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## **P R E S S   R E L E A S E**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Cachuma Lake Alive with Courtship and Color**

March begins the Wildlife Cruise season at Cachuma Lake. A naturalist-guided, 2-hour lake cruise explores the north side of Cachuma Lake, where wildlife and plant life abound. After winter rains, the woodlands are now softened with moist grasses, lush ferns, yellow buttercups, shooting stars, gooseberry, paint brush, nightshade and fiesta flower; while sticky monkey flower, tufted poppy, and pink prickly phlox spangle the slopes. Naked in winter, Valley Oaks now display canopies of bright green.

Red-tailed Hawks have again produced three fuzzy and bright-eyed chicks that can be observed from the cruise boat's viewing platforms. The male does the hunting and has been seen handing off prey items to mom to carry back to the nest and shred for the chicks.

Great Blue Herons, the lake's residential wading birds, also nest in oaks at the water's edge. These birds have a vast diet that includes fish, frogs, lizards, and ground squirrels. Their hunting techniques of stillness, camouflage, and ambush are suited to a solitary lifestyle. However, during the spring, the herons form rookeries consisting of several platform nests perched in the tops of Valley Oaks. Great Blue Heron chicks are quite boisterous and often compete and wrestle for food as many siblings do.

Small clouds of swallows that came in with the warmer weather have turned into swarms. The iridescent feathers of Violet-green and Tree Swallows flash as they perform daring acrobatics, snatching insects out of the air and off the lake's surface. Cliff Swallows arrived from as far away as South America. Several Cliff Swallows land on the shore together, gather mud in their bills, and then deposit the mud on steep cliff faces. This process is repeated over the course of a few weeks, until their mud dwellings are completed and their nesting season begins.

Western and Clark's Grebes breed at Cachuma and it is not uncommon to see their marvelous courtship spectacle, called "rushing," in which a pair may race side-by-side 50 feet across the water, as if water skiing. This is the season of vigorous "creaking," head-bobbing, and ritual preening. With the Lake nearly full, chances are very good that the grebes will

produce chicks this year. Tiny chicks seek warmth and safety snuggled among the feathers of their parents' backs.

Though eagle season has passed, and the resident Bald Eagles are busy with their own nest maintenance and incubation, there is always a chance they may show up.

Late fall is breeding season for Coastal Mule Deer, and by April, fawns are old enough--and bold enough--to approach the water's edge by their mothers' sides. Twins are typical. The older a doe, the more likely she will bear twins.

The shore isn't the only place wildlife abounds at the Lake. Anglers are landing 3- and 4-pound rainbow trout and easily catching their 5-fish limit. Black Crappie have emerged from their winter shyness and are active near the surface. Large and small-mouth bass are also abundant, and before long, spawning will be seen in the shallows. Monstrous Common Carp are also available for the fisherman who loves a good fight.

Taking a Wildlife Cruise on Cachuma Lake is the perfect way to celebrate the beauty and excitement of spring in the Santa Ynez Valley. The 30 passenger boat is equipped with padded swivel seats, a partially covered deck, viewing platforms, and wheelchair access. The Wildlife Cruises run March through October: Fridays, 3 to 5 pm; Saturdays, 10 am to noon and 3 to 5 pm; and Sundays, 10 am to noon only. Lake Cruise reservations are recommended; please call (805) 686-5050 Monday - Friday, and (805) 686-5055 weekends.

Fees: Adults \$15.00, Kids 4-12 \$7.00 (sorry, no children under 4), Park Admission Day Use Fee: \$8.00 per vehicle. Tours leave promptly. Arrive 1/2 hour prior to cruise departure time. Dress in layers; bring hats, water, binoculars and cameras.

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