

# **How to Explore the Wetlands with Luna**

## **Welcome to the wetlands!**

- **For Nature Lovers and First-Time Visitors**

**This book is designed to help you see the wetlands through Luna's eyes. Look for the plants, animals, and colors described in the story during your visit!**

- **Spotting Native Plants and Animals**

**Use the book as a checklist for native plants and animals you might find here. Luna's journey highlights some of the plants and wildlife unique to the wetlands.**

- **A Story for All Ages:**

**Whether reading with young ones or exploring on your own, Luna invites you to take time, look closely, and enjoy all that the wetlands have to offer.**

**Remember, each small action helps keep this environment thriving for Luna, her friends, and all the creatures who call it home!**



## Dedication and Author's Note

To the wetlands and the incredible wildlife that call them home, and to all those who work to protect these precious spaces.

This book is my small contribution, created as part of a stewardship project to bring attention to the fragile beauty of our natural habitats. Inspired by the endangered Ridgway's rail, a bird whose floating nests rise and fall with the tides, this story is meant to spark a sense of wonder and encourage all of us to help preserve the wetlands.

Special thanks to the Bolsa Chica Conservancy and the Fall 2024 California Naturalist Cohort for their invaluable guidance and dedication. To my dear friend Mark, who joined me on this journey, drove me to every field trip, and was my creative soundboard—thank you for your friendship and support.

Together, I hope we can inspire readers to connect with nature and make a difference, so that species like the Ridgway's rail have a safe, thriving home for generations to come.

This book is a work of fiction inspired by real places and wildlife in California. While it includes references to actual locations, species, and conservation efforts, the story and characters are fictional. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or deceased, or specific events is purely coincidental.

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# Whispers in the Wetlands

Written and Illustrated by  
Lauren Dela Cruz







White  
Sage

Luna the egret, so graceful and white,  
Glided through wetlands,  
her heart full of light.

Broadleaf  
cattail

California  
poppy

Common  
Yarrow





Pacific  
Glasswort  
(pickleweed)

Water strider

Green sea turtle

She fluttered past flowers  
in soft morning glow,  
As whispers of breezes  
sang sweet and low.





