



the griffith reporter

the newsletter of friends of griffith park/summer-fall 2023



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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Pardon me while I start this message on a grumble. I reassure you – more positive reflections are forthcoming.

The passing of P-22 last year was a milestone for Griffith Park. This remarkable creature left behind far more than memories. Currently, there is a lot of attention on how the Park will commemorate this big cat whose stories were heard across the nation and world.



For more than a year before P-22's demise, FoGP had been planning a mural at the Ranger Visitor Center Auditorium. The mural depicts P-22 "hidden in plain sight" and will cover three wall panels, over 60-ft width, with native flora and fauna. This artwork will be an incredible



During the Celebration of P-22's Life, Gerry Hans and Dan Cooper talked about connectivity issues in the region as P-22 looked on.

interpretive and aesthetically stunning asset for the Visitor Center area. The talented (and patient) artist duo from local Studio Tutto has everything lined up and ready to proceed, as we await approvals from L.A. City Recreation and Parks.

Good ol' fashioned red tape.

In recent years, FoGP has experienced long approval times for various proposals in the Park. The fact that our projects are fully-funded and ready to be implemented doesn't seem to matter. Going downtown for an approval seems to always be at a snail's pace or slower. We need to reverse this serious new trend!

Still, the fates of other FoGP projects are also in the wings. Waiting.

Two years ago, we offered to pay and remove a hazardous waste item from the Park – an abandoned water tank. Another effort, the restoration of a historic WPA wall, sits on ice while we await the go-ahead for the next phase of planning it.

On the other hand, RAP's on-the-ground Park staff greatly appreciates our efforts. And we are grateful for their support.

Now that P-22 no longer roams Griffith Park, I think about how his story engaged people in the lessons of living compatibly with wildlife.

The science of connectivity took major leaps in our understanding of its importance for our urban life in Los Angeles, one of the most highly biodiverse places on planet Earth.

P-22 laid the foundation for the Wallis Annenberg Wildlife Crossing, with much credit to FoGP friend, Beth Pratt, California Executive Director, National Wildlife Federation. Our awakened sensitivity to issues of wildlife connectivity and genetic health will help us diminish the extent of habitat fragmentation in the coming decades. Besides these crossings, the proposed Los Angeles City Wildlife Ordinance is one of those important steps forward which, if approved, will help the City's unique mountains and hillsides endure.

As our seasoned supporters know, FoGP is credited for the Griffith Park Wildlife Connectivity Study which led to the early discovery of P-22 on a remote wildlife camera. Dr. Daniel S. Cooper joined me on stage at the P-22 Celebration of Life at the Greek Theatre earlier this year. Dan has helped steer FoGP as its Scientific Advisor since our organization's launch, and managed the Connectivity Study along with Dr. Erin Boydston of USGS.

Little did we know that this FoGP study, initiated in the Spring of 2011, would yield such a mega-

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Below: Members share photos & stories, page 23



Photo: Michael Perry



Photos, cover and this page: Gerry Hans

Nuttall's Woodpecker: a Californian Special

~Gerry Hans, FoGP President

You'll probably hear its distinct voice before you see the elusive Nuttall's woodpecker. The call is a loud rattling with just a couple notes that most new birders find easy to learn. Other times you may first hear them drilling or "drumming" into bark or dead wood. The reason Nuttall's do this varies. They could be looking for food as they poke under the bark of trees; however, they also could be marking their territory or punching out a cavity since they are cavity-nesters.

A pair of Nuttall's will drill a new nest each year, often into soft, dead wood. Their favorite trees in Griffith Park are elderberry, oak and sycamore. They line their nests with wood chips to cradle the eggs. These cavity nests create a high level of security for the brood. While the parents share the egg incubation tasks, the male is usually saddled with the construction job. When they're finished rearing the chicks, other species, such as Griffith Park's many Bewick's wrens and the oak titmouse, will use the cavities the next season.

Nuttall's favor the oak woodland habitat of the Park where they find and devour ants, bugs, various

creepy crawlers, and also berries, fruit and seeds. Harvesting from poison oak is not a problem!

There is little chance of confusing this species with the Park's larger, gregarious acorn woodpecker. Acorns have more of a laughing call and are everywhere in Griffith Park. To hear and see a Nuttall's is indeed very special!

This woodpecker species gets its name from a celebrated British naturalist, Thomas Nuttall (1785-1851). Although not formally trained as an ornithologist, he spent much of his career in America following the paths of pioneers such as Lewis and Clark. He is credited with discovery of many flora and avian species. However, it was an associate collecting specimens for Nuttall in 1843 who brought this small woodpecker from the Wild West to England.

This limited-range species doesn't stray from its year-round residency in much of the western half of California, and slightly extending into Baja. Nuttall's are not found in the rest of the country, nor anywhere else in the world. Very Californian!

Not sure if what you are hearing is a Nuttall's woodpecker? We recommend the free Merlin bird id app for your smartphone! The sound identification feature works quite well. 🌿

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star celebrity in 2012! And what was even more surprising is that P-22 stayed 10-plus years! Miguel Ordeñana, now a FoGP board member, was the field biologist for the Study who first read the memory card from a remote camera confirming the puma's presence. Miguel also spoke at the Celebration of Life.

Is a bronze P-22 statue in the cards to rival James Dean's in popularity? We're currently involved in discussions about how best to honor this big cat in the Park. I hope you enjoy our tribute to P-22 (*pages 12-13*).

FoGP's calendar has been hectic and rewarding. We hosted two Earth Day events, and the Bee Rock Trail ribbon-cutting and hike the following weekend. We then partnered with California Native Plant Society for a botany/geology morning hike in Brush Canyon on Saturday, May 7. All the while, our volunteer coordinators accommodated three other private volunteer happenings which helped the City take care of the Park!

While the winter rains were a welcome relief for Griffith Park and the whole state, the increased growth of invasive plants create challenges for a safe summer and fall. We've never seen nasty Italian thistle like this. Or black mustard so tall it blocks views from trails! Park Maintenance Division is overwhelmed, as mechanical abatement is the only tool. (*See Weed Manager on page 9*)

We need everyone's eyes to report any activities that might lead to igniting a brush fire. Keep the Ranger Dispatch number handy, as they're often first on scene: (323) 644-6661. Or call 911.

Stay safe. Your feedback is always welcomed.

MY FAVORITE HIKE

~Erik Smitt,
FoGP board member

The best part of being a parent is re-experiencing the world for the first time through a child's eyes. It's especially true while hiking in Griffith Park with our toddler Colette.

One of our more memorable hikes this spring was one that explored around the fabled Hollywood Sign. My wife Maryann and I gathered up Colette and her trusty companion Oliver, our Labrador for an afternoon adventure in the wild.

We started at the Deronda gate and followed the Mt. Lee Trail up into the hills. Parking is sparse in this area, but one can leave their car in the lower Beachwood Canyon neighborhoods during the day and climb to the trailhead. The directions are straightforward; this trail only travels one direction, and following the signs at the two junctions will easily lead to your destination. This trail is known for its terrific views, and storied history of climbers heading to the classic Hollywood landmark.

As we climbed I held Colette close, pointing out the stunning views of the city skyline and the surrounding mountains. It was a clear day, and we could see all the way to the ocean. Colette was fascinated by everything around her, from the rustling leaves to the soaring hawks above. Oliver, on his leash, trotted beside us, sniffing the trail ahead and occasionally stopping to greet fellow hikers and their furry friends.

After summiting, we descended a short distance back to the previous trail junction. Continuing on the Mt. Chapel Trail, we found ourselves in the heart of Griffith Park surrounded by natural beauty, from the vibrant wildflowers to the rocky outcrops. The Park was alive with the chirping of birds, a beautiful symphony of nature. Colette's eyes were wide with wonder, and we felt a sense of joy and contentment watching her take it all in. I remember similar wilderness hikes with my own parents when I was her age, and am excited for Colette to begin build-



Photo: Maryann Smitt

ing her own appreciation and memories as her worldview develops.

