



# SYMBIOSIS

*A Quarterly Newsletter for MRCA Volunteers*  
*Winter 2004/2005*

*Published by the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy and the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority*

## Volunteer Efforts Raise Funds for Towsley Canyon

A year ago, the Towsley Canyon Lodge was full of snoring MRCA firefighters. This year it was full guests sipping wine and bidding on items in a silent auction. Instead of smelly socks, the aroma of scented candles filled the air. Instead of assembling sandwiches, volunteers were pouring wine and serving cheese. We've learned that fire is necessary for the growth and health of our natural world. So too are the efforts of our supporters who came to our aid on Sunday, October 24, 2004.

After the fire, volunteer Brenda Kardok identified some specific needs in the canyon, like replacing the trail markers that had been destroyed. At the same time, funding for all interpretive programming in the canyon was elimi-

nated. While this saddened and frustrated many people, for Brenda it was simply a call to action.

Brenda decided to put together a wine and cheese tasting fundraiser, where people could bid on auction items. The proceeds could then replace the trail markers and fund some interpretive materials. She approached Friends of the Conservancy, the non-profit support group of the Conservancy and MRCA, and they agreed to act as fiscal agent. Brenda then solicited donations of items for the auction and the always-generous Pat McQuaid of the Mountain Bike Unit (and Jim's Market in Woodland Hills) donated all the wine. Jim and Aileen Nowatzki and Steve (Continued on Page 2)

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Pat McQuaid

## From the Editor...

Thanksgiving 2004 ...some years it takes an extra effort to be thankful. Our Interpretive division has been cut by two thirds. We have shut down our offices at the River Center and the Natural Park. Those are the facts - no sugar coating. So is there a reason this year to be thankful?

Yeah...there is...I'm thankful for our volunteers.

I'm thankful for people like Brenda and her team, who saw a need and organized a fund raiser to meet it. I'm thankful for Pat, who generously donated wine for that fundraiser.

I'm thankful for Joann, who took the time to go to a week of CIG training this summer and is debuting a new program on Invasive Weeds at Franklin Canyon in January.

I'm thankful for the MBU'ers, who take children on bike rides. Along with the MAU'ers, they patrol our parks and are some of our best ambassadors.

I'm thankful for Russ, who is taking time out of his busy schedule to train our volunteers about Reptiles and Amphibians. And Paul, who taught us about butterflies.

I'm thankful for the "dirt monkeys" at Towsley, who weed and chop and dig, helping keep our trails in good shape.

I'm thankful for the photographers, Steve, Paul, Jim and others, who take pictures so that I may share them with you.

I'm thankful for the people who staff the Nature Centers when we are out in the field...the people who slap labels on newsletters...the people who look for ways to help and ask for nothing in return.

I don't know what the new year will bring. But I know that with the help of our volunteers, we will keep on sharing the wonders of the natural world to our visitors.

(Cont. from Page 1) and Linda Ioerger joined her committee and helped with the planning and the execution.

After a rainy week, Sunday October 24<sup>th</sup> was a beautiful, sunny day. The lodge was festive, the event was lovely, and Brenda's efforts raised almost \$2,000.

Our thanks to all who donated goods and service, volunteered their time and to those who attended. It is through efforts like Brenda's and her team that our parks will continue to prosper.

## Volunteers and Programs needed for Temescal Chautauqua Series...

The Chautauqua movement was founded in 1874 in southwestern New York State. The goal was to provide a place where people could gather together for education, inspiration, and enjoyment. From miles around people came to the shores of Lake Chautauqua where they heard from speakers of national renown, listened to live music, enjoyed plays, dined together, and generally engaged in an open forum for the discussion of public issues, literature, music, and science. Theodore Roosevelt was moved to describe it as "the most American thing in America".

In the 1920's and 30's, the natural world of Temescal Canyon served as a major center for the Chautauqua Arts Movement, attracting thousands of city folks to its shady canyons in their quest for knowledge and enlightenment. One hundred years after the first artistic seeds were planted, Temescal Canyon will once again flourish and beckon patrons of the arts to gather together in its pristine idyllic setting for enrichment and relaxation.

