In February the Garden celebrated “National Bird-Feeding Month” with a Bird Fest on Sunday, February 18. Many volunteers signed up to staff the various venues. As usual, the event was a huge success with over a thousand participants, and the weather gave us the gift of holding off the rain. My niece Jennifer was visiting that weekend from San Diego and she was looking forward to attending. As it turned out, not only did she attend, she volunteered with me at the origami beak craft station. There’s nothing better than watching the enthusiasm and concentration of a child while he or she works on a craft. Some of the children even continued to wear their beaks as they visited other venues. Even Jennifer and I donned our beaks for the attached photo.

I enjoy watching and listening to a number of birds in my neighborhood. Outside my kitchen window, fluffy California towhees land on the fence before jumping into my neighbor’s tangerine tree. A few years ago, a pair of mourning doves built a nest in my flowering pear tree. Across the street another neighbor’s bird bath attracts the occasional red-tailed hawk. Once I was surprised to see an egret in the next-door driveway. The egret was concentrating on a pile of rocks adjacent to the driveway and as I watched, it quickly ducked its head into the rocks and emerged with a lizard in its beak. A small flock of wild parakeets flies overhead on occasion, and you can’t miss the sound of their raucous calls. Crows are ubiquitous, and mockingbirds entertain with their chorus of imitation songs.

In the past few months, we have added quite a few new volunteers to our rolls. Welcome, and I hope all those who are new (and veteran volunteers) will take advantage of the opportunities to help out with Garden activities. One great way to participate is to become a member of one of the 10 volunteer committees. We...
will highlight two or three committees each month in Oak Notes so you will have an idea what they are about. This month will feature the Volunteer Library, Hospitality, and Enrichment/Field Trips committees.

—Betsy

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Lucinda McDade,
CalBG Executive Director

Hello volunteers!

Is it spring yet? One harbinger of spring at CalBG is the annual grapevine harvest and wreath forming event. You may have wondered why we’ve been letting the grapevines grow wild on the east fence between the Garden and the horticulture complex. The answer? Those wild, lengthy vines are perfect for twisting into forms to serve as the ‘backbones’ for wreaths. Those vines are now tidied up and many, many wreaths are just waiting to be decorated next fall.

A great group of Garden insiders assembled on the 15th of March to undertake this work and then to celebrate with a baked potato lunch. You volunteers hosted the event, provided the main ingredients and were the most numerous in terms of participants. We also had great participation and assistance from our horticulture staff. They led the taming of the grapevines portion of the event and participated thoroughly in all the rest. I was also happy to see a number of staff from the hilltop building involved. Our new Director of Advancement, Jessica Wetzel, went down to see what all the fun was about and stayed to make several wreaths and share lunch with the crowd. Likewise, Grace Stewart, my partner in the director’s office. As I often say: it takes a village! Thanks to all!

This reminds me that, with COVID at least semi-tamed, Patty Nueva España on board as our staff volunteer manager, and one ‘real’ volunteer training session under our belts, it feels like the volunteer program is really back. OH yes! I know that you’ve never really been gone. Members of the bench brigade came in during the height of COVID, and Val Cressy and Ashlee Armstrong had a system worked out that enabled Val to continue to contribute to weed management even when we were closed to the public. The Native Designs group continued to tend their cuttings garden toward the back of the mesa through thick and thin. But we did also stand down from a lot of activities and, sadly, we did lose quite a few from our volunteer ranks over the COVID period. Now, your ranks are repopulating, the events at which your participation is so critical are back and expanding. Patty is doing a great job matching volunteers with opportunities old and new… it feels great!

There have been a few personnel changes that you may wish to be aware of. First, if you’ve not stopped by to introduce yourselves to Jessica Wetzel—new Director of Development—please do so! She worked alongside many of you at the grapevine harvest event and is so impressed by the vibrancy of the volunteer group here that she wants to recruit her parents and in-laws! Also, management of the kiosk staff has returned to Visitor Engagement under the

A Very Happy April Birthday to:

Karen Casey    Bev Jack
Amery Castro   Rachel Levin
Sharon Chalmers  Betsy MacLaren
Katy Douglass   Ingrid Spiteri
Brian Espinoza  Amy Tims
Brittany Gamboa  Alayna Trejo
David Gish     Janice Tsuma
Judy Goss     Joe Vlietstra
able leadership of Lauren Stoebel. Melanie Gettler has been hired as lead kiosk staffer and Lauren’s right-hand person in kiosk management. You will see Melanie in the kiosk on occasion and she’ll be handling scheduling, training, etc. As we move into the busy days of spring and also the long days of spring and summer, we will be staffing up in the kiosk. We need to provide back-up/double-kiosk staffing for peak hours on spring weekends AND also need coverage for the later spring and summer evening hours to come. Watch for new faces and stop to say hello and introduce yourselves. Have ideas about the kiosk? Please share them with Lauren and Melanie.

Poetry in the Garden is our next public event and I hope to see many of you there! Then Forever California—not a public event per se but a very, very important fundraiser for our Garden. Mid-May will bring the second edition of our terrific Waterwise Festival: family friendly and with lots of fun and educational things to do.

In sum, lots of reasons to frequent our pathways! I hope to see you at CalBG soon!

**APRIL IN THE GARDEN**  
by Laura Christianson

If you’ve been volunteering with us for over a year, you may remember Ming Posa, our former Executive Assistant and Botany Coordinator. Ming was a professional at spotting hummingbird nests around the Garden, and taught many of us that if you simply stop, sit, and watch hummingbirds in April, you may notice after a minute or two that they fly repeatedly back to the same spot. Chances are high that spot contains one of these small, soft enclaves. This time of year, a large amount of wildlife returns to the Garden, reminding us why native plants are so pivotal in our landscapes and home gardens. Swallowtail butterflies visit various nectar sources, rabbits and lizards run across paths, and if we are lucky, our “resident” bobcat returns to saunter across the Garden this month.

The Garden bursts with color, smells, and sounds in April, with too many blooming plants to list them all here. We are thrilled to be once again included with the Theodore Payne Wildflower Hotline, which is updated weekly with all of the vibrant and charismatic plants blooming around the Garden. The list is updated every Friday, from March through June, so please stay tuned to find some of the best spots in the Garden. A few favorites blooming in April that are often overlooked include: *Opuntia basilaris var. brachyclada* (short-joint beavertail cactus, above), as well as the *Nolina parryi* (Parry’s beargrass), both of which can be found in the communities near the *Washingtonia filifera* (fan palms).
As with any garden, we have had our ups and downs with wildflowers this year. Many of the earliest-blooming flowers have struggled with the late rains and herbivory; however, we should have some beautiful areas blooming in time for Wildflower month. A large swath of *Eschscholzia californica*, the California poppies, are likely to be blooming in abundance in the northwest corner of the Mesa, as well as *Linum lewisii* (blue flax) along the pathway to the Trustee’s Oak Grove. In addition, the communities should be decorated with expanses of the purple blooms of Phacelias and *Salvia columbariae* (chia, above). We hope to see you out there!

**Volunteer Enrichment/Field Trips Committee**

Patty España, Volunteer Manager

The Enrichment/Field Trips Committee is one of several volunteer committees that welcomes participation by volunteers. This Committee was disbanded during the pandemic years, but was reinstated last fall. The purpose of the Committee is to plan one-hour presentations by speakers with knowledge of the flora, fauna, and geography of California that can educate and enlighten those in attendance. Volunteers, staff, and friends are encouraged to attend. Field trips will be planned as well.

The Committee is still deciding on the frequency of the talks: once a month, every other month, or quarterly. We had our first meeting last November and made plans for most of this year (no presentations in July or August). We will continue to meet as needed to continue scheduling speakers and plan field trips.

If you are interested in joining this Committee, please contact Patty España at pespana@calbg.org or by calling 909-625-8767, ext. 256.

**Hospitality Committee**

by Anne Odgers

The Hospitality team is looking for new members! We have a fun group that gets together to organize our quarterly luncheon meetings and special events.

If you love to put together events, this is the committee for you! In addition to the quarterly luncheons, which are usually held in the beautiful Forest Pavilion, we host special events. Coming up are two of our favorites: the annual Grapevine Harvest Wreath Making event, where we serve chili and roasted potatoes with all the fixings. Next is our wonderful Quarterly Luncheon. We will hear from our President, Betsy MacLaren, and the Garden’s Director, Lucinda McDade, followed by our usual raffle.

