



CELEBRATE SUCCESSES, FOR THEY GIVE US THE FORTITUDE TO MOVE THROUGH CHALLENGING TIMES!

Dear Friends,

Standing at the top of a bluff overlooking Drake's Bay on a sparkly blue-sky morning last week, I was filled with joy and gratitude for the gifts this crazy old world offers. An otter frolicked in the freshwater lagoon, the first lone elephant seal of the season lazily flicked sand, and our guests at our spotting scope exclaimed at seeing a whiskery elephant seal face so clearly.

We all know conservation is an endless task. We protect and support the same land and water over and over and over, as threats and our own errors pile up. There are great days, when everything goes right and we make progress. This day we were with a group of supporters from the Rose Foundation for Communities and the Environment, one of our most supportive and inspiring funders. As Terence Carroll, our research director, related

some of our accomplishments at Drake's Beach, we talked about how we came to this work and how we accomplish so much with such a small staff and budget.

Like most major nonprofit efforts, it happens through working closely with staff, board, volunteers, advisory board, funders, other nonprofits, agencies, and people. That's how conservation works, and that is how our organization works. We're grateful and delighted to work with people like you. We hope you enjoy our end-of-year newsletter and are moved to support our work.

We wish you a very happy holiday, and a peaceful, healthy 2024.

Megan Isadore, Executive Director

RESEARCH: Discovering our Watershed



Photo by Everett Clark

This year it was all about the pelicans — river otter predation on pelicans, that is. Thanks to a small grant from the Point Reyes National Seashore Association’s Neubacher Fund, we accomplished field studies on river otter predation on brown pelicans at Abbott’s Lagoon. There is no available peer-reviewed documentation of river otter predation on brown pelicans, and we took the opportunity to begin to explore this apparently relatively-new and very local phenomenon. While it was a grisly task at times, counting, measuring, and photographing pelican carcasses, it was truly fascinating and offered insight not only into pelican behavior, but also into river otter reactions to having a new-ish species to prey on. Stay tuned for study results in 2024.

We’re also happy to report that we have completed our genetics/genomics study supported by the UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine’s Oiled Wildlife Care Network. The long road through COVID-caused lab delays, lab changes, and working with the notoriously difficult river otter samples has at last yielded results. We will keep you informed as we continue to analyze our new information.

What’s next for research? We’ll submit our results and prepare to publish in the next year or so. Meanwhile, we will continue monitoring river otter numbers, pup production, behavior, and prey habits throughout our coastal and inland sites in Marin County. Look for our 2023 monitoring report in the first quarter of next year.

OTTER AMBASSADORS: Supporting conservation at otter hotspots



Photo by Jerry Cross



Photo by Karen James

As river otter numbers increase around the SF Bay Area and beyond, we're taking advantage of their presence and popularity in urban and suburban hotspots to meet people and help them support conservation right in their neighborhoods. This year, we trained our first class of Otter Ambassadors, who educated approximately 800 people along the Contra Costa Canal about otters, good stewardship practices and how we can all support local conservation needs. During 2024, we are expanding this program to support Marin County.

Ambassadors in Action in Walnut Creek

Karen James, one of our ambassador team leaders, noticed a large amount of fishing line and lure, as well as other trash, at Heather Farm Park. She has rescued several birds from entanglement in fishing line at that site, and upon finding an otter entangled, Karen sprang into action. She collected a few volunteers and set up a rapid cleanup at the fishing pond. We see this as an opportunity for on-the-ground conservation work. We plan further action in 2024 in tandem with the Heather Farm Park administration. Stay tuned!

ADVOCACY: We are not helpless



Photo by Russ Sharpe

We continue to provide eyes on the watershed to support best management practices by all our partners, like the National Park Service, California State Parks, agencies, and others. One of our roles is to notice problems and use our on-the-ground research and understanding to support better management practices. We also provide comments and advice on governmental and non-governmental projects and policies that affect our shared watersheds.

Water Quality

A number of our long-term research sites, including at Drakes Bay, Drakes Estero, and Abbotts Lagoon, are in the vicinity or directly downstream of water quality testing sites, and as a result we have direct experience of conditions in those areas.

