



2020—The Most Unusual Year in the Regional Parks Botanic Garden

by Bart O'Brien



September 9, 2020 at 12:36 PM, a day when the Garden was closed due to severe wildfire smoke.

Bart O'Brien photo, Rosie Andrews inset

This year will be long remembered for so many unusual events, but, from the Botanic Garden's perspective, 2020 will be the year when we were closed almost as much as we were open. COVID-19 (masks, social distancing, hand washing, temperature-taking, disinfection of surfaces and shared equipment), severe red-flag fire watches, and horrendous periods of hazardous smoke-filled air from multiple nearby and statewide wildfires all combined to make working conditions challenging. Additionally, the physical absence of the Garden's Friends, docents, volunteers, and visitors, along with the missing tours, classes, programs, students, and plant sales, left a deep and troubling hole in all of our lives. BUT—the major

redeeming feature of this frequently dismal year has been the pleasure of regularly working with and experiencing the beauty and serenity of the Botanic Garden and its collections. It is a transformational experience to immerse oneself in the diversity of California's native flora and habitats, and we will continue providing safe access for you to discover the essential natural pleasures of the Garden.

The Garden, as always, continued to grow, change, and thrive despite all the adverse conditions we experienced in our day-to-day lives. Not that there weren't hiccups—a number of our trees reached the end of their lives during the spring months and were removed while the Garden was completely

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Calochortus rustvoldii bloomed for the first time in the Garden this year. Bart O'Brien

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Your membership in the Friends of the Regional Parks Botanic Garden supports the important work of the Garden in educational programs, conservation, and horticultural experimentation. Funds raised by the Friends help provide long-term financial security for the Garden as well as new facilities and programs.

GENERAL

Individual \$50

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SPECIAL GARDEN FRIEND

California Poppy \$125

Buckwheat \$250

Ceanothus \$500

Manzanita \$1000

Members receive *Manzanita*, a quarterly publication of the Friends, as well as discounts on classes and field trips offered by the Friends, discounts at nurseries listed on the back cover, and early admission to the Garden's plant sales. Friends members gain free admission to participating gardens through the American Horticultural Society's Reciprocal Admissions Program. Contact the individual garden to verify this benefit.

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Donations to the Friends are welcome and may be designated for special projects or given in honor or in memory of someone. Contributions to the Regional Parks Botanic Garden Endowment Fund assist in providing financial security for the Garden. Please make all checks payable to the Regional Parks Foundation; note whether for Friends membership, gift, or Endowment Fund; and send to: Friends of the Regional Parks Botanic Garden, P.O. Box 7551, Berkeley, CA 94707.

Friends volunteers develop and oversee many of the Garden's educational offerings and its website, produce the *Manzanita*, and much more! New volunteers are always welcome.

For information about the Friends, membership, and becoming a Garden volunteer or docent, contact info@nativeplants.org, visit www.nativeplants.org, or call 510-544-3169.



The Botanic Garden pond in March, inexplicably clouding over, then clearing.

closed to the public. Our pond went through a disturbing and then quite delightful evolution: In early March, the pond's water turned a most unusual milky color virtually overnight and gave off a vile, sulfurous smell. Water quality experts were engaged and testing was done, but all results were inconclusive; there is still no explanation for what actually happened. Almost as suddenly as the water changed color, it became crystal clear by early April and was alive with more plants and wildlife than ever before. The water clarity has been remarkable since then—unlike in recent years—and there have been hundreds, if not thousands, of tadpoles. Tiny Pacific tree frogs (*Pseudacris regilla*) have been seen and heard in abundance ever since.

There were also a series of memorable plant firsts at the Botanic Garden. At the beginning of the shelter-in-place order in mid-March, one of our two dwarf greasebush plants (*Glossopetalon pungens* var. *glabrum*) unexpectedly bloomed for the very first time. The one-and-only flower lasted for three weeks. Two plants are now growing in the Garden: one in the Crevice Garden (as it should be best adapted to grow there), and the other is where it geographically belongs—in the Desert section. Both are thriving.

In early June, we flowered the first *Calochortus rustvoldii* in the Garden. This unusual Mariposa-

lily species was described fairly recently and has similarities to *Calochortus obispoensis* (which blooms a month earlier in the same bulb bed) and *Calochortus weedii* var. *intermedius* (which blooms a month later). This is probably the first time that this species has been flowered at a public garden. The flower is certainly unusual, but it is unlikely that there will be stampedes of gardeners wanting to grow it. This species is named for long-time garden volunteer, and excellent grower and explorer of California's geophytes, Ed Rustvold of Berkeley.

In mid-June, in the Shasta section, we were all very pleased to see a blooming specimen of Bolander's lily (*Lilium bolanderi*). This is not the first time this species has bloomed at the Botanic Garden, but it has been missing for a number of years. Our plant is very short—only a bit over a foot in height—and it carried three large maroon-red blooms. Ben Anderson cross-pollinated this plant with several other *Lilium* species growing in the Botanic Garden, and just recently harvested the last of the pods carrying the seeds of his experiments.

