

# THE CHAPARRALIAN

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# The Chaparralian #35

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*The Chaparralian* is the quarterly journal of the California Chaparral Institute, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that is dedicated to the preservation of native shrubland ecosystems and promoting an appreciation for the natural environment through science and education. To join the Institute and receive *The Chaparralian*, please fill out and mail in the slip below or join on our website. We welcome unsolicited submissions to *The Chaparralian*. Please send to [rvh@californiachaparral.org](mailto:rvh@californiachaparral.org) or via post to the address below. You can find us on the web at [www.californiachaparral.org](http://www.californiachaparral.org)

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**Cover photograph:** A young friend who inspired the life of a young teacher.

**Photo upper left:** Exploring old-growth chaparral the right way, the only way. Black Mountain, San Diego, CA.

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## NASCENT THOUGHTS

By the time you read this, a bunch of us will have embarked on our first Chaparral Walkabout. It was time.

We sit on our posteriors a lot. We sit to drive, we sit to write, we sit to eat, we sit to work, and we sit to sit. At the same time, we champion nature, we urge others to get outside, and we rejoice in the value of wilderness. There is no question that the knowledge of preservation is enough to make many of us sing, and in fact we know that many of the natural places we fight to protect will never see the soles of our boots – or bare feet, if you follow the path of the ultimate naturalist and fellow Chaparralian, Kirby Wolfe – (how he can glide over bits of granite on the trail in bare feet with only a smile is beyond me!).

There is no contradiction, however, because we fight to protect nature not necessarily for ourselves, but for the plants and animals we love and the future generations we know will enjoy them. This sets us apart from those who disingenuously claim they are fighting to preserve some fundamental right for American citizens (driving off-road vehicles over pristine landscapes, bringing guns into National Parks, riding mountain bikes through vernal pools, etc.), when in fact they are protecting only their own selfish desires.

We often don't get outside to enjoy what we promote because we are too busy trying to protect it for others. That said, if we want to stay healthy and, as Ed Abbey famously wrote, "outlive the bastards," we have to take time to get off our butts and enjoy that which we fight to protect.

As for myself, although I enjoy standing in front of an audience and pontificating with my supporting slide presentation, I enjoy myself best when I'm out on the trail discussing all things chaparral. Photos do a great job of getting the point across about how beautiful native shrublands are, but nothing beats listening to a lovesick wrentit proclaiming to the world that this is his territory for his family.

So with that in mind, I'm planning to engage in a regular Chaparral Walkabout sometime during the first weekend of every month, rain or shine, alternating between two locations: Daley Ranch and the Elfin Forest Preserve, both in Escondido. Check our website's member page for details.

The permanence and pattern of returning to the same locations will allow us to taste and sense the seasonal changes of the chaparral ecosystem in a way that scattered walkabouts never could. This also will provide us the opportunity to enjoy what the local pub offers best: a guaranteed time and place to meet kindred spirits. It's time we build our community for our own well-being and spread the love we have for chaparral as well as nature.

Key to this effort is to encourage kids to bring their energy to the cause. During all my travels and presentations, one thing has become clear: in the younger generation there is hope. Not that we inspired elders can't make a contribution to positive change – we can... but our numbers are too few. We are frequently overwhelmed by those who have lost their connection with nature and forgotten the inclusiveness they once knew when they were young. When it comes to altering how we view the environment as well as each other, Thomas Kuhn's thesis that change often comes only when the old guard dies may be more accurate than we want to admit.

Make a sincere effort to spread the love you have for nature to those who will be carrying forward your passion when you no longer can.




# Nevermore?

By Bill Howell

On the first day of September at 1 p.m. she was dead. Gone was the single survivor of the greatest assemblage of wild things the planet had ever known. When Martha died alone, in the Cincinnati Zoo in 1914, she had been the last member of a proud race whose numbers represented nearly half the known birds in North America! At the turn of the century all had vanished in the wild. A few lived on in captivity until Martha's final exit. The passenger pigeon, Martha's clan, is now a moniker for extinction.

