



# BIG MORONGO CANYON PRESERVE

## NEWSLETTER

*Friends of Big Morongo Canyon Preserve*

Winter 2016



Tom Haworth, Joe Zarki, Bob Cullen, and Bill LaHaye add butterfly attractant plants along walkway

### **New Plantings to Attract Butterflies**

Come spring, a walk to the Preserve's restrooms may be enhanced with the sight of butterflies flitting about.

In October, several one-gallon nursery plants were planted adjacent to the split rail fence. These particular plants were chosen because they attract butterflies. All of the new plants will have flowers that draw butterflies to their nectar, and most of the plants are additionally a host species for various butterfly species larvae. The adult butterflies should be laying their eggs on our new plants, with caterpillars to follow.

Larry Rosen organized this new endeavor. Of note, Larry was careful to choose only plants that are native to the Preserve—no exotics.

### **Forests Are for the Birds (and Vice Versa)** *by Margaret Hoggan*

Forests are very important to many species of birds, providing them with homes as well as food. Some 85 species of birds are cavity nesters in North America. These birds may use a natural cavity in a tree, excavate one (usually in dead or deteriorating trees), or take over a cavity created by another bird. Included among the birds that are cavity nesters are species of owls, woodpeckers, flycatchers, swallows, chickadees, titmice, wrens, bluebirds, and warblers.

Most of the cavity nesting birds are insectivores. Especially important to the forests they live in are the woodpeckers, which are predators on the many species of tree-killing bark beetles.

The role of birds in combatting insects that try to devour forest trees is something most of us are aware of. But less known is the role of birds in planting forest trees, and perhaps the most amazing is the relationship between pines and birds of the corvid family (jays, nutcrackers, crows, ravens, etc.). In our local forests, we have three species of jays and a nutcracker. These birds collect and cache pine nuts, burying them in the soil. The nuts that are not eaten can germinate, yielding more trees in the forest.

The Western Scrub Jay and the Steller's Jay have a fairly varied diet and are not highly adapted to a diet of pine nuts, although they do help plant pine trees. The Pinyon Jay and the Clark's Nutcracker are much more specialized, with longer bills more suitable for getting pine nuts, the capability for longer and faster flight allowing seeds to be carried farther, and pouches that allow them to carry a large number of seeds. (A Western Scrub Jay can carry 4 or 5 nuts, and a Pinyon Jay up to 50.) The bird most adapted to relying on pine nuts for sustenance is the Clark's Nutcracker.

The Clark's Nutcracker lives at high elevations in montane forests. It begins breeding in February when there is snow on the ground and so must rely heavily on cached pine nuts. And, it is not only this striking gray, white, and black corvid that is dependent on the pines. Some pines are equally dependent on the bird.

Some pines have winged seeds and cones that open when they are ready to be dispersed. These can be distributed on the wind to grow without assistance. But other pines have large seeds without wings and in some cases cones that need bird assistance to open, and these require birds to extract the seeds and cache them in the soil in sufficient abundance so that many will germinate and keep the forest growing. One nutcracker can cache 100,000 seeds in a season, two or three times more than it will need.

In recent years, researchers have found that the whitebark pine, a major forest tree in the Rockies, Cascades, and Sierra Nevada, is highly dependent on the Clark's Nutcracker and vice versa. A fungus infection, blister rust, introduced from Asia at the turn of the 20th Century, has attacked whitebark pine, making it vulnerable to attack by pine beetles. The infection has spread to 38 states with disastrous results, and nutcracker populations have decreased over half of their range since 2003. Nearly 100 other species rely on the forests created by these two species.

The Clark's Nutcracker can use other pines to some degree, even the pinyon pine found in our desert mountains locally. It is not the species most responsible for the propagation of our Southwestern pinyon-juniper forests, however. That we owe to our Pinyon Jay, also adapted to eating pine nuts and also responsible for keeping the forest going by caching pine nuts and hence planting new pine trees. So the next time you see a jay, keep in mind that we are indebted to them for planting much of our pine forests.

## Christmas Bird Count Saturday, December 19

BMCP Parking Lot at 7:30 a.m.

### ALL ARE WELCOME

BMCP will be participating in the 116th Annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count. It's fun, it's free, and we can use your help.

Teams will be formed to bird a variety of habitats within a 7.5-mile radius of the Preserve. At 4:30 p.m. we will gather to tally data and enjoy pizza.

