

Teachers !

If you would like your class to visit the Station,
please phone the manager, Stephen Dreher
(909-624-6661)

Summer at the Field Station

Stephen Dreher, BFS Manager

Claremont's colleges have gone summer-dormant and the sounds of hundreds of students and children at the BFS have dissipated. Nobody's collecting water samples or monitoring pollinating bees. To the untutored eye, the field station might seem "dead", but in reality the business of reproduction, growth and the struggle for survival is in full swing for the wildlife and plants living here.

Refreshing and nurturing rains are history for this season, but despite the dryness and the recent heat, our wildlife is definitely astir. Rabbits and ground squirrels can be seen everywhere searching for food. The ground squirrels spend most of the winter below ground, even though temperatures never really get below freezing here. In late spring and early summer they emerge *en masse* with their young. The little ones are at their cutest and they are much more tentative, less brazen, than the adults. They are also the ones most likely to get snatched by a red-tailed hawk or other predator. Rabbits and their offspring are also out and about. The nocturnal dusky-footed woodrats are quite active, adding to their familial nests, the conical wood masses built under trees or large shrubs than can often attain a height of 3 or even 4 feet. Great horned owls hunt them from tree perches, and if lucky, pounce on one quietly from the darkness.

The wildflowers and shrubs that graced BFS with blooms in March and April now are adorned with maturing fruit and seeds, the life source for many animals. Squirrels relish the large nuts from the wild cucumber, or "manroot", as they drop from their spiny capsules. Ground-feeding (and often ground-nesting) birds, such as California quail, brown or rufous-sided towhees and California thrashers, are grabbing up the wildflower or grass seeds. Scrub-jays await a bumper crop of acorns. Coyotes look for it all, being omnivores like ourselves. Perhaps they can nab a young squirrel or rabbit or have a meal of wild cherry fruit (watch for those pits in their scat). The cherries will ripen in mid-summer. Surprisingly, some plants at BFS don't bloom until early-mid summer, months after the last rains! Among these are many species in the aster family, both annual and shrubby. Two summer annuals are the diminutive true-blue star sapphires (*Eriastrum*), and bright pink conchalagua (*Centaurium venustum*), a short, plant with corkscrew-like stamens, the lone BFS representative

of the gentian family. Then there's the gourd *Cucurbita foetidissima* (common names are calabazilla and stinky cucumber—if you've ever smelled the leaves you'll understand). This is a sprawling prostrate plant with yellow trumpet flowers and huge leaves that don't make an appearance until the soil is dried out. It stores large amounts of water in tuberous underground roots.

Early summer also ushers in the new generation of many birds – from hummingbirds in their thimble-like nests to young Cooper's hawks in the oak trees along the entrance road and the resident coots or "mud hens" in pHake lake. With some luck, the mallards or even the ruddy ducks may stick around and nest at the lake during June or July.

Early summer is definitely no vacation for our wild friends in our wild place of BFS.

To get info about the BFS:

You can get information about the history and features of the station, as well as about its plants and animals (and some great pictures) at www.bfs.claremont.edu.

Past Issues of the Newsletter

When you suddenly have a question about pink glow worms or elderberry and can't locate the right past issue of the newsletter, log on to our website and find the info there.



"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"

Coming soon: Articles on some of our less well-known inhabitants: snails, bacteria, and lichens.

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