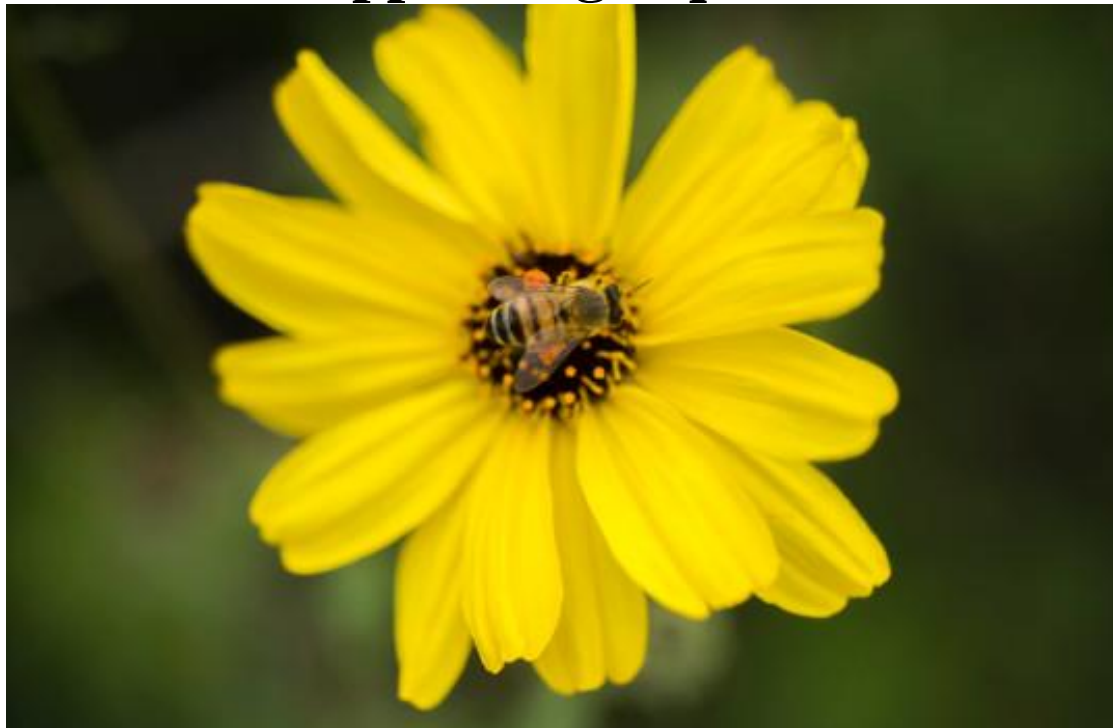


ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

The 2018 Southern California wildflower show's a disappointing sequel to 2017



A bee collects pollen from a California Sun Flower which is a blooming native wildflower at the Colorado Lagoon Wetland and Marine Science Education Center in Long Beach Wednesday, April 4, 2018. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova/Daily Breeze)

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PUBLISHED: April 9, 2018 at 12:05 pm | UPDATED: April 9, 2018 at 2:17 pm

After last year's [traffic-stopping displays](#) of entire hillsides thickly thatched with golden-orange California poppies, the 2018 spring wildflower season in Southern California is a disappointment for many.

“No one's going to stop by the road and see [superblooms like they did last year](#),” said Lorrae Fuentes, wildflower-hotline coordinator for the [Theodore Payne Foundation](#) in Sun Valley, which puts out a [weekly report](#) highlighting the region's most promising blooms.

“We didn't get rain at the right time of the year,” Fuentes said. “It was probably too little, too late.”



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Seacliff Buckwheat is a blooming native wildflower at the Colorado Lagoon Wetland and Marine Science Education Center in Long Beach Wednesday, April 4, 2018. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova/Daily Breeze)

And it doesn't help that expectations remain high.

"It's hard when you get a year like last year," said Bill Wagner, consulting biologist for the Metropolitan Water District, and an expert on wildflowers at Riverside County's [Diamond Valley Lake](#). "Everything is compared to it."

That's not to say there isn't anything to see. Wildflowers are blooming all over the region. But this time around floral prospectors will have to work a little harder in order to feast their eyes on Mother Nature's dazzling treasures.



Wildflowers start to bloom along the Wildflower Trail at Diamond Valley Lake near Hemet on Wednesday, April 4, 2018. (Photo by Frank Bellino, Contributing Photographer)

That was clear on Wednesday, April 4, at the [Diamond Valley Lake marina](#). Nearby hills appeared to be devoid of color. But a stroll on the lake's seasonal, mile-long Wildflower Trail revealed carpets of yellow California goldfields, blue arroyo lupine, yellow and white-tipped tidy tips and white popcorn flowers.

