



Conservancy

COMMENTS

The Donna O'Neill

Land Conservancy

Volume 16 Number 1
Winter & Spring 2008

TDOLC VOLUNTEERS

In one way or another, most non-profits are dependent upon the talents and energies of volunteers. *The Conservancy* is no exception. TDOLC is blessed with a cadre of supporters from all walks of life who donate their time to help us fulfill our mission of educating others about and caring for our 1200 acre ecological treasure.

Over the past year, changes in *Conservancy* staffing have highlighted the importance of these volunteers. On numerous occasions, their knowledge and skills have helped to ensure the continuation of *Conservancy* programs. There isn't a single aspect of our operations to which volunteers don't make a central contribution—from the newsletter you are now reading, to the trails you walk on and the programs you listen to when visiting the reserve. Behind the scenes, volunteers help staff our office, serve on our Board of Directors, and provide much needed expertise on matters from A to Z.

In this issue, we honor such efforts by profiling some of the individuals who provide them. In the pages available, we haven't the space to thank all those who deserve it. (We plan to feature at least one volunteer in every future newsletter.) Mainly, we hope readers get a sense of what *Conservancy* volunteers are like. Even better, some of you may feel inspired to join them!

*"Volunteers don't get paid,
not because they're worthless,
but because they're priceless."*

Sherry Anderson



Doing the Groundwork for Walks and Hikes!

ORANGE COUNTY STARS

City dwellers traveling to sparsely populated areas are generally delighted to discover how many more stars are visible there than at home. If you've not yet caught a glimpse of the Milky Way, you can still do so by journeying out to *The Conservancy* on Astronomy Night. But hurry! Skyglow caused by urban light pollution decreases the contrast between celestial objects and the sky. Our astronomers report that skies over *The Conservancy* are not as dark as they were a decade ago, but you'll still be able to view many more celestial phenomena than elsewhere in urbanized Orange County.

Conservancy astronomers are all volunteers. If you have attended astronomy night over the past few years, you have been stargazing with the assistance of Mike Balmages, a Tustin-based attorney and our resident astronomy guru. Mike provides an introductory lecture orienting visitors to seasonally visible astronomical phenomena. Like many patrons, Mike

SATURDAY SPECIALISTS

Few visitors to *The Conservancy* give a second thought to the condition of trails as they pass through the reserve on field trips, hikes or walks. Yet it is only through the efforts of our volunteer weeding and trail maintenance crews that these paths are kept accessible to thousands of *Conservancy* visitors. Once a month, weather permitting, volunteers use tools like McClouds, pruners and clippers—and plenty of sweat labor!—to cut away overhanging brush and branches and remove invasive plants intruding on our trails. One lucky volunteer even gets the dubious honor of trimming the poison oak!

On a beautiful November day last Fall, our crew was building a small detour on a trail where the nearby ravine had eroded. The group cut through brush and arranged rocks in strategic locations. *Conservancy* hillsides are covered with leaf litter, home to a delicate ecosystem teeming with life and activity. Our crew caught glimpses of this normally hidden

MOTTO CONTEST!

Do you have a way with words? We need help selecting a simple, but catchy *Conservancy* motto which uniquely describes who we are and what we do.

The winner will receive a signed, limited edition Richard Jackson wildlife photographer—and the satisfaction of seeing their work on all *Conservancy* communication. Give it a try! Your words could be inspirational for years to come!

Email "rmvlc@sbcglobal.net" with your entry. The winner will be announced in a future newsletter.

CONSERVANCY QUIZ

1. Year *Conservancy* founded:
 - a) 1985
 - b) 1990
 - c) 1995
 - d) 2000
2. Total acreage:
 - a) 428 acres
 - b) 812 acres
 - c) 1165 acres
 - d) 3000 acres
3. Included plant communities:
 - a) oak woodlands
 - b) sycamore groves
 - c) bunch grasslands
 - d) a, b & c
4. Resident owl species:
 - a) Barn & Great Horned
 - b) Long-eared & Western Screech
 - c) Boreal & Mottled
 - d) a and b
5. Number of visiting bat species:
 - a) One
 - b) More than 8
 - c) Three
 - d) Five
6. How to find out more:
 - a) Take a *Conservancy* hike.
 - b) Call 949-489-9778.
 - c) Visit www.theconservancy.org
 - d) All of the above!

