

THE ACORN

American River Natural History Association Quarterly Magazine – Winter 2022



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President's Message, Winter 2022



Laurie Weir

Where does the Effie Yeaw Nature Center fit into the history and tradition of nature centers, and why are nature centers so important in our lives?

Did you know that the history of American nature centers dates back to museums within the national park system? I read an interesting report, *The Future of Nature Centers* by Andrew Revelle, that includes a history of the American nature center. According to Revelle, in 1920 the National Park Service called for the “early establishment of adequate museums in every one of our parks for exhibiting regional flora, fauna, and minerals”. It started with the establishment of a museum in Yellowstone that same year. Along with the National Park System, the American Association for Museums, helped fund and create museums in parks across the country.

The American Association of Museums established the first park in New York that included a museum with interpretive displays, nature trails, live animal exhibits, and field trips for school children. This was so successful that it led to expanding the park’s program to include a youth nature school and professional development for science teachers. This became the prototype for the modern American nature center.

Sound familiar? This is the model on which the Effie Yeaw Nature Center is developed. Our Nature Center includes a museum with interpretive displays, nature trails, live animal exhibits, and field trips for school children. But it did not happen with direction and funding from the National Park Service or the American Association of Museums. It happened because of the dedication of a gifted local teacher named Effie Yeaw. In 1955 Effie Yeaw--a teacher, conservationist and environmental educator--began leading natural and cultural history walks in an area known as Deterding Woods, located along the American River.

Effie Yeaw and other local citizens recognized the value of the natural resources along the American River and began working to raise interest in preserving the lands along the river. She also trained tour guides and worked with the Sacramento County Parks Department to develop the concept of a “parkway” that included the preservation of Deterding Woods, now known as the Effie Yeaw Nature Study Area. With the continuing support of the County, construction of the Nature Center was completed in 1976. The Nature Center’s statement of purpose was adopted as part of the American River Parkway Interpretive Plan and the American River Natural History Association adopted the same goals upon its establishment in 1981.

The Effie Yeaw Nature Center’s Mission Statement affirms our dedication to providing educational and interpretive programs about the natural environment. But what does it mean to be an interpretive center?

Park and museum interpretive centers help visitors find meaning. In an article in *Curator: The Museum Journal*, two University of Wisconsin environmental educators elaborated on the definition of interpretation as an activity that “facilitates an intellectual and emotional connection between the interests of the visitor and the meanings of the resource.” The concept of helping visitors connect to meanings is a constant theme in the development of philosophies and practices in interpretation over the last century. Parks and museums have long shared in the effort to put this concept into practice.

At Effie Yeaw we are committed to facilitating visitors’ connections to the natural environment of the American River Parkway. Help us continue this mission by supporting our efforts.

-Laurie Weir



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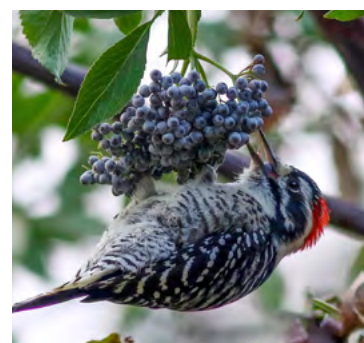
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Cover: Nuttall's Woodpecker.
Photo by Nora Papian.

Winter Birds at Effie Yeaw

By Eric Ross

At this time of year, with less daylight and cooler weather, it can be difficult to get motivated to go outside and spend time in nature. However, winter is a great time to view birds. With leaves gone from trees, it is much easier to see birds that are otherwise hidden behind foliage. Plus, there are more birds than during the rest of the year! In addition to our local year-round species, many seasonal birds come here in the late fall, spend the winter, and leave to nest elsewhere around the vernal equinox. Among such birds are swans, geese, ducks, gulls, and shore birds on and about the American River and perching birds such as warblers and sparrows.

