



# MAGPIE CALLS

Newsletter of the Santa Ynez Valley Natural History Society  
PO Box 794, Los Olivos, CA 93441  
805-693-5683 [www.syvnature.org](http://www.syvnature.org) [syvnhs@syvnature.org](mailto:syvnhs@syvnature.org)

*Dedicated to the study, exploration, and appreciation of natural history  
in the Santa Ynez Valley region*

## Carpinteria Tar Pits

Field Trip with Sabina Thomas  
Sunday, February 1, 2026, 1:00 to 3:30 p.m.  
Near Carpinteria State Beach

We will learn about local geology, in particular as it relates to the formation of fossil fuels and "tar." We will visit the Carpinteria asphaltum (bitumen) deposits and learn about the recent history of asphalt mining and oil production in the Santa Barbara-Carpinteria area. Of course, asphalt was used in materials production by Chumash communities long before the commercial development that began in the 1850s. On our field trip outing, we will see remnants of the more recent asphalt mining industry.

Bring: Sunscreen, beach shoes that could stand tar stains, hat, water, lunch or snacks. I advise against flip-flops or sandals; the first part of the beach has sharp wood fragments.

Sabina Thomas grew up in Germany and received her PhD in Geology from the TU Berlin. She left Berlin for the U.S. in 1989 and taught at colleges and universities in Texas and Ohio until she moved to Santa Barbara in 2010. She teaches earth-science courses at Santa Barbara City College and Ventura College. She also worked at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History. Sabina earned the California Naturalist Certificate in 2019, the Climate Steward Certificate in 2022 and loves going on field trips.



Asphaltum conglomerate near Carpinteria State Beach. Photo by Sabina Thomas.



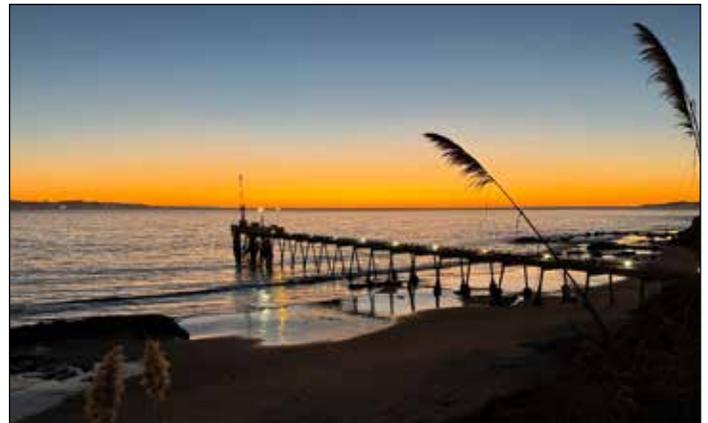
This capped oil well is visible especially during low tides. Photo by Sabina Thomas.

## How to Register

Event date: Sunday, February 1, 2026, 1:00 to 3:30 p.m.  
Participation is limited to 20.

Advance registration is required for this field trip and will open at 9:00 a.m. Thursday, January 15 for members and on Friday, January 23 for nonmembers at [syvnhs@syvnature.org](mailto:syvnhs@syvnature.org) or 805-693-5683.

Members \$15 / Nonmembers \$30 / Children \$5  
Directions and meet-up location will be emailed to registered participants.



The local oil industry still maintains a private servicing pier and oil platforms in the Santa Barbara Channel. Photo by Sabina Thomas.

## Upcoming SYVNHS Events

- Feb 1 Carpinteria Tar Pits: Field Trip
- Feb 19 Overview of the California Condor: Lecture
- Feb 27 California Amphibians: Lecture
- Mar 11 Protecting Santa Cruz Island: Lecture
- Mar 21 Wildflowers of the Pistol Club Trail: Field Trip
- Mar 27 The State of Fire on the Central Coast: Lecture
- Apr 18 Fire Ecology on Figueroa Mountain: Field Trip
- May 13 California's Native Bees: Lecture
- June 18 Trees of UCSB: Field Trip

Pop-Up events will be posted on the website and emails will be sent to members and friends

California poppies are abundant in some areas of the Pistol Club hike, especially where it crosses serpentinized soils in the Franciscan Formation (see page 4). Photo by John Evarts.

