



the griffith reporter

the newsletter of friends of griffith park winter/spring 2024-25



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FROM THE PRESIDENT

It was a refreshing year of achievements for Friends of Griffith Park, including project completions, our successful science programs, and advocacy efforts. Some projects take years to push through the layers of approvals. For example, the inspirational 3-wall mural, “Invisible Neighbors,” which now graces the Visitor Center Complex, was unveiled in November 2024. We began laying the groundwork for this mural in 2021. Have you seen it yet? It’s gorgeous. Persistence pays.

Historic Fern Dell benefited from projects that came to fruition, including wrought-iron fencing and restoration of a clay-tile roof for a 1926 restroom, known also as a “comfort station.” As the recipient of a County Safe, Clean Water Program grant, FoGP’s engineering consultant is deeply engaged in the Feasibility Study Phase, with hopeful prospects for the Design Phase to be funded later next year. Flowing water in the upper stream, an upgraded irrigation system, and tree/plant restoration work will enhance this L.A. destination. Plus, much of the storm water will be captured, cleaned, stored and reutilized.

Give nature
a chance to
do her good
work and
nature will
give every
person a
greater
opportunity
in health,
strength
and mental
power.

~Griffith J. Griffith

Please peruse the separate summary of Park Issues (*see page 4*) which includes this year’s shocker, a revised alcohol policy enacted in spring of 2024.

Colonel Griffith J. Griffith is often and rightfully credited for his generosity to the people of Los Angeles. “Public parks are the safety valve of great cities and should be made accessible and attractive, where neither race nor color could be excluded.”

The Greek Theatre, dedicated nearly a decade following Griffith’s death – was another gift executed through his trust. In the program for the festivity, it was said of the Colonel, “This man’s civic pride was genuine. He thought less of his gifts to this city as benefactions in themselves, than as examples to others able to give.”

2025 will be an important year for Griffith Park, and especially if Olympics directives take us by surprise. FoGP’s dedicated, all-volunteer board hopes your voice can be counted as we continue to advocate for the Park. And your ongoing support will help move our work and projects further than ever!



Gerry Hans, President FoGP



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MIGUEL ORDEÑANA

ALEX PHILLIPS

ERIK SMITT

KRIS SULLIVAN

newsletter team

BRENDA REES, editor
brenda@friendsofgriffithpark.org

KATHRYN LOUYSE, newsletter production
klouyse.friendsofgriffithpark@gmail.com

contact info

Friends of Griffith Park
P.O. Box 27573
Los Angeles, CA 90027-0573
☎ 323-521-9399
friendsofgriffithpark.org



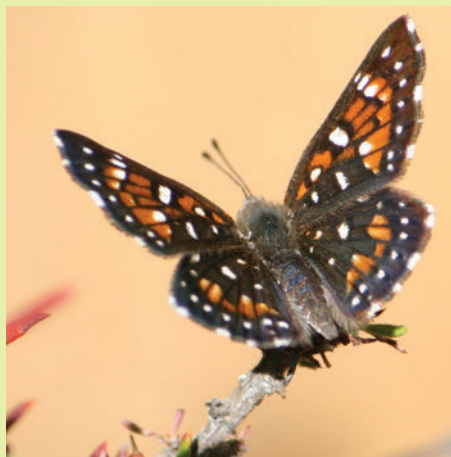
**Winter hiking can be much more fun,
and far safer, when shared with friends
(page 20)**

Photo: Kathryn Louyse

EMERGENCY CONTACT / GRIFFITH PARK
L.A. PARK RANGERS: 323-644-6661

Behr's metalmark: Nature's art in a tiny package

~Gerry Hans, FoGP President



Behr's metalmark
on California buckwheat
Cover & photo above: Gerry Hans

Behr's metalmark butterfly (*Apodemia virgulti*) is small, with a mere one-inch wingspan. It's easily missed, unlike giants such as swallowtails or the well-known, migrating monarchs.

If you can get close enough, Behr's metalmark wings feature a powerful and stunning visual: orange coloration against a brown background on both fore and hind wings. Dabs of well-placed white markings add to nature's artwork as do velvety edges and cylindrically-striped antennae.

The species range is from the Central California southward into Baja California, and eastward into Riverside County and the San Bernardino foothills. In Griffith Park, I've seen them during both the spring and late-summer; they are known to have two "flights" possible per year, therefore potentially two annual metamorphosis cycles.

Behr's is mainly tied with its host plant, California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*), which has flower clusters that provide nectar as a food source for butterflies and larvae. Eggs, laid in groups on lower leaves of buckwheat plants, hatch caterpillars which then eat soft, young leaves. A transformation occurs into pupa from which another butterfly emerges. And the cycle repeats!

Given Griffith Park's ample buckwheat, you might expect to see hordes of metalmarks fluttering throughout the Park. However, that is not the case. They are only found in select spots of sage scrub and chaparral habitat. (We don't know why.) It would be unusual to see a Behr's metalmark in your own backyard, or even in small neighborhood parks.

FoGP'S Scientific Advisor, Dan Cooper, notes that having intact blocks of healthy native habitat is essential for this species' survival. He also noted another small population of Behr's butterflies can be found on the coastal dunes at LAX. There, the species is tied to a narrow ecosystem of sandworts, and also includes another buckwheat, sea cliff buckwheat (*Eriogonum parvifolium*).

Indeed, looking at *iNaturalist*, the popular community science program, there are no observations between the LAX dunes patch and Griffith Park. The species is devoid across the entire L.A. Basin.

Behr's metalmark is a good example of the need to retain large blocks of native wildlands of Griffith Park. 🌿

Nature Starts in Griffith Park!

Help nature thrive – support the efforts
of Friends of Griffith Park

by BECOMING A MEMBER!
or JOINING OUR VOLUNTEERS!



GRIFFITH PARK UPDATES

GRIFFITH PARK MERRY-GO-ROUND

As strange as it sounds, the privately-owned historic 1926 Stillman carousel sits inside a building owned by the L.A. Department of Recreation and Parks (RAP). Due to co-owner Julio Godinski's death at the age of 49 in 2020, his 50% ownership still rests in the hands of the probate court.

Even so, the beloved merry-go-round operated sporadically during the COVID-19 pandemic, until a very expensive mechanical repair shuttered this affordable, favorite attraction. Unfortunately, until there is a resolution in the court case, little can be done to address the mechanical problems and reopen the ride.



Griffith Park's currently closed Merry-go-round

FoGP continues to see strong interest in keeping this rich piece of history alive in Griffith Park. To reiterate, FoGP is anxious to see RAP acquire ownership of the carousel and will help in this effort.

Parents of young children regularly reach out and ask us when it might reopen. Sadly, kids will miss another holiday season of riding this mighty four-abreast horse carousel. The ride was inspirational for Walt Disney, and has enthralled thousands of youngsters over the nearly nine decades it has resided in the Park. Julio's smiling face and passion made it even more inviting in recent decades.

PONY RIDES

Another favorite and affordable Park attraction – the pony rides – was placed on hiatus in late 2022. RAP hired an outside consultant, PlaceWorks, to manage the controversy with the public about live animal rides. Public outreach for “Reimagining the Pony Rides Site” conducted by the consultant has ended, and their formal report was delivered to RAP Commissioners on September 16, 2024.

The report gives no answers. Instead, it exhibits loads of input collected from the public via various methods. The “statistically valid survey” is compelling and states that a fair representation of L.A.'s demographics indicate that 70% of the public favor pony rides being offered to children with only 16% opposed.

The report cites a variety of possible uses for the 3.5-acre venue, with or without pony rides being a part of the final choice. Seven case studies of activities within California, ranging from no-animal interaction to primarily animal interaction facilities, illustrate the possibilities for the site's future. The case studies also explore business models, management structures, capital investment, and construction time for each option.



Griffith Park's Pony rides are currently closed

At the September Commission meeting, no deliberations occurred, although questions from L.A. Park Commission's President Renata Simril were answered. One question was whether there was a “strategic plan” for Griffith Park, and the response was, “not at this time.” However, *A Vision for Griffith Park* which provides an important document to guide Griffith Park, was not part of the discussion.

It was made clear that a decision might be a combination of activities from the case models presented. No timeline was given for this important topic to return to the Commission for final decisions regarding the venue.

The complete report, as well as detailed information on the path of outreach along the way, can be found at www.laparks.org/griffithpark/pony-rides.

ZOO EXPANSION

Litigation filed jointly by Friends of Griffith Park and the Griffith J. Griffith Charitable Trust on September 13, 2023, has not yet been resolved. The deadline for the City Attorney to present the Admin-



L.A. Zoo expansion plans under review

istrative Record has been extended several times by the Court, due to its depth and considering the possibility of settlement.

The suit, based upon the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), targets the massive excavation of an unnatural 60-ft deep “man-made canyon,” an 18,000 sq. ft. visitor center on top of a high ridgeline, and the loss of native habitat containing rare and sensitive flora, along with 26 City-protected trees/shrubs.

