



## Reaching Out to the Community

### Mira Loma High School Students Introduce the Outreach Portions of the Arcade Creek Project

*by Lisa Kelly, Senior Manager of Outreach*

The Arcade Creek Project began as a result of the International Baccalaureate Program coming to Mira Loma High School. The students and their instructors began studying nearby Arcade Creek, a beautiful neighborhood waterway that runs year-round just north of the school.

Today, the Creek Project is in its fifth year, and it has grown from encompassing seven components to eleven—eight studies, a restoration group, an outreach group and a data analysis group. The outreach group is the group which comes in contact with the public. We do this a number of ways, from participating in Creek Week and Sacramento Urban Creek Council's newsletters to visiting elementary schools to emphasize the importance of the environment and why we want to protect it.

One major interaction the project has had with the public involves politics and government. A large section of the watershed feeding into the creek was almost sold to another local philanthropic group (they were planning on turning it into a parking lot). Because Mira Loma students had been running ecological surveys on this watershed parcel, they knew its importance to adjacent wetlands. They undertook a massive letter writing campaign and invited City Council members to the site to explain its importance. This political part of the process added a new dimension to the project. The proposed parking lot has been put on long term hold, and it seems that the students' work has paid off.

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## Dipping Into Creeks

### An Educator's Guide and Kit

*by Beth Etgen, Urban Creeks Council Vice President, Education*

With flowing water, wooded banks, and a variety of wildlife, local creeks are an ideal resource for learning through experiential environment-based education. Research and classroom-based studies show that students learn better, are better citizens at school, and transfer their learning to new situations better in environment-based education programs. The Sacramento Chapter of Urban Creeks Council developed "Dipping Into Creeks" as an environment-based activity guide for educators that use community creeks as a "window on the world" to increase students' understanding of our complex environment.

***Much of California's economic prosperity has depended on how we have used our environment. In the future it will depend on how we understand our environment. In its broadest definition, our environment is the Now that joins our Past to our Future. Our environment links everyone and everything.***  
From Education & The Environment, Strategic Initiatives for Enhancing Education in California

Creeks naturally attract children; they are just about the right size of water for easy exploration. "Dipping Into Creeks" is a fun, experiential resource guide packed with great activities designed to encourage educators of children in kindergarten through eighth grade to use creeks as classrooms. The activities in "Dipping Into Creeks" give the leader

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**Creek Watch Editor** - Betty Cooper

The purpose of the Urban Creeks Council of California is to encourage the preservation, protection, restoration, and maintenance of natural streams in urban environments. The goals are to educate the general public on the aesthetic, recreational, and ecological values of natural streams.

As a chapter of the statewide organization, Sacramento UCC assumes the same purpose and goals. The chapter holds regular meetings, develops educational materials, participates in neighborhood fairs and public events. It works with schools, neighborhoods, and youth groups to encourage creek clean ups and streambank restoration. It cooperates with city and county efforts to reduce pollution from stormwater runoff. It cooperates with other organizations to monitor developments along stream corridors. Membership is open to anyone who wishes to share in these activities.

Chapter meetings are generally held the second Tuesday of each month at the Arcadè Creek Recreation and Park District.

Please call (916) 482-8377 for specific meeting dates and times.

# Creek Plants: Buckeye

by Bruce Swinehart

One of the most obvious changes that is evident in fall is the transition many plants make. To me, the drying of the grasses to a golden brown in late summer transforms the rather monotonous contours of the foothills into a colorful representation of our Golden State. As you travel through our valley, the warm brown plains create an aura of tranquility that artists consistently try to capture.

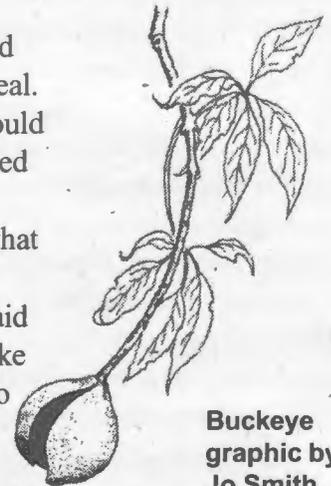
Although most of the changes in the hue of our vegetation are expected and accepted, there is one plant that makes a dramatic change that causes concern in the discerning observer.

Every year near the end of summer many people are alarmed at the buckeye tree that has all the symptoms of dying. These trees are generally seen along the streams of this area. Along our creeks there are many good examples. At this time of year we often see several trees with brown leaves that hang down as if the trees are in the throes of death. It is as if each leaf has echoed the despair of the tree in death. If one looks more closely, there are probably lemon-sized grayish-green balls hanging among the leaves. This would seem to indicate even further that something has killed the tree before the fruit has ripened. Often there are many of these trees in the same area that look the same. This is even further evidence to indicate a disease has attacked and is killing all of the trees.

