



Annual Report July 2024-June 2025

Friends of the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park

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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

Nancy Hamlett, Secretary and Treasurer

Wendy Reeder

Susan Starr

Ran Libeskind-Hadas

Vicki Salazar



Introduction

Mission and History

The formation of the Friends of the Wilderness Park is based upon the Master Plan for the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park (Section IP 2.1 of the Implementation Plan): an entity “assisting with recruiting volunteers for various projects, engaging with visitors on the trail to promote positive compliance with rules and trail courtesies, discussing issues of concern, sharing observations, and reporting to and coordinating with staff.” It is a group of volunteers, supporting the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park.

The Friends was constituted in its present form in Spring 2018. Since the start of the pandemic, the group has primarily met on Zoom. Ashley Dembiczak, Recreation and Human Services Supervisor, served as the City’s liaison to the Friends from August 2023 to August 2024. Eric Ey subsequently served as the liaison until November 2024 when Chase Berryman was hired as Wilderness Park Supervisor. When Chase left that position in February 2025, Eric Ey resumed the role of liaison. The Friends have several working groups concerned with specific aspects of the Park, which are detailed later in this report under “Specific Projects”.

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 has been submitted in response to that charge.



The Year at a Glance

Work on multiple projects continued despite a high number of Park closures.

- The Park was closed for a total of 43 days during the 2024-2025 fiscal year:
 - 22 Red Flag Warning
 - 17 Active Wildfires Nearby
 - 4 Rain
- We held 7 “Second Saturday” programs in FY 2024-2025, including two themed educational events.
- The Friends participated in community outreach events:
 - Claremont’s 4th of July Celebration
 - CalBG Native Plant Festival
 - Sustainable Claremont’s Earth Day Celebration
 - Milkweed Fest at the Grow Native Nursery.
- 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 958 observations and documented 71 new species.
- We continued some invasive plant removal in the Park.
- Forty-three Friends volunteers contributed 212 volunteer-hours to the Park.
- We entered into a fiscal sponsorship agreement with Sustainable Claremont.
- We updated our website, continued our blog, and added 161 people to our email list.



Fiscal Sponsorship Agreement with Sustainable Claremont

In December 2024, the Friends of the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park entered into a fiscal sponsorship agreement with Sustainable Claremont. As our fiscal sponsor, Sustainable Claremont provides fiduciary oversight, financial management, and other administrative services to the Friends, and the Friends' funds are in a designated subaccount of Sustainable Claremont. Donations are made to Sustainable Claremont, allowing us to take advantage of their 501(c)(3) nonprofit status. In return for their services, 8% of our income is designated for Sustainable Claremont to cover their costs for administering our account.

Although we may eventually opt to become our own separate nonprofit, fiscal sponsorship is an excellent arrangement to enable us to accept tax-deductible donations as we grow.



Specific Projects

Second Saturday volunteer program

Leaders: *Nancy Hamlett and Susan Starr*

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

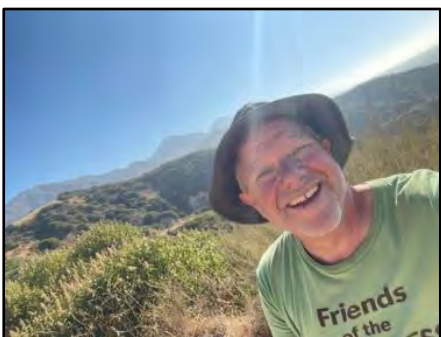
Our Second Saturday volunteers promote positive park culture and demonstrate respect for the outdoors by picking up litter on the trails and by providing information about the park to visitors.

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.

In addition, we held two special educational Second Saturday events:

- Snakes of the Wilderness Park and Snake Safety with herpetologist Prof. Kris Lappin, Cal Poly Pomona
- California Invasive Species Action Week – educational materials about invasive plant species in the CHWP and removal of thistles and mustard near the Park entrance



Volunteers Charlie Gale on the loop picking up trash (picture on the left) and Susan Starr and Cris Cheney at the Volunteer Table at the main gate (picture on the right). Photos © Charlie Gale.

Monarch and milkweed monitoring

Leader: Nancy Hamlett

Although the Monarch and Milkweed Monitoring program was on hiatus for 2024, the Friends resumed monitoring milkweed plants and monarch butterflies in the Johnson's Pasture area of the CHWP in 2025, using the protocols specified by the Integrated Monarch Monitoring Program.

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. The 2025 monitoring season is still ongoing, but as of June 30 (approximately the first third of the season), we had observed **40** Monarchs (8 adults, 25 larvae, 6 eggs, and 1 pupa).

These numbers represent a substantial (nearly 4-fold) increase in the number of Monarchs seen in the CHWP compared to the same period for 2023 – the most recent year with a full season's worth of data.

The baseline data on milkweed, blooming plants, and Monarch reproduction will be very useful for assessing any future restoration of the Johnson's Pasture area.



Clockwise from top left: Volunteer Lori Galloway inspects milkweed plant for Monarch eggs and larvae; A second-instar Monarch caterpillar on Woollypod Milkweed; Scott Marnoy and Patty Neuva-Espana check for eggs and larvae; An adult male Monarch on Woollypod Milkweed.

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

Mapping

Since most invasive plant locations in the Park (excluding Evey Canyon) have been mapped, no widespread mapping efforts were undertaken. We mapped some new occurrences as they were spotted, and we also mapped infestations before removal.

