



Winter is Here!

Happy Solstice! This time of year is special in the natural world, as we experience our shortest days and longest nights and many plants and animals are in their over-wintering mode. For the wetlands, winter brings much needed rain, and along with it some decidedly UN-needed trash and debris! In this season of gift giving, we hope you will consider the gift of a clean environment by reducing trash, recycling, and walking or biking instead of driving. Let's all give a gift that keeps on giving for a cleaner, healthier watershed, wetlands, and Bay.



What's New on the Wetlands

Burrowing Owls on the Move

For the past two years, our October site-wide bird surveys have detected a migrant burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*), one per year. Numbers of this species have been decimated in coastal California, and large populations persist only in the Imperial Valley and the southern San Joaquin Valley, where they are associated with agricultural canals. It is probable that the proliferation of the introduced red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) and non-native invasive plant species contributed to the decline of burrowing owl populations.

Up until the mid-1980s, a small population was resident along Ballona Creek as well as in the area now occupied by Playa Vista, but no nesting has been documented since. In October 2010, one owl was seen at a California ground-squirrel burrow along the road that leads south from the intersection of Jefferson and Culver Boulevards. to the Southern California Gas Company facility at the base of the Westchester Bluffs within the Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve. The bird didn't stay in the area for long, but the habitat looked ideal. This fall, a

burrowing owl was flushed from a small pile of cement rubble in "Area C" of the Reserve just north of Culver Boulevard. (photo at right).

While restoration of the wetlands will focus on improving the conditions for tidal marsh species, planned removal of exotic vegetation such as pampas grass and acacia will likely enhance habitat for the burrowing owl as well, since it uses drier areas of saltmarshes for foraging, roosting and even nesting. With restoration of the Ballona Wetlands we are hopeful that the burrowing owl will return regularly to winter and may even choose to nest in the restored wetlands in the future.

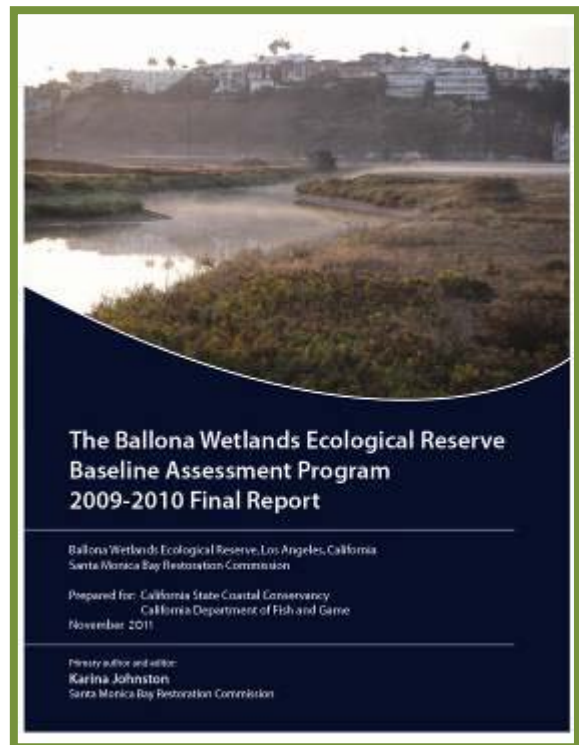


Photo: Burrowing Owl, Area C, 21 Oct. 2011 – Dan Cooper

The ‘Baseline Assessment Program: 2009-2010 Report’ is Complete!

After hundreds of survey days and thousands of hours spent in the field, laboratory, and working with data, the first fully comprehensive report on the flora and fauna of the Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve (BWER) is available. In September 2010, the SMBRC completed the first year of surveys at the BWER. The surveys were developed in partnership with the California Department of Fish and Game and the California State Coastal Conservancy to assess the condition of the BWER and inform the state’s wetland restoration planning. We would like to thank all of the staff, students, and wetland scientists throughout the region who contributed long hours to the development and implementation of this exciting program.

This report is divided into twelve chapters, one for each of the 11 monitoring components (i.e. water quality, marine sediments, terrestrial soils, vegetation, ichthyofauna, herpetofauna, mammals, avifauna, benthic invertebrates, terrestrial invertebrates, and physical characteristics), and one for the introduction. Each chapter includes the goals of the assessment program for that component of the study, summaries of previous studies of the BWER, detailed methods used in the Baseline Assessment Program surveys, and results. Chapters are available for



individual download (pdf), or together as the full Baseline Report (pdf) on our website: www.ballonarestoration.org.

