



THE ISLAND INSIDER

VOLUME 17, ISSUE #1: WINTER 2019

A PUBLICATION OF CHANNEL ISLANDS RESTORATION



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UPPER SANTA YNEZ WATERSHED
Ken Owen 

THE ISLAND INSIDER WINTER 2019

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The Island Insider
Vol. 17, Issue #1: Winter 2019

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Cover photo:
A team of intrepid volunteers and staff hike beneath oaks and
cottonwoods along the Piru Creek.
Sarah Haskins



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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

When Duke McPherson and I started removing Eucalyptus trees on Santa Cruz Island almost 19 years ago, we never dreamed that we would eventually found an organization that would restore hundreds of acres of habitat and touch the lives of many thousands of people. Channel Islands Restoration has grown in ways that we could not imagine. We are removing Tamarisk in remote wilderness areas and taking on the removal of Arundo in hundreds of acres of riparian woodland. This while we work at local nature preserves, grow plants and take kids out to the islands.

We are increasingly offering our services for various agencies on even larger projects. Most of these jobs are technically complicated and require a highly trained staff. We will always offer volunteer opportunities where our supporters get their hands dirty alongside our staff. But much of our work goes on behind the scenes in areas that are not appropriate for volunteers.

As we look forward to 2019, we are confident that CIR will continue to grow as we follow our mission to protect and restore California's native landscapes. We will again take kids to the islands, and we will offer volunteer opportunities on the mainland and the islands. We will also continue to grow behind the scenes and restore the hidden natural gems far from public trails. We are proud to be offering pivotal assistance that is truly making a difference for wildlife and people.

Sincerely,
Ken Owen

THE WILDFLOWERS ARE COMING!

With this year's rain, it's looking like it'll be a great year for wildflowers! Blankets of poppies and lupine, pockets of monkey-flowers, lilies, and fiesta flowers, rare stream orchids and Humboldt lilies, and more can be found all throughout the Central Coast - but the question is, where?

There are the big, well-known destinations that draw tens of thousands of visitors each year - the Carrizo Plain, Figueroa Mountain, Antelope Valley, Death Valley, Anza Borrego, and even far north at the North Table Mountain Ecological Reserve.

But what if you want to get off the beaten path and see wildflowers on your local trails? Well look no further - here are the top recommended local wildflower hikes from the CIR team!

SANTA BARBARA & SANTA YNEZ

Aliso Canyon Trail 3.78 mile loop, Easy

Just off Paradise Road is the Aliso Canyon trail. This loop moves from shaded creeks to vast open grasslands that can host thousands of wildflowers. Expect to see a large variety of wildflowers as you transition between the plant communities.

Grass Mountain 4.5 mile out-and-back, Strenuous

At the foothills of Figueroa Mountain is Green Mountain. Though not as tall, it can still have just as impressive of a display of wildflowers. It can be moderately busy at times, especially in the spring, but the last mile of this out-and-back trail is - with only slight hyperbole - nearly vertical. If you can pull yourself up that slope, you should be able to leave behind most of the crowds. It can't be overstated how steep that hill is though. Make sure you bring lots of water.

VENTURA & OJAI

Ventura River Preserve Variable mileage, Variable difficulty

The Ventura River Preserve is a nearly 1600 acre preserve located in western Ojai Valley. It offers everything from shaded creeks to chaparral ridges, and of course - meadows of wildflowers. Hike through Wills Canyon up to the Chaparral Crest trail to see a great diversity of plant communities!

CAMARILLO & THOUSAND OAKS

Ray Miller Trail 5.1 miles out-and-back, Moderate

Off PCH in Point Mugu State Park is the Ray Miller trail - one of the best trails for spring wildflowers in the area. It affords sweeping views of the Pacific Ocean and Channel Islands as it gently climbs 1000 feet through fields of wildflowers. Within that 2.5 mile stretch you can easily find 30 or more species of wildflowers.

Backbone Trail 70 miles of connected segments, Variable difficulty

The Backbone trail is a 70 mile trail that spans from Point Mugu to Will Rogers State Historic Park is a great trail to hike in segments. Each year in May the Santa Monica Mountains Trail Council hosts a 7 day trek through the segments of the Backbone trail, in which they typically identify between 140 and 160 species of flowering plants.

