

on the berm, all the gulls quieted down."

We all have favorite moments on the water. One of mine, from the first season, was being out on Elkhorn Slough at the end of summer, with not a tourist in sight, but a sky filled with hundreds of pelicans, diving all around us in a feeding frenzy.

Of course, there's the people as well.

"Perhaps the most gratifying and memorable aspect of this program is the wonderful people and volunteers I have had the privilege of meeting and paddling with over the last five years," Lauren says. "I have had job offers, met members of Congress and some of the most fascinating people."

Ron feels he learns something new each time he paddles.

"Sometimes from other team members, sometimes from people on the water, sometimes from things I discover, and also from the staff of the kayak shops who paddle for a living. I see the sparkle in the eyes of guests as I interpret the sanctuary for them and share my fascination with what we are so blessed with."

THERE ARE some downsides. For Lori it is having to reprimand the public. I recall, during the first season, finding a trail of oil at Cannery Row from some local spill, probably a small fishing boat, but being unable to track the source.

For Ron it's seeing wildlife being disturbed.

"While any one transgression may not seem to have a lasting impact on its own, repeated disturbances by tens of thousands of guests in the sanctuary can have a lasting effect."

Robert has had some people become a little belligerent.

"They think we are the kayak police. By far I create my own negative experiences when, after talking to someone, I realize it is not within my abilities to make them experience what I am experiencing."

Lauren unfortunately sees the same negative issues year after year. People still disturb wildlife in critical areas, the various interest groups such as environmentalists, duck hunters and fishermen still can't resolve their differences, and most frustrating for her, needed signs are not being replaced.

Cannery Row and the slough have kayak outfitters, creating crowded conditions on summer weekends. One of the favorite tourist attractions is the otter, and their playful antics make visitors want to get closer. Team OCEAN members spend more time protecting otters than any other animal. We remind people that while these creatures appear carefree, they divide their time between feeding, grooming and sleeping, leaving

little time for much else, and getting too close disrupts their survival schedules.

The current group of staff and volunteers patrol both areas Friday through Sunday from early summer to early fall. All have returned for this season.

"I think we actually do make a difference," Lori says. "And I can feel it every time I go out, even if some things work against us."

Meade Fischer is a part-time educator, writer, radio commentator, artist and environmental activist. He lives near Monterey Bay and can be reached at eclectypress@baymoon.com.

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