyond.

Therefore, the current nesting decline at Picher Canyon probably

does not reflect the status of the overall egret population. Since the inception of ACR's Heron and Egret Project in 1991, Great Egret nest abundance has fluctuated but remained stable throughout the San Francisco North Bay region. We have no current concerns regarding the overall health of egrets in the Bay Area.

*"When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe."* —John Muir

The unseen forces that drive natural processes are wonderfully complex and, as such, can be challenging to

understand. Rarely can a single factor contributing to a natural process be isolated from all others.

We do not know precisely what caused the colony to fail this year, and we may never determine this with certainty. What will happen in future years is also unknown, and we are hoping the egrets recover and continue with their long tradition of nesting in the canyon.

One thing we do understand about the natural world is its dynamic nature. Like a symphony without a conductor, nature is beautiful, unpredictable and always moving to her own beat.

*Sarah Millus is ACR's  
Helen Pratt Field Biologist*



The leaves crunching  
under-foot  
The ferns brushing  
against my side  
The birds chirping  
The water rolling  
It all happens  
when you are  
alone in the forest.

## GET OUTSIDE!

The Martin Griffin Preserve is open weekdays this fall. Extended hours allow visitors to explore nature this season. See [www.egret.org](http://www.egret.org) for visiting times.

## ACR Gains Inspiring Team Member WELCOME, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION ANNE BURNETT

Even as nature slows to observe the signs of fall, Audubon Canyon Ranch is all abuzz. We're celebrating the arrival of Director of Education Anne Burnett.



"Anne is remarkable, with considerable regional and national experience in the environmental education community, and is grounded in the Bay Area," says ACR Executive Director Scott Feierabend. "She will bring incredible new energy, vision, perspective, drive and bounce—both to our Education Department and to ACR as a whole."

Committed to building environmental literacy, Anne (pronounced Annie) has led and partnered on education initiatives with the National Geographic Society, the Smithsonian, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association and many other education outlets. She also sits on several Bay Area boards and advises

*"Her enthusiasm, energy and experience will be an awesome boost to the Education Program."*

— Jeanne Wirka

organizations about education trends and national priorities.

"I am thoroughly elated to be joining the Audubon Canyon Ranch team," says Anne. "To lead the education efforts among 800 committed volunteers and staff for an organization pioneered by many of the Bay Area's greatest conservation heroes of our time, is both a phenomenal opportunity and a culminating professional goal for me."

### *A lifelong environmentalist*

With professional strengths including program and curriculum development, Anne brings to ACR a lifelong love of the environment and teaching. She served as a field science educator and site manager for the Yosemite Institute in Yosemite National Park. And for 13 years, Anne was an instructor and course director for Outward Bound.

She comes to us from the Life Sciences Foundation, where she designed the organization's first framework for national education strategies. She also taught high school science for five years, serving as a crew leader at the Rocky Mountain School for Expeditionary Learning.

Anne holds a bachelor's degree in geology and environmental studies from Oberlin College and a master's in journalism with emphases in science and environmental

*"Anne is remarkable, with considerable regional and national experience in the environmental education community."*

— Scott Feierabend

writing from the University of Colorado at Boulder.

### *Serving the entire ACR community*

"Anne's warm and engaging personality, infectious enthusiasm and impressively deep experience in nature-based education will serve the entire ACR community well as we continue to refine and enhance our 'gold-standard' nature education programs," says Diane Jacobson, president of the ACR Board of Directors and member of the hiring committee.

Anne will lead strategic planning, community outreach, volunteer coordination, program evaluation and development efforts for ACR education programs. Building on the accomplishments of former Education Director Beth Gurney, Anne is poised





ACR's Education Programs, such as these, are directed by Anne Burnett and the Education team.



to be a font of inspiration and excitement for ACR's rich and diverse communities—board, staff, volunteers, funders, schoolchildren, educational professionals, like-minded organizations and more.

"The ACR Education staff feels so fortunate to have Anne join our team," says Bouverie Preserve Biologist Jeanne Wirka. "Her enthusiasm, energy and experience will be an awesome boost to the Education Program. Plus, she's really funny!"