Bart O'Brien



Dwarf greasebush (*Glossopetalon pungens* var. *glabrum*)

Bart O'Brien



Bolander's lily (*Lilium bolanderi*)

*Mandevilla hesperia*

Our most recent unusual first flowering is *Mandevilla hesperia* in mid-October (no common name in common use). I had collected seeds of it on the expedition to the Gulf of California islands a few years ago while hiking on Isla Santa Catalina (yes, it is a bit confusing that there are two completely different Santa Catalina islands). Up until very recently, there were no photos of the flowers of this plant online, though there are a small number that can be found on iNaturalist. I had thought that the flowers were likely nocturnal—they are large, white, and powerfully fragrant—and also that they may be very short-lived, perhaps just a single night.

Now we actually know that the flowers do begin to open at night, but that they remain open for several days, and they do not close until they wither. In the wild, this unusual small evergreen shrub is found near the edges of desert washes and in canyons, frequently amongst boulders, from the Mexican state of Baja California Sur on the eastern parts of the mainland and on a number of the southern Gulf of California islands. Though quite beautiful, and seemingly easy to grow, this plant is essentially unknown horticulturally, and this may be the first time that this species has flowered in cultivation. Hardiness is unknown, but three plants have survived outside (but not planted) at the Botanic Garden, and I grow one plant in Pt. Richmond. We sold five small plants at our 2019 fall plant sale (if you bought one of them, let us know how it is doing), and once we have “in person” plant sales returning, we may sell another handful of these desirable plants.

During the shelter-in-place order, when the Botanic Garden was completely closed to the public, we had two significant staff changes. In April, Kiamara Ludwig, our Interpretive Student Aide II, completed her four-year term of employment. Unfortunately, we have not yet been able to gather and

have an appropriate send-off for her, but we do enjoy seeing her when she visits on some of the Garden’s public open days. Following Ashika Narayan’s departure from the Botanic Garden in February (and coincidentally our “last” gathering prior to social distancing), our new Administrative Specialist, Angelina (Angie) Manno, started work in May. Due to social distancing and the tight indoor spaces at the Garden, Angie’s “office” is now in the Visitor Center’s auditorium. She uses the large conference table as her desk and she’s completely networked to the Park District’s phones and computer systems. Since the Garden was closed when she started working, she has had plenty of time to get up to speed on many aspects of the Garden—but has not had the experience of working directly with all of the Friends, docents, and volunteers and our diverse set of programs. On the other hand, Angie has been a very quick study and has been invaluable operating our new reservation system and facilitating and scheduling our socially distant plant sales.

For close to two months, only one staff member could be working at the Botanic Garden at a time. It was a challenge to keep the Garden growing and maintained, especially since it was for a period of rapid plant (and weed) growth. During this time, we had a single ongoing email thread that was updated at the end of each day, so we all knew what was done and what needed attention. As the Park District gradually allowed more staff to be working the

Bart O'Brien



Haylee Morris joined us from July through October as our new gate attendant.

same days, we've continually adapted. Our four Gardeners are now working ten-hour days, four days per week. Liz and I are back to our "old" schedules, but we now both work from home fairly regularly, and expect to be doing so through the upcoming winter months.

The public reopening of the Botanic Garden at the end of June, by reservation on four days per week, brought us two new temporary staff members: Haylee Morris joined us from July through October as our new gate attendant. She's the one behind the mask and across the three-table distancing under the check-in tent. Haylee may be back in spring 2021, if COVID-19 protocols remain necessary. Dawn Stevenson, Administrative Specialist at the Tilden Nature Center, has been working part time at the Botanic Garden helping out while Angie was away on maternity leave and is currently assisting with seed cleaning, care of the plants in plant sale nursery areas, and filling in at the entry gate as needed.

August brought the first-ever documented report of a rattlesnake in the Botanic Garden, breaking an 80-year record! Theo Fitanides spotted this specimen sunning itself on a path near the dunes, below a Mendocino reed grass (*Calamagrostis foliosa*). Later in the day, it moved across the path and into one of our many drainage channels where it was well camouflaged—and that's where Tammy Lim (of the Park District's stewardship group) caught it and placed it into the sophisticated transportation device seen in the photo. Tammy and Ben moved the snake quite a distance up South Park Drive where rattlesnakes are often found. Within two weeks, Liz Bittner heard a second(?) rattlesnake while she was cleaning up our materials storage area along Anza View Road. Since the rattlesnake was not seen, it is not known if it was the same animal. We are not looking forward to finding any additional rattlesnakes in the Botanic Garden, and those of you who have visited the Garden recently know that we now have a poster at the check-in table warning people of this new danger in the Garden.

As I write this in mid-October, our Annual Fall Plant Sale should have been completed, but as with all of our public events since March, it was cancelled. However, we have just started up socially-distant, online plant sales! This is a very good thing, as so many of the volunteer-propagated plants have continued growing despite the absence of the propagators. Staff is currently

operating the sales until our dedicated volunteers are allowed to safely return. All of us at the Botanic Garden are very much looking forward to the return of all of the Friends, docents, and volunteers. The Garden is a collaborative enterprise, and the staff definitely misses your on-site contributions to our shared endeavors. I wish you all happiness and satisfaction in the coming year, and welcome you to enjoy your special place in the Botanic Garden. 🌿



Bart O'Brien

Removal of the first rattlesnake recorded in the Botanic Garden's 80-year history required a sophisticated transportation device! Tammy Lin of the Park District's stewardship department managed the relocation.



