

Valley Wilds

A publication of the LARPD Open Space Unit

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Nancy's Garden

If you came to the Arroyo Road entrance to Sycamore Grove Park last spring you couldn't help but notice the native garden. Behind the restroom this area bordered by logs was overflowing with flowers.

By Ranger Amy Wolitzer



The Native Garden Photo by Amy Wolitzer

Orange poppies dominated the scene, pink clarkia bloomed in profusion, lupines, Chinese Houses and Owl's Clover were scattered here and there. Almost hidden amongst this profusion of flowers were a variety of native plants like sages, gooseberry, sticky monkey flower and soaproot identified by stone signs.

Where did this beautiful garden come from? It had humble beginnings when in 2003 a large storm felled a eucalyptus tree behind the restrooms. The tree was removed and staff took advantage of this opportunity to begin restoring the area with native plants. A few sages, buckeyes and an oak were planted. The staff that had been working on restoring the area left in 2004 due to budget cuts and the area was left to grow wild.

were at first overlooked and trampled by kids Nancy initiated efforts to make the restoration area look more established by making borders around the plants with rocks and suggesting we create a border for the area with logs. The logs not only looked nice and unobtrusive, they also provided good habitat for lizards and other small critters.

In the spring of 2008 Nancy Harden began volunteering at Sycamore Grove Park. It soon became clear one of her many talents was gardening. She took an interest in fixing up this forgotten restoration area. She weeded the entire area (no small task) and worked with staff to put in native plants including sages, bunch grasses, coyote brush, California fuchsia, soaproot, sticky monkey flower, gooseberry and more. What began as a small restoration area soon became a native garden. When the plants

Nancy made signs to identify some of the plants. As soon as the signs went up people began taking interest in the project. Practically every time she worked in the garden park visitors would come up and ask about the project. People were interested in knowing what each plant was, how big it grew and if it flowered etc. More than once, Nancy had people come back with their

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Livermore Area Recreation and Park District

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Nancy's Garden (Countinued)

cameras to take pictures of the plants with the signs so they could remember what they were looking for when they went to the plant nursery.

Although these plants are well adapted to the hot, dry California summers they benefit from a little extra TLC while they are getting established. All summer, Nancy watered the plants twice a week, first with buckets and later with a hose. When she watered lizards would scramble out from under the logs to catch some of the cooling spray and when she finished birds would hop around hoping to find some insects brought out by the water.

In January 2010 a volunteer work day was held to expand the garden. Fifteen people worked hard to clear weeds, spread mulch, create a rock-lined pathway and plant more native plants. Thanks in part to a donation from a generous community member, we were able to include stone signs that identify some of the plants and provide more information about them.

On a rainy afternoon in late January we spread handfuls



of wildflower seed on top of the mulch, not sure if they would take. Well, they took! Nancy pulled out invasive weeds that popped up and the flowers flourished. She eventually had to "weed" the poppies in some areas as they threatened to take over the featured native plants and even the path. Summer came and as the annual wildflowers finished blooming, some of the perennial natives added color. The sticky yellow blooms of the gum plant brought in all kinds of insects. Butterflies stopped to enjoy the purple daisy-like *Lessingia*. The red trumpets of the California Fuschia brought in the hummingbirds.

Late in the summer of 2010, Nancy and the garden faced a serious challenge – a gopher moved into town and began pulling plants down by the roots. It even got some of the sturdy established shrubs. It was very disheartening to see the plants Nancy had been babying disappear literally overnight. We tried filling the holes, flooding the holes, and sprinkling hot chili powder but we could not convince the gopher to leave the garden. We are perhaps

having some success with a sonic repeller - a solar powered device that emits a low frequency noise gophers supposedly dislike. However, the timing was such that it may have been the change of seasons rather than the device responsible for the decline in their activity. So we had to start anew with many of the plants. With Nancy's care and the help of a new volunteer - Ken Asmus, they are growing quickly.

So that's the story of Nancy's Native Garden. What was once an unremarkable area filled with non-native invasive plants has become a beautiful attraction easily accessible to those who visit the park. Even those who journey no farther than the picnic area have a chance to take in the beauty of the garden and learn a little about the diversity of our local ecosystem. While eating or resting visitors can watch the wildlife and appreciate Nancy's garden.

The LARPD Open Space Staff would like to extend a big THANK YOU to Nancy and other volunteers for making this beautiful garden possible! Come to the Arroyo Road entrance this spring to enjoy it while



Ranger-led Programs

Experience nature in a special way. Programs are generally 1 - 2 hours in length. A \$2 donation is requested. A \$5 parking fee is charged at both park entrances.

