OPEN SPACES

Summer 2016 vol 23 num 2
On a foggy day in May OVLC board members, staff, docents, and volunteers toured the western end of the US Forest Service’s (USFS) Ocean View Trail. They were joined by the Ojai District’s Wilderness Trails Manager Heidi Anderson and Los Padres Forest Association’s Cordon Jenkins. The OVLC in partnership with the USFS is now in planning stages for making the six-mile Ocean View Trail official. Some 18 miles in total, the trails will one day connect the Ventura River Preserve via the Kennedy Ridge and Camino Cielo trails to Carpenteria and Matilija Canyon.

Photos (clockwise from top): Looking up toward the Ocean View Trail; the view looking into Matilija Canyon; Stewardship Director hike on Kennedy Ridge; view toward White Ledge Camp on Ocean View Trail.

On the Trail to Camino Cielo

Riverview Trailhead Makeover

Long referred to on hiking blogs as “that dirt parking lot next to Rice Road,” the Riverview Trailhead recently got a well-deserved facelift with the help of Wild About Ojai funding—formerly known as 1% for Ojai. Riverview is the most central of the Ventura River Preserve’s three trailheads, and the OVLC’s most popular and visible trailhead.

Several improvements have brought the quality of the trailhead up to par, including a new kiosk with interpretive signage, and entry signage with temporary notices and rules. New perimeter and entry fencing was installed and repaired, with much of the fencing in place to keep preserve users away from a dangerous cliff drop off on the view side of the parking area. Warning signage was attached to the fence for public safety. The entry road just downhill of the trailhead has been repaired and the hillside planted with native vegetation to prevent erosion.

To address the dust of the dirt parking area, gravel was installed for the first time in the history of the trailhead which first opened in 2001. Initially, wood chips were put on the surface, but they would spontaneously combust, requiring occasional calls to the fire department.

In the past 12 months, similar contributions paid for rehab work at Oso Trailhead and the US Forest Service’s Pratt and Gridley Trailheads, which serve the Valley View Preserve area.
Providing Homes

OVLC field crew member and climber Kevin McLeod ascends up a tall eucalyptus tree on the Ojai Meadows Preserve to place a new barn owl box donated to the OVLC by the Ojai Unified School District and Once Upon a Watershed. Photo by Rick Bisaccia.

The Great Horned Owls at the Ojai Meadows Preserve

If you were lucky this spring, you may have been able to spot these guys at the preserve. Pictured to the right is the famous red-tailed hawk nest that had been used for years by the red-tails. Last year (2015) the great horns took over the nest (yes, they are more aggressive), so this is their second year there. The red-tails moved to another nest but have not yet been successful. It is very unusual for great horns to have three young; it must be a year of plentiful rodents to provide them with an abundant food source.

All owl photos courtesy of Dean Zatkowsky—thank you for the great images!
The OVLC is gearing up to remove over 16 acres of arundo in San Antonio Creek along Creek Road this fall. Arundo is an exotic, invasive plant species that looks similar to bamboo. It is extremely harmful to our creeks—it crowds out native plants and wildlife, uses three times more water than native plants, and is a serious fire hazard. Removing arundo benefits our community, wildlife, creeks, and views.

Importantly, this project helps to protect the valley’s water supply. Research published by the California Invasive Plant Council states that on average, removal of one acre of arundo results in a net savings of 20 acre-feet of water per year. To put that into perspective, one acre-foot of water supplies two average four-person families with water for one year. The area of arundo that we will be removing equates to a total savings of 320 acre-feet of water per year, or the amount of water 640 average households use in one year.

This project includes just under five miles of creek from Camp Comfort downstream to the confluence with the Ventura River adjacent to Rancho Arnaz. It requires multiple state, federal, and local permits, most of which have been issued. Such permits ensure that measures to protect endangered, threatened, and sensitive species that live in our creeks are implemented. The four species of highest concern are southern steelhead trout, California red-legged frog, and two birds—the southwestern willow flycatcher and the least Bell’s vireo.

Major collaboration between many agencies and the support of two dozen private landowners who have property along Creek Road makes this project possible. Funding for the project has been granted by the California Department of Water Resources and additional funding is currently being sought. This project is also part of a larger watershed-scale arundo removal effort. Numerous organizations are collaborating and conducting removal projects with the ultimate goal of an arundo-free Ventura River Watershed.

The Ojai Valley Land Conservancy is proud to announce the first Ventura County graduating class of the California Naturalist Program. The California Naturalist training is an innovative program developed by the University of California Cooperative Extension to foster a committed corps of volunteer naturalists and citizen scientists trained and ready to take an active role in local natural resource conservation, education, and restoration.

The course was divided into sessions focusing on state and local geology, geography, water, energy, plants, ecosystems, wildlife, and environmental challenges. Lead instructor Professor Don Rodriguez (Department Chair Environmental and Resource Management at CSUCI) was joined by local scientists and experts in the various fields. The field trainings were on OVLC preserves and other locations in our Ventura River Watershed.