ALCOHOL POLICY ADOPTED

FoGP remains concerned that in March of 2024, RAP expanded the opportunity for approved events to serve alcohol. In the adopted Revised Alcohol Policy, an “unlimited number of open area events” can be authorized by the RAP General Manager.

A second concern is that RAP expanded the currently-allowed beer and wine policy to include *all* liquor for these events.

We have suggested that Griffith Park’s “Wilderness Area,” which is delineated in the Historic-Cultural Monument documents, be precluded from potential “open area alcohol events” locations. FoGP has also reminded decision-makers that 800 acres burned in 2007, and an average of about a dozen reported fires per year are extinguished in Griffith Park. It has been shown repeatedly that alcohol is tied to carelessness and people falling asleep while smoking, contrary to the Park’s strict no smoking rules.



The 2007 fire heavily-impacted portions of Griffith Park

Loosening the Alcohol Policy is truly an environmental issue for Griffith Park with management’s extraordinary authority to permit alcohol in outdoor events. Currently, RAP struggles with budget reductions and insufficient staffing. We believe RAP is interested in having a standard policy throughout all its 450-plus properties and needs to raise revenue any way it can. However, standard policy does not fit the reality for Griffith Park or other regional parks in RAP’s holdings. 🌿

~Gerry Hans, FoGP President

Photos: Kathryn Louyse

Unveiling the Griffith Park Mural

~Brenda Rees, FoGP Board Member

A glorious new mural now lives at the Griffith Park Visitor Center courtyard – and it’s a must see!

“Invisible Neighbors” is the work of Studio Tutto, local artists Sofia Laçin and Hennessy Christophel, who transformed three blank walls into a semi-abstract homage to the Park’s plants and wildlife. FoGP sponsored the project that underwent nearly two years of approvals before the team began their work in spring, 2024.

Large crowds turned out to view the mural of flowing and twining plant life, discovering the hidden treasures including skunks, deer, praying mantises, and more. Smack dab in the middle panel, with white piercing eyes, is a depiction of the ghost cat himself, mountain lion P-22 who resided in this Park mainly undetected for more than 10 years. Adults and kids were delighted and mesmerized by the intricacies of the imagery.

In addition, a small native plant garden welcomed guests; a large plant spire was uncovered and the seeds inside will soon germinate. FoGP brought in native plant specialist Katherine Pakradouni to select and place plants that will augment yet not obscure the mural. This pollinator garden features a selection of sticky monkey flower, sage and blue-eyed grasses.

The plants have already been welcomed

While Laçin and Christophel were putting the finishing touches on the mural, a hummingbird approached their painted red fuchsia flower. Realizing it wasn’t the real thing, it buzzed off. But once the garden was installed, the artists noticed a hummingbird sipping from the blooming fuchsia.

“I don’t know if it was the same one,” Laçin told the crowds at the celebration. “But I like to think it was the same one returning and drinking from the real thing.”

On the following day, PBS’s Jennifer Jewell, *Cultivating Place* podcast, interviewed the artists for a broadcast that will air later. 🌿



Fern Dell Wrought-iron Fence Phase 3

When FoGP completed the attractive, historically-accurate (1920s) pedestrian bridge in 2019, the rusty chain-linked fencing surrounding the bridge became a horrific eyesore in comparison. It was up to our organization to make improvements since stretched-thin City dollars were unavailable.

Through fund-matching with generous donors, especially nearby residents, FoGP was able to complete the first two sections during 2020 and 2021. Our goal now – to encircle the entire area from the north side of the new bridge to the south to create a large loop with two gates that are secured at night.

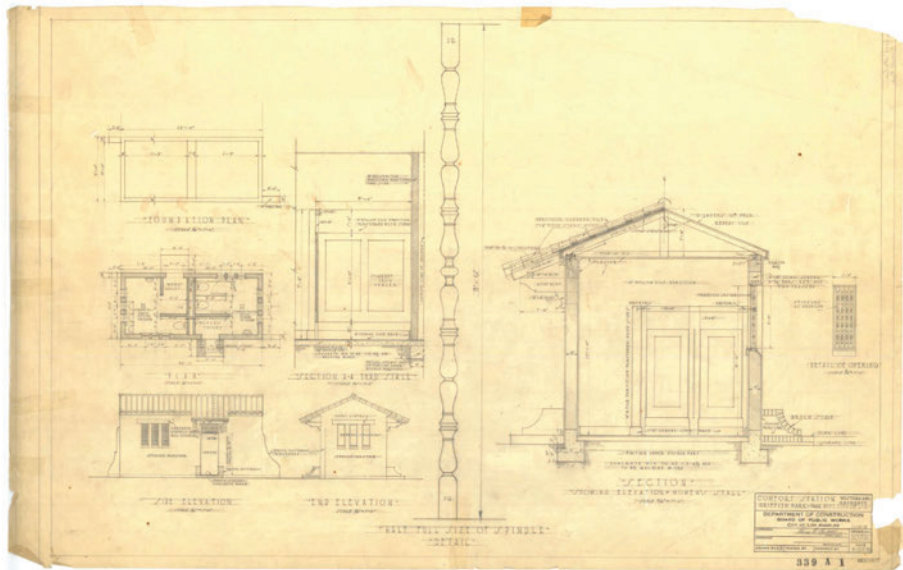
The contractor FoGP used for Phases 1 and 2 did superb work. This year, while committed to Phase 3, the final and longest stretch, we encountered a series of “red tape” bumps – even though we had already secured funding for the project completion! Fortunately, persistence paid off and we were able to work out issues over the course of several months.

We hope all Park visitors will enjoy this new section along the 200-ft long pathway that connects lower and upper Fern Dell, east of the bridges. Now, instead of dilapidated chain-link fence, you’ll find a more attractive, friendlier wrought-iron fence. Matching funds from our close partner, the Griffith J. Griffith Charitable Trust, made this project possible.

Original Tile Roof Returns to the Fern Dell Comfort Station

Some may think a restroom could not possibly be considered a historic feature, however; Fern Dell’s 1926-era “comfort station” is something everyone can embrace!

Constructed in the Spanish Colonial style, this structure boasted period-defining details that have been lost over the decades. Ironically, shortly after the Park’s designation as a Historic-Cultural Monument in 2009, the terracotta tiled roof was replaced with asphalt shingles while our attention was elsewhere.



Original 1926 Fern Dell Comfort Station floor plan

Friends of Griffith Park continues to initiate and promote projects that will enhance the visitor experience and those that support the Park’s wildlife and habitat

With approvals by the L.A.’s Department of Recreation and Parks, FoGP has been allowed to restore the roof back to its historic look. Our chosen contractor, Roof Repair Specialists, did a fantastic job. We hope you agree!

Although the vertical, lathed wood spindles were another striking and distinct detail of the original comfort station, FoGP was not permitted to incorporate them at this time. Eventually, we hope to reincorporate them, at least, in the openings above the doors.

Measure W Project

Our largest potential project of all involves flowing water in Fern

Dell. Engineering consultant Craftwater, Inc., continues the Feasibility Study for the Fern Dell Rehabilitation and Stormwater Capture Project. The one-year study grant was awarded through the County’s Safe, Clean Water Program.

Recently FoGP learned that the County will postpone the annual “call for projects.” As a result, this Feasibility Study Phase will continue for another year, but has been elevated to a higher level of design, 30% rather than 10%. Additional program funding of roughly \$40,000 will allow Craftwater to further develop conceptual and technical scopes. Even though this project will be delayed a year, we remain optimistic it will be elevated to full Design Phase.

Our vision for this project – to rehabilitate Fern Dell and improve the water quality that’s being discharged from the area and eventually flows into Ballona Creek. Stormwater capture and diversion from the existing City storm drain system, along with water storage and reuse are high priority goals.

Recirculation of stored water to the upper Fern Dell streambed, most often bone dry, is another goal that will benefit visitors’ experience, as well as tree and habitat health.

There are many possibilities for Fern Dell: an enhanced parking lot with a permeable surface, appropriate landscaping, historic trail restoration, and the gift of a renewed irrigation system. 🌿

~Gerry Hans, FoGP president

WE GET QUESTIONS

“I know native plants are important, but is there a difference between non-native and invasive plants?”

You are so right. Native plants ARE important. They do more than offer a lovely landscape; they provide food and shelter to a host of creatures like insects, birds and mammals. Native Americans knew their value as a food and building source and also as powerful medicine for physical and spiritual well-being.

Let’s break down the nomenclature of Southern California plants – and explain why non-native doesn’t automatically mean invasive.

Native Plants

Species that have existed historically in the area, native plants are considered to be those that have been growing in a location before colonization – for us in the City of Los Angeles that’s before 1600 AD. Native plants have evolved to create a symbiotic relationship with the soil, the birds, insects and other critters; and each needs the other in order to survive.

