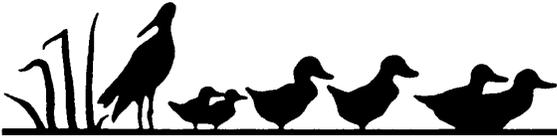
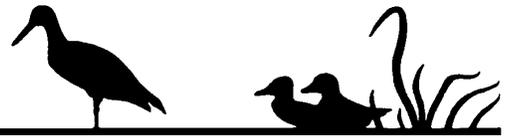


FRIENDS of FAMOSA SLOUGH



A California Non-Profit Corporation



Box 87280, San Diego, CA 92138-7280

SPRING 2021 NEWSLETTER

COVID-19 and Famosa Slough

Famosa Slough is open for visitors, but not for group events. We urge that visitors wear masks and stay at least six feet apart when they visit to reduce the possibility of transmitting COVID-19. We have not been able to conduct our scheduled nature walks or work events since March 2020. A few individuals have been working to keep up with weeding and trail maintenance, but larger tasks have been postponed.

35 Years of Conservation and Restoration

by Jim Peugh

The Friends of Famosa Slough have been involved in protecting and restoring the Slough for over 35 years, since 1985. To celebrate, this newsletter includes a brief history of that effort and a summary of the changes in the bird life over that time.

Here are highlights of an incredible story: How Famosa Slough became the special wetlands preserve it is today.

During the 1970s and 80s, the area south of West Point Loma Blvd. was a debris field, surrounded by sections of chain-link fencing. Where the trail runs parallel to West Point Loma Blvd., the area was littered with large chunks of concrete and asphalt dumped from construction projects. Old tires, car parts and other trash had been left everywhere. Weeds and ice plant grew on the west bank, with almost no native plants. The Slough was largely stagnant, except after heavy rains, because the flap gates to the San Diego River were closed, which allowed stormwater to exit the Slough but prevented tidal flushing.

The owners, it was believed, wanted to fill in much of it to build housing. A portion would be left to collect and carry stormwater from the watershed to the river.

For years, community environmental activists had encouraged the City to buy the space and improve it for wildlife. The Audubon Society, the Sierra Club, and other groups strongly supported the idea. A few biologists monitored and documented the wildlife to convince the agencies that the Slough was worth saving. (continued on Page 2)



Snowy Egret at Famosa Slough
photo by Evan Zucker

Changes in Bird Observations: 1992 to 2021

by Lesley Handa

In the process of updating the 8th edition of the Famosa Slough Bird List, I discovered major changes in the species of birds that use the Famosa Slough since the establishment of the Slough in September 1990. To demonstrate some of these changes, I selected a bird list compiled by Claude G. Edwards in 1992 and compared it to current records. *Definitions from the 1992 list include, "regular"--meaning apt to be encountered on most visits, "irregular"--meaning encountered occasionally and to be expected, and "seldom"--meaning observed very infrequently.*

There have been 253 species of birds recorded at Famosa Slough. 86 new species were recorded since 1992, which is a 51% increase in new species.

New bird species sighted at the Slough after 1992 include Hooded Merganser, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Turkey Vulture, Wilson's Phalarope, Ring-billed Gull, California Gull, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Nuttall's Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Red-crowned Amazon, Lilac-crowned Amazon, Red-masked Parakeet, Plumbeous Vireo, Cassin's Vireo, Hutton's Vireo, Western Bluebird, Black-and-white Warbler, Spotted Towhee, Chipping Sparrow, Summer Tanager, Fox Sparrow, and Swamp Sparrow. (continued on Page 3)

A Short History of the Slough

(continued from Page 1)

The push by concerned citizens and the resistance from owners kept the proposal in a state of high anxiety until the mayoral campaign of 1985. Both candidates – Maureen O’Connor and Bill Cleator – attended a public rally. Each promised to have the City buy it and convert it into a natural park, with each promising to buy it sooner than the other would. Eventually, the City did buy the property in 1990, thanks to Mayor O’Connor and preservation advocates on the City Council – John Hartley and Ron Roberts.

After thousands of hours of dedicated efforts by volunteers with the support of the City, the property was gradually cleaned up and improved.

A Famosa Slough Enhancement Plan was prepared by Merkel and Associates, with funding and technical assistance from the California Coastal Conservancy. Adopted by the City Council in 1995, it has guided the restoration of the Slough ever since.

The restoration was carried out in several phases.

- **Phase 1:** Work began in 1995, in two parts. Along Famosa Boulevard, on the west side of the Slough, the badly eroded west bank was restored and stabilized, the trail was constructed, and the banks were planted with natives. Along West Point Loma Blvd., rubble was removed. The AmeriCorps NCCC (National Civilian Community Corps) helped with both.

