



Annual Report

July 2022-June 2023

Friends of the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park

Email: info@friendsofthewildernesspark.org

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The Friends of the Wilderness Park is a grassroots organization that works with the City of Claremont to help preserve the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park as an environmental resource, manage the park for passive recreation, and minimize the impact of park attendance on surrounding residential neighborhoods.

LEADERSHIP TEAM

Charlie Gale, Chair

Meg Mathies, Secretary

Nancy Hamlett, Treasurer

Carol Blaney, Biota Project Manager

Ran Libeskind-Hadas

Wendy Reeder

Vicki Salazar, Volunteer Coordinator

Cover Photo: Second Saturday volunteers.

*Left to right: Hugh Wire, Wendy Reeder,
Margie Garcia, and Martha Rodriguez*

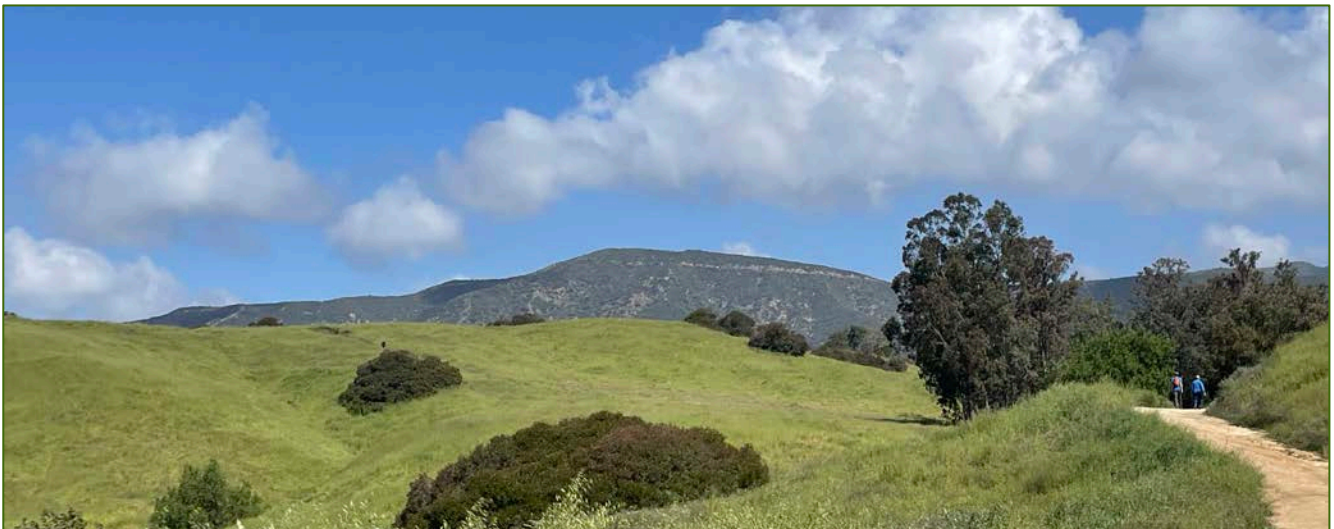


INTRODUCTION

Mission and History

The Friends of the Wilderness Park is a volunteer support group that was formed as a result of the *Master Plan for the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park* (Section IP 2.1 of the *Implementation Plan*). As described in that document, it was envisioned that the Friends would “assist with recruiting volunteers for various projects, engage with visitors on the trail to promote positive compliance with rules and trail courtesies, discuss issues of concern, share observations, and report to and coordinate with staff.”

The Friends was constituted in its present form in Spring 2018. In normal times, the Leadership Team meets monthly at the Alexander Hughes Community Center. For 2022-2023, Eric Ey, City of Claremont Human Services Manager, served as the City’s liaison to the Friends and attended the Leadership Team meetings. The Friends have several working groups concerned with specific aspects of the Park, as detailed below under “Specific Projects”, pages 5-15.



Purpose of this report

The *Implementation Plan for the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park* (CHWP) states that “In order to ensure the Community & Human Services Commission is informed of CHWP issues, the ‘Friends’ will provide an Annual Report and Recommendations on user experience and park culture to the Parks, Hillside, & Utility Committee as well as the Community & Human Services Commission.” This report is submitted in response to that charge.

