
THE CALIFORNIA ACORN REPORT

Volume 16

The Official Newsletter of the California Acorn Survey
Walt Koenig and Jean Knops, co-directors

20 October 2012

Editor: Walt Koenig

THE SABBATICAL REPORT

Welcome, faithful readers, to this year's *California Acorn Report*. We are obliged to begin with a report on our sabbatical year, which we spent—shockingly enough—in California! Who would have suspected? The first 6 months were spent at Stanford, where Janis hung out with CCARE (the Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education), an institute in the psych department whose mission is related to her interests in the evolution of human cooperation. Special thanks to Terry Root in the Woods Institute for the Environment for providing her with an office.

Meanwhile, I spent the fall riding my bicycle up (literally) Sand Hill Road to my office at Jasper Ridge, where Nona Chiariello had graciously given me space despite the fact that I wasn't officially anybody. This provided me with a chance to meet the people who do all the grunt work for the reserve—particularly Trevor and Cary—while spending time doing something I'd never done before despite working at Jasper Ridge for 20+ years—namely, walk all the trails and explore the place. And to think that all this time I had no idea there was a vending machine with cans of Dr. Pepper at the Goya Gate, not to mention a brewpub at the far end of trail 2! My apologies to Trevor for trying to confuse him by setting off the wildlife cameras wearing my bear costume (go Bears!).

In January I moved onto campus, where I was generously hosted by Liz Hadly, an old MVZer, in her spacious quarters in Herrin Labs. This turned out to be really fun, particularly because of Lily, her RA, and her fabulous grad students, with whom I got to hang out during lunches and lab meetings. I trust the latter will all keep in mind that the least they can do to show respect for their elders is to stop having such a good time and start suffering to the same extent we did back in the day.

So what, you may be wondering, did I accomplish during my sabbatical? Stuff. Bunches of stuff. At least I think that's true; I admit I can't remember exactly what although I sure spent a lot of time doing it. I do remember riding my bicycle a lot and building the *Titanic* in honor of the 100th anniversary of its demise. Wait...perhaps there was something about...what do you call them...acorns? It will come back to me, I'm sure.



Here I am my sabbatical project: a model of The Titanic, in our Stanford West apartment. It may be made out of card stock, but I was assured it was unsinkable. By the way, the king snake is painted on the table (by Janis; it's our kitchen table from Hastings), not crawling out of the large hole in the hold. All I need now

is a cardboard iceberg and a big aquarium and I'll be all set.

The best part of living in Palo Alto, however, was getting to see our old friends Robert and Tania, going to Cirque de Soleil with Bill and Karen, and having a nice walk at Jasper Ridge with my cousin Steve and his wife Kathy, who lived a short way away in Menlo Park. Particularly notable was running into Shushi, our first Hastings nanny from 1990, who recognized us while we were having dinner at Joya in Palo Alto. The last time we'd seen Shushi was in Binghamton, New York, sometime in the mid-1990s, so it was a quite a surprise to discover her at the next table, and even more pleasant that she wasn't just another Apple executive headhunting among the patrons otherwise trying to enjoy their tapas.

My cousin Steve, his wife Kathy, and their kids caving it up at Jasper Ridge. Steve makes his living studying companies and trying to figure out whether it's worth investing in pieces of paper they pass off to the public called 'stock'. I assured him that no one in their right mind would fall for such a scam.



RANCHO'O SEARCH'O-NO-MOR'O: OUR NEW HOM'O IN CALIFORNI'O

March came and we finally had our chance to move down to Carmel Valley for the field season. As usual, we had initially planned to live at Hastings, but, well, for reasons I won't bore you with, we came up with the idea of moving into our very own house on Tassajara Road—the one we purchased 24 years ago but have never actually lived in, instead renting it out to a colorful mix of teachers, builders, computer geeks, and (more recently) professional poker players and indoor hydroponic gardeners.