## The Once and Future King of the Skies: An Eco-Historical Overview of the California Condor

Free live lecture and Zoom webinar with Bryant Baker

Thursday, February 19, 2026, 7:00 to 8:30 p.m.  
Co-sponsored by the Solvang Library

In April of 1987 when the last of the remaining wild condors was captured, the world's population of this iconic species totaled 27 birds. Now, due to the efforts of conservation organizations such as the California Condor Recovery Program, there are over 500 California condors with 350 of them living in the wild in California, Arizona, Utah, and Mexico. Magnificent in flight, condors have a wingspan of up to ten feet, the largest of any avian species on the continent, and can fly over 200 miles in a single day. Not surprisingly, the condor's history and that of the region's early as well as current human inhabitants are intertwined.

Our central coast region, and especially Los Padres National Forest, has played an out-sized role in the California condor's natural history and its ongoing recovery. In his presentation, Bryant Baker will explore some of the fascinating and lesser-known history of condors in our region, how their current local populations are faring, and what the future holds for the species. He will also share unique maps he has created showing condor movements across the landscape.

Bryant Baker is the Director of Advocacy and Education at Runners for Public Lands. He previously spent nearly a decade as the Director of Conservation and Research at Los Padres ForestWatch, where he worked to protect land and species, including the California condor. He is a published scientist, Geographic Information System (GIS) analyst, and cartographer. His maps and analyses have been featured in the Los Angeles Times, San Diego Tribune, and other media outlets. In addition to his conservation work and research, Bryant is a plant and landscape photographer whose photos have appeared in books, magazines, and newspapers across the region.

### How to Attend

Event date: Thursday, February 19, 2026, 7:00 to 8:30 p.m.

Live lecture location: Solvang Library: The courtroom adjacent, 1745 Mission Drive (CA Hwy 246)

Register for the webinar at our website, [www.syvnature.org](http://www.syvnature.org)

A question-and-answer period follows the lecture.

The presentation recording will be posted online after the event.



Juvenile California condor number 11. Photo by Chris Trent.



Signage near California condor active sites. Photo by Bryant Baker.



Bryant Baker, director with Runners for Public Lands. Courtesy photo.

## California's Wild Waterpark: A Haven for Amphibians

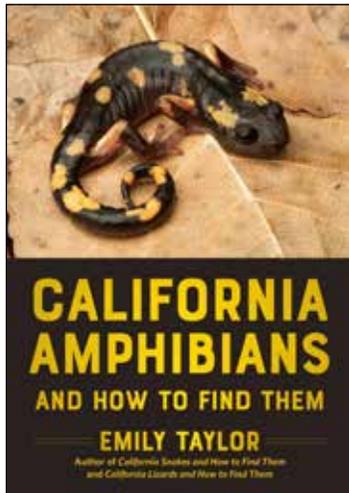
Free live lecture, Zoom webinar, and book signing with Dr. Emily Taylor

Friday, February 27, 7:00 to 8:30 p.m.

Co-sponsored by the UCSB Sedgwick Reserve

Dr. Emily Taylor will take us on a tour of the frogs and salamanders that inhabit California, a wild waterpark for amphibians. California boasts an incredible diversity of amphibians, from wandering salamanders who glide between the tops of towering redwood trees, to red-spotted toads who drink water through their lower bellies, and Pacific chorus frogs who throw rowdy all-night parties.

Featuring beautiful photography and a focus on storytelling, this presentation celebrates the publication of Emily's new book, *California Amphibians and How to Find Them*, which will be



Cover of Emily Taylor's newest book. Courtesy photo.

available for purchase and signing.

