



# Mission Trails Regional Park News

A PUBLICATION OF THE MISSION TRAILS REGIONAL PARK FOUNDATION Vol. 31, Number 2, Fall 2020



## ***IN THIS ISSUE***

**Autumn in the Park**

**Mission Trails History Series Continues**

**Farewell to the 5-Peak Challenge**

**New MTRP Online Store**



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## MISSION OF THE MISSION TRAILS REGIONAL PARK FOUNDATION

In partnership with the City of San Diego, preserve and protect the natural environment of Mission Trails Regional Park and provide and promote educational and recreational opportunities.



### OUR LAST NEWSLETTER WAS PUBLISHED DURING THE EARLY DAYS OF THE PANDEMIC IN THE SAN DIEGO REGION.

These past months have been dramatic, and we've all had to adapt: from wearing masks and social distancing to working remotely and assisting our children with online learning. With the exception of the Visitor Center and Kumeyaay Lake Campground, Mission Trails Regional Park (MTRP) is open, and we have seen an influx of new park users coming to Mission Trails for exercise and respite. This time has reminded us of our connection to the park and our need to be outdoors.

With most school campuses closed and field trip programs suspended, the MTRP Foundation is producing a new virtual field trip featuring Ranger Julie Aeilts. Each year, more than 10,000 schoolchildren come to Mission Trails, most on field trips to support curriculum on the native Kumeyaay. Our 20-minute virtual field trip will be an invaluable resource for educators and can be enjoyed by learners of all ages. We are very grateful to SDG&E for generously supporting this project! If you're on our email list, you'll receive an announcement when the film is available for viewing. Also, the geology film we released earlier this year, *Rise and Fall of the Mountains at Mission Trails Regional Park*, has had more than 7,200 views on YouTube and is being used by educators for distance learning.

Closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic have greatly impacted income to the MTRP Foundation, from facility rentals, Gift Shop sales, and grant funding that we have received consistently for decades. On December 1, we will participate in #GivingTuesday, a global day of charitable giving. For this important fundraiser we are creating a matching campaign and are seeking pledges from community members to add to our pool of matching funds. Please make a commitment to support Mission Trails in this way, and you can let us know about your matching funds pledge by sending a message to [jmorrissey@mtrp.org](mailto:jmorrissey@mtrp.org). Thank you for your support of MTRP, and we hope you will join us in our effort to preserve and protect the park today and for future generations.

— **JENNIFER MORRISSEY**, Executive Director, MTRP Foundation

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**Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation, Inc.**, established January 1988, is a non-profit public benefit corporation organized for the purpose of preserving, improving, and maintaining Mission Trails Regional Park.

### ON THE COVER

Wendy Esterly, MTRP volunteer, author and photographer, took this amazing photo of a bobcat on Father Junipero Serra Trail. Wendy reported that the cat, was visible for about one minute as it crossed to the river side of the road. According to Wendy, it was larger than a big house cat and with larger paws.

**IMAGE CREDITS** Cover: Wendy Esterly; Page 2: Wendy Esterly, Margo Hayes; Page 3: Don Endicott, Millie Basden, Wendy Esterly; Page 4: Wendy Esterly, Petra Koellhoffer; Page 5: Luann Wright, unknown; Pages 6-7: Photographers unknown; Pages 8-9: Gerry Tietje; Page 10: Heidi Gutknecht, unknown; Page 11: Kin Searcy; Page 12: Jayna McLeod, Gerry Tietje; Pages 13-14: Wendy Esterly; Page 15: Gerry Tietje, unknown; Page 16: Lowell Tindell

## Online Programs for the MTRP Community

The Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation is pleased to introduce OnTopic, a new series of online programs on topics related to Mission Trails. Our inaugural programs will be presented by MTRP volunteers and will impart knowledge that we can use as we explore the park.

These online events are free of charge, but registration is required through the MTRP homepage, and we hope you can join us!

> 6PM, THURSDAY, OCTOBER 29

### Amazing World of Bats, Nature's Tiny Fighter Jets

Presented by Don Endicott

**BATS! THOSE STRANGE, MYSTERIOUS CREATURES OF THE NIGHT.** They feature incredible skills of flight and acoustic navigation. Bats contribute to our environment in many ways—catching insects, pollinating wild fruits, and helping reforest disturbed lands. Poorly understood and frequently feared, they are under threat worldwide. Bats need our protection as much as we need them in healthy populations. During this multi-media presentation, Don will demonstrate how we record and identify their ultrasonic echolocation calls used to navigate and find prey in complete darkness.

A retired research engineer and executive in Navy Communications and Network Technologies, Don discovered a second career as a volunteer naturalist. He is a NAI Certified Interpretive Guide, MTRP Trail Guide, and public educator for the San Diego Natural History Museum and San Diego Humane Society's "Bat Team." Don is co-author of *50 Best Short Hikes San Diego* with the late Jerry Schad.

