

THE FOOTHILL ADVOCATE

Summer 2008

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SIERRA • FOOTHILL



• CONSERVANCY •

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Black Mountain Preserve grows

Way back in the 1960's, two Fresno State professors lived on Black Mountain. Sierra Foothill Conservancy members are familiar with the story of professor of organic chemistry Dr. Bill Miller and his wife Mary Elizabeth. Bill and Mary only lived on Black Mountain for a couple of years, but Bill's love of the mountain and recognition of its biological importance led him to eventually work with The Nature Conservancy to establish the Mary Elizabeth Miller Preserve. In 1998 SFC took title to the preserve and, with generous help from Bill and contributions from our members, increased the acres of protected land on Black Mountain from the original 360 acres to 1,337 acres.

In 1955 Dr. Art Staebler and his wife Helen moved to Fresno from Michigan with their three children (Bruce, Ann and Susan). Art taught ornithology and just about everything biological at Fresno State until his retirement in 1980. Two years after moving to Fresno, Art and Helen's youngest son Chad was born. The family moved onto 100 acres on the west slope of Black Mountain and that's where the children grew up. Health problems forced Art and Helen to move to a home in Clovis after his retirement, but they kept 60 of their original 100 acres. My wife Peg and I often saw them coming up the mountain to spend a day or two camping out at an old trailer on the property and sometimes we stopped by to visit. It was always a privilege to spend time with Art. His knowledge of the natural history of Black Mountain was deep and he never lost his intense interest in all things biological. Art was dearly loved as a professor and many former students and colleagues paid moving homage to him at his memorial service in early 2007.

One day several years ago I got a phone call from Art asking that SFC board member John Stebbins (a former student of Art's) and I visit him at the assisted living home where he and Helen were living. Art told John and me that he was inspired by Bill Miller's example in creating the Miller Preserve and that he wanted his and Helen's remaining 60 acres on Black Mountain to become a part of the Miller Preserve. Other talks followed over the next few years to work out how this might be done. Finally when Art became seriously ill, he instructed his family to work with SFC to fulfill his wish. In May of this year the Staebler's 60 acres became a part of the Miller Preserve. Thanks to the generosity of Art and Helen's children, SFC was able to purchase it at a fraction of its value.

The property is lower on the mountain than the rest of the Preserve and is reached from Black Mountain Road. It has two large ponds that are used by local ducks, geese and blue herons. It also has



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Challenges and Opportunities

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On almost any day one can pick up a newspaper and find an alarming article relating to climate change, often describing it as the greatest problem human kind has ever faced. As SFC prepares for a future of changing landscapes, we are presented with the potential for ecological devastation, but also the potential for increased support of land conservation.

Oak woodlands are one of the primary habitat types in SFC's area of service and in recent years have become our first conservation priority because of the rate at which they are being converted to other uses. Since these lands are among the most biologically diverse habitat types in California, the loss of the oaks could mean the loss of habitat for an entire ecosystem. UC Santa Cruz researchers found, in a 2005 study of a regional climate change model, that if we continue to emit the level of carbon we do now, blue oak habitat will shrink to 59% of its current range, and valley oak habitat to 54% of its current range. Additionally, the suitable habitat for both oak species will shift northward and to an elevation where the oaks do not currently grow. Will valley and blue oaks be able to move into this new habitat? UCSC Researcher Emily Sloan notes that "our state parks and other protected areas are not set up to move with climate change."

As SFC plans for this uncertain future, our goal of connecting protected lands becomes even more important to the survival of diverse ecosystems. SFC has the unique ability to work with private landowners and to partner with state agencies to connect up-slope corridors, providing species like oaks the open space to move up in elevation if they are able to adapt. Because our area of service extends from the grasslands, through oak woodlands, and into the conifer forests up to the Sierra crest, SFC can provide for species mobility from the valley to the mountains. In Mariposa we have worked with private landowners to conserve important transitional zones between oak woodland and yellow pine forest, where species from higher elevation and lower elevation coexist. These zones may be ideally suited to accommodate refugee species.

Although we find ourselves facing potential devastation of the species we have worked to protect, we also have the possibility to increase our resources because of climate change. State and Federal legislators are slowly trying to define courses of action to mitigate the effects of climate change. California is leading the way with ambitious market-based incentives for reductions of carbon emissions in Bill AB32 of 2006. In the meantime, the economy is responding with an emerging carbon trading market.

By protecting natural lands, SFC sequesters carbon by retaining the stored carbon in the landscape. In the carbon market, the tons of carbon sequestered in undeveloped land acquire a monetary value, and are tradable through a credit system. Carbon users from individual households to energy giants like PG&E can offset their carbon footprints by purchasing credits from groups that are protecting carbon stores and reducing carbon emissions. Although there are issues with the current systems of carbon trade, including the upfront costs associated with assessing carbon stores, some land trusts in California are already selling credits.

