
THE CALIFORNIA ACORN REPORT

Making Acorn Counting Great Again since 1980

Volume 26

The Official Newsletter of the California Acorn Survey
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*Treulich geführt ziehet dahin
wo euch der Segen der Liebe bewahr
Siegreicher Mut, Minnegewinn
eint euch in Treue zum seligsten Paar
Streiter der Tugend, schreite voran
Zierde der Jugend, schreite voran*

Wo ist das? Let's try it in English:

*Faithfully guided, draw near
to where the blessing of love shall preserve you!
Triumphant courage, the reward of love,
joins you in faith as the happiest of couples!
Champion of virtue, proceed!
Jewel of youth, proceed!
Flee now the splendor of the wedding feast,
may the delights of the heart be yours!*

In case that *still* doesn't look familiar, perhaps the more traditional words will hit a nerve:

*Here comes the bride
All fat and wide
Where is the groom?
He's in the living room
Why is he there?
He lost his underwear*

Ignoring how Wagner is handling all this, the *California Acorn Report* wishes the best to the happy couples who tied the knot (as opposed to being tied up in knots, like the rest of us) in honor of this, the 42nd anniversary of the *California Acorn Survey*.

Starting with our favorite daughter Phoebe and her beau Benjamin, we note that the wedding was NOT at Rancho Searcho-no-moro (we're keeping our fingers crossed for the next one), but on the shores of Seneca Lake in upstate New York. This did, however, allow us to have lunch at Dinosaur Barbeque in Syracuse (love those grilled *Stegasauri*), revisit a few of Ithaca's gorgeous gorges, and see our friends Barbara & Chuck, Steve & Natalia, Jim & Ann, and Phoebe's new parents-in-law Chris & Susan. And maybe more, but I drank too much champagne to remember. Congratulations and take the rest of the day off!



Here she is! The Phoebster herself, showing off her home-baked wedding cake on Sept. 3rd at Smith Memorial Park, a nice place except for the strange fishermen infesting the place. Phoebe is currently in the midst of grad work in Entomology at Cornell, where she studies (what else?) ants that live in acorns in an attempt to

avoid being kidnapped by other ants that live in acorns. Be careful; the forest may look tranquil, but it's an ant-enslaving-ant world out there.

Here's the happy couple awaiting the magical moment in the forest as Benjamin starts to wonder whether it was a good idea to have his future father-in-law hire the harmonium player after all.





We were also joined by none other than (one of) our favorite sons Dale, whom we hadn't seen in 2 ½ years (thanks a LOT, Covid!). Dale came over from Tokyo and accompanied us to the wedding

before flying back for a traditional Japanese Acorn dance festival in Okinawa. Here are both our FIs practicing satanic millennial hand signals at Liddell Field Station on a rare sunny Ithaca day.

Phoebe was not the only one to get married in honor of this year's *California Acorn Survey*; also on deck was Rob, son of long-time subscribers Louise and Brad ("H"), formerly of tugboat UC campus Davis, now at also-ran UC campus UCLA. I never saw the putative bride, so I can't confirm that such a person exists, but it was great that they seemed to think so and even greater that they stayed with us during the event.

To all the couples out there, including (here) Louise & H, posing on the front patio of Rancho Searcho-no-moro



with Rob the morning of Rob's wedding, I offer advice from a pair of famous philosophers (Bill & Ted, of the Excellent Adventure) based on my own 35-year marriage to Jannie Lou of the Ravishing White Hair: "Be excellent to each other, and party on, dudes."



Yet a third wedding since last year was that of our canuck friends Marty and Andy's daughter Claire, here on her big day last October with her big sister Laura in the big city of Halifax. Sorry we didn't make it there this year, even if it was all your fault.

