Edgewood EXPLORER
FRIENDS OF EDGEWOOD • WINTER 2020–2021

Success and Solutions Mark Year One at Edgewood Farms

Story and photos by Perry McCarty

The first season at Edgewood Farms (17 species!) is nearly complete, with only a few goldenaster (*Heterotheca sessiliflora* ssp. *echioides*) flowers remaining. We had such a great turnout with volunteers collecting seed in the field last year and I expected that would continue with amplifying seed at the farm, but those plans were shelved for this year with the restrictions due to COVID-19. However, we do have some results. (To see a list of plants being grown at the farm, go to plantid.net/PlantList.aspx?PlantList=Edgewood+Farms.)

Goldfields (*Lasthenia californica*) was one of the biggest successes. We collected more goldfields seed at the farm in 20 minutes than we did in 97 hours in the field! In 2019, we had five outings in the field on successive Mondays with up to nine seed collectors, for a total of 97 hours to produce 50 mg (2 oz) of *Lasthenia*. This year at the farm, three 2' x 4' plots generated 126 g of seed, about 2.5 times as much, and took only 20 minutes to harvest. That is about 730 times as efficient per amount of seed produced (if you don't include the minimal time spent on occasional watering of the plants).

Goldfields seed collected 6/6/2020 in about 20 minutes

California poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*) is another species that is far more efficient to grow at the farm. Our seed collection permit limits us to no more than 5% of the seed at a given site, or 1 in 20 flowers. Poppies at Edgewood are typically in small clusters. Each seed capsule contains many seeds, but we are limited to collect 1–2 pods per flower cluster. Also, the optimal time to collect is when the seed capsule bursts open as it is being collected, a difficult feat to achieve in the field.

Our solution at the farm: We purchased 390 small mesh organza (party favor) bags. Any time after the flower has been pollinated but before the capsule bursts, we cover the capsule with an organza bag, sometimes stuffing 2–3 capsules into a single bag, and pull the cord shut. When the capsule bursts, the seed is captured and can be retrieved when convenient. The photo below shows the poppy beds with about 315 organza bags. This strategy was successful and resulted in very little loss.

California poppies bagged for seed 6/6/2020, 315 bags

For a number of plants, we don't yet know how well seed amplification is working. Harvest brodiaea (*Brodiaea elegans*), clay and yellow mariposa lilies (*Calochortus argillosus, C. luteus*), blue-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium bellum*), and soap plant (*Chlorogalum pomeridianum* var. *pomeridianum*) all grew but they take more than one season to first build a bulb before sending up an inflorescence. These plants have completed the first year of their cycles, but we need to see if they successfully continue in coming years. With clay and yellow mariposa lilies, which take on the order of six years from seed to

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2020 General Meeting: Rise to the Challenge

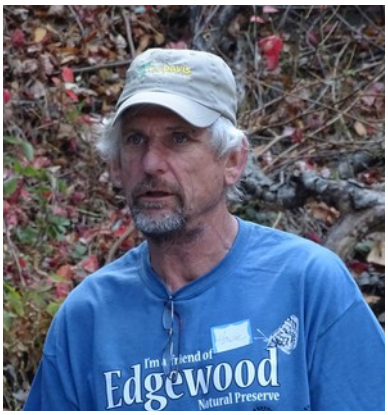
by Barrie Moore, Friends of Edgewood Vice-President

We had over 60 attendees at our first-ever virtual General Meeting held Oct. 4. Filling in for Friends of Edgewood (FoE) president Peter Ingram, I talked about the ways the organization has adapted to the challenges of COVID-19, new and continuing habitat restoration efforts, and important programs like the Bloomin' Hikes and the Native Garden. Dr. Stuart Weiss from Creekside Science reported on some Green Grass initiatives and a new milkweed and monarch butterfly monitoring program.

We recognized this year's Edgewood Best Friend and a Habitat Hero. Often the Habitat Hero award is given at our June volunteer appreciation picnic. Because of COVID-19, we were not able to hold our summer event so we announced both honorees at the 2020 General Meeting in October.