Twenty-one students received their certification at the end of the rigorous six-week course. The diverse and committed group completed 40 hours of combined classroom and field training. At the last class the students presented their Capstone projects. The projects were designed to benefit OVLC and other organizations such as Friends of the California Condor, the Ojai Valley Green Coalition, and the Ventura Hillsides Conservancy. The program also recommends a minimum 40 hours of volunteer service per year to the local community, in the following areas:

- Scientific research—plant identification or data collection
- Environmental monitoring—bird counts, stream sampling, invasive species monitoring
- Restoration or conservation projects—seed collection, native plant propagation, and planting
- Education—volunteer as docents, develop signs or brochures, lead nature hikes, make science more accessible to others through support of the Naturalist Program, or other community outreach activities.

The next certification class will be held in early Spring of 2017. OVLC will have an open house this fall to showcase the student projects and begin early bird registrations for next year’s class.
Ventura River Preserve Oak Restoration

Thanks to several new grants, oak restoration will continue at the site of the old orange orchard in the Ventura River Preserve through 2017. A total of 25 acres will be planted with coast live oaks and native shrubs this winter. This is in addition to the ten acres planted last winter. This new planting will begin just after the first winter rain to take advantage of our seasonal precipitation.

Why should we tackle such a project? When the OVLC acquired the Ventura River Preserve in 2003, the orange orchard was nearing the end of its productive life. In 2004, the OVLC stopped watering the orchard. Rainfall over the next ten years kept about a third of the trees green, but in poor condition. In the fall of 2015, most of the orange trees were removed to prevent the spread of the Asian citrus psyllid (agricultural pest) and eliminate a fire hazard, with the ultimate goal of restoring the land to what it was before the orange trees were planted.

Why is this project important? Oak savanna and woodland habitat has been severely impacted in California since the mid-1800s. These disappearing landscapes have been leveled for grazing, agriculture, and urban development. Oak woodlands provide many beneficial ecological functions to our environment, such as nutrient cycling, water storage and transport, carbon sequestration, and wildlife habitat. They are one of the richest habitats in southern California, home to over 60 species of mammals and over 110 species of birds.

Funding for this project comes from a variety of supporters. A generous gift from a private donor funded the majority of the orange grove removal. Once the orange trees were gone, the OVLC was able to apply for restoration grants. Just recently the OVLC was awarded $200,000 in grant funding from the State of California Wildlife Conservation Board and $131,000 from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. Furthermore, last year mitigation funds from the California Department of Transportation and the Ventura County Oak Tree Mitigation Fund were granted to the OVLC. In total, $786,000 has been granted to transform the old orange grove into oak woodland and savanna habitat.

On the Trail...

Members of OVLC volunteer trail crew shined up many of the trails this spring. A big thank you to all of our volunteers for their tireless efforts in keeping our trails as well maintained as they do. Without this dedicated group it would not be possible for the OVLC to keep our trails in such great shape.

Around Town...

In partnership with the City of Ojai, OVLC field crew members planted a number of our own nursery grown narrow-leaf milkweed plants at Cluff Vista Park in downtown Ojai. Crew leader Kimo Ellison slots in a milkweed, which is crucial to the development of the monarch butterfly.

OVLC Board

A warm welcome to our newest board members (clockwise from top left) Meredy Benson Rice, Jim Little, Martha Greszewski, and a warm welcome back to Stefanie Cooler. The OVLC is governed by an all volunteer board. To read more about our OVLC board members, please visit our website ovlc.org.
Preserve Cleanups

Above: The OVLC field crew cleaned up over 60 tires that were half buried on the Ventura River Preserve as part of a recent cleanup. Nathan Wickstrum flexes his muscles while Kimo Ellison advises him on his throwing technique.

Below: A paintball battlefield, trash, and junk were cleaned up on the Rio Vista Preserve by the OVLC field crew. The 33-acre preserve was acquired in 2009, and is 3/4 of a mile long and runs parallel to the bike path in the Oak View area.
Business Sponsor Profile
Ojai Valley Trail Riding Company

“I am so blessed to live and work here in the Ojai Valley. One of our many blessings here is the Ojai Valley Land Conservancy. Twenty-three years ago when I purchased my land to build a ranch I never imagined I would be so lucky to have the OVLC purchase the Ventura River Preserve and open it up to hikers, bicyclists, and equestrian activities, and ultimately be my neighbor! I have been fortunate to be able to utilize the Ventura River Preserve in a commercial respect. I enjoy bringing guests on the property and telling of the land conservancy and its history, while respectfully insuring, donating to, and volunteering with the conservancy. I count my blessings everyday while riding a horse on the preserve!”

— Sue Gruber, Ojai Valley Trail Riding Company

The Ojai Valley Land Conservancy is lucky to have a growing business sponsor program. Contributions from local businesses are an integral part of our preserve management program, and help keep our trails in great shape and our preserves free of trash and graffiti. Some of our business sponsors are also frequent users of our preserves as part of their businesses, forming a close relationship between them and the OVLC. In many cases, our commercial preserve users offer unique ways to experience and interpret the outdoors that the OVLC can’t offer on its own.

One of our long-time business sponsors, The Ojai Valley Trail Riding Company, offers trail rides on the Ventura River Preserve from their adjacent Oso Ranch. Run by local award-winning horsewoman Sue Gruber, the company offers visitors a chance to see the Ventura River Preserve on horseback while learning basic riding skills.

