



NEWSLETTER OF THE CALIFORNIA BOTANIC GARDEN VOLUNTEERS

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## FROM THE PRESIDENT

Kathleen Noll, Volunteer President

As the new year gets underway, it is a great time to reaffirm the mission of the California Botanic Garden (CalBG) volunteers: People, Plants, and Purpose. Our Volunteer Organization supports the Garden's commitment to botany, conservation, and horticulture, inspiring both the public and the scientific community about California's native flora.

CalBG is lucky to have community support, and this was especially evident during December's Luminaria Nights. I am pleased to share that our Bake Sale and Native Designs sales earned a net income of \$3,909.77 over the six nights. This fundraising success was made possible by in-kind donations from local partners, including: Crème Bakery, Some Crust Bakery, Cookies 'N Pints, and The DoubleTree Hotel. Please consider supporting these businesses when you are out and about. The Native Designs team changed their wares this year with "Meadow Makers" wildflower seed bombs, which attendees adored and purchased for themselves and for gift giving. Thanks to the Production Nursery and GNN for supplying the seeds and support for creating these lovely items. We also extend our gratitude to Lauren Stoebel, Jennifer Scerra, Patty España, Betsy MacLaren, Linda Prendergast, and all the staff and volunteers who made this winter tradition a success.

On Sunday, February 15, from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., the educational and entertaining 2026 Bird Festival will take place. Look for volunteer opportunities from Patty for this family-friendly event. Below is a list of volunteer events and bird fest-related activities taking place at the Garden this month:

- First Sunday Family Friendly Bird Walk: February 1, 8:00 to 10:00 a.m.
- Volunteer Enrichment: Wednesday, February 11, noon in the Sycamore Room.  
Volunteer Donna Bedell, Naturalist Photographer

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.

- Family Bird Fest: February 15, 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. This is a wonderful opportunity to engage the community in learning about native and migrating birds through fun activities and crafts.
- Grapevine Harvest, Wreath Weaving & Great Baked Potato Bar: Friday, February 20, 8:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at the Lenz Classroom.
- Drawing Winged Animals Workshop: Saturday, February 21, 10:00 a.m. to noon. Led by artist Aleta Jacobson, this is a wonderfully creative complement to the Family Bird Fest.

Finally, please consider visiting the CalBG Wishlist. Contributions to these specific items provide an immediate impact on our living collection and mission. Donations can be made via credit card on the “[Donate](#)” link of the Garden website or by contacting the Advancement office at [advancement@calbg.org](mailto:advancement@calbg.org) or 909-625-8767, ext. 222.

Thank you for being part of this wonderful community.



## FROM THE DIRECTOR

**Lucinda McDade,**  
**CalBG Executive Director**

Hello Volunteers and Happy New Year! I know that this column will appear in the February *Oak Notes* but as I write, it still feels early enough in January to say Happy New Year! And if anyone knows how it got to be 2026, I’d love to be informed!

**Sincere thanks** to all of you who worked the Luminaria Nights with us! As I’ve said before, we will remember this as the Luminaria season of warm weather. Fortunately, with all of our November rains, there was little concern for fire and we could simply enjoy the warmer, glove-free nights! Luminaria is a great example of an event that we could **not** pull off without you volunteers. We work those nights truly in partnership with you.

And then: what a holiday season we had! Shortly after the end of our Luminaria season, the long, warm, dry weather pattern that categorized much of December was also over and the season of deluges began.

Apparently it was the wettest Christmas–New Year’s period on record here in So Cal, complete with the fact that it *did* rain on the parade—the Rose Parade to be exact. I imagine some of you got texts and calls from relatives (as did I) who were watching the parade on TV asking, “What on *earth*?”

Now begin the questions about wildflowers: will we or won’t we have a super bloom? Of course, it depends upon what happens for the rest of the winter and early spring. Optimal conditions would be decent amounts of rain at reasonable intervals and an absence of warm, dry, windy conditions that are extended more than a day or two. All we can really do is hope for the best, although here at the Garden we will tend our patches of wildflowers and provide supplemental water as needs be. It is interesting that it is a little hard to get wildflower seeds to germinate well on “fake rain” but, once up (as many are!) the seedlings and small plants are more “gracious” about accepting the “fake rain.”

