



THE NATURE RESERVE
at Rancho Mission Viejo

COMMUNITY ACCESS REPORT 2023



The Nature Reserve at Rancho Mission Viejo (TNR) is a growing habitat reserve located in south Orange County. Over time TNR will grow to include over 20,000 acres of Rancho Mission Viejo lands, inclusive of The Richard & Donna O'Neill Conservancy. Visitation and exploration of The Nature Reserve is managed by The Reserve Connection. The Reserve Connection is a public 501(c) (3) non-profit, that serves to provide opportunities to the community to **Connect, Explore, and Preserve** Nature Reserve lands.

SCHOOL PROGRAMS

In the 2022-2023 School Year, the Reserve Connection provided 79 School Programs. The Nature Reserve offers opportunities for hands-on learning through our onsite field trips. All field trip curriculum is correlated to CA academic standards. Attending these field trips were 2,820 students. Through grants and donations, more than 50% of students attended free of charge, including transportation.

In addition to elementary school students, eight high school juniors and seniors participated in our Environmental Science Field Study Program, where we partner students with scientists working on the habitat reserve to help students gain experience in the field of conservation.



COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

In 2023, The Nature Reserve hosted 121 Community Programs, both public events and events only for residents of Rancho Mission Viejo. Public events included interpretive walks, recreational hikes, astronomy nights and night hikes, and natural history lectures.

Many events were offered at The Nature House, an interpretive building and teaching space located at Ranch Camp in Rienda. These include programs like *Reading with Reptiles*, a literacy program for preK-aged children and their families.

Residents of Rancho Mission Viejo also explored the land during *Open Access Events*, *Family Nature Days*, *Knee-High Naturalist programs*, and guided hikes on special trails.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

In order to connect with our surrounding communities, TNR participated in 12 community outreach events and shared information about The Nature Reserve with over 3,500 people in 2023. We also co-hosted two large scale events in Rancho Mission Viejo. In partnership with RanchLife, for the second year, we cohosted the *Earth Day Festival* and for the 7th year *Turkey Trot on The Ranch*, which supports TNR School Programs.

At The Nature House we hosted *Trail Mixers*. These were informal gatherings where folks get to know more about TNR by asking questions, hearing a short presentation, and speaking personally with staff and volunteers.



VOLUNTEER AND LAND STEWARDSHIP PROGRAMS

TNR is responsible for the maintenance of trails in certain areas of the habitat reserve. These include the nearly 10 miles of trail on the Richard and Donna O'Neill Conservancy. In addition to trail maintenance, TNR staff and volunteers remove invasive species such as artichoke thistle, milk thistle, and black mustard. In 2023, volunteers and staff hours were 1,044 hours on trail maintenance and invasive species removal.

Nature Reserve volunteers also donated 584 hours in support of our School, Community, and Outreach Programs. These volunteers delivered programs, helped out at outreach events, assisted on field trips, and acted as trail sweep during staff-led hikes and walks.