



August 2019

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Dear Nature Lovers,

We hope you will enjoy this issue of the *Valley Wilds* and your open space parks this month!

Sincerely,

The *Valley Wilds* and LARPD Open Space Staff

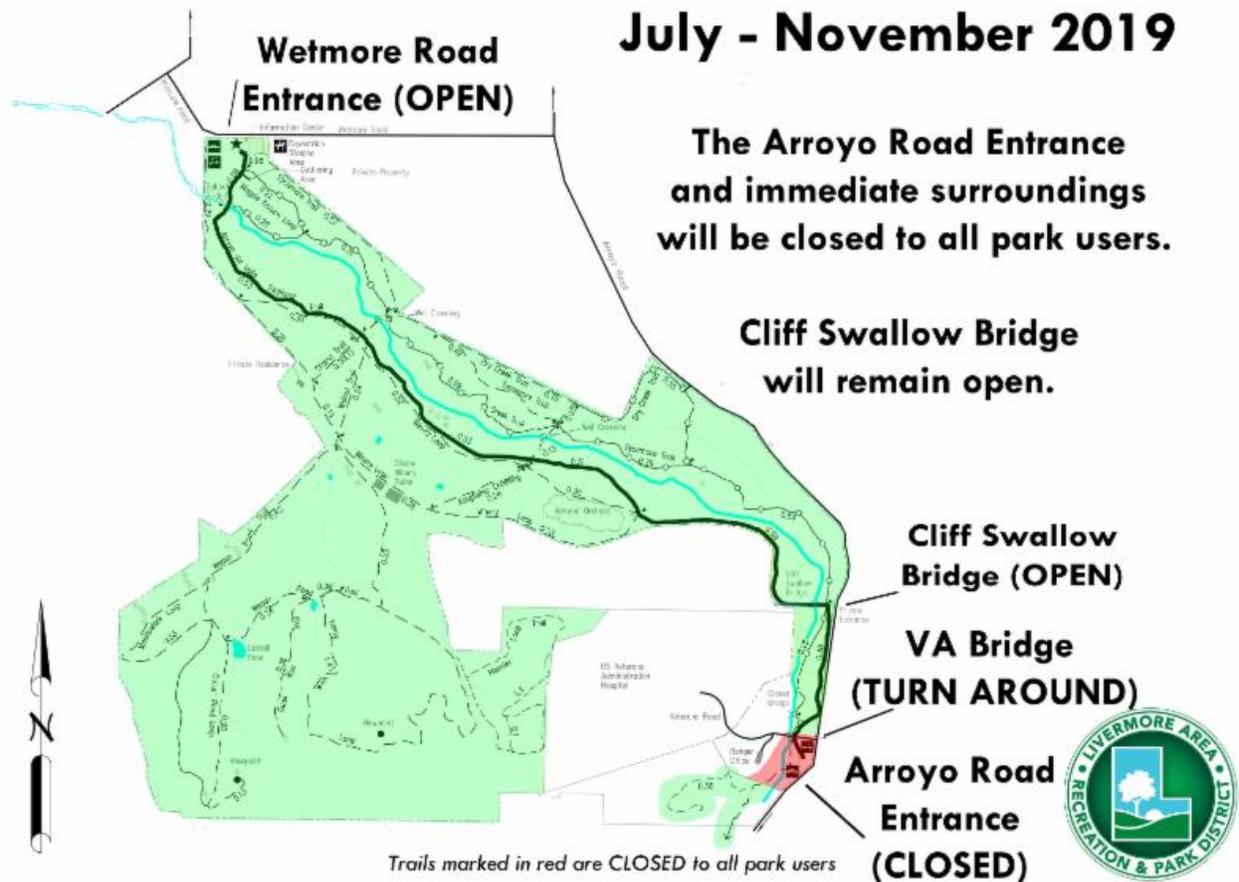
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Park News

Tri-Valley Conservancy's bridge construction project in Sycamore Grove is underway! Trees have been pruned and erosion control measures put into place. Work is being done to ready the area for installation of a beautiful new year-round bridge. It is scheduled to arrive in mid-September. Most of the park is open during construction with the exception of the Arroyo Road Entrance. The map below shows areas that are open and areas that are closed. We thank our park visitors for their patience during this important project.

Sycamore Grove Park Bridge Construction Closure

July - November 2019



Nesting Raptors and Owls in SGP

by LARPD Open Space Volunteers Polly Krauter and Ray Fontaine



Soaring over your head in Sycamore Grove Park, you'll see graceful birds known collectively as birds of prey. They are called birds of prey because they are active hunters. They mainly feed on rodents, small birds, or insects, and have beaks designed for tearing apart these creatures. Commonly seen in the skies over Sycamore Grove are Red-Tailed Hawks, Red-Shouldered Hawks, Cooper's Hawks, Northern Harriers, White-Tailed Kites, and falcons such as Kestrels and Merlins. If you are very lucky, you may see an occasional Peregrine Falcon. There is also a thriving population of owls, including Great Horned

Owls, Barn Owls, Burrowing Owls and Screech Owls.

