



# Canyon News

Black Mountain Park • Carmel Mountain Preserve  
Del Mar Mesa Preserve • Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve Oct., Nov., Dec., 2013  
Friends of Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve, Inc. Volume 27 No. 4

## Co-existing with Rattlesnakes in our Parks

Thomas Stuhr, Park Ranger, Black Mtn. Park

With hotter weather comes a greater chance at seeing a rattlesnake within Black Mountain Park (where I work) or other parks. Understanding the wild residents living in our parks is important. Having a solid understanding and respect for wildlife and wildlife habitat is equally important in helping preserve a healthy place for wildlife — including rattlesnakes — and ensuring a place for human recreation.

We can make critical choices in the protection, well being, and productivity of wildlife within our parks. Allowing a space for wildlife to dwell, breed, and live is crucial for a well balanced ecology to play out within a habitat; this in turn means a healthier park for us humans to enjoy when we visit.

In my opinion rattlesnakes are not only magnificent and beautiful, but are also misunderstood and often feared by park visitors. What visitors to the parks should know is that our rattlesnakes tend to seek out solitude and are pretty docile, secretive reptiles. Of the five types of venomous snakes in San Diego County, Black Mountain Open Space Park has only two: the Red Diamond and the Southern Pacific (a subspecies of the Western). Both types are vital for a healthy park, and landscape. Rattlesnakes assist in rodent population control, genetic disease suppression, and overall park health within the local eco-system.



Southern Pacific Rattlesnake

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[The other three species are the Speckled — found in the foothills from Mission Trails and Ramona east and south; the Sidewinder — found in the desert; and the Lyre snake — found in rocky areas in lowlands, mountains and the desert. The latter generally doesn't hurt people because it's scarce and its venom is in grooved teeth in the back of the jaw; a jaw too small to allow it to bite us.]

By following a few simple rules we can protect the well being of our rattlesnakes. Here are a few of these rules:

- Become educated about rattlesnakes. Love them or hate them, education is important for gaining a better understanding of this reptile and learning to co-exist.
- Keep dogs on leash and under control at all times. Not only a park regulation, it's a good way to avoid having your dog encounter a rattlesnake and get bitten, on or off the trail. Imagine someone coming into your home to visit and having them threaten you, chase, and bark at you; this may sound humorous, yet in theory this is no different a situation than that of a human visitor who comes to visit a park with a dog and allows them to run off leash. (see pg. 8)

## Upcoming Hikes and Volunteer Opportunities

Maps of Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve, Carmel Mountain Preserve and Black Mountain Open Space Park are available at [www.Peñasquitos.org](http://www.Peñasquitos.org)

All of our hikes are free. There is a fee for the Tracking survey classes. See below for details.

Wear good trail sneakers or boots and sun protection (hat, sunscreen or both), and bring plenty of water. Call 858-484-3219 for more information.

### Repeating Events

#### Every Saturday and Sunday:

##### **Historic Adobe Ranch Tour**

San Diego County Park docents lead a free guided tour of San Diego's second oldest standing residence, Rancho Santa María de los Peñasquitos, at 11 a.m. on Saturdays and 1 p.m. on Sundays, lasting 45 minutes. See an historic Mexican era rancho with three foot thick adobe walls, settler and Indian artifacts and tour the grounds. The Ranch House is located on Canyonside Park Driveway off Black Mountain Road between Mira Mesa and Rancho Peñasquitos.

#### Every month:

##### **Wildlife Tracking Walk**

**Sat. 8 a.m.-10 a.m. Oct. 12, Nov. 9, Dec. 14**

Everyone is invited to join a knowledgeable San Diego Tracking Team instructor for a free, easy introductory tracking walk to learn about the art of tracking and the Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve. Look for tracks and scat of coyotes, bobcats, raccoon, deer and other wildlife in the area! Information at [www.sdtt.org](http://www.sdtt.org). Rain cancels. Meet at the Historic Adobe Ranch House on Canyonside Park Drive and Black Mountain Road, Rancho Peñasquitos.

#### Every two months:

##### **Black Mountain Open Space Park Citizens Advisory Committee**

**Thurs., 6:30 p.m. Nov. 14**

Public is welcome to attend this meeting to plan park activities. Meet in the Canyonside Recreation Center at Black Mountain Road and Canyonside Park Driveway, Rancho Peñasquitos.

