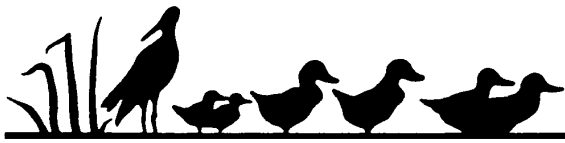


FRIENDS of FAMOSA SLOUGH



A California Non-Profit Corporation



Box 87280, San Diego, CA 92138-7280

SUMMER 2023 NEWSLETTER

Treatment Pond Restoration

by Tim Fleming

At the South end of the Slough, near Correia Middle School, about 100 acres of the watershed of the Slough flows into the Valeta Street Treatment Ponds. The ponds are frequently very good places for birding. The Famosa Slough Enhancement Plan (FSEP 1993) identified this project to improve water quality in the Slough. The ponds accumulate material from that portion of the watershed. That material has to be removed and disposed of periodically. Recently, the Friends of Famosa Slough applied for a grant from SANDAG to remove that excess material and restore the ponds to their initial design configuration. SANDAG issued the Notice to Proceed (NTP) in early June, and FFS is excited to administer this grant and restore these ponds to their full capability.

The initial construction of the treatment ponds was funded by a Clean Water Act Grant awarded through the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board. Project Design Corporation designed them as a contribution. Merkel & Associates obtained the needed permits and constructed the project in 1999. Prior to the construction, that area was dominated by invasive species such as Giant Reed, Pampas Grass, Ice plant, and Tamarisk.

In 1999, the area was first grubbed, San Diego Streets Division provided and hauled away many green bins. Earth moving equipment then came in to shape the ponds and berms used to retain stormwater. I recall when one heavy vehicle got stuck in the mud while trying to rescue another heavy vehicle that was even more stuck. The 'primordial slough muck' seemed to have no bottom. With the completion of the grading, volunteers planted willow and transitional marsh plants in the ponds and native upland plants along the trails. The first renovation was done in February 2011.

Urban runoff contains pollutants including sediments, nutrients, trace elements, oil and grease, and trash and debris (FSEP 1993). By design, the water is slowed down in the ponds. Many of the pollutants settle as the water slows. Plants in the ponds use the nutrients and bind pollutants to the roots and soil. These pollutants that would have been discharging into the Slough and San Diego River are now passively captured by the ponds.

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Story Stroll at Famosa Slough

by Lesley Handa



Emma enjoying the Story Stroll

Photo by Dana Sanchez

From June 1st to the 15th, the Friends of Famosa Slough partnered with the Point Loma Hervey Branch San Diego Library for the first-ever Story Stroll at Famosa Slough! The public, including young and old, enjoyed the featured story, "So We Planted A Tree," while walking the south end of Famosa Slough. Numerous library patrons, volunteers, and the public visited to enjoy the Story Stroll. Feedback from the public was fantastic with one regular library patron who regularly visits the Slough exclaiming that this event brightened her day!

Thank you to Dana Sanchez, Youth Librarian at the Hervey Branch Library, and to Leon Scales, Friends of Famosa Slough Board Member, for working hard to make this event happen! We hope this will be a reoccurring event in the future where the public can enjoy a good story outdoors at Famosa Slough!

A Change to Our Nature Walk Schedule

We have a new time for our Nature Walks – 9:00 AM on the 3rd Saturday of every month. Famosa Slough is one of San Diego's most popular hotspots for birding, and it's ideal for beginning birders and anyone who would like to learn about the birds, insects and native plants in and around this wetland.

All levels of experiences are welcome. We walk at a casual pace and take about two hours, but you can leave early if you'd like. We meet at the kiosk on Famosa Blvd., which is at 32.751965, -117.229320, south of the corner with W. Pt. Loma Blvd.

Treatment Pond Restoration

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The main goal of this project will be to remove the pollutant material that has accumulated. This will reduce the contamination and will also allow the dry weather flow to be better distributed through the ponds and be exposed to more of the soil and the roots of the native plants. Improving the flow will also make sure that the heavy storm flows will be carried through the pipes and spillways and not flow over the earthen berms and wash them out.

