



# the griffith reporter

the newsletter of friends of griffith park/winter 2019-20



***in this issue...***

- ❖ **FoGP Celebrates Ten Years of Service to Griffith Park**
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- ...and more***



Photo: Kathryn Louyse

In 2020 Friends of Griffith Park will celebrate its tenth anniversary! My, how time flies and how much we've grown.

We're often asked, what was the impetus for forming FoGP?

In 2005 a disastrous Draft Master Plan for Griffith Park was released to the public. The Melendrez Plan proposed numerous commercialization projects in the Park which outraged the public. Community opposition to the

plan pressured the councilmember to convene a Griffith Park Master Plan Working Group to rewrite the master plan. In order to achieve a consensus, Working Group members were appointed from various organizations representing the local community and Park user groups.

The group met monthly at a public forum and invited Park users, hikers and residents from communities abutting the Park. Concurrently, Working Group member and attorney Valerie Vanaman was spearheading a subcommittee to integrate dreams of the Working Group into master plan appropriate language.

Meanwhile, a small army of Park advocates descended into Griffith Park, local supermarkets and other venues to inform people and gather support for the new plan. In the end, 12,000 signatures on petitions opposing commercialization of the Park were gathered. This petition drive was appropriately referred to as "Save Griffith Park."

While the Working Group was busy addressing commercialization, the Griffith J. Griffith Charitable Trust hired a preservation specialist to prepare a nomination for city Historic-Cultural Monument designation for the entire Park. Griffith Park already boasted several individual historic landmarks but the goal of the Trust was to protect the Park in its entirety. Griffith Park easily qualified and received widespread support from LA City and the community. In January, 2009 the Park received Historic-Cultural Monument designation #942 and the community celebrated at Griffith J. Griffith's statue located at the corner of Los Feliz Blvd. and Riverside Drive.

The landmark status was a huge success story for the Park. The work on the revised master plan, while coming along nicely, had stalled in its LA City approval. Bernadette Soter from the Working Group invited a small group of ardent Park supporters to her home to address core problems. Even though there were several support groups in the Park (the L.A. Zoo, the Observatory, the Autry) there was no support group advocating for the Park as a whole, no one organization representing the interests of picnickers, hikers, bikers, or baby strollers.

After careful consideration and several meetings, the group decided to establish Friends of Griffith Park, a nonprofit advocating for the entirety of the Park. The group of activists initially opposing the Melendrez Draft Plan became the leadership for FoGP.

In October 2010, a launch party was held at Vanaman's home for this core group of friends and neighbors who might be interested in lending support to advocate for the Park as Friends of Griffith Park. A few months later, FoGP initiated a public campaign aimed at expanding our reach; memberships quickly grew to 500 active members from all over Los Angeles. FoGP was off and running!

The Griffith Park Working Group continued to push for a strong master plan document to preserve the Park's urban wilderness identity while protecting Park users. Finally, in early 2014 a Vision for Griffith Park was approved by the L.A. Recreation and Parks Board of Commissioners. Although not a Master Plan which the Working Group argued for, the Vision still contained many key elements the Working Group and Park supporters fought so hard to achieve.

FoGP continues to base its policy decisions on elements of the Vision, and acknowledges the wishes expressed during the Working Group's years of work. Moreover, FoGP continues to uphold Colonel Griffith J. Griffith's own words and intentions for donating over 3,000 acres to the people of Los Angeles in 1896: "Public parks are a safety valve of great cities and should be accessible and attractive, where neither race, creed nor color should be excluded."

*Marian Dodge*

~Marian Dodge

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- GERRY HANS, vp\_science & conservation
- MARY BUTTON, vp\_finance & administration
- LAURA HOWE, vp\_volunteer coordinator
- LUCINDA PHILLIPS, vp\_community liaison
- KATHRYN LOUYSE, secretary, media coordinator
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**on the cover:**

A Tale of Two Rabbits, Story on page 3.  
Desert cottontails cover photo: Gerry Hans

**photo above:**

Friends of Griffith Park was well represented at P-22 Day in Griffith Park, sharing information about rodenticide legislation AB 1788 and its effects on wildlife everywhere, including the Park. Pictured left to right, back: Mike Eberts and Clare Darden with Griffith Charitable Trust, FoGP's Mary Button, Marian Dodge and Gerry Hans. Front: Kathryn Louyse.

# A Tale of Two Rabbits ~Gerry Hans

Rabbits are as plentiful in Griffith Park as they are in most of North America. Not all rabbits across the country are created equal, though. Here in Los Angeles, along with most of southwestern United States and a large portion of Mexico, the desert cottontail (*Sylvilagus audubonii*) prevails.

Desert cottontails are not limited to the desert. They do very well in grassland and in chaparral habitats. They can “breed like rabbits,” as the saying goes, with as many as five litters per year, with three to five bunnies in each litter. Although they have a high population growth potential, the main limiting factor for these vegans is food resources and our long and dry summers. To make life in the wild even tougher, they are preyed upon by raptors, bobcats, coyotes, and probably our omnivorous Western gray foxes.

Desert cottontails in Griffith Park often stay out-of-view in burrows during the daytime as occupants of abandoned burrows from other mammals, such as ground squirrels. Since cottontails are mainly crepuscular (active at dawn and dusk), you’re more likely to see them during your early morning and late evening hikes across the Park.

## Or could it be a brush rabbit?

Is every rabbit you see in Griffith Park a desert cottontail? Well, that’s debatable!

There is another rabbit species that has a range hugging the coast



**Which is which?** Two types of rabbits inhabit our Los Angeles area – one is fairly common and the other is more elusive! The desert cottontail (*below*) is typically seen in Griffith Park, but there have been scattered sightings of the elusive brush rabbit (*above*). Friends of Griffith Park wants to know if this species has made a home in the Park, so be sure to always carry a camera as you hike. You never know what you may find!