The Ojai Valley Land Conservancy
Protecting your views, trails, water and wildlife
ovlc.org
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Partners...

Are you Wild About Ojai? We are.
Welcome our newest Wild About Ojai Partners...

Drawn to its natural beauty and small-town ways, my husband Joe and I came to Ojai 18 years ago to raise a family. We now have three boys, Lukas, Elias and, Matias, who, we are delighted to say, have grown up running and biking its endless trails, getting to know its wildlife, and developing a real love and appreciation for the outdoors.

Others also came to Ojai for its natural beauty and outdoor recreation. And as a realtor and business owner, I am keenly aware that these qualities are critical not only to my success, but to that of anyone doing business in the valley.

So much of what Ojai offers today is the direct result of OVLC’s efforts over the last 30 years to acquire open space, restore damaged lands and improve and manage these precious places for the benefit of all. Ojai would indeed be a lesser place without this great organization whose many preserves we are encouraged to enjoy. As one who personally and professionally benefits every day from OVLC’s work, I am happy and proud to support it by joining Wild About Ojai.

We are big supporters of local farms and our guests are primarily locals. We care very much about our surroundings and want to protect the health and charm of the Ojai Valley. We chose to partner with the OVLC and Wild About Ojai because we are WILD ABOUT OJAI and our residents.

Participating in Wild About Ojai gives me a good feeling, knowing that I’m helping, at least in some small measure, to sustain the recreational use of the many parts of our valley that have been preserved by OVLC. Being in the business of enhancing subjective life experience has heightened my awareness of the sustenance of just being immersed in natural beauty. I feel honored to support OVLC. See you on the trail!

– Allison Walton, Owner East End Restaurant & Bar

I joined the Wild About Ojai program because I am grateful for the Ojai Valley Land Conservancy and for their diligent efforts to protect our views, trails, water and wildlife. As a 4th generation Ojai native, I am lucky enough to have enjoyed these beautiful surroundings as a child and I am delighted that the OVLC will ensure the same for my children and future generations.

– Tonya Peralta, Realtor Peralta Real Estate Services, Inc

I am an outdoors enthusiast. When I have free time I am climbing mountains and rocks, hiking, biking, running, swimming, and adventuring through our local wilderness and the Sierra Nevada Mountains and beyond. We all need to wash our spirits clean and break clear away into nature once in a while.

I believe there is a better way to conduct business. A way that minimally impacts the environment; a way that supports our communities; a way that better us all by providing top quality services in a respectful and environmentally friendly way. The Glass Man supports this way of business and the organizations working hard to protect and maintain open spaces; that our children may see the world as we do… maybe even a little better!

– Dan Glassman, Owner The Glass Man Professional Window Washing Company, Inc.

We know how lucky we are to live, work and play in the Ojai Valley and enjoy all of the open space and places to explore. Our mission with California Solar Electric is to leave the world a better place by providing reliable alternative energy to the businesses and residents of Ojai and beyond, so it is natural for us to want to contribute even more by supporting the Ojai Valley Land Conservancy’s Wild About Ojai Program.

– Don "Cam" Campbell, California Solar Electric

We know that this is a special valley and it is a privilege to call it home. Our community will help protect Ojai’s open space for everyone to enjoy, forever.

Visit a participating business today and take part.

A Taste of Ojai
Axxess Ventura
BeCalm of Ojai
Bliss Frozen Yogurt
California Solar Electric
Chamber on the Mountain
CHAR MAN Brand Hot Sauce
Dogs Fly Design
East End Restaurant & Bar
EcoLogic LifeStyle Design
Erik Wilde, Coldwell Banker
Gabriela Ceseña Berkshire Hathaway HS
The Glass Man Professional Window Washing Company, Inc.
GoOjai.com
Greyfox Investors
Healthy Eco Home
Kava Home
Mooney Creative
NatureSprite.com
Ojai Food Taxi
Ojai Pilates and Fitness
Ojai Quarterly
Sal Haus Design
SusanKGuyArt.com
Suzanne’s Cuisine
Tobias Parker, General Contractor
Tonya Peralta Real Estate Services, Inc

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Visit a participating business today and take part.
Current OVLC members, you will soon receive a password by email to access discounted tickets.

Can’t find the email? Not sure if you are current? Contact tania@ovlc.org, or (805) 649-6852 x6.

Thinking about joining the OVLC? Join today and receive two free tickets! Please type “Mountainfilm Tickets” in the comments section of the donation form and we will send you two tickets when you join with a first time donation of $35 or more.

Sponsored by

Front Cover: This lonely roadrunner has been singing his song at the Ojai Meadows Preserve for the last few years in vain, but this summer he may have finally found a mate! Photo courtesy of Dean Zatkowsky.

Friday, September 23

Gates open at 5:00 pm / Films start at 7:15 pm
Ojai Valley School Sports Field

Tickets: ovlc.org/events

Bring your blankets and low-back chairs and stake out your spot on the lawn. Before the show there will be live music, food trucks, and a beer garden.