



MAGPIE CALLS

Newsletter of the Santa Ynez Valley Natural History Society
PO Box 794, Los Olivos, CA 93441
805-693-5683 www.syvnature.org syvnhs@syvnature.org

*Dedicated to the study, exploration, and appreciation of natural history
in the Santa Ynez Valley region*

Late Spring Wildflowers of Figueroa Mountain

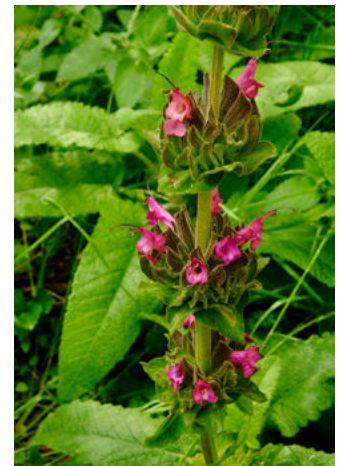
The soaking rains of early winter have been something of a two-edged sword this year. On one hand, they almost certainly guarantee an above-average season for wildflowers. But on the other hand, these powerful storms wreaked havoc on backcountry roads and trails throughout the county, many of which are now indefinitely closed to public access.

The Natural History Society is hoping to offer a spring wildflower field trip in our local area, but the timing of this depends on when and where trails reopen. Our current plan is to offer a casual wildflower hike in late April or early May, with a likely focus on some of the serpentine soils located on or near Figueroa Mountain. As many of our members know, serpentine soils are somewhat uncommon. They are derived from ultramafic rocks such as serpentinite and peridotite, which weather into soils that have low levels of essential plant nutrients but high concentrations of heavy metals. The suite of native plants that can grow on serpentine soils is a subject that has long intrigued botanists.

(Continued on next page)

Right: Fremont's star lily (*Toxicoscordion fremontii*) grows in serpentine soil areas. Photo by John Evarts.

Far right: Hummingbird sage (*Salvia spathacea*) and some other *Salvias* can grow on serpentine soils. Photo by John Evarts.



Upcoming SYVNHS Lectures, Field Trips, and Workshops

- Date TBD Wildflowers of Figueroa Mountain: Field Trip
- Mar. 2 The Accidental Ecosystem: Live & Zoom Lecture
- Mar. 12 Trees of Alameda Park: Field Trip
- Apr. 1 Arroyo Hondo Preserve: Field Trip
- Apr. 19 Bristlecone Forest Wildflowers: Live & Zoom Lecture
- May 11 Figueroa Mountain Game Preserve: Live & Zoom Lecture
- Pop-Ups Short-notice events may be posted on the website and emailed to our members and friends

Photo by Liz Gaspar.

President's Message from Marion Schlinger

Dear SYVNHS Members and Friends,

In my Fall 2022 president's message, I drew attention to our water issues and severe drought situation throughout California. I also mentioned the meteorologic atmospheric river, as this phenomenon was occurring elsewhere. Well, who knew that we would have several storms bringing the reality of an

atmospheric river to California and our Santa Barbara County and that within two days Cachuma Lake would fill from about 33% to over 90%! In my favorite walking area, the creek began flowing December 8. On visiting January 12 after the deluge, it had overflowed its banks, carved new paths around bends, and dug deep channels exposing interesting bedrock.

(Continued on next page)

Also, there was a major foot-deep mud accumulation on the road for several hundred feet that was from slumping on adjacent hillsides. I guess the saying 'never underestimate the power of nature' holds true in this case – awesome changes!

Throughout California the drought status has been greatly reduced but at the expense of lives, communities, homes, roads, and trails. I hope all of you were safe and not adversely affected by those storms. We are by no means out of the woods in terms of our ongoing drought, and all of us will need to continue to be mindful of our water usage. Also, predictions are that we will be getting more rain in future weeks, with hopes for not as many inches of rain at one time.

With the rains though, come wildflowers and as our hills turn green there are the beginnings of blooms with buttercups, a smattering of shooting stars, Johnny-jump-ups, and sanicles. Unfortunately, with so many trails impacted it will be challenging to find areas to visit, and some of our planned field trips have been postponed due to trail damage. I suggest a lovely accessible area at La Purisima State Park, having nice trails for various ability levels and wildflowers. On a recent hike there, I was treated to finding at least a half dozen early blooming wildflower species including California peony and a wallflower, (*Erysimum capitatum*). Be safe and please respect signs that say area or road closed.