It is the Conservancy's goal to recapture and foster the original spirit of this remarkable movement. Honoring the tradition of the original Chautauqua philosophy, we are planning a lively monthly series of lectures and events showcasing local, regional, and national talent in a variety of art forms. Programs will be one to two hours in length and designed for an adult audience. For the series pilot program last year, we had author and NPR reporter David Baron discuss his book about Cougars, "Beast in the Garden". Composer Rhonda Kess presented a musical lecture entitled "Sex and the Single Soprano," and the Grove Shakespeare Company presented Winter Classics: An evening with Dylan Thomas.

The program has a limited budget. We need volunteer presenters while we wait for responses to our funding proposals. WODOC volunteer, Dr. Lollie Ragana, a Professor at Cal State Los Angeles and Antioch University, has agreed to present "The Goddess and Nature: the natural world in the ancient myths". If you have any contacts with authors, professors, performers - or are one yourself - please email Amy at amy.lethbridge@mrca.ca.gov. The programs will be on a regularly scheduled weekday evening, details to be announced

## New Volunteer Opportunities at Franklin and the North.....

We're asking for volunteers to contribute in new ways. If you think you can help, give us a call.

### **Franklin Canyon.**

Librarian to catalog our new library.

Publicity Maven to find new free sites advertise our programs and activities and to update these sites as required.

Database Diva to create new databases for our supplies, school contacts and library.

Roving Docent coordinator to schedule roving docents at Franklin

Clean squad. We need 4 people to help once a week to keep the Nature Center tidy. 1 hour/week x 1 person x 4 wks = clean and neat nature center.

### **Northern Parks.**

Publicity Maven (see above)

Roving Docent coordinator to schedule roving docents at Towsley, Wiley, East/Rice, Pico and Whitney Canyons.

Mailing Master. We need help once a quarter mailing "Symbiosis".

Graphics and media production Guru. We are looking for volunteers to help create a CD/DVD that will provide interpretive information for the general public.

## Volunteer Gatherings...

**Please join us** for a Franklin Canyon Holiday bash in our newly renovated Sooky Goldman Nature Center on Saturday, December 11, from 1-4 PM. You'll be surprised to see all the enhancements, like our Resource Library and Kids Corner. Enjoy holiday music, tasty treats, crafts, and even try your luck and spin the famous Wheel of Franklin. Come mingle with your buddies and welcome new recruits to the MRCA Volunteer Family. If you would like to participate in the holiday gift exchange, bring a \$10 wrapped gift. Show off your favorite holiday dish for our potluck style spread of goodies. (Be sure to mark any personal dishware.) Not sure what to bring, feel free to call Nubez or Rebecca for suggestions, 310-858-7272 ext. 131 or 132.

**Northern Volunteers** will also hold a non-traditional Holiday Breakfast on Saturday, December 18 from 9-11 AM. Come share a potluck meal of high-carb/high-calorie but delicious breakfast food. We will be holding our first annual UGLY Holiday clothing competition. Dust off those ties, shirts and sweaters hidden in the back of your closet. There will also be a "Tacky Gift Exchange". Rules are simple: (1) entries are preferably used or homemade (2) or cost less than \$5 and (3) must be truly tacky. Call Wendy at 661-255-3606 for party details and recipe ideas.

## Arroyo Seco Woodland and Wildlife Park dedicated....



The 3-acre Arroyo Seco-South Pasadena Woodland and Wildlife Park is located in the City of South Pasadena along the bank of the Arroyo Seco, near York Boulevard and the Arroyo Seco Parkway (SR-110). A lookout point near the center of the site offers views of Mount Washington, the historic York Boulevard bridge, the Verdugo Mountains, and the San Gabriel Mountains. The park utilizes native arroyo stone for seat walls. Habitat restoration incorporates three separate plant communities: the California Sycamore Association, an Oak Savannah grassland, and a Walnut Woodland. The boundary of each type is loosely aligned with the park's trails, creating opportunities to compare and contrast the habitat types and the wildlife they support.

Educational material about native habitat and wildlife, natural sciences, site history, and an overview of the Arroyo Seco Watershed is incorporated into trailside displays, a kiosk, and plant identification markers throughout the site.

