

SANTA FE DAM NATURE CENTER NEWSLETTER



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News Updates

By Thomas Chang

New Snake at the Nature Center

On January 20th, the Nature Center received a beautiful Rosy Boa from the Whittier Narrows Nature Center. The Rosy Boa makes a great addition to the Nature Center's live snake exhibits, which also includes a California King Snake and a Gopher Snake. Both of these snakes continue to grow and thrive under the care of Volunteers Mike Hoare and Taylor Chen.

Rosy Boas are small boas, usually nocturnal, but may be active in the daytime during early spring. These boas are primarily terrestrial but will also climb low shrubs. Once common in the Foothills, the snakes may still be found in desert habitat, arid scrub, chaparral, and ravines. They spend most of their time hiding under rocks.

In nature, Rosy Boas eat small mammals, including cottontail rabbits and birds. They tend to be calm snakes, seldom biting, but will coil into a ball with head in center if frightened. Come to see the Rosy Boa at the Nature Center!

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NEW Improvements at the Park & Nature Center: Teamwork of County, Friends & Volunteers!

The County repaired the road leading to the Nature Center & Natural Area, adding more parking spaces for visitors and hikers. The new parking also includes two large spaces for school buses. Upgrades on Nature Center flooring, plus new water fountain access and availability are also welcomed, thanks to donations. The new fountain will better serve freshwater needs of hikers, cyclists, and pets. Come and experience these new improvements.

Thanks to our generous donors and the Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation for making these improvements.

Eagle Scout Redbud Woodland Planting

On the morning of Saturday, January 15th, David Rodgers and his Eagle Project Team from Troop 7 planted more than 30 Western Redbuds trees near the Park Office by the

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Monthly Calendar of Events

First Saturdays at 10 am – Guided nature walk

Second Saturdays at 10 am – Nature talks & tours

Third Saturdays at 8 am – Guided bird walks

Fourth Saturdays at 10 am – Habitat Rangers



Eagle Scout Project Team/Troop 7 takes a bow for planting the Redbud Woodland at Santa Fe Dam.

The Birds Knocking at My Door

By Terry Young, M.S.

OH! It's seven o'clock in the morning and my *Aphelocoma*, or California Scrub Jay, is calling me to get up and feed him *Tenebrio molitor*!

My cat, Mouse, has been wanting me to get up. He has been walking around my "perimeter" trying to bite my nose since dawn. Yes, I have been moderately successful pretending to be asleep under the covers then, "Jay" called. I rise up and Mouse is discouraged - he won't be cuddling under the covers this morning and enjoying the occasional nip of my chin. He sits very still looking forlorn. "You're a good 'mouse,' Mouse," as I pet his head.

I grab the container with the 500 Tenebrids from the kitchen counter calling, "JAY! JAY!". The "mealworms" are young larvae of the Family of Tenebrionidae and related to the Darkling Beetles in the Genus of *Eleodes*. You know the *Eleodes* as the one-inch long black beetles that raise their hind ends up if you touch them on their back... well, OK... I touch them on their back. Sometimes, they do smell funny. But they only ooz that liquid. They do not squirt. I love to see them on the trails up in the San Gabriel Mountains. They walk out and about knowing full well they taste terrible.

It's cold outside and I put on my

jacket/sweater which is too much of a sweater to be a jacket, but has a zipper and a hood which is more of a jacket than a sweater... Hmmm... the pockets are full of peanuts, my cell phone, a rock and a stick or two, and a pair of reading glasses.

->So, it's a storage container?? <-

"JAY!" I open the door and call out again, "JAY!" The little "person," as I call him, swoops down from above and sits on a branch of the lemon tree by my back door. He is so near, I could kiss his blue head. I give him his "worms" mostly, one at a time. I count 21 this morning. Hmmm. It was pretty cool and damp last night. He takes a few extra to feed his new friend who has followed him for nearly a year. His friend, who is bigger and bluer, sits far away from me but, close enough so that I can just see... that his "eyebrow" is... complete... and is a thin line over his (her?) eye. My "person" has bushy eyebrows. Just like the other jay who used to fly with my "person" two years ago.