> 6PM, THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 5

### Getting the Most from iNat

Presented by Millie Basden

**LEARN HOW TO BE A MORE ACTIVE PARTICIPANT IN INATURALIST (iNAT)** while improving the quality of your observations and identifications. The goals of this presentation are to encourage more active participation in iNaturalist, increase participation in app projects (MTRP Biodiversity Project, San Diego Plant Atlas Project, City Nature Challenge) and to improve the quality of identifications on iNaturalist. The presentation will be most suitable for those who have some experience using iNat.

Presenter Millie Basden joined iNaturalist in early 2016 and through her participation (20,000 observations, 15,000 identifications for others, participation in 60 different projects), she has gained significant knowledge of its workings which she would like to share with others. Millie is a volunteer Trail Guide at Mission Trails Regional Park and a Certified California Naturalist.

> 6PM, THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 19

### Birds and Mammals on the Trail at MTRP

Presented by Wendy Esterly

**MISSION TRAILS REGIONAL PARK IS HOME TO ALL KINDS OF BIRDS AND MAMMALS** and this presentation includes examples that are often seen on the trail. Viewers will learn where and when they were seen, something interesting about them, and the birds' call or song.

Wendy Esterly is a longtime volunteer at MTRP and an avid photographer whose stunning images of birds and wildlife have been used in publications and exhibits. She is on the training team for the Trail Guides and is the MTRP Nest Box Project's co-coordinator, monitoring nest boxes during nesting season. Wendy is the author of *Coloring Southern California Birds* by Sunbelt Publications.







**ABOVE:** Western Blue Bird eggs in a nest box photographed earlier this season.

**LEFT:** Ash-throated flycatcher with food for nestlings (in the nest box).

**BELOW:** Nest Box Project volunteer Richard Griebe monitors a nest.

## Nest Box Monitoring Season Cut Short

PETRA KOELLHOFFER, NEST BOX PROJECT VOLUNTEER

Back in March of 2007, I graduated from the MTRP Trail Guide training class. With so much wonderful information, I couldn't wait to get on the trail and share the newly acquired knowledge! The evening walks were my favorite—Wendy and Terry Esterly and I had a lot of fun leading many of them.

After being a Trail Guide for about five years and with some urging from my sister, Wendy Esterly, I joined the Nest Box Project. These volunteers monitor nest boxes in the park during the nesting season from late February through June. There are 13 routes, and each route has about 10 nest boxes. The boxes are monitored once a week, depending on activity.

We usually meet monthly to share news from our routes, but this year, COVID-19 limited our meetings to just one. Because volunteering was suspended throughout the park, the Nest Box Project was canceled for 2020. I was looking forward to the nesting season. There is always a



thrill of the first glimpse of a new nest, eggs, and baby birds.

However, one of my favorite memories of this year's brief program was a pair of Western Blue Birds setting up housekeeping in one of the nest boxes that I monitor. The fun thing was, they must have found some Easter basket grass because the nest was woven with a couple of strands of light blue grass. Fancy! It sure was fun to see the blue eggs and watch the babies develop. All the chicks fledged and were healthy. I watched them fly out of the box with their

parents, fluttering their wings and begging for food.

Volunteering on the Nest Box Project has been so rewarding. I have really missed being at Mission Trails this year and miss the anticipation of what might be in the nest boxes. But... it will be fun next year to see how many of the boxes have "left over" nests in them and I look forward to being back on the trail again and monitoring all the boxes.





# Backyard Discoveries

## LUANN WRIGHT, MTRP VOLUNTEER TRAIL GUIDE

As someone who enjoys sharing the wonders of nature with others, being a MTRP Trail Guide for 18 years has been a joyful experience—but missed during these difficult pandemic times.

To fill this void, I turned my backyard into a laboratory for studying some of the smaller creatures I had overlooked or ignored in the past. With camera and close-up lens, I discovered a world teeming with fascinating tiny critters. Here are just a few.

I found ten species of hover flies busy pollinating flowers, looking for aphids, or mating. Up close, their tiny bodies are decorated with vivid colors and artistic designs. How had I missed these attractive flyers?

What I thought was a fuzzy bee entering a flower turned out to be a bee fly going after nectar with its long, stiff proboscis. The wing patterns can resemble lovely stained-glass windows.

## San Diego County is a biodiversity hotspot for bees with at least 700 known species.

Another fly was a robber fly, which can look like a monster and act like one too! They lurk, waiting to ambush an unsuspecting victim. They then inject enzymes into their prey, dissolving its insides before sucking out its life. I watched a robber fly do this to a lawn moth.

Honeybees (originally from Europe) are frequent visitors, but I decided to find and photograph native, solitary bees that rarely sting. San Diego County is a biodiversity hotspot for bees with at least 700 known species. Our native bumblebees are easy to spot, but how about our small native bees? I inspected flowers and found the tiny creatures. Photographing them is a challenge, but not without rewards. Some display dazzling metallic colors or large opalescent eyes, but all are interesting. So interesting, that bee boxes were added to the backyard. I watched mothers filling the holes with eggs and nourishment, and later watched the new generation emerge.

With my background in biology, I just have to know what I am finding. Nature guides and websites are useful, as is iNaturalist—a citizen-science tool that not only helps in identifying plants and animals, but also aids researchers studying these organisms.