## MRCA volunteer training...

### Something to look forward to this winter:

Saturday, January 8, 10 AM - 12 PM at Franklin Canyon. Scit Scat Diddly Doo. Come to our scat workshop and make realistic models from clay, while learning what this "natural" function can tell us about wildlife. You can use these models as props or get an early start on next year's Christmas shopping. Please RSVP so we have enough supplies.

Saturday, February 12, 10 AM - 12 PM at Franklin Canyon. "Insectigations". Make a game you can use to teach children about Insect adaptations, as well as several other cool projects you can add to your interpretive tool kit. Please RSVP.

### Meanwhile, here's some photos from our volunteer trainings this fall:



**Volunteers** Laurie Krivak and Jim Bloch at September's Fire Ecology training met up unexpectedly with a group of mountain bikers.

**Habitat Authority** Volunteers, working under the direction of MRCA Rangers, help patrol the Puente Hills. In September these volunteers attended a CPR and First Class in Sycamore Canyon.



**Volunteers and guests** Aaron & Allan Gluck, Taylor Scott and Jim Robertson attended November's reptiles and Amphibians training at Upper Las Virgenes Open Space Preserve (formerly Ahmanson Ranch). Our special thanks to Dr. Russell Smith from the Los Angeles Zoo, for taking time to share his photos and experience.

## Community Volunteers support our parks at “Make a Difference Day” in Santa Clarita...

Community Volunteers, guided by MRCA volunteers and staff, completed three projects on Oct. 23 as part of our national “Make a Difference Day” in Santa Clarita. Out thanks to:



Volunteer Jim Nowatzki and his team - weeding at East/Rice Canyon.



Volunteer Steve Iorger and his team - painting a tool shed at Towsley Canyon.



Volunteer Al Dey and his team - cleaning up micro trash at Whitney Canyon. (And just what is micro trash? Small pieces of trash - like broken shards of beer bottles. Adult Condors collect micro trash and bring it to their chicks - one reason why baby condors don't always survive to adulthood.)

## MRCA on the Airwaves....

For those of you living in the Santa Clarita Valley and the upper reaches of the San Fernando Valley, radio station KHTS (AM 1220) features a “Hike Report” on Friday mornings from 7:10-7:15 AM. Come check it out and listen to Santa Clarita’s newest “Radio Personality”.

You may also check out their website:

[www.hometownstation.com/khts/](http://www.hometownstation.com/khts/)

where you can find photos and snippets of outdoors trivia.

Jim & Aileen Nowatzki



Brenda Kardok

Brenda Kardok & Dave Updike



**October 2004  
A Busy Weekend in Santa Clarita:  
"Make a Difference Day"  
Towsley Canyon Fundraiser**



Linda Ioerger



Steve Ioerger

## Science “News You Can Use” ...

*A information you can use to expand of your programs and perhaps get you thinking in new directions.*

### How Does the Nose Know?

Smelling is a task most of us take for granted. But the 2004 Nobel Prize in Medicine was awarded to Richard Axel and Linda Buck for their work on the molecular basis of smell. So just how does the nose know?

The lining of your nose has 5 million nerve cells or neurons; each neuron has at least 10 hair-like cilia that protrudes into the mucus lining of the nose (commonly known as snot.). These cells send messages directly to olfactory bulb in your brain. From there signals are sent to the cortex, which handles our higher level thinking and the limbic system, which generates emotional feelings. That’s why a certain scent can remind us of a feeling or an event years after the fact.

Each neuron has one type of receptor protein. Humans have 350 different kinds of receptors, fish have about 100 and mice have nearly 1000. When an odor is detected, anywhere from a handful to hundreds of neurons are activated, producing a specific biochemical signature that is transmitted to the brain. Using various combinations of receptors, a human can identify at least 10,000 specific odors, maybe more. The idea is similar to the way we use 26 letters to produce thousands of words.

If we have 350 receptors and can identify 10,000 scents, imagine how many scents a mouse, with 1000 receptors, can detect.