If you missed the meeting, check out the presentations on YouTube at youtu.be/1EG5vGu9lrk.

Howie Smith Is 2020 Edgewood Best Friend



At our 2020 General Meeting in October, we recognized Howie Smith as this year's Best Friend of Edgewood County Park and Natural Preserve.

Howie has been an Edgewood supporter for over a decade. In that time, he has guided us with his extensive botanical knowledge and his land stewardship wisdom and foresight. He's made significant contributions to Edgewood's Green Grass initiatives and the fight against sudden oak death in the preserve. He is the driving force behind Edgewood's native garden, working there every week, tirelessly cultivating hundreds of plants from carefully collected native seeds and rescuing specimens from trail clearing, in addition to weeding, watering, and spreading yards and yards of wood chip mulch.

Howie has generously volunteered his time and expertise as a past Weed Warrior and helped establish Edgewood Farms with Perry McCarty. He is a graduate of the Edgewood Docent Class of 2009 and has since become an instructor, teaching future docents about what makes Edgewood special. In addition, Howie is a former two-term board member.

Howie's warmth, kindness, encouraging attitude, and wry good humor make him a very special Best Friend for 2020.

Caroline Bowker Is Edgewood Habitat Hero

Occasionally, we have a volunteer who deserves a special shout-out for going above and beyond the call of duty during the year. Caroline Bowker was recognized as a Habitat Hero at the General Meeting in October.

Caroline took docent training in the class of 2019. She was disappointed not to be able to lead hikes this first year after her graduation but has dedicated herself to being a steward of the preserve this year nonetheless. She stepped up to participate in the yellow star thistle campaign in the summer of 2019. She walked with Mary and Dennis Wilson almost every Friday from early 2019 until their retirement from the Bloomin' Hikes this spring. She is now part of the new weekly Wildflower Survey team working with Sandy Bernhard, Deanna Schiel, and Gina Barton. Caroline also walks in Edgewood on her own many times each week.

Entirely on her own initiative, Caroline has been collecting trash while she walks, with ever greater intensity as the makeup of park users has changed over the course of the pandemic. She even purchased her own trash picker so she can reach farther into the poison oak!

Caroline also is responsible for adding another mammal to the park's species list—the long-tailed weasel *(Mustela frenata)* which she spotted and photographed back in July. See the photo in the Fall 2020 issue of the Explorer.

Edgewood Is a Place to Take the Trail Most Traveled

Story and photos by Kathy Korbholz

Unlike the chosen path in the Robert Frost poem "The Road Not Taken," Edgewood is a place to take the trail most traveled. The sanctioned trails—those found on a printed map of Edgewood—are trails that have been created with an eye to habitat preservation. These sustainable trails minimize environmental impacts, are easy to travel, and reduce future trail operation and maintenance costs.

On the other hand, social or maverick trails are often the shortest distance between two points and disregard the habitat they are traversing. Perhaps you have noticed the recent proliferation of social trails in Edgewood. The coronavirus lockdown sent many people unfamiliar with Edgewood's special preserve status into the park. They were looking for a COVID-safe outing for their families and a way to de-stress, get exercise, and let the kids (large and small) burn off some cabin-fever energy. We believe social trails are worse than ever before due to the influx of new visitors this past spring and summer.

Not only do these social trails detract from Edgewood's beauty, they heighten trail maintenance issues, threaten Edgewood's habitats, and legitimize improper visitor behavior. A small team of dedicated volunteers, including Perry McCarty, Howie Smith, Ken Himes, Dee Himes, Bill Korbholz, and me, collaborated to remedy the damage. Two members of the County Parks staff, Stuart Smith and Rogelio Castaneda, also provided guidance and help in the field. Stuart has led both boy and girl Scout troops to rehabilitate some social trails.