Bart O'Brien

While We Were Away: Life in the Virtual Garden Community

While it has been quiet in the Botanic Garden the past seven months, volunteer groups have carried on supporting its work in whatever ways we still can. All of us miss visiting the Garden to wander at will and talk with the staff and our friends, but our community has proven very resilient. As you'll read in this issue, our Docent Training program continued despite an abrupt interruption in March. And committees learned to meet virtually to keep projects moving forward and begin considering how they might best contribute in this new "normal."

Back in early April, with the Garden closed indefinitely and the Manzanita editorial group back on track via Zoom, we decided to devote this issue to the voices of our dedicated volunteers. We wanted both to take notice of a major milestone—2020 is the 25th Anniversary of the founding of the Garden's Docent Program—and to provide a space for "any Garden-related writing which you would enjoy sharing," as we put it in our request for submissions. We hope you enjoy reading what our contributors had to say.

—Rosie Andrews, Friends president

Rosie Andrews



In May, a number of hazardous trees were removed from the Garden and along Anza View Road, including two Mendocino White Plains lodgepole pines (*Pinus contorta* var. *bolanderi*) that came to the Garden just as it was being created in 1937!

Cloudy Reflections

by Theo Fitanides

I have felt so much appreciation for my job at the Botanic Garden during this pandemic. Not only do I have stable employment, it is outdoors, so I have felt relatively safe coming to work. Knowing that so many other people in our communities have an unsafe workplace, no work, or an isolating indoor environment feels distressing to me. I do appreciate the caution taken by the District and our Garden to close the park for a while, but I was also very glad to see other people come back into the Garden and appreciate the calming and life-affirming environment that we, the hugely fortunate Garden staff, have created. Tending to the beautiful poppy bloom, and all the other plants, felt so hollow with so few people able to see them. But there were also some silver linings during the Garden closure for me: I got to throw my green waste all over the paths (sometimes for weeks at a time); I noticed a slight uptick in animal scat; I listened to a lot of podcasts while weeding; and I didn't have to wrap my hoses every time I was done using one. 🌿

Theo Fitanides has been a staff Gardener since 2015.



Peter Thomas

On the Garden Community

by Cheryl Perko

Remembering those first weeks of sheltering in place, I can feel again that sense of the world turning upside down as we all tried to navigate this new life-changing situation. I remember clinging to my electronic devices 24/7, as my sister and brother-in-law were out at sea on a cruise ship, working their way through parts of Asia. While I was on the edge of panic over their situation, waiting for each update, incredible emails would arrive in the inbox from so many of you: stunning photos of backyard gardens, local neighborhood walks, first spring flower sightings, nests with new wildlife, and so much more. These mostly nonverbal messages of beauty, hope, kindness, care, and spring's resilience never failed to momentarily stop the panic and spark that sense of awe and wonder that only nature and human kindness can do so effortlessly. Even during a pandemic. Especially during a pandemic. How incredibly lucky I have felt to be part of this community during such a time as this. 🌱

Cheryl Perko has been a volunteer in the potting shed since 2019 and is also a member of the Publications Committee.

Garden re-opens:
clarkia kaleidoscopes—
pink pattern repeats.



White stemmed clarkia (*Clarkia gracilis* subsp. *albicaulis*)
Regional Parks Botanic Garden, June 30, 2020

Photo and haiku by David Sherertz

Rarity Breeds Passion by Wen Hsu

Excitement crackles in the air whenever the news passes from one volunteer to the next about a flower—a rarely seen flower, in an overlooked corner, that is blooming in the Botanic Garden. For example, *Orobanche parishii*, having bloomed once in 1997, came up again in May, 2018. Several of us scoured the rocky beds of the Southern California Desert section, looking for low-growing Parish's broomrape, which we had never seen before. Nobody found it. We went to the source of the information, Bart O'Brien. Sure enough, there it was! It was already shriveled, in rusty buff color, and just three inches high. But the fact that this little parasitic plant makes itself amenable to cultivation is already cause for celebration!

Once I was roaming the less-visited paths of the Canyon section when a tiny plant caught my

attention. It was white except for a single pink stem, and several delicate ivory flower buds were forming. No chlorophyll, and growing in the shade—could it be living on nutrients provided by trees nearby? I was excited by discovering a parasitic plant unknown to me. I showed its photos to Joe Dahl (then-Garden supervisor). He thought for a moment, and said, "You know what, I think it's an albino *Epipactis gigantea*." Once he said it, I recognized every bit of stream orchid in it. Being nutrient deficient, however, it could well be called *pygmaeus*. Not a rare plant, but it is a rare form!

