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UC SANTA BARBARA
Cheadle Center for Biodiversity & Ecological Restoration

Restoration Register

May 2025



Bush sunflower (*Encelia californica*) in full bloom on the NCOS Marsh Trail at sunset. Photo by Karen Lunsford.

Updates

Native Wildflowers



Red maids (*Calandrinia ciliata*), California poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*), miniature lupine (*Lupinus bicolor*), and seaside fiddleneck (*Amsinckia spectabilis*) bloom in front of Henley Gate. Photo by Susan Cook.

Native wildflowers are putting on a vibrant display across the Cheadle Center's managed areas. At Henley Gate, red maids (*Calandrinia ciliata*), California poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*) and seaside fiddleneck (*Amsinckia spectabilis*) are blooming in abundance. The show continues on Lagoon Island, where the burn plots remain rich with native wildflower diversity. In addition to the species already mentioned, visitors can spot common popcorn flower (*Cryptantha clevelandii*), miniature suncups (*Camissoniopsis micrantha*), blue toadflax (*Nuttallanthus texanus*), Nuttall's snapdragon (*Antirrhinum nuttallianum*), and common phacelia (*Phacelia distans*), among others.

More information about the burn plots and native wildflower restoration at the Campus Lagoon can be found in the article Controlled Burns on Lagoon Island and the video Fire Followers: Superbloom on Lagoon Island.

If you're curious about the unique color of our local poppies, check out our feature story from last year - Genetic Diversity and California Poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*).



California poppies (*Eschscholzia californica*) carpet Lagoon Island. Photo by Susan Cook.



Seaside fiddleneck (*Amsinckia spectabilis*). Photo by Susan Cook.



California poppies (*Eschscholzia californica*) brighten up the recreation center. Photo by Susan Cook.

Whittier Pond Nightlife

On the night of March 28th, a trail camera positioned near Whittier Pond at the North Campus Open Space captured a flurry of nocturnal wildlife activity. Within just four hours, the camera recorded a coyote, opossum, two raccoons, and a striped skunk moving along the rocky shoreline beside the pond. This brief yet eventful window underscores the importance of Whittier Pond as a year-round freshwater source.


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Celebrating Interdisciplinary Collaboration: UCSB & Harding School Field Trip



Harding Elementary students explore native wildflower habitat at the Campus Lagoon.

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who helped make the recent field trip to the lagoon such a memorable experience for our Harding co-learners! The fourth grade students had a fantastic time exploring the diverse sounds and life around the lagoon—learning through curiosity, observation, and hands-on discovery. This field trip showcased the power of interdisciplinary collaboration between UCSB's Cheadle Center, the Departments of Education, Music, and our Harding Elementary partners. When we bring together our unique perspectives and knowledge, we create unforgettable learning moments.



Bucket Brigade at the Ellwood Monarch Grove



Bucket brigade after a morning of planting with SB Foundation staff in the Ellwood Monarch Grove.

The partnership between the City of Goleta, the Cheadle Center, Your Children's Trees, and, most recently, the Bucket Brigade has resulted in the planting of over 465 eucalyptus trees in and around the monarch aggregation areas—along with more than 4,000 nectar-providing and riparian plants. Volunteers from Deckers, Yardi, the Santa Barbara Foundation, and local neighbors and friends have been instrumental in helping to transform the grove.