The social trail team considered how and why social trails develop. The team hypothesized reasons:

- Get to a place not accessible by legal trail
- Shortcut to another trail or trail segment
- Mistake an animal trail for a legitimate trail
- Provide more challenging exercise
- Why not? (naïve visitors don't know it's not allowed)
- Avoid muddy trail segment

The team imagined three goals for a desired future state:

- Traffic on existing social trails significantly reduced or eliminated
- No new trails created
- Damaged habitat restored

Our team is in the process of:

- Surveying the preserve to map, assess, photograph, and document all social trails
- Rehabilitating damaged habitat by erecting branch barriers and covering highly compacted soil with thatch
- Erecting barriers where appropriate
- Creating innovative ways to educate visitors

We know this effort will be a multi-year project. Without help, the highly compacted soil along social trails does not recover even with plentiful rainfall. Careless humans created these social trails; it takes deliberate action to restore them.

What can you do? Take the trail most traveled. Avoid the temptation to take an illegal shortcut; give the habitat a chance to recover. "See you on the trails" now has an even more important meaning.

New social trail around a fence barrier meant to keep visitors off sensitive habitat.

Ugly shortcut between the Franciscan trail and the Old Stage Road.

Edgewood Plant List Refreshed

by Sandy Bernhard

Each year, Friends of Edgewood puts out a supplement with updates to Toni Corelli's seminal work, *Flowering Plants of Edgewood Preserve* (2nd ed., 2004). This season, after sharp eyes and minds discovered several new species in Edgewood and helped clarify a few uncertain IDs, we decided to do a more systematic review of the list. So, a team of Edgewood experts—Toni Corelli, Alf Fengler, Paul Heiple, Ken Hickman, Ken Himes, and John Rawlings, along with Christal Niederer and Dr. Stuart Weiss of Creekside Science—reviewed the list of over 550 taxa documented within Edgewood's boundaries. Their efforts yielded 16 additions, including 11 native plants, 8 deletions, multiple taxonomic updates, and several clarifications on the subspecies and varieties of plants found in Edgewood.

Among the native plants added to Edgewood's flora this year are three members of the sunflower family: white hawkweed (*Hieracium albiflorum*), discovered in woodlands by Alf Fengler; woolly fishhooks (*Ancistrocarphus filagineus*), discovered in serpentine chaparral by Paul Heiple; and California rayless fleabane (*Erigeron reductus* var. *angustatus*), documented in serpentine grasslands by Ken Hickman after a pointer from Ken Himes.

Fresh observations and keying also determined that in several cases Edgewood has two native species where we thought we had one. For example, as a result of the 2018 taxonomic revision of the genus Mimulus in the Jepson eFlora, which included splitting seep monkeyflower (*Mimulus guttatus*) into multiple species, we realized Edgewood has two of the species, small-leaved monkeyflower (*Erythranthe microphylla*) and seep monkeyflower (*Erythranthe guttata*).

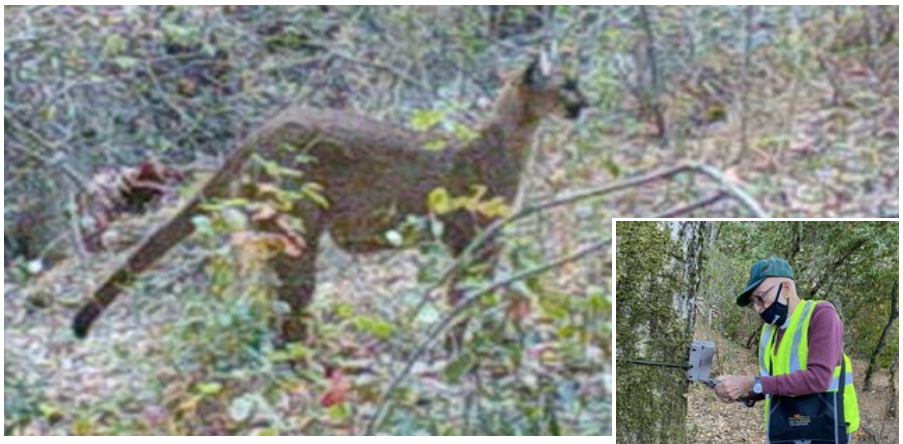
Small-leaved monkeyflower. Photo © Ken Hickman

Eight species from old, undocumented plant lists were deleted from the flora, including garland brodiaea (*Brodiaea coronaria*), which, after a taxonomic revision of the group, does not grow in the Santa Cruz Mountains. Plants for which we have good historical records, but are presumed extirpated from the preserve, were kept on the list with notes about their status. These plants include natives such as the rare Crystal Springs fountain thistle (*Cirsium fontinale* var. *fontinale*), last seen in the preserve in the 1980s, and non-natives such as fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*), once abundant in the preserve and now kept out by the vigilance of the Weed Warriors.

