

~ Life in LAMORINDA ~

Citizen Scientists research wildlife in the Nature Area



A bobcat, a top carnivore, has never before been photographed in the Nature Area during daylight.



A raccoon visits the Sue Graf pond.



Blacktail buck a few days before it was killed by a vehicle.

Photos provided

By Megan Kennedy and Kathy Barrett

A raven called from an oak tree announcing that people had returned to the Nature Area. The woods were still wet from a recent rain, and local high school students were gathering for their monthly check of the camera traps. For the past year, about a dozen students participated as citizen scientists, in a research project to learn more about the wildlife of the Orinda Nature Area.

The Friends of the Wagner Ranch Nature Area (FWRNA) conducted the project with partial funding from the North American Association of Environmental Educators, Youth Learning as Citizen Environmental Scientists (YLACES). FWRNA was recently renamed Friends of Orinda Nature Area (FONA) to distinguish it from Wagner Ranch Elementary School.

Under the guidance of UC Berkeley Emeritus Professor of Wildlife Studies, Reg Barrett, students monitored cameras situated in the five habitats of the Nature Area: wetland, grassland, shrubland, wood-

land, and riparian. Starting at the Sue Graf pond, they refilled the three bait stations across from each camera. Most months, they found the aluminum bait pans empty, so they filled them again with dog food, fresh blueberries, and hog chow, taking turns changing the camera chips so that animals visiting the bait had their pictures taken during the following month, which students viewed, studied, and proposed hypotheses to explain the activities of the wildlife.

During one of the sessions, two groups of the team carefully picked apart a number of owl pellets, finding the skulls of gophers, wood rats, and deer mice. Gophers and deer mice had not been captured on camera. Some of the most exciting photos were of a bobcat with a squirrel in its mouth, and a family of baby raccoons. Sometimes the students found slender salamanders under the 2-foot by 4-foot plywood boards supporting the bait pans. Worms, pill bugs and spiders also hid under the boards.

March and April of 2021, the first two months of the study, the group didn't put any bait in the aluminum pans to serve as a control period to al-

low them to observe the effect of bait on the activity of the wildlife. They continued monitoring the camera stations through March and April of 2022. During the control period, only three species were recorded. By the end of the study, 22 species had been documented visiting the bait. Ravens did not visit the bait stations during the Control Months, but starting in May, they were the first animals visiting the bait, and were very busy flying away with the dog food.

The group observed many changes in the creeks and vegetation over the 14 months of the study and using the data collected from the camera traps, they also noted several changes in the patterns of wildlife in the nature area.

Each student participating in the study was tasked to write a hypothesis regarding some of these changes, and is now in the process of writing a research paper to convey their findings. Students, from Miramonte, Monte Vista, and California high schools hope that their findings will not only further the community's understanding of the species in the nature area, but also provide

educators with information they can use when teaching about local organisms or the Orinda Nature Area.

Across the board, the students enjoyed the invaluable experience of being able to

study the nature area like environmental scientists under the guidance of experienced educators.

The Orinda Union School District owns the Orinda Nature Area, which is the 18-acre historic homestead of Theodore Wagner, California's first Surveyor General. On Sundays during the school year, children and their parents volunteer to help Naturalist Toris Jaeger maintain the biodiversity garden, pond, and trails. Before Covid 19, FONA conducted public festivals, one in the fall, and the other around Earth Day. Hopefully these festivals can resume soon. Dogs and pets are not allowed in the Nature Area. If people want to volunteer, they can reach out to Jaeger (torisjaeger1@gmail.com) who teaches programs and supervises Scout projects and volunteers. Information at www.fona.org. Photos were taken with RECONIX cameras.



When I say "good," you say "neighbor."

Mike Rosa
Agent
925-376-2244
Insurance Lic. #: OF45583
346 Rheem Blvd., Suite 106
Moraga
P097314.1

Now that's teamwork.
CALL FOR A QUOTE 24/7



State Farm Home Office, Bloomington, IL



Thank You to Our LPiE 2021-22 BUSINESS PARTNERS

DIAMOND PARTNERS

 Erin & Darrick Martin, Martin Homes, Compass

 Paddy Kehoe Team, Compass

PLATINUM PARTNERS

 Cobain Orthodontics

 Dana Green Team, Compass

 Dudum Real Estate Group, Julie Del Santo & Tina Frechman

 Lamorinda Pediatrics

 Lewis Asset Management

GOLD PARTNERS

 BeeSure

 Dana Reedy Homes, Compass

GOLD PARTNERS (cont'd)

 Douglah Designs/Luxe Home

 fLO Content Marketing *

 Law Office of Daniel Horowitz

 Minuteman Press Lafayette *

 Nicole Tamayo Homes, Compass

 Village Associates Real Estate

SILVER PARTNERS

Ann Ward, Real Estate Broker, Village Associates

Ashley Battersby, Real Estate Broker, Village Associates

Bridge Bank

Brydon & Ives Team, Compass

Danielle Gogo-Gallagher Graphic Designer *

Diablo Foods

La Fiesta Square

Lauren Deal, The Hurlbut Team

Rebecca Parish, M.D. Comprehensive Wellness

The Ventana Exploration Company

BRONZE PARTNERS

The Bar Method, Walnut Creek

Broadmoor Landscape Supply

Canyon Club Brewery

Healthcare Consulting CA

Honey Bear Christmas Trees

Honey Homes

Kurt Piper Group

Lamorinda Tooth Buds

Resourcefill

Rossmoor Medical Associates

Trove Professional Services

COPPER PARTNERS

Anderson Bros. Movers

Contra Costa Children's Dentistry

The Du Borg Group at Morgan Stanley

Formula3 Fitness

Jennifer Perlmutter Gallery

Lafayette Academy

Lafayette Orthodontics

Lamorinda Music

Lamorinda Technology, Inc. *

Mount Diablo Cider Company

Pillar Cowork and Childcare

Reasonable Books

Robert M. Sayegh DDS, Inc.

* In-Kind Donors

