

# **The Clear Print**

## **The San Diego Tracking Team Newsletter**



### **The Green Belt of Tracking**

By Gary Seiser

Congratulations, you're a tracker! That news came by way of e-mail, announcing that Karen Larson Gordon and I were the first to complete the San Diego Tracking Team's Apprentice Program and are now "trackers." Scary, huh?

I mean doesn't that title indicate I should be able to track an ant across a kitchen floor, find lost children before they get thirsty, and tell from a single track whether the deer I'm following is male or female, young or old, and whether its bladder is full or empty? If it does, I'm out of luck. There are still way too many times that Barry asks "What's that?" and I start wishing someone had written "Tracking for Dummies" so I could pull my well worn copy out of my tracking pack before giving an answer.

Luckily, that's not what being a "tracker" means. If tracking was a martial art that we entered wearing a white belt, finishing the tracking and naturalist series would be like getting your first colored belt – yellow, completing the apprentice program and becoming a "tracker" as Karen and I have just done would be the next – green, being a "senior tracker" would be a black belt, and being a "master tracker" would be – well – being a master. So all this means is I'm a green belt. Green for "go." I like that and I'm very proud of having achieved it.

So how did I get into tracking? Just lucky, I guess. I've always loved the out of doors and I've spent a lot of time in it, but I'm a city boy, born and bred, so I can't really say I was ever as good outdoors as I wanted to be. A couple of years ago I heard about the Tom Brown Tracker School. Six months later I took my first course. Two months after that I was taking my first tracker/naturalist class with the Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve Tracking Team, and then a Wildlife Survey class with the San Diego Tracking team. So began my journey to the green belt of tracking.

The Apprentice Program was a great path to travel. As part of the program I've done a lot of "dirt time," helping with transects and classes, collecting deer scat for the DNA study, and anything else I could fit into my schedule, whether it counted towards the 100 hours that was one of the programs prerequisites or not. In fact, having to keep track of my hours was a great incentive to do more, which was good with my busy schedule. It was also good to have a "mentor" I could ask for help and to go out with that mentor on transects and collecting scat. The special activities for apprentices and their mentors were also great. I'm really grateful to the SDTT for the Apprentice Program. It has been an interesting and valued start to what I know will be a lifetime journey.

That journey has already been blessed with a lot of great people. Lani and Karen LG have been wonderful. Karen Merrill with Preserve Calavera has been an absolute delight, as has Betty K. The "black belts" have been very good to me too: Rick, Chris and Lee especially. My tracking buddy – Juliet – and other fellow apprentices Matt, Dakota Doug, Toby and Bryan have all been great. The

list could go on and include Billy McConnell at the Tom Brown Tracker School, and Mike Kresky and Mark Elbroch at Pacific Tracking. And, of course, at the top of the list is my tracking mentor and friend, Barry Martin. I've learned from and enjoyed them all. Thanks.

Tracking isn't rocket science; to be good at it is far harder than that. It takes years of experience and a lot of dirt time. So as a new "tracker" I'm still very much a beginner, and that's okay. I've got my "green belt" and green means "go." Go start giving back by leading transects and teaching classes. Go study more about birds and rodents, wildflowers and trees, and the many other things I still know so little about. Go take more courses with different instructors. Go keep learning. Oh, and welcome to the green belt of tracking. I like it.

Now, let me think, what color is next?

### **On Becoming a Tracker**

By Karen Larsen Gordon

Five years ago this month I probably would not have guessed that I would be able to say I've progressed with my tracking skills to the point of being able to wear the badge, "Karen Larsen Gordon, Tracker!" You see, it was in October, 2000 that I began my journey with the San Diego Tracking Team. Having organized the Friends of Goodan Ranch and Sycamore Canyon Open Space Preserves and having served as a docent at Blue Sky Ecological Reserve since 1997, the opportunity to learn more about the local mammal species and assist in monitoring on the Sycamore Canyon transect were a natural fit in my quest to become a better naturalist. At the same time, I was concluding my certificate program at U.C.S.D. in Natural Resource Management. My classes had included Environmental Law, GIS, Project Management and more, and I soon became aware of how critical it is for nonprofit citizen-based organizations to have a voice in our regional planning. Thus, I continued to put my boots on the ground and stay involved with Friends groups.

