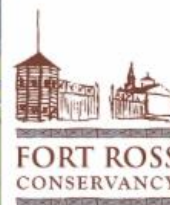


December 2018



Fort Ross & Salt Point News

Dear friends of Fort Ross and Salt Point,

In my family we had an informal end-of-day tradition. If there was a particularly beautiful sunset, the sunset spotter would blurt out "SUNSET ALERT!" and the rest of us were required to look up and comment on the view. Here on the coast the colors shift in a heartbeat so you need to be ready to take it in before the reds and oranges go dark, and this high-drama photo by Sarjan Holt captured the moment very nicely.



With those sunsets coming earlier and the year drawing to a close I want send you off with warm wishes from all of us at Fort Ross Conservancy. We are grateful for your support and friendship and we look forward to an adventurous year ahead with you as our partner.

Scroll on down if you want to learn about sea foam (not a Martha Stewart paint color), get the scoop on scheduling a Scout overnight, learn why we now have cows outstanding in our fields, or familiarize yourself with one of our friendlier coastal trees. We look forward to seeing you at Fort Ross where our staff has a lot to share and the sunsets are mighty fine.

Wishing you a bountiful holiday season!

Warm regards,
Sarah

Sarah Sweedler
Fort Ross Conservancy CEO
sarahs@fortross.org

Shop Local and Support Fort Ross!



A great selection of books and field guides, special holiday ornaments, old-fashioned toys, Russian lacquer khokhloma -- our visitors tell us we have one of the best bookshop in the land! Visit the Fort Ross Bookshop any Friday, Saturday, Sunday or Monday from 10am to 4:30pm to find that perfect gift. Additionally, Fort Ross and the bookshop is open mid-week between Christmas and New Year's - we are open on Wednesday, December 26th, and Thursday,



December 27th.

For every purchase you will receive one free Fort Ross poster - just mention this ad.

Please Support Fort Ross Conservancy

DONATE



Fort Ross Conservancy relies on community support to keep Fort Ross and Salt Point open and thriving. With your help we can continue to steward our public lands through our wide-ranging programming. Please consider making a donation today.

In Memory of Ludmila Ershov June 30, 1933 - November 28, 2018



The Fort Ross community lost a dear friend with the passing of long-time FRIA and FRC director Ludmila Ershov. Our thoughts go out to her family and to her husband Peter. Ludmila Ershov, an active member of the Bay Area Russian community since 1952 and a Fort Ross Interpretive Association board member since 1995, passed away on November 28th, 2018. I was fortunate to serve with Mila for many years on the FRIA board and she cared deeply about Fort Ross. Mila will be remembered as lively and opinionated, always optimistic. She and her husband Peter were always generous with their time, and when Mila could no longer travel to Fort Ross she continued to offer Russian language help in her role as Fort Ross Conservancy Advisor. Mila's reputation as a cook preceded her; we always looked forward to her contributions to our December potlucks and I have fond memories of her bringing a towering



Born to Mihail Duca, a Russified Romanian, and Lyubov Olovnyankina of Kungur, Russia, in the French concession of Shanghai in 1933, Ludmila was raised in Russian culture and attended the College Municipal Francais. After two years in a Displaced Persons camp in the Philippines, her family spent two years in Paris which at the time was still reeling from the war. Her Master's degree at San Francisco State College was followed by a PhD in Slavic Languages and Literatures from Stanford, and she taught 20 happy and fruitful years at San Francisco State University. In 1992 she established a summer study abroad program in St. Petersburg and for ten summers accompanied her students to Russia. She served on the board of Fort Ross Interpretive Association beginning in 1995. After retiring from SFSU as Professor Emerita she donned a sarafan to help bring Fort Ross alive for visitors. She was a core volunteer at the Russian

Easter kulich to our board meeting. Ludmila was a special person and she will be missed.

-Sarah Sweedler

Center, especially for the Russian Festival. Adept, ingenious and prolific cook, her holiday receptions were keenly anticipated, as were her cooking lessons and impromptu aperitifs. She was a faithful, engaged and supporting member of Christ the Saviour Orthodox Church on Anza Street in San Francisco for many years and an active participant in the sisterhood. She is survived by her husband of 45 years Peter Schwalbenberg, a son Alex (Natalia Kouznetsova), a daughter Maria (Raymond Grech), five grandsons and a great grandson. Her family suggests remembering her with donations to the Chronicle Season of Sharing fund.