## Cyber-teer....

In keeping our focus this issue on “Invasive Weeds” on pages 8 and 9, let’s look at things we can do as individuals to prevent the spread of invasive weeds. Gardeners certainly don’t intentionally plant invasive species. Here are a few sites where you can go to find out WHAT and WHAT NOT to plant in your garden.

[www.cal-ipc.org](http://www.cal-ipc.org). The California Invasive Plant council (Cal-IPC) has a brochure on Landscape Alternatives to invasive plants. If you are comfortable with a more active approach, they also have a card that you can download, print and carry with you to inform retailers that they are selling invasive plants.

[www.lasgrwc.org](http://www.lasgrwc.org). The Los Angeles and San Gabriel River Watershed Council offers a list of native plant alternatives to common ornamental plants in Southern California.

[www.bewaterwise.com](http://www.bewaterwise.com). Southern California water agencies have a site where you can get information about California Native plants and where to buy them.

## MBU News...

*The Mountain Bike Unit (MBU) is a volunteer organization that helps the NPS, CA State Parks and MRCA provide public assistance and resource protection in the Santa Monica Mountains.*

- New Volunteers! All you really need is a bike. Orientation begins Saturday, February 5 at 9:00 AM at Diamond X Ranch. Actual training starts February 19 at NPS headquarters. Contact Lois Olson at 805-495-6086 or lolson9978@aol.com for more details.
- The MBU Christmas party will be held on Dec. 1 at 6:30 PM at Upper Las Virgenes Canyon Open Space Preserve (formerly Ahmanson Ranch). No need to RSVP. Just bring a main dish (A-J), salad or snacks (L-P), or dessert (Q-Z). There will be a brief meeting at 7, followed by dinner and a magic show by Ranger Frank Padilla.
- MBU volunteers sponsored a Youth Adventures ride on Nov. 13 at Upper Las Virgenes Canyon Open Space Preserve. YA takes children between ages 8 and 17 on mountain bike rides in the Santa Monica Mountains NRA. The program is geared towards youth who don't otherwise have the opportunity to enjoy experiences with nature. YA supplies the bikes, helmets, gloves, water and provide instruction on safety, trail rules, and how to use the bicycles prior to the ride. During the ride, interpretive and historical information is presented about the park and its surroundings.



# Invasive Weeds.....

The introduction of Arundo to Southern California illustrates the "Law of Unintended Consequences". It was imported from Europe to LA in the 1820's to control stream bank erosion and was also used to thatch roofs. Yes, it stabilizes stream banks. But over time we have learned that rivers need annual flooding to encourage channel migration, maintain a natural cycle of plant succession and provide a mosaic of diverse natural communities. Arundo hinders this process.

Arundo is also a fierce competitor and crowds out native plants. It grows by as much as two inches a day and can reach a height of 30 feet. But unlike native plants, Arundo does not provide food or habitat for native animals. It's like someone attending a potluck, heaping their plate with food, and not bringing anything to share.

Arundo is highly flammable. In riparian corridors it acts as a kind of wick and can actually spread fire faster.

Arundo upstream means fewer fish downstream. It does not shade the stream like cottonwoods and other native trees. This results in higher water temperature which leads to lower water oxygen concentration and fewer fish downstream.

Because it reproduces vegetatively, Arundo is difficult to eradicate - the best way is to spray Rodeo (the only herbicide approved by the EPA for wetlands) on the foliage in the fall. As the plant prepares for the winter, the poison is drawn down into the root mass and kills it. Think of those old monster movies: the monster can only be killed by driving a stake into its heart.



Arundo Donax. Giant Reed

Volunteer Joann Leonard is working on a new interpretive program entitled "Runaway Plants", which she will debut at next year at Franklin Canyon. In keeping with the Interpretive Guideline, "Know your Audience", here's her report.

## The Plant Nazi

Recently I led a nature journaling walk at Franklin Canyon. My new program, "Runaway Plants", was on my mind. This program focuses on the problems alien invasive plant species create in our environment. A neighbor and friend, a fine artist and a regular hiker (age 91!), was one of the participants. While discussing native plants and their adaptation to our Mediterranean climate, I decided to try out some of the features of my new program on. I decided to concentrate on two of the most prevalent alien invasive species in Franklin Canyon Park: Arundo donax and Pampas Grass.