- **Phase 2:** In 2000, the Treatment Ponds in the south end of the Slough were created. They intercept stormwater flowing from about a third of the nearly 350 acres of the Famosa Slough watershed. The firm Project Design did the engineering and prepared the design, at its own cost. The San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board awarded a Clean Water Act grant for the work. Merkel and Associates excavated the ponds, installed the pipes, and built the berms. Friends of Famosa Slough volunteers planted all the native plants and maintained them.

- **Phase 3:** In 2003, the City constructed a sediment basin at the end of a major stormwater pipe on the southeast side of the Slough, as mitigation for a major sewer spill at Adobe Falls. About an acre that had been filled with sediment delivered by that pipe was excavated and returned to wetland. The project was designed and constructed by Dudek and Associates. Again, volunteers from the Friends replanted the newly exposed wetland area, and it has filled in beautifully.

- **Phase 4:** In 2004, the City removed fill dirt and restored about 0.4 acres of wetland east of the north end of the Famosa Channel. It was done as mitigation for a loss of wetland in Los Peñasquitos Lagoon for a flood control project. They also revegetated with native plants along the upland area between the new wetland and the fence along the Pacific Isle Condominiums.

- **Phase 5:** In 2006, a wetland restoration project was completed parallel to West Point Loma Blvd. on the north side of the Slough. It increased the wetland area, improved the tidal flushing to the east side of the Slough, and isolated the island where birds can rest and nest, away from terrestrial predators. It also greatly enhanced the scenic value of the Slough. Grants from the California Regional Water Quality Control Board and the US Fish and Wildlife Service made this possible. The revegetation was largely done by the Friends. The soil that was removed was used for the berm between the trail and West Point Loma Blvd. The more problematic soil is in the large mound near the gas station.

- **Phase 6:** The next major project, in 2008, improved the tidal flushing to the Slough. Two large pipes had carried water from each tidal surge under West Point Loma Blvd. When the streets were widened, one pipe was plugged, severely reducing the flow. The project removed the concrete plug and extended the pipe allowing both to fully function. The California Wildlife Conservation Board funded this project, with work managed by Merkel and Associates and construction done by Arrieta Construction.

- **Phase 7:** In order to provide a buffer in the upland areas around the Slough and to eliminate the potential for serious edge effects from any future land use there, the Friends of Famosa Slough acquired the undeveloped lots that are adjacent to the Slough on the southwest end. Two properties were purchased in 2012 and 2014, with grants from Caltrans, funded as a mitigation for transportation projects. Ann Van Leer managed the process.

All of the major projects in the Famosa Slough Enhancement Plan have now been completed, but work is ongoing for trail improvement, replacement of invasive plants with natives, and continuous removal of litter.

Our next goal is to remove much of the sediments and trash that have been trapped by the Treatment Ponds. This will allow the ponds to work as they were designed. We hope to get a grant to cover the permitting and implementation of that project.

The Famosa Slough Enhancement Plan was written in 1993, before it was realized how much sea level rise will impact coastal wetlands. The Friends believe the Plan requires an update, to identify essential changes to permit the Slough to maintain its functions and value in the face of sea level rise and climate change. We are working to find resources to do the research, analysis, and planning to produce an updated document.

Recent research has shown that our coastal wetlands do a great job of sequestering carbon that would otherwise contribute to climate change. An update to the Enhancement Plan should also show how to optimize the carbon sequestration of the Slough in a manner that would not eventually diminish because of sea level rise.

Changes in Bird Observations: 1992 to 2021

(continued from Page 1)

New bird species sighted at the Slough after 1992 that are rare visitors today include Herring Gull, Common Goldeneye, Tricolored Heron, White-faced Ibis, Mew Gull, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Willow Flycatcher, Bell's Vireo, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Hermit Warbler, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Great-tailed Grackle, Nutmeg Manikins, Ring-necked Duck, Brandt's Cormorant, Rock Wren, Swainson's Thrush, California Thrasher, Yellow-breasted Chat, Lawrence's Goldfinch, Northern Red Bishop, and the hybrid Eurasian X American Wigeon.

Unfortunately, numerous species have declined at the Slough since 1992, including Vaux's Swift, Green-winged Teal, Lesser Yellowlegs, Ruddy Turnstone, Hermit Thrush, American Pipit, Nashville Warbler, and American Robin. They were seen regularly in 1992, and are now considered rare. Snowy Plover, Red Knot, Loggerhead Shrike, and Blue Grosbeak were regular visitors back in 1992 and are now very rare with one or two records since 1992.

Sharp-shinned Hawk and Violet Green Swallow were seen regularly in 1992, but there are no records at the Slough since 1992. Glaucous-winged Gull, MacGillivray's Warbler, and Tricolored Blackbird were as irregular in 1992, with only one or two records at the Slough after 1992. Surf Scoter, Black Turnstone, Thayer's Gull, and Blue-headed Vireo were irregular in 1992, and have not been recorded at the Slough since 1992. Least Bittern, Baird's Sandpiper, Parasitic Jaeger, and Prairie Falcon were seldom in 1992 and not recorded at the Slough since 1992.

