

Oak Notes

Volume 43
Number 5
January 2026

NEWSLETTER OF THE CALIFORNIA BOTANIC GARDEN VOLUNTEERS

President: Kathleen Noll

Vice President:
Christine Zukowski

Treasurer: Rachael Wilkerson

Secretary: Kit Leung

Volunteer Coordinator:
Patty España

Goals & Evaluations:
Betsy MacLaren

Volunteer Personnel:
Judy Moffet

Volunteer Library:
Amy Baumann

Enrichment & Field Trips:
Marla White

Hospitality: Susan Starr

Horticulture & Research:
Tom White

Visitor Experience:
Co-Chairs: Virginia Herd
and Lynn Miller

Community Outreach:
No Chair

Native Designs: Co-Chairs:
Linda Prendergast and
Kathleen Noll

Oak Notes Editor:
Patricia Brooks

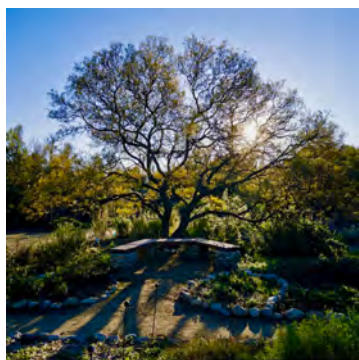
Copy Editor: Fred Brooks

Publisher: Carole Aldrich

Web Publisher: Jennifer
Scerra and Lauren Stoebel



FROM THE PRESIDENT Kathleen Noll, Volunteer President



Is your intention in the new year to spend more time in the California Botanic Garden? On the mesa there is a community cultivation opportunity awaiting. The Native Designs Flower Garden (adjacent to the Bird and Butterfly Garden) is currently undergoing refurbishment under the supervision of the horticulture staff. We are recruiting volunteers to plant, weed, and otherwise maintain the plants and pathways in the demonstration garden, which is the primary source for materials used by the Native Designs group in flower arrangements. It also serves as a place to learn, promote biodiversity, and well-being. This group of volunteers is distinct from the Native Designs creative team, and we need you.

I found that one of the best ways to learn about California native plants is to work directly with them over time. This is a wonderful opportunity to learn the basics alongside both new and long-time Garden volunteers.

You are invited to an introductory session on **Tuesday, January 20 from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.** This informal "open house" will be a friendly, informative, and a fun way to learn how the garden operates. Native Designs Garden volunteers meet weekly on Tuesday mornings following this

introductory session. No need to RSVP and no experience is necessary. Please bring gloves, water, and dress for the weather. We hope you will join us as a gardener in this beautiful setting. We are fortunate to have wonderful volunteers and thank you for your generous dedication to CalBG. Happy New Year!

The deadline for articles to be submitted for the OAK NOTES is the **15th** of the month **prior** to publication. Thank you for your prompt submission!

Volgistics reminder: Please submit your monthly volunteer hours to Volgistics. Every volunteer minute counts.



FROM THE DIRECTOR

Lucinda McDade,
CalBG Executive Director

Greetings volunteers!

My writing session for the January *Oak Notes* issue finds us in the days following a truly horrible weekend. The loss of two people close to our research community after long battles with disease was grievous enough. But then the Brown University shooting, followed shortly by the bigoted hate-inspired horror on a beautiful beach in Australia. AND then Rob and Michelle Reiner, victims of what seems to have been a long struggle with mental illness. Truly we are remarkable creatures! Capable of such pure, altruistic acts of generosity on the one hand, yet murderous cruelty on the other. As we struggle to make sense of it, join me in remembering how important our Garden is to people who are grieving in various ways or struggling to recover from terrible events. We all find solace in the peaceful strength of our live oaks and in the transient beauty of spring wildflowers. We work here every day to build a mutually supportive and kind community: it is *good* work!

On a happier note, we are in the middle of Luminaria season! It has been wonderful to see so many of you helping in so many ways with this lovely event! It truly takes a Garden to pull off each and every evening of magic. It also finds us in the middle of a remarkably warm (and dry) December—we will remember this Luminaria season as the warm one! I have not yet had to find my winter gloves. I know you all join me in being SO very glad that we got all of that rain in November. Otherwise this warm dry weather would be starting to make us very nervous.