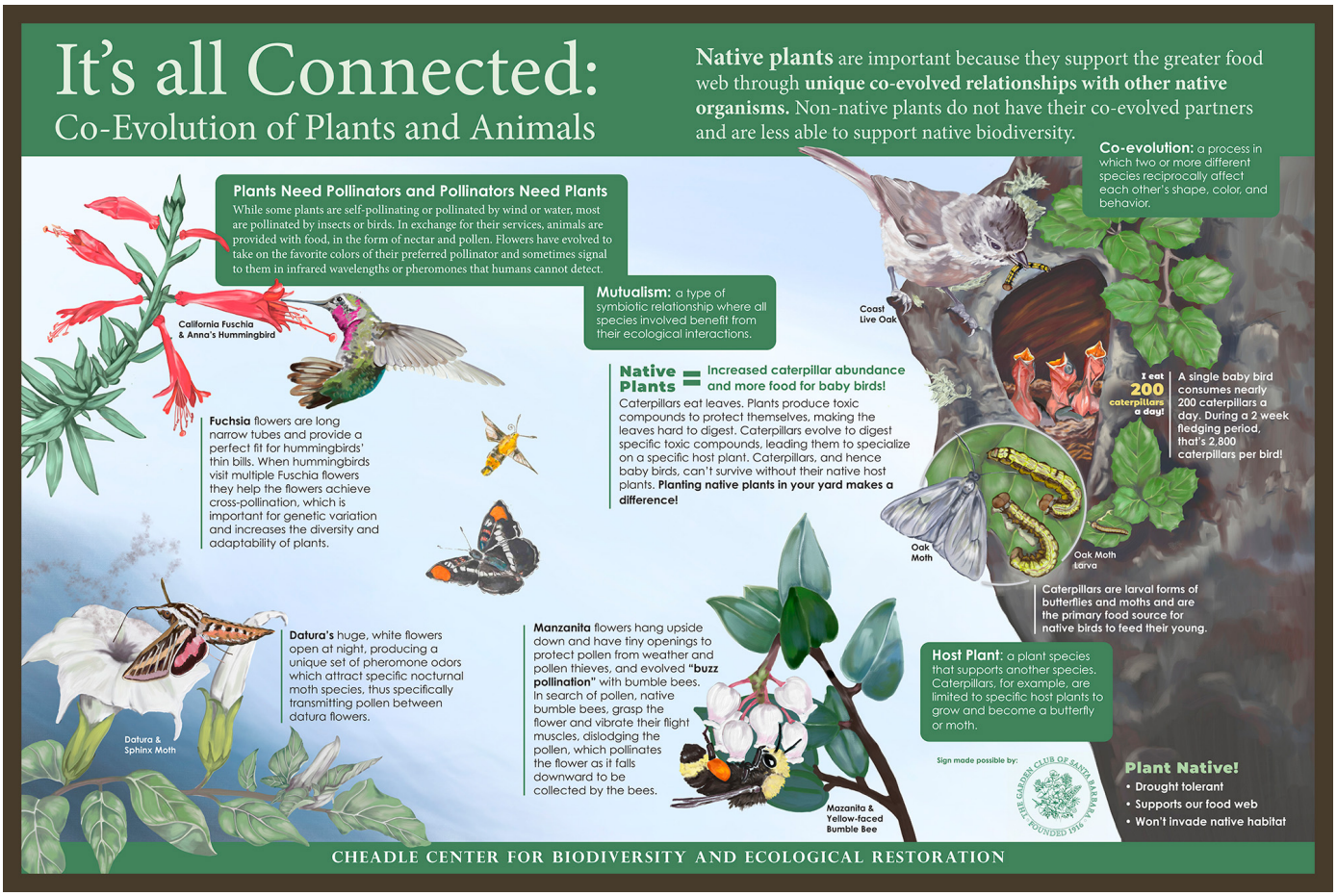
Join us on May 17 as the City celebrates 20 years of protection for Ellwood Mesa and the Monarch Grove. We look forward to seeing you there!

Native Plants Coevolution Sign



This sign was recently installed at the NCOS Duttenhaver Outdoor Classroom.

Check out our new interpretive sign at the North Campus Open Space! Learn how native plants and animals have evolved together in unique, mutualistic relationships—from hummingbirds and fuchsia flowers to caterpillars and oak trees. This beautifully illustrated sign highlights why planting native species is vital to supporting biodiversity and the greater food web. Every native plant makes a difference! Take a closer look at the sign below.



This and many other signs at NCOS and the Campus Lagoon were designed by Kelly Campbell.

North Parcel Planting



UCSB student workers plant blue-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium bellum*).

Planting has begun in the newest Ocean Walk faculty housing zone at the North Parcel restoration site! Staff, students, and volunteers have been hard at work beautifying the area with native plants such as California poppy (*Eschscholzia californica)* and blue-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium bellum*). These efforts help restore native habitat, support pollinators, and enhance the landscape for the entire community.



Staff members Madi and Camryn prep holes alongside longtime volunteer Rick.