April Programs

Quick Look:

Spring Compass Course
Saturday, April 2
10:00 am

Riparian Birding Adventure
Sunday, April 3
5:00 pm

Wildflower Wander at Holdener Park
Sunday, April 10
10:00 am

Ants!
Saturday, April 16
10:00 am

A Kinder, Gentler Wildflower Walk
Sunday, April 17
2:00 pm

Nightlife In The Park
Saturday, April 23rd
7:45 pm



Red-winged Blackbird Photo by Glen Florey

Spring Compass Course

Saturday, April 2nd

10:00 am

Come out to Veterans Park this Saturday to learn the wonders of finding your way without the assistance of a satellite powered GPS. We will be going off trail for an adventure into some of the less well known parts of the park. If you have your own compass, bring it to use, but we will have extras to loan out. Wear comfortable, sturdy shoes with closed toes.

Ranger Glen Florey

Veterans Park

Riparian Birding Adventure

Sunday, April 3

5:00 pm

Murrieta Meadows is a new program site for us! We'll explore the riparian area along the Arroyo Mocho, parallel to Daisyfield Drive. This area is thick with vegetation and tall trees in some places, then a bit more open with a clear view of the meandering stream in other areas. We should see an interesting variety of species throughout the various habitat types. We will be following a paved trail. Cancelled if raining.

Ranger Patti Cole
Murrieta Meadows

Meet on Daisyfield Drive
across from Hagemann Park

Wildflower Wander at Holdener Park

Sunday, April 10

10:00 am

Not a lot of people know about Holdener Park (Located at the end of Hansen Road) but the wildflowers there are amazing! We'll take advantage of a newly constructed trail to get part way into the park, but this "wander" will involve walking through the grass so wear appropriate shoes and long pants. Park in the parking lot near the water towers.

Ranger Amy Wolitzer

Holdener Park
East end of Hansen Road

Ants!

Saturday, April 16th

10:00 am

Their strength is legendary, as is their ability to ruin a picnic or raid the kitchen pantry. Ants are amazing insects that are found all over the world. Some are hunters, some are gatherers and some are farmers. Join us today to look into the life of these little critters and explore some of the different species found around the world.

Ranger Dawn Soles

Veterans Park

When a bobcat, mountain lion, or other animal used to living in the great outdoors wanders into a residential neighborhood why are they quite often killed and not brought back to their home in the wilderness?

-Valley Wilds Reader Vicki Newman

Ranger Patti answers:

There can be several reasons for a wild animal being put down if it is found in a neighborhood. If it wandered into a neighborhood of its own accord, it might be sick or injured, making it a potential threat to people and pets. Also, animals can be carriers of disease, parasites, etc., without showing obvious signs. If that animal is captured then released elsewhere it can infect an otherwise healthy population in the wild.

Assuming it isn't sick or injured, oftentimes simply capturing the animal alive and then relocating it to a "wild" area can result in a violent death for that animal. In general, it is virtually impossible to know where the animal actually came from. So, by dropping it into another animal's territory, it is likely to be attacked or killed by the resident animal. In the case of mountain lions, males are forced out of their parents' territory when they are about 18 to 20 months old. They must travel, searching for their own new territory. Young males at this stage are referred to as "transients". These are the ones you are likely to hear about in the press because they are inexperienced, probably having difficulty finding an available territory, and may be

getting desperate for food or other resources. This does not necessarily mean they are more aggressive or dangerous; just more likely to be in/near our neighborhoods. Unfortunately, this means they are very likely to be destroyed on-scene.

It's a tough decision, trying to figure out what is the best thing to do for the wild animal and the community. There are a lot of variables to be considered and each case can have its own unique set of circumstances. I hear more and more about communities that are taking less-than-lethal actions against large predators like mountain lions and bears. It seems the more we learn about these animals and come to better understand their behaviors, the more alternative possibilities are considered.

*More information can be found on
The department of Fish and Game's website:
<http://www.dfg.ca.gov/news/issues/lion/>*



Cougar

Photo by Valerie Abbott



More April Programs

A Kinder, Gentler Wildflower Walk

Sunday, April 17 2:00 pm

Most of our wildflower hikes require a hike far into the hills but for this walk we will stay down in the flatlands. There is still plenty of flora to be found This will be a slow-paced walk of about one mile. Strollers are welcome but be aware trails are dirt and rocky in some areas. Please call for directions if you do not know where the nature area entrance is.

Ranger Amy Wolitzer

Sycamore Grove Park, Nature Area Entrance

Nightlife In The Park

Saturday, April 23rd 7:45 p.m.

Ever wonder what happens when everyone goes home and the Rangers lock the gates at night? The animals come out and play! We will use our five senses and see what we can find while taking a short, easy walk through the park, all without flashlights! Reservations requested, by calling (925) 960-2400. Cancelled if raining.

Ranger Jamie Greco

Sycamore Grove Park, Nature Area Entrance