ANSWERS 1b, 2c, 3d, 4d, 5b, 6d

SCHOOL FIELD TRIPS

Believe it or not, the majority of visitors to *The Donna O'Neill Land Conservancy* are second and third graders! For the past ten years, *The Conservancy* has been a popular destination for schools in the Capistrano Unified and Saddleback Valley School Districts. More than ten thousand students have visited!



Sweep Nets Are Ideal for Catching Insects

For many, it's their first time hiking. Children relish the chance to see what an oak tree looks like or to smell California sagebrush. They discover deer tracks, giant wood rat nests, and hawks flying overhead. They express awe upon catching sight of *The Conservancy's* giant "Mother Oak." Because of our unique location, children get a sense of nature, without the view or sound of traffic or suburbia.

Our second grade program starts on the bus, where we point out geological features on the way into *The Conservancy*. Students hike the trail, stopping at different science stations. At one station, students simulate erosion by shaking small pieces of shale in a container. At another, they "excavate" shark's teeth in buckets of sand. Students learn what distinguishes a rock from a mineral and about the types of fossils found in this area.

Over the past three years, the majority of our visiting third graders have participated in a grant-funded program called "Wild Birds at School." The program provides hands-on kits to help students learn more about animal and plant adaptations, as well as slide presentations featuring wildlife found at *The Conservancy*. These



Learning To Use Binoculars

slide presentations elicit enthusiastic questions and personal stories about wildlife from young audiences. Students also identify and count birds at their school. The grand finale is a field trip to *The Conservancy* where kids learn how to use binoculars, catch insects with sweep nets, touch our pet "Rosy" the rosy boa snake, and go on a plant scavenger hunt. The program has received rave reviews from students, teachers, and parents.

At a time when too many children grow up without any real connection to the natural world, we are proud to offer school programs which provide students with an educational outdoor experience, a memorable introduction to the beauty and diversity of nature.



Conservancy Field Trips are Fun!

"We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect."

Aldo Leopold



Irresistible Enthusiasm for Volunteering!

TAYLOR MADE WALKS

Seventeen years ago, Lois Taylor noticed a newspaper article about *The Conservancy*, then still in its infancy. Fortunately for us, Lois fell in love with the area on her very first hike—and has been contributing her time and energy ever since! This special lady is one of our foremost volunteers.

Growing up in Riverside, Lois tells us that she didn't automatically develop an appreciation for nature. For years, she was kept busy raising two sons, teaching school, then working as a secretary and bookkeeper. An indefatigable world traveler, Lois eventually retired to Irvine, her current "base of operations."

Lois' epiphany about the natural world came in 1996, while on a hike in Yosemite. She found herself absolutely "awed by the flora" and came home "wanting to learn more and experience more. I was like a kid in kindergarten when I discovered the world of nature." Since then, Lois has joined the California Native Plant society, as well as enrolled in community college classes on botany. She has also studied birding, and now wants to learn more about insects! She muses that "one thing leads to another and every discovery opens another door to new things I want to learn about."

"Service to others is the payment you make for your space here on earth."

Mohammed Ali

Because of her enthusiasm, Lois is one of the busiest "retired" women you'll ever meet! She volunteers for Sea and Sage Audubon as a naturalist, University Park library bookstore, UCI arboretum, Fairview Developmental Center and the Nix Nature Center. Wow!

The Conservancy is fortunate that Lois reserves some of her energy to assist us, too. Over the years, she has not only attended many *Conservancy* hikes and walks, she also leads her own "Botany Saunters." Lois is a prompt and well prepared guide, who maintains unflinching enthusiasm and a friendly smile. Her excitement about the natural world is infectious.