CHANNEL ISLANDS

Anacapa Island, Inspiration Point 0.7 mile loop, Easy

Take a stroll through fields of giant coreopsis along your way to one of the Channel Islands' most iconic views. Be sure to bring a hat though, because East Anacapa Island is also home to the largest protected breeding colony of western gulls in the world.



Blue-eyed Grass
Sisyrinchium bellum



Giant Coreopsis
Coreopsis gigantea



Chocolate Lily
Fritillaria biflora



Sky Lupine
Lupinus nanus

WHEN RESTORATION WORK ISN'T SO GLAMOROUS

Here at Channel Islands Restoration we work in a lot of scenic places - the cliffs of East Anacapa Island, the peaks of Santa Rosa Island, on the sand dunes of San Nicolas Island, along the banks of the Sisquoc River, in the rolling grasslands of the San Marcos Foothills, and more. However, sometimes it's not so glamorous, and that's been the experience for many of our field technicians in the past few months.

The Santa Clara River is 83 miles long and flows from the small city of Acton, down through Santa Clarita, and to the Pacific Ocean at McGrath State Beach. Castaic Lake, Lake Piru, and the Sespe Creek all flow into this river. It provides vital habitat for species of concern such as southwestern pond turtles, least Bell's vireo, and steelhead trout (it actually hosted the largest run of steelhead trout in Southern California in the early 1900's), it also used to provide

habitat for beavers until European settlers arrived. Unfortunately, the river is infested with arundo (*Arundo donax*), which is sucking the river dry and directly causing the population decline of species that rely on it.

Channel Islands Restoration has been working alongside multiple other agencies to eradicate arundo from the Santa Clara River for years, and we recently took on a new project in a 33-acre riverside parcel.

When we began, we had no idea where any of the arundo was - just that it on average covered an estimated 5% to 25% of the parcel - so it was up to us to find it. Keep in mind that the parcel is 33 acres large (roughly the size of 25 football fields) and filled with vegetation so dense that you could hardly see someone standing just five feet away from you. To top it all off, poison oak was just about everywhere.

For the sake of efficiency we split up into two teams - one that surveyed the entire area, and another that carried the chainsaws and equipment necessary to remove the arundo. The former team would use a GPS to mark any arundo location they found, and then the chainsaw crew would go from point to point to treat each stand. The GPS units served another purpose in helping people not get lost, because as soon as you stepped off a trail, you could hardly see the sky - let alone orient yourself with any large landmarks.

After a few months' work, we found more than 700 stands of arundo and treated almost 500 of them - for a total of 1.5 acres treated (imagine a full football field densely packed with towering stalks of arundo. CIR is scheduled to work to remove arundo from the Santa Clara River for years to come.



Field technicians work to cut down Arundo
Ken Owen

WHAT IS ARUNDO AND WHY IS IT A PROBLEM?

Arundo (*Arundo donax*), also known as giant reed, is a tall bamboo-like invasive plant that has spread throughout the rivers and creeks of the American southwest. It was originally brought over from the Mediterranean to be used to stabilize streambanks, as a wind-break, or for roofing material. Since its introduction, it has spread rapidly - sometimes growing to comprise more than 50% of a stream's total vegetative cover. Arundo has widespread and devastating impacts to the areas it is introduced to.

When arundo (or similar invasive riparian weeds like tamarisk) takes root, it physically changes to nature of the stream. By sending down deep roots, the arundo can withstand light flooding and therefore, the stream gets funneled along a straight path which scours out the streambed and eliminates pools and eddies that would otherwise give shelter to aquatic animals and their eggs. When arundo establishes itself in a thick stand, it crowds out any larger trees (like sycamores or cottonwoods) that would be able to provide shade to

the stream, and rather allows sunlight to shine directly into the stream and warm it beyond temperatures that our aquatic animals can tolerate. Furthermore, arundo uses significantly more water than native vegetation in the same area. It is difficult to measure the difference in water use between the two due to the variability in a study area's climate and plant communities, but most studies show that arundo uses three to eight times more water than the native vegetation it displaces.