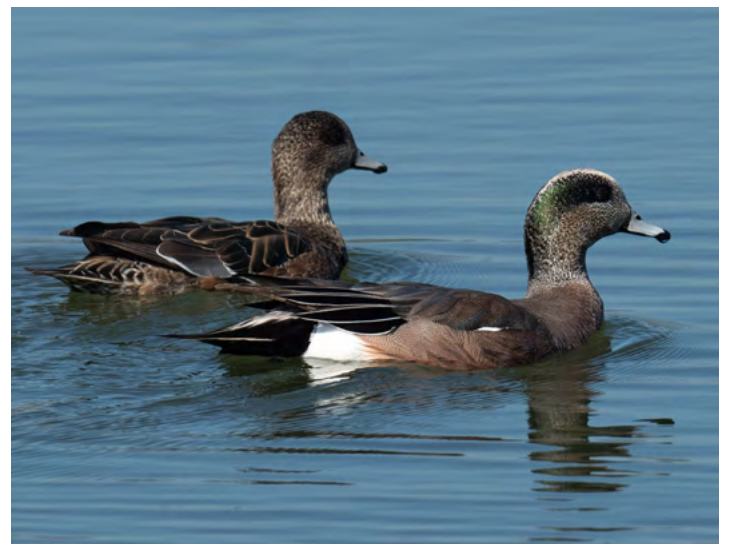
On the following pages, five accomplished local photographers capture a dozen common winter birds that can be seen at Effie Yeaw Nature Center and along our local rivers. You can observe these birds and more of our abundant birdlife this season by walking our Nature Study Area trails with a pair of binoculars, attending Sacramento Audubon Society's field trips listed led by experienced birders, or participating in one of the annual local Audubon Christmas bird counts. See the [Sacramento Audubon Society's website](#) for details. To better understand the birds' seasonal patterns, download a current checklist of the Birds of the Sacramento Area from the Sacramento Audubon's website, use a variety of bird identification apps on your phone, or go "old school" with readily available bird ID books including ARNHA's own. But, most importantly, get out and enjoy our winter birds!



Tundra swans, which are winter visitors to our area, have a yellow spot in front of their eyes. Photo by Ed Harper © 2022.



Snow geese are a common sight in winter in Sacramento, often flying in a V or U-shaped formation. In summer, they nest in the Arctic. Photo by Ed Harper © 2022.



American wigeon ducks can be seen in Sacramento from fall through spring. Males have green markings on the sides of their heads. Photo by Dana Miller-Blair © 2022.





The subdued coloring of the male gadwell and its high forehead distinguishes it from other area ducks. It is a year-round resident. Photo by Dana Miller-Blair © 2022.



The American kestrel is often observed perched high up on wires or trees watching for prey. It is a year-round resident in the Sacramento area. Photo by Dana Miller-Blair ©2022.



Yellow-rumped warblers, sometimes called "butter butts", have yellow patches on their rumps. They spend their winters in California's central valleys. Photo by Ed Harper © 2022.



When excited, the ruby-crowned kinglet raises the red crest on the top of its head. These small birds forage with warblers and other small birds and return to the mountains in summer to breed. Photo by Nora Papian © 2022.



The northern flicker is the only woodpecker in our area that you will see foraging on the ground, often feeding on insects such as ants. Most commonly seen in winter, much of the population migrates to the Sierra to nest in summer. Photo by Dave Dawson ©2022.



The ring-billed gull, the smallest gull seen in our area, is mostly a winter visitor. Photo by Rich Howard © 2022.





The phainopepla has a ragged crest on its head and prefers to perch high in a tree. Photo by Rich Howard © 2022.



The three white stripes on the top of its head make the white-crowned sparrow easy to identify. Photo by Nora Papian ©2022.



Golden-crowned sparrows, which occur in our area in winter months, forage for seeds as well as insects and are shyer than the more readily observed white-crowned sparrows. Photo by Ed Harper © 2022.

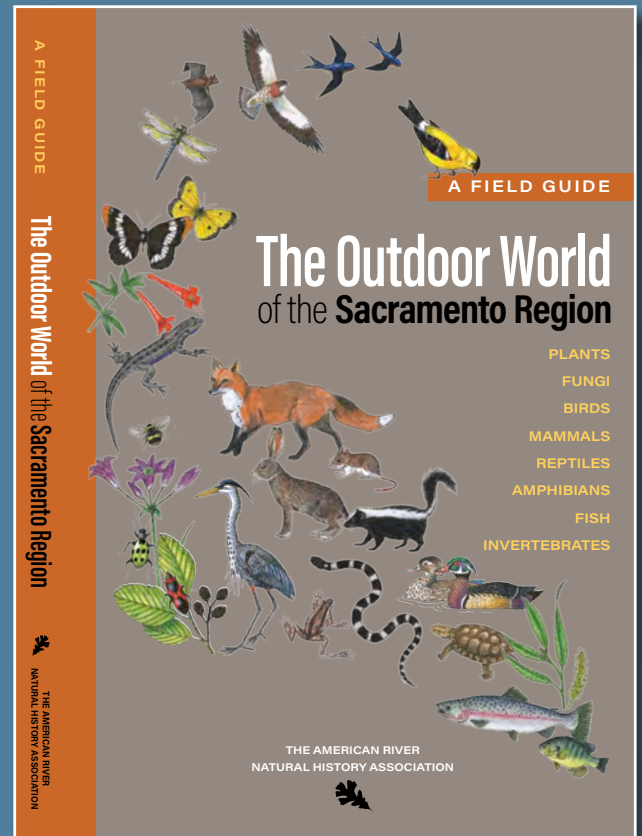
Eric Ross is a Docent at Effie Yeaw and a Certified California Naturalist. Special thanks to all the photographers who provided the images for this article.

