

SPRING/SUMMER 2025

Descanso

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Our Mission
At Descanso Gardens,
we connect people with
nature and one another.

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A place for rejuvenation



Our hearts are broken for those affected by the devastating fires in Southern California. What our community members have experienced is simply unimaginable. Descanso is here to serve the community and do whatever it takes to support the people affected. Our mission is to connect people with nature and one another—now is the time for one another. We are here when you need a moment to rejuvenate and refresh. This magazine is about habitats and the array of creatures and plants that call Descanso home. I invite you to explore and find comfort in the garden

Stewards of the garden

The animals that call Descanso home are not only fascinating but essential to the garden. Even as we humans work to keep the garden healthy and vibrant, our animal friends are already doing the work. They naturally help the garden in many ways, from pollination to soil improvement to pest control and fertilization. The plants support these animals in their own way—by providing shelter, food, and much more. In these pages, the horticulture team will tell you about the wonderful habitat here in the garden and all the animals that depend on it.

Wander and wonder

This spring and summer, whether you come to Descanso to find a shady spot or to enjoy a program, stop and look around. You will surely see many of the animals that call the gardens home.

See you in the garden.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juls".

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An eastern tiger swallowtail butterfly lands on Lantana, a nectar source for butterflies and other pollinators, and it can also be a host plant for caterpillars.



A home to many, exploring the habitat of Descanso

*by David Bare
Director of Horticulture and
Garden Operations*

Scrub jays, those noisy, ubiquitous, bright-blue citizens of the oak forest, are credited with caching up to 5,000 acorns every autumn. Most are eaten later, but a portion germinate and eventually become established trees. In this way, jays can be looked at as a kind of gardener, gradually turning habitat to their favor. Our ability to change things rapidly and at our whim to whatever we want omits the deliberate and gradual processes that define natural systems. But in many ways scrub jays and human gardeners are working toward the same thing, creating an environment that supports the wellbeing of all of its inhabitants.

We all love this place and want it to be one of the many windows onto our precious natural world.

In a little over 100 acres at Descanso, the line between cultivated and natural weaves in and out amongst a series of defined spaces. In the Camellia Forest, the cultivated landscape is tucked under the oak skirts of the natural. In the native garden, the chaparral blends into an orchestrated aquatic landscape. In the Promenade, wholesale planting appears and disappears four times a year.

We are a garden, a shifting cultivated landscape, pruned, weeded, planted, and changed all the time. A garden is not a natural landscape, but we feel it is a wonderful path toward fulfilling our mission of uniting people with nature and one another. We all love this place and want it to be one of the many windows onto our precious natural world.

We try hard to be respectful of our natural inhabitants as we present a cultured landscape that we strive to keep beautiful, interesting, and engaging on the outskirts of a densely populated city. It is a challenge and a pleasure.

At Descanso Gardens, we want to focus on habitats and their inhabitants and our efforts to improve them.



Western fence lizard

Cultivated and wild: a history of choices

*by Autumn Ayers
Garden Records and
Collections Manager*

“At Descanso Gardens we connect people with nature and one another.” Our mission statement highlights one of the things visitors value most about Descanso: the experience of “nature” in a city with limited public green space.

Living in concert

The concept of nature is often juxtaposed against human creation, but that can be a bit of a misconception. Humans have always lived in concert with nature, cultivating and shaping the ecosystems we inhabit, for better or for worse. When European settlers landed in America, what they saw as untouched natural forests were actually the well-tended food forests of America’s indigenous peoples. Los Angeles County, which includes the land that

Descanso Gardens sits on today, was and still is inhabited and cared for by the Tongva, Tataviam, Serrano, Kizh, and Chumash Peoples. Today, we at Descanso Gardens are charged with stewarding the natural lands and plants that grow here, along with a cultivated garden.

An idea is planted

In early 1959, a group of men formed the Descanso Gardens California Native Plant Committee to advise and guide the development of a native plant garden at Descanso Gardens.

Chaired by a Flintridge local, Conrad Fanton, the committee organized and oversaw the installation of thousands of plants in the new, 6-acre California Native Plants Garden. Theodore Payne donated most of the plants from his nursery, and his former mentee, Authur Barton, contributed to the design. Percy Everett, superintendent of Rancho Santa

Ana Botanic Gardens (known today as California Botanic Garden), arranged to donate many more plants from his organization, supplemented with additional plants from Descanso Gardens’ site and nursery. Invited to the committee after work was already underway, Sim E. Jarvi contributed his experience as superintendent of the Angeles National Forest to advise on the care and maintenance of the new area.

Many ecosystems

Descanso’s land naturally represents several ecosystems at once, blending a coastal sage scrub ecosystem, a chaparral ecosystem, and an oak woodland ecosystem across 160 acres. The California Native Plants Committee debated the merits of solely using locally native plants but ultimately decided that the California Garden would showcase plants that celebrate the diversity of ecosystems across the state.

Although some Northern Californian plants like Douglas iris still thrive in our collection, many others have succumbed to stresses related to climate change. Our current curatorial goals have a stronger focus on

Humans have always lived in concert with nature, cultivating and shaping the ecosystems we inhabit, for better or for worse.

