



Our Urban Ecosystem

by Mark Goldschmidt

Our mountain backdrop has changed little, but 150 years ago paleo-Altadena was virtually barren of trees, only seasonal grasses, chaparral and poppies covered the gravelly outwash. Then wells were dug and water was channeled from the front range. With water came first crops and trees, then gardens, more trees, streets and houses. Over the years a rich environment has developed that supports an interesting variety of wildlife, creatures that lead their own lives in what we consider our neighborhood. The big trees and old homes buried in shrubbery that make Altadena such a charming place also provide cover and nesting places, and irrigated landscapes provide food and water in abundance. In this mosaic of backyards and gardens, the urban ecosystem thrives.

Altadena's urban ecosystem includes animate life ranging from soil organisms to giant trees, from insects and worms to birds, raccoons and coyotes -- prey and predators. It is not a very stable ecosystem (few are), it depends on constant inputs from us humans. A habitat in an overgrown backyard can be wiped out in a day when an ADU is built. Or poison set out to kill rats can wipe out predators like coyotes and crows who scavenge the deadly carcasses. Fewer coyotes, major consumers of rodents, allow the rat population to increase dramatically. Diseases sweep through periodically, causing die offs. Raccoons are currently in deep decline due to distemper.

Habitat varies greatly across Altadena. Near the urban edge large animals — bears, deer, mountain lions — live up the mountain and come to town to forage. There

is a greater variety of birds at the edge, and other shy creatures that can't survive urban life, like foxes, snakes, wood rats, and native squirrels.

Down slope, where Altadena melds into the Pasadena grid, older mature neighborhoods offer a patchwork of habitat types. Overgrown yards, with abandoned vehicles, piles of construction debris, or broken down sheds, offer prime cover and denning opportunities; well kept yards provide ponds, pools, and a rich forage of fruits, grasses, and herbs. Garbage is a minor source of food for Altadena's urban wildlife. The range of fauna is poorer here, many are introduced species that join with native ones adapted to urban life. These are wild creatures in our midst in an ecosystem with a hierarchy of predators and prey.

Ecosystems, even poor ones like our urban habitat, are complex. Scientists spend careers unraveling the relationships, dependencies, and governing factors in natural systems. It is not possible in our newsletter to delve into these dynamics even if we were qualified, which we are not. Instead, we have looked at some of our larger wild neighbors and tried to give a feeling for what their lives are like, and a glimpse of how they interface with ours. We left out many important major mammals, skunks, deer, bobcats to name a few, but information about individual species is easily available online. We barely touched on birds, perhaps the subject for another issue.

Letter from the Chair

Val Zavala

Hello All,

I am honored and excited to become the Chair of Altadena Heritage, taking the reins from Sharon Sand who served AH so well as chair for six years. Her leadership and dedication were remarkable, and we are grateful for some really good years for our organization.

We are sorry to lose Catherine Cadogan of the board. She brought her amazing vitality and brilliant organizational skills to our organization. We have Catherine to thank for initiating our monthly email newsletter that keeps members up-to-date on happenings with AH and around the community. Catherine also hosted our first post-quarantine 2021 Holiday Party in her lovely garden. We will miss you on the board, Catherine, but we're certain you will put your organizational skills to good use elsewhere.

Altadena Heritage has been busy this year. Here are just a few of the events and accomplishments of 2022.

We emerged from the pandemic with our most-attended spring Golden Poppy gathering ever. Six Golden Poppy winners who created front yard gardens that "give to the street" were honored. At the event, AH members and guests were able to meander through the estate gardens of Renata and Talmadge O'Neil. Renata designed the exquisite gardens, and graciously shared them with several hundred appreciative visitors. Thank you O'Neils!

Third Thursday educational programs resumed in person at the Community Center. On September 15th, two engineers from the Los Angeles County Department of Public Work, and one from Southern California Edison spoke about "Lighting Altadena" on the controversial issue of the changeover to LED streetlights, covering past history, regulations, and how street lighting is designed in LA County. In October, we hosted "Alternatives to Grass Lawns." Three experts presented ideas on how to remove thirsty lawns and to promote attractive, drought-tolerant landscaping. Look for more "Third Thursday" panel discussions in 2023.

Tree Giveaway For the third year in a row, forty trees were given away to Altadenans eager to beautify their properties, help clean the air, and keep our neighborhoods cooler. The trees were chosen by an arborist for their adaptability and high success rate. Big thanks to Martin Kelley of Yerba Buena Landscape



who procured trees and stakes for us. Thanks, too, to AH's Tree Committee and the indefatigable Anne Chomyn who initiated this program and to SoCalEdison that continues to help fund it.

Sprucing up Marengo Triangle If you've driven by the small grove of trees on the corner of Woodbury and Marengo you may have noticed how weed-free it is. The parklet was initiated 17 years ago by Altadena Heritage and installed in conjunction with Arroyos and Foothills Conservancy. We transformed a waste space into an attractive spot on a busy corner of a major traffic corridor. This year we revamped the irrigation system and installed stone work to protect new planting. Thanks to Rob Bruce and all the volunteers who helped with weeding and mulching, including volunteers from SoCal Edison!

Owen Brown Commemorative Plaque We are pleased to partner with the County's Owen Brown Gravesite Committee who held a dedication ceremony for a large bronze plaque at Mountain View Mausoleum last month. The plaque commemorates Owen Brown, son of abolitionist John Brown. Supervisor Kathryn Barger joined with developer Tim Cantwell in the unveiling. Our thanks go to Michele Zack representing AH, who is chair, and who with this committee, the Town Council committee preceding it, and several individuals have worked for years to preserve the gravesite. This effort began in 1989, when AH first nominated it as a Los Angeles County Landmark. It has culminated over the past 18 months with the gravesite purchased and preserved, funding of \$300K secured for education and public outreach, and all but final details achieved in landmark designation and transfer to a conservancy.

