



BIG MORONGO CANYON PRESERVE

NEWSLETTER

Friends of Big Morongo Canyon Preserve

Fall, 2017

Summer Encounter at Big Morongo Canyon Preserve

For two weeks in late June, seventeen local youth livened up their summer breaks attending Summer Encounter at Big Morongo Canyon Preserve. The program connected youth to this special nature hot spot in the Sand to Snow National Monument. Consisting of two,



Jamie Haney uses an edible aquifer to demonstrate how surface contaminants seep into the water table below.

Photo by Leslie Burkhardt

one-week day camps, Summer Encounter allowed youth aged 8-11 from Morongo Valley and the surrounding area to experience nature up close. With personal misting bottles in hand, they hiked through the riparian oasis learning about the preserve's unique geology, history and wildlife from educator and naturalist Jamie Haney. Then, in the cool of the preserve's Education Center, they created wildlife dioramas, edible aquifers and many other projects to share with their parents at the conclusion on Family Fun Friday.

The program was presented by the Friends of Big Morongo Canyon Preserve and funded by a grant from the Conservation Lands Foundation. Jamie Haney was assisted by BLM volunteers Madison, Patty McCulley, Karen Nelson, and J. Lyn Hughes, as well as critical support by

Mariana Maguire, CLF's Southern California Associate Director for Conservation.

New friends, new adventures and FUN – that's what Summer is all about!

by Leslie Burkhardt



Summer Encounter means a discovery hike with naturalist Jamie Haney.

Photo by Leslie Burkhardt

Walking with Butterflies by Joe Zarki

For a long time now, Wednesday mornings at Big Morongo have been set aside for the weekly public bird walk. When I began helping as a volunteer bird walk leader several years ago, I brought not only a long-time interest in birds but also a 30-year infatuation with those equally beautiful winged creatures– the butterflies. So while each week we're trying to find vermilion flycatchers, hooded orioles, and Lawrence's goldfinches, I'm often looking at mourning cloaks, sylvan hairstreaks, and sagebrush checkerspots. Visitors and bird walk leaders have responded positively to this new focus on a different type of wildlife appreciation, but Wednesdays at Big Morongo are supposed to be 'for the birds.'

That led to an idea that maybe we should try a public activity dedicated to butterfly appreciation. With last winter's

record rains in mind, it seemed likely that this spring was going to be a great one for butterflies, and this would be the perfect time to test a new visitor activity.

After consulting with Volunteer Coordinator Leslie Burkhardt and the bird walk team it was decided to do one butterfly



A western tiger swallowtail feeds on yerba santa near the Yucca Ridge Trail.

Photo by Joe Zarki

walk a month this spring and see what happens. Butterflies like to sleep in and prefer their days sunny and warm, so I picked Friday mornings at 9 a.m. as the starting time. Unlike the bird walks that focus on Covington Park and the Marsh Trail, butterflies seem most numerous on the Mesquite Trail where more open terrain, varied habitats, and native flowers are found. March 17, April 14, and May 12 were advertised as the days for our fledgling butterfly walks, and I began to plan just how this new activity would actually work.

The butterflies certainly did their part as we recorded more than 40 species at the preserve this spring, and the walks averaged about 20 species each. As the short-lived insects flew at different times throughout the spring, each walk

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**National Public Lands Day,
Saturday, September 30**
BMCP Parking Lot, 8 a.m. - 2 p.m.

ALL ARE WELCOME

Did you know that more than 1/3 of America's lands are public lands? Give back to the places we go to learn, play and relax on September 30, 2017, the 24th annual National Environmental Education Foundation's National Public Lands Day! Volunteer to help the Friends of BMCP and the BLM repair trails, fencing, and signs in the preserve. Volunteers will receive water, soft drinks, and lunch. The Friends and the BLM will provide all tools, work gloves, and water. Projects are suitable for families with children over the age of 12.

