



A COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATION SUPPORTING THE LONG-TERM STEWARDSHIP OF CLAREMONT CANYON

President's Message

by Jon Kaufman



I AM PLEASED TO REPORT some promising developments for the Conservancy's efforts on a number of fronts. Our work to enhance the beauty of the canyon and our neighborhood, and protect both from wildfire is moving forward.

For those of you who walk the trails in the upper canyon, you may have noticed that the gorgeous old oak tree along the Willow Trail has been taken down as it had succumbed to sudden oak death (SOD). Worrying that weakened branches could fall and hurt someone while using the trail, the University of California, Berkeley acted quickly and cut the tree to the ground. Now, the Conservancy is putting together a plan to transform what once was a shady spot along the trail into a sunny, attractive area. Stay tuned as we develop the plan and identify resources to make it happen.

Vegetation management has been an unmet need throughout the East Bay Hills. As we learned from Berkeley Mayor Jesse Arreguin and Fire Chief David Sprague at last year's annual meeting, the passage of Measure FF in Berkeley is beginning to fund removal of fire prone vegetation and assist homeowners with making their property more firesafe.

Currently, the prospect of a similar effort is occurring in Oakland. Oakland District 4 Councilmember Janani Ramachandran and Oakland's Deputy City Administrator Joe DeVries will discuss the plan and a potential ballot measure to fund it at this year's annual meeting. See details

on pages 2 and 8. The Conservancy board has studied the revised draft environmental impact report and find it significantly improved over the earlier, 2020 draft. We are inclined to support both the plan and EIR so that the city can move forward with vegetation management, although we remain concerned that the plan focuses on thinning eucalyptus trees rather than removing this major cause of the spread of wildfire.

Another effort to increase wildfire safety is also making progress. For the past three years, the Conservancy and the Oakland Firesafe Council have spearheaded an effort to build cooperation at the regional level, involving Alameda and Contra Costa counties. A measure to create a regional wildfire prevention coordination group has now been drafted as a memorandum of understanding. It is being presented for approval to the area city councils, fire districts, and the two county boards of supervisors. Once up and running, it could facilitate funding from state and federal grants and offer regional solutions to what we recognize is a regional problem.

Finally we want to recognize the Berkeley Firesafe Council, a new grassroots organization with a focus on removing eucalyptus trees, that is already having a major impact. We all need to work together to reduce the chances of yet another wildfire. The devastation caused by recent wildfires on Maui and in Canada recall the horror of our own local wildfire in 1991. (1991 Tunnel Fire, also known as the Oakland Hills Firestorm. Read more about it on our website: claremontcanyon.org.) Together with our long-time partner, the Oakland Firesafe Council, we welcome and look forward to working with our Berkeley brothers and sisters.

Annual Meeting November 12

by Elizabeth K. Stage

MEMBERS, THEIR GUESTS, AND OTHER interested parties are cordially invited to attend the Claremont Canyon Conservancy's Annual Meeting on Sunday, November 12th at 4:00 p.m., at the Claremont Club and Spa (see back page for details).

The annual meeting will be an opportunity to learn about Oakland's revised vegetation management plan and assess whether the plan and its Environmental Impact Report (EIR) merit support.

Janani Ramachandran, the Oakland District 4 Council Member who represents the Oakland Hills neighborhoods, will be the keynote speaker. She will be accompanied by Joe DeVries, Oakland's Deputy City Administrator; who continues to coordinate the City's work across departments to reduce the risk of wildfire.



Janani started on the Oakland City Council in January 2023 and hit the ground running after campaigning on the health and safety of her residents, particularly regarding wildfire. She brought her experience as an attorney and community advocate to the table, including an exploratory visit to Garber

Park and securing funding for Oakland's Department of Tree Services.

Joe started working for the City of Oakland more than two decades ago. He's worked in Oakland's Department of Neighborhood Services and has established himself as a problem solver who gets things done, including fire prevention work along Grizzly Peak and Skyline boulevards.



The meeting will be in the Skyline Room of the Claremont Club and Spa. Join us at 4:00 for hors d'oeuvres and wine. The program will begin at 4:30.



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The loss of the heritage oak has transformed the Willow Trail's microclimate from a cozy, shaded area (above, January 2022) into an open and sunny path (page 3, top left, April 2023).

The Legacy of our Heritage Oak

by John Brochu

REPEATED VISITS TO BELOVED PLACES in nature are such an important ritual for many of us as we relax, disconnect, breathe deeply, or break a sweat. Claremont Canyon is such a place for many of us involved with the Claremont Canyon Conservancy. Throughout the year we notice changes in the landscape. Most are predictable, such as new buds and flowers in the spring or drying leaves in the fall. Others are more striking, such as the demise of our cherished heritage oak along the Willow Trail.