Thank you all for coming to my birthday party—AKA your quarterly luncheon! As usual, the food was marvelous. I'd happily live on a diet of those salads that many of you make. I will also note that the Volunteers are BACK—by which I mean that attendance at your quarterly luncheons is solidly excellent and everyone has a lovely time. Like many

things, it took a while to get back the “culture” of the quarterly luncheons—or maybe it had to be regrown. We have found the same pattern with our science seminar series. By the time we were able to go back to “normal” after Covid, there had been a total turn-over of our graduate students, such that they no longer knew how we ran the seminar series. The result is that we do some things the same but have taken on some innovations too!

At the luncheon, Win Aldrich asked about Art Braeger. Some, but probably not all, of you know that Art was a local contractor and special friend to the Garden. Who doesn't want a skilled and knowledgeable contractor as a good friend! This Garden, with all of its infrastructural quirks, very often benefited from Art's knowledge, experience, and dedication. He also served as a volunteer leader—first as a member and chair of the Garden's now defunct Board of Overseers before moving over and then serving nine years as a Trustee. The list of projects that Braeger Construction undertook for the Garden is lengthy, from the Cultivar Garden to the new irrigation system to our wonderful new paths in the SoCal Gardens area. He will be missed—no—he *is* missed! End of an era!

I wish all of you peaceful and serene holiday seasons with those closest to you. If you travel, may your travels be event-free other than your safe arrival at the other end. It will be 2026 before we know it! Happy holidays,

UPDATES TO VOLUNTEER STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

by Patty Nueva España,
Volunteer Program Coordinator

Happy New Year to All!!

Volunteers play an active and important role at California Botanic Garden. Appropriate training and intellectual enrichment are provided to all volunteers, including instruction in Garden safety and security procedures.

CalBG expects volunteers to conduct themselves at all times in a manner that fosters the following

characteristics: collegiality, mutual respect, fairness, safety, security, and lawfulness.

That is the introduction to the CalBG Volunteer Standards of Conduct. Some of our volunteers might have been with the Garden long enough to remember when these were added as an appendix to the Volunteer Handbook, but I believe it was long before my time. Upon review, it is clear that they themselves do not measure up to current standards. For instance, there is no mention of anything pertaining to safety or security.

Sometime last year, the California Botanic Garden Employee Handbook went through a major overhaul to bring it up to date with current workplace policies. In that document, I came across some things that pertain to us as volunteers, but are not mentioned in the Volunteer Standards. That is an issue the staff at CalBG feels needs to be remedied.

Here we are at the beginning of a new year, a time for new ideas and connections and possibly some new volunteer endeavors. There may be no better time to overhaul and update the Volunteer Standards of Conduct to reflect what is important at this time. We have a team of staff members who will be collaborating and getting it ready. So be on the lookout for a new, improved Volunteer Standards of Conduct in the coming months.

THE GREAT GRAPEVINE HARVEST AND WREATH-MAKING EVENT 2026

After a long year of rest and recovery, the grapevines are ready for pruning and wreath-making! Please join us for The Great Grapevine Harvest and Wreath-making Event & Luncheon is on Friday, February 20th. Harvest and Wreath-making from 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., luncheon from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

We invite all volunteers to help with a light, general pruning of our native grapevines. We will convene at 8:30 a.m. outside the Lenz Classroom at the Horticulture Building. A brief demonstration of proper pruning techniques will precede the pruning session.

What to Bring:

- Gloves
- Water
- Personal pruners (we will have some available if you do not have your own)
- Sunscreen and a hat are advisable.

Following the work, the Hospitality team will be serving the traditional baked potato bar luncheon with all the fixings.

We look forward to seeing you there!

BURROWING OWLS: DECEMBER ENRICHMENT PROGRAM

by Marla White, photos by Marla White



Suzanne Thompson, Emeritus Professor, Pomona College spoke to a full house on her passion project, burrowing owls, which are only found in the Americas. These are the only owls that nest and roost underground. Ms. Thompson said the

primary threats to these small raptors are from urbanization, agriculture, and development. Their main food sources are ground squirrels and beetles and they make their burrows in open fields. They are also greatly impacted by the use of rodenticides, which poison their food source (rodents) and ultimately the population that eats the tainted prey.



Her talk was enhanced with a documentary video regarding the habitat loss near the Ontario Airport

and the fight to save it from developers. CalBG volunteer, Paul Clarke, was part of the film and is active in helping to save these animals. She also updated the audience that pairs of the owls have been successfully relocated to Riverside County. The burrowing owl was listed as a candidate for California Endangered Species Act (CESA) protection in October 2024, triggering interim protections. Ms. Thompson is an active member of the Pomona Valley Bird Alliance, which usually meets the first Thursday of the month at the Hughes Center in Claremont.

