



# PAW PRINTS

Volume 40, Number 3 Newsletter of the Eaton Canyon Nature Center Associates March 2022

## PUBLIC CALENDAR

### Eaton Canyon Gardening Group

Every Wednesday at 9:30 am and second Sundays of the month at 10 am.

#### Current volunteers only.

Meet by Nature Center garage door.

### Nature Tails Story Hour

Every Saturday at 10:30 am. on the Outdoor Patio. Stories and activities for children.

### Saturday Nature Center Discovery

Saturday mornings on the Outdoor Patio. Animal Ambassadors: 10 am and 12 pm. Nature Discovery Tables: 10:30 am to 12:30 pm

### Docent-Led Family Nature Walks

Every Saturday at 9 am. Meet in front of the Nature Center. No dogs please.

**The following events and meetings cannot take place at the nature center due to precautions in response to COVID-19.**

### Calif. Native Plant Society Plant Walk

Plant walks are held on the second Sunday of each month except July and August at 9 am. Meet in the back patio.

### Audubon Bird Walk

Third Sunday of the month, 8 am. Meet leader Hill Penfold in front of the Nature Center.

### Meetings:

#### Pasadena Group Sierra Club

Monthly meetings via Zoom are held on the first Wednesday of the month at 7 pm. Check their website for information: [www.sierraclub.org/angeles/pasadena](http://www.sierraclub.org/angeles/pasadena)

#### Audubon Society

Monthly meetings are held on the third Wednesday of the month at 7:30 pm. Check their website for more information: [www.pasadenaaudubon.org](http://www.pasadenaaudubon.org)

### Calif. Native Plant Society

Meetings are held the fourth Thursday of the month at 7:30 pm via Zoom. Check their website for more information: <https://www.cnps-sgm.org/activities.php>

## Woodpeckers of Southern California

Text by Bella and Jake

Photos by Lily and Morgan

Los Angeles Birders-Students - [www.losangelesbirders.org](http://www.losangelesbirders.org)

Woodpeckers are charismatic birds often found foraging along tree trunks. They can be hard to see, but listen for their calls when out on a walk. As primary cavity nesters, woodpeckers excavate their own holes when nesting in trees, and secondary cavity nesters will reuse these holes to breed. Because of this, woodpeckers are invaluable to breeding Western Bluebirds, Tree Swallows, Wrens, Owls, and more. Woodpeckers are uniquely adapted to their tree-drilling lifestyle: their long tongues wrap around their skull, serving as seatbelts for their brain, while their stiff tail feathers brace them against tree trunks.



Downy woodpecker

called snags, so avoid cutting down dead trees except for safety reasons.

As dapper as our black-and-white woodpeckers look, **Northern Flickers** make a bold fashion statement with their black necklace, spotted chests, and mustache-like whiskers. To find them, listen for their loud alarm call while walking through open woodland. There are two forms of Northern Flicker: yellow-shafted in the East, and red-shafted here in the West. Intergrade Northern Flickers are common where the two forms overlap and interbreed. As their name implies, red-shafted Northern Flickers' flight feathers have bright red centers. Rather than foraging on the trees, Northern Flickers probe the ground for their favorite food: ants. Although they don't visit bird feeders often, you may have luck attracting this bird with a nest box during their breeding season.



Northern flicker

The **Downy Woodpecker** is our smallest North American woodpecker. Their bills are less than half the length of their head, differentiating them from the lookalike Hairy Woodpecker. They are the most likely woodpecker to show up at backyard feeders: suet blocks, sunflower seeds, and peanuts are their favorites. They can be found in woodlots, residential areas, and city parks. Locate them by their descending whinny call. Often, Downy Woodpeckers forage in mixed-species flocks with nuthatches and chickadees. This bird prefers to nest in dead or fungus-infested trees,

**Woodpeckers continued on page 2**



**Paw Prints** is a monthly publication of the ECNCA. Articles and photographs are welcome on topics related to natural history and Nature Center activities. If you see something interesting in the canyon, please share it with us! The deadline for submissions to the April 2022 issue is March 15, 2022. Send submissions to Brenda Hurst [eatonmember@gmail.com](mailto:eatonmember@gmail.com).