Now that we are allowed to exercise outdoors with masks and proper distancing, my backyard explorations have morphed into county-wide explorations with even more discoveries.

While these pandemic distractions are fun and increase my knowledge of the variety of life, I long for the day when I can take visitors out on the trails to talk about what makes MTRP so special!

# What to Do?

## MTRP TRAIL PATROL VOLUNTEERS MARTY FINK AND GEORGE VARGA

Volunteer Trail Patrols, like all of Mission Trails Regional Park's Volunteer Programs, have been suspended since mid-March; our last patrol was on March 5.

In a nutshell: WE MISS IT!

When the park trails were shut down, George and I took to walking our neighborhood to stay in semi-patrolling shape, hoping the closures were temporary and we'd soon be back. As everyone knows, this was not to be.

George and I were ecstatic when we learned that the trails had reopened even if all the parking lots remained closed and no street parking was allowed near the Visitor Center or Kumeyaay Lake Campground. We immediately planned a nature hike starting from our homes (we live on the same street). We walked the 1.5 miles to the Deerfield Street entrance, hiked the BMX Loop and onto the VC Loop Trail to Father Junipero Serra Trail, around Oak Grove Loop, and back home. What a grand experience that was! It reinforced just how much we missed MTRP.

Since then we have been taking weekly nature hikes throughout the park. George has gotten very involved with iNaturalist so we make frequent stops to photo-document what we come across, whether a lowly stink beetle or a majestic White-tailed kite hunting the Grasslands, hovering in search of prey.

During one of our earlier hikes we encountered a couple at East Fortuna Staging with puzzled looks on their faces. We discovered that visitors still needed assistance and ended up giving them verbal directions to South Fortuna. Since that time we carry maps and have had opportunities to lend a helping hand.

We don't wear name tags or volunteer patches and give no indication of being park volunteers. When asked, we tell people we are just patrons of MTRP and hope they have a good time.

We dearly miss the public interactions, the MTRP and Foundation staff, the other volunteers, Trail Guide walks and meetings, and George his monthly Star Parties plus not being able to set up his telescope for a viewing of Comet NEOWISE.

In the meantime, we'll carry on, masked and distanced, until we can safely return. We can't wait to get back!





# THE ORIGINS OF

## Mission Trails Regional Park: 1985-1995

WE CONTINUE OUR SERIES on the recent history of Mission Trails Regional Park with this second installment presenting the park founders' accomplishments between June 1985, when the Master Plan was approved, and the dedication and opening of the award-winning Visitor and Interpretive Center in February 1995.



**ABOVE, RIGHT:** The groundbreaking of the MTRP Visitor and Interpretive Center. (L-r): Foundation President Mike Pent, Kumeyaay Elder Clarence Brown, County Supervisor Pam Slater-Price, City Councilmember Judy McCarty, former State Assembly member and Senator Larry Stirling, former City Councilmember Dick Murphy, and Foundation Secretary-Treasurer Dorothy Leonard.

**ABOVE:** MTRP rangers Dan Bylin, Randy Hawley, Dion Heller, and Nancy Dollard in 1995.

### LAND ACQUISITIONS

Using open space bond funds that had been approved by the voters in 1978, the City Council approved the purchase of several parcels of land within the park boundaries designated in the Master Plan. These parcels included over 700 acres of Navy-owned land originally planned for military housing; a federally-owned site east of Tierrasanta, which at one time had been planned for a correctional facility; Kumeyaay Lake and the surrounding land owned by the City's Water Utilities Department; and several privately-owned parcels just south of the SR52 right-of-way.

### IMPROVEMENTS TO LAKE MURRAY

In the late 1970's, Lake Murray (a public water reservoir managed by the City of San Diego), was experiencing an infestation of a fast-growing noxious weed called hydrilla. In May 1977, the State of California ordered the City to close Lake Murray for public safety concerns. Between 1981 and 1985,

the City implemented an innovative and aggressive effort to successfully eradicate hydrilla from the lake. At a celebration on Memorial Day 1985, the surrounding recreation area of Lake Murray was officially reopened to the public. It wasn't until November 1994 that the lake could safely reopen for water-related activities.

With the successful removal of the noxious hydrilla, progress could continue on additional improvements to the Lake Murray area as set forth in the 1985 Master Development Plan. These enhancements included a recreational community park within the boundaries of Mission Trails on the northwest side of Lake Murray, featuring two girls' softball fields, an open lawn area, and a tot lot. In 1988 a tennis court complex was opened with access from Park Ridge Boulevard. Additional courts were added in 1998 and 2008. On May 17, 2003, a comfort station and snack bar were dedicated to serve the community park.





## VISITOR AND INTERPRETIVE CENTER CONSTRUCTION AND OPENING

Our beautiful Visitor and Interpretive Center was the first major capital improvement project completed in the Park. The building site was selected in late 1989 during a field trip attended by CAC members, Councilmember Judy McCarty, and City staff. This award-winning facility was dedicated and opened to the public on February 4, 1995, after a ceremony attended by approximately 1,200 people. The Center is a joint project of the MTRP Foundation and the City of San Diego, and provides ample space for a variety of uses by City and Foundation staff and the public. The two-story Center includes an exhibit area; a 94-seat theater used for public programs and film screenings; a small Gift Shop; a library stocked with publications for all ages about plants and animals; meeting/classrooms available to the public; office space for City and Foundation staff; and an outdoor amphitheater surrounded by a self-guided native plant garden. It continues to be managed and maintained jointly by the MTRP Foundation and the City of San Diego.



