The Ponderosa

The Pine Ridge Association Newsletter

September 1990

From under My Brim

by Barry Breckling

The Black and White Weasel

This well-known animal is seldom seen, but often its presence is sensed. As weasels go, it is rather chubby and slow and certainly not very vicious. It is sometimes seen wandering around appearing completely oblivious of the presence of nearby animals or people. Its scientific name is *Mephitis mephitis,* which, if you understand Latin, may give you a better idea of the more common name of this nocturnal mammal of Coe Park. Mephitis, according to Webster, means a harmful, bad-smelling vapor from the earth; a bad smell; stench. Its scientific name does not stop with just one mephitis, as you may have noted. Although you might not have known that skunks are weasels, by now you probably guessed that I'm talking about the striped skunk.

This housecat-sized animal is black but with a sharply contrasting, wide, white stripe starting on the top of the head, which splits into two stripes that run along the upper sides to the tail. Animals with bright or highly contrasting colors are often broadcasting a warning, and of course this is the case with skunks. Other more subtle things can signal a warning, such as when a skunk lifts its bushy tail. Back in my cross-country-running days, I once found myself running down a dirt road with heavy vegetation on both sides. In front of me was a striped skunk heading the same direction but at a much slower pace. It seemed unwise to attempt to pass, so I slowed to a jog—almost a jog in place. Every time I would catch up to within five or six feet, the skunk would lift its tail, and I would instinctively slow even more. It seemed like a half mile and a full hour before the skunk finally left the road.

All weasels have scent glands, but they are so highly developed in skunks that they can spray a noxious, yellow cloud over ten feet. This cloud is much like tear gas and will cause blinding tears. Even worse is the familiar, objectionable odor of the spray. If you or your pets are hit by the oily spray, you will find the scent very difficult to remove. The old remedy of washing with tomato juice is helpful, but when our dog was hit on two consecutive nights, we had to use tomato juice, Crest toothpaste, and ammonia, then more tomato juice before we would allow her to live in the house again (and the faint smell of skunk remained for weeks). Understandably skunks have few friends, and for that matter they have few predators. Great Horned Owls occasionally will take skunks—apparently owls have a poorly developed sense of smell.

Skunks are nocturnal hunters of ground insects but will also eat rodents, amphibians, reptiles, carrion, and fruit. Their eyesight is only slightly better than a worm's, but their senses of smell and hearing are quite good. Their long claws work well for digging up insects and worms

from under the ground's surface. Often you can see the conical holes they have left when looking for food. They spend the day in dens that they build in hollow logs, abandoned badger holes, and under park residences (Tom Derryberry could tell you a very pungent story).

Skunks, along with bats and foxes, seem to get rabies more often than other mammals. Back in the early 1970s, a skunk wandered into a tent at Manzanita Point and bit a boy. The father, also in the tent, grabbed the skunk and choked it to death—he was also bitten. The skunk was checked and found to have rabies. The father and son had to have the painful series of shots. Park attendance dropped as other rabid animals were found.

Skunks are little-loved animals that have earned a bad name, but they have a valuable place in the web of life. At Coe they are protected, although they need little help with that, and Coe provides a place where they can be studied, at a distance of course.

Oaks Simplified?

by Dennis Pinion

Oak (*Quercus*[1]) is a large genus containing approximately 300 to 500 species of trees and shrubs (depending on the reference book). The genus is limited almost entirely to the Northern hemisphere.[2] Approximately 68 species of oak grow in the United States.

Of the fifteen species of oak that occur naturally in California, only nine predominately grow to tree size. Six of these grow within Henry Coe State Park.

	White Oaks	Red Oaks
Leaves	Rounded lobes without bristles.	Bristles on the ends of pointed lobes or on leaf margins.
Acorns	Generally mature in one year and germinate in the fall. Meat does not taste bitter. Acorn shells are smooth inside (not hairy). The scales at the base of acorn cups are loosely appressed and pointed at the apex.	Generally mature in two years[4] and germinate in the spring. Meat tastes bitter. The inside of the shells have a thick, felt-like hairy mat. Scales at the base of the acorn cups are tightly appressed.
Wood	Pores small, barely visible. Pores of heartwood are blocked by tyloses making them impervious to liquids.	Pores relatively large and visible. Pores of heartwood are open and pervious to liquids.

