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# Blowsand Reader

VOLUME 5 ISSUE 3

APRIL / MAY 2009

## Superintendent's Notes

By Kathy Dolinar, District Superintendent

Springtime is a season of rebirth. Yet, here in the desert, new life quickly fades away as the temperatures rise and the moisture disappears.

The wildflowers and brilliant colors turn to brown, the temperatures climb, and people do not come as often. Yet, we know that this is only temporary. We also know that even hotter temperatures are ahead before the relief of fall. The park will become more and more desolate as the sounds of your happy voices and off-road vehicles disappear. But we also know that later, like the brilliant wildflowers, you will all return again, when temperatures cool and the desert breeze calls you back to our beautiful park.



Ocotillo Wells SVRA, work, and life— all are part of the circle of life. This spring, the circle was completed for my mom as she left her life here on earth. She loved the park and our great park family. She was very proud of me, of all of you, and of what we together as a park family have accomplished. Thank you to so many of you who brought smiles and joy to her. Her favorite reading was the *Blowsand Reader*. She smiled when I read her the last edition from her bedside; absent health and sight, she still felt the incredible life coming from the park

Elton John phrased it: There's far too much to take in here, more to find that can ever be found. There's more to see than can ever be seen, more to do than can ever be done.

Keep those words in mind as your own life once again comes full circle, and know that after the summer the park will still be here, temperatures will fall, the cycle will continue, and you can again return to the place you love. Even if you can't do it all, at least you know you can try.



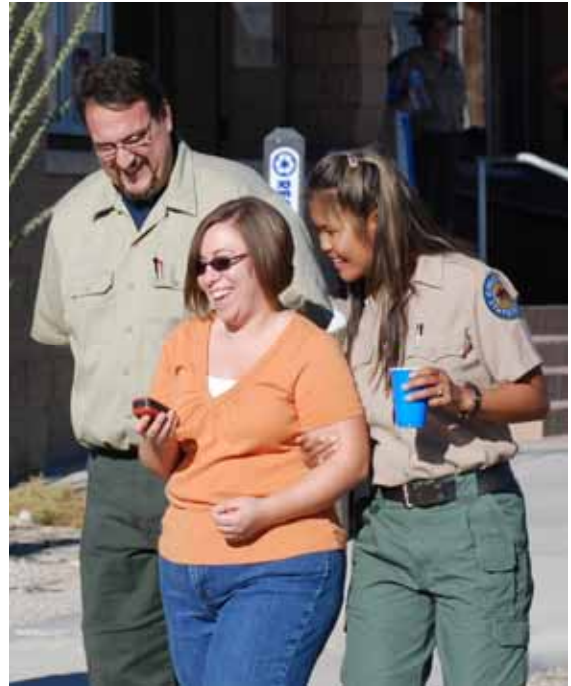
*The circle of life continues...*

# Ocotillo Wells SVRA is proud to announce the First Annual Roughneck Rendezvous!

By Jeff Price, Interpreter I

Geocaching has quickly become a favorite pastime for people visiting our parks and natural areas. A fun and active way to be outside, geocaching is a sport that uses GPS technology to hunt for caches hidden by other geocachers, so that they can log them to keep count of how many they have found, and they sometimes even find small treasures!

Ocotillo Wells Interpretive Department is taking advantage of this growing sport and putting on our first annual interpretive geocaching event! The main focus will be interpreting different ways that people can geocache off-road and lessen their impact to the resource at the same time. We are also incorporating into our event many stories of the natural and cultural resources that can be found at Ocotillo Wells.



We are still in the planning stages, but we can guarantee that this event will be a blast! We will have programs from Tread Lightly, Astronomy Programs (Navigating by the Stars), a HUGE Geocaching Treasure Hunt, a Raffle, an Outdoor Movie, and a Cache In Trash Out program on Sunday morning! All of this and much more will be going on, so mark your calendars and come join us for a wonderful weekend of geocaching in the desert!

**January 29<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup> & 31<sup>st</sup>**

## OW Birthdays...

Andrew Fitzpatrick  
Julie Humann  
Andrew Ahlberg  
Brandon Ide  
Lesley Manent

June 16<sup>th</sup>  
June 17<sup>th</sup>  
June 24<sup>th</sup>  
July 17<sup>th</sup>  
July 27<sup>th</sup>

Julianne North  
David Edman  
Robin Halford  
Kathy Dolinar  
Kirk Shea

August 3<sup>rd</sup>  
August 22<sup>nd</sup>  
August 26<sup>th</sup>  
August 27<sup>th</sup>  
August 28<sup>th</sup>



# Lost Loon Rescued

By Joe Hopkins, Environmental Scientist

While returning from Reptile Surveys on May 15, ES Joe Hopkins found a Pacific loon sitting in a vacant lot just off the pavement at the intersection of Borrego Springs Road and Yaqui Pass Road. The poor bird was baking in the 100+ degree heat. These birds, as they fly from place to place, occasionally tire or dehydrate and set down on blacktop, thinking it is water, stopping for a rest or drink. Then they are unable to take off since large waterfowl are unable to take flight without the benefit of water. Joe was able to scoop the bird up and placed it in a pond at the Springs at Borrego, a local resort, where it drank several times and dove into the water to cool itself. It was gone the following day, hopefully fully recovered from its ordeal.



The Pacific loon in the Rubicon, happy to be out of the blistering heat.



Oh, much better, as the loon is returned to more hospitable habitat.

Many times such events do not have such a happy outcome. The week after this rescue, Heber Ranger Vic Herrick found two dead brants, a type of wild goose, on Highway 78 by Ocotillo Road. A common loon was found dead by Resources personnel on Highway 78 by the Blu-Inn in November of 2007.

When Joe consulted the books, he discovered that there were no previous records of Pacific loon in Borrego Springs. Later he was told that a Pacific loon had been rescued off the road in early April down by Agua Caliente County Park, way south on S-2, which constituted the first record of a Pacific loon sighting anywhere in the area. Still, a rare bird story with a seemingly happy ending.