This report is available for free electronic download. You must have Adobe Acrobat Reader to view the downloaded files. Click [here](#) to get the free Adobe Acrobat Reader.

The full report can be found here:

<http://www.santamonicabay.org/smbay/ProgramsProjects/HabitatRestorationProject/BaselineAssessmentReport/tabid/203/Default.aspx>

Or you can go to our website: www.ballonarestoration.org, and click on “Project Documents”.

What's New in the Watershed

What the Rain Brings

In addition to the holidays and overwintering shorebirds, winter means that the full force of the stormwater season is upon us. The increase in rainfall during the wet season brings with it several impacts to our coastal habitats, namely pollutants in the runoff flows and an increase in stormwater driven trash.

There are significant efforts being taken by the SMBRC, as well as our partner organizations, to clean up both of these important issues throughout the watershed, including the implementation of rain gardens, trash catches, and BMPs. However, stormwater driven anthropogenic impacts continue to affect the Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve, Ballona Creek, the surrounding habitats, and the Santa Monica Bay. For results from the first year stormwater surveys assessing the trace metal pollutants in the BWER, please download the water quality chapter of the Baseline Assessment Program: 2009-2010 Report.



Styrofoam containers, plastics, and even very small pieces of trash have been present in large amounts this year along the Creek. In this season of giving, we encourage everyone to help by keeping track of your trash and recycling, and participating in cleanup efforts throughout your watershed.

Save the Date for the 2012 Southern California Urban Wetland Research Symposium!

Please join us for a scientific symposium that will highlight monitoring at the Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve and research at wetlands throughout southern California. Featured keynote speaker Dr. Joy Zedler will present along with wetland scientists from throughout California. This event is cohosted by the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission, Loyola Marymount University, and the Center for Urban Resilience and Ecological Solutions. Registration begins January 2012 and is open to the public.

Keynote Speaker: Dr. Joy Zedler

When: Monday, March 12th, 2012 - 8:00am-6:00pm

Where: Loyola Marymount University

Registration: \$20, Opens January 2012. To register please go to <http://www.ballonarestoration.org>

Ballona Creek Watershed Task Force Update

On Tuesday, November 15, 2011, the Ballona Creek Watershed Task Force held its regular bi-monthly meeting to discuss current programs, projects and activities throughout the Ballona Creek Watershed and Wetlands. During the meeting a number of presentations were made, including:

- Presentation on the Culver City Rain Gardens – Mark Abramson; SMBRC
- Presentation on the Park 2 Playa Project – Ana Petrlc; MRCA
- Presentation on Surfrider Foundation's Ocean Friendly Gardens Program – Paul Herzog; Surfrider Foundation

Our wetlands team will continue to attend task force meetings to provide updates on the monitoring program and restoration planning. The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, January 17 at its new time from 10:00 am-Noon in the Dan Patacchia Room, Culver City Hall. If you have questions regarding the task force or wish to be added to the aemail list for future meetings and agendas, please contact Diana Hurlbert (dhurlbert@santamonicabay.org).

Wetlands in the News

Carlsbad Area Lagoon Undergoing Habitat Restoration and Maintenance

October 18, 2011: Carlsbad area residents will see some increased activity at Batiquitos Lagoon this fall. The Department of Fish and Game (DFG) will be commencing a maintenance dredging operation at the Ecological Reserve beginning in November.

The 542 acres of vast eelgrass beds, mudflats and both salt and freshwater marsh habitats support many fish and avian species that inhabit the area. The land is jointly owned by DFG and the State Lands Commission and both have the responsibility for conservation and preservation of the resources in the lagoon. The State Lands Commission is partnering with DFG to provide contracting assistance to ensure the project is completed on time and within budget.

The project will remove 118,000 cubic yards of beach-quality sand that has been drawn in from the ocean at the mouth, accumulating to form a shoal in the central basin (between I-5 and the railroad tracks) that hinders the flow of incoming and outgoing tides. During this fall's operation, the dredged sand from within the central basin will be pumped onto South Ponto Beach to the south of the lagoon inlet, where it will provide habitat for grunion and shorebirds and enhance the recreational experience for beachgoers.