New Edition of Outdoor World Released!

Just in time for holiday shopping, a new edition of the American River Natural History Association's most popular book, *The Outdoor World of the Sacramento Region*, is now on sale.

This 14th edition, edited by Peggy Kennedy and Molly Keller, has been completely revised and expanded and features images and descriptions of over 575 plants, animals and other organisms common in our area.

This is the perfect gift for any nature lover. Buy it at the Discovery Store at the Effie Yeaw Nature Center or [online](#).



Nature of Reading

By Catie Equi

Just because school is back in session does not mean that learning has to be confined to the classroom. Effie Yeaw Nature Center (EYNC) provides lots of opportunities for kids to learn about the environment and nature outside of school. One of the best for younger children is the Nature of Reading program.

The Nature of Reading program was established just this past year by EYNC docent Margaret Rogers and Naturalist Hannah Steurer and is now led by docent Yvonne Manley. Designed to cater to children between the ages 4 and 8 and their parents, its goal is to build awareness about the environment and the animals that live around EYNC and the American River. It also offers families a way to connect with Nature Center in a fun and interactive way. The program is offered on the first Saturday of each month, and attendees can expect one or two books pertaining to a particular nature-centered theme to be read aloud. Hands-on crafts and other STEM-based activities accompany the reading along with a visitation from one of EYNC's Animal Ambassadors, making for an exciting, jam-packed hour of learning.

I had the opportunity to tag along during the September Nature of Reading event, which covered the theme of water, to see what the program was all about. At 9:30 a.m., just as day's heat was starting to overtake the morning coolness, a total of 8 kids gathered around with their parents in the back patio area of the Nature Center and listened intently as Yvonne read *A River Ran Wild* by Lynne Cherry. The book, which narrates the true story of Native Americans living along the Nashua River in Massachusetts, provides beautiful imagery of the natural world and the sustainable practices of the Native people while also sharing the damaging consequences of pollution brought about due to the increased industrialization of the area by European settlers. Throughout the reading, the kids were encouraged to engage with the story by discussing its content, by completing a question worksheet about the book with their families, and by simulating pollution by dumping wood chips, dye, and plastics into a bowl of water and observing how quickly it could go from clean and clear to dark and dirty. Though this story took place in Massachusetts, its message of restoration, environmental consciousness, and the importance of keeping our waterways clean resonates deeply with our own American River.



EYNC docent, Yvonne Manley, reads *A River Ran Wild* by Lynne Cherry to Nature of Reading attendees.



Kids and their families work together to answer questions about the book.



As the book came to an end, Clem, a western pond turtle and Animal Ambassador at EYNC, made an appearance. The kids learned a variety of cool facts about Clem and other turtles of his species and at the same time developed an understanding of how water pollution also harms the wildlife who rely on that water for survival. Clem is a charmer, and everyone was sure to wave goodbye when it was time for him to return to his home.

The event ended with a simulated river clean-up activity. Each family was given a sample of the water that they had dirtied up while reading the book and asked to try to make the water clean again. Coffee filters, cotton balls, and small pieces of charcoal were provided as clean-up tools. By using teamwork and problem-solving skills, participants were able to rid the water of the majority of its impurities, restoring it back to nearly the same clarity as before.