Our programs and activities would not be possible without the support of more than 350 members. If you'd like to help with events or the tree giveaway, or if you have an idea for a "Third Thursday" panel please don't hesitate to let us know. Altadena Heritage is, after all, for and by Altadenans. Here's to a wonderful 2023!



Val Zavala
Chair, Altadena Heritage



Join Us or Renew

Remain informed, be part of a great Altadena organization. *Altadena Heritage is a nonprofit, volunteer-based advocacy organization dedicated to protecting, preserving, and raising awareness of Altadena's rich architectural, environmental, cultural, and historic heritage.*

Check out our website and join us at altadenaheritage.org

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Wildlife Immigrants

By Mark Goldschmidt

Some native wildlife species have found ways to make their lives in our patchy “natural” environment of yards, streets, and open spaces. Skunks, coyotes, raccoons, and blue jays thrive here. But non-native wildlife species introduced by humans, intentionally or unintentionally, have found niches in our urban ecosystem, too.



Opossum aka: Possum - *Didelphis virginiana*

For many early settlers in Southern California, hunting supplied an important part of the diet. Native raccoon, rabbits, squirrel and deer, were relished, but southerners missed the possums they had enjoyed back home. So opossums were imported as “game” early in the 20th century and the population has taken off. I’ve never heard of anyone eating a back yard opossum, but “roast possum and ‘taters” was celebrated in the South.

The Virginia opossum migrated from South to North America when the gap between the continents closed about 2.8 million years ago. The opossum is the only marsupial on our continent, with a native range through Mexico and the southern US. It is a peculiar beast. It bears its young less than 2 weeks after mating; they are tiny, the size of a bee, and must “swim” to the mother’s pouch through the fur of her abdomen. Once arrived, each locks on to one of 13 teats where they remain for two months. When it gets too crowded, the pups exit the pouch and cling to the mother’s back as she forages. Opossums’ reproductive setup is fascinating: the male has a bifurcated penis, and the female a bifurcated vaginal tract and two wombs. Two other odd facts: the opossum’s body temperature is much lower than other mammals and it is immune to snake bites.

True omnivores, opossums forage at night on insects, slugs, snails, fruits, nuts, small animals including lizards, snakes, frogs, birds and their eggs, rats and other small mammals. In our environment, they have little fear of people, and are famous for using pet doors to access a meal. In urbanized Altadena they den under stairs, garden sheds, beneath houses, and in wood piles.

Possums are classified as “non-game animals”, and may be controlled by any legal means if found to be pests. In fact, the little creatures are not normally destructive of plants or

gardens. They do possess sharp incisors and can injure cats, dogs or people if attacked and cornered, but they usually avoid confrontations, most famously by “playing possum”. They do this very convincingly, tongues hanging out and a suppressed heart rate — they really do look dead. In Altadena their chief predators are coyotes, bobcats, and automobiles.

Red Crowned Parrot - *Amazona viridigenalis*

Simpson’s Garden Town, a sprawling garden center that covered several acres on Colorado Boulevard in East Pasadena, was a wonderful bazaar featuring landscaping supplies, fishponds, a flower shop, lawn mower shop, pets, and aviaries full of exotic birds. In 1959 the whole place burned, and in the conflagration the aviaries were thrown open to save the birds -- among them an unknown number of Red Crowned parrots, ancestors of the flocks that now inhabit the San Gabriel Valley. Another origin story credits a plane load of poached birds that escaped around the same time. These parrots, native to north-eastern Mexico where they feed on tropical seeds and fruit, have thrived in our suburban environment with its rich variety of introduced plants and few predators. (There are other species of feral parrots in Southern California, but the Red Crowned are by far the most abundant.)

Currently an estimated 3,000 inhabit the San Gabriel Valley, well known to us as the raucous flocks foraging in our treetops. California flocks exceed numbers in their native range where they are endangered due to habitat destruction and poaching for the pet trade.

Red Crowned Parrots mate for life, breeding high in trees



Photo: Arthur Beesley

in natural hollows or woodpecker holes, where they raise 3 or 4 fledglings a year. Parrots reach maturity at 5 years, and live 30 to 50 years. With no serious predators, the flocks promise to keep growing. Intensely social, they vocalize constantly when flying, and sound almost human as they “talk” while foraging.

Exotic, colorful and amusing to watch, the red-headed green birds are enjoyed by many; others are annoyed by the cacophony.

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Hunting the Highlands

By Michele Zack

Careening on a jubilant bender through Los Angeles's muddy streets at Christmas, 1873, Southern-minded Dr. John Griffin chortled that he'd finally got the best of those "Damn Yankees!" Anyone in earshot, including journalist Benjamin Truman (who wrote it down) learned that he'd sold 4,000 dry acres up the Arroyo to a naive group of Iowans — land where "a respectable jack rabbit wouldn't be seen." Shockingly, these fools paid him \$6.60 an acre for it!

The price was brought that *low* (from the point of view of Pasadena's founders) by Griffin's partner Don Benito Wilson, who threw in 1,400 extra acres at the last minute to seal the deal. This included the future Altadena in the outwash beneath the mountains.