North American oaks are subdivided into two groups, white oaks (*Leucobalanus*) and red oaks[3] (*Erythrobalanus*). All "live" (evergreen) oaks are red oaks.

Oaks Occurring within Henry Coe State Park

The six tree-size oaks occurring within Henry Coe State Park[5] are:

White Oaks:
- Blue Oak (*Quercus douglasii*)
- California White Oak, Valley Oak (*Quercus lobata*)

Red Oaks:
- California Live Oak, Coast Live Oak (*Quercus agrifolia*)
- California Black Oak (*Quercus kelloggii*)
- Canyon Live Oak (*Quercus chrysolepis*)
- Interior Live Oak (*Quercus wislizenii*)

Hybridization

Oaks frequently hybridize. The possibilities within Henry Coe State Park are:
- California White Oak with Blue Oak
- Interior Live Oak with California Live Oak
- Interior Live Oak with California Black Oak

References

If you would like to read more about oaks, here are some reference materials that may interest you.

Griffin, James R., and Critchfield. (1972). *The distribution of forest trees in California.* USDA Forest Service Research Paper PSW-82.

Miller, Howard A., and Lamb, Samuel H. (1985). *Oaks of North America.* Naturegraph Publishers, Inc.

Brockman, C. Frank. *Trees of North America.* Golden Press.

[1] Latin: Beautiful tree.

[2] A few species of oak grow in the Columbian Andes.

[3] "Black oak group" is a synonym for "red oak group."

[4] California Live Oak acorns mature in one year.

[5] California Scrub Oak (*Quercus dumosa*) grows as a shrub within Henry Coe State Park.

Piggies
by Lee Dittmann

Filtering water at the spring at the Dowdy Ranch
pulling twigs out of the water
splashing, I must sound like a pig
here come
six or seven little brown and black piggies
running over a golden grassy hill toward me.

I stand up
no, I am not your mama.

Six or seven little brown and black piggies
turn tail
run back over the golden grassy hill
out of sight.

It Just Kept a' Burnin'
by Teddy Goodrich

It seemed as if all of California were on fire during the summer of 1990. Thankfully, Coe Park escaped the destruction that was experienced elsewhere, but it hasn't always.

Fifty-four years ago, in 1936, a wildfire destroyed more than 100,000 acres of range land in the Mt. Hamilton Range, much of which is now within the park. Several years ago, Glen Knepper told me about the fire of '36. These are his words.

"Arch Parks had the ranch (the Coit) leased, and him and George (Milias) like to hunt together. And they went up in a real good spot. You know there was no road going into the Coit by the Hot Springs, but there was an old trail went up there. . . . And they went up there, and they run into these two fellas, and Arch Parks. . . . he gave them quite a talking to and let them out. And it was no time the fire took off.

"And they pretty near had it out, but it got on top of the ridge.

"It started there across from the Hot Springs in the first field as you go in the Coit, right above the yellow gate. Right out there in the open.

"I don't know how many days it burned, but there were no bulldozers then. CCC boys, they'd get 'em from all over, and all the neighbors helped. . . .

"They tried to check it. . . . They used cattle trails to start a backfire; that's all they had.

"They had a lotta' men back there. . . . One fella came from the Valley with mules. Oh, they were beautiful mules, and all the ranchers got their pack horses together. Had like four or six and then one fella would take them. They didn't have no trouble with meat, but all the other supplies. And they'd camp. One of the camps was right there at Live Oak Spring.

"It just kept a' burnin'."

After listening to Glen's tale, I was curious for more details about the fire, so I visited the Gilroy Historical Museum and looked at the old newspapers that are kept there.

Gilroy Evening Dispatch, dated August 5, 1936, had a small article on the front page entitled "Grass Fire on the Mahoney Ranch." It tells that the fire broke out on August 5, and, by the afternoon, it was thought to be under control. The blaze had been fought by the State Division of Forestry, the San Martin Rural Fire Department, and various volunteers.

Gilroy Evening Dispatch, dated August 7, 1936, had big headlines that read "Hot Springs Fire Breaks out Again." The fire had broken out again on the morning on August 7, and 5,000 acres had burned by noon. More than 100 men were on the fire line, and due to the intense heat, many of them had to be relieved of their duty due to exhaustion. Men were being recruited in San Jose to fight the fire, but it would "take several hours to reach the site as it is in almost inaccessible country between Gilroy Hot Springs and Madrone Springs."