Vampire  
dragonfly

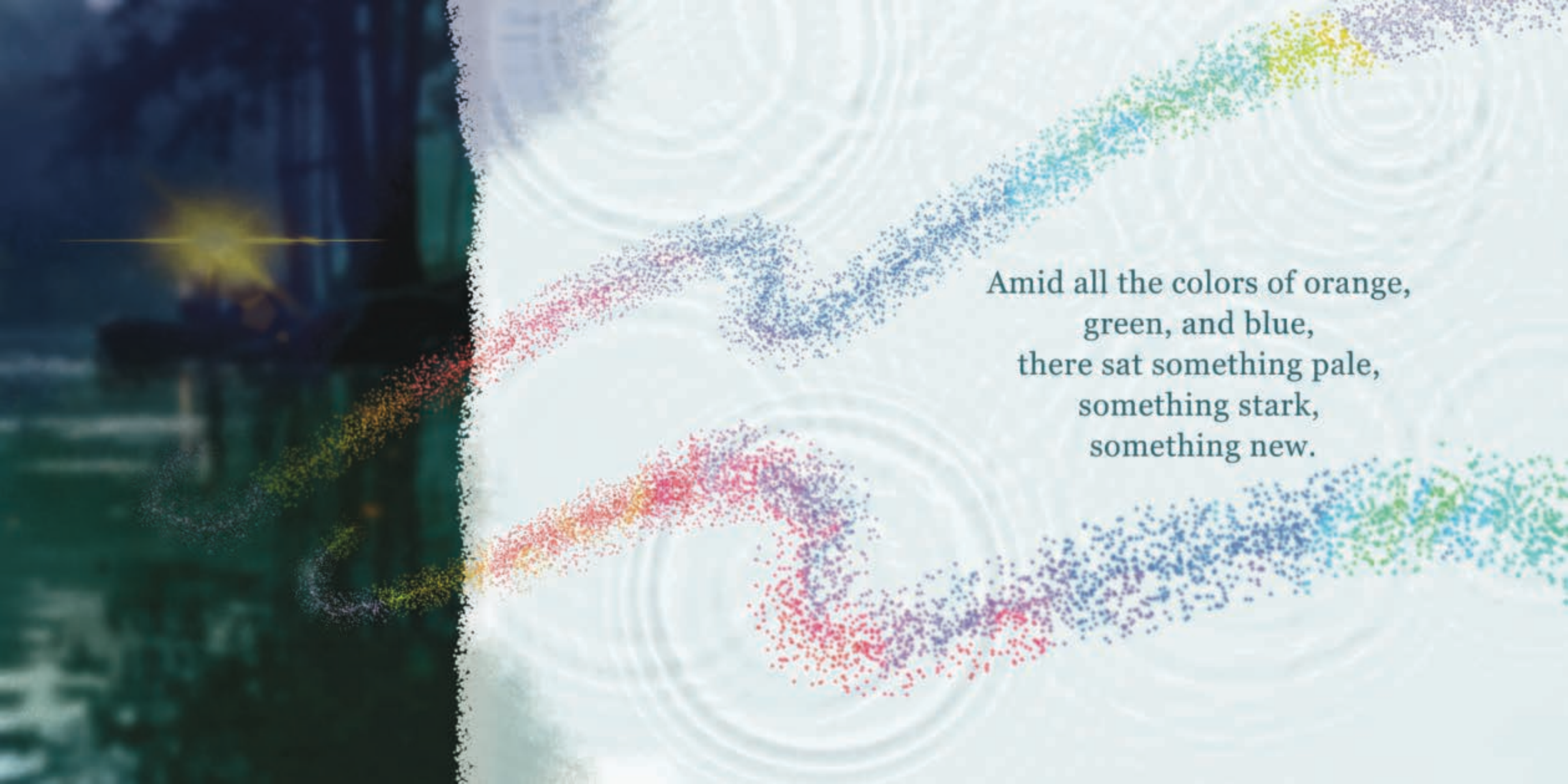
Light footed  
Ridgway rail

Snowy egret

But just as she stood near calm  
water's shore...

A quiet disturbance she could  
not ignore.