In James Audubon's day (early 1800s), passenger pigeons numbered more than 5 billion. They ruled the skies of the mountains and the farmlands east of the Dakotas. The resting swarms could foul a forest in one night, and branches would snap from the weight of the multitudes. The mass migrations of these frequent fliers blocked out the sun for hours. Fooled chickens would roost mid-day, and as the feathered flocks passed by, roosters crowed to the fake daybreak.

This relative of the giant dodo – another dovelike bird symbolizing extinction and trust in humankind – was an ecological success story until the American sportsman recognized that these avian vagabonds were cooperative as well as tasty. In front of the armed athletes, buckshot blitzed and feathers flew, but the birds continued to congregate. Though their numbers seemed limitless, the carnage that followed reduced the populations from billions to millions, and, in less than half a century, to only thousands. Their complex courtship antics required large numbers to be conclusive, and once the birds numbered thousands instead of billions, they were doomed. Solitary sex they couldn't handle. They needed a crowd, and the crowds were dwindling. Ornithologists delineate an area where friendly flocks court and mate as a lek. These luckless birds were now lekless. No leks; no sex.



Martha, the last passenger pigeon on earth, died in captivity in 1914. The last one in the wild was shot and killed on March 24, 1900, by Press Clay Southworth.

Biologists recognize that for reproduction to be successful, psychology must work in concert with physiology, and for these pigeons, ample numbers were part of the formula. Because human tampering had greatly reduced the populations, cues from the gene pool were obscured. The bird was gone.

“Nevermore,” said the famous ornithologist, Edgar Allan Poe. To steal a phrase from his tale of another bird, “ ‘Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!, Quoth the Raven, ‘Nevermore.’ ”

Endless clouds of monarch butterflies flutter to

the coast of California every year to add autumn color to the pines of Monterey and the eucalyptus groves of the southern counties. Throngs of orange insects amass in the trees with their overwintering numbers deemed infinite. The clustering phenomenon of these winged navigators is as dependable as the swallows returning to Capistrano, the fleas of summer, or the buzzards to Hinckley, Ohio. The monarchs migrate – hundreds by Halloween, thousands by Thanksgiving – and by Christmas the legions have arrived! Not.

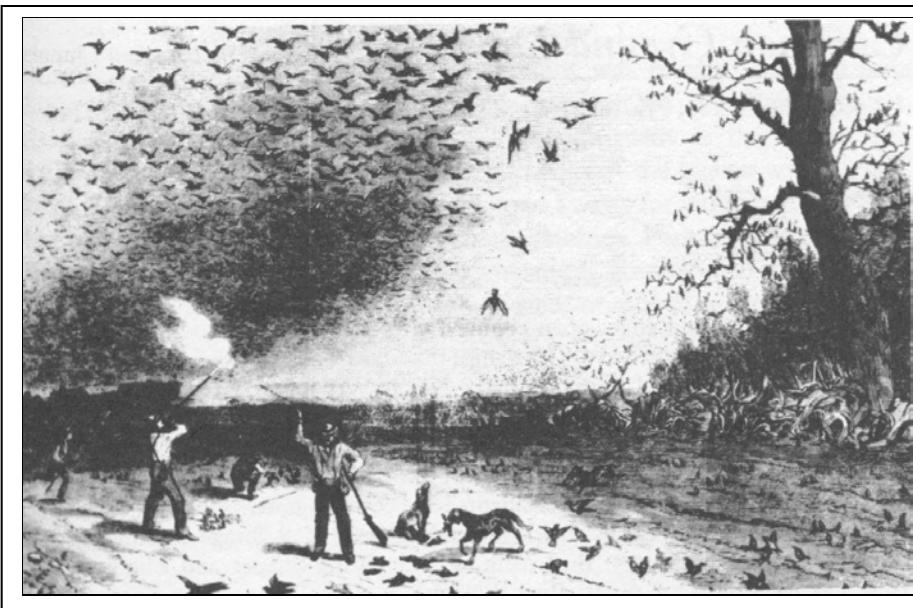


In past years, thousands of monarchs congregated in eucalyptus groves in San Diego County. This year, just dozens of confused butterflies fluttered amongst the foliage. Entomologists are confused too. Is this the beginning of the end, or just a normal glitch in the peaks and valleys of population dynamics? Other California monarch habitats have seen diminished numbers also, but the southern coast is hardest hit.