# Ocotillo Wells SVRA Earth Day Cleanup

By Bob Alexander, Tierra Del Sol

**Newsflash.....**from 7 AM until 2 PM PDT on April 18th, 2009 peculiar and as yet unidentified life forms were observed collecting specimens within the boundaries of the Ocotillo Wells State Vehicular Recreational Area. Upon further investigation, scientists categorized these specimens as “trash” often found in areas where carbon based units (aka humans) frequent. From what historians can determine, these unidentified life forms gathered together in the vicinity of the Ocotillo Wells SVRA Park Headquarters and were fed a free breakfast. They then spread across the entire SVRA collecting the human trash from all corners of the park. Researching weather records for that time period indicate that the temperature rose to 97 degrees Fahrenheit, which indicates these unidentified life forms were most likely a superior species, being able to withstand those



temperatures for a prolonged period. Researchers further have identified from the records that remain that these odd life forms actually brought all the human trash to one location and by early afternoon had amassed two very large piles of the human trash, which were later picked up and removed from the area leaving a pristine and natural environment behind.

From the few records that remain, scientists and researchers believe that after collecting and depositing the human trash into one location, they again gathered for what appears to have been another meal of sorts – remnants suggest a grilling of various meats. Also another strange ritual closed out the day as a journal entry found nearby identified that a “raffle” followed and these life forms were given “prizes” just for being there. The date of April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2009 was also significant in that a poster was found that stated this was the

official Earth Day Cleanup for Ocotillo Wells SVRA. All of this remains a shocking mystery, but it is a scientific fact that the park contains fewer specimens.

I know that these are very disturbing events and this reporter shudders to think of the impact should these life forms continue to appear. This would certainly create an imbalance in the universe, to think that they would actually appear in the harshness of the environment and collect human trash. They were not paid, they were not forced and when finished they gathered together and celebrated their accomplishment. Very strange behavior that one worries might be contagious and spread throughout the population.

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## Ocotillo Wells SVRA Earth Day Cleanup *continued...*

*PostScript:* In a startling discovery actual pictures of the unidentified life forms were found recently. If you see these, please be very careful, as they are known to uncontrollably perform random acts of kindness and volunteer. Researchers and scientists have not yet been able to accurately define their genus, but on the reverse of the photos they did find strange writings that may provide a clue to their origin. These included the words “Tierra Del Sol,” “Bo and Robin Neece,” “Tim Augustine,” and “Bob and Barb Alexander.”



Since this incident was first reported, no one has identified these life forms. Please let the authorities know if you have any information and if you can add to the little information thus far gleaned from the attached pictures. These pictures are being released to the general public for the very first time.

# Reptile Survey Sets Records

By Joe Hopkins, Environmental Scientist

We in Resources were thrilled when in Fall of 2007, we caught 40 animals during the first Reptile Survey with more pitfall arrays left open for a longer time period. We were ecstatic in 2008 when the Spring Survey caught 118 and the Fall Survey snared 106. Now we need a new thesaurus—the Spring Survey conducted from May 5-22 of this year totaled 210 animals, almost doubling the previous record. Heading into the third and last week, we had already broken the record and expected our numbers to fall off as hotter temperatures lessened activity, spring mating season would be waning, and animals would rely on the food they had already eaten during the lush spring. Instead, the last two days resulted in 50 new animals.



The beautiful breeding colors on a fringe-toed lizard, both seen and captured in much higher numbers this spring.

species, tying an old record. The plot at San Felipe had 16 animals, more than the total found there over the 10 previous years of surveys.

Many species were present in unusual abundance. Desert iguanas set a new record with 45 animals (the previous record was 19). Flat-tailed horned lizards numbered 47 (the previous high was 35)—and these were all adults so we are looking for a good FTHL survey this summer when there should be many babies as well as adults. Side-blotched lizards were almost non-existent on the survey for the first two weeks (8), but hatchlings emerged everywhere and the final total was 42 (previous record, 39).

For our surveys, all plots get a numerical index based on what is found. The two indices that we use require that at least two different species be found; otherwise one value is zero and the other cannot even be calculated. For the first time in the history of the reptile surveys, every plot had non-zero, calculable indices. Top plot was Gas Dome Dune with 21 individuals (old record for any one plot was 17) of 7

*(Continued on next page...)*

## Reptile Survey Sets Records *continued...*

There were a lot of shovel-nosed snakes captured. This one from Heber had exceptionally bright coloration.



Also very exciting was verification of a new species. The long-nosed snake had never been captured or observed in the district, at OW or Heber. One was captured at Heber on May 19.

An adult long-nosed snake would have been too big to be caught; fortunately for us, this juvenile didn't quite figure out that he could have gotten *out* of the bucket.

# Biological Resources for April/May

By Joe Hopkins, Environmental Scientist

Biological Resources had a lot going on this spring. Far and away the most exciting was the Reptile Survey conducted May 4-22. (It was so exciting, we felt it merited a special article elsewhere in this issue.) In addition, over 30 mammals, about five times more than usual—and including a Botta's pocket gopher at Barrel Springs, the first caught at OW—also ended up in our pitfall traps.



This little guy found a home in Joe's glove after being taken out of a bucket trap.

April began with the finishing off of projects started in March—the Hawkwatch and the Veg Survey. Both ended on low notes. For the Hawkwatch, the big day never materialized, and it ended up with the second lowest number of Swainson's hawks and the lowest total number of raptors for the seven years of the count. Such variation is to be expected, though, as there are many different routes through the area that the birds can take. For the Veg Survey, the absence of late rain meant counting a lot of shriveled plants; however, ES Gary Slattery and Senior Park Aide Steve Wilcox excel at plant identification from smallest sprout to dearest remains.