Meanwhile, during the deluges, we closely tracked our buildings for signs of leaking. One area of the elevator annex required additional work to make it water tight and, not surprisingly, a low area of the driveway between the admin building and the library+labs annex contributed to a leak in the basement. Steps have been taken to correct both of those situations and we are on to the next event! Happily, some of our frequent flyer areas in the department of leaks did *not*, in fact, leak this time. We have done a huge amount of infrastructural work in the last years, especially since the wind storm, and it has largely worked!

I recently wrote a newsy update on the graduate program for our alumni which some of you got. (If anyone would like the newsletter, just raise your hand! Lots of images!) On the upside we have several students who will be finishing their degrees over the spring semester. They are all master’s

students—specifically, master’s students who have done floristics studies of not-yet-well-known areas of California. Yes, there are many areas of our state that are not yet well known, believe it or not. In fact, our students have “adopted” the southern to central Sierra Nevada and are in the process of filling in knowledge by virtue of their work. As their advisors, it is incredibly rewarding for the senior scientists at CalBG to see this happen—with an emphasis on their own professional development as plant scientists. The Garden invests a lot in the graduate program. In terms of the three-legged stool of knowledge, conservation and appreciation that form CalBG’s mission statement, the graduate program directly addresses the first and second “legs.” Watch for announcements of the talks that these students will give as part of their defenses. You are all invited! These talks are always highly accessible and extremely well-illustrated.

On the downside, we are worried about funding for grants and contracts from the federal government because these have supported quite a bit of work by our students: around 25% of graduate funding comes from such grants and contracts. We are probably looking at smaller incoming classes until this settles out: admitting a student amounts to a contract that we make with him or her for funding, so we have to know that we will have sufficient funds, or at least a high probability thereof.

In the arena of public programming, Bird Fest is coming up and it promises to be one for the record books. Jennifer reports that all groups she invited to be with us on that day responded positively. I am especially interested to see the person who advocates for “catios”—outdoor enclosures that let cats be outside without giving them ready access to birds. You probably know that cats kill an extraordinary number of birds each year. Yet, many people feel badly about keeping their cat indoors. Catios may be a very good solution at least for some!

And on into spring! It will be a wonderful season here at CalBG!

## LUMINARIA NIGHTS’ FIRST NIGHT MARKET!

by Elaine Brown, photos by Andy Torres



In 2025, we started our three weekends of Luminaria Nights with a winter market in the Grow Native Nursery. The market featured night-shopping for native plants, some local small businesses, and our Garden’s very own Native Designs. GNN reported that the night market brought in a new audience of people. Many guests who attend Luminaria Nights are not necessarily familiar with native plants, so thanks to the night market, we had some first-time visits to the GNN. Children enjoyed glow-in-the-dark face painting and viewings of Saturn through a telescope, thanks to Claremont artist Sara Mae Heady’s “Space your Face” program. Native

Designs reported that they were able to speak with many guests at the night market. The night market was another effort by our Visitor Engagement team to add more festivities and a new dimension to our events. The goal, through little additions like the artisan markets, is to gradually expand our audience by deepening the connections with our local community. We hope to bring back the Luminaria Night’s Night Market next year in an even cozier capacity!



# CHILDREN'S WOODLAND

by Lucinda McDade,

photo by Jared Nokturne



A great deal of our progress on the new Children's Woodland is thanks to the enthusiastic hard work of our horticulture staff. They have hollowed the log, sanded sticks to build with, and organized the first planting. In fact, right before the deluge back in November (so

the concrete had time to set up before the soil got

drenched), they dug all the post-holes, poured concrete, and set the fence posts. The image shown here is of their boots surrounding an "autographed" concrete block with its pole: PROUD of their hard work and achievements! Of course, the concrete block shown here is now covered up! But it is still down there and I am very glad we have the image!

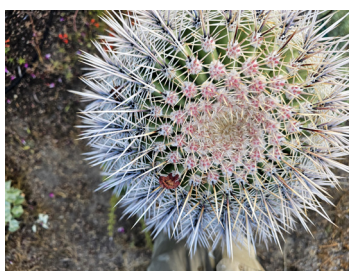
## SAGUARO by Steve Bryant



The Saguaro (*Carnegiea gigantea*), although the iconic plant of central and southern AZ, does grow in CA—there are perhaps 30 growing north of Yuma and in the Whipple Mtns. Large plants, salvaged from AZ, are planted along Hwy 62 in Yucca Valley, and along Hwy 74 in Palm Desert, as well as other places.