I fed and played with, who I believe to be, my little "person's" brother. They both have unusually bushy eyebrows for scrub jays. I called him my "crazy" jay. He would dive from the highest tree to grab a peanut from

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Contributions & Sponsorship

Many big thanks to those wonderful people who thought of the Santa Fe Dam Nature Center when giving donations.

Did you know the Nature Center is entirely operated by volunteers and money donations from the public? All donations and sponsorship of projects are welcomed. Your tax deductible contributions will benefit the environment, promote nature education, and keep the Nature Center open and growing. Thank you.

Volunteers Needed!

Volunteers play an essential role in the Natural Area of Santa Fe Dam County Park, operating the Nature Center, educating about nature and serving the public. If you want to help preserve the environment and promote conservation, we offer a multitude of opportunities to volunteer. Please email SGMRC for volunteer info.

FIVE Easy Steps in Becoming a Volunteer:

1. Attend orientation
2. Review the Docent Training & Protocols
3. Complete application and fingerprinting
4. Build skills by practicing, mentoring, and shadow-training with docents
5. Attend ongoing education classes and outings offered throughout the year

Eagle Scouts Tree Planting: Continued from page 1...

lake, and near the park entrance area.

For a job well done, Congratulations go to David and his Team, plus project sponsors from the Boy Scouts of America, Santa Fe Dam County Park, LAC Good-Will Industries, LACFD-Forestry Unit, and San Gabriel Mts Regional Conservancy (SGMRC). Also, noteworthy, was this new venture by Good-Will Industries in planning an environmental project partnership with



David and his Eagle Project Service Team at work.



Eagle Project scouts plant trees at Santa Fe Dam

CRV Items

Bring your CRV items (i.e.: plastic water bottles and aluminum cans) for funding Nature Center projects. We recycle these items and use the funds for care and feeding of Nature Center animals & birds.



Young redbud trees find a new home at Santa Fe Dam.

SGMRC to share with the region of the San Gabriel Valley.

More information about these very striking native trees: Western redbuds are drought tolerant, small native trees commonly found in the foothills below 4500 ft. Their beautiful magenta, pea-shaped flowers bloom in early March in chaparral and woodlands.

Leaves are heart-shaped and pointed at the tips. In fall, the leaves drop, exposing clusters of flat seed pods which often persist until spring. Native Americans used tree stems for baskets, leaves for incense, and roasted seed pods for food. Flowers and young pods are also edible. Redbuds are important trees for wildlife.

SGMRC Serving Up a Tasty Tribute to Volunteers!

By Dr. Ann Croissant, President/Board of Directors
San Gabriel Mountains Regional Conservancy

Special Thanks to ALL who attended the Winter Breakfast on January 29 at the Nature Center of Santa Fe Dam Regional County Park! And another round of applause for those who cooked up a great tribute for all who serve

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Clean and green: Continued from page 2...

my fingers. One day, over a year ago, he disappeared. Around that same time, my little "person" flew to me with a hurt wing which was drooping. He would fly - glide - to the fence with his peanut and then, hop the rest of the way to the tree where he hid at night. I was very worried. I wondered whether I should capture him. But, I thought that I would scare him and then lose his trust.

There are Cooper's Hawks which hunt near my house. These hawks do hunt jays and other birds. One killed one of my pet chickens last year, but not without a response from the neighborhood birds.

The crows that tease my jays and take their peanuts watch me from the tops of nearby trees all the time. With the loss of my chicken, one of the crows from the top of a neighbor's tall tree, watched me pick up my dead chicken. I sat with my "Silky" on my lap and I know "Caw Caw" watched me cry. Then, from that moment until dark, and again, at the first light until that afternoon, tens of crows circled and "cawed" and chased that Cooper's Hawk far away. Three of the crows still come to call at me and I set peanuts out just for them.

It is a special pleasure to have such friends. Sometimes, in the warm days of summer, my "person" and I sit near each other. Many times, when things are quiet



*White-crowned Sparrow at Native Plants Garden
Photo by Thomas Chang*

and warm, and he is full of worms. Instead of his calls and shouts, he will sing his "soft song" with a tiny and softest of voices. I whistle back at him and he sings like the Bushtits, those tiny soft grey birds of California with the large black eyes. I can hear them as they bustle under leaves in the brush for bugs.

