



Seen any roadrunners in the Conejo Valley lately? Not likely. On June 10, for COSF's second 2021 Speaker Series presentation, ornithological researcher Dan Cooper, Ph.D., talked about which local birds are thriving and which are disappearing. Learn more about his talk in the related story below.

A Few Words from Our President

Greetings! In our previous newsletter's introduction I noted that an acceleration of vaccinations for Covid-19 suggested that by summer we might return to many of our past social activities. That time has come and California is opening up again!"

In the midst of the pandemic, COSF has continued to be busy. We just hosted our second online Speaker Series talk of 2021, and sent \$2,500 to the National Wildlife Federation's [SaveLACougars](#) fundraising campaign as part of our \$10,000 pledge to support the construction of the wildlife corridor bridge over the 101 freeway. We produced a [video with the Animal Actors of Hollywood](#) for CVUSD fourth grade classes in lieu of the canceled Trails Education Days. Their presentations with live, native animals have always been a highlight of the T.E. Days field trips.

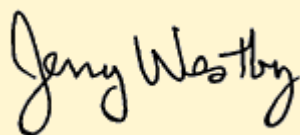
With this Summer issue of the newsletter, we hope to continue to provide useful information and updates on COSF's activities. You'll find a review of the excellent and rewarding presentation Dr. Dan Cooper made in his Speaker Series talk on bird populations in the Conejo Valley. We'll have two more Speaker Series talks this year, possibly with in-person presentations, so stay tuned.

You'll also find a summary of terrific books to use for trail information for our area. Additionally, there's an update on the opening of the rerouted Los Robles Trail West due to the land acquisition above Newbury Park. The profile of Anne Russell, who's an avid mountain biker and key volunteer for a number of local nonprofit groups, provides a sample of the passion all of our Board of Directors have for our open space.

Many of us will continue to get out on the trails frequently, but now we have another challenge—sustaining the dry, sunbaked open space during what looks to be a long, hot summer. We need to remember that going off-trail risks destroying the sensitive, drought stricken vegetation. Let's be responsible and show the care for the open space we need for our future enjoyment and the wellbeing of the plant and animal wildlife.

Finally, thanks to our donors and volunteers who allow COSF's Board to work to enhance our knowledge and enjoyment of our environment in this era of climate change and urbanization challenges. Thanks!

All the best,



President, Conejo Open Space Foundation

We Couldn't Do It Without You

[**COSCA**](#) relies on volunteers to help build and maintain trails, act as extra eyes and ears for the rangers, carry out educational programs and support the open space in many other ways. Please consider volunteering for a program that interests you.

[**COSF**](#) depends on open space supporters for donations that help fund COSCA volunteer programs and so much more. We greatly appreciate your generosity.

Donate

Volunteer



Dr. Dan Cooper has studied data from bird censuses between 1971 and 2018 to determine how avian populations have changed with increased development.

How the Birds Species We See Are Changing

While it's self-evident that the Conejo Valley has been heavily developed over the past half-century, what isn't as obvious is how much that increasing urbanization has changed our bird populations. Ornithological researcher Dan Cooper, Ph.D., addressed this topic on May 10, as COSF's second guest in the 2021 Speaker Series. Dr. Cooper, who lives in Oak Park, is the author of Important Bird Areas of California and is the president of Cooper Ecological Monitoring.

Dr. Cooper noted that development has "created an urban forest of nonnative trees" and that, thanks to widespread irrigation, "Our area has gotten wetter and wetter, even in the middle of a drought." He noted Medea Creek as an example, which now flows year-round, but in the past was a dry arroyo much of the year. This dense forestation and anthropogenic water has played a role in which birds make their homes in the Conejo Valley, Dr. Cooper said.