"You have to actually get on the trail," Wagner said. "You can't sit in the parking lot."

Flower lovers also shouldn't count on taking a [casual drive down the highway](#) to see flowers, Fuentes said.

"They're going to have to get out of their cars and search for them," she said.

A little bit of everything

And you may want to stay a little closer to home.

"This season is not a good season to drive all the way out to [Anza-Borrego](#) or to [Death Valley](#)," said George Nanoski, a high school science teacher in Los Angeles.

But around the corner from his Long Beach home is the Colorado Lagoon, and it is beginning to put on a show.

What colors can be found there? "Purples and yellows and oranges and pinks and blues — a little bit of everything," said Nanoski.

He spends much time there and files weekly reports with the Theodore Payne Foundation. Worth seeing, he said, are the wild hyacinth, tidy tips, arroyo lupine, California poppy and California bush sunflower. One of his favorites is the Chinese house.

“It’s a really interesting flower,” Nanoski said. “It kind of looks like one of those temples that has parallel roofs that are on top of each other.”



Eric Zahn, a restoration ecologist who works for a consulting firm called Tidal Influence, stands among the blooming native wildflowers at the Colorado Lagoon Wetland and Marine Science Education Center in Long Beach on Wednesday, April 4, 2018. (Photo by Thomas R. Cordova/Daily Breeze)

Eric Zahn, an ecologist who directed the restoration of the Long Beach lagoon, said the flower show there isn’t at its peak.

“But in about two weeks it will be,” Zahn said.

Hard to miss

Down the coast in Orange County, color is bursting at the Environmental Nature Center in Newport Beach.

Lori Whalen, assistant director, said visitors will find blooms starting to pop on California poppies, Hooker’s evening primroses, Island snapdragons, sugar bushes, brittlebushes and California encelias.

Whalen said that she recently visited a couple of coastal hot spots for wildflowers, the [Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve](#) and [Crystal Cove](#), and came across wishbone bush, blue-eyed grass, fiddleneck, Indian paintbrush and monkey flower.

In inland Orange County, a favorite place to hunt wildflowers is [Caspers Wilderness Park](#).

There, flowers are coming up along exposed ridges and will trail along a little later in cool canyon bottoms, said Laura Camp, general manager of Tree of Life Nursery in San Juan Capistrano, who provides reports to the Theodore Payne Foundation.

A highlight at Caspers, Camp said, is the Mariposa lily. There won't be as many as last year, but their pink and white tulip-shaped flowers can be found.

"It's hard to miss them because they are a fairly large flower and beautiful," Camp said.

Better than expected

"It's not a great year," Camp said. "But I'm not too disappointed. We had some late rains, and those late rains have perked things up."

The 2018 season, she said, "may turn out better than we expect."

Wagner, the consulting biologist for Metropolitan, said that after hiking the loop Wildflower Trail at Diamond Valley Lake last week the blooms are more impressive than he had anticipated.



Carpets of yellow California goldfields were emerging along the Wildflower Trail at Diamond Valley Lake near Hemet on Wednesday, April 4, 2018. (Photo by Frank Bellino, Contributing Photographer)

But Wagner said there is one big difference between this year and last: In 2018, you generally won't see entire hillsides and landscapes covered in colorful tapestries woven with wildflowers.

And the question many are asking is, How long will this year's show last?

Wildflowers are reaping the benefits of a relatively cool start to spring. But, said Fuentes, from the Theodore Payne Foundation, “If it gets really hot, it’s going to be a really short flower season.”

If that happens, Southern Californians have the option of going to an irrigated park.”

‘You need sunglasses’

One such place is Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden in Claremont. David Bryant, manager of communications and graphic design, said the garden has 86 acres devoted to native California plants.

“This is go time,” Bryant said, saying visitors will be able to see blooms through early May.

The garden has all the favorites. And, of course, the California poppies tend “steal the limelight,” he said.

But Bryant said the garden also has plants one might not see elsewhere, such as native Pacific Coast irises. “And they’re gorgeous.”

Southern Californians also can take advantage of the region’s diverse topography, in a bid to keep the show going.

Climb up to 5,000 feet in the foothills of the San Bernardino Mountains, and you’ll see flowers for several more weeks at the [Oak Glen Preserve](#).

Tim Krantz, University of Redlands professor of environmental studies and botanic garden director at the Oak Glen Preserve, said it boasts dozens of plants native to the Southern California mountains.

The preserve is full of flowers, pines, trails and birds.

“Our biggest wildflower attraction is what we call the Artist’s Palette,” Krantz said.

It’s a 6-acre natural rainbow-like canvas splashed with color so bright, he said, “It’s almost like you need sunglasses.” And he said the preserve’s peak wildflower bloom occurs in May.