##### **Peñasquitos Canyon Citizens Advisory Committee**

**Thurs. 6:30 p.m. Nov. 28**

Public is welcome to attend this meeting to plan park activities. Meeting is at the Historic Adobe Ranch House on Canyonside Park Driveway and Black Mountain Road, Rancho Peñasquitos.

##### **Friends of Peñasquitos Canyon Board of Directors**

**Tues., 7 p.m. Nov. 5**

Members are welcome to attend this business meeting to plan Friends' activities. Meeting is at the historic Adobe Ranch House at Black Mountain Road and Canyonside Park Driveway, Rancho Peñasquitos.

#### Quarterly:

##### **Beginning Tracking Wildlife Surveys**

**Sat. 8 a.m. - 4 p.m. Oct. 19**

This class prepares you to participate in surveys that monitor the wildlife in major open space preserves and other critical areas. Topics include basic recognition and identification of animal tracks and other signs, introduction to track patterns and gaits, wildlife journaling, an overview of the survey protocol, and more! Classroom time is supplemented with plenty of time in the field ("dirt time"). This training is required for survey volunteers and also serves as a prerequisite for the Intermediate Tracker/Naturalist class. After this training, students are expected to participate in at least one SDTT wildlife survey. Preregistration is requested to reserve your spot. The \$25 fee includes a number of valuable reference materials. Dress prepared to spend time outdoors and bring a sack lunch and water. More information at [www.sdtt.org](http://www.sdtt.org). Email [info@sdtt.org](mailto:info@sdtt.org) or call 760.715.4102 to register. Meet at the Historic Adobe Ranch House on Canyonside Park Driveway and Black Mountain Road, Rancho Peñasquitos.

##### **Advanced Tracking Wildlife Surveys**

**Class: Wed. 7- 9 p.m. Nov. 13**

**Field Sat. 8 a.m. - 4 p.m. Nov. 16**

The Advanced Class continues to develop your proficiency as a tracker. Subtle details of track identification are presented. Tech-

niques and exercises for trailing animals through various surfaces will enable you to stay on the right track. Drills and exercises will help expand your knowledge base, point out areas to work on, and give you a preview of the tracker evaluation process. Cost: \$50 (\$10 discount for SDTT members). Pre-registration required. More information at [www.sdtt.org](http://www.sdtt.org). E-mail [info@sdtt.org](mailto:info@sdtt.org) or call 760-715-4102 to register. Meet at the Historic Adobe Ranch House on Canyonside Park Driveway and Black Mountain Road, Rancho Peñasquitos.

### Hikes & Volunteer Opportunities

#### October

##### **History and Nature Walk**

**Sat. Oct. 12, 9:00 - 11:00 a.m.**

Join naturalist Mike Kelly for an easy 2 hour walk from Canyonside Park, Rancho Peñasquitos. Meet at the kiosk and gate at the southwest corner of the Canyonside ball fields and Recreation Center. If the parking lots are full proceed up to the ranch house and park there. Hike through Sycamore and Coast live oak tree groves and visit the historic adobe ranch house. Bring water and sun protection. Use 12350 Black Mountain Rd San Diego, CA 92129 for your mapping program.

##### **After the Birds of Summer are Gone**

**Sat. Oct. 19, 8:00 - 10:00 a.m.**

Join Jeanie Anderson, bird photographer, for an early morning hike. We will bird with all our senses along a tree-lined "less traveled by" trail that follows Peñasquitos Creek. The birds of summer may have migrated, so we will seek the denizens of the Canyon including Red-shouldered Hawks, Coopers Hawks, Acorn Woodpeckers, Common Yellowthroat, Song Sparrow,, and more. Bird lists and maps will be provided. Please bring binoculars and sturdy shoes. Meet at the trailhead at Canyonside Park, 12350 Black Mountain Road, San Diego, CA 92129

## Sensory Awareness Hike with Will Bowen

Sun., Oct. 27, 4:00 - 5:30 p.m.

A hike to explore our sensory experience as a way to know nature better. We will experiment with sight, sound, taste, touch, kinesthetic feeling, and fragrance in the field, contemplating and sharing our experience of the colors of the grasses or the sky, the song of a bird, the fragrance of a leaf, the taste of a berry, the texture of tree bark, the feeling of a place, etc. This practice can help one have a more profound and rich connection with the natural world. Meet at the West End Parking Staging Area.