**Contributors:** Marilynn Hildebrandt, Brenda Hurst, Los Angeles Birders students- Bella, Jake, Lily and Morgan

#### **Paw Prints Production**

Content Editor: Brenda Hurst  
Layout: Carole Scurlock  
Copy Editor: Laura Joseph

#### **DOCENT AND MEMBER CALENDAR**

**Notice:** The following events and meetings temporarily cannot take place at the nature center due to precautions required in response to COVID-19.

#### **Guided School Tours**

School tours are conducted from October to the end of the school season. Call the office for reservations. 626-398-5420

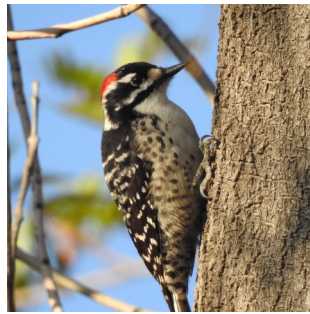
#### **Bag Lunch and Mini-Inservice**

Wednesday, March 2, 2022, at Noon on Zoom. **Dana Stangel** will present **"What's it like to be a bobcat in Los Angeles, have you ever seen a gray fox?"** Learn the natural history of some of our favorite locals and how to keep yourself safe when you share territory with them. Note: The link for the Zoom meeting will be forwarded by email to docents and volunteers. Click on the link a few minutes before noon and follow directions. RSVPs required.

#### **ECNCA Board Meetings**

The ECNCA board meetings are held on the second Wednesday of the month at 7 p.m via Zoom. If you are interested in joining a meeting, please send an email to [eatonmember@gmail.com](mailto:eatonmember@gmail.com), at least 2 days prior to the meeting.

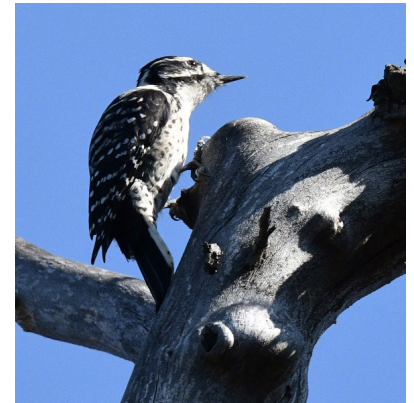
#### **Woodpeckers continued from page 1**



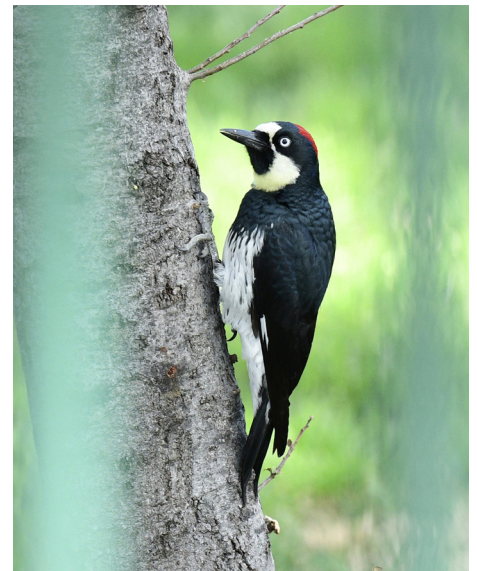
Nuttall's woodpecker

They can be identified by their zebra-like black-and-white striping patterns. Their distinctive call, which is a loud, metallic rattle, is often heard long before they are seen. Adult males have a red patch on the back of their head, while young birds of both sexes have a red patch on their foreheads; the patch is more extensive on males. Adult females lack the red altogether.

**The Nuttall's Woodpecker** is a common woodpecker in the oak woodlands of California. While a familiar visitor here, their range is almost completely restricted to the state and thus can be hard to find elsewhere. Their favored trees are oaks, but they can also be found in a variety of willows, ashes, sycamores, and exotics.