THE YEAR AT A GLANCE

Work on multiple projects continues despite unusual weather

- The Park was closed for a total of **49** days during the 2022-2023 fiscal year:
 - 6 Red Flag Warning
 - 2 Nearby Fire
 - 10 Excessive Heat
 - 27 Rain
 - 1 High Wind Advisory
 - 3 Road Maintenance
- We held **10** "Second Saturday" programs in FY 2022-2023.
- The Friends participated in Claremont's Earth Day Celebration in April 2023.
- We continued monitoring Monarch butterflies and milkweed in the Park.
- Our iNaturalist project documenting flora and fauna in the Park recruited new members, held a BioBlitz, added 1700 observations, and documented 176 new species.
- The Friends worked with the City and Claremont Wildlands Conservancy to design and conduct Park user surveys.
- The Friends' first invasive plant removal event was held in the Park.
- We updated our website, continued our blog, and added 64 people to our email list.



Meet and Greet with the Friends of the Wilderness Park, the Claremont Wildlands Conservancy, and Park Rangers, July 2022.

SPECIFIC PROJECTS

(1) Second Saturday volunteer program

Leader Vicki Salazar

The Second Saturday volunteer program is a collaboration of the Friends of the Wilderness Park, CHWP Rangers, and City Staff.

Our Second Saturday volunteers promote positive park culture and demonstrate respect for the outdoors by educating visitors about the park, picking up litter on the trails, and providing information.

Our Friends' volunteers also:

- Answer questions about the kiosk map and trails.
- Exhibit and discuss the Friends' biodiversity poster.
- Promote the iNaturalist project dedicated to the CHWP.
- Encourage visitors to join the Friends email list and sign up to volunteer.
- Remind visitors to take adequate water for themselves and their dogs.

For 2022-2023, the Second Saturday program involved:

- **21** Volunteers
- **125** volunteer hours



Second Saturday Volunteers. Left: Charlie Gale; Right: Nichet Simpson and Brenda Havro.

(2) Monarch and milkweed monitoring

Leader Nancy Hamlett

In 2022-2023, the Friends of the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park continued monitoring milkweed plants and monarch butterflies in the Johnson's Pasture area of the CHWP, using the protocols specified by the Integrated Monarch Monitoring Program (IMMP).

The monitoring program includes weekly Monarch larvae and egg surveys, biweekly adult Monarch surveys, and monthly milkweed and blooming plant surveys as well as a site description for each visit. Here is quick summary of the activity:

- 10 Volunteers participated
- 100 Volunteer hours
- 124 Monarchs observed (89 adults, 29 larvae, 5 eggs, and 1 pupa)
- 2 species of Milkweed present (Narrowleaf Milkweed and Woollypod Milkweed)

Because Monarchs clearly reproduce in the Park, the CHWP would be a prime site for Monarch and pollinator habitat improvement if the City were to undertake such a program.



Clockwise from top left: Volunteers hard at work; a Monarch caterpillar on Woollypod Milkweed; an adult Monarch nectaring on Narrowleaf Milkweed; a (greatly magnified) Monarch egg; Crotch's Bumble Bee, an Endangered Species Candidate, also gets nectar from milkweed.

(3) Documentation of Park flora and fauna

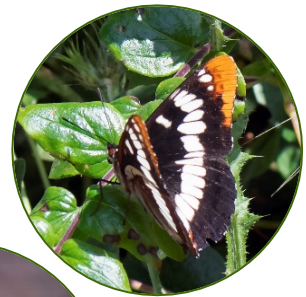
Project Managers Carol Blaney, Nancy Hamlett, and Vicki Salazar

To help lay the groundwork for effective Park conservation management, especially of special-status species, the Friends are cataloguing the Park's flora and fauna. Our main tool is iNaturalist, a non-profit platform initially established by the California Academy of Sciences. Users upload a photo or sound recording (with location) of any wild plant, animal, or fungus. Then iNaturalist's image-recognition software and iNaturalist community members – sometimes world-renowned researchers – help identify the organism.