The Annual Water Quality Strategy Report submitted by NPS makes clear that water quality at Point Reyes National Seashore (PRNS) is appallingly bad, and that coastal resources continued to be degraded rather than protected to the maximum extent practicable. Ongoing discharges of pollutants threaten the integrity and biological productivity of Drakes Estero Marine Wilderness, the Point Reyes Headlands Area of Special Biological Significance, and the Point Reyes State Marine Reserve. Moreover, the report demonstrates that park visitors may be exposed in all seasons to *E. coli* at levels that are unsafe for humans. Please see [this advocacy letter](#) for details.

ADVOCACY (continued)

Asbestos Abatement

This year marked the removal of an old, rusted, asbestos-contaminated pipe that was broken above the newly-restored wetland at Drake's Beach. We were successful in our efforts to have the pipe removed, and are happy to have completed that task. Please see [this letter](#) for details.

Elk Management

River Otter Ecology Project commented on the new Tomales Point Area [Elk Management] Plan proposed by Point Reyes National Seashore Association (PRNS). We are concerned about the characterization of the purpose of the plan as only addressing impacts of drought on Tule elk confined within the Reserve, rather than the larger issue of management of the elk as a wildlife resource within PRNS. Please see [this letter](#) for details.

River Otter Attacks

An unusual advocacy opportunity came up when we heard about river otter attacks on humans at Serene Lakes, northwest of Lake Tahoe. Two extremely aggressive river otters attacked swimmers at the lakes, and the community is understandably worried and nervous about swimming or recreating in the lake. Otter attacks are rare, but can be both frightening and cause serious injuries.

Executive Director Megan Isadore offered her services to the California Fish and Wildlife Human Wildlife Conflict group to help problem-solve. We suggested ending fish stocking at the lake for at least a year, practicing a strict “keep away from the otters” policy, keeping dogs on leash around the lake and keeping watch on the otters from afar. Ideally, the otters will leave the area this winter. Their warning cries and aggressive behavior indicate fear and stress around humans. As we humans increase our population and continue to degrade and take over wildlife habitat, close encounters with semi-urban wildlife like river otters become more common.

EDUCATION: The future of the watershed



Summer Education Workshop. Teachers loved learning new methods of involving students in science learning.



A serendipitous teaching moment: Terence Carroll explains the pelican project to a group of UC Berkeley students out on a field trip with Dr. Ignacio Chapela.

We continue to meet and greet everyone, over zoom, in person, in classes, and while out and about doing our work.

This year we spoke to 2,500 people, including a group of Girl Scouts in Sebastopol who decided they would like ROEP to do a presentation for them in person. Megan met with the group over Zoom, so they could collect information to take back to their schools and see if they could persuade the administration to allow a presentation. We love that the girls are doing this part of the work themselves — learning to advocate for what they want, collect information and make their voices heard. Way to go, Girl Scouts!

Once again, we worked with 32 K-8 teachers to develop their ability to provide place-based, experiential science learning for their students. During our 3-day virtual and in-person workshop, we modeled the kind of learning that inspires and excites students... and teachers too. We spent our time using data as clues to understanding the mystery of relationships among processes and organisms that make up our natural world. We made models, illustrated with markers and stick figures, discussed, took field trips outdoors to learn camera trapping skills, watched and analyzed videos, and generally acted like the elementary school students we teach. One of our favorite things about teaching is acting as students ourselves.

volunteer!

Volunteers provide us with their attentive caring, endless hours of learning, teaching, and speaking up for otters, they're our eyes on the ground, and offer wise guidance. They push us to be better. They support us in every way they can, and some we never thought of ourselves. We thank our volunteers for all your good work!

You can volunteer for field work and/or Otter Ambassador work. Both positions involve training with yearly training updates.

We always seek great college interns for field-work, outreach, and surveying. Please see the Volunteer and Intern pages on our website to apply.