While parents were thrilled about the hands-on, interactive learning that the Nature of Reading offered and the valuable lessons that it taught about caring for our natural world, the kids expressed their excitement about having an up-close encounter with Clem and working their way through the final water restoration activity. One attendee even exclaimed, "I liked the river activity. It was really cool!" More information about the Nature of Reading program can be found on the EYNC website: www.sacnaturecenter.net under the "Events" and the link labeled "Storytime".

Catie Equi is a senior in high school at Rio Americano who has a passion for nature and conservation and has grown up around the Effie Yeaw Nature Center. She now serves as a teen volunteer at the EYNC helping to produce The Acorn. All photos were taken by the author.



Kids listen eagerly as Naturalist Hannah Steurer shares facts about Animal Ambassador Clem and other western pond turtles.



Yvonne gives instruction on how to complete the river clean-up activity.



Using a variety of resources including filters, cotton balls, and pieces of charcoal, kids and their families worked to make polluted water clean and clear again.



Lifestyles of the Small and Inconspicuous

by Melanie Loo

This season of limited sunlight, cooler temperatures, and promised rain mutes the activities of most flowering plants and their consumers. It allows us to take notice of smaller, slow-growing organisms with less well-known lifestyles. As we walk the winter trails in the Nature Study Area (NSA) our eyes may be delighted to catch sight of lichens, mosses, and mushrooms—resilient organisms that become active in this cool, damp season.

You have probably seen lichens in every season forming colored crusts on trees, broken twigs, and rocks, or hanging from branches. Each species of lichen is a composite organism comprising one or more fungal species plus one or more green algal or cyanobacterial species. The fungal component is known as the mycobiont and provides most of the lichen's protective body structure, while the algal or cyanobacterial component is known as the photobiont and produces the lichen's chemical energy through the process of photosynthesis. The separated mycobiont and photobiont components look very different from the composite organism and are not able to survive the same conditions on their own. Besides the exquisite cooperation of the mycobiont gathering water and mineral nutrients and the photobiont producing sugar to power the lichen, lichens' success relies on an extraordinary ability to withstand desiccation and enter a metabolically inactive state until water is available. When the rains come, they brighten and burst into astounding growth in the order of millimeters a year.

The existence of lichens was only accepted in 1867 after extensive microscopic examination, and presently lichen identification relies on microscopic observations bolstered by chemical tests. Worldwide there are about 20,000 species of lichens, living in all kinds of environments, and covering around 8% of the land surface. Less formally, lichens are initially identified by their color and growth form. The grey, green, orange, and yellow colors are largely due to pigments of the photobiont and the growth form is due to the mycobiont; both are altered when the lichen is well hydrated. Based on form, lichens are called crustose when they grow tightly to a rock or branch, foliose when they have leaf-like lobes, and fruticose when they have a branch or branches extending from one attachment point (figures 1, 2, 3). There is a wide variety of growth forms and terms to describe them.

Although they grow very slowly, lichens are valuable to the ecosystem in several ways. The fungal part of the lichen secretes enzymes and other compounds that can help to break down rocks and dead wood, releasing nutrients to



Figure 1. Crustose lichen growing on a rock with a little bit of foliose lichen on the edges.

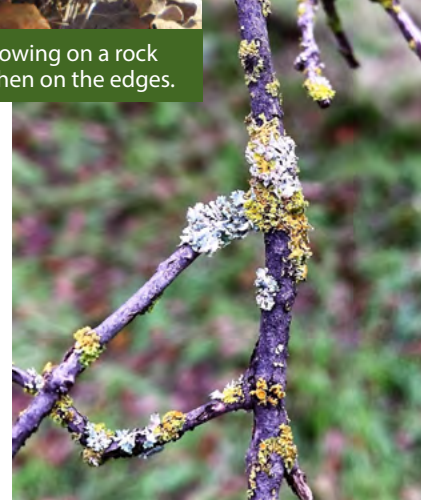


Figure 2. Greenish foliose lichen and yellowish crustose lichen growing on a twig.



Figure 3. Fruticose lichen, with foliose lichen in background.



Figure 4. Moss with reproductive structures growing on a fallen tree along the Cut-off Trail.



be absorbed by themselves and other organisms. The lichen body also traps small particles and nutrients from the air. This plays a big role in decomposition and soil building. In addition, some animals eat and find shelter in lichens, while birds use lichens as nesting material. Humans have used specific kinds of lichens for food, medicines, and dyes.