On her "You've Got Gall" walk last fall, Lois unraveled the mysteries of galls: what they are, where they grow, and what you find in them. At the end of two hours, one young boy exclaimed, "I didn't know anything about galls but now I think they're *amazing!*"

Not only does Lois lead *Conservancy* walks, she volunteers during our newsletter mailing "parties," membership drives and fundraisers. When asked what she would like to do in the future, Lois said, "I am fortunate that I love my life right now." *The Conservancy* is very grateful we are a part of that life. *Thank you, Lois, for all you do!*

MARCH CALENDAR

2	<i>Sunrise Hike</i>	5:30-07:30a
8	<i>Trail Clear & Weed</i>	8:00-11:30a
8	<i>Astronomy Night</i>	6:30-08:30p
15	<i>Frog & Toad Walk I</i>	6:30-08:30p
16	<i>Bird & Nature Walk</i>	9:00-11:30a
22	<i>Scavenger Hunt</i>	9:30-11:30a
22	<i>Sunset Moonrise Walk</i>	6:30-08:45p
30	<i>Conditioning Hike</i>	2:00-04:30p

APRIL CALENDAR

5	<i>Wildflower Walk</i>	9:00-11:30a
5	<i>Astronomy Night</i>	7:00-09:00p
6	<i>Conditioning Hike</i>	8:00-10:30a
12	<i>Frog & Toad Walk II</i>	7:00-09:00p
13	<i>Wildflower Walk</i>	9:00-11:30a
19	<i>Trail Clear & Weed</i>	8:00-11:30a
26	<i>Family Nature Walk</i>	9:30-11:30a
27	<i>Sierra Sage Walk</i>	9:00-11:30a

MAY CALENDAR

3	<i>Native Am. Plants</i>	9:00-11:30a
3	<i>Astronomy Night</i>	7:00-09:00p
4	<i>Conditioning Hike</i>	8:00-10:30a
11	<i>Mother's Day Walk</i>	9:00-11:30a
17	<i>Trail Clear & Weed</i>	8:00-11:30a
24	<i>Family Nature Walk</i>	9:00-11:00a

For an up-to-date listing of events, visit www.theconservancy.org or call 949-489-9778.



NATIVE PLANT CRAFTS

The Conservancy strives to maintain its acreage in a state approximating that familiar to once resident Native Americans. On May 3rd, you can take a morning hike on *The Conservancy* to learn more about local Native American plant use. Then, drive east a few miles on Ortega Highway to *Tree of Life Nursery* where you'll meet women from the Seri tribe of Sonora, Mexico. These women still practice Native American handicrafts using traditional plant and other materials.

Learn more about the Seri at: uapress.arizona.edu/onlinebks/seris/titlseri.htm.

THE DONNA O'NEILL LAND CONSERVANCY MEMBERS

Support from new and renewing members underwrites recreational activities, environmental education, biological research, and land management on your Conservancy. Thank you!

Founding

Gilbert Aguirre
Dr. and Mrs. Leon Baginski
R.J. and Gloria Brandes
Laura Cohen
Mike Evans
Terry Evans
Richard and Jill Jackson
Bruce King and Family
Michael and Lynn Lindsey
Tony and Melinda Moiso
Nancy Nolan
Richard J. O'Neill
The Oliphant Family
Geordie Shaw & Family
Jim Stovall
Scott Struthers

Lifetime

Stephen T. Beneto
Richard J. O'Neill
George O'Connell

Corporate

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Southern California Gas
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Oglebay Norton
Wal-Mart Stores Inc.,
Foothill Ranch

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Sam Perricone, Jr.
Michael & Lori Reznick

Supporting

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Jennifer Gore
Daniel & Janet Ferons
Suzanne & Craig Johnson
Laurie & Joe Seymour
Lois Taylor

Conservator

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Denny Bean
Michael Butler
Laura Cohen

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John Duenes
Michael Green,
Clark & Green Associates
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The Laub Family
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Shirley Zanton &
Mike Whalen

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Rebecca & Jud Fisher
Pamela Fraser

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Trina Burdick
Laura Camp
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Tad Dudzinski
Dan D' Urso
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Pallie Jean Stenzel
Philip Storm
Diana Weir
Jim Williams

The Mather Family
Isobel Pelham

RICHARD J. O'NEILL FUNDRAISER

Last November, *The Conservancy* hosted a fund-raiser luncheon to honor the environmental contributions of *Conservancy* founder and lifetime member, Richard J. O'Neill. The event—held at The Beachfire Bar & Grill in Ladera Ranch—was personally hosted by Frank Barbaro and Dan Jacobson. Senator Lou Correa and Wylie Aitken also served as event co-sponsors. Numerous *Conservancy* supporters, members, and trustees made an appearance.