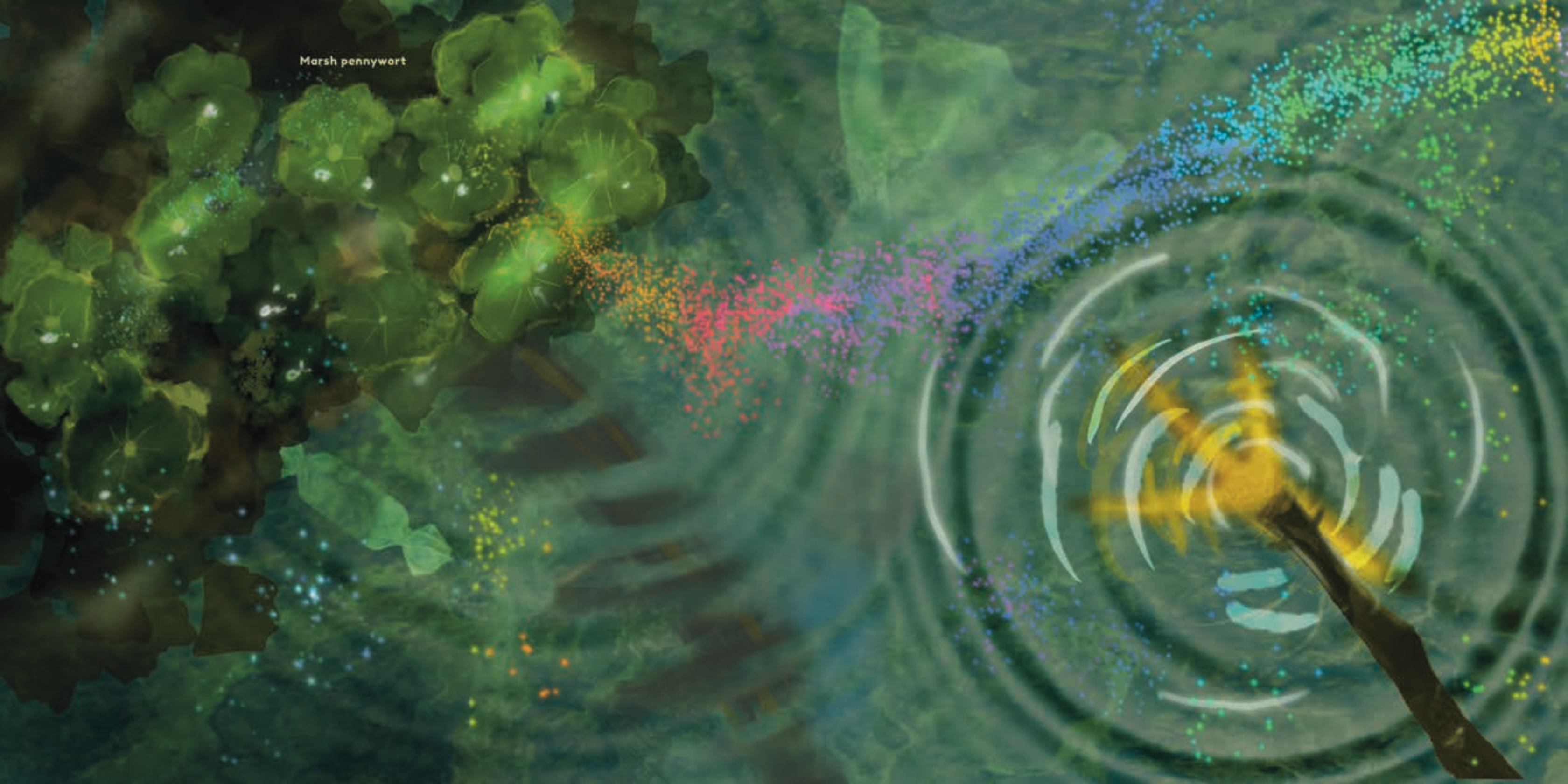




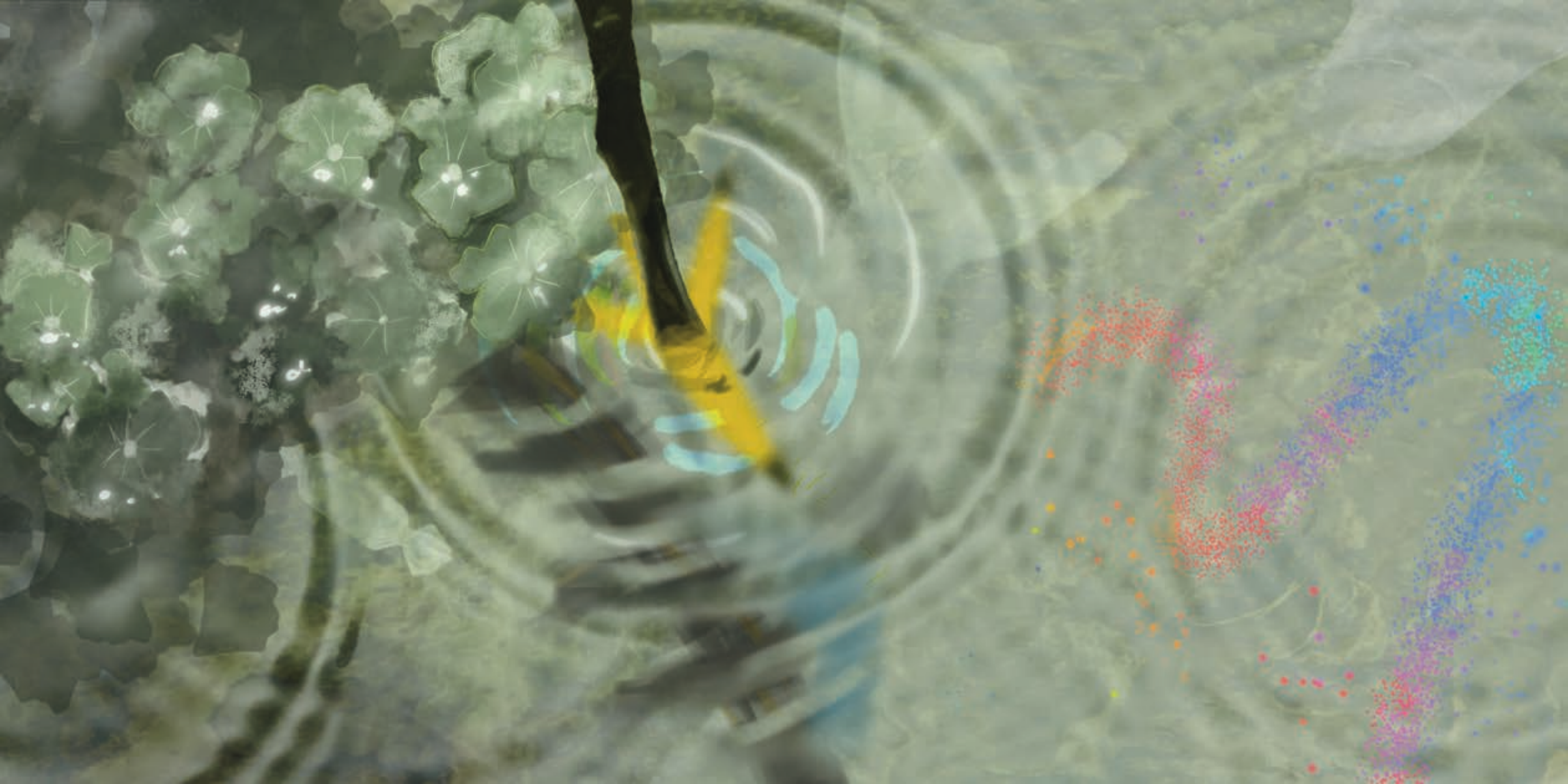
Amid all the colors of orange,  
green, and blue,  
there sat something pale,  
something stark,  
something new.



Marsh pennywort









A scooter, forgotten,  
so white and so bare,  
Lay tangled in reeds,  
with a cold, heavy stare.

Nearby, a rail peered from tall,  
thinning grass,  
Where cordgrass once grew,  
but was fading too fast.







The whispers grew quiet, the  
warmth turned to chill,

The wetland was silent,  
so empty and still.



Luna stepped closer, her heart  
full of care,  
The scooter's cold presence  
weighed thick in the air.

“The colors have vanished, the  
whispers now cease,  
What once was alive is now  
quiet, at peace!”







Her feathers, so white, stood  
bright in the gloom,  
As shadows crept closer, like  
ghosts in the room.

“This doesn’t belong,” Luna  
whispered alone,  
“It’s silenced the wetlands, once  
vibrant and grown.”








Just then, a boy named Jun  
wandered by,  
and noticed the stillness,  
the quieted sky.

“What’s wrong?” he asked,  
his voice soft as a breeze,  
“The wetlands seem silent,  
as though lost at ease.”







Jun frowned at the sight, and knew what to do,  
he called to the stewards, who quickly came through.

Luna pointed her beak at the scooter so stark,  
“It’s hushed all the whispers, and darkened the  
spark.”





With careful hands, the scooter was freed,  
And whispers returned with the rustling reed.

The flowers stood tall, the grasses did sway,  
The softness of whispers returned to the day.



