

Berkeleyside

Tracking neighborhood wildlife, one beetle at a time

August 30, 2010 2:01 pm by Tracey Taylor



Photo: Kay Loughman.

Gulf Fritillary feeding on penstemon on Grand View Drive.

Like many residents of the Berkeley-Oakland hills, Kay Loughman enjoys living close to nature. Sightings of deer, wild turkeys and skunks are common-place. But Loughman is fascinated by the more diminutive species too: be it an Anise Swallowtail butterfly, a Western Terrestrial Gartersnake or a Spotted Towhee bird.

Three years ago, Loughman started a website, Wild Life in the North Hills, to keep track of the wealth of natural life close to her home on Gravatt Drive. “It was an outgrowth of the monthly bird list I’d been posting on our neighborhood listserv,” she says. “A few people suggested it would be helpful to see pictures of the species I mentioned.”

Soon, friends, neighbors and other members of the community were contributing photographs and helping to identify mushroom species. The site, developed with the help of Loughman’s husband Bill, is divided into nine sections and documents insects, plants, fungus, rock and minerals as well as reptiles and birds.

Loughman, who describes herself as a birder and native plant gardener, defines the area covered by the site as roughly bounded by Tunnel Road, Domingo Avenue, Claremont Canyon, and Grizzly Peak Blvd, with an emphasis on Claremont Canyon and the surrounding hillsides. She has lived in the same spot since 1972, with a 20-month absence after the 1991 firestorm.

Given her passion for California natives, Loughman includes an album on the site showing invasive exotics, “so people can see what not to plant”.

Loughman’s favorite wild animal to spot is the coyote. “Although I hear one occasionally, it’s been a few years since I’ve seen one in the neighborhood,” she says.

One would think that Wild Life in the North Hills would have enabled Loughman to be more at one with the environment, but she says the opposite is true. “It’s brought me closer to my computer. For every hour I spend outside taking pictures, there could be a dozen or more hours spent reviewing and editing photographs. And I’m always conscious of the ‘need’ to get a photo, so I fuss with my camera instead of just enjoying the moment.” Still many days bring new discoveries. “Just yesterday I saw an insect I’d never heard of before – a robber fly,” she says.

Contributions to the site are welcome. Read the notes for contributors in the About the Photos section to ensure the site’s standards are adhered to. If your lady-bug is not actually photographed in the Claremont Canyon Watershed, for instance, she doesn’t qualify for pin-up status here!



Kay Loughman