Remember, the passenger pigeon populations were like avian weeds and nothing could limit their future, yet inside of 50 years they were no more. “Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,” said Poe, “Nevermore.” That phrase was for the birds, but what about the monarchs? The swan song of the pigeon flocks took less than half a century; the western monarch flocks have shrunk in less than half a decade. Is it a

climate thing? Will the eastern monarchs “go west young man” and save us, or will we discover a mysterious malady that has reduced their populations? It’s just not known what’s going on. These are challenging times for the monarchy.

The dinosaurs took less than half an eon to disappear. As to what caused their departure, we still have only theories, but I wonder: If we were standing in a Jurassic park 150 million years ago amongst endless hordes of “terrible lizards,” would we have known it was, for them, too soon the end? I also ponder, will the modern monarchs share with pigeons, dodos, and ancient reptiles the symbol of the grand finale: “Nevermore?”



Flocks of passenger pigeons, the most abundant bird in the world, shot from the sky.

- Hunted by the millions for food.
- Used for target practice.
- Three million were shipped east from Michigan in 1878. By 1880, the species was extinct in the state.
- Stool pigeon: came from the practice of tying a passenger pigeon to a stool to attract others so they could be shot easily.

# Poetry from Kindred Spirits

## Inertia

By Nicholas Halsey

Six men stared hard at the computer screen  
At the strangest problem that they'd ever seen  
For staring solemn and lonely back  
Was a plain locked door on a screen of black.

"Try the doorknob again,"  
Said the politician.  
"That's what it expects,  
Try the door hinges next,"

Snapped the critic, despite  
Thinking the former was right.  
Said the philosopher, "I've better things to do with my  
time  
Than bother with an unsolvable paradigm."

"Alone we'll never discover the answer,  
We must pray to God," recommended the pastor.  
"Let me," said the student, "hack the HTML."  
While the scientist sat, clicking every pixel.

And then from the back a small voice sighed.  
"Please," asked the child, "Can we go play outside?"



Ropevine (*Clematis pauciflora*) in bloom

## The Cotton Breeze

By Jake Halsey

A speck of fluff  
Carried by a gust of wind  
A pod of life

A last measure  
to carry that life  
to a far away place

A stripped stretch of land  
For the fluff to grow  
and to bring more specks of fluff



Ropevine with seed fluffs

# Going On and On

By Jim Hart

My name's Chappie. It's not my real name, but Chappie's a cool nick name 'cuz my animal friends gave it to me.

You're probably thinking, animal friends? This guy must be a real freak. Yeah, well, it's not like we talk to each other over dinner or something – it's just that wild animals inspire me. They talk to me in a weird sort of way. Do you know what I mean? People get so damn literal sometimes.

Anyway, Chappie's short for chaparral. That's that place where I like to hang out, to think. People say I think too much. My friend Roxy says that. I think Roxy's a nick name too, but more about her later, if I feel like it.

People think I'm weird because I like animals and nature so much, but I don't care. They're the ones missing out. I like to be in nature 'cuz I can be myself. I don't have to be fake and stuff. It's like a place I can be honest. My animal and plant friends don't judge me. I can have messed up hair or a dirty shirt, and they don't care. I can say what I want, and they don't care. I can be quiet and just stare at a sunset, and they don't care. When I get sad, I can visit my friends in the chaparral and they always make me smile. They're the only ones who seem to be able to do that anymore, or maybe ever did for that matter. Now, don't think I'm some kind of hermit or emo, for cryin' out loud. I just prefer being in nature than worrying about what people think about me.