Visitors to the garden can experience “nature” in a city with limited public green space.



locally native plants and plants from hotter and drier regions that will be better able to handle current and future weather conditions. This curatorial focus epitomizes a strong characteristic of Descanso, the blending of cultivated and wild. Under the shade of wild, 140-year-old oaks grow thousands of cultivated camellia plants, and next to 5 acres of heavily cultivated roses and perennials, local chaparral plants roam free in the 7-acre Oak Woodland. Both coexist here at Descanso and require intensive care from our staff and volunteers.

Cultivation

Throughout our history, humans have carefully grown and bred plants to suit our purposes. Sometimes, that means breeding a crop plant that is larger, tastier, and easier to harvest, and sometimes, it means making a flower more beautiful, fragrant, or resistant to disease or climate conditions. This process of growing plants

for human purposes is called cultivation and is analogous to the domestication of animals. Sometimes, plants escape cultivation and enter ecosystems where they don't belong, competing with native plants for resources and often becoming invasive. To keep wild areas populated with the plants that natively belong there, human effort is needed to remove the plants that might take over.

Stewarding the land

Stewarding and protecting nature is the impetus behind so many human movements, like the National Parks system and The Nature Conservancy, as we recognize the need for action to preserve what we have left. But our species' history of cultivation has also enabled us to thrive and accomplish amazing things. Descanso Gardens stands as an homage to the natural environment and human ingenuity.

Just as many varied plants call Descanso home, so do

different kinds of animals. Locally native animals like ground squirrels and coyotes wander the grounds and use natural and human-added resources, like our streams and lakes. The shady canopy, plentiful vegetation, and presence of water have also enticed many other domesticated species into the gardens, like ducks and honeybees. Like plants, an animal out of its home ecosystem living free in the world is not considered to be “wild” or natural. Instead, released or escaped domesticated species are called “feral.” This means that honeybee populations found living in the garden or domestic ducks floating in the ponds are actually more properly referred to as feral animals, not wild. Being a botanic garden in a city setting means that Descanso Gardens is a refuge for all kinds of life, and staff work hard to balance the cultivated and wild to nurture an environment that many can call home. 🌿

Raptor rapture

by David Bare
*Director of Horticulture and
Garden Operations*

On very early autumn mornings at Descanso, you can hear great horned owls calling back and forth through the forest. Great horned owls have nested here now for several years running. Their nests are often discovered by the public and watched over by multiple guests. We usually manage to keep their location an in-house secret to keep down the gawking and secure the nests.

Owls are opportunists when it comes to nests, often occupying an old crow or squirrel's nest. They have a long incubation and fledging period. The eggs take more than a month to hatch and the young can fly at about ten weeks. The parents watch over them for several months. The female is in the nest, and the male perched nearby.

We've had a pair in the same general vicinity (not telling) for three years running. During storms, I watched trees come down in their nesting vicinity, and tree crews come in to clear them, and the owls persisted in sticking with the nest.

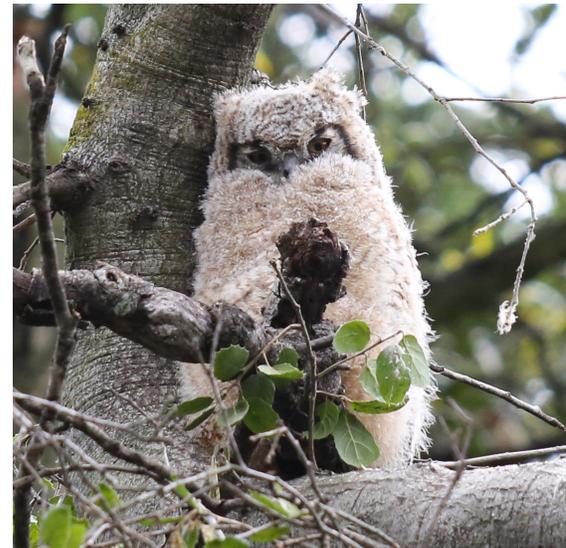
After weeks of watching, one day, a pair of fluffy heads appear

over the mess of sticks and leaves, and seemingly baseball-size yellow eyes fix onto yours. They manage to be menacing and adorable at the same time. I am always fascinated by their strength and endurance, their ability to practically disappear through camouflage, and their beauty and mystery.

This spring, we had the pleasure of hosting a red-tailed hawk family. In one of our tallest trees, the pair fledged two young from a large stick nest they managed to keep barely visible. The hatching and fledging timeline is similar to the owls.

Unlike the secretive owls, there was no doubt that the red tails were in town. The screaming teens were often tailing their parents through the garden as they dangled another unfortunate squirrel from their talons. Flower beds that were previously destroyed by squirrels were suddenly less appealing.

It is impossible to know if the raptors we encounter in the forest today are the parents or offspring of last spring's brood or if they are an entirely different population. But I like to think that out in the wild world, the creatures generated at Descanso are thriving. 🌿



Top and bottom: young and mature great horned owls. Middle: red-tailed hawk

Turtles: a native species story

by Frank Obregon
Nursery Horticulturist

The ponds, lakes, and waterways at Descanso shape and define the geography and ecology of the garden in a way that nothing else can. Beyond the waterfowl, tule reeds, and all-too-plentiful duckweed that call these waters home, the turtles are arguably the most recognizable of all the wildlife that the aquatic ecosystems support.

You are most likely to see red-eared sliders (*Trachemys scripta elegans*)—a pond turtle found seemingly in every body of water in Los Angeles County. Unfortunately, these turtles are not native. Southern California does have two native pond turtle species: the southwestern pond turtle (*Actinemys pallida*) and the desert mud turtle (*Kinosternon sonoriense*).