If you have questions, contact
Leslie Burkhardt at 760-363-1159,
or LBurkhardt@BigMorongo.org

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NEWSLETTER

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Fall, 2017

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CHATting WITH DEE... by Leslie Burkhardt

When I want to chat with Dee these days, I need to grab pen & paper and follow him! He's always on the move, but also always delights in sharing the latest animal sightings at the preserve. So as he was preparing a month's worth of hummingbird food, with four tea kettles coming to the boil on the range, he mentioned that toward the beginning of July, there were reports of bighorn sheep on the West Canyon Trail -- at least six females with a ram. He hasn't had a sighting of the bighorns since the drought ended, so this was good news. Deer have been plentiful this summer. Does have been regularly bringing their yearlings and fawns into the preserve, one doe with twin fawns.



Bees and wasps have been building hives in awkward locations this summer (as usual). They seem to particularly prefer building under the boardwalk. He also barbequed two huge batches of hot dogs for the Summer Encounter Family Fun Fridays in June. Just before midnight on May 28, a wildfire was reported that was located near the top of the Canyon Trail. Dee coordinated, monitored, reported, and lost sleep while our fire-fighting friends from CAL FIRE expertly extinguished the flames over the next 48 hours. Dee's life is certainly not boring!

By the way, if you live in San Bernardino County, and want to be sent text or phone messages of alerts, such as wildfires, that are near your home or at the preserve, you can sign up for the county's Telephone Emergency Notification System (TENS) at their website or by calling 2-1-1 or (888) 435-756.



CAL FIRE crew at BMCP on May 29 successfully controlled the Matz Fire.

Photo by Leslie Burkhardt

NEW VOLUNTEER WORK & LEARN PROGRAM TO START SEPTEMBER 30 by Leslie Burkhardt

National Public Lands Day on Saturday, Sept. 30 would be exciting enough as is, but it is also the first official event of the newly created Friends of Big Morongo Canyon Preserve Volunteer Work & Learn Program.

What is the Volunteer Work & Learn Program? It is a monthly morning program, usually the fourth Saturday and Sunday from 9 to 11:30 AM. Each morning starts with a service project and ends with a presentation that will help people learn more about the natural environments of the high desert, particularly BMCP and Sand to Snow National Monument. In between, people can bring their own snacks for a leisurely break to talk and enjoy one another's company.

People can sign up to attend either or both days each month, depending on

which projects and presentations are of interest. We already have some incredible speakers lined up: The expert local biologist and botanist Robin Kobaly of SummerTree Institute will launch the program as our first speaker on NPLD, Saturday, September 30. We are also very pleased to have BLM Interpretive Specialist Tracy Albrecht on Saturday, October 28 at 10:30 AM present "Know Your Native Snakes".

Find out more about this exciting new program, and check the Work & Learn Calendar for the latest list of projects and presentations by visiting: BigMorongo.org > Friends of BMCP Forum > Volunteer Information > Volunteer Work & Learn Program. Or call our Volunteer Information Line at (760) 363-1159.

Hope to see you there!

BIG MORONGO CANYON PRESERVE

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT by Greg Hill

Along with Volunteer Coordinator Leslie Burkhardt, I would like to thank all our members, donors, volunteers, and our Board of Directors for another great season of hard work and accomplishments at Big Morongo Canyon Preserve. The Friends of Big Morongo Canyon Preserve serves as an integral partner in assisting the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service in managing the public lands of the preserve and the surrounding Sand to Snow National Monument. Being part of a national monument means we have greater visibility, challenges, and opportunities. This makes our weekly bird walks, school programs, Summer Encounter, and Jr. Docent training so important in meeting these challenges. I hope you will continue to join us as we develop more public programs and volunteer projects.

