

Fall 2015

Marsh Mailing

Madrona Marsh Preserve and Nature Center

Marsh Mailing is also available in full color at www.friendsofmadronamarsh.com

Native Plants and Gardens

Tony Baker, California Native Plant Society

We are very fortunate to live in coastal Southern California. Our Mediterranean Climate with its wet temperate winters and dry warm summers is close to idyllic. The Pacific Ocean acts as a natural air conditioner and the subtropical temperatures allow us to grow practically anything in our home landscapes, and we do. What is known as the California Floristic Province is considered to be a biodiversity hotspot and is home to a wide array of plant life and habitats, many of which are endangered, threatened or sometimes destroyed. Within our geographic area reside hundreds of native plant species that thrive in normal garden situations. I find it puzzling that it is still rare to come across a garden featuring our native flora in the South Bay area.



Concha Ceanothus

A few reasons why California native plants are beneficial in the home garden:

Saving water should be an imperative of all citizens and a native landscape can cut water use drastically, especially when compared to the ubiquitous sod lawn. It is estimated that over 60 percent of local residential water usage is for outdoor landscaping and much of that goes to the lawn. Water requirements are low for most natives, but of course a drought tolerant garden does require some moisture to establish, and once established can benefit from periodic deep watering during the dry months.



Toyon Tree, Vince Scheidt (2004)

No fertilizers, pesticides or amendments are needed for a successful native garden. Natives actually prefer our naturally nutrient-poor soils, in which they can grow slowly. Natives also have built-in defenses against pests and diseases. Some of our current gardening practices are harmful to the environment. For instance, chemicals used on some lawns and landscapes often taint the runoff that finds its way to the sea, causing harm to sea life and to the general health of the ocean.

Attract wildlife to your yard by planting natives. Much of our native wildlife depends on native flora for food and shelter. We can contribute to the survival and well-being of the animal life around us

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“Native Plants” continued from page 1.

by creating diverse mini-habitats in our own gardens. A naturalistic California habitat garden will quickly become a magnet for birds, butterflies, bees and more.



Island Bush Snapdragon, Annie's Annuals

Celebrate Our Natural Heritage. The plants of our Coastal Sage Scrub and Chaparral habitat communities have adapted to the mild Southern California climate over thousands of years. They belong here and yet they are underutilized in our landscapes; in fact, they have become strangers in their own land.

Below are a few of the many beautiful and unique native plants that are available:

Trees and large shrubs such as **Toyon** and **Lemonadeberry** not only provide a garden with a strong structural element, but also serve as a source of food and shelter for birds and other wildlife.

Medium-size natives such as **Ceanothus (California Lilac)** and **Manzanita** have many species and varieties with forms ranging from ground covers to upright shrubs. The vibrant blue flowers of Ceanothus attract butterflies and other nectar seekers. Manzanita are known for their sculptural structure but are also stunning when bell-shaped pink flowers appear—followed by “little apple” fruits (*manzanitas*, in Spanish).

The many varieties of **Sage** are easily grown in gardens and produce spectacular floral displays and

Marsh Mailing is a quarterly newsletter designed to provide information about activities and upcoming events at or relating to the Madrona Marsh Preserve. Contributions are welcome and may be e-mailed to Editorial Advisor, Bill Arrowsmith, FrاندBill@att.net or Editor, Diane Gonsalves at gonwild2@yahoo.com or may be dropped off or mailed to the Nature Center, P.O. Box 5078, Torrance, CA 90510.

have delightfully fragrant leaves. Bees are particularly attracted to the flowers, which come in an array of colors. After the seeds on the upright stalks have ripened, expect birds to come around for nutritious snacks.

Some natives are specifically adapted to hummingbird pollination, producing tubular flowers that don't allow other birds to access their nectar. Hummer plants that thrive in local gardens include **California Fuchsia** and **Island Snapdragon**.

There are also many species of **Buckwheat** that will draw an amazing number of insects—from butterflies to tiny wasps—to their masses of tiny flowers, while thriving on very little water.

Grasses can add a soft textural element to native gardens, as well as create a graceful flowing motion with breezes. **Canyon Prince Rye** and **Deer Grass** are two evergreen, medium-sized species. Some varieties may even serve as a drought-tolerant lawn substitute—such as **Meadow Sedge** or **Grama Grass**.

Many of our natives are sun lovers, but some prefer shade. **Currants** and **Barberries** both produce berries sought after by birds. **Coral Bells** and **Pacific Coast Iris** also perform well under the canopy of trees.

There are many other locals to consider for a “true native” garden such as **Bright Green Dudleya**, a rare succulent of the Palos Verdes coastal bluffs, and **Coastal Buckwheat**, the larval food plant of the endangered El Segundo Blue Butterfly. Not surprisingly, South Bay and Peninsula natives are some of the plants that are best suited for our local gardens.