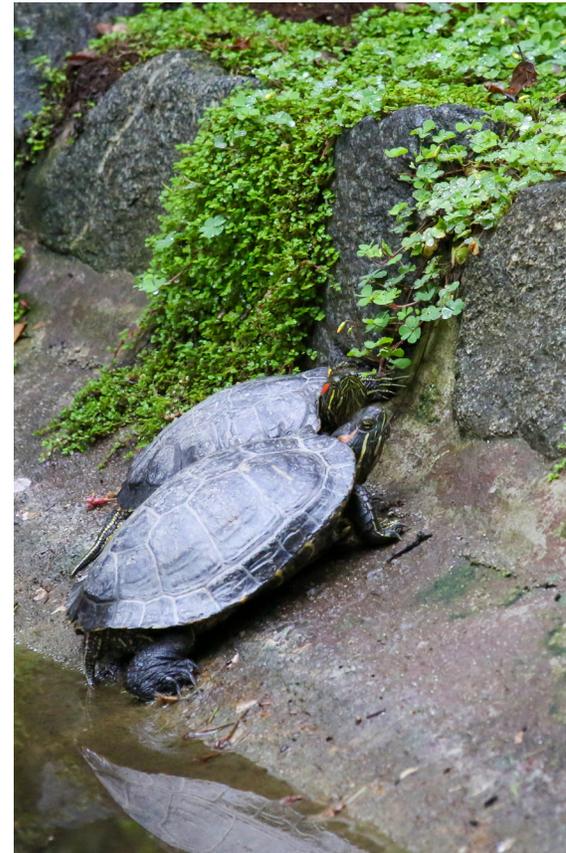
While the desert mud turtle is an extremely shy, nocturnal species, the southwestern pond turtle is a colorful, active, and gregarious species that is often found in groups of dozens to hundreds of individuals. The surprisingly long tail of the southwestern pond turtle only adds to the endearing traits.

These two species have called Southern California home for hundreds of thousands of years and have evolved in a delicate balance with the local ecosystems. They are capable of withstanding droughts, have a balanced diet of native fish and insects, and they serve as proverbial stewards of the ponds and rivers they inhabit by digging and helping to oxygenate the soils of their habitats. By comparison, the Johnny-come-lately red-eared sliders have been in California for roughly 100 years and are responsible for damage to native plant, fish, and insect populations. Worst of all, they have been known to transmit infections and diseases to native turtles.

Unfortunately, native pond turtles are facing devastating population declines. Between competition for resources from the invasive red-eared sliders, continued habitat loss, and the predation of pond turtles and their eggs by introduced pests (bullfrogs, rats, non-native birds, and fish), the native turtles have become so rare that most Southern Californians don't even know that our native turtles exist.

Sadly, the desert mud turtle in our state hasn't been seen

Red-eared sliders inhabit the waterways at Descanso.



in many years, and it has been declared “likely extinct” in California. The southwestern pond turtle still persists, but it has seen population declines in excess of 75% in the last 80 years.

Southern California's freshwater ecosystems are facing severe threats to their continued existence, and without direct support, these critical native ecosystems will continue to wane into extinction. As Descanso embarks on a mission to redesign our main lake to increase the lake's viability as a keystone part of our support of native plants and animals, we are optimistic that native pond turtles will find a welcoming and protected home on our grounds. 🌿

Stop, look, and listen for the birds

*by David Bare
Director of Horticulture and
Garden Operations*

Birds animate Descanso. With quiet, close observation, they begin to reveal themselves: white-crowned sparrows in the Rose Garden grass, goldfinches dangling from spent blossoms in the Promenade, acorn woodpeckers investigating the oaks. To really see the birds inhabiting a landscape, it takes a certain kind of attention, a quiet focus that nurtures a deeper understanding and appreciation of the natural world.

One of the wonderful things about birding is that at any given time, some curiosity you've never seen before can show up in your backyard. It is always wonderful when this happens but I gain a lot of pleasure seeing familiar birds working their chosen spots. Every habitat at Descanso supports particular species of birds, and it does not

take long to familiarize yourself with the most common of them. Each has its niche and specialty.

Among the oaks

The oak forest at Descanso has a healthy population of acorn woodpeckers. They are oil black with a red cap and a white patch on the face and have a distinct white ring around their eyes. As likely heard as seen, when two members of the family come together, they usually greet each other with a loud yammering. They have the unique habit of storing acorns in large caches created by individually carving holes to fit each acorn. When an acorn shrivels over time, they will reposition it in a more appropriately sized hole. It is an obsessive habit, and it seems they find every upright structure fitting as a storage cache, including the window frames at the back of the Boddy House.

