



Conference Committee Seeking Donations for *the Silent Auction*

by John Havicon

Every year at the annual conference, we hold a silent auction to help defray some of the cost of the conference. This has become a very popular event and members enjoy participating in it. This year, I have been asked to host the silent auction. Letters have been sent out to various businesses and corporations for donations of books, event tickets, wines, local artwork and resource tools and I look forward to arranging them for you to bid. I don't want to leave anyone out and I know we have creative folks in our organizations that have also donated their works in the past. I would like to encourage your support by donating items for the auction. If you have a visitor center in your park that sells items, they also may be willing to donate something. If you had a "buy one get one free" coupon and now have only two items left, here's a good opportunity to show support. If you have found a good book or useful item, and think that it would be perfect for the auction, guess what? It is!

If you would like to make a donation, you can either bring it with you to the conference or send it directly to the Conference Committee: **California Parks Conference, P.O. Box 191269, Sacramento, CA 95816-9998**. If your mailing it, please send before March 15th. If you have any questions, please call me at 916-875-6672 or email <parcs2003tahoe@yahoo.com>. I'll look forward to seeing you all at the conference and thanks for your support.

A Shout Out

by Lee Hickinbotham Jr.

I want to give a shout out at the top of my lungs to Doug Bryce. Doug has stepped down as executive manager of PRAC after 22 years. He was an employee of the California Department of Parks and Recreation for 31 years, voted as an honorary member of PRAC in 1990 and maintained the web page. Doug is most known as the happy friendly person behind the registration table at the conference that always greeted you with a smile. He has given countless hours and dedication to the association over the years and is greatly appreciated.

I would also like to give a shout out to Jeff Price and Todd Kellogg. Todd will be taking over as executive manager and Jeff will be the new designer and keeper of the web page.

So off goes my hat to Doug for all the years of hard work in keeping PRAC a growing association and to Jeff and Todd for being brave enough to step in to continue the hard work that goes along with a professional organization.

PRAC Dues are Due!

Don't forget to renew your PRAC membership. You should have received a renewal notice by now. If not, use the application on the back of this *Signpost*.

Don't put it off. Do it today!

From the President's Desk

Greetings Fellow PRAC Members,

Here we are already, starting off a new year. The holidays are behind us and winter is in full swing. I would like to welcome our new Board members to the PRAC Board. I also want to thank our Directors that are leaving the board this year for volunteering their time to PRAC. A heartfelt thanks goes out to all of the candidates who ran in the last Board elections. It is always a pleasure to have a choice of candidates for an office and this last election gave us two to three candidates to choose from for each office. Deciding to run for the PRAC Board shows the highest level of commitment and dedication both to the organization and the profession. This last election proves that we don't have a shortage of members that care about the organization and the profession. We are always looking for members to become involved with PRAC. Not only as Board members but also to serve on any of PRACs standing committees. I look forward to working with PRAC members and the Board in 2003 toward accomplishing our organizations goals while we continue to grow as an organization.

I wish Doug Bryce the best in his retirement from serving PRAC. Thank you to those who attended his farewell party. Todd Kellogg has been working diligently to get the new PRAC office on-line and to help ensure a smooth transition.

PRAC members have a lot to look forward to this year. The 2003 Parks Conference is just around the corner. By now, you should have received your conference registration packet. If you haven't, let us know and we will get one off to you. This years conference is destined to be one of the best conferences ever. There will be many multi-discipline training opportunities to learn new skills and refresh old ones, pick up some certifications that you can use toward your PRAC Generalist Ranger Certificate, and just have fun while enjoying one of the most beautiful places around. Conference attendees will have the option of earning 1 unit of college credit from West Valley College and 8-14 hours of POST-accredited training hours will also be available to attendees. I cannot wait for the conference and I hope to see many of you there.

PRAC will be planning training workshops throughout the year to help members hone their skills and fulfill PRAC learning domains for the PRAC Generalist Ranger Certificate. In January, West Valley College will offer a PRAC-approved Wildland Fire Fighting Training that fulfills PRACs Fire Learning Domain. Other training sessions will also be held to cover some of the other disciplines. If you have an idea for a training session you would like to see or host, please contact your regional director or myself.

The new PRAC web site, www.calranger.org, is up and running. If you haven't already had a chance to check it out, please do so. Our webmaster, Jeff Price, has put in many hours designing and maintaining our web site and serving as moderator for the PRAC e-mail list server. If you have any comments or suggestions for our web presence, please let Jeff know.