## November

### Miner's Loop Trail

Sat., Nov. 16, 9 - 11:00 a.m.

A moderately difficult hike with naturalist Mike Kelly. Learn about the arsenic-gold mine and the colorful characters that built and ran it almost a century ago. Learn about the plants and animals of the chaparral. Meet at the Parking-Staging area at 14850 Carmel Valley Road, about 1/4 mile east of its intersection with Black Mountain Road in Rancho Peñasquitos.

### Shaman's Hike with Will Bowen

Sun., Nov. 24, 3:00 - 5:30 p.m.

A short hike to a power spot where we will explore shamanic traditions of the Americas. We will learn about saging, calling the directions, creating sacred space, and harnessing the energies of nature for healing, insight, and wisdom. We will do some healing work, sharing and story-telling, and make some shamanic art. This is a good opportunity for self-healing and connection with spirit through nature. Please bring a blanket to sit on and a drum or rattle. Meet at West End Parking Staging Area.



# ARCH IN THE PARK



The **San Diego County Archaeological Society** presents  
an educational day of **Archaeology and Fun** at the  
**Ranch House in Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve**  
**Saturday, October 19, 2013 • 10:00 am to 3:00 pm**  
**Celebrating California Archaeology Month  
and National Archaeology Day**

- ➔ Find out what archaeology is all about; dig in a mock excavation; play games
- ➔ Discover the history of the Ranch House on a tour of the adobe
- ➔ Be there at 11:30 a.m. to meet Running Grunion, a Kumeyaay Indian, and learn about his people
- ➔ Speak to local archaeologists and see archaeology exhibits, demos on stone tool making and basket making, raffles, games, and more!



Bring a picnic lunch to enjoy in the shade. Fry bread, snacks, and sodas will be available for purchase.

For more information, call: 858-538-0935  
visit our website: [www.sdacas.org](http://www.sdacas.org)  
or e-mail us at: [info@sdacas.org](mailto:info@sdacas.org)



**Directions:** From I-15 take Mercy Rd. west, turn right (north) onto Black Mountain Rd. and then take the first left into Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve. Follow the road all the way to the back (past Canyonside Community Park ball fields), and park in the designated parking area in the field.



## December

### History and Nature Walk

Sat., Dec. 7, 9 -11:00 a.m.

Join naturalist Mike Kelly for an easy 2 hour walk from Canyonside Park, Rancho Peñasquitos. Meet at the kiosk and gate at the southwest corner of the Canyonside ball fields and Recreation Center. If the parking lots are full proceed up to the ranch house and park there. Hike through Sycamore and Coast live oak tree groves, see the mistletoe and California holly, and visit the historic adobe ranch house. Bring water and sun protection. Use 12350 Black Mountain Rd San Diego, CA 92129 for your mapping program.

### Shaman's Hike with Will Bowen

Sun., Dec. 15, 3:00 - 5:00 p.m.

A short hike to a power spot where we will explore shamanic traditions of the Americas. We will learn about saging, calling the directions, creating sacred space, and harnessing the energies of nature for healing, insight, and wisdom. We will do some healing work, sharing and story-telling, and make some shamanic art. This is a good opportunity for self-healing and connection with spirit through nature. Please bring a blanket to sit on and a drum or rattle. Meet at the West End Parking Staging Area.

**Please be aware of where you are stepping when out in the canyons.**

**Snakes, lizards, and other wildlife are still abundant on warm days.**



## Updating the Los Peñasquitos Canyon Bird List

Jeanie Anderson

Friends President Les Braund looked at the Bird List for our Preserve recently, noticed it was dated 1996, and suggested that it be updated. Our heartfelt appreciation to Barbara Zepf, Claude G. Edwards, and Brian Swanson for creating the original bird list. With my field ornithology experience, I volunteered to produce an updated, current list of birds observed in our Preserve.

Many changes to habitat and species have occurred in the past 17 years. First, I reviewed the original bird list and determined that it included Penasquitos Lagoon birds which were not part of the Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve. So those species were set aside for a separate Lagoon birds list not included with this effort.