From Mt. Chapel Trail, we descended the short interchange of Mt. Hollywood Drive where it links to Mulholland Trail, offering a different perspective on Griffith Park. We exited the previously dense foliage and hiked through rocky terrain, surrounded by the diverse ecosystem. Colette pointed out each new discovery she saw, from bright orange butterflies to wild rabbits that darted across the trail. Oliver introduced himself to every dog on the trail!

Finally, as we descended onto the Hollyridge Trail, we were treated to a stunning view of the Hollywood Sign from a new angle. The trail wound through peaceful grasses and offered spectacular views of the city skyline along the rocky outcroppings. We even encountered a parade of majestic

horses along the way, bringing a hushed amazement to both Colette and Oliver.

As the hike came to an end, we left with a sense of wonder and gratitude for the natural world around us and for the gift of Griffith Park. Colette had fallen asleep in her carrier, and I held her close as we returned to Beachwood Canyon Drive through the gate which allows egress. Oliver was tired but content after our four-mile course.

Since it was a warm and perfect LA day we brought plenty of water; we later rewarded ourselves with ice cream, savoring the sweetness of the moment and the memories we made.

When she finally woke up, Colette and Oliver were both ravenous and enjoyed extra helpings!

Hiking with our family in Griffith Park always brings us closer to nature and each other. It reminds us of the beauty and power of the natural world and of the importance of preserving it for future generations. The Park is a treasure of our city, offering a peaceful escapade for the whole family, and our furry family members, too. 🐾



FoGP Adopts a Freeway

If you drive southbound on the 5 Freeway before the Los Feliz exit ramp, keep your eyes peeled for Friends of Griffith Park's Adopt-A-Highway sign.

The sign designates that on this stretch of highway, FoGP is supporting clean-up efforts. Because of safety reasons, volunteers cannot access this area near the 5 Freeway. FoGP is picking up the tab for monthly professional cleanups, but most is then rebated by a State of California stipend program.

We are proud that our name is out there and hope it will raise awareness; especially for commuters stuck in bumper-to-bumper traffic. 🐾

"Shuttered?"

~Gerry Hans, FoGP President

"Some things never change," as they say. In Griffith Park, often that's a very good thing.

Two important Griffith Park amenities have been shuttered, at least, temporarily. Both represent the most historic and inexpensive of all Park attractions for children: the Pony Rides and the Merry-Go-Round. How unfortunate that these facilities are both non-operational at the same time. These two venues attract young families from far-reaching and underserved communities. They are both "magnets" that bring kids to the Park where they are then, intentionally or not, introduced to its nature. So what's going on? Each has its separate story:

GRIFFITH PARK PONY RIDES – Closing the Pony Rides came as a shock to most, despite the regular protests by animal rights activists which expended far too much Park Ranger energy to keep the peace there. Three days before Christmas, the Pony Rides closed, on short notice by RAP General Manager Jimmy Kim. The most unfortunate aspect of this decision – there was no public outreach or discussion on the merits of not renewing this concession agreement.

The cancellation leaves the future of the Pony Rides venue, established in 1947, in limbo. RAP has called for the venue to be reimagined. But what does this mean? RAP is considering the possibility that an outside consultant be tasked to make recommendations, while Griffith Park Advisory Board (GPAB) has assembled an ad hoc to also provide solutions. Wow, this all could take a while! In the meantime, FoGP is concerned this area could remain empty, if not blighted, for years.

Our position has been made clear: "FoGP supports a commitment to continued use of this historic venue for the purpose for which it was built, pony rides, introducing children to animals and the equestrian world. Going forward, this could be achieved with a higher degree of sensitivity to animal care. This could become the compromise that benefits and satisfies all." FoGP's position is supported in a 4-page letter, available online. Fortunately, both RAP and CD 4 have gone on record saying the future of the venue does not preclude ponies or pony rides, but that it would be at a different standard to square previous concerns raised. The Cultural Heritage Commission added its support saying that the Pony Rides is a "legacy use" venue within their purview.

MERRY-GO-ROUND – As strange as it sounds, RAP owns the building housing the carousel, but not the 1926 Spillman carousel itself. The carousel has an impressive pedigree as one of the largest made by the prestigious Spillman manufacturer, with four horses abreast for a total of 68 horses plus two chariots.

Fifty-percent owner, Julio Gosdinski, passed away unexpectedly in August 2020. He had become a co-owner in 2011 and was a reason families visited the Merry-Go-Round. Julio loved children and they loved him; he worked the ride since he was a teenager.

Currently, the partial ownership remains in the hands of probate court. FoGP is anxious to see what will transpire and has successfully encouraged the City to become a party of interest.

While the Merry-Go-Round operated for some time after Julio's death and after COVID restrictions were relaxed, an expensive repair has forced its closure. There is an outpouring of assistance offered by people and organizations, including FoGP, to get this cherished venue re-opened. Sadly, until there is a resolution to its ownership, there will likely not be a commitment to keeping it in operating condition. The City is not in the driver's seat without ownership, and currently does not even have in-force concession arrangement.

"You don't know what you got 'til it's gone" is an understatement, considering the strong reaction and public cries to rescue both these affordable and historic jewels for families from across the City. ❄️



Current state of the Pony Rides – a big empty space.



The Griffith Park Merry-Go-Round during happier days.

AERIAL TRANSIT SYSTEM – No news is good news for a gondola or aerial tram across much of Griffith Park's interior, the subject of a staggering \$750,000 feasibility study. Unfortunately, there's also been no formal acknowledgment from the City that it's off the table.

LA ZOO EXPANSION – At time of this newsletter coming together, the City has not yet released the Final Focused, Recirculated EIR which responds to the public comments submitted. It is hard to speculate whether the delay is merely due to the voluminous earful the City received, or whether further revisions to the expansion plan are being made. We wait.

FoGP Scholarship Awardees are the Future of Environmentalism

~Anna Josenhans, FoGP board member

Earlier this spring, Friends of Griffith Park announced the recipients of the FoGP Diversity Scholarships choosing three students of color who attend the North Hollywood High School Zoo Magnet School (known as the Zoo Magnet) located on the grounds of Griffith Park. Congratulations to Jet Benitez, Juliette Dalicano and Geraldine Perez!

In addition, FoGP created a Continuing Education Scholarship to a previous scholarship awardee; this year the scholarship goes to Emily Reyna as she continues her education at UCLA.

The FoGP Diversity Scholarships were established in 2021 and are awarded to students who demonstrate academic excellence and a desire to become environmental stewards. The money can be used to pay for various educational expenses.

Their student essays reflect the depth of their determination and dedication along with their intellectual prowess.

Here are just a few paragraphs from each awardee.

"I've removed trash from my community since I was five and believed consumers were empowered to make changes with reusable bags, clean-ups and metal straws. My world was transformed in my junior year when I spent over 100 hours caring for the animals in our school's agriculture area during the pandemic closure. When school reopened, our donkey, Jenny, struggled to eat and stand. Despite our efforts, she died. Her necropsy revealed a blockage caused by an indigestible plastic wrapper. I knew that plastic impacted wildlife, but this experience made it personal.

I've attended Algalita's Innovation Youth Forum and presented at their International Youth Summit because of my efforts to reduce plastics in LAUSD's prepackaged meals. My work with Algalita opened my eyes to systemic plastic pollution embedded in global economies, institutions, and industry. They are the biggest contributors to pollution, but are not held

accountable. Combatting plastic has been a labor of love that has spanned most of my life, but the battle is just beginning. I plan to study Environmental Science... so that I can continue to be part of the plastic solution as a field biologist, restoration ecologist, or director of sustainability."

~Jet Benitez, UC Davis

"My interest in biology was shaped by my time as a biomedical research intern at Children's Hospital Los Angeles... by assisting with cutting edge research investigating the mechanisms of injury in the chronic kidney disease membranous nephropathy. I became aware of the ethics and procedures of using animal models. A love for helping people through research came with understanding how animals further it. I've always been in awe of the inspiring diversity of wildlife and wanted to share with others. In my science electives I've enjoyed the introduction of each concept and the

thrill of understanding as I connect the dots to the overall picture. My engagement in Zoology resulted [in my] Avian/Hoofstock Docent Specialist Program and Animal Husbandry Internship, allowing me to engage with visitors and animal care. As a college student I'd like to gain more knowledge in biology research and animal biology so that in my career I may bridge a gap between animals and human researchers, maybe even develop new ethical practices or technology that ensures care for both groups."

