



VALLEY WILDS

May 2010

4444 East Avenue, Livermore, CA 94550-5053 (925)960-2400

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Interpretive programs at Sycamore Grove Park, Veterans Park, Ravenswood Historic Site and Brushy Peak Regional Preserve

Get Those Kids Outside!

by Ranger Patti Cole

Cooling off along the banks of the river. Seeing who could skip rocks the furthest. Cleaning fish caught that morning, to be served for dinner. Pretending to be adventurers in the Amazon jungle, as we explored the dense forest of locust, oak, buckeye and hawthorn. Swinging on thick vines that hung from the trees.



A shriek and jump at being startled by a copperhead snake in the thicket. Catching “lightening bugs” in the field until being called in for bedtime.

These are some of my favorite childhood memories of growing up in Kentucky.

But recalling these memories brings a bit of sadness, too. It makes me think of all the children today who won’t have these kinds of experiences with nature, and that is very sad.

Five years ago Richard Louv’s book, “Last Child in the Woods” was published. This book caused quite a stir as it brought the concept of *nature-deficit disorder* to the attention of people across the country. It shed light on how cultural changes were having significant negative impacts on our children and, therefore, our future.

The related cultural changes stem largely from two sources: advances in technology and stranger-danger.

While there is no denying that the advent of a-television-in-every-house, generally associated with the late 1950’s into the 1960’s, resulted in some level of increased time indoors, it was the technological advancement of small and cost effective computers

(a.k.a. personal computers), beginning in the 1980’s, that has had the most devastating effect on children’s connection with nature and the outdoors.

Here are a few associated facts realized over the past 30 years:

- Significant increase in childhood obesity and type-II diabetes
- Children today are predicted to have shorter life spans than their parents (the first time this has occurred since World War II)
- Children today have less unstructured playtime and less discretionary time (9 hours less per week, between 1981-2003)
- Fear of child abductions (stranger-danger) has led to less free time outdoors for children

Children are losing ground in terms of physical well-being, psychological well-being, social development, and having a connection with nature. They need to get outdoors!

To address this need, a campaign was initiated in California which included the development of the California Children’s Outdoor Bill of Rights. The objective of the campaign is to ensure that, by the end of their 14th year, each child has had the opportunity to:

- Discover California’s past
- Splash in the water
- Camp under the stars
- Explore nature
- Play on a team
- Celebrate their heritage
- Learn to swim
- Follow a trail
- Catch a fish
- Play in a safe place

LARPD has numerous offerings to help each child



Please see “Outside,” page 3

May Programs

Birds of North Livermore

Sunday, May 2 8:00 p.m.

It's time again for our spring pilgrimage to the north side of town. We'll be looking for birds in breeding plumage, breeding activity, and any signs of nests or young. This is an easy walk, appropriate for all ages and levels of birding experience. We will travel along a wheelchair accessible paved path. This program will last about 2 hours. For more information or directions, please call (925) 960-2400.

Ranger Patti Cole

*Marlin Pound Park
2010 Bluebell Drive
(across from Buckskin)*

Mother's Day Birds

Sunday, May 9 8:00 a.m.

At this time of year mother (and father) birds are busy defending their territories, protecting their brood from nest robbers, cleaning out the nest, feeding their young'uns and teaching them the finer points of flying. We'll take a long, in-depth look at the domestic life of these wild creatures on this birdwalk, which will last about two hours. Beginners are encouraged to attend. Don't forget your binoculars and field guides; we'll have a few to lend.

Ranger Pat Sotelo

*Sycamore Grove Park
Nature Area Entrance*

Creatures of the Night

Saturday, May 8 7:45 p.m.

Sycamore Grove usually closes at sunset, but here is your opportunity to see what happens in the park when the sun goes down. Join us to learn about the local denizens of the dark and enjoy a short, slow-paced wander to see if we can find any signs of them. We'll also play some fun games and use all of our senses to explore the night without any flashlights. No Hoot Owl groups please.

