

# Maturango Museum News

Preserve, interpret and develop an appreciation for  
the natural and cultural history of the Northern Mojave Desert.  
100 E. Las Flores Ave., Ridgecrest, CA 93555  
Open Monday – Saturday 10 am – 5 pm, Sunday Noon – 4pm  
760.375.6900 [www.maturango.org](http://www.maturango.org)  
Death Valley Tourist Center Northern Mojave Visitor Center

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## Museum Director's Notes

*By Debbie Benson, Director*

*Stars spill without end, Moon drapes silver on the mountain rims, Stillness guards the dark*

March begins that shift towards Spring and the concept of what we see as comfort. This winter seems to be a bit chillier at the Museum as we, much like everyone else, have been in some unsteady weather patterns. We look forward to what we know will be more sun-warmed days though still cool at night.

A perfect time for wildflowers to make their showing as only they can. Those warmer days in February, before the storm, started a Spring cycle. The many creatures of the desert will be warming as well so our eyes and ears will be more alert to their existence. It's an enlivening time. With our new garden area, we will be preparing for planting and a "music area"! Make sure to keep watching for continuing work by our volunteers.

We hope to see many of you at some of our events this month. All of them being a pleasant return to some of what we enjoy the most! A meeting with the membership, a Searles Museum field trip, Free Saturday with the docents and Children's Hour.

Hope to see many of you and the pleasure of saying hello! Enjoy the shift of the seasons, the time change and please continue to Be well!

### **Maturango Museum's Annual Meeting**

Sunday March 1, 2 pm

Gather with your friends at the Museum, meet our new Board members and our Staff.

We hope to see you there!

### **Our New History Curator - Terry McGuire**

Having taken the job of History Curator at the museum, I came to an understanding of the depth of our museum's collection. My background as an elementary teacher has allowed me to develop a great love of history and respect for those who preserve it for future generations. The museum is a treasure in our desert community.

I have been working with Elaine Wiley and learning the process of documenting artifacts. We have spent many hours together, and with her guidance and patience, we are working through the artifact donations that have been received. I am fortunate to have Elaine as a great resource to call upon.

I am looking forward to working closely with the museum staff and the community to keep the Maturango Museum a vital part of our greater community.

## Docent Doings

By Nora Nuckles, Education Coordinator

In January Bob Parker and Dan and Brenda Burnett presented a program on Winter Birds to High Desert Haven residents. This month we plan to have residents make Mardi Gras masks. Next month the residents of the Haven will make bird feeders with help from Bob, Dan, and Brenda. The docents are collecting empty milk cartons for the residents to use for the bird feeders.

The art docents led by Carol Dezellem and Cam Alden are presenting art programs nearly every week. Their lessons cover the fundamental elements of art, present information, and then an art activity.

Visitors created beautiful valentines on our Free Saturday that actually was on Feb. 14, Valentine's Day. Free Saturdays always attract many visitors to the Museum, many of whom are visiting for the first time.

Our next Free Saturday on March 14. Melanie Branson, a Burroughs School science teacher, has invited many organizations and scientists to present Conservation Day at the Museum. The Coso gallery will be filled with stations where knowledgeable people offer exciting bits of information or demonstrate something fun. Jessica Cash, a chemist from the base, always has something fun to share. This is the third year Melanie has organized Conservation Day at the Museum. It always attracts a crowd of visitors. The Conservation event is from 11am-2pm but the Museum is free all day.

If you would like to consider becoming a Maturango Museum docent, please join us at our next meeting in the Coso Room on March 3 at 10:30am. If you have any questions, please call me, Nora, at the Maturango Museum, 760-375-6900.

### Mark Pahuta's Photo Exhibit: "Ridgecrest and Eastern Sierra"

Exhibit runs through March 3, 2026



### Debbie Newton's Art Gallery Exhibit:

#### "Seeing Through My Eyes"

#### Opening Reception Saturday March 7, 3-5pm

Artist Debbie Newton moved to Indian Wells Valley as a youngster in 1958. She went to work for the China Lake Naval Base in 1980 in the Contracts Department where she worked in various positions until she retired in 2010. In the late 80's she started taking art classes offered on base then expanded to lessons offered locally, in Bishop and other areas. She continues to attend in-person workshops and attends many live/online classes to improve her artwork.

She has attended workshops in France, Santa Fe, San Diego, North Carolina, Maine, San Francisco and Los Angeles.