~Juliette Dalicano, UC Davis

"Directly interacting with the critically endangered Peninsular Pronghorn at the L.A. Zoo has allowed me to explore discussions of conservation with my keeper and even my peers. Conversing about the

numbers left in the wild and both the negative and positive impacts humans can have on not only the pronghorn but other animals has extended my interest in the natural world that relies on the more positive impacts from humans in order to thrive. Reaching a resolution begins at the root, and in the case of animal conservation, it begins with humans, who can reduce the effects of already existing issues affecting the natural world. Animal conservation cannot be fixed instantaneously, but I believe that in furthering my education at a university and studying animals and science, I'd have the opportunity to have my voice heard and therefore aid in efforts in conservation and advocating for the protection of animals from the disastrous effects of humans like myself and ultimately reach sustainable ways of living without contributing to the demise of various species of animals."

~Geraldine Perez, UC Santa Barbara

"As I reflect on the past year, I am so grateful to have had the privilege of creating so many fond memories and accomplishing things I have always dreamed of. During this past year, I was accepted into college, participated in senior activities, recognized as a valedictorian, traveled for free, and began my first job. However, my greatest reward has been the amazing relationships I have created with the people around me. I always strive to do well in school so I often asked my teachers in middle school and high school for help. These tutoring sessions often turned into conversations, which created bonds between us. Whether it was a simple hello as I passed by their class room or a "hello" email, I am very grateful for my relationships with them."

~Emily Reyna, UCLA



Zoo Magnet students cleared many of the weeds from this planting area.



Volunteers made quick work of the mulch pile on Earth Day.

Earth Day Planting Comes Off Without a Hitch

~Kathryn Louyse, FoGP board member

The Bird Sanctuary missed out on volunteer efforts for several years due to Covid restrictions so Friends of Griffith Park decided it was high time to revisit this space and place more natives in the ground while at the same time, conduct some well-deserved TLC. This beautiful garden became our Earth Day project for 2023.

After several logistical meetings with RAP to ensure the area was cleared of dirt piles and ready to go, FoGP's Volunteer Coordinator Ross Arnold and I walked the site to identify areas to prep for the Earth Day event. During the long wet winter, numerous rainstorms had drenched the Sanctuary, and there had been an explosion of growth – weeds were everywhere and fallen tree limbs clogged stream beds. But students from the Zoo Magnet persevered and by the end of

Friday, the island and stream beds were looking quite impressive – cleared and ready for planting!

On Saturday, April 22, a very large group of volunteers went right to work, digging holes – after a short how-to-plant intro by FoGP's Laura Howe – and placing plants. While some folks continued to weed the area, some helped place mulch around the new growths. After the day ended, Ross and I took some time to water the entire planting area to make sure these new plants had an opportunity to thrive. 🌱

We're always looking for volunteers or organizations who have an interest in helping to make Griffith Park a place of respite. Please go to our website friendsofgriffithpark.org and let us know more about you!



A very proud volunteer crew poses after FoGP's Earth Day.

Photos: Kathryn Louyse



Photo: Marian Dodge

The 9.7-acre addition to Griffith Park was celebrated with a ribbon-cutting ceremony, attended by City Officials, LA Recreation and Parks General Manager Jimmy Kim, LA Parks Foundation's Carolyn Ramsay, FoGP's Gerry Hans, CD 4 Councilmember, Nithya Raman and FoGP's Mary Button.

More Land for Griffith Park

A rectangular 9.7-acre plot of land, smack in the middle of Griffith Park's most remote wildlands, is now officially owned by the City. It's not the first time bits of land which were previously holdings of Hollywood studio tycoon Howard Hughes have been added to the Park.

Friends of Griffith Park partnered with the LA Parks Foundation, Council District 4, and several private donors to purchase the land, making it part of Griffith Park in perpetuity. Land use attorney Jamie Hall handled the transaction, pro bono.

A news conference was held on March 9 at the Lake Hollywood Overlook to celebrate the acquisition. Among the speakers, FoGP president Gerry Hans described the 9.7 acres as one of the few places where the sensitive Blainsville horned lizard still persists, while it's been lost throughout most of the Park. He reminded everyone that buying the land doesn't necessarily protect it, and there's plenty of work ahead to defend this incredible natural resource we call Griffith Park. 🌿

Stay Connected. Sign up for FoGP's E-Blasts... friendsofgriffithpark.org

Tasty Toyon



Toyon was misnamed "California Holly" by Easterners moving to the western region even though this lush plant already had a scientific name *Heteromeles arbutifolia* and a Native American name from the Bay Area's Ohlone language – toyon.

In the spring and summer, the white toyon blooms attract butterflies, bees and moths – and during winter months, the bright red berries on this evergreen provide a food source for birds including cedar waxwings, American robins and the hermit thrush. Other animals such as coyote and bear also consume these berries and then disperse the seeds.

See page 10 for accompanying story.

Mapping Weeds in Griffith Park

~Gerry Hans, FoGP President



Photo: Kathryn Louyse

Calflora is a non-profit organization that developed a database of California plants that fulfills a huge need for the conservation, education, and appreciation for the state's incredible plant diversity. Over 10,000 native and introduced species are now captured by qualified contributors, with more than three million geotags which collectively describe each species' distribution.

Recently Calflora has built a separate specialized system called Weed Manager that has become a successful tool to help agencies and organizations across the state manage invasive plants, by mapping infestations and tracking treatments in real time.

Los Angeles County has embraced the system, and City of LA Sanitation Department's Biodiversity team encouraged urban park ecologist, Courtney McCammon, to become involved. As a consequence, Courtney and a small trained team of Friends of Griffith Park volunteers are geo-mapping species of concern in the Park. While in the field, data is recorded by drawing spatially on the Weed Manager smartphone app, with input of the species and estimate of the number of plants.

FoGP has been in a constant battle against castor bean, tree tobacco, black mustard, fountain grass and Russian thistle, to name a few. Invasives pose an existential threat to the native flora diversity of Griffith Park, crowding them out of space and zapping the soil of nutrients. Soil disturbance opens a niche for non-natives along every trail, and required brush clearance produces a backlash of more non-natives.

To make matters worse, in recent years there has been a blanket moratorium on the use of all herbicides by City Departments, whereas targeted and limited herbicide use was an effective tool previously.

Mechanical removal can't solve the entire problem. Interestingly, the County (not the City) lifted its moratorium on herbicides recently, except glyphosate Round-up, – the chemical that caused the controversy in the first place.✿

Photo: Castor bean plants along Zoo Drive in Griffith Park were staggeringly tall before Wade brought them down. These plants are one of many invasives being removed by several volunteer groups.

Interested in giving a few hours to one of our volunteer groups? Please reach out... friendsofgriffithpark.org/volunteer



Toyon Through the Seasons

~Jorge Ochoa, FoGP Advisory board

Toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*) is a very important plant for the overall healthy habitat of Griffith Park. The plant is commonly seen growing wild throughout the Santa Monica Mountains range – and it's found throughout Griffith Park.

Many people know the plant by the common name of “Holly Berry” because the leaves and the red fruit that mature during the fall are reminiscent of the European Holly. The name Hollywoodland, which later became Hollywood, was given to this area of Griffith Park by early settlers who saw the green plant with red berries growing profusely on the surrounding hills.

Throughout the year, toyon offers many important benefits to wildlife that live in Griffith Park. Since toyon can grow to be a large shrub or a small tree, the plant provides a protected area from animals such as coyotes to roost or build homes safe from ground predators.

Field observations in the summer find toyon plants in full bloom. The plant produces a large amount of small white blossoms that offer food and drink to insects such as butterflies, bees and beetles during the hot summer days. The plants' survival relies on the insects: insects visit the blossoms looking for nectar, and carry away pollen which is distributed to other toyon plants and thus producing fruits.

During the fall season, after several months of growing and maturity, toyon fruits change color from green to red; it's a signal to birds and other larger animals that a meal is ready for them. It is also during the fall that the hills of Griffith Park are adorned with striking red colors reflecting the many toyon plants growing in the hills of the Park.