The distribution of Saguaros is limited by the availability of summer rain, and by winter frost—they need some of the former and can't take much of the latter. Seedlings grow slowly at first; in nature, a 2–3 cm plant may be 10 years old and seedlings



often get started

where protected by "nurse plants" or rocks. Plants may grow to 16 m, with stems as large as 75 cm in diameter, and live over 150 years. Annual growth occurs in a relatively small window of time, usually June–July in my yard. In cultivation, with summer water, growth can be fairly fast—the picture shows 15–25 cm tall "growth bands" on the Saguaros in my

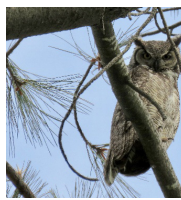
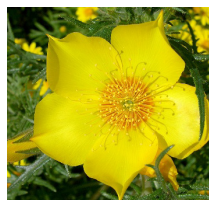
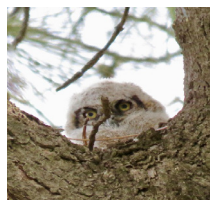
## CALBG VOLUNTEERS ENRICHMENT PROGRAM: February 11th at Noon, in the Sycamore Room



Donna Bedell, a long-time CalBG volunteer, will share some of her photos and experiences through her naturalist lens.

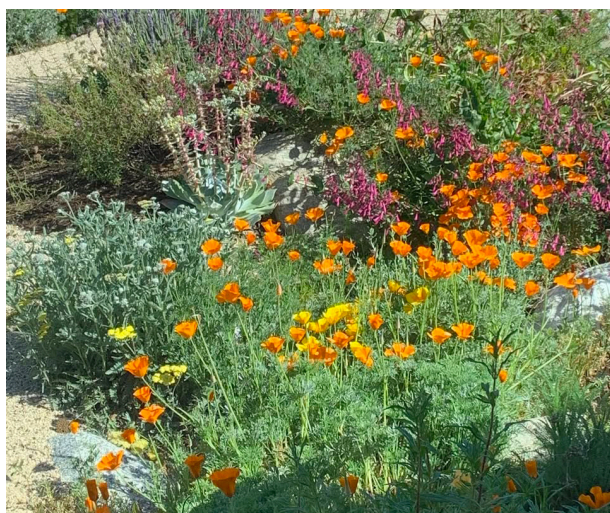
Donna became a volunteer with the class of 2004, as soon as she retired from teaching. Over the years Donna has helped at the plant sales, Native Designs, special events, group tours, research library, and served on our Volunteer Board.

The enrichment committee will provide cookies while you feast your eyes on Donna's photographs.



yard (look closely!), and new growth is distinct from old growth in having reddish aureoles and yellower spines (see photo). I purchased my ~30-cm-tall Saguaros from GNN in about 2018, and the tallest is now 2 m, or about 170 cm in seven years. Flowers are first produced on 2–3 m tall plants, and are white, robust (to take the weight of bats and birds), open at night (photo), but close the next morning. Bats are the major night pollinators, with bees and birds pollinating the next morning. Since flowers occur primarily at stem tips, any branching in older plants may increase reproduction. Fruits have a bright red pulp with numerous small black seeds and are a staple food for humans and other animals. Gila woodpeckers make callused nest holes in Saguaros that are used by other animals the following season. When a Saguaro dies, these now-exposed nest holes

## SPRING VOLUNTEER LUNCHEON ALERT

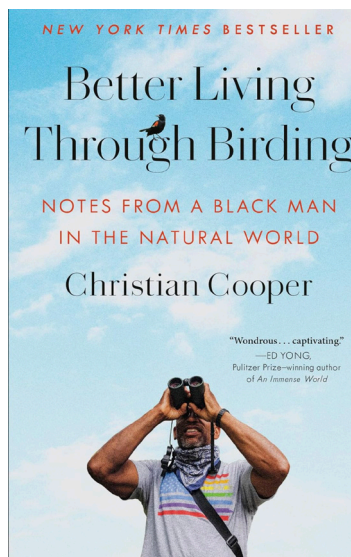


**Mark Your Calendars!**  
**Spring Volunteer Luncheon**  
**is around the corner**  
**Wednesday, April 1 at Noon**  
**in the Forest Pavilion**  
**Details to come.**  
**Be ready for April tomfoolery!**

are said to be “Saguaro Boots.” After death, the flesh of a Saguaro decays, leaving the supporting hardwood-like “ribs.”