The same thrill exists for birders who find a rare bird (rarity being defined by location,

season, or any other phenological yardstick). Having come to the Botanic Garden to watch birds, in addition to plants, for years, I am still surprised from time to time by a rare occurrence. The current prize is a female belted kingfisher.



Parish's broomrape (*Orobanche parishii*)

Minder Cheng



Townsend's solitaire

Minder Cheng



Chipping sparrow

The garden staff has seen her displaying and rattling by the pond since the beginning of September. Kingfisher may not be a rare bird in the Bay Area, but it previously appeared in our Garden only anecdotally.

In fact, any bird not in the Garden's four-year accumulated checklist of 81 is worthy of the title "rarity." The year 2020, if nothing else, has proved to be fruitful for wildlife sightings. In addition to belted kingfisher, the tenacious

bird-survey volunteers of the Garden saw, in the first seven months, Lawrence's goldfinch, hooded oriole, and chipping sparrow gracing us with their unusual presence.

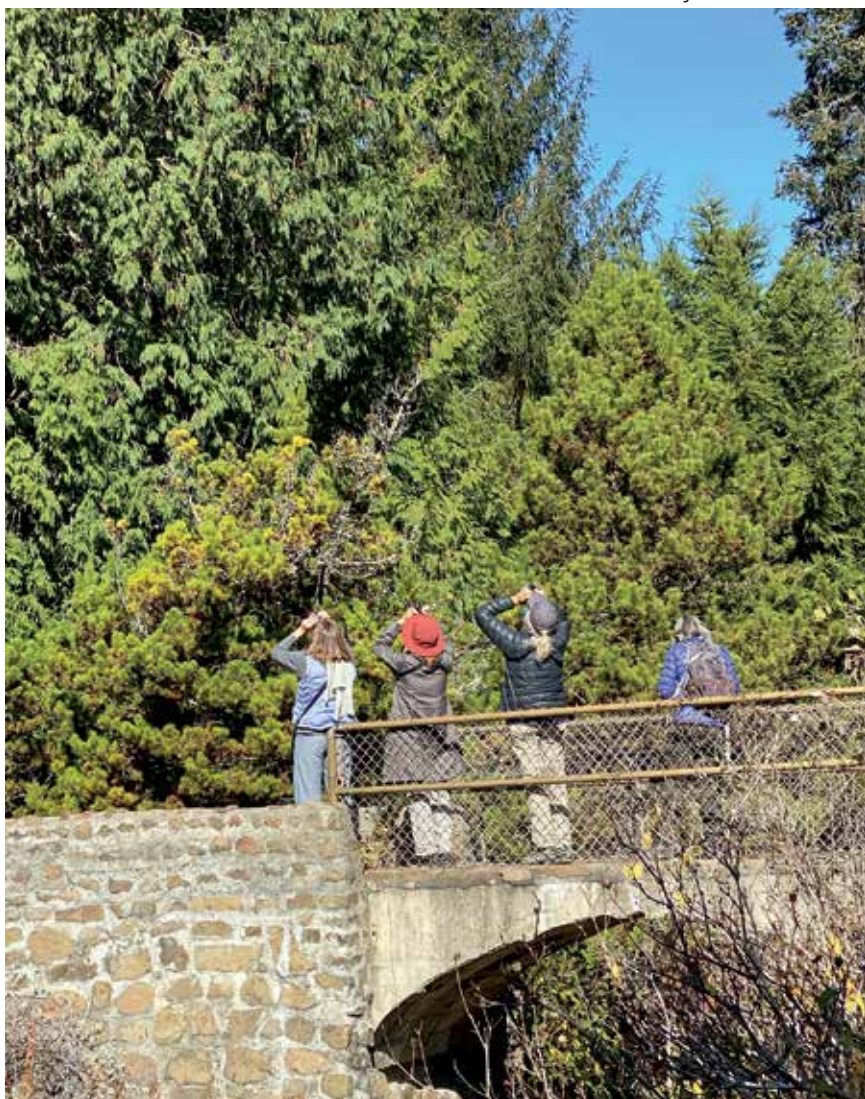
I am particularly intrigued by the chipping sparrow. It looked very much in its element in our Garden when I laid my eyes on it in disbelief in early July of this year, soon after the Garden reopened with a reservation system. The bird stood on a tree branch, hopped around, then dropped to the ground and disappeared behind shrubs or rocks. I happened to have been in Yosemite two weeks earlier and saw chipping sparrows there in the open woodlands around 7,000 feet. I had come across the species in the Bay Area, too, but only on the east side of the Berkeley-Oakland Hills, for example in Briones Park and on Mount Diablo. Why did it come to the moist and wooded westside of the hills? I looked up eBird reports and found two other records of chipping sparrow in the Garden in recent years. I can't help suspecting that chipping sparrow must know a few things about the drying of our hills and the corresponding changes to the plant community.