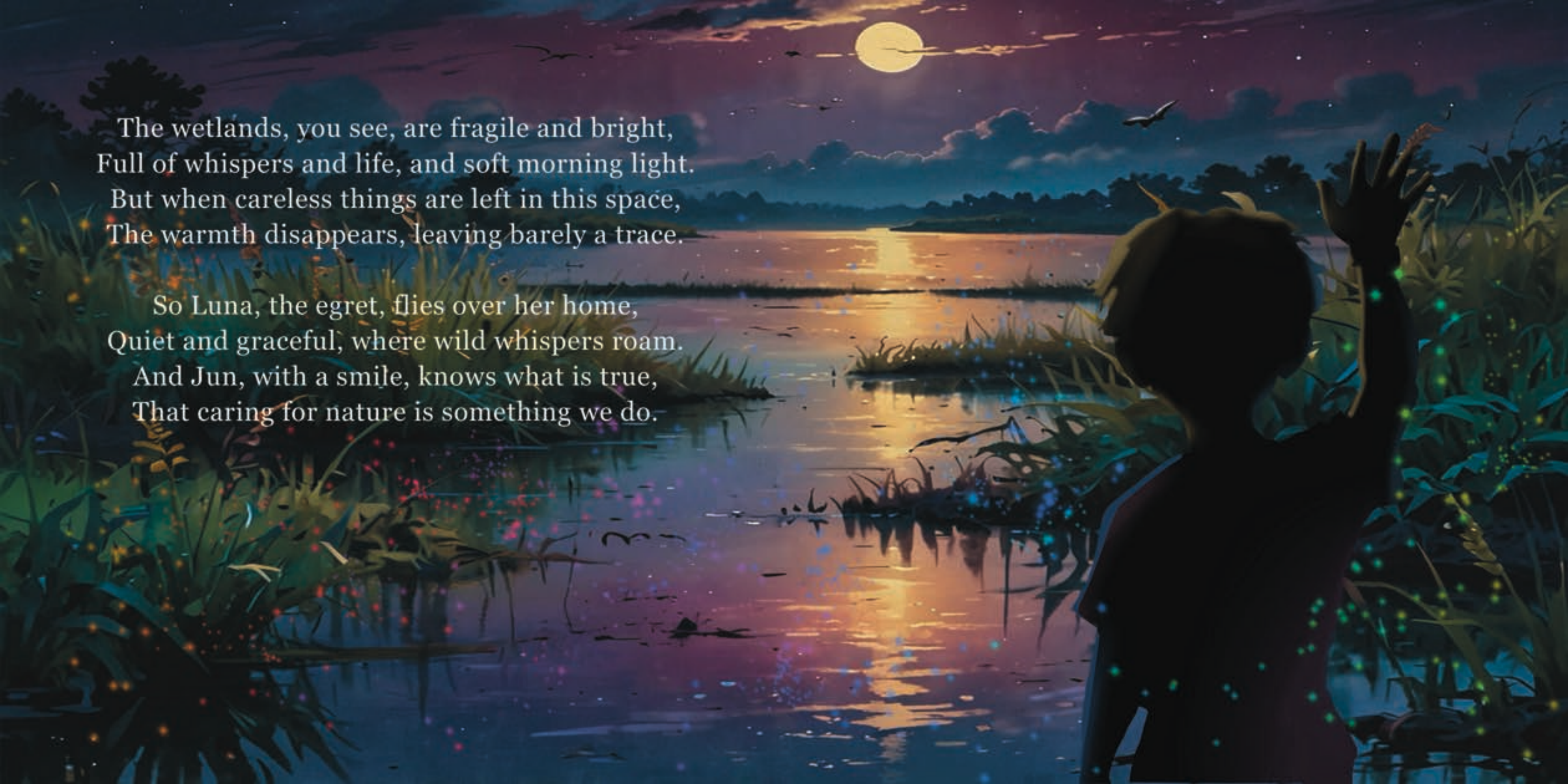


The cordgrass grew strong, the rail found his place,  
Building a nest, floating safe in its space.  
His nest on the water, so gentle, so light,  
Drifting with whispers through day and night.

The birds sang their songs, the air full of cheer,  
As Luna's wetlands grew vibrant and clear.  
Jun smiled at Luna, his heart full of pride,  
Together, the wetlands were brought back to life.