Helping Hands



The maintenance and upkeep is never ending within the 10,000+ acres (plus numerous buildings, trails and more) of Fort Ross and Salt Point State Parks. So, in addition to our hard-working California State Park maintenance crew, Fort Ross Conservancy facilitates various volunteer projects, including a many-year tradition of once-a-month Scout Service Projects. Trail work, firewood stacking, leaf-raking, fence repairing, cleaning, sweeping, and more keep our Scouts and other service groups busy for the required four-hour minimum work stint, then they enjoy their outdoor dinner, campfire, and overnight in the Fort Compound.

Kudos to Boy Scout Troops 217 (Fair Oaks) and 73 (Alameda), pictured, for their energetic assistance these past two months!

Please visit our [Fort Ross Conservancy Scouts and Service Projects webpage](#) to learn more about this program, or to schedule a service project at Fort Ross or Salt Point. We'd love to have you on our team!

-[Hank Birnbaum](#), Bilingual Guide, Historical Specialist & ELP Instructor

Viola Adunca



If you ventured out to Salt Point State Park this October you might have been greeted by a friendly group of cattle grazing the hillsides. They are here as part of the Coastal Prairie Restoration project aimed at enhancing prairie conditions to protect the endangered Behren's Silverspot butterflies that are found only along our Sonoma and Mendocino coastlines. Fort Ross Conservancy partnered with California State Park's Natural Resources Management team to implement a short term, high intensity, rotational grazing system that has the potential to reduce grass thatch and improve habitat for the Western Dog Violet (*Viola adunca*), the host plant for this threatened butterfly.

The Behren's Silverspot butterfly was listed as federally endangered in 1997. The largest known population is located near Point Arena, and surveys from 2010 through 2012 identified very low numbers. Soil and climatic conditions and disturbance regimes (such as routine burns by Native American populations and wild elk grazing) are believed to have historically contributed to maintaining low, open prairies by suppressing encroaching trees and shrubs. The *Viola adunca* that once thrived in these areas are now threatened by exotic vegetation, natural succession, the loss of the elk population, fire suppression and development. Current treatment is needed to help sustain not only the host plant to these butterflies but also adult butterfly nectar sources and sustainable courtship areas found along our coast.

Butterflies are an important part of our ecosystem as they play roles as both predator and prey in our food chain. They are a huge contributor to the pollination of flowers and are a good indicator of the

health of our climate.

The Coastal Prairie Restoration project was spearheaded in Manchester State Park and just this year, with the help of our dedicated volunteers monitoring the growth of the *Viola adunca* throughout its growing season, we were able to extend south to Salt Point State Park by the issuance of the Coastal Prairie Restoration Grant from the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Between the two parks a vegetation management treatment that includes both grazing and mowing will occur over a period of three years and between the two parks will cover a minimum of 80 acres. It aims at restoring our grasslands to encourage more *Viola adunca* to thrive along our coast.

An extension of this project will be the propagation of *Viola adunca* plants and the outplanting of propagules by volunteers in areas where Behren's Silverspot butterflies occur or have historically occurred.

In addition to bumping into a friendly herd, you might also encounter State Park scientists monitoring the results of these treatment methods.

FRC volunteers will undertake another round of *Viola adunca* surveys this spring, followed by butterfly surveys with State Parks scientists this summer. **If you would like to join us for the training to participate in this year's project or learn more about the many natural and cultural volunteer opportunities at Fort Ross and Salt Point, please contact melissab@fortross.org.**

-[Melissa Bushner](#), Volunteer Coordinator

Sea Froth and Foam



Looking out over Fort Ross Cove, I point out the lack of bull kelp, explain the population explosion of urchin and the resulting starvation and decline of the abalone population when one of the more curious students asks what all the white froth is on the surface of the ocean. I'm in the midst of giving my introduction to the complicated and amazing ecosystem of the Rocky Intertidal Zone to thirty 6th graders during a [Marine Ecology Program](#) (MEP). I am routinely asked this question when I'm teaching and after giving my brief explanation to the inquisitive child, I have wondered, is there more I could learn and teach about sea foam? These questions formed the basis of this article.

Sea water naturally contains an assortment of dissolving particles, including salts, proteins, fats, dead algae, zooplankton and phytoplankton, and a bunch of other bits and pieces of organic and artificial matter. Sea foam (beach foam, ocean foam, or spume), in essence, is simply dissolving organic matter, some combination of the elements above, that has been churned up by waves. You'll notice sea foam is usually at its frothiest when the waves are large and wind is high.

Most sea foam is not dangerous to humans. In fact, during this time of year, when we have winter storms, with lots of wind and waves, sea foam is a sign of a healthy ecosystem. It is largely a product of annual [upwelling](#), the process by which wind traveling across the surface of the ocean and deep ocean currents pull colder, nutrient-rich water up from the depths. Upwelling creates an excellent food source for many marine species and is essential to the health and the maintenance of cooler temperatures in our oceans.