Starting off our winter/spring programs on March 2, UCSB's Dr. Peter Alagona will discuss the topic of

his new book, *The Accidental Ecosystem: People and Wildlife in American Cities*. His lecture will be both in-person and live-streamed via Zoom. Other interesting presentations are also planned on the "Figueroa Mountain Game Preserve" and the new book titled *Bristlecone Forest Wildflowers*. Field trips on Trees of Alameda Park and the geology of Arroyo Hondo Preserve are planned, together with a late spring wildflower outing in the Figueroa Mountain area if trail conditions improve. As areas open up, we may be able to offer pop-up outings. Stay tuned!

Our brief annual meeting and elections results will precede the March 2 lecture. Ballots for the election will be sent out by email by mid-February. Members can vote by return email or by printing out the ballot and returning it by regular mail on or before February 28th. Results will be announced at the annual meeting.

Finally, thank you to all of our members for your continued support with membership renewals and participation in field trips and lectures either in person or via Zoom. This year marks the 23rd Anniversary of the Santa Ynez Valley Natural History Society. Many of you have been members from the very beginning and have participated in many ways as this organization has grown. Thank you all for helping to make the SYVNHS an important part of the Santa Ynez Valley as we foster an appreciation of the natural history of the Santa Ynez Valley and surrounding areas for both our members and the general public.

—Your President, Marion Schlinger

At UC Sedgwick Reserve, for example, ongoing research examines the flora growing in the serpentine soils found along the north side of the Little Pine Fault.

Please check the Society's website in the coming weeks for an announcement of this botany hike. Once the details

of the field trip are finalized, members and friends will receive an email with detailed information for this outing. In the meantime, happy wildflower hunting, wherever you explore.

— John Evarts, on behalf of the SYVNHS Board



Serpentine outcrop in the foreground, with Monterey Formation on Grass Mountain in the background. Photo by John Evarts.



Goldfields (*Lasthenia* species) can tolerate serpentine soil areas, such as this seasonal meadow off Figueroa Mountain Road. Photo by John Evarts.

The Accidental Ecosystem:**People and Wildlife in American Cities**

Free lecture with Peter Alagona

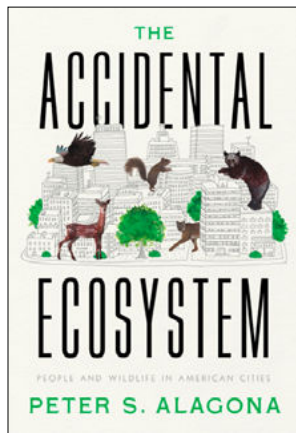
Thursday, March 2, 7:00 to 8:30 p.m.

St. Mark's in-the-Valley Episcopal Church, Stacy Hall

2901 Nojoqui Avenue, Los Olivos

This in-person talk will also be live-streamed via Zoom on a link emailed to SYVNHS members and friends of the Society. As the date gets closer, the link will also be posted to our website, www.syvnature.org

Since WW II, cities in North America, South America, Europe, Australia, and parts of East Asia have attracted unprecedented numbers of wild animals even as many wildlife populations have declined or been decimated in other “wilder” ecosystems. Most American cities, in particular, now have more wildlife in and around them than at any time in their history. How did this happen? And what does it mean for people, wildlife, cities, and even nature itself on our increasingly urban planet? In this talk, Peter Alagona will answer these questions in relation to his new book, *The Accidental Ecosystem: People and Wildlife in American Cities*, published in spring 2022 by the University of California Press.



San Joaquin kit fox in Bakersfield suburbs. Photo: CSUS ESRP / Tory Westall.

Peter Alagona is a professor in the Environmental Studies Program at UCSB. Before arriving at UCSB, he studied at Northwestern, UCLA, Harvard, and Stanford. He is the author of around 5 dozen articles and 2 books on American environmental history and human relations with wildlife, including his most recent book. He is also the founder and facilitator of the California Grizzly Research Network, which conducts research on the past and potential future of brown bears in California.

**Trees of Alameda Park**

Field trip with Larry Ballard

Sunday, March 12, 9:00 to 11:30 a.m.