## OLD MISSION DAM HISTORIC SITE IMPROVEMENTS

It is so fortunate that the Old Mission Dam has survived all these generations, and it's easy to understand why it was designated as a California Landmark by the Offices of Historic Preservation in December 1932. Additionally, it was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1966, and recognized by the San Diego Historical Resources Board in 1968. The Old Mission Dam site features prominently in Mission Trails' original park plan. In 1985, both the City Council and state of California approved funding to hire a landscape architect to design improvements for the Old Mission Dam area. These dollars were used to improve the parking area and signage, create a picnic area, install an irrigation system and water fountain, and plant native vegetation. This project subsequently received an award for historic preservation.

## COWLES MOUNTAIN STAGING AREA

In 1984, the City and County of San Diego jointly developed a plan to construct a major entry to the Cowles Mountain area at the northeast intersection of Navajo Road and Golfcrest Drive. The proposal included landscaped parking and a comfort station, realignment of the trail from the staging area to the summit of Cowles Mountain, and development of a summit viewpoint.

## MISSION TRAILS REGIONAL PARK FOUNDATION

In 1988, three members of the MTRP Citizens Advisory Council (CAC) formed the Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation as a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation. The purpose of the Foundation is to preserve, improve, develop and maintain the park, as well as to foster public appreciation and understanding of the park's natural assets. The three founding members were Mike Pent, Jean Hatton, and Dorothy Leonard.



We hope you enjoyed learning about this period of Mission Trails' history, and we thank those who have made and continue to make the park an invaluable resource to San Diego County residents and visitors.

**ABOVE, LEFT:** Construction begins on the MTRP Visitor and Interpretive Center, and the February 1995 dedication and opening of the Visitor and Interpretive Center.

**ABOVE:** MTRP Foundation outreach table at Lake Murray Days in 1995. Pictured are Councilmember Judy McCarty (center) with Del Overton (right) and another Foundation volunteer.





# Autumn in the Park

Text by Reva Block, Former MTRP Trail Guide, Photos by Gerry Tietje, MTRP Volunteer.

## MTRP's Subtle Pleasures

**AS THE DAYS GROW SHORTER**, autumn enters the park without attracting much attention. Visitors from the wintry areas, while seeking our warmth and sunshine, often complain that our autumns are dull, with colors ranging from faded brown to gray. It's true; there are no spectacular color displays with impressive canopies of huge, leafy trees showing off their autumn foliage of yellow, orange, red and brown. Yet, if you look carefully, the park offers some lovely autumn treats unique to our environment.

Walk through any path in the park, and stop to enjoy a surprising, subtle palette. Notice the profusion of stiff, straight-stemmed plants with tiny, deep green leaves and brash, upright clusters of dark yellow blossoms that mingle with the dry, brown plants of the chaparral and sage scrub. This is the Coastal Goldenbush, a fall bloomer in the Sunflower family. Much as mustard keeps the park cloaked in yellow in spring, the Goldenbush takes on that role in the fall.

Contrasting the bright yellow of the Goldenbush is the deep rust of California Flat-Top Buckwheat. If you look toward the Fortunas from the patio of the Visitor Center, you can see stands of buckwheat dotting the quiet landscape. In early autumn, Buckwheat's delicate clusters of white blooms with their pink anthers first show tinges of orange that gradually turn to dark brown. To keep us interested, these clusters often bloom nearly year-round, thus providing us with a lovely display of white, orange, and brown for many months. Bees flock to the flowers in almost every season.



Wherever you go in the park, you will see the fall-blooming Broom Baccharis, the most prevalent shrub in the park. Its tiny white and cream-colored flower heads shimmer in the sunlight. On separate plants, female flowers are thin and white, while the male flowers are round and pale yellow, with tiny spikes. As fall progresses, the female flowers bloom out in white, fluffy clusters that are carried off by the wind.

Look for changes in the three large native deciduous plants in the park, the Cottonwoods, Sycamores, and Willow. In the fall, Cottonwood and Willow leaves begin turning yellow, not orange or red. Sycamore leaves turn brown, and all three plants lose their leaves for the winter. Then, the bare uppermost Sycamore branches reveal bright green clusters of Mistletoe. Of course, our famous Coast Live Oaks retain their green color throughout the year.

Some other plants reward us with flashes of red. Poison Oak leaves begin turning red in early autumn, deepen to a dark red, and eventually drop from their stems. Toyon adds its contribution as well. In late summer and early fall, we see their heavy



**THIS PAGE, TOP ROW:**

Rose Hips, White  
Crowned Sparrow

**MIDDLE ROW:**

Buckwheat, Goldenbush

**BOTTOM ROW:**

Ground Squirrel habitat

**OPPOSITE PAGE:**

Sycamore tree,  
Poison Oak with red  
leaves in the fall.



clusters of green berries that will gradually turn red in time for Christmas. You might even still see some California Fuchsias bravely holding up in early autumn.