By planting natives, gardeners can create an environmentally friendly space for wildlife, help protect our water resources and foster an appreciation of our rich natural heritage, while also enjoying a vibrant, colorful and sustainable garden. Individuals, institutions and communities can set a good example and create a learning environment for children as well as adults.

—Tony Baker

CALIFORNIA NATIVE PLANT SALE

Fall is the best season to plant natives, so mark your calendars and start planning. Thousands of plants will be available.

The South Coast Chapter of the California Native Plant Society www.sccnps.org will be holding its annual plant sale at the Madrona Marsh Nature Center **Friday October 2**, 5 to 7 p.m. for members of CNPS and Friends of Madrona Marsh; and **Saturday October 3** from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. for the general public.

Not Just a Fig Eater

David K. Faulkner

Photos by Kim Moore

Perhaps the most striking (literally) large insect seen cruising and crashing around the Marsh in the late summer and fall is the Green Fig Beetle, *Cotinis mutabilis*, sometimes called the peach or green fruit beetle. These $\frac{3}{4}$ to $1\frac{1}{4}$ inch long insects have a green thorax and forewings (elytra), bordered by a dark yellow to light brown band, while the underside



is iridescent metallic green. When airborne, the translucent flight wings, with their dark blue sheen, span $2\frac{1}{2}$ to $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches, and can generate a loud buzzing sound. If disturbed, the beetles take off in an erratic pattern, often colliding with both stationary and moving objects that might appear to be targeted.

Eventually, the Green Fig Beetle will find a suitable tree, such as fig, peach, or plum, and search for fruit that has been damaged by birds or other insects, and begin to feed. They possess a flattened horn on the head that helps to enlarge the existing injury on the fruit. Vines with ripening grapes are also a favorite, but they seem to avoid citrus trees. Before the introduction of non-native trees, their primary food was cactus fruit.

Eggs are deposited in compost, accumulated leaf litter, piled horse manure, or other decomposing plant material. The "C" shaped curl grubs hatch and begin feeding on the rotting vegetation, completing at least two molts before cooler weather sets in. By this time, tunnels have been created that allow the pale white grubs access to material on the outside of the decaying mass for their nocturnal feeding. As temperatures increase in the spring, feeding again



begins, followed by pupation and adult emergence. In turning over composting material, the grubs can be exposed and will attempt to escape by digging into the surrounding soil. Most mortality occurs at this time, with birds and rodents being the primary predators. If there is time, the larvae roll on their back, where they possess short modified thoracic bristles that firmly grab the ground and undulate away. The grubs are sometimes called "back-crawlers."

Before the 1960's, Green Fig Beetles were uncommon in Southern California, but were abundant in neighboring Arizona and Mexico. They eventually extended their range into this region, adapting both to the abundance of deciduous fruit trees that the adults favored, and the increasing availability of composting habitats for the immature's stages. Although not a serious pest

—and they might even be considered beneficial, as they break down dead plant material—the beetles can definitely be a nuisance. This insect is now added to over 500 scarab beetle species recorded throughout the state.



Native Bees - Little Honey, But a Sweet Solution?

Bill Arrowsmith, Past FOMM President

Don't get me wrong; I love honey, and therefore also our primary source thereof, the European honey bee. But I was also very aware of the recent increase in "colony collapse disorder" (CCD) among honey bees when I read an editorial in the *LA Times* last June, "Don't Give Native Bees Short Shrift," which not only enlightened me; it gave me fresh hope.

CCD is a phenomenon in which most of the worker bees disappear from a hive, and many ascribe it to the increased use of pesticides called neonicotinoids. Our own Shirley Turner brought this problem to our attention several years ago. It is estimated that, in the six years prior to 2013, more than 10 million beehives were lost to CCD (Benjamin, Holpuch and Spencer (2013), *The Guardian*).

So what? Why is this non-native honey bee so important, anyhow? (Even for those who don't care for its sweet product.) First, a little historical background: the European honey bee was brought to this continent in the early 1600's, not to pollinate crops or make honey, but to provide beeswax for the production of candles. [It would be another 200 years before Thomas Edison's genius would provide electric light bulbs for the masses.]

From Beeswax to Business

But by the late 1900's, as large-scale industrial farming began to replace smaller family farms, the honey bee became very important to agriculture. On the huge new farms, vast stretches of land were devoted to a single crop, rather than the mix of crops planted on the old small farms. This meant massive numbers of flowers, all of the same type, were blooming at once, requiring massive numbers of pollinators.