Although morning rain threatened, by the time guests began arriving, clouds had lifted, permitting relaxed socializing on the Beachfire's sunny patio. Guests could view *Conservancy* maps, photo cutouts of Mr. O'Neill in his youth, and pictures of *Conservancy* namesake, Donna Newman O'Neill, Mr. O'Neill's late wife.



Dan Jacobson Honoring Mr. O'Neill

At the conclusion of lunch, host and *Conservancy* trustee Dan Jacobson gave a speech, highlighting the importance of Mrs. O'Neill's influence on her husband's environmentalism. Mr. Jacobson also detailed Mr. O'Neill's longtime role as mover and shaker in the Orange County Democratic Party. And of course, he played a central role in the establishment of *The Conservancy* itself: "1,200 acres of land that is to remain pristine forever" because of his hard work and dedication. Mr. Jacobson pointed out that "the earth is a better place" because of such efforts: "We and our children breathe better, live longer, are healthier, can view, appreciate, and enjoy the beauty of nature, and swim in cleaner waters."



Pete Bloom Recalls Wild Orange County

Mr. Jacobson's speech was followed by an impromptu tribute by Pete Bloom, a well-known raptor and birding expert, whose lifelong interests were stimulated by youthful encounters with natural wonders like those found on *Conservancy* lands—wonders which used to be much more widespread throughout the County.

Former business partner Howard Adler also related the story of how, in the mid 1980's, the O'Neills rescued a 50 million year old whale skeleton which was unearthed during construction of the Plaza de la Paz Shopping Center. The O'Neills not only raised the money required to have the fossil removed to the Los Angeles Museum of Natural History, they personally participated in the digging! (You can still see a replica of the recovered whale skull at the Plaza de la Paz Shopping Center.)

Thanks to contributions by attendees and many others who donated but did not attend, the event raised just over \$10,000. *The Conservancy* would like to give special thanks to Dave Donaldson, owner of the Beachfire, and Chef Cathy McKnight, for their help in making this fundraiser possible. Proceeds will benefit *The Conservancy's* educational and conservation programs.



O'Neill Fundraiser on Beachfire Patio

O'NEILL FUNDRAISER DONORS

Henry Segerstrom,
C.J. Segerstrom & Sons
Joan Irvine Smith



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Peter Bloom
Suzanne Kim
Michael Hayde
Daniel L. Jacobson
Jeff Joy, Greenburg Traurig
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Howard Adler
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SATURDAY SPECIALISTS

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world. One volunteer discovered a small skink, which was carefully moved to safety. Another came face to face with a four-inch centipede. These invertebrates have two poisonous tail stingers, kept in readiness to deliver a powerful sting to the animal's prey!

Last year's drought made trail clearing easier than usual. However, much-needed recent rains have transformed our formerly brown, dry hillsides into a beautiful bright green. Unfortunately, we've also seen indications that invasive weeds, suppressed by drought, are reviving, greedily stealing the precious water, space and nutrients that native plants need to grow. This means the jobs of trail clearing and weeding will loom more important and necessary in the upcoming year.

Now is the ideal time to pull weeds. The ground is moist and weeds are

still small and easily removed. Anyone is welcome to join us on the second or third Saturday of each month for a chance to work off some calories, spend time outdoors in a unique landscape, and learn more about the natural world while helping *The Conservancy*. Attend one Saturday per month or one Saturday per year!

If your business, organization, scout or student group is looking for an outing or community service project, please contact us. You can join the comraderie of our regular trail clearing and weeding crews, or we will arrange a special date for your group to come out and work.

Help us carry out our mission to preserve and protect by keeping our acreage of native Grasslands, Coastal Sage Scrub and Oak Woodlands in an ideal, weed-free state!