"Only once during my rambles about Berkeley have I discovered the strange Townsend's solitaire.... It is much like a fly-catcher in general appearance, but in structure more closely allied to the thrushes. It is rather larger than a sparrow in size, decidedly longer and more slender, and is colored a plain, slaty gray all over, becoming lighter upon the under parts of the body. It usually inhabits the mountains and is a rare, shy creature, very easily overlooked on account of its severe coloring." Written a hundred and twenty years ago by Charles Keeler, a poet and naturalist who called Berkeley home, this passage describes my own encounters with Townsend's solitaire perfectly. When a solitaire looked me in the eye as it sat in a Santa Cruz Island ironwood in the Channel Island section one October day, I was in shock. I texted fellow birders-cum-docents and urged them to come witness the rare moment. I had never done it before, nor have I since.

The Botanic Garden is made ever more attractive by its rare gems that don't stay long. It evinces an irresistible pull to birds, amphibians, mammals (including me) and more. And who's gonna resist? 🌿

Wen Hsu has been a Regional Parks Botanic Garden docent since 2000 and an avid birder since 1984.

Wen Hsu (red hat) and other members of the Garden's bird-survey team at work.



THE BOTANIC GARDEN'S DOCENT PROGRAM: REFLECTIONS ON THE FIRST 25 YEARS

A Docent Program for the Garden *by Glenn Keator, PhD*

Rosie Andrews

In the mid-90s I moved from Sebastopol back to the East Bay and so was able to start visiting the Regional Parks Botanic Garden more often. On one visit, I happened to mention to Steve Edwards that I'd love to do docent training at the Garden; I had previously done several years' worth at Strybing Arboretum in San Francisco when I was education director there. Steve cogitated for a while and then one day surprised me by giving his consent to go forward. My original formulation of the training was very different from what we do today. Over 25 years it's been changed and modified as needs have arisen, and in the last few years it has been aided by the Docent Steering Committee, which has become active in many matters concerning docents.

All of these have been happy, fulfilling years for me, and I still look forward every year to a new class. Even though we have a dedicated core of experienced docents, we also have attrition, and many docent trainees have gone on to other affairs in their lives. New classes are helpful in filling the gaps. Meanwhile I've had the good fortune to have made some good friends during this time, and I am grateful for the support I've received.

We first started with the training in the fall, but soon I decided that we really needed to hold the training during the spring, so trainees could see the many native wildflowers and their pollinators.

While I originally did most of the training myself, that has also changed, and now, although I teach perhaps half the sessions, the very knowledgeable May Chen does pollination and pollinators, while experienced docents do several sessions on theme tours and share hints on docent techniques. Our theme tours have evolved especially for children's groups. I feel very strongly that bringing children into the Garden is important, so that we can instill a love of nature and its protection. We now encourage new trainees to give children's tours if they are willing, because this aspect is so important, as is the new California Native People and Plants outreach program described by Beth Levine on page 15.



Glenn Keator talks to visitors at an open house in the Garden.

I think our biggest challenge has been making the new docents feel at home and ready to start doing their own tours. Many seem to be a bit intimidated by the amount of material they receive, so now I always start by saying that what's most important is a love for plants and the Garden, and enthusiasm for what they show visitors, rather than knowing everything or having to pretend they do. To help them get started with touring, new docents can now pair up with experienced docent mentors.

Our training always ends with short in-class presentations of a hypothetical tour each trainee would design. These have resulted in some truly innovative ideas. Because we can only allot a short amount of time for these presentations, we give them inside the Visitor's Center, then follow up by celebrating with a potluck lunch and a "graduation" ceremony.

I believe our training classes have been a great success and look forward to many more. And I'm always open to suggestions made directly to me. ➤

Glenn Keator is a popular instructor of botany and a field trip leader in the Bay Area and teaches the docent training course at the Regional Parks Botanic Garden. He is the author of a number of books on native plants.

My First 25 Years as a Docent:

A Love Letter to the Regional Parks Botanic Garden *by Greti Séquin, PhD*

*To the memory of the dedicated docents who passed on and
To the memory of my parents, who loved the "little botanic garden"*

Pattie Litton



Jo McCondochie, a member of the original docent class, helped to teach new docents for many years.

"Secret paths, small creeks and bridges, many steps up and down, and neat plants to discover." This is how my children, some decades ago, used to describe a visit to the "little botanic garden," one of their favorite outings. And whenever my parents would visit from Switzerland, they would soon take a walk to the Regional Parks Botanic Garden to learn about California plants and to watch birds. So, when it was announced that a docent program would be started at the Garden, I signed up right away and met a wonderful group of other plant lovers. Glenn Keator and Garden personnel taught us the names of many California native plants, where to find the plants in the Garden, how to key them, and how to lead attractive tours for the public. Each docent added his or her own special interests during the programs. For example, Jo McCondochie added her love of art, and Jock Anderson added his great knowledge of Greek mythology when explaining systematic names. Celia Zavatsky excited us about the natural places where the plants came from, and a bit of plant chemistry was included by myself.

Out of this lively group grew other programs: The Friends of the Regional Parks Botanic Garden, the Seedy Friends, and the BBC (Botanic Garden Book Club) are still going strong. And it has been easy to gather smaller groups of plant lovers for one-day excursions to explore plants, or for several days of camping. A most memorable "camping trip" included a night in the Garden, with dinner and breakfast alfresco on the lawn and pitching our tents in favorite spots in the Garden. Armed with black lights, we explored the glow of the nectar in the fremontia blossoms. Great horned owls provided us with a hooting concert later during the night.