The honey bees were a perfect solution. They form huge colonies which could be easily placed in whatever crop area was blooming and required pollination. The bees took over from there; scouts located the nearest, sweetest sources of nectar, then returned to the hive and shared information with worker bees: a "waggle dance" told direction, nectar odor on the scouts the type of flower bloom. These bees became invaluable to the growing agribusiness community, transferring pollen from one flower to another and in the process, fertilizing the plant so that it could grow and produce seeds.

Flower Fidelity

Honey bees also practice "flower fidelity," which makes them very efficient pollinators for specific crops.

Flower fidelity is the habit of concentrating on one specific species of flower when gathering and transferring pollen, even though the bee might be attracted to a wide variety of flowers.

Any honey collected by the farmers was, well, icing on the cake. The real value of the honey bee was the rapid and efficient pollination of the new megacrops. The value of honey bee pollination to US agriculture is over \$14 billion annually, according to a Cornell University study.

And all was well, until Colony Collapse Disorder, which had been around since 1869, got out of control, about 2006. Until then, hive losses had remained stable at about 17-20 percent, since the 1970s. By 2007, commercial beekeepers in several states had reported losses ranging from 30 percent to 90 percent of their bee colonies.

Unfortunately, as the *Times* editorial pointed out, the single-minded focus on European honey bees and addressing the decline in their hives by banning certain pesticides or allowing more backyard beekeeping, has obscured the importance of native bees. Few people know that they exist. Yet there are 1500 native bee species in California and 3500 species in North America. Given the right habitat—a variety of flowering plants (especially natives) that aren't sprayed with pesticides—they'll thrive, either in the ground or in holes in wood.

Prolific Pollinators

Native bees are "easy neighbors:" prolific pollinators that don't swarm, they are solitary; most don't sting and they don't suffer from CCD. They fly faster than honey bees and, unlike honey bees, the males will also pollinate. Because they are solitary ground-dwellers, native bees can't be shipped *en masse* to a flowering agricultural field, but they could help us solve the honey bee problem, with only modest changes to current agricultural techniques. Planting a few additional crops, with different flowering periods would make a huge difference. And planting the perimeter of fields with hedgerows of native shrubs would provide ample habitat for the native bees. An analysis of crops worldwide has found that when native bees coexist with honey bees, production increases substantially.

So, you can help produce healthier bee populations, both honey bee and native, by doing just what Tony Baker suggests in his article on page 1, and what Dr. Connie Vadheim has been

"Native Bees" continued on page 5

Old Friends on the Marsh

Bill Arrowsmith

Tracy Drake's list of recent bird observations on page 9 has several species in bold print, and the footnote tells us that these are considered "uncommon sightings"; that is, not rare, perhaps but not seen on a regular basis.

At least, they haven't been seen on a regular basis for some time, but a couple of these 'uncommon' birds were much more likely to be seen on the preserve forty years ago, when I started birding there.



Loggerhead Shrike, courtesy of Manuel Duran

My favorite among these is the Loggerhead Shrike, a striking black, gray and white predator with a black mask, sometimes known as the "butcher bird" due to its habit of impaling a recently caught



The City of Torrance welcomed a visit from China's Anhui Provincial Water Resources Department representatives earlier this year. The Madrona Marsh was pleased to host this group for interesting presentations by Manager Tracy Drake and staff from Torrance Public Works Department. The Chinese group was interested in learning about water issues in California and how we are responding to the drought.

grasshopper or lizard on the barb of a barbed wire fence or on a thorn to for easy eating, or to save for later. In the 60s and 70s this bird was often seen hunting from atop the fence surrounding the preserve or from atop nearby utility poles.



Phainopepla courtesy of Dinuk Magamma

Another old friend of mine is the Phainopepla (fay-no-PEP-la), whose name comes via the French from the Greek for "shining robe", a fitting description of shiny, jet-black plumage of the male (the female is gray). I had seen this crested bird on hikes in the Mohave Desert, but was amazed the first time I saw it right here in Torrance. I found out later that this bird, which can mimic other birds, has two distinctly different behaviors in the two habitats it prefers: in the desert it is territorial, actively defending nesting and foraging sites, while in riparian woodlands it is more colonial, and will share a tree with other nesting pairs.

"Native Bees" continued from page 4

recommending for years: plant a few native plants in your own yard. They will attract the friendly and helpful native bees, and maybe end up helping the honey bees, as well. Oh, and did I forget to mention that, once established, many native plants are very drought tolerant? They are.