Another oak-lover, the large and conspicuous **Acorn Woodpecker** leads one of the most complicated social lives of any bird in Southern California. They live in colonies, constantly harvesting nuts, primarily their namesake acorns, and storing them in holes in granary trees. Some granaries have up to 50,000 nuts stored in them. A colony usually consists of one or a few breeding pairs and many helpers, most of whom are related to the breeding pair(s). During nesting season, all the colony's breeding females will lay their eggs in a single nest. Each female destroys any eggs present in the nest before she begins laying. The female will cannibalize the destroyed eggs (apparently the other female's), this is called heterocannibalism. Once all the breeding females have started laying, their destructive behavior stops. Acorn Woodpeckers are highly vocal, meaning they can be an effective alarm system for smaller birds in the vicinity. They can often be seen mobbing hawks or ravens alongside other birds. Identification is relatively straight-forward: Look for a boldly marked, black-and-white, clown-like face with a red crown on top. Females have a black bar separating the white forehead from the red crown, while the red and white are connected in males. Acorn Woodpeckers are fiercely territorial and will attack any animal who tries to steal acorns from their granaries, including squirrels, jays, and other Acorn Woodpeckers. They will often attack any birds near their granaries, regardless of whether they are trying to steal acorns.



Acorn woodpecker

So next time you're hiking Eaton Canyon's trail system, be sure to listen and look for the amazing Woodpeckers!

Reference: **All About Birds.** <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/search>



# Plant of the Month

**Plant:** Coast Prickly-Pear

**Botanical Name:** *Opuntia littoralis*

**Family:** Cactaceae

**Blooms:** May-June

**Lifeform:** Shrub (stem succulent)

**Habitat:** Coastal sage scrub

Coast prickly-pear is the most common *Opuntia* species native to the coastal areas of southern California and northern Baja California. Coast prickly-pear generally grows to three feet tall and frequently forms large thickets over extensive rocky slopes. The cactus pads are covered with many spines. The large showy yellow flowers of coast prickly-pear bloom in May and June followed by the purplish-red fruit, called "tuna" in Spanish, which ripen late summer-early fall. The fruit is edible once their spines are removed and the skins are peeled away, and it's advised to remove the seeds. Coast prickly-pear supports wild-life in a number of ways. The plants are home to various spider species, and the flowers provide nectar and pollen to native bees who help to cross-pollinate the fruit. Like other *Opuntia* species, coast prickly-pear is a host plant for cochineal scale (*Dactylopiis spp.*) These insects attach themselves to the plant and suck its juices. The insects are hidden and protected by a waxy white substance resembling tufts of cotton. The scale bug contains red carmine acid thought to be distasteful to predators. The red liquid from the cochineal scale (or carmine) was used by the Aztecs for dye and carried back to Spain by the Spanish conquerors. Today, cochineal scale provides carmine for food coloring in many products. Large coast prickly-pear patches provide habitat for cactus wrens who build their nests among the pads of the cactus which provides protection from their predators. Native Americans used both the cactus pads and the fruit for food. Some groups made paint from the red juice of the fruit, others added the juice of the pads to waterproof plaster or used the long spines for applying tattoos.

*Opuntia* species are native to the western hemisphere. They are distinguished from other cactus by their broad, flat pads or segments, which are modified stems and by the presence of glochids, tufts of very small, penetrating spines found at the base of the larger spines. These glochids detach readily from the pad and can penetrate skin easily and be difficult to remove. Prickly-pears are highly adapted for dry climates. Instead of leaves, the thick, waxy stems (pads) have developed chlorophyll which carry out



*Opuntia littoralis*

the photosynthesis. Along with other succulent plants, they have adapted a way to exchange gases (CO<sub>2</sub> and oxygen) at night when temperatures are lower and humidity higher greatly reducing the amount of water lost in the process. The pads are spongy, providing a large volume for storing water and the root system is wide and shallow allowing prickly pears to capture the slightest moisture. Even the protective spines of the cactus serve as dew points, as the largest spines often tend downward, they can condense fine mist and dew so water droplets fall at the base of the plant to be collected by the root system.