The claim about jack rabbits was pure hyperbole. It is well-documented that the land teemed with wildlife— particularly jack rabbits! Many seasonal rivulets and canyon water sources in the late 19th century supported food supplies for deer, puma, bears, gophers and other small mammals, and birds such as quail. Fish were prevalent in canyon streams. Boys and young men coming to the new settlements arrived with, or soon developed, hunting skills — walking miles and spending days to track and bring home mostly rabbits for the family pot.

Game for the family pot

Alice Eaton Smith remembers brothers Will and Ben Eaton "loved to go hunting for jack rabbits in the hills and they brought back the cottontails, too." Alice was familiar with this abundance; her family had lived by the mountains at Fair Oaks Ranch next to what is today called Eaton Canyon, since the end of the Civil War. Her father, Pasadena founder (not from Iowa) Benjamin Eaton understood the land's potential, brokered the deal with Griffin, and invested in it. When Alice was four years old the family moved south to be closer to schools, neighbors, and other marks of civilization appearing with the rush of educated Midwesterners to Pasadena. But her big brothers still headed to the hills to hunt.

Before the move, Eaton always had concerns at Fair Oaks dealing with wildlife. He was determined to stop the elusive bear plundering his bee hives, and in 1879, awake one night with a "howling toothache", set out with his old Sharps musket 50-70 single shot to hunt the culprit. He was startled to discover it was a Grizzly! By this time, *Ursus arctos horribilis* was uncommon here. After a first shot, with a very quickly loaded second he stopped him at a distance of 10 paces as the wounded animal charged. It took four men the next day to load the giant into a cart, and he was taken down to town. "In a few moments it seemed as if the whole population of Pasadena was gathered at

Williams's store to see the bear... school was dismissed so the children would have a chance to see it. The animal measured 7 feet 10 inches, but weighed only about 500 pounds, for he was very poor..." Eaton recollected in Hiram Reid's 1895 History of Pasadena. More quotidian, Eaton reported killing 11 rattlesnakes his first year at Fair Oaks (1865), "three of them having 11 rattles each —" as well as various predators (brown



Founders of the Valley Hunt Club first met in Altadena.

Photo: Altadena Historical Society

bears, mountain lions, and wildcats) who found good eating in his livestock and garden.

Levi and Luna Giddings and their son Eugene came here in 1874 with a large clan, and soon founded Mountain View Cemetery. They shared many pioneer hunting stories, as did the hunt-loving Briton William Allen, and the Woodburys. Giddings "always kept hounds" on his ranch (near the mouth of Millard Canyon), usually five or six, to keep down the chicken-stealing fox population. Levi related an incident in which his hound Cash treed four "big wildcats" in a single tree. Giddings shot two, Cash attacked a third that jumped down from the tree, and a fourth sprang on the struggling duo. One cat escaped, and miraculously Cash survived, "though he was laid up for some

time with the bites and scratches the cats gave him.” Cash was with him one of Giddings first years here when “I got 37 deer within two miles of the house”

The Elite Set and “Sport” Hunting

It is difficult to grasp how quickly Pasadena and the coming of more genteel, often sick, Temperance-minded immigrants began changing both eco-systems and social landscapes. Most were less rough and ready than “family pot” hunters, who were hardly rustic bumpkins. In the 19th Century, being a jack of all trades was a survival skill: Eaton was a Harvard-trained lawyer and water engineer, Giddings an abolitionist whose uncle was in Congress, John Woodbury a banker and aesthete, and William Allen of the Sphinx Ranch had been a cotton broker in Egypt for 23 years. But many of the more religious among the new settlers frowned on growing wine grapes, the Highlands’ (as Altadena was then known) chief crop— and most were city-bred folk who preferred to distinguish themselves by forming literary and arts societies, and in scientific, business, and social pursuits.

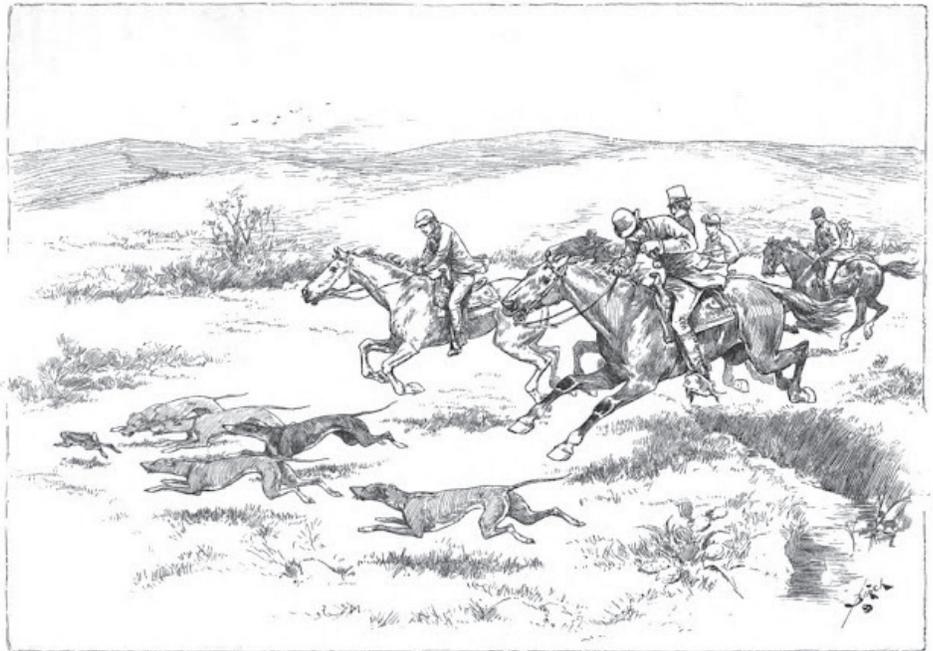
Among this contingent was Bayard T. Smith, known as the “Chesterfield of Pasadena” for his natty dress and impeccable manners. A publisher, Pasadena postmaster, political influencer, and real estate developer, he moved up from his Pasadena Oak Knoll Ranch to Altadena the year our community was founded, 1887, to a Fredrick Roehrig designed mansion he commissioned. On the northeast corner of Mariposa and Santa Rosa, it was the site of many highbrow social events, and also the first informal meeting of the Valley Hunt Club. The story is that