Bushtits are tiny, inconspicuous balls of brown and

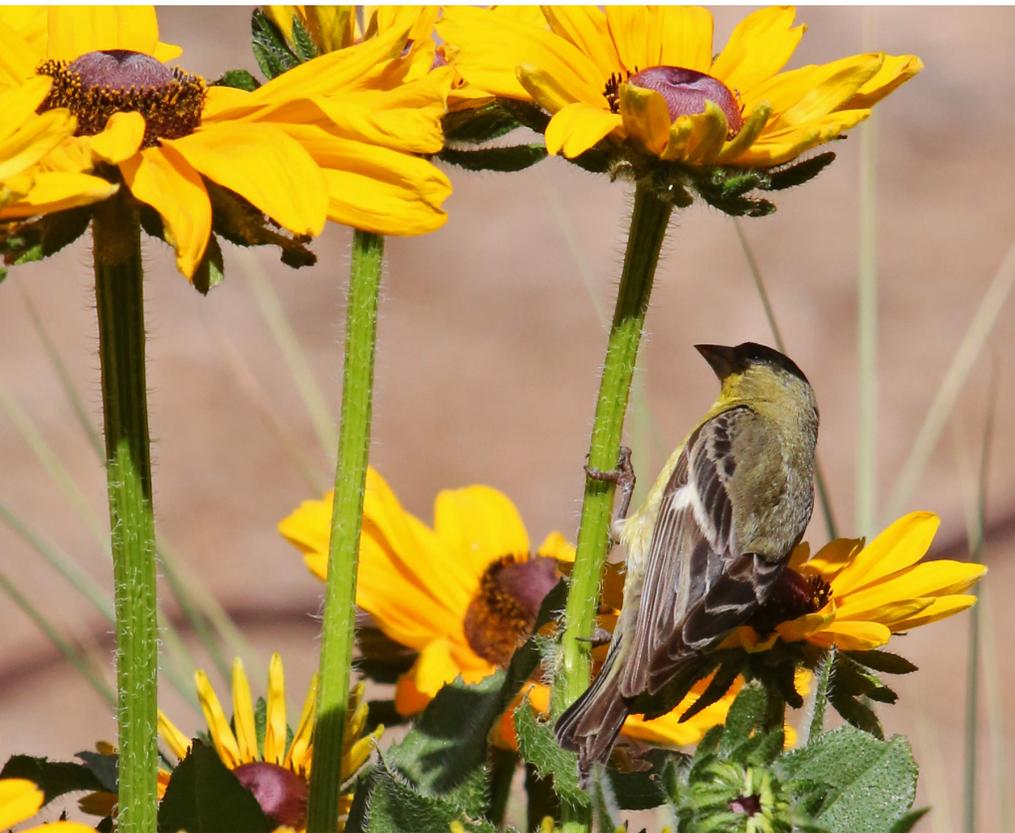
gray fluff. You can see them just about anywhere in the gardens, but often, they are working their way through the oaks, investigating every twig and leaf underside, gleaning minuscule bugs. They are always in flocks and in constant conversation through a series of high-pitched squeaks, like little vacuum cleaners scouring every surface.

Commuting between the oak forest and the chaparral, are brilliant blue scrub jays. These boisterous birds can often be seen flying from forest to open land, their long tails streaming behind and an acorn in their beak. They are considered the primary distributor of acorns and are responsible for establishing oak forests everywhere they go.

Lower to the ground

The state bird of California can be found hurrying on foot through the cavernous underbrush of the chaparral. A covey of California quail can grow large, into the dozens or more, and their three-note call usually announces them. Patience will usually yield a view as they dash through the open spots. Quail are one of our most beautifully marked birds

Simply by virtue of being able to fly, birds remind us that we are part of something greater than what is before us.



with a slate blue breast, black mask, and distinct comma-shaped “hood ornament”. Often a sentry can be seen in a conspicuous spot watching and warning and nervously piping back and forth to keep the group together.

Along the lake edge, you may encounter a squat bird who is as much neck and bill as body. About the size of a crow, the green heron happily feasts on mosquito fish, tadpoles, and crayfish, all of which are introduced species at the gardens. An amalgam of gray-

A lesser goldfinch on the Promenade and green heron in a Descanso waterway.

green, bronze, and cinnamon, it is entertaining to watch his slow-motion stalking erupt into an explosive stab.

We have mallards and Canada geese nest here annually, and they often parade their adorable fledglings for all to see. We are the unfortunate recipients of a few domestic ducks that have been brought in as well. The lake restoration is expected to attract a wide variety of waders and waterfowl and it is hoped some rarities like the least bittern.

Beauties among beauty

In the flower gardens, hummingbirds work the nectar-rich *Salvia* and *Grevilleas*, sparrows and juncos glean the



bugs and seeds from the soil, phoebes sweep in to capture flying insects, goldfinches extract seed from sunflower heads. Every one has its own niche and their own adaptation to fulfill it.

Space does not permit us to explore the numerous species on the Descanso Gardens checklist of birds. They are many and varied, migrant and resident, and all together have fascinating and complicated lives that are intimately tied to our landscape. Simply by virtue of being able to fly, birds remind us that we are part of something greater than what is before us, that every habitat borders another, and every piece completes the puzzle. 🌿