And a visit to the Garden allows us to slow down and invites us to quiet contemplation. As Jo McCondochie once described to me, "I recall walking through the Garden one mid-afternoon in late spring, witnessing the emergence of a butterfly from its chrysalis and waiting for its wings to dry before it flew off to whatever awaited it in the natural world."

Our love of native plants has led to many great friendships, with humans and with plants. Here's to the next 25 years! 🌿

Greti (Margareta) Séquin is a long-time docent at the Regional Parks Botanic Garden. She holds a PhD in Organic Chemistry and has taught organic and plant chemistry for more than 30 years, at SFSU and in field seminars. She is the author of The Chemistry of Plants: Perfumes, Pigments, and Poisons (RSC 2012, 2nd ed. RSC 2021) and The Chemistry of Plants and Insects: Plants, Bugs, and Molecules (RSC 2017).



Greti Séquin and Liz Bittner

Peter Thomas

The 2020 Docent Training Class: Navigating the Pandemic

by Susan Wijeyesekera and Marilyn Siegel

As the co-leaders of the 2020 Docent Training Class, we were in a daze. In mid-March, with three months to go, the class came to an abrupt halt when shelter-in-place orders were issued for Contra Costa and Alameda Counties, effectively closing the Botanic Garden. How were we ever going to finish? The only solution was to go online.

After learning to use Zoom herself, Susan was ready to host our first online class on March 24. To our great delight, everyone was able to log into the meeting. We collectively decided that our online classes should focus on slide shows, website presentations, and student plant reports. The schedule would be re-arranged to “frontload” those, while saving the “must go out in the Garden” parts of the program for “later,” meaning mid-April or at the latest mid-May. At this time, in March, it was inconceivable to us that the shelter-in-place orders and social distancing would extend into the summer.

However, by May the possibility that we might not be able to complete the 2020 docent training class in 2020 was becoming real. Bart O'Brien had confirmed that social distancing would still be required if the Garden reopened in the summer. Taking an entire class out there would not be possible; we would have to continue online. Fortunately, the trainees were eager to continue with online classes, Glenn Keator willingly produced more slide shows, and we continued to learn online from a variety of guest lecturers. Long-time docents Rosalie Gonzales, Ingrid Madsen, Renee Cheney-Cohen, and Roz Westil created an online version of the California Native Peoples and Plants Tour, complete with pictures of all the props and stations!

As the end of June approached, we began to think about how to keep the docent trainees—now called “provisional docents”—engaged with the Garden and the program during the class suspension. We gave them the final class assignment, to develop a 10-minute presentation of a Garden tour reflecting a theme of their choice, but we realized that our new provisional docents had had little or no opportunity to “shadow” any actual tours. To help mitigate that, Marilyn set up a program to pair each provisional docent with an experienced docent



Rosie Andrews photos

mentor—to keep in contact, get support with the tour assignment, and go on “socially distanced” Garden visits. Our new provisional docents are also welcome to attend online docent trainings as well as serve on Garden committees. Several of them are already attending committee meetings.

We are looking forward to the day when the 2020 Docent Training Class can finally “graduate.” What a talented, resilient, and dedicated group! We hope they will enjoy being part of the Garden community for many years to come. 🌿

Susan Wijeyesekera obtained a BA in Botany from Connecticut College and, after moving to California in 1996, became a science teacher. She discovered the Botanic Garden in 2015 and took Glenn Keator's year-long class on California plant families. Since then she has taken many Garden classes and has become a docent as well as volunteering with the Docent Training Committee.

Marilyn Siegel has enjoyed volunteering at the Botanic Garden as a propagator and weekend tour leader. She played violin at the last few plant sales with the San Francisco Scottish Fiddlers to entertain the customers.

Become a Docent! You'll Enrich Your Life and the Lives of Others *by Idell Weydemeyer*

Bart O'Brien




A young visitor checks out a soap plant brush with help from Garden Docent Ingrid Madsen.

Helping visitors make exciting discoveries is one of the joys of volunteering as a docent. When visitors enter the Garden, I always ask, "Where are you from?" and "Are there some native plants there that you have enjoyed?" If they came from a climate that has regular rain, the desert area is always a big hit: "Yes those are actual ferns." And then we would go to look at the giant chain fern nearby to show the growth response to more moisture. Visitors also would just look at each other in disbelief at my story that "yes, for six or more months, there is no rain here." If they come from a drier climate, the massive grandeur and ancient lineage of the redwoods are always a favorite. They find it strange that fog drip supplies significant moisture. A puzzle set for visitors is why one barberry on the Channel Islands has spiny leaves and the other does not, and also why there is a major difference in the leaves of two very similar ironwood trees, both growing on the islands. Feeling the "refrigerator tree's"

cold bark (manzanita) always brings big "ooohs." And visitors enjoy learning about the uses of plants by the indigenous people who lived on this site for centuries.

