

THE FOOTHILL ADVOCATE

September 2011

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SIERRA • FOOTHILL



• CONSERVANCY •

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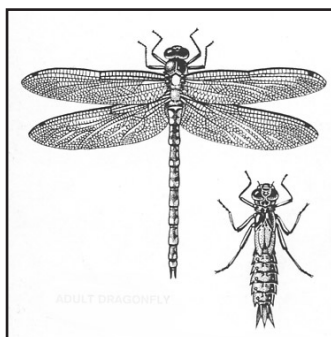


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Meet our colorful, beneficial dragonflies

The long, cool, rainy spring of 2011 set the stage for a prosperous season for many of the plants and animals of the Sierra Nevada foothills. Some we could have done without, such as the invasion of yellow star and Italian thistles along our roadsides and hillsides and the population explosion of gophers and ground squirrels. However, many lovely native plants and shrubs, such as the *Carpenteria* and *Fremontia* on Black Mountain, were outstanding well into June. Around our Auberry home we have enjoyed watching an unusually large number of quail, chipmunks, alligator lizards and bunnies.



Many mornings we sit by our pond and admire the flights of the colorful resident dragonflies, which also seem to be having a good year. One is a bright rust red; two others which are smaller and iridescent blue are probably damselflies. Questions occurred: why do we always see them around water? What are they hunting for? The answers reveal that they are a big asset to our ecosystem. Together with the bats in the bat house, they are apparently the reason we have had very few mosquitoes.

Dragonflies and damselflies are insects of the order Odonata. They have four wings, six legs, big compound eyes and long slender abdomens. Both species live around water and eat insects by catching them in the basket formed by their hairy legs. Dragonflies are strong fliers; some have been clocked at 60 miles per hour. They have been around for a very long time. Fossils of *Meganeura*, a dragonfly-like creature with a 30 inch wingspan, have been found in 200 million year old rocks of the Upper Carboniferous era.

Dragonfly reproduction involves interesting aerial acrobatics over a body of water where the eggs are to be laid. Males aggressively establish territories in which they seek out females both near and away from water. When a female dragonfly is found, the male will grasp the female behind the head or thorax with a special appendage at the tip of his abdomen. Flying in tandem, they will go to a suitable location with the female trailing the male. Copulation will take place on vegetation or sometimes while in flight. Following copulation, females will deposit their fertilized eggs, sometimes while still attached to the male, in or near a body of water.

The eggs hatch into larvae called nymphs. The nymphs look somewhat like plump wingless dragonflies with gills which enable them to breathe under water. They have a strange modified lower lip ending in hooks, which is normally folded back under the face. When a meal is found, the lip folds out to snare prey such as mosquito larvae or other aquatic insects, and even small fish or tadpoles. Then the lip folds back, delivering the meal to the nymph's jaws. The nymph may spend more than a year in the pond, molting several times. When it is fully grown, it will crawl out of the water, shed its nymphal skin, and start its life as a fast, skilful, beautiful flier.

Sallie Mook

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Fall notes from Jeannette's desk

On May 21st, SFC held its annual fundraising dinner and auction at the scenic Beal Quarter Horse Ranch in Clovis. Over 250 guests enjoyed the shade of the spacious arena and sweeping views of the surrounding foothill lands while listening to music from the Sierra Riders and savoring the BBQ meal prepared by Merritt Catering. In celebration of reaching our milestone of over 20,000 acres, this year's theme focused on the Mary Elizabeth Miller Black Mountain Preserve, where we began 15 years ago.

We are pleased to report that SFC raised over \$22,000 at the event. Businesses and members donated over 100 items to the silent and live auctions. Some of the most popular auction items included a beautiful Adam Longatti painting, two beach cruiser bikes from Rubber Sole, and 40 lb. variety packages of Sierra Lands Beef.

We appreciate our hard working dinner committee and all of the volunteers who helped make the dinner a success. We would like to especially thank Sequoia-Tioga Brewing Company for donating beverages, along with our other generous business sponsors, including Table Mountain Rancheria, law firm Baker, Manock and Jensen, accountants Heberger & Merritt Inc., Regency Investment Advisors, Sierra Endocrine Associates, Aegis Groundwater Consulting, Ben Ewell & Family, H.T. Harvey and Associates, Payroll People, and Vulcan Materials Company.

For more than two years, Sierra Foothill Conservancy has been working closely with Table Mountain Rancheria's Cultural Resources Department to help identify important historical and cultural areas on the McKenzie Table Mountain Preserve. (More about these unique cultural resources will be featured in a future newsletter.) The nearly 3,000 acre McKenzie Preserve was created to protect native plants and wildlife, scenic views, and important historical and cultural resources. Table Mountain Rancheria owns property adjacent to the McKenzie Preserve and several of the Rancheria's tribal elders have memories of hiking the historic trail which led to the old McKenzie Station. This year, SFC plans to work with TMR's Cultural Resources Department and Learning Center to help re-create the experience for tribal youth.

In June, Table Mountain Rancheria generously granted SFC \$193,500 to purchase new vehicles and equipment, update existing technology, and to support several land management and education and outreach projects. We want to thank Table Mountain Rancheria for partnering with Sierra Foothill Conservancy to support the protection and management of natural and cultural resources in our foothill region.

Since December of 2009, SFC and the Cold Springs Rancheria of Mono Indians have jointly owned the 120 acre preserve in Haslett Basin in eastern Fresno County. The property, which was donated by the Ted Martin Family, is a wintering ground for the North Kings River deer herd. Deer populations have been declining in the Basin over the past few years, and one explanation may be the dense overgrowth of vegetation in and around the Basin.