P.S. Please join me in attending **"What's All the Buzz?"** at the Nature Center on Saturday, January 16, 2016, 2 – 4 p.m. as expert beekeeper (and Torrance City Manager) Leroy Jackson shares personal stories on beekeeping and what he knows about the most important pollinators on the planet. \$5/person or \$10/family. Registration recommended. —**Bill Arrowsmith**

Madrona Marsh Preserve and Nature Center*

Schedule of Events for October 2015 through January 2016

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				10 am-Tyke Hike -donation 10:30 Prop.Soc.	5-7-Native Plant Sale-Members 10 am-Fri. Fun**	8:45 am-12 n-Hab.Restor. & Student.Service 9 am-2pm-Native Plant Sale Open to Public
<u>4</u>	<u>5</u> CLOSED	<u>6</u> 8:30 am-Tour d'Torrance 10 am-Adult Weeders	<u>7</u> 10 am-Adult Weeders	<u>8</u> 10:30-12:30-Prop. Soc. 1pm-Sr.Naturalist 35+	<u>9</u> 10 am--12 n-Friday Fun-donation** 6:30-Christansen Ragimov Recep.***	<u>10</u> 8:45 am-12 n-Hab.Restor. & Student.Service 10am-Tortoises, Turtles
<u>11</u>	<u>12</u> CLOSED	<u>13</u> 10 am-Adult Weeders	<u>14</u> 8 am-Bird Walk/ Bob Shanman 10 am-Adult Weeders 6:30-8:30 pm-FOMM Board Meeting	<u>15</u> 10:30-12:30-Propagation Society	<u>16</u> 10 am--12n-Friday Fun-donation**	<u>17</u> 8:45 am-12 n-Hab.Restor. & Student.Service 10am-Nature Water-colors-fee
<u>18</u>	<u>19</u> CLOSED	<u>20</u> 8:30 am-Tour d' Torrance 10 am-Adult Weeders 7 pm-Audubon Mtg.	<u>21</u> 10 am-Adult Weeders	<u>22</u> 10:30-12:30-Propagation Society	<u>23</u> 10 am--Friday Fun*** Christansen/Ragimov Exhib. Ends*** 6:30-Night Hike	<u>24</u> 8:30 am-Bird Walk/Dinuk 8:45 am-12 n-Hab.Restor. & Student Service 10am-Make a Diff. Day 10 am.Nature Walk
10am-Nature Walk 2pm-Sun. Sci.-Reptiles fee <u>25</u>	<u>26</u> CLOSED	<u>27</u> 10am-Home School Nature Class/Reid 10 am-Adult Weeders 1pm-DeRidder Exhibit begins***	<u>28</u> 10am-Home School Nature Class 10am-Home School/Reid Nature Class 10 am-Adult Weeders	<u>29</u> 10:30-12:30-Propagation Society	<u>30</u> 10 am--12 n-Friday Fun-donation**	<u>31</u> 8:45 am-12 n-Hab. Restor. & Student Service

OCTOBER

All activities and classes meet at the Madrona Marsh Nature Center, located at 3201 Plaza del Amo (between Maple and Madrona) on the north side of the street. **Reservations are required for Friday Fun. *See Artists Corner, page 11. For latest event information, see our newly updated website,*

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<u>1</u>	<u>2</u> CLOSED	<u>3</u> 8:30 am-Tour d'Torrance 10 am-Adult Weeders	<u>4</u> 10 am-Adult Weeders	<u>5</u> 10 am-Tyke Hike-donation 10:30-Prop. Society.	<u>6</u> 10 am--12 n-Friday Fun-donation**	<u>7</u> 8:45 am-12 n-Hab.Restor. & Student.Service 10am-"Captivating Containers"-Dr.Vadheim
<u>8</u> 1 pm-Sunday Science-"Nature Rhythms" fee	<u>9</u> CLOSED	<u>10</u> 10 am-Adult Weeders	<u>11</u> 8 am-Bird Walk/ Bob Shanman 10 am-Adult Weeders 6:30-8:30 pm-FOMM Board Meeting	<u>12</u> 10:30 a.m.- Prop.Society 1pm-Sr.Naturalists- 35+ 6:30pm-Dr. Vadheim	<u>13</u> 10 am--12 n-Friday Fun-donation**	<u>14</u> 8:45am-12 n-Hab.Restor. & Student.Service 10 am-Nature's Watercolors
<u>15</u> 1pm-DeRidder Reception***	<u>16</u> CLOSED	<u>17</u> 8:30 am-Tour d'Torrance 10 am-Adult Weeders 7 pm-Audubon Mtg.	<u>18</u> 10 am-Adult Weeders	<u>19</u> 10:30-12:30-Propagation Society	<u>20</u> 10 am--12n-Friday Fun-donation**	<u>21</u> 8:45 am-12 n-Hab.Restor. & Student.Service 10 am-Holiday Ornaments 1:30-Nature Origami 6:30 pm-Star Party
<u>22</u>	<u>23</u> CLOSED	<u>24</u> 10 am-Home School Nature Class/Reid 10 am-Adult Weeders	<u>25</u> 10 am-Home School Nature Class/Reid 10 am-Adult Weeders	<u>26</u> 10:30-12:30-Propagation Society	<u>27</u> 10 am--12 n-Friday Fun-donation**	<u>28</u> 8:30 am-Bird Walk/Dinuk 8:45 am-Hab.Restor. & Student.Service 10 am-Nature Walk
<u>29</u> 10 am-Nature Walk	<u>30</u> CLOSED					

