



The Post

Newspaper of the Claremont Wildlands Conservancy

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Karen Chapman

The Option is Ours!

For more than two years, the Claremont Wildlands Conservancy (CWC) has worked to protect Johnson's Pasture—the beautiful area of rolling hills in north Claremont—from being turned into a housing development.

Now the conservancy and its supporters have cause to celebrate. Working with the Trust for Public Land (TPL), a national nonprofit that helps preserve open space, the conservancy has acquired an option to purchase Johnson's Pasture.

The significance of the option is that during a one-year period, no developers will be able to purchase the land. TPL and the conservancy have that time to raise money to buy the property and preserve it in perpetuity. According to Scott Ferguson, TPL's senior project manager for Southern California,

preserving the Johnson's Pasture land is particularly significant because "it would mean connecting two existing parks, the Claremont Wilderness Park and the county's Marshall Canyon."

The option is a major step toward preservation of the hillsides. Ferguson is confident that the necessary money will be raised from state, federal, and local governments as well as individuals and foundations. Toward this purpose, the conservancy has recently formed a grant-writing committee that is planning a variety of approaches to raising funds for Johnson's Pasture.

*"May she who feeds
the birds in the
morning
sleep well at night"*

Birding in Johnson's Pasture



White-crowned sparrow

by Suzanne Thompson

We ducked under the bar and stopped to listen at the bottom of the fire road leading up to Johnson's Pasture. More birds could be heard than seen: the *twee* of a spotted towhee in the distance, the twitterings of finches, a mournful dove, and even the plaintive whistle of a lesser goldfinch. Two birds caught our attention as they flitted quickly from the safety of one tree to the cover of another: a strong black and white wing pattern, but too dark to be mockingbirds.

With the confidence of amateur birders who know that no one is around to contradict them, we put them down as acorn woodpeckers.

My husband, Seth, and I were heading up to scout out birds in Johnson's Pasture. The morning air was cool, but the clear blue sky overhead promised warmer temperatures.

As we hiked up the hill, I heard the whistle of a Cassin's kingbird, a robin-sized gray bird with a bright yellow breast. Mustering all our patience, we scanned each bar of the power pylon and finally spotted the kingbird near the top. Well worth the search! A few steps further on, a handsome red-eyed spotted towhee with black, white, and rust plumage buzzed at us.

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Volunteer Spotlight: Jeff Johnson

You can find him on Sunday mornings in the parking lot of Rhino Records in the Claremont village. He is manning the CWC booth at the weekly Farmer's Market. He may have a stack of papers to grade if things are slow.

Yet he never misses an opportunity to tell passersby about the conservancy and its efforts and to sign people up on the mailing list.

Jeff Johnson is an activist and indefatigable worker for CWC. He is someone who makes things happen when he believes they should.

Two years ago, to let City Hall know that people felt strongly about preserving Johnson's Pasture, Jeff initiated a letter-writing campaign. In just two days, more than 300 people responded, expressing their deep concern about the hillsides. The bundles of letters were presented at City Hall with the *Claremont Courier* recording the event.

As a member of the CWC board, Jeff has played a major role in organizing volunteers and representing the conservancy before numerous audiences. He organized the Walk for the Hillsides on November 10, 2001 (see page 3) and the Phone-a-thon for Proposition 40. To drum up support for the proposition, Jeff and 12 other volunteers called the entire CWC mailing list—more than 1,300 people.

We especially appreciate Jeff's time and energy given his new role as father of our first CWC baby—Violet Grace Alvarez Johnson. Jeff has decided to step down from the board so he has more time to spend with his family. He will remain an important part of CWC and will continue to work at the Farmer's Market each week and you will see him there.



Above, Jeff Johnson and Georgeanne Andrus look at materials available at the CWC table at the Claremont Farmer's Market.

Margaret Nilsson

Proposition 40

The passage of state Proposition 40 in March is likely to play an important role in CWC's success in preserving Johnson's Pasture and the surrounding open space in the hillsides. The proposition sets in motion a \$2.6 billion bond issue to provide monies to protect open space and watershed. The proposition passed 70% to 30% in Los Angeles County compared to 57% to 43% in California as a whole; we can't help but believe that the efforts of Jeff Johnson and the 12 people on the phoning committee influenced the results in our area!

The Post is the newsletter of the Claremont Wildlands Conservancy.

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CWC's Broadest Vision of Land Protection Becomes a Proposal for State Fish and Game Department

A document known as the CAPP (Conceptual Area Protection Plan for the North Claremont Ecological Reserve) is scheduled to go before the Lands Committee of the Department of Fish and Game's Wildlife Conservation Board this month.