Photo, top: Walter Siegmund, Wikipedia, bottom: Kathryn Louyse

from the tip of Baja northward to Oregon. The brush rabbit (*Sylvilagus bachmani*) is typically smaller, and has a coat that’s more uniform and grayish than the desert cottontail. Their ears are a bit shorter, legs slightly shorter, and tails smaller. The underbelly is more fully white or pale compared to the desert rabbit. To make a differential identification even more difficult, brush rabbits are usually found in dense habitats, so they’re hard to photograph. Slightly more nocturnal than desert cottontails, you’d expect to see them less. And neither species has shown up regularly on our wildlife camera photos.

From personal experience, I can’t say for sure whether I’ve ever seen a brush rabbit in the Park. A few years back I photographed a suspected brush rabbit and sent it to FoGP’s scientific director, Dan Cooper. He thought it was the most likely candidate he’d ever seen in Griffith Park, and other qualified naturalists agreed. Since that time, a few scattered photos of potential brush rabbit sightings have also been submitted to *iNaturalist.org*. This type of identification is often inconclusive, especially when photos are fuzzy or don’t show key features needed to help identify the species.

Let’s try to resolve the question of brush rabbits in Griffith Park. If there are breeding populations of these rabbits in the Park, as there are in the Santa Monica Mountains to our west, the next question is whether these populations can persist in this Park — or

other large expanses of habitat — as fragmented and isolated as they are.

Keep an eye out for rabbits in Griffith Park. Send us your photos or submit them to *iNaturalist*. Be a part of science! ♣

**WARNING: Use of Rodenticides  
has unintended consequences.  
Rat poisons kill wildlife & domestic animals!**

Please sign the petition urging Gov. Newsom to intervene in  
this growing environmental crisis... go to  
[www.friendsofgriffithpark.org/important-information-on-ab-1788-2](http://www.friendsofgriffithpark.org/important-information-on-ab-1788-2)

**NO on AB 1788**

The best hike for me is one where I can step out my front door and be on the trail in 10 minutes. Hiking to the top of Mt. Lee meets that criteria, and it's a very popular hike for the stunning vistas it commands.

As you hike this trail, not only will you see views of the Hollywood Sign located at the top of Mt. Lee, on a clear day, there are also spectacular views of downtown Los Angeles and flights coming into LAX.

Long before GPS and Google Maps, only a few people would be out walking the trail; now there are hundreds. Nowadays you'll encounter many Angelenos (often with families) especially on the weekends, but people from all over the world also enjoy this hike. Personally, I've met folks from many different countries while hiking the trail; one day I met three different French families! Granted, the increase of tourists and Park users have become big issues, but consider yourself an ambassador as you meet and help folks from other countries to understand the beauty of our Park.

The fire road trail (used by Park Rangers and other officials) is easy to follow and the views along the way are spectacular – that's why I love this hike! To the east is Mt. Hollywood with its flat top. The



Photo: Kris Sullivan

**my favorite hike**

higher you climb, the more you can see of the L.A. Basin. On the main ridge, one can actually walk around the back of Mt. Lee and catch views of Burbank, Glendale and the Verdugo Mountains.

Hiking in the winter, you may see a snow-capped Mt. Baldy. The roads ends at the cyclone-fence protected Mt. Lee, and then it's

a short steep climb to the very top. Many who've not hiked these trails are surprised by the equally breathtaking views extending far out toward Catalina, Long Beach and Palos Verdes. From this vantage point one gets the sense of just how enormous the Los Angeles community really is.

So get out, enjoy the hike, the people and the stunning views!

Note: Parking in and around Griffith Park is very limited. To avoid a ticket, always check parking signs before heading up the trails. ♡

*~Kris Sullivan*

**Tell Us About Your Favorite Hike in Griffith Park!**

We want to know all about your favorite hike in Griffith Park. Drop us a few lines about your hike and why you think it's special.

Email us at [@friendsofgriffithpark](mailto:@friendsofgriffithpark) and put in the header: **My Favorite Hike.**



Explore *Investigating Griffith Park*, our experimental, hands-on exhibition that reveals the many stories from Griffith Park's 4,000-plus acres!



In Griffith Park Across From Zoo | Free Parking  
**AUTRY MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN WEST**  
 4700 Western Heritage Way  
 Los Angeles, CA 90027

TheAutry.org

# Nesting Raptors of Griffith Park and Surrounding Area

~Courtney McCammon & Daniel S. Cooper,  
Cooper Ecological Monitoring, Inc.

If you're often in Griffith Park, you may have witnessed individuals looking intently toward the skies and treetops last spring, and not realized these were among the 75 volunteers who participated in the 2019 Griffith Park Raptor Survey.

Since 2017, more than 200 potential raptor nests have been found in and around Griffith Park. Along with volunteers, we increased the number of monitored nests from 54 in 2018 to 60 during the 2019 season. Of the 60 active nests, approximately 87% (or 51 nests) were successful and fledged young.

One of the survey's goals is to understand how local wildlife use resources in Griffith Park and the nearby area. Griffith Park sits at the eastern-most edge of the Santa Monica Mountain range and is surrounded by three major freeways and dense urban development. Still, the Park boasts a large and vibrant wildlife population that includes both diurnal and nocturnal birds of prey.