A walk downstream

by Andrew Fleming
Gardener

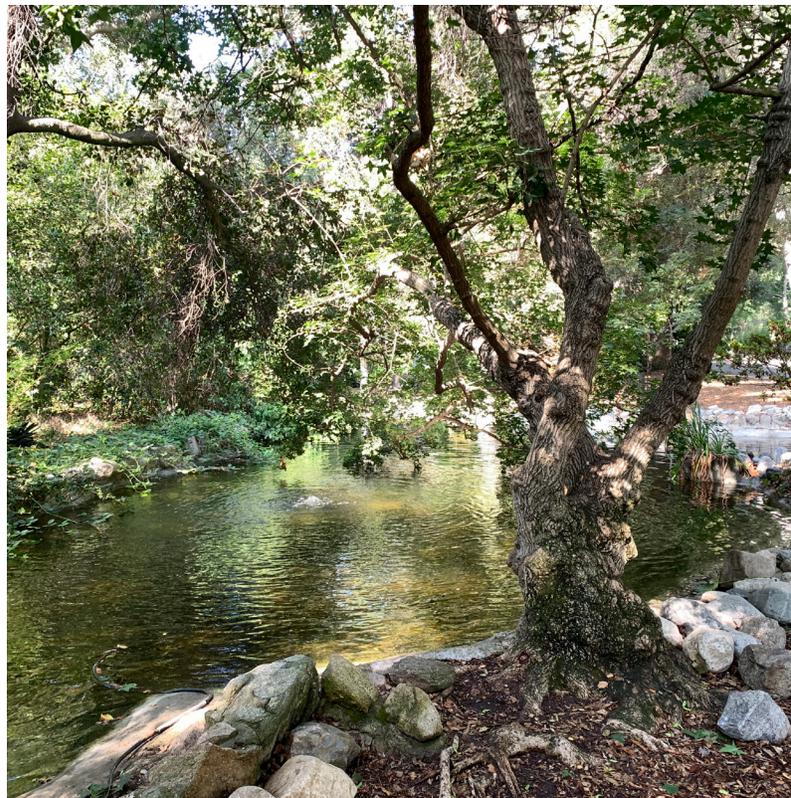
The aquatic features at Descanso mimic a natural watershed, flowing from our lakes downhill through the garden, bringing together species native and introduced. Let's take a walk downstream, shall we?

We begin at our driest aquatic habitat: the lakes. The waterfall that appears to flow from the lake actually cycles water within its own system, which you may have noticed given that the falls continue to roar despite the lack of a lake behind it. An artificial rocky gully runs next to our Australian *Grevilleas*, which attract native Allen's and Anna's hummingbirds, which in turn attract native and non-native photographers.

See the turtles

Next, let's visit Mulberry Pond, another self-contained system along the path of the watershed. Mulberry Pond is the premier location to see red-eared sliders, the most invasive turtle across the globe, and the most beloved creature by children visiting the garden. I hope you never have to tell a field trip full of students that you scared the turtles away while scooping out duckweed. Those moments haunt a gardener's dreams, and the only solution is a trip to Jones Coffee—an important if often overlooked part of the water cycle.

Just across the road from Mulberry Pond, in a thicket of dogwoods and camellias, the garden's main stream flows past the azaleas, with patches of native strawberries growing through concrete banks, before opening into the Promenade pond. Domesticated ducks bask in the shade, sitting



Right: Baby ducks often inhabit the ponds in the spring including the pond across from the Promenade, bottom. This page: Visitors enjoy koi in the Japanese Garden.



under donor benches at the feet of our visitors, together watching the bullfrog tadpoles multiply and contemplating our roles as late-arriving guests in this ecosystem.

See the crawdads

We continue downstream behind the Descanso Railroad to the Center Circle pond, a spot where we intentionally introduced a nonnative species during Carved: the monstrous gourd-skinned Sea Dragon. (Don't worry; only one lonely individual will be needed to ensure it does not establish a breeding population.) We drain the pond to release the dragon, which pushes the pond's mosquitofish and crawfish into a small pool. As the gardeners scoop these invasive creatures into buckets to take back upstream, the ducks and our resident green heron gather for the buffet.

The koi live here

The stream continues into the Japanese Garden. Dragonflies breed in the murky pools, and I remain grateful to their nymphs, whose presence once scuttled plans to spend the day scooping out the mud. Water flows from the breeding pools to the koi pond, where domesticated carp lounge in the cool water and wait for their delicious pellets to hit the surface. Must be nice.

The stream toddles under the bridge, between cherry trees, then into the edge of the Camellia forest, under the nesting great horned owls, finally ending its journey by traveling back in time through the Ancient Forest. There the water waits under a redwood canopy, at peace until our new pump sucks it in and sends it through 1,417 feet of pipe up 20 feet in elevation for Descanso's water cycle to begin again. 🌿

They live here, and we are just visitors

by Andrew Martin
Gardener

A British couple, tourists, were relaxing on the Adirondack chairs in the California Garden, enjoying the mountain scenery as I coiled a hose nearby. I heard rustling in the grass at the roadside, and two California quail peeked out, looked both ways, and crossed the road. Then, three more. I waved to the couple, and we watched silently as a covey of fifteen or twenty quail bobbed over the road and disappeared into the brush on the other side. “Our state bird,” I whispered, and they nodded, their eyes wide with amazement.

