



# the griffith reporter

the newsletter of friends of griffith park/summer 2011



## Endangered lizard sighted in Griffith Park

Dan Cooper, Scientific Advisor for the Griffith Park Natural History Survey, searched for three years before finding a Coastal Horned Lizard, (a.k.a. "Horney Toad"), in Griffith Park. When he finally spied one in 2009, it was a thrilling verification of the continuing presence of these elusive creatures in Griffith Park.

Subsequently, a Friends of Griffith Park Boardmember encountered his own Horney Toad basking on one of the Park's sun-exposed western trails. After quietly switching his camera to telephoto, he got off a few shots (one of which is shown above). He knew the prehistoric-looking lizard would dart into the brush if he got any closer. Surprisingly, the creature cooperated and seemed to watch his human observer for quite a while. Then in a flash, he disappeared, burying himself under the trail's shallow soil, the behavior for which this species is known.

Over the last few decades, this species' numbers have diminished greatly in L.A., mostly due to urban development. They need loose sand in which to bury themselves and rely on

*(Endangered Lizard, continues on back cover)*

## Safeguarding parks from new and regressive cost-recovery schemes

Urban parks are not businesses. On the contrary, they are respites from the commercialization we encounter everywhere else in our metropolis. The current challenge park users face is resisting the emerging "cost-recovery" ethic whereby officials are attempting to resolve the City's budget shortfall by reclassifying parks as sources of revenue. Bureaucrats are pioneering new ways to charge the public for using its own property (commercialization) or are redirecting our communal spaces into private hands (privatization). New directives are cannibalizing the parks budget, forcing parks to pay for essential city services such as water, power and trash pick-up (chargebacks). Depressed revenue is cited as the justification for these measures, but at the same time, the City is awarding hundreds of millions in grants, tax subsidies and other support to privately owned hotels and arenas, cultural attractions and entertainment enterprises operated for profit.

### Preserving Unpaid Access

For more than a century, L.A. residents have supported our municipal park system, recognizing the fundamental role parks play in making this a livable City. Free access to our parks is a core civic value. Griffith Park, our largest municipal park, actually came with the stipulation that its access be free. Its donor, Griffith J. Griffith knew poverty in his youth and insisted that there be no financial barriers to its use. He could not have foreseen, but certainly would have recognized, that in car-dependent 21st century Los Angeles charging to park in Griffith Park is tantamount to levying an admission fee.

Recently, when the Greater Los Angeles Zoo, a rent-free tenant of the Park, was pressured to introduce paid parking to its lot that serves general park users and the Autry as well as the Zoo, Friends of Griffith Park was successful in keeping access free. We spoke before the Zoo Commission and to City officials, wrote letters and asked other groups to join us. At the end of the day, all parties agreed that the plan was inefficient as well as regressive. On second look it emerged that the potential revenue gain from instituting paid parking would be eclipsed by the cost of installing a fee-collection system. A very minimal increase in ticket price would achieve the Zoo's goals without penalizing all park visitors. This episode yielded another positive result. In the City's Draft of a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the private operation of the Zoo, (story, page 5), language has been inserted specifying that parking at the Zoo will remain free.

*(Continued on next page)*

We recognize that the City is facing a fiscal crisis. But it is punitive to devise ways to charge cash-strapped families and individuals to use the resources they have long owned and supported through taxes and bond measures. Even in the depths of the Great Depression, the City of Los Angeles did not levy new fees. Nor did it reposition its parks as moneymaking resources.

### Resisting Commercial Blight

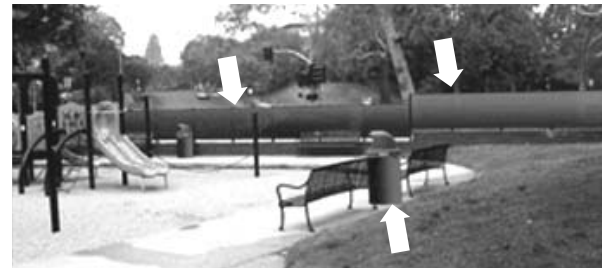
Last fall, in an arrangement brokered by the privately held L.A. Parks Foundation, Warner Bros. was invited to install supergraphics for its 3-D movie *Yogi Bear*, on walls, fences, tables, shade shelters, benches, walkways and other surfaces throughout Holmby Park, Pan Pacific Recreation Center, and Lake Balboa Park. Under the deal approved by the City's Recreation and Parks Commission, the corporation would donate \$57,000 to the Foundation which would deduct handling fees before turning over \$42,636 to Rec and Parks. In addition to providing unprecedented marketing access to L.A.'s kids, the plan violated the city's billboard ordinance. But when the City Attorney's Office pointed this out to the Rec and Parks Commission, its President responded, "Make it legal."