For the last six years, LARPD Open Space Volunteers have conducted a limited survey of Birds of Prey in order to assess the numbers and variety in the area. The survey's goal is to use uniform methods to collect raptor nest

information and get a picture of the status and changing populations of these birds. The information collected will indicate the ecosystem health of Sycamore Grove Park and the surrounding area. Raptors often serve as a barometer of ecological health of an area because they are predators at the top of the food chain. Threats like pesticides, habitat loss, and climate change have a dramatic impact on top predators. As such, Birds of Prey are considered indicator species.

Locating nests high in tree canopies or in cavities (holes) can be a challenge. Volunteers survey nest locations along a route, identify species, and record the number of fledglings. We never attempt to count eggs or look inside the nests. We take great care to maintain a distance from the birds in order to not inhibit their activities. We take sightings from designated trails only, using binoculars. We identify nest locations by GPS coordinates.

Keeping track of who is nesting where can be a challenge because the birds abandon their nests for a variety of reasons. Occasionally, a Great Horned Owl will take over a nest built by a hawk, crows can pester a bird in the nest until it leaves, weather can destroy nests, parasites can cause a bird to leave, and sometimes birds will leave because they find a better location for a nest.

Typically, we start looking for birds building or rebuilding nests in February. Over the next five months, we monitor about a four-mile route on the Sycamore, Arroyo del Valle, and Wagon Road Trails. Starting around mid-February or March, successful raptor nests typically hold eggs, which may hatch in March or April. Three- or four-week-old young will begin to look outside the nest to investigate their surroundings in April or May. At this time, we can see fledglings and begin our counts. At the age of about 9 to 10 weeks, the juveniles begin to fly. It is likely that only one to two nestlings will successfully fledge from the nest.

Many factors act as barriers to nestling survival, including human disturbance, low prey availability, and competition for increasingly limited nesting territory due to encroachment from human development. Climate change can manifest in changes to prey base, increased competition for territories, cavities, or nests, etc. Climate change may also compound existing threats such as the spread of invasive species and increased competition. Flocks of crows harassing raptors and owls also may cause birds to abandon a nest. Mobbing attacks are strongest when birds have the most at stake, such as during the breeding season when young birds are at risk.

Some years, Sycamore Grove is home to many raptors that sometimes nest relatively close to one another. We asked the authors of *Raptors of California* and *Owls of California and the West*, Hans and Pam Peeters, if the close proximity of raptor and owl nests is unusual. Their response is that it is not, if sufficient food is available. Since all raptors and owls do not eat the same food, there is usually enough. Red-Tailed and Red-Shouldered hawks eat mammals such as rabbits, squirrels, and gophers. The medium hawks like Merlin, Cooper's, and Sharp-Shinned are primarily bird hunters. Kestrels like

large insects and small reptiles. Another factor that can extend food supply is the time of day that the birds hunt. Dusk, nighttime, and dawn are when Owls feed, and they have preferred foods that allow them to "share" space. The larger owls feed on night-roaming rodents (mice, rats, moles, etc.), whereas the smaller owls like nighttime insects (moths, and some beetles). Different preferences for nest type also allow occupation of the same habitat by multiple species. Most of the raptors are "open-nesters," but some are "cavity nesters."

This year's population assessment is not finalized, but thus far the number of Red-Shouldered Hawks (two) and Red-Tailed Hawks (four) is down compared to last year (six Red-Shouldered, and 8 Red-Tailed). We have observed that Great Horned Owls have displaced hawks from their nests - our surveys found three sets of two fledglings. This year, we were unable to find White-Tailed Kites in the areas where they normally nest. Along our survey trails, we saw five different species that fledged young (Red-Tailed Hawks, Red-Shouldered Hawks, Cooper's Hawks, Great Horned Owls, and Barn Owls). Keep in mind that these are the nests that we could see from the trails - there could be many more nests that we did not find.

Our raptors and owls play an important ecological role in the area by controlling populations of rodents and other small mammals. They are important indicator species, and a beautiful sight for all of us to enjoy. If you see a young bird on the ground, please do not approach it - just leave it be. Juvenile hawks and owls may spend a few days on the ground before they take wing. If you are concerned about a bird on the ground, you may call the LARPD Ranger Office at (925) 960 2400.



Photos by Polly Krauter

Please RSVP for Programs!