Recently, Cold Springs Rancheria and SFC were awarded a Tribal Fish and Wildlife Service Grant to develop a long-term management plan for the Haslett Preserve and to improve the deer habitat. A

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Fall classes and events

Annual Member BBQ at the McKenzie Preserve: Sunday October 2.

Gates will open at 9:00; lunch, featuring barbecued Sierra Lands Beef burgers, chicken or vegetarian choices, will be served about 2:00. You may enjoy the Discovery Trail, hike to the top of the table, or socialize with your friends. Cost is \$10; register at www.sierrafoothill.org or call 855-3473 for reservations. Don't miss this great annual event!

Harvest Arts Festival: Saturday & Sunday, October 8 & 9. SFC will have a booth at this big community event at the Intermountain Nursery in Prather, which features local crafts, good food and live music.

Fall classes and hikes

See the enclosed schedule or check the website at www.sierrafoothill.org for details on hikes and classes.

Astronomy on Black Mountain: Friday, October 21, 6:15 to 9 p.m.

Beginning Orienteering on the McKenzie Preserve: Saturday, October 22, 9 a.m. to 12 noon.

History of the SJ&E Railroad on the McKenzie: Sunday, December 4, 9 a.m. to noon.

Saturday, November 26: work off your turkey and stuffing by hiking the Discovery Trail or to the McKenzie Table Top. 9 a.m.

Sunday, December 18: McKenzie Table Top hike. 9 a.m.

Fall Mariposa area hikes and events

Great Sierra River Cleanup: Saturday, September 17: Every year we help to clean up the Merced River. For details, call Gretchen at 209-742-5556, or contact gretchen.coll@sierrafoothill.org.

Saturday October 22: Family hike on Trabucco Ranch, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Saturday, November 5: Hike on Von der Ahe Conservation Easement. 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Notes from Logan

Thanks to a grant from Sierra Nevada Conservancy, SFC was able to install fencing along more than a mile of Lower Fine Gold Creek near Millerton Lake. The fencing will be used to control grazing in the newly created riparian corridor along the creek, where cattle have traditionally concentrated for water and shade. This project will allow SFC to implement a rotational grazing system on the 700+ acres of the Fine Gold Creek Preserve. Water troughs were also installed on both sides of the creek for cattle and wildlife to utilize.

For more information on Sierra Foothill's rotational grazing programs or to view the new fencing, next spring you may visit the Fine Gold Creek Preserve Open House or one of the Fine Gold hikes or classes.

Sierra Lands Beef is currently selling beef in a variety of packages. This beef is raised on the preserves, has never been fed antibiotics or hormones, and is finished on grass pasture during the peak of the growing season. Best of all, 100% of the proceeds support Sierra Foothill Conservancy's Land Conservation Program! To order your grass fed beef, please visit our website at www.sierrafoothill.org and click on Sierra Lands Beef, or call our office at 855-3473.

Logan Page

The governing board and staff of Sierra Foothill Conservancy express our sincere gratitude to Chuck Peck and Peg Smith for their many years of devoted service to our organization. Without Chuck's vision and hard work, SFC would not be the outstanding force in land conservation it is today. Chuck has retired as Land Protection Director, but we are committed to preserve the legacy of conservation he and Peg have given to the foothills. We honor that heritage and remain faithful to the mission and vision of Sierra Foothill Conservancy.

from Jeannette's desk

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combination of management activities will take place to reduce fuels loads while encouraging native browse species and species with cultural importance to the Mono Indians.

This is a new and exciting land stewardship project and we are looking forward to working with the tribe to meet shared goals. Keep a look out for volunteer opportunities in the Basin this fall and winter!

Jeannette Tuitele

PG&E has provided a grant to underwrite the printing and mailing of the Foothill Advocate.

Thanks, PG&E!



Black oaks in autumn

Well here it is, late summer, and already my thoughts are turning to fall. I look forward to cooler temperatures, brisk breezes, and especially the glorious golden hues of autumn trees. We in California may not get the brilliant reds and oranges of New England maples, but we do get to enjoy the many shades of yellow and gold that are displayed by wild grapes, hazelnuts, certain willow species, and above all, the black oaks.

California Black Oaks (*Quercus kelloggii*) are big deciduous trees that occur in the company of ponderosa pine, white fir and incense cedar in forests located from 2000 to 6000 feet elevation. In Fresno County you can see them as low as about 4000 feet; further north, and in places that capture a lot of rain, they can live at lower elevations. For example, the town of North Fork in Madera County (at 2800 feet elevation) is rich with black oaks. Foothill towns in the gold country have even more and at lower elevations.

California Black Oaks are easy to distinguish from the blue oaks and live oaks of the lower foothills. Their leaves are much larger (two to six inches in length, as opposed to one to two) and do not have the tough, leathery aspect of their drought-tolerant cousins. Each leaf is deeply divided into angular lobes, each lobe having a long, soft bristle on its pointed apex. In early spring, as the leaves begin to develop, they have a soft pinkish tinge. Later they turn deep green, shiny on top. In fall they are a rich, golden yellow, with many subtle shades of ocher to russet. The acorns are squat and deeply recessed in their thin, papery cups.

You've probably seen dramatic photographs of Yosemite Valley in the fall. They often feature black oaks, their branches black with rain against a background of pure golden leaves. Another good place to see them, besides Yosemite, is Shaver Lake, especially along the road to Big Creek. The foliage will probably be at its best in late October. I hope you'll have a chance to enjoy the fall color of our foothills.

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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