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NHM 2025 ANNUAL REPORT

NHM Mission Statement

Our Mission is to inspire and educate our community through regional collections and to promote the discovery and appreciation of the natural world.

NHM Vision Statement from Strategic Planning

NHMSM is a regional keystone for understanding, celebrating and protecting our natural world.

NHM Board of Directors

Yvette Andrade, Scott Christian, Dawn Jackson, David Kisner, Esmeralda Mendoza, Stephanie Robb, Jason Stilwell, Tamara Vodehnal



Evelyn Ramirez
translated question
box quizzes to Spanish.



Kira Corona & Vicki Duarte
at Chamber of Commerce Hispanic Mixer

Natural History Museum, Santa Maria Annual meeting agenda. January 12, 2026

5:30 P.M. Lawn Bowling Community Room.

5:30 P.M. Check in, social mingling, grab food, drinks, be seated for meeting.

5:45: Welcome: Natural History Museum BOD President: Virginia Souza

Introductions: Roll Call: 2025 BOD. Advisory BOD, membership.

Introduction of Ernest Houston Member of Northern Chumash Tribe: long time Santa Marian

Old Business: BOD members vote on Old Business

Approval of 3 months minutes: August, October, November: Yvette Andrade

Treasurers report: Tamara Vodehnal

6 00 P.M.: President's recap of 2025

6:05 P.M. Garden committee: Nancy Heck

6:10 P.M. Strategic plan: Jason Stilwell

6:15 P.M: New Business:

Building repair and maintenance: Virginia

Non-BOD member picking up mail: Tamara. Motion and Vote*

Volunteer of the Year Award: Nancy Heck. Peer nominated selection process:

Awardee remarks:

6:30 P.M.: *All Membership may vote for 2026 roster**

New BOD officer's installation: Virginia:

Co-Presidents: Dawn Jackson and David Kisner

Vice President: Vacant

Secretary: Yvette Andrade

Treasurer: Tamara Vodehnal

Directors: Esmeralda Mendoza, Stephanie Robb, Jason Stilwell.

Are there any board nominations from the membership?

Motion to accept roster of 2026 NHM Board of Directors: Membership motions and votes*

Gavel passed to new co presidents.

New Co-Presidents lead the rest of the meeting.....

6:45 P.M.: Dawn Jackson/ David Kisner take the gavel and review calendar of coming events.

Introduces guest speaker: David Kisner: "The Importance of Collaborations"

Adjourn: 7 P.M.

Year to date Treasurers Report			
Organization Name: Natural History Museum of Santa Maria			
Year to date: 2025			
Beginning Bank Balance		\$ 80,873.59	
Income			
Income Source	Amount (\$)		
Grants	\$ 13,000.00		
Donation Box	\$ 598.16		
Donations -MISC	\$ 2,338.01		
Donations -Pennies	\$ 1,171.79		
Donations -Y-E-A	\$ 100.00		
Membership Fees	\$ 7,999.41		
Restricted Donations - YEG	\$ 250.00		
Restricted Donations	\$ -		
Honorariums/Sponsorships	\$ -		
In-Kind Contributions	\$ -		
Interest Income	\$ 82.32		
Other Income	\$ -		
Total Income	25,539.69		
Expenses			
Expense Category	Amount (\$)		
Direct Program Expenses			
Program - Materials & Supplies	\$ 493.04		
Program - Advertising & Marketing	\$ 427.31		
Program - Food	\$ 30.98		
Program - Exhibit	\$ 3,358.24		
Program - Professional Services	\$ -		
Program - Marketing and Advertising	\$ 1,813.41		
Bldg. Repairs & Maintenance	\$ 1,662.73		
Administrative Expense	\$ 4,025.88		
Dues & Licenses	\$ 290.00		
Garden	\$ 66.38		
Insurance	\$ 3,403.00		
Office Supplies	\$ 369.60		
Salaries and Wages	\$ -		
Professional Fees	\$ 600.00		
Utilities	\$ 1,318.21		
Volunteer	\$ 713.09		
Website	\$ 150.00		
Total Expenses	\$ 18,721.87		
Adjusted from 2024	\$ 1,028.22		
Ending Bank Balance - Reconciled		\$ 88,719.63	
Santa Barbara Foundation Restricted GRANT	\$ 1,799.12		
Altrusa Restricted GRANT	\$ 321.26		
Morgan Stanley Restricted funds	\$ 5,000.00		
Perry Foundatin Restricted GRANT	\$ 39,917.31		
ACTUAL BANK BALANCE - LESS RESTRICTED FUNDS		\$ 41,681.94	
Prepared by: Tamara Vodehnal, Treasurer			
Date Prepared: 1/3/2026			
Note: This document provides an overview of the financial activities of the organization for the Year			