After succumbing to sudden oak death earlier this year, this 100-year-old oak on one of UC Berkeley's ecological study areas in upper Claremont Canyon, entered a new chapter. Those who frequent the upper canyon may have noticed that the oak was cut down—its parts scattered about the ground. This was done by UC to mitigate the risk to visitors of falling branches.

While Conservancy members and volunteers are saddened by the loss of what feels like an old friend, we are reminded that the oak will remain with us for many years. It will now host countless numbers of lifeforms as its branches and trunk decompose and continue their return to the soil. As the tree participates in the never-ending nutrient cycle that brought it into existence so many years ago, one might wonder which chapter supports more life. In any case, the ending of this life means the beginnings of countless others.

We may feel a void where the tree once stood, but we are also energized by the new opportunity to help steward the next phase of life in this part of the

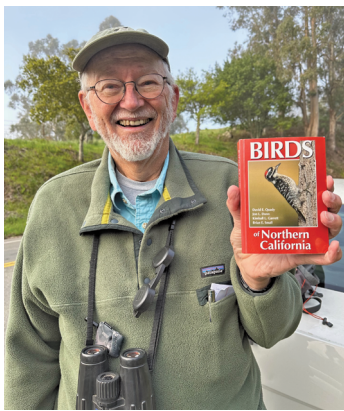


canyon. Moving forward, we will be focusing our efforts to maintain a healthy, safe, and welcoming environment where we have a new opening in the canopy. In the short term, we will focus heavily on supporting native plants by suppressing invasive ones and preventing erosion in upcoming wetter seasons. In the longer term, we hope to continue the legacy of our heritage oak with the propagation of young oak trees that will someday fill the shoes of an old friend.

Here's to the next chapter!

The Birds of Claremont Canyon

by Marilyn Goldhaber



Dave Quady holding his co-authored field guide, *Birds of Northern California*.

A SMALL GROUP OF BIRDERS met with Dave Quady on a cool Sunday morning last April to search for resident birds in Claremont Canyon and Neotropical migrant birds who returned to our area to breed.

The fog thinned periodically making for a rather beautiful morning. Dave shared his recommended field guides for local birds, including one he co-authored, and his Merlin app to identify songs and calls.

Kay Loughman, who runs a local wildlife website, commented that on spring walks we often hear more species than we see. "The birds are courting and defending a territory and don't necessarily want to show themselves, especially if they might be protecting a nest."

In all, 16 species were identified including a

wild turkey in mid-flight. Nancy Mueller, host of the event, said, "It was a big thrill for me to see a turkey flying down Claremont Avenue. I had no idea they could fly."

Wild Turkey, Band-tailed Pigeon, Anna's Hummingbird, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Warbling Vireo, Steller's Jay, Common Raven, Wrentit, Bewick's Wren, American Robin, Lesser Goldfinch, Dark-eyed Junco, Song Sparrow, Orange-crowned Warbler, Wilson's Warbler, and Black-headed Grosbeak.

If you would like to participate in a future bird walk, or host your own, send us an email at info@claremontcanyon.org.

A Fruitful Partnership with the Claremont Club and Spa

by Wyllie Clayson

SO FAR THIS YEAR we've had two wonderful workdays partnering with the Claremont Club and Spa. The goal of these workdays is for the Claremont employees and local neighbors to work together to beautify our shared community spaces.

Volunteers working on the Evergreen Path removed slippery debris, mainly eucalyptus leaves, from the steps and pulled invasive plants attempting to take over the steps. The volunteers working in Garber Park focused on removing dead debris, cleaning up the Evergreen Lane entrance, and making the paths easier to walk on by replacing worn and missing mesh treads on the steps leading down to the fireplace. Overall, these efforts resulted in over 100 bags of green waste removed between the two sites, and after each workday, we ended with a delicious lunch, generously provided by East Bay Provisions.

We look forward to continuing this partnership and usually hold three workdays a year. If you would like to join any of these workdays in the future and help make Evergreen Path and Garber Park safer for all, please contact Nancy via info@claremontcanyon.org.



Just in Time for Halloween

by Alex Pierce

ARE YOU SEEING A LOT OF SPIDERS THIS FALL? Well, probably many are European garden spiders (*Araneus diadematus*) also known as cross spiders, or crowned orb weavers. Their peak season is August through October. They range in color from yellow to brown to dark gray and have a long hairy head, spiky hairs on their legs, and tiny hairs on their abdomens.

