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Trillium chloropetalum blooms in Garber Park.

WILD LIFE IN THE NORTH HILLS

Ten Years of Documenting Wildlife in Claremont Canyon
by Kay Loughman

2015 MARKS THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY of my documenting flora and fauna of Claremont Canyon. It's been a rewarding, though sometimes frustrating process. The project was prompted by Conservancy member Bill McClung who persuaded me to post a monthly list of wildlife sightings on Open Forum, our local list-serve. He also talked me into believing that people would also be interested in seeing pictures of the canyon's wildlife. My own thought was that the more people contribute sightings or photos, the more they come to appreciate the Canyon. Thus the idea of a wildlife website was born. The primary asset I could bring to the project was skill in bird and mammal identification as I had little knowledge and less interest in websites or photography at the time.

I realized early on that the website would need a few policy guidelines. The most important one—the one that continues to define the main characteristic of the site was that: *All photos must document sightings in Claremont Canyon.*

A few people began to contribute photos and, with a lot of help from my husband, a website was launched in 2007. In that first year the website hosts I tried were awkward to use and technical grief undermined my commitment to continue with the project. In terms of content, it became clear that if I wanted a lot of pictures, I would have to take them myself.

We owned an early model digital camera at the time. It was lightweight, fine for many uses, but not great for wildlife photography. By mid-2008 I had a more advanced camera, was learning to use it, and had a website host I could work with.

Of even greater importance at the outset were the many photographic contributions from Conservancy members Marilyn Goldhaber, Martin Holden, and Tamia Marg. Then too, while participating in Conservancy field trips, I learned to identify species other than birds (plants, butterflies, etc.), and through those outings, I also met experts who were willing to help identify the content (mushrooms, lichens, and insects) of pictures I'd taken.



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As the number of photos on the site grew, more and more people submitted pictures of their own! By 2015, 2500 photos, submitted by more than 100 photographers, documented all types of flora, fauna, and more.

The greatest variety is in the bird category—nearly 100 bird species—common year-round residents, migrants that are here to breed, winter residents now departed for breeding in northern climes, flyovers, opportunists, misplaced easterners, old friends and new finds. While most photos were taken by people, a few images of wildlife were captured by security cameras! *Photographs comprise the bulk of the site, but I have also included lists of species reported, recommendations for printed field guides, and reports of biological research done in Claremont Canyon.*

My own pace has slowed considerably over ten years. So I'm enormously grateful for the continuing efforts of John Colbert (who has contributed pictures of more species than any other photographer), Erica Rutherford, and all who hike regularly in the Canyon and generously share their observations and photos.

For the future, below is my bucket list. If you would like to help, please contact the Conservancy or contact me at www.nhwildlife.net.

1. Of 400 plant species reported in Claremont Canyon, the website has photos of about 250. I still need photos of the remaining 150. It's a great project for someone who knows plants and is willing to carry a camera.
2. There are still several bird, butterfly, mammal, and reptile species not yet documented with a photo.
3. I have dreams of one of those insect survey groups spending a few days in Claremont Canyon – catching, identifying, and photographing insects.
4. Precious little time has been spent in the

northeastern parts of the canyon, including Side Hill Trail. I'd love to know what is being seen in that area.

5. My field guide recommendations should include electronic resources, as many people now turn to applications on their smart phones or computers rather than consulting a printed work.
6. Given that we are next door to a major university, I expect more biological research has been done in the canyon. Locating it is the challenge.
7. There are lots of mushroom photos still to be identified.
8. The Conservancy could use an energetic volunteer or part-time person to reinvigorate its nature walk program.



May 17 Bird Walk in Claremont Canyon

JOIN DAVE QUADY AND KAY LOUGHMAN to look for some of the birds that breed in Claremont Canyon. Meet at 7:00 AM at the four corners intersection of Grizzly Peak Boulevard and Claremont Avenue/Fish Ranch Road. We'll pick an area that looks interesting and search until about 11 AM for year-round resident birds and for Neotropical migrant birds that have returned to breed. Bring binoculars if you have a pair (Dave will have a few pairs to share) and a field guide if you have one. Free and open to the public. RSVP appreciated but not necessary to info@claremontcanyon.org or (510) 843-2226.

For something different, meet Kay and Dave at 5 AM at the foot of Gelston Street to enjoy the dawn chorus as birds break into song as the sun rises. We will stand quietly and try to identify birds by their songs until about 6:30, leaving enough time for a quick breakfast snack before our 7 AM meeting at the top of the canyon.