I look forward to seeing many of you at South Lake Tahoe, March 31 - April 3. Don't forget our annual membership meeting will be at the conference on Tuesday, April 1. It will be the perfect opportunity for you to meet the board and our new Executive Manager Todd Kellogg, and to share your input with the PRAC Board and your fellow members. If you have an item for the membership meeting agenda, please let me know. Until then, I hope you all have a safe winter and lets be careful out there!

Mike Chiesa

Arundo: The Plant from Hell

[Editor's note: The following article appeared in the Wall Street Journal on 10/19/02 and was forwarded to us by Gerda Lydon.]

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. - Driving slowly, Allen Sharpe searched the bank of the St. Johns River here for his favorite reed. "There she grows," Mr. Sharpe said, braking to a halt next to a silver-plumed stand of *Arundo donax*.

And grow it does. The cane-like reeds tower 30 feet over the six-foot-four Mr. Sharpe, adding as much as three inches of new growth overnight. Environmentalists here see the plant as a godsend, offering a fast-growing replacement for coal and wood products without gouging the earth or chopping down forests.

With the blessing of the Northern Florida Sierra Club and Lung Association chapters, Mr. Sharpe has secured a contract to supply Jacksonville's city-owned utility, JEA, with as much as \$250 million in *Arundo*-fueled "green" power over the next 15 years. He plans to plant 8,000 acres of *Arundo* next spring on leased land near the Florida Everglades.

Deanne DiPietro, an environmental analyst at the University of California at Davis, was horrified to hear of his plans. She is one of the leaders of a multi-million-dollar federal and state effort to rid California of *Arundo*. State officials, along with local Sierra Club chapters and other environmental groups, blame the reed for fueling wildfires, causing floods and killing fish. *Arundo* ranks near the top of the state's list of botanical pests.

"It's the plant from hell," says Ms. DiPietro.

America can't make up its mind about *Arundo*. Enthusiasts, mostly East Coasters, are planting the hyperactive reed — technically a giant grass — from Delaware Bay, where researchers are working with it to make building products and paper, to Alabama, where researchers want to see whether it could replace tobacco and cotton as a cash crop.

On the West Coast, *Arundophobes* are ripping out the stuff as fast as they can. "We're doing everything we can to get rid of it," says Alan Sanders, conservation chairman of the Los Padres Sierra Club chapter. Sangfer Hedrick, a citrus grower in Ventura County, north of Los Angeles, says he has spent the past two years battling to remove a 15-acre *Arundo* stand from his 400-acre spread.

First, Mr. Medrick says, he tried cutting it out by hand. "That didn't work," he says. "So then we brought in tractors, then ground rippers, then a flail

mower that spins at 3,000 rpm." He ended up pouring herbicide over the remains.

"I think we got most of it out," Mr. Hedrick says. "If we patrol it once or twice a year for a while, we can keep it down."

Although *Arundo* has been growing in California for more than a century, Thomas Dudley, a plant biologist at the University of California at Berkeley, says it has become a serious pest only in the past couple of decades. Streamside development and runoff of chemical fertilizers into rivers have fed the reed, allowing it to outstrip competing plants, particularly marsh grasses, he says.

Mr. Dudley, author of a chapter on *Arundo* in "Noxious Wildland Weeds of California," calls it "the fastest growing plant there is," and says it has spread as far as the Channel Islands — 30 miles off the coast. California officials recently put *Arundo* on the state's list of noxious weeds, allowing counties to pass local ordinances making growing or transporting it a crime.

Still, Mr. Dudley sheepishly admits he kind of likes the plant. "I'm a clarinet player and *Arundo* makes the best clarinet reeds you can get," he says.

David Bransby, a researcher at Auburn University in Auburn, Ala., who this year patented a commercial process for growing *Arundo*, says the reed could replace wood fiber for making pulp and paper. In March, Samoa Pacific Cellulose, in Samoa, Calif., produced a 40-ton test run using *Arundo* to make pulp for writing paper. Frank Fitzpatrick, president of Samoa's marketing unit, says the company is planning to plant up to 5,000 acres of the reed near its northern California plant next spring but future operations will be mainly in the Southeast.