Regular dredging and maintenance is needed in the basin to maintain the valuable and pristine habitat for the species that live there. This area has been dredged several times since 1995. The Port of Los Angeles provided maintenance funding to DFG to manage and protect the habitat.

DFG will address erosion concerns in the western basin during a later phase of the project. Two nesting areas for California least terns (*Sternula antillarum browni*) and western snowy plovers (*Charadrius alexandrinus nivosus*) were created in the western basin during the original restoration project. Unprotected edges of these sites have experienced ongoing erosion, resulting in loss of nesting habitat and steep, unstable slopes. Bulldozers will be used to push sand from the basin to reestablish these areas and improve shoreline habitat while enhancing open water for plover and tern foraging.

Andrew Hughan, DFG Communications, (916) 322-8944
Warren Wong, DFG Lands Program, (858) 467-4249

Upcoming Events & Activities

Farmers' Markets

- Playa Vista Farmers' Market: 2nd Saturday of every month
- Westchester Farmers' Market: varies (check social media)
- Mar Vista Farmers' Market: varies (check social media)

For further information on events, volunteer opportunities, or docent training sessions email Elena Tuttle at etuttle@santamonicabay.org or call (310) 417-3962.

Local Events

January 8, Sunday – Friends of Ballona Wetlands will host a salt marsh and dunes tour of the Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve. The tour leaves from the Department of Fish and Game parking lot the Behind Gordon's Market at 303 Culver Blvd. in Playa del Rey. For more information see the Friends website (www.ballonafriends.org) or call 310-306-5994.

January 14, Saturday – Friends of Ballona Wetlands will host a freshwater marsh tour near the Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve. The tour leaves from the southwest side of Jefferson Blvd. immediately west of Lincoln Blvd. For more information see the Friends website (www.ballonafriends.org) or call 310-306-5994.

January 21, Saturday – Ballona Creek Renaissance (BCR) will be hosting a Ballona Creek Cleanup along the Creek at the Centinela Avenue bike path entrance. See the BCR home page (www.ballonacreek.org) for details, a flier, and waivers.

January 28, Saturday - Friends of Ballona Wetlands will host a habitat restoration on the Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve. Volunteers for the restoration should meet at the Department of Fish and Game parking lot the Behind Gordon's Market at 303 Culver Blvd. in Playa del Rey. For more information see the Friends website (www.ballonafriends.org) or call 310-306-5994.



Get Involved

Share Your Photos of the Ballona Wetlands

We're always in search of fantastic photographs of the wetlands and its plants and animals to be used on the Ballona Wetlands Restoration Project's website and in our materials. If you have photos, we'd love to see them! Contact Karina Johnston (kjohnston@santamonicabay.org) to learn how you can help inform and inspire the public through the beauty of your photos. To view past photo winners, visit the "Get Involved" link at our homepage www.ballonarestoration.org.

Help Educate the Public about the Ballona Wetlands

Interested in learning more about the Ballona Wetlands and helping to inform the public about this valuable ecosystem? Contact the California Department of Fish and Game's Volunteer Program (<http://www.dfg.ca.gov/volunteer/>) for how to get involved. Also, visit the Ballona Wetlands Restoration Project's partner page at <http://www.ballonarestoration.org/> for a list of additional organizations and agencies working on related issues.



Stay Connected

Fanatical about Facebook? Tickled with Twitter? Join the Ballona Wetlands Restoration Project on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Flickr to stay informed and up-to-date on the exciting phases of the Ballona Wetlands Restoration Project.

Follow the Ballona Wetlands Restoration Project on:



What is the Ballona Wetlands Restoration Project?

Stretching from Playa del Rey to Venice, the Ballona Wetlands once occupied a 2,000-acre expanse of critical coastal habitat. Currently covering an area of 600 acres, the Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve is the largest and most promising opportunity for coastal wetland restoration in Los Angeles County.

The Ballona Wetlands Restoration Project is a long-term, science-based plan to return the Ballona Wetlands into a thriving ecological reserve. By healing this highly degraded site, the restoration project will create a diverse, resilient and dynamic ecosystem while providing a unique opportunity for the community to reconnect with southern California's natural heritage.