She started her artistic journey oil painting and has continued that journey adding watercolor, acrylic and pastel along the way. After her retirement, she focused on her art, painting daily. She fell in love with pastels when she took a workshop through the Desert Artists' League in Ridgecrest. Although she still works in oil, acrylic and watercolor she prefers to paint in pastel. Her subject matter includes traditional landscape, seascape, floral, and still life but her favorite subjects are animals, mainly birds. She works mostly from her studio because, as she likes to say, the desert is either too hot, too cold, or too windy for painting outside. She works from photos from her travels, including trips to Africa, England, Southern France, Canada, Alaska, Hawaii and most of continental USA.



She is a member of the Desert Artists' League and the Kern River Valley Art Association.

## Searles Valley Historical Society Museums Field Trip – Saturday March 7

Most of these museums are “appointment only” but we’re in luck! We’ve made the arrangements to visit each of them. We’ll be visiting the Fire Museum, History House, Trona Railway Museum and Caboose, Archives, and the Old Guest House Museum. Docents will be on-hand at each location to guide us through their rich history and their exhibits. Want to peruse at your own pace? You can do that as well during the time we are at each area.

Our journey will start at the Maturango Museum and we’ll drive over to Trona through Poison Canyon. By the way, did you know that the “real name” of Poison Canyon is Salt Wells Canyon?



We’ll make a brief stop at the Trona Pinnacles turn off to view two monuments; John Searles’ Freight Wagon Route Monument and the Epsom Salts Monorail Monument. If you want to learn more about the Epsom Salts Monorail, Maturango Museum has a great book on this subject as well as a great display in the Museum.

From there we’ll continue to the Fire Museum. Inside this museum are two antique fire engines, a 1924 Stutz and a 1938 Ahren-Fox. Displays in the Fire Museum include 20 photographs of major fires in Argus, Borosolvay, and

Trona and other fire memorabilia.

We’ll then make a quick stop at the Trona Rest Stop to take care of business and proceed to the History House, Caboose, and Railway Museum.

The History House is one of the oldest residential houses in Trona (built around 1920) and is a treasure trove of items from yesteryear. The Trona Railway Museum displays artifacts from the Trona Railway and the Caboose will be open to those able to navigate the steep stairs to get in and out.

Be sure to bring a picnic lunch. We’ll head over to the Archives when we are done at the History House. They have tables in the Archive building where we can eat our lunch. Before or after you eat your lunch, you can peruse through the Archives. There is so much to see! If you prefer to eat at one of the local restaurants in Trona, we’ll have a “meet time” at our final stop.

After lunch we’ll head to our final stop, the Old Guest House Museum. This building was built around 1917 and is one of the oldest buildings in Searles Valley. Originally it was built as four apartments and was remodeled as a guest house with twelve rooms for visitors to Trona. The twelve rooms show events in Searles Valley from the early mining days to present plant ownership. Since this is our final stop, once you have finished viewing all the cool “stuff”, you can head back, we just ask that you let the Leader of the Field Trip know you are leaving.

9am: meet at the Maturango Museum for check in. Participants will be required to sign a liability waiver. Car caravan will be organized and for those that want to carpool, we’ll figure it out there.

The cost is \$35 for adult museum members (\$60 for 2 adults), \$40 adult non-members (\$70 for 2). No Pets. Sign up at; [maturango.org](http://maturango.org) or come to the Gift Store.



Be sure you have enough gas (less than 100 miles round trip), car and tires in good running order.

Usual dress code for field trips applies: hat, sunscreen, comfortable walking shoes, layered clothing, water, camera (although some of the buildings ask no photographs). It is better to

have these items and not need them, than need them and not have them.

Bring a picnic lunch to eat while we are at the Archives.

**Cancellation Policy:** If the Museum cancels your trip, you will be given a full refund or you may transfer the money to a different trip. No cash refunds will be given if you cancel.



## Conservation in the IWV Event 2026: Pollinators, Desert Gardens and Water Free Saturday March 14, from 11am to 2pm.



Meet some of our local conservation organizations, pick up some garden tips, learn about our local insects, plants and other wildlife. We have wonderful ideas to share with you!

In our local desert bio-diversity we have quite an abundance of wildlife and plants in our diverse range of habitats. While most of our human residents see mainly the creosote shrubland of the valley floor, we are actually on the boundary edges of three converging eco-regions; technically Ridgecrest is in northwest corner of the Mojave Desert, while we also border with the Great Basin and Range to the north

and the Sierra Nevada mountains to the west. The diverse ecosystems found in and around the Indian Wells Valley include the Western Mojave Mountain Woodlands, Shrublands, Basins, Arid Steppes, Eastern Sierra Lower and Upper Montane Forests, Great Basin and Mojavean Slopes.