In terms of natural disasters, arundo infestations directly contribute to creating worse wildfires and floods. Arundo dries out in the summers and its tall thick stands easily catch fire and can add to the intensity of a wildfire, and also allow the fire to spread quickly up and down a dry streambed. Arundo also grows thick enough to trap sediments in streams - leading to a lower water capacity - and it slows the flow of water during high-runoff events - leading to water piling up and spilling out of the stream channel.



Furthermore, arundo deprives our local wildlife of the habitat they need. Birds are unable to nest in the reeds, deer can't graze on it due to the harsh alkaloids that it transports to its leaves, and larger mammals can't even move through it.

Luckily, arundo infestations are containable and eradication is possible. Arundo can't germinate from seeds in our region, meaning there is no seedbank for arundo to regrow from and seeds can't blow in or out of the infested area. Arundo in our region spreads from fragments and cuttings of parent plants - so if an arundo stalk is cut or snapped off, the broken piece can become an entirely new

individual plant. Similarly, when arundo stalks are scoured out by floods or burned off by fire, they can regenerate from their deep roots. With this knowledge, we can work from the headwaters of a river to the mouth of it and be sure that the plant does not regenerate upstream of where we're working.

We've been working along other agencies for years to eradicate arundo from the Santa Clara River. It's a lot of work, but it has been shown time and time again to be worth the effort. In the long run, removing arundo saves money by reducing fire and flood risk, increasing the availability of water, improving habitat quality, improving streamflow and sediment transport. In 10 years, removing arundo can have a conservative economic benefit to cost ratio of 2:1.



Kevin Thompson stands beneath
Arundo at least twice his size.

For more information, read the California Invasive Plant Council's report on *Arundo donax* at <https://cal-ipc.org/solutions/research/arundo-report/>

FIELD REPORT FROM THE LOS PADRES BACKCOUNTRY

I sat down with field crew leader and backcountry trip veteran, Doug Morgan, for an inside look into what the backcountry trips are like. Here's what he had to say.

So you just got back from a trip to the Santa Ynez River – how was that?

It was a much tamer trip than past trips – considerably tamer. We were basically car camping each night, but we had the cowboys from Los Padres Outfitters to prepare all of our meals, so we just got to hang out and relax each night after work.

The biggest challenge was just getting in and out. We got like seven inches of rain leading up to this trip, and a lot of the roads were washed out. And then we had to bail early to avoid getting rained on. It's not the getting wet, it's the getting out. We're getting a better feel for the area though and we know where we can and can't get with the current road conditions.

You've also been doing a lot of trips to Piru - which is a new place this season, how have those been as compared to the Sisquoc trips?

Killer. It's as hard as or harder than most of the Sisquoc trips. There's a lot more tamarisk and the area is a lot bigger and the creeks are a lot denser.

But it's right there on the condor sanctuary and it's a crazy and wild oasis back there. One day all within 15 minutes we saw a golden eagle flying in and it started getting harassed by a white tailed kite, and as we were watching that go on, a flock of white pelicans flew in headed towards the lake. Then within a moment of that, a condor soared around the edge and then we stood there watching that for about 15 minutes and then a northern harrier came in right below. It was like a birder's dream.

But again, Piru is hard to get to, the work areas are hard to get to. It's a minimum of 5 mile walk in, and in most cases it's like eight to ten miles and it's like all hills. It's absolutely beautiful back there though - I would highly recommend it. Don't go over the potholes trail, though. You climb up a steep mountain and then it plateaus for about 20ft and then it goes straight up another mountain – and it does that about 8 times. It's just crazy.

How many back country trips have you done at this point?

I think it's close to two dozen or maybe even three dozen. I don't even know anymore.

Do you have a favorite memory from any of these trips?

I think the rocket launch – watching the rocket launch up on the Sierra Madre Ridge. Also, watching the full moon rise up out of the notch of Hell's Gate on the Piru trip – the full moon kind of followed the notch up. That was kinda cool.