Ranger Amy Wolitzer

Sycamore Grove Park



Birds

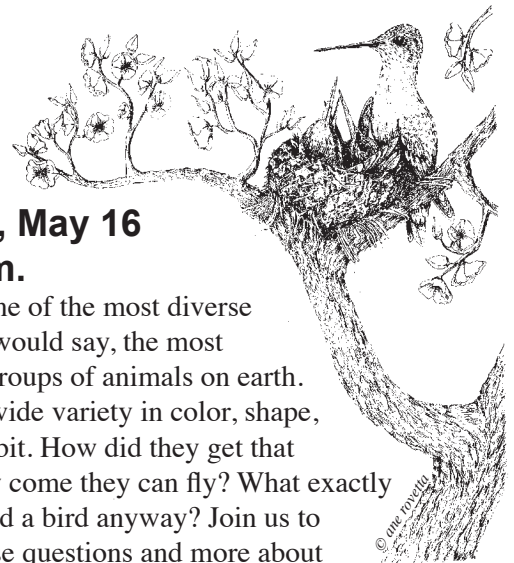
Sunday, May 16

2:00 p.m.

Birds are one of the most diverse and, some would say, the most beautiful, groups of animals on earth. There is a wide variety in color, shape, size and habit. How did they get that color? How come they can fly? What exactly makes a bird a bird anyway? Join us to answer these questions and more about these wonderful animals.

Ranger Dawn Soles

Veterans Park



About the programs...

Unless otherwise noted, weekend programs are 1-2 hours in length.

A donation of \$2 is requested.

A \$4 parking fee is charged at Sycamore Grove and Veterans Park. Annual passes are also available and provide a substantial savings for repeat park visitors.

Contact Information

For more information on the parks, ranger-led programs or other LARPD programs or facilities check our website or call one of the numbers below.

www.larpd.dst.ca.us

Telephone numbers

Ranger Office (925) 960-2400
LARPD Office (925) 373-5700

More May Programs

Late Spring Wildflowers

Saturday, May 22 10:00 a.m.

The first wave of wildflowers is over, but here comes round two! As spring progresses, we get a whole different set of species to admire. This time we'll be searching for mariposa lilies, Lessingia (purple asters), Indian paintbrush, blow wives, clarkia, wally baskets and more. The full hike will be about five miles with some moderately steep climbs. If five miles sounds too long for you, please join us anyway, and feel free to head back when you begin to tire. The hike will last two to three hours.

Ranger Amy Wolitzer

Sycamore Grove Park
Wetmore Road Entrance

Orienteering Adventure!

Saturday, May 29 10:00 a.m.

For the last several years I have led several compass courses through Sycamore Grove, and I am often asked why we are following predetermined bearings instead of orienteering. The time has come to attempt something new! Bring your compass (if you have one) to the park this Saturday for a morning of navigating by map and compass alone. Please wear good hiking shoes, and be prepared to go off trail.

Ranger Glen Florey

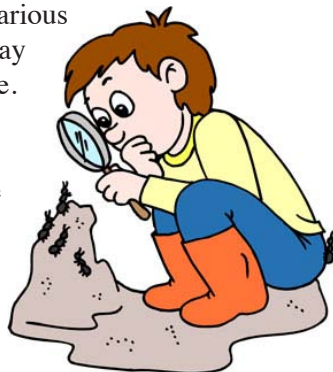
Sycamore Grove Park
Wetmore Road Entrance

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in our District experience these Rights. (Check out the [LARPD web site](#) for programs and activities.)

Additionally, we park rangers have committed to offering a series of family-oriented summer evening programs to further provide opportunity for nature exploration and experiences in the outdoors. These programs will be held at various starting times on Wednesday evenings beginning in June.

A special astronomy fee program in August will include camping under the stars in Sycamore Grove Park. You won't want to miss that – just be sure to bring the kids, too.



Special Programs

Preregistration is required. You may register on-line at larpd.dst.ca.us or by phone at (925) 373-5707, or in person at 4444 East Avenue. **Since these are group tours, there will be no refunds.**

Brushy Peak

Historic Brushy Peak Saturday, May 8

Here's your chance to explore a pristine natural area of Brushy Peak Regional Preserve that is not open to the public, and if nature cooperates, see a variety of beautiful wildflowers. Hikes include a trip to the top of Brushy Peak for fabulous views of the Livermore Valley and the Great Central Valley and are approximately 4 miles round trip, including a moderately difficult climb. Due to the sensitive nature of the site and the fact that it is closed to the public, all participants must stay with the group at all times. For specific information on these hikes, call the ranger office at 960-2400. This trip is approximately 9 am-2 pm. Participants under age 18 must be accompanied by parent. Fee: \$25