You can find the complete plant list of taxa at our new index (foew.org/plant-index) to the Friends of Edgewood Field Guide, thanks to the work of Sue Lindner, Gina Barton, and Susan Steade. See also the updated Edgewood preserve plant list (with the exception of some ornamentals) on PlantID.net, thanks to Bruce Homer-Smith. Thanks also to Ken Hickman for instigating this review and for help with this article. Several species await spring blooms for further investigation, but there's no doubt the diversity of species at Edgewood remains extraordinary with discoveries still to be made!

Camera "Traps" Mama Cougar

In October, Friends of Edgewood volunteer Ken Seydel collected images from a camera trap set deep off-trail back in July. It turned out to have some of our best images yet! This short compilation video (foew.org/mountain-lion) shows a young female cougar (Ken nicknamed her Mercury), her cub and other animals, visiting the site where she cached a deer kill. Mountain lion territory is increasingly impacted by humans; Edgewood provides critical habitat for big cats to live and continue their important role in the ecology of our area.



We need more volunteers to review and process camera trap photos and write stories about what we find. Learn more at foew.org/camera-trap-volunteers.

The March of the Coyote Brush

by Bruce Homer-Smith

Plant habitats are not stable at Edgewood. Over many years, plant colonies extend into areas previously held by other plants. There is a natural order to how these invasions happen, called succession. Although we can't watch the whole show, we can see succession in progress all around Edgewood.

Phase 1: Enter Coyote Brush

Coyote brush seeds. Photo © Wilde Legard CC BY-NC-SA 3.0

Each fall and winter Edgewood sees about one million coyote brush (*Baccharis pilularis*) seeds float easily through the air on their fluffy pappus. Their seeds are much lighter than grass seeds—only .0001 gram. A few will come to rest on bare ground, in full sun, on pliable dirt. A few weeks after the rains start, the tiny seeds germinate and immediately start growing roots and leaves. A healthy new plant can grow an 18-inch taproot in the first two months.

Coyote brush thrives in full sun, growing rapidly when it finds water and pausing when conditions get too dry. Once established, a coyote brush will not be overrun by grasses. Over time, as more coyote brush seedlings find bare soil exposed by chance erosion or other disturbance, coyote brush starts to impinge on grasslands.

Coyote brush. Photo © Toni Corelli CC BY-NC-SA 3.0

Phase 2: Coffeeberry and Other Shady Shrubs

Rabbits and other small mammals shelter under coyote brush, nibbling the plants under the shrub and creating bare ground. Birds land on the coyote brush and defecate undigested seeds. Some of the seeds, including coffeeberry, elderberry, and blue witch, grow nicely on the bare ground in the shade of the coyote brush.

Coffeeberry creating full shade. Photo by Bruce Homer-Smith

Once they grow up, coffeeberry and the other shrubs create a deeper shade which prevents new coyote brush seeds (which need full sun) from establishing new plants. The photo above shows an example. The photo is taken looking east on the Franciscan Trail. To the left of this scene are grasslands. In this picture coyote brush is starting to be replaced by coffeeberry. You can see oak woodlands higher up the hill.

Phase 3: A Possible Transition to Oak Woodlands

Sometimes, shrublands will transition to oak woodlands. If enough organic matter builds up and conditions are wet enough and cool enough for oak seedlings to thrive, they'll start growing and eventually create a new habitat.

The Edgewood Succession

The march of the coyote brush is not automatic. In Edgewood, serpentinite soils and sterile greywacke soils prevent coyote brush growth. Some places are too dry for coyote brush. Human interventions, such as grazing and mowing, have also changed the balance for a time.

