



# NATURE NEWS

## Welcome to Nature News

Through this quarterly newsletter we hope to encourage you to **CONNECT** with us through our many programs, **EXPLORE** the wonders of nature, and help us **PRESERVE** Orange County wildlands. Enjoy!



Join the  
20-Year  
Anniversary  
Challenge!  
Starting in April.





**Celebrating 20 Years!**



Finish the Challenge.  
Join the Party!

**SAVE THE DATE**  
October 4

Nature  
Reserve 20th  
Anniversary  
Celebration!



## Rambles About Nature

### Longevity of the Land

If there's one living organism on the Nature Reserve that embodies the idea of longevity, perhaps it is the coast live oak tree, we call the Mother Oak. At an estimated age of 550 years, it is the oldest known



## Volunteer Corner



High School  
Environmental

oak on The Nature Reserve and a favorite spot for many, including myself.

Every time I walk up the trail and catch the first sight of this magnificent tree, I'm always a little awestruck. The proof would be to look through my photographs over the years. So many of those are of that first glimpse as you come up the trail. Often as I stand under the branches of this tree, I wonder what the Mother Oak has seen in the 500 plus years. What are the stories it would tell if it could talk? What changes have occurred as it sprouted from an acorn to seedling. As it grew from a sapling to the great oak it is today.

Did Acjachemen, the first people to the area, gather acorns from Mother Oak's branches?

When the oak was just 200 years old, did members of the Portola expedition ever rest beneath its shade as they made their way through the San Juan Capistrano Valley.

During the earthquake of 1812, did the leaves shake? Did any last remaining acorns of the season fall to the ground?

How tall were its branches in 1882, when the Flood and O'Neill families first started cattle ranching in the area? Did the cattle nibble at low-lying branches?

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## Laura's Line



### 20 Years of Management and Monitoring

This year 2026, will be the 20th reporting year for The

Nature Reserve. Twenty years of managing and monitoring The Nature Reserve at Rancho Mission Viejo. We started in 2007 with just over 2,000 acres and twenty years later The Nature Reserve is just over 8,700 acres of permanently conserved wildlands. So far, we have protected important populations of our listed species: California gnatcatcher, least Bell's vireo, Riverside and San Diego fairy shrimp, thread-leaved Brodiaea and arroyo toad, in addition to important populations of our non-listed bird species such as cactus wren, grasshopper sparrow, yellow-breasted chat, yellow warblers and amphibians such as western spadefoot and southwestern pond turtle.

Along the way we have improved the condition of The Nature Reserve by implementing a Reserve-wide invasive species control program particularly in our riparian and grassland communities. We have documented through monitoring that our coastal sage scrub continues to be healthy, our oak woodlands are slowly coming back from the extended drought of the 2011-2017 and the riparian habitat associated with our creeks is stable or improving. Through regular surveys we know

## Science Career Program

Building tomorrow's future stewards of the earth promotes longevity of open spaces like The Nature Reserve. The High School Environmental Science Career Program began in 2020 and helps local high school juniors and seniors become more familiar with careers in environmental science and land management.

Each meeting introduces a different professional in the field of environmental science and the role they play with The Nature Reserve and other projects in Orange County.

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## Staff Picks



### New Staff, Field Naturalist

Susan is a Field Naturalist for The Nature Reserve and loves working with elementary aged children on their field trips. She grew up in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and graduated from Northern Michigan University with a bachelor of science degree in Business Administration. She has worked in the education

that all our listed species continue to occupy their historic ranges on The Nature Reserve but year to year numbers vary according to conditions of the survey year.

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## Species Spotlight

### Long-eared Owl (*Asio otus*)

The long-eared owl (*Asio otus*) is a medium-sized, slender owl that often

appears to have a surprised expression due to their long ear tufts that typically point straight up like exclamation marks. Although long-eared owls occur in the state year-round, they have a restricted breeding range in southern California and may be more prevalent during the winter. This species is about the size of a crow or mallard, and is considered to be a smaller, slimmer version of the more common great horned owl. They are fairly dark birds with buff/orange faces and detailed black, brown, and buff patterning on their feathers. They also have two ear tufts that are black with buff fringes, and two vertical white stripes between their yellow eyes. The species is very vocal and has a wide variety of hoots, squeals, barks, and other sounds.

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field at both Saddleback Valley USD and Saddleback College. In her spare time, Susan enjoys hiking, walking her dogs, working in the garden and spending time with her family.

[OUR TEAM](#)

## Outdoor Explorers



## Building Longevity

While most young people are not focused on longevity, there are some simple everyday actions families can do together to begin focusing on wellness and longevity. For kids, start with building skills focused on health and wellness for the body and mind. See our T.R.E.E.S. Longevity for Kids for some ideas below.

[T.R.E.E.S. Longevity for Kids](#)

## Community Connections

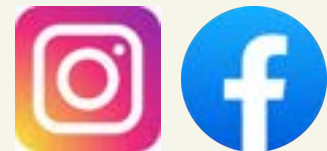


### Orange County Bird of Prey Center

A longtime friend of The Nature Reserve, the Orange County Bird of Prey Center (OCBPC) is a local nonprofit organization built upon a volunteer community working to sustain populations of raptors for healthier habitats here in Orange County. OCBPC works tirelessly to treat and rehabilitate injured raptors with many successfully released back into the wild. They also provide public education on the challenges raptors face and the integral role they play in the balance of nature.

The Nature Reserve has hosted OCBPC at community events, presentations, and our annual summer camp. Rehabilitated red-tailed hawks (*Buteo jamaicensis*) have also been released into The Nature Reserve to ensure the longevity of the species and sustain a healthy ecosystem.

Follow us!



We thank the OCBPC for their longtime partnership and commitment to ensuring a healthy population of raptors for generations to come. Learn more about the OCBPC and their work at <https://www.ocbpc.org/>. Join The Nature Reserve and the OCBPC for a special evening learning about Birds of Prey on March 18. Register [here](#).

READ MORE

Watch for **Tuesday Takeovers** on our Social Media from this year's **High School Environmental Science Career Program Students!**



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