

# News from the

Volume 24, No. 2, December 2023

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**FRIENDS OF THE  
BERNARD  
BIOLOGICAL  
FIELD STATION**



*Season's Greetings to you all!*



## Meet the Inhabitants

### Nettles

*Urtica spp*

Many of us have quickly learned to identify this plant, naturalized in California from Europe long ago, after being painfully stung by the hairs on its



leaves. These hairs release formic acid just like some ants do and can cause a painful, though fortunately short-lived, sting. There are both annual and perennial species, generally inhabiting moist areas. The species at the BFS, *Urtica urens*, pops up every year from underground rootstocks, especially in the shaded areas under the oaks. These are 6"-18" tall, with oval, coarsely toothed leaves arranged in pairs opposite each other along the stem. The tiny, green flowers appear in loose clusters in the spring. Nettle is the preferred larval food plant for a number of butterflies including the Red Admiral, and are relished by Brown Towhees.

Nettles (Sachikili) were also important to our local Native Americans, the Gabrieleno-Tongva, who used them in many ways. They gathered the plants after wrapping their hands in Mugwort (*Artemisia douglasiana*) leaves for protection. Nettle leaves were rubbed on sore joints where the stinging of the nettles produced heat that soothed the painful area. Rheumatism sufferers whipped themselves with the plants to distract themselves from the pain. A tea was made from leaves and stems to treat chest colds, urinary problems, and general pain. A poultice of leaves was applied to the head for headache and to sore limbs. In addition to medicinal uses, the leaves provided a dye to restore hair color. The leaves were eaten raw, boiled, or steamed and the fibers used in basketry and for cordage.



## Gray Fox

*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*

Gray foxes are medium-sized, weighing 7-12 lbs, grayish on top with reddish brown legs and tawny sides. They are white on their throat and cheeks, and along the mid-line of their underside. There is a black patch along each side of their muzzle. The tail has a black tip and a dark stripe on the top. They are found throughout the west and into Texas in brushy areas near woods. One was seen recently behind the manager's apartment at the BFS.

Gray foxes are very good at climbing trees, particularly if there are low-hanging branches, and will do so to escape dogs or people. They are not strictly nocturnal. Although they are much more active at night, they can sometimes be seen foraging in the daytime too. When they see an intruder, they often hide behind vegetation and wait quietly until it passes.

## Ecological Walk

We are delighted to announce that the Garden Club is donating \$3000 to the BFS to help with establishing the Ecological Walk along the Foothill frontage.

The demo gardens that the Claremont Garden Club created last winter at the Mills end of the Walk are doing well. A few casualties, but most of the plants are thriving. And the benches are being used!

If you would like to donate, get in touch with the Director. (Photo from Nancy Hamlett)





Gray foxes usually make their dens in rock crevices, in underground burrows, under rocks, in hollow logs, or in hollow trees, sometimes as high as 30 feet up. They have even been known to make dens in woodpiles and fields of sorghum!

These foxes are omnivorous and eat small mammals, insects, and birds in the winter and spring. In late summer and fall, they add fruit and nuts (mostly acorns) and the occasional crayfish.

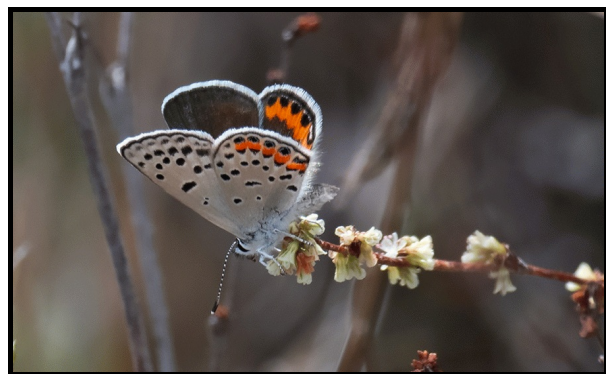
Breeding begins in December and continues on into March. Between three and six pups are born in April or May. The pups grow rapidly and soon leave to find their own shelter. There is some evidence that where coyotes formerly were numerous, the gray fox is scarce and that, if the coyote population decreases, the gray fox becomes more abundant.