NON-NUPTIAL EVENTS

At least two other expeditions warrant mentioning. Jannie Lou missed Rob because she was on an Irish music tour with her sister Sandy, a trip that had been put off, along with the rest of our lives, back in 2020 (thanks AGAIN, Covid!). I joined her afterwards in Counties Clare and Donegal, spending much of my time hiking, listening to music, and birding, including a lovely afternoon at the Cliffs of Moher which, I have to say, are indeed worth the trip. They may not be as famous as the Escarpment of Acorns in Kyrgyzstan, but they're still amazing.

Among the many adventures Jannie Lou of the Ravishing White Hair had in Ireland was the discovery of Guinness stout, here complete with a somewhat scary "stoutie" at the Rusty Mackerel in Carrick, County Donegal, on June 24th. Sláinte!



Another notable trip was to San Diego and Tecate, first to visit our old friend Judy Gradwohl, and then to see the beginnings of CAS Founding Members Bill and Karen's casita, which they continue to imagine is being built at Rancho La Puerta.



Jannie Lou and Judy, both with ravishing hair and picture postcard perfect, in Old Town San Diego on April 10th. Judy goes back to my grad school days at Berkeley, where she worked on antwrens in Panama along with Russ Greenberg before moving to D.C. We hadn't seen her since she moved back to California in 2016, where she is now no less than the Grand Poobah of the San Diego Natural History Museum. Go Judy! We are not, nor have we ever been, worthy!

Speaking of Judy, it's from her that I first heard about the Pageant of the Masters, the annual festival in Laguna Beach where they recreate famous works of art lifesize with real people. It was the most bizarre and



unique event I've ever been to, and that includes the 3D Destiny Lounge at Burning Man in 2018. Go; it's a hoot.

You can't photograph the performance, but here's one of the sets that was part of the "Portraits of one-eared artists" act of this year's Pageant.



One other trip that bears mentioning was up to Berkeley on May 7th for my old boss Dave Wake's wake. I owe a great debt to Dave, along with my other bosses over the years, for never blinking at my obsession with acorn counting. That includes Jim Patton, here with his own ravishing white-haired spouse Carol, at whose home in the Bay Area I crashed countless times during my decades at Hastings after spending the day smoking acorns on Telegraph Avenue. Dave's wake gave me a long overdue chance to thank them by taking them out to dinner while once again sleeping in Jim's man cave off their garage.



Of course, many of our most memorable moments were right here in upper Carmel Valley with friends and colleagues who came to celebrate the forthcoming acorn-counting season. Above, Bruce Lyon, who, besides being a fellow behavioral ecologist, is an excellent photographer and kind enough to let us use his photos whenever we need one doesn't look like it was taken by a drunken acornologist (that would be me). He's also a fellow Dr. Pepper fan. Here we are at Hastings on his visit from Santa Cruz on May 10th while one of the sketchier ACWO field assistants lurks in the background.



Finally, a nod to my weekly birding companion Edward Rooks, here at Fremont Peak in May illustrating how much he loves the California Acorn Report. Edward's a fabulous naturalist and continues to do a great job of forcing me to pay attention to something other than acorns and acorn woodpeckers on our birding trips.

THE HASTINGS UPDATE

Hastings hosts the editorial offices of the *California Acorn Survey*, thanks to Jen Hunter, the reserve's energetic Director who continues to remain sane despite the best attempts of the UC Berkeley bureaucracy. Also still at Hastings (at least part of the year) are Eric Walters, running the Acorn Woodpecker project mostly from Norfolk, Virginia; various ACWO people doing the actual field work including Spencer, Angela, and Mya; and a bunch of classes, most of which I respectfully ignore. Thanks to all of you who still work for a living; after all, somebody has to.

Two developments of note: first, the road up the lane got (re)paved after having fallen into disrepair over the past 20+ years. I and my bicycle riding are particularly grateful, as I haven't had a single flat tire since the paving was done in March.

