



A COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATION SUPPORTING THE LONG-TERM STEWARDSHIP OF CLAREMONT CANYON



President's message
by Jon Kaufman

A BRIGHT SPOT for us this year was the planting of baby oak trees just inside the fence at Signpost 29 in Claremont Canyon.

An enthusiastic group of volunteers led by member Martha Griswold (see page

4) nurtured the native oaks seedlings and transplanted them where we hope they will flourish and help secure the hillside there. Stop by Signpost 29 and check them out.

While the recent rains have for now reduced the threat of wildfire in the East Bay Hills, we all know that more work to manage vegetation is necessary. The Conservancy is one of several local organizations raising concerns about wildfire threat—and taking action. In our immediate area the Oakland Firesafe Council, Firesafe Berkeley, and the Vicente Canyon Hillside Foundation are also focused on making our communities safer. Together we want to reduce fire-prone, invasive vegetation, like blue gum eucalyptus and French broom, while encouraging native vegetation such as live oaks to thrive.

Those of us whose homeowner's insurance was either canceled or renewed at higher premiums understand the direct impact the threat of wildfire has on our pocketbooks. Another reminder: Oakland and Berkeley have tough new standards for annual vegetation inspections. Berkeley voters passed Measure FF in 2020. The changes affect inspections coming up this summer. Based on a revised vegetation management plan due out this fall, we hope Oakland will place a similarly strong measure on the ballot in 2024.

Three years ago, we began to work toward creating a joint powers agency among the various cities, the two counties, and additional fire districts in the East Bay Hills. We are motivated by a need for a cooperative approach to vegetation management on

a regional as well as local level. That effort is taking shape in the form of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) now being finalized by an attorney at Hanson Bridgett. The MOU will be circulated for review and approval by those local jurisdictions later this spring and summer.

Fire departments work successfully together to suppress fires, but coordinated prevention efforts are needed as well. We ask that you encourage your city council members and county supervisors to adopt the MOU when it comes up for consideration.

Meanwhile, the Conservancy itself is growing. Membership contributions must now support more hours of paid staff while we mentor a young group of environmental stewards. A special shout-out goes to our retiring treasurer, Kay Loughman, who has shouldered the Conservancy's bookkeeping responsibilities for nearly seven years. We hope that she will continue to offer her editorial skills to this newsletter and will keep up her Wildlife in the North Hills website.

In the past year we have added several new members to the Conservancy board of directors. John Brochu, who has been our stewardship coordinator, brings his vegetation management skills to our board. Law professor Rick Marcus brings his legal expertise and will take over as treasurer. Dr. Dan Robbins brings his valuable experience in starting and running another non-profit organization. And, Jason Wu brings to us important fundraising expertise. Welcome to the Conservancy!

As always, we have great appreciation for all our volunteers, both old and new (see next page). Please join us. We couldn't do our work without you. UC Berkeley student (right) removing large branches from a main path on Berkeley Project Day (see page 3).



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A lone male Williamson's sapsucker was seen busily drilling holes in the bark of a Monterey pine tree in the Claremont Canyon Regional Preserve.

A warm welcome to a new canyon visitor

by Ruby Soto Cardona

SEVERAL LOCAL BIRDERS spotted and photographed a male Williamson's sapsucker last February at various locations in and around Claremont Canyon. The sightings caused quite a stir; this particular sapsucker is mostly a mountain dweller and seldom, if ever, found in the Bay Area.

The Williamson's sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus thyroideus*) pecks rings of shallow holes called sap wells along conifer trunks to harvest sap and the insects trapped within. Come springtime when the oozing sap becomes more abundant, the birds feed heavily on it as they prepare to raise their young. After their young hatch, the bird family transitions to a varied diet of ants, beetles, arachnids, and other insects often found underneath the bark along the trunk or around the base of the tree. On rare occasions, Williamson's sapsuckers are known to catch insects mid-flight!