The Park has many large, planted and native trees in the developed areas including the golf courses, the L.A. Zoo, and Greek Theatre. Data collected on tree species found that the large, often non-native, trees (various pine and eucalyptus species) planted years ago provide important nesting habitat for our local raptor species. Often, they are the largest and most stable trees in the area, making them ideal locations for species such as the red-tailed hawk. As in prior years, just a single raptor nest in the entire study was located in a native oak tree, confirming our previous suspicion that this tree species is now simply little-used by our local urban-dwelling raptors. However, both developed and non-developed portions of Griffith Park provide important foraging habitat for many raptor species in and around the Park boundaries.

Our 2019 Raptor Survey allowed us to investigate patterns of nest re-use for each species. We calculated a 47% re-usage rate across all species in 2019 (26 of 55 of the 2018 nests were re-used in 2019), and found that red-tailed hawks maintain a higher-than-average reusage rate (59%). The lowest fidelity of the four species was found in Cooper's hawks (25% re-usage rate). While the sample sizes were small, 3 of the 4 great horned owl nests found in 2018 were active in 2019 (75%), and just 2 of the 6 red-shouldered hawk nests from

2018 were active in 2019 (33%).

The finding that site fidelity varied across species, with red-tailed hawks showing a much higher-than-average rate of re-use, was not surprising. This is the largest species, and it constructs the largest, most elaborate nest, and is well known for re-using their nests.

The lower rates of re-use found in the other species, in particular the Cooper's hawks, may either be an adaptation to varying conditions of "urban life", or it may indicate the opposite – a vulnerability to loss of nest sites. Given how common Cooper's hawks remain in the study area, we suspect it to be the former, that flexibility in nest site choice is one factor that enables this species to thrive.

The inclement weather we had this past season had an apparent effect on nesting raptors around Griffith Park, suggesting that heavy rains prolonged the nesting season. The year of the project



Photo: Gerry Hans

launch (2017) followed an exceptional four-year drought in the Los Angeles area; however, the 2018 – 2019 rainy season saw a total of 18.82 inches in the downtown Los Angeles area, which is 4.09 inches (>20%) above the seasonal average for the area. In turn, the raptors delayed their nesting by a few weeks to a month. In the survey area, red-tailed hawks usually start incubating around mid-February but during the 2019 season they did not begin incubating until the first or second week of March.

An incredible amount of effort went into the survey, for which great strides have been made in utilizing the data collected to protect our local raptor species. Survey volunteers conducted much of the fieldwork, and provided invaluable ecological information that would have been otherwise difficult to obtain.

The vision and support of Friends of Griffith Park continues to propel this study forward into great, new directions. We look forward to having many more volunteers joining us for the 2020 season! ♡

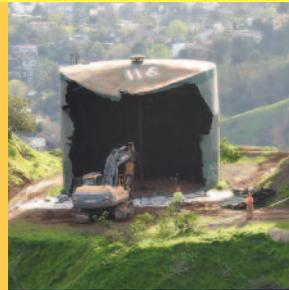
We'll be posting information about the 2020 Raptor Study Training in the next few months, so please check back on our website and follow us on Facebook and Instagram for up-to-the minute details.

# FoGP Celebrates a Decade of Service, Advocacy and Action

-Brenda Rees



Save the Heritage Sycamore photo: Martha Benedict



It's hard to believe it's only ten years that Friends of Griffith Park has been working to preserve and protect the history and wilderness of L.A.'s urban oasis, Griffith Park.

We are grateful for the many opportunities to be of service and to help spread the message of how Griffith Park is unique not just to Los Angeles, but across the United States, if not the world. We are proud to carry on the wishes of Colonel Griffith J. Griffith who wanted Griffith Park to be forever free and open to all.

*Here are some highlights of our efforts over the past decade:*

## FERN DELL PRESERVATION

To preserve the rich history of this Griffith Park area, through a successful funding campaign and generous matching grants, FoGP invested a quarter of a million dollars to study the restoration of this site and today continues restoration and revitalization efforts. This year, repair of the pedestrian bridge will finally be completed. FoGP provided the funds for a structural engineer, preservation architect and building permits so the repaired bridge will harken back to the area's 1920s-era roots. Future plans include restoration of the creek's recirculating water system.

## STOPPING BILLBOARDS IN CITY PARKS

Firm voices from FoGP and a terrific program on KCET halted a 2011 plan that would have put advertising in city parks. Friends continues to strongly advocate for maintaining the tranquility of city parks for all park users.

## SPONSORING SCIENCE STUDIES

In order to better understand the realities facing Griffith Park's flora and fauna, FoGP has sponsored a wide-range of scientific studies that provide valuable field research, data and recommendations.

As a part of our Griffith Park Connectivity Study, a USGS camera captured the first photos of mountain lion P-22 entering the Park. Some extensive studies commissioned by FoGP include: a Rare Plant Survey, Western Gray Squirrel Genetics Study, as well as the current Raptor Survey that kicked off in 2017 and continues in 2020, among others. (*A complete list of FoGP studies can be found on our website.*)

## SAVING CRYSTAL SPRINGS TREES

A proposal to reconfigure Crystal Springs with additional baseball fields would have meant the removal of numerous protected oaks

and a heritage sycamore. FoGP successfully advocated on behalf of the now-saved trees and picnickers who enjoy this Park location.

### **CREATING WAYFINDING SIGNS**

FoGP worked with LA Recreation and Parks Department to design and locate much-needed wayfinding signs throughout the 4,310 acres to safely guide hikers and visitors through this vast Parkland.

### **REMOVAL OF WATER TANKS**

Numerous heavily-vandalized abandoned water tanks in the Park interior presented dangers to hikers over the years and worse, were an eyesore on the natural landscape. FoGP provided funds to remove the first tank which encouraged RAP to dismantle other nonfunctioning tanks in the Park.