Also fun is moving at a fast trot over the whole Garden when rowdy groups of young men from high schools come to tour, with their hopeful question, "Are there bears here?" (What bragging rights that would be!) When visitors arrive in wheel chairs, it is a pleasure to help them enjoy a scented-leaf tour of woolly blue curls, sages, gum plants, and more along the paved paths. Visitors with small children in tow do not typically stay for more than 30 minutes, but with them I will move quickly past spiny plants and attractive climbing rocks. Many times docents stay an hour or two past the end of the tour, as our visitors want to see "More, more, more!" and it is very rare to be able to view, much less absorb, the attractions of the whole Garden in an hour.

Becoming a docent has provided me with exceptionally rewarding interconnections, with the natural world and with other people. While at the Garden I can encourage visitors to care more about our planet. What I learn from visitors' plant stories, travel, and gardening experiences I can also share with others. If anyone reading this has a chance to become a docent, come join us for a most fulfilling activity! 

Idell Weydemeyer has been a docent since 2008. She enjoys visiting wild areas in the West for their plant, animal, and bird life and shares her knowledge gained with others by giving tours of her garden during the Bringing Back the Natives events.



Idell Weydemeyer

Peter Thomas

Why I Love Being a Docent *by Maggie Ingalls*

Since I have become a docent, one of the joys of my life has been leading tours for children at the Regional Parks Botanic Garden. This is a pleasure on many levels. The Garden itself is wonderful for children, since it is full of small-scale wonders. It is a wild garden, full of hidden glades, crooked paths leading to mysteriously unseen destinations, a gurgling stream with many bridges, and a forest with majestic trees casting deep cool shade on hot days. I wish we didn't have to tell the children to "just walk, don't run," because this garden is crying out for a game of hide and seek or capture the flag, or for some imaginary game of heroes and villains. And children love this garden! Some of them love the beauty that is here, some love the wildlife that abounds, some just love being outside.

One delightful aspect of touring children is that they see the world from a different perspective, and you can see through their eyes if you listen to them. They are seeing a level of detail that adults miss. "Look, there is a ladybug wing in this bird poop!" I think one of my most successful moments as a docent was when my group came across two lizards having a battle! We trailed those lizards for at least five minutes. I have had children thank me, and not just at the end when the teacher tells them to. In one group of five boys, I overheard "You were right, Eddie, this is the coolest field trip ever!" Eddie was obviously interested in plants, and the other boy wasn't particularly, but he too was enchanted with our Garden.

My big dream is to contribute to the development of a biologist, botanist, or ecologist. But if all I do is encourage a fascination with and love of nature in some of these children I will have made an important positive difference in the world. I am very proud to be supporting this beautiful place and the important work that is done here. And I love being a docent! 🌿

Maggie Ingalls has been a passionate gardener for more than 30 years. Her interest in native plants began with the prairie plants of the Midwest, but she switched to California natives when she moved to Benicia in 2007. She has been a docent at the Regional Parks Botanic Garden since 2009.

Rosie Andrews



A stop in the Southern California section to talk about plant adaptations.

Peter Thomas



Maggie Ingalls

Native People and Plants Docents are Learning as Well as Teaching

by Rosalie Gonzales with Roz Westil, Renee Cheney-Cohen, Joan Martin, and Ingrid Madsen

The California Native People and Plants tour has a long history at the Botanic Garden. Originally called the Indian Uses tour, it was started by volunteer docent Sue Rosenthal over 20 years ago. Sometime in 2011, Sue asked for volunteers to revise and expand the original tour. Ingrid Madsen answered the call in order to learn more about Native California culture, while Rosalie Gonzales wanted to learn

Ingrid Madsen photos



After securing permission for the outing, Wakean Maclean joined docents from the Garden and gathered tules for tuleboat making at a small pond on EBMUD land in the East Bay hills.



more about the plants the California Indians used. For some docents, the sheer number of different tribes and language groups was the revelation, while for others the myriad number of plants used by Indians and the varied ways of using them began the fascination. We came to the tour for different reasons, but we all ended up being impressed and awed by the observational and scientific skills and the resourcefulness of the Native Californians, who thrived by using and caring for the plants in their differing environments.

Not many of us anticipated the responsibility we were taking on in developing and giving this tour. We certainly have succeeded in creating a tour that is engaging for students. They seem to enjoy pounding acorns, washing with soaproot, and visiting the many stations in the Garden to learn

about specific plants and hold/feel/explore props made from the plants. The tension for those of us who are conveying this knowledge is in balancing the fun with the obligation to introduce Native California culture to students in a way that is accurate, respectful, and mindful of present-day California Indians.

