



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:
Heidi Arch
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 Stobel



FROM THE PRESIDENT Kathleen Noll, Volunteer President

April is National Volunteer Month and I want to thank you for the time, talent, and resources you dedicate to California Botanic Garden. According to the journal “Social Science and Medicine”, volunteering is associated with slower aging on “epigenetic clocks” and tied to greater cognitive, physical, metabolic, cardiovascular, and immune functioning. Beyond these health benefits, volunteering here offers life-long learning and a deep engagement with nature.

Our Garden thrives because of the dedication of our Garden Guides, Education Materials Preparation Team, Tour PLOPPers, Wednesday and Saturday Grounds Crews, Bench Brigade, Grow Native Nursery, Propagation and Production, Research Library, Herbarium, Native Designs Garden, Native Designs, Outreach/Social Media Team, Tram Drivers, and the Honey Do Crew. You are the center that keeps the Garden growing.

Many of you also contribute to our recurring special events including: the Fall Plant Sale, Things that Go Bump in the Night, Luminaria Nights, Family Bird Fest, Native Plant Festival, Grapevine Harvest, and our fundraising activities.

I hope you will visit our new area dedicated to our youngest visitors, The Children’s Woodland, opening on April 10 and 11. I also invite you to take a walk in the Garden this month or to purchase plants at the Grow Native Nursery, open Friday through Sunday until the end of May.

Please stay connected with us through Facebook and Instagram:

<https://www.facebook.com/CaliforniaBotanicGarden>

<https://www.instagram.com/californiabotanicgarden>

<https://www.facebook.com/GrowNativeNursery/>

<https://www.instagram.com/grow.native.nursery>

See you in the Garden,

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

Hello volunteers!

As I write we are staring down a very hot week—predicted to be more than 20 degrees above average for most of the week. I think we will be breaking records, *but* this has been such a strange winter—it has been a tale of two weather patterns: cool very wet storms coming at us for three or four days straight alternating with long patches of dry and above normal temperatures. So we’ve had very solid rainfall but the general “warmer than average” pattern has not been good for snow pack. *And* now this coming week in the upper 90s and it is only mid-March. Of course this frightens all of us as we think forward to the real summer!

I wanted to use this *Oak Notes* article to provide you with an update and some background on our new Children’s Woodland which will officially open in early April. We have had a children’s garden in the plans here at least since the 80s when a lot of volunteers were involved and were very enthusiastic about the project. Ashlee Armstrong can show you a whole box of rolled up plans for children’s gardens in her office that stem from that time period. That effort ended when the Board of Trustees was definitely not interested in prioritizing the feature.

I have always been enthusiastic about the idea and have visited children’s gardens at other botanic gardens whenever I am able. I have admired some of the features of almost all of them but have not encountered one that seemed entirely apt for our native plant/waterwise garden. Some feature expanses of lawn on which the kids can roll around: *not* for us. Some feature constructed play items that are clearly artificial: *not* for us. A couple feature computer screens that convey lessons: *definitely* not!

It turns out that Ashlee Armstrong, our terrific Director of Horticulture, and I came to the realization almost simultaneously that what we needed was a place in the shade where kids could engage with natural materials to devise creative ways to play in the woods. Ashlee had thought of a much better spot than the one I was thinking of and her location is where the Children’s Woodland has taken form in the last few months: just off the north end of the mesa. (I won’t tell you where I was thinking of because you will think it an astoundingly dumb idea!). Turns out that there are two related features in Santa Barbara: one at the Garden there, and one in the natural history museum. We sent a group of staff up to visit them late last summer/early fall and they came back brimming with ideas.

It has been truly inspirational to see how staff—emphasis on our horticulture colleagues—have worked together to bring the woodland into reality. Fundamentally, it is Ashlee’s design but the entire department has been all in. Also very heavily involved have been our colleagues in Advancement as they have worked hard to raise funds for the Children’s



A zoomed-out perspective of the children’s preview day on March 6 (Photo by Andy Torres)



Children’s Woodland coming soon! (Photo by Andy Torres)

Woodland. Interestingly, the nature of the project helps immensely with fundraising as it really sells itself, and both foundations and individuals have stepped up. Many of you will know that the daughters of the late, great, retired Nature Interpreter, Joan Presecan, chose the living hut (a structure with a solid frame covered by native living vines) as the target for “in memoriam” donations in honor of Joan. As soon as it is fully funded, we will begin construction.

One more anecdote that will make you happy is that the hollow log in the Children’s Woodland is the last of the site-native coast live oaks that we lost during the horrible windstorm four years ago. By the time it was cleared from where it fell, we were out of money—and then some!—for clean-up and so it sat along the fence near maintenance for nearly three years. Jared Nokturne, Garden Operations Manager, had the idea of turning it into a hollow log for kids to play in and on, and launched into the project!