It isn't necessary to be an expert birder. Each team will have an experienced birder leading, and help is needed to spot birds and record data. So come join us, see some interesting birds, and help find out what is what with our feathered friends.

While there is no cost to participate, donations to Audubon will be gratefully accepted. Audubon will make summary results of the count available online.

Bring binoculars, good walking shoes, layers of clothing suitable for changeable weather, a sack lunch & water.

Call Joe Zarki at (760) 366-8913  
if you have questions.

## Bird's Eye View ... and more

*gleaned from  
Dee Zeller*

Sitting in Dee's trailer in the late afternoon on a blustery mid-November afternoon, the bird activity at the feeders is rather slow (wrong time of day), but a female mule deer with her twin young somewhat make up for the lack of birds. These twin fawns are approaching their mom in size, and they have already lost their fawn's spots. Mom effortlessly, from a standstill, bounds the rail fence between the bird feeders and the road. The fawns, well they have to think about it for a minute, and then over they go too.



Dee says the Preserve's trails are better than he has ever seen them, thanks to much needed and extensive trimming and sprucing up by volunteers Tom Coor and Phred Cappillari. Thanks Tom and Phred.

Another volunteer who saw a long-standing need and took care of the problem is Krissy Shamley. The painted bird silhouettes on the cement floor of the kiosk were in very bad shape after years of footsteps wearing them down. These silhouettes are numbered so that visitors can identify the bird by looking above a silhouette for a full-color painting of the bird and also viewing the numbered key to the bird's name. Krissy applied fresh paint to the ground silhouettes, making them good to go for many more years.



Section of kiosk floor with freshly painted bird silhouettes

By mid-November, the usual winter birds have arrived at the Preserve, and 45 to 50 species are being seen on the bird walks. Unusual this year though is the scarcity of Yellow-rumped Warblers. This species is usually common here in winter, but for unknown reasons, only a limited number of individuals are being seen.

However, another species that is rarely seen here, the Red-breasted Nuthatch, has been delighting birders of late and has been enjoying the suet and peanuts at the bird feeders.

As to November mammal activity, visitors are getting good views of a male bobcat. But, no mountain lion has been seen in the last month, the gray fox has not been seen since last spring, and black bears are not currently present. Raccoons seem to be indulging in food resources outside the Preserve, raiding neighborhood trash cans and food left out for pets.

Bighorn sheep haven't been seen on the Preserve's ridges lately, and Dee expects that with the forthcoming El Nino winter rains, the sheep will be visiting the Preserve infrequently, as they will have many resource options for water throughout the local mountains. Bighorn though are being spotted from Highway 62 along the Morongo grade. There is good indication that they are using the Dry Morongo Canyon underpass under the highway. Groups as large as 15 individuals are being seen on both sides of the highway.



Section of kiosk ceiling matching same silhouettes with bird images

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# BIG MORONGO CANYON PRESERVE

## Busloads of Fun *by Jane Olson*

What do dream catchers and peanut M&Ms have in common? Give up? They put smiles on the faces of the students who come to Big Morongo Canyon Preserve to learn about Native Americans or the local geology.

The Native American class was designed to complement the fourth grade state science standards. The goal is to expose the students to the ecosystem from which the Native Americans derived all the materials needed to sustain life and a robust culture. For many hundreds of years, the Serrano clans lived on the land that is now the Preserve as well as in the surrounding mountains and canyons. Including plants from various elevations, they used over two hundred and fifty plants for food, medicine, shelter, and even entertainment. On a recent trip on the Mesquite Trail with fourth graders, the students learned to recognize just four of these two hundred and fifty plants. By the end of the walk, they were impressed with the range of necessities that plants could provide for people who knew how to use them.

After the trail experience, the children return to the Education Center for a crafts or science project related to the theme of the tour. Many Native American cultures used dream catchers to repel or catch bad dreams. Their dream catchers were made from a willow branch formed into a circle. Their net was made from animal fibers such as sinew or from string made from plants. Ours were made from embroidery hoops and from string, dyed feathers, and beads. We had a pattern to follow, but that proved elusive for many. No matter how they turned out, the children enjoyed their hands on project.

The geology tour was also designed to fit the state science standards. It involves taking the children for a walk to view some of the more interesting rocks that are found on the Preserve. Who would-

n't want to put their hands on rocks that are believed to be in excess of two billion years old? Even grownups like the idea of touching something that old. Gneiss (nice) is the main rock in Big Morongo Canyon Preserve. It can be identified by the parallel stripes caused by extreme heat and pressure. Some scientists believe that it is the oldest exposed rock on the planet.