#### *Early influences*

A fourth-generation Colorado native who began skiing and climbing the Rockies shortly after learning to walk, Anne is an avid outdoorswoman and environmental steward. A sixth grade visit to a residential

environmental education center inspired her to nurture an appreciation and respect for the environment.

"I am thrilled to join the Audubon Canyon Ranch community of learners, thinkers, volunteers and participants," says Anne. "The opportunity to unite my three greatest passions—conservation, education and science—is an incredible lifetime achievement for me. And to do so with the support and institutional history of ACR is a cherry on my proverbial professional sundae."

Anne began her journey with Audubon Canyon Ranch in early October, and the ACR staff looks forward to introducing Anne to our volunteer, supporter and educator communities.

**Welcome aboard, Anne!**

## Becoming a Member of the Clerin Zumwalt Legacy Circle

### MY ACR JOURNEY

by Susan Moritz

Earlier this year my husband Dennis and I added Audubon Canyon Ranch to our estate plan. I had no idea when I began docent training in 2006 that I would become as involved in ACR as I am today. I became hooked on ACR's Education Programs very quickly.

First, I was captivated by Resident Biologist Gwen Heistand's infectious enthusiasm. Who else would have the confidence to stand in front our training class and mimic the egrets calling her name, the flehmen response in deer\* or the various calls of the coyote?

#### *Inspiration on many fronts*

Next, I was inspired by the Training

*"I began to understand, on a visceral level, that I am part of nature. We all are. We all have our season."*

— Susan Moritz

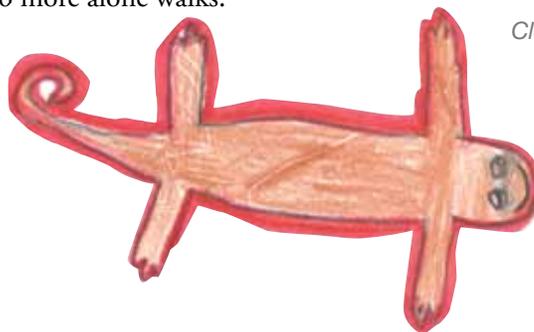
Committee and my fellow classmates. I was excited to be doing something so

\* a behavioral response of male mammals, especially deer, that consists of raising their heads and curling back their lips to expose more nasal receptors



worthwhile with many like-minded folks. It drew me deeper and deeper into the program. I could see how important it would be in the lives of the students.

Finally, I was inspired by the schoolchildren themselves. As a docent, I am often with children who are rarely outside on dirt trails, let alone on trails for three hours. It is so gratifying when a student who was initially nervous finds herself wanting to hold more newts or do more alone walks.



#### *Drawn into nature*

It wasn't long before I realized something more was happening than just learning the information in our binders. Before I finished the training, it occurred to me that whenever I was at the preserve, I never thought about my personal problems or any issues concerning my family or anything else. I was present in nature, completely absorbed, thoroughly happy.

As I better understood the rhythm of the passing seasons and the somewhat predictable changes in fauna and flora, I felt myself also change. I began to see where I fit in the bigger picture.

I began to understand, on a visceral level, that I am part of nature. We all are. We all have our season. That's the gift ACR gave me. It was an easy decision to give back by joining the Clerin Zumwalt Legacy Circle.

*Susan Moritz is a docent at ACR's Martin Griffin Preserve and a member of the Clerin Zumwalt Legacy Circle*

## CLERIN ZUMWALT LEGACY CIRCLE

ACR's Clerin Zumwalt Legacy Circle honors supporters who have included Audubon Canyon Ranch in their estate plans. If you name ACR in your estate plan—at any amount—you become a member of the Clerin Zumwalt Legacy Circle. For more information, contact Judy Prokupek, Interim Director of Development and Communications, at 415.868.9244 or [judy.prokupek@egret.org](mailto:judy.prokupek@egret.org). We welcome your questions.