Many of us were inexperienced and poorly informed about California Indians. Becoming a tour leader began an ongoing educational process. We organized and participated in diverse activities such as dining at Café Ohlone, a pop-up restaurant dedicated to introducing non-Natives to Ohlone culture, and visiting Coyote Hills Regional Park to help build a tule home and participate in the many programs about native cultures. Some of us even helped to cut, gather, and dry tule to make new props for the tour, only to learn that we had gathered a three sided, triangular tule, *Schoenoplectus californicus*, instead of the preferred rounded tule, *Schoenoplectus acutus*. We learned this when gathering tule with ethnographic consultant Beverly Ortiz and several Native Californians for a tuleboat-making project. Just as the tour itself is under constant revision as props wear out and plants are removed from or added to the Garden, the docents are in a constant state of new learning.

The Botanic Garden has aided in these efforts with enrichments featuring Native Californian cultures, with sensitivity trainings, with some of the Wayne Roderick lectures, and with presentations to the new docents by knowledgeable speakers such as Norm Kidder (known for his expert replication of California Native material culture), Beverly Ortiz, and EBRPD Naturalists Sonja Gomez and Frances Mendoza.

When the Garden is again able to offer tours, we encourage all docents to join us in giving these tours and learning more about California Native cultures. And if any of you know anything about making tule mats or tule model boats or tule anything, please let us know. Ingrid Madsen has several bundles of *Schoenoplectus californicus* stored at her Berkeley home! 🌿

The authors are all Botanic Garden docents, enthusiastic about utilizing the Garden's marvelous collection of California native plants in order to help young people at our local schools appreciate the connection of native plants to native cultures.

The California Native People and Plants Tour is a Gift to My 4th Graders

by Beth Levine

In the words of my 4th-grade students, "Thank you so much for one of the best field trips ever!"

As a teacher at Montalvin Manor Elementary in San Pablo, I have received the best gift ever these past few years. Thanks to the Regional Parks Botanic Garden's generous funding, my 4th-grade classes have had the opportunity to participate in the Garden's California Native People and Plants tour. The Botanic Garden provides a high quality experience for the 4th-grade social studies curriculum, and my students have loved it.

How do you teach the geography and history of California to 9-year-olds? To do it well, you bring them to this beautiful spot in Tilden Regional Park which has a diversity of plants representing all the different regions of California. My students are able to visit the whole state in just two hours! What better way to give them a sense of place? And the Garden brings alive the variability of California's ecosystems and all the different natural resources that are used by Native people.

But the partnership doesn't begin with a visit to the Garden. The volunteer docents thoroughly prepare the students for the visit with a pre-trip class. On this day, I watch as the three docents unfold a wall-sized map of California and immediately engage the students in a study of the state's different climate regions. Each student is given stickers of fog, rain, and sun to engage with the activity directly. The students then collaboratively sort through a series of photos to classify the needs of Californian Indians. Having the students work in groups, providing opportunities to study images, and encouraging discussion, all promote engagement and understanding. A well thought-out pre-trip visit by the docents makes the actual trip to the Garden meaningful.

One of the most important things to me as a teacher is a high ratio of docents to students on a study trip. It is not fun to trudge along in big groups unable to hear what is being said or ask questions. This is not the case at the Botanic Garden. As we get off the bus, we are surrounded by docents. A ratio of four or five students to one docent provides for meaningful interaction with an expert and an opportunity for students to freely ask questions and explore together. This

makes the Botanic Garden exceptional.

The students are off on their adventure. In each of the different regions, they engage in hands-on activity. Underneath an oak tree, they examine an acorn and give a try at using a mortar and pestle. They get to wash their hands using soaproot and play instruments underneath the towering redwood trees. In each of the regions, they observe a plant and something made from the natural resource: sandals in the desert region, a model canoe made from a tule plant, string made from yucca. The beauty of the Regional Parks Botanic Garden is the amazing opportunity it provides for students to experience the diversity of California and the ways in which indigenous people in California use the variety of natural resources.

Once we return to class, the trip provides for continued exploration but with increased relevance and understanding. Students continue to study the different regions of California and how natural resources are sustainably managed and used. Students' writing comes alive as they write about their trip, and their experience provides an anchor for additional research. Their tour of the Botanic Garden has provided them with a great launch into understanding. 🌿

Since 1999, Beth Levine has taught in the West Contra Costa Unified School District. She has been teaching 4th grade at Montalvin Manor Elementary, a K-8 school in San Pablo, for the past 15 years and has been bringing her students to the Botanic Garden for three years. She decided to become a teacher after organizing a school garden that she works in with her students.

Learning about California's ecosystems with Botanic Garden Docent John Helms.



Beth Levine

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There's still time for fall planting! You'll be happy to hear that the Garden is now offering remote plant sales with curbside pick up. You'll find many plants, lovingly propagated by garden volunteers, that are difficult or impossible to find elsewhere. We have a wide variety of Manzanitas, from groundcovers to large shrubs, and they're looking great right now!

The Botanic Garden is currently open to visitors, by free online reservation only, on Saturday, Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday. Same day reservations are not available, but you can reserve up to three weeks in advance for up to five people. We hope you can visit the Botanic Garden soon.

The Botanic Garden's free e-newsletter is a terrific source of information about the Garden, its plants and features, and its natural history. Please consider subscribing!

To purchase plants, make reservations, subscribe to the e-newsletter, and more, visit the Garden's website at www.nativeplants.org!

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