On April 27th, we attended the City Council's 2011-12 Budget & Finance Committee Meeting and were dismayed to hear the same executive – who also heads the L.A. Parks Foundation – defend permitting advertising in parks, which he redefined as thanking and acknowledging donors. He prefaced his remarks with the statement, "This is not a windfall," signaling that the potential upside from selling advertising will not begin to address the parks' multi-million dollar shortfall or resolve the maintenance, staffing and security losses faced by the system.

Friends of Griffith Park not only opposes advertising in parks, we do not believe it is necessary if the actual goal is to credit donors. Throughout Los Angeles, corporate benefactors of public and cultural institutions are thanked and acknowledged handsomely on donor walls featuring no logos or references to the companies' products or services. The Los Angeles Public Library, UCLA, the Music Center, and multiple museums are examples.

Some officials agree, but others dismiss objections to advertising as "elitist," implying that protecting parks from blight and kids from exploitation is motivated by snobbery. Further muddying the issue, anti-sign activists are being spun as opposing Little League sponsor banners which are permitted on field fences in parks and are benign. Keeping advertising out of parks will be a protracted citywide battle that will require

Griffith Park affords myriad opportunities for outdoor leisure and enjoyment and a chance to decompress and experience the beauty and tranquility of the natural world. Yet if some have their way, it will become a place where kids learn about brands instead of the great outdoors.



Images aimed at advertisers prepared by the L.A. Parks Foundation show how pervasive advertising will be if permitted in our parks. Arrows point to just a few of the typical park surfaces that can be flooded with signs.

all of us to pitch in. While the threat is on hold for the time-being, some officials are working on developing language that would exempt parks from the billboard ordinance.

There are serious implication for our parks as well as the City as a whole. Should promoters of advertising in parks prevail, the City's hard-fought billboard ordinances could implode. And who is to say that this scheme won't morph into a lucrative contract to be turned over to an outdoor advertising company which would be a windfall for that company, indeed.

### **Opposing One-Way Chargebacks**

Chargebacks, a mechanism through which the city collects money from itself, have dealt a \$19.7 million blow to this year's Rec and Parks budget. While the city is not obligated to pay for parks' basic operating expenses such as water and power, it has done so for decades – we presume out of sense of fairness. After all, our municipal parks provide the LADWP with free land upon and underneath which it erects permanent structures – electrical relay towers, reservoirs, water tanks, and giant underground conduits – for the acquisition, storage, transmission and delivery of its products to its paying customers.

Nevertheless, the 2010–2011 City Budget forced the Recreation and Parks Department to pay for water and power at its more than 400 properties. The 2011-2012 City Budget does the same, this time reducing the parks' operating budget by \$16 million. The LADWP is not being compelled to reciprocate by paying lease market rates (franchise fees) to Rec and Parks to continue to occupy its lands. Nor is the Sanitation Bureau being asked to compensate the parks for its facilities on parkland, although the parks are now being required to pay \$3.7 million for trash services.

Chargebacks should not be a one-way street. The LADWP and Sanitation Bureau should pay the parks for their tenancy, or the City should declare it a wash and return to the previous practice of providing these departments' services free to parks.

Friends of Griffith Park will continue to oppose commercialization, privatization, chargebacks and other cost-recovery schemes that penalize our parks while degrading their beauty and purpose. If you would like to help keep commercial advertising out of parks, send a message in opposition to your City Councilmember. If you would like to help restore \$19.7 million to this year's Recreation and Parks budget, send a message opposing these unfair chargebacks to your City Councilmember and the Mayor. Their contact information can be found at [www.friendsofgriffithpark.org](http://www.friendsofgriffithpark.org) along with more information on these issues.



Requiring parks to pay the LADWP \$16 million for water and power is patently unfair. For nearly a century DWP electrical relay towers have crossed Griffith Park delivering power to the city. Currently, a substantial portion of the 44-acres "Headworks" area of Griffith Park is being bulldozed by the utility to accommodate the new emergency water storage facility for Northeast L.A. that replaces Silver Lake reservoir. Simultaneously, the DWP is excavating the Park to a fifty-foot depth to replace the 8-foot diameter River Supply Conduit pipes running its length which bring water to city areas south of the park. There are over 18 DWP water tanks in the park, both active and decommissioned.