Like humans, some birds thrive in an urban environment filled with people, cars, pets, restaurants, and noise. Others avoid it. Among the birds that used to be common in the Conejo Valley, but are no longer here (or seen only infrequently) are:

- American kestrel
- Golden eagle
- Loggerhead shrike
- Roadrunner
- White-tailed kite

Dr. Cooper noted that the reasons for the birds' departure from our area aren't fully known to science and probably involve multiple factors, from lost food sources to poor nesting opportunities. On the flip side, the species that are growing in numbers include:

- Allen's hummingbird
- Cooper's hawk
- Dark-eyed junco
- House finch
- Lesser goldfinch
- Song sparrow
- Western bluebird

"Bluebirds are everywhere now," Dr. Cooper said. "If I had told you that would be the case 20 years ago, you wouldn't have believed me."

According to Dr. Cooper, characteristics that help a bird adapt to an urbanized environment include boldness (measured by distance before a bird takes flight when approached); nesting earlier than other birds; and eating a varied diet.

To help out those birds that still call the Conejo Valley home, Dr. Cooper urged listeners to:

- Avoid using rat poison
- Keep cats indoors
- Limit watering
- Use a rake instead of a leaf blower and ask your gardener to do the same. ("Think of the critters that are just being blown away," he said.)

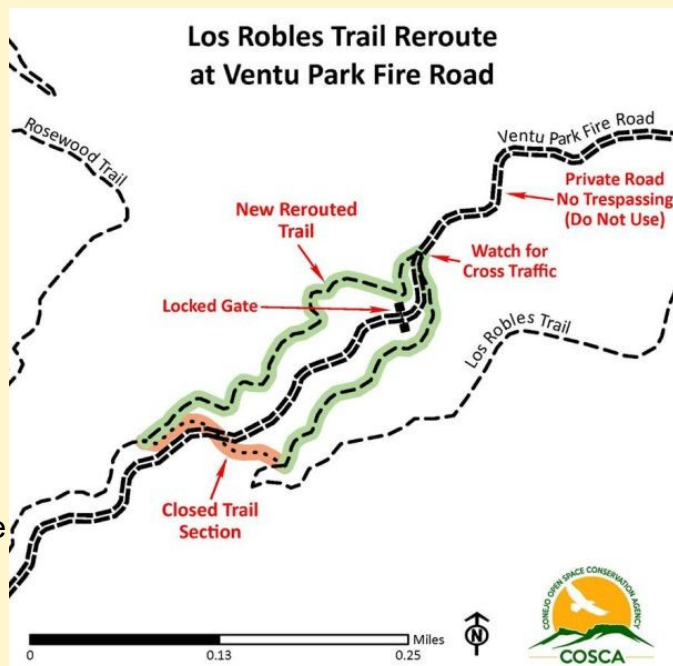
As to the controversy over whether bird feeders are helpful or harmful, Dr. Cooper responded, "You're feeding the birds so you can enjoy them. Always keep that in mind and be judicious about it."

Watch the [video of Dr. Cooper's talk](#).

Los Robles Reroute Opens to Rave Reviews

On May 11, [COSCA](#) inaugurated a new 0.48 mile section of the Los Robles Trail system just east of the Rosewood Trail. The improvement was made possible by the donation of 82 acres by the Rasnow family, who live on Rasnow Peak above the area.

COSCA rangers waited for bird-nesting season last fall to end before beginning trail construction with the help of the Ojai-based C.R.E.W., members of [COSTAC](#), and other volunteers.



The new trail crosses the Ventu Park Fire Road at a different location than the former trail. COSCA reminds trail users that the fire road is private and requests that users stay on the trail.



Brad Kieffer created a personal trail-running challenge for his 60th birthday that also raised funds for an African women's charity.