After a rocky start—our tenant, although a nice guy, had pretty much neglected to move out, much less clean up after himself—moving into our house turned out to be a surprisingly brilliant idea. Once part of the Search Ranch, *Ranch'o Search'o-no-Mor'o* is unquestionably one of the most beautiful places on earth, something I claim only because I'm totally and completely unbiased. We immediately started to fix up the place with the view of making it a more permanent residence (yes, retirement is indeed somewhere just over the horizon), having locals Forest and Dave build a new deck to replace the old porch, putting a new roof and floor on the old storage shed (slated to become my Man Cave), and planning with old friend and neighbor Michael Newton to do some work while we're back in Ithaca on the upstairs, still in the original (albeit charmingly) funky state that it was in when we bought the house back in 1988.

The underbelly of the old front porch after 30 years. It would appear that we were lucky it didn't collapse some time ago; even Beezel refused to go that way after checking it out.



A few weeks later, here's Yours Truly with Beezel—still admittedly looking a bit skeptical—trying out the fabulous new front deck.



Spring, I have to say, was quite the do. With one of the best coast live oak acorn crops in history, there were still acorns on some of the trees all winter, and the birds responded with one of the most productive years ever. (Eric facilitated this by insisting on finding nests over at Blomone, Blomtwo, and beyond.) Horsetail, after having a fall nest with 5 babies, had a spring nest with 9 nestlings, a new record that was matched by Lower Haystack a week later. Another first was group 1500, which had two simultaneous nests—something that we've steadfastly claimed never happens and can only hope doesn't happen again anytime soon.

Meanwhile, we worked with a great group of field assistants, got a chance to know Vince, the fabulously talented and friendly new Hastings manager, and his wife Sandy, made a trip to LA to see our old friends Brad and Louise, had numerous opportunities to hobnob with our wonderful neighbors Ben and Cate, and enjoyed a series of visits from Ithaca friends and colleagues Cliff, Steve and Natalia, and Barbara and Chuck. We look forward to having all of them and more visit us in the future as *Ranch'o Search'o-no-Mor'o* continues to take shape.



The 2012 Hastings crowd posing on the deck at Ranch'o Search'o-no-Mor'o. Vince, the new Hastings manager, is standing on the far left. Next to Vince is some guy who I guess just wandered in from Cachagua. The rest of the standees include Veronica, Anna, Ian, Melanie, Sheena, Eric, and Jani Lou. Sitting in front are Tracy, Riley, Grace, Rose, Torrey, Julie Joe, Yours Truly, and Caglar. Not pictured are REUs Sophie, Ricci, and Chelsea, who didn't show up until later in the season, and Bezel, who was probably busy jumping up on the living room table and eating the food from the potluck while we were playing around outside.



Deserving of special mention are Janis's and my wild-and-crazy postdocs Caglar and Ian, shown here luxuriating in the spa facilities of the Red House Cottages, aka Formalin Acres.



Among the visitors at Ranch'o Search'o-no-Mor'o last spring was Cliff Kraft, one of our Cornell colleagues, who came out to California to see his son, recently kidnapped by Google in Mountain View. Hearing rumors of Mi Tierra's tacos in Seaside, however, was enough to lure him down for an all-too-

brief visit. Here he and Janis enjoy the one-day special cockapoo dog tacos Mi Tierra graciously cooked up for us after Beezel inadvertently came along for dinner. Who'd a thunk old Beez' would go so well with cilantro and hot sauce?

SUMMERTIME SUMMERTIME

Our stay came to an abrupt end in mid-July, an event that did not correspond as well as we might have hoped to the end of the breeding season. (Fortunately Joey was able to come back and band the kids at School Hill Annex that were too young for Eric and me to deal with before we left.) Things slowed down quickly after that, however, and so we were eventually able to put another year—and, with 232 nestlings banded, a record one at that—in the books.

It was then the long cross-country drive back to New York. This time we zipped through all the good stuff until Iowa, where we spent a day with Janis's sister and dined at La Michoacana, Iowa City's fine taqueria that we hope portends a trend that will continue to migrate east and make it to upstate New York in time for us to enjoy some real Mexican food before we retire to Ranch'o Search'o-no-Mor'o for good. We made a brief stop in Madison to see Janis's former postdoc Ben, stayed with recently retired bro Bill in Milwaukee, spend a night at Janis's uncle's house in Indianapolis, and (last but not least) relived the start of our sabbatical saga by spending the last night with Ron and Sarah in Meadville PA, the town that time got lost trying to locate and the decades perhaps could, but apparently lack the movitation to, improve.