Memberships

For our members, we also want to announce some upcoming changes to our donation categories. Currently the Friends offer three levels of membership; \$25 Individual Annual, \$35 Family Annual, and \$250 Lifetime. Our Board of Directors has approved new categories to appeal to a wider constituency, offer additional member benefits, and enhance our fundraising abilities. The new membership levels will be:

- \$25 Student Annual – receives newsletter and vinyl window sticker
- \$35 Individual Annual – receives newsletter and vinyl window sticker
- \$100 Supporter Annual – receives newsletter, vinyl window sticker, choice of Friends ball cap or canvas tote bag, and a personal private tour of the preserve
- \$750 Lifetime - receives newsletter, vinyl window sticker, choice of Friends ball cap or canvas tote bag, a personal private tour of the preserve, and a natural history video CD.

We hope that adding a student category will attract new members at a lower cost, and the new supporter and increased

lifetime categories will greatly help with our fundraising goals. These new categories will not take effect until January 1, 2018, so please consider renewing or joining now to take advantage of the current membership rates. Of course, those that have Lifetime memberships, or join/renew at the present Lifetime rate before December 31, will continue to enjoy Lifetime benefits after the beginning of the year. So, now is the time to lock in your Lifetime membership and help the Friends with your generous donation!

Preserve Restoration Projects

Big Morongo Canyon and the rest of the Sand to Snow landscape is a biologically diverse and complex ecosystem. Human and environmental changes mean that the preserve requires constant monitoring and sometimes, restoration. A recent project involved calling on one of our important partners, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE). CAL FIRE offers conservation inmate crews to agencies and organizations for restoration and other projects. In May, over 20 members of the Oak Glen Conservation Camp spent several days in the preserve removing overgrown vegetation around the Education Center to make the area more “fire safe”, removed invasive plant species, and improved

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Oak Glen Fire Camp workers clear brush near the BMCP Education Building. Photo by Greg Hill

THE PRESERVE JUST LOOKS BETTER by Leslie Burkhardt

Sometimes when an annoying eyesore disappears, we may not even notice it's gone. The place just looks right, and perhaps we can't even recall a time when it didn't.

But take a good look around now at the preserve and you may notice a wonderful summer miracle. Many of the sorrowful, tumbled down and broken split rail fences around the picnic area, parking lot and the entrance road have been repaired!

This spring Volunteer David Williams contributed his time, skills, and sweat equity toward sprucing up the preserve's split rail fences, many of which were demon-

strating the effects of time, gravity, and too much exposure to our relentless desert sun.

Take a closer look at the myriad of creative and economical solutions that achieved this transformation, and you will see ingenuity and effort par excellence! It just looks... so much better.

AND WE'RE BETTER ORGANIZED, TOO.

Thanks to the organizational efforts of volunteer Tom Haworth, if you look behind the scenes in the tool shed attached to the Education Center, there is now a place for everything, and everything is in its place. Autumn, BMCP is ready for you!



Volunteer David Williams mending fences at BMCP. Photo by Leslie Burkhardt

GPS In A Feather by Jane Olson

A bird named after a person doesn't usually have many identifying features. And that is the case with the diminutive Wilson's warbler, *Wilsonia pusilla*. It weighs between two- and four-tenths of an ounce. It is between four- and four-and-a-half inches long. In other words, it is a scrap of a bird. But, it delights us during migration season when we find its bright yellow form popping about in the foliage hunting for insects. It distinguishes itself from other yellow warblers by sporting a black cap. The females have a less distinct cap. The shiny black eye stands out in the plain yellow face and gives the bird the appearance of being alert to the world and all it holds.

Wilson's warblers see quite a bit of the world – at least the western hemisphere part. The populations that winter in southern Mexico and Central America nest in Alaska and the Canadian tundra. Those birds that nest in our lower western states winter in southern Baja California and coastal Sinaloa, Mexico. The longest journeys are plus or minus 7,000 miles. This figure brings home the fact that stopover points are truly necessary. The habitat most favored by Wilson's warblers is ours. "They are usually found in wooded and scrubby habitats near water," say all the books. That describes the Marsh and Canyon Trails, doesn't it?

We are a very important stopover point for these tiny birds on their long migrations.