You probably have no idea what chaparral is. Most people don't. That's OK. I didn't know what it was either until my eighth grade science teacher, Mrs. Wilson, told me. Well, she told the class, but you know what I mean. She was a real nature nut. She always wore sandals and long dresses. Her classroom was really cool. It had a couple aquariums with reptiles and insects in them. This one poster on her wall had a picture of

John Muir that had a quote that said something like, "When you touch one thing in nature, you find it hooked up to everything else." I like that quote. She also had this bumper sticker on her desk that said, "Question Authority." I like that one too. She was a real hippie.

Sometimes my friends made fun of Mrs. Wilson, but I really liked her. Not that I was in love with her or anything weird like that, but I just thought she was really cool. She didn't care what other people thought of her and stuff. She just was who she was.

Anyway, so I don't start going off on all that, I'll tell you what chaparral is. It might help you figure out why I like it so much. It's a place where there's nothing but bushes – all kinds: manzanita, lilac, scrub oak, chamise, mahogany, and lots of others I can't remember the names of. No trees, no grass, no cement; just dense, pure shrubs. It covers most of the hills and mountains near my home. I live near Los Angeles, if you have to know.

Chaparral makes the hills look like they have this really cool, puffy green blanket covering them. I love it when it just goes on for miles. That's why I really hate it when someone carves into it with a road or just rips into it for no good reason. It's like slashing a da Vinci painting with a knife or something. Only crazy



people would do something like that.

Some people think chaparral's a plant. It's not. It's a whole bunch of different kinds of plants that make up a nature place. I think people get confused about it all because a lot of the places where you find chaparral are called forests. How dumb is that? Like I said before, chaparral doesn't have trees. It's like calling a butterfly chrysalis a cocoon, or cross country, track. Hello? Butterflies don't spin cocoons and you don't pole vault when you're doing a 5-mile run. It drives me nuts when people think I do track.

What really pisses me off is when people keep saying you gotta thin out the trees and get rid of bushes to stop forest fires. Hello? There aren't any trees in the chaparral, and how do you get rid of the bushes when that's what's supposed to be there in the first place?

So how come there aren't any trees in the chaparral? Well, Mrs. Wilson told me it has to do with the climate. We have scorchin' dry summers and wimpy, wet winters – the same kind of climate they have around the Mediterranean Sea. Whenever I think about the Mediterranean I think about Mr. Haiman's world history class. I always think how cool it is to live in a climate that's the same as the one the ancient Greeks and Romans did. They lived almost on the other side of the world from here for cryin' out loud. It all has something to do with latitude, ocean currents, and stuff. Anyway, there just isn't enough water for trees to grow in most places where there's chaparral except along stream beds or higher in the mountains. Well, sometimes there are a few oaks sneakin' into the chaparral on the edges, but only rarely. Mrs. Wilson said it usually rains in the summer in other parts of the world. Rain in the summer? That's totally weird to me.

Chaparral used to be all over the place, but because there are so many people, it's been mowed down to make room for houses and stuff. That makes me sad, because it takes away the homes of my animal friends. Chaparral catches fire a lot, too, because people are careless. Long ago before all these people came here, chaparral

could grow back after fire, no problem. But now there are too many fires, too close together. Chaparral can't handle that, and it gets taken out. When that happens, those weeds with stickers that stick in your socks take over. I hate weeds. They're not even from here. Mrs. Wilson said people from Europe brought them over when they first showed up. I think that was pretty stupid. This is one of the reasons I think people suck. They do stupid things without thinking about the future.

**I'm afraid my plant and animal friends will end up like the grizz if people don't start loving nature and the chaparral like I do.**

One of my favorite plant friends in the chaparral is manzanita. It's a really cool bush because it has this smooth red bark and can grow like 20 feet tall. Mrs. Wilson said the California grizzly bear used to hang out in places where the manzanita grew really tall. Man, I would love to have seen one of them. They're all gone now though, extinct. The last one in Southern California was shot and killed in 1908. See what I mean about people. That's why I worry about fires, and weeds, and houses. I'm afraid my plant and animal friends will end up like the grizz if people don't start loving nature and the chaparral like I do.