Gilroy Evening Dispatch, dated August 8, 1936, again had headlines about the fire: "Range Blaze Blackens 60,000 Acres." Contradictory sources reported either 35,000 or 60,000 acres had been burned. Three hundred men from CCC camps and San Jose were battling the blaze on a twenty-mile front. It was called the worst blaze in the history of the Mt. Hamilton Range. "The flames are raging through deep canyons, virtually inaccessible to man, and fire fighters have been warned to stay out on open fire lines to avoid casualties."

Gilroy Evening Dispatch, dated August 11, 1936, reported that, after five days, the blaze was under control. Apparently 100,000 acres of "fine, shady cattle grazing lands lay a blackened waste." Deputy Game Warden Sprig Fredrickson believed that no cattle or deer had been

killed, but that many quail had perished. Several cabins burned, as did the historic Dowdy house on Pacheco Pass.

The cause? Never determined, but you can read between the lines of Glen's story.

Parasite

by Lee Dittmann

Back in high school I had a biology teacher, short in stature but lofty in thought, who would perch in his high chair behind his desk and periodically put forth thoughtful statements that unfortunately went over the heads of most of the class. On one such occasion, he leaned forward across his desk, looked us over, and in his steady and deliberate manner proclaimed, "There is nothing SINFUL about EROSION."

What he was referring to, of course, was the tendency of some to become preachy and missionary about the Need to Control Erosion. It is as though, to some, this natural process were an Evil in itself, which should Never, Ever Be Allowed to Occur on Pain of Dire Consequences. My biology teacher wouldn't have denied that there are many times when erosion is a serious problem, but some folks become so fanatical about it that they cannot think about it in a clear-headed and objective manner.

But this is not about erosion. It is just that, in honor of the spirit of my teacher's proclamations, I wish to say unto you:

There is nothing SINFUL about PARASITISM.

Think about it. Don't you feel disdain for oak mistletoe? Its roots piercing the bark of some mighty valley oak to take its precious fluids (the robber—its botanical name *Phoradendron* even means "tree thief"). Don't you loathe the very thought of a tick sucking the blood of a deer or rabbit—not to mention your own blood? (Vermin, pest.) Doesn't your appreciation of the beauty of the bright red flowers of the Indian Warrior take a nose dive when you learn that it is a "partial parasite" with roots connected to the roots of other plants? (And such a nice plant! Who would have thought it led such a vile life?)

But let's look at this objectively for a moment. All living beings are autotrophs ("self-feeders") or heterotrophs ("other-feeders"). The autotrophs are the green plants, which have the ability to manufacture their own food using sunlight, chlorophyll, and an assortment of simple nutrients. The heterotrophs, which include animals and fungi, don't have the ability to make their own food and must therefore ingest either autotrophs or other heterotrophs to survive. An oak is an autotroph. A hawk is a heterotroph. The bushy green oak mistletoe, so common on oaks on Pine Ridge, is part autotroph (it has chlorophyll and can manufacture much of its own food) and part heterotroph (it gets water and some minerals from the oak in lieu of having roots in the soil). The small spindly yellow clusters of pine mistletoe that are frequent on grey pines throughout Coe Park, on the other hand, have no chlorophyll; it is a heterotroph. A tick is a heterotroph, just like everything from which it sucks blood. We, too, are heterotrophs.

Generally speaking, organisms with the parasitic life habit do not usually kill their hosts. Contrast these with most other heterotrophs: a spider kills a fly; a lizard kills a spider; a hawk kills a lizard. So what is so disgusting about a few lice or ticks taking a bit of blood from the hawk?

The problem, I think, lies in human perceptions of nature. We think of the world as being made up of "us" (humans) and "them" (non-humans). We try to understand "them" by analogy with human society. But can this be a valid analogy when in reality we are one species among millions? We are social animals. How we get along among ourselves can only be legitimately compared with how members of another social animal species—such as a coyote or a harvester ant—get along among their own kind. Yet we persist in transferring our opinions about right and wrong in human society to the whole of nature.