Watch for the arrival of White-Crowned Sparrows and Yellow-Rumped Warblers, two of the many fall migrants that travel south for the winter. Most of the hummingbirds seen in San Diego migrate south in the fall as well. Notice as they flash their gem-like colors during their travels. Larger birds, such as the Red-Tailed Hawks, seem especially active in the fall, as they either migrate or fatten up for the winter. And, of course, you shouldn't miss the fall migration of Monarch butterflies. You can see these beauties heading west through the park on their way to their coastal hangouts in the Eucalyptus and Torrey Pines.

As the season deepens, the air cools, winter approaches, and the park becomes quiet. It's a time for slowing down and rest. Rainstorms may stir many insects, but in a dry autumn, they too remain quiet. It's the necessary lull before a new burst of activity announced early by the tiny blossoms of White-Flowering Currant and Lemonadeberry that surprise us when they appear in winter and early spring.

*Reva Block was in the Trail Guide class of 2000 and became a member of the training team. Reva passed away in 2014.*





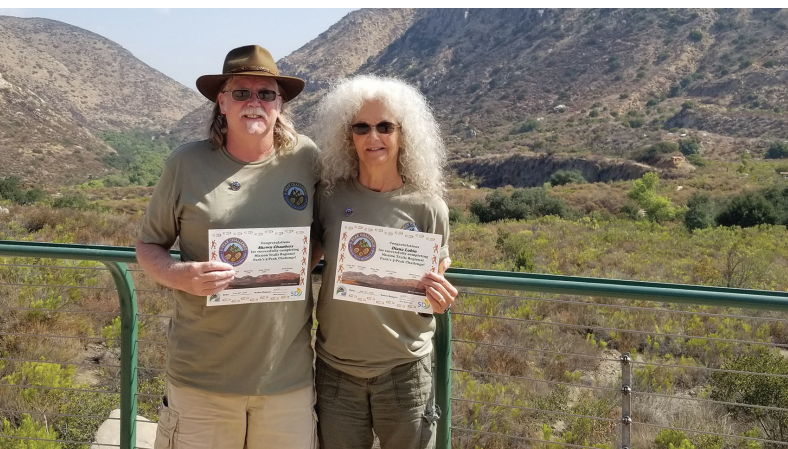


# Farewell to the 5-Peak Challenge

BY RANGER HEIDI GUTKNECHT

On the evening of Friday, June 26, 2020 we processed the 15,000th and final participant of the 5-Peak Challenge. This means that official certificates and logo pins will no longer be issued to those who did not submit their photos prior to June 26. Participants who have previously submitted their photos for verification and have already received an email confirmation from us, need not worry; we will still have their certificates on file and logo pins waiting to be retrieved once the Visitor Center reopens to the public.

pictured here. They began the Challenge in mid-February, before all the park trails closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and completed it on June 25, after the trails to Cowles Mountain and Pyles Peak were once again open. Shawn thought for sure they did not make the cut-off and was ecstatic when he found out that he and Diana were actually the last two participants! Before taking on the Challenge, both of them had only hiked up Cowles Mountain, and Diana was not very fond of all the crowds, so they were happy to discover the other four peaks in the park with much less people. Now they drive only 10 minutes from La Mesa for some nice hiking trails, instead of going all the way out to the Cuyamaca Mountains like they used to do. While hiking up to South Fortuna via the “Stairway to Heaven,” Shawn suffered from heat exhaustion, but persevered and pushed on to the summit, and now refers to that section of the hike as the “Stairs of Doom.”



**The final participants in the official 5-Peak Challenge, Shawn Chambers and Diana Lubin, started their trek in mid-February, and completed it in June when the trails were open again.**


The 5-Peak Challenge, created by Park Rangers Levi Dean and Heidi Gutknecht, began on November 7, 2015, with the original goal of encouraging park visitors to experience all five peaks in the park, and not just the ever-popular Cowles Mountain. After nearly five years, with more people hiking all five peaks now than ever before, we can definitely say we have successfully accomplished that goal. As a result, we decided to end the Challenge, so as not to encourage the overuse of the trails, and to help prevent them from being “loved to death.”

The last two participants, numbers 14,999 and 15,000 were actually a married couple, Shawn Chambers and Diana Lubin,

Throughout the duration of the Challenge, there have been many truly inspiring stories shared by participants. There have been people who overcame life-threatening diseases, like stage IV brain cancer survivor Osmond Nicolas (above, center photo), who completed the Challenge on May 20, 2019. There have been people who lost major weight, like David Tyler, who lost 90 pounds through the Challenge. One young lady was proposed to (and accepted it) on the summit of North Fortuna, and a creative guy named Steven came down from Los Angeles to complete the Challenge literally in his wife’s name (Erica) for a special wedding anniversary surprise. Several groups completed the Challenge in memory of lost loved ones, and some did it for charities, like the group of students from EF International School in Point Loma, who completed the Challenge in one day (on July 4, 2018) to raise over \$1,000 for homeless charity Father Joe’s. The Challenge also enabled many families to strengthen their bonds with each other and nature.