NOVEMBER

Nature Center & Gift Shop

(310) 782-3989

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		<u>1</u>	<u>2</u> 10 am-Adult Weeders	<u>3</u> 10 am-Tyke Hike -donation 10:30 Prop.Soc.	10 am--12 n- <u>4</u> Friday Fun-donation** DeRidder Exhibit Ends***	<u>5</u> 8:45 am-12 n-Hab.Restor.&StudentServ. 10am-"HeavenlyHeucheras -Dr. Vadheim
<u>6</u>	<u>7</u> CLOSED	<u>8</u> 8:30 am-Tour d'Torrance 10 am-Adult Weeders Hill Exhibit Begins***	<u>9</u> 8 am-Bird Walk/ Bob Shanman 10 am-Adult Weeders 6:30pm-FOMM Mtg	10:30-12:30- <u>10</u> Prop. Society 1pm-Sr. Nature- alists 35+ 6:30- Dr. Vadheim	10 am--12 n- <u>11</u> Friday Fun-donation**	<u>12</u> 8:45 am-12 n-Hab.Restor. & Student.Service 6:30 pm-Night Hike-fee
<u>13</u> 2 pm-"Holly Jolly Critters" fee	<u>14</u> CLOSED	<u>15</u> 10 am-Adult Weeders 7 pm-Audubon Mtg.	<u>16</u> 10 am-Adult Weeders	<u>17</u> 10:30-12:30- Propagation Society	10 am--12n- <u>18</u> Friday Fun-donation**	<u>19</u> 8:45 am-12 n-Hab.Restor. & Student.Service 10am-Wreath Making (fee)
<u>20</u>	<u>21</u> CLOSED	<u>22</u> 8:30 am-Tour d' Torrance 10 am-Adult Weeders	<u>23</u> 10 am-Adult Weeders	<u>24</u> CLOSE AT NOON	<u>25</u> CLOSED FOR HOLIDAY	<u>26</u> 8:30 am-Bird Walk/Dinuk 8:45 am-12 n-Hab.Restor. & Student.Service 10 am-Nature Walk
10 am. <u>27</u> Nature Walk	<u>28</u> CLOSED	<u>29</u> 10 am-Adult Weeders	<u>30</u> 10 am-Adult Weeders	<u>31</u> CLOSE AT NOON		

DECEMBER

*All activities and classes meet at the Madrona Marsh Nature Center, located at 3201 Plaza del Amo (between Maple and Madrona) on the north side of the street. **Reservations are required for Friday Fun.

***See Artists Corner, page 11. For latest event information, see our newly upgraded website, www.friendsofmadronamarsh.com.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					<u>1</u> CLOSED FOR HOLIDAY	<u>2</u> 8:45 am-12 n-Hab.Restor. & Student.Service 10am-TBA-Dr. Vadheim
<u>3</u>	<u>4</u> CLOSED	<u>5</u> 8:30 am-Tour d'Torrance 10 am-Adult Weeders	<u>6</u> 10 am-Adult Weeders	<u>7</u> 10 am-Tyke Hike -donation 10:30 Prop.Soc. 6:30-"TBA- Dr.Vadheim	10 am--12 n- <u>8</u> Friday Fun-donation** 6:30pm-Hill Reception***	<u>9</u> 8:45 am-12 n-Hab.Restor. & Student.Service 6:30pm-Night Hike-fee
<u>10</u>	<u>11</u> CLOSED	<u>12</u> 10 am-Adult Weeders	<u>13</u> 8 am-Bird Walk/ Bob Shanman 10 am-Adult Weeders 6:30-8:30 pm-FOMM Board Meeting	<u>14</u> 1pm-Sr. Naturalists 35+ 10:30-12:30- Prop. Society	10 am--12n- <u>15</u> Friday Fun-donation**	<u>16</u> 8:45 am-12 n-Hab.Restor. & Student.Service 1:30pm-Nature Origami 2pm-Native Bees-fee
<u>17</u>	<u>18</u> CLOSED	<u>19</u> 8:30 am-Tour d' Torrance 10 am-Adult Weeders 7 pm-Audubon Mtg.	<u>20</u> 10 am-Adult Weeders	<u>21</u> 10:30-12:30- Propagation Society	10 am--12 n- <u>22</u> Friday Fun-donation** Hill Exhibit Ends***	<u>23</u> 8:30 am-Bird Walk/Dinuk 8:45 am-12 n-Hab.Restor. 10am-Nature's Watercolors 10 am - Nature Walk
10 am. <u>24</u> Nature Walk	<u>25</u> CLOSED	<u>26</u> 10am-Home School Nature Class/Reid 10 am-Adult Weeders	<u>27</u> 10am-Home School Nature Class/Reid 10 am-Adult Weeders	<u>28</u> 10:30-12:30- Propagation Society	10 am--12 n- <u>29</u> Friday Fun-donation**	<u>30</u> 8:45 am-12 n-Hab. Restor. & Student Service
<u>31</u>						