Visitors can experience close encounters with wildlife of many kinds. In the parking lot, flocks of exotic parakeets or red-crowned parrots fly overhead as they vocalize their raucous calls. Near the Boddy House, families of mule deer regularly traipse down the Boddy House hill for a browse at the tree shoots or a sip of water from sprinkler heads. Neither species lives in the garden but ranges from the surrounding wildlands. The deer commute from their homes, just as gardeners and visitors do, to

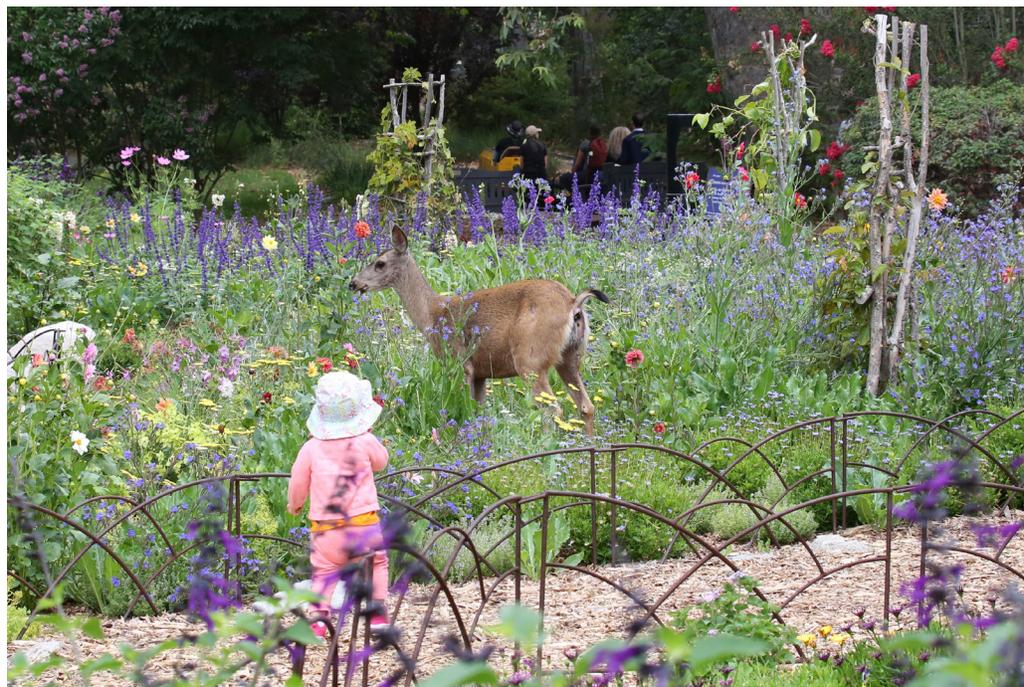
spend part of their productive hours in this fertile place.

Healthy and dynamic

Climate, geography, and our broad range of plants and habitats support organisms from molds and moths to mammals and mankind—and our organic ethic helps them thrive. Not all gardens have this ethic, which means careful and proactive stewardship of our varied soils and water courses. Organic means no harmful pesticides or herbicides. It also means recycling plant

waste through our compost pile rather than overloading the environment with artificial fertilizers. Organic practices unite our diverse habitats into a healthy, living whole that is more significant than the sum of its parts: E Pluribus Unum.

While our habitats are healthy and dynamic, Descanso is not a natural environment. Soils, pests, and dangerous or invasive species have to be managed to maintain an artificially beautiful equilibrium. Still, animals that are native or naturalized here have the full





scope to engage in every aspect of life, including predation.

A coyote ambled out of the Ancient Forest on a hot afternoon. Seeing me on the path, perhaps recognizing me as no threat, she continued past and slunk into the shade of the Camellia Forest. An hour later, on the Promenade pond, gardeners and visitors were watching the three Canada goslings in the water, wondering why their parents weren't with them. In a heart-stopping instant, the coyote sprang from the bushes, plucked a gosling from the pond, and melted back into the forest. It was a solemn moment but as natural as daylight. Coyotes gotta eat.

Sharing their home

Coyotes, like the deer, are commuters. But some species are full-time residents, here to

Right: A visitor sees a deer along the Promenade. Above: A coyote in the Oak Grove, and a goose with goslings.

establish territories, hunt for food, and raise their young. This is their home, and we are privileged to share it with them. Owls roost in the Ancient Forest and red-tailed hawks dominate the sycamores in the Promenade and Rose Garden.

A murder of crows haunt the picnic area of the parking lot, regularly skirmishing with the red-tail family, mobbing the hawks when they overfly the crows' turf. One American crow, dubbed Alfred, has a distinctive broken wing—perhaps from an aerial dogfight—and is an unofficial mascot for the gardeners. Alfred has been here for many years, a respected member of his mob. Crows have long memories. It's amazing to think Alfred recognizes each of us, just as we gardeners recognize him.

Resident red-tails stoically endure thunder and lightning before a rainstorm. Rattlesnakes, striped racers, and tiny ring-necked snakes

prowl the California Garden. Rattlers are the only dangerous snakes. In the summertime, our horticultural and facilities staff are vigilant to their movements. When visitors report their appearance in public areas, our snake handlers respond within minutes with long-handled tongs to humanely remove them to remote areas. But sometimes, the striped racers do our job for us. It's amazing that snakes eat other snakes, but they do.

Unlike many other gardens, Descanso's gardeners, volunteers, docents, and Guest Services staff are almost always out working on the grounds during visitation hours. We are nearby and available to guests who have questions, concerns, or observations. In fact, we love sharing information about wildlife. It helps us keep the garden a safe, comfortable place for us all to experience the many thrilling wonders of animals at home in their and our environment. 🌿

Jumping spiders: all friend, no foe

by Taylor Lopez
Nursery Intern

What is your initial reaction upon seeing a spider? Gasp? Scream? Flame thrower?

It would have been close to my initial reaction a few years ago. Still, I knew that if I wanted to pursue a career in horticulture, I'd need to overcome this lifelong fear of spiders and somehow start to live amongst them.