Second, for all of you who have fond memories of Hastings and have found yourselves with too much cash holding you back, we'd like to announce the new **Tom and Fanny Hastings Arnold Endowment**, set up by two generous non-anonymous donors, to support Hastings in its quest to remain indefinitely solvent. Donate \$10K or more and we'll add you to the queue to be taken off the *California Acorn Report* mailing list. (Admit it; it's a tempting offer, isn't it?) Drop a note to Jen (jshunter@berkeley.edu); she'll be happy to point you in the right direction.



Hastings was graced this year with a visit from former Special Master Mark Stromberg, here with spouse Barb enjoying the recently paved lane with Reserve Stewart Jaime and Director Jen in front of the Stromberg's new house on May 5th. Sure, Mark, I'll be happy to take you off the CAR mailing list (for one year, anyway), as soon as you donate the \$499 totally nominal processing fee to Hastings. (Yes; it used to be only \$99, but hey—between inflation and supply chain issues, prices have gone up.)

ACORNS AT LAST?

We're getting close. One of the notable warmups for this year's count was an NCEAS working group on masting behavior, which provided me with an excuse to spend several days in Santa Barbara. The group also provided an interesting contrast with the first such group back in 2000. Yes, the world has changed in the past 20 years.



Above: the 1st NCEAS masting working group from 2000-2001, including Dave Kelly (the wild-eyed New Zealander in the front with the Australian magpie t-shirt); Victoria Sork (to the right of Dave); Sandy Liebhold (in the far back on the right); and several others, all of whom were nice except for the weird Ruskie dude in the back who kept ranting about trying to start a long-term study of acorn production in Crimea.

Here's the more recent NCEAS working group (hi everyone!), which includes a comparable group of colorful and fun mast-fruiting enthusiasts, including CAS member Ian Pearse (3rd from the left in back); Jalene LaMontagne (in the center with sunglasses); Elizabeth Crone (in front on the right; Elizabeth and I were together in Japan for the record-breaking Tsunami season of 2011); my NCEAS birding buddy Diana Macias (in the far back in the middle); and—there's always one—the weird Ruskie dude again. A free, 1-year subscription to the California Acorn Report for anyone who can detect a notable difference between the two groups.



ACORNS AT LAST?

As for the crop itself, it's an interesting acorn year. Of course, *every* year is an interesting acorn year. (As they say: if there ever happened to be an acorn year that wasn't interesting, that would be *very* interesting.) It started off on Aug. 26th when Ian flew in from Fort Collins to count acorns on the isolated valley oaks around Davis. Two notable things about the Davis count: first was the flock of 30+ Swainson's Hawks that were aggregated in an empty field along Road 101 in Woodland, and second, in case you're looking for the current hot crop in the southern Sacramento Valley, the answer is: pistachios. At the rate they're being planted, I expect to see pistachio oil and pistachio shampoo showing up in your local market any day.

After getting back from Phoebe's wedding, the count resumed forthwith! This year, with Jean still stuck in Suzhou, China, where as far as anyone can tell he spends all his time being tested for covid, it was once again left up to long-time counter and CAS founder Bill Carmen to accompany me.



Ian walking back from counting acorns at one of our less gregarious valley oaks on Aug. 26th. This was the 9th year of this project, which asks whether acorn production by trees growing by themselves is reduced, presumably because of

pollen limitation. Let us know what you think the answer is by Nov. 8th: remember, every vote counts!

As always, Bill was great fun to do the survey with. We started by doing our two tanoak sites (Chews Ridge and Santa Cruz) on the way up to Jasper Ridge, but wait! It's already noonish, and where better to stop and have lunch than the Alpine Inn in Portola Valley? And who better to meet there than Robert (alumnus from the '20 pandemic survey) and Tania? A great start to a stellar survey.



Bill, Tania, Robert, et moi at the Alpine Inn ("Zott's") on Sept. 9th. The Alpine Inn dates to 1852, making it the 2nd oldest continuously operating tavern in the state. (The oldest claims to be the Iron Door Saloon in Groveland in the Sierra Foothills, but I'm convinced the vote was rigged. Stop the Steal!)