Well, anyway, I don't want to go on and on about all that right now. Roxy, that girl I mentioned before, used to always tell me I do that. Go on and on about stuff, I mean. Speaking of Roxy, I guess I'll talk about her now. She and I went on a hike in one of my favorite chaparral patches a while ago. It seems like forever ago because I don't really talk to her anymore. I don't know why, honestly.

The weirdest thing happened when I was with her once. We were walking on a trail and this little wrentit almost flew right into us. A wrentit is a little brown bird with this long tail and bright, yellow eyes. Yeah, I know, it's got a

funny name. I'm not making it up, though. You can look it up. When I first told Roxy the name, she made a big deal about the tit part, as in like she kept repeating, "wrentitty tit, tit, tit," and so on. She's pretty gutsy. Most girls I know wouldn't do that.

Anyway, so this wren was acting all shook up and stuff, making this rattle kind of sound in short, little bursts. It sounded like my alarm clock ringing, but when the clock is covered by my pillow. Turns out there was another wren on the other side of the trail chattering the same way. They both almost crashed into each other and jumped around on the ground in front of each other for like a minute or so. They eventually flew up and went their separate ways. Then both of them did their ping-pong song at each other for like forever. It's a quick set of whistles that has the beat of a bouncing ping-pong ball. You can't miss it when you're out here. You can hear them all the time.

This is one of the reasons I like the chaparral so much. It teaches me things about all sorts of other stuff. Well, it's all actually related in a way, just like John Muir said. You see, birds have figured out a way to settle their differences by singing. The world could learn a thing or two from them. If people could just sing instead of fight, like the birds in the chaparral, things would be so much better. I told Roxy this and went on and on about it. That's when she first told me I go on and on about things.

Roxy also said she liked that about me. She liked to hear me talk about stuff. Don't get the wrong idea, though. We weren't like boyfriend and girlfriend. She just said she liked to listen to me. I think she is the only person, other than my animal friends, that is, who has ever said that kind of thing to me.

Well, OK, now that I'm getting into this, I might as well explain the whole thing. Roxy stopped talking to me after awhile because I think she started hanging out with a bunch of new friends who thought I was weird. I remember the exact day I kinda' figured this out. You can probably

guess what I did. Yeah, I went hiking to clear out my brain.

The place I went to was this totally cool chaparral patch near my house that is almost 12 feet tall. It's mostly old scrub oak. Scrub oak is like a big oak tree, but it stays small. You have to crawl to get under its canopy, but once you get in, it's like this secret cave that goes on forever. Lichens, little colored splotches of fungus and algae, are all over the old branches and the rocks. The ground is soft and squishy like lying on my bed. That's because it's a thick layer of tiny oak leaves. If you dig down, there are like a million little animals that live there – tiny spiders, mites, worms, all sorts of things. It's like a total jungle. It's fun to lie down on your stomach and stare at the whole thing.



Mrs. Wilson told me once that all the little animals that live in the soil are really important for all the plants like the scrub oak, because they help break down the dead leaves and return minerals to the earth. She even said there is also like this whole highway of tiny fungus threads that connect the plant roots to each other. They help the plants get nutrients out of the soil. I went on and on about this with Roxy once. I even said I thought the plants could talk to each other this way. I still think that.

Anyway, under my little scrub oak cave there is a woodrat nest. It's a huge pile of sticks that's nearly as tall as I am. I'm five foot five.

Woodrats are cool because their tails are furry and they have little white patches on their feet. They travel through the chaparral along all the branches. This is one of the reasons old-growth chaparral is so special. Old-growth means chaparral that's been around for at least 75 years or more. When a chaparral stand gets that old, it's beginning a new part of its life cycle. Acorns and seeds from other chaparral shrubs can germinate in the thick leaf litter and there are lots of places for animals to live, especially birds.

