



PAW PRINTS

Volume 41, Number 2

Newsletter of the Eaton Canyon Nature Center Associates February 2023

PUBLIC CALENDAR

Eaton Canyon Natural Area Park

Winter Hours: 8 am - 5 pm.

Nature Center Hours: 9 am - 5 pm
(includes restrooms)

Docent-Led Family Nature Walk

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

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

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.

Meetings:

Pasadena Audubon Society Meeting

Meetings are held on the third Wednesday of the month at 7:30 pm in the Eaton Canyon Nature Center Auditorium. No meeting in December.

California Native Plant Society Meeting

Meetings are held in the Eaton Canyon Nature Center Auditorium, the fourth Thursday of the month at 7:30 pm, except for November and December.

Pasadena Group Sierra Club Meeting

Program meetings are held on the first Wednesday of the month, 7 times a year, at 7:30 pm in the Eaton Canyon Nature Center Auditorium. Check their website for more information: www.sierraclub.org/angeles/pasadena

Next time you take a walk in our beautiful Eaton Canyon Natural Area, try listening to nature. Yes, that's right, listen to the language of the natural world around you and you may be surprised and enlightened.

For example, if you hear the raucous calls of the California Scrub Jay, it's not just a loud and boisterous noise—the bird is trying to send a message. Maybe it's trying to stay in touch with its mate, or perhaps it's a call about food, or alerting others to danger nearby! Whatever their message may be, their specialized voice box, called a syrinx, helps them sing a variety of complicated sounds to communicate.

Molly, age 20, a sophomore at Yale University and a member of Los Angeles Birders-Students, wrote a beautiful article describing her experience of decoding the language of the Chickadee.

So, remember to stop and listen to the language of the natural world in Eaton Canyon.

Susan Gilliland, Co-Founder Los Angeles Birders

Chickadees

Article and drawings by Molly

One of my favorite words comes from a bird language: the language of Black-capped Chickadees. It is typically written as *chick-dee-dee-dee* and is the source of their common name. It is classified as an alarm call and certainly carries meaning, yet is it fair to describe it as a word?

Like human words, *chick-dee-dee-dee* is an independent unit: it is the distillation of a specific thought. *Chick-dee-dee-dee* stands crisp and isolated on a page, made of familiar letters, looking no different from any English word. Of course, the chickadees' word does not really sound like *chick-dee-dee-dee* at all—it is nasal and harsh and fast, made of sounds we don't have letters for, formed by an organ called the syrinx that we don't even have. But giving it a mnemonic that we can read and pronounce demonstrates its wordhood in a way no vague auditory description ever could.

Like many complex human words, *chick-dee-dee-dee* is composed of multiple small subparts. Nothing can show that feature of the call better than pictorial spectrograms' displays of the length, pitch, and intensity of sound. Unlike the written mnemonic, the spectrogram accurately represents how the call sounds: the curve at the beginning symbolizes the "*chick*" subsection of the call, while the stacked lines at the end illustrate the "*dee-dee-dee*." Isn't there a kind of onomatopoeic beauty to the graphs that English letters lack? They are an elemental alphabet perfect for describing the words of animals.



Chickadees 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 March 2023 issue is February 15, 2023. Send submissions to Brenda Hurst eatonmember@gmail.com.

Contributors: Susan Gilliland, Brenda Hurst, Lorraine Lazarus, Molly

Paw Prints Production

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

DOCENT AND MEMBER CALENDAR

Bag Lunch and Mini-Inservice:

Wednesday, February 1st at Noon in Classroom 1. **Dr. Char Miller** will present the topic "**The San Gabriels in a Future of Drought,**" and will use historical and contemporary images to illustrate his exploration of the array of impacts that the enduring drought is having and will continue to have on the San Gabriels and the valleys below.

Guided School Tours

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

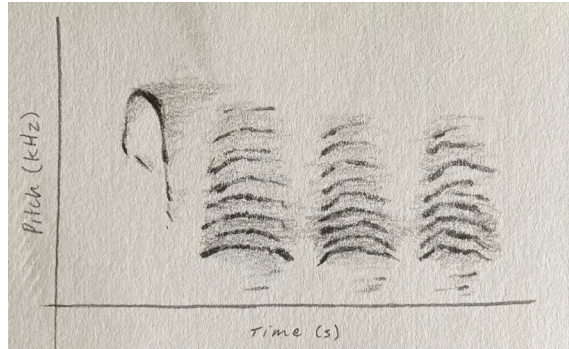
ECNCA Board Meetings

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

Chickadees continued from page 1

Most importantly, *chick-dee-dee-dee* is rich in meaning—perhaps even more so than most human words. Ornithologists studying the alarm call recently discovered that it varies with context. The number of dees at the end ranges from one to many, and the greater the number of dees, the greater the alarm of the bird. Knowledge of chickadee predators allows us to draw specific inferences about what they are saying.

Seven, eight, or more dees, for example, can suggest the presence of a Sharp-shinned Hawk, one of the chickadees' most deadly predators. Three or four can alert us to raccoons or coyotes. Nothing feels more electrifying than hearing one or two dees explode above your head. You know the chickadees are talking about you.



Spectrogram display of the length, pitch, and intensity of sound

Still, even this scientific understanding of the call's meaning feels incomplete. Words are only fully understood in the context of their society. We might translate a word into our own language, but without an intimate understanding of its home culture, we cannot grasp its subtleties. Learning any language should extend beyond the memorization of vocabulary and grammatical structure to cultural and societal details associated with the language. Yet who among us can claim intimate knowledge of Black-capped Chickadee society?