The migration of birds has been studied for a long time. Recording observations at the same time and place each year yielded information of passing birds, but not much information about where the individuals had been or where they were going. The earliest tracking method for individual birds was banding. Of the 307,489 Wilson's Warblers banded in the last century, only 289 were recaptured. Clearly, this was not enough data to reveal very much about their migratory paths. As technology advanced, satellite trackers were developed for birds. These were too big for tiny birds and too expensive. Then came ingenious devices called geolocators. The disadvantage was the same as with bands. The bird had to be recaptured to get the data. Fortunately for ornithologists curious about migration paths, another technology came along to aid them in their studies.

Scientists developed the technology to discern specific information from DNA. All sorts of information can be teased from the DNA of people, plants and animals. Kristen Ruegg, a professor from UCLA's Institute for the Environment and

Sustainability, had long thought that the DNA in the shafts of bird's feathers could provide a key to migration patterns. When the technology came along, she was ready. The Institute had been collecting feathers for decades from banders across the nation and around the world. Its migratory bird feather collection numbered in the hundreds of thousands. Ruegg and others launched the Bird Genoscape Project.

Birds breeding in different regions develop their own distinct genetic markers. The task was to define these markers for Wilson's warblers. The research team started by examining the DNA in 22 different feathers collected from birds that had been caught in five recognized breeding regions and included feathers from the three known subspecies. For their purpose, the team identified 100 genetic markers. When these markers were used in combination, the scientists could determine the breeding region of the bird by analyzing the DNA from a single feather.

This key was used to analyze the next batch of 1,626 feathers. These had been gathered from birds caught at Central American and Mexican wintering sites as well as at migration stopovers. From just one feather, it can be determined to which breeding ground the wintering bird will return. The genetic data from this group of feathers from the archive resulted in a map of the travels of Wilson's warblers.

As usual when we dig deeply into the life history of any organism, it is more complicated than was originally thought. The study of Wilson's warbler feathers proves this to be true. It was found that there are six populations of Wilson's warbler; each breeding in a different region. Some wintering areas are shared by more than one population. The technology of using the GPS contained in the DNA of feathers will be a great aid in directing conservation for many migratory bird species.

So, the next time you see a feather on the trail, imagine what it could tell you!



Wilson's warblers are a common sight during spring and fall migration at the preserve. . Photo by Larry Rosen

BIG MORONGO CANYON PRESERVE

Walking with Butterflies by Joe Zarki (cont.)

featured new species. The March walk had bramble hairstreaks, Mojave blues, and spring whites. April saw western tiger and black swallowtails with dozens of Sara orangetips, while the May walk featured a lovely West Coast Lady, a newly emerged Bernardino blue, and the very rare California tortoiseshell.

It soon became clear that a butterfly walk is a different kind of animal. The walks averaged about 12 participants, mostly BMCP volunteers and Friends with just a handful of general visitors. Logistics on a butterfly walk are very different than on a bird walk. For one thing the objects of the activity are much smaller, the largest butterfly being about equal in size to a verdin. That puts the focus of the group on a much smaller area. On a butterfly walk, you are generally looking at eye level or lower, whereas when birding you are typically looking up and outward. It's an easy matter to point out a bird that is 30-40 yards away and have the entire group see the bird.

When a butterfly is the size of a nickel and can't be easily seen from more than about 15 feet away, a different group dynamic comes into play. It was often hard for people at the back of the group to see a butterfly that the folks in front were examining. I occasionally used a net to briefly capture some of the smaller butterflies and show them to everyone close up. Often the butterflies themselves cooperated. Lorquin's admirals sometimes perched on the edge of the net when released as if wanting to make sure we were aware of their stunning beauty. Those can be special moments, especially for children.

So the butterfly walk is a work in progress and requires a different approach to ensure that everyone in the group has a good experience. Late summer and fall will bring new flights and different species so I'll likely try again. We'll get the word out if more walks are scheduled in the near future. But remember... Wednesday's are still 'for the birds.'