a group of Bayard’s pals were hunting the wilds of Altadena soon after his grand residence was built. A fierce storm broke out, Smith wasn’t at home, so they broke in. While enjoying this shelter and warmth, they decided to form a British-style hunt club to promote “the hunting of jack rabbit, fox, and other wild game with horse and hound.” The group (significantly, women made up half the original members) included McNallys, Greenes, Banberrys, Bandinis, Staats, Carters, and others from prominent families. It formally organized in Pasadena in 1888.

This club marked the social ascendance of “sport” over “family pot” hunting, though the latter variety continued until real estate and agricultural development gradually squeezed out game. Members of the Valley Hunt Club held hunts and elevated social occasions, and introduced gentler alternatives to earlier rabbit rousts where one’s seat on a horse (or even having a horse) was less appreciated than ebullience and colorful storytelling. Among the new civic entertainments cooked up by the Valley Hunt Club was a “Tournament of Roses” featuring a Rose Parade, and an organization (for years limited to 100 members) offering social advancement and female influence. A popular but short lived “Gladiator Race” where toga-dressed contestants

in chariots galloped around a ring in the Arroyo revived the earlier spirit, but was discontinued as too wild and dangerous to co-exist with the floral parade. Within a few years, the blood-sport crowd had football games to satisfy that particular lust.

Hunting the wilds of Altadena decreased as people settled here and homes, vineyards, roads, railways, piped water, and other development impacted wildlife habitat. In the early 20th century, new animals were introduced, including possums and squirrels, for hunting and eating, but never took off. While killing certain animals is still allowed (either by permit to hunt, or by other means if the critter is categorized as invasive or a “nuisance”), shrinking open space and shifts toward nature preservation have all but ended the practice. Co-existing



Hunting in Altadena 1889

with wildlife, appreciating what we have left, and sharing our environment are today’s cultural norms. Shopping at grocery stores replaced more time consuming, strenuous forms of hunting and gathering. People unhappy with nuisance wildlife today tend to use traps for control, which is reasonable, and poison, which is not — because it goes on to sicken and kill birds and other animals eating poisoned carcasses.

Those who hunt in the 21st Century mostly travel far, even out of state, or to the Pacific Ocean to do it. One backyard vintner in Altadena did for a time hunt invasive fox squirrels ravaging his grapes, tossing his prey into the freezer until enough accumulated for a casserole. But for every one downed, another popped up to claim the decedent’s territory — so he gave up. There were a few bow-and-arrow, or cross-bow hunters going after deer in our foothills. The most famous was a fellow styling himself Ram-bow — but he and others were pursued and chased off by locals with smart phones and safety concerns.

The Animal Healer - An Interview with Cleo Watts

By Val Zavala

Behind a modest home on Altadena Drive is another smaller home with some unusual occupants. Two people, 11 squirrels, four parrots, a full-grown raccoon, two baby opossum and a couple very friendly chihuahuas. The human in charge of this menagerie is Cleo Watts. You may have seen her on Next Door. She's an official "Small Mammal Wildlife Rehabilitator", certified by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Over the past 20 years about 1,000 injured wild animals have recovered under her dedicated and knowledgeable care.

What animals do you take in the most?

"Squirrels are the most common patients. One baby squirrel I cared for fell or was pushed from its nest. It was only a few days old with no fur and its eyes were still shut. An x-ray showed its tiny body had five broken bones." For several weeks she fed it with a syringe in a heated cage. (Baby squirrels can't self-regulate their temperature.) It survived. Then she showed me two larger squirrels. "Both have head trauma. This one has seizures and this one goes in circles. We keep them for up to a year and they do come out of it. But sometimes they don't, and if they don't, they go to a sanctuary."

"Since last October", said Cleo, "we've cared for and released 99 squirrels. Some people ask me why I waste my time with squirrels. They call them tree rats. I see them as living creatures that deserve respect."

Parrots are also familiar to Cleo. She had four parrots when I visited. One had a bad wing break in two places. "If the parrots are young they can be handled", she says, "but if they are older and wilder, it's best to keep contact to a minimum." How do animals get injured?

"A lot of animals come in because of tree trimming, car accidents, the mother dies or is eaten. Ground squirrels are dropped by hawks often at the golf course. Parrots are hit by cars. One squirrel — a nursing mom — fell out of one of the big trees on Christmas Tree Lane."

Do you have a favorite patient right now?

"That would be Rocky (a raccoon). I got him on Mother's Day. His family, the mother and three siblings were attacked by a coyote. The finders said Rocky was curled up on patio." Today he's happy, healthy and very friendly. He eats all kinds of fruits and vegetables, chicken, salmon, dog kibble and scrambled eggs. Like a typical racoon he douses his eggs in water before eating them. "He can forage and hunt," says Cleo, "but he is also friendly and will approach humans. So he'll have to go to a sanctuary instead of being released to the wild."

How did you get your start in animal rehabilitation?

