

Valley Views

The Friends of San Pedro Valley Park

January/February 2024

Upcoming Talks

A January Zoom Webinar by Morgan Stickrod “The Spectacular Plant Diversity of San Pedro Valley Park”

On **Saturday, January 13th at 7 pm**, the Friends of San Pedro Valley Park are pleased to welcome Morgan Stickrod to tell us all about “The Spectacular Plant Diversity of San Pedro Valley Park.” Home to over 350 species of vascular plants, the ~1,052 acres of San Pedro Valley Park host an impressive diversity of plants and habitats, many of which are quite rare and have distributions barely exceeding the boundaries of the park. San Pedro Mountain and adjacent Montara Mountain form the northern spur of the Santa Cruz Mountains and share a floristic affinity with the coastal mountains extending to the south. San Pedro Mountain also contains traces of the formerly expansive Franciscan flora. The rich mosaic of biodiversity that characterizes the landscape has much to do with a fascinating geologic history, as well as a dynamic interplay of climatic and ecological processes. These factors will be considered as we explore the maritime chaparral, coastal scrub, riparian, coastal grassland habitats of the park, with emphasis on the fascinating flora and plant communities associated with them. Please join us via Zoom for this fascinating lecture.

About the Speaker: Morgan Stickrod is currently the Senior Botanist at Sol Ecology. He is a botanist and plant ecologist with over 10 years of experience doing research and field work throughout California, the southeastern United States, Mexico, and South America. He completed his MS at San Francisco State University, where his research focused on floristics, dispersal dynamics, and rare plant management within the Suisun Marsh estuarine complex. In recent years, he also worked for the SFPUC, doing rare plant management work throughout the San Francisco Peninsula watershed and Santa Cruz Mountains.



To participate in this Webinar, please register in advance using the following link:
https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_ltQ6qJggSTuInMbW0Or87g

Include your name and email address to register. You will then get a confirmation email with further instructions and reminder emails closer to the event.

A February Zoom Webinar with Heidi Perryman - “Return of the Engineer”

Please join us via Zoom on **Saturday, February 3rd at 7 pm** for an informative discussion about the return of the beaver to our present day environment. Europeans decimated the beaver population in North America by the end of the 1800s. They hunted the animal for its water-resistant fur, used felted beaver fur for hats, and used castoreum in making perfumes. Heidi Perryman will discuss the return of beavers (*Castor canadensis*) to our landscape, what it means to our creeks and infrastructure, biodiversity, and resilience to climate change. Even if it is possible, is it beneficial to coexist with an animal that can chew down the landscaping we use tax dollars to plant? Is there any value to sharing our streams with a creature that can block culverts and flood roads? Tune in and let's find out.

To participate in this Webinar, please register in advance using the following link:
https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_07uuvklgRI-69kloST4qvw

About the speaker: Heidi Perryman, Ph.D., is a child psychologist who became an accidental beaver advocate when she started filming the beavers that showed up in her hometown in 2006. She served on the beaver subcommittee and started the organization “Worth A Dam” to advocate for their safety and educate others about their value in the watershed. Heidi organized the first beaver festival in 2008, an annual event which has since become one of the largest nature festivals in northern California. She has been particularly interested in the way that the beavers’ struggle has connected residents more closely to their environment, to their city government and to each other.



The Friends of San Pedro Valley Park

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The Friends provide
volunteer hosts to staff the
reception desk at the VC
when it is open on
Saturdays and Sundays
(only) from 10 am to 4 pm.
Our Trailside Store is open
during those hours.

Upcoming Walk

A Nature Walk in San Pedro Valley Park

with J.R. Blair

This is the first Nature Walk of 2024. Register for a 1.5-hour nature stroll with J.R. Blair on **Sunday, February 18th at 10 am**. We'll get started as soon as everyone has gathered, so please be on time. Dress for light drizzle with waterproof clothing, but heavy rain cancels. Umbrellas are best left at home as they block the view of other attendees. This walk is for **ages 12 years and older** and is **limited to 15 people**.

Sign-ups are done using the following Eventbrite link: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/a-naturalist-walk-in-san-pedro-valley-park-tickets-783033332777?aff=oddtcreator>

About the leader: J.R. Blair received his Bachelor's degree at the Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington and obtained his Master's degree at San Francisco State University in 1999 studying with the accomplished mycologist, Dr. Dennis Desjardin. His thesis was Fungi Associated with Arctostaphylos in Northern California.



