



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

## President's Message

by *L. Tim Wallace*

IT HAS NOW BEEN ALMOST EXACTLY TEN YEARS since the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) announced that it was awarding millions of dollars to three public agencies that owned land in the East Bay Hills. The idea was to have those agencies reduce the fuel load on their land in such a way as to reduce the likelihood of another major wildfire in the hill area. Despite the passage of ten full years, however, the proposed risk reduction work remains undone.

This story goes back a century or more to the time when tens of thousands of seedling trees—most of them highly invasive non-native blue-gum eucalyptus—were planted by private water companies and by well-meaning but misguided land developers. By the year 2000, after 100 years of rapid growth, those seedlings had become a tall, dense, litter-filled, blue-gum eucalyptus forest—a forest type well known to foresters and fire fighters across the nation and around the world as a dangerous fire hazard.

How Real is the Risk? Between 1923 and 1992, fifteen major wildfires occurred in the East Bay Hills. Eight of them were driven by very hot, dry easterly winds, known locally as Diablo Winds; seven were driven by somewhat cooler west or southwest winds coming off the Pacific Ocean. Altogether, the fifteen major wildfires burned a total of nearly 9,000 acres, destroyed approximately 4,000 homes, and killed 26 people. One of the fires, the 1923 Berkeley Fire destroyed more than 550 homes in a few hours. A fire in 1970 consumed more than 200 acres and burned 37 homes. The 1991 Tunnel Fire killed 25 people, destroyed more than 3,000 homes, and did an estimated \$1.5 billion in damage.

Reducing the Risk: FEMA proposed to reduce the risk of another major wildfire by awarding “fire hazard mitigation grants” to the City of Oakland, the East Bay Regional Park District, and the University of California. This approach to the problem was expected to provide about \$5 million for euc removal work in strategically important parts of the East Bay Hills.

So far, so good. But then, a small band of hill-area residents—originally eight individuals—none of whom were professional forest managers or wildland fire fighters—threatened to sue the university and/or FEMA if the university continued to call for conversion of the existing euc forest into to a native oak or oak-laurel forest. Calling themselves the Hills Conservation Network, they filed objections to the university’s fire hazard reduction plan. They made no secret of the fact they liked eucalyptus and did not want it to be systematically removed from the canyon. They called instead for a “species neutral” approach to tree removal in the canyon and made wild claims that the university was planning to clear-cut the hills and pour on thousands of gallons of herbicide.

Total cost of all this planning, litigation, and related paperwork? At least \$1 million! Some estimates ran as high as high as \$8 million.

Recently, FEMA released a report entitled “Record of Decision,” which summarizes the findings made by state and federal investigators, including licensed geologists, foresters, wildlife managers and other environmental review specialists. The release of such a document suggests that FEMA’s project review process is complete. In fact, we understand that grant monies have already been released to the state of California Office of Emergency Services. The final plan now calls for a step by step approach that will result in the gradual removal of trees over a ten-year period—to be used by all grant recipients.

The Conservancy would have preferred a one-time operation as was originally proposed by the university, but we are prepared to accept the compromise that has now been reached. A number of other environmental groups also supporting the university, including the Public Lands Committee of the Sierra Club’s East Bay Chapter, may not be so willing and may be considering legal action of their own.

We are pleased, however, that the grant money finally has been released and that risk reduction work can begin sooner rather than later.



*Garber Park Stewards work in Fern Glade in Garber Park's woodland understory removing Cape ivy during a winter restoration workshop. "We were thrilled to see Trillium chloropetalum blooming there along with the ferns."*

## **Earth Day Celebration in Garber Park**

*by Marilyn Goldhaber*

IF YOU HAPPENED TO STOP BY GARBER PARK last month on the morning of April 18, you would have heard mention of such mysterious-sounding places as Evergreen Hillside, Fern Glade and Horsetail Meadow. These are the beautiful mini-landscapes within Garber Park that are winter restoration sites for the *Garber Park Stewards*.

Winter is a time of rain and thus the best time for the *Stewards* to put plants in the ground. Although we are currently experiencing the fourth year of a drought in California, the native plants in Garber Park don't seem to notice.

This past December marked the fifth year of winter restoration workshops in Garber Park headed up by Lech Naumovich of the Golden Hour Restoration Institute. Lech's monthly hands-on teaching and planting sessions combined with year-around maintenance by the *Garber Park Stewards* have proven to be mighty successful.

In honor of this success and to celebrate Earth Day, the *Stewards* along with other community volunteers gathered on the morning of April 18

to "free the ferns." This meant mostly attacking invasive Algerian ivy at the Claremont Avenue entrance to the park that leads up to the lovely little Fern Glade. Clearing the ivy gives our native ferns a chance to spread their leaves and thrive. It also provides improved fire safety along the roadside, which will become important later in the year as fire season approaches and vegetation dries out.