"I've always taken in animals, if I saw a bird with a broken wing or a kitten or opossum on the road. If the mother got run over and the babies got scattered, I'd scoop up two of them and take them

in. In 2002 I started volunteering for Bottle Baby fostering for kittens. And then people said, 'Oh hey, I found this squirrel. It fell out of the tree. It's a baby. Can you help me? You do kittens. It has to be similar.' So I took one in."

"Later people would sometimes say, 'Oh you love animals. You



Rocky and Cleo

want to be a vet.' I said, 'No. I don't want to be a vet. I want to be like their nurse. I want to be hands-on with animals.' Then people would say, 'Oh you want to be a zookeeper.' 'No. I don't want to be a zookeeper. I want to work with animals.' "

How did you get your animal rehab license?

"This lady from Squirrelmender reached out to me on Facebook and she said, 'Are you licensed?' and I said 'No.' And she said, 'Well I think you do really good work and I really think that you should be licensed.' That was last year. She said, 'This is what you have to do. You have to have in-take forms. You have to have the cages set up like this.' I have the book Standards for Wildlife Rehabilitation. I studied that. Before this I was a dental assistant in La Verne. Then the pandemic came along. The pandemic is when I really started saying yes to all the calls for help." Cleo quit her dental assistant job and started animal rehab full-time.

How do you pay for all this animal care?

"I get some donations. \$25, \$50 sometimes \$100. X-rays cost \$120. But most of the costs my boyfriend pays. (Laughs) He's a sweetheart. Also when it gets crazy and I have too many baby animals I'll go on Next Door and say, 'I have this baby that needs this and this baby than needs that.' I'll take pictures of what's needed and I'll say if anyone would like to donate right now it would definitely be appreciated. I had someone donate

an incubator. People bring me fleece blankets that they'll make. They'll sew custom blankets weighted with rice so I can keep the babies warm. Sometimes people will think of me when — unfortunately — their pet passes away and they have extra-food."

Where do you take the animals for vet care?

"I use vets in various places, depending on their specialty. One vet who specializes in skunks is in Loma Linda. An exotic animal vet is here in Pasadena."

What happens if an animal can't be saved?

"Some injured animals have to be euthanized. If they need to be euthanized, I call the Humane Society. But only about 15 animals have had to be euthanized."



What's the biggest challenge?

"A really exhausting part is baby season in the spring. I have to get up every three hours to feed them. That's what kicks my butt. But I guess the hardest thing would be an animal that I can't save. They may have internal bleeding or head trauma. That's the hardest. So I'll hold them until they pass. Just comfort them."

What the most satisfying part of your work?

"It's most satisfying when you release them into the wild so they can live life like they should. That's the reward. There's nothing like it. I had many jobs but I'm naturally nurturing. I get gratification with wild animals."

If you would like to help Cleo in any way you can contact her at cleowatts43@gmail.com

Coyote

By Mark Goldschmidt

In the lore of many Native American peoples, Coyote has been around from the beginning: he was there at creation, he is a link to the other world. Coyote is "the Tricky One." He is bad, but he's also good, he's always changing, no one likes him. But long ago Coyote took pity on humans because it was winter and they were dying of cold. Fire belonged only to the Fire Beings who guarded it fiercely, but Coyote tricked them, stole it, and gave it to humans so they could live.

It's spooky seeing a coyote walking the street in broad daylight. He is wary, he is watching you, he is not afraid, and he is definitely a wild beast. Sinister, canny, intelligent eyes, it's easy to see him as a mythic character: mischievous, menacing, and unpredictable.

Above all, coyotes are adaptable. They thrive in all kinds of environments from Alaska to Belize, and from wilderness to urbanized areas like Altadena. There are 19 recognizable sub-species, ours are a small desert breed — 25 pounds or less. Omnivores, they subsist largely on rodents and some larger animals, carrion, fruit, berries, insects, domestic animal dung, roadkill, garbage, fresh grass.

Coyotes mate for life, a couple raises 3 to 7 pups in winter in a burrow the pair excavates, a hollow log, or some other sheltered spot. Parents bring food to the den and regurgitate it for the pups. In fact, the male brings food in the same manner to his mate when she's pregnant. Some pups remain to help take care of the next litter, but at 6 to 10 months most disperse to find their own territory; they mature fully by three years. All coyotes can breed with wolves and domestic dogs and produce fertile offspring; DNA studies show that there is a little of each in most coyotes. Coyote-domestic dog crosses are rare because male dogs don't help with child-rearing, and estrus differs. "Coydogs" are way more intelligent than dogs and have a reputation as difficult pets.



Photo Robert J. Lang

Coyotes scent-mark their territories to let other coyotes know to keep away. But they are gregarious, too. Unrelated individuals, young animals without territory, non-breeding females for the most part, form packs for companionship and to hunt large prey. Packs work together with tactics of distraction and harassment to bring down animals much larger than themselves such as deer or large dogs. With 11 recognized "vocalizations" plus an expressive body language and scent markings, coyotes have a large vocabulary to communicate with each other.

Attacks on humans are rare, only 2 known fatalities. One in Nova Scotia, the other in a Glendale park in 1981, when a picnicking family's three-year-old daughter ran out to give a piece of chicken to the doggie, was savaged, and killed. NEVER GIVE FOOD TO A COYOTE, or any other wild animal, for that matter. The coyote you feed will remember your scent and stalk you ever after. Urban coyotes are wary but have little fear of humans, and may take an interest in the dog you are walking.