Most of us believe that the kind of behavior in human society where some individuals do not work, contribute nothing, and live at the expense of other human beings is wrong, unjust—or at least not fair. We think of this relationship as parasitism. That's fine, we can call it whatever we want—so long as we realize that this form of parasitism has little to do with the other kind—the kind that is the tick's and mistletoe's means of survival.

The societal "parasite" is an intraspecific relationship—an interaction among members of the same species. Mistletoe, ticks, lice, broomrapes, and so forth are interspecific parasites. This constitutes an interaction among members of different species.

If you think about it, their manner of livelihood is less reprehensible—in anthropomorphic moralistic terms—than that of *Homo sapiens,* who is often not content with consuming merely a portion of another organism, but will kill and eat entire chickens, cows, and cabbages! We even kill our own kind (while frowning at the thought of eating our kill—that would be cannibalism!)

Uh-oh. I said the "C"-word. That is something else to think about. Looking at nature as a whole, is there anything necessarily SINFUL about CANNIBALISM?

From the District
by Kay Schmidt-Robinson

The following article by Ranger Morgan Zeitler expresses a feeling we all should have when greeting park visitors. Whether we are rangers, maintenance workers, or volunteers, the public deserves that helpful attitude and cheerful smile. The volunteer effort is a critical link in allowing visitors to thoroughly enjoy Henry Coe State Park. Their friendly smiles, advice about the park, and words of knowledge and encouragement are much appreciated.

Public Relations Matters[6]
by Morgan Zeitler

One of the lesser-known benefits of being a ranger in the Off Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division is that I can get time off in the summer to take a vacation. Attendance at most OHV parks drops in the summer when the weather gets hot and the trails get dusty. It gives me an opportunity to play tourist in the traditional sense and see how other parks are managed during the "season." Not only can I relax, but I also get a lot of useful ideas to take back to my own park—Hollister Hills.

This past June I took my family to visit MacArthur-Burney Falls State Park. I don't think a person could ask for a more pleasant camping experience. The campsites were clean and well-spaced. The roads, trails, and rest rooms were well maintained. My initial impression was one of order and tranquility, which carried through the length of my visit. The most lasting impression, however, was made by the staff. From park aids to rangers to concessionaires, everyone was neat, polite, friendly, and displayed a genuine enthusiasm for helping park visitors.

The cynic in me was quick to say, "Well, I got special treatment because they knew I was a ranger. They're just starting their busy season and are still fresh and relaxed, etc." This was followed by two realizations: (1) I needed a vacation. (2) Even if there were much truth to my dark conjectures (which there wasn't; I had ample opportunity in the ensuing days to see the courtesy extended to other visitors, and the Burney Falls season while short, is booked solid), they were beside the point. It was refreshing to experience the sense of welcome that any visitor could receive at any state park when the staff is willing to take a moment to see the visitor as more than a reservation number.

The Burney Falls example underlines the importance of making the most of the brief contacts I have with the majority of my own park visitors, regardless of how busy my park is or what kind of mood I happen to be in. Really, I can't afford not to. Every person who takes the time to visit a state park is a voter at minimum, potentially a park supporter, an extra pair of eyes for the Campground Watch program, a docent or volunteer, a friend. It also occurred to me that when my park gets so busy that I start to find myself irritable and distracted, chances are my visitors can wind up that way, too. This can add to my problems down the line as a ranger if I have filled my park with more or less disgruntled people merely because their initial contact with park personnel was one of indifference or worse, being treated as an imposition. It is precisely when I least want to that it is most important that I make a conscious effort to treat each visitor as an individual.

I'm back at Hollister Hills now, and I've been looking at our operation with a fresh eye. I'm appreciative for the visitors who say they prefer Hollister Hills to some other places, even ones that are closer to their homes, because they feel that the park is well maintained and that they are treated well by the staff. I think I know what they mean. Since my return I try to remember those visitor compliments, and the good folks at Burney Falls, when I am having a bad day or am faced with a visitor who is having one. A smile and advice on where to hike or ride, an invitation to a park activity, anything that turns a business transaction into a human contact can make all the difference in a visitor's day and, surprisingly, my own.

Aren't vacations great?

[6] Reprinted from *News & Views* with permission from the author.