Non-native Plants

These plants have been introduced by humans, brought into the area as food (citrus trees, grains, etc.) or ornamentation (geranium, jacaranda trees, etc.). On the whole, these plants don’t necessarily pose a threat along developed roads or picnic grounds, but they don’t feed the soil and living things around them like native plants. They’re the “empty calories” of the greater ecosystem. Ornamental trees host far fewer native birds and insects than native trees which have evolved symbiotic relationships.

Invasive Plants

These non-native species harm the native plants and local ecosystems. They disrupt the growth of natives, often rooting and quickly reproducing as they choke out natives. Invasives flourish because there’s nothing in nature to stop them. There are no predators or pathogens that keep this type of plant in an ecological check. Many of these invasives poison the soil, depleting it of nutrients that normally would have been used by native plants. Growing tall and throwing shade on native plants is another way they become winning competitors.

Soil disruptions and vegetation alterations encourage invasive plants to first take hold. It’s when they spread outside disturbed areas that they became a real threat to native plant communities. When you’re hiking in Griffith Park, you’ll see more invasives adjacent to the side of the trails where soil is pushed up by Park maintenance doing brush clearance or where vegetation is repeatedly removed.

Invasives in Griffith Park

Invasives present an existential threat to the current diversity of flora in Griffith Park, because they quickly transform areas into lower quality habitat which can negatively affect fauna. In Griffith Park, common invasive plants include: castor bean, tree tobacco, Russian thistle (tum-

bleweed) fennel, cocklebur, fountain grass, Ailanthus (tree of heaven), Spanish broom and black mustard.

Unfortunately, except for mapping affected areas, few resources from the L.A. Department of Recreation and Parks are available for actual extraction of these killer plants. This battle against invasive plants in Griffith Park continues through FoGP’s volunteer efforts, but sometimes it feels like a losing uphill battle.

Once a week, a team of dedicated FoGP volunteers remove invasive plants by hand. It’s a slow, tedious process, but necessary if natives are to recapture these pilfered lands. These Weed Warriors concentrate their efforts on removing castor and tree tobacco, especially disposing of the plants’ seeds which pop up quickly after rains. The team has made amazing progress in certain areas of the Park but they are a small number battling a huge Park-wide problem.

Mechanical removal of invasives by hand seems to be the only option on the table at this time. A big problem is how to extract the older, larger and more powerful invasive roots. If left untreated, invasives can regrow quickly. The traditional way of removal was to have a licensed professional apply either Monsanto’s glyphosate product or one of the various non-glyphosate products onto the remaining stumps of Ailanthus, tree tobacco and others.

Around 2016, Monsanto’s glyphosate product Roundup appropriately became the target of public scrutiny. In 2019, by City Council motion, RAP was instructed “to take immediate action to prohibit the use of Roundup at all City parks and facilities, and report on alternative products or vegetation management methods that better protect public health and the potential costs.” So far, a follow-up report to Council has not been produced.

In the meantime, RAP has greatly reduced even non-glyphosate herbicide usage, except on a very limited, case-by-case basis. We wonder if this is throwing the baby out with the bath water when it comes to defending native habitat.

A discussion of best practices in the use of herbicides in city parks is in progress, as RAP’s Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Manual is being updated. An environmental consultant is advising on revisions to a very old IPM. We hope input from the public, FoGP and invasives control experts, such as California Native Plant Society, will be welcomed in the near future.

Two back-to-back very wet winters have created an unprecedented situation of invasives overwhelming the Park. We’re hoping to create more awareness with politicians and decision-makers since funding for resources to protect habitat health is critical to remove killer plants from our open spaces. 🌿

If you’re interested in receiving more information, or volunteering with FoGP’s Invasive Abatement team: weeds@friendsofgriffithpark.org.

-Gerry Hans & Brenda Rees



L.A. River Walks

~Kathryn Louyse, FoGP Board Member

Photos, this page:
Great Blue Heron remains alert
along the soft-bottom islands
near Los Feliz Blvd.
Bottom: Migrating Buffleheads
float in the stream

Opposite page:
left: Various river fowl congre-
gate along the shore
Center: Osprey eyeballs hikers in
Bette Davis Park
Right: Egret silently hunts for
food

Photos: Kathryn Louyse



Griffith Park is unique, and there's much to appreciate about this 1896 gift from Col. Griffith. But for me, it's the adjoining river where I frequently hike along the banks, celebrating a love affair that began many years ago after moving to L.A. from Santa Barbara. There's an abundance of history, and much life that can be spotted along this waterway, due in part to L.A.'s changing seasons and vast array of migrating birds.

My trek frequently begins near the Riverside Bridge, thanks to the ease of accessing the river. Occasionally I'll cross the bridge into the Park, taking in the sights and slightly-musty smells, especially after a drenching rain turns the shallow streambed into something far more ominous.

I recently came across a passage from Gary Krist's book *The Mirage Factory* where William Mulholland discussed his first impressions of the Los Angeles River. "The river was the greatest attraction (for me). It was a beautiful limpid little stream with willows on its banks. I loved the Los Angeles River." Sadly, the majority of willows admired by Mulholland are long gone.

Many in our fair city tend to regard the L.A. River as a giant drainage ditch but trust me, it's far more. This short 51-mile river begins high in the foothills of Simi Hills and Santa Susana Mountains, meandering south through multiple communities before arriving in Long Beach, where it spills into the San Pedro Bay.

The river also shares a long, storied history that includes the indigenous Gabrieleno-Tongva people who created their communities alongside, and fished these waters long before the colonists began settling the region. Once Spanish colonists began to inhabit the area, their thirst for water quickly outgrew L.A.'s ability to supply. This part of history now resides under tons of concrete poured by the Army Corps of Engineers after massive flooding decimated communities abutting the L.A. River in the late 1930s.

And now this "limpid little stream" is – for better or worse – encased in concrete to lessen the impacts to surrounding communities, when the river thunders downstream toward the bay. While the river has been tamed to a degree, there are moments when its fury is felt, and Park Rangers are quickly dispatched to patrol the area, and caution those who've set up encampments on midstream islands to move to higher ground.

Yes, Virginia – there really are seasons in California

During the chilly winter months, I grab my umbrella, long coat and camera for a quick drive over to Bette Davis Park. After exiting my car, I climb the bank, checking to make sure I'm high enough, especially when the river is running fast and furious. During the winter, I've observed egrets and herons tentatively approach the rapidly-flowing water, appearing to debate whether it's safe to plunge into the waves. Other river fowl appear less hesitant, and can be seen ►►

►► bobbing along, until it's time to head toward the high banks or take to the skies, like little kids out for a romp. There have been times when I've set up a camera to document their antics, only to sit, observe, and completely forget to photograph. Occasionally fish can be heard splashing through the shallows, only to be gobbled up by egrets and herons lining the banks.

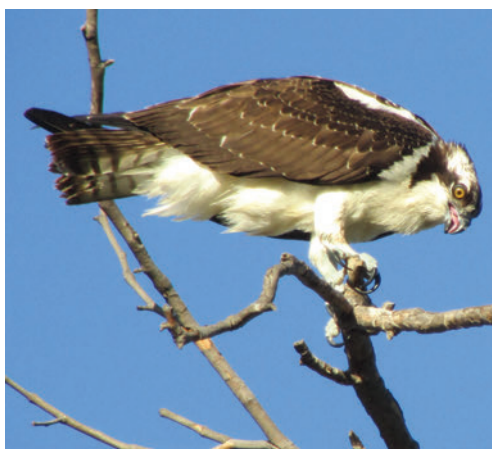
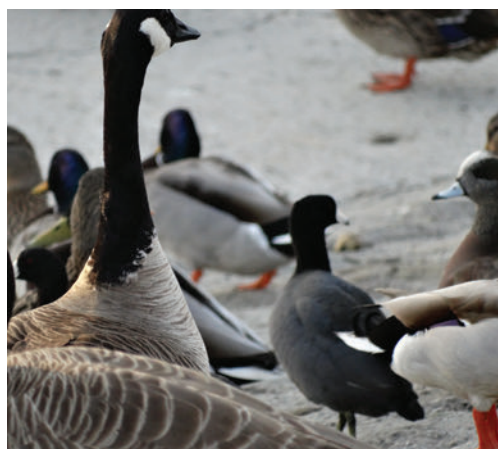
Once our winter storms have passed, signs of spring begin to sprout, especially along the islands near Los Feliz. Denuded of foliage during L.A.'s rainy season, suddenly an explosion of greenery takes root, and with it, new life begins to take shape. Ducklings splash mid-stream, following in the wake of their mallard parents. Canada goslings, heron, egret, American Coots, and stilt chicks begin to gather in reeds lining island banks. Over the years, I've noticed that many of these species live companionably, with very few disagreements taking place.