We eventually stumbled out of Zott's and made it the rest of the way to Jasper Ridge, where it's year 34 there, in case you've been keeping track. We then continued on to Bill's house in Mill Valley to rest up for the bulk of the survey.

Like last year, we spent most of our nights camping, providing excellent opportunities for what's become the primary goal of the CAS: checking out swimming holes.



Bill, floating in Mill Creek next to our site at Tower House on Sept. 10th, decompressing after another hard-scrabble day counting acorns. It's a tough life, but somebody has to do it.

One occasionally comes across pretty gnarly stuff while hanging around those swimming holes. Here, for example, at Dye Creek on Sept. 11th, we witnessed some sort of undescribed (and indescribably hideous) amphibian crawling onto land for the first time. Gross! Is there any way to unsee it?



The statewide count went through Sept. 17th and included camping near Whiskeytown, along the Yuba River at Sierra Foothills Research and Extension Center, at South Fork Campground in Sequoia National Park, at Palomar Mountain State Park, and at Malibu Creek State Park. They were all great. And for the other nights we once again imposed on Brad & Louise in LA and Kathryn Purcell & Ken in Coarsegold. Many thanks and keep those G & T's coming!



In between swimming holes, we squeezed in a bit of acorn counting. Here's Bill showing off what was an especially large, but strange looking, crop of blue oak acorns at Sedgwick Reserve.

Speaking of Kathryn Purcell, here she is in her fabulous hay bale house catching up on old California Acorn Reports. It's definitely one way to butter up the Editor and get a nice photo of yourself in the CAR.



For the Hastings survey itself we had help from ACWO crew member Angela Brierly, who kindly acted as official timer and data recorder. Here she proudly shows off her official California Acorn Survey clipboard at the new, disimproved Red Houses Sept. 27th.



After we finished with Hastings, there was but one more site: the black oaks on Liebre Mountain. Despite our National Forest contact Vilius's best attempts, this site was inaccessible by car due to the tropical storm on Sept. 9th that washed away a good chunk of SoCal. This was not the first time this site had been a problem, but it was the first time I bothered to look on a map and notice that there was a trail short enough to be a potential alternative route to our site. On the way to NCEAS in Santa Barbara on Oct. 2nd I checked it out, and yes! It involves a 1200' climb, but the hike from our valley/blue oak Sandberg site to our black oaks is only 45 min, proving that we can get there any year the National Forest isn't closed altogether. (And, with Vilius's blessing, maybe even then.) Woohoo!

So; do we want to hear about the acorn crop itself? OK; why not? It was, as I've already mentioned, interesting. Take valley oaks. All in all, it was a mediocre year (mean acorns counted per 30 s = 11.1, compared to 16.5 in 2021 and 21.2 in 2020), but numbers ranged from a very strong 33.7 acorns/tree at Malibu Creek State Park in the Santa Monicas to a pathetic 0.25 acorns/tree on Liebre Mountain, only 42 miles away as the acorn flies. Similarly, for blue oaks, numbers ranged from a spectacular 55.9 acorns/tree at Sedgwick in Santa Barbara County to a measly 0.15 acorns/tree, again at Liebre Mountain, 76 miles away. In other words, it was highly variable from site to site.



Like acorn years, all acorn sites on the CAS are interesting. One of the more bizarre is along the south fork of the Kaweah River, where we do

canyon live oaks along the river near the border of Sequoia National Park. The road has long turned to dirt by that point and becomes nearly impassable by the time one gets to the park. Nonetheless, the county (?) recently rebuilt the one-lane bridge over the river with a beautiful concrete structure, complete with artistic mosaics at the corners, such as this one of My Friend the Acorn Woodpecker. We certainly appreciate the new bridge, as do the tens, maybe even dozens, of other people who drive over it every year.



One other notable aspect of this year's survey, which you can't see if you look very carefully at this photo of Bill not pointing at them. Anybody? Anybody? That's right! No face flies! Well, there were a few, especially at Kaweah River. Otherwise, the

lingering effects of the tropical storm early in September made conditions by far the most pleasant for the statewide survey that any of us can remember.