PRA Artists in the News

The Pine Ridge Association is certainly fortunate to have such artistic people to count among its own. In the last issue of *The Ponderosa*, the show of artist Dave Sellers was announced (which included works of Coe Park), and Kathy Paivinen was acknowledged for her oak savanna wildlife mural that is located downstairs in the Coe Park Visitor Center.

For those of you who do not know Kathy, she specializes in wildlife art and animal portraits, concentrating on water colors and scratchboard drawings. Her painting of four galloping horses was selected to appear on note cards published by Leanin' Tree. This past year, her painting of

a Samoyed and her litter of ten puppies was selected as a limited edition print by The Greenwich Workshop.

Kathy's original works can be seen locally at the Gallery Americana in Carmel; prints are available in any Greenwich Workshop dealer, including the Leedo Gallery in Gilroy, among others.

Thanks to you both for all of the artistic pleasures you have brought us!

Coe Postcard Contest Results
by Bonnie Larsen

Despite a fine slide show, awards presentation, and potluck at Coe headquarters on August 18, we still don't have a Coe postcard. Clark Gussin, a PRA member, was declared the winner for his beautiful shot of a path running by a large oak. His photo was considered the most artistically composed photo of a typical Coe park scene, but it was deemed too dark for a postcard.

Receiving honorable mentions (in alphabetical order) were: R. A. Breuch, for his lovely photo of an oak catching the morning light; Teddy Goodrich, for her unusual painting-like photo of the Rooster Comb; Don Mason, for his fine shot of Mahoney Meadows with Pine Ridge in the background; and Chris Weske, for his sharp picture of Blue Ridge in early spring.

Receiving a dishonorable mention, and evading questions about how he managed to do it, was Larry Haimowitz, who had turned in an interesting shot of himself jumping into a pool in his birthday suit.

Those of us who handled the entries thought all the slides were great and had debated among ourselves as to which one would become the postcard, so it was a letdown when Earthshine Postcards personnel judged that none was entirely suitable. Still, we appreciate the efforts of those who entered and thank them for doing their best.

We do want to try again, so keep those cameras shooting. Someone is bound to get it right sooner or later! Checking slides on hand might yield a forgotten treasure too. Don't give up. No!

In the meantime, we have collected other state park postcards from Earthshine and are going to display them at park headquarters. When you're up there, take a look and see what appealed to the experts. Keep an eye out for the details of the next contest, which will be announced here in *The Ponderosa*. We probably will aim at next June as the next collection time.

The Fall BBQ: A Success!
by Margaret Enns

The annual fall fund-raising event for the Pine Ridge Association, the barbecue prepared by Ben Marasco from Santa Maria, was held on Saturday, September 22. It was a beautiful day, with plenty of sunshine and good cheer, before a wonderful lightening and thunderstorm at the close of the day. Approximately 350 people enjoyed all the steaks and hot dogs they could eat. The tarantulas, which were out and about, enjoyed the nature hikes that were led by Coe Park volunteers. Children had a great time flying kites. A good time was had by all! This event could not have taken place without the dedication and hard work of more than 30 PRA members who helped plan and work. Thanks to all!

PRA Board Notes
by Dave Hildebrand

The meeting was held at Bonnie Larsen's home, and present besides Bonnie as Chair were Roberta Wright, Margaret Enns, Jim Mason, Barry Breckling, Winslow Briggs, Bill Frazer, guest Don Holmes, and myself.

After approval of the minutes for the last meeting, Don Holmes made a report on the Conference of State Park Associations, which he attended for the Board. Don came away with many good ideas and suggestions, some relating to the recent problems with the association at Año Nuevo. In summary Don felt that, compared with many other associations, we look very good, with few if any of the problems others are experiencing.

Bill Frazer reported on a letter he had sent at our behest to the League of California State Park Associations. After some discussion, we decided to wait before making any decision about rejoining.

Winslow reported on the new map—it is really there and on sale—and also the progress on installing signs for the new trail system—almost half are done.

Jim reported on the budget. He recommended that we move the remaining funds from the Eric May Memorial Fund to the checking account to be used for interpretative purposes, and this was approved. The Board also increased the current budget for printing and postage to

make up for increased expenditures. Dave and Jim are the committee to develop a budget for 1991, which will include purchase of a new computer system for the visitors center.