Tamara Vodehnal, NHM Treasurer

Review of past 30 years of Natural History Museum, Santa Maria



Dear Friends, How do you summarize 30 years into 450 words? I guess everything began with inspiration. The inspiration for this project was the Field Museum in Chicago. Our “Museum” non-profit was named a “Museum” without a single thing in the collection and no physical location. Kinda crazy! Only through collaborations with Santa Barbara County Schools, Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, Los Angeles Museum of Natural History, Santa Maria Discovery Museum, the local Society of Petroleum Engineers and a very able board were we able to create traveling science kits and curriculums to be delivered to local classrooms as our first offerings in the 90’s.

By October of 1999 a board member proposed the need for a physical location and recommended an abandoned landmark building, the Hart Home, on McClelland St. That decision marked the next phase of the Museum and began a partnership with City of Santa Maria. Having the right board members, at the right time was the key to NHM growth which allowed nature education to be offered free to schools and the public.

In 2007 an important collaboration with Town Center East and a San Francisco Foundation allowed a wonderful photographic art show “The 4 Seasons of Nature from the Artic National Wildlife Refuge” to travel to Santa Maria. NHM volunteers mounted the art show which was open 7 days a week from 10 AM-9 PM for the month of July. That level of activity was a total stretch for our Museum volunteers. Once again, the right people at the right time!

The NHM Native Garden and Amphitheater was another important Museum milestone. The first major Museum fundraising campaign was created and a large project installation was executed 2013-14. NHM Native Garden has proven to be a jewel, as it is a living exhibit, educating young and old alike with the variety of plants and animals residing there.

Taxidermy collections also miraculously have been donated to us over the years, including everything from bugs to the bones of the largest creatures ever to live on earth; whales. The Museum collection is now something we are all proud of. Collaborations regarding exhibits have ranged from Monterey Bay Aquarium to Royal B.C. Museum in Vancouver, B.C. and so many more which we are all so grateful for.

What keeps coming to mind as I close this summary is the great people that have enabled NHM to thrive year in and year out over 30 years! Thank you! Thank you to all the board members, volunteers, donors, members, artists and collaborators that have created what we know is a treasure in and for our community! As I step down from the board, I am certain NHM again, has the right people at the right time, to lead this project into its next phase of “promoting the understanding and appreciation of the natural world.

With gratitude, Virginia Souza, retiring board President

Membership Report:

Membership chairperson NHM President Emeritus Judy Garrett resigned due to poor health of her husband Clif Garrett in 2025. She performed her membership role all the way through the year and NHM BOD is so grateful for her 10 years of dedication to NHM and tireless support for membership with every person she met!! Thank you Judy! Judy and BOD Treasurer Tamara Vodehnal as well as Nancy Heck, and Annie Lawrence are showing Museum volunteer Jenni Little the membership process for 2026. Members will be hearing from Jenni as their membership comes up for renewal. We so appreciate Jenni for loaning her talents to this very important task!