White-tailed Kite at NCOS



White-tailed kite on the border of the North Campus Open Space and South Parcel restoration site.

After years without sightings and only a few sporadic ones in recent times, a white-tailed kite was recently observed successfully hunting at the North Campus Open Space. This exciting moment marks a hopeful

sign of the species' return to the area.



The kite took flight to hunt over the NCOS Mesa grassland.



Following a successful hunt, the kite landed in the remnant willow patch to the northeast of the Mesa grassland to feed.



White-tailed kite resting in the willow patch after eating its fill.

Feature Story

Burrowing Owl Conservation at NCOS



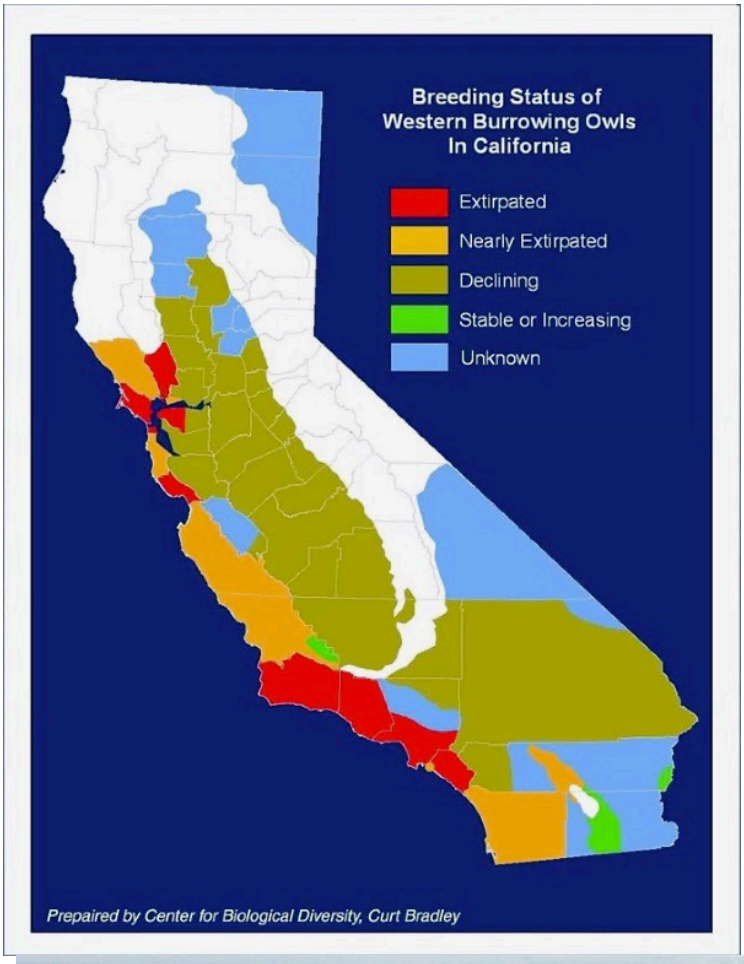
Burrowing owl on the NCOS Mesa

Burrowing owls were once a common sight - and their calls a familiar sound - across the grasslands and deserts of the western United States. Belatedly, they are now being considered for listing as threatened or endangered in California, though there is little doubt they have been highly endangered for a long time—especially in Santa Barbara County.

These owls have declined dramatically in California over the past 100 years. Approximately 60% of their remaining breeding habitat, recorded in the 1980s, was lost by the 1990s. Their numbers have continued to decline precipitously since then.

Now completely extirpated as breeders in the state, they appear only as winter migrants from the northern parts of their range—a migration that untold thousands have made for over a million years, but which now sees fewer and fewer participants each year.

Unfortunately, when they now migrate into Southern California, they encounter a world transformed by vast swaths of development. Many do not survive the winter to return north and breed. Most of



the flat, open spaces they once relied on are gone—lost to urban sprawl and intensive agriculture.



While most birds that fail to find the few remaining patches of suitable habitat are left to fend for themselves, a fortunate few find their way into the care of rehabilitation experts—and with that, a

new lease on life.



Burrowing owl undergoing full oil decontamination at International Bird Rescue in San Pedro. Photo by Ariana Gastelum from International Bird Rescue.