It was then on to Ithaca, where we spent most of our time getting the house back into livable shape before heading off to Scandinavia to attend the ISBE meeting in Lund, Sweden. Outside of the meeting, we made the ridiculously scenic drive from Oslo to Bergen, drove through the Laerdal tunnel, at 15.2 miles the world's longest road tunnel (I point this out for those of you who compete in trivia contests), hung out in Copenhagen with our good friends Rob and Andy, and had a wonderful Norwegian seafood dinner at Solsiden Restaurant on Akershusstranda in Oslo for our 25th Anniversary. Presumably someday we may even catch up to the *California Acorn Survey*, which celebrates its 33rd year in 2012—but not this time around.

A FEW RANDOM SPRING AND SUMMER PHOTOS

Jannie Lou washing dishes in Ranch'o Search'o-no-Mor'o's funky, yet charming, kitchen. We purchased the place in 1988



when MVZ, in the process of hiring a manager for Hastings, threatened to move us out of La Casa Grande. That didn't happen, but having a place of our own in Carmel Valley seemed like a good idea nonetheless. Although we have questioned that decision a few times over the years, particularly when Janis got a job 2,902 miles away in Ithaca, New York and one of our tenants turned out to be a major pot grower, we are now really glad we

kept it all those years and look forward to having visitors when we're in California during the breeding season.

Jannie Lou (modeling her brand-new Norwegian sweater) and Yours Truly on the Aurlandsfjord heading back to Bergen from Flâm, Norway. Yes, you are not the first to note that she's wasted on me.



Our good friend Brad, late of UC Davis, demonstrates the successful completion of his new magic trick of conjuring up his wife Louise out of an armoire in Wertz Brothers Antique Mart in Santa Monica. Brad moved to UCLA in January, where he heads the new La Kretz Center for California

Turtology while perfecting his magic act in preparation for his audition at the Academy of Magical Arts in Hollywood.

AND WHAT ABOUT THE F₁'s?

Thanks for asking! Dale, after spending half of last year helping to keep the country Safe for Communism at Sandia Labs in New Mexico (or something like that; I may have the details confused), has started a Ph.D. program in math at UC Davis. We'll come back to him later, since we saw him when we stopped in Davis on the *California Acorn Survey*. Phoebe, on the other hand, is, well, we aren't quite sure what she's doing besides making her parents worry a lot, but it's clear she's having the time of her life doing it. Her adventures since finishing a second year at Reed last May include spending the summer in Homer, Alaska and hanging out on the Big Island of Hawaii, where she's apparently currently sailing to Maui. As far as we know, her next stop is The Big Apple, so we'll presumably get a chance to confirm her existence when Thanksgiving rolls around.



Phoebe lost her iPhone somewhere on the Kenai Peninsula last summer and thus we're short on recent photos. She clearly had lots of exciting adventures in Alaska, however, Here, for example, she and her boyfriend survey the mountains across

Kachemak Bay from Homer, where Phoebe worked for Mako's Water Taxi Service.

AND FINALLY, THE COUNT

Yes, we did actually count acorns this year. This was despite a couple of major obstacles, the most notable of which was the absence of Jean, who left in mid-July for a year's sabbatical in Lanzhou, China. As most of you are aware, Jean and I have faithfully conducted *The California Acorn Survey* together every September since 1994 regardless of teaching loads, terrorist attacks, and, most problematically, our kids' birthdays, which have had the inconvenient tendency to take place in and around mid-September. But China? We looked into having him come back for the count, but the journey from Lanzhou to *Ranch'o Search'o-no-Mor'o* is a long one. Specifically, according to Google Maps, it's 16,569 kms and involves 124 steps, starting with

1. Head east on 南滨河东路 toward 金昌北路
2. Turn left onto 天水北路
3. Slight right to stay on 天水北路
4. Take the ramp to G30连霍高速
Toll road

I could handle the first three steps, but a toll road? No way. Actually, I particularly like step 94: "Sail across the Pacific Ocean, 6243 km". That gets one to Hawaii, after

which there's of course one more minor jaunt of 4436 km to make it to the West Coast (step 106, if you happen to be keeping track). In any case, this finally prompted me to make other plans.