Alameda Park in Santa Barbara

Participation is limited to 20. Advance registration is required and opens at 9:00 a.m. on February 15 for members and on February 26 for nonmembers at syvnhs@syvnature.org or 805/693-5683.

Members \$10 / Nonmembers \$25 / Children \$5

Directions and meet-up location will be emailed to registered participants.

Join naturalist Larry Ballard for a stroll through Santa Barbara's Alameda Park, where he'll discuss the botany and history of selected trees that have been cultivated on these two city blocks. Alameda Park is home to 300 trees, comprising about 75 species from six different continents; at least six of the park's specimen trees are found nowhere else in the Santa Barbara region. There is a California Big Tree state champion, three trees planted by King Albert and Queen Elizabeth of Belgium on their visit to Santa Barbara in 1919, several specimens over 100 years old, and another

nearly 100 feet tall. Larry plans to focus on the species with the best stories.

The two city blocks that make up Alameda Park were first referred to as “blocks 73 and 74” in a 1868 Santa

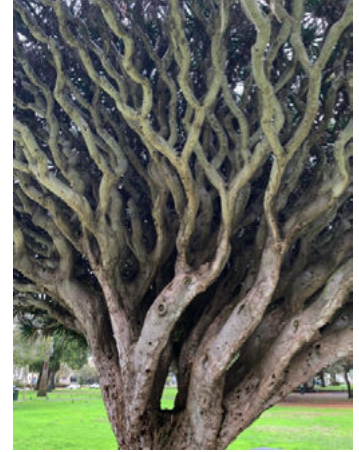
(Continued on next page)



Alameda Park contains a rich collection of exotic palms, hardwoods, and conifers. Photo by Larry Ballard.

Barbara city ordinance that foreshadowed the city's arboreal legacy. These blocks remained in a state of neglect until 1902 when Dr. Augustus Boyd Doremus was appointed to Santa Barbara's newly established Parks Commission, serving as Parks Superintendent. His efforts included planting several hundred trees in the park and along streets all over the city in the following decades. About 40 of the trees in Alameda Park planted by Doremus still survive.

Larry Ballard is a natural history educator with a focus on botany and has been a popular field trip leader for the SYVNHS and other organizations for nearly 25 years. He has offered past tours of the famous collection of trees on the campus of UCSB, as well as educational walks to introduce the trees of valley communities, including Los Olivos, Santa Ynez, and Solvang.



Left: A towering specimen of forest red gum (*Eucalyptus tereticornis*). Right: One of the unusual trees in Alameda Park (we'll reveal its identity on the trip). Photos by Larry Ballard.

Arroyo Hondo Preserve: A Cross-section Through Our Local Rock Formations

Field Trip with Sabina Thomas

Saturday, April 1, 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

Participation is limited to 20. Advance registration begins at 9:00 a.m. on March 1 for members and on March 22 for nonmembers at syvnhs@syvnature.org or 805/ 693-5683.

Members \$15 / Nonmembers \$30 / Children \$5

Directions and meeting location will be sent to registrants.

We will hike along Arroyo Hondo Creek towards the mountains. This stream runs north-to-south while our local geologic formations extend west-to-east. This gives us the great opportunity of crossing and studying several geologic formations on our walk. We will start near the barn and follow Arroyo Hondo Creek as we encounter steeply inclined hard and soft rock formations that get increasingly older with elevation.

Topography as well as vegetation are quite variable and should make this hike interesting. In addition to rocks,



we hope to see some wildlife as well as wildflowers. The plants may include fire followers since the area was affected by the Alisal Fire in 2021. Botanists, scat and track readers, and other naturalists are welcome to contribute! This approximately three-mile hike is moderate with some rocky areas. Plan on spending at least three hours, or more if you want to have lunch on the way back.

Sabina Thomas grew up in Germany and received her PhD in Geology from the TU Berlin. She moved to Santa Barbara in 2010. In addition to teaching earth-science courses at Santa Barbara City College, she works as a Nature Education Manager at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History.



Far left: The up-tilted layer-cake of geologic formations is especially evident in the upper canyon of Arroyo Hondo. Photo by John Everts.

Above: Arroyo Hondo is a good place to look for the California newt, which is an endemic species of special concern. Photo by John Everts.