To gather these observations of park species, the Friends initiated the “Biota of the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park” community science project in 2019 (<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/biota-of-the-claremont-hills-wilderness-park>). In addition to documenting Park flora and fauna, this project fosters community awareness of and appreciation for the Park and its biodiversity. So far, naturalists have documented more than 700 species in the Park. Here is a snapshot of our effort so far:

- iNaturalist Observers: **289 (68 new this year)**
- Species Observed: **731 (176 new)**
 - 307** Plants (41 new)
 - 14** Mammals (1 new)
 - 63** Birds (6 new)
 - 8** Reptiles
 - 4** Amphibians
 - 3** Mollusks
 - 257** Insects (106 new)
 - 25** Spiders (7 new)
 - 5** Mites & Ticks (1 new)
 - 7** Protozoans
 - 34** Fungi & Lichens (7 new)



This year's long, cool, wet spring created the perfect growth environment for species that had not been documented in the Park for decades—or ever. Below are some of the unique species observed by Park naturalists this year.



Twining Snapdragon. ©Boaz Solorio.

Omnivorous black bears (*Ursus americanus*) thrive on the plentiful vegetation and insect populations that a wet year supports. This adult bear and her cubs were observed by visitors in Cobal Canyon in June.



American Black Bear with cubs. ©Vicki Salazar.



Halictus tripartitus. ©Nancy Hamlett.

More than 100 species of insects — diverse and fascinating contributors to ecosystem health — were added to the Park list this year. The sweat bee at left (*Halictus tripartitus*) is covered with pollen from a California poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*).



Comatricha slime mold. ©Keir Morse.

Moisture-loving slime molds, like this *Comatricha* shown to the right, feed on bacteria and fungi. They were documented in the Park for the first time this year.

Biota Project Accomplishments in 2022-2023

- Based on several years of iNaturalist data, the Friends have now documented that 15 potentially threatened species make their home in the park. An estimated 96 introduced species, several of which are invasive, also live in the park.
- iNaturalist observations in the Park increased dramatically (again) this year, from 2,596 to 4,372.
- This year, the Friends expanded the Park BioBlitz from one day to four. Linked to the worldwide City Nature Challenge, the BioBlitz added 58 species to the park list. For more information on the BioBlitz, read our blog: <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/biota-of-the-claremont-hills-wilderness-park/journal/79824>
- To increase engagement in the Park, the Friends reached out to nearly 50 naturalists and scientists to invite them to the BioBlitz. Friends also hosted booths at Claremont's Earth Day celebration and at the Mills Avenue entrance during one day of the BioBlitz. In total, 27 naturalists participated in the BioBlitz, and nearly one-third were new to making observations.



Volunteers Vicki Salazar and Wendy Walker explain the City Nature Challenge CHWP BioBlitz to visitors to the Friends' booth at Claremont's Earth Day Celebration.

Featured Contributors

Two skilled scientists added a wealth of species and identifications to our park biota list this year



Keir Morse is a professional field botanist who recently completed a PhD studying *Malacothamnus* (the bushmallows) at California Botanic Garden in Claremont. He loves to document the natural world through his photography. See more at keiriosity.com/



Psyllaephagus
parasitoid wasp (left)

White-flowering
currant (below)

©Keir Morse



Clara Stuligross is a postdoctoral researcher at UC Riverside, studying the effects of climate change on bees and plants. She enjoys hiking at Claremont Hills Wilderness Park and documenting its amazing biodiversity. See more at clarastuligross.com/



Prong-faced Slender-
Mason bee (above)

Ceanothus silk moth
(left)

© Clara Stuligross



(4) Park User Surveys

Leaders Meg Mathies and Wendy Reeder

As noted in last year's Annual Report, although the CHWP Master Plan directed that user surveys of the Wilderness Park be conducted every two years, a thorough survey had not actually been carried out since 2014. All involved parties – the Parks, Hillside, & Utilities Committee, Community & Human Services Commission, Claremont Wildlands Conservancy, Friends of the Wilderness Park, and Claremont City Staff – were in agreement that conducting a survey to determine both the annual number of Park users and their usage patterns and interests was of high priority.