So, although the 5-Peak Challenge is officially over, we have 5-Peak Challenge T-shirts available for purchase through our new online store at [www.mtrpstore.org](http://www.mtrpstore.org), or at the Gift Shop when the Visitor Center reopens. We encourage everyone to continue enjoying the many wonders of Mission Trails, while helping to protect and preserve it. Stay safe, and happy hiking!





**Comet C/2020 F3 NEOWISE** was imaged above Iron Mountain by a digital single lens reflex camera at the entrance to Mission Trails' West Sycamore area the morning of July 9, 2020.

# What to Look for in the **Autumn Sky**

*With the regular Star Parties at MTRP on hold, Kin Searcy, Star Party Coordinator for the San Diego Astronomy Association, shares these tips for backyard stargazing and recounts NEOWISE.*

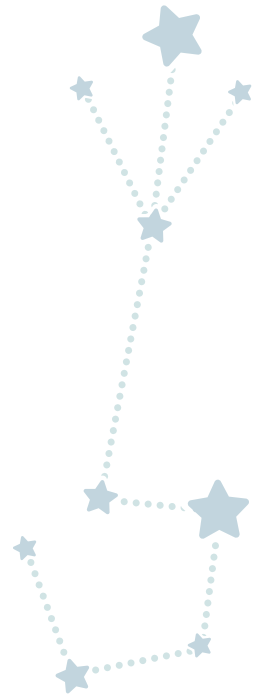
Comets are visitors from the outer solar system that swing around the sun and then fly back into space. Balls of rock and ice, they are warmed by the sun on their approach and release gasses and material that make a bright cloud around its body and sometimes a long tail. We have been excited by Comet C/2020 F3 NEOWISE in July that was a naked eye object visible from San Diego first in the early morning and then right after sunset. The comet was discovered by NASA's Near-Earth Object Wide Field Infrared Survey Explorer (NEOWISE) satellite.

## **This is a great time to view planets. Jupiter and Saturn are visible at dusk and red Mars rises in the East about 9PM.**

Because of the planetary orbits around the sun, the visible night sky is always changing. In mid-September, we transitioned from the Summer constellations to Winter. After sunset, see the bright star Vega overhead and the Milky Way just barely visible from West Sycamore on a dark night, setting to the SW. Vega is one of the bright stars making up a figure called The Summer Triangle. Look for two other stars, Deneb and Altair, that make up a large triangle with Vega. Vega will set in the West at 4AM. If you have a good view to the South, look for the unmistakable scorpion, the constellation Scorpius. This is one of the 48 constellations named by the Greek astronomer, Claudius Ptolemy, in the second century and there is a bright orange star at the scorpion's heart. It is rewarding to scan the region of the scorpion's stinger with binoculars and look for a tight cluster of young stars called Ptolemy's Cluster after our Greek friend who catalogued it. As with Vega, these objects will set in the West before midnight and the Orion Nebula will rise in the East an hour later to begin its domination of the Winter sky.

This is a great time to view planets. Jupiter and Saturn are visible at dusk and red Mars rises in the East about 9PM. These planets will be visible all night through the end of October. With binoculars, you can discern up to four large moons orbiting Jupiter in an arrangement that changes hourly. With even a modest telescope, the moons are spectacular, cloud bands are visible on Jupiter (with a large amateur telescope), and the majestic rings of Saturn will amaze.

**For more information about stargazing in San Diego, visit [www.sdaa.org](http://www.sdaa.org).**



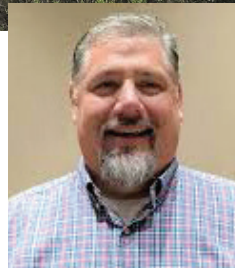


# Conversation with Mark Berninger

**The City of San Diego manages 47,000 acres of preserve and conserved lands, and the Parks and Recreation Department manages 28,000 acres of this land which includes Mission Trails Regional Park. Incredibly, only Anchorage, Alaska, manages more city park acreage in the United States than does the City of San Diego.**

Open space parks are differentiated from developed parks (Balboa Park, community parks) in that they are left in their natural state as a haven for our native wildlife and vegetation, and these spaces give local scientists the opportunity to go into the field to study our highly diverse flora and fauna. Additionally, our open space parks provide a much-needed escape into the natural world that many of us crave and enjoy.

With the closure of many of our public spaces (gyms, pools, etc.) due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we wondered if more local residents are using MTRP since it re-opened and wanted to explore the pros and cons of this change in usership. We spoke with Mark Berninger, the City's Natural Resource Manager in the Parks and Recreation Department's Open Space Division, who shared some hard data, along with anecdotal evidence, regarding changes in park usership since the pandemic. Here are some of the highlights from our conversation with Mark.