CalBG Volunteers are invited on a field excursion to see the burrowing owl habitat located near the Chino campus of Chaffey College: the date will be announced this spring.

[Burrowing Owl of Southern California Video](#)
(Link)

FAMILY BIRD FESTIVAL RETURNS

by Sally Hy , Photos by Carrie Rosema



My first time working the Family Bird Festival at CalBG was the first time I learned how to use binoculars properly. I was located at Johnson's Oval that year where we had a Great Backyard Bird Count Station run by Pomona Valley Bird Alliance. The wonderful volunteers there lent me a pair of binoculars and taught me the basics of spotting a bird, bringing the binoculars to your eyes, and focusing. Even as an adult, I am building core memories and will not forget the clear vision of seeing those little goldfinches feeding off the seed mix.

That's what the Family Bird Festival is for many, a beloved community event for people of all ages to build those core memories and gain a better appreciation for our wild birds. Whether someone

is an avid birder or a casual observer of nature, there is something for everyone at this event. The event takes place on the upper level of the Garden, the Mesa Gardens, with stations for bird-related crafts, activities, story time, and delicious food and treats. The Cultivar Garden will once again host our Migration Challenge as visitors pretend to be birds through an immersive game and learn the hardships of a bird's migration. We will be welcoming back old and new community organizations, including: our partner, Pomona Valley Bird Alliance; Wild Birds Unlimited; San Bernardino County Museum; Friends of California Condors Wild & Free; Los Angeles Catio Tour; and more!



You do not need to be a bird expert to volunteer for this event. Many of the tasks include wayfinding,

welcoming/greeting, keeping craft areas tidy, and passing out materials. However, you are more than welcome to share fun bird facts with visitors throughout the day. Come be a part of making those core memories for our visitors. The Family Bird Festival is on Sunday, February 15, 2026 from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Sign up to volunteer on Volgistics.

ROSES OF THE DESERT MOUNTAINS

by Steve Bryant

The Rose family (Rosaceae) is often thought of as needing abundant water and having prickles, but there are shrubby species growing in our desert mountains that are "prickle-less," require very little water, have interesting fruits, and sometimes plentiful flowers. These include several *Prunus* species (see April 2024 *Oak Notes*). *Fallugia paradoxa* (Apache Plume) grows in the Providence and New York Mountains from ~1000–2000 m. It can be grown anywhere in SoCal as a shrub 1–3 m tall and wide. The leaves are small and on numerous stems, with

white, ~2+ cm flowers produced in the spring (flower size shrinks noticeably as the season progresses). Flowers are followed by a cluster of 30–50, 3-cm-long plumose fruits in late spring/early summer that give the plant its common name. Once established, it will grow in almost any SoCal soil, and tolerate most watering or pruning regimes. From the first flower to the last dropped fruit is often over 8 months in my yard, and I highly recommend it.



Purshia stansburiana (Cliffrose—formerly *Cowania mexicana stansburiana*) grows from the Providence Mtns. through the White Mtns. at ~1000–2600 m. Leaves usually have five divisions. To 7 m tall, this plant always reminds me of my

grandfather’s house at Grand Canyon, because this plant was one of the first he made me learn there. It also has small white-yellow flowers, followed by a cluster of 3–5 fruits, each with a long plume. Slow

growing in my garden: after 20+ years from seed, my plants are only about 2 m tall. *Purshia tidentata* (Bitterbrush), to 4 m tall, grows east and north of the Sierras from 500–3500 m and in the transverse ranges. Its leaves are like *P. stansburiana*, though with only three divisions per leaf (hence the name). The flowers and fruit are also like *P. stansburiana*; the two may hybridize.



Cercocarpus ledifolius (Curl-leaf Mountain Mahogany, pictured left) has a distribution similar to *P. tridentata*. To 7 m tall, it has small leathery leaves, very small flowers, and fruit

like *P. stansburiana*. *C. ledifolius* also grows slowly in my yard—a 20-year-old plant is only 1.5 m tall.