There are a number of other *Opuntia* species native to southern California and some of them readily hybridize with *O. littoralis* which can make plant identification difficult. Additionally, the Mexican settlers brought the mission cactus, or Barbary fig (*Opuntia ficus-indica*), with them north into California and it too has hybridized with the local coast prickly-pear species. The mission cactus is a large trunk-forming, segmented cactus that may grow to 15-20 ft. with a 10 ft. crown and a thick trunk. It is also almost spineless. The mission cactus was domesticated and cultivated for food (both the pads and fruit) and for cochineal in Mexico well before the arrival of the Spanish. It is thought that its wild origin is likely to have been in Mexico because its close genetic relatives are found in central Mexico. This species has been introduced into many places in the world including Italy, north Africa and Australia.

Coast prickly-pear grows in many places in Eaton Canyon. It can be found in the garden near the nature center, along the trails, and is common in Eaton Canyon's stream bed. There are a few mission cactus as well, likely planted by early settlers. A tall one is viewable from the main trail near the junction of the coyote canyon trail. There are likely some hybrids of Mission and Coast prickly-pear in the natural area as well. Marilynn Hildebrandt

## The Gift Shop Is Open Again!



We are excited to announce that the gift shop is now open on a limited basis! Each Saturday, the shop will be set up on the patio from 10 am - 1 pm. Featured merchandise will include children's nature books and activities, field guides, Eaton Canyon t-shirts, mugs, and patches, as well as a variety of gift items and souvenirs.

The Gift Shop is run by ECNCA volunteers and helps to support programming and the care of the animals that are housed at the center.

Memberships and donations may also be made when the shop is open. Cash, checks, and credit cards are accepted.



Gift Shop Books Photo: Brenda Hurst

## ECNCA BOARD MEMBERS

**President:** Brenda Hurst

**Vice-President:** Mary Foltyn

**Recording Secretary:** Marge Mayotte-Hirn

**Corresponding Secretary:** Mary Veselich

**Treasurer:** Terry Ginsberg

**Membership Chair:** Brenda Hurst

**School Trip Docent Chair:** David Kristoff

**Weekend Docent Chair:** Ramie Case

**Twilight Program Chair:** Mike Regan

**Bus Grants Committee Chair:** Marge Mayotte-Hirn

**Gardening Group Chair:** Marilynn Hildebrandt

**Conservation Group Chair:**

**Gift Shop Chairs:** Pam Edwards, Karen Mateer

**Bag Lunch Chair:** Mary Foltyn

**Moonlight Hike Co-chairs:** Ramie Case, Teresa Kirkland

**Members-at-Large:** Judy Jenkins, Rose Haig, Susan Hopkins

**Nature Center Director:** Helen Wong

**NCA President:** Laura Nicholson

**NCA Representatives:** Diane Lang

Eaton Canyon Nature Center Associates (ECNCA) is a chapter of the Nature Center Associates (NCA), a non-profit support group of the natural area park system of Los Angeles County. Founded for educational and scientific purposes, its primary mission is to develop in children and adults an appreciation of the natural world and to preserve Eaton Canyon as a natural area for future generations.

The Eaton Canyon Nature Center and Natural Area Park are located within the unincorporated area of Los Angeles County in the Supervisorial district of Kathryn Barger. The Natural Area and Nature Center are operated by the County of Los Angeles, Department of Parks and Recreation, in partnership with the Eaton Canyon Nature Center Associates.

## Become A Member of the ECNCA (Eaton Canyon Nature Center Associates)

Membership benefits include the ECNCA newsletter, program announcements and a 10% discount at the gift shop. To join the Eaton Canyon Nature Center Associates, fill out the form below and mail with your check, payable to the ECNCA, 1750 North Altadena Drive, Pasadena, CA 91107.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Please check appropriate box and mark return envelope "Membership"

☐ Individual \$30 ☐ Family \$45 ☐ Senior \$15 ☐ Senior Family \$30 ☐ Student \$15

☐ Friend of the Canyon \$75 ☐ Sage Saver \$100 ☐ Chaparral Contributor \$250 ☐ Riparian Guardian \$500

☐ Oak Woodlands Protector \$750 ☐ Wildlands Angel \$1000 ☐ NEW ☐ RENEWAL

Enclosed is my MEMBERSHIP in the amount of \$\_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed is my additional DONATION in the amount of \$\_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to the ECNCA. All contributions are tax deductible.