

THE SIGNPOST

March - April 1988

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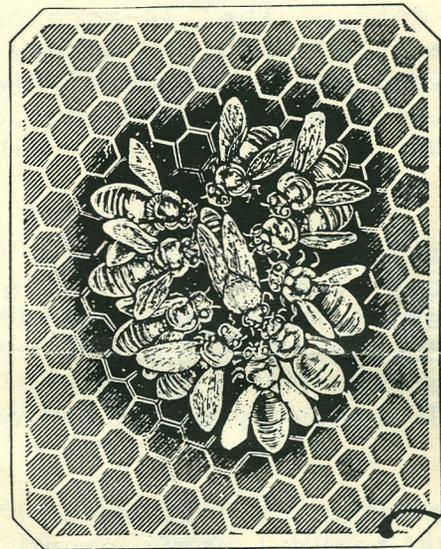
PRE - CONFERENCE ISSUE

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

As you are aware, several positions on the PRAC Board of Directors are up for election. You should all have your ballots from the last Signpost. Please take a few moments to complete and return your ballot (Another ballot has been included in this month's issue). Election winners will be installed at the PRAC/CSPRA/LEAGUE conference this month. There are some highly qualified rangers vying for these positions, so your input is vital to the success of our association.

Speaking of the Conference, the 1988 edition promises to be among the best, with numerous sessions, trips, and social activities planned. I hope to see as many of you there as possible.

The time has never been better to get involved in PRAC. Many training opportunities are in the works, including an interpretation clinic with nationally renown naturalist Elizabeth Terwilliger (see insert), and an animal control seminar slated for this Fall.

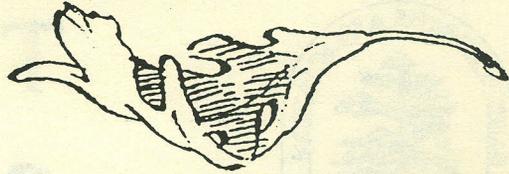


At the last PRAC Board of Directors meeting, held in Walnut Creek, it was decided that we purchase coffee mugs and quality stickers embossed with the association logo. These will be used to raise funds for the association for future activities.

As you read through this issue of The Signpost you will discover some interesting stories and events. I encourage you to join with us by contributing newsletter items, or by participating in future activities.

MIGHTY OAKS

Effort Under Way To Restore Majestic Grove At Mooney



Contributed by
John Ramirez, PRAC President

After years of contributing (to) the downfall of the majestic oak groves that once (covered) Tulare County, man is now working to restore one of the few stands that remain.

An ambitious oak planting program is in full swing at Mooney Grove Park with hundreds of young oak saplings already placed in mulch beds dotting the 144-acre park since 1984, when the County realized existing trees were in decline and allotted money for a program to preserve and replant oaks.

The goal, said county park services superintendent John Ramirez, is to rejuvenate a decaying grove so future generations could enjoy the stately trees symbolic to county life.

