

# Coastline

GAVIOTA COAST CONSERVANCY NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2021



Photo :Shaw Leonard

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Photo: Ken Pfeiffer

**Gaviota Coast Conservancy is dedicated to protecting the rural character and environmental integrity of the Gaviota Coast for present and future generations.**

## MOVING TOWARDS CONSERVATION

# VISION FOR THE GAVIOTA COAST

GCC is moving towards permanent conservation of coastal properties, and working with our allied organizations to repair infrastructure and provide jobs.

## BY DOUG KERN

**T**he Gaviota Coast connects Central and Southern California, covering 76 miles of coastline from Point Sal on the northwest to Coal Oil Point on the southeast. It represents the largest intact rural Mediterranean coastline remaining in the nation and is a biodiversity hotspot. GCC's project area of interest encompasses 215,000 acres, including 43 watersheds of the Santa Ynez Mountains and all of Vandenberg Space Force Base.

Gaviota Coast Conservancy has recently completed a vision document for the Gaviota Coast. The Vision offers an inventory of exceptional projects and properties to conserve and restore. This inventory is not exhaustive of the opportunities, but is representative of the potential.

### ACQUISITION

GCC has held the line on inappropriate development on the Gaviota Coast for 25 years. While we will continue to oppose projects that would detract from the rural character of the Coast, GCC's interest is to preserve in perpetuity those properties where a willing landowner would like to sell or donate. There may be several near-term opportunities for acquiring properties on the Coast and GCC will seek the assistance of our partners, philanthropists, state funders and our supporters to save these properties.

### RESTORATION

Several public and private properties on the Gaviota Coast have suffered from unsustainable agricultural operations. GCC seeks to work with willing landowners to restore these properties to healthy habitat and passive recreational use.

One public property where GCC would like to see more intensive restoration is at

Baron Ranch. The 1,000-acre property is located in a coastal canyon on the Gaviota Coast and is managed by the Santa Barbara County Public Works, which is not a natural resource protection agency, a public recreation agency, or an agency with agricultural production expertise. The property is being held rather than managed with the aim to produce revenue from agricultural production, a venture which has previously failed on the property. In the meantime, the property's natural resources are suffering from minimal attention and there is little proactive support of passive public recreation. The property should be restored managed for the public benefit.

### INFRASTRUCTURE

Our State Parks along the Gaviota Coast need some tender loving care. Proceeding west from Goleta along the Gaviota Coast are three State Parks: El Capitan, Refugio and Gaviota. All need rehabilitation and restoration.

We'd like to see trails rebuilt, and exotic vegetation removed to make room for native species and reduce the risk of fast moving and intense wildfire.

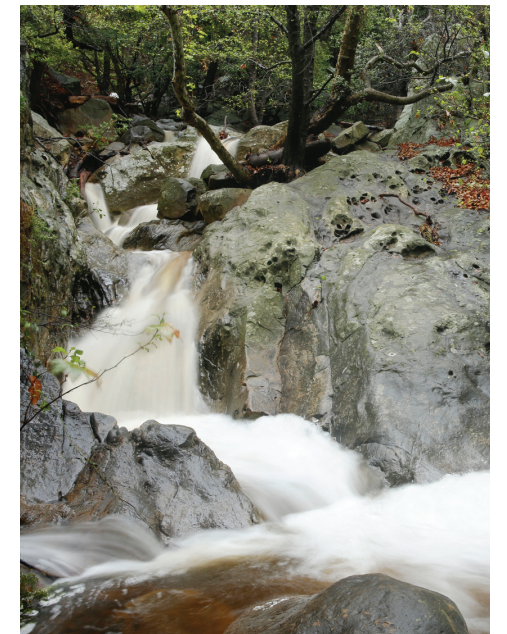
### REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE

Agriculture has been the long-term economic bedrock of the Gaviota Coast. However, the region is constrained by limited water and variable quality soils. Regenerative agriculture (RA) offers practical solutions to these limitations. RA builds soils and soil fertility while increasing water retention – helping to mitigate the two significant Gaviota Coast limitations.

### GAVIOTA VISION

To learn more about GCC's "Vision for the Gaviota Coast" please contact me at [info@gaviotacoastconservancy.org](mailto:info@gaviotacoastconservancy.org) and I'd enjoy talking with you about it.

