

Conservation

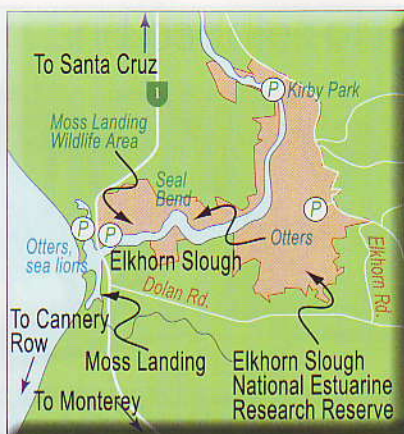
gulls, pelicans and cormorants.

Occasionally migrating whales appear beyond the kelp beds, and orcas patrol just a couple of miles offshore.

The slough also has an otter population, much of which congregates near the launch ramp at the harbor. I've seen up to 75 huddled together. Farther up the slough there is a haul-out beach for seals. While brown pelicans and gulls dominate the slough, it's also home to egrets, herons, avocets, willets, sandpipers, terns, grebes, plovers and dozens of other coastal birds. At times we see white pelicans, a rare visitor in our area. These fascinating birds don't dive for food like their brown cousins. They encircle a school of fish, creating a captive pool of food.

Elkhorn Slough is a favorite of our staff. Lauren Hanneman is passionate about saving the slough, which acts as a nursery for young fish.

"It loses more of its precious mudflats and pickleweed habitat due to erosion from tidal flow," she says. "The migratory birds come here because California has lost over 98 per cent of its coastal wetlands. We all need these resources, no matter what our reasons are."



Lauren is a veteran of five seasons with Team OCEAN, although she is still under 30. Her college degree more closely fits the job than anyone else, and she is still searching for that perfect career that combines what she loves about this program with a career. She is a natural when it comes to engaging and educating people about environmental issues, and that, plus the marine environment, motivated her to join.

Staff member Ron Eby took over the lead job in 2006. His new duties include scheduling staff and dozens of volunteers. Ron is retired

from the navy, and is a man of unbounded energy, often biking to the launch site before starting his six hours on the water.

"I love the water, especially the slough, love to kayak and wanted to learn more about what I was seeing, and to share my enjoyment of our wonderful sanctuary with others. I am absolutely amazed at how fulfilling my time with Team OCEAN is," he says.

There is also the camaraderie with fellow members and interacting with sanctuary guests, "many of whom have become friends and paddling buddies, and some who have become members of Team OCEAN," Ray says.

Robert Scoles, a retired police officer, is in his third season. He remembers one particular Saturday on the slough.

"The gulls were agitated at Pelican Berm and Seal Bend because there was a fledgling gull about a third of the way across the channel. Apparently it had entered the water and was then washed away by the incoming tide. The parents found it and started making it swim back. The gulls flanked the chick and each time it tried to stop or change direction, the adults would peck it. Once they got it back

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