The Spring Bird Survey, on the other hand, went quite well. The number of migrating warblers was not big, but four other species stood out. Loggerhead shrikes usually occur just a few times on our surveys. This spring, 6 of the 11 OW plots had a pair of these striking birds. Two LeConte's thrashers, a rare bird sought after by birders who visit our area, were also seen, one in Palo Verde Wash and one in San Felipe. Horned larks, which seemed to have disappeared the last few surveys, were back in large flocks. And Bullock's orioles, probably the rarest of the three oriole

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## Biological Resources for April/May *continued...*

species that live in our area, were seen on three different transects. (Another Bullock's and large numbers of shrikes and larks were also encountered while doing the Reptile Surveys.)

In early April, Anza-Borrego Tracking Team founders Mac McNair and Karin Vickers joined ES Joe Hopkins and others for the first Tracking Transect at Barrel Springs. Badger tracks at two separate locations were the big finds of this newest monitoring tool. Mac and Karin also did the preliminary work so that another transect can be done at the fork of Tule and Eriogonum Washes, that transect scheduled to start in the fall.

New park aides, Joni Bye, Carole Pepito, and Robin Halford, attended flat-tail training conducted by BLM in El Centro. Senior ES Eric Hollenbeck represented the department at the big OHV meeting at Mott in May. Eric, Joe, Joni, and Robin also got an opportunity to observe and help out with



A loggerhead shrike, aka the butcher bird, surveys the area for possible prey.



the mammal and reptile operation being conducted by the San Diego Natural History Museum as part of the biological surveys on the Freeman Property.

This sidewinder, a species totally absent from the Reptile Survey, made an appearance during the mammal tracking transect at Barrel Springs.

# Archaeological Site Stewardship Program

By Margaret Kress, Assistant State Archaeologist

In order to better preserve and protect archaeological sites within the boundaries of Ocotillo Wells SVRA, Associate State Archaeologist Jennifer Parker and Assistant State Archaeologist Margaret Kress decided it was time to begin an Archaeological Site Stewardship Program here at the park. On Saturday, April 25, volunteers arrived at Ocotillo Wells for an Archaeological Site Stewardship Basic Training Course. The training was conducted by Chris and Beth Padon, who run the California Archaeological Site Stewardship Program (CASSP) and are members of the Society for California Archaeology.



Map showing the locations of CASSP volunteer workshops across California.

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# Archaeological Site Stewardship Program *continued...*

CASSP is a volunteer program that began nine years ago as a way to increase the protection of archaeological and historical sites and to increase the public's knowledge and enjoyment of them. Archaeological sites are very fragile, and once lost, they are lost forever. When protected and maintained, archaeological sites give us a wealth of information about our predecessors, our communities, and ourselves.

The Basic Training Course is a two-day training consisting of both time in the classroom and time in the field. In the classroom portion of the training, volunteers learned what CASSP is all about (provided by Beth and Chris Padon), the history and archaeology of Ocotillo Wells SVRA (provided by Assistant State Archaeologist Margaret Kress), and what the laws concerning archaeology are and how to monitor archaeological sites safely (provided by Supervising Ranger Vic Herrick). Out in field, volunteers were able to get familiar with artifacts in an archaeological site and practice assessing the site for damage. The volunteers were taken to two different sites within OW—one was historic and one was prehistoric—after signing confidentiality agreements concerning site location information and other sensitive data from the official archaeological records.



The entire group of Site Stewards at the completion of the training, along with Supervising Ranger Vic Herrick and Assistant State Archaeologist Margaret Kress.

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## Archaeological Site Stewardship Program *continued...*

Now that the basic training is complete, volunteers will have one more training in the field before they begin to visit assigned sites within OW regularly (about once a month) to inspect for damage, both from natural erosion and from deliberate or accidental damage from visitors. After each visit, the volunteers will complete a report, which they will then submit to Jennifer and Margaret. If there is any damage noted, they, in conjunction with the local ranger, will assess the damage and determine if any repairs can be made and/or what preventative actions must be taken.

Anyone interested in participating in CASSP or who would like more information about the program, can check out the CASSP website at [www.cassp.org](http://www.cassp.org). The CASSP training includes a hat, lunch and a notebook containing a wealth of information regarding Site Stewardship. The cost is \$25 and a confidentiality agreement must be signed.



Beth Padon handing the Site Stewardship documents over to Assistant State Archaeologist Margaret Kress, who will be working with the volunteers at OW.

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# Archaeological Site Stewardship Program *continued...*

Giving the volunteers some background information about the archaeological site they are going to see.



Beth Padon speaking about archaeological sites during the classroom portion of the training.

# Black Widows: Friend or Foe?

By Jeff Price, Interpreter I

The most notorious spider in the United States is in our own backyard—and front yard and side yard, under our eaves, in our houses, and sometimes even living in our cars! It can be found almost anywhere and for most people, anywhere they find it is a bad place for it to be. Yes, we are talking about the Black Widow, the highly venomous and the most feared spider that we have living in our desert. But are they really as bad as we make them out to be? As with all living things, it is good to look at their complex and unique life-cycle, their pros and their cons, and their role in the ecosystem before we pass ultimate judgment on them. So come on over to the dark side as we explore the fascinating life of the most despised spider of all.



Most of us have seen the adult female black widow hanging upside down in her web, but not many of us have witnessed the emergence of her hundreds of offspring from their egg sac. It truly is a sight to behold! The black widow's eggs are wrapped inside a globular egg sac, roughly ½" in diameter which has a silky covering



with the consistency of rice paper. Each sac can contain between 100 and 400 eggs, and there can be 1-3 egg sacs for every female black widow each year. Inside, the eggs incubate for about 30 days before hatching. Even after they have hatched, the spiderlings do not immediately venture out into the world—they stay in their protective egg case until they have molted for the first time, and their exoskeleton has hardened once more.