Swallows roost under the bridges crossing at various junctures, dashing out to capture insects in the skies, and occasionally osprey can be seen

high on the electric towers or sycamore trees lining Bette Davis Park. Black Phoebe flit in and out of the foliage when the islands are chock-full of greenery during the spring and summer months. I once witnessed a Red-tailed Hawk with meal in talon along the high river bank. As we locked eyes, the surprised hawk quickly flew off to one of the islands and proceeded to dispense with its catch, while I marveled at the unexpected encounter.

The river has always been my favorite meditative spot – I can leave worries behind and sit and ponder the lives of these birds, watching as new generations are born and begin their lives.

And while we Angelenos are perpetually reinventing the skyline of Los Angeles, perhaps it's time to embrace and revitalize this unique, amazing Los Angeles River. It's a fun, easy connection to nature that can be shared by folks walking and biking along the paths, or paddling the river. Best of all, it's Park adjacent. 🌿



Acknowledging Al Moggia A Life Well-lived

~Carol Brusha, FoGP Board Member



Photo l-r: Al Moggia and volunteers in Fern Dell

Al Moggia, 84, a founding board member of Friends of Griffith Park, died August 4, 2024 from heart failure and pneumonia.

A quiet man who never raised his voice, he was a major inspiration for the formation of FoGP. In 2010, during a meeting of Griffith Park advocates, Al pointed out that our Park did not have a formal support group dedicated to its preservation. From that statement our organization was formed with the mission to protect and preserve Griffith Park for the enjoyment of everyone.

Before FoGP, Al was active with the Sierra Club's Central Group and the Griffith Park Section, where he became a hike leader. He attended Griffith Park Resource Board meetings and the now-defunct Greater Griffith Park Neighborhood Council's PROS Committee (Parks, River and Open Space) which led to the formation of FoGP.

Al was a vocal opponent of the unpopular 2005 draft Master Plan commissioned by the City, which would have impacted the fragile natural environment with several multi-level parking structures among other ideas. A Griffith Park Master Plan Working Group was established and Al attended all meetings and provided good ideas.

Park advocacy was his specialty. A passionate public speaker, Al spoke at public meetings around the city, going to City Hall for Los Angeles Recreation and Parks Commission meetings when it was necessary to advocate for Griffith Park. He was an ardent, persuasive speaker.

Al frequently volunteered at our tabling events where he would extoll the virtues of becoming a member of Friends. He joined the LA Raptor Study that we sponsored and enjoyed monitoring his nests.

Al lived in Silver Lake most of his life and graduated from John Marshall High School. His profession was in electronics and his passion was hiking, mainly in Griffith Park but also in the Angeles National Forest.

Four years ago, Al moved to Morgan Hill to be closer to his family. He's survived by his brother, Dr. Charles Moggia, two nieces and two nephews and their children. Dr. Moggia donated \$5,000 in Al's memory to FoGP which we deeply appreciate. 🌿



Final LA Raptor Study Roundup

~Gerry Hans, FoGP President

Year Eight of the Los Angeles Raptor Study once again produced a remarkable pool of data on hawk, owl and falcon nesting activity over the same geographic areas as the last few years. For the 2024 nesting season, numbers were up from the previous two years for our four major species: Cooper’s Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk and Great Horned Owl. This notable increase includes the number of active territories, active nests and the total number of fledged birds.

More important than breaking records, we had the opportunity to analyze data on a species-by-species basis to shed light on territory re-use, non-breeding pairs, nest takeovers, nest switches (takeovers by other species), and more. The goal of the study is to understand the year-to-year trends and to discover the forces at work involving our local raptors in the Los Angeles area. Apex predators play an important role in the ecosystem, especially in our complex urban setting where human influences can alter balances. What better place than Los Angeles to study urban raptors?

In late September, the LA Raptor Study 2024 Final Report was presented to a well-attended audience via Zoom. The Study represents the only comprehensive dataset of an entire breeding raptor community within the urban core of Los Angeles, per Dr. Dan Cooper (Cooper Ecological Monitoring, Inc.), who directed the launch of the Study in 2017. Nurit Katz, the Study’s Outreach Coordinator, has elevated communication and education capabilities with our volunteers and the public since 2022. Nurit was a raptor study volunteer, monitoring nests prior to her taking on her current role, and she is also employed as UCLA’s Chief Sustainability Officer.

The study has become a recognized model for “community science” within Los Angeles, with clear scientific goals and plethora of data being collected by community scientist volunteers who undergo training on scientific methods.

Apply to Volunteer in 2025

Details for participating in the study are discussed on FoGP’s “Raptor Study & Resources” webpage where you can also find a link to a Volunteer Application. In January, registered volunteers are invited to a virtual training session and a field training workshop held in early February. Nest assignments are then made. Dan, Nurit, and myself also help orient new volunteers at their assigned nest sites.

Since Cooper’s Hawks are late-nesters and present special challenges in

tracking, a second virtual session and field training are offered specifically for this species in April. Cooper’s Hawk nest assignments are made for ambitious, willing volunteers, and nearly all volunteers want one!

Study Result Highlights in 2024

650 raptor territories were rechecked or discovered across the study area, representing 239 Cooper’s territories (vs. 222 in 2023), 215 Red-tailed Hawk territories (vs. 184 in 2023), 57 Red-shouldered Hawk territories (vs. 55 in 2023), 105 Great Horned Owl territories (vs. 84 in 2023), as well as a handful of territories of American Kestrel, Peregrine Falcon, Barn Owl and Western Screech-owl.

While not all of these territories were found to be active in 2024, the numbers continue to closely reflect the maximum number of territories in the study area, thanks to increased effort and our growing knowledge of local species ecology. The study puts focus on the territories of breeding pairs which, for the most part, mate for life, but don’t necessarily use the same nests from year to year.

Fledge Rates

We define Fledge Rate results as fledged nests for territories tracked; the fledge rate of active nests, on the other hand, is extremely high, with few failures once birds start incubating. Convergence of the Fledge Rate this year for the three focal hawk species is interesting and unexpected, considering they were quite different in the previous few years:

- **Red-tailed Hawk:** 127 nests fledged from 169 active territories (75%). This fledging rate saw a return to average after the higher rates of 2020 and 2021 and lower rates in 2022 and 2023.
- **Cooper’s Hawk:** 88 nests fledged from 113 active territories (78%). This rate of success was slightly below the average across the past five years, up from the last two years.
- **Red-shouldered Hawk:** 27 nests fledged from 36 active territories (75%). This proportion is higher than the prior two years and the 5-year average, but lower than in 2020.
- **Great Horned Owl:** The analysis for this species changed this year, because we added new territories based upon more than only active nests found, such as pairs that duet. We found that 40 nests fledged from 58 territories, but any comparison to previous years would be invalid.

Territory Re-occupancy

Red-tailed Hawks kept their amazing and steady territory re-occupancy

rate of 80%. The other two hawk species' re-occupancy rates have been more variable over the years of study. Red-shouldered Hawks were around 75% in 2024. The lowest rates were for Cooper's Hawks at roughly 65%, which is well above the previous two-year 50% average territory re-occupancy rate. Only these hawk species were included in this analysis. There are plans to dig deeper into the data to explore nest structure re-use, in addition to focusing on territory re-use.

Nest Productivity

While there was a significant increase across all four major species in the total number of fledged young, nest productivity rate is measured as the mean number of chicks hatched from successful active nests (with failed/abandoned nests excluded). Interestingly, this metric peaked in 2019 across our four species. There is no explanation. It is possible that two very wet winters was not enough to overcome the previous drought trend in place, and we continue to explore possible correlations with seasonal weather. Over the study period (2017-2024), mean nest productivity number (chicks per nest) varied in a fairly tight range of 1.8 for Red-shouldered Hawks to a high of 2.5 for Cooper's Hawks.

Our Special Species

There is limited data from the study on the rarer local raptor species, including American Kestrel, Peregrine Falcon and Western Screech-owl.

The study closely tracks one peregrine pair in Griffith Park. Two other peregrine nest locations were confirmed on top of high buildings this year where juvenile rescues took place. Several other tall structures are also suspected host sites for nesting, but collecting data is difficult due to building management challenges. We plan to put more effort to following these peregrines in coming years.

Cavity-nesting American Kestrels also prove challenging, but one residential-area nest in Boyle Heights was monitored and another territory in Sepulveda Basin was confirmed with four post-fledged juveniles observed.

Work done by students under the UCLA Institute of Environment and Sustainability Senior Practicum, with FoGP as their client, addressed breeding owl species including Barn Owls and Western Screech-owls. Students successfully contributed with nocturnal field surveys and predictive distribution modeling. More detail is available at FoGP's raptor webpage.

Nest Disturbance and Tree Trimming

A new focus of the study involves documenting nest disturbances such as nests lost to wind, tree-trimming or trees being chopped down. It is illegal to trim out nests even when it is done between nesting seasons. It is also illegal to disturb active nests in any manner which may adversely affect reproductive success. We have observed that the destruction of nests is often unintentional on the part of residents.