Since then, he has been an active member of the Mycological Society of San Francisco. He served a two-year term as President and was Fungus Fair chairperson for five years. He has taught mushroom identification workshops for mycological societies and outdoor education programs for many years. He was a lecturer of biology at SFSU for 21 years and the director of the university's Sierra Nevada Field Campus for eleven years until his retirement in December 2020.

Recent Program

Bob Lewis' "The Importance of Islands to Avian Evolution"

by Bing Huey

Bob Lewis is a premier birder with a phenomenal life list and an extensive association with the Golden Gate Audubon Society. Drawing on his many observations and incorporating concepts of island biogeography, he has made a study of the diversity and evolution of birds on islands. Accompanied by excellent photographs, this was his webinar for the Friends entitled, "Importance of Islands to Bird Evolution," which took place on Saturday, September 16th.

The talk highlighted six areas in which islands are important to birds and bird evolution. They are 1) avian endemism, 2) island type, 3) evolutionary theory, 4) evolutionary adaptations, 5) seabirds and islands, and 6) extinction and opportunities.

Endemism is where a species occurs in one geographic location and nowhere else and is a marked feature of birds living on islands. While islands form just 5.3% of the earth's land mass, more than 10% of avian families occur on only a single island or island chain. Bob offered numerous examples of endemic species, like the New Guinea painted berrypeckers or the Cuban warblers. Some have diverged to be the sole species of their family.

An island's origin determines the species found there. Oceanic islands form by rising from the ocean floor, usually the result of volcanic activity. At the time of formation, they are uninhabited, to be later colonized by organisms through the process of dispersal. Continental islands form when landmasses become separated from a mainland through tectonic activity or by the loss of a land bridge as a result of sea level rise. Established species of the larger mainland become divided and isolated, with the potential for divergence and speciation. This process, where one species experiences a geographic barrier and subsequent populations evolve separately, is known as vicariance.

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Recent Walk

Mushroom BioBlitz - December 2023

by Mila Stroganoff

It was a day for mushrooms! Fifteen people had gathered on Friday morning, December 15th, to help collect mushrooms with J.R. Blair. It was a very good turnout on a beautiful day. These mushrooms were going to be identified and put on display the following day in South San Francisco at the SF Mycological Society's Mushroom Fair. Many thanks to all who came and helped.



We combed the area around the Visitor Center, Trout Farm Trail, and saw plenty of banana slugs of varying sizes. It was a great day for banana slugs, too!



We looked at mushrooms from different angles, upside down and right side up, smelled them, observed the different colors they had and even tasted a few. Well, truth be told, I would not recommend that. The one I tasted was very unpleasant. We learned that some mushrooms develop different colors as they mature. The caps go from darker to lighter. Some have tubes instead of gills, did you know that? Oh, and the different shapes and sizes!

What an adventure it was and such a pleasant group of people all combing the park area to see what we could find. Some participants were faster, some slower and some very observant and knowledgeable. But all had a good time.



Afterward, J.R. Blair spent time looking at everything that had been collected. He organized and discarded and explained.

Do come and join us next year. It's fun.



(All photos by Mila Stroganoff)

New Friends on a Nice Late Fall Day

by Joseph Piro

For our November 11, 2023 Trail Day, four new-comers -- **Katie, Christian, George and Wen** -- joined **Stan Jensen, Istvan Puski**, my brother **Erik** and **I** for some drain dip work on the west end of the Hazelnut Trail --



good timing in advance of the (hopefully) rainy season ahead. We took along an assortment of tools (including a mattock, rakes and McLeods) and headed up the hill under a sunny Fall sky. We cleaned leaves and silt out of and spruced up at least 16 or so spots along our way up to the bench before turning back down.

George and Wen -- mushroom enthusiasts -- were also excited to spot a few along the way. Nothing like some new friends, some good trail work, and a nice Fall day!

Last Trail Day of the Year!

by Joseph Piro

For our December 9th Trail Day - the last one of the year! - **Mary Larsen, Katie, Wen**, brother **Erik** and **I** headed out to the east end of the Hazelnut Trail to work on drain dips (**Istvan Puski** caught up with us on our way back).