When they finally do emerge, they are generally orange with white markings. Once out of the egg sac, they spend a few days in the web waiting for a nice breeze, and when it comes they spin out a long piece of light silk and use it as a parachute to “balloon away” and find a suitable place to live. This is the most trying stage in the spider's life, not only do many insects and other animals see them

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## Black Widows: Friend or Foe? *continued...*

as a food source, their own siblings do as well! Due to cannibalism, predators, and environmental factors, there is a 98% mortality rate for young spiders.

If our young spiderling survives the onslaught of mortality and finds a good place to live out its life, it will hunker down and spin a web to catch some prey. As with all other arachnids, when a black widow is growing, it needs to shed its outer layer of exoskeleton to reveal the larger exoskeleton that has been forming underneath. The male black widow will do this approximately 3-6 times in their life and the much larger female will molt 6-8 times. While in these immature stages the spiders will look similar to each other, having red and yellow bands as well as spots. As they continue to eat their insect prey and molt, they gradually change color, usually becoming darker with each successive molt until they reach sexual maturity. After 2-3 months, depending on environmental factors, the males will become sexually mature, closely followed by the females who mature at 3-4 months of age. Once they have molted for the final time, the



females resemble the black widow that we have all come to recognize, while the small and secretive male is a dull black or brown and is rarely ever seen.

When immature, female black widows are harmless—the males are always harmless. Yet when the females have matured

they have enough venom and strong enough fangs to deliver that venom into potential threats, so they make their web much more conspicuous. The style of web that is used is extremely effective but looks very messy. The silk that they produce is also some of the strongest in the arachnid world, as anyone who has walked into one of their webs can attest to! It is even used extensively by hummingbirds in the construction of their nests. Once sexually mature, the female will produce pheromones designed to attract one of the wandering males to her web. Once the male has located

*(Continued on next page...)*

## Black Widows: Friend or Foe? *continued...*

the female's web, he has to be very careful! If he makes a wrong move, the female will only sense that another item of prey has been snared and will devour the hapless male before he even has a chance to explain himself! If the male is skilled and lucky, he will be able to mate with the female, and start a whole new generation of widows. While most people think that this is the end of the male's life, it is not normally so. In the wild, black widow males are rarely eaten after mating with a female, more often affecting their escape to pursue more mates. In captivity however, it is the exact opposite, the male being eaten more often than he gets away. In any case though, the male will only live for about 7-8 months before expiring, after having fathered many spiderlings. The female, on the other hand, can live for up to 3 years, sometimes even longer in captivity, and can produce many generations of black widows.

During a female black widow's life, she can eat hundreds of insects such as flies, roaches, crickets, moths and many more. This can keep some of these insect populations down to tolerable levels. Widows are also very shy and are not aggressive unless they mistake you for an insect or believe that you are threatening their egg sac, and in both of these situations it requires you to be in contact with their web. Also, while extremely venomous for a spider in the US, their bite is now fatal to less than 1% of people bitten since an antivenin was developed.

With their unique life cycle, solid place in the ecosystem, and relative harmlessness, black widows really aren't as bad as we make them out to be. If we leave them alone to do their work for the environment, and show them the respect that they deserve, we too can live in harmony with this darkly beautiful and unique organism.

## Meet Anthony ...

The OW maintenance staff welcomes Anthony Beepath. Anthony was promoted to Park Maintenance Assistant (PI) in May. For three seasons Anthony worked at Palomar Mountain State Park as a Park Aide. Prior to that, he worked as a trail volunteer at Cuyamaca Rancho State Park for four months. On Anthony's days off, he also volunteered at Cabrillo National Monument at the tide pool, and in the summer, he helped in the greenhouse. Anthony's interests include hiking and protecting the environment.





## Meet Carole ...

The Resource staff welcomes Carole Pepito to their team...

“The desert is a new experience for me, and I welcome this opportunity to spend lots of time studying this beautiful place. I’ve been living in northern California and Oregon since taking an early retirement from Folsom Cordova Unified School District. I love traveling and hiking and try to combine the two whenever possible. I’ve done trail maintenance and other volunteer work with Coastwalk, an organization working on developing an Oregon-Mexico coastal trail and preserving access to our magnificent coastline. I was also fortunate enough to spend several years as the park host at Sinkyone Wilderness State Park during the month of June, the perfect time of year to watch the progress of the elk calves.”



