

Connecting with Nature on Fiscalini Ranch Preserve: Coyote Brush, an Unsung Hero



By KITTY CONNOLY, Executive Director, Friends of the Fiscalini Ranch Preserve (fiscaliniranchpreserve.org)

An unsung hero in Cambria's landscape is the lowly coyote brush (*Baccharis pilularis*). Maybe if it has a more lyrical name, like "Emerald of Summer", it would be appreciated by more people. As it is, coyote brush is our constant companion here on the coast. It forms the backbone of both the coastal sage scrub plant community and the chaparral. If you look at the hills in late summer and see a green shrub, chances are you are looking at coyote brush.

Because it is so common, it is easy to take coyote brush for granted. It often gets a bad rap as a being flammable. Yet like so many California native plants, it remains green during the driest times of year, demonstrating that its leaves are full of water and so resistant to fire. Older plants can build up dead branches, but a quick cut to ground level during summer and it resprouts with the fall rains. The deep roots of coyote brush also make it a favorite for landscapers aiming to hold steep slopes in place.

One of coyote brush's most valuable habitat qualities is something that is also easy to overlook: its flowers. This sunflower relative has unremarkable cream-colored blooms that produce fluffy seeds on the female plants (picture). Males are less showy. This means that besides being green all year round, coyote brush supports nearly thirty species of butterflies and moths.

Coyote brush grows naturally on Fiscalini Ranch Preserve and provides vital food for monarch butterflies in a season when few other plants are in flower. Truly coyote brush carries its weight in the landscape, natural or cultivated.



Monarch on coyote brush, by Brad Seek

A Gift that Grows

On Saturday, Nov 28, more than 70 volunteers joined the staff of CCSD & FFRP in planting 350 Monterey pine seedlings on the Ranch. Some of those trees were dedicated to friends and family.

In memory of: **Grace**, by Jean Schrum, **Mabel Black**, by Mary Jo Linke; **Dana Stockton**, by Judith Pratt; **Beth Rienzi**, by Judith Pratt; **Mike Reibel**, by Terry Young & Kitty Connolly; **Alexandria Reihau Tsao**, by Eugenia Tsao; **Barbara Stoeckeler**, by Karen Mackin, and **Marshall & Audrey Brown**, by Barbara Beuche.

In honor of: **Phoebe, Wyatt, Eleanor, Ava, Farin & Madelyn**, by Jeff & Paula Hook; **Patricia Taylor**, by Paul Nelson; and **Lucie & Wouter Nicholai**, by Imkelina Nicholai.