According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, endangered species of the valley and nearby mountains include the Fisher, Sierra Nevada Red Fox, California Condor, Inyo California Towhee, Western Snowy Plover, Monarch Butterfly, Mojave Desert Tortoise, and an ice-age remnant fish the Mohave Tui Chub.

While there are no designated critical habitats for endangered species on the valley floor, there are in the surrounding mountain areas as well as seven Federal Wilderness areas which help conserve wildlands for many vital species: Kiawah, Owens Peak, El Paso Mountains, Chimney Peak, Sacatar Trail, South Sierra, and Coso Range. In addition, as the Indian Wells Valley is a part of the Pacific Flyway bird migratory path in the spring and fall, The Audubon Society has designated some of the riparian desert/montane ecosystems as "Important Bird Areas". These areas include: Argus Range - South, Southern Sierra Desert Canyons, and three seasonally riparian North Mojave Dry Lakes.

Surprisingly, our high desert valley is the seasonal home to thousands of shorebirds, marsh birds and other waterfowl during the winter. Ever popular, the Snow Geese over-winters here with the average flock size of about 1,700, according to the local Kerncrest Audubon's Christmas Bird Count numbers since 1987. Some of these Snow Geese travel from as far away as their nesting area on Wrangel Island, Siberia - over 3,200 miles one way. They come for our park's grass and mild winter, likely due to the loss of 90% of California's original wetlands and marsh grass of the northern and central valleys since 1920.



Other species native to our area which are important keystone species include the Creosote Bush and the Joshua tree. Unarguably the long-lived Mojave Creosote Bush is the predominant shrub of the Mojave Desert, and although it is not considered a valuable food source, it is one of the few plants available for shelter, shade and good burrowing sites for our threatened/endangered species such as the Mojave Desert Tortoise, Mohave Ground Squirrel and Burrowing Owl. (The oldest creosote known as "The King Clone" of Lucerne Valley, has been dated to 11,700 years old!) The Joshua tree, an important shade, shelter and nesting source, is losing habitat rapidly due to rising temperatures, increasing wildfires and urban sprawl. We are fortunate to have them in our local canyons at higher elevations, as they are a great source of

supporting habitat and even food sources for some species like the Cactus Wrens, Yucca Moths and Kangaroo Rats.

All these local species of flora and fauna depend on us to be good stewards of our environment. What benefits do we gain from a local biodiverse and healthy ecosystem? The less obvious services which we should ponder include cleaner air and less dust pollution, recycling of waste and nutrients for healthy soil, healthier water filtered at depth in our aquifer, regeneration of oxygen even from micro-soil cyanobacteria - the list goes on and on. This leads us to water conservation, along with a host of other mindful

habits we human neighbors can do to help nature. Recycle/reuse, compost, plant native plants, support pollinators by eliminating or minimizing garden toxins, provide wildlife nesting, food, shelter resources and



reducing hazards where possible such as covering trash against predatory animals such as Ravens, minimizing outdoor cat and dog threats, and over-bright white night lighting which disrupts night migrations.

Back to our own water - we need to support water conservation in our high desert area for human consumption - but our local springs also need it to support nature.

This year we are featuring a guest speaker focused on sustainable living with local insects, bee researchers from Cerro Coso Community College, and garden tours by the Maturango staff showcasing native plants and the new pollinator habitat.

**Tami Force presents “Nevada Ghost Towns”  
Sunday March 15th at 2:00 pm.**

Tami Force is an explorer, historian, author, and content creator of the Eastern Sierra region. Her presentation will cover topics such as:

The Eastern Sierra’s hundreds of ghost towns, mining camps, stage and railroad stations, and mines.

Visitors and history usually focus on a handful of ghost towns, such as Bodie, Cerro Gordo, and Randsburg. Explorers and historians have forgotten the smaller sites, their ruins and history hidden for over a century in the desert.

The tales of the lesser-known ghost towns put the authors of dime novels to shame. Each story is unique, showing that sometimes the truth is stranger than fiction.