## Meet Charlie ...

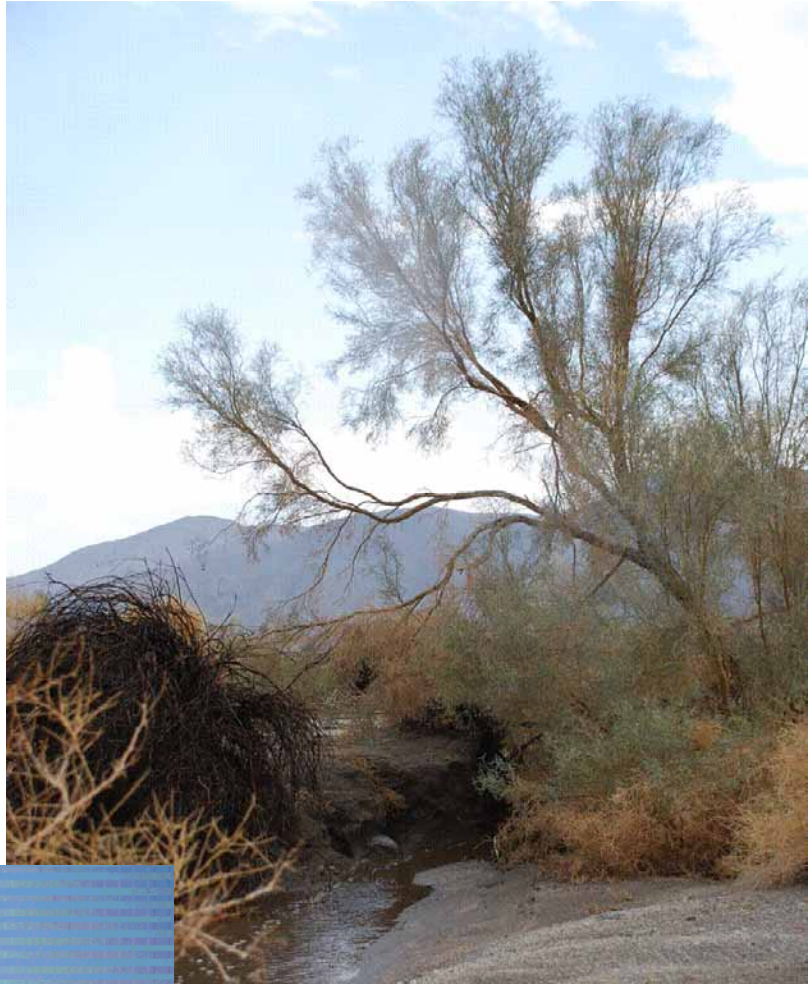
Charlie Spratt was recently promoted to Maintenance Worker I (PI). Congratulations! Born in Weaverville, the home of the Joss House, in northern California, he enlisted in the US Army after graduating from high school in 1974. He spent 4 years as a Heavy Equipment Mechanic, half of that time in Germany. After he was discharged, Charlie moved to San Diego and worked for Naval Public Works for 8 years as a Sheet Metal Mechanic; the last 2 years he did planning and estimating. Deciding to try running his own business, his brother and he purchased a semi-truck and he hauled freight cross country for the next 4 years. Because of the economy, he sold his company and went to work for McDonnell Douglas in Long Beach, where he worked on the MD-80 program as a Quick Response Mechanic. Following the downsizing in the aircraft business, he was laid off. For the next 10 years Charlie held various jobs before his wife Kitty and he decided to move to El Centro. In October 2005 he started working for OW in the Maintenance Department. Kitty and he have been together 21 years and have raised three children—Jeffrey, Jeremy and Kristina. With the addition of a new grandson, they now have three grandsons and two



# Smoketree

By Peggy Hurley, Park Maintenance Assistant

Smoke trees are the reward to those hardy souls who stay past tourist season and into the heat of summer. The last of the major plants to bloom each wildflower season, they brighten up June and July days with their dark purple blossoms. They are in the pea family and their heady fragrance is reason enough to search out a smoke tree in bloom. While the intoxicating aroma is one reason the smoke tree is one of my favorite plants and the grayish-green color of the branches another, perhaps the biggest reason I enjoy this tree is because of the ongoing artwork that occurs beneath its boughs as it blooms. The spent petals pile up beneath the branches like miniature purple snowdrifts. The wind swirls them into intricate patterns: a mosaic of sand, pebbles and purple. The harvester ants hurriedly collect the fallen blossoms to take back to their mounds and then create still more art by discarding them around their holes as purple circles.



These trees may look like a puff of smoke from a distance, hence the name. Since the leaves are small, seasonal and practically nonexistent, photosynthesis occurs through the stems of the thorny grayish-green branches. Naturally occurring in washes, smoke trees rely on the abrading

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## Smoketree *continued...*

action of churning sand and water during flash floods to perforate the hard seed covering, allowing it to sprout.

The smoke tree is known as smokethorn in other areas, and “smoke tree” can refer to several unrelated species... Thus proving to me, once again, how confusing common names can be.

However, now I am getting confused about the Latin name too! *Psorothamnus spinosus* is not as easy to pronounce, nor is it as pretty of a name, as the synonym *Dalea spinosa*, by which it is also known. So now there are two names to remember?

*Dalea spinosa* seems much more refined, like a stage name for an exotic headliner. She is onstage now, after waiting in the wings, to close the wildflower show. As the other spring beauties fade in the oppressive early summer heat, *Dalea spinosa* is just donning her elegant wardrobe. *Dalea* is flashy and wears too much perfume, attracting hoards of busy bees- a humming soundtrack to her performance.

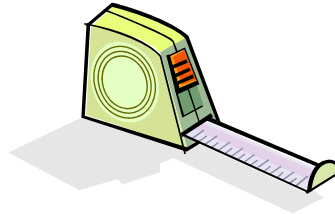


As *Dalea spinosa* takes the final bow at the end of an incredible wildflower season, inhale her perfume and feel the hum of life surrounding her while pausing to admire the mosaic of jewel-like petals at her feet.



# OW Maintenance

By Julie Humann, Park Maintenance Worker I



The maintenance staff at OW had several promotions and a new hire during the months of April and May. Charlie Spratt was promoted from Senior Maintenance Aide to Park Maintenance Worker I (PI) on April 1<sup>st</sup>. Norbert Moeller was promoted from Senior Maintenance Aide to Laborer (PI) on May 18<sup>th</sup>. Jeff Smith was promoted from Senior Maintenance Aide to Park Maintenance Assistant (PI) on May 18<sup>th</sup>. Anthony Beepath is our new employee; he came from Palomar Mountain State Park where he was a Park Aide. He joined us here at Ocotillo Wells on May 18<sup>th</sup> as a Park Maintenance Assistant (PI). Congratulations and welcome to all!

Projects completed during the months of April and May include deck resurfacing and new stairs at one of the residences, the construction of several new shade ramadas throughout the park, staining of the gable ends of all the ramadas in the residence area and the fascia boards of other

district facilities, sidewalk and stairs from the block house to employee parking. New stairs were also added to the gas pump station. The back door area of the district office got a new enclosure for refuse and recycle bins, a new sidewalk, and an extension to the door landing.



One of our ongoing projects is a new roof on the sign shop. The project had been put on hold for several months because of a nesting Saps

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# OW Maintenance *continued...*

Phoebe; maintenance employees had all the materials purchased and ready to go. Thanks to Norb, the demo and construction has gone smoothly. Julio and Cesar also worked on the project, and, with a little more paint, it will be complete.

