

Fall 2020



COVID-19 LOCKDOWN SHOWS NATURE'S SPEEDY RECOVERY



Birds have an easier time finding mates and avoiding predators when there's less traffic noise.

In the quiet of night you can hear the sounds of nature. But the collective noise from the hustle and bustle of our daily lives makes it hard for even wildlife to hear each other. Songbirds have changed their songs to be heard above the din of traffic. Traffic noise also makes it more difficult for birds to hear the alarm calls of other birds, putting them (and other wildlife) at greater risk of predation. Noise also impacts the ability of birds to hear mating calls. It's no wonder fewer birds are found living near noisy roads.

With less traffic and noise since the COVID lockdowns, people who are cooped up at home have been discovering a vast array of birds in their area. And the birds have noticed the COVID lockdown too! Scientists have found

that when traffic noise decreases, birds sing more quietly because they don't have to compete with the noise.

Unexpected environmental benefits have extended to air quality and to waterways as well. Oceans, rivers and lakes are experiencing better water quality from less shipping, cruises and fishing, and less urban and agricultural runoff. Sea turtles are crawling onto newly undisturbed beaches; whales and other sea creatures are venturing closer to shore, and degraded aquatic and subterranean plant life is rebounding and flourishing.

In our parks, wildlife is venturing into unoccupied campgrounds and along empty roads. Some natural resources professionals dream of keeping some of the natural public lands closed to humans, or rotating closures to enable species to flourish. Yet open space has become more valuable than ever to humans who clamor to shed their COVID confines and safely immerse themselves in nature, where we can refresh our souls and get exercise without treadmills or weight machines.

With the recent passage of Land and Conservation Act funding from Congress and the Great American Outdoors Act, we are working to purchase more lands for open space preservation both for wildlife and ourselves.

It's good to know that because of SOAR, any new lands purchased and designated for open space zoning in Ventura County will be protected from development by a SOAR vote of the people.

It's ironic that nature is benefiting because we humans are limiting our activities in order to save our lives. Yet one of the most beneficial lessons we've learned from COVID-19 is how quickly we can improve the health of our local and our global environment by reducing our collective human footprint. ☆

We've learned how quickly we can improve the health of our local and global environment.

LOCAL FARMS DELIVER

Support local farmers and farmworkers

and enjoy fresh-from-the-field goodness by taking advantage of one of the numerous Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs we are fortunate to have around us in Ventura County.

CSAs allow consumers to buy a share in a farm's production and receive weekly boxes of whatever vegetables, fruits and other products are ready for market that week – giving wide scope for new-found interests in culinary exploration. Some CSAs deliver to neighborhood drop-off points; others require that each week's box be picked up at the farm. Some CSAs bundle the production of several small local farms to provide a wider selection of products.

And these days some may even deliver produce directly to your door.

Not ready to commit to a weekly produce box? Consider sharing a subscription with a neighbor. Or stop by some of the county's many roadside farm stands and pick up a bagful of whatever tempting fruits and vegetables are for sale, just harvested from the nearby fields.

Visit www.farmbureauvc.com/farm-to-table for links to local CSAs, farm stands, farmers markets, u-picks and other ways to get the freshest, most delicious produce and help keep Ventura County agriculture going strong. ☆



Proposed 277-acre Hitch Ranch development in Moorpark

A Hitch in Moorpark

Country living for residents in the foothills north of the 118 in the western end of Moorpark may be a thing of the past if the Moorpark City Council approves a proposal for 777 residential units on Hitch Ranch. Comstock Homes' proposal for the 277-acres of ranchland near Gabbert Road and Poindexter Avenue includes 456 houses, 236 apartment units and 63 triplexes and duplexes.

An EIR (Environmental Impact Report) will be released in late summer/early fall with hearings for the project anticipated in the winter. Because the development is in the City, no SOAR vote is required to develop the Ranch. ☆

DARK SKIES

There is a movement afoot by those who like to see stars at night. The County of Ventura has approved two local laws (so far) that require reduced night lighting: one law applies to the unincorporated Ojai Valley and complements the City of Ojai's Dark Sky ordinance, and the other applies to lands in wildlife corridor zones. Now stargazers have set their sights on expanding dark sky protections into other areas.



"Dark skies increase one's enjoyment of the night's solitude."

Dark skies in Ventura County aided enjoyment of the once-in-6,800 years' glimpse of Comet NEOWISE (and a wise owl) passing through the neighborhood. (Image credit: Justin Lee)

One such group in the unincorporated Malibu area of Ventura County is led by Dark Sky enthusiast and SOAR board member Van Vibber. Van explains that "Less light pollution makes it easier to see the stars (and comets!) at night. Plus we know that lights can negatively impact wildlife migration and degrade habitat so dark skies also benefit wildlife." From a personal perspective, Van finds that "Dark skies increase one's enjoyment of the night's solitude."

The Dark Sky ordinance for the unincorporated Malibu area has been drafted by Ventura County's Planning Department with input from community members and the International Dark Sky Association. It will be before the Board of Supervisors and Coastal Commission for approval later this year as part of an amendment to the area's Local Coastal Plan.

Tentative key provisions include turning off outdoor lights at 10:00pm unless people are present or for security lighting on motion sensors and timers. The ordinance has maximum brightness and height restrictions, and a requirement that outdoor lighting be shielded and directed downward.

SOAR aims to preserve the open space land beneath our feet. Dark Sky ordinances aim to preserve the dark sky above.



PO Box 7352
Ventura, California 93006-7352
www.soarvc.org

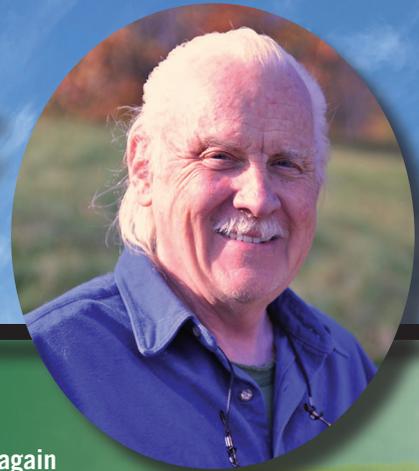
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In Memoriam

Norman Eric Johanson



In May of this year, SOAR lost one of its most generous angels. Norman Eric Johanson, "Eric" to his friends and family, was the embodiment of the confluence of conservative and conservationist.

A lifetime Republican, Eric grew up in the rural lowlands of northern New Jersey in the 1940's and early 1950's, which instilled in him a love for nature – fishing, hunting and self-reliance.

Eric moved west with his family, wife Donna and four children, John, Lauren, Kurt and Neil, in 1992, landing in the Santa Rosa Valley of Ventura County, and re-established his business, Johanson Dielectrics, in the San Fernando Valley. We are all lucky for the timing. A co-founder of the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza, Eric extended his love of open space to generous support for Ventura County's first SOAR effort in 1998.

In 2016, SOAR's renewal campaign again benefitted substantially from Eric's beneficence. Demonstrating his ability to keep one hiking boot in each camp, Eric was insistent that the SOAR Board meet with representatives of COLAB (Coalition of Labor, Agriculture and Business) an organization that opposes SOAR, to try to reach a compromise. He strongly believed conservation and economic growth can go hand in hand as long as you don't fragment natural open space.

He showed that for all of the perceived conflict between conservatism and conservationism, it is important to remember that there is a point of confluence. Our friend Eric represented that point in place and time. For that we thank him and his family. He will be remembered. He will be missed.