It was a brisk, sunny morning and trail conditions were just right to spruce up several dips, dig out a few "tripping hazard" roots and trim back a few branches.

Enjoy the trails and happy holidays to all!



January/February Calendar

January Trail Day

Saturday, Jan. 13 9 am

Stickrod: Diversity (webinar)*

Saturday, Jan. 13 7 pm

Jan. Habitat Restoration Day

Saturday, Jan. 20 10 am

Perryman: Beavers (webinar)*

Saturday, Feb. 3 7 pm

February Trail Day

Saturday, Feb. 10 9 am

Feb. Habitat Restoration Day

Saturday, Feb. 17 10 am

J.R. Blair: Nature Walk*

Sunday, Feb. 18 10 am

*(Reservation needed)

>> FACTOID <<

ARE NORTHERN LIZARDS ODD?

Northern alligator lizards do not lay eggs; we could say that the young are born live, but so are embryos in eggs!



Their southern relatives do things the usual reptile way, laying eggs. Our northern species can have up to 15 wiggly youngsters.

(Source is Wikipedia) (photo by Gary Nafis)

We Need Volunteers!!

The Friends of SPVP are continually looking for new volunteers to join the small, but dedicated, group of individuals who now contribute to our activities on behalf of the park. If you are interested in learning more about how you can help us and give back to wonderful SPVP - whether it's being a host at the Visitor Center on weekends, or helping us to maintain the trails or remove invasive plants each month -- **please contact President Judy Bacon or our Visitor Center Host Coordinator, Carl Schwab**, or any of the members of our Board of Directors (listed on page 2; our email address is also listed there).

We'd be more than happy to speak with you about our various volunteer opportunities.



— Carolyn's Corner —

“THE STARS ARE OUT TONIGHT”...

“They are shining, shining bright!” The night sky can be a winter wonderland of constellations in Pacifica during these premier months. By the southern horizon, Orion, the Hunter smacks you in the face with his bright belt and his two premier stars: blue supergiant Rigel and an exciting shoulder star, the goliath red Betelgeuse, which has astronomers on the edge of their seats. Star gazers were despondent when they saw that Betelgeuse, on our left top of Orion, was getting much dimmer, but NASA says it turns out there has been a cataclysmic disturbance from within Betelgeuse, which could be due to the absorption of a nearby star that kicked up dust that has veiled the actual (real) 50% brightening of the star. So this giant is a semiregular variable star, whose changes in brightness are not so predictable. In addition, this beauty has had changes in color. About 2000 years ago, the Greeks and the Chinese reported it as a yellowish star. But the real drama will shock the world, when it becomes a dazzling bright supernova, with half the moon's brightness in perhaps within 100,000 years from now. (NASA space exploration)



DEEP IN OUR PARK'S SKY-GAZING PAST



San Pedro Valley Park's first “remembered” star party* for the then “SPVP Volunteers” was in 1996, back in the 20th century, at the turn-around back on Weiler Ranch Rd. We lured in 7 guests from the San Mateo County Astronomical Society with a premier free potluck (one time a home-cooked Greek dinner). In turn, their leader gave us a lecture on the cosmos and also on the sky of that night. The society's amateur astronomers from this first show navigated our rocky road transporting a total of 5 sophisticated telescopes tubes, drives, etc. in their trucks and awed us with nebulae, star clusters, the Andromeda Galaxy and planets. Six star parties followed, the later ones at the Walnut Grove Picnic Area. Sometimes Lady Luck dealt us a tough hand, shifting a marine layer

over us, even in September or October, but the first party was a dream.

In the following years, a small group of us did creep out surreptitiously to walk to the end of the Weiler in winter—how thrilling!—a big treat compared to the mostly faded star patterns in the October heavens—it's always a winning show on a clear January or February evening.

CHRISTMAS BERRY—*Toyon*—NOW

Hollywood was named after the toyon, a tall bush of unlacquered leaves, but brilliant, red berries — not one of the “real” shiny-leafed hollies. In normal years, it is in fruit from late November through February, meaning that you should venture onto the lower Hazelnut Trail and see some perfect toyonos opposite the spring site of the showy Douglas irises. Though these berries are not poisonous, don't plan on making the equivalent of an elderberry pie: for most mammals and our Ohlone predecessors, the bitter berries are not a first-pick.