While Garber Park's winter workshops have ended, monthly activities in the park continue (see next article). All are warmly invited to participate.

*John Garber Park is a City of Oakland park located just behind (east of) the Claremont Hotel. For a three-minute video tour, go to [www.claremoncanyon.org](http://www.claremoncanyon.org). Garber Park Stewards is a nonprofit volunteer organization headed up by Shelagh Brodersen in order to safeguard the wildland resources of the park, reduce the risk of wildfire and maintain trails. Winter Workshops in Garber Park were funded by the Claremont Canyon Conservancy.*

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*Trillium chloropetalum* blooms in Garber Park.

### STEWARDSHIP EVENTS IN THE CANYON

PLEASE JOIN US for stewardship events in Claremont Canyon throughout the spring and summer months: twice a month (first Tuesday and third Saturday) in Garber Park led by Shelagh Brodersen of the *Garber Park Stewards* and once a month in the main canyon (fourth Saturday) led by Jon Kaufman. All levels of fitness are welcome. Watch for the monthly emails or check the Conservancy website for added events and to see where to meet. We usually meet at the Claremont Avenue entrance when working in Garber Park and at signpost 29 for main canyon events. Events are 10 AM till noon.

When venturing into the canyon, please 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 [GarberParkStewards@gmail.com](mailto:GarberParkStewards@gmail.com) for Garber Park events and [info@ClaremontCanyon.org](mailto:info@ClaremontCanyon.org) for all other events.

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*Volunteers haul away debris on Earth Day.*

## WILD LIFE IN THE NORTH HILLS

### Ten Years of Documenting Wildlife in Claremont Canyon

*by Kay Loughman*

2015 MARKS THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY of my documenting flora and fauna of Claremont Canyon. It's been a rewarding, though sometimes frustrating process. The project was prompted by Conservancy member Bill McClung who persuaded me to post a monthly list of wildlife sightings on Open Forum, our local list-serve. He also talked me into believing that people would also be interested in seeing pictures of the canyon's wildlife. My own thought was that the more people contribute sightings or photos, the more they come to appreciate the Canyon. Thus the idea of a wildlife website was born. The primary asset I could bring to the project was skill in bird and mammal identification as I had little knowledge and less interest in websites or photography at the time.

I realized early on that the website would need a few policy guidelines. The most important one—the one that



© 2006 Wm. D. Loughman

continues to define the main characteristic of the site was that: *All photos must document sightings in Claremont Canyon.*

A few people began to contribute photos and, with a lot of help from my husband, a website was launched in 2007. In that first year the website hosts I tried were awkward to use and technical grief undermined my commitment to continue with the project. In terms of content, it became clear that if I wanted a lot of pictures, I would have to take them myself.

We owned an early model digital camera at the time. It was lightweight, fine for many uses, but not great for wildlife photography. By mid-2008 I had a more advanced camera, was learning to use it, and had a website host I could work with.

Of even greater importance at the outset were the many photographic contributions from Conservancy members Marilyn Goldhaber, Martin Holden, and Tamia Marg. Then too, while participating in Conservancy field trips, I learned to identify species other than birds (plants, butterflies, etc.), and through those outings, I also met experts who were willing to help identify the content (mushrooms, lichens, and insects) of pictures I'd taken.

*Wild Life continued on page 4*



Hutton's Vireo

**Wild Life continued from page 3**

As the number of photos on the site grew, more and more people submitted pictures of their own! By 2015, 2500 photos, submitted by more than 100 photographers, documented all types of flora, fauna, and more.

The greatest variety is in the bird category—nearly 100 bird species—common year-round residents, migrants that are here to breed, winter residents now departed for breeding in northern climes, flyovers, opportunists, misplaced easterners, old friends and new finds. While most photos were taken by people, a few images of wildlife were captured by security cameras! *Photographs comprise the bulk of the site, but I have also included lists of species reported, recommendations for printed field guides, and reports of biological research done in Claremont Canyon.*

My own pace has slowed considerably over ten years. So I'm enormously grateful for the continuing efforts of John Colbert (who has contributed pictures of more species than any other photographer), Erica Rutherford, and all who hike regularly in the Canyon and generously share their observations and photos.

For the future, below is my bucket list. If you would like to help, please contact the Conservancy or contact me at [www.nhwildlife.net](http://www.nhwildlife.net).

1. Of 400 plant species reported in Claremont Canyon, the website has photos of about 250. I still need photos of the remaining 150. It's a great project for someone who knows plants and is willing to carry a camera.
2. There are still several bird, butterfly, mammal, and reptile species are not yet documented with a photo.
3. I have dreams of one of those insect survey groups spending a few days in Claremont Canyon – catching, identifying, and photographing insects.
4. Precious little time has been spent in the

northeastern parts of the canyon, including Side Hill Trail. I'd love to know what is being seen in that area.

