

THE FOOTHILL ADVOCATE

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SIERRA • FOOTHILL



• CONSERVANCY •

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The foothills prepare for winter weather

The waning light of autumn brings many changes in our local foothill woodland and riparian systems. Leaves of many deciduous plant species turn shades of yellow and orange, signaling the breakdown of chlorophyll and the shutting down of the life giving process of photosynthesis. Rather than staying green and active throughout the year, such species are able to harness and store enough of the sun's energy to completely shed and then regrow their leaves on an annual basis. While many plants are shutting down for the winter, others are just getting started. Rain brought by fall storms brings moisture to the parched soils of the foothills. With this life giving moisture, grasses and forbs germinate, turning the straw yellow landscape to multiple shades of green. Lichen and moss on trees and rocks also color up and snap out of their drought-induced dormancy.

As this unfolds, animals of various types are shifting their behavior in preparation for the winter to come. Many birds, which exploited seasonal abundance of food and other resources throughout the Sierra during the warmer months, fly south or down slope to take advantage of warmer climes and seasonally abundant foods. Dark-eyed Juncos and Yellow-rumped Warblers, who spent the summer breeding upslope in the montane belt of the Sierra Nevada, join other wintering and year-round residents to make up large mixed species flocks that will forage together exploiting patchily distributed food resources. Mammals such as gray squirrels and California ground squirrels are preparing for the winter through tireless foraging and caching of storage foods such as various grass seeds, pine nuts and acorns. Deer, who have spent their summer foraging in higher elevations, will also move down slope to their wintering grounds below the snow line in the upper and mid foothill belt. Amphibians such as chorus (tree) frogs, newts and salamanders emerge from their recesses to exploit the seasonal availability of water and for many, the ability to both feed and reproduce. Other animals, such as insects, die in large numbers, leaving some survivors as adults, juveniles and/or larvae to repopulate and assume their ecological roles once warmer conditions prevail.



Tiger salamander

Although all of this wonder takes place in plain view, changes in the microbial community for the most part go unnoticed. With the wetting of the soil and the residual warmth from the shortening fall days, the microbial community springs to life. Bacteria and fungi, many of which reduced their activity during the dry and hot summer months, resume the soil enriching process of decomposition, reducing fallen leaves, grass straw and other dead biological material to nutrient molecules to be returned to the soil and atmosphere. As this process continues throughout the winter and spring, it will provide for a reservoir of nutrients to be once again incorporated into the plants, resident, and transient animals that are part of the foothill woodland system and beyond.

Rodney Olsen

Goodbye from Gretchen Coll

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The Sierra Foothill Conservancy is a non-profit public benefit corporation under Internal Revenue Service Code Section 501(c)(3) and California Revenue and Taxation Code Section 23701d. Contributions are deductible for federal income tax purposes.

I can't believe my time with Sierra Foothill Conservancy is already coming to a close. It seems like only yesterday I was traveling cross country for my first extended stay in California. I can honestly say that I am not ready to leave this area or this wonderful organization. I will miss Mariposa's abundant wildlife, the gorgeous swimming holes, sunrise and sunset in the Sierra, exploring Yosemite, and working with SFC. Throughout my year of service, I have gained a tremendous amount of knowledge and developed skills I never knew I possessed. My time has allowed me the opportunity to discover the inner workings of a land trust and realize my passion for working with non-profits.

Some of the highlights of my service year include: helping with the McKenzie Preserve education program, coordinating a Garden Care Day at the Catheys Valley Elementary School Learning Garden, assisting with the Great Sierra River Clean Up (and finding out that poison oak is awful), working with all of our wonderful volunteers at various events, getting soaked at the Bean Creek Preserve Dedication, assisting with the Fresno State trail building event and being reminded of how much fun college students can be, attending the Land Trust Alliance Rally, getting to know our amazing conservation easement landowners, and exploring acres and acres of SFC's conserved land. The AmeriCorps program and SFC have given me such a remarkable opportunity, and I am so thankful for all of the programs and events I have been involved with.