## **MARK BERNINGER**

*Natural Resource Manager*  
City of San Diego  
Parks and Recreation Department  
Open Space Division

### ***MTRP Foundation (MTRPF): Is there any data showing how many people use MTRP?***

**Mark Berninger (MB):** We have collected uninterrupted data for two and a half years on four trails leading up to Cowles Mountain (Cowles Staging Area Trail, Barker Way Trail, Mesa Rim Trail, and Big Rock Trailhead) by far the most popular hike in MTRP. In July 2020, 45,000 users climbed the main trail, and another 20,000 used the three other trails. That's a 20% increase from July 2019, when 36,000 people climbed the main trail. This data lets us extrapolate public use across all our parks and have estimated that city open space parks—not including developed parks—received 2.2 million visitors in 2019, more than the San Diego Zoo, Padres and Chargers games (combined), and several national parks.

### ***MTRPF: That really speaks to the need of people wanting and needing nature and wild. Do you have any information on who these new park users are?***

**MB:** We talked to rangers who believe most are active adults whose gyms and yoga studios are closed, so they go to the open space preserves to work out, rather than to enjoy and appreciate wildlife. There are pros and cons to this change—on the one hand new people are being exposed to outdoor parks, including lots of kids who would typically be indoors in day care or school but are now being exposed to nature and the outdoors at an earlier age and more frequently. The flipside is those who think of the trails as their personal gym may not know park rules or be aware of trail etiquette. With our urban preserves, it's about the space being for the animals and habitats, people's use is a secondary benefit. The main benefit is to maintain rare and endangered habitats for plants and animals so they have a place to continue to exist.



San Diego Goldenstar



**MTRPF: How might better community understanding of park and trail rules be achieved?**

**MB:** Education will be most important. We see an opportunity to engage these new users and partner with MTRP to spread the word about trail etiquette. The parks need more rangers now more than ever, because there's no better substitute for the personal engagement with ranger programs. These programs can sway people more than any sign. Ranger programs also teach kids at a young age to respect the environment. If I had my way, I'd have dozens more rangers whose focus was education.

**MTRPF: During the park's closure, it seems the City's park rangers—including MTRP's rangers—ended up having to do a lot of policing and encountered people upset that they couldn't use the park.**

**MB:** Right, and all the rangers' regular duties didn't go away (monitoring and eradicating invasive species, etc.), so they had extra work while they enforced the lockdown.

**MTRPF: Did you have any data of how wildlife changed during the lockdown?**

**MB:** During April, we were busy figuring out what we could and should study, and how, but before we were ready to begin, the parks reopened. We also study least tern nesting, and we wondered if they would come back while the beaches were closed. One day during the shutdown, I went to Ocean Beach Dog Beach and saw thousands of least terns, pelicans, and seagulls resting on the beach. It's a wide flat open area where they could watch for predators and find their own prey. After it opened up again, all those birds were forced to move inland to the flood channel.

**MTRPF: Did you get a chance to be at MTRP during the closure, and did you witness anything special?**

**MB:** I was at MTRP during the closure and had a cool encounter with a roadrunner, in the East Elliot area while out monitoring the progress of San Diego Goldenstar, a native plant. I heard a male roadrunner cooing in the brush next to me and realized I was scaring lizards off the trail and into the brush, so he must've been snatching up lizards as I flushed them out. His call was so soft, that if someone was on the trail talking, I wouldn't have heard it. You don't hear roadrunners making noises, so that was really special. I saw a legless lizard, which are typically very secretive. Lots more snakes this spring too.

**MTRPF: What else should the public know about the importance of our open spaces?**

**MB:** The lockdown gave us a chance to see how valuable these open spaces are to people. They got so upset when they closed. They felt it was their trail, their quiet time and exercise. Open spaces are important to cultivating the next generation of conservationists by getting them in the parks early and developing programs for kids. What better way to be safe and socially distant than outdoor schools? Advocacy matters the most with the people who approve our budgets. When I request funding to hire more rangers, equipment for trail maintenance, expanding programs, I frame it as asset protection for the City. For development, the Multi-Species Conservation Plan (MSCP) is a tool for the City to say we're setting aside these areas for preservation, and here are the rules for what you can do in the vicinity of these preserves. It allows our economy and development to move forward, and that benefits the City. Because of San Diego's incredible biodiversity, we have upwards of 90 species covered under MSCP that are threatened, endangered, or special status. We were the first city to have MSCP. We are a model for other cities on habitat conservation. We have the second largest urban preserve in the US, we started the vernal pool conservation plan. The City sees our native plants and animals as a major asset that needs protecting and is contingent on our management of these areas. We shall, we need to, and we will manage these areas.



Greater roadrunner





# Donor Highlights


**THANK YOU to the following community members and organizations for their donations to support Mission Trails Regional Park (MTRP) through the MTRP Foundation.**

This list reflects donations of \$250 and more made from July 2019 through June 2020. Please contact the MTRP Foundation at [mtrp@mtrp.org](mailto:mtrp@mtrp.org) with any inaccuracies or omissions.

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# Planning Ahead

## with a Planned Gift to Mission Trails

We never know what the future holds, and 2020 has been a stark reminder of this fact. However, we know with certainty that we cherish Mission Trails Regional Park and want this extraordinary natural resource to be preserved and protected today, tomorrow, and for generations to come.

Did you know there are creative ways to help fund the park through the Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation? Through planned giving, you can support our wonderful park in perpetuity, and also realize important tax benefits for you and your loved ones. We invite donors at all levels to name the Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation as a beneficiary in their wills or trusts, to make life-income gifts, or other deferred giving arrangements to benefit the park.