### **PLANTING NATIVE TREES AND PLANTS**

Thanks to an ever-increasing number of volunteers, FoGP has hosted numerous planting (*see pages 8-9*) as well as follow-up watering and mulching events. To handle the overwhelming response by individuals and groups, FoGP hired a part-time volunteer coordinator, Ross Arnold, who works closely with FoGP Boardmember Laura Howe to insure that trees, plants and volunteers come together to keep the Park green and thriving.

Griffith J. Griffith Charitable Trust (Fern Dell Restoration), Oaks Homeowners Association (Fern Dell Restoration), National Park Service (LA River camera trapping survey and enhancing the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail), National Wildlife Federation (P-22 Day), Grown in LA (native plantings), Sierra Club (ICO hikes), with more partnerships on the horizon.

### **ADVOCATING FOR MORE PARK RANGERS**

When city budget cuts reduced the number of Park Rangers throughout the city, FoGP successfully advocated for funding more Rangers to protect the Griffith Park and its many users.

### **ESTABLISHING THE JUAN BAUTISTA DE ANZA TRAIL INCLUDING INFORMATION / HISTORICAL SIGNAGE**

To commemorate the historic 1775-76 expedition that trekked from Sonora, Mexico to San Francisco – and included a stopover in current day Griffith Park – Friends of Griffith Park applied for and received grants. FoGP then worked with the National Park Service and RAP to create signage and partnered with Grown in LA to create a native plant garden so Park visitors could understand the historic significance of this area along their journey.



### **INTRODUCING CHILDREN TO NATURE THROUGH INSPIRING CONNECTIONS OUTDOORS (ICO) HIKES**

Alongside our Sierra Club partner, FoGP has provided 3,500+ students from Title 1 Schools in low income areas an outdoor experience in Griffith Park on more than 100 hikes since 2011. FoGP works with Sierra Club to pay for the buses so these hikes are free. Under the leadership of veteran hiker and FoGP Boardmember Felix Martinez, ICO hikes are often a child's first encounter in a wilderness area.

### **RAISING AWARENESS OF RODENTICIDES**

FoGP joined forces with other statewide nature-advocacy groups in support of banning the most dangerous of rodenticides which adversely affect urban wildlife, often resulting in the death of owls, hawks, coyotes, bobcats and mountain lions. California bills have been unsuccessful in the past, but the recent proposal, AB1788, has passed the Assembly and cleared nearly all committees and, with continued support from the public, may be voted into law in 2020. (*More on environmental legislation on page 8 and our website.*)

### **FORGING PARTNERSHIPS**

FoGP has worked in tandem with many organizations through the years on one-off and long-term projects. To name a few: The

### **EDUCATING PUBLIC WITH LECTURES, WALKS, AND WORKSHOPS**

In past years, FoGP has presented opportunities to the public to learn more about local animals and plants of Griffith Park as well as historical events. Friends of Griffith Park continues to offer several lectures during the year at the Los Feliz Library plus a number of annual hikes (Bird LA Day, Christmas Bird Count, Mushroom Walk, etc.) and seasonal workshops (coyote abatement, Raptor Study and more.) ♣

**As we move quickly toward our second decade of service within this urban wilderness, we must thank our volunteers and all Friends of Griffith Park members. Your participation helps us protect and preserve this Park.**

**Not yet a member of FoGP?  
We invite you to join us!**

**Go to [friendsofgriffithpark.org](http://friendsofgriffithpark.org) and click to join. Your financial support helps Griffith Park survive and thrive as an urban wilderness for decades to come.**