Jared Nokturne writes about the hollow log undertaking: “I have never worked on a project of this scale before, albeit, well worth all the hard work. When Ashlee said Horticulture was going to create a children’s woodland, I came up with the idea to make a hollowed out log. The 5’ x 3’ crawl through *Quercus agrifolia* was an old saved stump left over from the windstorm. I utilized skills I learned over many years of operating chain

saws, like cross hatch and plunge cuts, the entry point to the project. There were many processes to making this a success story; however, I want to mention that I could not have done this without the help of James Reed, Plant Records Manager. Chain sawing was part one, making deep cuts, connecting slits on both sides. We then pried and snapped the “boards” loose with a pry bar. Next was grinding and pounding out the remaining large pieces of oak with a jackhammer. All the fine-tuning was shaped with a rotary hammer and hand chiseling. Upon many hours of strenuous labor, the hollowed oak was complete by measures of safe scorching via a propane torch, sanding and an epoxy finish. Lastly, I want to give my thanks for being able to work on the *Q. agrifolia*, and that I am yet again, humbled by remarkable nature.”

In sum, it was a little more complicated than Jared thought but it is now a reality and kids love it! It warms my heart that a much honored victim of the horrid windstorm is still being honored, and I fancy that the tree itself will be enjoying its role in the Children’s Woodland!

Some of you may be thinking: are you worried about safety? Are you worried about kids climbing? The short answer is: safety is at the top of our thinking here at CalBG, and especially so regarding the Children’s Woodland. *But* we are even more worried about the impact of all too many kids growing up indoors with too many



Horticulturist Jensen Talmo helping his daughter along the balance logs (Photo by Andy Torres)



James Reed, Plant Records Manager, hard at work on the log hollowing process (Photo by Jared Nokturne)



Jared Nokturne, Garden Operations Manager, completing the safe scorching of the log (Photo by James Reed)



Advancement Director Jessica Wetzel’s son Frank enjoying the completed hollow log! (Photo by Andy Torres)

computer screens and too few opportunities to learn and grow from small risks taken as they engage in healthy creative physical activity outdoors with other children. We are proud to be countering the trend of scripted, indoor childhood!

We did a trial run of the woodland on the first Friday in March, mostly for staff children (and a few lucky others). The kids loved it! Some headed straight for the bubbling rocks water feature (they are invited to play in it—we will be purifying the water early and often); some headed straight for the hollow log; some headed straight for the pile of sticks that is positioned to invite creative play; the stump jump features were jumped on—including the one that we adults did not understand to be a stump jump (the kids thought otherwise!); some swung in the hammock. They all loved it—from a child as young as 18 months (horticulture colleague Jensen Talmo’s daughter) to kids just completing their first ten tours around the sun, all found some very fun things to do and none were ready to leave when the appointed time came.

The official opening weekend is April 10 and 11: stay tuned for details—some of the events will need volunteers and I hope to see many of you there! In conjunction with the opening, there will be a “Joy in the Garden” children’s art show on display in the Sage Gallery through June.

Meanwhile, let’s hope for cooler weather soon and at least one more decent rainfall! Thanks for all that you do, volunteers. See you on a path or at a Garden event soon!

NEW VOLUNTEER MIXER

**Patty Nueva España,
Volunteer Program Coordinator**

It’s not always possible in a first meeting to describe to a new volunteer all that CalBG has to offer, or through the VicNet calendar, or by numerous email notices. Orientations are a great start, but are very hard to coordinate and providing them annually is impractical at best.

What can we do in the meantime to give a sense of place to our new volunteers? The popular idea was simple enough, a New Volunteer Mixer! Couldn’t

hurt to try. Plan a casual get-together, on a Saturday morning; the Garden is wonderful in the morning!

The date was set, Saturday, March 7th. The setting, the Johnson Memorial Oval. And for refreshments: coffee, donut holes, fresh fruit, and juice. The flyer was created, volunteers invited, all was ready to go! Then the wind blew in with a vengeance! The circumstances were not safe, meeting in an area under lots of windswept trees. Luckily, such a simple event was easy to cancel and reschedule. A notice was sent out—we would have to save it for another day.

Before momentum on the idea was lost, the date was switched to the following Saturday, March 14th. A warm, calm morning had an intimate group of volunteers, new and established, gather at Johnson’s Oval. There was lively conversation and a shared spirit. The new group consisted of a few recently retired people, some still in the work force but with limited time available, and an eager high school student.

The highlight of the event was a stroll through the Garden. All were told the names and locations of our various venues: the Sage Gallery, the Cultivar Garden, Outdoor Classroom with the Bird & Butterfly Garden, the Native Design Garden, and the Forest Pavilion to name a few, as well as many notable native plants. All in all, it was a pleasant get-together, designed to help new recruits feel more welcome and included. Would we do it again? You bet! This may be a regular occurrence on the volunteer calendar. Stay tuned for the next New Volunteer Mixer—all are welcome.