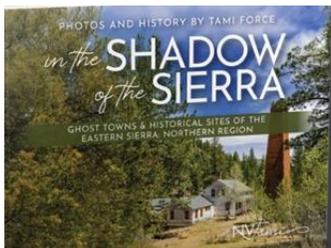
Learn about these unusual ghost towns and the forgotten lives of those who lived in the Old West and made the Eastern Sierra what it is today.

How were German U-Boats related to Atolia?

Who was the “Human Mole” and how did he earn that name?

What previous cargo did the burros Jennie and Lupe carry to the Clair mine?

What happened to those in Johannesburg who forgot their phone calls were on a party line?

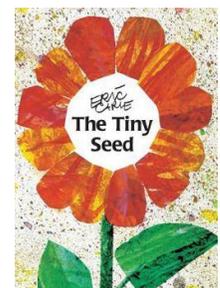


Tami has two books: “In the Shadow of the Sierra, Ghost towns & Historical Sites of the Eastern Sierra Northern Region” and “In the Glow of the Sierra, Ghost towns & Historical Sites of the Eastern Sierra Southern Region” and will have copies for sale and a book signing after her presentation. Tami curates an interactive ghost town map online at [nvtami.com/nevada-ghost-towns-map/](http://nvtami.com/nevada-ghost-towns-map/) and can be found on facebook at NVTami.

**Children’s Hour: Wildflowers  
Friday March 27, 10:30-11:30 am**

After plentiful rain in the High Desert this past fall and winter, our Mojave Desert is already putting on a show with an abundance of wildflowers. Through the stories “The Reason for a Flower” by Ruth Heller, “The Tiny Seed” by Eric Carle, other stories, action songs, and a craft, the children will learn about the lifecycle of wildflowers and other plants. Who moves the pollen from flower to flower? How do seeds travel? What grows underground beneath a tree? Curiosity and questions from children are encouraged!

More information about Children’s Hour can be found on [www.Maturango.org](http://www.Maturango.org) or by calling 760-375-6900.



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## Help Us Make Children's Hour Better

We would like to provide a program that meets the needs of our community. Please write an e-mail to [Nora@maturango.org](mailto:Nora@maturango.org) with your comments and suggestions.

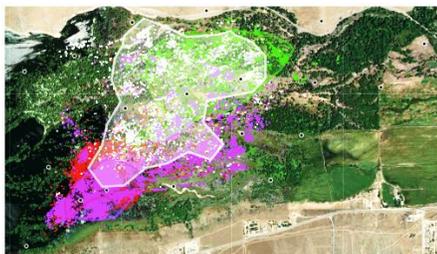
- How did you first learn about Children's Hour?
  - Would a different day of the week or time be better for you?
  - What do you like about Children's Hour?
  - Any other suggestions to get this wonderful program known to our community...
- 

## Kerncrest Audubon Presents MOTUS Thursday March 19, 7pm

MOTUS is an international network of antenna stations to detect signals of animals carrying tiny transmitters called tags. The data collected from these stations are collected and made available for studies of how animals (mostly birds and bats) move about the Earth. Kerncrest Audubon and the Maturango Museum have installed a MOTUS antenna array at the museum.

The presentation by Dr. Patrick Lorch of the Southern Sierra Research Station is titled "Using Modern Tech to Track Western Yellow-Billed Cuckoos in The Kern River Valley".

After a decade doing academic research and teaching, that included radio tracking insects with the USDA, Pat moved to working with the Motus wildlife tracking system. After setting up over 58 Motus stations, Pat has tons of experience with planning and constructing Motus stations as well as with data management and analysis. At SSRS, he's leading our Motus station projects, assisting with data analysis, and grant applications aimed at strengthening the role the station plays in regional conservation.



Estimated locations of four MOTUS tagged Yellow-billed Cuckoos from July 7 to August 7, 2025 in the Kern River Valley just east of Lake Isabella. Each white, purple, red and green dot is a detection of a tagged bird during 1 time-interval. Black dots represent ground detectors or nodes that detected the tags. Colored dots represent location estimates from 1 time-interval.