* I heard that constant trail worker, **Art Armstrong**, was the first to host a SPVP star party. Maybe **Ed Decker**, charter(?) member will tell us about it.



~~~~ Happy New Year 2024! ~~~~

The Friends of San Pedro Valley Park wish you and yours  
a New Year filled with joy, health and adventure

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### **Importance of Islands to Avian Evolution** *continued from page 2*

A remarkable avian example of island evolution is the Hawaiian honey creepers. Members of the finch family, they number about 50 species emerging successively with the formation of each of the Hawaiian Islands. The honeycreepers arrived on each new island, becoming new species relatively quickly by adapting to newly available niches. This process of adaptive radiation can be seen in the striking differences in the sizes and shapes of beaks adapted for different food types.

An island close to the mainland lends itself to rapid colonization, but the island population is less genetically isolated from the mainland. Where the island is far from the mainland, effects of colonization such as founder effect and genetic drift are seen. With the founder effect, colonization by small populations results in a limited sampling of the genetic diversity of the mainland population, resulting in a population with less genetic capacity to adapt to new conditions. Genetic drift in small populations occurs when genetic variability is randomly lost over time and fewer genes become fixed in the population. These factors, together with geographic isolation and sharp boundaries, lead to strong selective pressures. This is part of the speciation process, which according to theory, is in equilibrium with an extinction rate. Factors leading to extinction can be 1) arrival of competitors, 2) arrival of predators, 3) unsuitability of habitat, 4) a weather event, or 5) disease.

Islands are opportunities for the range expansion of bird species and can serve as incubators of new species. Bob spoke of a big radiation of passerines that began in Australia and moved to the Indonesian islands. Over time, absence of predators leads to the loss of flight and increase in size, traits that serve the species until the arrival of a new predator, such as humans and rats.

Sixty-five million years ago an asteroid struck where Mexico is today. The dinosaurs that survived evolved into birds that radiated to fill the available niches. Five global extinction events are believed to have occurred over the past 500 million years. We are potentially now in the midst of a sixth event, largely human driven. Since 1500, some 150 bird species have gone extinct, and most of these were island species with small populations. Over half of now highly threatened bird species inhabit islands. Among the causes is the introduction of nonnative predators and nonnative herbivores. Habitat is lost through activities like deforestation. Hurricanes and volcanoes severely impact island habitats. The albatross species that nest on the Midway Islands are threatened by climate change related sea level rise. In Hawaii, malaria and mosquitoes and the loss of food trees threaten bird populations. Islands have contributed much to the rich diversity of bird life on Earth. However, it's a fragile resource that may not survive the ongoing threat of species loss globally.

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### **Interpretive Planning for San Pedro Valley Park**