Dedicated Weeding Crew Jubilant Over an Important Job Well Done!

DANTE'S BIRTHDAY

How did 12 year old Dante Ivec decide to celebrate his birthday in January? A limo ride to the beach with friends? No. A shopping trip to the mall to pick up the latest electronic gear? Not! How about a "green" hiking party out at *The Conservancy*? All right!

Dante, family and friends packed their lunches, carpooled to *The Conservancy*, and started a day of adventure: analyzing animal tracks,

ducking under branches, leaping over gulches, ferreting out trapdoor spiders, marveling at views, and enjoying nature's fragrances. The festivities culminated with a huge chocolate cake!

Dante even took his birthday plans a step further. In lieu of gifts, he asked that guests donate to *The Conservancy*. Dante's generosity raised \$230! Many thanks to all the celebrants who joined Dante for "the best birthday I've ever had!"

ORANGE COUNTY STARS

continued from page 1

first visited *The Conservancy* after reading a notice about Astronomy Night in the local newspaper. The introduction that evening was provided by Robert Gill, then astronomy lecturer at Cal State Fullerton. Mike was already quite interested in astronomy. Both he and his wife, Mary, began to make regular Astronomy Night visits to enjoy *The Conservancy's* dark skies.

Mike possessed a telescope, which he brought out a few times. However, Mike's ownership of the special type of green laser pointer popular with astronomy enthusiasts proved to be of greater future significance. After the formal lecture, Mike would engage in one-on-one Q&A, entertaining small groups using his pointer. It was obvious that Mike enjoyed interacting with his audiences. As an attorney, Mike needs to be a good talker. ("I'm the best!" he quips!) On an occasion when the lecturer unexpectedly cancelled at the last minute, then Executive Director Laura Cohen exactly knew who she should ask to step in. Eventually, Mike transitioned from astronomy night understudy to astronomy night star!

Whereas university-trained astronomers might prefer to concentrate on the science, Mike says that he purposely slants his talks towards "star-gazing," focusing on visible phenomena. Mike provides a bit of astronomical trivia, along with some of the mythology with which constellations are typically associated. He generally points out that Betelgeuse (typically pronounced "Beetle Juice"), located in the constellation of Orion the Hunter, is the largest object you can see with the naked eye, and the Andromeda galaxy is the furthest. A college football fan, Mike refers to Albireo, a pretty blue and gold double star located in the constellation of Cygnus, The Swan, as the "UC Berkeley star." Although Mike is a willing volunteer, don't ask him to lead Astronomy Night if his *alma mater*, UC Berkeley, is playing! But he doesn't mind coming out to *The Conservancy* on his birthday! Last October, Mike, his wife Mary, their daughter, son and

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his fiance came directly to Astronomy Night from Mike's birthday celebration at a local restaurant!

For those interested in moving beyond naked eye observation, green laser pointers aren't the only equipment you'll find at Astronomy Night. Other volunteers, including Dave Gosman, bring telescopes to share. Dave, an Astronomy Night volunteer for nearly a decade, is a salesman at Cal's Camera in Costa Mesa. Dave was originally recruited by longtime volunteer Gary "Dr. Bird" Meredith. Gary has been bringing a spotting scope—more typically used for birding—to Astronomy Night for years. As one of Dave's regular customers, Gary discovered that Dave owned a telescope, and the rest is history!



Dave Gosman Checks Equipment Settings

Two years ago, Dave upgraded from a 3" manually controlled telescope to his current 8" computerized Celestron Schmidt-Cassegrain. Dave enthusiastically reports that he has seen more in the last couple of years with his new "goto" scope than in the previous decade with his manual one. Computerized scopes are also ideal for Astronomy Night "star parties," says Dave. Instead of constantly having to "push people out of the way" to adjust his scope for continued tracking of celestial objects, he now just presses the button and lets the computer-controlled motors do all the work!

On any given night, you are likely to meet other volunteer astronomers who also bring out telescopes to share. Russ Tanton, a former telescope company sales representative, regularly brings his 16' collapsible Dobsonian, a scope so tall that

observers must climb a ladder to use it! All in all, our Astronomy Night volunteers are a very friendly bunch, happy to share their equipment and knowledge of the heavens with interested observers. Take an astronomical adventure! Come out to meet them on our next Astronomy Night!