Markings on their abdomens have four or more segments which form a cross. Females range from 0.25 to 0.75 inches and the males from 0.25 to 0.50 inches. After mating, the female often cannibalizes the male and wraps it up for a later meal.

The female spins the webs—a new one every night! Her first web is the most perfect. Successive webs tend to have more flaws. After the web is completed, this spider sits in the middle, head down, awaiting its prey. Other times, the web is attached to a single trigger line. When the spider feels a vibration, it means a security breach or, more importantly, the



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dinner bell. Its diet consists of flying and jumping insects.

Fun fact: this spider is said to be the first spider to go into space on Sky Lab. Look for this spider in trees, particularly redwoods and across the trails in the canyon.

Explore Kay Loughman's website nhwildlife.net to see more pictures of wildlife in and around Claremont Canyon.

Garber Park

by Wyllie Clayson and Ruby J. Soto Cardona

FALL IS SEEN AS A TIME OF TRANSITION with the summer heat shifting to the cold and rain of winter. As Garber Park goes through seasonal changes, we are reminded of historical transitions that the park itself has been through.

Garber Park started as a property privately owned by attorney John Garber and was sold by Garber's heirs in 1920 to the city of Berkeley to be used and preserved as a public park. Located less than a 15-minute walk from where one of the Key System trolley routes ended, it became a popular destination during the 1920s-1940s. In 1952, the park was transferred to a new property owner, the city of Oakland, where it slowly fell out of use. Little attention was paid by the city of Oakland and Garber was visited only by the most daring of hikers and neighbors.

In 2010, it went through another transitional phase—perhaps not one of legal ownership like the last two phases, but of community engagement. Shelagh and Bob Brodersen, whose home is adjacent to Garber, worked with neighbors to begin the process of reclaiming and restoring the park under the banner of The Garber Park Stewards. With their leadership and the efforts of the hundreds of volunteers over the past 13 years, the park's trail system was established. Native plants and the 1920's stone fireplace were

uncovered from underneath English ivy, and native plant restoration is now at the forefront of the park's efforts. Garber Park's transformation was so extensive that it has been referred to as a "small jewel of a preserve" (by Sandy Friedland of the Berkeley Path Wanderers Association) and "a hidden gem of the Claremont Hills" (by a park volunteer).

The Garber Park Stewards are continually working to maintain the trails, enhance the native plant habitat, and remove debris to reduce the fire hazard in the canyon. Earlier this fall on Creek-to-Bay Day, the stewards filled a 20 cubic yard dumpster with debris from a fallen oak from deep within the park, and eucalyptus litter from the Alvarado entrance which helped make the trail more walkable.

The park is important as a source of

Thank you to Ricardo Marroquin (right), long-time steward, for helping remove and haul debris!



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The Cal Habitat club returns to Garber Park with another group of students ready to help continue maintaining and restoring trails, removing fire-prone debris, and preparing for a possibly wet winter!



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community enjoyment, with peaceful hikes, a natural ambiance, and exciting finds; but another key community function of the park is serving as an evacuation route if the need arises. Please join us to volunteer in the park; or you can also make a donation by scanning the QR code or by visiting claremontcanyon.org to support our activities and keep us going strong!

Stewardship in the Canyon

PLEASE JOIN US FOR STEWARDSHIP EVENTS in Claremont Canyon throughout the fall and winter months. All levels of fitness are welcome.

We meet in Garber Park twice a month (first and third Saturdays) usually at the Evergreen entrance to the park and are led by Wyllie Clayson and Ruby J Soto Cardona of the Garber Park Stewards, 9 a.m. till noon.

We meet once a month (fourth Saturday) in the upper canyon at Signpost 29 (1.5 miles up Claremont from the intersection with Ashby) and are led by Wyllie Clayson, 10 a.m. till noon.

When volunteering, please bring a bottle of water and wear long sleeves, long pants, sturdy shoes, and a hat. If you have gloves, please bring those too but we'll have extras.

Please contact gpstewards@gmail.com for inquiries about Garber Park events and info@claremontcanyon.org for all other events. Watch for our monthly emails or check the Conservancy website claremontcanyon.org for added events and to verify where to meet.

Claremont Canyon is the largest relatively undeveloped canyon on the western slope of the Oakland/Berkeley Hills. Most of the canyon's watershed is owned by the East Bay Regional Park District, the University of California, the East Bay Municipal Utility District, and the City of Oakland, with about one-fifth in private hands.

The Claremont Canyon Conservancy promotes the long term stewardship of the entire watershed, coordinated among the stakeholders to preserve or restore a healthy native ecosystem, reduce wildfire hazards, and foster education and research.