As you walk in the canyon this spring, keep your binoculars handy; look and listen for this intriguing bird. Pay close attention to his soft nasal churrr, descending in pitch, one of the key identifiers of this medium-sized woodpecker. According to the Cornell Lab website, "Male sapsuckers are identified by their silken black feathers, a cherry-red throat, a rich yellow belly, and sharp white wing patches. Females, on the other hand, have fine horizontal black and white barring on the back, a brown head, and a black breast patch."

Explore Kay Loughman's website nhwildlife.net to see more pictures of wildlife found in and around Claremont Canyon.

Stewardship in the Canyon

PLEASE JOIN US FOR STEWARDSHIP AND NATURE EVENTS in Claremont Canyon throughout the spring and summer months. All levels of fitness are welcome.

We meet in Garber Park twice a month (first and third Saturdays) usually at the Evergreen entrance to the park and are led by Wyllie Clayson and Ruby Soto Cardona of the Garber Park Stewards, 9 a.m. till noon. We meet in the upper canyon once a month (fourth Saturday) at Signpost 29 and are led by John Brochu, 10 a.m. till noon. Please contact gpstewards@gmail.com for inquiries about Garber Park events and info@ClaremontCanyon.org for all other events.

When volunteering, please bring a bottle of water and wear long sleeves, long pants, sturdy shoes, and a hat. If you have gloves, please bring those too but we'll have extras. Watch for our monthly emails or check the Conservancy website ClaremontCanyon.org for added events and to verify where to meet.

Sunday, April 23—The Birds of Claremont Canyon, 7 a.m.-11 a.m., led by Dave Quady, Audubon Christmas Bird Count leader for Claremont Canyon.

Meet Dave and your Conservancy host Nancy Mueller at 7 a.m. as we look for birds that breed in the Canyon. We'll search for year-round resident and Neotropical migrant birds that have returned to breed.

This event is limited to ten participants. Please contact us at info@claremontcanyon.org to sign up for this walk. Location details will be shared with participants several days prior to the event. Bring binoculars and a field guide if you have one. Rain cancels.



Our leader Dave Quady (second from the right) with other birders on last spring's bird walk.



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The Dish Network corporate group (left) on their volunteer workday in Claremont Canyon and UC Berkeley students (right) on Berkeley Project Day after maintaining trails and caging young oak trees to enhance their survival.

Interested in community service?

by John Brochu



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DID YOU KNOW that the Claremont Canyon Conservancy hosts many groups, from high-school students seeking community service hours, to college students interested in outdoor volunteer activities, to corporate groups on volunteer days? Land stewardship in Claremont

Canyon is an ongoing endeavor and ranges from removing invasive non-native plants, to building trail segments, to including many fun tasks in-between. Our projects prove to be both great team-building exercises and wonderful learning experiences for all ages.

Stewardship workdays are a fantastic way of bringing positive energy to the canyon, satisfying volunteer service hours, and enriching members of the community with an invigorating dose of nature! Our workdays are also very effective at advancing our mission to promote a healthy, natural environment, maintain publicly accessible trails, and increase public awareness of land conservation and restoration.

Interested in planning a workday for your group? Send us an email at info@claremontcanyon.org. You can also volunteer individually with us either in Garber Park (see page 4) or the upper canyon

(see page 2, top of column 2 for details). Bring your energy, positivity, and sturdy shoes. We provide tools and snacks. Plenty of beautiful trails are waiting for you!

Claremont Canyon is the largest relatively undeveloped canyon on the western slope of the Oakland/Berkeley Hills. Most of the canyon's watershed is owned by the East Bay Regional Park District, the University of California, the East Bay Municipal Utility District, and the City of Oakland, with about one-fifth in private hands.

The Claremont Canyon Conservancy promotes the long term stewardship of the entire watershed, coordinated among the stakeholders to preserve or restore a healthy native ecosystem, reduce wildfire hazards, and foster education and research.