A committee comprised of members of the above groups was formed and draft versions of a Visitor Intercept form and a numerical tally sheet were approved. The committee agreed that we would try to replicate the survey schedule employed by the consulting firm MIG in 2014 so that we could apply the same reasoning in analyzing the results. Thus, we planned to conduct exit counts and surveys for 2-hour periods at 5 different Park entrances (Main gate, Pomello, Sycamore Canyon, Mountain Avenue, and Marshall Canyon) and during 16 different survey periods, distributed on both weekdays and weekends and during both mornings and afternoons. In the end the number of sample periods was reduced because of inclement weather and/or shortage of volunteers.

Volunteers were recruited from various supportive groups (CWC, Friends of the Wilderness Park, Boys and Girls groups, those on CHWP mailing lists, etc.) and registered on-line for the various individual time periods. Park Rangers, under the direction of Eric Ey, did a wonderful job of managing the logistics of the survey. They met with volunteers in the South parking lot before each



Park visitors taking the survey.

survey session for a training period and to distribute survey forms, clipboards and pencils, hi-vis vests, parking permits, radios, signs, water, and even snacks!! They were on call during the sessions to trouble-shoot any problems, and then met volunteers at the end of each period to collect all the materials. Several volunteers commented on the high level of organization and smoothness of the operation.

The results of the survey have been distributed to the Community & Human Services Commission and do not need to be repeated in detail here. We will simply summarize a few of the outcomes which are of interest.

- About $\frac{1}{3}$ of the respondents indicated that they have been coming to the Park for 10 years or more.
- About $\frac{1}{4}$ said they use the Park 1-2 times per week, and just over half reported that their usual visit is 1-2 hours long.
- The most popular times to visit the park are weekend mornings (~ 60%) and weekday mornings (~42%), with weekday afternoons (~20%) ranking next. (Note, numbers don't add to 100% because respondents were invited to list more than one choice.)
- 82% of respondents said their primary interest was walking/hiking, while 22% checked jogging/running and 21% indicated enjoying nature. (Again, they could indicate more than one interest.) 13% said their primary reason was mountain biking.
- Just over 50% reported parking in the main lot on North Mills, and 72% of that group paid via the parking meters. The remaining 28% were about evenly distributed between those who used a resident's permit (parking in South lot) and those with an annual paid parking permit.
- The strong plurality of Park visitors (23.5%), were residents of Claremont (91711 zip code) with the remaining 76.5% coming from surrounding communities (Pomona, Ontario, Rancho, Upland, La Verne, San Dimas, Chino, etc.). This is roughly comparable to the results of the 2014 survey, where ~18% were from Claremont and ~82% from other zip codes. These results



Park visitors taking the survey.

confirm that, although the Wilderness Park is owned and operated by the City of Claremont, we serve essentially as a regional park for the San Gabriel Valley.

- Park visitors included slightly more females than males (~53% vs. ~46%) and a plurality were in the middle age group (~34% between 36 and 50 years old). In terms of race/ethnicity, about half of the visitors (~49%) identified as Latino/Hispanic/Spanish origin, with White/Caucasian coming in next (~37%), and Asian Americans third (~11%).
- The annual number of visitors was estimated by two different methods (Hourly Average Approach and Multiplier Approach) as described in the 2014 survey conducted by MIG. These gave slightly different results (~425K vs ~532K), which average to approximately 479K visitors. Given that the Forest Service considers the results of such surveys as having a 20% margin of error, this is comparable to the usage estimate of ~531K as calculated in the 2014 survey.

Despite the fact that several data points are missing due to rainy weather and/or a shortage of volunteers, we consider this a highly successful survey operation. The results are generally comparable to those obtained in the 2014 survey, and the data will be useful both for making decisions about Park management and for fund raising. Most gratifying is the fact that the vast majority of those making comments in the open-ended section of the survey expressed appreciation for the beauty and maintenance of the Park, using descriptors such as: Great place, Amazing, Clean, Enjoyable, Good work, Love, Awesome, Excellent, Love CHWP, Beautiful, and Love the place. The Claremont Hills Wilderness Park is a well-appreciated asset to our community.



Park visitors taking the survey.