Left: We might see large-flowered phacelia (*Phacelia grandiflora*), which is a fire follower. Photo by Margie Popper.

Bristlecone Forest Wildflowers

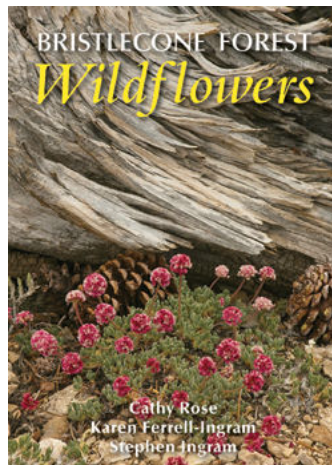
Free lecture with Cathy Rose, Karen Ferrell-Ingram, and Stephen Ingram

Wednesday, April 19, 7:00 to 8:30 p.m.

Co-sponsored by Solvang Library
Solvang Library, 1745 Mission Drive

This in-person talk will also be live-streamed via Zoom on a link emailed to SYVNHS members and friends of the Society. As the date gets closer, the link will be posted to our website, www.syvnature.org.

Located in the White Mountains of California, one of the highest desert mountain ranges in North America, the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest is federally protected for its scenic and ecological values. Many species of plants grow in this high and dry climate that aren't found in other places in California. The authors of a new book, *Bristlecone Forest Wildflowers*, will tell



the story of the common, showy, and hardy plants that thrive alongside the oldest living trees on earth. This beautifully illustrated talk will cover wildflowers, shrubs, trees, and grasses that grow along the trails of the Schulman and Patriarch Groves of the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest.

Bristlecone Forest Wildflowers fills a gaping hole in wildflower guides, providing information about a little-known treasure trove of botanical gems. In 2015, the same team of authors produced *Rock Creek Wildflowers*, a plant guide to the beautiful Little Lakes Valley above Mosquito Flat in the Sierra Nevada.

Cathy Rose (of Santa Barbara) is a retired English teacher and long-time botany enthusiast. **Karen Ferrell-Ingram** is a former native plant propagator. **Stephen Ingram** is a botanist, photographer, and writer.



Stephen Ingram, Cathy Rose, and Karen Ferrell-Ingram. Courtesy photo.



Far left: Ancient bristlecone pine forest, home to the world's oldest living trees. Photo by Stephen Ingram.

Left: Raspberry buckwheat (*Eriogonum gracilipes*) and stemless goldenweed (*Stenotus acaulis*). Photo by Stephen Ingram.

Figueroa Mountain Game Preserve

Free illustrated lecture with Ken Doud
Thursday, May 11, 7:00 to 8:30 p.m.

Co-sponsored by Solvang Library
Solvang Library, 1745 Mission Drive

This in-person talk will also be live-streamed via Zoom on a link emailed to SYVNHS members and friends of the Society. As the date gets closer, the link will also be posted to our website, www.syvnature.org.

As recently as 10,000 years ago, in what is known as the Late Pleistocene period, prehistoric elephants, lions, saber-toothed cats, and many other large beasts were part of the now-vanished megafauna in California. Ken



Reimagined saber-toothed cat. Digital art by Ken Doud.

(Continued on next page)

Doud will reprise his popular 2009 presentation to re-imagine a scenario where these creatures did not become extinct, but instead could be viewed at a local game preserve on Figueroa Mountain. Doud's photo simulations use state-of-the-art digital technology to depict accurate restorations of the extinct animals based on Rancho La Brea Tar Pit fossils.

The imaginary "Figueroa Mountain Game Preserve" is modeled after the warm-temperate game preserve Hluhluwe-Imfolozi in South Africa, which boasts a full complement of large mammals and associated fauna. The Late

Pleistocene megafauna did not disappear in Africa and has survived into recent times. We can compare the two ecosystems and speculate whether megafauna could fit ecologically in present-day California. We will also examine some possible reasons why these animals became extinct.

Local resident **Ken Doud** holds an MFA from UCSB. He uses computer technology to create special effects and photo simulations for land-use planners, scientific publications, and architects. All of the photos and computer-generated images used in the presentation are original.



Prehistoric elephant in the Figueroa Mountain Game Preserve.
Digital art by Ken Doud.



Ken Doud sitting on top of a (real) whale vertebra.
Courtesy photo.