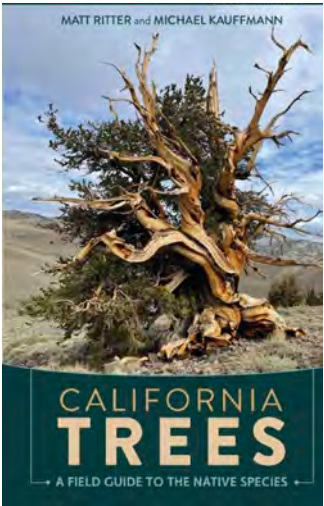
BOOK OF THE MONTH

Ann Morgan,
Volunteer Library Committee



A Very Happy January Birthday to:

Makayla Arch	Linda Prendergast
Laura Burt	Melissa Salinas
Isabel Garcia	Mariana Sanchez
Susan Gregory	Berenice Sealy
Patricia Hoppe	Paul Standerfer
Mellena Leong-Pearson	Raffi Tashjian
Karla Maez	Jillian Terrazas
Eric Magana	Katina Vlastos
Debbie Maki	Jennifer Wyatt
Morris Powazek	



California Trees: A Field Guide to the Native Species by Matt Ritter and Michael Kaufmann. Backcountry Press, Kneeland, CA, 2025. 208 pages.

California Trees is a compact, well-organized guide to our state’s native tree species. The book starts with an introductory overview of the major forest and woodland areas in California followed by tree descriptions organized by plant families. Details for each tree include common name, scientific name, key measurements, species description, and identification tips. Detailed color photographs and a range map are provided as well. The authors also devote a few pages to what they call “almost trees”—large shrubs such as toyon and ceanothus. Rounding out the guide are suggested locations for viewing

trees in various habitats around the state. A sturdy, flexible cover ensures the book will stand up to use in the field and survive in a crowded backpack.

California Trees won the 2025 National Outdoor Book Award in the Nature Guides category. The award cites the clear writing, scientific rigor, and thoughtful design. It is an excellent introduction to the subject and is accessible to those of us still learning about native plants.

California Trees is available for check out from the Volunteer Library.

If you're thinking of buying a copy, I suggest that you bypass Amazon and go to the Backcountry Press website, backcountrypress.com. There you'll have the option of purchasing the print edition, the ebook (PDF) edition, or a print and ebook package.

MISSING BOOKS MYSTERY

Volunteer Library Committee

During the process of updating the inventory for the Volunteer Library it was discovered that a number of books are missing. It is very easy for borrowed books to blend in with home libraries. If you notice a book at home that is from the Volunteer Library, we would appreciate having it returned so we can make it available to other volunteers. We promise no "late book shaming." Please help us to solve the missing books mystery by returning any books you find hiding in your house or car.

WINTER/SPRING EVENTS

January 1: Garden Closed

January 4: First Sunday Family Friendly Bird Walk 8:00 a.m. (registration required)

January 4: Yoga in the Garden Half-Day Retreat 9:30 a.m. (registration required)

January 6: Run for Fun Monthly Meetup 4:00 p.m. (please RSVP)

January 11: Silent Reading Club Meetup 1:00 p.m. (please RSVP)

January 15: Yoga in the Garden 6:00 p.m. (registration required)

January 17: Nature Art: Winter Branches Painting Workshop 10:00 a.m. (registration required)

January 19: Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

January 20: Family Story Time 9:00 a.m. (please RSVP)

January 20: Native Designs Garden Volunteer Open House 9:00 a.m.

January 23: Yoga in the Garden 12:00 p.m. (registration required)

January 28: Yoga in the Garden 9:30 a.m. (registration required)

January 30: Yarn in the Yuccas: Fiber Arts Monthly Meetup 1:30 p.m. (please RSVP)

February 1: First Sunday Family Friendly Bird Walk 8:00 a.m. (registration required)

February 3: Run for Fun Monthly Meetup 4:00 p.m. (please RSVP)

February 8: Silent Reading Club Meetup 1:00 p.m. (please RSVP)

February 11: Volunteer Enrichment: Wildflowers by Donna Bedell 12:00 p.m.

February 15: Family Bird Festival

February 17: Family Story Time 9:00 a.m. (please RSVP)

February 20: Grapevine Harvest, Wreath Weaving & Luncheon 8:30 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

February 27: Yarn in the Yuccas: Fiber Arts Monthly Meetup 1:30 p.m. (please RSVP)

March 1: First Sunday Family Friendly Bird Walk 8:00 a.m. (registration required)

March 3: Run for Fun Monthly Meetup 6:00 p.m. (please RSVP)

March 8: Silent Reading Club Meetup 1:00 p.m. (please RSVP)

March 17: Family Story Time 9:00 a.m. (please RSVP)

March 27: Yarn in the Yuccas: Fiber Arts Monthly Meetup 1:30 p.m. (please RSVP)

LUMINARIA NIGHTS

Photos by Andy Ragano and Marla White

“Thank you volunteers for contributing to a magical Luminaria Nights 2025!”



MORE LUMINARIA NIGHTS

