



A monarch rests on a native white sage. You may not think of butterflies as pollinators, but they are, as Jenn Rodriguez will discuss at our next Speaker Series. Find out who else is speaking in the related story below.

A Few Words from Our President

Greetings from COSF as we leave Summer 2021 behind!

It's been an eventful summer for many of us with the Covid-19 Delta variant lurking, the ongoing drought, wildfires of historic proportions, and the political acrimony that seems to define our current era. One continual refuge from our problems is our open space. There we're all alike, out to enjoy the trails and the relief they offer. I like to say I rarely meet an unhappy hiker or biker. Let's keep it that way.

On July 28, State Senator Henry Stern hosted the 27th district's **Nonprofit of the Year Award** virtual event. We at COSF were very proud to have been selected as a finalist in the category of Climate, Environment, and Wildlife Protection and recognized with, "Your dedication and leadership has made an invaluable contribution to the community." We were one of the few

organizations in our category to provide brief comments, which allowed me to introduce COSF to the large collection of amazing nonprofit organizations present, as well as describe the grateful responses from our two scholarship recipients.

We've been active at COSF in the past few months. We had scheduled an outdoor Native Plants Expo, but Covid concerns caused us to change it to a virtual presentation. See below for details on the **October 14 Speaker Series event**.

We've also been actively reaching out to collaborate with local organizations to address open space issues and increase our inclusiveness in the Conejo Valley. We've been meeting with **Poison Free Conejo Valley, the Conejo Climate Coalition, and Adelante Comunidad Conejo**.

Once again, I think newsletter editor Anne Russell and contributing Board members have put together an interesting and informative quarterly update. Besides expanding on some things mentioned above, you'll see an update on upcoming volunteer activities, a profile of **Board member Beto Huerta Salazar**, a review of a few terrific books of local interest, and recent news briefs.

Finally, we were greatly saddened by the tragic deaths of two experienced local hikers recently. Please stay on designated trails and also remember to show respect and gratitude to the rangers and others who are there to make our open space experience safer and more enjoyable.

All the best,



President, Conejo Open Space Foundation

We Couldn't Do It Without You

COSCA relies on volunteers to help build and maintain trails, act as extra eyes and ears for the rangers, carry out educational programs and support the open space in many other ways. Please consider volunteering for a program that interests you.

COSF depends on open space supporters for donations that help fund COSCA volunteer programs and so much more. We greatly appreciate your generosity.

[Donate](#)

[Volunteer](#)



Laura Pasetta (above), two other native plant experts, and COSCA administrator Brian Stark will present at our October 14 Speaker Series event.

Next Speaker Series: Native Plants Demystified

On October 14 at 7:00 p.m., three native-plant experts will share their knowledge with attendees of COSF's quarterly speaker series. Still being held virtually via Zoom, the fall Speaker Series event will feature botanical educators Laura Pasetta, Jenn Rodriguez, and Antonio Sanchez. COSCA administrator Brian Stark will also join to talk about native plant preservation in the open space.

Laura Pasetta, founder and owner of [Wild Rootz Outdoor Adventures](#), is a trained clinical herbalist, California naturalist, organic gardener and nature photographer. Her video presentation will cover how to identify native plants for food and medicine and some tips on native plant gardening.

Jenn Rodriguez, who holds a BS degree in Horticulture from UC Davis, will speak about the relationship between native plants and pollinators and will give a video tour of Camarillo wholesale nursery Growing Works, which she manages. Growing Works focuses on California natives, succulents, and Mediterranean plants and provides supported employment for adults with moderate to severe mental health challenges.

Antonio Sanchez is the nursery manager and restoration volunteer coordinator for the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. He has over 15 years experience, including heading up the nursery at California Botanic Garden in Claremont and co-owning Nopalito Native Plant Nursery in Ventura. He has worked at Cal Flora Nursery, Theodore Payne Founda-

tion for Native Plants, and the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden. He will talk about native plants in the garden and join Pasetta, Rodriguez, and Stark in answering attendee questions at the program's conclusion.

Attendees who donate \$10 or more when they [register](#) will receive a voucher for a free 4-inch plant from Growing Works and a 15 percent discount code to participate in a Wild Rootz adventure.



