

The Community VOICE

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Cotati Creek Critters intern's viewpoint



By Stevi Sprengle May 27, 2010 03:16 pm

For the past two years, Cotati Creek Critters has collaborated with faculty at Sonoma State University to run an internship program, giving students an opportunity to gain valuable hands-on experience in environmental restoration to complement their academic studies.

Stevi Sprengle attended an Environmental Studies Forum class at SSU at which Cotati Creek Critters Stewardship Coordinator, Wade Below, and Outreach Coordinator, Jenny Blaker, gave a presentation about their work. Subsequently Stevi applied and was accepted for an internship with Cotati Creek Critters. She writes about her experiences...

In September 2009, I joined Cotati Creek Critters as a Stewardship Intern. As an Environmental Studies student at Sonoma State University, I think it is absolutely crucial I gain the valuable experience necessary for building a successful career in my field.

After beginning work with Cotati Creek Critters, I was provided with numerous challenges, tasks and opportunities that would allow me to develop my skills in the field in a multitude of ways.

During the height of my college career, working almost full time in order to fund my education, finding the time for an unpaid internship could have been nothing more than a burden. However, looking back on it now, I've realized my experience in finding and participating in this internship has been anything but burdensome.

My experiences were like a breath of fresh air and that small stretch of the Laguna de Santa Rosa became an escape from all of the overwhelming responsibilities that had come along with the last year of college.

Being an intern for Cotati Creek Critters has been an invaluable experience both academically and socially. Many times I had to step out of my comfort zone and by doing so, met numerous wonderful and knowledgeable people.

My participation with the Cotati Creek Critters has a positive impact, which reaches far beyond our small community. Not only was my work important and rewarding, it was fun. To me there is nothing better than doing something worthwhile and fun at the same time.

I now have a much broader understanding of restoration and all the hard work it entails because of the vast amounts of planning and effort that goes into every aspect of each project. We re-used everything and wasted as little as possible.

It's amazing, but Wade can somehow take a completely useless item, such as an old discarded golf bag, and give it a new purpose as a tool bag. Within this small organization, there is a great appreciation for quite literally everything. I had no idea so much work went into cleaning and refurbishing tools to extend their lives.

It became very obvious to me over the ensuing nine months that Cotati Creek Critters is much larger than what meets the eye. It provides ample educational opportunities for any and everyone interested, and I can sincerely say I have learned more about native plants, plant propagation, and restoration than I ever could in a classroom. I can now recognize and name many of the exotic and invasive species occurring in the upper reach of the Laguna, and most of the native plants found throughout the stretch under the stewardship of CCC.

Cotati Creek Critters may be just a small organization, but they are doing very big things and I consider myself lucky to be a part of it. You can do your part by attending Creek Stewardship Days hosted by the Cotati Creek Critters, and cleaning up after your dogs.

I am very proud of my work and involvement over the past two semesters, the creek is changing more and more every day and I am relishing the opportunity to watch it continue to change and grow before my eyes.

Cotati Creek Critters welcomes applications from students interested in both Stewardship and Outreach internships. See www.CotatiCreekCritters.info for further information.

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