Toyon fruit looks like a tiny apple with many small seeds. Griffith Park wildlife eat the entire fruit. Once consumed, the fruit is digested and the intestinal track extracts the calories and nutrients from the fruit's fleshy portions. Seeds safely go through the animal's intestinal track and will later be dropped elsewhere in the Park where they can germinate, grow and become a new toyon plant.

Because toyon is one of the few plants that ripen its fruits during the fall, when many of the other plants are barely waking up, having a healthy population of toyon to sustain wildlife is vital for the ecosystem of the Park. 🌿



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

RAPTOR STUDY UPDATE

~Gerry Hans, FoGP President

SAVE THE DATE

Final 2023 Raptor Study Results
Presentation via ZOOM

Thursday, Sept. 21, 2023

7:00 PM

YOU CAN HELP THE RAPTOR STUDY...

RAPTORS IN YOUR HOOD?

Have you noticed a hawk or an owl
in your LA neighborhood?

Help locate nesting raptors by
sending the location (address or
cross streets) and other details you
have (photos or videos welcome) to...
raptors@friendsofgriffithpark.org

It's too early to crunch the numbers, but the 2023 raptor nesting season was off to a great start with our earliest nesters, the great horned owls. And because there's a good amount of red-tailed hawk and red-shouldered hawk data recorded, it's a sign of a potential highly productive year. The last of our raptor species to nest are Cooper's hawks.

Public Outreach Director for the Raptor Study, Nurit Katz, notes that various one-chick red-tailed hawk nests from last year seem to be producing larger clutches this year. Last year, successful fledglings was considerably lower than 2021, especially red-tailed. The dataset for the Study is now robust enough to see trends and even develop hypothesis to explain them.

In Griffith Park, we had our hands full with owlets falling or literally being blown from their nests, due to repeated strong winds. City Park ecologist, Courtney McCammon, Park Rangers, and the Raptor Team were called upon to rescue owlets in the Park more than a half-dozen times.

L.A. Animal Service's Specialized Mobile Animal Rescue Team (SMART) offers great services including tree-climbing skills when very young fallen nestlings need to be "re-nested" so the parents can finish the job. Others times, larger owlets or chicks can be placed on branches where the parents will still care for them. Sometimes, though, they need to be transported for professional care and are released as soon as they can fend for themselves.

A bit of background, if you haven't been following the LA Raptor Study. FoGP initiated the Study in 2017; it's a huge success as community science volunteers are trained to monitor active nests, now over an area expanded out from Griffith Park. Applications are being taken for limited spots for the 2024 season, online.

One of the Study's highlights was in 2020 when a peregrine falcon pair slipped into a very quiet Griffith Park to nest while it was closed to the public. They've been back each year since, last year with a fledgling count of four! That's a big job for parents to feed and protect – which they did with great aplomb.

The final Raptor Study results will be published in our winter/spring newsletter. ✨



Park Biologist Courtney McCammon, FoGP's Gerry Hans and Griffith Park Superintendent Stefanie Smith check out the new FoGP donated equipment.



Chief Ranger Joe Losorelli, Ranger Sharie Abajian and Ranger Patrick Joyce admire the new high-tech equipment as FoGP's Gerry Hans looks on.

FoGP donates "wish list" equipment

FoGP recently donated equipment and tools that will help our park staff and rangers monitor and help educate others about Griffith Park.

First, we presented a selection of trail cameras and accessories that will allow staff, especially Park Ecologist Courtney McCammon, to better monitor the wildlife in and around the Park's boundaries. We also donated spotting scopes which can help educate children and adults about bird species and other wildlife in the Park.

As the days heat up, the threat of wildfires rises. FoGP provided park rangers with a selection of Fire-PROx, devices that can detect hot spots after brush fires which can reduce flare-ups. The devices are also sensitive enough to be used for locating body-heat at a significant distance, such as an unconscious hiker or wildlife. Additionally, other materials were also given to Park Rangers that will help their interpretive presentations at local events, school visits and more. ✨



P-22's Long Legacy in Griffith Park

~Brenda Rees, FoGP board member

We all knew that the day would come. The phone call. The text message. The social media post. How terrible would the news be?

“P-22 has been hit.” “P-22 was found unconscious.” “There’s no transmission signal on P-22’s collar.”

As it happened, it was a combination of forces that led to the end of an era in Griffith Park, the era of the Los Angeles’ Hollywood Mountain Lion, the death of P-22 who survived more than a decade in our urban wilderness.

As we mourned losing this big cat, people wondered how best to honor P-22, a wild animal that captivated our attention, tugged at our heartstrings and helped many understand and appreciate the diverse ecosystems that surround us here in Southern California. What should his legacy be?

Of course P-22’s story sparked the big-scale advocacy for more habitat connectivity in Southern California. He became the spokescat for the movement that culminated in last year’s groundbreaking for the Wallis Annenberg wildlife crossing in Agoura Hills – a bridge that will no doubt save countless animals’ lives from traffic deaths, but also help spread the genetic pool for critters large and small.

Other creative tributes are planned: the L.A. Philharmonic commissioned composer Adam Schoenberg to write a piece in honor of P-22; “Cool Cat” premiered at the Hollywood Bowl earlier this summer.

P-22’s legacy will be immortalized in some form in Griffith Park with statues, murals or other artworks. Upcoming children’s books, songs, poetry, etc. will help future generations learn the story of this amazing cat and his incredible journey from the Western Santa Monica Mountains to Griffith Park – and what his presence meant not only to the residents of Los Angeles, but people all over the world.

But for those of us who were lucky to live in the years he resided among us, P-22 can best be remembered when we hike in his paw prints, follow in the shadows where he lingered and quietly feel his ghost spirit that still inhabits the wilderness that is Griffith Park.

How best to honor the memory of P-22? Let us indeed support bridges that will keep his fellow mountain lions safe, but let’s not forget that for at least 10 years, Griffith Park sustained this big cat. Beyond playgrounds, the Hollywood Sign and golf courses, this urban wilderness provided P-22 with everything he needed: food, shelter and a territory, albeit an incredibly small one for a mountain lion.

Los Angeles, Griffith Park is our Yellowstone, our Yosemite. It deserves to be congratulated for nurturing not just one top predator for a decade, but for nurturing coyotes, deer, rabbits, toads, bobcats, plant life, along with underground critters and soaring raptors. Every single day.

Quite possibly we’ll never have another mountain lion stay in Griffith Park for as long as P-22, but there are plenty of wild animals that are worthy of our love, protection and admiration. How best to honor P-22? Let’s view Griffith Park as a true wilderness to defend and cherish. 🌿

After the passing of P-22, fourth and fifth grade students at Aragon Avenue Elementary School in Cypress Park wrote poems describing what the big cat meant to them. “They are structured poems,” writes their teacher Jane De Haven who also followed the story of P-22 very closely. The first three lines of the poem had to be a prepositional phrase showing “where,” the fourth a prepositional phrase showing “when,” the fifth line a simile and the last a title or summary of the situation. “All turned in heartfelt poems that reflect how immediate and impressive an impact our boy had on children,” writes De Haven.

Here is just a selection of the poems:

The Finding

~Kimberly R., Grade 5

For a place
To stay
P-22 looked
Up a rocky, spooky hill
With tangled trees growing,
Into the next day.
P-22 gazed at the city lights like a newcomer.
Watching, planning, enjoying the view!
Finding his home.

Reign Over LA

~Alison H., Grade 4

Along Griffith Park,
Among us roamed P-22,
Through the night he shone,
He ran like the legend he was.
He was the king of Griffith Park.
Prowling, seeking, hunting.
The undisputed monarch of a city.

Always

~Mia P., Grade 5

Throughout the horizon,
Under the twinkling sky,
Above Griffith Park,
P-22 hikes into his mountain
Under his cave.
P-22 looks curious and strange.
He hunts like a Mayan king
And is wild like a tree.
He is a warrior as you can see.
P-22, you courageous guy
We will always love you
From day to night.