5. My field guide recommendations should include electronic resources, as many people now turn to applications on their smart phones or computers rather than consulting a printed work.

6. Given that we are next door to a major university, I expect more biological research has been done in the canyon. Locating it is the challenge.

7. There are lots of mushroom photos still to be identified.

8. The Conservancy could use an energetic volunteer or part-time person to reinvigorate its nature walk program.



Calliope Hummingbird

**May 17 Bird Walk in Claremont Canyon**

JOIN DAVE QUADY AND KAY LOUGHMAN to look for some of the birds that breed in Claremont Canyon. Meet at 7:00 AM at the four corners intersection of Grizzly Peak Boulevard and Claremont Avenue/Fish Ranch Road. We'll pick an area that looks interesting and search until about 11 AM for year-round resident birds and for Neotropical migrant birds that have returned to breed. Bring binoculars if you have a pair (Dave will have a few pairs to share) and a field guide if you have one. Free and open to the public. RSVP appreciated but not necessary to [info@claremontcanyon.org](mailto:info@claremontcanyon.org) or (510) 843-2226.

For something different, meet Kay and Dave at 5 AM at the foot of Gelston Street to enjoy the dawn chorus as birds break into song as the sun rises. We will stand quietly and try to identify birds by their songs until about 6:30, leaving enough time for a quick breakfast snack before our 7 AM meeting at the top of the canyon.



*Bob Strayer (above) guides the bridge installation. It took four people to lift the redwood slab and place it across the gully.*



*Josh Borkowski and Fred Booker pose with their handiwork.*

## On the Trail

*by Jon Kaufman and Fred Booker*

NOTHING STAYS THE SAME IN NATURE. Willow trees are an example. They grow rapidly and also can die and fall over rapidly. That happened this past winter along the Willow Trail, named in honor of that species in upper Claremont Canyon. A large willow fell right across the trail making passage difficult, if not impossible. Instead of removing the tree, our stewardship group decided to reroute a small section of the trail to avoid both the tree and a nearby rivulet that was causing erosion—another example of how things change.

Rerouting proved to be a major undertaking as the most direct path required crossing a couple of small gullies. Thanks to the contribution of two large redwood slabs by Conservancy member Tom Klatt, and the hard work of Conservancy volunteers, the job is now completed.

On a related matter, we are happy to report that six large trail maps have been ordered to be placed at trailheads in Claremont Canyon: at the top of Dwight Way, at Signposts 29 and 27 within Claremont Canyon, at the head of Claremont Canyon at the Four Corners intersection and at the Claremont Hotel. We would also like to place a sixth map near the Stonewall trailhead but we are still awaiting approval. The maps will be displayed on 36 x 24 inch high pressure laminated board and mounted to an aluminum frame typical of the many informational signs seen within our local parks.

**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:**

Founding Sponsor: \$1,000 over 10 years.  
Family Membership: \$50 per year.  
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**Contact Us:**

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Email: [info@ClaremontCanyon.org](mailto:info@ClaremontCanyon.org)  
Website: [www.ClaremontCanyon.org](http://www.ClaremontCanyon.org)

**The Board of Directors:** L. Tim Wallace, President; Joe Engbeck, Vice President; Barry Pilger, Treasurer; Marilyn Goldhaber, Secretary; Members at Large: Fred Booker, Steve Holtzman, Jon Kaufman, Jerry Kent, Bob Strayer and Dick White.

**The Claremont Canyon Conservancy News** is edited by Marilyn Goldhaber and Joe Engbeck.

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\*CENA made the initial \$1,000 contribution to found the Conservancy in 2001.

## Conservancy Membership

by Marilyn Goldhaber

HONORING OUR MEMBERS: From our founding in 2001, we have encouraged nearby residents and community organizations to support the Conservancy by becoming Founding Sponsors with a commitment to contribute \$1,000, either all at once or over ten years. Many of our Founding Sponsors have pledged to continue their support into the future with another \$1,000 to cover the next ten years. Thank you!

We are pleased to list on the opposite page our Founding Sponsors (anonymous not listed). Below, we also honor an additional 140 current members from other categories of membership, who have supported the Conservancy in our most recent membership drives.



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*Frannie Lewis shares a coffee break with Bob Brodersen on Earth Day, after a long morning pulling Algerian Ivy. We are fortunate to have Frannie among us. As a student in Lech Naumovich's new Restoration Certificate Program, she has chosen Garber Park to satisfy many of the required volunteer hours. A win-win situation for all.*

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SUPPORTING THE LONG-TERM STEWARDSHIP OF CLAREMONT CANYON



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*Volunteers help “free the ferns” on Earth Day.*