In late 2022, the San Mateo County Parks Department completed its Interpretive Strategic Plan (ISP) and is now busy completing a park-specific framework for each of the individual county parks. The Parks Department states that the purpose of the ISP is "to provide direction in developing and implementing interpretive products, programs, and messaging that meets the needs and desires of the public, including increasing equitable access to parks and diversifying park visitation. The interpretive theme structure set forth in this plan establishes the main messages we want visitors to absorb. The significant stories that convey these ideas may differ from one park to another, but collectively support the overarching themes in ways that are relevant to park visitors."

A group of interested Friends Board members met with the SMCPD Interpretive Team, led by Katherine Wright, on August 29th to provide our input on the draft Park-Specific Interpretive Planning Framework for SPVP (IPF) and to begin discussions on how it will be implemented. One product of the meeting was an agreement between the Friends and the Interpretive Team to meet on a quarterly basis and continue to address how we will work together to implement the Framework's goals and objectives. Our first quarterly meeting was held on November 21st and we concluded that session on a very upbeat, encouraging note. We will provide much more information on the specific projects that are currently underway to start this process in the coming issues of Valley Views. Stay tuned for much more good news on interpretive improvements for our park!

## On The Nature Journaling Trail

by Sharron Walker

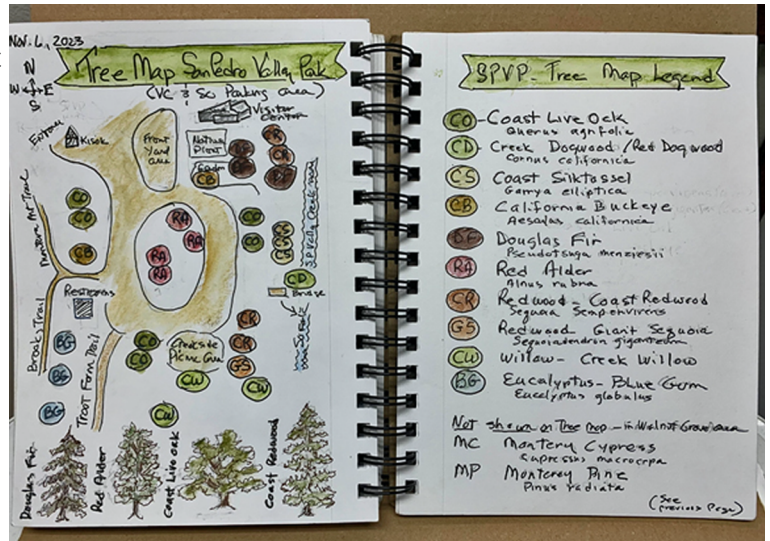
Nature Journaling is the practice of drawing and writing in response to nature. This fun, relaxing practice helps one to connect more closely with the natural world, resulting in the creation of one's own unique nature journal. The San Pedro Valley Nature Journalers have been meeting for 2 1/2 years. We have journaled to a variety of prompts, from trees, to birds, to insects, to spirals in nature and more. Life in the park being, for the most part, our underlying theme.



Our current prompt is mapping. So what does mapping look like in a journal? It could be a map of birds' nests in an area or flowers in one's back yard.

Melanie Heisler created a map of Pacifica Beaches.

I chose to map the trees of the main parking area to the south of the Visitor Center.



To put the map to use, we went for a "tree discovery" hike. In our meetings we not only nature journal, we often do a discovery hike to share and learn from each other.

Artist and educator John Muir Laws states it simply: "Nature journaling will enrich your experiences and develop observation, curiosity, gratitude, reverence, memory, and the skills of a naturalist."

We are taking a break in December, so our next meeting will be on Thursday, January 18. If interested in learning more about our group, please contact me: [sharronlee@aol.com](mailto:sharronlee@aol.com)

## Uke in the Park! by Sharron Walker

The Coastsiders Strummers, also known as the Seniors in Action Ukulele Group, normally meet weekly at the Pacifica Community Center on Wednesdays and Fridays. Led by Abby Margolis, we gather together to play and sing. Abby produces books with words and chords for a variety of songs - Rock & Roll, Rhythm & Blues, Gospel, Hawaiian - so we are all on the same page!



What is so wonderful about the group is there is no pressure and everyone is welcome regardless of skill level! Enjoying singing and playing together is our only goal!

When the community center is closed, Matt Del Carlo, our park's Head Ranger, has permitted us to meet in the overflow (far north) parking area. A perfect place for us surrounded by the beauty of San Pedro Valley County Park.

Several of the uke players are Friends of SPVP members. We so appreciate being able to play in the park!!

If you see us strumming in the park, come sing with us!!

## The Friends' Annual Christmas Party - "And a Good Time Was Had by All!"

by Judy Bacon