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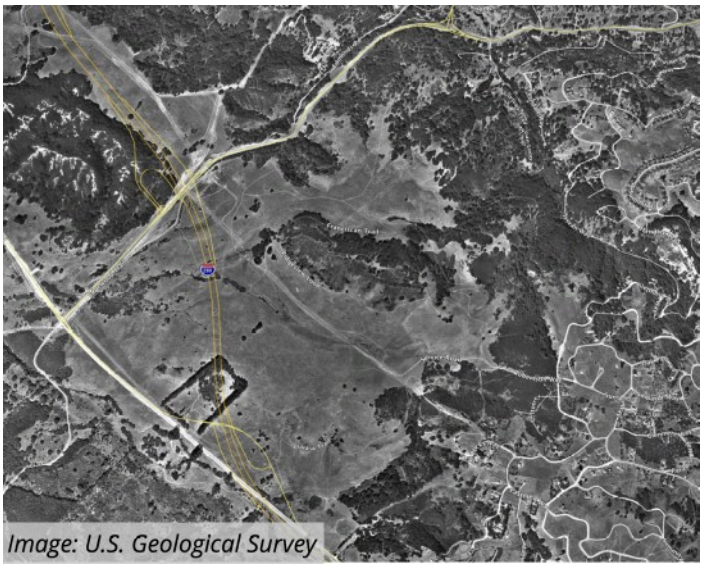

Image: U.S. Geological Survey

Photo © 2020 Google

Coyote Brush, *continued from page 5*

However, the mixed soils around the central ridge have allowed coyote brush growth, and in some of those places the succession has moved on to shrublands and oak woodlands.

Above is a photo from Google Earth of the area now covered by Edgewood Preserve, taken in 1948. At right is roughly the same area from a current Google Earth image.

You can see that the extent of coyote brush and oak woodlands on the ridge has expanded. We see that it is continuing to expand along the Franciscan Trail. There is also coyote brush expansion in damp spots. However, in the 72 years between these photographs, great swaths of Edgewood's grasslands remain intact.

Paul Heiple and Ken Hickman contributed to this article.

For more on coyote brush, see PlantID.net/?TaxonRpt=Baccharis+pilularis

Edgewood Farms, *continued from page 1*

flower, we are attempting to shorten this cycle. This year we obtained a permit and have collected bulbs, shown at left below. We'll let you know once we find out if this approach is successful at reducing how long it takes to start generating mariposa seeds at the farm.

We did not have much success with miniature lupine (*Lupinus bicolor*) or summer lupine (*Lupinus formosus*). The beds were not available for planting this year until Feb. 17, which may have been too late to start the lupine. We will get an earlier start this season and will find out if that results in greater success.

Seeds produced at Edgewood Farms are intended for use in restoration projects at Edgewood. We have obtained permits for the HMP (hydromechanical pulverization) and close-mowing restoration that will be performed following germination after this year's rains. Edgewood Farms seed will be used for "boutique" planting in the restoration plots. That aspect of the Green Grass restoration project is still being worked out, but we'll be sure to provide updates. Stay tuned!

San Mateo Thornmint Continues to Increase!

Story and photos by Christal Niederer, Creekside Science

You may remember the days when the only population of San Mateo thornmint (*Acanthomintha duttonii*) in the world was a diminishing plot in Edgewood. This tiny annual mint had declined to 249 individuals in 2008. The risk of extinction loomed large.

There have been ups and down since, but the last few years have seen major increases in this charming endangered species. In May 2020, there were ~43,000 plants occupying 540 square meters at six occurrences, the highest number and area since this project began in 2008. This is continuing the upward trajectory from 2019's ~25,000 plants occupying 479 square meters at six occurrences, 2018's 19,185 plants occupying 344 square meters at five occurrences, and 2017's 7,549 plants occupying 236 square meters at four occurrences. It is important to point out that this project began over a decade ago with modest gains. Long time frames can be needed to begin scaling up successes and making solid progress toward recovery goals. For the last two years, San Mateo thornmint can be found in the Pulgas Ridge watershed as well as in Edgewood, increasing the resiliency of the species.

