

# ENDANGERED HABITATS LEAGUE

*Dedicated to Ecosystem Protection and Improved Land Use Planning*

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## *Carlsbad Adopts Habitat Plan*

After years of effort, during which prospects dimmed more than once, on September 21, 1999, the Carlsbad City Council adopted a Habitat Management Plan, or HMP. This plan, which earned EHL's support after improvements were made, will be a cornerstone of the Multiple Habitat Conservation Program (MHCP), which also includes Encinitas, Oceanside, San Marcos, Escondido, and Vista.

The landscape of northern San Diego County is already extensively fragmented by suburban sprawl, with few large parcels remaining. Nevertheless, for species like the California gnatcatcher, it is a vital link between core habitat areas to the south and Camp Pendleton to the north. Of the 8,800 acres of remaining habitat in the City, the Carlsbad HMP will preserve about 6,400 acres. Connectivity, such as linking Carlsbad's well-known and scenic coastal lagoons to upland areas, will be maintained through well-defined standards for new development. The land use process is being used effectively, and in an important precedent, mitigation will occur for both agricultural and disturbed lands. Coverage for 47 species of plants and animals under state and federal endangered species acts is expected.

The most controversial element of the plan is a large block of coastal sage scrub in the southern part of the City. This land, previously owned by the Fieldstone Company,

and now by Bank of America, is subject to a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) previously approved under the Endangered Species Act. This agreement, which dates from 1994, allowed the loss of very significant gnatcatcher habitat, so significant that the viability of the entire preserve system was thrown into question. However, due to EHL's intervention in the original negotiations, the HCP contained provisions, though technically non-binding, to purchase additional land through the HMP in the adjoining Santa Fe Valley, which is also prime gnatcatcher habitat. Now, under the terms of the HMP, both the City of Carlsbad and Bank of America will make good on these commitments. This acquisition will form the nucleus of a very important population of gnatcatchers, upon which subsequent conservation planning can build.

About a year ago, the City and the wildlife agencies were at loggerheads over several aspects of the plan, and collapse seemed imminent. EHL and Buena Vista Audubon Society met with the City, urging them to remain at the table. With tenacious effort by both parties, sound conservation solutions were reached and the plan was salvaged. Carlsbad is thus the latest piece in the puzzle for a California South Coast ecosystem preserve, which is slowly but surely taking shape under the umbrella of the State of California Natural Community Conservation Planning (NCCP) program.

### **Endangered Habitats League Annual Meeting — Save the Date**

EHL will hold its annual membership meeting on **Saturday, December 11, 1999** at beautiful Starr Ranch Audubon Sanctuary in Orange County from 10 A.M. to 12 noon. Please bring a picnic lunch, to follow the meeting. Self-guided walks on the Sanctuary will be available. The agenda will include a county-by-county conservation update with EHL staff and board members.

*This is the only meeting notice you will receive. This notice is also your entrance pass for the Dove Canyon security gate. Don't forget to bring it with you!*

#### *Directions*

Take 5 Freeway to Alicia Parkway exit. Head east, and continue approximately 5 miles. Right on Santa Margarita Parkway to Plano Trabuco Road. Right on Plano Trabuco Road to Dove Canyon Drive. Left on Dove Canyon Drive to Security Gate. Present this Newsletter and continue on Dove Canyon Drive. Left on Grey Rock Road. Proceed 100 yards to Starr Ranch access road on right. Proceed cautiously and follow signs. Call Starr Ranch at (949) 858-0309 if you need help finding your way.

## San Diego and Riverside County General Plan Updates Move Forward

Any conservationist who has fought a development project soon understands the overarching importance of the General Plan. Required by state law, the General Plan is the “land use constitution” for a city or county. It designates land for particular uses, such as agriculture or urban development, and is the basis for more detailed zoning regulations. In Southern California we face dual problems with General Plans. First, the plans are not good to begin with. Secondly, they are typically amended to suit the interests of landowners and speculators, rather than on the basis of sound planning. The Counties of Riverside and San Diego have both initiated comprehensive updates of their General Plans. Recognizing the enormous implications of the outcomes for wildlife and for stopping sprawl, EHL has made these updates a top priority.