Seeing the condors is definitely up there – I've seen condors back there twice now. It's been 50 years since the last time I saw them – that was back before they captured them all.

There was also one time when I was driving with Elihu up on the Sierra Madre road and a golden eagle swooped down and grabbed a rabbit right in front of the truck and it barely could maintain its airspeed as it flew down the hill - it took like 400 feet to get enough lift to be able to take back off again. I thought that eagle was going down. That was pretty cool.

We also saw bobcats twice – and one of them was the biggest I've ever seen. On the Santa Ynez trip I saw the biggest bear print I've seen in California - it was about a foot long. It was bigger than my boot. Not like Kevin's boot though. He's got massive feet. I've seen canoes smaller than his feet.

All these places have been on my bucket list for years - the Sisquoc has been on my bucket list ever since I got back to California. I wanted to go in there, but I didn't think I was going to walk every linear foot of it.

There's some rock features back in the Sisquoc that rival Yosemite that nobody knows about that are really hard to get to. You know, maybe just a smaller scale and they're not granite, but they are still the same type of hanging vertical walls.

It's just going to places that are so completely wild - like nobody goes in there.

There were a couple times where not dying was a high point. Coming back with the same amount of body parts is always good, too.

That's always a good goal - really the number one goal ideally. If someone was interested in volunteering would you tell them anything?

Go. Definitely go. There's something for everyone on the trips, usually. Actually, the intensity is being ratcheted up on both the Sisquoc and Piru - all those trips are going to require just the right type of people. But I mean, if people are interested and considering it, they're probably just the right type of person.

But the Santa Ynez is a little more accessible?

Yeah it's a little more user friendly right now – it's going to get really tough. It's going to get so intense that I haven't really applied myself to figuring out how that's even going to work yet.

How do you mean? Are you going to get a gym membership to train up for these?

No, and I can barely keep the weight on as it is - even with Boone's "all-bacon diet" I've lost like 12 pounds since we started this. When I get out of the backcountry I eat as much as I can before heading back on the next trip.

You could actually sell it as that.

As a good weight loss program?

It's a really good weight loss program.



NATIVE PLANTS FOR SALE

Channel Islands Restoration currently has hundreds of plants native to Ventura County available for sale.

In 2017, Channel Islands Restoration gathered native seeds from many Ventura County watersheds including the Ventura River Watershed, the Santa Clara River Watershed, the Santa Monica Mountains, and others. With every seed collection we recorded the exact location so that genetic integrity would be ensured. This way we can provide you plants whose seeds were collected in your watershed.

Since then, we have propagated these seeds in our native plant nursery in Camarillo (pictured above). We are now excited to make them available for sale!

Come by our Camarillo Nursery on Saturday, March 9th or Monday, March 18th to purchase plants for your garden!

For more information, pricing, and to place a large purchase, email our nursery technician, Sarah (sarah@cirweb.org) for more information!

We can also grow other species and fulfill custom orders at your request. The full list of species is found below.

Interested in learning how to propagate seeds and grow plants on your own? Volunteer with us at our Camarillo Native Plant Nursery! Our knowledgeable staff can answer all of your questions and give you hands on experience.

