

Wandering & Wondering

John Maybury



SPACIFICA

Karen Rosenstein likes that Pacifica has so many health, wellness, beauty, and fitness spas and salons. Now all we need is to discover the magical healing properties of Pacifica mud and water. Maybe that yellow foam on the beach has therapeutic value. Whaddya think, beach nuts?

BIRD BRAINS

Congratulations to Sequoia Audubon on the debut of its online San Mateo County Birding Guide, loaded with photographs, searchable maps, and clickable links for birders, hikers, and all nature-lovers. This new Web site incorporates decades of work on the San Francisco Peninsula Birdwatching book. Sequoia Audubon welcomes citizen-scientist additions and corrections to any of the information and pictures on the new site. You also can use the site to find out about the local Audubon chapter's events, field trips, and other news. (sequoia-audubon.org)

RAPTOR VS. MULLET

Back in the high-flying '80s, Scott McKellar and I drove limousines in San Francisco, whisking VIPs from the airport to down-

town hotels, restaurants, private clubs, and corporate suites. We vicariously experienced life in the fast lane, waiting around for our grand-poobah clients to finish their business or pleasure, and then we deposited them back at their first-class departure lounges at SFO. We made out all right, had a few adventures, had a little fun, made a little money, and hobnobbed with the rich and famous inasmuch as chauffeurs can do. We have stories we could tell, especially Scott, but we'll save those for another day. My mission here today is to pass along Scott's latest nature sighting. Nowadays, retired from the limo business, Scott wears The Black Apron for a well-known home improvement store and lives on a hill looking across Linda Mar Valley. He frequently sights deer, foxes, coyotes, owls, and other things that go "eek" in the night. Then, because he is not a computer guy, Scott pulls out his lined notebook paper and writes me a nature report or just calls me. I have begged him to get online, but it ain't gonna happen. He's a friend, so let's just say he's a bit set in his ways. Recently, Scott's neighbor John, who wears

what is left of his hair in a sort of Brian Wilson-style mullet on the back of his head, was out on his back deck admiring the view. All of a sudden he heard a whooshing sound and felt sharp knifelike pains in the back of his head and neck. All he saw was a large, winged shape flying away, clutching a bit of his scalp and hair in its talons. In excruciating pain, John managed to get to an emergency room and have his wounds stitched up. The doctors confirmed that he had been attacked by a raptor, probably a red-tailed hawk. They surmise that one of the big predators, a common sight circling in the thermals over Linda Mar and swooping down from treetops to capture rodents, had mistaken John's swatch of gray hair for a prey animal. Scott took pictures of John's wounds, but unfortunately his camera is a non-digital drugstore disposable, so we have no photographic evidence of the attack. You'll just have to take his word for it.

WHALE ALERT

Marine mammal officials warn kayakers, boaters and surfers to avoid a group of gray whales spotted less than a mile off the coast of Pacifica. People have been unintentionally hassling the giant sea creatures, leading to concern that the three adult whales and two calves may become separated or abandon their natural feeding ground, according to Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctu-

ary spokeswoman Mary Jane Schramm. Recently, a surfer paddled directly over where a whale was about to surface for air. Then, five kayaks "converged very closely" on a whale to "have a closer look," according to Schramm. "It doesn't look like intentional harassment with malice, but they are crowding the whales," she said. Coming into such close range of a gray whale can be extremely dangerous to both the person and the whale, she said. "People approaching these whales may think they don't have any real impact on them if they just do it once or a couple times," Schramm said. "But there could be a cumulative impact of a number of people doing this, which might cause the animals to abandon this particular little feeding ground," she added. Gray whales are not on the endangered species list, but in 1999 and 2000 the gray whale population — then about 26,600 whales — dropped by about a third likely due to malnutrition, according to Schramm. Schramm said if people want to watch the whales, they should take a designated whale-watching trip or watch with binoculars from a high point along the coast. It is illegal, she said, for a person to come within 300 feet of a gray whale under federal law. The Marine Mammal Protection Act also states that anyone who harasses or disturbs a gray whale could face civil or criminal charges. "We feel people do not

mean to harm them, but they may inadvertently do so," Schramm said. "These animals need our protection and our respect. We need to learn how to share the road with the whales." (from a CBS/BCN news item forwarded by Alyssa Byrd)

NIGHT OWLS RULE

"A study has found that people who sleep in tend to be cleverer and richer than morning larks. And it adds to growing evidence that it is night owls that rule the roost. Previous studies have found that those who rise later tend to be both cleverer and richer than early birds. For the latest study, scientists pitted morning larks against night owls in a task designed to measure their reaction and attention times. During the experiment, the volunteers got up and went to bed at their usual times, with the larks tending to turn in four hours earlier than the owls. Both did similarly well at the task shortly after getting up. But ten hours into their day, it was the night owls that shone, being both quicker and more alert at the task, the journal Science reports. Despite being awake for the same length of time, the larks felt sleepier, with scans showing that the parts of their brains linked to attention were less active. Previous studies have shown that getting up late appears to be in our DNA, with our body clock regulated by a series of genes which determine whether we are larks or owls. Other studies have de-

bunked the popular saying 'early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise'. Famous night owls include Charles Darwin, Adolf Hitler and Winston Churchill, who regularly went to bed at 4 a.m. and rose late. Due to his sleeping patterns, he often hosted War Cabinet meetings in his bath. It is thought that the division into larks and owls has its roots in evolution, with early risers in the Stone Age taking the initiative in food gathering, while owls stood guard late into the night. Those who fell into neither category could sleep safely in the knowledge that their needs were being taken care of. When humans moved towards tending animals and harvesting crops, larks came in demand for the early starts, while owls started to be thought of as less industrious." (Fiona MacRae, Daily Mail, April 24)

SWAMI SEZ

"The French navy's motto: A l'eau, c'est l'heure." (Mike Appleby, Edingburgh, U.K., in the Guardian, London) [Hint: Don't translate, just sound it out.]

SITSEER

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