Join the Conservancy:

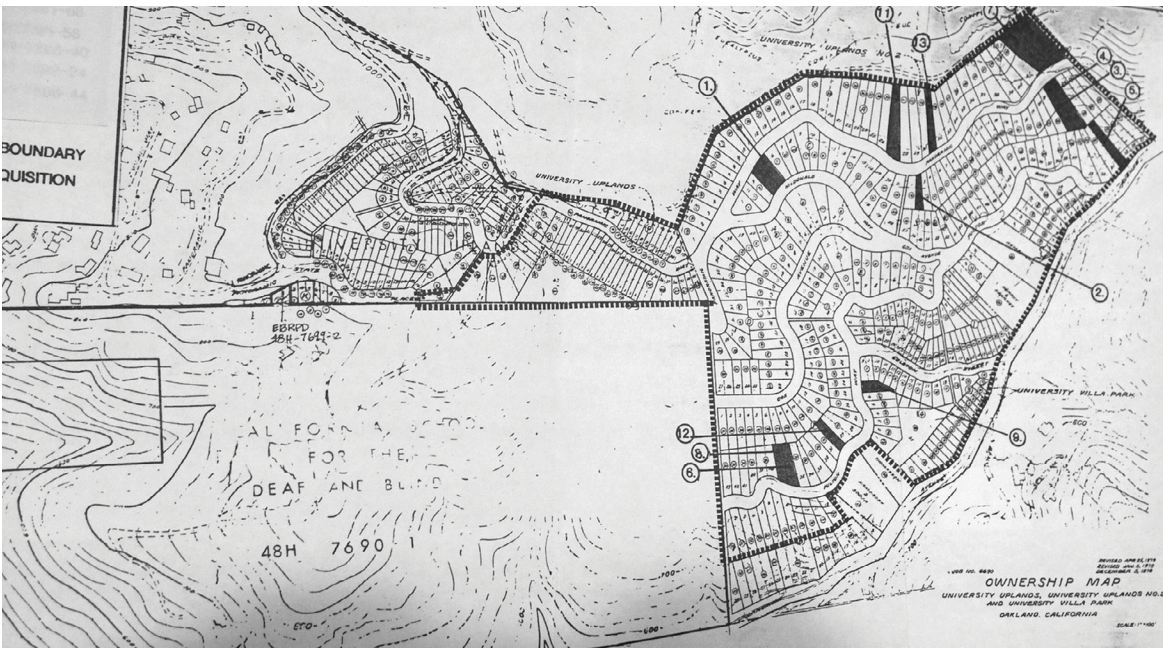
Student Membership: \$50
Family Membership: \$100 per year
Patron: \$250
Sponsor: \$500
Visionary: \$1,000

Contact Us:

PO Box 5551, Berkeley CA 94705, 510-843-2226
Email: info@ClaremontCanyon.org
Website: www.ClaremontCanyon.org

The Board of Directors: Jon Kaufman, President; Marilyn Goldhaber, Vice President; Rick Marcus, Treasurer; Nancy Mueller, Secretary; Members at Large: Josh Borkowski, John Brochu, Jerry Kent, Melina Linder, Richard Marcus, Dan Robbins, and Elizabeth Stage.

The Claremont Canyon Conservancy News is edited by Ruby J. Soto Cardona, with assistance from Kay Loughman and Marilyn Goldhaber.



A “paper subdivision” of land parcels in Claremont Canyon created in 1878 was bought by the Examiner newspaper and individual lots given away to readers who took out a one-year’s subscription!

Canyon History: Acquisition of the Claremont Canyon Regional Preserve by Ralph Samuel

MY STORY BEGINS WITH PROPOSITION 13, the initiative to limit property taxation, that was adopted by the State of California in June of 1978 where I was about to depart from my job at the Alameda County Public Works Department. I had been in the Real Estate Department as a right of way agent for thirteen years appraising real estate and acquiring properties for flood control projects, highways, road widening, and other public projects. Previously, I had spent five years with David Simmons, a highly regarded real estate appraiser in Orinda specializing in the appraisal of major properties being acquired by public agencies. For a short while I also worked for the Richmond (California) Redevelopment Agency and the Oakland Redevelopment Agency in their respective Real Estate Departments.

I had a Certificate in Real Estate from the University of California, Berkeley and had taken many education courses of the American (now International) Right of Way Association. I met June Miller from the Land Department of the East Bay Regional Park District at a local chapter meeting of the IRWA where she told me that she was leaving to go back to college to become a geologist. I asked her how I could get her job, “Ask Hulet Hornbeck, Chief of the Land Department” she replied. I was eventually interviewed by Hulet who hired me to

acquire the undeveloped lots that made up the center of the newly proposed Claremont Canyon Regional Preserve. I was given a desk, a phone and the necessary files in the Land Department offices in the basement of Park Headquarters on Skyline Boulevard in Oakland.