Emily Taylor is a professor of biological sciences at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo, where she conducts research on the physiology, ecology, and conservation biology of reptiles and amphibians with her students. Her first two books are *California Snakes and How to Find Them* and *California Lizards and How to Find Them*. She lives in Atascadero, CA with a variety of rescued animals.

Learn more at [EmilyTaylorScience.com](http://EmilyTaylorScience.com).



Professor and herpetologist Emily Taylor. Courtesy photo.

### How to Attend

Event date: Friday, February 27, 7:00 to 8:30 p.m.

Live Lecture location: UCSB Sedgwick Reserve, 3566 Brinkerhoff, Santa Ynez

Zoom webinar: Register for the webinar at our website, [www.sylvnature.org](http://www.sylvnature.org).

A book signing follows the presentation.

The presentation recording will be posted online after the event.

## Protecting Santa Cruz Island

Free live lecture and Zoom webinar with Lara Brenner  
Wednesday, March 11, 2026, 7:00 to 8:30 p.m.

Co-Sponsored by the Solvang Library

Our Channel Islands are often called America's Galapagos due to the large number of animal and plant species found there and nowhere else in the world. Protecting the islands' unique biota from current threats and rehabilitating their unique ecosystems from damaging historic uses is an ongoing challenge that calls for scientific studies and creative solutions. The Nature Conservancy (TNC), which owns three quarters of Santa Cruz Island, the largest of the five National Park islands, has taken on that challenge. Historic overgrazing and overharvesting altered or devastated portions of the island's native ecosystems; imported pigs caused extensive changes in populations of endemic species like the island fox and island spotted skunk populations; and nonnative plants and insects continue to arrive as part of human visitation and displace native species. While Santa Cruz Island has benefitted from the protections provided by TNC and the National Park, the island is now on a new trajectory due to the effects of climate change.

How can such unique islands be protected and



Santa Cruz Island coastal bluffs are blanketed by native goldfields (*Lasthenia californica*). Photo by Sue Pollock.

rehabilitated? Island ecologist Lara Brenner has been addressing such problems on the Channel Islands for 8 years, first on Catalina Island and then for TNC on Santa Cruz Island, conducting or overseeing a variety of in-depth wildlife studies. In this presentation, she will share some of her research and ongoing challenges with us. She has been given the comprehensive task of developing procedures

(Continued on next page.)

to prevent the arrival of invasive species; refining technology for the early detection of unwanted arrivals; and developing conservation protocols which can also be used on other Channel Islands and even other islands of the Pacific. Santa Cruz Island is both a laboratory and potentially a model of effective island conservation.

Lara Brenner received her B.A. in environmental studies from Carleton College in Minnesota and an M.S. in wildlife biology from the University of Montana with a thesis on human-cougar conflict. Among other projects, she has published a natural history field guide to oyster-associated species of New York Harbor. She is an Island Scientist for TNC California's Land Program.



Lara Brenner. Courtesy photo.



Northern Channel Island fox pup. Photo by Sue Pollock.

#### How to Attend

Event date: Wednesday, March 11, 2026, 7:00 to 8:30 p.m.  
Free live lecture location: Solvang Library: The courtroom

adjacent, 1745 Mission Drive (CA Hwy 246)

Zoom webinar: Register for the webinar at our website, [www.syvnature.org](http://www.syvnature.org).

A question-and-answer period follows the lecture.

The presentation recording will be posted online after the event.

### Wildflowers and Plant Life Along the Pistol Club Trail at Sedgwick Reserve

Saturday, March 21, 2026, 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.  
Field trip with Margie Popper and John Everts

For many years, the Pistol Club Trail on the upper part of Sedgwick Reserve was not accessible for casual hiking. That changed in 2023 due to the hard work of Sedgwick staff and volunteers who restored this route. Join Margie Popper and John Everts on a leisurely hike along this loop, which offers a combination of great scenery, diverse spring wildflowers, and a mosaic of vegetation types. There are some species along the route that are uncommon or not found elsewhere on the Reserve. This trail crosses the Little Pine Fault zone, which provides a good opportunity to see some of the edaphic influences on plant life within the Franciscan Formation. Large swaths of this area were impacted by the July 2024 Lake Fire, and although this hike will not specifically focus on fire ecology, it will offer a chance to view a landscape that is on the rebound after burning.