**ACR is in strict accord with the ethical guidelines of the National Planned Giving Committee.**

## Doing Only What You Enjoy . . . and Lots of It

### VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

The volunteer hats available at Audubon Canyon Ranch are numerous and varied, and Anna-Marie Bratton wears many of them.

She is a Docent and Ranch Guide volunteer at ACR's Martin Griffin Preserve, a member of ACR's Board of Directors and a regular workday volunteer. And, Anna-Marie is a weekly volunteer for the conservation science team, entering and proofing data for the waterbird and shorebird surveys and the Heron and Egret Project. Her volunteer hours are impressive.

Anna-Marie is retired from her professional life, most recently as the lab manager of the Biology Department at City College of San Francisco. That experience, coupled with a bachelor's degree in ecology, lends great knowledge to the many roles she plays.

When asked what inspires her to spend so many hours on ACR preserves, Anna-Marie responds, "Well, it's just a

tiny bit of not being able to say no!" But then quickly adds, "I fell in love with ACR—the organization and the people. It provides me with opportunities to do things that I enjoy doing. The most important thing about being retired is you don't have to do anything you don't want to do."

"Volunteering with ACR keeps me going," she says. "It gives me an opportunity to feel as productive in my retirement as I did when I was working."

And then adds, "If I didn't like the people . . . I'm not *that* much of a can't-say-no person . . . I wouldn't be here!"

Anna-Marie's 12 years of volunteer service is the kind of gift that keeps ACR running effectively and efficiently.

To Anna-Marie and all her contemporaries at Audubon Canyon Ranch, we tip our hats to you. We could not—and wouldn't want to—do what we do without you.



## THANK YOU, ACR VOLUNTEERS!

ACR extends its sincere gratitude to the many volunteers and supporters who helped us protect natural resources and habitat, and teach children about nature over the past 50 years.

## BECOME AN ACR MEMBER

Audubon Canyon Ranch members think globally and act locally through ACR's land preservation, nature-based education and conservation science programs. Please join today, and together we will protect wildlands in Marin and Sonoma counties.

Call **415.868.9244** or visit [www.egret.org](http://www.egret.org) to join.

## CORPORATE SPONSORS

*We are especially grateful to ACR Corporate Sponsors*



## CHECK OUT WWW.EGRET.ORG!

Visit [www.egret.org](http://www.egret.org) and check out ACR's new website with more photos of our breathtaking preserves.

You'll also find a calendar with nature exploration opportunities, a Show & Tell section with publication archives and fan mail from students, and in-depth information about ACR's programs and preserves.

STRATEGIES FOR MOVING FORWARD continued from page 2

Investment Plan.

The Plan, you may recall, allows Audubon Canyon Ranch to prepare for the future in a manner that will ensure its continued vibrancy and leadership, while greening its operations, reducing its carbon footprint, fostering long-term sustainability and reaching financial stability.

Strengthening infrastructure

Many of ACR's buildings and facilities have deteriorated and can no



longer support the diverse programs and activities that inspire a love for and understanding of the natural world.

Similarly, ACR's energy systems and information technologies have fallen behind and are unable to provide the full efficiencies and opportunities to engage its diverse community.

By addressing these and several public access issues, ACR will improve the delivery of its mission in bold, innovative and exciting ways, thus



maximizing its programmatic impact. Watch for updates soon to come!

Come for a visit

We hope you share our enthusiasm and excitement for these transformative changes coming to ACR. We look forward to seeing you on a morning hike or an afternoon visit to the magnificent preserves of Audubon Canyon Ranch.

Thank you for your steadfast support and love for this remarkable organization.

J. Scott Feierabend is ACR's Executive Director

Diane Jacobson is President of ACR's Board of Directors

Stay in the Loop

Published every two months, our online newsletter brings you updates from the preserves, school group visits, latest findings from science staff, volunteer opportunities and ways to explore ACR's nature sanctuaries. Visit www.egret.org/eNewsletter to opt in.