"We're trying to create an optimum natural environment for

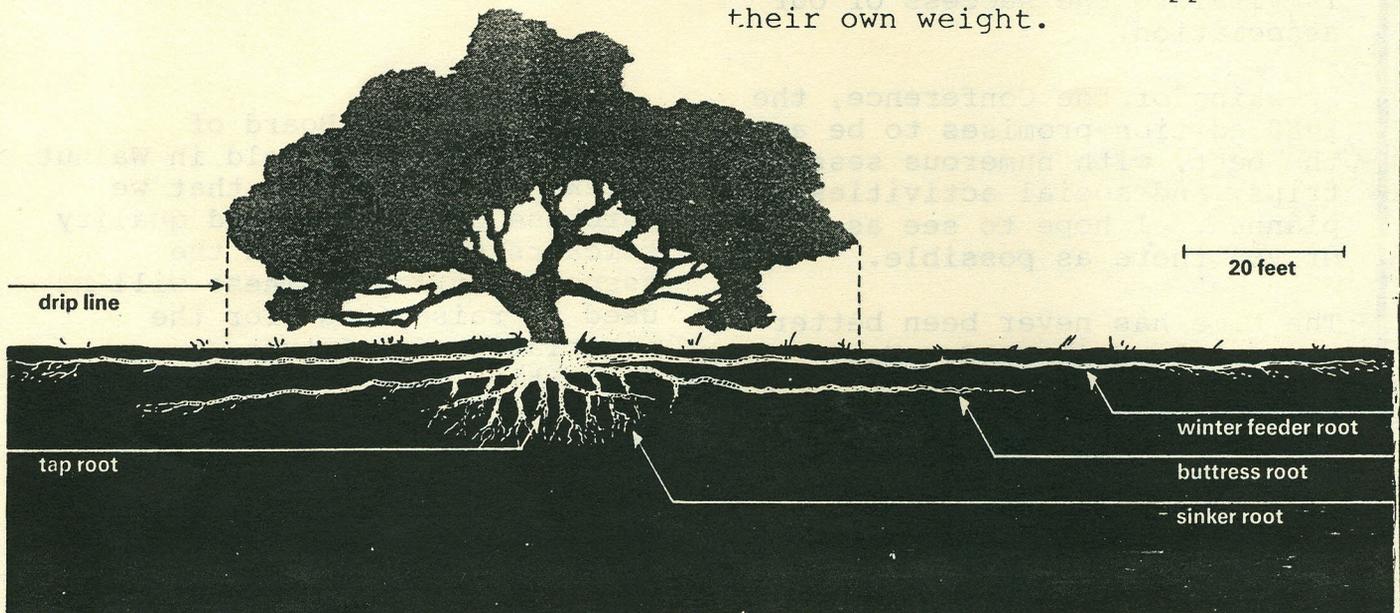
the oaks with the mulch beds and discouraging people from walking near them," said Ramirez near a site where dozens of young oaks are taking root.

Salvaging the imperiled grove is being done two ways. One is to revive the existing trees suffering from disease, the other involves a vigorous replanting program.

Improvements to the park since it was purchased by the county in 1910 and environmental factors have contributed to the demise of the grove.

A study done on the state of the grove in 1984 revealed that lawn grasses planted in the 1950's were choking off oxygen to aerate around the oak's base, Ramirez explained.

Once oxygen was cut-off, the roots of the trees slowly decayed and left them susceptible to disease or unable to support their own weight.



Root System of the California Oak

Illustration by Amy Pertschuk

Also, the park's bermuda grass prevented water from absorbing deep into the ground- forcing the trees to spread shallow root systems- and didn't allow leaves and other organic matter to decay and provide fertilizer.

Visitors who walked around the oaks unknowingly compounded the problem, compacting the soil around them to further seal off life-giving oxygen.

The 1984 study estimated that 85 percent of the older trees in Mooney Grove were in danger of dying off. "After 75 years of county ownership, the Valley Oaks of Mooney Grove are in jeopardy of disappearing," the study's authors warned.

Since those warnings, park workers have trimmed back the grass that used to surround the oaks, allowing for water and oxygen to permeate. Some oaks too sick to save have been cut down, and other diseased ones pruned back, Ramirez said.

But Ramirez and others responsible for the project are staking their future hopes for the oak's survival on the saplings now planted in the eight mulch beds around the park.

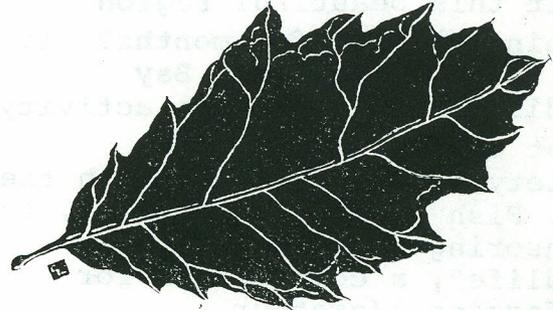
The beds, composed of decaying compost piles, were prepared by Tulare Civil Conservation Corps workers. They also laid irrigation systems to deep water the young trees.