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT by Greg Hill (cont.)

our trails. Many of you remember the outstanding work these crews did to repair damage to the preserve after the 2005 Paradise Fire. Unfortunately, CAL FIRE needed to return on May 29 to battle the Matz Fire, a new blaze along the Canyon Trail, near the top of Big Morongo Canyon. With assistance from the BLM and local fire agencies, the fire was quickly controlled at just a few acres. However, with the past winter's rainfall, the preserve is at risk for wildfires and we need to be extra careful and vigilant.



CAL FIRE workers help reduce fire hazards at BMCP. Photo by Greg Hill



FRIENDS OF
BIG MORONGO CANYON PRESERVE

Yes, I Want to Help!

PLEASE RETURN YOUR TAX-DEDUCTIBLE DONATION TO:

FRIENDS OF BMCP
P.O. Box 780
MORONGO VALLEY, CA 92256

NAME(S) _____
MAILING _____
ADDRESS _____
CITY _____ STATE _____
ZIP _____
EMAIL _____

ENCLOSED MEMBERSHIP DUES:

- \$ 25.00 INDIVIDUAL ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP
 \$ 35.00 FAMILY ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP
 \$ 250.00 LIFETIME MEMBERSHIP

ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS:

- \$ 10.00 \$ 50.00
 \$ 20.00 OTHER _____

NEWSLETTER (WINTER, SPRING/ SUMMER, FALL ISSUES)

- EMAIL MAIL NEITHER

BECOME A MEMBER OF

FRIENDS OF BIG MORONGO CANYON PRESERVE

Friends of Big Morongo Canyon Preserve is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) association organized solely for the advancement of programs at Big Morongo Canyon Preserve/Area of Critical Environmental Concern. The primary purpose of the Friends is to enhance wildlife viewing, wildlife protection, educational programs, and recreational opportunities provided by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) within the preserve. The Friends provide ongoing support of the Bureau's conservation, education, and recreation programs within Big Morongo Canyon Preserve. The Friends achieve these goals by raising funds, accepting donations, recruiting volunteers, and assisting the BLM in the planning, creation, and maintenance of programs and facilities at the preserve.

All donations received from visitors are used by the Friends to purchase materials for trail construction, benches, signs, and displays. Maps, trail guides, brochures, and educational and informative printed materials are also provided to visitors from these funds. Donations to the Friends also support education and environmental programs and are fully tax-deductible in accordance with IRS and state laws.

As a Friend, you will receive an annual summary of accomplishments and, if requested, new environmental education materials and programs made possible through the donation fund. Friends of BMCP are invited to attend the annual fall general membership meeting. As a special thank you, new Friends receive a unique BMCP embroidered color patch. Lifetime members also receive a canvas preserve tote bag in addition to two BMCP color patches.

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NEWSLETTER

is published by

Friends of BMCP

P.O. Box 780

Morongo Valley, CA 92256

GO GREEN...to choose the digital option for receiving your newsletter, call the Preserve.



CALENDAR

AT BMCP

AUGUST – DECEMBER

Gate open 7:30 a.m. to Sunset

365 days a year

WEDNESDAY BIRD WALKS

Every Wednesday at 7:00 a.m. (Start time will change to 8:00 a.m. in October.) Bring your binoculars and spend a couple of hours strolling the trails with knowledgeable local bird walk leaders. Meet at BMCP parking lot. Beginning birders welcome.

SATURDAY BIRD WALKS

Bird walks held on the third Saturday of each month from October through May. From October through March, walks begin at 8:00 a.m. In April and May, walks start at 7:00 a.m. No Saturday bird walks are held from June through September. Same format as Wednesday bird walks.

UPCOMING EVENTS

August 21, Solar eclipse. Approximately 70% totality in our area.

September 30, National Public Lands Day. See p. 2 for details.

October 3, Volunteer Meeting. 9-11 a.m., Education Building.

October 11, Friends of BMCP Board & Membership Meeting, 1 p.m. All are welcome.

December 16, Christmas Bird Count. Saturday, 7:30 a.m.

Check the BMCP website for information and updates on future events.