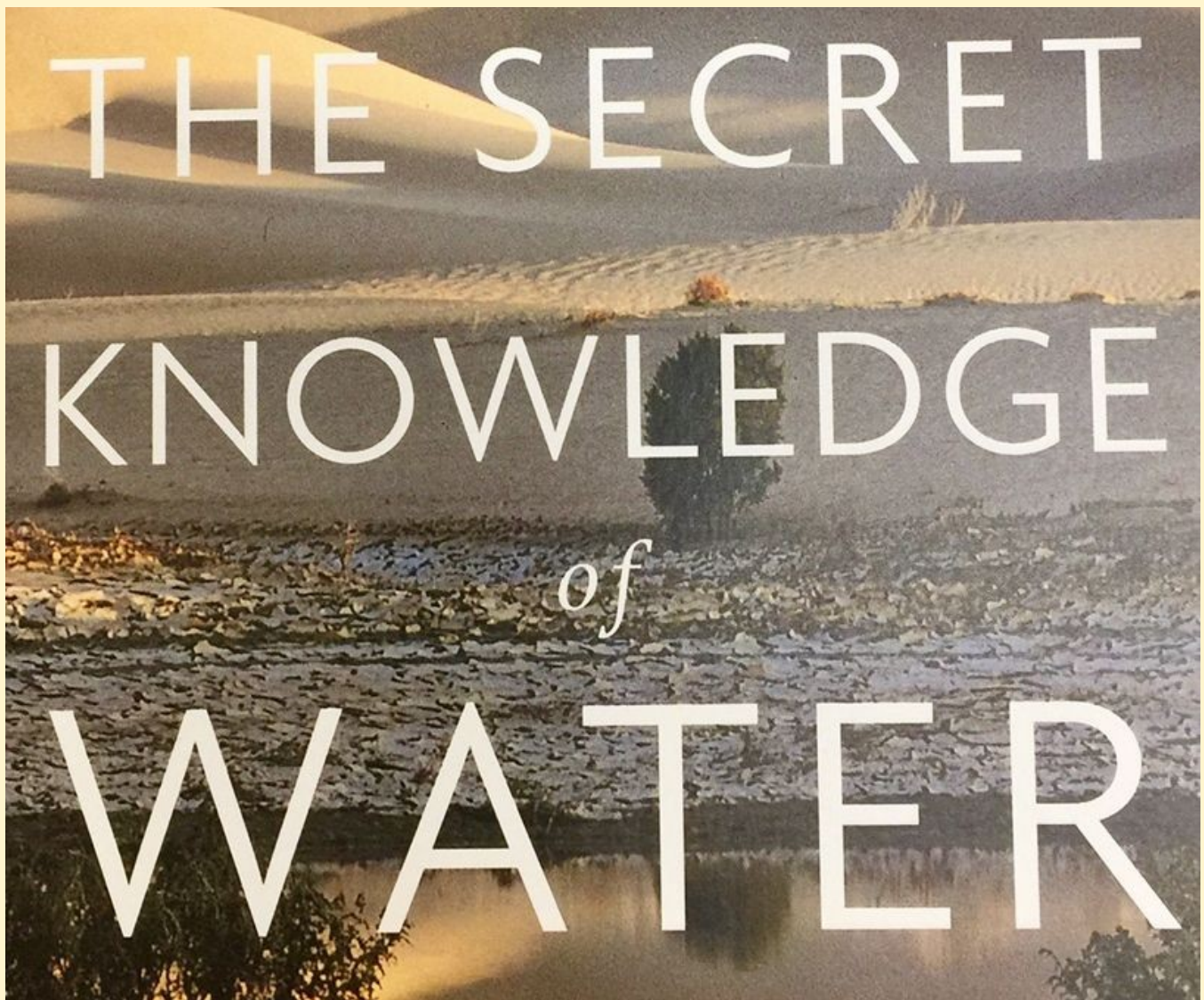
Conejo Valley Runner Logs 60x60 for Charity

On March 13, 2020—the day after California’s stay-at-home pandemic guidelines went into effect—Newbury Park resident Brad Kieffer turned 59. And he made a big commitment: He would do a 60-kilometer (37-mile) run on Conejo Valley trails before he turned 60. And as he trained, he pledged to raise money for the nonprofit [The Greater Contribution](#), where he serves on the board.

“I vowed to use the new time constructively to lose weight, improve my health and strengthen my body through trail running,” Kieffer explains. “At first, my mileage was three miles. Then four, then six. Before I knew it, I was running 13 miles.”

On March 12 of this year, Kieffer successfully completed his 60x60. About 20 donors contributed to his cause, raising over \$1,000. The Greater Contribution funds Ugandan women’s empowerment through economic independence and that money will go a long way, Kieffer says. “If you consider that \$80 is enough to provide literacy training, business skills, and a microloan to a Ugandan woman to help her become an entrepreneur, then the 60x60 challenge helped about a dozen participants,” he says.