The Pistol Club hike is rated as strenuous by Sedgwick Reserve docents and staff. Its total distance will vary from 4 to 5 miles, depending on trailhead parking access on the day of the trip. The loop entails a stiff ascent in the first mile, and the trip's overall elevation gain is nearly 800 feet. We plan to make rest stops on the climb up, especially since the route offers excellent views across the Little Pine Fault. Our short midday lunch stop will likely be near the crossing of the east fork of Figueroa Creek or close to the Pistol Club, which was the site of a rustic retreat used by

*(Continued on next page.)*



After an initial stiff climb from the trailhead, the Pistol Club loop traverses rolling and occasionally steep terrain near the headwaters of Figueroa Creek. Photo by John Everts.



The Pistol Club Trail is the only place to see wide-throat monkeyflower (*Diplacus brevipes*) on Sedgwick Reserve and it is one of three different monkeyflowers along the trail. Photo by John Everts.

Duke Sedgwick. Participants on this trip must be fit hikers, and trekking poles are strongly recommended.

Margie Popper and John Evarts are docents at Sedgwick Reserve and past trip leaders for the Society. They honed their skills as naturalists during a 30-year career of editing, writing, and publishing California natural history titles as owners of Cachuma Press.

### How to Register

Event Date: Saturday, March 21, 2026, 9 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Participation is limited to 20.

Registration opens at 9:00 am on February 20 for members and March 1 for nonmembers at [syvnhs@syvnature.org](mailto:syvnhs@syvnature.org) or 805/693-5683.

Field trip location and information will be sent to registrants.

Hike difficulty is rated as strenuous

Members \$15 / Nonmembers \$30 / Children \$5



The showy flowers of crinkle onion (*Allium crispum*) are frequently seen on this part of Sedgwick Reserve. Photo by John Evarts.



Margie Popper and John Evarts, on the top of Gaviota Peak, 2025. Photo courtesy Gaviota Gopher.



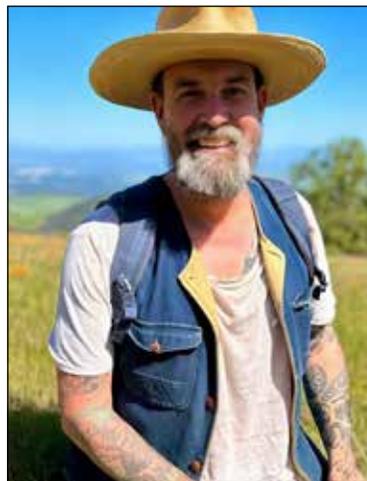
Blue dips (*Dipterostemon capitatus*) and South Coast Range morning glory (*Calystegia collina* subsp. *venusta*) are two plants on the Pistol Club Trail that we can expect to see on the hike, since they do especially well in the years after a fire (this photo is from the Pistol Club Trail, 2025). Photo by John Evarts.

### The Place for Fire: Poetry and Policy on California's Central Coast

Friday, March 27, 2026, 7:00 to 8:30 p.m.  
Free live lecture, Zoom webinar, and book-signing with Obi Kaufmann

Anyone who loves the richness of California's biogeography and spends time outdoors is aware of and grapples with the dilemma of addressing wildfire, the destroyer—and wildfire, the regenerative force in the landscape. In his talk, Obi Kaufmann will explore the current state of affairs in our fire-prone, yet fire-dependent Central Coast ecosystem. Touching on themes in one of his most popular books, published in 2024, "*The State of Fire; Why California Burns*," this talk should be insightful and timely. From publisher Heyday Books, "Obi Kaufmann delves into the history, science, and future of fire ecology. With Kaufmann's signature artistry and deep research this book looks at some of the most devastating fires of modern history and also the many ways that our ecosystem benefits from fire. It's an ultimately hopeful book..."