Maiden Venture (Backpacking for women)

**Saturday-Sunday,
May 15-16**

If you've wanted to try backpacking but would feel more comfortable if the guys stayed home, join us on our women's backpacking trip in Sunol Regional Park. We'll make a stop at scenic Little Yosemite and continue to the backpack camp where we'll spend the night under the stars. Transportation, Saturday dinner and Sunday breakfast included. Participants must provide own pack and sleeping bag. Don't worry if you don't have the gear. Renting is recommended. We'll give you tips on what to look for and go over some backpacking essentials at our pre-trip meeting. Due to rules in wilderness areas no smoking allowed. Since this is a group tour, there will be no refunds. Fee: \$97
Rangers Aileen Theile and Sharon Peterson



The Joy of Truffles

by Ranger Pat Sotelo

“Presently, we were aware of an odour gradually coming towards us, something musky, fiery, savoury, mysterious – a hot drowsy smell, that lulls the senses, and yet enflames them the truffles were coming.”

-William Makepeace Thackeray

The mere mention of the word “truffle” in some circles can send people into swoons of gastronomic delight. Chefs and food aficionados value truffles for use in gourmet cookery. “In price per pound, truffles are one of the most valued organisms in the world,” says Randy Molina, a retired research botanist with the Pacific Northwest Research Station. Researchers have found, however, that truffles are even more valuable because of their indispensable role in the ecological health and diversity of forests and of the animals that live there.

But I must digress. Here at the ranger office we receive scientific periodicals geared toward those readers with an ecological bent. One of the best of those journals is “Science Findings,” published by the Pacific Northwest Research Station, a division of the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Forest Service. The November 2009 edition of that excellent journal was dedicated solely to truffles.

I remembered, from a *Valley Wilds* article I wrote two years ago about northern flying squirrels, that these squirrels depend on truffles for food, and in return help spread the spores of these beneficial fungi. Journal in hand, I read on, and was inspired to write an article on these amazing fungi. The information and quotes used in this article are from the November 2009 edition of “Science Findings.”

Truffles (like other mushrooms) are the fruiting body, or sporocarp, of the fungus organism and are the “means of reproduction for microscopic fungal filaments collectively called mycelia.” These thread-like filaments spread and grow throughout the forest soils extracting nutrients, water, and food from plants - both dead and alive.



Since fungi do not produce food through photosynthesis, “many form symbiotic relationships with the root systems of shrubs and trees to access essential carbons and sugars. In return, the fungi enable the trees and plants to glean valuable phosphorus, nitrogen, and water from the soil.” This mutually beneficial fungus and root relationship is known as mycorrhizal symbiosis. More than 100 trees and plants in the Pacific Northwest depend on mycorrhizal symbiosis with truffle fungi.

While mushrooms can pop out of the soil and release spores from their caps into the wind, truffles remain buried in the soil like little potatoes. What’s a truffle to do? As the truffle matures, “...it begins to give off an odor. Some species have a distinctive smell that may be fruity, garlicky, lemony, fishy, or earthy.... The odor attracts forest-dwelling mammals who then dig up and eat the truffles. Once eaten, the spores remain intact through an animal’s digestive system and are dispersed when the animal defecates.”

At least 45 different mammals depend on truffles, from gophers, squirrels, chipmunks and rabbits to elk, deer, and bear. “Like humans, these mammals seem to enjoy a variety of tastes,” says PNW research botanist Jane Smith. “There are a lot of vitamins and minerals in truffles that aren’t available anywhere else.”

Much of the health of the forest and the animals living there depends on unseen mycorrhizal relationships involving truffles. Botanists and biologists have learned that forest management decisions must be based on an understanding of the complex interactions among all of the organisms in an ecosystem, even those hidden underneath the soil.

The beguiling delights of these mysterious, magical truffles are slowly being revealed by scientists. But perhaps it is the mammals (including humans) that eat them who experience most intimately the joy of truffles.

Park News

Summer registration

Registration for summer classes and programs begins May 5. Summer Nature Camp, kayaking, stargazing, and escapes to the Sierra are just some of the outdoor possibilities. Learn more on our [web site](#).