

Lake Los Carneros, local treasure

By Tony Galván

Most people think of Lake Los Carneros as a pleasant place to take a walk with the dogs and throw stale bread crumbs to the ever-receptive pond birds. But it's so much more than that. In fact, Lake Los Carneros is a true Goleta community treasure.

Then ...

The original land tract was purchased by William Whitney Stow in the summer of 1871. At the time of the purchase, there was a duck pond or *patera* on the property (*pato* is Spanish for duck) and La Patera Ranch became the name of Mr. Stow's new home.

Three generations of Stows lived on the property until 1964, when the Stow Co. deeded a portion of the ranch, which today also includes the present day Stow House and the South Coast Railroad Museum to the county of Santa Barbara. The remainder of the property was then sold to the Boise Cascade Corporation.

After the initial deed transfer to the county, the Boise Cascade Corp., which had purchased the property with the goal of developing lakefront housing, ran into opposition for its plans.

Neighbors protested the project and the county listened. In 1975 the remaining 136 acres were purchased by the county from the corporation, and it became a county park. County plans at the time had baseball fields and other "improve-

ments" for the area. Again, protests and recommendations by local residents stopped that idea and Lake Los Carneros or LLC as it's known to local birders, was left alone. In June of 2005 Lake Los Carneros became the Lake Los Carneros Ecological Preserver, managed by the city of Goleta.

... And Now

Today, the 22-acre lake and surrounding 136 acres is a nature preserve home to diverse plant communities or habitats. Eucalyptus, oak, and pine tree stands, open grassland savannah and rolling meadows provide habitat to many different

The Day Tripper

Editor's note: Tony Galván is a computer network systems consultant who lives in Goleta. The Day Tripper will visit places within three hours of the Good Land.

birds, small mammals, reptiles and insects. Many novice birders begin their "life lists" at LLC, sometimes on their own and sometimes as part of a school project or field trip.

Orioles and the striking cedar waxwings are some of

the more colorful songbirds attracted to the lake in the winter months. Walking around the lake on any of the numerous hiking trails, you can see raptors such as red-tailed hawks, red-shouldered hawks and American kestrels soaring over the grassland savannah, looking for food and guarding their territories. I've encountered great horned owls while walking through the eucalyptus stands in the north part of the preserve and seen a Cooper's hawk sitting on a Monterey Pine looking down for a meal in the tall grass.

The lake is a busy and interesting place during the fall

and spring migration when birds of all sorts are moving south or north. In the fall, the lake plays host to waterfowl passing through on their way south. The South Coast is in the Pacific Flyway, a natural corridor migrating birds take from the northern climes of the Arctic and Canada, south to Central and South America where they winter.

Sometimes, some of these migrating birds decide Goleta is a good place to winter and they stay for most of the season. Don't be surprised to see a Canada goose or a zone-tailed hawk — normally a resident of Arizona, New Mexico and Texas — at the preserve. The hawk has been coming to Goleta for more than 10 years like clockwork. Seems it enjoys wintering here.

In the spring and early summer, depending on the winter rains, a host of wildflowers create a colorful carpet in the open areas north of the lake. This is the time to look for hummingbirds passing through as well. The north end of the lake has an elevated boardwalk over a thick section of tules or bulrushes. This is a great place to see coots or common moorhen and other waterfowl in the spring with their young, swimming among the reeds for protection.

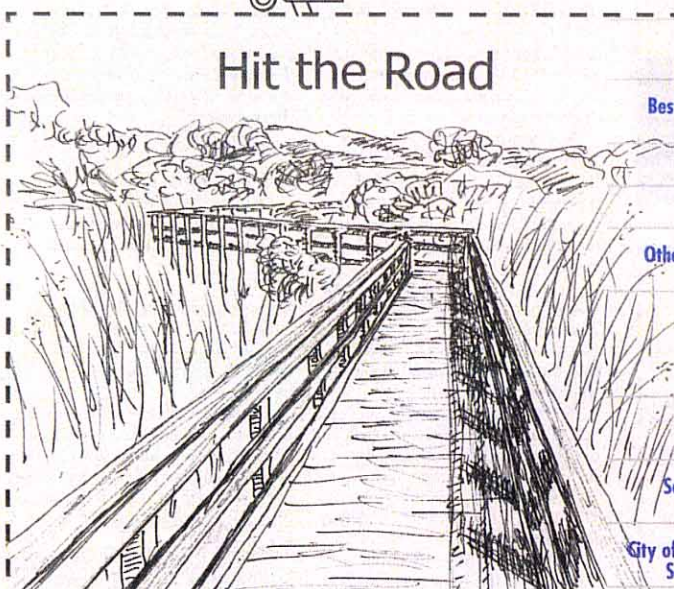
So how did La Patera become Lake Los Carneros? What does Los Carneros mean? That will be another destination for the Day Tripper.

Tony Galván is a natural history illustrator, photographer and kinda nosey traveler who lives in Goleta.



ILLUSTRATIONS © ANTHONY GALVÁN III

Hit the Road



Location Take Los Carneros Road exit from Hwy 101, go north (towards the mountains) 0.3 miles, turn right at the fire station into parking lot.

Best season for birding All year. Fall and spring migration offers a chance to see many transient birds at the lake.

Wildflowers Spring, March, April and May.

Hiking Easy walking trails for adults, children and dogs (must be on leash).

Other points of interest Rancho La Patera and Stow House, the home of the Stows (Goleta Valley Historical Society) and the South Coast Railroad Museum.

Hours Lake Los Carneros Ecological Preserve: Open all days of the week from 8 a.m. to sunset. Free. No permanent facilities. No motorized vehicles on trails, bicycles only. No swimming; fishing allowed, but adults must have valid California Fishing License.

Stow House: Weekends, 2-4 p.m. Docent tours 2 and 3 p.m. Donation: \$5 per person. www.goletahistory.org

South Coast Railroad Museum: Wednesday through Sunday, 1-4 p.m. Donations accepted. www.goletadepot.org

City of Goleta Community Services Department For information on park and preserve events and regulations call 961-7500. goleta.govoffice.com