Jean, by the way, is in China escaping from Lincoln, Nebraska but otherwise studying the strikingly diverse *Stipa* grasslands of Inner Mongolia. Whether this will lead to adding the Mongolian oak to the survey depends on whether NSF will buy us a yacht that's capable of step 94 or not. Despite his absence, Jean managed to participate briefly in the survey via Skype while we were at the James Reserve, the only site we visit with enough bandwidth to allow such an undertaking.



A few of the students at the Chinese Academy of Sciences Cold and Arid Regions Environmental and Engineering Research Institute greet Jean as he arrived in July, eagerly asking for autographs

in their traditional little red notebooks.



And here he is—Jean in the flesh, with his sweetheart Tammy. Jean and his whole family—Tammy, Christopher, and little Tilley—are in Lanzhou this year learning Chinese so as to more efficiently order take-out from Lincoln, Nebraska's Egg Roll King restaurant on South 56th Street. Long live the Revolution!

One casualty of Jean's sabbatical was, however, the Minnesota Auxilliary of the *California Acorn Survey*. (We will now have a moment of silence in its memory.) Actually, it wasn't entirely Jean's fault; going to Minnesota before Jean left in mid-July didn't fit into my schedule either and in any case Kyle is well along on analyzing and writing up the data. (You ARE working on that paper, right Kyle? Kyle? Are you there?) I will, however, miss having an excuse to go to Minnesota once a year, even if it was kind of lame to begin with and it's been several years since we scheduled the survey to overlap the Minnesota State Fair.

The second obstacle to the survey this year was that I am, for a change, actually working—specifically teaching a course in Advanced Behavioral Ecology—which I agreed to do in penance for having blown off my responsibilities the last two years while we were either on or contemplating our sabbatical. Fortunately, Janis graciously took over for me the first week I was gone and my TA Josh practiced his karaoke for the class during the second week. Thanks guys; I really appreciate it.

AND NOW ONCE AGAIN: THE COUNT, THIS TIME FOR REAL

While Jean was busy adjusting to his year on the banks of the Yellow River and getting to better know our future Chinese overlords, I flew to California early on 14 September and was met by Bill Carmen, his wife Karen, and their dog Moxie for the official start of the *California Acorn Survey*. After a stop at the Village Cheese Shop in Palo Alto to pick up sandwiches and dog biscuits, we drove to Jasper Ridge and met Ian, my oak postdoc, and Matt Knope, a Stanford postdoc who was tagging along to gather ideas for a stand-up comedy routine he’s working on, and dropped off Karen and Moxie for their afternoon pow-wow (or maybe it was an afternoon bow-wow?).

Karen Nardi, the California Acorn Survey’s official legal advisor, prepares for an arduous afternoon with Moxie in one of the more obscure recesses of Jasper Ridge.



The survey took longer than anticipated, perhaps due to the nap we had up in the blue oak woodland, but was otherwise uneventful, at least once Ian and I remembered how to download the iButton data with our Palm Pilots. Speaking of which, if any of you know of a way to read iButtons with an iPhone, please contact our Technology Department with details. My current plan is to buy old Palm Pilots off eBay to replace the ones I have when they inevitably crash. So far that’s worked, but it would be nice to not depend on 20th-century technology forever.

Here we are at the conclusion of Jasper Ridge: Matt, Bill, Moxie, Yours Truly, and Ian. This was year 24 at the site, which was begun back in the heyday of the acorn-counting fad of the 1980s along with Polaroid cameras, pac-man, and cabbage-



patch kids—all of which remain integral to The California Acorn Survey.