WELCOMING Christine Banzon

A new voice on our Board of Directors



“Serving as a River Otter Ecology Project Board Member has been one of the most invigorating experiences I’ve enjoyed this year. It’s truly an honor to get to be part of this community of passionate and engaged volunteers and leaders. And I relish the opportunity I have to contribute my professional skills from the corporate world in support of the ROEP vision and the natural world. I am so excited about the years to come and what we can and will accomplish together.”

Christine expressed interest in joining our group in April, and we didn't take long to snap her up for our Board. Her extensive marketing and social media experience were what first drew us. Once we began working with Christine, we've found that her ability to move directly to the heart of discussions about our direction and strategy is extremely helpful. Christine is an organizational, team, and long-term thinker. She's also a lot of fun to work with. We are privileged to have her aboard.

Please support us this year

This year has been tough due to the loss of the opportunity for our sailing fundraiser at the very last minute due to problems with the vessel. Many of you have responded with financial support, for which we are extremely grateful. Yet the loss is real, and our programming depends upon gifts we receive.

- 1 Give a [Ring of Bright Water Gift](#): sustain our work for 5 years
- 2 Give a [One-Time Gift](#)
- 3 [Adopt an Otter](#): Three adoption packages available. Choose one and gift your friends and relatives
- 4 Buy a logo cap: Donate \$35, note whether you wish the orange or green cap
- 5 Buy an otter car decal: Donate \$25 and we will send you your choice of the “Adorable baby otter” or “I’ve got teeth!” otter



For more information or to purchase otter swag (numbers 4 and 5 above) [send us an email](#).

David Ford: Patrick Mitchell Memorial Otter Spotter of the Year Award



For our first annual Otter Spotter of the Year award we chose [David Ford's beautiful videos](#) of very young otters out with their mother learning to swim, fish, and cavort. We don't often get videos of such tiny otters out and about, so David's videos are very special.

Patrick Mitchell passed during 2022, and his best friend Amiee wanted a positive way to remember this kindest of men who loved otters and people. We are privileged to offer the Otter Spotter award in Patrick's honor.