Obi Kaufmann is an award-winning author of six best-selling books on California's ecology, biodiversity, and geography. Most famously, his 2017 book, "*The California Field Atlas*," re-examines popular ideas about what he calls "California's more-than-human world." He has published four additional popular books, including, "*The Deserts*



Naturalist and author Obi Kaufmann. Courtesy photo.

*of California*," and others on California water, forests, and coasts. "Deserts," the most recent field atlas, won the 2024 Book Award for California Lifestyle from the California Booksellers Association. Well known for his stunning watercolor illustrations, Obi was a 2025 featured artist for the National Gallery of Art in Yosemite and the artist-in-residence for the National Park Service. Obi regularly travels throughout the state, presenting his work and vision for ecological defense and reciprocity to many groups, including the Santa Ynez Valley Natural History Society. A lifelong resident of California, when he isn't backpacking Obi Kaufmann makes his home base in Oakland.

### How to Register

Event date: Friday, March 27, 2026, 7:00 to 8:30 p.m.

Live lecture location: UC Sedgwick Reserve, Tipton House  
Limited to 50 participants

Registration opens at 9:00 a.m. on February 27 for members and March 17 for nonmembers at [syvnhs@syvnature.org](mailto:syvnhs@syvnature.org) or 805/693-5683.

Zoom: Register for the webinar at our website, [www.syvnature.org](http://www.syvnature.org).

A book signing follows the presentation.

The presentation recording will be posted online after the event.



Annual wildflowers such as sky lupine and tufted poppy (*Lupinus nanus*, *Eschscholzia caespitosa*) put on great displays in the burn zone on Figueroa last spring, and we may be lucky enough to see a similar profusion of blooms this year. Photo by John Evarts.

## Fire Ecology Hike to the summit of Figueroa Mountain

Field trip with Matt Kay

Saturday, April 18, 9:00 a.m. to 3 p.m.

On this hike to the summit area of Figueroa Mountain, biologist Matt Kay will focus on the themes of recovery and resiliency in the plant life of this ecological sky island. Much of the mountain was burned during the Lake Fire of July 2024. Now, nearly two years after this wildfire, the Figueroa landscape is undergoing a transformation that provides a living classroom for the study of fire ecology. The trip will explore the intersection of natural history and resource management. Of particular importance is how natural history informs management of native plant communities under various fire regimes, and how understanding natural history of plants and animals shapes our expectations for recovery post-fire.

Figueroa Mountain is one of the few places in our region that offers easy access to stands of Ponderosa pine, big-cone Douglas-fir, and canyon oak – three tree species that each respond to fire in different ways. The mountain is also home to a variety of shrubs and other perennials that have their own adaptations to fire. On this hike we'll have an opportunity to look at vegetation transects that were established by the U.S. Forest Service after the fire, and we'll also see unburned areas for comparison. With less competition and shade, many annuals vigorously rebounded following the Lake Fire last spring, and with any luck, participants will see some good displays of wildflowers this year.

This moderately strenuous hike entails five miles of walking and an elevation gain over 800 feet. Registrants need to be in good condition for hiking and are expected to carry ample water for personal hydration as well as a lunch to eat at the summit. Trekking poles are recommended.



Much of the south side of Figueroa Mountain was intensely burned in the Lake Fire, but the coast live oaks (*Quercus agrifolia*) that dominate this slope show vigorous basal sprouting. The widespread silver bush lupine (*Lupinus albifrons*) in the understory here should be in bloom during this trip. Photo by John Evarts.



Dr. Matt Kay showing a student how to identify a black oak (*Quercus kelloggii*) in the field. Photo courtesy of Matt Kay.