The maintenance staff continues to have regular meetings on heat stress/stroke and other safety issues. The upcoming months of summer have let us set aside several inside projects which we will recommence when temps rise. Some of these projects include remodel of the auto shop and its office, texture and painting of the administration, resource and ranger offices. New flooring is starting to go in at the resource office. A list of small projects has also compiled for afternoon work, one of which was the installation of a new RO system and ice machine in the district break room.

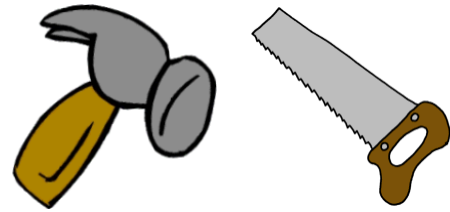
The housekeeping staff continues its good work, and is busy with some major cleaning of the facilities that will be closed down for the off season at OW. The housekeeping and maintenance staff said goodbye to Peggy Hurley this month as she goes on her required time off.

Well, that sums it up for our busy April and May; stay tuned for more in June and July.



# The Heber Dunes Report

By Vic Herrick, Supervising Ranger



Heber Dunes had a predictably busy Easter Holiday/Spring Break, with lots of visitors. The weather has changed, the nights are now relatively warm and the days hot, several well over 100° F as of 5/9/09. To our surprise, the weekend of May 2-3 was very busy; perhaps a final hurrah before the searing summer sun keeps all but the hardiest of riders lying low.

Delights to the naturalist's eye may now be found, and we are enjoying the migrant birds passing through, including lazuli buntings, Swainson's hawks, hermit warblers, western tanagers and others. A large number of doves are nesting in the park, with a recent influx of white winged joining the already nesting Eurasian collared and mourning doves. Black-necked stilts are nesting totally exposed on the ground of nearby irrigation levees, miraculously hatching tiny stilts in this desert climate with searing sun beating down upon the attentive parents. A coyote was seen yesterday, apparently with a den site and suckling pups nearby, based on her sagging and worn appearance. A bumper crop of brush rabbits leaves the heavy cover here in the park each morning to graze the adjacent alfalfa fields where this coyote was observed hunting.

Maintenance worker Alfredo Jacobo has been busy using the specialized tread tractor known as the Sweko. He has opened up the east boundary road, providing new access to this formerly overgrown area. An abundance of salt cedars have encroached on this road, and the removal of them makes for safer passage by riders.



Alfredo Jacobo working with the Sweko.

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## The Heber Dunes Report *continued...*



We are receiving many compliments about Heber Dunes' cleanliness and safety record from park visitors, some of whom can tell of wild and wooly times in the past. One interesting "old timer" recently visited and told us he "coon hunted" with his hounds here years ago. He said it was a very productive area, with a large population of raccoons in the dense trees, and the nearby and frequently flooding Alamo Canal and Alamo River providing favored habitat. We told him things had changed—the water no longer creates a marshland due to concrete lining of the canals, and, in response to his polite inquiry, that hunting is no longer permitted here. His vehicle is still outfitted for hounds and he still runs them elsewhere. I still see a few raccoons here, at least one of which raids my garden.

May has found us with triple digit temps, and diminishing visitation. Some hardy souls arrive each evening for twilight rides. Our new restroom is getting rave reviews, and I am so happy to report most folks are respecting it and caring for it (no vandalism). Gambel's quail nests have hatched, and I look forward to seeing them on early morning patrols in the park. Other signs of wildlife are the abundant nesting doves, the abundant Audubon's rabbits and round tailed ground squirrels, many of which are now pregnant and fat as sausages! Snake tracks are commonly seen, their source less often, in the loose sand of the perimeter road. The great horned owls are frequently heard at twilight on the west side boundary, likely hunting rabbits in the hay fields.

We will be busy with ongoing maintenance, and continue to make improvements in the newest off-road vehicle park in the system. Some warm days will follow....will you be one of the hardy souls to still come riding?

## Meet Chris ...

We welcome Chris Dahl to the maintenance staff.

"I grew up in Poway, California. My family and I have been coming to the desert since I was a baby. Four years ago I bought a house and property in Ocotillo Wells. I enjoy having friends and family visit so we can go geocaching or I can show them things I've found. I've been a member of an off-road club for four years, and I love to explore."



# Visitor Services

By Jordan Fenwick, State Park Ranger



I would like to start off by welcoming our new rangers to Ocotillo Wells. Rangers Jesse Adams, Erik Dodos, and David Hart graduated with BVST 33 from the Mott Academy at the end of April and arrived at OW in mid-May. They will be doing their field training at Ocotillo Wells with Ranger Mike Howard as their FTO; and also at Hungry Valley and Oceano Dunes throughout the summer.



Jesse Adams



Erik Dodos



David Hart

In April, Ranger Borello was called to a domestic violence incident at the park that turned into a three week investigation. Both parties were hospitalized for injuries, an aggressor was determined and arrested, and felony charges were filed. Well done, Detective Borello.

On May 12, all OHV law enforcement officers attended a conference at Mott Training Center hosted by Deputy Director Daphne Greene and OHV Division Chief Phil Jenkins. The conference was highly productive, many questions were asked, concerns were addressed and answers were given. It was good to meet fellow OHV Rangers from other parks. It was also nice to escape the desert heat for a few days.

For two weeks in April, Ranger Fenwick attended Firearms Inspector Class at the Mott Training Center. The class was instructed on the proper methods of weapon disassembly, inspection, cleaning, part repair and replacement, and reassembly. The first week focused on the Smith & Wesson 4006 handgun, the second week on our Remington 870 shotguns and Colt AR-15 patrol rifle. Ranger Fenwick will now share the duty of weapon inspecting at OW with Supervising Ranger Shea. Ranger Fenwick also completed the MSF motorcycle patrol class at Hungry Valley put on by Rangers Grant and Meichtry. Already being seasoned motorcycle riders, the class focused on form and technique, followed by an exciting 4 hour trail ride through Hungry Valley and National Forest land.