This new market presents potential for an additional funding source for the protection of our natural lands. It also sets an economic value on preserved land in addition to the value associated with development or

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Fall classes, hikes and events

SFC Classes require advance registration and cost \$10 per person or \$20 per family. Bring a sack lunch and water. For information and to sign up for **classes**, call Jeannette at 559-855-3473 or go to www.sierrafoothill.org and print out a registration form to send with your check.

Sunday, October 19: Oaks of the Sierra. Join Chuck Peck for this popular tour of the beautiful oaks of the central Sierra. You will learn about 7 or 8 species of oaks and the critical role they play in providing food and shelter for our wildlife. Meet at 8:45 a.m. at the Park & Ride where Auberry Road leaves Highway 168, just past the Intermountain Nursery, to arrange car pools and set off on our journey. **9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.**

Saturday, November 1: Biotic Communities & Geology of the Sierra. Geologist Craig Poole and Biologist Rodney Olsen will discuss connections between geology and biotic communities as we caravan up the western slope of the Sierra to Courtright Reservoir. Meet at the Friant Cove Park at the junction of Friant Road and Road 206. Bring lunch and water. **8 a.m. to 7 p.m.**

Conservancy Hikes in fall 2008: Reservations are now required, and we suggest a \$5 donation for non-members. Each hike will be limited to 20 people, so make reservations at 559-855-3473 or at www.sierrafoothill.org.

All hikes begin at 9 a.m. Call the SFC office at 855-3473 for meeting places and weather cancellations. Bring a lunch and water; hiking boots are a good idea.

Saturday November 29: Work off your Thanksgiving dinner with a stroll along the Table Mountain Discovery Trail, or hike to the Table Top.

Saturday December 20: Hike the 6 mile round trip to the top of Table Mountain.

Check the Class and Hike Schedule for the 22 hikes scheduled for winter and spring 2009.

Annual Member Barbeque at the McKenzie Preserve

Sunday, October 5

Gates will open at 9:00; lunch will be served about 2:00. Come visit with friends and stroll the Table Mountain Discovery Trail or hike to the top of the mountain. Staff and board members will bring you up to date on exciting new projects. Email jeannette.tuitele@sierrafoothill.org, or call 855-3473 for reservations and your choice of chicken, beef or vegetarian.

Harvest Arts Festival October 11-12

SFC will again have a booth at this community event featuring local crafts and food at the Intermountain Nursery on Auberry Road a mile east of Prather. Come enjoy the fall day, buy a new SFC T-shirt or cap, and take a chance on winning the beautiful quilt donated by Bev Karau.

Our Annual Fundraising Dinner was a success

SFC's annual dinner, at the Fancher Creek gardens of Ann and Nat Dellavalle on May 19, was a wonderful evening for 206 members and guests. The guests enjoyed delicious hors d'ouvres from local organic farms as they strolled the lovely gardens and bid on an unusually fine assortment of silent auction items. The great buffet dinner was catered by Brenda Ostrom and Chef Jen Meno.

Dessert wines from Quady Winery, homemade ice cream, a rousing live auction, a talk about SFC's accomplishments during the past year, and more visits to the silent auction tables finished a beautiful evening.

The hard work of the dinner committee, led by Mary Biskup, and the generosity of our members added \$18,532 to SFC's very important operating funds.



Jim Putman memorial

Sierra Foothill lost a good friend this spring. Jim Putman was the leader of the fearless Sierra Hiking Seniors, known throughout the Sierra Nevada Mountains and Foothills for their commitment to the trail and robust membership at over 50 members. Jim coordinated and guided this great club with joy and skill. The memory of Jim Putman is a strong one, with many stories of his leadership, humbleness, humor, and great passion for wild places living on through his friends, family, and colleagues.

Just before Jim passed, he led a hike on SFC's Keltenberg Striped Rock Conservation Easement in Mariposa County, for the Sierra Hiking Seniors. One would never have guessed Jim would be gone just two days later.

Jim left many legacies in his full and rich life, including a significant contribution to Sierra Foothill in the form of a memorial fund established by his beloved widow, Betsy Putman. When Jim passed away, Betsy encouraged Jim's numerous family and friends to make a donation to Sierra Foothill, noting that SFC had really "caught his interest."

From all of us at Sierra Foothill Conservancy, happy trails, Jim.

We would like to send our condolences to Jim's family and friends and our heart-felt thank you to Betsy and the contributors to the Jim Putman Memorial Fund:

Charles and Avelina Newger, Lawrence T. & Darleen M. Martin, Sydney & Susan Bluestone, H.C. & Linda Gilliam, Mary Ann Halvorson, Suzann Foster, Robert & Carole Moore, Robert and Janet White, Colleen S. Bare, Gerry Thomas & James McLaughlin, Dorothy Westwood, Gwenith Filbin, Blair Stewart, Joan Putman, Arvin & Flora E. Burlingame, Jean Crispin and Lone Pine High School, Spencer and Elizabeth Putman, Bruce & Dianne Archibald, Dennis K. & Nancy L. Martin

Cool ways to contribute to the Sierra Foothill Conservancy

New members Ruth and Jon Paul Salonen of Mariposa are owners of a home business, an environmentally friendly wellness company. Check out their website, www.melaleuca.com. They will contribute 5% of each purchase to SFC.