PLANTS CURRENTLY FOR SALE



California Bricklebrush
Brickellia californica



California Sunflower
Encelia californica



California Buckwheat
Eriogonum fasciculatum



Coulter's Matilija Poppy
Romneya coulteri



Purple Sage
Salvia leucophylla



Black Sage
Salvia mellifera

SEEDS AVAILABLE FOR BULK SALE OR PROPOGATION

Acemispom glaber (Deerweed), Adenostoma fasciculatus (Chamise), Artemisia californica (California Sagebush), Baccharis salicifolia (Mulefat), Calystegia macrostegia ssp. cyclostegia (Coast Morning Glory), Castilleja affinis (Indian Paintbrush), Ceanothus megacarpus (Bigpod Ceanothus), Cercocarpus betuloides (Mountain Mahogany), Clematis lasiantha (Pipestems), Deinandra fasciculata (Clustered Tarweed), Diplacus aurantiacus (Sticky Monkey Flower), Elymus condensatus (Giant Rye), Encelia californica (California Bush Sunflower), Eriogonum fasciculatum (California Buckwheat), Hazardia squarosa var. grindeloides (Saw Toothed Goldenbush), Hesperoyucca whipplei (Chaparral Yucca), Juglans californica (Southern Black Walnut), Keckiella cordifolia (Climbing Penstemon), Malacothamnus fasciculatus (Chaparral Bush Mallow), Malacothrix saxatilis var. saxatilis (Clift Aster), Malosma laurina (Laurel Sumac), Marah fabaceus (California Man-Root), Prunus illicifolia (Holly Leaf Cherry), Rhamnus crocea (Redberry), Rhus integrifolia (Lemonaid Berry), Romneya coulteri (Coulter's Matilija Poppy), Salvia apiana (White Sage), Salvia leucophylla (Purple Sage), Salvia mellifera (Black Sage), Sambucus nigra ssp. caerulea (Blue Elderberry), Solanum douglasii (Douglas' Nightshade), Stipa lepida (Foothill Needle Grass)

PROTECTING OUR NATIVE GRASSLANDS

BY DANIELA SCHWARTZ

Early Sunday morning, a group of motivated volunteers met up at the trailhead of San Marcos Foothills to help restore the native habitat. The group spent around three hours pulling out the invasive weeds surrounding the native plants on the Preserve.

The main objective of Sunday's event was to remove invasive weeds that were encroaching upon the milkweed and purple needlegrass, two important native plant species of the San Marcos Foothills. The volunteers worked along an important freshwater seep and focused on removing clovers, mustards, and other invasive grasses. A volunteer would set up next to a native plant, marked by a little flag poking out from the ground, and remove any invasive weeds in a one foot "halo" around the native plant.

Leading the event was Kevin Thompson, a project manager for Channel Islands Restoration. He explained where and how to remove the weeds, as well as offered assistance on identifying plants and answered any other questions. Thompson has been with CIR since 2005, and has worked on all eight Channel Islands and throughout the mainland.

A volunteer named Jamie explained that invasive weeds smother the native species, making it hard for them to grow because they can't outcompete the weeds. Jamie does four to six volunteer projects a year. She said that aside from restoring a habitat, it's a nice way for her and her husband to do something as a couple.

Another volunteer named Blake, who is studying biological conservation, said that coming out to San Marcos Foothills to volunteer is a great way to spend a Sunday.

The volunteers worked hard to remove the offending invasive weeds all for the benefit of restoring biodiversity (the overall diversity of plant and animal life in an area). Restoring and maintaining biodiversity is vital for the health of the plants and animals in our region. For example, Kevin noted that the greater the abundance of milkweed, the greater the population of monarch butterflies, because milkweed is a great food source for them. Blake remarked that she had seen fewer monarch butterflies around Santa Barbara County this year than last year. A leading cause of the decline in monarchs has been the loss of milkweed plants along their migratory routes - the leading cause of milkweed decline has been the rapid growth of invasive weeds.



Kevin Thompson teaches volunteers about plant identification.

"California has lost 97 or 98 percent of native grasslands. Luckily, the San Marcos preserve still has bunches of the bunchgrass," Kevin said. Bunchgrasses - grasses that grow in clumps rather than spread out like lawn grass - are a defining part of native California grasslands.

Much of the Central Coast is besieged by invasive plants, but by doing restoration events in strategic locations, we can ensure that habitat is available to the species that need it most. However, according to Kevin, CIR is only able to come to the San Marcos Foothills a couple times per year. He said that the rate the organization comes really depends on funding. REI is one of their biggest sponsors, but plenty of support comes from private donations from the community as well.

After almost two hours of weeding, the group took a snack break in the shade, sharing past volunteer experiences. They then walked over to nearby habitat that had been restored a couple years ago. Before CIR volunteers' work, the area was completely covered with black mustard and other weeds, but it is now flourishing with native plants and singing birds.