Second, I identified the databases available for this project. The amazing San Diego Bird Atlas is now on Google Earth as an overlay template. To access, <http://www.sdnhm.org/science/birds-and-mammals/projects/san-diego-county-bird-atlas/bird-atlas-google-earth-presentation/>

The atlas contains bird surveys by dedicated ornithologists faithfully performed over 5 years between 1997 and 2002. Our Preserve represents map sectors N8 and N9 with the exception of the lower left portion of N8 which is PQ Lagoon.

Third, I found that we now have an excellent 21<sup>st</sup> century tool called eBird. Per their website -- <http://www.ebird.org> -- *“Launched in 2002 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, eBird provides rich data sources for basic information on bird abundance and distribution at a variety of spatial and temporal scales.”*

eBird has been collecting field observations from birders throughout North America by location, time and species. I have used eBird for my Christmas Bird Counts and area bird surveys for about 5 years. It's free to join and very useful for keeping your bird lists organized. Your field observations will make a lasting contribution to the important areas of species status and distribution over time.

The new bird list will be kept up to date on our website, [www.penasquitos.org](http://www.penasquitos.org). So as we glean new

species and changes to distribution, it will reflect the latest bird list.

In the course of compiling the current data, I noted the following changes to species common names, some from splitting of one species into two for different regions.

### Species Name Changes

Old Common Name	New Common Name
Greenbacked Heron	Green Heron
Common Snipe	Wilson's Snipe
Western Flycatcher	Pacific-slope Flycatcher
Solitary Vireo	Cassin's Vireo
Plain Titmouse	Oak Titmouse
Rufous Towhee	Spotted Towhee
Northern Oriole	Bullock's Oriole

A new Species to the Preserve List is the Eurasian Collared-Dove, introduced from the Old World to the Bahamas, from which it has spread to Florida, then all the way to the West coast. As it expands, it is expected to impact the Mourning Doves over time as it is a larger more aggressive dove.

Some of the significant species in decline as reported by Phil Unitt, project manager and author of the San Diego Bird Atlas include:

- Greater Roadrunner
- California Quail
- Loggerhead Shrike
- California Gnatcatcher

It is loss of habitat and habitat fragmentation resulting from development that is contributing to decline of these species.

A number of rare species not seen in years were removed so that the list would be relevant to the most likely species that a visitor to the Canyon can expect. A space for “write in” candidates is included. Remember to report them on eBird. Send your new species observations to me at [greenjeaniebird@earthlink.net](mailto:greenjeaniebird@earthlink.net) and share your eBird list with me – Jeanie Anderson.

Hope you enjoy the new bird list and many fine adventures discovering the feathered fauna of our Canyon Preserve.

## Cactus Wren Grant Signed Off

Mike Kelly, Conservation Chair

In August of this year, the Natural Resources Conservation Service signed off on their grant to the Friends for the Cactus wren restoration sites we have reported on in these pages in past issues. The oldest site, begun in 2008, is close to where the Water Aqueducts cross Luzardi Creek in the Santa Luz grasslands of Black Mountain Park. The second site is on a terrace about 1/4 mile above and south of Luzardi Creek. The original grant was for a little more than \$73,000.

This writer wrote the original grant which went through the City Dept. of Parks and Recreation since the land is owned by the City. The City then chose the Friends to administer the grant. The work was carried out by private contractors and volunteers organized by the Friends. Much of the grant went to pay for native plants and for contractors such as the tractor contractor who augured over 3,000 holes in Site #2, in soil that was more rock than soil!

The Friends grew almost half the plants for the project from cactus pads we collected and seed of other species. Melanie Howe, a botanist experienced with germinating and growing native plants, did most of the work involved in growing these in the Friends' nursery (Mike Kelly's very large back yard!).

The ultimate goal of the project is to attract the endangered California Coastal Cactus wren to the site. Much of the remaining habitat of this bird was destroyed in the big fires of the last decade. [This writer has had the privilege of working for many years now restoring this burned habitat in the Lake Hodges area, its prime habitat.] We used the expression "remaining habitat" since much of its prime habitat has been developed on. For example, we use to have this bird nesting in the west ends of both López and Peñasquitos Canyon, but they haven't been documented there in over 20 years.

What kind of habitat is suitable for the Cactus wren? A sub-type of Coastal sage scrub. It likes dense, tall patches of Prickly pear or Cholla plants for nesting, and Coastal sage scrub species such as California sagebrush, Goldenbush, Black and White sages, native bunch grasses, and a scattering of other shrubs. Interestingly enough, Mexican elderberry is often found close by to its habitat.