Algal blooms are another common source of thick sea foam. Fort Ross and the surrounding area had two large algal blooms this late summer. Some sea foams formed by harmful algal blooms can impact humans, animals, and the environment. Algal blooms of *Karenia brevis* have been known to irritate human eyes and skin. The tiny bubbles of the sea foam pop, releasing aerosol, making it dangerous for beach goers with respiratory issues.

In 2007, off the coast of California, scientists studied a harmful algal bloom which seemed to have caused seabird die-offs. They found the decaying *Akashiwo sanguinea* algae bloom had detergent-like qualities that removed the waterproofing on feathers, making it harder for birds to fly. This led to the onset of fatal hypothermia in many birds.

Generally speaking, most sea foam is non-toxic, and non-toxic sea foam plays many ecological roles, including providing a food source and habitat for many marine dwellers. The foam holds nutrients in place, giving organic matter a longer time to decay than if it were simply free floating in the ocean, and in so doing, makes it more likely to be consumed in the food web and this energy moved into higher trophic levels.

The Friendly Douglas Fir



Change is afoot! The cool air is getting cooler, I've just seen my first frosted breath in months, and the night skies have been clear and brilliant with stars. What does it all mean? It's beginning to look a lot like winter, of course! Winter, a time for gathering with family and friends, to renew our relationships and carry out our end-of-the-year holiday traditions -- such as going out and finding the perfect tree to brighten the home! In recognition of the holiday season, I'd like to take this opportunity to shine a light on a popular, favorite tree that can be found at Fort Ross and Salt Point State Parks -- a tree that I like to call "The Friendly Douglas Fir" (*Pseudotsuga*).

Douglas Fir trees are named after David Douglas (1799-1834), the Scottish botanist who introduced many native American tree species to Europe. Despite their common name, they are not true fir trees. In fact botanists struggled to classify Douglas Firs because of their similarity to a number of different genera, and in 1867 these evergreen trees were decidedly unique enough to be given their own genus (*Pseudotsuga*). The Douglas Firs that are found locally belong to the coast variety (*Pseudotsuga menziesii* var. *menziesii*)

that range from British Columbia to Central California.

Of all the trees growing west of the Cascades, Douglas Firs are the most prolific. As they age their bark becomes nice and thick, which helps them survive forest fires and allows them to live to a ripe old age of 500, and sometimes over 1000, years old! Douglas Firs are some of the tallest trees around and provide habitat and food for dozens of animals. Their sweet-smelling, needle-like leaves grow out from the branch in a circular pattern, which gives them a soft, puffy, and, dare I say, friendly appearance.

According to one California Native story, during a big forest fire, mice were looking for a place to keep out of danger and were granted shelter by the kind Douglas Fir. If you look closely at the tree's cones you can make out its characteristic three-ended bracts, situated underneath the scales. These bracts are said to be the tail and legs of the mice that were able to survive the fire, thanks to the refuge provided by the friendly Douglas Fir.

People have used Douglas Firs as Christmas trees since the 1920s, but these hospitable trees have a number of other traditional uses. Their softwood is quite strong and versatile; it is harvested in great quantities for use in many types of building and construction. Different parts of the tree are also used to make an impressive range of medicinal remedies. Some of these treatments are used to aid digestive problems; to heal cuts and burns; and to relieve sore muscles, cold and flu, and congestion. One of my favorite uses of Douglas Fir is a tea made from the leaves. The fresh tips are chock-full of vitamin C, giving them a delightfully tart, citrusy flavor. As the chemistry of their leaves change throughout the year so does their taste, giving the tea a sweeter flavor during the winter.

There you have it! While the Douglas Fir may not be a true fir, it surely is a true friend, providing food, shelter and medicine for many. I hope like the Douglas Fir, you are surrounded by fine friends this winter. On behalf of all of us at Fort Ross Conservancy, wishing you a sweet holiday season, and good health and happiness in the new year!

[Read more about Douglas Fir](#)

[Read more about coast Douglas Fir](#)

[A Tale of Mice and 'Fir' Trees](#)

To learn more about preparing Douglas Fir medicine: *Pacific Northwest Medicinal Plants* by Scott Kloos (this title can be found at the Fort Ross Conservancy Bookshop).

-[Charon Vilnai](#), Programs Instructor and Sea Lion Survey Project Lead



Visit our website at WWW.FORTROSS.ORG for details

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