Even with the long dry spell last winter, 2020 was a good year for thornmint at many of its seeding sites. A single square meter plot had more than 1000 plants, which is especially remarkable considering how sparse the plots were just over a decade ago. Habitat patches that have been treated with spring mowing are enlarging, making more spaces to fill with thornmint seeds when the rainy season begins. In addition to the experimentally-seeded plots, we are beginning to use more macroplots.

The purpose of the macroplots is to pilot methods of scaling up this recovery project as its successes increase. Instead of painstakingly measuring seeds, delineating plots, and censusing survivors, a larger area is marked, broadcast-seeded more haphazardly, and later sampled (not censused) for survivorship. This method is much less labor-intensive, and it appears to be worth continuing based on two years of success. It is also a good use of the large number of seeds being produced annually at the Creekside Science Conservation Nursery (~500,000 total over the last four years). We also plan to continue installing experimentally-seeded plots at Pulgas Ridge that will be censused and compared to references in Edgewood.

Macroplot

The newest site in Edgewood, so-called Harrier Hollow, performed better this year. In 2019 we nicknamed it Thornmint Swamp and hypothesized it might perform better in a drier year. This appeared to be true, and in general we're pleased to have a range of different seeding sites that trade off successes based on the year's weather.

We were lucky enough to be able to continue to work safely throughout the pandemic, with field work lending itself well to social distancing. Parasitic dodder (*Cuscuta* sp.) continues to be a concern throughout the sites in Edgewood, and a small team of socially-distanced, mask-wearing volunteers helped clear larger buffers of dodder from around the seeded sites. (Photo on page 9)

For the 2021 growing season, we anticipate another year of seeding at both Pulgas Ridge and Edgewood. Seeding at the Original site is not recommended, based on overall poor performance. Unfortunately, the high-performing Butterfly site appears to be fully occupied until dodder in adjacent areas can be controlled, but we have other areas just waiting for thornmint seed. Propagation will continue at the Creekside Science Conservation Nursery.

We are grateful for the support and assistance of Friends of Edgewood, San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, San Mateo County Parks and the San Mateo County Parks Foundation, Yerba Bioadvocacy, California Native Plant Society, California Dept. of Fish and Wildlife, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This is truly a community project!

Western bluebirds, left and center. Tree swallows, right and below. Photos by Whitney Mortimer

Nest Box Monitors Report High Yields in 2020 Season

by Frances Morse

Amazingly, we had a productive avian season in spite of all the pandemic chaos in the human realm. Our nest box monitoring had to be modified due to COVID-19. Getting to the nest boxes was interesting due to the frequent park closures, trail reconfigurations, and social distancing rules. Whitney Mortimer did solo checking on half of our boxes, and John Morse and I checked the other half. We had to turn away some newbie volunteers, unfortunately, because our training couldn't be done well with social distancing.

Whitney, John, and I checked our 27 boxes weekly from early March to mid July. Unlike the past few seasons, we had no weather extremes this season. Here are some of our findings.

2020 Nest Box Summary (27 Boxes)

Bird	Nests	Eggs	Hatched	Fledged/Yield
WEBL	12	60	47 (78%)	47 (78%)
TRES	6	26	18 (69%)	17 (65%)
ATFL	1	4	4 (100%)	4 (100 %)
CBCH	1	1	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
HOWR	1	0	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total	21	91	69 (76%)	68 (75%)

Overall, we had 21 nests and 91 eggs from several species of cavity-nesting birds, a fairly typical year for us. We had nests built by western bluebirds (WEBL), tree swallows (TRES), an ash-throated flycatcher (ATFL), a chestnut-backed chickadee (CBCH), and a house wren (HOWR). Thanks to our efforts, 68 new fledglings are now flying around Edgewood. These 68 newbies gave us a 75% yield, i.e., ¾ of our eggs made it to the fledgling stage. This was the second highest yield since I started keeping records in 2013.

Since western bluebirds were the focus of the initial nest box monitoring efforts, we always look at their results separately. There were 47 bluebird fledglings, which was a 78% yield for us. An added surprise was that all the hatched eggs fledged. This was a first for us. We don't know if it was due to good food, good parenting, or good genes.