CASTILLEJA

by Steve Bryant



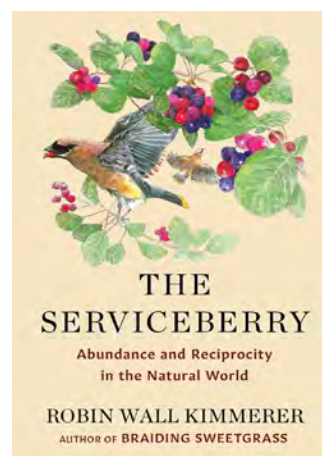
There are nearly 40 spp. of *Castilleja* (Paintbrush) in Jepson and includes the reassigned *Orthocarpus* (Owl’s Clover) spp. *Castilleja* are generally hemiparasitic: they photosynthesize and absorb through their own roots but also use their roots to steal water and

nutrients from other plants. *Castilleja* are found throughout the state, with various spp. from several centimeters tall to small shrubs; many are dormant either in winter or summer. The noticeably colored parts of the plant, which may be shades of red, yellow, or purple are bracts: modified leaf-like structures below the flowers. These bracts are thought to attract pollinators to the somewhat less obvious flowers. Some spp. have cleistogamous (closed, self-fertilizing) flowers as well as chasmogamous (open-pollinated) flowers. Cleistogamy requires fewer plant resources (no petals or nectar), so may be useful in stressful habitats, but it does result in inbreeding. My favorite sp., *Castilleja foliolosa*, is a common small shrub in our local area; the plants on my morning walk in the foothills seem to grow mostly with *Eriogonum fasciculatum* (California Buckwheat) and presumably parasitize that plant. Intrigued with hemiparasitism, decades ago I planted some *C. foliolosa* seed near some *Salvia mellifera* (Black Sage) in my garden. Some seeds germinated and grew into several plants. Over the years, I have continued to propagate the species, and now have it growing well in several places, some near *S. mellifera*, some near *E.*

fasciculatum, and some near other plants; *C. foliolosa* seems to have catholic tastes in hosts and might even be able to grow in cultivation without a host. In the foothills, *C. foliolosa* goes completely dormant in the dry season, generally leafing out and growing with the late fall rains. In my garden, with year-round water, the plants go only semi-dormant in the summer and fall. Inflorescences are terminal and produce very hard fruits containing numerous silvery-black seeds that usually ripen in August. I use a hardwood rolling pin to crush the dried fruits and release the seed. My plants are of several different shades, even though from the same original batch of seeds (see photo, previous page).

BOOK OF THE MONTH

Amy Baumann, Volunteer
Library Committee



The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World by Robin Wall Kimmerer. Scribner, New York, NY. 2024. 128pp.



A Very Happy March Birthday to:

Karen Casey	Silvia Lee
Sharon Chalmers	Betsy MacLaren
Katy Douglass	Corina McDonald
Isabel Ebiner	Cindy Nguyen
Edward Frankel	Ingrid Spiteri
Brittany Gamboa	Alayna Trejo
David Gish	Janice Tsuma
Judy Goss	Kathy Van Allen
Rosalia Iriye	Joe Vlietstra
Bev Jack	Jessica Warren
Subrahmanya Jampana	Conner Willette

Robin Wall Kimmerer, author of *Braiding Sweetgrass*, again shares the wisdom of Indigenous cultures in understanding the natural world as a gift. The humble serviceberry is used as an example of providing a myriad of benefits to humans, birds, butterflies and the earth. Kimmerer encourages the reader to consider moving away from an economy that views everything as a commodity and toward a gift economy that honors restraint, respect and reciprocity. She states: “I don’t think it’s pie in the sky to imagine that we can create incentives to nurture a gift economy that runs right alongside the market economy.” The question is posed as to how to move a complex economic system toward one with more of an ecological focus that benefits all people and the earth. The author offers insight into how systems

change. She highlights two mechanisms that work in replacing a complex system that seems too big to change. Kimmerer states: "Succession relies in part on incremental change...but also on disruption of the status quo." This small book is packed with information for positive reflection and action.

The Serviceberry is available for check-out in the Volunteer Library.

CALBG VOLUNTEER EVENTS APRIL–JUNE 2026

April 3: Wildflower Walking Tour 10:00 a.m. (registration required)

April 3: Wildflower Tram Tour 2:00 p.m. (registration required)

April 4: Garden of Verses Poetry Festival (free with admission)

April 4: Wildflower Walking Tour 10:00 a.m. (registration required)

April 4: Wildflower Tram Tour 2:00 p.m. (registration required)

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 8: Volunteer Enrichment: J. Travis Columbus, Ph.D. Professor of Botany CGU and Research Scientist. CalBG program on Vernal Pools at noon, Sycamore Room

April 10: Joy in the Garden Youth Community Art Exhibition in the Sage Gallery

April 10: Opening of the Children's Woodland at CalBG 10:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m.