Then we will host our Annual Sunset Social, with wine direct from the Garden’s Wine Cellar, followed by crackers and cheeses. The last event planned is our final June Luncheon, with its beautifully catered luncheon.

We have an enthusiastic team and would love to get some new volunteers to make it even better!

**Prunus of CA**

by Steve Bryant

There are eight spp. of *Prunus* (stone fruits) in CA. Four are desert species (spp.), the others grow in moister areas. The desert spp. are generally spiny
shrubs 2–3 m tall, with -1 cm diameter fruits, which in good years have perhaps 1 mm of flesh under the skin. Some spp. form large thickets. *Prunus andersonii* (Desert Peach, above) grows in the eastern deserts from about Lake Isabella to Modoc County, and has pink flowers. *Prunus eremophila* (Desert Plum, above) is a rare sp. with small pinkish flowers. Although known to “desert rats” from at least the early1990s (when I first heard of it from my Dad), it was only described scientifically in the early 2000s and is restricted to the Lanfair Valley area. *Prunus fasciculata* (Desert Almond) is primarily found in the Mojave Desert and has white flowers and fuzzy fruits. *Prunus fremontii* (Desert Apricot) is a large spiny shrub to 4 m tall by 3 m wide, with white flowers and smooth fruits. It grows in a wide north–south band from the Mexico border to Morongo Valley. Many grow in the hills above Palm Springs where their seeds are often found in animal scat. *Prunus ilicifolia* (Holly-leaved Cherry) is cismontane from the Bay Area south, and plentiful in our local hills. A good garden plant, its clusters of white flowers produce edible fruit (to me) when the skin turns black. *Prunus subcordata* (Sierra Plum) grows in the northern Coast Ranges and the western foothills of the Sierras; to 7 m tall with white/pink flowers and 1.5-2.5 cm fruits: Calsparks says they are edible, but tart. Bitter Cherry (*Prunus emarginata*, below) grows to 15 m in mountains throughout the state. It has white flowers and juicy but inedible, bitter fruit. Western Chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana* var. *demissa*) has a CA distribution similar to the Sierra Plum and grows to 5 m. It has fragrant white flowers and a ~1 cm fruit that contains cyanide, especially when unripe. Its leaves are similar to domestic cherries but flowers follow the leaves, rather than preceding them. The species is found in most of the USA and its fruits were eaten by several indigenous groups. Caution: humans have evolved such that toxins may give a “bitter” taste as a warning of inedibility!
This is a charming, informative, and accessibly written book about wildflowers in our immediate area. Barbara Iyer is a longtime resident of the Inland Empire who collaborated with local plant and resource experts as well as with her daughter, Jennifer, to produce this book. Acknowledgements are given to Riverside-Corona Resource Conservation District staff, as well as Lorene Sisquoc, member of the Fort Sill Apache Tribe and descendant of the Mountain Cahuilla of southern California. A line from the forward gives the book’s flavor, “Searching for wildflowers can be addicting...an addiction worth cultivating.”

This book is organized into the following areas: Flowers by Color, Flowers by Plant Size (including “Belly Flowers”—those that can only be appreciated when laying on our belly), Dangerous Plants, Plant Conservation, Plant Communities, Find Native Plants, and Gardening with Native Plants. Our CalBG Grow Native Nursery is listed as a resource. Photography by Jennifer Iyer is clear and beautiful. Each plant is fully described via scientific and common name, size, description, longevity, blooms, and nectar-associated insects. Plant purchasing information and helpful websites are also included.

This book can also serve as a field guide since it is rather small and very well organized. It can be checked out from the Volunteer Library or purchased directly from the Riverside-Corona Resource Conservation District.

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**Spring Fling**

**April Potluck Volunteer Luncheon**

Friday April 5, 2024, 11:30 a.m., Lantz Outdoor Classroom

Please bring an appetizer, main dish, salad, or dessert to share. Drink and utensils provided. Tram starts at 11 a.m. Come have fun and find out what’s happening at the Garden. Don’t forget your name badges.
GRAPEVINE HARVEST

Photos by Susan Starr and Marla White
GRAPEVINE WREATHS
Photos by Susan Starr and Marla White