Unstoppable

~Victor G., Grade 4

In the deep of Griffith Park,
As the moon shines on trees
Below where life crawls
Inside the dark night,
P-22 went across the stars like
An unstoppable meteor.
Seeking, prowling, hunting,
The soul of the hills and the city.

Ascension

~Alexander H., Grade 4

Around the forest,
Where the beast sleeps
Inside the heart of the city,
On top of a pile of dead leaves
Into the silent night.
P-22 lay down like a soul
Ascending to nirvana
Growling, breathing, stretching,
A soul at rest.



Los Feliz Branch Library P-22 exhibit asked kids to think about the impacts made by this cougar's life.

There are currently plans underway to place a permanent P-22 monument somewhere in Griffith Park. The resolution, presented by CD 4's Nithya Raman, instructs city staffers and the Griffith Park Advisory Board (GPAB) to make proposals within 120 days. Stay tuned for more info!

The blinding realities of light pollution

~Anna Josenhans, FoGP board member

Something I've always found special about Griffith Park is how dark the city can feel at night even as you gaze out at its thousands of lights from the deck of the Observatory. While the flatlands of city below present a spectacle, it is the immediate foreground of complete darkness that provides the true perspective. And although the twinkling lights speak to the results of great human endeavor, it's the draping darkness that provides a blanket of serenity as well as a sense of the infinite mysteries that are only found when the lights are out.

I recently learned that the night sky is getting 9.6% brighter every year. And as one with a lifelong reverence and fascination with the night sky, learning this was heartbreaking. I can't imagine the next generation deprived of experiencing the grandeur of a dark sky lit only by stars and planets.

We can see this phenomenon at work right here in LA. If you had taken a photo of the brightness of Los Angeles from Griffith Park's Mt. Hollywood in 2009, you'd likely have seen the yellowish glow of incandescent street, shop and house lights.

Now, hike up to that same spot today, and take a picture from that same view. That brightness is magnified, cranked up to a new blinding level. Why? Right after 2009, the city replaced street lights with Light Emitting Diode or LED lights. These powerful lights blanket wider areas and spew harmful lumens into unintended places or areas that don't benefit from being lit. More light is not better and sometimes it acts as a counteractive force. Think about the experience you have in a dark place when you face the glare of an exceedingly bright light and you'll recall that it commonly makes it more difficult to see — it's ironic.

Another irony is that we developed LEDs to solve the problem of energy efficiency and curb fossil fuel emissions, but this solution is creating the new devastating problem of light pollution.

For most people, especially urbanites, light pollution isn't on our radar, but it impacts us in ways both large and small. Artificial light interferes with our circadian rhythms, which in turn affects our hormonal balance and is often linked to a vast array of maladies including mood disorders, high blood pressure and even cancer, to name just a few.

Shedding Light on Griffith Park

~Gerry Hans, FoGP President

THE SIGN

Inbound Mayor Bass made a bold statement on her earliest arrival. The final Executive Directive quietly carried out by former Mayor Eric Garcetti was to initiate an 18-month pilot program to allow the lighting of the Hollywood Sign for commercial purposes.

Bass rescinded the order without hesitation, beating the clock of the directive becoming legally effective. Homeowners in the area cheered because illuminating the Hollywood Sign would only attract more tourists onto narrow streets. FoGP also applauded Bass's swift annulment of the directive for another reason: harmful spillage of light onto the Park habitat with insects, bats and wildlife is not the message a City should send. We are confident that Mayor Bass recognizes that the City's most-esteemed urban wilderness asset is worth protecting.

MT. LEE FACILITY

What about all those nasty bright lights to the east of the Hollywood Sign? Where did those come from and why?

Most folks didn't ask the question when they were first installed, and instead, assumed they were for



What else can I do?

Support California Assemblymember Alex Lee's continuing efforts to dim the lights on state properties

Call your representatives and ask them to support International Dark Sky Week

Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper outlining the many harmful impacts of overly-bright street lights

Additionally, our friends in the outside world are affected negatively by unnatural light; bats, coyotes, mountain lions, lizards, rodents, turtles and many other fauna have been studied and shown to exhibit deviations in mating, hunting, feeding and navigating. Plant cycles are also affected directly by artificial light and indirectly by the disruption of their pollinator's lifecycle.

Remember the goose at last year's Dodger-Padres game landing on the field? While it was funny to see grown men befuddled by a bird, the truth of what was happening was sobering. That bird was likely disoriented as a result of the blinding stadium lighting, which is often the case for migratory birds encountering city lights. Light pollution affects each member of an ecosystem differently but its impacts are detrimental for our local ecology and biodiversity.

Can we dim the lights?

Many cities across America have opted to darken their streetscapes and return to traditional incandescent lighting. I did a double-take as I drove west on the I-40 past Flagstaff, Arizona on my way to the

Grand Canyon last fall. All of the city lights, including those on the exterior of residences, were pointed downward illuminating the immediate space below with a dull yellow light. The result was wonderful. You could see the sky and clearly identify the constellations. I discovered later that Flagstaff was the first to be designated an International Dark Sky City which is now shared by dozens of cities, National Parks and reserves across the globe. Proving it can be done!

As individuals we have the power to make small changes which do add up. Consider outdoor home lighting that projects the light into a specific area or setting up a motion detection system or join the citizen scientist campaign to record the brightness of night sky from your home (globeatnight.org) or become an advocate for the International Dark Sky Organization (darksky.org) and learn how you can educate others on the importance of preserving the night sky for our next generation. ✨

Mt. Lee night lights photo: Gerry Hans

security of the communication equipment that consumes much of the flattened peak. Okay, let's start there and assume they're for security purposes. But why are the lights pointing outward, not inward onto the assets that need the protection?

The lamps project outward around the entire perimeter, more than a dozen viable lamps can be seen from as far away as Eagle Rock, above Coldwater Canyon, and planes flying into LAX. Each LED lamp produces 4,600 lumens (and they are doubled-up on the poles) at 5,000 Kelvin temperature, which is blue/white light, the opposite end of wildlife-friendly light. This intensity and spectrum would miserably fail the lighting guidelines of the City's proposed Wildlife Ordinance.

The lights were installed shortly after the completion of major upgrades to the communication facility around 2016. Because of the extent of the project, a Minimal Negative Declaration (MND) under CEQA law was mandated and prepared. In that public document, it clearly states, "All-night light that would be visible from outside of the site will not be used."

FoGP has asked questions, including with Council District 4. Answers have not been forthright. LAPD Security Division says, "not them." Information Technology Agency (ITA) states they didn't install them, even though they control the switch for the lights. LAFD? "No." Did FAA ask for them for the plethora of helicopters that fly around there? Again, "No."

We aren't giving up with this conundrum. Surely, the City can understand that there is a case to attenuate lights that shine out onto the remote wildlands of Griffith Park's interior. Dark nights are the best Park policy. Shielding, redirecting, reducing intensity, and changing lamps for less harmful, warmer light, are possible steps in the right direction. Or, maybe the easiest of all solutions, just flip the switch off, forever. ✨

No Such Thing as a “Safe Poison”

~Angela Woodside, FoGP member

A red-tailed hawk hovers aloft over the 101 in the midday sun, scanning a nearby hillside for signs of life. This raptor’s keen eyes catch the rustle of grass, a long tail disappearing into the vegetation: the telltale signs of a waiting meal. Pest control is on the clock, and this hardworking mom has mouths to feed back at her nest. She suddenly makes her move: wings tucked, in a steep dive heading straight for an unsuspecting rodent who today has the misfortune of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Success! With lunch grasped tightly in her sharp talons, the hawk heads back to her hungry chicks, job well done.

But what she doesn’t know is that the now ex-rat in her grip is a ticking time bomb—because a few days ago that rat fed on what it thought was a tasty snack in a black box in the back alley of an apartment complex, and he’s been feeling sick ever since. His days were numbered even before the hawk’s shadow fell across his path. And now, when this hawk shares this meal with her chicks, the anticoagulant rodenticide concentrated in this rat’s organs will do just what it says on the box. In addition to killing the pest, it will kill the pest control too.

Hang on, I thought we banned rodenticides! It was all over the news.