Mosses share similarities with lichens and are sometimes mistaken for them, but mosses are small, simple plants. Mosses are often found near lichens in rock and bark crevices; they can also suspend their metabolic activities in dry conditions and resume them when water is available. In addition, mosses in wet and dry conditions form masses of organic material where particles from the air can be caught and contribute to soil formation. However, mosses do not secrete substances to break down rocks and they consist of single plant species. Unlike flowering plants, mosses are non-vascular, meaning that they lack the system of tubes that provide support for distributing nutrients among the many cells of vascular plants. Instead, individual cells of mosses must absorb water and carbon dioxide directly from the environment or nearby cells. Hence, mosses are only a few cell layers thick; lack true leaves, stems, and roots; and are usually only a few centimeters tall. If you have a chance to observe a moss closely, you can note the small, leaf-like structures (called phyllids) projecting from a main axis. After a rain you might also see sexual reproductive structures at the ends of tiny stalks above the phyllids. The old fallen tree along the Cut-off Trail between the Bluff and Main Trails is a place where you can stay on the trail and still be close enough to more closely view mosses growing after a rain (figure 4).

A third winter attraction along the trails are the mushrooms. Mushrooms belong to the kingdom Fungi. Fungi get their nutrients by secreting enzymes to break down materials in the environment and then absorbing the resulting small molecules. Many fungi go undetected because they are microscopic or threadlike structures that need to remain moist and thus are often hidden under a protective layer like soil or bark (figure 5). Fungi perform a great service to the ecosystem by hastening the decomposition of dead organisms and making nutrients available to other organisms as small molecules or when their bodies are consumed. They also work symbiotically, exchanging nutrients with algae and cyanobacteria to form lichens and with plant roots as mycorrhizae. Mycorrhizae are combinations of fungi and plant roots under the soil; the fungus benefits from sugars made by the plant and the plant benefits from water and minerals captured by the fungus.

Fungi become more noticeable when they form fruiting bodies to undergo sexual reproduction. Mushrooms are the fruiting bodies of some groups of fungi. When nutrients are limited in the immediate environment, the fungal

filaments will coalesce into a macroscopic fruiting body, designed to carry out cell divisions creating new gene combinations, and to release spores to propagate in new areas. Mushrooms typically have a stalk and cap or have a shelf-like structure (figures 6 and 7). For more information about specific kinds of fungi in the NSA please see an archived article by Mary K. Hanson on page 2 of the [Winter 2019 edition of *The Acorn*](#).

I hope that your walks in the NSA this winter will reward you with many sightings of lichens, mosses, and mushrooms, as well as thoughts about the varied lifestyles these organisms represent.

Melanie Loo, Ph.D. is a retired Professor of Biological Sciences at CSU Sacramento. She volunteers at EYNC as a docent, trail steward, and member of the Habitat Restoration Team. All photos were taken by the author.



Figure 5. Millipede and fungal filaments on decaying log, whose bark had been removed.



Figure 6. Inkcap mushrooms with cap and stalk structure.



Figure 7. Turkey tail mushrooms with shelf form.



Volunteer Profile: Cindy Rogers

By Krystin Dozier

If you spend much time at Effie Yeaw Nature Center (EYNC), you will have probably seen Cindy Rogers at work. She is one of our most active docents, supporting school programs as a guide for nature tours, nature camps, pond and river outings, and Maidu natural history programs. Cindy also participates in special events. As a birder, she enjoys leading hikes for EYNC's Bird and Breakfast events, helping visitors spot birds and their nests along the trail. NatureFest is another event Cindy always participates in.

Cindy began volunteering at EYNC in February 2016. Her first assignment was removing invasive thistles within the Nature Study Area. While pulling thistles one day, she overheard a group of young students on a nature tour. The docent leading the hike had pointed out coyote scat (feces) to the students and as each student passed by the scat she heard them say "scat," "scat," "scat". When she shared this amusing story with former Volunteer Coordinator Jamie Washington, Jamie asked her to consider becoming a docent. Although she had some fear about the snake handling requirement (which she overcame), Cindy joined the Docent program in September 2016.

In order to expand her knowledge and value as a docent, Cindy attended the California Naturalist Program at EYNC and became a certified California Naturalist in 2018. To complement her docent knowledge, she also learned to care for EYNC's resident animals, including glove training for handling raptors. At special events, you may have seen Cindy with EYNC's resident great horned owl Echo on her arm, introducing her to visitors. She enjoys bringing children into nature and seeing their eyes go bright with wonder and their minds expand with excitement at the discovery of something new. An avid supporter of the docent program, Cindy was asked to join EYNC's Docent Steering Committee to assist staff in docent engagement, building team spirit, and keeping docents informed.