Many Altadenans would like to see coyotes eradicated from our midst. Not possible! Also not a good idea, these beasts occupy an important niche in our community, scavenging and helping keep a lid on the rodent population. They are not about to move back to the chaparral. When local coyotes are eliminated, others quickly move in. Furthermore, it has been proven that when the population dips, females go into "hormonal overdrive" and bear larger litters that soon make up for any loss. We must learn to live with them. Watch your pets, keep them indoors as much as possible. Clean up what attracts them — fallen fruit, pet food, bird feeder excess, garbage.

If you feel you are being stalked, don't be afraid, just wave your arms and make noise, let them know you are aware. Look at them and they look back, and you know you are dealing with deeply intelligent beings.

Immigrants - Continued from page 3.

It certainly must be unpleasant to live under the trees where flocks roost each night. A 1964 LA Times article “Wild Parrots Cause Squawk in Pasadena” started out: “A policeman’s bullet silenced Friday the squawking of a wild parrot, and thereby touched off another round of controversy over the birds who have inhabited a residential neighborhood here for seven years.” There had been dozens of complaints about the roosting birds at Glenarm and El Molino Avenue -- perhaps shooting one bird encouraged the flock to roost elsewhere.

However one may feel about them, these birds have found their niche in our environment. Barring disease or a new predator the population will increase and spread.



Eastern Fox Squirrel - *Sciurus niger*

There are four species of squirrel native to California, but the one that has completely taken over in Altadena’s urban ecosystem first arrived in California when some were intentionally released in the 1920s at a Veterans Home in the San Fernando Valley to amuse the residents. This is the Eastern Fox Squirrel. In fact, there must have been multiple introductions, because their range now extends to many other western states where they are non-native and invasive. California grey squirrels still inhabit the oak woodlands on the urban fringes of Altadena, but are rare to non-existent in urbanized areas.

These rodents are outstandingly agile, fun to watch as they take breath-taking leaps, chase each other around tree trunks, sit upright on alert, or flick their tails and chatter atop fences. On the minus side, these little guys can be real pests, which you’ll know if you’ve ever seen a squirrel tear through a fig tree taking a bite out of every fruit before throwing it to the ground. They are also disliked for their habit of invading attic space where they gnaw on wiring and cause significant damage.

Eastern fox squirrels make dens in tree hollows, or nests of leaves high in trees, where a female bears two litters of an average of 3 pups each year. They are fairly solitary animals, not playful but highly territorial. With few predators they are very successful in Altadena. Raptors probably get a few, as do automobiles, but these squirrels are too wary, alert, and quick to fall prey to most cats or dogs.

Tree squirrels are listed by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife Code as “a game mammal” which may be hunted with the proper permit. The exception is our Eastern Fox Squirrel, which may be trapped and killed as a pest. It can certainly be eaten -- like the possum squirrel is savored in the South. The *Joy of Cooking* had recipes and directions for dressing and cooking squirrel up until the 1975 edition.

Peafowl - *Pavo cristatus*

The first peacocks were brought to the San Gabriel valley by Lucky Baldwin sometime in the 1880s to ornament his showplace, Rancho Santa Anita. Descendants of the original flock continue to inhabit the site, including the Arboretum and much of Arcadia. Andrew McNally kept peacocks and other exotic birds at his 1890 house on Mariposa (site of AH’s 2022 Holiday Party), possible precursors to Altadena’s current feral flock.

Peacocks — male peafowl — are magnificent creatures; their tails (called trains) are a wonder of nature, and make up to 60% of the 8 to 12 pound body weight of a male., yet they are able to fly quite well. Although native to tropical India, they tolerate cold weather, even snow, and have no problem finding plenty to eat and trees to roost at night in Altadena. Peacocks have a lifespan of 15 to 30 years, they are polygamous and a female can raise as many as 20 fledglings per year.

Our local peafowl are domestic birds gone wild. They don’t fear humans, and while beautiful to look at, they are no fun to live with. The frequent cry — more of a scream — of the males can carry up to 5 miles. They wreck gardens, poop everywhere, hang out on roofs where they damage shingles and tiles. When they see their reflection males will frequently attack it with beak and spurs, and can seriously scratch a shiny car.



Photo: Nancy Romero

Peacocks are large, formidable birds, and while they will do their best to flee danger, they can be vicious when cornered. They have few predators in Altadena, just coyotes, bobcats and perhaps the occasional large dog. They are reputed to be delicious but no one I know would kill and eat one. Dressing and cooking instructions can be found online (they are notoriously difficult to pluck).

If a flock has invaded your yard, spraying them with water may drive them off. Squirt them enough, and they might move on to someone else's yard. Feral peafowl are listed as an invasive species and are not protected. If you have a problem with peacocks, don't call County Animal Control, they do not deal with nuisance fowl.



Tree Rat, aka Black Rat/ Roof Rat/ Wharf Rat - *Rattus rattus*

Everywhere humans go, so go rats. In many ways, rats and humans are alike. Like us, rats are omnivores and generalists, they thrive on all kinds of food and adapt to many environments. *Rattus rattus* has followed people for centuries, hitching rides on ships throughout the world (thus one common name "wharf rat"). It is believed they came to Europe from Asia along Roman trade routes, eventually unleashing repeated human tragedies as they and their flea parasites brought the plague. Rats have assisted humankind in our destructive program, modifying habitats all over the world, indelibly altering ecosystems, devouring flora, bird and reptile eggs, and competing with native wildlife for food, often leading to extinctions. (The larger Brown Rat, or Sewer Rat *Rattus norvegicus*, is also present in the Los Angeles metro area, but its range is near the coast.)