JANUARY

An Undeserved Reputation

Suzan Hubert, FOMM President

Being afraid, in and of itself, is not a bad thing. Fear is a useful emotion. Fear warns us so that we can decide to flee or fight. Mostly humans should flee as we don't have many natural in-born self-preservation skills. We are clever and crafty; we read, we write, we create cool helpful tools but, unlike other mammals, we lack built in defenses.

I'm always afraid when I drive the 405 under the LAX flight path so I drive a little faster; not as if that's going to help much if a plane wheel falls off. On the Preserve our Harvester Ants, when afraid, will raise their front legs prepared to fight and defend their nest; not as if that will help much when a shoe comes down.

Most of our Preserve animals fear people and depend on camouflage or flight as a first line of defense; birds fly away so they are safe enough, even with their bright colors. Consider the insects, amphibians, reptiles and mammals. They all have coloring similar to the environment—shades of black, brown, grey or green—which is very efficient camouflage. Raccoons and opossums are night critters and even more difficult to see because they blend into the environment.

But what about those skunks? I've been wondering about them. That elegant black and white fur stands out even at night when they are most active. Well, we all know about skunks and their built in protection skills. "EWWWW, skunks! They will spray you and they stink!" That's the reaction most people have when they hear the word skunk. It's an undeserved reputation.

The truth is that you have to work pretty hard to get sprayed by a skunk. Spraying is the only defense a skunk has; they only use it as a last resort to save their lives. Sure they are quick, they have claws and teeth, but you are not likely to get close enough to learn about those skills. Skunks produce an oil based spray and have two glands, one on each side of the anus, under their tail from which their spray is dispersed. They can control the amount they spray and can spray a distance of up to 10 feet very accurately.

If you encounter a skunk on the Preserve, in your own garden or in the wild, it's helpful to know how to 'speak' a little skunk. Skunks will very politely 'tell' you to go away before they spray. First they look you in the face (they are aiming) then they gently stamp their front feet. Next they take a couple of little bouncy steps toward you and, perhaps, make some squeaking sounds that probably mean, "What, you're still here?" I read about this so I was theoretically prepared the first time I encountered a skunk. We both froze for a moment.

Then the skunk did all the things I just described, including the squeaking. I ducked my head, thinking if I get sprayed it won't get in my eyes, then I slowly backed away saying in a quiet, calm voice, "Okaaaaay,

this is your space, I'm going away now." He huffed a bit and moved on. I was thrilled that I was 'speaking skunk.'

One summer when I was a kid, in Cape Cod with my family, our dog Gypsy was sprayed; clearly Gypsy didn't speak skunk. My parents washed her with tomato juice. We thought it helped a little but poor Gypsy had to sleep on the back porch for a week. Tomato juice is a common cure for skunk spray so I wondered if V8 Juice would work the same or better. Debunking a myth here . . . actually, I discovered, neither one works. The strong smell of the tomato juice tricks your olfactory senses into thinking it whisked away the skunk smell. It's just one smell on top of another smell.

The composition of skunk spray depends on the species but common to all is a group of organic compounds called thiols. These compounds are characterized by their attached sulfur and hydrogen atoms, and are notorious for a strong smell. The only way to get rid of skunk odor is to neutralize the thiols by changing them into compounds your nose won't recognize as offensive. You can do this by adding oxygen in a process known as oxidation. When oxygen is added to sulfur and hydrogen, odorless sulfonic acid is formed. Sound like Chem. 101? It's not, it's actually doable in the kitchen.

Use a nonreactive (glass, stainless steel, enamel) pot; mix one quart of 3 percent hydrogen peroxide, a quarter cup baking soda and one teaspoon of liquid detergent. Lather up, wait 5 minutes, rinse off well and you're good to go. This is applicable for people and furry friends. This mix can slightly change hair color, and don't store it because it releases oxygen and will break a container. For your clothes, a good wash in the machine with bleach will work.

Next time you walk in the Preserve, the forest or your own back yard, be prepared to 'talk' with the wild things. You don't have to be Dr. Doolittle, you just need to respect and respond to what they tell you—which is usually, "go away and leave me alone." Opossums and cats hiss, raccoons and dogs growl; they just want to be left alone.