After the walk, the group returns to the Education Center for a short study about the structure of our planet. Each student is given a picture of a cutaway version of earth and a handout describing what is inside the Earth. Then everyone gets two peanut M&Ms on a napkin. The instructions are to neatly bite the M&M in half in order to reveal the layers. Many of these bites have to have "do-overs." That is everybody's favorite part. But among the giggles and savoring a bite of candy, the students do examine and label the layers of Earth.

None of this could happen without the participation of the education volunteers. Our Director of Environmental Education, Kc McKay, designs the programs, schedules the tours with the schools, assembles all the materials for the programs, and does a major portion of the classes. The Friends hired a consultant to help with revising the educational training materials. The first drafts of most subjects are completed. The docents will be taking the revised programs on a test run, so to speak, as they conduct their tours this season.

Environmental education of the kind that Big Morongo Canyon Preserve can offer is scarce. We have many more requests for schools than our small group of docents can accommodate. The last year has taken quite a toll on the members of the Education Committee. If we are to continue to offer nature classes to children, we very much need more volunteers. Please, if you can see yourself leading walks or passing out peanut M&Ms, please contact Kc McKay at [kcrobin@netscape.com](mailto:kcrobin@netscape.com).



## BMCP Plant List is Now Up to Date *by Ann Garry*

The Big Morongo Canyon Preserve has a plant list that was compiled by George Helmkamp, Ph.D. The list contains 390 plants and lists their scientific family name, common family name, their scientific genus and species, and their common name. Over the years, many of the scientific names have changed, and we decided that bringing the list up to date was a necessity.

Your first question might be, “Why do scientific names change?” Most name changes reflect a better understanding of the evolution of the plant, something that has resulted from intensive study of the plants themselves (stems, leaves, flowers, fruits) and especially from the recent ability to compare the internal structure of DNA molecules.

Your second question might be, “Why is it important to know the scientific name of a plant?” This is the name that hardly anyone can say or spell and that nobody is able to remember. “Why can’t we just use its common name?” A really good reason not to restrict ourselves to common names, e.g., daisy, buttercup, aster, is because those names vary from person to person, region

to region, state to state, and country to country. Common names frequently refer to several different plants (not just one), and many plants can have several common names.

On the other hand, scientific names assigned by botanists to plants are accepted internationally. Two words associated with a plant’s name are “**genus**,” which encompasses a group of species that are closely related, and “**species**,” which is the most specific level of scientific classification. The scientific name for a plant is always two words. The first word designates the genus to which the plant belongs, and the second, called the species name, gives a name to distinguish this plant from all others in the same genus. For example, in the name *Senecio flaccidus*, *Senecio* is the genus and *flaccidus* is the specific species name. No other plant in the world has the name *Senecio flaccidus*.

The plant list also informs the user if a plant is native or nonnative. A native plant is one that occurs in an area not as a direct or indirect consequence of human activity or that is, in other words, indigenous. A nonnative plant is a species that has been introduced into new areas that have not historically been part of its native range. Exotic, alien, nonindigenous, and intro-

duced are all synonymous terms referring to nonnative species. The removal of nonnative species at Big Morongo Canyon Preserve or from our own yards is a topic of concern.

The author of “The Sixth Extinction,” Elizabeth Kolbert, has given us a lot to think about. Introduced species are now so much a part of so many landscapes that, chances are, if you look out your window, you will see one. We play a big role in the “invasive” species story. We have influenced geographic distribution through global trade and global travel. The process of mixing the world’s flora, which began slowly along the routes of early human navigation, has in recent decades accelerated to the point where in some parts of the world nonnative species now outnumber native species.

With all of the changes, climatic and otherwise, that our flora and fauna face now and in the future, it is important that we stay up to date with our scientific knowledge of the plants at Big Morongo Canyon Preserve.

The newly updated Plants of Big Morongo Canyon Preserve plant list is available on our website [bigmorongo.org](http://bigmorongo.org).

## BMCP Fall 2015 Weather *by Ray Yeager*

High and low temperatures have been a few degrees cooler than normal so far this fall. A few early cold fronts have been passing through, producing no rain but cold and windy days.

Because a strong El Nino has been predicted, we all are hoping for above average winter rain. Past strong El Ninos have produced about two inches above normal precipitation at BMCP.