Green Your Mailbox

Join us in our continuing commitment to green practices and choose to receive the ACR Bulletin online. Let us know if you'd like to opt out of the snail mail version by calling Leslie Sproul at ACR Headquarters at 415.868.9244.

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Photo by Jocelyn Knight

Fall Exploring  
**Martin Griffin  
 Preserve**



ACR's Martin Griffin Preserve is open to the public on weekdays during the following times:

**October 1 – November 15**

**Monday 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.**

**Tuesday – Friday 2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.**

(When morning School Programs are in session, the preserve is closed to the public.)

**November 18 – 22**

**Monday – Friday 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.**

**December 2 – 18**

**Monday – Friday 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.**

No reservations necessary. After parking, check in at the bookstore for a preserve map and a brief orientation before starting your self-guided hike.

Visit [www.egret.org](http://www.egret.org) for more information.

Guided Nature  
 Walks

**Bouverie Preserve**

**Saturdays ~ September 21, October 12, October 26, November 9, 2013**

**February 1, March 1, March 15, April 12, May 3, May 17, 2014**

**9:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.**

Experience the beauty and rich natural history of this 535-acre preserve. Reservations required and accepted one month before each respective hike date.

[rsvp@egret.org](mailto:rsvp@egret.org) or 415.868.9244

Backyard Naturalist  
 Series

**Bouverie Preserve**

**Saturday ~ November 16, 2013 – Drawing Autumn Leaves at Bouverie Preserve  
 with Nina Antze**

**9:30 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.**

Geared toward the adult amateur naturalist, these Saturday seminars include time in the classroom and on the trail. One- to three-mile hike. Mildly to moderately strenuous. Bring lunch and water.

Class size is limited. \$25 per seminar. *Discount for ACR members at Sponsor-level or above.*

Registration required: [rsvp@egret.org](mailto:rsvp@egret.org) or 415.868.9244

Habitat Protection  
 & Restoration  
 Stewards

**Bouverie Preserve**

**Mondays ~ 8:30 a.m. – noon**

Bouverie Stewards work intimately with the land throughout the year at the Bouverie Preserve. This dedicated crew assists with all sorts of habitat protection and restoration work, while learning about the ecology behind the project.

Call 707.935.8417 or e-mail Jen Potts at [jpotts@egret.org](mailto:jpotts@egret.org)

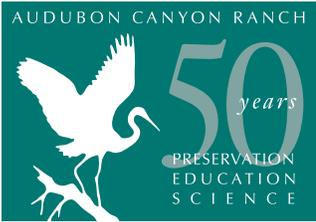


Nature Hikes

**Modini  
 Mayacamas  
 Preserves**

Explore the rugged terrain of ACR's newest nature sanctuaries, the Modini Mayacamas Preserves, just east of Healdsburg. Natural history, local history and birdwatching hikes are guided by local naturalists. Visit [www.egret.org/calendar](http://www.egret.org/calendar) for more information or contact ACR Naturalist David Self at [david.self@egret.org](mailto:david.self@egret.org). Hikes organized in partnership with our friends at the Madrone Audubon Society.

No RSVP or cost, but donations appreciated



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## Our Mission

Audubon Canyon Ranch  
protects nature through land  
preservation, nature education  
and conservation science.

## VISIT US

*To visit these preserves, see the Calendar of Events inside*

### **Bouverie Preserve**

Woodlands in the Valley of the Moon

### **Martin Griffin Preserve**

Sweeping Coastal Views in West Marin

### **Modini Mayacamas Preserves**

Wilderness in the Mayacamas Mountains

*By appointment only*

### **Cypress Grove Research Center**

Call 415.663.8203 to schedule

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The Audubon Canyon Ranch Bulletin is published twice yearly as a benefit to our members, supporters and volunteers.

Managing Editor Jennifer Newman

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Cover photo: *Searching for newts at Martin Griffin Preserve's Monday and Tuesday Ponds*

by Wyn Hoag

Artwork throughout by student participants of ACR's Education Programs and on page 4 by Ane Carla Rovetta

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## Embracing the Winds of Change