A child stands in a wetland at dusk, looking out over a body of water. The sky is a mix of purple, blue, and orange, with a large, bright yellow sun or moon hanging in the center. The water reflects the colors of the sky. In the foreground, there are tall grasses and reeds, some of which are illuminated by small, glowing fireflies. The child's silhouette is visible on the right side of the frame, with their hand raised towards the sky. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

The wetlands, you see, are fragile and bright,  
Full of whispers and life, and soft morning light.  
But when careless things are left in this space,  
The warmth disappears, leaving barely a trace.

So Luna, the egret, flies over her home,  
Quiet and graceful, where wild whispers roam.  
And Jun, with a smile, knows what is true,  
That caring for nature is something we do.



# GET INVOLVED!

If you're inspired to help protect wetlands and the endangered species they support, here are some ways to get involved and learn more:

- **Bolsa Chica Conservancy**  
Website: [bolsachica.org](http://bolsachica.org)

*Get involved with local volunteer opportunities, educational programs, and conservation efforts at the Bolsa Chica Wetlands.*

- **Huntington Beach Wetlands Conservancy**  
Website: [hbwetlands.org](http://hbwetlands.org)

*Support restoration projects, explore educational resources, and learn about conservation initiatives focused on preserving these critical habitats.*

- **National Audubon Society**  
Website: [audubon.org](http://audubon.org)

*A resource for bird enthusiasts, offering information on wetland ecosystems, bird species, and conservation advocacy.*

- **California Department of Fish and Wildlife**  
Website: [wildlife.ca.gov](http://wildlife.ca.gov)

*Learn more about California's native species, conservation efforts, and ways to contribute to the protection of local wildlife.*

Every small action, from volunteering to reducing waste, contributes to the health of our wetlands and the survival of species like the Ridgway's rail. Thank you for being part of this journey toward preservation and care for our natural world.

## more about THE RIDGWAY'S RAIL:



### Unique Nesting

Ridgway's rails build floating nests! These nests are anchored to marsh plants like cordgrass and move with the tides, keeping the eggs safe from rising and falling water.

### Secretive Bird

This bird is very elusive and prefers to stay hidden in dense marsh vegetation, making it one of the hardest marsh birds to spot!

### Endangered Status

The Ridgway's rail is endangered, primarily due to habitat loss from urban development, pollution, and invasive plant species that threaten the marshes where it lives.

### Excellent Swimmers

Unlike many birds, Ridgway's rails are strong swimmers. They use their legs to paddle through water, often moving stealthily to escape predators.

### Diet Variety

These birds have a varied diet that includes insects, small fish, crustaceans, and even seeds, making them adaptable marsh dwellers.

### Distinctive Call

Knowns for a loud, clattering call, the Ridgway's rail uses its voice to communicate across the marshes, especially during the breeding season.



## **Take the Wetlands with You**

**Luna's story is a reminder of the importance of caring for our environment. Even small efforts make a big impact in protecting places like the wetlands.**

### **Things to Do After Reading**

- **Bring this book on your next visit and see what new plants or birds you can spot!**
- **Share what you learned with family or friends – maybe even inspire them to join a local cleanup!**

**Thank you for joining Luna in protecting the wetlands. Together, we can help keep this beautiful place safe for generations to come.**



Whispers in the Wetlands takes young readers on a journey into the delicate beauty of the California coastal wetlands, where every creature plays a unique role in the ecosystem. Through gentle storytelling and captivating illustrations, this book reveals the quiet voices of nature—from graceful birds to hidden creatures—that call the wetlands home. More than a story, it's a call to protect these vital landscapes and the life within them. Perfect for nature lovers, curious minds, and budding environmental stewards, Whispers in the Wetlands shows how small actions and a listening heart can make a big difference.

### About the Author

Lauren is a passionate illustrator, storyteller, and certified California Naturalist who finds inspiration in the beauty and resilience of nature. She created this book as part of her commitment to preserving the wetlands and raising awareness for endangered species like the Ridgway's rail. Lauren hopes that her work will encourage readers to explore, appreciate, and protect the incredible ecosystems around them. When she's not illustrating or writing, she enjoys spending time outdoors with her family, observing local wildlife, and volunteering with conservation groups.