Kieffer says he feels very fortunate that he and wife Karen Oxrider live near an access point to the Potrero Ridge Trail, where he often runs. “We are so incredibly fortunate to have these trails winding through the neighborhoods,” he says. “They provide us with easy access to nature and solitude. Nature is energizing and cleansing, and I feel a sense of greater contentment every time I return from a run or a hike.”



Craig Childs' story of his travels through the Southwest explores the complex role water plays in an increasingly dry environment.

3 Must-Have Books for Trail Explorers

Board member Steve Johnson chose these three books from his 500-volume personal library as his top recommendations for Conejo Valley adventurers.

Hiking Trails of the Santa Monica Mountains Milt McAuley

This classic from a long-time Conejo Valley resident contains descriptions of 90 trails in the Santa Monica Mountains, from Beverly Hills to Pt. Mugu. Published in 1998, parts of the book are out of date, but most of the descriptions, which include mileage, elevation gain, points of interest, and some history, still hold. (Can be found in the Satwiwa, Bielensohn NPS bookstores, and occasionally online).

Roadside Geology of Southern California Arthur G. Sylvester

This 2016 book describes the geology and terrain of southern California, from Lompoc to the

Nevada border, from Ridgecrest to the ocean. A great reference, it discusses the impact of plate tectonics, climate, and man on the land we see around us as we hike.

The Secret Knowledge of Water Craig Childs

The cover blurb reads "There are two easy ways to die in the desert: Thirst and Drowning." We live in an arid Mediterranean climate, where the western Mojave Desert meets the Pacific Ocean. Childs' 2000 book is set more in the central Mojave (Arizona and New Mexico), but illuminates the joys and perils of our sporadic rains. I recommend this book to guests from the Pacific Northwest or the Midwest who have never seen Joshua trees, flash floods, or our crystalline skies.



Spotlight on...

COSF board member and Outreach Committee chair **Anne M. Russell** is a journalist who specializes in health and science topics. She served as editor in chief of digital magazine VIVmag and was editor in chief of Shape before that. She was the editorial director of the now-defunct Health Network, where she oversaw the network's website as well as on-air content.

She has also been the editor in chief of magazines Vegetarian Times and Living Fit, a sister publication of Shape that focused on healthy living.

Tell us about your hobbies and how you spend your down time.

I do a lot of official and unofficial volunteer work, including with the [Santa Monica Mountains Trails Council](#), weeklong [Sierra Club volunteer trips](#), and helping with a native-plant project in Moorpark. I also bike—road and mountain, trail run, and hike.

Why did you join the COSF board?

I think what COSF does in terms of supporting COSCA is important and I want more people to know about it. I also want to build coalition with other environmental groups.

Why is open space important to you?

I'm going to go with Henry David Thoreau's observation: "In wildness is the preservation of the world."

What advice to you have for open-space visitors to get the most out of their time there?

Look around. Really look around and see what's there and educate yourself about it. Bring binoculars with you and look up into the trees. Bring a magnifying glass and see what bugs are crawling around and learn the names of things.

What do you like to do in the open space?

I love the exercise part of being on the trails, running or riding my bike, but I also like to just go out and be surprised by trees and flowers and birds and whatever else shows up.

What's your favorite animal? Favorite plant?

Whatever I saw last. I'm fickle that way.

Is there any "secret" open space that you think people should know about?

Not much is a secret these days, but I really like the [Lake Eleanor Trail](#). It has amazing views and some endemic plants you don't see many other places.

What are your hopes for the future of COSF and/or the Conejo Open Space?

That we will continue to protect open space and wildlife effectively and keep the land open for everyone to enjoy.