That aspect is important, said Ramirez, because the watering can be controlled to simulate an environment of flooding and dry periods that used to exist in the park prior to dams and canals being built in the area.

So far, keeping the saplings alive during their most fragile time has been more successful than

anticipated. Ramirez expected losses to 50 percent of the 237 planted last winter, but only 50 trees died.

"That's just excellent, we got a 79 percent survival rate," he said.



PARK RANGERS ON DRUG PATROL IN LOS ANGELES

From the Associated Press
Newswire, February 27, 1988

Rangers are the latest recruits in the city's battle to curb drug dealing, gang-related violence and other illegal activities in city parks.

Eleven uniformed city park rangers, carrying night sticks and police radios but not guns, are patrolling six south and south-central Los Angeles parks in an effort to rid them of drug dealing and violence.

The program, officially initiated by Mayor Tom Bradley, has been underway on a trial basis for three weeks. Chief Ranger Hector Hernandez said he has already seen a decline in drug dealing.

Gang members traditionally use parks to conduct drug transactions, Hernandez said.

Bradley said, "These local playgrounds get more use and harder use than anywhere else, and we have to put more into them...to make them hospitable for the people who use them."

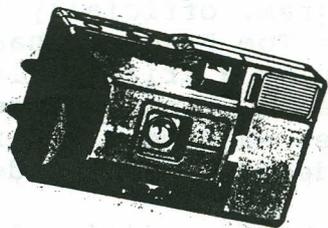
WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION
TO BE HELD IN THE
SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA

Are you a resident Bay Area photography buff, or a photo aficionado whose planning to visit this beautiful region within the next few months? If so, the San Francisco Bay Wildlife Society has an activity right up your alley. The Society, in cooperation with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, is sponsoring "Picture Local Wildlife", a competition for professional/amateur photographers of all ages.

The grand prize winner will receive a 10-day Alaska safari. First prize winners will receive Oceanic Society whale-watching trips to the Farallon Islands; and second prize will be lift tickets/equipment rental at the Yosemite Park And Curry Co..

Deadline for entries is August 26, 1988. Prizes will be awarded on September 8, 1988 at the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center.

For more information and an entry form write to: San Francisco Bay Wildlife Society, P.O. Box 524, Newark, CA., 94560-0524, or call (415) 792-0222.



TREE OF HEAVEN
Encounter with An Odorous Exotic

A Park Discovery By
Chris Crockett,
Park Ranger, County of Santa Clara

For many rangers working in urban parks throughout California, the

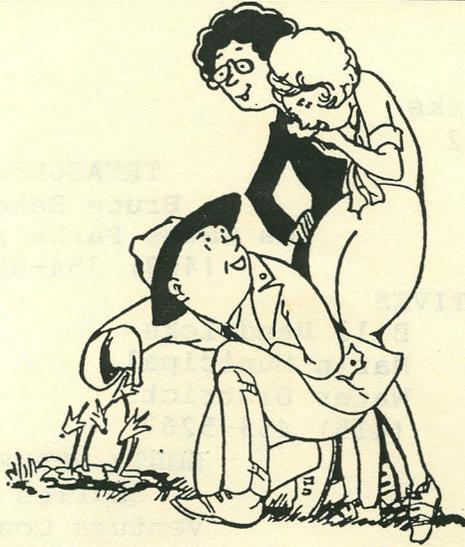
sight of a delicate, healthy-green, deciduous tree is joyous to behold.

This was my reaction one morning in the Spring of 1982. I was a new seasonal ranger in a regional park in south San Jose, California. I was on foot patrol, becoming acquainted with my workplace when I spotted this exquisitely beautiful tree planted next to a lawn. I approached for a closer examination noticing the small, ovular (pinnate) leaves; and the small greenish-yellow, polygamous flowers. I also noticed small greenish-brown fruit, many of which were scattered at the tree's base. Unsuspecting, I picked one of these soft morsels up and gently squeezed it between two fingers. What ensued was the most horrid, putrid smell I had ever had the displeasure to encounter.