Coalition group Cities Against Rat Poison produced two billboards—one in English and one in Spanish—that went up September 8 to spread the word about the dangers of rodenticides to the community at large. LA County Supervisor Sheila Kuehl provided funding for the effort.

Advocate for Wildlife: Stop Rodenticide Use

The Conejo Valley now has its own chapter of Poison Free, a group dedicated to breaking the poison chain that sickens and kills local wildlife such as owls, hawks, bobcats, coyotes, and mountain lions. Founded by Robin Bertolucci and Bambi Corso-Steinmeyer, the [Poison Free Conejo Valley](#) team is working to educate individual homeowners and HOAs about the toll rodenticides are taking on pets and wild animals—even those poisons promoted by commercial exterminators as “safe.”

The passage last year of AB 1788, the California Ecosystems Protection Act, put a moratorium on the use of second-generation anticoagulant rodenticides (known as SGARs, these are the most persistent in the food chain). The SGARs temporarily banned by the bill are:

- Brodifacoum
- Bromadiolone
- Difenacoum
- Difethialone

But the bill, which was sponsored by State Senator Henry Stern and Assemblymember Richard Bloom, still allows the use of older forms of anticoagulant rodenticide, which also persist in the food chain and concentrate in the livers of higher level predators. Testing by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife shows that 80 percent of the smaller predators (bobcats, coyotes) and 95 percent of the mountain lions had multiple types of rat poisons in their bodies. Local vets also report regularly seeing pets poisoned by either eating poison bait directly or by eating poisoned rodents. And many of these toxic substances have no antidotes.

What you can do to help:

- Learn about and practice RED principles for pest management: [Repel, Exclude, Deter](#).
- Never leave your pets' food or water outdoors at night
- [Advocate](#) for safer pest control methods with your HOA.
- Display a Poison Free yard sign. You can order one from Poison Free Conejo Valley. Email them at PoisonFreeConejoValley@gmail.com: \$10 for two signs. (Use one on your own lawn and offer one to a neighbor to start a conversation.)
- If you see a wild animal incapacitated by mange (a symptom of poisoning), report it at [AnimalHelpNow](#). You can also download their app.
- Let your state assembly and local representatives know you are concerned about rodenticide use and that you'd like to see the SGAR ban become permanent and extended to all rodenticides.

If you would like to start advocating for wildlife in your own community, learn more at [Cities Against Rat Poisons](#).



COSCA is hoping to hold its next volunteer trail-work day next spring. The fall event, previously scheduled for Oct. 16, is canceled due to Covid-19 precautions.

Volunteer Opportunities: Come Join Us!

On **September 25**, National Public Lands Day, the Santa Monica Mountains Fund (SAMO) is hosting a volunteer work day at Rancho Sierra Vista. Projects include: Restoring native plant habitat for wildlife; improving trails; and repairing the Park Service horses' stables! [Advance registration is required.](#)

On **October 7**, the Conejo Senior Volunteer Program will hold a volunteer fair from 10:00 am until noon at the Conejo Creek North Park. (The park is located behind the Goebel Center and Thousand Oaks Library.) A total of 40 nonprofit and public-service organizations, including COSF, will be there with information about volunteer opportunities for older adults.

[Ongoing volunteer opportunities](#) with COSCA include:

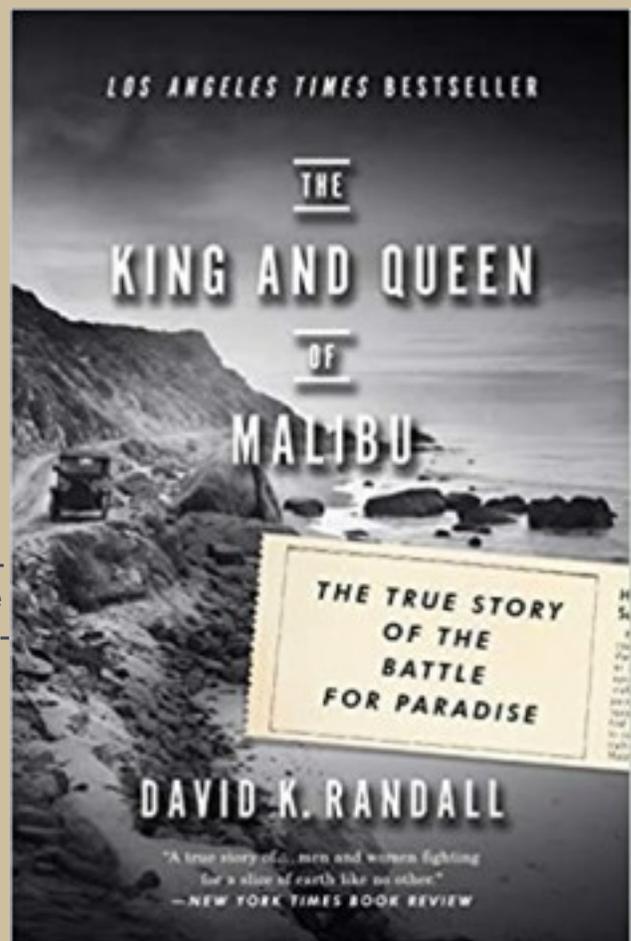
- **Adopt-A-Trail.** This has been the most popular COSCA volunteer program of 2021, with 58 volunteers adopting 79 Conejo Open Space trails and filing 359 reports about conditions and doing light maintenance. There are still trails available for adoption!
- **Bike Bell Boxes.** In 2021, nine volunteers refilled trailhead boxes on an ongoing basis with complimentary bells paid for in part by COSF. The bells are for mountain bikers to alert other trail users to their presence.
- **Trail Watch.** Keeping an eye on trail conditions and reporting hazards to COSCA is important. This year, 21 volunteers in the Trail Watch program filed 412 reports, as well as restocking trail maps and picking up trash.

Conejo Reads: Something for Everyone

Board member **Steve Johnson** scoured his 500-volume personal library for favorites to share with you, whether you're looking for adventure, history, or nature content. His current recommendations:

[Local Multi-Use Trails](#) Kelly Murphy
This 2012 book describes the author's favorite readily accessible multi-use trails from Reseda to Newbury Park and from Simi Valley to Malibu. Each description features distance, elevation, technical, and aerobic ratings as well as a sketch of the route. Definitely told from a local perspective, as reflected in the somewhat myopic title. Self-published.

[The King and Queen of Malibu](#) David K. Randall



This 2016 book describes the post-Alta California settlement of the Santa Monica Mountains by settlers from the East, and how they came into conflict with the wealthy Rindge Family, who had purchased the land. Why are there vestiges of a railroad line across the beachfront from Santa Monica to Malibu Colony? Why is there a museum at the Malibu Lagoon? This book will tell you.

[Calochortus: Mariposa Lilies & Their Relatives](#) Mary Gerritsen & Ron Parsons

We are extraordinarily fortunate to live and recreate in an area replete with Mariposa lilies, which can be found every spring, but in great abundance in rainy years following wildfires. This 2007 book describes the 73 species and hundreds of varieties of Calochortus, provides beautiful photographs to help in identifying them, and pointers on how to grow them yourself.



Spotlight on...

COSF board member **Alberto “Beto” Huerta Salazar** moved to the Conejo Valley with his wife Cecilia in 2013 to join Amgen, where he currently works as a regulatory affairs lead. Salazar holds degrees in pharmaceutical engineering and industrial administration.

When did you join the COSF board and why?

I joined COSF in March 2021 to collaborate in COSF's objective of promoting and maintaining the Open Space and trails of the Conejo Valley and making sure the community is engaged as custodians and protectors. The magnificence and beauty of the Conejo Valley has touched me deeply and I'm glad to give back to our community to preserve and cultivate the love for our precious Open Space.

Why is open space important to you?

I am a committed trail runner and hiker. I enjoy the beautiful trail system almost every day along with my wife and my dog-souls Genaro and Poli: It's an extension of my home, a place I cherish as part of my daily life. The nature around us has become an important element of the way I live and interact with the community, and, as such, I'm committed to maintain, improve, and preserve this landscape.

What advice to you have for open space visitors to get the most out of their time there?