When you ignore the skunk's polite requests... well, you won't have to ask others to go away and leave you alone; and I've heard that a week or so by yourself can be refreshing.



. . . who speaks skunk
and loves them well!

The Birds of September 2015

Observations by Tracy Drake, Mark Rubke, David Moody, Manual Duran, Ron Melin and Dinuk Magammana

1	Gadwall	6-Sep-15	41	House Wren	4-Sep-15
2	Mallard	1-Sep-15	42	Marsh Wren	13-Sep-15
3	Great Blue Heron	6-Sep-15	43	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	1-Sep-15
4	Great Egret	1-Sep-15	44	Swainson's Thrush	12-Sep-15
5	Snowy Egret	1-Sep-15	45	Northern Mockingbird	8-Sep-15
6	Green Heron	4-Sep-15	46	European Starling	6-Sep-15
7	Black-crowned Night-Heron	3-Sep-15	47	Phainopepla	8-Sep-15
8	Cooper's Hawk	1-Sep-15	48	Tennessee Warbler	6-Sep-15
9	Red-shouldered Hawk	1-Sep-15	49	Orange-crowned Warbler	1-Sep-15
10	Killdeer	13-Sep-15	50	Nashville Warbler	6-Sep-15
11	Wilson's Snipe	13-Sep-15	51	Common Yellowthroat	1-Sep-15
12	Western Gull	1-Sep-15	52	Yellow Warbler	1-Sep-15
13	California Gull	6-Sep-15	53	Black-throated Gray Warbler	3-Sep-15
14	Glaucous-winged Gull	6-Sep-15	54	Wilson's Warbler	1-Sep-15
15	Rock Pigeon	3-Sep-15	55	Yellow-breasted Chat	6-Sep-15
16	Eurasian Collared-Dove	1-Sep-15	56	Chipping Sparrow	12-Sep-15
17	Mourning Dove	1-Sep-15	57	Brewer's Sparrow	12-Sep-15
18	Anna's Hummingbird	1-Sep-15	58	Lark Sparrow	6-Sep-15
19	Allen's Hummingbird	1-Sep-15	59	Vesper Sparrow	15-Sep-15
20	Belted Kingfisher	1-Sep-15	60	Savannah Sparrow	1-Sep-15
21	Downy Woodpecker	3-Sep-15	61	Song Sparrow	6-Sep-15
22	American Kestrel	1-Sep-15	62	California Towhee	1-Sep-15
23	Peregrine Falcon	9-Sep-15	63	Western Tanager	1-Sep-15
24	Olive-sided Flycatcher	9-Sep-15	64	Black-headed Grosbeak	6-Sep-15
25	Willow Flycatcher	6-Sep-15	65	Blue Grosbeak	3-Sep-15
26	Dusky Flycatcher	13-Sep-15	66	Lazuli Bunting	6-Sep-15
27	Pacific-slope Flycatcher	1-Sep-15	67	Red-winged Blackbird	1-Sep-15
28	Black Phoebe	1-Sep-15	68	Brown-headed Cowbird	6-Sep-15
29	Say's Phoebe	13-Sep-15	69	Hooded Oriole	12-Sep-15
30	Ash-throated Flycatcher	6-Sep-15	70	House Finch	1-Sep-15
31	Cassin's Kingbird	1-Sep-15	71	Lesser Goldfinch	1-Sep-15
32	Loggerhead Shrike	4-Sep-15	72	American Goldfinch	1-Sep-15
33	Warbling Vireo	3-Sep-15	73	European Goldfinch	15-Sep-15
34	Western Scrub-Jay	6-Sep-15	74	House Sparrow	1-Sep-15
35	American Crow	1-Sep-15	75	Northern Red Bishop	8-Sep-15
36	Common Raven	1-Sep-15	76	Diamond Firebird	4-Aug. 15
37	Northern Rough-winged Swallow	12-Sep-15	77	Scaly-breasted Munia	1-Sep-15
38	Tree Swallow	1-Sep-15			
39	Barn Swallow	1-Sep-15			
40	Bushtit	1-Sep-15			

Bold = uncommon sighting

South Bay Native Plant Corner

Dr. Connie Vadheim, CSU, Dominguez Hills



White (Small-flowered) nightshade
Solanum americanum

Fall, in the fourth year of a drought. Plants have dried out early and food resources for birds and other wild creatures are low. In years like this, it's important to manage Preserves and gardens carefully; planning which plants to pull or prune and which to keep. One keeper—which you may have considered a garden weed—is the Small-flowered (White) nightshade.