# Friends of Griffith Park and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency see eye-to-eye on Forest Lawn Hollywood Hills expansion

Joining the massive NBC Universal development proposal now in its Environmental Impact Report (EIR) stage another Griffith Park neighbor, Forest Lawn Hollywood Hills, is embarking on an expansion that will eliminate much of the remaining open space on the park's northwest border. Friends of Griffith Park is monitoring this development and recently filed comments with the City Planning Department on Forest Lawn's Draft EIR.

The expansion plan for the Park-contiguous cemetery would add 200,000 new interment spaces to the 444-acre site, nearly doubling the total capacity for the facility and bringing it to maximum capacity. Forest Lawn says that it is committed to providing and servicing the traditional cultural and religious burial rites their clients expect, which translates to water-intensive lawns and above-ground crypt structures, densely arrayed on the facility's remaining undeveloped acreage.

Friends of Griffith Park has expressed concern about the adverse impacts resulting from removal of the site's extraordinarily rich and mature native habitat directly bordering the park. This includes 632 protected coast live oak trees and 144 protected Southern California black walnuts, plus many rare plants, including mariposa and Humboldt lilies. Sennett Creek, whose waters come from natural seeps within Griffith Park, runs through the Forest Lawn property and connects the Park to the L.A. River. In addition to core loss of rare and pristine riparian habitat, the creek's function as a mountain-to-river wildlife corridor will be affected adversely.

Responses from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the State of California Department of Fish and Game and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy support our view. These agencies point out that there is no satisfactory mitigation for the demolition of mature, protected species. Replanting them at a different site does not replicate the complex plant community that has been lost, nor does it address the destruction of the wildlife-nurturing habitat the plant com-

munity provided and the creatures that inhabited it.

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires Forest Lawn's Draft EIR to propose development alternatives and the cemetery has presented multiple approaches to its preferred project plan. After considering them, Friends of Griffith Park has recommended Alternative Five which we believe will have the least impact on Griffith Park. Almost all of Forest Lawn's business goals can be accomplished by its modest scale-back of intentions, while protecting most of the sensitive habitat that would be destroyed otherwise. Now the Environmental Protection Agency has joined us. The EPA is involved out of concern over unacceptable impacts to what they define as "aquatic resources of national importance" as well as "110 acres of natural, high-quality woodland, scrub and riparian communities that currently serve as a buffer to neighboring Griffith Park, designated by local planning authorities as a Significant Ecological Area (SEA)."

Friends of Griffith Park remains hopeful that Forest Lawn will be true to their stated goal of being a good Griffith Park neighbor. You can read our response to the Draft EIR, as well as the responses of the EPA, California Department of Fish and Game and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy online at [www.friendsofgriffithpark.org](http://www.friendsofgriffithpark.org).

Friends of Griffith Park's comments on the Environmental Impact Report for the NBC Universal expansion plan can also be found at [www.friendsofgriffithpark.org](http://www.friendsofgriffithpark.org).



As with Griffith Park, Forest Lawn Hollywood Hills' site drains to the L.A. River. Thanks to the federal government's designation of the river as a "Traditional Navigable Water," maintaining and restoring the health of its watershed has become an EPA priority. Right: both water and land dwelling animals are nurtured by the habitat at risk in the cemetery expansion. Friends of Griffith Park and the EPA have both recommended the development alternative with the least impact on Griffith Park, the L.A. River and the eastern Santa Monica Mountains.



# BETWEEN FRIENDS



## City Puts Privatizing the Operation of the Los Angeles Zoo on Fast Track

Since its establishment as a rent-free tenant of Griffith Park in 1912, the Los Angeles Zoo has been supported in the main by tax-paying citizens. Currently, the City is nearing the completion of a Zoo Capital Improvement Project costing nearly \$172 million, while the parking lot that serves the Zoo is undergoing a \$14.9 million renovation. The lion's share of these funds come from tax-payer funded propositions and a significant portion of the Zoo's day-to-day operations are supported by taxes. It is clear that the people of Los Angeles are the major investors and stakeholders in the Zoo.

Nevertheless, many L.A. residents are not aware that in order to reduce the City's General Fund contribution to the ongoing support of the Zoo, officials are on the verge of issuing a Request for Proposal (RFP) whose purpose is to transfer management of the Zoo to a private operator.

The pros and cons of public vs. private management are many and reflect many interests including, but not limited to, the Zoo's employees, its membership-support group GLAZA, animal advocates and others. In the event that the City Council does vote to approve and release an RFP seeking a private Zoo operator, Friends of Griffith Park has requested that it require that the successful applicant indicate a willingness to operate the Zoo in a manner that is sensitive to its host and context, Griffith Park.