I would like to thank Bridget, Jeannette, Logan, Rosanna, Margaret, Bill, the SFC board members, and all our wonderful volunteers for their support and direction during this past year. I was inspired each day by their dedication to SFC. I hope I can continue with a career in land conservation and inspire others to join the effort.

Gretchen Coll



Thanks to generous donations from Jim and Kathy Bolen, Jan Davidson and an anonymous supporter, SFC was able to purchase materials to build benches for an outdoor amphitheater on the McKenzie Preserve. Volunteers Kathy Bolen and Dennis Christiansen helped Preserve Manager Bill Dennison assemble the 12 benches, which are located under a stand of oaks approximately half a mile from the parking area. Through a grant from REI, the Conservancy was able to purchase some much needed tools for the clearing and brushing of the amphitheater area. These tools will be used in a host of different projects as the season progresses. Thank you to everyone who made this project a success!

Rosanna Ruiz

SFC winter classes and hikes

Hikes and classes are open to the public; reservations are required. Classes are \$10 for members, \$20 for members' families, \$5 for student members, \$15 for non-members or \$30 for their families. There is a suggested \$5 donation for hikes for non-members. To register for classes, go to www.sierrafoothill.org and print out a registration form to send with your check, or call Rosanna at 855-3473. Bring lunch and water; hiking shoes or boots are a good idea for both classes and hikes.

Saturday, March 3: Mushrooms of the Sierra foothills. Biologist Russell Kokx will lead this popular class on the McKenzie Preserve for a day of collecting and identifying the fungi of oak woodlands. **9 a.m. to 2 p.m.**

Sunday, March 4: Beginning GPS Navigation. Amy Vorhees will help you learn to use your GPS to enter and follow waypoints, mark locations, and follow a geocaching course. **8 a.m. to 12 noon.**

To sign up for hikes, email Rosanna at rosanna.ruiz@sierrafoothill.org, or call 855-3473. These hikes begin at 9 a.m.

Sunday December 18: Hike to the McKenzie Preserve Table Top. About 6 miles round trip, elevation gain about 1000 feet.

Saturday, January 7: McKenzie Table and Smith Basin. An advanced hike, about 8 miles round trip with 1000 feet to the table top and 800 feet down to Smith Basin, about 6 hours round trip.

Saturday January 14: McKenzie Discovery Trail. Easy, about 3.7 miles.

Saturday January 21: Fine Gold Creek Preserve. Hike distance 1-2 miles along the creek. Suitable for children with parental supervision.

Saturday, January 28 Table Mountain Table Top

Saturday, February 4: Table Mountain and Smith Basin.

Sunday, February 5: Black Mountain. 4 miles round trip along a dirt road with an elevation gain of 800 feet, or 6 miles including a walk along the ridge.

Saturday, February 11: Table Mountain Loop. Very strenuous, about 8 miles round trip, up and down to the river, then up to the table and back. About 7 hours.

Saturday, February 18: Table Mt Table Top

Sunday, February 19: Fine Gold Creek. Easy .

Saturday, February 25: Table Mt Table Top

Sunday, February 26: Table Mt Table Top

Saturday, March 3: Black Mountain

Sunday, March 4: Table Mt Table Top

Saturday, March 17: Fine Gold Creek

Sunday, March 18: Table Mt. Table Top

The season's notes from Jeannette's desk

For the past four years my family and I have been fortunate to live at the caretaker home on the Mary Elizabeth Miller Preserve on Black Mountain. With its sweeping views and amazing plants and wildlife, we have built life-long memories of this place. My five year-old daughter Amaelia has loved her first experiences of outdoor exploration on the Black Mountain Preserve.

It's easy to see how Black Mountain captured its residents and turned them into ardent enthusiasts. I am proud that we can count our family with the Kneelands, the Millers, and Chuck Peck and Peg Smith as those lucky enough to have experienced life on Black Mountain. We know how wonderful the place is, and how important it is to protect it.