Species with increased presence at the Slough since 1992 include Osprey, Dark-eyed Junco, Golden-crowned Sparrow, Bewick's Wren, House Wren, Horned Lark, Cassin's Kingbird, Western Wood-Pewee, Merlin, Northern Flicker, Black-chinned Hummingbird, Black Skimmer, Royal Tern, Heerman's Gull, Wilson's Snipe, Red-shouldered Hawk, Northern Harrier, Brown Pelican, American White Pelican, and Western Grebe, birds that were designated as irregular in 1992 but now occur regularly at the Slough. Horned Grebe, Clark's Grebe, Little Blue Heron, White-tailed Kite, Ridgway's Rail, Virginia Rail, Sora, Peregrine Falcon, Tropical Kingbird, Savannah Sparrow, and American Crow were seldom in 1992 and now occur regularly at the Slough.

We have made every attempt for our records to be as comprehensive as possible, but we may not have captured all records over time. If you have records of unusual bird sightings that we may have missed, please contact us to help update our records.

Birds of Famosa Slough 8th edition and *Rare Birds of Famosa Slough 1st edition* lists will be on the Famosa Slough website soon.

2020 Science Fair Winners

by Tim Fleming

The 2020 Greater San Diego Science and Engineering Fair was held last spring. Over 570 total students who applied were accepted last year, and Friends of Famosa Slough was there asking the 'tough questions' of the teams that developed projects related to wetland biology, water quality, or other projects that could be important to the Famosa Slough.

Board members Jim Peugh, Lesley Handa, and Tim Fleming judged the students' work and awarded two projects. The first project was 'Exploring Water Quality at the Buena Vista Lagoon' by Kelly Bordin & Kaitlyn Podlich, 8th graders at The Rhoades School in Encinitas. They surveyed water quality stations in the lagoon and found healthy levels in the chemistry of the water (pH, phosphates, nitrates), but found elevated levels of Coliform bacteria. Their hypothesis of poor water quality due to inadequate drainage at the Lagoon requires further study.

The second project recognized was 'Documenting the Prevalence of Invasive Species at the Batiquitos Lagoon' by Rohan Keswani & Elias Samady, 7th graders at The Rhoades School. This team developed observation plots along a 1.6-mile long path; they logged distribution of native and invasive plants at 23 locations and compared the ratio of native to invasive plants for each site. They found that the invasive plants were impacting the native stands and that in some areas black mustard was so dense that it allowed no space for native plants. Other areas were less impacted. This survey can be useful as baseline data for restoration efforts.

We appreciate the enthusiasm of these young scientists and encourage their continued interest in wetland biology. They each were awarded \$50 and a membership in the Friends of Famosa Slough, and were invited for a tour of the Slough when in-person tours are safe again.

The Friends of Famosa Slough (FFS) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization established to protect and restore Famosa Slough as a natural wetland preserve and to promote public awareness of the importance of wetlands. The City of San Diego purchased the Slough in September 1990. The City's Parks and Recreation Department manages it.

City's contact is **Mission Bay Senior Park Ranger, Karolynn Estrada-Sparlin**, phone **858/581-7602**

To contact Friends of Famosa Slough, phone **619/224-4591** or email info@famosaslough.org.

<https://www.FamosaSlough.org>
<https://www.facebook.com/FamosaSlough>

MEMBERSHIP IN FRIENDS OF FAMOSA SLOUGH

NAME(S) _____ PHONE _____

ADDRESS _____ E-MAIL _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

____ Please send future newsletters and notices via email only.

____ FULL MEMBERSHIP. Yes! I/We support the goals of FFS and submit \$10.00 annual dues. \$ _____

____ ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP. Yes! I/We support the goals of FFS and wish to be counted.

ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTION: \$ _____

TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED: \$ _____

I/We volunteer to: ____ assist with administrative tasks, ____ clean up around Slough, ____ help with educational activities,
____ distribute flyers, ____ assist in park planning, ____ collect environmental data/do research, ____ assist in special events,
____ anything. Other pertinent skills: _____



PO Box 87280, San Diego, CA 92138-7280

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

EVENTS ARE TEMPORARILY CANCELLED

**WORK PARTIES AND NATURE WALKS
are suspended for the time being while COVID-19
restrictions by the City and County are in place.**

If anyone is interested in helping with watering or other
maintenance opportunities, please

Email: info@FamosaSlough.org

If you visit, we welcome observations via iNaturalist.org
or eBird.org. Having more data helps our efforts.

**Map Location: W. Pt. Loma Blvd. & Famosa Blvd.
San Diego, CA 92107**

**Female Hooded Merganser
by Gail DeLalla**