Nightshades are members of the same family as the tomatoes—the *Solanaceae*. This family is both loved and feared throughout the world. While some members are deadly poisonous, others—including the White nightshade—are not as toxic as their reputation would have us believe. In fact, with proper preparation, they are sometimes even eaten. **Note: unripe berries and foliage should not be eaten.**

Solanum americanum is mainly native to the warmer parts of the United States through Central and South America. We know it as a plant of open—often disturbed—places. You have likely had this species (or the related *Solanum nigrum*) appear in your garden; it also grows wild on the Preserve.

Like all nightshades, White nightshade is an herbaceous annual or short-lived perennial, 2-4 feet tall, with medium-sized triangular or oval leaves. The entire plant is upright and open, and the leaves may have a rough texture due to hairs. The leaves are green when young, but

may be tinged with purple by this time of year. The plants, which thrive in shady areas, are often green when other native plants are dry.

White nightshade is a plant of warm weather. It blooms primarily in summer, with small, white, star-shaped flowers in drooping clusters. The fruits, which look like small, dark-purple tomatoes, ripen in summer or early fall. The ripe fruits of this species are shiny; those of the related Black nightshade (*Solanum nigrum*; an old World plant) are dark but not so shiny (dull).

The ripe fruits of both are eaten by a wide range of fruit-eating birds including Robins, Mockingbirds, Blackbirds, Bluebirds, Black-headed Grosbeaks and Phainopepla. Raccoons, skunks, lizards and other small animals also eat the fruits and seeds. In fact, birds and animals are important seed dispersers of the Solanums, explaining their surprise appearance in gardens.



So, leave the nightshades, other fruits and seeds on your plants this fall. The birds are desperate for food, and our gardens should be a welcome haven. To learn more about managing your fall garden for habitat see: http://mother-natures-backyard.blogspot.com/2014/11/maintaining-your-new-california-garden_15.html

Learn more about local native plants at our “Out of the Wilds and into Your Garden” series on the first Saturday of each month. Plant Information Sheets and Plant Lists are also available at the Nature Center.

Seasoned Vinegars

The holiday season IS coming! If you are thinking about gifts for a friend who, 'has everything and doesn't need more stuff', consider gifting them with homemade flavored vinegar.

Seasoned Vinegar Recipe

8 oz vinegar (use white wine vinegar for Tarragon; red wine or rice vinegar for stronger flavored seasonings like California Salvia, Sagebrush or Bay)

2 sprigs of fresh herb (about 6 inches long, washed)

Place sprigs of seasoning in a glass container. Cover with vinegar. Let steep until flavor is to your liking (about 2-14 days).

Remove sprigs; strain vinegar to remove any plant material. Use as marinade, in salad dressings, or any place you would use a flavored vinegar.

The hardest part is choosing a lovely glass jar.

—Suzan Hubert

Gift Shop

If you are not interested in making seasoned vinegar, consider the Friends Gift Shop at the Nature Center. The Gift shop has useful and unusual gifts -- from jewelry to children's toys.

All profits from the gift shop are donated to the preservation, restoration and enhancement of the Preserve, Nature Center and our educational programs.

Donations of \$100 or More

Date	Donor	Donation	Information
June	Irma Ruiz	\$365.00	
June	Hermosa Garden Club	\$300.00	
June	William & Barbara Ailor	\$500.00	In honor of Martin & Eileen Byhower. – Martin retired June 22
July	Lenore Bloss	\$200.00	
July	Maxine Trevethen	\$100.00	
July	Torrance Teachers Association	\$300.00	
August	James Justiss	\$400.00	
August	Nathan & Ruth Vogel	\$100.00	
August	Joannie Spring	\$100.00	
August	David Moody	\$100.00	

Artists Corner

September 22 through October 23-Art Exhibit by **Mark Christansen and Lala Ragimov**. Artist Reception, Friday, October 2, 6:30 p.m.


October 27 - December 4 - **Botanical Illustrations of Madrona**, an Exhibit by **Estelle DeRidder**. Artist Reception Sunday, November 15, 1-3 p.m.

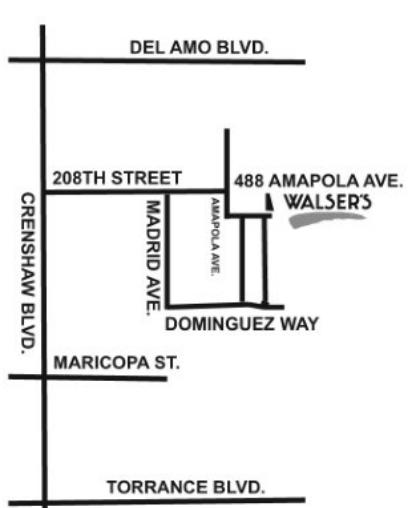
December 8 - January 22. - **"Marsh Memories,"** A Photography Exhibit by **Lance Hill**. Artist Reception, Friday, January 8, 6:30 pm.

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