With Jasper Ridge under our belts, we drove to Hastings, making a brief diversion to count the Empire Grade tanoaks just north of UC Santa Cruz. We arrived in Seaside relatively late, but luckily just in time to have dinner at the Noodle Bar, whose pork and vegetable stir-fry is one of the four California dishes (along with Mi Tierra’s fish tacos, Tommy’s Wok’s grilled eggplant, and Top Dog’s bockwursts) that I regularly dream about when I’m in Ithaca. (Alice Waters can only aspire to such culinary heights, although I admit to occasionally dreaming of Chez Pannisé as well.)

Then it was on to Hastings, where, not having water at *Ranch’o Search’o-no-Mor’o* (apparently a minor issue with the pump controller that got solved by Sunday afternoon), I hung out with Bill and Karen up in the Hastings Cabin and slept in the ruins of La Casa Grande for the next two days while Bill, Ian, and I conducted year #33 of the Hastings survey. Perhaps the most notable observation was the coast live oaks that still have acorns on them from 2011, thus, for the first time, confirming that it’s possible for there to be acorns on the trees year-round. We also ticked off the survey’s first roadrunner as we returned from the Arnold on Saturday. Otherwise, it’s a decent year, more so than I would have expected given how good it was last year. Both valley and blue oaks did almost as well as last year, while California black oaks had their best year since 2008. Only coast and canyon live oaks were notably low.



For his first full statewide survey, Bill trained rigorously for a week this summer in Black Rock City, Nevada, where tens of thousands of aspiring acorn counters gather every year to create a community

dedicated to innovation, art, self-expression, and, as far as I can tell based on this photo, dressing up like extragalactic clowns, an endeavour that Bill unexpectedly excelled in.

Monday, 17 September was blast-off day for the statewide survey. Given the desirability of dropping Bill off at his home in Mill Valley at the end, we conducted the survey withershins for the first time since 2009, going south to Pozo and spending the first night at Sedgwick. We then further bucked SOP by doing the southern part of the survey clockwise, hitting up Switzer’s in the San Gabriels before driving down and spending the night at the James Reserve in the San Jacintos west of Palm Springs. We then made our way around to Palomar Mountain State Park and the Santa Rosa Plateau in time to fight through LA traffic and spend the night with Brad & Louise at their penthouse spread in Westwood.



Ian and Yours Truly scooting along in one of the Hastings mules, our eco-friendly choice for the California Acorn Survey this year that not only got great gas mileage but had fabulous off-road capabilities and

allowed unparalleled open-air, non-stop acorn counting. The only problem, besides a top speed of 20 mph, was that there was no place for our GPS, which may explain why we seem to be heading the wrong direction on Interstate 376 in Pennsylvania.

After LA it was north to the ever-bizarre Liebre Mountain, where the black oaks, usually spectacularly productive, had a relatively poor year with a mean of 22.8 acorns per tree counted in 30 seconds, a value that's pretty good for Hastings, but at the lower end of what's typical up there. We then drove north and counted at Kaweah River and Kaweah Oaks, after which we descended for a second year in a row on Kathy Purcell and her imaginary friend in their wonderful house near the San Joaquin Experimental Range.



Kathy having a good laugh with her 'friend' after a lovely salmon dinner in her ever-amazing off-the-grid hay bale house on the bluff overlooking Fresno in the foothills of the Sierras.

Next up was Yosemite National Park where, having forgotten my permit, I instead purchased a Golden Eagle Pass (now apparently called a "Senior Pass," perhaps to dissuade people from getting them), to celebrate turning 62 last August. For lunch we had a nice picnic on the way out of the valley, accompanied by a ground squirrel, a raven, and, more problematically, a swarm of yellowjackets that appeared out of nowhere after I opened a package of prosciutto.



How do we come up with the funds to do all this every year? Well, it's not from playing the slots, that's for sure, even though we keep trying. Here's Walt losing his change at 9:30 am at our favorite Indian casino on the way to Palomar Mountain on Day 3 of the survey.

That evening was spent in Davis, where, with the demise of *Chez Brad et Louise*, we instead were hosted by Ian and his wife Jill in their apartment on Eighth Street following a celebration of Octoberfest with Dale at Little Prague on G Street. More on that later.