The Board approved the funds to buy an ice chest to keep sodas cold for sale at the visitors center, if approved by the District. Bonnie displayed the new plans for the expanded visitor center. When the construction is completed, we will have three times the current space on the lower floor for meetings and presentations to the public. More work needs to be done on the funding for the building expansion.

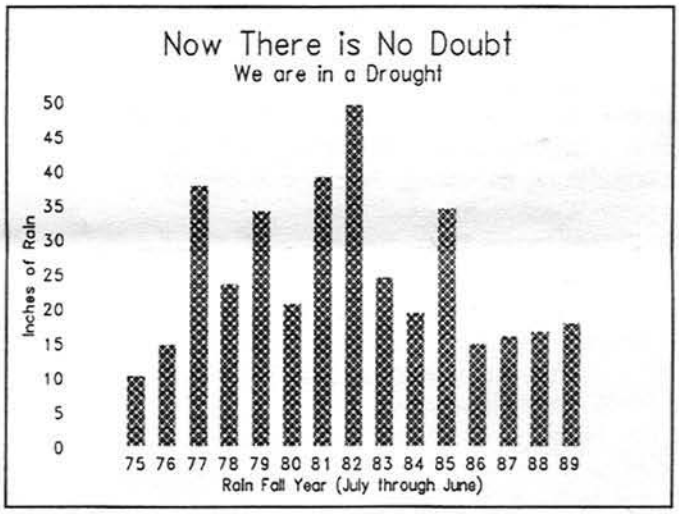
The next meeting will be October 23 at Winslow Briggs's home in Palo Alto (480 Hale Street, 415/324-1455). All PRA members are invited to attend.

Time to Run for the Board

by Bonnie Larsen

Pine Ridge Association Board of Directors Election Coming Up!

The Pine Ridge Association will hold its annual election for Board of Directors in the next newsletter. The terms of two directors expire at the end of this year, those of Dave Hildebrand and Bonnie Larsen. At least one incumbent has decided not to run again. Now is the time to prepare your candidate's statement and send it to Barbara Bessey, 127 Glenwood Avenue, Woodside, CA 94062.



Data compiled by Everett Allen from Park records. Graph by Dennis Pinion.

Any association member may run for the Board. A member also may nominate another. To do this, secure the person's permission and send Barbara Bessey a statement explaining why you believe the person would be a good Board member.

The most important qualification for a Board member is a willingness to attend Board meetings and oversee certain tasks for the association. Meetings typically take place every other month on week nights. The term of office is three years. If a Board member is also a Coe Park volunteer, meetings and related activities count toward volunteer hours.

So that the ballots can be prepared for distribution in the next issue of *The Ponderosa,* it is important that all candidate statements be received in a timely manner. Please send your statements to Barbara postmarked on or before **Saturday, November 3, 1990.**

Fall

by Dennis Pinion

It was Indian summer. As the days grew cooler and the humidity increased, the hyphae, tired of asexual reproduction, grew restless and began to knot, forming a basidiocarp. Propelled by increasing turgidity, the newly formed basidiocarp was thrust skyward through the forest litter into the dawn of a new day. Its veil, ruptured by the spreading pileus, was soon reduced to a tattered annulus dangling precipitously near the top of its bulbous stipe. As the sunlight sifted through the verdant canopy, a gentle morning breeze wafted past its adnate gills, sweeping its sticky haploid spores off into the forest as they were discharged from the basidia. It was truly a splendid time to be a fungus!

Barely affected by gravity, the minute spores sailed with the breeze for what seemed to be an eternity, finally settling on all manner of biotic and abiotic substrates. Alas, most perished but for a fortunate few that alighted on a suitable host. Here they were able to germinate, sending out their germ tubes to form single-nucleus hyphae. The septate hyphae, reproducing asexually, rapidly ramified through the substrate, forming a mycelium until at long last they encountered hyphae of the "opposite sex." Seizing the moment, they fused, the nucleus of one hypha cell entered the other and quickly migrated through the mycelium, dividing as it went, converting each cell in the mycelium to a binucleate form.

The mature hyphae, genetically stronger (and perhaps wiser), were at last fulfilled. Now capable of producing basidiocarps, they were prepared for the next Indian summer.

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The Ponderosa is a periodic publication of the Pine Ridge Association. Its mission is to enhance and enrich the public's experience at Henry W. Coe State Park through education and interpretation.