THE RESTAURANT REVIEW

Although we're only arguably in a post-pandemic world, things have calmed down enough that we felt reasonably safe eating at some of the places the CAS has largely been avoiding since 2020. We've already mentioned the Alpine Inn in Portola Valley, where the tacos match the upscale atmosphere of the renovated Beer Gardens. Two other old favorites of the *California Acorn Survey* where we had lunch this year included Roberta's Taqueria in Williams on the way to Tower House from Hopland and Jilberto's Taco Shop at the corner of Hwy 76 and Pauma Reservation



Road below Mount Palomar.

Although we had lunch at a several worthy taquerias, we also succumbed to the allures of haute cuisine with hamburgers at In-N-Out Burger one day and legendary Costco hot dogs on another. Thank goodness I brought the Grey Poupon!

Gorilla Quesadilla

After Kaweah Oaks, we drove into Visalia for lunch. I can't say as the town looked all that interesting, except for the Habibi Hookah Lounge at 117 N. Court St. (According to Yelp, #2 of the 10 top Hookah Bars in Visalia. I will not expose my ignorance by asking what a hookah bar is.) In any case, we were about to give up when we passed Gorilla Quesadilla, a local chain that appeared to only be doing take-outs from the sidewalk. We ordered two quesadillas, the "classic" for Bill (pork chile verde with black beans, rice, and white cheese) and "chorizo con bellotas" for me (crumbled chorizo, roasted acorns, onion, with white and jack cheese; yes, I made up the "acorn" part). They were both great, and large enough for both lunch and subsequent dinner at South Fork Campground in Sequoia NP. We're particularly excited about the Gorilla Quesadilla food truck that apparently parks up at Three Rivers on weekends. Rating: 🌮🌮🌮🌮



The 43rd Hastings acorn count a wrap, Bill, Karen, and I celebrated by going whale-watching, after which we stopped for deep-fried artichoke hearts in Castroville. Here's Bill et moi admiring the size of those giant artichokes on Sept. 28th. We were also

impressed with the decorative petal spikes, which I'd never noticed before.

AND FINALLY

Last but not least, a big thanks to Bill, who (spoiler alert!) has been promoted, after several failed attempts, to Senior Acorn Counter, and Karen Nardi, long-time General Counsel of the *California Acorn Survey*. Keep up the good work, and yes, we'll

continue to humor both of you by pretending that your Mexican casita will be finished someday.



A definitely very recent photo of Karen and Bill at a beach near one of their world-wide properties. How do they stay looking so young? It's a secret only the tarot cards know for sure.

And that's it for the 2022 *California Acorn Report*. Our US editorial offices are:

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The California Acorn Survey, founded in 1980, is an international cabal dedicated to counting California's acorns, consuming great tacos, and world domination, not necessarily in that order. Members and years of servitude include

Ron Mumme, Meadville, PA (1980-1983)
Elizabeth Ross-Hooge, Glacier Bay National Park, AK (1991)
Mark Stanback, Davidson, NC (1989-1990, 1992)
Jay McEntee, Springfield, MO (2005)
Xiaoan Zuo & Wenjin Li, Lanzhou, China (2010)
Eric Walters, Norfolk, VA (2006-2010)
Maria Dolores Carbonero Muñoz, Pozoblanco, Spain (2013)
Kyle Funk, Normal, IL (2018)
Mario Pesendorfer, Vienna, Austria (2014-2018)
Robert Olson, Los Altos, CA (2020)
Ian Pearse, Fort Collins, CO (2012-2013, 2015-2019, 2021-2022)
Bill Carmen, Mill Valley, CA (1981-88, 1990-92, 1994-98, 2000-19, 2021-22)
Jean Knops, Suzhou, China (1993-2011, 2013-2017, 2019)
Walt Koenig, Jamesburg, CA (1980, 1984-2022)

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