The next day found us going up to Sierra Foothills, where we had a perfect look at a nice bald eagle flying down the valley, followed by the long drive up to Tower House and our *Q. garryana* site in Trinity County. After a nice dinner in Weaverville with Kyle, who came down from his study site up in the hills, we spent the night at Dye Creek. Day 7 had us make the trek to Hopland, where we spent the last night of the survey. Last but not least we drove down to Mill Valley to drop off Bill, crossed the Golden Gate Bridge at 1:56 pm, counted the tanoaks up on Chews Ridge, and called it a wrap at 6:25 pm as we returned to Hastings, 2236 miles and 18,420 acorns later, making this a fairly average year, to the extent such a thing exists in California.



Dye Creek, located in the Lassen foothills, was particularly pleasant this year, affording us the chance to hike up the canyon to the spectacular volcanic buttes. Here Bill, on

the way back down the canyon, takes the opportunity to return to his Yaqui roots and commune with some of the local volcanic rocks after a dip in the river.

THE ANNUAL RESTAURANT REVIEW

It was another good year for dining during the *California Acorn Survey*. Shockingly enough, this was true despite the fact that we only ate at but a single taqueria during the entire trip. Yes, it's true: tacos were not the main event this year, which was instead overtaken by sauerkraut, bratwurst, and polka music—yes, the international sound of fun itself! Whether this is a trend that we can look forward to more of in the future remains to be seen.

The Bucket (4541 Eagle Rock Blvd., Eagle Rock) Back when I was at Occidental College in the early 1980s, The Bucket—all 200 or so square feet of it—was one of the more exotic local lunch options in Eagle Rock. (Where, you ask, is Eagle Rock? Look it up.) Back in those days it was presided over by a guy named Julio, who dumped a special sauce containing obscene quantities of garlic, hot mustard, and pepper sauce on top of pretty much everything on the menu. Julio, for better or for worse, is no longer there, but his sauce lives on in the form of Julio Fries, the Julio Burger, and Julio Shrimp (fried shrimp and imitation crab meat wrapped in bacon and deep

fried, served on a bed of cabbage, and covered in Julio sauce). How could we resist? Eschewing the appetizingly named “Bucket Burger”, we ordered both Julio Fries and Julio Burgers for lunch on Day 2 of the survey. And I must say, it’s everything I remember and more. Julio sauce may not be something you’d want every day, and is for sure to be avoided if you are likely to be concerned about your breath anytime soon, but otherwise, we’re definitely talking not-your-standard dressing. Indeed, I



know of nothing comparable to Julio sauce served anywhere else on the planet, and probably this sector of the galaxy.

Bill shows off his Julio burger, the signature dish of The Bucket in Eagle Rock. Julio sauce, with more garlic and hot mustard than you can shake a stick at, is smothered over just about everything at this place—burgers, fries, shrimp, and for all I know their soft drinks, although I

brought my own Dr. Pepper and can’t confirm this. In any case, it’s a dining experience well worth a try.

The last time I had lunch at The Bucket was in 1996 on my way to a meeting in San Diego, but it’s definitely a place that’s hard to forget, even after 15+ years. It’s a bit bigger than I remember due to the addition of a small patio with several picnic tables adjacent to the still-tiny building itself. But it’s a keeper; their motto, in fact, is “We’ve been here since 1935. Where have you been?” Heck if I know. I do know, however, that if you ever find yourself in beautiful downtown Eagle Rock, The Bucket is an experience you will not soon forget. Plus, there isn’t a heck of a lot else in the area, so you may as well check it out. **Rating: 3.5 acorns.**

El Grullense (49713 Gorman Post Rd., Gorman) It’s hard to do Liebre Mountain without ending up in Gorman for either a meal, staying the night in the Crappy Motel (I think that’s its name), or both. The good news, besides having successfully avoided staying in the motel in recent years, is that the dining options associated with it have decidedly improved. Gone is the Sizzler that used to be there. In its place is El Grullense, a taqueria that I’d noticed driving to and from LA in the past but had not previously sampled. This time, after it was recommended by Brad, we had lunch there on Day 4 of the survey.