Please take a look at all details this pristine Open Space has to offer across seasons: flowers, trees, grass, birds, large animals... this is a living organism that transforms, regulates and regenerates itself year-round. If you pay attention carefully, you'll realize this is an open museum, with all exhibitions at your fingertips.

What do you like to do in the open space?

Running, hiking, taking a nap or just hanging around... all possibilities for relaxing and contemplating.

Is there any "secret" or underused open space that you think people should know about?

Upper Santa Rosa trail (connecting from CLU to Wildwood) is gorgeous and low trafficked with amazing sunsets. A fun 5- to 6-mile loop starts either by Wildwod (main entrance) or at Briar Bluff Ct. (trailhead is right by the cul de sac at the end of the street).

What are your hopes for the future of COSF and/or the Conejo Open Space?

I would like to see COSF being a community-supported organization that Conejo Valley citizens take pride in, an example of how we all can make a difference in protecting and preserving our loved spaces.



Eagle Scout candidate Luke Purmer's crew with the completed bench.

News In Brief

- Starting bright and early on August 14, a group of Scouts from Troop 787 in Thousand Oaks teamed up to complete Luke Purmer's Eagle Scout project, installing a bench at the north end of the Shooting Star trail where it meets the Lower Santa Rosa trail in Wildwood. COSF volunteer coordinator John Kross supervised, helping the Scouts carry materials and tools up the trail to the site. COSCA rangers Ryan Stead and Nick Ferrari also assisted, as did Luke's father, Dr. Michael Purmer, who hiked in the 50 lb. bag of concrete needed to secure the bench's base.
- **COSF welcomes a new board member, Tania R. Garcia**, who fills the seat of departing COSF Secretary Katie Morgan. Garcia, who is an avid hiker, has an extensive background in development and community relations with the University of Denver and California State University Channel Islands.
- In early July, a juvenile **black bear was spotted** late at night near the Borchard Skate Park in Newbury Park. Ventura County sheriff deputies followed the cub in patrol vehicles for about an hour until it returned to the open space without incident. No additional sightings have been reported.
- We are **updating and adding to the hiking route pages** on the COSF website. The new and improved PDF guides are only two pages so they are easy to print and take with you. New features include: a general description of the trail and its highlights; statistics such as the length, amount of climbing, facilities, hazards, and trail conditions; the elevation profile and a map that shows the route clearly. New maps will be posted to social media every other Monday and trail trivia questions will appear alternating Tuesdays.
- RIP: Two hikers fell to their deaths in the open space in separate incidents. In late July, Newbury Park's **Johnny Mutolo**, 48, died after falling down the hillside above the Ar-

royo Conejo. In August, **James Ledbetter**, 60, of Thousand Oaks, tumbled onto rocks and suffered a fatal head injury near the Sunrise Trail in the Lang Ranch area.

- Congratulations to the winners of our new and improved “Where in the Conejo” contest! Our knowledgeable entrants correctly identified two local trails and a notable native insect in the July, August, and September competitions. This season’s winners of a \$25 gift card are: **David Filgas, Liz Mian, and Wendy Zimmerman**. If you would like to be added to the “Where” contest email list, go [visit our website](#) and sign up.
- Have a comment, correction, story idea or other **input for the newsletter?** Let us know! Email us at: newsletter@cosf.org.



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Want to Volunteer? Here's How!

The COSCA Volunteer Corps has many ways for residents to help maintain and preserve the open space that surrounds our beautiful Conejo Valley. By joining with others, we can make sure that the trails, canyons, and ridgelines will be enjoyed by visitors for generations to come. You can read about the specific volunteer opportunities below, and you can submit a request to volunteer, noting your specific interests, [here](#)

- [Adopt-a-Trail Program](#)
- [Bike Bell Box Replenishment](#)
- [Trail Watch Program](#)
- [Trail Ambassador Program](#)
- [Trail Work Days](#)
- [Trails Education Days](#)



The Conejo Open Space Foundation was formed in 1995 to promote and maintain the open space and trail system of the Conejo Valley and to educate residents as to their roles as custodians and protectors of the open space and the environment. Our [web site](#) illustrates ongoing Conejo Open Space programs supported by the Foundation that help preserve and protect our precious open space.

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