You’re probably thinking of AB 1788; this bill, the California Ecosystems Protection Act, went into effect January 1, 2021 and was a big win for wildlife. The bill made the strong case for the harm caused by second-generation anticoagulant rodenticides (SGARs) to the very predators that are naturally working to control the rodent populations in the wild and in our cities. Prior to this bill, California had limited the over-the-counter sales of these SGARs in 2014, but studies conducted on wildlife in the intervening years showed no significant decrease in



Photo: Nurit Katz

rodenticide exposures and associated deaths—not surprising, since SGARs were still widely in use by commercial pest control companies, and available via mail from online retailers. AB 1788 is an even stricter regulation of the use of SGARs; however, the bill makes several notable exceptions for public health activities, protecting water supply infrastructure, agricultural production and food storage facilities, medical waste facilities, and use on offshore islands to eradicate invasive species. So while it’s significantly harder for the average California consumer to procure SGARs or the services of pest control companies who utilize them, these deadly poisons are unfortunately still out there.

First generation? Second generation? What’s the difference?

First-generation anticoagulant rodenticides (FGARs) were developed in the 1940s and 50s, and work by disrupting blood clotting, causing internal bleeding and eventual death over the course of a few days to a couple weeks. FGARs like diphacinone or chlorophacinone are still widely available for con-

sumer purchase. You might remember the shocking photo of our late great celebrity cat P-22, back in 2014 when he was captured and treated for mange; tests revealed he had both of the aforementioned FGARs in his system. Rodenticide poisoning weakens an animal’s immune system, and this parasitic skin condition is one of the ways it can present.

Second-generation anticoagulant rodenticides (SGARs) are more potent than first-generation, and may only require one feeding to be fatal. These blood-thinning toxins include brodifacoum, bromadiolone, difenacoum, and difethialone, and all cause massive hemorrhaging and death within several days.

However, the toxins themselves have a half-life of over 100 days and so their potency persists as they work their way up the food chain to apex predators. The average person or company putting out these poison baits is thinking only about solving the immediate problem at hand—when in fact, poisoning the ecosystem has the opposite effect in the long-term, actually increasing the population of rodents by eliminating their predators. These predators have a much slower reproduction rate than their prey, so in the time it takes to replace one apex predator lost to rodenticide, many more rapidly reproducing rodents will have set up shop in your neighborhood.

But I see those black boxes all over the city and my neighborhood. Don’t the rodents get trapped inside after they’ve eaten the bait? How are predators eating them?

Contrary to popular belief, these bait boxes aren’t rat coffins. They are designed so that rodents can go in and out, returning to feed on the bait multiple times and/or bringing back bait to their young. And once the now-poisoned rodents leave these boxes, they often present an easy meal to the neighbor-

hood cat or great-horned owl as they weaken, succumbing to the poison's effects. These bait boxes may say they're tamper-proof, safe for pets and children, but on average every year in the United States, tens of thousands of children and pets accidentally consume rat poison.

But my pest control company says their methods are safe!

"Safe poison" is an oxymoron—if a pest control company tells you their product is non-toxic, check to see if it contains any of these FGARs like *diphacinone* and *chlorophacinone*, or the nerve toxin *bromethalin*, all of which are still available to consumers. Even though the FGARs are less potent and slower acting than SGARs, they still have potentially lethal capacity if consumed directly or indirectly by children, pets and wildlife. *Bromethalin*, which acts by way of causing respiratory distress and death within 24-48 hours, is lethal if consumed directly.

I just discovered I have mice in my house! What am I supposed to do now if I can't use rodenticide?

OK, so you heard the distinctive skitter of tiny rodent feet in your walls, or found their dreaded droppings in your cupboard. Don't go reaching for the poison! First: focus on exclusion. How are the mice getting into your home? Seal up any entry points. Trim tree limbs and vegetation away from walls and the roof. Reduce the amount of welcoming rodent shelter available around the house like woodpiles and ivy. What's attracting them to your home? Keep your trash bins closed; make sure you're not leaving pet food out; clean up birdseed from the ground under your feeders. Old-fashioned snap traps are still a quick and efficient way to control unwanted houseguests; newer electronic traps work well, although these traps are more expensive. NEVER use glue traps—they are a slow, inhumane way for any animal to die, and non-target wildlife like birds and lizards often get stuck by accident. If you're looking to hire a pest control company, ask around for one that practices Integrated Pest Management and verify that they aren't using poisons. Some companies are also beginning to implement rodent birth control as a non-

toxic strategy for long-term population reduction. And, if all that doesn't have you convinced, an unintended consequence of using rodenticides is that this out-of-sight, out-of-mind approach may result in a decaying rat in your walls—it may be out of sight but certainly not out of scent.

The rodent problem in our city is of our own making, but it's a problem we can solve with

Current Rodenticide Legislation [AB 1322]

Assemblymember Laura Friedman is leading the legislative charge against the use of diphacinone, the agent that made P-22 sick in 2014.

Recently, FoGP funded lab testing of a young bobcat, confirming it had a high load of diphacinone.

AB 1322 would extend the existing moratorium on dangerous second generation anticoagulants, and adds diphacinone, the most widespread rodenticide used today. It has a high probability of affecting non-targeted wildlife.

There is little doubt that most of the use of this agent is by pest control "professionals" in residential neighborhoods.

HELP US SUPPORT AB 1322!

the aid of our furred, feathered, and scaly neighbors—and without anticoagulant rodenticides. Help us protect current and future generations of our all-natural pest control. Let the predators do their job, and leave the poison on the shelf.

You're preaching to the choir. I already don't use rodenticides and love watching the wildlife in my neighborhood. What else can I do to help?

One great way to help the wildlife in your neighborhood is to cultivate native plant habitat where you live—no matter how small the space—to increase the biodiversity of your area and connect to other nearby habitats, thus creating your own version of a wildlife

corridor and providing natural sources of food and shelter for your local animals.

On the subject of food, do not feed wildlife! Maybe you saw someone hand-feeding their illegal pet raccoon on social media and you thought it looked cute, but raccoons and other wild animals can be vectors for many diseases including rabies, and wild animals that become too habituated to humans lose their instinctual fear and can become aggressive. Animals have specialized diets, and those that become too reliant on human food will become malnourished and get sick or die from eating the wrong foods. There are others ways to show your love for wildlife than endangering their lives for a photo op!

If you do see any animal that appears sick, injured, or behaving suspiciously, do not attempt to touch it, capture it, or feed it without first consulting wildlife care professionals. There is, for example, currently an outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza particularly in raptors and waterfowl, and very strict precautions must be taken when handling potentially infected wildlife.

Also, it's now spring which means it's baby season! Don't assume baby animals on their own are abandoned—their parents may have left them in what they thought was a safe spot, and they are nearby searching for food. Observe from a safe distance to see if the parents return, and if you are still concerned, please call a licensed wildlife rehabilitator or rescue like California Wildlife Center, International Bird Rescue Center, Marine Mammal Care Center, or Ojai

Raptor Center for further instructions. You may do more harm than good by trying to "help" a baby animal that doesn't need it. And please hold off on tree trimming until the fall or winter, after nesting season.

And finally, for the sake of your beloved cats' wellbeing and for the wellbeing of all our wildlife, keep your cats indoors! 🐾

FoGP has more information available on our website – and while we recommend using various traps (snap or electronic) to control mice and rats, we'll leave it up to you to do the research.
<https://friendsofgriffithpark.org/breaking-the-poison-chain/>

Your Griffith Park Questions... Answered!

~Brenda Rees,
FoGP board member

Do you have a burning question about the Park you'd like us to answer?

*Let us know by emailing
brenda@friendsofgriffithpark.org*

"I recently hiked up Skyline Trail when I came to the intersection of trails at the top. To the left, I could meet up with Rattlesnake Trail, to the right, was a short trail that ended at some nice views and a picnic table. I never looked at the sign, but this time I did. Migdal Trail it said.

Migdal? What is that? Who is that?"

If you look at a map of Griffith Park trails you'll notice a slew of proper names attached to trails and other Park areas. Do you know the stories behind the names? Let's find out.