In 2024, to address the significant trimming issues observed, we created signs to place on accessible nest trees. The signs include information about applicable laws protecting nests. Template letters were also created to inform homeowners and area residents of nests on their properties. These measures represent a proactive educational approach to prevent loss of nests.

Another disturbance involves loss of raptors through secondary poisoning by rodenticides. We hope that the California bans on two classes of anticoagulants will alleviate the senseless death of raptors that ironically serve a vital role in rodent control. FoGP and many other organizations have fought hard for these legislative actions; we're finally nearing the goal line.

The Raptor Study family of participants celebrated a fantastic year of accomplishments at the Volunteer Appreciation Dinner held in Griffith Park this fall. FoGP thanks our volunteers, our talented science team, and the public agencies that

provided access and services, along with L.A. residents who provided so many great tips! Let's keep up the momentum! 🌿

Apply to be a nest monitor volunteer today! This QR code takes you directly to: friendsofgriffithpark.org/raptor-study
You can also notify FoGP of any issues with raptor mortality or nest disturbance using the same info above.
Alert the CALTIP 24/7 hotline to report illegal tree trimming while occurring - 888-334-2258.



Nurit Katz honored at Ojai Raptor Center event

Recently the Ojai Raptor Center honored the work of Nurit Katz at its annual fundraising dinner held in Ventura - and we couldn't be happier.

Nurit was singled out as the Guest of Honor for her work as UCLA's first Chief Sustainability Officer and for her leadership efforts as Outreach Coordinator with the LA Raptor Study. Nurit is a master juggler of her talents and skills: her additional responsibilities include being a member of the City of Los Angeles Biodiversity Expert Council and she serves as Commissioner on the Board of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, appointed by Mayor Karen Bass.

Did we mention she's pursuing a PhD in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology?

Nurit has rescued and transported numerous injured raptors to the Ojai Raptor Center along with trips to the California Wildlife Center in Calabasas and L.A. Animal Services - and she surely will add the newly opened San Dimas Raptor Rescue to her list.

For the LA Raptor Study, Nurit has been an invaluable, inspirational leader, a font of knowledge, and a dedicated team builder. She assists volunteers, answers questions, and scopes out potential nests across the study area from golf courses to backyards. Her professionalism and smiling personality is infectious.

All volunteers of the LA Raptor Study applaud Nurit on this honor from the Ojai Raptor Center; thank you Nurit for being an advocate for community science and a good friend to our local raptor communities.

Submit tips on raptor nests and raptor pair activity in your neighborhood by going online to:
www.tinyurl.com/LARaptorTips

If you observe an injured raptor in your area, please coordinate a rescue by texting Nurit Katz at 818-384-9493

Raptor nest photo: Gerry Hans
Photo above: Kathryn Louyse

Migrating Birds Love Griffith Park

~Griffith Park Birders

For an urban park in the middle of one of the most populated cities in the world, Griffith Park has an unusually diverse number of bird species that breed, stop off, and winter. Local birders have now recorded more than 300 species of birds, making it one of the most avian biodiverse urban parks in North America!

Birding is one of the fastest growing hobbies in North America and with access to free apps like *iNaturalist* and *Merlin* with their built-in AI (yes this is AI used in a good way!) any photo or bird audio can now be easily identified. You can be quickly on your way to building a life list of birds and other plant and wildlife you observe on your Griffith Park hike.

If you're just getting started in birding or want to know where to kick off your Griffith Park birding adventure, a good place to begin could be the Old Zoo. Year-round, a morning visit can be productive here but especially in spring, fall and winter, there is a greater variety of birds. The flowering bottle brush and silk oaks here are very good for hummingbirds and other nectar-eaters like warblers, brightly colored tanagers and orioles. For the past two winters, a rare Summer Tanager has made this spot its wintering home and local birders have just reported that it is now back for its third winter! It can be difficult to see and is usually heard more than it's seen with a loud "pit-tuck" call, but if you do get lucky to spot it, this 7-inch bird is bright red all over!

For the adventurous, an evening wander is when you will usually hear a Great Horned Owl, perhaps an eerily, Screeching Barn Owl, or the soft bouncing ball call of a Western-owl. During summer evenings, the beautiful "poor-will" calls of the Common Poorwill is often heard on the trails below Bee Rock. If you are hiking when it's dark, you may even spot one sitting on the path ahead of you with its red eyes glowing from your flashlight.

Before noisy birthday parties are kicked off in Mineral Wells, a morning trip here can also be very productive. There is usually a trickle of water along the culvert and also at the horse trough in the quiet northwest corner that attracts birds especially during dry spells. Stand (or sit at a picnic table) quietly and look for Yellow-rumped Warblers, Anna's Hummingbirds, Acorn Woodpeckers and Dark-eyed Juncos coming to

drink and bathe here.

While spring and fall migration is often the most exciting times for birders with the greatest diversity of species, winter is often exceptionally good in the Park, too. This past winter, if you drove along Griffith Park Drive adjacent to the Wilson Harding Golf Course, you may have noticed groups of birders staring intently up at the eucalyptus trees along the edge of the golf course. For the past two winters, a very rare Thick-billed Kingbird has been spending the winter on the Golf Course and the L.A. Zoo. This bird is usually found in Mexico, breeding as far north as Sonora but very occasionally, a few wandering vagrants head north in the winter. This past winter the kingbird was joined by a Hepatic Tanager, an equally rare neotropical vagrant. The chances of two very rare neotropical vagrants turning up together in the same set of trees is spectacularly unusual.



Even the rough, weedy ground at the Toyon Landfill has proven to be a vitally important habitat for birds that are categorized as Species of Special Concern. Since a large area of undeveloped habitat is very hard to find in the coastal basin, Toyon welcomes one the largest wintering flocks of Western Meadowlark in the coastal basin. Other very scarce species, such as Mountain Bluebirds, are regularly recorded here in winter, too.

The Hollywood Reservoir can be a major draw for waterfowl. Tiny Black and White-eared Grebes winter here in large numbers and if you are lucky in winter, you might spot the very striking looking Drake Hooded Merganser among the commoner mallards, Double-crested Cormorants and American Coots.

The L.A. River is actually part of Griffith Park on the north and east sides. A walk along the soft-bottom stretch of river at Bette Davis Picnic Area and also further east at Glendale Narrows Riverwalk can be very good and it's easy to see 30 species of birds in a short walk. (*See also My Favorite Hike, pg. 18*) There is a great diversity of waterfowl in the winter along with hundreds of the bright and noisy Black-necked Stilts.

iNaturalist and *eBird* are great resources to find out what is being seen in the Park and where. Both are community science gatherers and your sightings entered in to

these websites make an important contribution to our understanding of status and distribution of the birds in the Park. *eBird* is a great way to keep track of all your sightings and you can build year lists and life lists of all the birds you have seen.

If you're interested in joining a bird group (some lead guided walks around Los Angeles), check out active organizations like Los Angeles Audubon (www.laaudubon.org/), Pasadena Audubon (www.pasadenaaudubon.org/) and Los Angeles Birders (www.labirders.org/). 🌿



Photos: this page:
Great Horned Owl
Opposite page:
(t) Black-necked Stilt
(b) Summer Tanager
Photos, courtesy of
Dorian Charnis



On the Trails With Griffith Park

~Shawn Sites, FoGP Member

A volunteer-inspired project has mapped the 50+ miles of Griffith Park hiking trails into a fun, new way to Explore More

Did you know there are more than two marathons' worth of official hiking trails in Griffith Park?

And while hundreds trek through this L.A. treasure each week, many fewer can boast of walking nearly every official trail in the Park – a goal that many hikers would like to tackle.

That's only just the beginning of what the Griffith Park Explorer (or GP-eX) is all about.

The idea for GP-eX first emerged from a Meetup hiking group I regularly lead. When members expressed they'd never been to some parts of the Park we were hiking in, I started roughing out routes to connect all the official trails.

But this passion project unfortunately came to an abrupt halt for me when the Park closed due to the pandemic.

FoGP to the rescue

Fast forward to 2023, when I shared the concept to Brenda Rees and Kathryn Louyse, board members of Friends of Griffith Park (FoGP) who immediately got it.

They advocated for the project with the rest of the board who enthusiastically agreed that this was a worthwhile project, in line with FoGP's mission. The board suggested GP-eX should, like avid hikers, take this a few steps further. Segment maps would focus on navigation, and prose descriptions would augment with history, geology, wildlife and native plants/trees.

"We hope that by learning more about the Park's natural and historic features, hikers will become more proactive advocates for its preservation," said Gerry Hans, FoGP president.

After a kickoff Zoom, everyone got down to work. Gerry identified official trails on Google Earth, and on spreadsheets by length, gain and type of trail. Board members and avid hikers, Erik Smitt and Alex Phillips began the process of consolidating those into draft AllTrails maps.

Boots on the ground

We asked for volunteers to help with a secret hiking project, and to share a few thoughts about their experience with the Park.