After my initial training, Phoenix Von Hendy welcomed me on her surveys for several years. Along the way, Ann Hunt encouraged me to pursue the Advanced Tracker/Naturalist training. Timing can be everything... and how great it was to be a part of the September, 2004 Advanced class! Enthusiasm was so high in our group that it was easy to see the newly launched Apprentice Program for SDTT would be well received. I could actually envision myself volunteering for the required hours and activities. Add that concept to my new collection of tracking books that seem to rotate beside my bed and I was on my way as an apprentice. Need-less-to-say, my husband often gives me a funny look as I may be studying characteristics of scat in the late hours of the night...but that is what it takes to muscle through the challenges on the trail.

As we are all aware, everyone seems to develop an affinity to particular biotic components of our local habitats. For some it is birds, plants, insects or reptiles, and for me it became mammals. Plants are still fascinating as well – and are a reason we may take a bit longer on Transect #33. We often stop to examine unfamiliar species, whip out our reference books and try to piece together the fabric of the landscape. The fact that the area completely burned in the Cedar Fire has made examination of its recovery a unique opportunity to observe nature at work. I'm certain all who are surveying burned areas are rooting for the return of the wood rat, too!

Now I am on a new mission; I would like to participate in a survey of each of our active transects. So far I have assisted in 9 transects, primarily inland. It will probably take a year or so to accomplish this goal, but I regard it as a great way to further understand our various habitat types. So to those of you with whom I have not had the pleasure of sharing the trail, I hope to see you soon!

*Editor's Note: One may join the SDTT Apprentice Program at any time after completing the Tracker Naturalist Series (Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced classes put on by the Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve Tracking Team) or equivalent. The Apprentice Program provides a mentor and a self-paced, individualized course of work for becoming a Tracker. For more information, please contact Lani Noreke at 858 513 0359 or noreke@sbcglobal.net.*

## Upcoming Events

Both the **Fall Wildlife Survey** and the **Fall Deer Scat Collection** period are underway with plenty of volunteer opportunities remaining. If you are interested in helping with either of these activities or if you have any questions, please call Lani at 858-513-0359.

**Sunday, November 27:** Dirt Time at MTRP, for those who wish to improve their tracking skills. See [www.mtrp.org/events](http://www.mtrp.org/events) or call Joe Bochiechio (760-470-3702) for details.

**Saturday, December 10:** Monthly tracking walks, 8:00 am to 10:00 at the Peñasquitos Preserve Ranch House. Beginning and Intermediate/Advanced levels offered.

**Sunday, December 11:** Introductory tracking walk, 8:30 to 9:30 am at the MTRP visitor center.

**Saturday, January 14:** Monthly tracking walks, 8:00 am to 10:00 at the Peñasquitos Preserve Ranch House. Beginning and Intermediate/Advanced levels offered.

**Sunday, January 15:** Introductory tracking walk, 8:30 to 9:30 am at the MTRP visitor center.

**Saturday, January 21:** Winter Wildlife Survey Volunteer Training, 9:45 am to 4:00 pm at the Ranch House in Peñasquitos Canyon.

**Sunday, January 29:** Dirt Time at MTRP, for those who wish to improve their tracking skills. See [www.mtrp.org/events](http://www.mtrp.org/events) or call Joe Bochiechio (760-470-3702) for details.

**Saturday, February 11:** Monthly tracking walks, 8:00 am to 10:00 at the Peñasquitos Preserve Ranch House. Beginning and Intermediate/Advanced levels offered.

**Sunday, February 12:** Introductory tracking walk, 8:30 to 9:30 am at the MTRP visitor center.

**Thursday, February 23 and Saturday, February 25:** Intermediate Tracker Naturalist Class, 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm Thursday and 8:00 am to 6:00 pm Saturday at the Peñasquitos Ranch House. Contact Rick Botta (858-672-0584, rmbotta@earthlink.net) to sign up as a student or to help out.

Don't forget, you can help support SDTT in two important ways—volunteer your time and/or contribute financially by becoming a donor member. Call our new number 760-715-4102 to volunteer and go to [www.sdtt.org](http://www.sdtt.org) for a membership form.

Please send submissions to the Clear Print to Lani Noreke at [noreke@sbcglobal.net](mailto:noreke@sbcglobal.net).