ANZA NATIVE GARDEN PLANTING



PREP WORK FOR UNDERSTORY PLANTING, FERN DELL



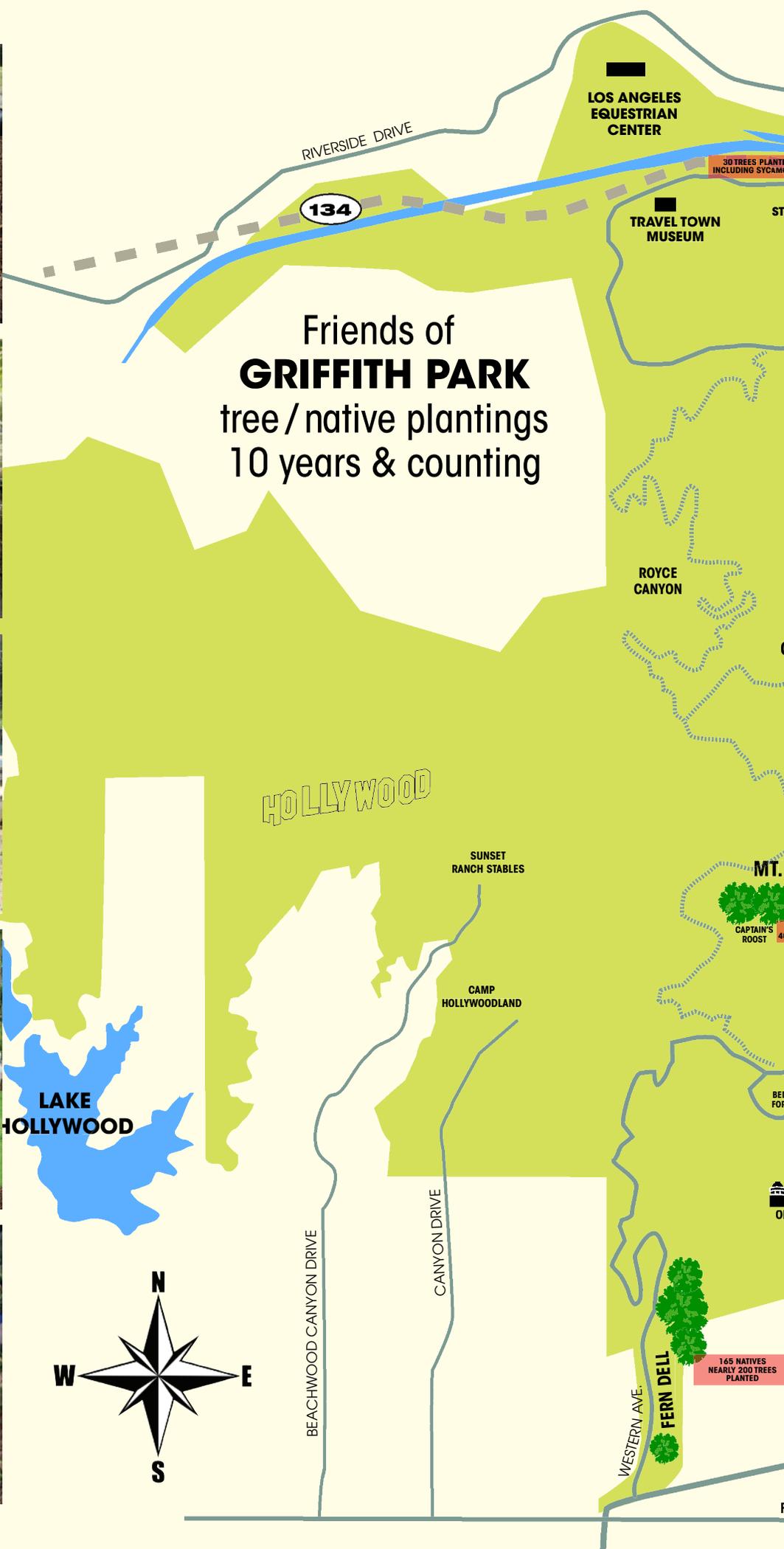
COMMONWEALTH NURSERY NATIVE PREP



MULCHING NEW TREES AT PARK CENTER



CAPTAIN'S ROOST UNDERSTORY PLANTING



Friends of  
**GRIFFITH PARK**  
tree / native plantings  
10 years & counting



PLANTING TOYONS ALONG MT. HOLLYWOOD TRAIL



PECAN GROVE PLANTING



NATIVE PLANTING IN FERN CANYON



COMMONWEALTH NURSERY REPOTTING



CAPTAIN'S ROOST TREE PLANTING

# Beachwood Gate Legal Battle Ends *~Gerry Hans*

Friends of Griffith Park's legal efforts challenging the City of Los Angeles' 2017 decision to close the Beachwood Gate to the Hollyridge Trail in Griffith Park have come to an end. The City was able to avoid the substance of the lawsuit, particularly the "gift of public funds," on technicalities. On appeal, the City also shifted gears and deceitfully proclaimed the gate "open" even though it is clearly closed to public access. In reality, it's only open for emergency egress.



head, and ordered the City to steer pedestrians differently so they would not interfere with the stable's business. Rather than finding an alternative that would accommodate pedestrians as the court mandated, the City decided to close public access at Beachwood Canyon completely. There were other choices for pedestrian access; those possibilities still exist today.

According to the original court's findings, Sunset Ranch does not have an exclusive right to the access road that leads to the trail-

FoGP continues to advocate for free public access at Beachwood and elsewhere. We are also committed to working with LA City powers to implement measures to mitigate impacts of an increasing number of Griffith Park visitors, many of whom are merely there for a close-up glimpse and photo of the Hollywood Sign. ♻️

# Come for the Views

Stay for the Vistas...

Join Friends of Griffith Park Today and Help Griffith Park Thrive...





Photo: NPS P-44

# Helping Wildlife Thrive in California ~Kathryn Louyse

A flurry of California environmental legislation introduced this year will push the state to recognize and address concerns raised by communities and activists alike. While there were some “wins” there have also been some stumbles along the path.

The consequences of unregulated rodenticides have long impacted our state. While we know that predator species like bobcats, coyotes, mountain lions and raptor species like red tailed hawks and owls are

**WHILE AB 1788 LEGISLATION IS CURRENTLY ON HOLD, THERE HAVE BEEN SOME POSITIVES COMING OUT OF CA LATELY**

affected, we’ve ignored the problem of unregulated poisons because we fail to see the final results. An example of a species in serious jeopardy is the San Joaquin kit fox (*Vulpus macrotis mutica*). Weighing in between five and six pounds, this is the smallest fox in North America. Although it received state protections in 1971 due to increased agricultural expansion, rodenticides used by the agriculture industry

continue to exact their toll and now this small fox teeters on the verge of extinction.

**AB 1788** would ban specific rodenticides (rat poisons) in most applications but this legislation became a two-year bill after being pulled from the Senate Appropriations Committee by the bill’s author, Richard Bloom. The bill, also supported by California Assemblywoman Laura Friedman, has been given another opportunity at becoming law in California. In the meantime, activists are petitioning Gov. Newsom to impose a moratorium on rodenticides while details of **AB 1788** are being worked out in the legislature. If you’re interested in signing one of these online petitions or getting more information, go to [friendsofgriffithpark.org](http://friendsofgriffithpark.org).