Big thanks to our GP-eX Volunteers!*

Since early 2024, these volunteers have contributed many hours, not just developing logo concepts, but repeatedly hiking draft segments

and reporting back, suggesting trail names and overall improvements in the routes/directions to make the GP-eX hike segments as user-friendly as possible. We couldn't have done it without you!

Trail Testers/Reviewers

Kevin Cooper
Julia Damron
Sandy De Leon
Gabriela del Campo
Kyung Chi
Alyx Garda



Park Explorer

Not surprisingly, we got many enthusiastic responses. Col. Griffith would be moved to learn how important his gift to the city has been for generations of visitors to the Park. For me, reading about the deep and passionate relationships our demographically-varied trail testers have with the Park was the highlight of working on GP-eX.

Many began hiking here as kids with their family or Scout troops. Or they hiked the trails as a family while raising their own children. Others moved to L.A. from another state or country and the Park became a beloved go-to destination for solo time on the trails, or with two- or four-legged pals. Some were regulars on the Sierra Club's weekday evening hikes or Meetup hiking groups.

After a Zoom briefing in the spring, each draft route was assigned to two testing teams, along with an evaluation form with prompts about the route, trail conditions, options for improvement and suggestions for the segment name.

Working in parallel

While our testers were in the field, the board worked on other aspects of the project, including:

- Asking volunteer designers to create a logo, then finalizing the artwork
- Briefing L.A. Rec and Parks Officials, Park Rangers, and Sierra Club leaders
- Meeting with FoGP website designers and Cartifact map makers, and...
- Planning the launch marketing/publicity plan

After the initial feedback from the testers, we worked on turn-by-turn narratives to serve two purposes. These narratives will add layers of history, flora and fauna to differentiate these hikes from existing digital navigational options. Second, they will be downloadable, printable backups to navigation apps since connectivity in the Park can be spotty.

The finished GP-eX system contains 15 segments ranging from less than 2 miles to nearly 9 miles, with options for beginner and experienced hikers (as well as suggestions for combining segments). What's more, each hike contains a secret gem that may surprise even hikers familiar with the Park.

GP-eX timetable

Griffith Park Explorer (GP-eX) will launch in 2025 and will be available via the Friends of Griffith Park website as well as on AllTrails.

"While GP-eX isn't designed to be a 'challenge' or competition, we expect that completing its 15 segments will become a goal for every local and visiting hiker," explained Gerry, adding: "I'm proud of this hands-on, team effort between our board and member volunteers to help ensure that Griffith Park remains L.A.'s signature green and open space and a place of free recreation."

We hope GP-eX will introduce you to a new trail, a new view, and a new favorite place in Griffith Park. . . and make you fall in love all over again with this magical place. 🌸

Photo: Gerry Hans

Shelly Gaytan
Emmy Goldknopf
Amy Gustincic
Bill Luddy
Trevor Lyon
Will McWhinney
H.S. Naji
Charles Ortiz

Betina Papadeas
Andrew Pask
Willie Perez
Jan Marie Perry
Logan Prather
Matt Rauchberg
Sarah James Rogers
Elysa Rosenfeld-Ortiz

Elizabeth Schetina
Gregory Schetina
Amanda Shafer
Amanda Jill Smith
Katy Wood
Marika Zappas

*Current as of 9/24

Graphic Design

Carrie Brown-Kornarens
Akiko Crawford
Victoria Dyer
Manne Green
Chloe Meyer
Petryr Whisky

Hunting for Fungus Among Us

Whether you stroll in the grass or hike along a trail, you might notice the colorful and curious mushrooms that dot Griffith Park. These fascinating fungi come in countless shapes, sizes, and colors, each with its own story to tell. But what are these organisms, and how can we safely interact with them? I'll guide you through the visible world of mushrooms and delve into the transformative processes happening beneath our feet.

What's Out There?

Mushrooms, or fungi, are actually just the fruiting bodies of a much larger organism that lives underground. The mushrooms we see are much like seeing an apple on a tree. Fungi are fruiting bodies created with the goal of reproduction. The "tree" is a vast network of thread-like-tissue called mycelium that absorbs nutrients/water, but sometimes intertwines with tree roots for a symbiotic relationship.

You might encounter a variety of mushrooms on your hikes through the Park, including:

EDIBLE MUSHROOMS: Such as puffballs or morels, which are sought after by chefs and foragers.

POISONOUS MUSHROOMS: Like the infamous "death caps" and "destroying angels", common under oak trees. Some mushrooms can cause serious harm, so it's crucial to avoid consuming any mushroom unless you are absolutely sure of its identity.

INEDIBLE BUT INTERESTING

SPECIES: These make up a majority of the mushies around us. They can be fascinating to observe, such as the bioluminescent Jack-o-lantern mushrooms, *Omphalotus olivascens*, which glow in the dark.

Where do I find them?

Mushrooms can be everywhere, but timing is crucial. These ephemeral fruiting bodies grow and disappear quickly, so it's always a matter of being in the right place at the right time. Mushrooms need moisture, so they tend to be more abundant after rains. During long periods without rain, it's still possible to locate mushrooms that are specialized to fog drips and sprinklers.

To find mushrooms, all you have to do is

look around you. Some mushrooms have specialized relationships with certain trees. Oak trees have so many special relationships that they can be like an "X marks the spot" after a good rain.

Some mushrooms are decomposers, and decomposition happens all around us. If it decomposes, there's a good chance that there is a specialized fungi for it. You can find a mushroom virtually anywhere if conditions are right.



Jack O' Lantern



Giant Puffball



Deadly Amanitas

Can I Touch It?

You can touch any mushroom! They need to be ingested to cause harm.

How Best to Observe

When you observe mushrooms in the wild, take a moment to appreciate their diverse ecosystems. Here are a few tips for a mindful experience:

Use a Field Guide: Bring a guidebook, even if you don't know how to identify mushrooms yet, it will give insight into where/when to find certain mushrooms. Look for key features like cap shape, gills and habitat. A best choice for Southern Californians is the *Field Guide to Mushrooms of Western North America* (Davis, Sommer, and Menge). It uses a keying system that is unsurpassed.

Take Photos: Document your finds with photographs of the top and bottom, including the base. This allows you to study them later when they've disappeared.

Upload finds to iNaturalist: Upload your photos to the *iNaturalist* app for insight from experts and to potentially document your find. You never know when you might've found something uncommon, and the experts will appreciate the documentation.

Next time you venture into the woods, take a moment to look for mushrooms. Whether you're admiring their beauty or pondering their role in the ecosystem, these incredible organisms are worth your attention. And remember, while the mushrooms above ground are enchanting, the hidden world of mycelium beneath is where the true magic lies. Happy hunting!

If you're interested in learning more, consider joining a local mycology club; also FoGP is planning Mushroom Walks in early 2025, weather permitting! Stay tuned! 🍄

Bat Vardeh is the founder of Foraging and Mushroom Hunting Women of SoCal and a member of the Los Angeles Mycological Society.



Photo: Jason Greenwald

MRCA improvements along Canyon Drive are coming soon

Partnering With MRCA to Protect More Natural Space *~Gerry Hans, FoGP President*

Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) is a local government public entity that works alongside the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, which is a state agency. MRCA acquires and protects open space and parkland. Fortunately, land proximate to Griffith Park is on their (and FoGP's) high priority list.

Closing out 2024, FoGP helped fundraise to add another property to MRCA's portfolio of protected open space, a second acquisition in

Bronson Canyon. Both properties have heritage coast live oaks, and one with large sycamores. Thanks to generous donors who value these exceptional oak woodland habitats, these parcels are now essentially part of Griffith Park.

MRCA recently announced a significant improvement plan along a Canyon Drive sidewalk. Constructed on the MRCA land's 410-ft frontage, this barrier wall will help protect the city sidewalk from debris, especially during rains. This 1.3 acre property was acquired in 2020 with the help of generous local residents and FoGP fundraising.

Once the barrier wall is in place, FoGP will use a \$20,000 grant awarded by MRCA for tree and native plant rejuvenation on the large parcel. The project presents interesting challenges: steep hillsides and the required annual brush clearing. Our plan is for plantings in multiple companion groupings, rather than isolated individual plantings. These "green islands" will be composed of one coast live oak tree, a few shrubs, and several perennial grasses in 100-sq. ft. blocks.

In other MRCA news: MRCA's Measure H, an assessment on a large area of Santa Monica residential properties east of the 405 to Griffith Park, passed with flying colors, with 80% voting yes! This demonstrates how supportive citizens are when it comes to protecting remaining open space! This funding allows MRCA to continue their good work. 🌱

What's Happening in Griffith Park? We'll Help Simplify Your Search...

Sign up today for our monthly e-blast newsletter & more
www.friendsofgriffithpark.org



Instagram



When Hummingbirds Dance With Flowers

~Jorge Ochoa, FoGP Advisory Board Member

Hummingbirds are residents of Griffith Park and can be seen flying in many areas. Hummingbirds are among the smallest birds found in our world and have great acrobatic skills, hovering in midair and even flying backwards.