Please know that the NHM fifty-three memberships are the foundation for all our Mission work! The Museum is entering new territory after 30 years and will need even more support as the level of service to the community grows to new heights led by the Museum Board of Directors. Please renew and tell all your friends! **THANK YOU!!**

2025 NHM Members By Level

\$25 HUMMINGBIRD

Baxter, Jane
Boydston, Shirley
Furnberg, Rita
Hancock, Linda
Lawrence, Annie
Snodgrass, Lynda and Jim
Whitham, Heather
Wolf, Kenneth

\$50 CALIFORNIA QUAIL

Aguirre, Raul and Melinda
California Native Plant Society
Centeno, Barbara
Chandler, Patricia
Chipping, David and Linda
Christian, Scott
Dias, Laura
Herrera, Lisa
Klein, Shelley
Lara, Cynthia
Lewis, Steve and Maia
Prober, Gary
Ramsden, Howard and Susan
Reid, William and Caroline
Schartz, Kathy
Thacker, Cynthia
Van Sant, Judy
Vodehnal, Tamara
Wineman, Dean and Elizabeth

\$100 MEADOWLARK

Altrusa of the Central Coast
Boyd, Sandy
Cooper, Margaret
Donati, Ethel and David
Garrett, Andy
Garrett, Clif and Judy
Hajnik, Frank and Suzanne
Heck, Nancy
McCalip, Pernelle and Kenneth
McGill, Tilden and Susan
Patino, Alice
Paulsey, Anastasia
Pratt, Frederic and Scheryn
Ransome, Karen
Sharum, Kathy
Stilwell, Jason
Thiessen, Karin
Stevenson, Barbara

\$250 GREAT HORNED OWL

Deutsch, Becky
Community Bank of Santa Maria
Fischer, Katherine
Lyons, Dottie
Shower, Anita
Walsh, Jerry and Ann

\$1,000 RED-TAILED HAWK

Souza, Virginia
Woods, Caroline and Eddie



Gary Prober
renewed an insect exhibit
for the museum

Docents Committee:

Natural History Museum volunteers come and go as health and education interfere with free time. We love to meet the new ones and are sad to see the experienced ones move on to full time relaxing or to other schools further from Santa Maria. This year has been no different.

Just today a new volunteer signed up named Mya Genworth. We look forward to training Mya and others who will step into our world this year as we all learn together about human beings through visitor and volunteer interaction and about our natural world (so much to learn). *Virginia Souza, Interim Docent Chairperson*

Names of current active docents

John Bortugno, 2023

Sandy Boyd, 2023

Alelieze Aastrejon 2023

Amanda Corcoran, 2023

Damon Garcia, 2024

Lisa Herrera, 2024

Jenni Little, 2024

Mark Robertson, 2016

Bill Decker, 2007

Brennan Simpson, 2021

Virginia Souza, 1996

Cindy Brown, 2025

Mya Genworth, 2026

Randy Cohen, 2025

Kira Corona, 2025



Nancy & Kira at SB Museum of NH



Field Trip to Chumash Museum 2025.

Education Committee Report:

This year was a busy one for education of students! This summer, as in the past, the Museum partnered with City of Santa Maria Rec and Parks Department. Next year we plan to expand the summer program and include some school site works well. The months of December was the most challenging and rewarding field trip month for NHM to date. We hosted 300 students in a 2 week period from all the classes of Grade 1,2,3 and 6 at Bonita School out on West Main Street. That was 4 classes of each grade level. The wonderful Museum volunteers, Anelieze, Randy, Brennan, Amanda assisted by myself gathered valuable information for their debrief sessions on how to customize the Museum Nature Journals to be grade specific with special vocabulary and activities. Randy's Compass Treasure Hunt was especially popular with the 6th graders! A tired group of students and volunteers relaxed after the two hours each day of touring!

Virginia Souza, Interim Education Committee Chairperson.



Randy and Jenni show
Cockroaches to summer
science helpers



Bonita School's field trips to
SM Natural History Museum
in December 2025

Garden Committee Report 2025

In addition to routine garden maintenance, the committee also:

- Tied up a few loose ends from the 2024 garden project, most notably, the planting of a Channel Islands Tree Poppy (*Dendromecon harfordii*). This is a very special native plant that is very difficult to propagate and hard to find. We were put on a waiting list for several months before acquiring one.
- Hosted a garden tour and treasure hunt for members of the California Native Plant Society in February
- Provided California native plants for Earth Day
- Helped facilitate the Museum's June program, "Reaping the Rewards of Replacing Your Lawn".
- Tended our bumper crop of milkweed plants and the many Monarch caterpillars who fed on them. Brought caterpillars and chrysalises into the Museum for visitors to see up close. Took measures to protect caterpillars from the many predators this year. We still have some caterpillars in January!