I talked about the features of Arundo donax that cause it to spread rapidly, particularly along water courses, the difficulty in controlling its spread and eradication,

*As a sidebar, this came in a few days ago from the CalWeeds Task Force. Just goes to show "those who do not learn from the past are condemned to repeat it."*

While shopping in a local nursery here in Santa Barbara County, I discovered a plant for sale - Arundo "Old Gold". This plant was golden in color and smaller in stature than Arundo donax as seen in the field.

As you all probably know, Arundo donax is listed in the California Code

of Regulations Section 4500 as a noxious weed. My office, the agricultural commissioner's office, decided to investigate further. The thought was that the plants would be rejected, destroyed, and sale would be prohibited.

... I learned from the local grower, the plants were grown locally, the species is Arundo formosana 'Oriental Gold', a plant patent is applied for, and the common name is 'Oriental Gold' Giant Reed. The retail nursery where I

originally found the plants, re-labels their plants for resale, and mistakenly changed the variety to 'Old Gold'.

Information from the grower indicates that the parentage is from China....This selection of the giant reed is a perfect choice for a dramatic accent or used in the background....

I left the plants on sale...did not reject them. I am sending a flower sample to CDFG's botany lab to confirm the species.

and the problems it creates. During this discussion, I noticed my friend frowning. I asked her for comments but she shook her head.

As we neared the lake at Franklin Canyon I opened a discussion on the alien Pampas Grass edging our trail. We felt its skin cutting saw-edged leaf blades, and learned how it's seed dispersal caused it to become the dominant plant on the east side of the lake, while crowding out the native willows that provide abundant food and shelter for many native birds, insects and other animals without providing the same services.

At our stop to write and draw in our journals my friend spoke up, and said with some force, "I think you are being a Hitler to these plants! They are now here, and you should be nice to them! They are beautiful."

I was taken aback, as I had never thought that I was an advocate of plant genocide. I pointed out that while alien plants are often a valuable feature of their native lands, they now spread unchecked in our benign climate as they have no native forces to keep them under control.

I asked her how she thought we might make people aware of the dangers of planting these and similar invasive species in their gardens. I ended by pointing out the beauty and advantages of gardens that focused on California native plants.

She was adamant, "No, you are like a Hitler. If the plants are here they should stay here. This is now their home."

I will talk with my friend again, but I thought you should be aware of this potential problem while discussing native plants vs. alien plants.



## Notes from the field...

**Birth Announcement.** Mountain Lion P-2 gave birth to a litter of four cubs (two males and two females) at the end of August in the Santa Monica mountains. According to reliable sources, P-1 and P-2 met for a romantic interlude last May. As you may recall, we wrote about these Mountain Lions in the Summer edition of "Symbiosis": Track of the Big Cats.

**West Nile Virus.** In the Fall edition of "Symbiosis", we wrote about the steps you could take to protect yourself from West Nile Virus. For the latest information you can go to the CDC website at :

[www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/q&a.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/q&a.htm)

Or the state of California website at:

[www.westnile.ca.gov/](http://www.westnile.ca.gov/)



**Five California Condors** were recently spotted in our parkland. For those of you into statistics, that's approximately 2% of all the condors in the world..

They still need our help and support to survive:

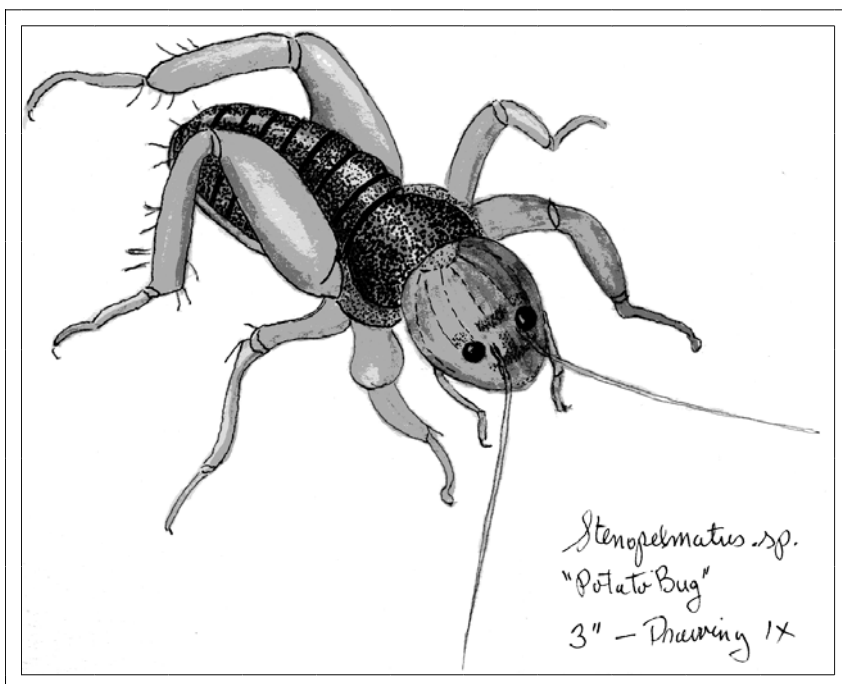
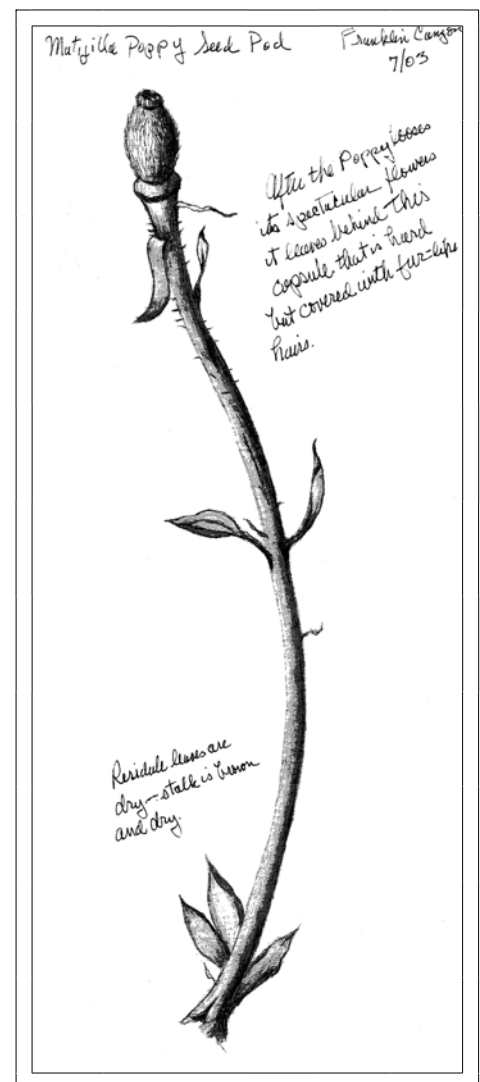
- Pick up micro trash - small pieces of trash - like broken shards of beer bottles. Adult Condors collect micro trash and bring it to their chicks - one reason why baby condors don't always survive to adulthood.
- Don't get too close. (These photos were taken from a distance.)
- Support a ban on lead gun pellets. Condors eat carrion and can ingest these poisonous pellets.

# Botanical Drawing Class at Franklin Canyon.....

If you ask a group of young children how many of them are artists, all the children will raise their hands. If you ask a group of adults...you'll be lucky to find one.

We offer a chance to re-capture that creative joy .

Franklin Canyon offers a free weekly Botanical Drawing Class on Tuesdays from 11-3. Call Joann at 323-656-3899 for details and to reserve a spot.



"To see things in the seed,  
that is genius."

- Lao-Tzu

to publication..

858-7272 x 133 or Wendy.Langhans@mrca.ca.gov. Submissions must be received no later than one month prior  
**To submit an article or information:** Contact MRCA Director of Volunteer Services, Wendy Langhans at (310)

pursuant to Section 6500 et seq. of the Government Code.

The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) is a public entity of the State of California exercising joint powers of the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, the Conejo Recreation and Park District, and the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District



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*MRCA Volunteers...Making a Difference!*