

**President Message September 2024**  
**Lots of Rain but Few Poppies**  
**By Margaret Rhyne, President PRMDIA**

In the Spring of 2024 at the Poppy Reserve and others places known for carpets of the state flower, heavier than usual winter rains did not result in massive displays of California poppies as many had expected. Instead, the rain pattern resulted in early germination of non-native species including filaree and European grasses that crowded out poppy plants. Researcher Mike Powell, who visited the Poppy Reserve in early September after a storm generated by Hurricane Hillary dropped 4 ¼ inches of rain noted, “during this early September visit, a massive amount of filaree seed germination was observed (basically, a carpet of these plants everywhere) as well as a limited amount of poppy seed germination.”

(To read Mike’s full article visit [www.prmDia.org/research/](http://www.prmDia.org/research/))

Other researchers, including Joan Dudney, an associate professor of global change ecology at US Santa Barbara, noted that native plants do better after a period of drought and can outcompete non-native species that are not adapted to a periodically arid climate. “I expected that we would see a bit of a dampened bloom this year, just because we had so much seed production of the non-native grasses last year,” Dudney said. ([Los Angeles Times, April 5, 2024](https://www.latimes.com/science/la-sc-0505-plant-ecology-2024-04-05/))

**Year of the Birdcage Primrose**

In other areas of the desert that did not get as much rain as the Poppy Reserve in either 2024 or 2023, species of native wildflowers flourished. Displays of verbena and desert lilies bloomed in parts of Anza Borrego. Closer to home in the eastern Antelope Valley, an outstanding display of verbena and birdcage evening primrose carpeted parts of Saddleback Butte State Park, the Antelope Valley Indian Museum and in and around Lake Los Angeles.

Birdcage evening primrose (*Oenothera deltooides*) was especially prolific in the eastern Antelope Valley. Other common names for this unique plant include bird cage plant, basket evening primrose, lion in a cage, and devil’s lantern. These names reflect the way that the plant distributes its seeds. As blooms disappear and the plant dries out, the branches turn upward forming what resembles a large bird cage (or basket or lantern). Then the dried plant, like tumbleweed, breaks free of its root and tumbles across the desert, dispersing its seeds along the way.



***Birdcage Primrose blooms and "cage."* Photos 1 and 2: Saddleback Butte State Park, April 2024.  
Photos 3 and 4: Antelope Valley Indian Museum, January 2024.  
Photos by Margaret Rhyne**

**Visit Saddleback**

Two events are planned for Saddleback Butte State Park that will allow participants to see one of the “birdcages” in the visitor center and perhaps in the park as well. On October 26, PRMDIA,

Support Saddleback volunteers and State Parks will host a **Fall Clean Up Day**. The event will be from 10 a.m. to noon and start in the day use area. PRMDIA will give Saddleback water bottles to participants and cookies and water will be provided. The visitor center will be open.

On January 1, Saddleback Butte will again be the place for "**First Day Hikes**." Three hikes for different ability levels will be led by park staff and volunteers. Visit our Activities page for more information.