On January 24, 2025, we received a burrowing owl that had been rescued by a citizen in Los Angeles County and meticulously rehabilitated by the staff at the Ojai Raptor Center.

After their expert team cared for the owl's injuries and closely monitored its recovery, it was ready for release—and we were able to play our part. As one of the few sites in the region with open space restored and specifically designed with burrowing owls in mind, we could offer ideal conditions to give this owl its best shot—all we could hope to do. Burrowing owls require short grass, abundant burrows made by ground squirrels or badgers, relatively flat terrain, and an absence of trees or perches to survive and thrive.

We released the owl in the late afternoon into an artificial burrow we had previously confirmed was unoccupied. A dark, deep burrow is a safe haven for this species—and it darted into it like a bullet. We left it a mouse, quietly withdrew, and crossed our fingers.





Right away, this owl began to show its personality, gradually taking in the new landscape. Notice how it keeps its head on a swivel here, looking for great horned owls - but stands its ground from a wandering skunk.

Three days later, we cautiously approached the area. From a distance, we could see the owl had relocated about 25 yards, to a similar but different artificial burrow. It was here it would make itself at home- becoming our rarest bird on campus.



A month in, the little owl was seemingly here to stay, spending its nights out hunting, and its days watching the goings on- and always keeping a keen eye out for red-tailed hawks, crows and other dangers.



As each day passed, the owl grew more and more comfortable. But ever alert, it knew when to retreat at the first sign of danger—waiting until the coast was clear to resume its lookout.

The owl relied on the features of our site to stay alive- a single tree or artificial perch nearby would almost certainly have resulted in its predation or departure from stress. And dangers were indeed present..



Many of these visited the burrow at night, while the owl was out hunting.



But the owl persisted. As time went on, it even found the courage to face the ever-abundant crows it had once hidden from.



It was often seen preening, stretching, and quietly observing the day-to-day activity around it, occasionally darting out during the day to snatch an insect. Most of its feeding, however, seemed to occur at night.

The owl appeared to leave us on the evening of March 23, likely migrating north to breed. While we were sad to see it go, we're grateful to have given it a fighting chance. We are just beginning the first major steps to implement habitat recommendations and improvements across thousands of acres in Santa Barbara County to support these critically rare birds. Stay tuned for more updates on these efforts!

Volunteer Opportunities



"Second Saturdays" at NCOS

May 10th, 9:00 - 12:00

Please RSVP to ncos@ccber.ucsb.edu

Help us restore and create NCOS with plants and more! Meet at 6969 Whittier Drive at 9am. Bring water, sunscreen, and wear a hat, clothes and shoes that are suitable for outdoor work.

Thursdays - Greenhouse Associates





Thursdays 9:00 - 12:00

Come help transplant seedlings of native plants with the CCBER team. To join, please send an email to ncos@ccber.ucsb.edu.

Nature Guide Tour

May 17th, 9:30 - 11:00

Please RSVP to ncos@ccber.ucsb.edu

Come take a walk around NCOS and learn about native plants and animals with a trained Nature Guide.

Community Photos

We are interested in any observations of wildlife activity on NCOS, as well as plants and landscapes. Please send your observations, with or without photos, to ncos@ccber.ucsb.edu. Thank you!



Green Heron at Phelps Creek on NCOS. Photo by Valérie Lent.