After four years of severe drought, the surface water at the Preserve doesn’t appear to have changed much. A relatively high water table (fifteen feet below the surface) keeps our cottonwood trees and other deep-rooted plants healthy.

# BIG MORONGO CANYON PRESERVE

## CALENDAR AT BMCP DECEMBER – MARCH Gate open 7:30 a.m. to sunset 365 days a year

### WEDNESDAY BIRD WALKS

Every Wednesday at 8:00 a.m. (Start time will change to 7:00 a.m. in April.) Bring your binoculars and spend a couple of hours strolling the trails with birding experts. Beginning birders welcome.

### SATURDAY BIRD WALKS

On the third Saturday of each month at 8:00 a.m. (Start time will change to 7:00 a.m. for April.) Same format as Wednesday Bird Walks.

### UPCOMING EVENTS

Dec. 19, Sat. (7:30 a.m.-late afternoon) - Christmas Bird Count. See page 2.  
Jan. 19, Tues. (9:00-11:00 a.m.) - Volunteer Meeting. Joe Zarki will be speaking on butterflies.  
Mar. 15, Tues. at 9:00 a.m.) - Volunteer Meeting.



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

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#### ENCLOSED MEMBERSHIP DUES:

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

#### ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS:

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

## 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 material are also provided to visitors from these funds.

Donations to the Friends are tax-deductible and are not used to cover overhead or operational expenses.

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

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P.O. Box 780  
Morongo Valley, CA 92256

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the Preserve*



Big Morongo Canyon Preserve volunteers and BLM staff gather for their first meeting of the year on October 20, 2015

# Friends of Big Morongo Canyon Preserve

## 2014/2015 Annual Report

***Change, chaos, challenges and opportunities***—these are the dynamics your Board of Directors has been working with over this last year. It's been a year of adjusting to deep losses while preparing for big opportunities on the horizon.

We are still reinventing our organization to address the loss of several key people over the last few years. What this translates to is "capacity." The Board has been carefully considering the issues of capacity, programs, volunteerism, and meeting our mission and principal responsibilities.

Make no mistake, your Board is fully dedicated to the principal reason we are here—to protect and steward this precious and unique environment so that it may continue to support the diverse and varied plants and wildlife that make this their home and so that our Preserve may continue to be a worldwide attraction. But there is a second and equally important role we must fulfill; in order for our Preserve to survive long into the future, to remain vital on a timeframe dictated by nature not development, we must ensure there is a continuum of passionate people well into the future. It is succeeding generations who will guarantee this precious Preserve will remain just that—preserved! And that is why your Board also is very aware of the need to inspire, teach, and nurture our youth. In our modern world of smart phones, video games, and social media, our kids are becoming . . . let's say, distracted. That coupled with the dwindling support for our schools is making it more difficult for us to maintain the level of education for which we are so respected. What this translates to through the lens of capacity is the need for more bussing resources, more in-class time, more in-Preserve time, and most critically more feet-on-the-ground help.

The Board just completed a year-end design session—nearly a full day of deep examination of resources, mission, capacity, and Preserve needs now and long into the future. The elephant in the room was *change, chaos, challenges and opportunities*.

In addition to the challenging, changing nature of our activities, we have the probability of becoming part of Sand to Snow National Monument. While this will produce more support on some levels and greatly increase our ability to meet our two prime objectives, it will not solve our capacity issues. There is one simple and profound solution to this dynamic.

So here is my call to action, my deepest request. Your Preserve and particularly our youth inspiration and outreach colleagues need your help. This is not a request for expertise or deep skills; it's an opportunity to show your passion and enthusiasm for your Preserve by volunteering your assistance under the very capable direction of our Director of Environmental Education, Kc McKay. Particularly if you are in our area, our neighborhood, and can participate even just a few hours a month helping "kit-up" class activities, collate and organize class materials, help with the kids or just to be available to answer questions out on the trails. This is truly powerful and meaningful work. And it is great fun while truly making a difference.

The next decade promises to be full of exciting and productive activities for the Friends. We have a few challenges to get through but our future is very bright indeed. I want you all to have the opportunity to own a piece of that coming success. Dear members and volunteers, "Come on down!"



David S. Miller  
President, Friends of Big Morongo Canyon Preserve



Friends of Big Morongo Canyon Preserve — Board of Directors

David Miller • Patrick Casey • Jane Olson • Jane Mootz • Ann Garry  
Kc Robin McKay • Laura Sherrod • Meg Foley • Tish Miller

# BMCP 2014/2015