"This is something that was really, really successful and it has everything to do with people like you guys," Thompson said. "Volunteers who came out for every single step of it; from clearing the initial space, to spreading the mulch, to planting, and to the continuous watering and weeding that it took to get these [native plants] grown up." Channel Islands Restoration has two more volunteer dates in February scheduled as of now: Saturday the 16th and Sunday the 24th.

UPCOMING EVENTS

VOLUNTEER EVENTS

San Marcos Foothills Preserve

We will be planting native grasses and shrubs into the open space we have created. These plants will directly contribute to increasing the biodiversity of the Preserve and the amount of life it can support.

Saturday, February 23rd

Sunday, February 24th

Sisquoc River

Join us on multi-day backpacking trips through the remote San Rafael Wilderness along the Sisquoc River - deep in the Los Padres National Forest backcountry.

Sunday, March 3rd to Thursday, March 7th

Sunday, March 17th to Thursday, March 21st

Lake Piru Watershed

Join us on multi-day backpacking trips in the backcountry above Lake Piru as we work to eradicate tamarisk from this vital watershed.

Sunday, February 17th to Thursday, February 21st

Santa Ynez River

We're heading into the backcountry for multi-day car-camping trips. Join us as we explore the far reaches of the watershed that feeds the Santa Maria River.

Monday, February 25th to Friday, March 1st

Monday, March 11th to Friday, March 15th

Monday, March 25th to Friday, March 29th

MEMBERSHIP APPRECIATION EVENTS

Spring Membership Picnic

This member-exclusive event will feature a hearty lunch of BBQ, grilled veggies, and plentiful sides - plus a raffle with great prizes!

Sunday, April 7th

NATURAL HISTORY TRIPS

White Mountains of Eastern California

Four days of geology, wildflowers, ancient trees and birds in the majestic alpine wilderness!

July 4 - 7

NATIVE PLANT SALE

Camarillo Native Plant Nursery

We have a number of native plants grown from seeds collected in Ventura watersheds for sale. Fill your garden with native plants!

Saturday, March 9th

Monday, March 18th

CONFERENCES

The 26th Annual Conference of the California Society for Ecological Restoration

The California Society for Ecological Restoration (SERCAL) is hosting their 26th annual conference here in Santa Barbara. CIR will be among dozens of other restoration agencies from across the state in presenting our work and sharing this year's lessons learned with our peers. If you're interested in attending, you can learn more at <https://sercal.org/sercal-2019-welcome/>.

April 10 - 12

NATIVE PLANT PROFILE

Toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*)



Toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*) is a common native shrub here on the Central Coast, which is easily identifiable by its small, but brilliant red berries, which give it its other common names - Christmas berry and California holly.

The five to 15 foot tall shrub is mostly found in the chaparral community alongside plants like scrub oak and lemonade berry. Toyon does not need much shade or water, so it's clear why the shrub is found in many parts of California, from Baja California to the Sierra Nevada, and especially in our Santa Ynez Foothills. It is also common to see the plant near homes because it makes a great hedge plant, and with enough moisture it can even act as a fire retardant, according to California Native Plant Society.

The berries are the most distinguishing feature on this plant, and they provide food and shelter for many of our native animals. Toyon berries are a food source for animals from small birds such as western bluebirds, cedar waxwings, and mockingbirds to large mammals like coyotes and bears. It's a win-win for both the animals and toyon, because animals provide the shrub's main method of seed dispersal. In the summer, the shrubs' bright flowers offer nectar to a wide diversity of native pollinators.

Toyon is the only California native plant that continues to be commonly known by its Native American name - given to it by the Ohlone people (according to the book California Native Plants for the Garden). For the Chumash, Toyon berries were a traditional source of food. They would collect the fruit in the canyon and roast or allow the sun to dry the berries before mashing them up and eating them. In addition to a food source, toyon could also be used to make tools like utensils, fish hooks, or even arrow shafts.

There is a commonly held belief that Hollywood gets its name from the California holly in the foothills above it. However, according to the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles, Hollywood was named by a wealthy landowner because they liked the name of a friend's estate in Illinois - also named Hollywood.

by Daniela Schwartz



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INSPIRATION POINT, ANACAPA ISLAND
Judy Oberlander, Holiday Photo Contest Winner