ROYCE'S CANYON

The delightful canyon is named after Royce Neuschatz, a former city RAP commissioner and advocate for urban open space, who also served on the board of the Los Angeles Conservancy. She led a successful campaign to stop a proposed dump in this canyon in the early 1980s. The proposed dump, dubbed Toyon II, would have filled the canyon with trash within about 18 months, according to *The Los Angeles Times* report.

BILL ECKERT TRAIL

A Glendale native, Eckert hiked, worked, researched and wrote about Griffith Park for much of his life. Eckert was a Park Ranger and known as a learned botanist and historian of the Park. Co-sponsored by the Park Rangers and the Sierra Club, Eckert's monthly six-mile hikes were extremely popular because of his enthusiasm and detailed knowledge of the flora and fauna of the area.

MARTINEZ ARENA

Located near Travel Town, this open space has been used by horse riders of modest means to school and ride their horses. It was created under the aegis of Ranger Abe Martinez in the early '60s. The arena has been rented to organizations for horse shows, gymkhanas and other equestrian events.

CHARLIE TURNER TRAIL

The honorary "Mayor of Griffith Park," Charlie Turner volunteered in the 1970s as an assistant to artist Dante Orgolini who created the three-acre garden Dante's View in 1965. The British born Turner took over the caretaking duties when Orgolini passed away in 1978. For 15 years, he visited the garden almost every morning to trim trees and prune plants along with watering and erasing graffiti. Speaking of gardens, there are two other "folk gardens" in Griffith Park. One, on the eastern side near Mineral Wells is called Amir's Garden and the other is Captain's Roost, near the Griffith Observatory.

JOE KLOSS WATER STATION

Joe Kloss was a prolific LA-based sign painter who was also was head of the Griffith Park Athletic Club, a group of early morning trail runners. Kloss along with fellow club member Bob Tetrick organized an annual race, the Tetrick Trail Run that became famous for its shenanigans.

BETTE DAVIS PARK

While not a trail, this parcel on the Burbank side of the LA River was named in honor of one of the more famous screen stars, Bette Davis. This small Park also hosts the micro-forest which was modeled after the Miyawaki method of afforestation. (Story available at: <https://friendsofgriffithpark.org/a-micro-forest-for-griffith-park/>)

And now for the...

Migdal Trail:

Probably one of the Park's shortest trails at 834 feet, Migdal Trail bears a Hebrew name. That's all we know. Really. That's it. So if you have any more information, please contact us. We are all bursting with curiosity! ✨

Stay Connected. Sign up for FoGP's E-Blast... friendsofgriffithpark.org



Per Leon Boroditsky, RAP Forestry Division

"There were 56 tree-related emergencies from January through April of this year in the Park; 43 trees were down or removed; 10 were limbs down, and 3 were hanging limbs.

There's an active hawk's nest in Mineral Wells, and RAP is waiting until the hatchlings fledge and our wildlife biologist gives the green light before maintenance can go back in and work. RAP will attempt to save the downed live oak.

Additionally, golf courses were extensively damaged – there were 61 storm-related emergencies on Griffith Park golf courses: with 40 trees removed or down, but still alive, two hanging limbs and 19 down limbs. We were able to save a few of the down oak trees.

There were also down trees along trails and while some were removed, some were pushed over the edge to become homes for wildlife."



One of the saddest sights – the massive old growth live oak that collapsed just south of the Griffith Park Pony Rides (top, left).

Photos: Kathryn Louyse

Winter Strikes a Blow in Griffith Park

~Kathryn Louyse,
FoGP board member

The past winter saw an unprecedented level of destruction from downed trees to water and debris not seen in decades flowing down canyons and overflowing catch basins. And while L.A. Park Maintenance was quickly dispatched to address problems presented by unrooted trees and collapsing branches, they were dealing with massive numbers thanks to Mother Nature, and were hard-pressed to keep up with the level of damage.

According to information obtained from Leon Boroditsky with LA RAP's Forestry Division, 2023 saw a number of situations in the Park, from broken tree limbs to down trees (*see sidebar*). Many of these trees are ending up as mulch for future Park projects and the facility on Griffith Park is being kept busy these days. 🌳

HISTORIC FABRIC

Photos, top: Merry-Go-Round, circa 1940s – kids were still able to grab the brass ring for a free ride.

Center: The day after John Lennon was shot and killed, a make-shift memorial took place at the Merry-Go-Round with hundreds in attendance.

Bottom: Merry-Go-Round from the 1950-60s when kids and adults still flocked to the ride.

The Ups and Downs of Griffith Park's Merry-Go-Round

~Marian Dodge, FoGP board member



The Griffith Park Merry-Go-Round has been a part of Angelenos' lives for 88 years. Children have gravitated toward the happy, upbeat music from its Stinson Military Band Organ with smiles and laughter.

Some horses date back to 1895. The carved and painted horses each have their own personality. "Devil" is a black horse with one leg sticking out in back as if he is going to kick you. "Hannibal" has a stubby unicorn horn guarding his head. "Isolde," carved by renowned carver Charles Loeff, is a dappled beauty with flowers in her reins. A pure white stallion, "Arthur" boasts the profile of a lion above his foreleg. Adults who used to ride the Merry-Go-Round when they were kids are now having just as much fun riding horses with their grandchildren.

The status of the Merry-Go-Round is currently in limbo (*read Park Status, page 5*), but first let's spin back in time for some Merry-go Round reminiscences and notable events.

Retired Park Ranger Bill Eckert shared fond memories of riding the Merry-Go-Round in the 1950s and 60s in *The Griffith Park Quarterly*, May, 1982:

Do you have a personal story to share about the Merry-Go-Round or about Griffith Park? Do you have any photos? Please send to brenda@friendsofgriffithpark.org

I used to come to the Merry-Go-Round when you could jump on the outside row and reach out for a ring that was placed in a long chute frame alongside the Merry-Go-Round. Then if you got a lead ring you threw it into a canvas basket. Once in a while I would be lucky and pick a gold ring that would be placed among the lead rings, about every 12 or 20 rings apart. If you obtained a gold ring in those days you could have another ride free just by turning it in to the box office or by giving it to the ticket taker.

The Merry-Go-Round was a favorite with my children. We'd go to the park for a day's outing in the early 1960's to enjoy a ride and listen to the Wurlitzer organ music.

As years went by, the price of tickets to ride on the Merry-Go-Round went up. After 1951 the fare went up to a quarter. Now with inflation, the same ride is 50 cents. Where else for so little money can you come to relax on a grassy lawn, have your picnic lunch, listen to the carousel music, have your children or grandchildren ride the colorful Merry-Go-Round or roll down the grassy slopes around it? This is but one of many types of amusements and recreation that Griffith Park has to offer residents or visitors that visit the park year-round.

The 1960s were challenging times for the Merry-Go-Round and Park Center

On Memorial Day, 1961 a group of Black youth jumped on and off the ride without paying, and, taking a cue from the Civil Rights protests of the time, called themselves "Freedom Riders." Bystanders came to their defense. The owner called the police. Chief William Parker was known for being antagonistic toward the Black community. Responding officers used racial slurs which exacerbated the situation rather than calming things down. The Park was forced to close and it took 75 officers to quell the race riots.

Throughout the 1960s, Flower Children would frequently gather around the Merry-Go-Round for Love-Ins where they painted their bodies with flowers, drank alcoholic beverages and used drugs. Some interior Merry-Go-Round paintings were vandalized. The Flower Children caused other problems for Park Rangers; for a while families did not feel safe bringing their children to the Merry-Go-Round.

Not all large gatherings near the Merry-Go-Round were contentious. In 1980, about 500 fans gathered peacefully in Park Center for a tribute to John Lennon the day after he was killed in New York. The event was organized by radio rock station KROQ.

Families returned to the Park in great numbers. Little Annie Jewell in her red Santa outfit rode a shiny black jumper horse with her mother Lynne in 1988.

A match made in heaven

Julio Gosdinski emigrated from Peru to the United States when he was 12 years old. While at John Marshall High School, he started working at the Merry-Go-Round on weekends which would become his life's calling. A true kid at heart, Gosdinski loved the Merry-Go-Round and made sure all riders enjoyed it as much as he did.