Matt Kay grew up in Santa Barbara where he fell in love with the natural world, from chaparral-covered foothills and backcountry creeks to coastal beaches and nearshore reefs. This passion for natural history led him to obtain a BS in biology from the University of Oregon and a PhD in fisheries and marine science from UC Santa Barbara. Matt is a Professor of Biology at Santa Barbara City College, where his courses emphasize evolution by natural selection and the adaptations that organisms possess to survive and reproduce under the selective pressures they face in the environment.

### How to Register

Event Date: Saturday, April 18, 2026, 9 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.  
Participation is limited to 20.

Registration opens at 9:00 am on March 18 for members and March 28 for nonmembers at [syvnhs@syvnature.org](mailto:syvnhs@syvnature.org) or 805/693-5683

Field trip location and information will be sent to registrants.

Hike difficulty is rated as moderately strenuous  
Members \$15 / Nonmembers \$30 / Children \$5

## The ABCs of California's Native Bees

Free live lecture, Zoom webinar, and book-signing with Krystle Hickman  
 Wednesday, May 13, 2026, 7:00 to 8:30 p.m.  
 Co-sponsored by Solvang Library

Join National Geographic Explorer and community scientist Krystle Hickman for a presentation about her studies of California's native bees, which culminated in her new book, *The ABCs of California's Native Bees*. California is home to one of the most biodiverse bee populations in the world with over 1,600 species of native bees throughout the state. A committed conservationist, Hickman spent more than a decade capturing exquisitely detailed photographs of our native bees and making exciting discoveries about their behavior in the field.

During her illustrated lecture, Hickman will share some of her bee-seeking adventures, which have ranged from suburban native plant gardens to far-flung wild places within California and beyond. Her collection of bee stories—one for each letter of the alphabet, matching the first letter of a bee's scientific name—offers an intimate look at the daily habits of rare and overlooked native bees in California. We'll learn that many native bees are cloaked in green or black or red. There are those that live alone in the ground or sleep inside flowers. Some aggressive species will invade nests and pillage resources. Still others are devoted exclusively to the pollen of a single type of flower.

Krystle Hickman strives to elevate awareness of the decline of native bee species through her passion for nature and an eye for artful photography. Hickman's influence extends beyond the lens: She has graced multiple television and online broadcasts, been interviewed on podcasts such as *Ologies*, presented at the 2024 United Nations Biodiversity Conference (COP16) in Colombia, and lectured at colleges such as Harvard, UC Irvine, UCLA, and more.

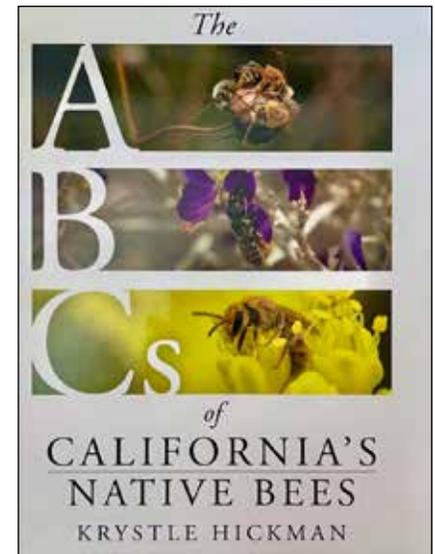
### How to Attend

Event date: Wednesday, May 13, 2026, 7:00 to 8:30 p.m.  
 Live lecture location: Solvang Library: The courtroom adjacent, 1745 Mission Drive (CA Hwy 246)  
 Zoom: Register for the webinar at our website, [www.syvnature.org](http://www.syvnature.org).

A book signing follows the presentation. The presentation recording will be posted online after the event.



Native bee photographer Krystle Hickman in the field with her camera equipment. Photo courtesy of Coriolis Company.



Krystle Hickman's new book. Courtesy photo.



Three male all-white micro digger bees (*Anthophora hololeuca*) sleeping on small wirelettuce stem (*Stephanomeria exigua*). Photo by Krystle Hickman.