Stephen Schoenig, California's Noxious Weed Coordinator, tells the story of a stand of *Arundo* in Southern California that grew so dense it caused the Santa Ana River to flood, in March 1995, washing away a highway bridge. A year later, after the *Arundo* was cleared and the bridge rebuilt at a cost of \$700,000, the giant reed grew back and the new bridge was washed out three years later. Federal and state officials are spending \$20 million to rid the river of the weed.

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The Art of Stealth

by John Havicon

We have all seen them. The suspicious group sitting out in the picnic area. You know they are up to something, but the minute they see you, they all put on their halos. Don't you wish you could slip under an invisible cloak or something and catch them? I don't have anything like that to offer but I do have some suggestions on how you may gain the element of surprise on some of these contacts. I learned a lot of techniques from our Fish & Game Wardens, whom I consider the masters of outdoor surveillance. I'll be the first to admit it involves all lot of luck and these techniques don't always work. I do believe if you practice a stealthier approach, your going to get results. It actually has become a game to me, to see how close I can get before they notice me.

- Those green and tan ranger uniforms won't make you invisible but actually do a pretty good job of camouflage. Consider wearing a green or brown ball caps to cover that shiny forehead.
- Binoculars can bring you closer without being spotted. I always carry compact binos in my shirt pocket.
- Walk in shadows of anything that cast a shadow (trees, buildings, etc.).
- Avoid excessive movement. Watching people is similar to watching wildlife. Moving your arms or moving around will get you noticed.
- Walk slowly and methodically toward your suspect.
- When observing a person, note the persons description, clothing and what he/she is doing. Write information down. If your observing a group, be systematic. Pick a person in the group as suspect "A," write down short a description and what you see, (i.e., "A" pulled baggie from top rt. pocket.). Describe the next person on "A's" right, (Suspect "B") and continued for everyone in the group.

- Watch the persons hands, especially on your approach. Contraband disappears quickly at the slightest distraction. If there are two of you making contact, try having only one of you make the initial contact while the other observes movement of the person or group. Also consider that sudden hand movements may mean the person is attempting to retrieve a weapon.

- Be careful of "tunnel vision." Know what is going on around you. Try to get the whole picture. Watch to see who is coming and going, and where other park users are.

- If you see a violation, don't react immediately. Try to wait a little longer before contacting. There may be more going on than the initial violation.

- Be careful approaching lighted areas. If the light is in front of you, you will shine like the moon. If the light is behind you, your shadow precedes you. It's best to have the light to your side.

- Shiny objects stand out. Badges, sunglasses and sometimes reflections from binoculars give you away.

- Approaching vehicles can be tricky. Most violators are looking toward the parking lot entrance. Try approaching from an unexpected location. I have the best luck approaching from the drivers blind spot, from the rear of the vehicle and at an angle to the car, to stay out of the mirrors.

- Advise your dispatch of your contact and keep your radio volume down. Never turn it off. You may need it quickly. If your radio carries a lot of traffic, try a secondary channel that you can stay connected with your dispatcher.

- Sound carries well in open areas. Keep quiet! Keep the keys from jingling.

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Lake Tahoe
in 2003**



Packets are mailed directly to all PRAC and CSPRA Members

Sponsoring Partners: Park Rangers Association of California and California State Park Rangers Association

Arundo: The Plant from Hell

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"We should spend a lot of money to get rid of Arundo once and for all," Mr. Schoenig says.

In Florida, Mr. Sharpe blames the different sorts of rivers found in the East and West for the bicoastal bickering. Arundo doesn't propagate itself from seeds, Mr. Sharpe says. It spreads fastest when pieces of the plant break off and get carried to a new location, where they send out roots and shoots.

In the east, where coastal rivers tend to flow more slowly, that isn't a problem, Mr. Sharpe says. But California's snow-fed coastal streams are perfect for spreading Arundo. When they flood in the spring, Arundo stalks snap off, then lodge downstream and sprout when the rivers dry up.

"I understand their flooding problem out there," Mr. Sharpe says, "but we don't have that problem here."

Arundo isn't the first fast-growing plant to be imported here by entrepreneurs. Early in the last century, developers brought in the Melaleuca tree from Australia, figuring the willowy, water-slurping tree would help dry up the Everglades and cut down on mosquitoes. Instead, it ran amok, taking over hun-

dreds of thousands of acres of native grassland and pushing out just about everything — vegetable and animal — in its path. Assaults with fire, herbicides, and predatory insects haven't been able to dislodge it.