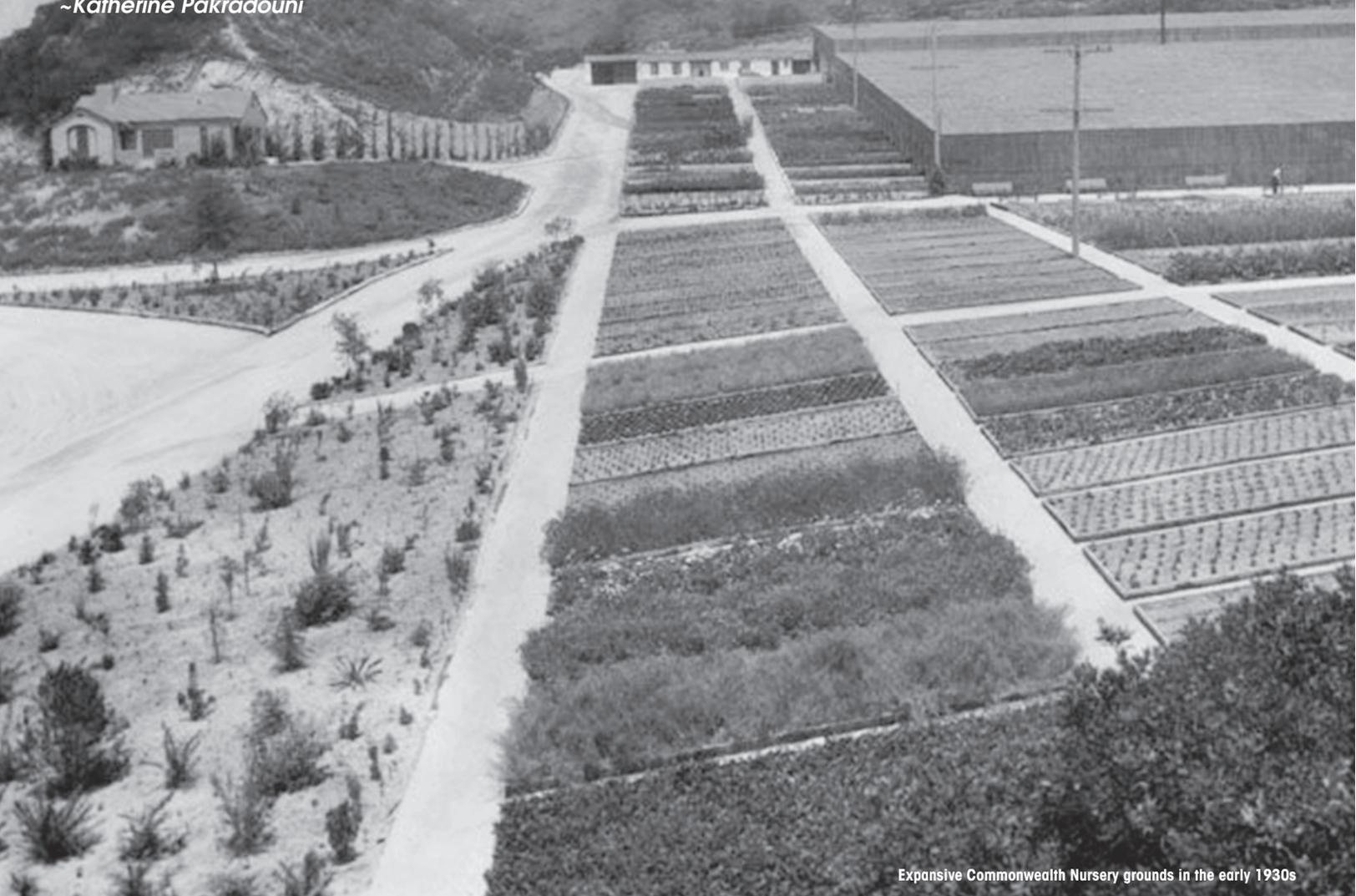
**AB 273** recently passed and signed into law by Gov. Newsom makes California the first state in the nation to outlaw fur trapping. The fur industry had been dwindling in this state for many years, and in 2017 a mere 133 trapping licenses and four dealer licenses were issued. When San Diego Assemblymember Lorena Gonzalez originally proposed the legislation, she argued fur trapping is a cruel industry that decimates vulnerable wildlife. In the end, buttressed by environmentalists, Gonzalez’ bill prevailed. As Brendan Cummings from the Center for Biological Diversity commented, “the overwhelming majority of Californians value our wildlife alive...” Along with this act, **AB 44** the Fur Products Prohibition Act would ban the sale of fur products in California, with limited exceptions; for example, used furs or fur products used for specified purposes.

California loves its monarch butterflies. Unfortunately these brightly-colored pollinators are rapidly diminishing across the board for a variety of reasons. **AB 2421** would establish a rescue program designed to address and implement recovery efforts for these and other pollinator species.

While there are many other environmental legislative bills under consideration in California, one that will impact future generations enormously is **AB 792** introduced by San Francisco’s Phil Ting. This would set a high bar for the plastics industry, and is aimed at reducing the effects plastics are having on the environment. Two earlier bills were unable to garner sufficient support among lawmakers but if **AB 792** clears hurdles and finally arrives on the governor’s desk, it will have a huge impact the industry, requiring plastic beverage containers to utilize 10% recycled plastic by 2021, 25% by 2025 and 50% by 2030. As Assemblywoman Jacqui Irwin says “This is the most aggressive recycled-content mandate not only in the United States, but in the world.” ♻️

# The History of Commonwealth Nursery

~Katherine Pakradouni



Expansive Commonwealth Nursery grounds in the early 1930s

Griffith Park is steeped in history. Whether one is strolling around Fern Dell, exploring the ruins of the Old Zoo, or riding the carousel, a visitor to the Park is immersed in an environment that harkens to the past while it simultaneously enriches the experience of the present.

There is, however, one slice of Griffith Park's history that is largely unknown to the public, the Commonwealth Nursery. Situated in a canyon at the northernmost border of Commonwealth Avenue, the remnants of Commonwealth Nursery endure, revealing just a glimpse of a majestic nursery that was, according to accounts in *The Los Angeles Times*, "made larger than any municipal undertaking of its kind in the country."