Despite the fact the grant has run out and the project has been signed off, the Friends will continue tending the sites, including more plantings to expand the sites out. We hope you'll join us and help out our Cactus wrens!



Pictured are a few of the many volunteers who helped plant, weed, and water our Cactus wren site in the Santa Luz grasslands of Black Mountain Open Space Park.

In the foreground is the bee-friendly yellow flowered Gum plant. Lots of other insects are attracted to it. These and the other shrubs pictured were planted by volunteers. The blue plastic tubes are protecting seedlings from dehydration.



## Trail for All People Update

Jas Arnold

The Trail for All People project is at a critical point. The design drawings have been submitted to the city (30% level). The design is being improved where the central viewing pavilion is eliminated (there is actually no view in the center) and being exchanged for four bench pop outs along the outer perimeter trail. At various locations along the trail, interpretive signage will appear. All the plants and animals found in this region have been listed in the Natural Resources Management Plan. This list must be pared down to a "top 20" to serve as a start for the signage. Additional signage can be added at a later date if deemed appropriate. These exhibits will have verbiage in English, Spanish, and Braille.



A species increasing in abundance is the Allen's Hummingbird. In 2001, this *Selasphorus* genus hummingbird was first confirmed to breed in San Diego County. Now they are quite common in many areas including Los Penasquitos Canyon. I am happy to report that Allen's Hummingbirds have made my wildlife habitat their home for the past 4 years and seem to coexist with the Anna's Hummingbird at the same feeder.

~ ~ ~ Jeanie Anderson



### Pet & Animal Safety & Evacuation During Emergencies A FREE PUBLIC EDUCATION CLASS

Sponsored by the Penasquitos Emergency Response Council

PENASQUITOS PUBLIC LIBRARY  
October 8<sup>th</sup> @ 6:30 – 7:50 PM

Presented by: **Lt. Kalani Hudson**  
County of San Diego Department of Animal Services

It is important to adequately prepare for every member of your family. This includes your pet(s). They need special attention during stressful times. This seminar will provide great tips to keep them safe and calm. Lt. Hudson will also provide some information on the County's disaster management plan for pets and large animals. This plan was the first of its kind nationally and is used as the basis for other plans being developed in other governmental jurisdictions throughout the United States.

[www.perc4pq.org](http://www.perc4pq.org)



**P·E·R·C**  
Penasquitos Emergency Response Council







**(Rattlesnakes cont.)**

- Most rattlesnake-dog or rattlesnake-human conflict is a result of being off trail, somewhere visitors don't belong.

Remind others of these rules and best practices when in our parks. Word of mouth can make a huge difference. One thing we can share with other visitors is the importance of never trying to handle a rattlesnake; the Facebook photo of a visitor holding a rattlesnake is risky. In fact, a majority of snake bites happen because people try to pick up a snake. If you ever encounter a rattlesnake, or any snake for that matter, while on the trail, allow it space, never corner it, never throw rocks or objects at it, and please let any other visitors know of its location in passing on the trail. To a rattlesnake we humans look like a large mountain, a rattlesnake will usually flee before putting up a defensive fight to protect itself.

With the continued permanent loss of wildlife habitat within San Diego County due to development and the degradation of even the remaining preserved lands, the importance of humans applying these reminders and the theme I have outlined in this article become even more urgent.

A visitor is a temporary guest who has the honor to spend a small amount of time recreating in another living creature's home. When reduced to these simple terms it would only make best sense to be respectful, follow the rules, and to be a responsible visitor I call on you, the visitor to chip in and to help in being a part of the solution rather than a part of the problem.



Red Diamond Rattlesnake



Mike Kelly about to lead a walking-group from Scripps Ranch on a night hike in Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve. Mike leads these hikes once a month during the summer months. In 25 years hike participants have always seen mule deer and other wildlife. Plus, the Preserve is quite different at night from the daytime, smelling and sounding differently.

**Beware of Poison Oak Year Round**

Along with the browns, greens, and yellows of Fall in the Preserves, poison oak adds a bright red warning to its otherwise shiny green three-leaf clusters. Make note of the red leaves and steer clear. As winter approaches, the leaves will drop off, but even the stems present a danger to the susceptible person.