Such is not the case, however. The trees are not dead or dying but merely preparing for winter. The leaves have finished making food for the tree. The leaves then die to prevent further water loss. The various mechanisms the tree has to bring this about are interesting but complicated. The fruit continues to ripen and the leaves and fruit fall later so the fruit can take advantage of the early spring rains. If the fruit is examined after the covering has split open, the rich red-brown fruit of the buckeye can be recognized.

The buckeye fruit, sometimes called the Horse Chestnut, has large amounts of tannic acid in it and as such is inedible. Beekeepers do not appreciate the buckeye as its pollen is poisonous to bees. Sometimes many bees are found dead under the tree.

Several years ago I taught a class in edible wild plants. We had successfully made edible acorn meal. I challenged the class to a project to see if they could leach the tannic acid out of the buckeye. They tried drying and roasting it and just about every other possible way. But nothing worked. No matter what was done, when water was applied to leach it, it became a gooey, mucilaginous mess. I heard it said once that if the eastern Indians had learned to make the buckeye edible, we may not have been able to colonize America. I was born in the buckeye state, Ohio, so they are special to me.



**Buckeye graphic by Jo Smith**

## Reaching Out... *(continued from page 1)*

Outreach works to make the community more aware of its environment. Its current projects are developing curricula for visiting elementary and middle schools and teaching classes about caring for the environment, representing the Arcade Creek Project at various environmental symposia and gatherings, publishing a column in a local environmental newsletter promoting the interests of the creek, and generally reaching out to the community about our project and the environment.

This year, Outreach will be bringing this comprehensive project into classrooms in kid-sized portions. We are creating curriculum at this moment that will translate into even greater levels of stewardship and community service. We're hoping to inspire kids at a young age to feel a responsibility for the environment. We feel it is but one manner in which we can do our part to contribute to a generation of people who will be prepared to face the challenges of sustaining the world for generations to come.

We plan to do all this with a series of curriculum that teachers can choose from, including Dr. Seuss's timeless classic story, The Lorax. This story is a great tool for teaching kids about the importance of environmental awareness and conservation. Another curriculum involves understanding proper lab technique as an incredibly important component of any science education. This lesson will teach students about listing a hypothesis, experimental and control groups, materials and methods, procedure, data, data analysis, and conclusion in lab reports while giving them hands-on education about the environment. Yet another involves informing students about the importance of protecting the quality of water, soil, air, and wildlife habitats as well as the importance of preserving biodiversity for environmental and aesthetic reasons.

This outreach group hopes to promote and motivate children to form healthy, lasting relationships with nature by generating an interest in the protection of natural resources. We hope to pass on the understanding that the Earth has provided for and nourished us for millions of years. Yet, with the destruction of the environment from our consumption and industry, we are endangering ourselves and all posterity. The environment must be protected - for ourselves, for our children. And who better to train to protect it than those same children?

## Dipping Into Creeks *(continued from page 1)*

everything needed to prepare and guide a group of children to a local creek, from "Getting Ready in the Classroom" to "Planning For Action". During the learning process, the children proceed from awareness of their local creek to knowledge of the importance of the creek habitat, to planning a specific task for creek improvement. The guide is \$20 and is available from Urban Creeks Council.

Pulling together the equipment that is needed for a group to do activities at a creek site can be a time consuming job. Because of this, a kit of materials that can be used at a creek site is also available for loan. The kit includes aquatic life identification guides, dip nets, white trays, magnifying glasses, ph paper, clip boards and more, for a class of 30 students. To request a loan of a creek kit, please call the Arcade Creek Recreation and Park District office at (916) 482-8377.

"Dipping Into Creeks" would make a wonderful addition to any elementary or middle school educator's library as well as helping to support the Sacramento Chapter of Urban Creeks Council and their work to educate the community about the importance of urban creeks. Consider purchasing one for yourself, your child's or grandchild's teacher or for a local school. With the active participation of many individuals, we can help improve the quality of life for all Californians.

**Mark Your Calendar:  
Creek Week 2006 Clean-Up is April 29**



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What native tree  
 loses all its  
 leaves while the  
 fruit remains?  
 See page 2 to  
 find out!

Address Correction Requested



The Urban Creeks Council of Sacramento is dedicated to protecting and sharing the abundant natural treasures that make up the extensive creek systems of our region.

As a member, you will receive many benefits, including our newsletter *Creek Watch*.

To become a member or renew your membership, please fill out and mail the form below to: Sacramento Urban Creeks Council, 4855 Hamilton Street, Sacramento, CA, 95841

YES! I want to help Sacramento's creeks. Enclosed is my tax deductible gift of:

- \$10/Students
- \$25/Regular membership
- \$40/Family Membership
- \$100
- \$250
- Other \_\_\_\_\_
- I would like to be a member of the Sacramento Urban Creeks Council.
- I'm already a member; please accept my donation and renewal.

Make check payable to: Sacramento Urban Creeks Council.

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Questions? Call: (916) 482-8377 Email: [ucc@arcadecreekrecreation.com](mailto:ucc@arcadecreekrecreation.com)