During the summer months, the OW Ranger staff is looking forward to participating in various projects at the park, including working with resources, assisting with reptile surveys and

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## Visitor Services *continued...*



archaeological studies. Ranger Fenwick assisted Joe Hopkins, one of OW's Environmental Scientists, with a reptile survey. A decent number of animals were measured and counted, including several flat-tailed horned lizards and desert iguanas. It was fun holding the horned lizards, as they are very mellow and will just sit peacefully in your hand. Some of the Rangers will also be assisting other OHV parks this summer during their busy season, including Oceano Dunes and Hungry Valley. I hear the Dunes are beautiful this time of year.



And finally, the biggest news for OW Visitor Services during May was the arrival of Ranger Sasha Wessitsh's son, Logan. Sasha's wife Sarah gave birth to Logan Souyadeth (su-ya-day) Wessitsh on May 27<sup>th</sup>. He weighed 6 pounds 9 ounces. Souyadeth is a Laotian word meaning "the sun." They have since returned home and all of them are doing well. Congratulations to the family!

# The Search for Black Gold at OW... Depression & WWII

By Andrew Fitzpatrick, Interpretive Specialist

With the end of drilling at the Routhe and Beal Wells in the early 1920s, interest in the oil possibilities of Ocotillo Wells dried up, but only temporarily. The quest for oil here would continue—as science itself gained a new respect—through the Great Depression and into another World War.

In 1926, the Borrego Land Company hired a well-respected Los Angeles geologist to study the feasibility of petroleum deposits here. The bubbling natural gas found in the local springs was encouraging, and his report stated that the layers beneath the San Felipe Hills (now the eastern portion of OWSVRA) were “particularly favorable for oil accumulation.” Furthermore, he felt the previous failures by the Diamond Bar and Imperial Valley companies were not conclusive. In other words, there was a very good chance that “black gold” still awaited discovery somewhere below. Two years later, another professional geologist, R.E.Vandruff, conducted another petroleum study for interests out of Santa Monica. His report echoed that of his predecessor and, regarding the defunct Routhe and Beal Wells, he boldly stated his opinion that “neither of these wells were drilled deep enough.” In the opinion of these two earth scientists, the prospects for “black gold” at Ocotillo Wells had never looked so good.



Standard Oil Stock Certificate

But starting in 1929, the Great Depression crippled America’s economy including the oil industry. With fewer people driving and fewer cars being built, there was, of course, less need for pumping petroleum out of the earth. Despite geologist Vandruff’s encouraging words, it was not until 1932 that a new attempt was made at drilling beneath Ocotillo Wells. A new incarnation of the influential Imperial County investors, again under the leadership of Assemblyman Beal, constructed a huge derrick and began drilling right next to their previous effort at the “Artesian Well.”

Photographs taken by Vandruff during a visit to see the start of this “Imperial #2” Well, appear to be the earliest ever taken of our park. As well-connected as the management of this new operation was, they failed to submit the proper paperwork to the state’s Division of Oil & Gas. Instead, Beal and his associates produced a series of lame excuses, but never submitted the appropriate drilling records. In any case, it seems to have encountered the same problem as the Routhe and Beal Wells—no oil—and was similarly abandoned.

In the fall of 1932, the San Felipe Oil Company began drilling what they called Dauner #1 Well, but which became more popularly known as the Wolfe Well. Little is known about the operations

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## The Search for Black Gold at OW *continued...*

here, except that this outfit had expected to hit oil around 4000 feet down. Like the others before, they were ultimately disappointed. The service road built to the site was one of the first access routes into the off-road world of Ocotillo Wells and is still enjoyed today as Wolfe Well Road. After years of inactivity, yet another attempt was made by yet another outfit as the year 1940 began. This independent wildcat well, funded by Los Angeles investors, was drilled by contractor John Sheran and a crew of two dozen near the south-eastern corner of Benson Dry Lake, just north of today's Highway 78. They hit several pockets of natural gas before bottoming out against granite at almost 4000 feet; and so ended the Sheran Well.

With the Japanese attack against Pearl Harbor on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941, the United States was thrust into the Second World War. Here in the Borrego Valley region, the Army began training for combat against the Germans and Italians to prepare for the similar terrain of North Africa. But our Ocotillo Wells region wasn't just a desert training ground; it was also a focus in the search for wartime fuel so our tanks, planes, and warships could take the fight to the enemy. The first oil firm to explore the area during the war was the Pure Oil Company which built a large derrick in the Truckhaven region (today the southeastern corner of the modern Freeman Properties) in December 1943. Following suit in the spring of 1944, the large Standard Oil Company of California came into Ocotillo Wells in full force, leasing 24,320 acres in the area. Their crews set to work

at a feverish pace, working day and night, their tall derrick lit up like an electric flare, apparently racing their Pure Oil competitors, as they drilled smack dab in the middle of today's O.W.S.V.R.A. In their haste, a drill bit was lost in the hole at 3580 feet and had to be fished out, delaying the downward sprint for petroleum. The work here was rough, water had to be trucked in for miles, and the crews trucked in miles further from the cooler mountain climes near Julian. Small amounts of oil were

*Right:* Oil Rig at Wolfe Well



*Below:* Wolfe Well 013



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## The Search for Black Gold at OW *continued...*

found and actually brought to the surface, but the quality was quite poor. There is still some uncertainty regarding the oil well history of Ocotillo Wells. Locals recall that this low-grade oil was actually used to construct a service road of homemade blacktop to the drilling site. Others contend that the oil was trucked in from elsewhere to enable the construction of Standard's drilling derrick. In any case, the remains of this tar "macadam" road of low-grade petroleum, mixed with local sand, can still be seen along sections of the Cahuilla Trail. Then, as quickly as the excitement had grown, the prospects for striking oil here faded, as they had in the past. Both Pure Oil and Standard Oil admitted defeat in the oppressive summer heat of 1944, though they had drilled to 6000 and 4500 feet, respectively.