(5) Invasive species management

Leader Nancy Hamlett

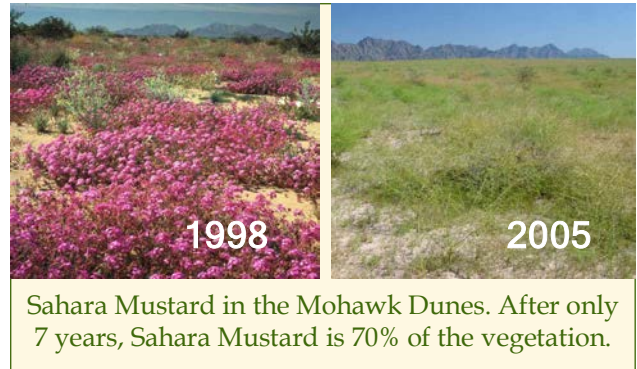
"Invasive plant species degrade native habitat and displace native plants and wildlife, increase wildfire potential; increase slope erosion potential; and degrade recreational opportunities. Therefore, invasive plant species control and management are important components to preserving the integrity of CHWP's native habitat."

— Master Plan for the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park

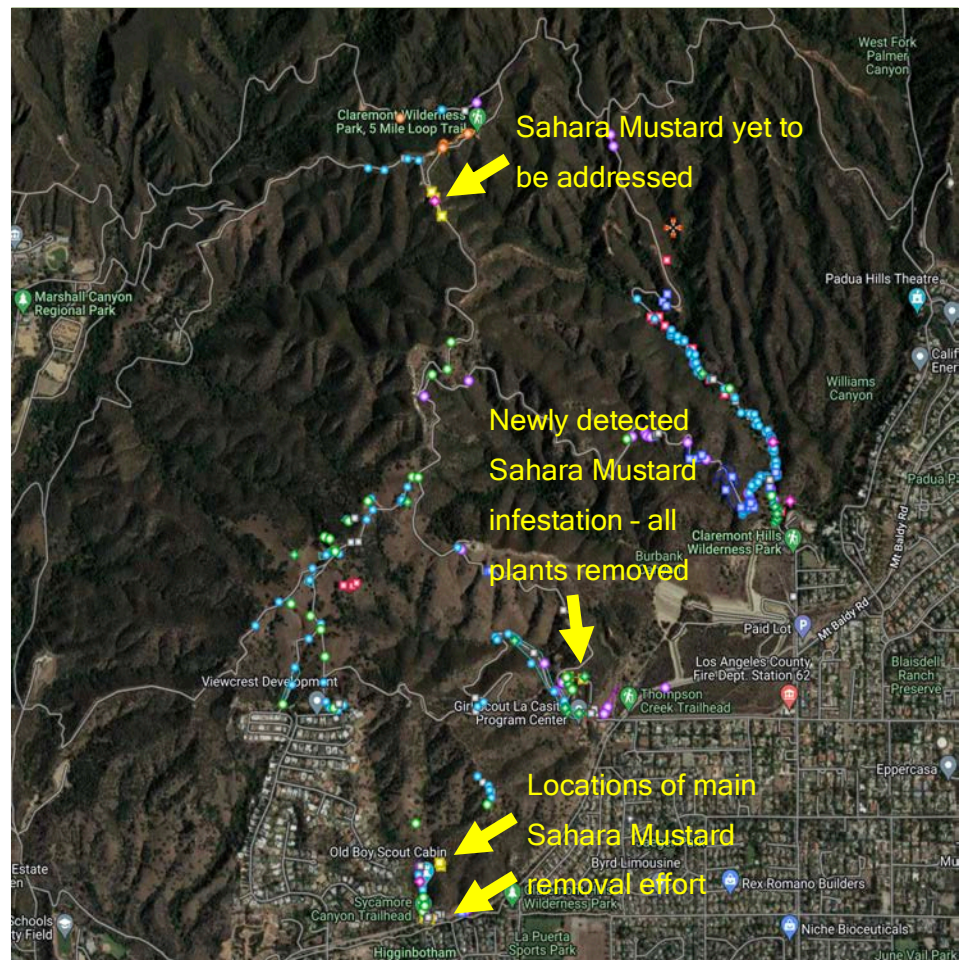
In the invasive plants arena, the Friends' focus this year was on Sahara Mustard (*Brassica tournefortii*). In the CHWP, Sahara Mustard is considered a Priority 1 invasive plant — it's highly invasive but feasible to control. It has caused serious damage to desert ecosystems east of here, displacing native wildflowers and other plants as well as creating a fire hazard where none had existed previously.