Because of their small size, hummingbirds burn calories very quickly and require constant feeding to ensure they have energy for their active lifestyle. A hummingbird's diet consists of protein provided by insects and carbohydrates provided by flower nectar. Hummingbirds are very selective of the flowers they visit and many plants have adapted their flowers to cater to the hummingbirds. Hummingbirds and plants engage in a mutualistic relationship, evolved over time, in which the flowers get pollination services and the hummingbird gets a valuable meal.

The flowers that are most attractive to hummingbirds have colors of red, orange, and yellow. Hummingbirds do not use smell to discern

flower preferences, but can detect dangerous insects in order to avoid them by sensing their chemicals. Because hummingbirds can hover in midair, their preferred flowers will lack a landing platform and are suspended in the air away from the plant to ensure a clear line of sight by the bird.

One of the best ways for people to help hummingbirds is to incorporate plants in their garden space with flowers that specifically cater to the birds. Plastic or glass nectar feeders are not recommended because they can easily transfer infections and pathogens from one hummingbird to another.

If you wish to view hummingbirds while hiking, all you need to do is sit in close proximity to a plant that is blooming and avoid making sudden and quick movements. In time, hummingbirds will arrive to drink from the flowers – and you will have a front row seat. 🌸



Top left: California Fuchsia

Top center: Fuchsia-flowered gooseberry

Top right: Golden currant

Circular photo, left: Southern pink

Circular photo, right: Scarlet larkspur

Bottom left: Heart-leaf Penstemon

Bottom center: Pink Thistle

Bottom right: Scarlet monkeyflower

Photos: Courtesy Jorge Ochoa

Jorge Ochoa is an associate professor of horticulture at Long Beach City College. He often leads FoGP walks through Griffith Park, and occasionally lectures on the fauna and flora found throughout the Park.



Monthly CERT Hikes Honor the Memory of Sally Menke

~Brenda Rees, FoGP Board Member



The Sally Menke story in 2010 brought attention to the issue of lost hikers who unfortunately die – and that sad episode continues to bring CERT volunteers into Griffith Park to train to be able to assist in the next search for a lost hiker.

The Los Angeles Fire Department trains thousands of Angelenos every year in Community Emergency Response Team (CERT). This no-cost course prepares residents to be self-reliant during the first 72 hours after a major disaster. CERT was created in 1985 as a way for trained citizens to assist firefighters when a large-scale disaster uses up resources; CERT members can provide certain fire safety protocol, disaster medical services and light search and rescue. They are pros when it comes to radio communications and now function under the auspice of the LAFD Homeland Security Division.

Menke, a successful film editor who worked on many of Quentin Tarantino films, went on a Griffith Park hike with her dog and a friend in late September. Her friend turned back because it was too hot, but Menke kept hiking. When she didn't return, her friend alerted authorities that something was wrong.

A full-scale effort to find her quickly occurred. Search dogs, Los Angeles Police Department helicopters and patrol unit officers spent hours searching. In the early morning, Menke's body was located near Bronson Canyon in a rugged area north of Green Oak Drive. She was 56 years old, and her severely dehydrated dog was sitting next to her, according to law enforcement sources.

The LAPD determined there was no foul play and it appeared that Menke had become disoriented.

At the time, Chief Joe Castro decided that something should be done to find lost hikers, especially within Griffith Park. He worked with local CERT teams who quickly organized search and rescue drills and created best practice procedures.

Over the next five years, CERT teams staged search and rescue drills in Griffith Park and nearby Debs Park. The first drill drew up to 150 volunteers into the Park and Councilmember Tom LaBonge paid the fee to use the Fern Dell area as a staging location. Later drills became Eagle Scout projects because of the intensity and organizational skills needed.

But when Chief Castro retired in 2016, the next fire chief decided that CERT teams needed to focus less on search and rescue and more on fire patrol during red flag days – asking residents to move cars in case fire engines and equipment need the street.

L.A. City Park Rangers have primary responsibility for lost hikers and Captain Patrick Joyce has been invaluable with his expertise and support.

According to CERT leader Thomas Wirth, today's monthly CERT hikes in the Park are a callback to the memory of Susan Menke.

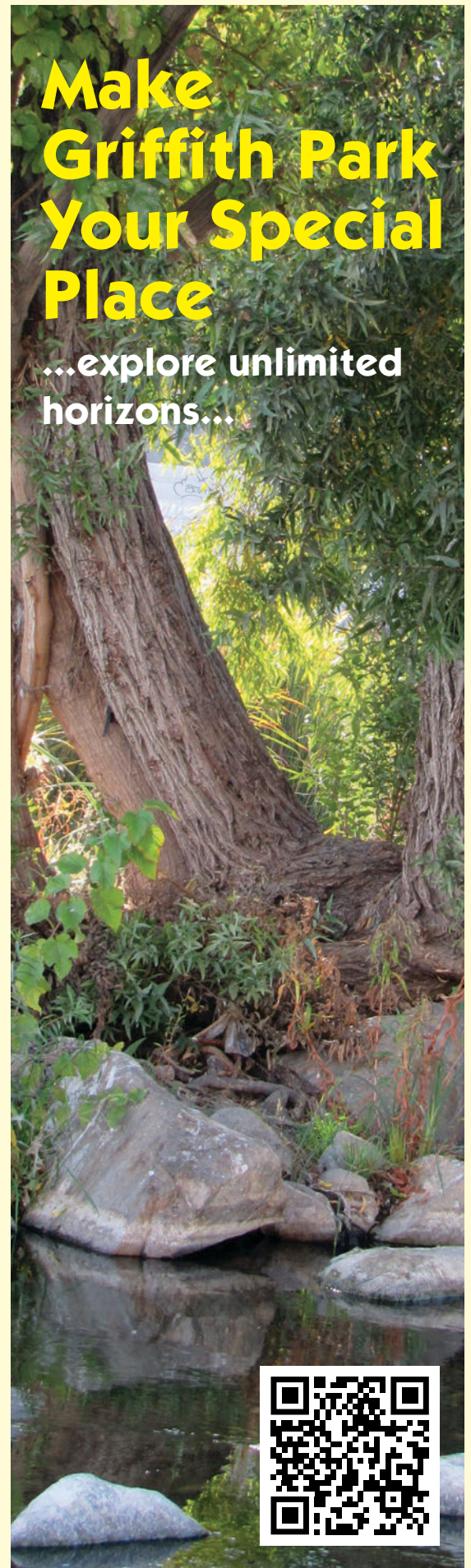
On the second Saturday of each month, CERT Wildland Search and Rescue conducts a hike to different location with most taking place on various trails in Griffith Park.

Hikes start at 9 AM and are usually four to six miles long. CERT members consider these hikes communications drills; one volunteer is left behind at the Command Post to receive and record check-in messages from hikers. "It's also exercise for us to meet new people who may be interested in the CERT program," says Wirth.

To receive info on upcoming CERT-LA hikes: griffithparkcertsar@gmail.com or visit www.facebook.com/groups/northeast.cert/ To learn more about the CERT-LA programs and free disaster training preparations for residents, go to www.cert-la.com/ 🌻

Make Griffith Park Your Special Place

...explore unlimited horizons...



20 Things to Know About Winter Hiking in Griffith Park

~Mike Eberts, FoGP Advisory Board member

Hiking in Griffith Park is a pleasure that is hard to define. It's not a city walk, although city sprawls all around it. It's not the wilderness because it is in the midst of nearly 4 million people.

In the summer, the trails can be packed with a montage of sweaty humanity: parents trying to get the kids away from the screen, tourists looking for that perfect selfie with the Hollywood Sign, hikers who wish they had hit the trailhead earlier in the day. But during the winter, the air is cooler and the trails emptier. Daylight hours are fewer. The foliage is greener. Wildlife—at least some of it—is more active.

After speaking with a variety of experts on the wild(er) side of the Park, here are 20 things to know if one of your New Year's Resolutions is to get out on the trails this winter.

1. Trail conditions are worth paying attention to. After rains, not all parts of the Park shed water well. Shale breaks down. Soil gets soft. Some trails get muddier than others. North Trail (near the Toyon Landfill) gets particularly muddy. And—especially in wet weather—don't walk close to the edge of trails.
2. Be mindful of lower temperatures and less light. At higher elevations, the Park can become cold and breezy. Days are shorter, which means that some morning hikers begin in darkness and some afternoon hikers can be surprised and disoriented by sudden nightfall. Using a red light will improve nighttime visibility.
3. Avoid trails that have a lot of accidents. The Pipeline Trail (several tenths of a mile past the Charlie Turner Trailhead) is deceptively treacherous and generates 12-15 helicopter rescues per year which is why Park Rangers are advocating for the closure of this illegal trail. The trail leading from Mt. Chapel to Mt. Lee Drive is also the site of

numerous injuries. And, of course, avoid trails with signs directing people to not hike on them.