With the exception of Applefest, please RSVP for programs in advance so we know how many people plan to attend. This also allows us to let people know when a program is cancelled. All payment will now be collected at the start of the program. Payment may be made by cash (exact change is appreciated), credit card, or check. If you have already registered for a program, you do not need to RSVP. We will have records of your registration at the program.

Upcoming Ranger-led Programs

<p>PONDING USA Saturday, August 17 10:00 am <u>Sycamore Grove, Reservable Picnic Area</u> Forget surfing - everybody's going ponding with Ranger Darren today! Let's beat the August heat and explore the pond. After a brief introduction, we will take nets and go hunting for the elusive critters (water bugs) hiding in the pond. Afterwards, we will take a look at what we caught. Good for ages 5 and up. All ponders must wear closed-toed shoes like water shoes or old tennis shoes.</p>	<p>Fee: Adults \$5 Ages 5-17 \$1 <u>RSVP*</u></p>
<p>LEAPING LIZARDS Sunday, August 18 2:00 pm <u>Sycamore Grove, Reservable Picnic Area</u> Summertime is reptile time! Some of our most easily seen reptiles are the lizards. Join Ranger Dawn to learn about the lizards found in our area and around the world. There will be live specimens to see.</p>	<p>Fee: Adults \$5 Ages 2-17 \$1 <u>RSVP*</u></p>
<p>INTERMEDIATE MOUNTAIN BIKE RIDE Saturday August 24 9:30 am <u>Sycamore Grove, 1051 Wetmore Road</u> Join Ranger Heather for a fun 8-mile climb into the hills for beginner to intermediate riders on fat-tire bikes with gears and hand brakes. This is not a technically challenging ride, but it will include about 800 feet of climbing at a slow-but-steady pace. Ages 8 to adult. Tough mountain-biking adults with a younger child on a trail-a-bike are welcome, but the trail is not suitable for bike trailers. Helmets are required. Excessive heat will cancel.</p>	<p>Fee: Adults \$5 Ages 8-17 \$1 <u>RSVP*</u></p>
<p>APPLEFEST! Sunday, August 25 12:00 pm - 4:00 pm <u>Ravenswood Historic Site, 2647 Arroyo Road</u> Come to Ravenswood Historic Site to explore the apple orchard and taste antique apple varieties you can't find in stores. Drop in any time between 12 - 4 pm, Ongoing activities include cider making (and drinking!), "apple slinkie" making, face painting, old-fashioned games, and docent-led tours of the historic buildings. Special apple tasting and apple history talk with Ranger "Apple" Amy begins at 2 pm.</p>	<p>Fee: Adults \$5 Ages 2-17 \$1 No RSVP needed.</p>
<p>EVENING HILL HIKE Sunday, Sept. 8 7:00 pm <u>Sycamore Grove, Reservable Picnic Area</u> Join Ranger Amy for a short hike to a hilltop with a beautiful view! The</p>	<p>Fee: Adults \$5</p>

trail is steep but short (less than one mile round trip). Bring water, a jacket, and a maybe a snack. Children under 18 must be accompanied by a registered adult. Recommended for ages 4+.

Ages 4-17 \$1
[RSVP](#)

SYMBOLS OF THE STATE

Sunday, Sept. 15 10 am

[Sycamore Grove, Reservable Picnic Area](#)

Most of us know the state bird and flower. However, the state has many other official symbols. From fish to flag, and museum to dance, there are a surprising number of symbols for California. Join Ranger Dawn to learn what they are and a little about their history. Recommended for ages 8+.

Fee:
Adults \$5
Ages 8-17 \$1
[RSVP*](#)

FALL NATURE HIKE

Saturday, Sept. 28 10 am

[Sycamore Grove, Reservable Picnic Area](#)

The year is winding down, the temperature is dropping, and the fall colors are beginning to appear. Join Ranger Darren for a walk through the park as we observe these changes and, hopefully, observe some of the resident wildlife getting ready for the winter season. This will be a one- to two-mile hike over more or less level ground. Bring water and a camera if you like.

Fee:
Adults \$5
Ages 2-17 \$1
[RSVP*](#)

* RSVP by clicking on the RSVP link, emailing valleywilds@larpd.org, or calling the ranger office at (925) 960 2400

Once a year, Ranger Amy trades in her ranger uniform for Victorian clothing...



Applefest

SUN. AUGUST 25
12-4PM

Join us for cider making, apple picking, old-time games and docent tours.

AGES 18+: \$5 • AGES 2-17: \$1 • UNDER 2: FREE

Ravenswood Historic Site

2647 ARROYO ROAD, LIVERMORE

FEES PAYABLE AT EVENT OR PRE-PAY AT LARPD.ORG

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Livermore Area Recreation and Park District | Ranger Office: (925) 960 2400 |
<https://www.larpd.org/departments/openspace>

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