Join the Conservancy:

Family Membership: \$100 per year
Vision Sponsor: \$1,000

Contact Us:

PO Box 5551, Berkeley CA 94705, 510-843-2226
Email: info@ClaremontCanyon.org
Website: www.ClaremontCanyon.org

The Board of Directors: Jon Kaufman, President; Marilyn Goldhaber, Vice President; Nancy Mueller, Secretary; Richard Marcus, Treasurer; Members at Large: John Brochu, Josh Borkowski, Jerry Kent, Dan Robbins, Elizabeth Stage, and Jason Wu.

The Claremont Canyon Conservancy News is edited by Ruby J. Soto Cardona, with assistance from Kay Loughman and Marilyn Goldhaber.



Conservancy member Martha Griswold (in pink hat) organized a pilot project to plant hand propagated, coastal live oak seedlings and test whether they can survive longterm in the upper canyon with minimal nurturing..

Winter oak planting

by Martha Griswold

LAST JANUARY, A GROUP OF EAGER VOLUNTEERS assembled along Claremont Avenue at Signpost 29 to plant native live oak seedlings. Using the latest information for successful planting, provided earlier by Ruby Soto and Wyllie Clayson, nine baby oaks were nestled in the ground, watered, and surrounded by wire cages to ward off deer or other animals looking for a fresh snack.

The oaks (*Quercus agrifolia*) were initially watered every day for three days and then watered faithfully and generously by Mother Nature through the winter. Once our bountiful rains decline, Conservancy members will continue weekly watering through the end of April.

In May and June, watering will be reduced to twice a month, decreasing to once a month until next winter's rain return. If anyone would like to sign up to help with watering, please call Martha Griswold at 650-678-3307. A one-month commitment is appreciated.

While additional planting projects are hoped for in the future, plenty of young oak trees are growing already on their own in the canyon. Upcoming work will include identifying those with the most promise, protecting them with temporary wire cages, and thinning away the competition.

Opinion survey results

by Jon Kaufman

LAST FALL the Conservancy circulated a questionnaire among its members and friends. Here is a summary of the results which the Conservancy is using to guide it moving forward.

More than 80 percent of the respondents said they enjoy the canyon simply by driving by it. Eighty percent also stated they walk along the trails at least occasionally. Seventy percent said that they interact with Claremont Canyon by viewing it from home or work. Almost 30 percent said they walk their dogs at least occasionally and 20 percent said they ride bikes along the roads.

We asked people to rank their top three goals for what the Conservancy's priorities should be and gave them a list of five from which to choose: access for recreational activity; education about the canyon's wildlife, geology and history; wildfire safety; restoring native plants and trees; and preserving the overall beauty of the canyon. While all goals received support, wildfire safety was clearly the respondents' top priority. Accessibility for recreation was a close second followed by restoring native plants. Preserving the beauty of the canyon was fourth with educational programs trailing.

When asked specifically about educational programs the Conservancy could offer, there was strong support (between 70 and 80 percent) for programs covering the history, geography, plants and ecology

of the canyon, and bird walks, which the Conservancy presently sponsors. There was somewhat less support for education on how to build defensible space and home hardening, both of which reduce the wildfire risk; but those subjects are covered by other organizations.

When asked about what the Conservancy could do to improve trails, the top priority was adding directional signs, followed by a navigation app, handrails, and building new trails. Providing paper maps received somewhat less support. Finally, when asked what groups within the community the Conservancy should focus on there was agreement that families, neighborhood groups, students and individuals were all important.

See our website's blog section for tabulations from this survey.

Garber Park: A park full of hope

by Wyllye Clayson

GARBER PARK IS A PLACE OF EXPLORATION AND CHANGE offering new experiences right around the corner! Most important, Garber Park is a place of community and respite from the hectic activities of everyday life.

This year's generous rains brought new challenges to the park. Due to the soggy soil, several trees uprooted, fell over, and blocked paths. A section of the lower Loop Trail slid away complete-

ly. These unfortunate happenings brought the park community together, however, and we, the Garber Park Stewards, were able to face the challenges head-on.