For years, the arrangement was beneficial. Gosdinski was raised by his single mother, while Merry-Go-Round owner Warren Deasy never had a son. It was a match made in heaven. Deasy appreciated Gosdinski's love of the Merry-Go-Round, the way he engaged with guests, and his sense of humor. Deasy frequently commented that Gosdinski was the son he never had.

When Deasy died in 2011, Gosdinski was surprised to learn he had left him half ownership of the Merry-Go-Round. The other half is owned by Deasy's ex-wife Rosemary West. West maintained the horses and Merry-Go-Round while Gosdinski sold tickets, ran the machinery, selected the music, and interacted with the public practically every day. You couldn't miss his brilliant blue eyes and his irrepressible grin. He knew everyone. He was so proud that his Merry-Go-Round was one of the oldest, largest, and fastest at 14 miles per hour.

Another fan of the Merry-Go-Round was Chuck Simpson's grandmother Jessie. In her honor, 44 family members and friends paid for the restoration of one horse. They threw a big party on-site on February 16, 1986 to celebrate the return of the shiny horse to Griffith Park. Named for Grandma Simpson, "Jessie" is a brown and white horse with a huge red bow around her neck.

Merry-Go-Round owner Rosemary West described the event to Simpson:

It was wonderful of your family to not only do such an amazing thing for us but to do such a joyous event for your family's matriarch. Jessie, the horse, has been our ambassador to many events from being on exhibit at a local bank, to being featured in a magazine, which is where the 3 horse picture is from. The other 3 photos are from when we were painting her. The drawing I did of her is on the cover of our coloring book. The sign for her at the Merry-Go-Round has just the part of the photo that shows the real Jessie and says: "JESSIE"
With fond memories and LOVE The Simpson Family and Friends have supported the restoration of this carousel horse in honor of their Mother, Grandmother, Great-Grandmother, and friend Jessie Gates Simpson.

What is the future of the Griffith Park Merry-Go-Round?

Julio Gosdinski died unexpectedly in 2020; he was 49 years young and had no will. The Probate Court is in the process of determining what will happen to Gosdinski's half of the Griffith Park Merry-Go-Round. A determination may be made soon. Friends of Griffith Park is monitoring the situation.

The Department of Recreation and Parks, Friends of Griffith Park, and a plethora of parents want the Merry-Go-Round to continue to operate in Griffith Park. It is one of the few inexpensive activities for children available in the Park – and it brings such joy and memories for generations.

Currently, this ride is closed due to broken parts in the mechanism that operates the Merry-Go-Round.

We anxiously await its reopening and the chance once again to ride up and down and to hear the magnificent music streaming from its booming interior organ. ✨

Restoring the Fern Dell Pedestrian Bridge

~Ross Arnold, FoGP volunteer coordinator



A bucolic view of the pedestrian bridge surrounded by ferns from the 1930s.

Friends of Griffith Park constantly marvels at the number of individuals willing to pitch in to create a better, safer space for all Park users.

Earlier this year, one Eagle Scout chose as his project, repainting the historic Fern Dell Pedestrian Bridge. Several years earlier, FoGP had provided funding to restore the bridge – a massive undertaking as the center support had completely rotted through and a replacement support had to be located and brought from outside California. Over time, the bridge was again in need of TLC – minor repairs and repainting. On Saturday and Sunday, February 18th and 19th, Scout Troop 301 from Monterey Park joined Eagle Scout Aaron to conduct the necessary work. This project was planned with help from FoGP's Volunteer Coordinator Ross Arnold and Gerry Hans, FoGP President. FoGP purchased materials, paint, stain and other supplies that were used for the project, the scouts provided the muscle, and there were parents and other adults who helped coordinate the efforts.

This Community Service Project was undertaken as part of Aaron's requirement to achieve his Eagle Scout Award – the highest Youth Scouting Award. Additionally, he's earned 21 merit badges and holds a leadership position in his scout troop. Aaron commented "the ability to thoroughly plan, adapt in the moment, and galvanize my peers could only be achieved through the lessons I've learned along the way in Scouting. To the people and visitors of Griffith Park, I hope we provided a valuable service, and to all the volunteers, thank you."

Aaron, Scout Troop 301, and all adult coordinators achieved a superb undertaking – and once again Fern Dell visitors will be able to safely cross this well-traveled historic bridge thanks to the accomplishments of Aaron and his fellow scouts! ✨

More photos of this volunteer event are posted online at friendsofgriffithpark.org



Applying finishing touches to bridge hardware.

Photo: Kathryn Louyse

Bobcat at work

~Michael Perry, FoGP member

(Editor's note: We are always so tickled when members send us photos, whether they are historic images of the Park, or capturing the current landscape. We were thrilled when a FoGP member shared these amazing photos he took of a natural predator hard at work!)



Photo: Michael Perry

I live within walking distance to the Park. Several days a week I photograph birds and other wildlife, in all areas of the Park, and on the 11th of March, in Fern Dell, the rain had lightened up, but not quite quit, and I headed up the Loop Trail, which I had to myself, thanks to the weather. I photographed a few acorn woodpeckers and yellow-rumped warblers; a couple of ducks that were using a puddle as their private lake. Then I hiked a little further and saw a strange shape in a tree alongside the trail.

I got a little closer and recognized that it was a bobcat, sitting haunches-up, eating a big ground squirrel. I moved carefully and quietly and, though the cat checked me out a few times, staring through the mist, it decided I posed no threat, and continued with its late lunch. During this whole period, more than 20 minutes, no other humans came up the trail, and I was able to spend some quality time

with the bobcat.

Fun observation: after eating the (pretty big) squirrel, the bobcat switched trees and started yawning and fighting to keep its eyes open, trying to stay awake, the way we do after Thanksgiving dinner.

I took a lot of photos that day and many are too gory for a family newsletter since he's ripping into the squirrel with gusto. I say, "he's", but we might be looking at a female; I'll bet someone who knows bobcats can properly sex this cat and, if it's female, determine if it's pregnant (we are in mating season.) In a few shots, when it's standing, it looks like the abdomen could be carrying kittens...✿

Great capture Michael! If you have a great shot of the landscape, please email to us at newsletter@friendsofgriffithpark.org.

LAMS/FoGP Partnership in Griffith Park



Photo: Kathryn Louyse

Have you ever attended a mushroom hike with Friends of Griffith Park? If you have, you probably also met members of Los Angeles Mycological Society (LAMS) who provide ample expertise to make it an educational experience. FoGP has hosted these hikes since 2012, except for a few years when rain was scarce.

Now LAMS and FoGP are partnering to formally document the fungi of Griffith Park. LAMS chief mycologist, Rudy Diaz, will lead the work which will include multiple forays yearly. With permission from LA Rec & Parks, fungal specimens will be sparingly collected, identified and then vouchered at UCLA.

Don't take fungi for granted; they provide important mycorrhizal connections underground, providing nutrition and healthy soils to benefit the trees and plants above the ground. And a mushroom is just the fruiting body we sometimes see. As always, FoGP members are invited to participate on the hikes which are always at a slow, fungal pace. Learn more about LAMS: LAmushrooms.org ✿



Photo: Gerry Hans



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friendsofgriffithpark.org/volunteer

Native plantings have taken place throughout the Park recently, but it takes more than just putting them into the ground.

Because of torrential downpours, courtesy of an unusually wet winter, we've also experienced an abundance of invasives, like black mustard and thistle sprouting everywhere.

Our intrepid Wednesday team has taken on several projects. They remove weeds from around new growths, (flags mark these plants) then they attack (and remove) mustards, thistle and other invasives like foxtail. After removing the weeds, bags are placed for pickup by LA Parks Maintenance. Finally, they give new plants a leg-up by watering these natives.)

This area is particularly lovely as penstemon, buckwheat, black sage, and other natives are emerging from the soil.

Photo was taken from the road-way leading up to the Griffith Observatory. Wade works in the foreground while Bettina finishes up in the background.

If you're looking for an organization that gives back, FoGP just might fit the bill. We're always looking for volunteers willing to give a few hours... it's a rewarding feeling knowing you're helping protect Griffith Park!



Before/After Photos: Bettina Boxall