*Right:* Standard Test Well 001

*Below:* Standard Test Well 004



Though the Great Depression hindered the quest for petroleum here, the Second World War spurred the search. No fields had yet been found. But with the start of the Cold War, the importance of domestic energy production grew, and drilling continued at Ocotillo Wells...

## Meet Jeff ...

Jeff Smith was recently promoted to Park Maintenance Assistant (PI). Congratulations, Jeff! He is a native San Diego county resident, and has lived in Borrego Springs for the past 15 years. Jeff went to work for the state park as a seasonal park aide in October 2008. Over the years, he has worked in several different construction trades. Jeff also worked as a flooring installer for many years.



## Meet Joni ...

The Resources group welcomes Joni Bye to their staff.

“Hello OWSVRA!  
Loeseliastrum, Lepidium,  
Hesperocallis undulata!”

What fun, I’ve been here only a few months, and I’m already speaking Latin! I’ve spent most of my life in this desert paradise, and it’s really cool to know it’s not all “stickers.” Research is just like home.”



## Meet Norbert ...

Welcome to Norbert Moeller, our new Laborer. Working at Ocotillo Wells for his second season, Norb grew up in Northbrook, IL. He moved to Florida in 1983 and to California in 2000. Before working for the state park, he owned a framing company for high-end custom homes for 30 years. Norb's hobbies are off-roading and art as an abstract expressionist. His skills include woodworking, plumbing, electrical work and all areas of maintenance projects – old and new.



# The Interpreter's Corner



By Steve Quartieri, Environmental Scientist

It was an amazing season in the Interpretive Department at Ocotillo Wells. Together, we have seen our program develop from what was only a concept in mind and spirit—to a program which presented **145** interpretive programs to over **7,686** visitors. We watched as visitors, young and old, happily joined us for a wide variety of interpretive programs including live animal exhibits, Junior Ranger programs, wildflower walks, off-road tours, coffee with the naturalist, moon and star gazing programs, ATV geology tours, evening bug programs, CalPAL programs, and ATV Safety classes.



Any program is only as good as its people, and this season the Interpretive Department was blessed with a group of highly motivated and talented team players. Each of whom brought a passion and a desire to do great things. I want to thank each of you for the incredible contributions you made to our program, and it was because of your hard work and commitment we were able to accomplish great things this season. Thank you!

- Cheryl Gillott** – Visitor Center, ASI Safety and CalPAL programs
- Carleen Roberts** – Visitor Center, Junior Rangers and Wildflower programs
- Beth Shugan** – *Blowsand Reader* and Interpretive publications
- Lesley Manent** – ATV Geology tours and Special Out-Reach Projects
- Andy Fitzpatrick** – Live Animal Exhibits and Astronomy program
- Charlie Eversole** – Astronomy program
- Jeff Price** – Live Animal Exhibits, Off-Road Tours, and Coffee with the Naturalist



As I look forward to the 2009/2010 season, I have a genuine feeling of excitement. The return of a seasoned interpretive staff, the opening of new interpretive facilities, and the debut of several new interpretive programs is going to allow our interpretive program to take another giant step forward.



**WOW... It's going to be another exciting season at Ocotillo Wells. Stay tuned!**

# Geology of Ocotillo Wells

These geologic terms represent things that can be found in and around Ocotillo Wells. Their names never lie wholly in a straight line; they bend and twist in every direction to challenge your mind.

A S A N D H T R A E B H J Y R A  
 E N F C D Q R A P T R E S E D K  
 Y C L O M U P V E V D I A A R U  
 F O Y A E A N E S A D A J E R R  
 R S O T I K M M E R B A F O A O  
 R M A E V E D E W N D E S N I T  
 O I L L U F A N L I S H L O O B  
 R G C O O A E T M O A N A T I O  
 P N T I L U L L E L D N L F H S  
 H E O O L H A H N E L O W A L A  
 E I N U C R A T Y C O P A R K L  
 R P C S Y L O P E D R O I S O F  
 G L T R Y O K D R T N E S W R R  
 A B A E O C A A E Y H I D O E E  
 R M S Y K U O S W U H J L S A D  
 I R O A A M G I Q I N O C D L W

- ALLUVIAL FAN
- IGNEOUS ROCK
- ARROYO**
- METAMORPHIC ROCK
- BAJADA
- PLAYA
- DESERT PAVEMENT

- RAIN SHADOW
- DESERT VARNISH
- SAND DUNES
- EARTHQUAKE FAULT
- SEDIMENTARY ROCK
- EROSION
- FLASH FLOOD
- FOSSILS

# The Weather Log...



April

High Temperature	Apr 21 <sup>st</sup>	103.3 degrees
Low Temperature	Apr 5 <sup>th</sup>	45.7 degrees
Average High Temperature		83.9 degrees
Average Low Temperature		60.0 degrees
Maximum Wind Gust	Apr 14 <sup>th</sup>	52.0 mph
Rainfall for the Month		0.00 inches

May

High Temperature	May 18 <sup>th</sup>	107.4 degrees
Low Temperature	May 26 <sup>th</sup>	65.2 degrees
Average High Temperature		99.9 degrees
Average Low Temperature		71.6 degrees
Maximum Wind Gust	May 2 <sup>nd</sup> & 5 <sup>th</sup>	36.0 mph
Rainfall for the Month		0.00 inches

Data recorded at the Ocotillo Wells Ranger Station, Ocotillo Wells, California.



## Ocotillo Wells District

P.O. Box 360  
Borrego Springs, CA 92004  
Phone: (760) 767-5391  
[www.ohv.parks.ca.gov](http://www.ohv.parks.ca.gov)