The ponds provide another very important benefit for the Slough. The year-round freshwater runoff into the Slough had allowed many invasive plants and brackish water plants to displace saltmarsh plants. The ponds soak up much of the low dry season flows so they do not get into the Slough. The heavy winter rains flow right through the ponds and into the Slough. This returns the seasonal salinity variations to a much more natural pattern and has allowed the saltmarsh plants to expand considerably.

A third goal of the renovation project will be to remove much of the non-native vegetation that has gotten into the ponds from the watershed. Removing them will allow more room for native vegetation, which will improve the wildlife support value of the ponds.

The project will be done during a time of the year that will cause a minimum of disturbance to wildlife. It will also be monitored by biologists and be overseen by the City and the State and Federal environmental agencies.

In most neighborhoods, the urban runoff flows directly into our waterways and receiving waters and is not filtered at all. We hope that thinking about this project will remind readers of the important of not letting pollutants and litter flow from their property and their vehicles.

Please look for updates as we get closer to the work.

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 Park and Recreation Department manages it.

The City's contact is the **Mission Bay Senior Park Ranger**, phone 858/581-7602

FFS Contact Information: Phone 619/224-4591 or Email info@famosaslough.org.

For more information about the Friends, see the FFS web site: <http://www.FamosaSlough.org> and FFS Facebook page, www.facebook.com/FamosaSlough.

Welcome, New Board Member, John Chisholm!

Welcome to the newest member of our Board of Directors, John Chisholm! John has lived adjacent to the Slough for over 35 years, working on removing invasive plants, planting natives, and trash removal. He works for Caltrans with the full range of environmental impacts caused by government public works projects, and mitigation measures. Prior to this, he taught Geography/Environmental Science at San Diego State.



You will often find him welcoming walkers while watering and weeding to help establish our native plants at the Slough, hoping the weeds will eventually be displaced!

Recent Rare Bird Sightings

In San Diego, we are lucky to have some great bird photographers who post their checklists and photographs on eBird.org, a community science database hosted by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Data is collected from all over the world and is accessible to the public. The Famosa Slough is one of many local “Hotspots” in San Diego County that you can find by Googling ‘ebird hotspot famosaslough’ – then, you can click on ‘Top Media’ for recent photos or look for any of 253 birds seen over the years.

A record was broken in July 2023 for the most Yellow-crowned Night Herons (YCNHs) seen at Famosa Slough at one time. Ian Swirka saw five on July 13th and held the record until July 30th when Michelle Haglund saw five and photographed three at three different stages – juvenile, immature, and adult. Below are two of her photos, and on the back page is an immature YCNH by Sara Baase Mayers.



*An adult and a juvenile Yellow-crowned Night Heron
Photos by Michelle Haglund*

Featured Bird: Swamp Sparrow

by Ian Swirka



*Swamp Sparrow at Famosa Slough
Photo by Michelle Haglund*

“Skulker,” “secretive,” “more often heard than seen.”

Famosa Slough has been a stopover for many rare and interesting birds over the years, but these descriptors belong to one of its more recent drop-ins – the Swamp Sparrow.

A typically furtive fellow, the individual that called Famosa Slough home for a few months this winter did not stray from expectations as it rarely left the protection of the dense, lower bramble. Often given away initially by its husky, little chip or “chimp” call, one could eventually follow the sound to a flash of reddish-brown moving from perch to perch in the undergrowth. A medium-sized sparrow, the Swamp Sparrow has relatively plain, greyish underparts, buffy sides, a whitish throat and a grey nape, but its calling card is the rich, ruddy-brown – almost chestnut – tones throughout the wing and crown.

“Wait, was that it?”

