

Valley Wilds

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Fairyland

I hadn't believed it. Not really. I mean, in this day and age of science and technology, how many people really do?

While doing research on plants I had stumbled across a passage that said "On September 29th the doors open between our world and the land of fairie." It didn't really mean anything to me then. I ended up working that night in Sycamore Grove.

I started the evening inspecting one of our single track trails. It was just getting dark when I began walking along the familiar trail. It took me a few seconds to realize that something was different. I realized that the trail was bordered with thick, lush, green grass and flowers of all shapes, sizes and colors were blooming everywhere.

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School Nature Programs

Livermore Area Recreation and Park District

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By Ranger Dawn Soles



I stopped dead in my tracks. This shouldn't be. This time of year the grass should be sparse and yellow and few, if any, flowers should be blooming. What was going on? A light breeze began to blow, bringing with it wonderful smells and the sound of laughter. I decided to walk on and see if I could find whoever was laughing.

As I walked I started to see things. Not pink elephants or anything like that, but what appeared to be small people. I dismissed this as an over-active imagination. It was late and I was tired after all. But, if I concentrated, I could just hear them talking in tiny voices. They were very excited, discussing their upcoming ride. To humor my imagination I started looking for little horses. I didn't see any. The little folks stopped at the edge of the trail and started grabbing handfuls of grass. I was trying to figure out what they were doing when they each leaped onto the grass which turned into little horses and off they rode into the park! Wow! I couldn't believe my eyes. I was pretty well convinced that I must be dreaming. Since it was a dream I figured it couldn't hurt to keep walking.

The next thing I saw just about

had me falling out of my boots! I looked at the creek to admire the willow trees. The trees were moving. I don't mean blowing in the wind, but walking around the edge of the creek! Not only were they walking but they seemed to be talking to themselves. What a dream! It was pretty cool - scary, but cool. I kept walking.

I came across another group of little people. They were dressed as though going to a grand ball. Beautiful long gowns were worn by all the ladies. They stopped at the edge of a thistle patch and began to pull the thistle flowers apart. The flowers transformed into gloves that the ladies pulled on. The group turned and walked into the dark. One lady had dropped a glove. I picked it up to keep it safe. I hoped she would come back and ask me for it.

I was approaching one of my favorite trees, a beautiful, old and stately sycamore. As I got closer I heard someone speaking. It was an

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Fairyland (Continued)



old, grizzled voice, deep but somehow gentle. I was intrigued. I came up to the tree and felt my jaw drop. The sycamore was still firmly rooted to the earth, but a giant, wizened face had emerged from the trunk. He was speaking to a group of little people and animals that were gathered around. I didn't pay close attention to the words, I was too fascinated by the scene. The animals and little people were listening intently and seemed to be nodding to themselves as though the information was tremendously important. I stayed for a little while to watch the amazing sight. Then, I continued walking.

I started paying more attention to what was going on in the areas surrounding the trail. I saw faces emerging and disappearing in the creek water. The wind itself seemed to breathe. The earth at my feet seemed to smile. Occasionally I would walk through warm spots of air. The night was so alive. I saw guards surrounding the blackberry vines. An elderberry tree was decorated beautifully, with little candles and flowers surrounding it. Buttercups were being gathered by a little old woman into a basket full of herbs. My impression was that she was a healer of some sort. Everywhere I looked there was activity and it was wonderful!

As I approached the large oak tree that marked the end of the trail I found the source of the laughter that had drawn me to begin this journey. There was a large ring of mushrooms growing. Inside the ring, little people danced and played and ate and drank and laughed. It looked like amazing fun. I really wanted to join in but didn't want to intrude. The little woman that had been gathering herbs stopped near me and I asked her if it would be okay for me to join in. She said, "It would be fine, but the night is almost over and the party is about to end." I was very

disappointed. Then, she said "If you want to go home it would be best if you went now." I asked her "How?" She said, "Go to the oak and knock on the door." I glanced at the tree then turned back to ask "What door?", but she was gone. I quietly made my way to the tree and, lo and behold, there was a door. I knocked gently and it swung open. I was a little nervous but I went through the door – and found myself back at the beginning of the trail. It was no longer green, there were no flowers or laughter or sweet smells. I pinched myself and tried to figure out what had just happened. It must have been a daydream – and a pretty good one at that!

I bent down and picked up the trash bucket and started to pick up trash. A few feet down the trail I decided I wanted some lip balm. I reached into my pocket and pulled out a little glove that slowly turned into a thistle flower, and blew away....

Mythological Roots

I was trying to discover how some of the plants of Sycamore Grove got their names when I stumbled across some information on their more "mystical" roots. I found the information to fun and interesting – it just begged to become a story. The origins of the journey you just read are below:

Fairyland – also known as Tir Nan Og, is an enchanted place where fairies live. It is the land of eternal youth, where everything is lush and green and there is nothing to do but enjoy life. It is a place where time stands still and there is no sickness or death.

Sycamore Tree – Has been known in some cultures as the Old Man of the Forest, a tree that is sought by those seeking wisdom. To seek the wisdom of the sycamore is to seek the keys to the universe. It holds the knowledge of the laws of abundance and supply and how to use them to your greatest benefit. Attuning to the Sycamore will augment all connections to nature.

Oak Tree – This tree has been sacred to many cultures over time. It is thought to be home to a powerful spirit that has great strength and endurance. Oaks hold the ancient knowledge of the continuity of life and are thought to be doors into time itself. In many ancient languages "oak" meant door. Because of its link with time it is a natural doorway to and from the faerie realms.