There's this old-growth chaparral tunnel in the mountains near me that I swear was an old grizzly bear trail. It's got to be more than 150 years old. You can still see where the bears put their paws in the same place over and over. You can even see the claw marks.

So I guess what I am saying is that the chaparral is a good place to figure your brain out. You can relax there. It helped me figure out this thing with Roxy. I mean the thing about her not talking to me anymore. I cried a lot when I took that visit to my favorite chaparral patch. But don't think I'm a crybaby, for crying out loud. It just felt good to do that.

**I think they all need to chill and take a walk out in the chaparral.**

Who knows why she stopped talking to me. I don't get it. When I say people suck, this is what I mean. People get opinions about things, maybe they think of them themselves or someone tells them to them. Either way, they start to believe that their opinions are the only truth and forget that everyone is different and has opinions just as good as theirs. But they stop listening and hang out just with people who think like them. So the longer Roxy and I didn't hang out together the weirder I think she thought I was. That's the way it works. I think Roxy's friends convinced her that she was better than me and

that she shouldn't hang out with me anymore. I think this because I once overheard one of them call me an avocado and everyone laughed. Roxy did too. That's some kind of code word for Mexican.

I told my mom about all this, about me and Roxy and what her friends had said. She told me not to worry, that things would work out because I had a good heart. She said just as long as you love instead of hate, things will work out. Well, I don't know. There sure seem to be a lot of people these days shouting about how to love, who to love. I think they all need to chill and take a walk out in the chaparral.

This is why I think it's important to have a quiet place in nature to visit. It helps you think, clears your brain, and stuff like that. People who suck need it more than anyone. I don't mean like a park with a mowed lawn and trees from England planted every 50 feet or so. No, I mean a natural place: a place with plants and animals that grew up here and belong here. Mrs. Wilson taught me that native animals and plants like these need our protection. They've lost so much space already that we really need to consider them first and keep it safe for them.

Mrs. Wilson helped me understand that it's important to know the native plants and animals we share the earth with. That's what I've been doing the past few years of my life. The scrub oak, the woodrat, the wrentit, the manzanita; I know their names now. What's really fun for me is that since I know what they are, I know what I don't know and stuff. You know what I mean? I think life is so much more interesting and fun when you actually know things, learn to like how a bird sings, why it sings, and where it sings, not just glance around and then go back to chewing your nails or something.

Next time I see Roxy, I'm going to tell her about this. I don't think I ever did before. I mean about how nature is so important to me, for us. How it clears our brains. I've noticed she has been eating lunch alone lately. I think she'd like to hear me go on and on about this stuff.

# UNFOLDINGS

I am quite sure... I have no racial prejudices, and I think I have no color prejudices, nor caste prejudices, nor creed prejudices. Indeed, I know it. I can stand any society. All I care to know is that a man is a human being – that is enough for me; he can't be any worse.

-Mark Twain

Sometimes I feel discriminated against, but it does not make me angry. It merely astonishes me. How can any deny themselves the pleasure of my company?

-Zora Neale Hurston

It's hard for the modern generation to understand Thoreau, who lived beside a pond but didn't own water skis or a snorkel.

-Bill Vaughan



A young Ati man on the island of Panay, Philippines. The Ati are the original inhabitants of the islands. After centuries of persecution, very few are left.

You don't have to ask a child about happy, you see it. They are or they are not. Adults talk about being happy because largely they are not. Talking about it is the same as trying to catch the wind.

-Jeanette Winterson

You are destined to fly, but that cocoon has to go.

-Nelle Morton

There is a way that nature speaks, that land speaks. Most of the time we are simply not patient enough, quietly enough, to pay attention to the story.

-Linda Hogan

He didn't tell me how to live; he lived, and let me watch him.

-Clarence Budington Kelland

Love to throw yourself on the earth and kiss it. Kiss the earth and love it with an unceasing, consuming love.

-Feodor Dostoyevsky

There's a stereotype that black people are lazy. I don't know if that's true, but I know white people went all the way to Africa to get out of doing work.

-Lance Crouther