Four years ago, when Mr. Sharpe's company, Biomass Industries, began courting JEA and other utilities to convince them of Arundo's environmental and economic benefits, the first thing Mr. Sharpe did was get a letter from Florida's Department of Agriculture attesting that the reed is a "noninvasive species."

Still, to make sure the plant doesn't get loose, Mr. Sharpe says his 8,000-acre Arundo farm will have a "no-plant zone" around the edges, isolating it from other vegetation. In addition, he says, he plans to build a gasification facility to burn Arundo and produce power right at the farm, so trucks won't have to haul the plant itself along state roads where pieces could drop off and take root.

Mindful of Arundo's problems in California, Mr. Sharpe has also renamed the plant. His company's Web site and literature refer to it simply as "e-grass."

"It's just easier to pronounce," he explains.

Reaching into your Interpretive Tool Box for Park Management Solutions

by Angi Bates, MRCA

If you are like many rangers, some days you might feel like you might as well be a machine, repeating the park rules to each new wave of visitors, “Please don’t feed the ducks. Please don’t pick the wildflowers. No, you cannot take a pet home from the park.” On your end, you are the trained park professional and you know why it isn’t a good idea to feed a duck. Often, the general public is feeding the wildlife because they care about them and they want to have a close encounter. What to do to break out of the doldrums? Try using interpretation in your message. If your ultimate goal is gain voluntary compliance, and it most often is, then try giving information tailored to your audience that will help them to want to obey the laws for all the right reasons. Here are some specific examples that I have used that may spark you to come up with some that fit your particular situation.

On feeding the ducks: This is a particularly tricky problem that takes a lot of patience and a gentle touch. Often the offenders are children, parents and the elderly. You can inform them that its against park rules and they shouldn’t do it, or you can get interpretive about it. After reading up on the reasons not to feed the ducks so I could give some hard information to park visitors, I realized that I could equate the nutritional deficiency caused by the feeding with junk food. I might say at eye level to a child, “Did your mom or dad ever tell you not to eat potato chips or candy right before dinner because you wouldn’t be hungry for the stuff that’s good for you? Well, its like that for the ducks, too. When they fill up on white bread, which is not good for them, they don’t want to eat the food that will help them to grow healthy and strong.” The other main issues with feeding the ducks are: poor water quality, overpopulation, which can kill off fish due to the high amounts of ammonia in duck feces, inability for the ducks to get their own food as they are used to handouts and malnutrition. I followed up on my campaign by bringing in a

biologist from the Department of Fish and Game to speak to our docents and staff about why duck feeding is not such a great idea. It helped to inform the people who are most likely going to encounter people feeding ducks in the park.

On picking wildflowers: Again, it seems like such a minor offense, but in parks in urban areas, it can devastate the plant populations. I liken this one to visiting a museum when I am discussing it with children. Even if they haven’t been to a museum, they usually know what the rules are. I say something like “This area is set aside for people to come and enjoy nature, kind of like a museum. If you take something from here, other people wont be able to enjoy it. You wouldn’t take a painting off the wall of a museum and bring it home, would you?” If I am speaking to an adult, I explain that the flowers are the reproductive part of the plant and when you take that home, you are removing that plants future generations. It is also true that wildflowers normally will not last once they are picked. I encourage them to visit our local native nursery and plant them in their garden to enjoy. I have the information about the name of the plant or look it up in a field guide in the nature center and I write down the phone number for the nursery, to make it easy for them.

On removing wildlife: Children love to see the animals in their natural setting. Unless they have been informed by an adult, they generally don’t understand what might be wrong with taking a bullfrog, a newt or a tadpole home with them. I use a shortened version of the Salamander Room (a childrens book) for my explanation of this. In the book, a young boy finds a salamander and wants to take it home. His father says “Okay, but then you will need to take home what the animal eats. And, you will need to bring the animals home of leaves and a pond. And the animal is used to seeing the stars at night when it goes to sleep, so we’ll have to take the roof off of the house. And what about its friends and family? They will need to come along as well... You get the idea.”

All of the above management rules come back to enjoying nature in its natural habitat and trusting that the balance that is maintained is working without our intervention. If you can find an interpretive method to get your message across, it is more likely to be remembered and, if you are really lucky, even repeated to a family member or friend. I can recall seeing a family in the nature center one day and a seven year-old was telling her five year old brother about leaving the plants alone because that was food for the animals. She had been on one of our school field trip programs, her mother explained. That moment made my coworker and I smile and was worth more than a paycheck!