Removal events

In Spring 2025, we held two events for the removal of Castor Beans (*Ricinus communis*) and Tree Tobacco (*Nicotiana glauca*) on the lower part of the Cobal Canyon Trail. As part of a special Second Saturday program for California Invasive Species Action Week, we also removed invasive mustard (including *Hirschfeldia incana*, *Brassica fruticulosa*, and *Sisymbrium orientale*) and Italian Thistles (*Carduus pycnocephalus*) from areas near the Park entrance that had been newly planted with native plants.



Left: Ranger Jake helps attack some serious Castor Beans. Right: Weed workers with bags of mustard and thistles.

Newly spotted invasive species

***Rhamnus alaternus* (Italian Buckthorn)** is on the California Invasive Plant Council (Cal-IPC) Watch list. This shrub is native to the Mediterranean and in California favors scrub and chaparral, forests, and riparian and bottomland habitat. Seeds are spread by fruit-eating birds and mammals. One well-established individual was spotted growing through a Laurel Sumac in Johnson's Pasture.



Volunteer Peter Saeta starts to cut a Tree Tobacco (*Nicotiana glauca*) down to size.



Italian Buckthorn (*Rhamnus alaternus*)



Major Castor Bean (*Ricinus communis*) infestation before (left) and after (right).

Biota Report: Documentation of All Park Species

Leaders: Carol Blaney, Nancy Hamlett, and Vicki Salazar

To help lay the groundwork for effective Park conservation management, especially of special-status and invasive species, the Friends are cataloguing all the Park's known species of animals, plants, and other organisms. Our main tool is iNaturalist, a non-profit platform that stores observations from millions of naturalists worldwide, 435 of whom have made observations in the Park so far. Users upload a photo or sound recording (with location) of any wild plant, animal, or other organism. Then iNaturalist's image-recognition software and iNaturalist community members – some of whom are world-renowned researchers – help identify the organism.

To compile iNaturalist observations of Park species, the Friends initiated the “Biota of the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park” (<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/biota-of-the-claremont-hills-wilderness-park>) community science project in 2019. In addition to documenting Park flora and fauna, the project fosters awareness of and appreciation for the Park and its biodiversity. The current iNaturalist project counts are:

- **960** Total species observed
(71 new since last year)
- **349** Plants (16 new)
- **20** Mammals
- **73** Birds (4 new)
- **10** Reptiles (1 new)
- **4** Amphibian
- **5** Mollusks
- **368** Insects (31 new)
- **42** Spiders, mites, ticks (8 new)
- **9** Protozoans (1 new)
- **72** Fungi & lichens (8 new)



Photo credits clockwise from top left: Cardinal Catchfly ©Vicki Salazar, Say's Phoebe ©Nancy Hamlett, Goldenstar ©Vicki Salazar, *Phidippus adumbratus* jumping spider ©Nancy Hamlett

Nearly 1,000 iNaturalist observations were made in the Park by nature enthusiasts this year, who photographed everything from bears sauntering along the Loop trail to tiny jumping spiders and brilliant wildflowers thriving in their native habitats.



Adult anise swallowtails (*Papilio zelicaon*) take nectar from many types of flowers, and the larvae (caterpillars) feed on the leaves of plants in the carrot and citrus families.

Photo © Nancy Hamlett

This young bobcat was observed hunting in Johnson's Pasture on an autumn evening. Bobcats stalk and ambush their prey, which range from insects and lizards to rodents and rabbits. Full-grown bobcats are about twice the size of a domestic cat.

Photo ©Scott Marnoy





California centaury (*Zeltnera venusta*), a showy native member of the gentian family, was reported for the first time in CHWP this year.

Photo ©myosotisalpestris (iNaturalist)

Biota Project Accomplishments in 2024-2025

- In 2025, the Friends Biota Team continued its work with the *All-Species List for Claremont Hills Wilderness Park*, which includes all the Park species reported on iNaturalist, plus those reported in Calflora, the Consortium of California Herbaria, and eBird as well as by local experts. This comprehensive list now contains a total of 1103 species. Currently, according to iNaturalist, 36 of these are special status (threatened or endangered) species and 150 are introduced; of the introduced species, 47 are invasive (according to Calflora). The list will continue to be updated as new reports come in from reliable sources; it can be viewed here: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1xRIO6cvv9zPvGuf-OJSf93fTZ-U3w9PXLjl6i-0mmN8/edit?usp=sharing>
- iNaturalist observations in the Park increased dramatically (again) this year, from 5,735 to 6,693.
- For a third year, the Friends continued our expansion of the Park BioBlitz from one day to four: April 25-28. The BioBlitz encourages people to observe nature in the Wilderness Park, and this year, a dozen naturalists participated. Among these were students from a local university, who observed as part of a course, adding to their knowledge and our documentation of the Park's species.
- Linked to the worldwide City Nature Challenge, the 2025 BioBlitz added 5 species to the Park list. For more information on the BioBlitz, read our iNaturalist project blog: <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/biota-of-the-claremont-hills-wilderness-park/journal/111574>

Recommendations to the City

- 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. Because of this spring's passage of an e-bike ordinance, with a decision to reevaluate in a year, we recommend particular attention be paid to assessing how e-bikes are affecting the Park environment and user experience.
- We recommend that the city explore ways to manage invasive species, some of which pose a potential wildfire threat. Many invasives also pose ecological concerns, including reducing habitat for native species that play a vital role in the Park environment.

Acknowledgments

Many thanks to:

The City of Claremont

for providing:

- Our liaisons – Ashley Dembiczak, Eric Ey, and Chase Berryman
- Rooms for meetings and training sessions
- Storage in the Rangers' shed and use of the Rangers' tools

The Friends of the Wilderness Park Leadership Team

for their donations of:

- Funds for legal advice related to the fiscal sponsorship agreement
- Domain registration, website hosting, and Google Workspace