That deep, reddish tone was present in this individual, but when a bird is flitting about in the shadows, it’s often difficult to pick up descriptive intricacies, and its shrub-mates did not make this easier on those hoping to get a look. Of the handful of birds that can be mistaken for a Swamp Sparrow, two of them – Song Sparrow and Lincoln’s Sparrow – were both often present in the very same bush as the rarer Swamp Sparrow. While there are many distinguishing characteristics, the quickest way to separate this trio of lookalikes may be a good look at the breast of the bird. The Song Sparrow has a thick and messily streaked breast – as if by a marker, followed by the Lincoln’s, also streaked, but as if by pencil or fine-tipped pen – much tidier – and finally, the Swamp Sparrow, largely devoid of any markings on its breast at all.

“So... why is it a big deal?”

Although they are far from unheard of in San Diego County, Swamp Sparrows are mostly found in the eastern

United States, usually wintering as far south as Mexico and as far west as Texas, so it is a treat to be able to observe one here in San Diego. Before this winter, it had been six years since the last reported Swamp Sparrow observation at Famosa Slough. Local birders came out in droves with over one hundred individuals reporting having seen or heard the Swamp Sparrow on eBird.org - a database of bird observations – between December and March.

While the Swamp Sparrow is currently regarded as a “species of least concern” in terms of its conservation status, one does not have to squint one’s eyes to see the importance of conservation of our wild places to the continued long-term health of the Swamp Sparrow and any other bird. The Swamp Sparrow is reliant on wetlands throughout much of their year, including breeding season, and wetlands like these are often on the front lines of threats like development and sea level rise.

“Will it be back?”

Who’s to say! Certainly stranger things have happened. You’ll have to come on by and find out!

What You Can Do – Litter – Reduce & Remove

by Cindy Pencek

Picking up litter at a beach or along a waterway such as the Famosa Slough is really helpful. But what about the rest of the watershed? Rain and residential runoff from 370 acres around the Slough flows through stormwater treatment infrastructure and ends up in the Slough. And trash and debris are carried with that water and end up in the Slough, too. There’s a benefit to our waterways if we cast a wider net and pick up litter from surrounding streets and neighborhoods.

Cigarette butts are toxic, and organic compounds leaching from them harm wildlife and aquatic organisms. They’re tedious to pick up, but it’s tremendously beneficial to pick them up when collecting litter. Dog poop is another big problem for health of waterways; the nitrogen and phosphorous encourages growth of harmful algae. It’s a serious problem and a big target for litter removal.

The water in the San Diego River and Famosa Slough eventually travels to the ocean. I’m sure you’ve heard of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, a mass of floating plastic. Our litter removal will help reduce trash that flows into the ocean, and prevent some plastic from being added to the gyre. Speaking of prevention, we as consumers are being offered more and more plastic-free products. Keep your eye out for options with less plastic; if we use our purchasing power and buy fewer things packaged in plastic, we are hitting the problem at the source.

MEMBERSHIP IN FRIENDS OF FAMOSA SLOUGH

NAME(S) _____ PHONE _____

ADDRESS _____ E-MAIL* _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

____ *Please send future newsletters and notices via email.

____ 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: \$ _____

Donations accepted online at [Paypal.me/FamosaSlough](https://www.paypal.com/funding/campaigns/famosaslough)

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

ELECTRONIC SERVICE REQUESTED

UPCOMING EVENTS

WORK PARTIES

2nd Saturday of odd-numbered months

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

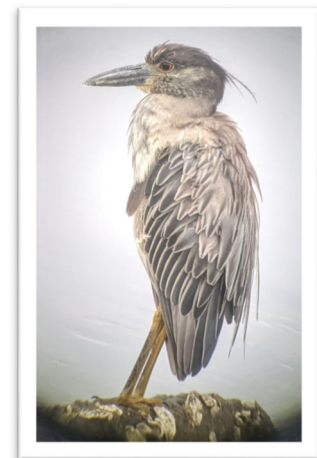
email: info@FamosaSlough.org

NATURE WALKS

NEW TIME – 9:00 AM, STARTING SEPT. 16, 2023

3rd Saturday of every month

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



*Immature Yellow-crowned Night Heron
Photo by Sara Baase Mayers*