## Recent Donations

### Donations

Alicia Blueeyes  
Dan and Brenda Burnett  
Give Lively Foundation, Inc  
George and Eleanor Herr  
Denny Kline  
Nana Makes a Difference  
Lloyd and Bea Smith  
John and Janice Zenor

### In Honor of Museum Docents

Nora Nuckles

### Art Gallery

Aubrey Phillips

### Building Fund

Jacqueline Burnett

### Discovery Center

Nora Nuckles  
Janice Philpott

### Pollinator Garden Fund

Peter and Elaine Wiley

### New Members

Greg Boske  
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Kathy Brown

Gina Peters  
Linda Richter  
Hank Truxillo

### New Premium Members

Ken and Leilani Banks  
Alicia Blueeyes  
Matthew Henriksen

### New Lifetime Members

Patricia Wharton and  
Ken Wetzel  
Elaine and Peter Wiley

**Maturango Museum  
of the IWV**

100 E. Las Flores Ave., Ridgecrest, CA 93555  
Open Mon - Sat 10 am – 5 pm  
Sunday noon – 4pm (except major holidays)

Staff

Debbie Benson, Museum Director  
Maureen Goff, Store Manager/Buyer  
Barbara Bane, M.A., RPA, Archaeology Curator  
Nadia Mohsen, Curation Technician  
Terry McGuire, Local History Curator  
Sherry Brubaker, Natural History Curator  
Andrea Pelch, Art Gallery Coordinator,  
Newsletter Editor  
Nora Nuckles, Education Coordinator,  
Museum Assistant  
Barbara Ingle, Membership, Donations,  
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## Wildflower Exhibit 2026

Friday, April 10 – Sunday, April 12.

See an impressive array of wildflowers all in one location.

I hope you have had the opportunity to venture outside and see the wildflowers blooming in the Rademacher Hills, Short Canyon, and other areas. As of February 25, many wildflowers are blooming. It's a different year for wildflowers due to the wet fall and winter, above-average temperatures in December and January, followed by more rain and freezing temperatures in February. Early in December, many plants took the opportunity to grow, bloom, and produce seeds while the weather permitted. It was a gamble, but many plants have succeeded in doing just that.

The Lacy Phacelia wildflowers are flourishing in the Rademacher Hills. Go to the end of College Heights Blvd, park in the dirt parking lot, open your car door, and take in the sweet aroma of Lacy Phacelia. This plant is growing in profusion in and around the creosote bushes. In some areas, plants are reaching two feet tall! This appears to be Lacy Phacelia's year to dominate the landscape in the Rademachers. The related phacelia, Yellow Throats or Fremont's Phacelia, is soaking in the sun on the south sides of creosote bushes in the Rademachers.



Brown-eyed primroses are also prominent in the Rademachers and just about every other place I've looked. Chia is another plant that is growing and thriving everywhere. The bright yellow Coreopsis is creating bright spots of vibrant color, and the small yellow goldfields are starting to give small areas of a hillside a tinge of yellow.

The wildflowers are here and will continue to grow, bloom, and seed. We expect a wonderful variety of wildflowers for the exhibit weekend.

We will have three presentations over the Wildflower Exhibit weekend:

**Friday, April 10, at 5:30 pm, Glenn Harris** (provide info) will give a presentation on **“Why Plants Grow Where They Do.”** Glenn, a retired BLM employee, now volunteers with the Maturango Museum, giving environmental education talks to children and adults.

**Saturday, April 11, at 2 pm, Allison Autry**, PhD candidate, studies orchids that grow on the eastern slopes of the Sierra Nevada and riparian enclaves on the Mojave Desert. Her presentation is titled, **“An Introduction to the Native Orchids of California and Nevada, with a special focus on the Southeastern Sierra and the Mojave Desert.”** Did you know that orchids grow in the eastern Sierra Nevada and the Mojave Desert?

**Sunday, April 12, at 2 pm, Dylan Layfield** will give a presentation on the **Wildflowers That Grow in Sand Canyon**. This eastern Sierra Nevada canyon is located north of Grapevine Canyon. Dylan has studied the wildflowers of this canyon for many years. Dylan works at China Lake.

## Upcoming and Ongoing Events

- **Museum's Annual Meeting:** Sunday March 1, 2pm
- **Mark Pahuta's Photo Exhibit "Ridgecrest and Eastern Sierra":** exhibit through Mar 3
- **Searles Valley Historical Society Museums Field Trip:** Saturday March 7
- **Debbie Newton's Art Gallery Exhibit Opening Reception:** Saturday March 7, 3-5pm
- **Free Saturday: Conservation Day,** Saturday March Feb 14, 11am – 2pm
- **Tami Force presents "Nevada Ghost Towns":** Sunday March 15, 2 pm
- **Kerncrest Audubon Presents MOTUS:** Thursday March 19, 7pm
- **Children's Hour: "Wildflowers",** Friday March 27, 10:30 – 11:30 am
- **Annual Wildflower Exhibit:** April 10 – 12