Nancy Heck
Garden Committee Chairperson

A BIG THANK-YOU TO OUR DEDICATED
GARDEN COMMITTEE

Jane Baxter, John Bortugno, Pat Chandler,
Damon Garcia, Cynthia Lara, Kathy Schartz
AND A WARM WELCOME TO OUR
NEWEST MEMBER -
Babette Allcock!



Channel Islands
Tree Poppy



Dendromecon
harfordii



Monarch Butterfly Chrysalis

NHM Naturalist Report 2025

The 2025-2026 overwintering numbers for Monarch butterflies (*Danaus Plexippus*) in California appear to be the second lowest recorded. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has determined that the eastern population has declined by 80% and the western population has declined by 95% compared to their 1980 numbers. The USFWS has proposed to list the monarch butterfly as a threatened species under the U.S. Endangered Species Act.

My personal goal for 2026 is to be more proactive and take the small steps that I can to make positive changes. The Xerces Society is an “international nonprofit organization that protects the natural world through the conservation of invertebrates and their habitats” and has a great deal of information on the Monarch. Their article “Top 5 Ways Californians Can Help Western Monarchs” outlines five steps that we in the central California area can take to help the Monarch that can be found in our area year-round. I will summarize these steps and expand where appropriate.

Step 1: NO NOT plant species like tropical milkweed (*Asclepias curassavica*) which allows for fatal Monarch butterfly parasites to build up.

Step 2: Plant (the right) nectar plants, which for our area appears to be sages and daisies. It is surprising how little we really know about Monarch nectar preferences. If you can have flowers available year round, this would be ideal.

Step 3: Advocate for overwintering sites - this one is hard because the ones that are known are well protected. We all need to keep our eyes and ears open to help protect the less well-known sites and work to enhance the existing well known ones like Ellwood to the south and Pismo State Beach Monarch Butterfly Grove to the north.

Step 4: Participate in community science research - if this is of interest to you, I recommend looking into the Xerces Society’s website since they have soooo many different types of community science projects.

Step 5: Avoid pesticides - this can be a challenge since most nurseries and all “big chains” stores use some sort of pesticides. Seeds can even be “pre-treated” with pesticides that can last years. When possible, work with local nurseries and growers who know exactly what their plants have been treated with and avoid long-lived systemic insecticides like neonicotinoids.

Together these small steps can make a huge difference for the Monarch and boost our feelings of empowerment and optimism.

David Kisner, NHM Naturalist Chairperson

Monarch Caterpillars





SANTA MARIA, CALIFORNIA

The Natural History Museum, Santa Maria 30th Anniversary Celebration

Jan. 2026 - Dec. 2026 Sponsorship Levels & Calendar

California Grizzly Sponsor:	\$5,000. +
California Tule Elk Sponsors:	\$2,500 .+
Red Tailed Hawk Sponsorship:	\$1,000 .+
Condor Sponsorship:	\$ 500. +

Sponsorship benefits: Business support of the only natural history museum between Morro Bay and Santa Barbara is transformative. The NHMSM features regional natural history collections, a variety of truly excellent art installations from well-known local artists inside and all around the exterior of the local historic landmark Hart Home building. Civic center beautification by NHM is an important component to civic pride. A restful native garden with many benches and 2 picnic tables for the community on the grounds of the museum property are enjoyed by city employees and casual visitors. Free programming provides a priceless public service to local schools and the community all year every year for over 25 years.

IMPORTANTLY: Tax Id.77-6198551 Business benefits from sponsorships.

Appropriately sized logo/name on Anniversary souvenir pamphlet, regular museum brochure, anniversary year event flyers, anniversary year website home page and social media.

2026 NHM Community Nature Education Events:

Nature Talk: Spring, 2026

Earth Day 2026: April, 2026

Summer Science Camps with Partners: 2026

Member/Volunteers Field Trip: Summer/Fall, 2026

Nature Talk: Fall, 2026

Anniversary Fundraiser Nature Art Events: Early October, 2026

School field trip education: ongoing

Ongoing free NHM open hours: Wednesday-Sunday