Specifically, we have asked that the Draft RFP's language be amended to specify that:

1. Griffith Park is designated by UCLA as a County of Los Angeles area of Critical Environmental Concern for its substantial populations of native flora and fauna.
2. Griffith Park is the largest City of Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument. While the Zoo facility is not historically significant in itself, it is located within Griffith Park's landmark's boundaries and is adjacent to areas of Griffith Park that are historically important.
3. The welfare of its animals remain the Zoo's central purpose and that compliance with the highest standards of animal care be affirmed by the City on an annual basis.
4. Operation and management of the Zoo be conducted with transparency and accountability to the City and the public. Given that its property, buildings and animals will continue to be owned by the people of Los Angeles no less should be accepted.

The justification for the potential transfer of the Zoo's operations to a private partner begins and ends with the official desire to tail off financial support for the Zoo. However, if the Zoo becomes profit-based, can it continue to be an educational institution whose primary purpose is species conservation? Or will its emphasis shift to entertainment at the expense of its core mission? Will it continue to be a responsible tenant of Griffith Park? These are the big questions.

## Keeping the Park Rangers that keep us safe

Friends of Griffith Park recently reaffirmed its support for a fully staffed Park Ranger Division serving Griffith Park and LA's regional parks. In a letter to Councilmember Tom LaBonge, we pointed out that park users continue to appreciate and rely on the professionalism and dedication displayed by our Park Rangers on a day-to-day basis, and noted the efficiency and value the rangers provide.

In a 1960s era act of wisdom, the City established the Park Ranger Division to provide generalists in the field who could react to day-to-day, hour-to-hour safety and quality of experience issues. In Griffith Park, Park Rangers have been historically the first responders to fires. They rescue the lost and injured, administer first aid, patrol on foot and in vehicles, unlock traffic jams, diffuse disputes, enforce regulations, provide friendly interpretive guidance to visitors and respond with knowledge and sensitivity to wildlife issues. In times of economic stress, Park Rangers are the City's best bargain, as they can perform a remarkable multiplicity of tasks.

We have asked that a plan be devised and implemented to restore Park Rangers to 24/7 duty, expanding the truncated 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. hours the Department currently maintains. In our round-the-clock metropolis, they can be needed when least expected. We believe there are no good alternatives to Park Rangers and strongly urge that all open positions be filled immediately to multiply their presence and effectiveness in our parks.

*Traditionally, Park Rangers have been first responders to wildfires. We hope that the Division's new fire truck is a sign that the City is committed to the robust staffing and deployment of rangers in Griffith Park and other regional parks.*



## Books on Griffith Park topics given to libraries

In conjunction with the Griffith Park Lecture Series, Friends of Griffith Park has donated signed copies of two fascinating books relating to the history of the Park and Los Angeles to local institutions. The Los Feliz Branch of the Los Angeles Public Library and high school libraries near Griffith Park received copies of Leo Braudy's *The Hollywood Sign: Fantasy and Reality of An American Icon* and Mike Ebert's *Griffith Park: A Centennial History*.

This free lecture series features authors, academics and experts speaking on the people, events and ecologies that have shaped Griffith Park. See back cover for information about the next event.

# Inner-city outings offer kids hikes, history and fun

To help urban kids discover the fun of outdoor recreation and the natural world, Friends of Griffith Park is partnering with the Inner City Outings Committee of the Sierra Club on a series of daytime adventures in Griffith Park.

In June, second grade students from Toland Way Elementary in Eagle Rock explored the Park's trails, encountered insects, animals and plants, viewed the Hollywood Sign and visited Griffith Observatory's Astronomers Monument.

What stayed with the young hikers? Here are some excerpts from notes we received:

*Thank you for teaching us about animals, plants and the water tank with solar panel. I learned many things in Griffith Park...I saw burned trees, pine seedlings, a hole pecked by a woodpecker and a fly with an orange rear end.*

*I learned that the mustard flower doesn't really taste like mustard.*

*It was cool when we saw the Hollywood Sign. It was awesome when we saw a brown lizard on a bright yellow rock. I like the orange and yellow butterfly. Thank you good friends!*

*We know you are nice because you take care of nature.*

Photos here and on the back cover tell the story – an enjoyable time was had by all and we can't wait to do it again.