The Friends once again got together for their annual Christmas party in the Visitor Center on Wednesday, December 13 at 6:00 pm. Judy cooked a turkey breast and Enid cooked a ham. Everyone else brought sides, drinks, and desserts. Everything we ate and drank was good. Poinsettia plants decorated the tables and Christmas music was in the air. The partygoers enjoyed the company of their fellow members among the tables, as well as the tasty food and beverages.



After we all ate our fill, the traditional gift exchange "game" began. I think we all know this game. You get a number when you bring a gift to place under the tree and then, after dinner, we begin selecting numbers from a "hat." When each selected number is called, the person with that number gets to come up

and either choose a gift from under the tree and open it, or take someone else's gift instead. The person who has their gift "stolen" away can then pick a new one from under the tree or take someone else's. Needless to say, you can't get too attached to your gift as it might get stolen. It was all in good fun and we didn't have to break up too many fights.

For next year's holiday celebratory gathering, however, we will probably have to schedule it during the daylight hours due to a number of our members now having difficulty seeing and traveling during the evening hours (i.e., after dark). At least then, we won't have to close and lock the park gate in the dark after the party is concluded, as it was rather difficult to do this year.

See you at the party next year!



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## Friends of SPVP Photo Contest 2024 ... Will YOU enter this year??

by Sharron Walker & Mark Golembiewski

On February 1, 2024 we will launch our third annual **Friends Photo Contest!** Once again, it will run until May 1st, and, like last year's contest, will be **open to all park visitors.**

The four entry categories will remain the same: 1) Flora, 2) Fauna, 3) Views of Trails & Landscapes, and 4) Activities of People in the Park. Photos entered in the contest must be taken between May 1, 2023 & May 1, 2024. Guidelines with detailed submittal instructions for entrants will be sent to members in early February and again in March, with that same information posted on our website for all other park visitors.

Winners will be awarded recognition ribbons and the winning images will be printed and displayed in the Visitor Center for about three months. All winning images will also be posted on our website and presented in this newsletter, as well. Visitors to the Visitor Center who view the displayed contest photos will have the opportunity to vote on their favorite image and the photograph that gets the most votes will be declared winner of the People's Choice Award.

So whether you're a seasoned and accomplished nature photographer, or just a budding photo artist with a smart phone, come join us for the Friends Photo Contest 2024 and have some additional inspiration and fun while taking photos in the park. Or start going through your photo library to see if you might already have any award-winning images from last year. We want to see your Best Shots!!!

'The Fungus Among Us' in SPVP by Laurie Nikitas



More of 'The Fungus Among Us' in SPVP by Laurie Nikitas



## The Beauty of Flora in SPVP by Bing Huey



Common powderhorn lichen  
(taken on 12-10-23  
along the Hazelnut trail)



Toyon berries  
(taken on 12-9-23  
along the Hazelnut trail)

Liverwort (possibly Asterella)  
(taken on 11-26-23  
along the Hazelnut trail)



## More Beauty of the Flora and Fauna in SPVP by Bing Huey



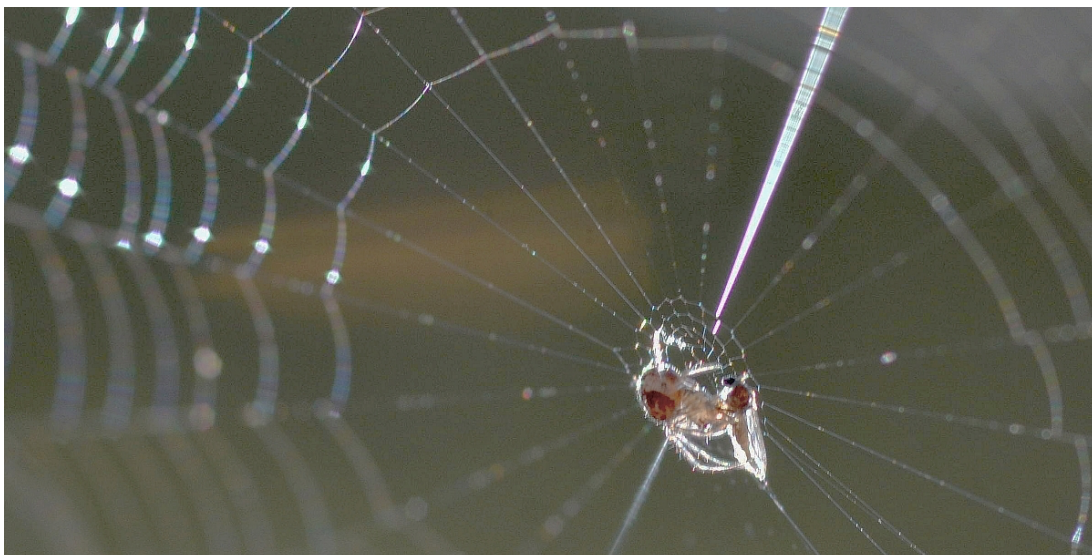
Brush rabbits in meadow  
off Weiler Ranch Rd.  
(taken on 12-10-23)



Early blooming pink flowering currant  
(taken on 12-10-23 along the Weiler Ranch Rd trail)



Late season woodland strawberry  
(taken on 12-10-23 along the Hazelnut trail)



Orbweaver with prey gnat (taken 10-16-23 along the Hazelnut trail)