The Park District had included the possible purchase of a new regional preserve in its 1973 Master Plan. I was hired to handle the acquisition of smaller private parcels in Claremont Canyon, a project involving 400 parcels owned by approximately 200 separate owners scattered all over the country. My work included acquisition strategy, review of appraisals, negotiation with property owners or their representatives, presentations to the Park District Board of Directors, review of all documents, closing of escrows, and coordination with consultants and title company.

The center of Claremont Canyon was basically a paper subdivision of undeveloped land parcels laid out and recorded in 1878 and revised in 1879. I learned that the entire subdivision was bought by the Examiner newspaper of San Francisco and individual lots were given away to readers who took out a one-year’s subscription!

Acquisition appraisals for the paper subdivision were prepared by Richard (Dick) Ehrhardt, a well-respected real estate appraiser in Oakland. Dick Ehrhardt established that \$1,250 was the fair market value of the individual 25-foot by 100-foot lots that made up the proposed subdivision.

With Assemblyman Tom Bates' assistance, the Park District was able to acquire the 80-acre upland and undeveloped School for the Blind property, by a land trade involving the State of California with equivalent acreage from the Park District's Diablo Foothills Regional Park transferred to Mt. Diablo State Park. Other larger acreage acquisitions like the 27-acre Marron property were acquired for \$305,000, and the 69-acre Marg property for \$1,073,000.

Acquisition of Claremont Canyon Regional Preserve was my major contribution during my seven years with the Park District. We were able to acquire 208 acres for approximately \$3 million dollars. When I left the District in 1986, the Claremont Canyon project was 95% complete and none of the remaining in-holdings posed a threat to the newly created regional preserve.

I was with the District's Land Acquisition Department from 1979 to 1986 and during that

time acquired in excess of 1,000 acres of parkland for approximately \$4 million, plus several miles of regional trails connecting existing regional parks.



© 2023 Courtesy of Jerry Kent

A bench honoring Ralph Samuel was erected in 2002 at the top of the Stonewall-Panoramic Trail. The bench plaque pictured here replaces the original which unfortunately was stolen in 2020.

Enjoying the Canyon

by *Wyllie Clayson and Ruby J. Soto Cardona*

CLAREMONT CANYON IS HOME to a network of trails that lead to many of the open spaces in the East Bay Hills. Our volunteers help maintain these trails, in particular at sites Signpost 29 on UC land and the City of Oakland's Garber Park. Our activities range from invasive plant removal, trail renovation and upkeep, plank replacement and upgrades, and removal of dead debris and litter to lower the hazard of wildfire.

Through partnering with local clubs and organizations, we offer volunteer activities to keep trails safe and traversable. Recently at Signpost 29, students from the UC's *Berkeley Project*, a student-run charity outreach (*photo to the right*), were able to improve several trails for everyone's enjoyment. The students cut back overgrown vegetation along a stretch of the Willow Trail and were able to stabilize over 100 feet on the Gwin Canyon Trail.

For many of the UC Berkeley students, this was a completely new experience. The students were amazed to see native wild strawberry plants, an abandoned hummingbird nest, and to learn that trails can be built and main-

tained by volunteers just like them. An important part of volunteer activities is connecting people to their nearby wildland areas and educating them about these spaces.

Many moments and memories are created on these trails. The flora and fauna of the area are rich and diverse, with fun opportunities for sightings of local wildlife such as gray foxes or the shy Pacific ring-necked snake. Whether enjoying these trails by volunteering or simply setting out for a hike, we can all take a moment to appreciate our canyon and the wonderful trails that give us access.



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Scan the QR code above or explore the trails tab on our website to learn more about the network of trails in Claremont Canyon.



**CLAREMONT CANYON
CONSERVANCY**

P.O. Box 5551
Berkeley, CA 94705
www.ClaremontCanyon.org

THE CLAREMONT CANYON CONSERVANCY

Dear Friends and Neighbors

Please join us on

Sunday, November 12, 2023, 4-6 PM
Claremont Club and Spa

Upstairs in the Skyline Room

Reception 4:00 PM
Presentations 4:30 PM
Open Forum 5:30 PM

Keynote Address by Oakland District 4 Councilmember
Janani Ramachandran
and Oakland's Deputy City Administrator
Joe DeVries

Refreshments and wine bar

RSVP: info@ClaremontCanyon.org **Bring:** masks optional