Photo: Shaw Leonard



## 30x30?

30x30 is the name for a global initiative to preserve at least 30% of the earth's ecosystems by 2030. On October 7, 2020, California Governor Newsom signed an Executive Order to conserve a minimum of 30% of California's land and waters by 2030 and on January 27, 2021, President Biden signed a similar Executive Order "Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad."

Gaviota Coast Conservancy is positioning the Gaviota Coast to receive funding for special parcels and for improving coastal infrastructure from both Federal and State 30x30 initiatives.

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### Coming Events

10/2 Kayak Day Adventure

### Contact Us:

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# Shaped by Rain

Rain water courses into the streams of deep, coastal arroyos, discharges to the beach...

BY REEVE WOOLPERT

One way to see terrain is as a water collector or watershed — let your eyes flow over the landscape like raindrops. The principal contours of the Gaviota Coast mark the many pathways taken by

series of short, discreet, coastal watersheds lined up side by side like a comb’s parallel, slender teeth. For nearly thirty miles, storms scrape this exposed, south facing, repeatedly cut flank of the mountains. But just north of angled Conception on the



Photo: Reeve Woolpert

precipitation as it heads back to the sea to its origin as evaporated seawater. The abrupt climb out of the ocean of the Santa Ynez Mountains’ western end, sends rain fallen on uplands downhill, across narrow, tilted marine terraces, promptly home. During wetter years, storms saturate lowland areas, flooding roads and gullies. Rain water courses into the streams of deep, coastal arroyos, discharges to the beach, and seeps from bluff faces, taking soil, driftwood and relics with it to the ocean.

Below Point Conception, unconstrained clouds and wind from distant, oceanic beginnings sweep off the Pacific on a down-channel, crosswise path across a

Gaviota Coast’s windward, west face at Jalama, the weather directly enters the wide mouth of a rambling consolidation of watercourses that have merged into the largest coastal watershed between the Santa Ynez and Ventura Rivers. Along the Gaviota Coast, these sunken, damp habitats provide highly productive strips of ecologically critical habitat for wildlife and, when flooded, nutrients for sea life. The first American settler known to have visited Point Conception commented in 1850 on two aspects of the Gaviota Coast important to him. He declared, “The beef has a finer flavor and more delicacy than any we have met with on the coast... The water is disagreeable to the taste.”



Photo: Sally Berry

Your Assistance is Urgently Needed and Appreciated!

Donate to the Gaviota Coast Conservancy!

Protecting the Gaviota Coast Since 1996

## Royal Guests on Gaviota

BY JANET KOED

I received a text from Charis van der Heide, asking if I wanted to join her for the Xerces Society’s Western Monarch Thanksgiving 2020 Count the next day. I jumped at the opportunity to visit this property on the Gaviota Coast near Jalama. Charis flew from her new home in the Netherlands to participate in the Count which she has been helping with for over a decade. Her calling with Monarch butterflies began 20 years ago with a project offer from a professor at Cal Poly where she graduated.

Charis tracks the Western Monarch Butterfly with the Thanksgiving and New Year counts, and her work is focused on Santa Barbara County, an area spanning from Vandenberg AFB to Carpinteria. As a volunteer with the Count, she trains and enlists the help of volunteers to count the dozens of Monarch sites in the county that are visited every year. She is also an environmental consultant. We set out from Goleta at 7:00am. It’s optimal to catch the Monarch clusters before the sun hits their wings. Heat sparks their metabolism and they can disburse in flight when the temperatures reach above 55 degrees F. We hoped to find



Photo: Sally Berry

large clusters clinging to the eucalyptus branches in the cool morning. As we turned off Hwy 101 toward Jalama, the fog shroud magically disappeared. It was a crystal-clear day the rest of the way. Once we left the truck, the sounds of hawks screeching among other bird calls reminded me of how different this remote location, devoid of traffic, is from our urban existence.

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# Fresh Air - Hiking Baron Ranch

It was a wonder to be directly connected to the forest.

BY PHIL MCKENNA

I recently spent a February afternoon hiking at Baron Ranch with friends. It was a beautiful day; the sun was warm, the air cool. The front country of the Santa Ynez Mountains can be quite breezy, especially in the afternoons, but this afternoon was absolutely still, unusually so.