And it was indeed very good. Bill and I had tacos, which were amazingly big, had a nice sauce with cilantro and lots of chopped onions, and were a great bargain at \$1.25 a shot. Ian had an *al pastor* torta, which was more like a burrito than any he’s seen before. And everything we had was lip-burningly hot and gratifyingly messy in a way one hopes for from a Mexican taqueria. El Grullense was a

sit-down establishment, which was a bit disconcerting, but otherwise the decor was appropriate in having an El Niño de Atocha print and lots of bad art on the walls. For a grand total of \$20 including tip, we agreed that it’s the place to stop after (or before) negotiating the Grapevine on Interstate 5, depending on what direction you’re headed. **Rating: 3.5 acorns.**

Little Prague (330 G St., Davis) The end of Day 6 landed us in Davis, where I had previously arranged to have dinner with Dale. His choice—and I emphasize that I asked him more than once—was that we should try “the Czech restaurant”. So Czech it was—specifically Little Prague on G Street. I’m not sure what kind of experience this might be on a normal day, but Sept. 21st was anything but normal. Rather, it was (drumroll please) the first day of Oktoberfest! And I mean The Works—huge tankards of draft beer, roast suckling pig, and, last but not least, none other than Kurt Walter’s Alpenband, including a guy dressed in fake lederhosen jumping around making obscene gestures and singing German drinking songs to seemingly endless accordion polka music. Fortunately, we were at a table outside and it was all a lot of fun.



Bill, Dale, Jill, and Ian toast acorn counting at Little Prague’s Oktoberfest celebration in Davis. With the exception of our Oktoberfest dinner in Sydney, Australia back in 2010 (see CAR, vol. 14), we have somehow managed to avoid miss this annual celebration of the German acorn harvest. Never again, or rather should I say, “nie wieder!”

And the food was pretty good. Dale, Bill, and I shared the “Festival dinner” consisting of 1/2 a duck, a suckling pig, bratwurst, red cabbage, sauerkraut, and dumplings, while Ian and Jill had the oven roasted pork shank with sauerkraut and a baked potato along with fresh horseradish and mustard. For dessert we all shared sweet dumplings with cream cheese and sugar. Meanwhile everyone had way too much beer, except for Yours Truly, who stuck with my traditional Oktoberfest ice tea. Dale claimed the suckling pig was the best he’d ever had (and no doubt the only one he’s ever had), while Ian and Jill agreed that the pork shank was good, albeit not quite as good as what they’d had in Weimar at the real McCoy.

Our Davis experience was topped off as we walked away from the restaurant only to be hailed by some random street person who turned out to be Nils Warnock, an old friend and PRBO colleague who now works in Alaska but happened to be in Davis for a meeting and is on Nate Senner’s Ph.D. committee with me back at Cornell. It is indeed *eine kleine Welt*. **Rating (Little Prague, not Nils): 2.5 dumplings.**

La Grange Café (520 Main St., Weaverville) As I mentioned earlier, Kyle had come out from Nebraska, where he's Jean's Ph.D. student, to finish up his field season in the hills somewhere out beyond Weaverville. Since our Trinity County *garryana* site turns out to be only a short drive away, I had carefully researched the best restaurant for us to meet and have dinner at on Day 7 of the survey. And the restaurant? It was clearly the Stoney Knob on Merrimon Ave., ranked #1 of 13 restaurants in Weaverville and recommended as being excellent by 92% of 78 reviewers. The only problem, as noted by Kyle when he got hold of me that afternoon, was that the Stoney Knob turns out to be in Weaverville North Carolina, not Weaverville California. *Doche shade!* (I even had a map to it and everything in my notes.) So instead Kyle arranged to meet us at Johnny's Pizza on Main St., which we cased out, quickly rejected, and replaced with La Grange Café across the street.