Our jumping friends

Enter, jumping spiders. After seeing a few videos about these little guys, I decided to research. With their adorable large eyes, fuzzy extremities, curious nature, and, the biggest one for me, none of the species in the genera are venomous, jumping spiders are a great way to desensitize those initial reactions of fear and ick and start appreciating them for the crucial role they play in our habitats and gardens.

As you might imagine, Descanso is a vast home to many creatures and definitely to jumping spiders. They can be seen wandering in any part of the garden, usually during the daytime, as they retreat to rest at night and hunt during sunlight hours.

Speaking of resting, did you know that there is a possibility that jumping spiders dream? According to an article from the "Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences," after observing adolescent jumping spiders, scientists determined that they exhibit REM-like behaviors, which could indicate that they also experience dreaming in the same way humans do. Fascinating and adorable.

Jumping spiders aren't just cute and helpful little garden friends, they have some serious positive benefits. The biggest advantage would



Photo credit © Andrea Fabiani

probably be that their prey is generally the herbivorous insects that come to feed on our plants, such as aphids, mites, and caterpillars.

Jumping spiders are hunters, so they roam around plants looking for their next meal. By doing so, they not only keep the garden pests at bay, but they also can have some accidental pollination effects. Jumping spiders and many other arachnids will often wait within the pollen of a plant's flower, hoping for an insect to land for nectar. By doing so, the spider naturally picks up some pollen and can spread it to others as they continue this process throughout the day and bounce from flower to flower.

Get into the garden and seek out some of these little guys. Let these eight-legged, fuzzy ones be your gateway into the wonderful world of arachnids. 🕸️

Building a network of community scientists

*by Jennifer Errico
Director of Communications*

What is that? This is a question that our staff and volunteers hear a lot. What is that plant? What is that bug? What if the answer was not only from our staff but from scientists and others curious about the same things?

This year at Descanso, visitors will be able to participate in community science, working with others around Southern California and beyond to understand habitats and ecosystems and the animals that thrive in them.

You can be a scientist

Community science is when everyday people work together with scientists to learn more about the world. It means people help collect and share information for possible scientific research. These projects often teach people about animals, plants, or other things they study and how science works.

Participating in community science goes beyond the “what” question. Some people will just see a tree, but with community science, it’s about seeing more and learning more,” said Chanel Jimenez, Education Programs Manager. “By connecting with others, people can find and explore a whole ecosystem here at Descanso or in their backyard.”

Taking a look

One part of community science has already begun here in the garden. Late last year, game cameras, with the help of UCLA, were installed on the edges of the garden. The photos collected will be reviewed

and shared with the community. Over time, anyone interested can see and track how and when the animals use game trails around the garden.

This year, there will be many opportunities to become a community scientist. In fact, when you visit many of the garden’s signature programs, you may find yourself participating in community science.

Visitors will be invited to explore through iNaturalist, a free website and app where people can join a community of nature lovers to share and learn about plants, fungi, and animals. iNaturalist is where people work together to identify different species and record where they are found.

“With limited resources, it is a great way for people and scientists to collect data and see what is happening in ecosystems worldwide,” Jimenez said.

Look for many upcoming activities to try community science. 



Help Descanso explore the ecosystems that surround us.

A summer of imagination and wonder and discovery

by Jennifer Errico
Director of Communications

This summer, “boredom” won’t even be in your vocabulary. The garden will be bursting with exciting surprises that will have you coming back for more. Explore the inspiring exhibitions at the Boddy House and Sturt Haaga Gallery, where creativity takes center stage. Adventure and discovery are waiting around every corner.

“Last summer, we welcomed the new Descanso Railroad, and our visitors loved it,” said Juliann Rooke, CEO. “So we thought, ‘Why not have another amazing summer? Southern California can be hot, but under the oaks of Descanso, you can find a shady place, and explore.’”

Use your imagination

At the Boddy House, *Animated Nature*, a new exhibition curated by the National Animation Museum, will show

how nature has inspired animation, including animals, plants, flowers, gardens, and landscapes. This exhibit will celebrate famous animated movie scenes, characters, and worlds about nature, as well as the talented animators who created them.

Opening on June 14 and running through February 2026, the exhibition will give visitors a chance to learn about the creative and technical tricks animators use to make things look like they’re alive through moving images. You’ll also discover how technology has improved animation, allowing artists to capture nature in even more amazing ways.

The exhibit will include famous animators from Southern California, including Frank Thomas, Ollie Johnston, and Ken Anderson, who were inspired by nature in their work. You’ll also learn about more contemporary animators

influenced by the natural world and Descanso Gardens.

Animated Nature will feature a collection of the best nature-themed animated scenes, favorite video clips, photos, drawings, and even behind-the-scenes videos showing how animations are made. There will also be interactive stations where visitors of all ages can learn how animation works. These hands-on activities will let you think and create like an animator yourself.

Discover something new

Roots of Cool: A Celebration of Trees and Shade in a Warming World will feature indoor and outdoor art installations and thought-provoking and educational activities that help visitors appreciate trees’ vital role in keeping our neighborhoods cool and livable.

From July 12 to October 12, 2025, the exhibition will showcase artwork created by women artists. The theme will focus on shade equity, exploring how and why some communities in Los Angeles lack trees or shade. We can all create more shade, and it can start with something as simple as planting and caring for trees.

No one will be able to say, “I’m bored,” this summer. There will be so much to discover that you’ll want to come back over and over.