As I usually do, I reported our findings to the California Bluebird Recovery Program (www.cbrp.org). We were lucky that we were able to monitor our boxes. Many of the nest box trails across the state were closed due to the pandemic, so monitors were unable to check those boxes. The statewide results for this year will be compromised.

We don't know what next spring will hold for our nest box monitoring program. If you are interested in potentially being involved with this fun and rewarding program, please contact info@friendsofedgewood.org.

I would like to give a final shout-out to Whitney Mortimer, my right-hand helper for five years. Whitney has moved to Sebastopol and won't be able to monitor next year. She is a Master Birder, an excellent data cruncher, and an incredible photographer. (See some of her photos in this newsletter.) I will miss her skills, humor, sense of adventure, and close friendship. Thank you, Whitney. You will be welcome any time next season you can make it down to Edgewood for a quick nest box check.

Finally, Whitney, John, and I hope visitors will encounter and enjoy some of the 68 new birds flying around Edgewood in spite of the pandemic.

Update to San Mateo County Parks Reopening Plan

by Peter Ingram and Laurie Alexander

Friends of Edgewood visitor programs continue to be impacted by the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. The board and program coordinators are evaluating evolving circumstances to understand when and how we can carry out programs, using best practices specific to Edgewood and our volunteers and following San Mateo County Parks guidelines.

In November, Nicholas Calderon, director of County Parks, said recent rises in San Mateo County case numbers and the likely trend into winter "has turned our prior tiered reopening plan on its head." The timetable for potential reopenings, especially of indoor facilities and programs, is slipping. The County's current approach is now much more of a case-by-case decision process across the entire parks system. The parks department is following guidance for reopening facilities from the California Dept. of Public Health, Cal OSHA, and the San Mateo County health officer. Director Calderon will work with friends groups to develop reopening plans.

While the Bill and Jean Lane Education Center remains closed and public programs, such as Wildflower Walks and Junior Explorer hikes, remain on hold, Friends of Edgewood's (FoE) individual and small group volunteer projects are going strong. FoE's volunteers are still carrying out our mission through restoration projects and education activities, thoughtfully working to keep all participants safe. See other articles in this issue of the Explorer for more about ongoing activities.

Socially-distanced and masked, FoE volunteers continue activities in Edgewood. Photo by Christal Niederer

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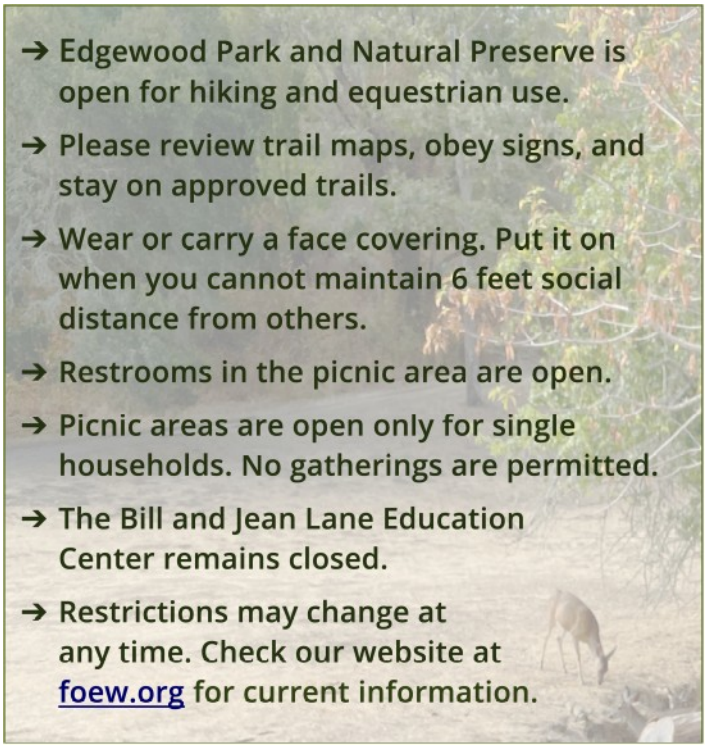

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