I don't know anything about Weaverville (NC), but Weaverville (CA) appears to be a hangout for a lot of people who don't realize it's not the 60s anymore. In other words, we felt totally at home. Fortunately, although filled with hippies of various sorts, La Grange Café was mostly 21st century, offering artichoke fettucini (Bill), a nice chicken salad (Ian), a memorable king salmon with fresh tomato salsa (Kyle), and a very good grilled trout with caper sauce (*moi*), topped off with marionberry cobbler with ice cream for dessert (all of us). The bottom line is that it may not have been on par with the Stoney Knob, but it was as good as anything Jean and I have succeeded in finding in much larger Redding over the years. **Rating: 3 acorns.**

Carmen/Nardi 60th Birthday Bash (The Outdoor Art Club, 1 Blithedale Ave., Mill Valley) It's always difficult to decide on the most appropriate debauchery with which to cap off the *California Acorn Survey*. This year it was a no-brainer as Bill and Karen had organized a 60th Birthday Bash for themselves on Friday, 28 Sept., just before I flew back to Ithaca. And I must say it was great. The evening was beautiful, the food was excellent, Bill and Karen were, as always, charming, and their kids (2 of 3 made it) were fabulous. It was almost enough to make one sick, especially the fact that they've been together since high school, something I generally consider suspicious, at best. But they succeed, time and again, to be gracious hosts and wonderful people, both separately and together. Congratulations guys, and keep up the good work! **Rating: 5 stars, and one gin-and- tonic to go!**



Bill, Karen, and their daughter Sophia at the Carmen/Nardi 60th Birthday Bash. Live long and prosper, guys!

THE PUBLISH OR PERISH DEPARTMENT

Yes, *The California Acorn Survey* does actually publish things besides this lame excuse for a newsletter. In fact, it was a pretty good year for the Publications Department, which produced two papers: one showing that within-season flowering phenology is highly suggestive of pollen limitation (*Journal of Ecology* 100: 758-763) and the other analyzing sex allocation based on our (now nearly 20-year old) litterfall dataset (*PLoS One* 7(8): e43492). We also have two papers in press, the first (in *Oecologia*) analyzing potential trade-offs in life-history traits and the second (in *Ecology*)—arguably the first paper we've written based primarily on all those years counting acorns around the state—analyzing spatial synchrony and cross-synchrony in valley and blue oaks. Next year maybe I'll even save some space in the *California Acorn Report* to tell you about it all.

WRAP-UP AND FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE

And that would make it a wrap for the 2012 *California Acorn Report*. We gratefully acknowledge support from the National Science Foundation, which once again was unanimously voted the official science foundation of the *California Acorn Survey*. Our offices for 2012-2013 are:

**Cornell Lab of Ornithology, 159 Sapsucker Woods Road
Ithaca, NY 14850 and Ranch'o Search'o-no-Mor'o, c/o
38601 E. Carmel Valley Rd., Carmel Valley, CA 93924
(wdk4@cornell.edu)**

and

**Cold and Arid Regions Environmental and Engineering
Research Institute, Gansu Province, 320 Donggang West
Road, Lanzhou, China (jkno2@unl.edu)**



We look forward to seeing you at Ranch'o Search'o-no-Mor'o in 2013, or in Ithaca, as the case may be (we particularly recommend the former). In the meantime, as always, keep those acorns counted!

The California Acorn Survey, founded in 1980, is an international conspiracy of nearly a dozen people dedicated to the understanding of acorn production by California oaks and the appreciation of polka music worldwide. Names and years of servitude include

Ron Mumme, Meadville, PA (1980-83)
Mark Stanback, Davidson, NC (1989-90, 1992)
Elizabeth Ross-Hooge, Mt. McKinley, AK (1991)
Jay McEntee, Berkeley, CA (2005)
Xiaoan Zuo & Wenjin Li, Lanzhou, China (2010)
Eric Walters, Norfolk, VA/Jamesburg, CA (2006-2010)
Ian Pearse, Davis, CA/Jamesburg, CA (2012)
Bill Carmen, Mill Valley, CA (1981-88, 90-92, 94-98, 2000-12)
Jean Knops, Lincoln, NE/Lanzhou, China (1993-201)
Walt Koenig, Ithaca, NY/Jamesburg, CA (1980, 1984-2012)