**Riverside County.** In the most comprehensive example of planning of which we are aware, the Riverside County Integrated Plan (RCIP) is undertaking a multiple species conservation plan and a transportation plan in conjunction with the General Plan Update. Involvement of the cities, which have independent land use authority, is encouraging. As a member of three separate advisory committees, EHL is arguing for a new paradigm for development — compact, walkable communities oriented to a transit system connecting “nodes” of employment and housing. Given the nightmarish traffic congestion that already exists, there is little other rational choice if expected population growth is to be accommodated. It is equally important that certainty be established for agriculture, natural open space, and rural areas. Such certainty is likely to be the most contentious issue.

As part of the planning effort, a series of public workshops were held. The public’s vision was for unique communities surrounded by open space, unlike the Los Angeles basin from which many residents had moved. EHL’s ideas are entirely consistent with this public input. A detailed vision document is now under preparation by the advisory committee. We also hope to form an alliance with building interests on well-designed, higher density development, which consumes less land per capita. As the entire plan is “stakeholder driven,” our intensive involvement has considerable potential to make a difference.

**San Diego County.** The landscape of San Diego County mandates a different strategy than Riverside County. In San Diego, the truly rural lands of the East County must be preserved with little population growth. Such growth must be directed to the cities along the coast, where the multiple species plans have already established a preserve system to steer development into less sensitive locations. The San Diego County “2020 Update” relies heavily on the input of elected “planning groups” which represent the various communi-

ties. Interest group stakeholders, like EHL, meet in a separate body. The planning groups have formulated population targets for their communities, which are less than the old General Plan allowed. A difficult challenge will be to maintain expansive greenbelts between country towns, particularly where the “greenbelts” have already been subdivided into smaller parcels. Another challenge is to salvage what charm remains of places that have been devastated by disfiguring “estate lot” sprawl, like Alpine, Ramona, and Valley Center.

Adding to the complexity is a lawsuit which has forced a rezoning of lands currently designated as agricultural preserve. If, in response to the litigation, sufficiently large parcel sizes are mandated by the Board of Supervisors early next year, the 2020 Update will have a far greater chance of success. A related problem is to create more sustainable patterns of development in the cities along transit lines, and overcoming obstacles to higher densities. EHL is involved in several forums in which these issues are being discussed.

## Quino Checkerspot Butterfly Conservation Advances

The endangered quino checkerspot butterfly has been a driving force behind the Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan, playing a role similar to that of the California gnatcatcher elsewhere. Its only two remaining strongholds — after historically being one of Southern California’s most common butterflies — are in Riverside County in the Temecula-Murrieta area and in southern San Diego County. The quino presents a quandary for local governments and landowning interests because surveys for quino are difficult and the species is potentially present over large areas of otherwise developable land. But because the quino is very susceptible to habitat fragmentation, it desperately needs a comprehensive conservation plan, and would fare poorly under project-by-project review.

Prime quino habitat was found to coincide with land near Temecula which is already approved for housing development. Even worse, the land is heavily encumbered with debt in the form of assessment districts for infrastructure. Much of this infrastructure has already been constructed, in anticipation of housing starts. Fortunately, the management team of the Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan put all the players in one room — the landowners, builders, local governments, and wildlife agencies. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service laid out what was needed in terms of conservation, and the group devised a solution — a balanced mix of project redesign, off-site mitigation, and local general public acquisition. What previously had appeared unresolvable was endorsed by EHL and was moved forward by the Board of Supervisors. While much more remains to be done for the quino, this is a promising start.

**State Park and Water Bonds on Ballot**

The Legislature has passed and the Governor has signed a park bond and a water bond. Both bonds have very significant monies available for our habitat programs. Poorly informed forces in Sacramento could easily have denied funding for Southern California wildlife in the park bond, and it was a struggle to obtain the funding we did. On a key trip to Sacramento to educate legislators on the merits of our programs, EHL accompanied a unified and impressive array of elected officials, staff, and interest groups. We particularly recognize the able and enthusiastic participation of the San Diego County Board of Supervisors (represented by Supervisor Dianne Jacob), Orange County Board of Supervisors (represented by Supervisor Tom Wilson), and the Riverside County Board of Supervisors (represented by Supervisor Jim Venable). It was Senator Tom Hayden’s version of the park bond that provided the basis for funding what we are trying to create — a preserve system adjacent to and serving major population centers.

