Field Trip Report
May 5, 2013
Olompali State Park Family Walk
Trip Leader: Wendy Dreskin

Twenty of us, including nine children, joined Wendy for a walk through the meadows and woodlands at Olompali State Park in Novato. The day was cool and overcast after several days of hot weather. Wendy gave us an overview of the interesting history of the area, which has been inhabited since 6000 BCE. A silver sixpence dating from the time of Sir Frances Drake’s landing was found on the site of the old Miwok village. The importance of the discovery saved the site from development. The area has been a Miwok village, a Miwok land grant, the Burdell estate with its plants from around the world, and a gathering place for the Grateful Dead who visited the area when it was a commune known as the Chosen People in the late 60s.

We enjoyed watching the Turkey Vultures, a Red-tailed Hawk, a Black Phoebe that posed for us, and Cliff Swallows at work on their nests under the eaves of the remains of the Burdell house. An Acorn Woodpecker also cooperatively stayed still so kids could view it in the scope. Walking along the trail participants found interesting insects to observe in a magnifying box, including a Scorpion Fly and Tussock Moth caterpillar. The children discovered a Seven-Spotted Ladybug that Wendy explained was introduced from Europe. The Crane Fly we studied eats pollen – not mosquitoes as commonly thought. Kids got to see the halteres, the vestige of the second pair of wings present in flies. We also learned to identify Stinging Nettle and, equally importantly, English Plantain which can be used to stop the stinging. Wendy showed us how to tell the difference between the native Purple Needlegrass and introduced Ripgut grass by running our fingers down the seed heads. When we stopped for lunch, we listened to the beautiful song of the Warbling Vireo and then Wendy picked up a gopher snake that the children enjoyed holding. The kids also enjoyed a California Slender Salamander and a Jerusalem Cricket. We had an enjoyable day and the enthusiasm and curiosity of the children added to the fun.

By: Vicki Van Meter