The *chick-dee-dee-dee* call means danger, but when heard, all the local chickadees and other small songbirds fly toward the sound, knowing that together they stand a better chance of harassing the threat into leaving instead of hunting. How can we understand that selflessness implied by *chick-dee-dee-dee*? The word expresses a cooperation extending beyond chickadees to all species who join to combat common enemies.

Chick-dee-dee-dee, then, is a word that transcends species. We hear it as birdsong, creating background noise in a forest full of creatures that hear and understand it as so much more. Upon reflection, that human inability to grasp its meaning is the anomaly. This understanding fits *chick-dee-dee-dee* into a language, one more immediate and visceral and communal than any human language, yet one just as worthy of consideration. What is a language if not a system of words used to communicate, and what is *chick-dee-dee-dee* if not a part of a rich and varied forest language whose edges we can only grasp?

Around us in a forest, life passes and is spoken about. Bobcats and foxes speak a silent, predatory language to themselves as they hunt; squirrels chatter with each other about the acorns, the weather, the bobcats. The deer speak a sign language of alarm involving wide eyes and pricked ears and the flash of white tails. Flowers sing in color about their bounty for the bees; surely even the trees themselves, through their underground mycelial webs, can be said to commune. And chickadees, the most voluble of songbirds, talk to keep each other safe.



Meet Lorraine Lazarus, Our New Eaton Canyon Nature Center Superintendent!

Lorraine's passion for Recreation started when she visited parks with her father, Tomas Martinez, who retired from the Parks Department in 2006. With love for the outdoors, Ms. Lazarus found Recreation to be more than a job, but a calling.

Lorraine started her career with the County of Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation in 1999 as a Recreation Leader. Since then, she has served as a Recreation

Supervisor, Recreation Manager and for the most recent five years, Assistant Regional Recreation Director for the South Agency managing parks in unincorporated Whittier, Cerritos, La Mirada and Compton. She has supervised parks in the 5th Supervisorial District that include Arcadia Community Regional Park and Charles S. Farnsworth Park in Altadena.

"I am thrilled to be here at the Eaton Canyon Nature Center as the new Superintendent. It's been 15 years since I have had only one facility to give my time, focus and attention to. I plan on working diligently with the staff and volunteers to create quality programs and events and provide an unforgettable, educational experience for the residents of Los Angeles County. I am also in awe of the biodiversity at Eaton Canyon and I know that each day will be a different adventure in learning and treasuring this amazing natural area. My first two weeks here have been unbelievable and I'm thankful for the hospitality that I have received."

Lorraine is active in the City of Baldwin Park, where she lives with her family and has been a Personnel Commissioner for the past year.



Teresa Jover receiving her 5 Year Volunteer Badge in our nature center's native plant demonstration garden! Teri is a dedicated ECNCA Gardening Group Volunteer.



It's that time of year again! Rain and lots of rushing water in our Eaton Canyon stream! Photos: Brenda Hurst

New Gift Shop Hours!



Photo (l-r): ECNCA Gift Shop Volunteers Mary Foltyn, Judy Jenkins and Mary Veselich.

The Gift Shop is now open Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. On Thursdays, the Info Desk is staffed by a volunteer to help the staff with phone calls and greet visitors.



Do you **LOVE YOUR TIME IN NATURE?**

Do you want to help others do the same?

Join us at Eaton Canyon Nature Center!

We are welcoming new volunteers. Training begins in February.

Starting February 21, 2023, for eight weeks;
Tuesday and Thursday morning classes* (9:00am – 12:00noon)

We need docent leaders!



Our docent-naturalists lead both school children and adults on hikes throughout our park. Your class will cover an overview of natural world topics to enable you to do that: Ecological Concepts, Geology, Botany, Wildlife, Canyon History, as well as guidance on being a naturalist leader.

We also need friendly people to help visitors at the front desk/gift shop, assist in the garden, to help with crafts and activities at special programs, and many other essential tasks.

For information on training and tuition, email:

ecanyontraining@gmail.com

*If you wish to volunteer on weekends and can't do weekday training,
we have a special training program available.

Q&A Coffee on Tuesday, February 14, 10:00 a.m. at Eaton Canyon Nature Center

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 & Recreation, in partnership with the Eaton Canyon Nature Center Associates.



Photo: Carole Seurlock

ECNCA BOARD MEMBERS

President: Brenda Hurst

Vice-President: Diane Marcussen

Recording Secretary: Marge Mayotte-Hirn

Corresponding Secretary: Mary Veselich

Treasurer: Terry Ginsberg

Bag Lunch Chair: Mary Foltyn

Bus Grants Co-Chairs: Mary Foltyn, Judy Jenkins

Conservation Group Chair:

Gardening Group Chair: Marilyn Hildebrandt

Gift Shop Co-Chairs: Pam Edwards, Karen Mateer

Membership Chair: Brenda Hurst

Moonlight Hike Co-Chairs: Ramie Case, Teresa Kirkland

School Trip Docent Chair: David Kristoff

Twilight Program Chair: Mike Regan

Weekend Docent Chair: Ramie Case

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

Nature Center Director: Lorraine Lazarus

NCA President: Laura Nicholson

NCA Representative: Terry Ginsberg

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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 of \$_____

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

You may also join and/or donate online at www.ecnca.org.