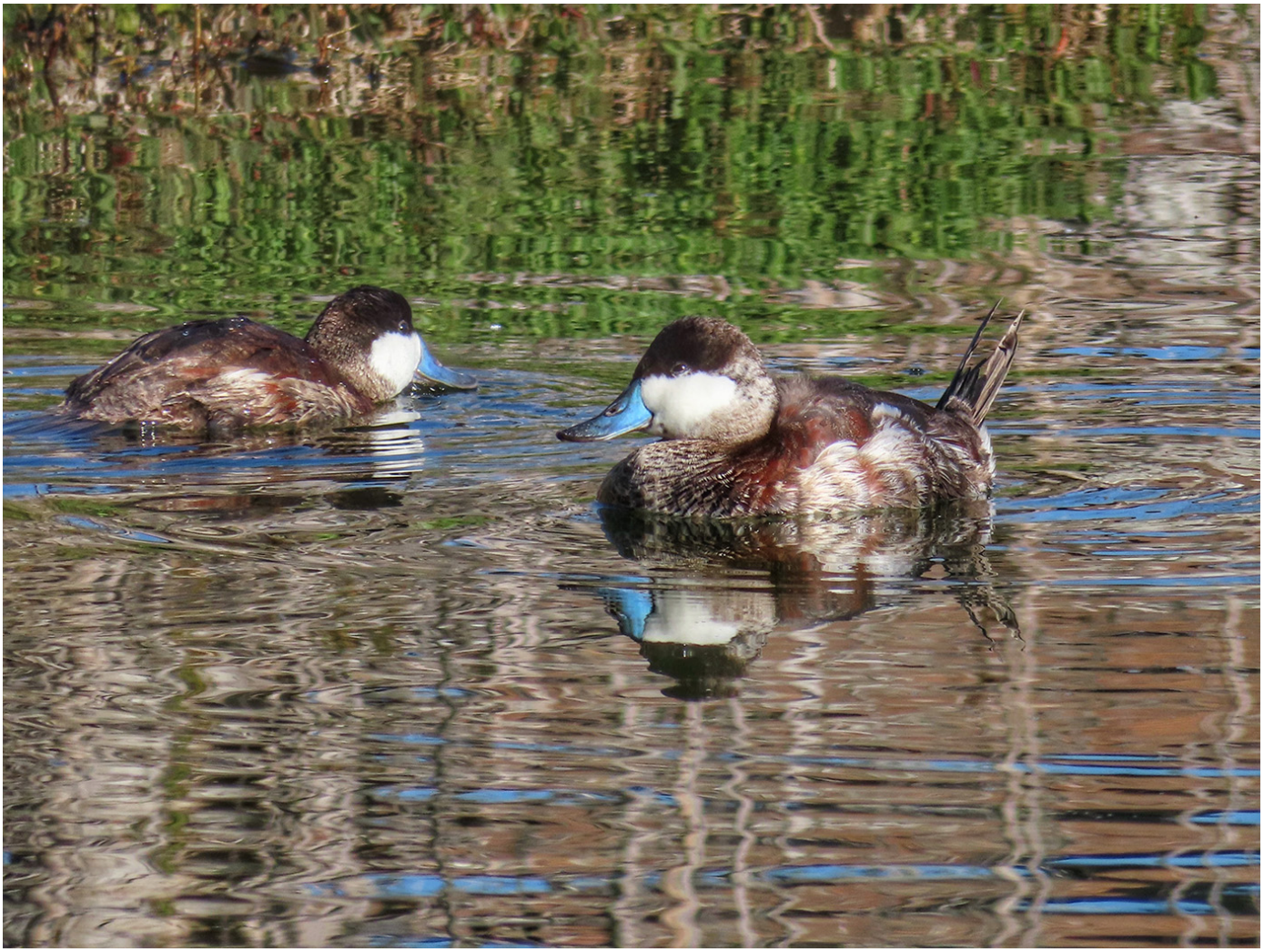
White-faced Ibis at NCOS. Photo by Adrian O'Loghlen.



Red-shouldered hawk on Lagoon Island. Photo by Daniel Forseth.



Bufflehead duck in the Campus Lagoon. Photo by Sally Colman.



Ruddy ducks in the Campus Lagoon. Photo by Sally Colman.



Yellow-headed blackbirds on the NCOS Mesa. Photo by Jeremiah Bender.



Garter snake seen at South Parcel restoration site. Photo by Jeremiah Bender.



Gopher snake seen near Cook's Nook restoration site. Photo by Jeremiah Bender.

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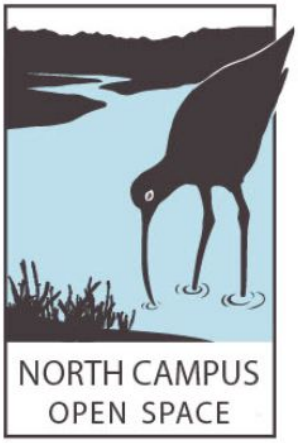
For more information on the North Campus Open Space Restoration Project, Click here, or email ncos@ccber.ucsb.edu

To support our work click here

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