Buy raffle tickets for the beautiful quilt that member Bev Karau has donated to SFC. The tickets will be on sale at the annual members BBQ at the McKenzie Preserve Sunday October 5, and at the Harvest Arts Festival at the Intermountain Nursery October 11 and 12. The winner will be announced the afternoon of the 12th.

Sign up for the automatic monthly payments for your membership contribution. Call the office at 855-3473 for details.

Check www.sierrafoothill.org for a way to contribute the value of your old car to SFC through Donation Line, or how to include SFC in your will.

And don't forget your year-end contribution!

Global warming

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harvest of natural resources. This new assessment of economic value based on conservation has some potential to create a change in our collective land ethic.

As we look to the uncertain future of human caused climate change, SFC faces significant complications in our land conservation work and planning. However, we also look to a future of new monetary, community, and individual sources of support for land conservation as we wake up to the facts of the human impact on the earth, and realize how interconnected we all are.

Bridget Fithian

New property

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several large valley oaks, none of which occur on the rest of the preserve. The water on the property is of great value to the wildlife of the entire mountain and especially to a large population of California newts. SFC staff and board look forward to introducing the property to our members at a celebration next spring.

We hope that by the time the next Advocate reaches your mailbox we will be able to announce another addition to the Miller Preserve. Stay tuned!

Chuck Peck

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Thank you to generous corporate sponsors for recent grants

Pacific Gas and Electric

\$10,000 to assist with the Black Mountain Expansion Project

Recreational Equipment, Inc. (REI)

\$5,000 for restoration on the new Miller Black Mountain Preserve property

Southern California Edison

\$8,7000 to help pay for materials and school busing for the education program on the McKenzie Table Mountain Preserve

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Supporters who make a life-income or estate gift to the Sierra Foothill Conservancy become honored members of The Foothill Heritage Circle. Your planned gift will benefit the land and the people of our region for generations to come. For information about how to make a planned gift, please contact our Black Mountain Office.

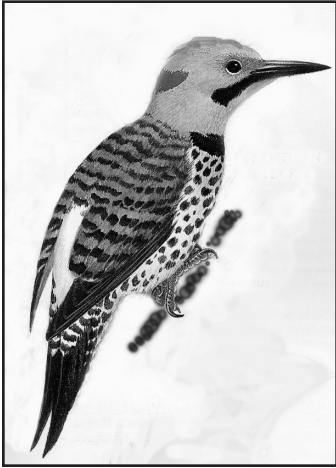
As a member of The Foothill Heritage Circle you will help ensure that the lands you care about are protected forever. The greatest gift you can leave is one that transcends generations by continuing a legacy of your conservation and community values.

Flickers announce autumn

It's that time of year again, the time when nature seems to be gathering up strength to make the difficult transition from a long lazy summer into the more demanding seasons of fall and winter. If you go out walking in the foothills, you can hear the quiet and almost feel the air of expectancy, of changes about to happen.

One change that begins this month is the arrival of winter birds. Many of the summer birds have headed out already: the Black-headed Grosbeaks, the Ash-throated Flycatchers, the Western Kingbirds, and the orioles. But the warm-weather vultures are still with us, and perhaps a few other lingering individuals of other species as well. And, just recently, a sudden loud squawk announced to me that one of my favorite winter birds—the Red-shafted Flicker—will soon be arriving at our gardens and ranches. The individual I heard was a bit ahead of the crowd, but he was a harbinger of flickers soon to come.

Red-shafted Flickers are a kind of woodpecker, but they don't look much like your typical woodpecker, nor do they act like one. They are slightly larger than a chunky robin and primarily brown in color. Their backs are barred and their bellies are spotted. When they sit quietly on a branch you can see a black "bib" under the chin. When they fly above you, you can see the rust red feathers under their wings. When they fly away from you, you can see a large white patch on the rump.



Perhaps the thing that most sets flickers apart from other woodpeckers is that they do a lot of their foraging on the ground. There they look for insects, insect larvae, seeds, nuts, and especially ants—more ants than any other North American bird. They often look quite awkward as they hop about on the ground seeking their favorite food.

Where have the flickers been all summer? Many went north (as far as central Alaska) to breed and raise their young. Many others migrated up into the high mountains of the Sierra, the Cascades, and the Rockies. With the coming of fall and winter they are retreating to warmer climes all over the Central Valley, Southern California, the Southwest and Mexico, many of them passing through the foothills and others remaining here for the winter. Expect to see and hear them starting in October.

Peg Smith

The grasslands, foothills and forests between Yosemite and Kings Canyon National Parks provide land for farms and ranches, a home for native plants and wildlife, and a source of clean water. The Sierra Foothill Conservancy honors our natural and cultural heritage by protecting these resources and ensuring that present and future generations will continue to experience and enjoy the land in this region.

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