Mission Trails Regional Park's ability to advance our mission and accomplish our goals is directly tied to the generous support we receive from families and individuals, including planned gifts. Help us secure our future as an unequalled natural resource for our community and visitors from around the world. To discuss the planned giving program or voluntarily inform us of your intention to leave a bequest to Mission Trails Regional Park, please contact Jennifer Morrissey, Executive Director, MTRP Foundation at [jmorrissey@mtrp.org](mailto:jmorrissey@mtrp.org).

**PLEASE NOTE:** *Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation does not provide legal or tax advice. You should consult with your attorney or tax advisor to determine the benefits and risks of any charitable planned gift.*

## New Memorial and Commemorative Benches and Picnic Tables Available

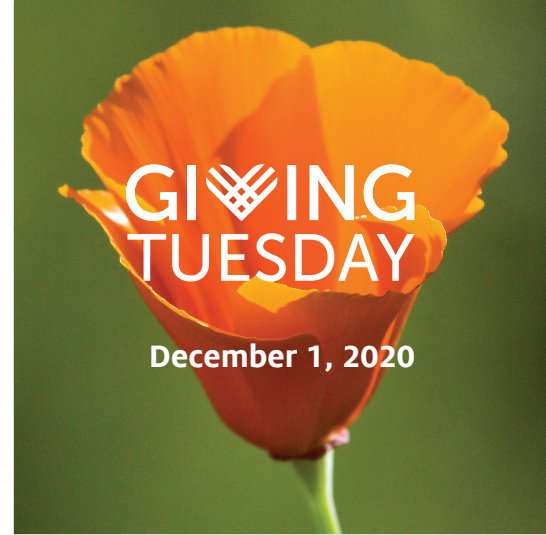
Do you or your family have a deep connection to Mission Trails and a wish to support the park? You've likely seen park users relaxing on benches and sitting at picnic tables to take a breather and enjoy the beautiful natural surroundings.

Last year, additional spaces for bench placements at the base of Cowles Mountain were approved for perpetual sponsorship, and in addition to the benches at Cowles Mountain, there are other

areas in the park where Memorial and Commemorative plaque opportunities are available. To learn how you can memorialize your family and loved ones through the Memorial and Commemorative Plaque Program, contact the MTRP Foundation at [mtrp@mtrp.org](mailto:mtrp@mtrp.org).



Denise Barrow (center) and her sons Danny and Brian relax on the memorial bench to honor Jim Barrow, husband, father, and former MTRP Trail Guide who passed away last year.



## Mark Your Calendar for Giving Tuesday on December 1

For the last few years, the MTRP Foundation has participated in #GivingTuesday, a global day of charitable giving. Each year, more community members have come forward to support the park through the Foundation, and there was a wonderful outpouring of support last May for the special #GivingTuesdayNow event, organized to help nonprofits impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, there has been a steep decline in income due to important grants being suspended and the MTRP Visitor Center's temporary closure. Our inability to host after-hours events and sell items through the onsite Gift Shop also contributes to our decline in income.

We're planning a matching campaign for the next #GivingTuesday, so if you plan to make a contribution to the MTRP Foundation before the end of the year, we can leverage your planned donation and include it as part of the matching campaign funds! All you need to do is inform us of your donation, and you can do so by contacting Jennifer Morrissey, Executive Director, MTRP Foundation at [jmorrissey@mtrp.org](mailto:jmorrissey@mtrp.org).

Whether or not you make a pledge toward the match, please plan to support the park on Tuesday, December 1. In the meantime, we encourage you to contact your tax professional regarding new charitable giving incentives for 2020 offered through this year's CARES Act. Thank you!





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## NOTICE REGARDING MISSION TRAILS REGIONAL PARK USAGE

Per San Diego County public health order in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Mission Trails Regional Park is open for passive purposes only (walking, jogging, or hiking). There can be no congregating or participating in group sports activities. Members of the same household may walk or hike together. Maintain social distancing of 6 feet (1.8 meters) at all times, and wear a face covering when in the park and on the trails. Do not come to the park if you have a cough or fever, and do not engage in unnecessary physical contact. The Mission Trails Regional Park Visitor and Interpretive Center and Kumeyaay Lake Campground are temporarily closed. This information is current as of October 1, 2020.

**For the latest information related to park policies during the COVID-19 pandemic, please visit [www.mtrp.org](http://www.mtrp.org).**



# MTRP STORE

## Shop to Support Mission Trails at the Online MTRP Store

The park's Visitor Center and Gift Shop are still closed, but you can now stock up on MTRP branded items and pick up a copy of Pat Abbott's book, *Geology: Mission Trails Park* at the newly created online MTRP Store! With just a few clicks, you can select from our custom T-shirts, hats, and other products that not only pay tribute to MTRP but support the park at the same time. All orders will be shipped to you, whether across town or across the country. We will add more inventory over time, but for now please shop to support the park and show your love of Mission Trails.

[www.mtrpstore.org](http://www.mtrpstore.org)