TDOLC SCOUTS

The Conservancy believes its educational school programs and youth opportunities for involvement in the wonders of nature are critical to fulfilling our mission. On a regular basis, we offer family nature walks, and student field trips you can read about elsewhere in these pages. Young people also regularly join our weeding and trail clearing crews to perform community service.

Over the years, we have also benefited from the energies of area Girl Scout and Boy Scout troops. Eagle Scouts, in particular, have worked on a number of projects on their way to scouting achievement awards. Because Derek Knobel, Ranch Manager of Rancho Mission Viejo, served as Scoutmaster of Eagle Scout Troop #724 for several years, *The Conservancy* has enjoyed a particularly close relationship to that troop. Eagle Scouts built—and rebuilt!—the Gato Road bridge that many a *Conservancy* visitor has walked on. Two Eagle Scouts from Troop #724 are currently working on projects designed to educate Talega homeowners about *Conservancy* programs. Eric Crider is one of them.

Eric hails from Mission Viejo. He is now a sixteen year old high school sophomore, but his involvement with *The Conservancy* started several years back when he was only a seventh grader. Along with the rest of his troop, Eric accompanied *The Conservancy's* then Executive Director, Laura Cohen, on several hikes around the reserve. He also spent many weekends removing invasive thistles from *Conservancy* hillsides. He was also part of the crew who winched the aforementioned Gato Road bridge back into position, after a season of heavy rainfall washed away the



Eric Crider Designs Signage Wordings

supporting banks, causing the bridge to slump into Gato creek. When the time came for Eric to develop an Eagle Scout project, he knew where he wanted to make yet another contribution. Eric approached Laura Cohen to ask what kind of help *The Conservancy* needed, and she suggested Eric work on an educational "no trespassing" campaign by developing signage and deterrent plantings. Eric knew he could obtain prickly pear *Opuntia* cactus from the backyard of his grandfather free of charge. To get ideas for signs, Eric and his mother visited area parks. At Oak Canyon Nature Center, Eric first encountered recycled plastic lumber, which appealed to his desire to work with an ecologically friendly product. Eric go to work on a design, then researched companies around the State to obtain an affordable quote. Eric will begin fundraising for his project shortly.

If you'd like to help with Eric's fundraising efforts, please contact *The Conservancy* at 949-489-9778. We are looking forward to enjoying the fruits of Eric's hard work.



Installation Site for New Signage

*"The best way to predict the future is to invent it."
Immanuel Kant*

The Donna O'Neill
Land Conservancy

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MEMBERSHIP IN THE DONNA O'NEILL LAND CONSERVANCY

The Donna O'Neill Land Conservancy is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation originally established in 1990 to provide stewardship for a 1200 acre south Orange County wilderness reserve located in the coastal foothills just east of San Juan Capistrano.

Our mission is to create awareness of the rich natural and ecological resources of the San Mateo Watershed by providing opportunities for environmental education, biological research, and sensitive recreational access to *The Conservancy*. The public is regularly invited to join us for nature walks and hikes, butterfly counts, astronomy nights, bird walks, bat and owl outings, and much more.

Consult our website (www.theconservancy.org) for a current schedule of events, email us at "rmvlc@sbcglobal.net" or call 949-489-9778.

Please join us! Your membership will help protect Orange County Wildlands! All members receive a biannual newsletter, free nature walks and hikes, discounts on *Conservancy* events, and the satisfaction of knowing that local wildlife is protected by the many programs which membership funds help support. (Conservator, Supporting, Sustaining and Lifetime members receive additional benefits. For details, please consult our website or contact *The Conservancy* office.)

Individual	\$25	Supporting	\$250
Family	\$45	Sustaining	\$500
Conservator	\$100	Lifetime	\$10,000

Checks should be made payable to "TDOLC" and sent to *The Donna O'Neill Land Conservancy*, P.O. Box 802, San Juan Capistrano, CA 92693. You may also download a membership application from our website or phone 949-489-9778 to request one.