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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.

September Programs

Quick Look:

Owls
Saturday, Sept. 3
2:00 pm

September Sunset Spectacular
Saturday, Sept. 10
7:00 pm

Seeds of Life
Sunday, Sept. 11
2:00 pm

Harvest Birds
Sunday, Sept. 18
8:00 am

Gall-y
Saturday, Sept. 24
2:00 pm

Rut's Up?
Sunday, Sept. 25
2:00 pm

Owls

Saturday, September 3rd

2:00 pm

Come discuss some of the legend and lore of these mysterious animals, as we debunk what is true and what is false. We will learn about some of their physical adaptations that set them apart from other birds. There will be specimens of some of the local owls to help you identify the owls you commonly see around our area

Ranger Jamie Greco

*Sycamore Grove Park
Arroyo Road Entrance*

September Sunset Spectacular

Saturday, September 10

7:00 pm

The moon will be high in the eastern sky as we set out into the park to enjoy the cooling temperatures and the wonderful late summer sunset. As the rest of the park visitors head to the exits we will be setting out into the park to enjoy the sunset and the crepuscular creatures who favor that time of day. We will be hiking on both paved and unpaved parts of the park so please bring comfortable walking shoes.

Ranger Glen Florey

*Sycamore Grove Park
Wetmore Road Entrance*

Seeds of Life

Sunday, September 11

2:00 pm

Some travel in the water, some travel in the air, some travel in animal's bellies, some even travel in your socks! Join us for a short walk in search of seeds of all types. We'll take a close look to see if we can discover how they get around and speculate on how these amazing adaptations evolved. We may even be eating some seeds so bring water and an adventurous appetite.

Ranger Amy Wolitzer

*Sycamore Grove Park
Wetmore Road Entrance*

Harvest Birds

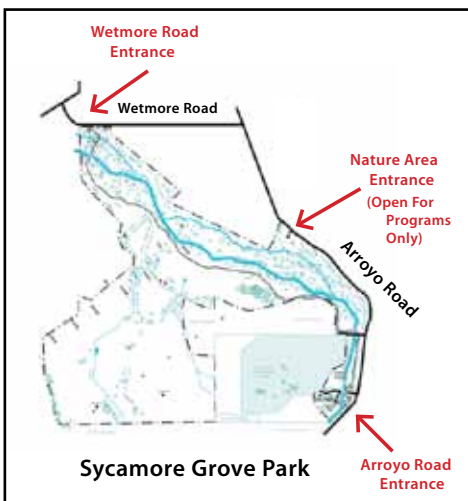
Sunday, September 18

8:00 am

For several weeks now the birds have sensed the days getting shorter and the coming of the cooler, shorter days of autumn. Some of them are preparing for the rigors of migration. We'll look to see what winter birds are already here and what summer birds have yet to leave. Perhaps we'll catch a glimpse of migrating birds on their journeys to warmer climes. If you have binoculars and field guides, please bring them.

Ranger Pat Sotelo

*Sycamore Grove Park
Arroyo Road Entrance*



More September Programs

Gall-ly

Saturday, Sept. 24th 2:00pm

If you look at many of our trees and shrubs you will notice that some of them have bumps, bulges or outright growths on them. Join us today to learn about these strange and interesting formations – galls. We will spend some time talking about how they form, the different types, and then go on a short walk to see how many different kinds we can find.

Ranger Dawn Soles

*Sycamore Grove Park
Arroyo Road Entrance
(5049 Arroyo Road)*

Ruts Up?

Sunday, Sept. 25 11:00 am

Fall is the happening time for amore among ungulates. Today we'll discuss the rut and what it means in terms of deer behavior and biology, as we hike along some of their favorite trails. Be prepared to hike dirt trails with some off-trail excursions. Reservations required by calling (925) 960-2400.

Ranger Patti Cole

*Sycamore Grove Park
Nature Area Entrance*



Mythological Roots (Continued from page 2)

Blackberry - It was taboo to eat blackberries in many cultures. It was considered a fairy fruit, one they protected faithfully, and was therefore untouchable.

Thistle – Also called pixies' gloves, thought to be used by fairies to clothe themselves.

Willow – A magical tree with great mysticism and life to it. Its spirit (and the elves who live under it) are the keepers of the knowledge of herbology. The willow tree talks to us to share its knowledge, but if you don't know how to listen it can be frightening.

Elderberry – The Elder is thought of as the tree of birth and death, beginning and end. It is the spirit of transition. It teaches how to awaken opportunity, to cast out the old and build the new. The elder spirit facilitates contact with all the beings of the woods. Elder trees and bushes are said to protect fairies, especially at night, from negative energy and from people and entities who would do them harm and is THE sacred faerie tree. It is very foolish to cut down or in any way cause harm to an Elder as doing so will incur the wrath of the Faerie.

Buttercups – The flower of healing energy. This flower is known to help one find one's own special gifts and how to apply them.

Mushrooms – Mushrooms are linked to "Fairy Rings". Fairy rings were believed to be places of dangerous enchantment that formed where fairies danced.

Teachers and Parents: Click [here](#) to check out LARPD's School Nature Program offerings! Parents: for as little as \$80 you can sponsor an in-class program for your child's class. Call the LARPD Ranger Office at (925) 960 2400 or email psimi@larpd.dst.ca.us for more information.



Programs include...

In the Park: "A Walk in the Wild", "Life in the Pond", "The Wonderful World of Plants"

In the Classroom: "Creepy Crawlers", "In the Dark", "Mammalian Madness", "California Indians"