The nursery was officially established on May 26, 1928, around the same time that Roosevelt Golf Course was created, and approximately two years before the official opening of the Greek Theatre. The nursery operated on nearly 12 acres of land and produced 500,000 plants within its first year. Its purpose was clear: to locally produce all the trees, shrubs, and flowers for city parks and public buildings and according to *The Times*, makes "Griffith Park one of the largest gardens of native flowers and shrubs in the world."

These were admirable goals, and the nursery was well-equipped to achieve them. Fully staffed from the onset with 19 men from the Los Angeles Parks Department as it was known then, 26 W.P.A. men and

women workers, and with chief propagator Joseph Kladler at the helm, the nursery expanded its capacity every year and produced between one and two million plants annually during its heyday.

Fortunately, hundreds of thousands of these plants were our very own native plants of Griffith Park, such as rhus, ceanothus in variety, fremontias, manzanita, barberries, mimulus, prunus, rhamnus and others. In one planting bed alone, 75,000 coast live oaks were growing from locally collected acorns, a sight which astonished and amazed the 500 park employees who attended the nursery's official grand opening in 1928.

The nursery featured acres of growing beds,

a one-acre lath house, a general office, a caretaker's cottage, a research library, storage rooms for bulbs and tubers, bins for materials, a manufacturing area for pots, and two large greenhouses. The design of the greenhouses was ahead of its time, as it captured rainwater from the roof and stored it in a great underground tank for use six months out of the year rather than relying on municipal water.

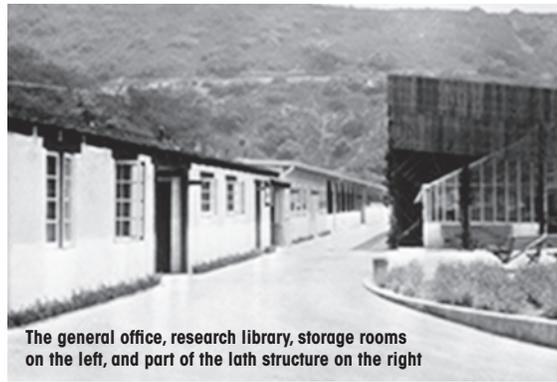
While contemporary concerns have made rainwater harvesting and water conservation a large priority in Los Angeles, it is now evident that Commonwealth Nursery operated with a sustainability ethic long before the more recent green movement. Unfortunately, water conservation was not always a priority outside the nursery, as simultaneous plans were being made to establish an extensive network of irrigation throughout the entire Park that would give the recently planted native plants the irrigation and care that is commonly given to a modern lawn, artificially increasing the rainfall of the Park by 400%. Luckily, this costly and unsustainable endeavor was never fully realized, while plant propagation at the nursery continued to flourish.

In addition to plant production, the nursery also supported a robust horticulture education program whereby interested individuals could apprentice at the nursery to learn from experts and work their way up into the Park department. During its first official year of operation, there were 12 apprentices participating in the program.

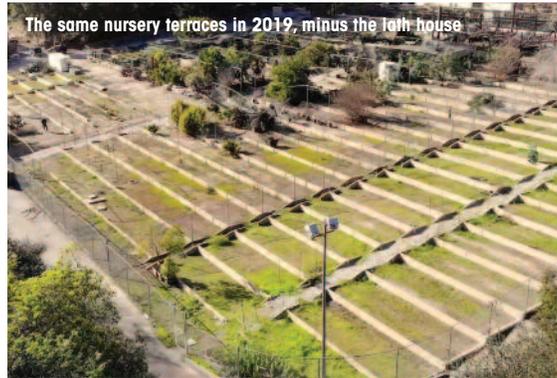
As the years went by, the nursery continued to offer horticulture education and operated as a training ground for Recreation and Parks grounds maintenance staff, as well as providing a site for schoolchildren to learn about horticulture and native flora.

Yet despite the public benefit that the Commonwealth Nursery provided to Griffith Park and Los Angeles as a whole, the entire horticulture program ended in the 1970s after the passage of Proposition 13. Budget cuts made supporting the facility and its staff untenable and as a result, the nursery fell into great disrepair.

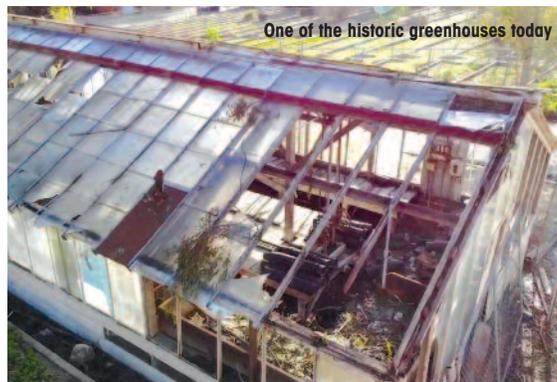
Today, walking around the site of old Commonwealth Nursery, one sees dilapidated remnants of the buildings



The general office, research library, storage rooms on the left, and part of the lath structure on the right



The same nursery terraces in 2019, minus the lath house



One of the historic greenhouses today



A typical work day at the nursery today, includes transplanting seedlings



Overview of the terraces and one-acre lath house

and once striking structures. Growing grounds have made way for asphalt parking lots and holding yards for park maintenance vehicles, shuttle buses, dumpsters, and equipment. Two greenhouses are slowly collapsing with massive downed eucalyptus limbs caving in its roofs. The lath house is no longer visible, and a system of tattered shade-structures remains in its place. The nursery office, research library, storage rooms and materials bins have been repurposed as offices and storage facilities.