I hurriedly returned to the ranger station to rid myself of this odor. While there, I enquired with the Supervising Park Ranger as to what had attacked my nasal membrane. After a hearty laugh he said I had tangled with a Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*). The smell of the fruit was a mechanism designed to protect the seeds from marauding birds and rodents.

A native of Asia and northern Australia, he said the Tree of Heaven can grow to a height of 60 feet. It was first introduced to California in 1751. In the 19th century laborers from China brought trees with them as a token of good luck and prosperity. Today, the Tree of Heaven is widely used for shade in many city parks.

After learning about this unique plant I both marvelled at its visual splendor, and was puzzled as to how such a stinky tree could be so numerous and desirable. One of those mysteries of nature, I guess.



THE GAMES OF
PROJECT LEARNING TREE

Project Learning Tree, a workshop on environmental education, will be conducting its next event on March 23, 1988 from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., at the Coyote Point Museum in San Mateo County. Other workshops are held at various times/locations throughout the year.

The following is one of the games of Project Learning Tree:

The Touchy-Feely Box

Hesitation, ... a look of concentration and finally a big smile of understanding spreading across a child's face. The responses are just part of this active, intriguing game/display. It is a great way to heighten a child's sensory perceptions. By feeling objects inside a box, then trying to find them in nature, children learn to "see" with their hands and "feel" with their eyes. Objects placed in the box should be endemic to your park. For more of a challenge use objects which are difficult to find in their natural setting. Using larger groups of children heightens the excitement, as each participant has his or her own idea of what their feeling. The satisfaction and sense of accomplishment at finding a match makes this game rewarding.

Create a Touchy-Feely Box by cutting a 3-4 inch diameter hole in a small cardboard box (ie., a shoebox). Put one to four objects in the box, and let all participants feel for them. Ideal objects might include leaves, acorns, small rocks, and snake skins. After everyone has felt the box's contents show them the boundary of their search/play area, give them the okay, and watch them diligently search for the right objects (Caution: have them watch for hazards such as poison oak, etc). After a 5-10 minute period call the children back to a gathering area for a sharing of discoveries. Afterwards, make sure all the children return their items to where they found them. Touchy-Feely is a great way to explore a new environment.

For information on other games in in Project Learning Tree, and how to register for a workshop, phone (408) 262-5513.



SLIDES NEEDED FOR PRAC
PRESENTATION

Horizontal format slides are needed to revise the PRAC Slide Presentation. Slides should reflect routine and special duties performed by rangers in your agency.

If you have any slides available contact Bill Hendricks, PRAC Coastal Representative at (415) 459-5267.

PARK RANGERS ASSOCIATION OF CALIFORNIA
1987-88 Executive Board Officers

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(209) 733-6612

VICE PRESIDENT
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(415) 944-5766

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Water District
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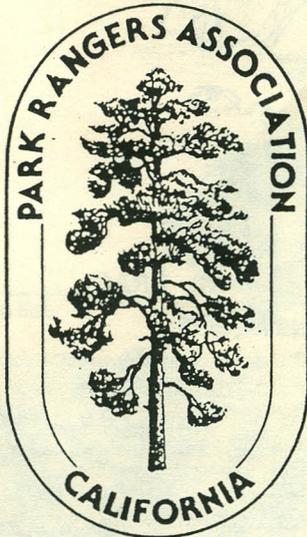
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Charles Tello
Ventura County Parks
(805) 654-3977

SECRETARY
Michelle Alex
Sacramento County Parks
(916) 366-2072

SIGNPOST EDITOR
Chris Crockett
Santa Clara County
Parks & Recreation
(408) 249-4312

CAL RANGER EDITOR
Ed Stuckrath
Big Basin Redwoods
State Park
(408) 338-6132

EXECUTIVE MANAGER
Doug Bryce
(916) 383-2530



P.O. BOX 28366
SACRAMENTO, CA 95828