**Orange County’s Barham Ranch Targeted for Housing Development**

The Endangered Habitats League has joined the Orange Park Association and the Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks in filing suit to protect Barham Ranch. Barham Ranch is a habitat area of over 500 acres adjacent to the Central/Coastal NCCP in the northeast portion of Orange County. It was identified in the NCCP as an important acquisition target to strengthen the preserve system, particularly for its excellent wetland and willow riparian habitat in the Santiago Creek floodplain.

Barham Ranch is owned by two public entities, the Serrano Water District and the Orange Unified School District. The Water District has plotted with a development company to force the sale of the entire parcel for development purposes. By failing to do environmental review, they have violated the California Environmental Quality Act. The goal of the plaintiffs is to bring the property under conservation ownership.

***Beasts and Botany of the Coastal Sage: Funnel-web Spiders***

Now, before the first winter rains, while the weather is still warm, most of our spider species reach maturity. Their webs stretch across every pathway and festoon every shrub. They hang fat and heavy in the bushes by our front door, or, in a swarm of eight churning legs, fling themselves across the sidewalk just before our startled feet. They lie in wait beneath rocks, stones and debris, or in crevices and dark passages, lingering yet a little longer in hopes of one last meal before they lay their eggs and die.

In short, it is now that spiders reach their sleekest, most colorful, most obtrusive, yuckiest best. Fortunately, for those who are somewhat squeamish about these land-based octopods, there is one spider family whose members are rarely noticed, even though their webs are in evidence all year round. They are the funnel-web spiders.

Their webs are the common horizontal sheets of silk that cloak every dense shrub, grassy bank or field. In the gray of a dew-touched morning, the webs form a patchwork of white upon the quilt of gray, green and brown vegetation. In the dusty months of fall, the webs take on an aged, decrepit look, almost as if the webs had been long abandoned by their makers. They look thick and tattered, laden with detritus left behind by last week's windstorm. Marked by the passage of time, they seem ancient, forgotten.

All of this large spider family's webs have a funnel-shaped retreat where the owner lurks. The funnel leads into the depths of the grass, shrub or structure in which the web is built. It is open ended, so the spider can escape in either direction, should it be too closely pursued by some larger being intent on lunging at the spider's expense.

The exterior end of the funnel fans outward to become a sheet of silk spread in a mat of welcome for the spider's guests. The silk used is not sticky, so visitors and spider alike can move over its surface. However, the spider is much more adept at running over this silk than are the insects which fall on it. Each time the spider moves out across the sheet, it adds a new strand of silk to the surface. The resultant matted web is ideal for entangling an insect's legs, greatly impeding escape.

Funnel-web spiders are brown over all and have moderately long, thin, spiny legs. Their vision is poor, so they rely on a well-developed sense of touch. The abdomen of these spiders is dark, often marked with a light brown hatching that sometimes forms a series of chevrons.

These spiders are quite sedentary. Each remains in its web until it is time to reproduce. The males leave home at maturity to find a mate. The females, to lay their eggs. The lenticular egg sacs are placed under bark or in some other protected spot. After laying her eggs, the female normally dies, though the females in some species wait until their young have hatched.

Next time you come across one of these webs, take a look for the funnel. From somewhere in its depths, you'll find eight eyes staring back at you.

—Jess Morton

## Leaves

By Jess Morton

In the spring of our forest time  
we learned how the trees grow  
watching through the green windows  
uncurling from every limb

The summer sun ripened us  
for the long ewers of trees  
pouring golden streamers  
through the open windows

Fall shuttered the windows  
leaving red flags for the wind  
golden bowls full of dew  
where the hummingbirds would bathe

On a path through winter trees  
we wait for the rain to come  
assured fallen leaves still live  
our hands, hallowed in the rich earth

*In Memorium: Norma Sullivan, long-standing  
Conservation Chair, San Diego Audubon Society*

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## First Class