## Deer delight

The blooms of wavy-leafed soap plant, (*Chlorogalum pomeridianum*), are extraordinary and seldom seen in Griffith Park. The reason...deer seem to love their taste, and also love to munch on the stalks from which they sprout. Its stalks shoot as high as seven feet from its leafy base plant, each capable of branching out and producing hundreds of buds.

This beautiful member of the lily family is found in spotty locations throughout Griffith Park. Its name "soap plant" is derived from Native Americans and early settlers who ground the bulbs to use as soap. As this photographer found out, not only do you need to get lucky that a deer doesn't find the plant first, but also that cool weather can put the buds into standby mode for weeks. Finally they started blooming!



# join friends of griffith park



Friends of Griffith Park promotes the enlightened stewardship of Griffith Park so it can survive and thrive in the 21st century. As a member of Friends of Griffith Park you help to:

- Preserve Griffith Park's open landscapes, natural ecosystems and Urban Wilderness features
- Safeguard Griffith Park's integrity as L.A.'s largest landmark and work to restore its historic fabric
- Protect loss of open space, free use and identity-changing commercialization and development
- Ensure that planning and decision making are open, accountable and made in partnership with the public
- Promote knowledge about the Park's natural heritage and human history
- Provide grants and engage in fundraising for the Park's study and preservation

As a Friend of Griffith Park you will receive on a regular basis:

- Our *Between Friends* newsletter reporting on issues and events affecting the Park and its users.
- Invitations to free lectures and programs, guided hikes and other activities.
- Invitations to volunteer opportunities in the Park.
- The satisfaction of knowing you are helping to preserve and sustain the natural heart of our city.

**Fill out and return this form with your payment or join online at [www.friendsofgriffithpark.org](http://www.friendsofgriffithpark.org)**

Please enroll me as a member of Friends of Griffith Park at the following level:

- \$20 Friend    \$50 Caretaker    \$100 Guardian    \$250 Steward    \$500 Benefactor    Above: \$\_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (for questions regarding your enrollment only) \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to give the above as a gift membership. Please acknowledge it as a gift from:

\_\_\_\_\_

I am enclosing a check made out to Friends of Griffith Park in the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please charge the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to my:    MasterCard    Visa    Discover    Amex

Cardholder Name \_\_\_\_\_

Card Number \_\_\_\_\_ Expiration Date \_\_\_\_\_

Billing Address (if not same as above ) \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

**Mail this form to Friends of Griffith Park P.O. Box 27573 Los Angeles, CA 90027-0573**

Friends of Griffith Park is a 501 c 3 charitable nonprofit corporation. As such, your donation is tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

(Endangered Lizard, continued from cover)

a good ecological relationship with native harvester ants (the big red ones) on which they feed. Unfortunately harvester ants have been overrun by the nonindigenous Argentine ants—the ones we often see in our kitchens.

The California Department of Fish & Game considers the Coastal Horned Lizard a *Species of Special Concern* and the U.S. Forest Service lists the Coastal Horned Lizard in its “sensitive” category. Some people may think they are just ugly, spiny critters. But the fact that this homely animal, once common in L.A., has managed to retain a foothold in Griffith Park transcends its appearance. Its continued existence affirms the healthy status of a complex ecosystem. In our opinion, the Horney Toad is beautiful and we’re glad it can be found right here in Griffith Park.



Second-graders from Toland Way Elementary acquaint themselves with the Astronomers Monument on the grounds of Griffith Observatory. Partnering with the Sierra Club's Inner City Outings Committee, Friends of Griffith Park is holding a series of outings for kids that teach them about the Park's natural and human history.

Griffith Park Lecture Series  
Thursday, August 11 6:30 p.m.

## Major Mammals of Griffith Park



Griffith Park is home to the City's greatest concentration of native fauna within urbanized Los Angeles. Ecologist Dan Cooper, Scientific Advisor to the *Griffith Park Natural History Survey*, focuses on the habits of Griffith Park's predator species: bobcats, coyotes, grey fox, raccoons, and even mountain lion, discussing the natural habitat and prey animals that nourish and sustain them and how humans can aid their continued existence. Sponsored by Friends of Griffith Park, this free lecture takes place Thursday, August 11 at the Los Feliz Branch of the Los Angeles Public Library 1874 Hillhurst Ave (corner of Franklin) Los Feliz, CA 90027 (323) 913-4710 Doors open at 6:30 p.m. Program starts at 6:45 p.m.



P.O. Box 27573

Los Angeles, CA 90027-0573

[www.friendsofgriffithpark.org](http://www.friendsofgriffithpark.org)

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