In addition to her active role as a docent, Cindy is a citizen scientist, studying monarchs during their breeding cycle each summer. She has been inspecting milkweed patches at EYNC, looking for eggs, larvae, chrysalises, and adult monarchs as part of the University of Minnesota's Monarch Larvae Monitoring Project, which EYNC has participated in since 2015. The decline of monarchs led to her involvement in the Habitat Restoration Project in 2019 focused on planting of milkweed and pollinator plants in the Nature Study Area (NSA).

Cindy also volunteers with the Sacramento Egret and Heron Rescue, which patrols local nests for young that have



Cindy in a field of blooming Showy milkweed.
Photo by Kathy Moore.

fallen and helps them get any necessary medical care, if needed. Egrets and herons nest in large groups and return to the same nests each year. However, some nesting sites are now becoming encircled by development with vegetation replaced with concrete which creates hard landings and danger for young birds falling out of nests.

Born in Florida, Cindy has called Sacramento home since she was seven years old. Camping with her family as a child instilled in Cindy a joy of the outdoors whether hiking in the woods or investigating critters in ponds.

Cindy now fills her days with nature, exploring new areas on hikes into the wilderness, and taking photographs. Mostly self-taught, Cindy continues to improve skills by using her camera to capture birds and other wildlife around her. Her Facebook page is filled with photos and descriptions of hikes she has taken or other interesting finds in nature. EYNC provides a calm and peaceful place for her to share her love of the outdoors with visitors and all the friends she has made while volunteering here.

Krystin Dozier is a California Naturalist, volunteer, and docent at EYNC as well as chair of the Habitat Restoration Committee.



2022 NatureFest a Great Success

After a two-year hiatus, Effie Yeaw's NatureFest event was held once again on Sunday, October 9. It was a great success, drawing in over 679 visitors, many of them families with children. The event is meant to showcase local organizations involved in environmental education and conservation, animal rescue and wildlife protection, indigenous peoples' culture, as well as spotlighting the resources offered by the Effie Yeaw Nature Center (EYNC). Over 30 different groups participated, setting up displays and demonstrations that ranged from identifying rocks and minerals and interacting with live animals to lessons on making baskets and bracelets from tule.

The program featured presentations with live animals from Gabe Kerschner from Wild Things, Save the Snakes, and visits with EYNC's own Animal Ambassadors. Participants enjoyed guided nature walks around the Nature Study Area, savored food from two food trucks and interacted individually with experts on topics such as amphibians and reptiles; pigeons, herons and egrets, and birds in general; fish and other aquatic creatures; beekeeping; Maidu, Karuk and Wintun culture; and what's being done in our area to protect water quality, flood plains, and natural habitats. More than 72 EYNC volunteers were involved in the event.

These photos illustrate some of the highlights of the day.



Photos on this page by Kimberly Steinmenn.





Photos above by Paul Barth.



Photos by
Mary Lou Flint.



Donors & New Members—July through September 2022

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- Sacramento Tree Foundation
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- Maria Sanchez-King
- Save the American River Assoc.



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- Bohdan & Motria Tomkiw
- Maureen Tracy
- Marjorie Tuckerman
- Colleen Uhlenhop
- Unitarian Universalist
Society of Sacramento
- Talitha Van der Meulen
- Jay Verhaag
- Dorothy & Patrick Wagner
- Dee Warenycia
- Larry & Jamie Washington In
Memory Of Connie Wade
- Lee Washington
- Kathy Webb
- Jacqueline, Richard &
Matthew Webber
- Betsy & Fred Weiland
- Laurie Weir & Jacek Lisiewicz
- Richard Weisberg
- Blaine Welker
- June White
- Mary Wilkinson
- Liz Williamson
- Terry Wilson
- Lucinda Woodward
- Harold & Suzanne Yackey In
Memory Of Jack & Zilpha Hiehle
- Zachary Yeates

Errata for Fall 2022 issue of *The Acorn*.

Pages 12 & 13: Photos were taken by Paul Barth. Page 14: Top photo was taken by Emily Eklund. Page 14, 4th paragraph, line 3: Name misspelled, should be Renee Covey.





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