Baron Ranch is an orphan. It had been abandoned by the cattle ranchers decades ago, and more recently by an avocado grower seeking riches from marginal soils and hard water pulled from sandstone formations. The temperate climate favored the avocados, but it’s my guess that the soils and poor water quality starved the trees. Today the 250 acres of once-upon-a-time orchards are graveyards marked by orchard roads and occasional skeletal trees. It’s a shame – and an opportunity – something like a strip mine waiting to be reclaimed.

The rest of the 1000-acre Ranch is a jewel. This is a mature forest, last burned in the Refugio Fire of September 1955. It rewards the patient hiker with a beautiful upper canyon watered by a tumbling creek that is forested with oaks and laurels. The slopes of the mountains are carpeted with our trademark chaparral, impenetrable to you and I without a trail, but home to the

critters of the canyon and the springtime florescent that scents the sun-warmed air with the fragrance of our homeland.



Photo: Deborah Williams

Walking into the canyon from the access road, the evidence of the restoration of the riparian corridor, trampled first by cattle then by orchard plantings

encroaching into the banks of the creek, is in full view. This restoration work is the penance of the County Public Works Department for the destruction of red legged frog habitat in the neighboring Tajiguas Landfill, the midden mound of South Coast Santa Barbara County.

About a mile into the canyon, the ranch road, serving as the trail at that point, joins the wooded creek and begins a climb into the mountains. It is not excessively steep, but it is insistent. I am an eager hiker, but at 74, enthusiasm is tempered by capacity. Walking in the shade of the trees with the creek murmuring in its bed, I noted to my companion that after one-quarter mile of incline I was actually feeling rejuvenated. He, of similar vintage, agreed.

And that was the moment. I realized that the forest was feeding us. The sun was warm, energizing the trees of the creek. The air was cool, tending to settle into the creek bed. The stillness of that air did not disperse its settlement, but concentrated the oxygen released by the trees.

It was a wonder to be directly connected to the forest. It was not an intellectual understanding but a visceral reality.

Nature gives us continual gifts. We should learn to reciprocate.

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Several mule deer munched on grass in the nearby pasture. Armed with a new pair of binoculars, I felt confident about locating Monarch clusters as I had been taught in this same place last year. We spotted a few encouraging flyers but as we walked around, looking high above, our spirits were dampened. Where were the clusters?

We may have spent a half-hour searching and found absolutely no clusters. Charis is an expert at spotting these royal winged ones. She knows they like to congregate in certain “cathedral” overhangs with an opening in the center or over a damp area. Our total count was 12 flyers – not a good sign. Then we hopped into the truck and drove to the next site further up the canyon. Our second location was dry and eerily devoid of Monarchs. Our hearts sank. We counted three flyers.

I asked Charis what was happening with the other counts. Her explanation mirrored information posted on the Xerces Society website at [www.xerces.org](http://www.xerces.org).

The Xerces Society has released a blog post and press release about the monarch count in the winter 2020 season and unfortunately, it is not looking good for the Monarchs locally but throughout California as well.

“Historically, Western Monarchs have made a spectacular annual migration to overwinter in forested groves along the coast of California. Each spring, butterflies fan out across the West to lay their eggs on milkweed and drink nectar from flowers in Arizona, California, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Utah.

That migration is now in crisis. In the winter of 2018, and again in 2019, the Western Monarch overwintering population has reached the lowest level ever recorded—less than 1% of historic populations, and a dizzying 86% drop from the year prior. In response to this, the Xerces Society has spearheaded the Western Monarch Call to Action, working in partnership with universities, government agencies,

other organizations, and communities to stabilize and recover this imperiled population.

These actions are building upon the Xerces Society’s decades of Western Monarch conservation work. Western populations have been less well-studied than their eastern counterparts, and have unique conservation needs. To that end, the Xerces Society conducts annual surveys of overwintering populations; assesses the status of overwintering sites; provides guidance for the management of breeding, migratory, and overwintering habitat; advises on habitat establishment and restoration; and researches the distribution of Monarchs and milkweed in the West.”

I asked Charis if there was a glimmer of hope to leave readers and Monarch fans with. She explained that insect populations naturally fluctuate and it’s possible that in the right conditions one strong reproductive season could facilitate an increased population.