A great climber, the roof rat prefers lairs above ground, but will burrow in the soil if that's what's called for, or make a den in a wood pile. They often build nests in trees, but your attic or a similar dry, dark place is better, where they can hang with their buddies during the day, going out to forage at night, often in groups. They are social animals.

Altadena with large trees, irrigated gardens, berry, fruit and nut bearing plants, lots of shrubbery, and older frame houses is prime roof rat real estate. There is such an abundance of forage here that garbage and pet food make up an insignificant part of their diet. Roof rats are great climbers, and will find a way into an attic if there is an opening the size of a quarter; if the opening isn't quite big enough, they will gnaw to enlarge it. They eat only about half an ounce of food a day, and an equal amount of water — but they proliferate at a great rate, each female bearing 30 or so young in a year. Average lifespan is a bit more than a year.

As prey animals, roof rats are an important component of the wildlife Altadena's ecosystem, supporting nocturnal hunters including coyotes, raccoons, owls, bobcats and feral cats. For us, they are the most undesirable of neighbors; they invade our homes, eat our food, foul their nests, stink up our attics, and carry diseases and parasites. Yet they are here to stay.

If you need to kill rats due to an infestation, please, never use poison; birds and mammals will consume poisoned carcasses, sicken and die. Poisoning the rats' natural predators can lead to explosive growth in the rat population.

Cats - *Felis catus*

Ancestor of our domestic pets, the African wild cat began hanging out with people around 8,000 years ago when agriculture was invented. Stored grain attracted rodents, rodents attracted the cats, their natural predators, and a symbiotic human/cat relationship developed. Extremely effective predators of rats and mice, as well as beloved furry companions, cats have accompanied humans throughout the world. In most environments, cats don't really need humans; strays have led to populations of feral cats worldwide that have devastated wildlife and even whole ecosystems in places they were introduced, especially island habitats.

In Altadena feral cats form an important component of our urban wildlife ecosystem; in fact they have been players in its development since its founding when our desiccated outwash plane evolved into agriculture, then into suburb. Cats keep a lid on the rat population, reducing the likelihood of a population explosion. Cats are also prey for our larger predators, coyotes and bobcats. Unfortunately, all cats kill birds and other animals we would rather keep around, like moles and lizards.



Feral cats often live in group dens called "colonies," sometimes supported by people who feed them. When I moved to Altadena years ago, a colony nearby was fed by an elderly neighbor. The colony disappeared after she died, but there are still strays in Altadena and will be as long as there are rats.

An ongoing movement to trap feral cats, neuter, vaccinate, and release them back into urban areas (called Trap Neuter Release or TNR) is active in LA and nationwide. The idea is to develop and maintain a stable, healthy population of "community cats" to keep the rodent population under control. Proponents of TNR have claimed success in some cities; they point out it is better to have non-breeding, healthy community cats than untold numbers of feral diseased ones. Furthermore, felines provide non-toxic rodent control. The movement has its skeptics, including some scientists who have studied TNR, and the Audubon Society. The fact is that it is impossible to eradicate either cats or rats, and they both play important roles in our urban ecosystem.

Ursus americanus californiensis

by Val Zavala

It's ironic that the only grizzly bear in California is on our state flag. There have been no grizzly bears in California for a century, the last was shot in 1922 in Tulare County. It is the black bear that has made itself comfortable in our San Gabriels

They are called black bears, but they come in all shades, from dark brown to cinnamon. Black bears were widely hunted in the 19th century in Southern California, apparently to extinction.

They were reintroduced in the 1930s when California wildlife officials moved 28 "problem bears" from Yosemite National Park to southern California; 22 were released in Angeles National Forest and six in Los Padres National Forest. They have thrived and multiplied, now there are 30,000 to 40,000 black bears statewide. Small by bear standards. females weigh up to 175 pounds, males can weigh as much as 660 pounds.

Jessica West, a Human-Wildlife Conflict Specialist with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, spends much of her time educating people about bears and how to interact -- or not interact -- with them "mostly managing the things that attract the bears, like unsecured food and water, bird feeders, fruit trees, and garbage. Over time the bears become 'habituated', their natural fear is diminished and that increases risky behavior." Their natural diet is insects (particularly ants), nuts, berries, acorns, grasses, roots and other vegetation.

Unlike coyotes, West says "Overall people love the black bears. When you talk to folks about a bear entering their home they are so forgiving. They want to report the bear but don't want anything bad to happen to it. 'Please, don't hurt them' they say." Department policy is to never harm a bear except when one is deemed "predatory," a highly unusual situation. Officials will relocate a bear only if a homeowner has taken every precaution and the animal continues to be destructive. Where bears are about, it's critical to secure trash cans and other sources of food. (There's more advice for homeowners about bears and wildlife: ca.gov/Keep-Me-Wild/Bear)



Bears can have very specific food preferences says West. "I've heard of a bear that raided a fridge that would take the chocolate cake but not touch the bacon. Another bear had taken to eating citronella candles. If they like a scent, they will investigate. We could tell which scat was his. It smelled like citronella-scented poop."

Some people who love bears may feel a desire to leave food out for them so the bears stay healthy, but West says "don't do this." It just speeds "habituation" and bears that become habituated to hand-outs or garbage become nuisances.

Bears in the southern California foothills don't hibernate, it just doesn't get cold enough to make dens; they sleep in trees, on the ground, or even on patios. Prolonged drought and higher temperatures in California make swimming pools increasingly appealing to bears.