From our new home in the foothills, we have a stunning view of the south side of Black Mountain. SFC is currently working on three different land conservation projects on the mountain which will add more than 2600 acres of protected ranchlands and important habitat. To date, SFC has raised over two million dollars in grants for the Black Mountain Expansion project. When it is completed, the entire area will include over 4,300 acres of contiguous habitat and ranchlands, creating the largest privately conserved area in Fresno County.

Our 2011 Year-End Campaign is focused on raising the funds to help us complete several projects. These include the Black Mountain Expansion, the new easements on both the Topping Ranch along the upper San Joaquin River in Madera County, and the Stockton Creek watershed in Mariposa County. By the end of this spring, we hope to be celebrating a milestone of 25,000 total acres of land conserved in our region. You can help get us reach this 25,000 acre goal by giving a year-end gift to SFC.

On behalf of Sierra Foothill Conservancy, we wish all of our members a wonderful Holiday Season and hope you get a chance to enjoy and connect to the outdoors!

Jeannette Tuitele-Lewis

Sierra Foothill Conservancy

Annual Giving Circles

Live Oak Circle (\$10,000+)

Pacific Gas and Electric Company
Southern California Edison

Manzanita Circle (\$5,000+)

Al and Carliene Anderson
Mark and Jan Balcom
REI

California Buckeye Circle (\$2,500+)

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Jim Wheeler and Harriet Wrye
Tom Zimoski

Foothill Heritage Circle

Supporters who make a life-income or estate gift become honored members of the Foothill Heritage Circle. As a member you will help insure that the land you care about will be protected forever. Your planned gift to SFC is a meaningful statement of your vision for the future and what you want to leave behind.

Anonymous
Beverly Brock
Jerry and Edith Kemp
Sy and Linda Mack
Norma Mastin

Carley and Lyell Metcalf
Bea and Kevin Olsen
Jane Pritchard
Gary and Carolyn Temple

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Betty White (\$150,000)
Table Mountain Rancheria (\$193,500)

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Chuck Peck and Peg Smith
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The rain beetles are coming!

June beetles in October? Naw! Although the beetles which take flight after the first rains here in the foothills belong to the scarabs, the same family as June beetles, they have a very different life habit than their summer cousins. Our fall beetles belong to the genus *Pleocomma*, and are appropriately called rain beetles. At last count, there are about 20 *Pleocomma* species in California.

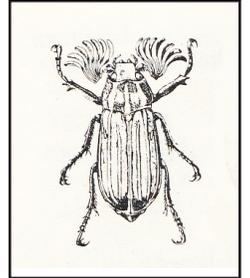
These guys are big (over an inch), dark brown, furry, and spiky. Yes, guys. Flying rain beetles are males, and are desperately searching for mates. Their brides-to-be lie in wait for them under the soil, where they call their suitors by emitting a pheromone, a chemical which attracts the opposite sex.

Rain beetles spend most of their lives underground, feeding on roots of oaks, pines, manzanita and *Ceanothus*. They spend two or three years as grubs before making burrows in late summer, where they pupate. After the first couple of soaking rains, the beetles emerge from their cells. Females make tunnels to the surface and males take flight, the lucky ones finding females in their burrows. After mating, females dig deeper to lay eggs, and males, their job done, die.

What is remarkable is how closely synchronized the rain beetle flight is. How do they know when to fly? One theory is that they wait for moisture to reach their cells. Their daily biological clocks are probably involved too, because their flights usually begin at dusk and continue until dawn. But how do they know it is actually raining? Perhaps they can sense the drop in atmospheric pressure, but that doesn't mean rain is falling. Can they "hear" or feel the raindrops hitting the ground?

Flying beetles are very attracted to lights, so if you live in the country, don't be surprised if some rainy evening in fall you hear the tapping of rain beetles hitting your kitchen window, or are greeted by a horde of these lumbering scarabs as you step out on the front porch. Our children have a delightful time catching the errant beetle that makes its way into our house. Even though they are well endowed with dull spikes, they are perfectly harmless and are actually fun to play with. Restrain your urge to swat them. Put them outside and wish them good luck!

Michael J. Costello



Rain beetle

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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