

FIELD OBSERVATION REPORT

By Mary Wilson

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Antelope Valley California Poppy Reserve

Poppies are starting to bloom. There are still poppy plants that are still forming their rosettes and first buds, some buds still have their calyx and some are in full bloom.

Also in bloom are filaree, fiddleneck, slender keel fruit, wild parsley, fringe pod and pygmy-leaved lupine. Just starting to bloom are goldfields and cream cups.



There are other wildflowers in bloom and some are quite small. They are known as “belly flowers” - you have to be on your belly to see them. They do not grow in small fields and are pretty much solitary plants.



tiny forget-me-nots



slender phlox



red maids

Arthur B. Ripley Desert Woodland State Park

Now is a great time to visit this park—the Joshua trees are in bloom.



Joshua bud starting



Joshua bud



Joshua bud starting to flower

There are a lot of young “juvenile” Joshua trees that are producing their first bud and flower. For the first several decades of its life, the Joshua tree grows a vertical stem with no branches. It can take 20 plus years before they produce that first flower and it is a kind of “right-of-passage” because after the first flower drops off, leaving a length of dried stalk, new leaves will grow beneath this dead portion and it will then start forming its first branches.



Juvenile Joshua tree



It will be decades before the juvenile tree will produce many branches and flowers. Some estimate the Joshua tree has a lifespan of about 200 years.

Painted Lady Butterflies

Painted Lady butterflies were on the east side of the valley in the Saddleback Butte State Park area. There were swarms of them and they seem to like fiddleneck.

Swarms of Painted Ladies journey from southwestern deserts to eastern and northern areas beginning in February. When food is plentiful, masses numbering to the millions pass through California.

Early Native American legends reveal stories of butterflies carrying various wishes to the Great Spirit in Heaven. Many ancient civilizations believed that butterflies were symbols of the human soul and that a soul was born each time a butterfly merged from its chrysalis. Among many Mexican tribes, butterflies were a symbol of earth’s fertility. Born out of a caterpillar in a chrysalis, butterflies became a symbol of rebirth, regeneration and joy.

PAINTED LADY BUTTERFLY

Venessa v. cardui

By Mary Wilson



The Painted Lady is probably the most widespread butterfly in the world. They are found all over the North American continent, ranging north into the sub-arctic and south to Panama. It is also known as the thistle butterfly and the cosmopolitan (because it is so widespread). Painted Ladies are also found in Asia, Africa, and Europe – they especially like living near flowery meadows and mountaintops. These butterflies migrate from south to north in the late spring. In cold climates, you can see Painted Ladies between March and October. In some southern deserts, they live all year round.

The Painted Lady is a butterfly with a wingspan of 2-2 7/8 inches. The upper surface of Painted Lady butterfly wings is mostly black, brown, and orange. They also have some white spots and red and blue markings. The undersides of the wings are gray, with white and red markings. Butterflies have three pair of legs – each divided into five parts. At the end of the legs are tiny spurs that help them land and stay on plants or perches.

The Painted Lady begins its life cycle as an egg that is the size of a pinhead. Eggs are pale green; they are laid on thistle, mallow, or hollyhock leaves. The incubation period is 3 to 5 days and then it becomes a caterpillar or larva.

The caterpillar eats continually for 5 to 10 days before it pupates. The purple to black caterpillar has long spines on each segment; there are yellow-green strips and large white dots. The caterpillar is up to 1.25 inches long. It builds a silky webbed nest as it feeds, usually eating thistle, mallow, malva, hollyhock, sunflower, or canola. As the larva grows, it sheds its skin. When the caterpillar has grown to the right size, it pupates. It hangs upside-down from a leaf or branch, and attaches itself with a single silken string. An adult forms from the caterpillar, whose internal structure changes completely. The chrysalis becomes almost transparent when the butterfly is about to emerge. An adult will emerge about 7 to 10 days after the chrysalis has formed.

When the butterfly first emerges from the chrysalis, its wings are soft and crumpled. The butterfly rests, and then slowly unfolds its wings to dry. After a few hours, the butterfly will be ready to fly. The Painted Lady butterfly has a 2 to 4 week life span. During that time, its main goal is to reproduce and lay eggs so the cycle can begin again.

It has predators at all stages of life; while eggs insects will eat them, when a caterpillar they are endangered from ants, birds and lizards. Birds and lizards like the chrysalis and when they are butterflies birds, spiders, frogs and lizards eat them.

They dwell in open areas, from mountaintops and meadows to deserts and sand dunes, while the weather is fair. They can't tolerate frost, so colonies in northern regions die off in the fall, only to be replaced by new migratory groups the following spring.

BURROWING OWLS LEARNING TO FLY AND LAND

Juvenile burrowing owls will start learning how to fly at about four weeks old. The juvenile below still has the down feathers on it's body—not the barred adult feathers. The wooden block it trying to fly to is about 10-inches off the ground—that is about its height.



Flap wings and get a running start.



Bend legs and wings tilt upwards.



Jump and flap.



Successful landing.