A Book to Report on

by Lee Hickinbotham Jr.

Its that time of year when the fall migration is happening. All the birds are migrating to a warmer area to get away from Mr. Freeze. I work in the Baylands Nature Preserve, a worldwide known place among the birding community.

It is not rare to have a visitor come up and ask me what kind of bird is lurking in the Marsh. As all Rangers do, I study up on the flora and fauna of my park so that I am prepared for such questions. However I am not only being asked what kind of bird that is but also what are its habits, feeding pattern, migration route and many other questions a visitor can come up with.

As I try to increase my knowledge to be the best Ranger I am capable of being, I can't help to admit that some of the bird guides are just plain boring and hard to read. So I turned to our Naturalist for help. She recommended a great book that captivates it audience with humor. This book is for the dummies of the birding community or Rangers like myself who tend to get lost with certain guides.

The book is titled Down and Dirty Birding by Joey Slinger. It easy to read and cost about \$12.00. This book is for the armchair birder who needs the quick knowledge to act like he/she knows what they are talking about. It teaches you words like altricial and cloaca, just enough information to be articulate with the average birder. However I recommend that while you are buying time, you actually learn how to read one of those hard to understand guides. Hmmm a future book report.

Remember to take the time to read and enjoy the book.

Can You Feel It?

by Lee Hickinbotham Jr.

Is the hair on your neck starting to rise? Do you have goose bumps? Is your stomach twisting with anticipation? No, I am not preparing you for a book report. I am wondering if you can feel the allure of the 2003 conference calling you. If you haven't heard, listen up we have been talking about it for over 9 months now!

Yes! It's just a short time away and everything is planned, organized and ready to go. The food has been ordered; the session's speakers are putting last minute touches on their presentations and the field trips have been arranged and paid for. The planning committee has been promoting this conference as the best ever (I may have mentioned it once or twice) and all we can say about this one is WOW!

I am so excited about

everything that is being offered I could just sing right now. However, you will just have to wait for the campfire following the Dixie Queen dinner cruise to hear me, besides how can I sing on paper? Speaking of the campfire program, have you ever been to one that served beer? How

else can you stand to hear me sing? That alone should be a teaser as not to miss the best conference ever.

So, there is still time to register for the conference, the hotel and any field trips that involve fishing, snow shoeing, down hill skiing or just about anything else you can do in the snow. If you need a conference packet go to the web page at www.calranger.org or contact the director in your region.

I hope to see all of you there.

Celebrate!



Park Rangers Association of California

Board Officers

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Region 5 Director

TOM ASH
 (909) 926-7416
 FAX: (909) 926-7418
 E-Mail: REGION5@CALRANGER.ORG

Past President

JOHN HAVICON
 (916) 875-6672
 FAX: (916) 875-6632
 E-Mail: PASTPRES@CALRANGER.ORG

The Signpost Editor

DAVID BROOKS
 (831) 336-2948
 FAX: (By Arrangement)
 E-Mail: NEWSLETTER@CALRANGER.ORG

Scholarship

BILL HENDRICKS
 (805) 756-1246
 FAX: (805) 756-1402

Executive Manager

TODD KELLOG
 Office: (707) 847-3077
 FAX: (707) 847-3077
 E-Mail: EXECMANAGER@CALRANGER.ORG

WebMaster

JEFF PRICE
 E-Mail: WEBMASTER@CALRANGER.ORG

President

MIKE CHIESA
 (707) 847-3245
 FAX: (707) 847-3325
 E-Mail: PRESIDENT@CALRANGER.ORG

Region 1 Director

MIKE NICHOLSON
 (925) 373-5775
 E-Mail: REGION1@CALRANGER.ORG

Region 2 Director

LEE HICKINBOTHAM JR.
 (650) 617-3156
 FAX: (650) 858-2659
 E-Mail: REGION2@CALRANGER.ORG

Region 3 Director

STEVEN HOGUE
 (530) 895-4758
 FAX: (530) 895-9825
 E-Mail: REGION3@CALRANGER.ORG

Region 4 Director

WALT YOUNG
 (310) 858-7272 EX 102
 FAX: (310) 858-7212
 E-Mail: REGION4@CALRANGER.ORG

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Park Rangers Association of California
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 STEWARTS POINT, CA 95480-0153
 (707) 847-3077 FAX (707) 847-3077

Park Rangers Association of California
 P. O. Box 153
 STEWARTS POINT, CA 95480-0153

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