A visitor enjoys the Rose Grade, top. Animated Nature, middle, and Roots of Cool, bottom.

The art installations in the garden will help visitors understand what it is like to live in an area with little shade and explore creative ways to solve the problem. Inside the Sturt Haaga Gallery, visitors can explore the past, present, and future of shade conditions in Los Angeles through the intersection of art and science. There will also be activities for the whole family, such as a “heat scavenger hunt” and a chance to adopt a free tree, allowing everyone to take action and make a difference in their neighborhoods.

Edith and Jolly de Guzman curated the exhibition, and it will feature works by artists including Kim Abeles, Victoria Arriola, Chantée Benefield, Shoshana Ben-Horin, Pascaline Doucin-Dahlke, Leslie K. Gray, Cidne Hart, Lois Keller, Diana Kohne, Robin Lasser, Lisa Tomczeszyn and Sarita Zaleha.

The exhibition is supported by several groups, including Perenchio Foundation, Accelerate Resilience LA, the USDA Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry Program, TreePeople, and the Los Angeles Center for Urban Natural Resources Sustainability. 



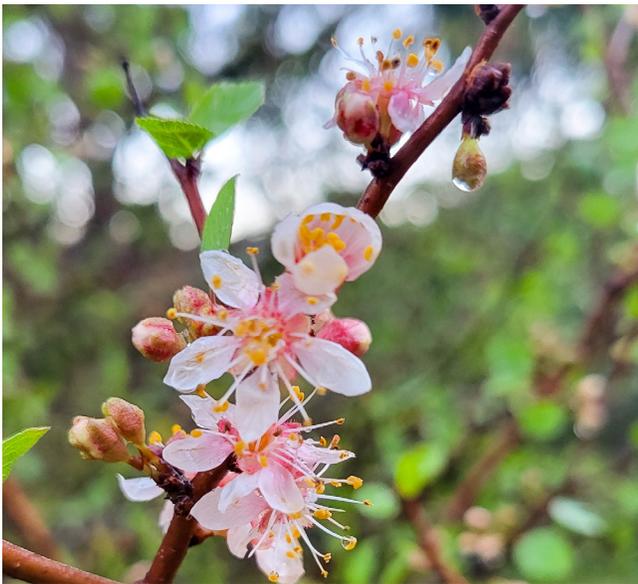
In the Garden

Blooms

Spring is a beautiful time at Descanso, and some will argue that the cherry trees are the stars with their ethereal petals that drop to the ground like falling snow. Still, for several years, gardens and bloom lovers all over the country have begun to celebrate all the blooming trees of the season, dubbing this time of year “pink tree season.”

In February, pink tree season begins at Descanso when the saucer magnolia and peach trees blossom in the Rose Garden. The cherry and crabapple trees typically start flowering right after. Once spring is finished, blooming crape myrtle will keep the garden pink through summer.

So this year, see the kaleidoscope of tulips and stop and smell the lilacs, but don't miss all the other beautiful blooming trees that make up pink tree season.



Above: Desert apricot (Prunus fremontii) in the California Garden. Photo by Nursery Manager Frank Obegron. Right: Melissa Meier, Lotus Pods, 2022. Courtesy of the artist.

Art



Daphne's Wardrobe—Metamorphosis into Nature, running March 1- June 1 at the Sturt Haaga Gallery, explores transformations of the body into nature. The exhibition draws on mythological and folklore narratives to examine themes of metamorphosis, revealing humanity's deep connection to the natural world.

Curated by Carole Ann Klonarides, the exhibition features wearable garments, photography, sculpture, painting, and works on paper by artists Valerie Hammond, Adelle Lutz, Elana Herzog, Melissa Meier, Wangechi Mutu, Vibeke Sorensen, Alison Saar, Rina Banerjee, Phyllis Green, Iris Yirei Hu, and Vera Lehndorff/Holger Trülzsch. The artists challenge us to rethink our deep connection to nature while also referencing the complex cultural histories—both constructive and destructive—that have shaped this relationship.

DONOR PROFILE

Time well spent

Craig Hamilton gets his hands dirty in the garden and loves every minute.

Finding his place

Craig worked in the intellectual property department at a movie studio for many years, but now he has a “new office.” As one of Descanso’s tireless volunteers, he not only works to keep the garden growing but does it with love and compassion.

“Descanso is like a drink of water on a hot summer day,” he said. “It is homey and wonderful. This garden is a curated space, but it still feels like a place to wander and discover. It is truly a special place.”

A desire to serve

“When I retired, I wanted to be of service. I wanted to volunteer, and my friend reminded me how important it is that we have nature and space to rejuvenate ourselves,” he said.

This is when he found Descanso. First, he went for walks, and then he became a member and volunteered. As a volunteer, he has done everything from pruning roses and helping in the Ruth Borun Nursery and Propagation Center to sweeping the Promenade.

“Volunteering is like therapy,” he said. “You work with your hands. I may be raking or weeding, but in the end, I can see that I have accomplished something.”

The work of our volunteers is invaluable to keeping the gardens thriving. Last year, volunteers worked more than 16,000 hours in the gardens.

Along with his time, Craig has also included Descanso Gardens in his estate. “I don’t have much,” he said, “but it is important that this place carries on because Los Angeles needs places to find solace and places for people to recharge.”

For more information about supporting Descanso Gardens, please visit descansogardens.org.



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Learn more at
descansogardens.org