In the CHWP, Sahara Mustard has established only a few relatively small infestations, as shown on the map to the right. We did discover a new location this year with only 5 plants, all of which were removed.

With the encouragement and support of City, staff and the Park Rangers, the Friends of the Wilderness Park held their first ever invasive plant removal event in January when a dedicated group of



Sahara Mustard in the Mohawk Dunes. After only 7 years, Sahara Mustard is 70% of the vegetation.



Invasive plant locations in the CHWP. Sahara Mustard is shown in yellow.

volunteers, including members of Boy Scout Troop 407, removed Sahara Mustard from two locations on the Sycamore Canyon Trail — one at the bottom of the trail and one about one-third of the way up. We did our best to remove all of the mustard in both of those areas, and we filled 15 contractor bags full of mustard! It will take a few years before all the mustard is gone, as a seed bank has already been established, but we hope to see progress soon!

We hope to have more invasive plant removal events, in the coming year.



Clockwise from top left: Boy Scouts in the field of mustard; Naomi Fraga pulling mustard; Iris Magboo pulling mustard; Teddy and Iris Magboo with the bags of mustard; a bag of mustard heads down the trail, Boy Scouts show off their mustard trophies.

(6) Park signage policies

Leader Charlie Gale

This year, the Friends assisted the City with the final language and design of the main entrance visitor kiosk sign, which includes essential information, a map, park regulations and emergency numbers for first-time visitors. The final design followed many of the suggestions received by the Friends during the monthly Second Saturday volunteer/park clean-up days, and the Friends also contributed content to the *Wilderness Park Gazette* portion of the sign. The kiosk will also include a plaque that officially recognizes the people and funding sources that enabled construction of the kiosk.

The Friends look forward to the continued implementation of the guidelines for signage in the Wilderness Park as approved by the Parks, Hillsides, and Utilities Committee and the Community and Human Services Commission.

Lastly, the Friends look forward to working with the City on the official unveiling of the kiosk soon.



Park visitors perusing information on the new kiosk sign.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE CITY:

- We recommend that the city continue to work on implementing the revised Park signage as outlined in the approved Guidelines, with the next priority being the directional/way-finding signs, which will increase Park safety. The current CalFire grant includes funds that can be used for this signage, and possibly the Friends and the Rangers could help with installation to reduce the total cost.
- We recommend that the City consider how the Park is financed given the increasing number of Park closures. Wildfires, fire danger, and excessive heat – the reasons for most closures – will only increase as climate change increases, leading to further losses in Park funding.
- We recommend that the City explore ways to address resource and safety concerns expressed in the visitor survey and observed by Friends, including bike safety; creation of social trails; off-leash dogs; after-hours park entry; and unsanctioned gathering of wildflowers and other park resources.
- We recommend that the City develop a plan to open the Evey Canyon entrance.



MANY THANKS TO:

City of Claremont

for providing:

- Our liaison, Eric Ey

Friends of the Wilderness Park Leadership Team

for their donations of:

- Domain name, web hosting, and G-Suite renewal
- Zoom license
- Monarch monitoring materials
- Second Saturday materials
- Money to purchase T-shirts

Photography credits:

- Cover: Vicki Salazar
- Pages 2 and 3: Nancy Hamlett
- Page 4: Sam Atwood
- Page 5: Vicki Salazar
- Page 6: Nancy Hamlett
- Page 7 (clockwise from upper left): Western Kingbird by Carol Blaney; Lorquin's Admiral by Nancy Hamlett; Pleated Marasmus by Naturalist Nellie; Wide-throated Yellow Monkeyflower by Carol Blaney; center photo: Texas Striped Sweat Bee by Nancy Hamlett.
- Page 9: Nancy Hamlett
- Pages 11-13: Meg Mathies
- Page 14: Sahara Mustard in the Mohawk Dunes from <http://www.my-photo-blog.com/sahara-mustard>
- Pages 15-18: Nancy Hamlett