My cat, Mouse, walks outside from the kitchen and sits down on the stoop. He watches me play with the jays from the window, inside. My "person" sees him, sings his last soft note to me and flies to sit near his friend who had been waiting up in the tree next door. "Hey! Mouse! Ya hungry?"

White-crowned Sparrows at Santa Fe Dam

By Thomas Chang

White-crowned Sparrows are large sparrows with very bold black-and-white stripes on the head, crisp gray breast, and pale yellow bill. They appear each winter at Santa Fe Dam over much of the park area - natural and recreational.

When visiting the Nature Center, watch for flocks of White-crowned Sparrows near the feeders. You'll see these sparrows hopping on the ground or on branches feeding on seeds and small insects, but typically with the safety of shrubs or trees nearby.



*White-crowned Sparrow hopping on the ground
Photo by Thomas Chang*

Listen for this bird's thin and sweet whistle. Male White-crowned Sparrows do most of the singing, but sometimes females also sing. During migration, White-crowned Sparrows can travel hundreds of miles in a single night. Alaskan White-crowned Sparrows migrate about 2,600 miles to winter in Southern California.

These migratory sparrows are some of the many birds you will see on Bird Walks offered on the third Saturday 8:00 a.m. of each month at the Nature Center. This walk is led by an experienced bird naturalist and offered free of charge to the public.

Plant Profile - Golden Currant

By Thomas Chang

Plant Profile is a new feature of the newsletter that will inform our readers of both invasive and native species found at Santa Fe Dam Natural Area.

This month's plant is Golden Currant, *Ribes aureum*, an erect shrub that grows 3 – 6 feet tall with alternate, 3-lobed, shiny green, small leaves. The plant has straight branches with lots of yellow flowers that turn orange with age.

Golden flowers give way to small yellow berries that turn to red, and to black as they ripen. The fruits of golden currants are edible and quite tasty. The berries are a favorite of Robins, California Thrashers,

and Phainopeplas.

Golden Currants prefer well-drained soil that's sandy and loose in texture. Its leaves are drought-deciduous, falling off the plant during the hotter and drier months. Leaves grow back when winter rains provide supplies of essential water. Active plant growth is early, immediately following the rains of November and December and continuing through Spring.

The berries are used to make jams and jellies and pies. Indian tribes and early settlers used the berries fresh and dried, and mixed them with other berries, fat and meat to make pemmican. Some tribes dried and ground the berries, mixing them with flour to make a mush.

Golden Currants are very common at Santa Fe Dam. You can find them on the Nature Trail and the Natural Area of the Park.



Golden Currant fruits are edible and quite tasty.



Golden Currant flowers have 5 petals and a floral tube.

Photographer's Corner

Winter is a great time to get out and take some photographs. The migratory birds have returned to spend the winter. Here are a few waterfowls of the many now in our area.

Please send your photograph and subject line to sfdnews@yahoo.com



A Pied-billed Grebe at Santa Fe Dam Lake. The pied-billed grebe is small-sized bird with a chicken-like beak. The pied-billed grebe may mimic the movements of a duck in water, but this bird does not have webbed feet.



A male American Wigeon. The American Wigeon breeds in northwestern North America and is found throughout the rest of the continent during migration and winter. They are among the earliest waterfowl to reach their wintering grounds.



The hooded merganser is a beautiful small duck, with a feathered mohawk hanging from its head.



The Lesser Scaup is an abundant diving duck in the Northwest that migrates south as far as Central America in winter.



In Southern California, the Northern Pintail is a common winter visitor. A distinctive feature of the male is its long pointed central tail feathers.

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so well in sharing time and talents to visitors, hikers, walkers, cyclists, and others who stop by to find out what's happening at the Nature Center, Gardens, Trails, and the Natural Area of Santa Fe Dam!

Besides SGMRC Board Members and Volunteers of the Nature Center, Friends of SFD, and Park Staff - all from Santa Fe Dam, plus representatives and friends from other Nature Centers and Conservancies attended the Event to Celebrate Volunteers! Also in attendance were Galster Park/ Nature Center Volunteers, West Covina; Whittier Narrows Nature Center, South El Monte; Glendora Conservancy/ Nature Center and Glendora Conservancy Board Members; and the La Verne Land Conservancy Board.