Mother bears usually keep their cubs for about two years, but when food and water become scarce they may separate from them earlier. Left on their own, the cubs are vulnerable to coyotes, bobcats, mountain lions, and even other bears. About one in five cubs don't survive, but those who do live for an average of 18 years. It is legal to hunt black bears with a permit; given their healthy numbers, hunting has little impact on the overall black bear population.

If you encounter a bear while hiking or camping, first stand still. Do not approach it. Move away quietly in the opposite direction. Do not run, that can trigger a chase response. If the bear is cornered it will get fearful, so be sure to leave the bear a clear exit as you back away. More bear encounter advice at bearwise.org/bear-safety-tips/bear-encounter/

Over the nine decades since *Ursus americanus californiensis* was reintroduced in Southern California no human has ever been killed by this species. Wildlife officials would like to keep it that way.

New and Downtown

Robot Coffee on North Lincoln south of Altadena Drive is a breakfast and lunch cafe with patio seating in the back. Proprietor Justin Pinchot is a former AH board member whose long road to gaining county permits has been documented in these pages. His menu of salads, sandwiches, and mac n'cheese is striking a chord with Altadenans happy to have a new dining option. It's close to Unincorporated Coffee in Northwest Altadena's new "Coffee Neighborhood." Look for the cheery orange umbrellas on the sidewalk in front!



Raccoon

Famous for their raffish black “masks” and ringed tails, raccoons are native in most of North America. They have adapted well to suburban environments throughout the US. Unlike the coyotes we spot regularly, their nocturnal habits make raccoons less conspicuous.

Urban raccoons make their homes in abandoned buildings, in your attic, under your house, cavities in trees, in abandoned vehicles, storm drains, under brush cover, in hollow logs, and change dens frequently. Forest creatures, they like the cover provided by the dense vegetation found around Altadena, and need to be near water, which we provide with our pools and ponds.

Raccoons are omnivores feeding mainly on insects, worms, fish, bird eggs, lizards, fruits and nuts — 40% invertebrates, 33% plants. Only rarely do they hunt birds or other mammals, but they do relish our garbage, and they are notorious for going after chickens. These critters find plenty to eat and have few predators. Coyotes probably, and great horned owls can take the little ones, but adult raccoons weigh from 12 to 20 pounds or more. Disease is probably the main check on raccoon population. In Altadena, it is currently on a down cycle due to distemper which sweeps through every 5 to 7 years

Raccoons are shy and usually retreat from people, but beware, if provoked they can be vicious. If you surprise one inside your house, ask it to leave, don't get aggressive or you might find yourself tangling with fangs and claws. Another reason to avoid contact with a raccoon is that they are vectors for some serious diseases and parasites. Feces is the most dangerous; raccoons latrine communally, often high places, frequently on roofs. If you find a latrine on your property, look up precautions to take.



In twilight raccoons see well, but their distance vision is poor. They are almost color blind, but they do see green. Their hearing is acute, they can hear extremely soft noises, like an earthworm moving underground.

Their strongest sense is the sense of touch. Their fore paws are extremely sensitive and a great part of their brain is dedicated to processing tactile impulses. Despite lacking opposable thumbs, their little hands are amazingly dexterous. When eating, they perch on their hind legs and maneuver their food with their front paws; when near water they like to “wash” or “douse” their food. With short legs, raccoons are poor jumpers and can't run fast, topping out at 10 to 15 mp with a lumbering, bear-like gait They are adept climbers, however, with the rare ability to climb down a tree headfirst by rotating their hind feet to point backwards.

You may find raccoons cute, but they do not make good pets. They need to stay in the wild. In California it's a misdemeanor to keep any wild animal as a pet. Although the state rarely prosecutes, penalties can run from \$500 to a \$10,000 fine plus possible jail time. People do make pets of them however, that's how they got to Germany and Japan where they have become noxious invasive species.

Sources: California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Wikipedia, Critter Control of Pasadena, Jim Hartman, Los Angeles County Dept. of Weights & Measures, Wildlife Management.

Tree Giveaway 2022



Members of the Altadena Heritage Tree Committee joyfully giving away another 40 trees to help cool Altadena, third year in a row. From the right: Anne Chomyn, Lisa Wintner, Janet Castro, Michele Zack, Mark Goldschmidt, and Val Zavala.



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Owen Brown Plaque Unveiling at Mountain View

The Owen Brown Gravesite Committee* wants everyone to know that a magnificent plaque honoring Owen Brown (son of abolitionist John Brown, whose failed raid at Harpers Ferry VA in 1859 was a spark setting off the Civil War) now occupies a marble wall in Altadena's Mountain View Mausoleum. Along with Owen's gravesite, the plaque is among the very few memorials to the Civil War in California. Much more accessible than Owen's grave, the plaque is also a memorial to the Abolitionist Movement.

About 80 people attended its unveiling Nov. 4, and we encourage others to visit —the mausoleum is a magnificent 1920s structure worth seeing even without the plaque! Mountain View Cemetery (of which the mausoleum is a part) is Altadena's oldest business, founded by the Giddings family of abolitionists in 1881.

Owen was at Harpers Ferry with his father and two brothers, and was one of the few to escape being shot during the raid or hanged for treason. After living as a fugitive for 20 years, Owen settled in Altadena's foothills and became a local celebrity. When he died, 2,000 attended his funeral and he was buried here.

We unveiled the 5X3 foot plaque Nov. 4 with help from 5th District Supervisor Kathryn Barger and developer Tim Cantwell (pictured above), who have been working with our committee to save this history.



* The Committee is chaired by AH representative Michele Zack, members are Marietta Kreulls representing trails, Diane Marcussen for the Town Council, and John Burton from the Meadows neighborhood, where the gravesite is located.