April 11: Opening of the Children's Woodland at CalBG 10:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m.

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

April 18: Natural Art Journaling Class 10:00 a.m. to noon (registration required)

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)

April 25: Volunteer Field Trip: Docent-led tour of Santa Rosa Plateau Vernal Pools (limit 25 See email for details)

April 26: Botanical Art Workshop on Dried Plant Techniques by Herbarium Collections Manager, Annica Wu 10:00 a.m. to noon (registration required)

May 3: First Sunday Family Friendly Bird Walk 8:00 a.m. (registration required)

May 3: Forever California Spring Fundraising Gala

May 5: Run for Fun Monthly Meetup 6:00 p.m. (please RSVP)

May 10: Silent Reading Club Meetup 1:00 p.m. (please RSVP)

May 13: Volunteer Enrichment: Field Trip to Robert J. Bernard Biological Field Station with Marty Meyer (see email for details)

May 15: Spring Photo Contest through June 15 (see CalBG Website for entry)

May 19: Family Story Time 9:00 a.m. (please RSVP)

May 23: Natural Dyes of the San Gabriel Foothills Class 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. (registration required)

May 29: Yarn in the Yuccas: Fiber Arts Monthly Meetup 1:30 p.m. (please RSVP)

June 2: Run for Fun Monthly Meetup 6:00 p.m. (please RSVP)

June 5: Volunteer Quarterly Luncheon & Business Meeting, 11:30 a.m. Forest Pavilion

June 10: Volunteer Enrichment: Scott White program on the Flora of the San Jacinto & Santa Rosa Mountains, at noon, Sycamore Room

June 14: Silent Reading Club Meetup 1:00 p.m. (please RSVP)

June 16: Family Story Time 9:00 a.m. (please RSVP)

June 20: Volunteer Field Trip: Friends of the LA River (see email for details)

June 24: Volunteer Recognition Celebration

June 26: Yarn in the Yuccas: Fiber Arts Monthly Meetup 1:30 p.m. (please RSVP)

WISHLIST SPOTLIGHT

by Kathleen Noll

The CalBG Wishlist is where we make a real difference.

Donating to CalBG's Wishlist items has immediate impact, ensuring we have resources needed to nurture the living collection and fulfill our mission. From plant signs for the Living Collection to chest freezers for the Herbarium, your support is vital.

Our latest successes are the additions of a new label maker for the nursery and the arrival of a new nursery cooler. The label maker prints pot-marking stakes for the production nursery, and the cooler unit arrived just in time for seed propagation and Native Designs activities for the upcoming warm season.

Thank you for your generous donations and continued support of the Garden.

California Botanic Garden Wishlist



GRAPEVINE HARVEST 2026

by Kathleen Noll, photos by Susan Starr and Marla White

On February 20, the Horticulture Staff and Native Designs Team led our annual grapevine harvest and weaving event along the east service road at CalBG. This tradition provides the keepsake wreath bases that fuel creativity throughout our Garden.

Despite the chilly morning, it was a productive day of teamwork. We successfully completed 80 grapevine wreath bases on the jigs.

A special thank you to: Ashlee Armstrong and Jennifer Chebahtah for overseeing the harvest; Linda Prendergast for managing the wreath-making station; Susan Starr for setting the scene in the Lenz Classroom; and The Hospitality Team for providing a fantastic and cozy Baked Potato and Chili Bar, complete with hearty chili, sides, and desserts.

Thank you to all the volunteers who participated. Your hard work made this event a great success.



GRAPEVINE HARVEST



CALBG VOLUNTEERS

ENRICHMENT SPEAKER SERIES:

Vernal Pools, April 8, 2026 at Noon, Sycamore Room



J. Travis Columbus, PhD
Professor of Botany, CGU
& Research Scientist at
CalBG

His research focus is the systematics of the grass family, Poaceae, comprising some 1,400 species worldwide.

The enrichment talk will address the diversity of native flora and fauna found in California's vernal

pools, which make them especially unique.



Field Trip: Santa Rosa Plateau Ecological Reserve

Saturday, April 25th at 10 a.m., 39400 Clinton Keith Road,
Murrieta, CA 92562, Phone: 951-677-6951

Cost for the docent-led field trip is \$10 per person. This is a 2- to 2.5-hour, moderately paced walk; Dress for hiking. Bring water, a sack lunch, and enjoy at the site's picnic tables. Participation is limited to 25 persons. Carpooling is encouraged. Reserve your space with Patty España. pespana@calbg.org (Photography by Linda Clement is from the 2019 field trip.)