Male agile longhorn bees (*Melissodes agilis*) sleeping on flaxes. Photo by Krystle Hickman.

## Trees of UCSB

Field trip with Larry Ballard  
Thursday June 18, 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.  
UCSB campus

Due to popular demand, we are once again offering a walking tour with Larry Ballard to visit a varied selection of trees on the campus of UCSB. With more than 250 species from six continents, UCSB is among the best locations in California to see both common and unusual trees in an urban landscape. The campus grounds also contain several rare or unusual trees not found elsewhere in the Santa Barbara area. Larry will be sharing some favorite specimens from past trips as well as adding some new species. He will also discuss the architecture of trees and identification tips. Along with more familiar trees, we'll encounter some locally uncommon introductions, such as firewheel tree, giant fishtail palm, coast banksia, Guadalupe palm, banyan fig, and mallet flower.

Groundskeepers, the staff of the UCSB greenhouse, a variety of faculty, and a former UCSB Chancellor have all contributed to the establishment of this dynamic botanical diversity. Our trip is timed for the break between spring and summer classes, and we'll find the campus to be more quiet than usual.

Larry Ballard is a natural history educator with a focus on botany and has been a popular field trip leader for the SYVNHS and other organizations for over 25 years. He has offered past tours of the famous collection of trees at UCSB, as well as educational walks to introduce the trees of Alameda Park in Santa Barbara and the street trees in the valley communities of Los Olivos, Santa Ynez, and Solvang.



The thick spongy bark of cork oak (*Quercus suber*) can be removed (by hand) about every nine years without killing the tree, which makes this oak a valued forest and plantation tree in the western Mediterranean. Photo by John Evarts.



Strawberry snowball tree (*Dombeya cacuminum*) is native to the tropical forests of Madagascar and takes its common name from its large round clusters of pink flowers. Photo by John Evarts.

## How to Register

Event date: Thursday June 18, 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

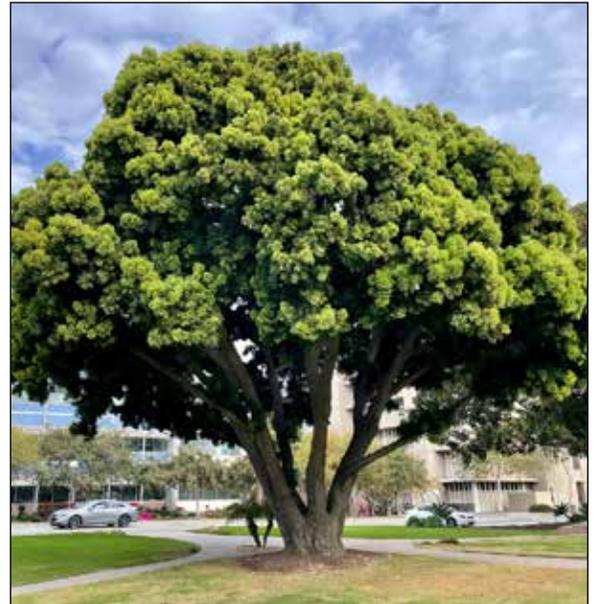
Participation limited to 20.

Registration opens at 9:00 a.m. on May 18 for members and on May 27 for nonmembers at [syvnhs@syvnature.org](mailto:syvnhs@syvnature.org) or 805/693-5683.

Field trip meet-up location and information will be sent to registrants.

Hike difficulty is rated as easy.

Members \$15 / Nonmembers \$30 / Children \$5



East African yellowwood (*Afrocarpus gracilior*) is a conifer of higher elevations of equatorial Africa whose cone resembles a hard berry, similar to the junipers native to California. Photo by John Evarts.



Coast banksia (*Banksia integrifolia*) is native to the eastern coast of Australia and produces flowers year-round that attract insects, birds, and bats. Photo by John Evarts.