Gray foxes are thought to live six to 10 years in the wild. The main causes of death are predation, parasites, diseases, and, of course, people.

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## Butterflies





## And others!



### **Photos by Nancy Hamlett**

Species/genera new to the BFS list in green

- Monarch on pine bush; Cabbage White on Cliff Aster
- Common Buckeye on Scalebroom; Cloudless Sulphur on Penstemon
- American Lady on Scalebroom; Acmon Blue on Slender Woolly Wild Buckwheat
- Owlet moth; Four-Spurred Assassin Bug; **Boll's Potter wasp**
- Female Blue Dasher on grape leaf near pHake Lake; a bee fly on California Aster; **a square-headed wasp**
- A robber fly; Side-Blotched Lizard (for info about the varied throat color, see <https://research.pomona.edu/bfs/2012/05/24/the-bride-wore-orange/>); **Cabbage Webworm Moth**
- Toyon photo also by Nancy Hamlett
- Gray fox photo by Jonathan Wright

***Still no word from the colleges about their promise of permanent protection for the center part of the BFS (the Temporarily Restricted Property , the TRP)***



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## Tours of the BFS

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Community and school groups can arrange to take tours. If you are interested in bringing your group to the BFS to learn about what is there, contact the Director: 909-398-1751 [wallace.meyer@pomona.edu](mailto:wallace.meyer@pomona.edu)

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## BFS Volunteer Days

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The first Saturday of the month, 10:00 am until noon, followed by a tasty pizza lunch. If you have questions or want to be added to the volunteer list, please contact the Director.

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## Claremont Garden Club

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The Club has disbanded but the website is still up  
[www.claremontgardenclub.org](http://www.claremontgardenclub.org)

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## Friends website

[www.fbbfs.org](http://www.fbbfs.org)

for past newsletters and a map showing which colleges now own which parts of the Field Station.

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City of Claremont: [www.ci.claremont.ca.us](http://www.ci.claremont.ca.us)  
P.O. Box 880, Claremont, CA 91711  
City Clerk: 399-5460  
Claremont Colleges: [www.claremont.edu](http://www.claremont.edu)  
The Claremont Courier : (909) 621-4761  
114 Olive St, Claremont, CA 91711

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*The Friends is a non-profit,  
grassroots organization*

*"Dedicated to Education  
and the Environment"*

## The BFS: A Facility of the Claremont Colleges

**How big is big enough?** A field station is land left in its natural state for use in the study of complex interactions between plants and animals. The usefulness of such natural laboratories depends on size and shape. Extinctions occur frequently in small areas, due to smaller populations. Narrow shapes increase the amount of pollution by noise, air, water, and pesticides from surrounding areas, and increase the chances of competition from exotic (non-native) species. The current 85 acres from College to Mills is just large enough to maintain reasonable stability in the existing ecosystems. The center bit of the BFS alone, which is all that is currently protected, would not be sustainable if Harvey Mudd, Scripps, and Claremont Graduate University build on the parts they have now purchased.

**Who uses it?** The BFS is used by Claremont Colleges faculty and hundreds of students every year, as well as by many schoolchildren from Claremont and the surrounding areas. It has also been used by college classes from as far away as Long Beach, by scout troops, and by members of the public and for research by other institutions.

**What's there?** There are over 30 acres of the fast-disappearing coastal sage scrub community along with a number of species of state or federal concern. There is a stand of oak woodland in the north where water wells up along an earthquake fault, there is annual grassland slowly returning to coastal sage scrub in the east, and there is a one-acre, man-made lake excavated in 1978 which is a sanctuary for western pond turtles displaced by development.

**→ Since much of Claremont was originally covered with coastal sage scrub, it is a fascinating window into our past!**



*"A tour of the property readily convinces visitors of the importance of keeping such a beautiful expanse of land, shrubs, and trees for scientific purposes."*

Robert J. Bernard in "An Unfinished Dream" pg 708