## BOOK OF THE MONTH

**Betsy MacLaren, Volunteer  
Library Committee**



*Better Living Through Birding, Notes from a Black Man in the Natural World* by Christian Cooper. Random House, New York 2024. 382pp.

Christian Cooper is a passionate birder. While birding in Central Park in New York City on Memorial Day 2020, he came across an unleashed dog and its owner. The ensuing altercation made national headlines. Mr. Cooper doesn't detail the encounter until Chapter 12, but it is exemplary of his life experiences growing up in New York City as a gay, self-described Blerd (black nerd). This book isn't just about birding although he provides valuable tips and describes his many sightings and the places where he has travelled. A quote from the back cover of the book captures its essence: “Equal parts memoir, travelogue, and primer on the art of birding, this is the story of Cooper claiming and defending space for himself and others like him, from his days at Marvel Comics introducing the first gay storylines to vivid and life-changing birding expeditions across the globe.”

*Better Living Through Birding* is available for checkout in the Volunteer Library.



# WINTER/SPRING EVENTS

**February 6:** Yoga in the Garden, Noon (registration required)

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

**February 11:** Yoga in the Garden 9:30 a.m. (registration required)

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

**February 15:** Family Bird Festival 11:00 a.m. (sign-up Volgistics)

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

**February 20:** Grapevine Harvest, Wreath Weaving & Baked Potato Bar 8:00 a.m.

**February 21:** Herb Walk 9:00 a.m. (registration required)

**February 21:** Drawing Class; Winged Animals 10:00 a.m. (registration required)

**February 22:** Yoga in the Garden, Noon (registration required)

**February 24:** Yoga in the Garden 6:00 p.m. (registration required)

**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)

**March 28:** Native Plant Festival

**April 1:** Volunteer Quarterly Lunch & Business Meeting 11:30 a.m.

**April 5:** First Sunday Family Friendly Bird Walk 8:00 a.m. (registration required)

**April 7:** Run for Fun Monthly Meetup 6:00 p.m. (please RSVP)

**April 12:** Silent Reading Club Meetup 1:00 p.m. (please RSVP)

**April 21:** Family Story Time 9:00 a.m. (please RSVP)

**April 24:** Yarn in the Yuccas, Fiber Arts Monthly Meetup 1:30 p.m. (please RSVP)



## A Very Happy Febrary Birthday to:

Crystal Baik	Donna Nicholson
Victoria Bhavsar	Donald Page
Jake Burrola	Jean Parry
Julie Chadwick	Madison Santiago
Lindsey Dodge	Julie Scheuermann
Richard Davis	Barbara Shelley
Harrison Edwards	Stacy Spargo
Sofia Flores	Amanda Vleitstra
Phoebe Frankeberger	Emy Lu Weller
Carol Hopping	Sandy Wilson
Amanda Krausz	Ryan Wright-Harrigan
Ann LeVangie	Betsy Zimmerman
Elizabeth Loof	



# PHOTOS FROM THE PAST

by Marla White and Karen Casey







**CALBG VOLUNTEERS: DON'T MISS OUT**

**ANNUAL  
GRAPEVINE HARVEST,  
WREATH-MAKING, &  
BAKED POTATO FEED**

**Friday, February 20, Lenz Classroom  
all morning**

Join us in pruning the grapevines that grow along the eastern fence of the Garden and weaving them into wreaths for our Fall Fundraisers.

Plan to stay for a baked potato/chili brunch after all your hard work.

No experience required—Native Designers and the Horticulture team will be delighted to assist you.

Shifts will be available for sign-ups on Volgistics—details will follow.

Don't forget to bring sunscreen, sun hat, garden gloves, water, clippers, and of course your name badge.

**Just think: fun and food and creativity  
all in one morning.  
See you there!**