4. Use appropriate footwear. Sometimes the difference between a successful hike and injury is having shoes or boots with lugged soles. And with enough use, the lugs that were so grippy and safe last year may be worn dangerously smooth this winter.
5. Size up the trail you are about to hike. Is it on the trail map available at the Crystal Springs Visitors Center? Soon you'll be able to check the new Griffith Park Explorer (GP-eX) system of trails ([article on page 14](#)). Here's a rule of thumb: If the trail is too narrow for two people to pass, it's probably not an official trail. Furthermore, realize that a shorter route isn't necessarily an easier (or safer) route.
6. Bring water. People need water, even in cool weather. Many water fountains in the Park are operational, but some aren't.
7. Appreciate rattlesnakes, but don't confront or tease them. Being cold-blooded reptiles, rattlesnakes are considerably less active in the winter and are subject to brumation, which is like hibernation. But it is not unusual to come across one sunning itself on a warm winter day. They are generally afraid of people. If given time and room to slither off the trail to safety, most will. If it becomes necessary to remove a recalcitrant rattler from the trail, rangers have snake tongs. In case of a snake bite, rangers will assist everyone, but they are more sympathetic toward a Park user with a snake bite on the ankle than one with a bite on the hand. The former is likely an unfortunate accident; the latter may be evidence of someone trying to handle the snake.
8. Keep your dog on a leash. Not only is it illegal to have an unleashed dog on the trail, but small dogs are at risk of being snatched by a coyote. Even a large dog will find trouble if it surprises a rattlesnake, opossum, bobcat or skunk. And realize that even a seemingly harmless squirrel may be carrying rabies.



Photo: Kathryn Louyse

9. Keep your parked car locked and valuables out of sight. Theft from automobiles is fairly common in several areas of the Park, including Bronson Canyon, near the golf courses and near the Observatory. Thieves are looking for valuables that can be grabbed easily and quickly. On-trail crime, thankfully, is rare.
10. If you do get lost or injured, having the *What3Words* app on your phone will help rangers or paramedics find you. This free app divides the world into roughly 10-foot by 10-foot squares. Both the Park Rangers and Los Angeles Fire Department use it.

The list above may be a little negative... don't get hurt, lost or victimized. But the Griffith Park ecosystem—big and robust enough to support a mountain lion—also has natural wonders that await a winter hiker.

1. The Park is quieter in winter, making it more likely that you will see wildlife. Western toads begin their mating season in late winter and you can hear them croaking in quiet pockets. They are sometimes seen in pools of water after winter rains.
2. The Park has three species of squirrels. If you're a fan of native species, root for the Western Gray squirrel, which is slowly being driven out of its habitat by the brown, tree-dwelling and extremely adaptable Eastern Fox squirrel. The California Ground squirrel is a burrower, often with spots.
3. Speaking of burrowers, the Burrowing Owl is a very special winter visitor to Griffith Park. They sometimes use squirrel burrows. This owl species is now a candidate for state endangered species listing due to habitat loss.
4. Great Horned Owls are active in the winter, with their nesting and incubating occurring in January and February. See a nest? Let the folks with the LA Raptor Study know about it!

5. Red-tailed Hawks are year-round residents of the Park. In the winter, they begin their courtship rituals and start nest building by March. Other birds to be on the lookout for include Western Meadowlarks, Mountain Bluebirds and Scrub Jays.
6. The side of the Park facing Hollywood and Los Feliz gets more sun, is dryer and a little warmer. There is more chaparral on the side facing Burbank and the San Fernando Valley. The Valley side gets a little more shade and more native monkeyflower.
7. If you come upon a snake that doesn't have rattles on its tail and a less diamond-shaped face, you can breathe easier. It is likely a harmless, non-poisonous gopher snake.
8. Common foliage in the Park includes Toyon, notable for its big red berries. Eastwood Manzanita grows in Griffith Park, along with California Buckwheat, white, turning later to a rusty brown.
9. Poison oak is still a factor in the winter. The leaves may fall off but the stem still can irritate. During the summer/fall, this leaf pattern is a very shiny green, but during the winter, leaves turn red and blend into the surrounding foliage.
10. The Park is home to numerous invasive plant species, including castor beans, tree tobacco, fountain grass, Russian thistle, Italian thistle, artichoke thistle, cocklebur, and Tree of Heaven (found in Oak Canyon). 🌻

Mike Eberts serves on the Friends of Griffith Park Advisory Board. Currently, Eberts is a professor of Mass Communications at Glendale Community College.

Assisting in this article research: Griffith Park Rangers Sean Kleckner, Andrew Trejo, Kayleigh Raciak and Jalen Woods. Also assisting: Naturalist Courtney McCammon.



Photos: Brenda Rees

Funnel Weavers

~Brenda Rees, FoGP Board Member

When the sun hits the fall and early winter trailside just the right way, the webs appear like soft accent lights placed by a garden designer with an odd sense of style – or who had a few too many the night before. A few here. One there. A whole bunch in a line.

When hiking in Griffith Park, I love finding these concave webs, and often stop to peer into the deep dark hole, imagining how its resident funnel weaver spider perceives the world. After all, they have two straight rows of four eyes and can sense modest changes in light. They can feel a light wind blowing and understand when a big shadow is cast over their web.

Funnel weavers don't make showy webs like orb weavers; their practical design is more Mid-century Modern, I think. While not sticky, the web is composed of filaments that can entangle prey and catch on its body or limbs. They are harmless to us humans and are often misiden-

tified as a hobo spider (a toxic species) which doesn't even live in our SoCal area.

If you have time to wait for a hapless victim to land upon this smooth welcome mat, you'll witness a quick ambush by the spider as it sprints out and delivers a paralyzing venomous chomp. The spider will then drag its meal back inside to enjoy its feast – in private – away from you.

Males, I learned, like to move around creating various webs; females like to stay put. If you find a funnel weaver in or around your house, windowsill or doors, chances are it's a male. Even if their web is disturbed, they will keep coming back to it, setting up post and lying in wait.

Next time you come upon these ingenious engineers, tip your hat and wish them well. 🌿

When you donate to Friends of Griffith Park, your support goes directly toward helping this Park (and all its critters) thrive...

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Western Gray Fox photo: Petyr Whisky

THE LEGACY OF P-22 LIVES ON



This fall, Friends of Griffith Park and the National Wildlife Federation – with support from L.A. Recreation and Parks along with CD 4 Councilmember Nithya Raman – teamed up to sponsor a memorial that would honor P-22, the late, great mountain lion who lived in the Park for more than a decade.

The sculptured memorial will reflect the personal connection P-22 had to people of not just Los Angeles but admirers around the world. The artwork will also remind Park patrons how this one mountain lion impacted attitudes about conservation issues and illuminated the need for city dwellers to coexist with wildlife.

Artists have been asked to record their interest in submitting a proposal by Dec. 31, 2024 to have their ideas considered at p22mountainlion@nwf.org. The exact location for the sculpture is to be determined, but organizers would like it to be easy for visitors to get to and be a quiet place to honor and contemplate him.

P-22 was first discovered via images downloaded from FoGP's Griffith Park Connectivity Study in 2012. Researchers determined that he was born in the Santa Monica Mountains, and must have crossed two busy freeways to get to his Griffith Park home where he lived quietly for many years. His freeway success, among so many other wildlife deaths by cars, was the inspiration for the Wallis Annenberg Wildlife Crossing that will be completed in 2026 in Agoura Hills.

P-22 was euthanized in December 2022 due to serious health issues, including injuries he sustained after being hit by a car and anti-coagulant rodenticides found postmortem. He was buried following a tribal ceremony in March 2023 at an undisclosed location in the Western Santa Monica Mountains where he was born.

Follow FoGP on our website, Facebook and Instagram for more details about the memorial. 🌿



Photos: Kathryn Louyse

Making a Roar at P-22 Day

~Brenda Rees, FoGP Board Member

Once again the sun was shining and the skies over Griffith Park were pure blue as environmental groups gathered in mid-October to pay tribute to the legacy of the world's most famous mountain lion, P-22. (Yes, we will make that claim!)

Now in its ninth year, the event held at Park Central was organized by the National Wildlife Federation.

Friends of Griffith Park enjoyed meeting everyone who came to our booth as we shared our projects and listened to why people like being in and supporting the Park. It's so nice to see smiling faces from folks of all ages who share an affinity for our natural world.

Yes, while he was only ONE mountain lion, P-22 has given everyone across Southern California a reason to enjoy and protect the wildlife in our urban backyards and in open landscapes like Griffith Park. 🌿





Sticky monkey photo: Jorge Ochoa



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P.O. Box 27573
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Photo: Kathryn Louyse

Friends of Griffith Park works hard to make the Park enjoyable for all visitors, and of course, volunteers are always welcome to join in our efforts.

If you, or an organization you're affiliated with is interested in volunteering some time to help Griffith Park sparkle, let us know... scan the QR code or go to www.friendsofgriffithpark.org/volunteer.



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