

Our Dictionary Hill

DHOSA

Western Fence Lizard



Spring 2018

www.dictionaryhill.info

Our Hill Belongs to the People

In case you missed the momentous announcement in our last newsletter, it's worth saying it again. The County Board of Supervisors voted in November to acquire and preserve 175 acres of coastal sage scrub and chaparral habitat in Spring Valley. The property, which includes Dictionary Hill and adjacent canyon and ridgeline areas, will be added to the County's Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP).

MSCP lands are preserved to ensure the long-term survival of sensitive plant and animal species to balance the public need for development and open space. Supervisors authorized the County General Services Department to complete the purchase for an appraised value of \$5,467,000. The Board also approved additional funds for signage, access control and vegetation management.

A Generous Grant from CECO

Dictionary Hill Open Space Advocates are delighted to announce that the San Diego County Employees' Charitable Organization (CECO) has awarded a grant to our organization of almost \$1,000. With the purchase of a computer and programs, DHOSA will be better able to educate community groups, residents, and students on the intrinsic value and importance of Dictionary Hill, as well as promote the physical and mental health-benefits received by simply hiking to the top of this quiet, unspoiled land.

Remember to like us on Facebook. It's one more way we can publicize the importance of Dictionary Hill.



Dictionary Hill Community Hike

Forty-one local hikers turned up Sunday, March 25 for DHOSA's annual interpretive trek to the summit. Three groups were guided by our resident biologist, Jim Merzbacher, zoologist Pat Bryan



and docent Karen Gless. After the recent rains the hill was looking green with several species of our native wild flowers blooming for us.

It was one of those special spring days when the views are stunning. For several of the people who joined the hike, this was their first time up Dictionary Hill. If you haven't been to the top of Dictionary Hill, we have the best 360 degree view point in all San Diego County. We suspect that those newcomers who experienced that view will be become regulars who appreciate this Spring Valley gem.





It's what's under your feet

Those colored patches on our rocks are lichen. Not many people know what lichens are, yet there are twenty thousand known species in the world. Lichens are complex and bizarre organisms which are a partnership of two separate organisms, a fungus and an alga. They have formed a relationship where the alga photosynthesizes and produces food, while the fungus provides the structure and takes minerals from the rocks. So the lichen you just missed treading on is really two life forms working together. They are extremely slow growing so watch where you put your feet, That lichen may have been growing here before the first Spanish explorers landed in San Diego.

We Need Your Help

Dictionary Hill now belongs to the people of San Diego County. The Parks and Recreation Department will be active in improving access and protecting the hill, but we need all of us as local residents to take an active role. Off road vehicle activity on the hill causes lasting damage and is now illegal.

If you see vandalism, illegal dumping or off road vehicle activity please contact the Sheriff's non-emergency number 858-565-5200, or the County Parks at 619-644-5492.

Together we can make Dictionary Hill a preserve we all treasure and appreciate.

Flat Topped Buckwheat

An Easy One to Spot

It's fun to be able to identify the plants as we hike up our hill. An easy one to start with is Flat Topped Buckwheat.



This is a perennial shrub. But what does perennial mean? Simply that it doesn't just live for one year and then die off. It survives for many years.

This common bush grows to around four feet. It's easy to identify because it can be seen flowering most months of the year. The flowers are

tiny and grow in clusters. They are pink and creamy colored.

Significantly this buckwheat is a habitat for two of the rarest fliers in the US. The California Gnatcatcher is a tiny bird found only in the coastal south west of California - nowhere else in the country. It nests and hides within its branches. The endangered Quino Checkerspot butterfly was seen in 2017 after a 35 year absence. Its larvae survive in the lower branches during their dormant period.

This buckwheat is also an attractor for bees. This is crucial when our national bee population is declining at a worrying rate. Many of our food crops depend completely on bees to pollinate them. No bees equals crop collapse equals food shortages equals rocketing prices.

Insects v Spiders

We have spiders on the hill. We have insects on the hill. So how can you tell a spider from an insect?

Pretty simple.

1. Spiders never have wings. No spider can fly. Most insects have wings at some stage in their life cycle.
2. All spiders have eight legs. All insects have six legs.
3. Spiders don't metamorphose like caterpillars into butterflies or maggots into flies.
4. Spiders don't ever have antennae - feelers - on their heads.
5. All spiders are carnivores. No spider feeds on plant material, Mostly they catch and eat insects. Easy isn't it?

If you want to join our team or know more about the work of Dictionary Hill Open Space Advocates, contact Chris Heiserman at chaise9400@aol.com