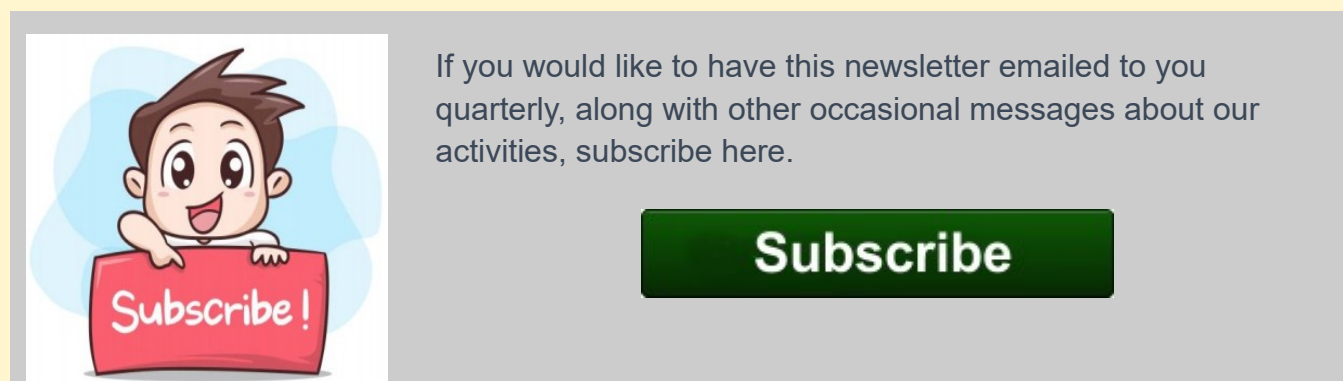


COSF recently partnered with COSCA for the purchase of more bike bells for trail riders as well as the installation of more bike-bell boxes on key trails.

News In Brief

- The recipients of COSF's first \$1,000 continuing scholarships, Oak Park High School students **Daniel Conway and Naomi Lin**, have chosen their colleges, which are, respectively, UC Berkeley and UCLA.
- The **2021 Conejo Open Space Challenge ended May 31**. Challenge participants who sought to hike, run, or ride 10 designated trails in the Conejo Valley this year numbered 193 people. Of that, 138 completed the Challenge. COSF contributed \$250 in gift cards toward prizes for the finishers. To see photos of the awards celebration, go [here](#).
- At the end of March, the National Park Service released an analysis of **mountain lion P-78's cause of death** in late December 2020. P-78 was the 23rd puma in NPS's longterm study to be killed since 2002. He appeared to have been struck by a vehicle, but also had a significant concentration of five anti-coagulant rat poisons in his body. To learn more about what you can do to keep rodenticides out of the food chain, visit [Poison Free Conejo Valley](#).

- COSF bids a fond and grateful farewell to Board member **Mary Klem**, whose professional life has necessitated a move away from the Conejo Valley. We will miss her.
- Congratulations to our most recent “Where in the Conejo” winners! Our knowledgeable entrants correctly identified local trails. This season’s winners of a \$25 gift card are: **Bill Brenden, Zyg Martynowicz, Cindy Wagner, and Elise Wilson**. “Where in the Conejo” is undergoing a reinvention and will debut in its new form in July. If you would like to be added to the “Where” contest email list, drop a note to news@cosf.org to let us know.
- Have a comment, correction, story idea or other input for the newsletter? Let us know! Email us at: newsletter@cosf.org.



Want to Volunteer? Here's How!

The COSCA Volunteer Corps has many ways for residents to help maintain and preserve the open space that surrounds our beautiful Conejo Valley. By joining with others, we can make sure that the trails, canyons, and ridgelines will be enjoyed by visitors for generations to come. You can read about the specific volunteer opportunities below, and you can submit a request to volunteer, noting your specific interests, [here](#).

- [Adopt-a-Trail Program](#)
- [Bike Bell Box Replenishment](#)
- [Trail Watch Program](#)
- [Trail Ambassador Program](#)
- [Trail Work Days](#)
- [Trails Education Days](#)



The Conejo Open Space Foundation was formed in 1995 to promote and maintain the open space and trail system of the Conejo Valley and to educate residents as to their roles as custodians and protectors of the open space and the environment. Our [web site](#) illustrates ongoing Conejo Open Space programs supported by the Foundation that help preserve and protect our precious open space.



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