The millions of plants that once lined the ground on the entire 12 acres are mostly gone, leaving behind tangles of weeds, occasional pot-bound palm trees, escaped bamboo thickets, and overgrown bougainvillea.

Yet in the face of all this, one can still sense the latent vibrancy of the people and plants that once animated the site during the glory days of the nursery. The excitement of designing and innovating, the fervor of transplanting and potting, the joy of teaching and learning, and the quiet energy of millions of plants growing, are echoed with every step of the site. Fortunately, as a result of the infusion of Prop K funds – thanks to the joint venture of the Department of Recreation and Parks and the LA Parks Foundation – a portion of the nursery will soon be renovated, and the enchantment of Commonwealth Nursery will once again become a reality for an entire new generation of Angelenos.

Currently, the nonprofit Grown in LA has established an initial proof-of-concept native plant nursery on the site, restoring the original goal of the nursery to grow the plants that benefit our parks, create habitat for our local wildlife, and provide an opportunity for horticulture and ecology education. Many plants grown at the nursery have already been earmarked for various habitat enhancement projects within Griffith Park, such as the Bird Sanctuary and Anza Native Garden restorations spearheaded by Friends of Griffith Park.

If you'd like to support the reinvigoration of plant propagation at Commonwealth Nursery, please contact [Katherine.pakradouni@growninla.org](mailto:Katherine.pakradouni@growninla.org).

Let's see what we can grow together! ♣

# Thank you, Albert Torres

~Miguel Ordeñana

I am a wildlife biologist who conducts research in Griffith Park and even though I grew up just outside Griffith Park, I didn't have a connection with local wildlife. I had an interest in wildlife conservation but nearly didn't find my way into my career due to a lack of nature education and role models in the field that looked like me (Latinos) in the environmental field.

Eventually I learned about local wildlife in grad school. Afterward, I moved back to LA on a mission – to do research in LA's favorite urban park because Griffith Park had been understudied for so long, and it was my own personal version of a Yosemite. However, I didn't know where to begin.

Friends of Griffith Park connected me with Ranger Albert Torres who opened my eyes to how much Griffith Park and other city parks act as an oasis for wildlife in Los Angeles. I shared my goals and background with him and he immediately jumped at the opportunity to support me. He helped my team get permits and went out of his way to show me around the park and connect me with colleagues who might also help me. He was eager to not only share his passion for wildlife but his inspiring personal background. As a minority in the field this seemingly simple gesture, watching him in his role, and his continued friendship meant the world to me.



Albert Torres is a perfect example of why representation matters. It was inspiring to see another person of color care so much about not only wildlife but also about nature education going toward the next generation. He reaffirmed the importance of not only learning about urban wildlife but sharing that knowledge with the local community, even if that is not your main job. He encouraged me to push the boundaries of what a scientist does just like he pushed the boundaries of what a Park Ranger does.

I now work at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County as a Community Science Manager and help connect more local residents with nature. I take a cue from Ranger Torres who always went out of his way to support any wildlife education programs we host in the park – an effort to make Griffith Park and local nature education more accessible to more diverse communities.

Torres' forward-thinking perspective was infectious and I, Griffith Park, urban wildlife, and Angelenos are in a much better place because of him.

I hope his legacy will continue in the Recreation and Parks Department through staff members going beyond the call of duty, especially where it comes to protecting the homeless, recreationists, prioritizing habitat preservation, and wildlife conservation so our parks are healthier and more accessible many years from now.

May Senior Captain Albert Torres rest in peace.

Photo of FoGP boardmember Miguel Ordeñana and his daughter taken at P-22 Day

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Photo: Kathyn Louyse

## A Remembrance *~Laura Howe*

Remembering Ranger Albert Torres, I immediately think about his deep kindness and genuine concern for others. A role model for all Park Rangers and a stellar human being, Albert believed deeply in the welfare of wildlife in Griffith Park. As the volunteer coordinator for Friends of Griffith Park, I had the honor of having Albert guide me through the ins and outs of getting things done in the Park; he showed me how critical Park Rangers are to both the public and wildlife. On occasion, he invited me to tag along on his patrols and I watched how thoughtfully he treated everyone he came in contact with.

Albert always had time for people and their concerns; and he would take the time to consider their particular issues and with grace and diplomacy would propose suggestions to solve problems. Albert epitomized the ultimate park advocate, inspiring young people from all over LA to become rangers or civil servants and never seemed to doubt that good things were possible, regardless of the issue.

Albert had a kind, gentlemanly way of speaking, yet commanded respect. His knowledge about Griffith Park and Los Angeles was extensive. And when he began riding with the horse patrols you could tell he really had a love for riding. In recent years he was assigned to Hansen Dam so we in the Park were deprived of seeing him every day, but his loss leaves a very big hole in our hearts. When I think of him now, it is not with sadness but with great joy – and how that inspires me to follow in his kindness for people, our wild spaces and wildlife.



Sharing the trail  
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# P-22 Day 2019



Photo: Marian Dodge

**It's More Than a Cougar Celebration** – The fourth annual P-22 Day in Griffith Park, held on October 19th, was a chance for all Angelenos to celebrate local wildlife including P-22, our famous mountain lion resident. While this big guy was probably watching from afar (or more than likely, asleep!), the day was the culmination of Urban Wildlife Week and featured nature lovers from across Southern California, fun activities for kids and musical performances. Families, politicians and activists mingled, shared stories and learned about challenges facing urban critters. Hats off to Beth Pratt and her team from the National Wildlife Federation for organizing the festivities – including the hike that retraces P-22's amazing journey across the Santa Monica Mountains into Griffith Park. Friends of Griffith Park is always happy to be a part of this fast-growing annual tradition!