



Spring 2014

# Nature Center Chronicles

*Quarterly Newsletter of the Turtle Rock Nature Center*

## Join us for "Second Saturdays"

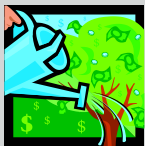
Help make a difference at the Turtle Rock Nature Center! Projects vary and include invasive plant removal, trail maintenance, and general conservation.

- April 12
- May 10
- June 14

9 a.m.—noon

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## Turtle Rock Nature Center

[irvineopenspace.org](http://irvineopenspace.org)

1 Sunnyhill Drive  
949-724-6738

### Hours:

Mondays-Fridays ■ 9 a.m.-5 p.m.  
Saturdays ■ 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

## Drought-Year Restoration Underway

It is amazing what a little water can do.

Late February rains gave Southern California a welcome respite from a drought extending into its 3<sup>rd</sup> year. One-gallon plants and seed put into place during the January "Second Saturdays" program received their first significant storm, giving staff and volunteers a break from weekly watering chores. Instead they were able to take advantage of the softened ground to replace plastic flags delineating the seed plots with biodegradable "bio" flags. After that it became a waiting game to see what emerged.

Seed was also applied to six sites, with species selected to add color and enhance habitat. California Thistle, Owl's Clover, Miniature Lupine, California Goldenrod, Ocean Spray and California Tidy Tips were broadcast in sites throughout the plateau. It is hoped that the native thistle will replace the exotic thistles that were removed over the last few years. The owl's clover, if it emerges, will satisfy the request of a longtime volunteer. The other species were utilized to boost the diversity of plant species found within the Nature Center and the site's biological diversity.

A seeding project was implemented at several sites here several years ago. Of a seventeen-species seed mix, only seven species emerged. Only four species emerged in subsequent seasons. The California Poppy was the clear victor of that effort; it returns each year to three sites near the perimeter, adding a burst of color to the Nature Center and to the community. However, until the end of February rains fell, it looked like none of the new seed would emerge. It looked like the 2014 seeding project had failed.

Then a major storm moved into the southland. It started out gently; the Nature Center rain gauge contained two tenths of an inch on February 27<sup>th</sup>. It was followed by three more days of rain, with a 4-day total of 2.9 inches, bringing the total rainfall received since July 2013 to 5.01 inches. But the rainy season is winding down fast.



*The poppies & Blue-eyed grass were part of a seed mix added several years ago. The California Goldenrod in the background is a summer bloomer.*

Restoration projects conducted during drought are an uphill battle. Volunteers and staff provide the water here, but new plantings were having difficulty establishing the kinds of root systems needed to become viable on their own. Watering resumed on plantings from the previous season to ensure their survival.

The situation complicates efforts to weed project areas. Lack of rainfall means weed species may not emerge. The seed, however, remains viable and waits for a better year. Within days of the recent rains, however, the weeds sprang forth. Days later "Second Saturdays" volunteers arrived to help staff remove them in targeted areas.

Fortunately, blooms are beginning to appear. The desert mallow is blooming and the poppies open. The container plants planted are flourishing, but in the coming months temperatures will begin to climb. Still, with regular watering our restoration efforts will not be in vain.



## Mourning Cloak Butterflies Abound

Flowers ... are a proud as-  
sertion that a ray of beauty  
out values all the utilities of  
the world.

– Ralph Waldo Emerson



One of the most common insects seen at the Nature Center is the Mourning Cloak. This medium-large butterfly is dark with a yellow border and adjacent blue spots. Caterpillars are black and spiny, with rusty-red spots down their backs.

The Mourning Cloak caterpillar feeds in groups on the leaves of deciduous trees, including willow, elm, cottonwood and birch. Adults feed on tree sap by landing above the flow and bending its head downward to siphon it. It also feeds on rotting fruit and rarely feeds on flowers. This may be one of our longest lived butterflies, with a lifespan of ten to eleven months.

*Did you Know? ... Upon the approach of a predator, the Mourning Cloak makes a “click” sound when flying away from rest.*



Female laying eggs. Photo by P. Bryant

### Turtle Rock Nature Center Precipitation Record 2008–2014

2008-09	9.01
2009-10	16.01
2010-11	26.56
2011-12	7.8
2012-13	5.28
2013-14	5.01*

The City of Irvine’s  
“Demographics Information”  
page lists Irvine’s average  
annual rainfall as 10-13”. The  
state average is 21.44”.

\* Recorded precipitation as of  
3/2/14, measured in inches.

## Behind the Scenes



Three Desert Mallow tucked behind prickly pear cactus were part of a restoration project conducted on the Plateau’s desert area in early 2013. Next year six more of this plant plus additional native dudleya will be added to provide this region a burst of color in the spring and summer.

Where the most beautiful  
wildflowers grow, there man’s  
spirit is fed and poets grow.

– Henry David Thoreau