The CAPP, a concept developed by CWC supporter Frank Schiavone, envisions protecting the area of land bounded by the Angeles National Forest to the north; the 1200-acre Claremont Wilderness Park to the east; and Marshall Canyon Regional Park to the west.

The goals of the plan are the augmentation of the existing Wilderness Park and the establishment of a permanent wildlife movement corridor that will extend for more than five miles; the conservation of rare plant and animal species; the protection of the hillside's watershed that feeds groundwater basins; and the permanent protection and linking of large public holdings of high quality habitat.

The purpose of the proposal is to raise the funds to make this broad conceptual plan a reality.

Birding in Johnson's Pasture

(Continued from page 1)

Seth spotted a small bird fly into a nearby bush and gave his usual helpful directions: "Bird. Right in front of you." Hmm: Much was in front of me, but this one was easy to find. The gray pointed crest of a little titmouse bobbed around as he worked his way through the bush chattering to a mate or maybe just to himself.

At the top of the hill, we got our first look at the San Gabriel Mountains, their details distinct in the clear air. The morning sun illuminated the west side of the mountainside canyons, leaving dark shadows to the east.

In the foreground, the pasture was turning green after the browns of fall and winter and made a pleasant contrast to the blue above.

A California thrasher started his throaty melodic song off to the right, but he seemed to be on the far side of a large bush and not in sight.

More thrasher songs and then we spotted two of them playing tag along the hillside. This is a bird you have to love: large and distinctive with its long downward curving bill. Thrashers sing their engaging mimic songs loud and clear, often from the tops of bushes, making them easy to spot.

We listened and watched the thrashers for a while and then walked to the start of the meadow where a red-tailed hawk eyed us from the eucalyptus trees and flew off.

As we stopped to scan the pasture for birds, we said hello to Mark von Wodtke and Beverly Speak who were leading a breakfast hike through Johnson's Pasture for the Claremont Community Foundation.

A flock of birds flew up from the grass and then disappeared again:

Meadowlarks! Bright yellow breasts marked with a strong black vee. Meadowlarks have a beautiful song—rich and fluty. The flock wasn't singing for us, but we got a good look at their bright plumage as they searched through the green grass for breakfast.

While wandering the meadow we found house wrens, a Nuttall's woodpecker, flickers, an Anna's hummingbird, and robins. A side trip down an overgrown path to the west of the pasture gave us views of a California thrasher and Marshall Canyon in the distance. The distinctive "bouncing ping pong ball" call of wrentits often reverberated in the background and we were lucky enough to spot one picking his way through the underbrush, his long wren-tail flicking back and forth.

After an enjoyable two hours and 25 species of birds checked off our list, we headed back down the hill, happy to know that the birds of Johnson's Pasture will be there for generations to come.

Walk for the Hillside 2001. Below, supporters of the conservancy pass out packets for participants in CWC's Walk for the Hillside. At the rally before the walk, CWC board members talked about the importance of saving the hillside. Then, participants collected their packets and walked neighborhoods of Claremont distributing information about the conservancy's efforts.



Margaret Nilsson

How Thankful We Are

We've come a long way in two years. And we have many people to thank: all of you who have come to meetings; joined the board; worked at the Farmer's Market; designed and printed materials; donated art, time, ideas, and talent; talked to people; spread the word; written poetry; performed music and dances; taped bird songs; surveyed plants and animals; made phone calls; written letters, editorials, complex documents, and articles; walked the neighborhoods of Claremont; offered us meeting space; written grants; given invaluable advice and counsel; organized and staffed CWC booths on the Fourth of July and at Village Venture; worked on the mailing list; stuffed and sealed our newsletter; shown us the way, and kept our spirits up with your energy and enthusiasm ... **how thankful we are for all of you.**

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The Claremont Wildlands Conservancy (CWC) is a non-profit, grassroots organization dedicated to keeping the foothills wild and free for all.

Conservancy Reaches Out to the Community

In recent months, the Claremont Wildlands Conservancy has not had general meetings. Instead, we have concentrated on doing the work necessary to get an option on Johnson's Pasture. We have also focused on outreach to the community and on researching funding sources.

Representatives of the Conservancy have appeared or will appear before groups such as Active Claremont, the Homeowners' Associations at Highpoint and Claraboya, the Claremont Colleges EcoClub, the 29th Senate District Conservation Advisory Group, and the Environmental Quality Committee of the Claremont Colleges. You can find us at the Farmer's Market every Sunday, at Village Venture in the fall, at Claremont's Fourth of July celebration, and at the Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden's Earth Day celebration on April 20.



Please renew your donation as a Friend of CWC. An envelope is enclosed. Thanks for your support!