Besides the beauty of the day and unique place for this one-of-a-kind Nature Centers in the heart of the rarest of habitats in Los Angeles County, there were a variety of activities, displays, and media available, plus just enjoying each others company in the cool morning air of the desert! Two new insect collection learning resources were presented to SGMRC Volunteers - for use with the mobile classroom unit and the Nature Center. Presenter was Carol Anne Haegle of the SGV Mosquito & Vector Control. Special Thanks to SGVMC for all the great work they do!

Already in the planning is a repeat event to Celebrate Volunteers in May - a BBQ Picnic at sunset in the Great Outdoors of Bluebird



Wish List

*The Nature Center needs aquarium tanks, heating pads, heating rocks, heating lamps, bird feeders, bird seeds, and bird houses. Bring your donated items to the Nature Center. ** We also need volunteers to pull invasive plants along the Nature Trails and in the Native Plant Gardens.*

Ranch with the Glendora Conservancy & Nature Center Volunteers. The event will also celebrate the 20th Anniversary of the founding of the Glendora Conservancy (1991) and its important conservation efforts, protecting watershed, saving endangered species, plus nationally recognized methods for natural resource management in urban/wildlands interface areas.

Tentative date is the 2nd Saturday of May at 4 pm. Register and join with us to Celebrate Volunteers and the Conservancy. More details will be forthcoming.



Nature Center Hours

Tuesday to Thursday: 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
 Friday to Sunday: 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
 Closed on Mondays, Holidays or Rain

Saturday Programs

1st Saturday: Guided Nature Walk
 2nd Saturday: Nature Talk
 3rd Saturday: Bird Walk (8 a.m.)
 4th Saturday: Habitat Rangers
 5th Saturday: Bugs / Special Projects



Volunteer Profile - Nancy Begg

By Thomas Chang

We love all of our volunteers. Without them, the Nature Center couldn't function and operate. Our volunteers show an extra level of dedication that inspires us, and everyone around them. So we are starting a new column to recognize our volunteers.

A long-time volunteer at the Nature Center, Nancy Begg has been described as compassionate, dedicated, and easy-going. Her many roles, responsibilities, and generosity make her an indispensable part of the Nature Center. Since childhood, Nancy has developed a passion for nature. In the 50s, her family moved to West Covina, and the new house was located next to a walnut and orange grove where wildlife and birds were abundant. Nancy and her brother would feed the wildlife from the backyard and learned to enjoy and appreciate nature.

Despite her hearing impairment, Nancy attended public school and went on to College to study advertising design. After College, she got a job as a decorator in a drapery shop, and later worked for a dental equipment company.

Nancy joined the Boy Scouts of America in 1991. She has volunteered many years with the Scouts and earned numerous awards including the highest Award for Golden Eagle District, Award of Merit, San Gabriel Valley Council BSA, Silver Beaver Award, and Catholic Committee of Scouting Brown Pelican Award. She's also Mom of an Eagle Scout and Tech Volunteer for the Nature Center,



carrying on the tradition of scouting, nature, and volunteering to the next generation. She is active in a variety of service organizations. Always giving and resourceful, that's Nancy.

As a volunteer at the Nature Center, Nancy has spent many hours caring for the animals and the Native Plant Garden. She guides school kids and Scout groups on field trips. She enjoys interacting with guests and answering their questions. She talks to visitors about wildlife, plants, and the history of Native Americans who lived in the area. Nancy is a member of the Leadership Team of volunteers, which plans and oversees the Nature Center operation with SGMRC. When asked "What is the highlight of her volunteer experience?" She answered "Making new friends, giving back to the community, and just being in nature."

Stop by to visit and learn from Nancy on her Nature Center Volunteer Days of Wednesdays, Fridays, and some Saturdays. And you can also, schedule your scout, school, or church group field trip or cleanup project with Nancy.

Many thanks to Nancy for her hard work and dedication, and we are very happy to have her as part of our team!

The Santa Fe Dam Nature Center Newsletter is a bi-monthly publication promoting the preservation and enjoyment of the Santa Fe Dam Natural Area. Please come, enjoy, learn and volunteer.

To receive a newsletter via email, contact Thomas Chang at sfdnews@yahoo.com.

All past issues of the Newsletter can be found at: <http://www.sgmrc.org/sfdNews.html>