With the help of new and long-time volunteers, we overcame many obstacles. We sawed off and removed branches from a large downed bay tree on the upper Loop Trail, reinforced the hillside with native plants and temporary fencing at the Alvarado entrance to the park, and enlisted the help of a neighborhood geologist to help us figure out how to tackle soil erosion.

I am happy to report that many people and groups came together to keep Garber Park accessible and vibrant. I thank our long-time volunteers and advocates who showed up: our UC Berkeley student volunteers and partner organizations, CAL Rotaract and CAL Habitat clubs; our partnering businesses, the Claremont Club and Spa and Dish; and, of course, all who enjoyed the park in various ways and give us inspiration.

Garber Park is a hidden gem to discover, whether through volunteering time, enjoying the trails, or learning about and making contributions to the Garber Park Fund. When the community comes together to steward the land, everyone, including the species who reside there, benefits.

The Garber Park Stewards are exceedingly grateful and look forward to a fruitful spring season seeing everyone out on the trails!

The Cal Rotaract Club and returning volunteers show their enthusiasm after a day of clearing debris from a bay tree that fell across the upper Loop Trail. Team leaders Ruby J. Soto Cardona and Wyllye Clayson are seen kneeling (center, left and right).



© 2023 Courtesy of Cal Rotaract

Bring Back the Oaks

by Marilyn Goldhaber

BRING BACK THE OAKS is a short video created in 2016 to educate the public about the build-up of fire fuels in the East Bay Hills—and suggest a sensible way to deal with it. The eight-minute video, which can be found at ClaremontCanyon.org/wildfire-videos, was released by the San Francisco Bay Chapter of the Sierra Club with hands-on participation and local support from the Claremont Canyon Conservancy, the California Native Plant Society, and others. The movie's principles are still relevant today as we wait for legal proceedings to be finalized regarding UC Berkeley's large-scale vegetation management. Hopefully, a court ruling will happen soon to allow UC Berkeley to move forward in its Hill Campus, which includes parts of Claremont Canyon.

The video's strategy entails removing the most highly flammable, ember-generating trees like eucalyptus, prioritizing areas considered most at risk for fire along the wildland-urban interface. Once the flammable non-native trees are removed, less flammable native species can reclaim the landscape and provide for a rebound of biodiversity. This model of fire prevention is summarized in the box to the right.



© 2016 Marilyn Goldhaber

A mature, coastal live oak thrives on a south-facing slope of the Claremont Canyon Regional Preserve.

REMOVE the most flammable non-native trees in select areas most at risk for fire.
RESTORE those areas with more naturally fire resistant native trees and plants.
RE-ESTABLISH greater biodiversity of flora and fauna, including endangered species like the Alameda whipsnake.

Conservancy Membership

HONORING OUR MEMBERS: From our founding in 2001, we have encouraged nearby residents and community organizations to support the Conservancy. We are pleased to list below and on the opposite page people who have supported the Conservancy during our most recent membership drive in 2022-2023.

HONORING THE LAND: In the last several years, more than 500 households in the canyon and surrounding communities have lent their financial support to preserve/restore the land, contribute to our programs, grow our staff, and learn along with us how to best mitigate

the threat of a devastating wildfire. We warmly invite you to come and experience this place we call home.

Wondering where Claremont Canyon is? Claremont Avenue runs right up its center, from the grounds of the Claremont Hotel at its base to Grizzly Peak Boulevard at its eastern ridge. Most of canyon is publicly owned, the largest stakeholders being the East Bay Regional Park District and the University of California. The goal of the Conservancy is to energize the largest landowners to be good stewards of the land and, importantly, to involve the participation of the citizenry.

Thank you to members and friends who donated this past year

Roger Abraham and
Maureen Crosgrove
Susan and James Acquistapace
Hossein Afkhami
Linda Agerter and
Richard Judd
Marie and Ray Alberti
Jeffrey and Joan King-Angell
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THE CLAREMONT CANYON CONSERVANCY

SUPPORTING THE LONG-TERM STEWARDSHIP OF CLAREMONT CANYON



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Sunset view from Panoramic Hill, part of the Claremont Canyon Regional Preserve.