

# Wetlands also a learning environment

By Joshua Lowe

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HUNTINGTON BEACH

— Live terns, pelicans, and sea gulls, are not the usual classroom aids, but in the Bolsa Chica Wetlands they are providing local grade-school students with a unique learning opportunity.

Thanks to the Orange County Department of Education, Amigos de Bolsa Chica and Signal Landmark, children get the chance to spend a day in the wetlands with a naturalist and learn about the environment.

The cooperative venture is the latest part of the county's ongoing program of nature education, which began back in 1981, according to program director George Schuett.

Students are given hands-on experience with simple experiments to describe the fragile nature of the wetlands and make them more sensitive to the environment.

"We have three goals in the program. First, we want to make students more aware and appreciative of the environment; second, we want to increase their knowledge and understanding of the wetlands; and finally we want them to realize that they must help to protect the wetlands," said Schuett.

Schuett explained that the project began as something of a peace offering from Signal

Landmark after the war with Amigos de Bolsa Chica over the future of the ecologically sensitive tidelands.

"Signal wanted to put on a good face after the conflict to show that they did care about the wetlands, so they came to the Department of Education and offered to fund the Bolsa Chica project," he said.

The wetlands classroom is only one of several outdoor experiences for students as part of the Department of Education's Environmental Field Study Program.

The other nature sites in the nearly 10-year-old program includes the Lazy W Ranch in Dana Point, Irvine Park, and Upper Newport Bay.

The Bolsa Chica segment has only been operating since March 12, but according to Schuett the response from the two Huntington Beach elementary school districts has been good.

"We have been getting good feedback, but since the program is new, the written evaluations will not be back for a couple of weeks yet," he said.

But if the reaction of the participants is any indicator, the project is a smashing success.

The students are separated into four groups, and are lead through the wetlands by Department of Education natu-

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Bolsa Chica

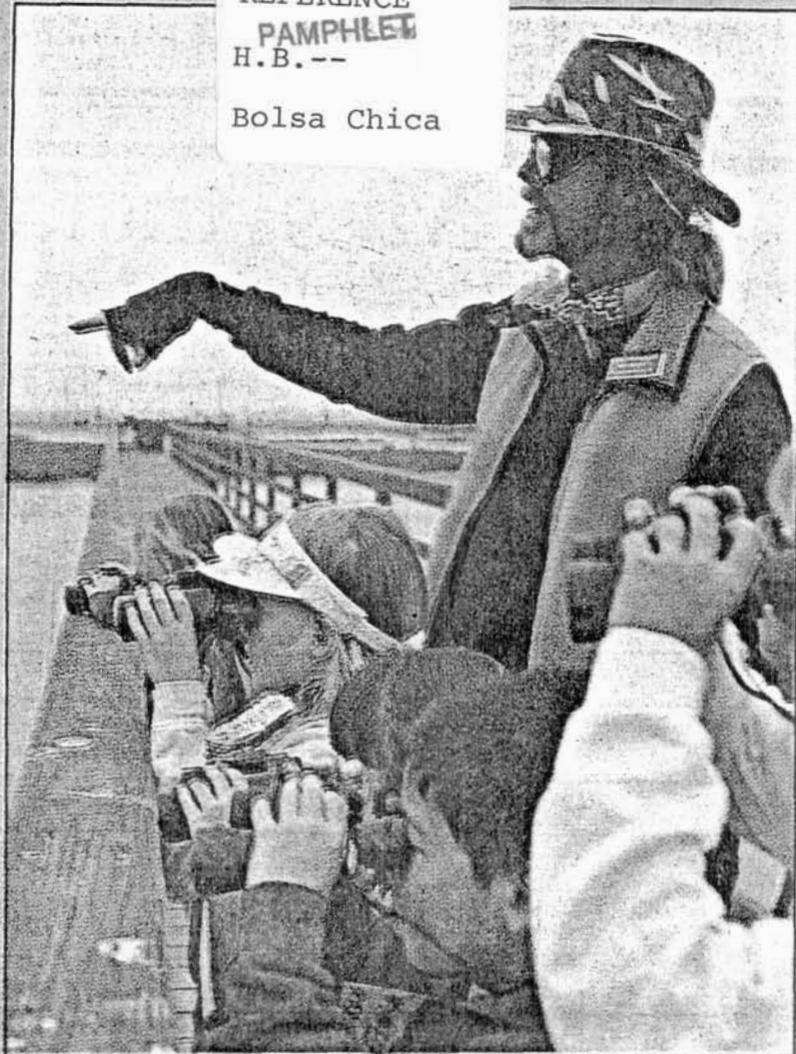


Photo by Daniel Hankin

**Naturalist Kevin Cavanaugh leads some local elementary school students on a tour of the Bolsa Chica wetlands.**

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## NATURE

### From A1

ralists, and they explore the animal and plant life as well as the effects of pollution.

Pupils are lead through a series of experiments that demonstrate how the food chain works, the salt and chemical content of water, bird watching and life in the water.

The naturalists are very good with children and are careful not to talk over their heads, and to keep the children entertained as they teach them.

For example, one naturalist uses a puppet, Count Trashula, to demonstate the dangers of pollution to kids.

The parents and teachers that accompany the groups were suitably impressed with the project.

"I think it's terrific. These are basically city kids, they don't normally get to experience nature," said Cora Countryman, a special education teacher at Hope View school in the Ocean View School District.

"The kids really get to learn something. They become more environmentally aware."

Parents even learn a thing or two from going along on the tours, according to Hope View parent Cindy Paulson.

"They were very organized, and were good with the kids. I would suggest it to other schools," she said.

Schuett said that the appreciation for the wetlands is a constant undercurrent of the curriculum.