2023 FINANCIALS

INCOME

■ Grants 36%
 ■ Direct Contributions 39%
 ■ Contract Services 10%
 ■ Events 15%



EXPENSES

■ Programs 92%
 ■ Support Services 5%
 ■ Fundraising 3%



PROGRAM EXPENSES

■ Research 26%
 ■ Education 37%
 ■ Community Science 37%



2023 HONOR ROLL

Richard Abramson	Maryann Foley	Mallory Knapp	Rebecca Rishell
Sarah Allen	Maureen Forsy	Megan Knobloch	Pamela Rosenblum
Michael Amado	Janette Frank	Lori Kopacz	Betsy Sanville
Alan Anacheke-Naseman	Seth Frost	Daria Koshkina	Theodore Schulze
Anonymous	Clint Gamble	Mary Patricia Kramer	Matthew Scott
Robert Aston	Ann Marie Gibbs	Barbara Lancaster	Kathryn Shack
Juanita Baker	Mary Gleim	Lori Lawrence	Teri Shore
Christine Banzon	Janice Gonsalves	Matthew Leonard	Rodney Siegel
Pete & Lisa Barto	Paula Gorenstein	Susan Levenson	Liza Silver
Sally Beauford	Holly Groves	Abigail Levy	Sherrie Sinclair
Annamarie Beckel	Randall Hagen	Leslie Levy	Jane Smith & David DuVal
Ben Becker	Lynn Hajek	Yanan Li	Wendy Sparks & Jeff Torquemada
Niki Beecher	Janelle Hall	Helen Lindqvist	Heather Spillane
Paul Berensmeier	Colleen Haraden-Gorski	Julie Litwin	Todd Spina
Jessica Berman	Scott Harrington	Cynthia Lloyd	Al Springstead
Katherine Bermingham	Iris Hassing	David Loeb	Alice Stauffer
Wayne Best	Elaine Hattendorf	Jeff Loomans	Brenda Steger
Sagit Betser	Christine Hayamizu	Dave Mackenzie	Marlene & Martin Stein
Cat Bland	Garry Hayes	Petronila Esther Mandeno	Jake Strouf
Millicent Bogert	Eva Heninwolf	Lisa Mann	Paul Stucky
Kevin Bowen	Lori Hennessey	Arthur Manzi	Karl Swartz
Christopher Boyd & Margaret O'Brien	Ceci Herrmann	Elaine Mason	Dawn Tanner
Anthony Brewer	Denise Hill	Donald McIlraith	Cheryl Thomas
China Brotsky	Anastasia & Randall Hobbet	Lynette McLamb	Tig Tillinghast
Josephine Burns	Gabriel Hojman	Jerry Meral	Maureen Tracy
Eric Carlson	Gary & Karen Holm	Carrie Miller	Heidi & Charles Triay
Colin Carroll	Kristen Holmstrand	Akayla Miller	Tony Tyson
Karin Chase	Luke Hones	Jon Mires	Scott Ullman
Joanie Ciardelli	Heather Ilse	Bridger & Katherine Mitchell	Diane Valenti
Julie Clark	Janet Isadore-Barreca	Roxanne Moger	Donna Vannucci
Jim Compton	Crystal Jackson	Mia Monroe	Annette Varady
Kathy Coultrup	Julie Jacobs	Louisa Morris	Julia Verbanic
Sarah Cox	Karen James	Robert Morton	Mary Wade
Ann Cross	Peggy James	Flor Murray	E Walker
Barry & Barbara Deutsch	Dianne Jenett	Melissa Nelson	Shelby Watters
Annie Dolan-Niles	Arnold Joe	Peter Nelson	David Watts
John Dolinsek	Sue Johnson	Stacy Nii-Eastly	David & Idie Weinssoff
Barbara Dornan	Carol Johnston	Wayne Parker	Malcolm & Julie McDade Whyte
Ken Drexler	Katherine Jones	Kristine Patton	Patricia Williams
Sonya Dublin	Cindy Jordan	Kathryn Peisert	Peter Wilson
Ashley Eagle-Gibbs	Janice Kattke	Mary Perez	David Wimpfheimer
Michele Egan	Albert Kelly	Marilyn Petch	Kristin Womack
June Eidson	Mary Keydash	Carol Peterson	Donna Wooldridge
Joan Ellis	Sunni Killfoil	Amy Piper	Annabel Zammit
Ginny Fifield	MaryEllen King	Sarah Quan	
Dixie Finley	Joseph Guy Kinyon	Jacqueline Read	
	Kathy Klahn	Mathieu Reeves	

Join us by supporting our work to protect otters and our shared watersheds.

END OF YEAR THANKS

Business Supporters

Amazon Smile
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Wildlife Commission
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SW Fisheries Science Center

In-Kind Donors

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2023 Intern

Amanda Lipari Maxson,
Tufts University

River Otter Ecology Project

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[ROEP Website](#)



2023 Volunteers

Ganette Abaya
Robert Aston
Katie Ballinger
Christine Banzon
Peter Barto
Dave Berlin
Cynthia Briggs
Terence Carroll
Frank Cipriano
Brenden Collett-Grether
Robert De Leo
Barry Deutsch
Wendy Doherty
Mary Gleim
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Alexa Quintana
Kristy Snaith
Wendy Sparks
Jeff Torquemada
Scott Ullman
Frank Werblin

Advisory Board

Sarah Allen, PhD

Senior Scientist, Point Reyes
National Seashore (Retired)

Frank Cipriano, PhD

Research Associate, Center for
Comparative Genomics, and
Academy Fellow, California
Academy of Sciences

Nicole Duplaix, FLS, FRGS

Co-Chair, IUCN SSC Otter Specialist
Group, Senior Instructor Fisheries
& Wildlife Dept., Oregon State
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Professor of Wildlife Ecology,
Frostburg State University; North
American Coordinator for the Otter
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Business; Novelist

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Mary Ellen King

Secretary
Retired Development Professional

Megan Isadore

Executive Director
Board Member, Co-founder, ROEP,
Deputy Continental Coordinator, IUCN/
SSC Otter Specialist Group



Photo by Debbie Fier