



News from the PARK BENCH

Friends of Hendricks Park *Eugene's First Park* **Spring 2026**



The Forest Saddle Gets a Makeover

Good things are said to come to those who are patient, or, in this case, for those of determined perseverance. We are not talking about spring after a long winter. We are talking about the Upper Saddle Project in the Hendricks Park forest.

Those readers of elephantine memory will recall that this began as one of Friends of Hendricks Park's 20th Anniversary Projects back in 2021. The proposal was to redesign this nexus of forest trails, with its expanse of asphalt and long defunct fountain.

An extended effort to bring the fountain back to life dried up. Some fabulous ideas for artwork trailed off due to concerns over vandalism and price tag. General cost estimates soared, high enough to rival some Douglas firs. Staff changes at Parks and Open Space took time.

But to the patient and determined good ideas do not die. Just this past year a doable version was crafted together with Parks and Open Space. Two donated benches will make the Saddle a comfortable place to rest. The fountain will become a pedestal for a 3-d map of the park. Wayfinder signs will help visitors turn the Saddle from a place to get lost into a place from which to explore. Re-graveling will perk up the ground underfoot. Vegetation has been trimmed and tucked after Board members and other volunteers completed a work project in early March. The project is about to get underway and will, we hope, be completed this summer -- just in time for our 25th Anniversary Project Fundraiser this fall.

The accompanying photo is a "before" picture. Be sure to see the "after" status for yourself! ❖

UPDATE ON SEASONAL WORKERS FUNDED BY FOHP

Two new and impressively proficient seasonals, Allie Dorris and Camille Best, are scouring the forest for weeds to pull and problems to address mid-March to mid-June. They say the forest looks to be in relatively good shape, although the biggest burst of growth of some invasives is yet to come.

Andrea Wuenschel is working her third year as an Rhododendron Garden seasonal, providing a crucial contribution beyond what the regular staff and volunteers can provide. Emily Aune praises her as having "explosive knowledge of the natural world." Emily is recruiting for a second RG seasonal as we go to press. ❖

We Remember --In Memoria

MICHAEL ROBERT



Over the past 120 years Hendricks Park has been cared for by many hands. Some hands have left an especially lasting legacy; Michael Robert's are among them. Michael died on December 9, 2025.

Michael was Hendricks Park's head gardener from 1981-2003 and worked in the garden for four years before that. When he came, the Rhododendron Garden was an

enthusiastic assortment of donated plants -- old standards, donor favorites, novel and unnamed hybrids. He spent years removing redundancies and low performers, moving many plants around for better effects, and introducing newcomers. He opened the garden up for longer views and better visitor flow. Rock walls, paths, and irrigation infrastructure were installed and upgraded. These are his imprints directly visible today.

Michael's impact can be seen in the rest of Hendricks Park as well. He oversaw the rebuilding of the Wilkins picnic shelter after the 1999 windstorm. He championed the 2000 Forest Management plan to begin the arduous restoration that continues today. The Native Plant Garden

was carved out on his watch. Hendricks' erstwhile wild partying reputation was tamed into a quieter place for more respectful visitors to enjoy.

Ginny Alfriend worked with Michael for 15 years and succeeded him as head gardener. She remembers him as a staunch park advocate, who brought people together for the sake of the park. He mentored at risk youth working in the RG. The RG Tuesday volunteer program began by Michael going door-to-door in the Fairmount neighborhood to drum up interest. He went to Neighborhood Association Meetings to publicize the Forest Management Plan, which caught the attention of several people who went on to found Friends of Hendricks Park.

Sandra Austin, one of those founders, marvels that even though Michael retired way back in 2003, his influence in the park blooms on today. At his retirement, a rhododendron hybrid was named in his honor. ❖



JOAN KELLEY

It is with great sadness that we mark the passing of Joan Kelley who died on December 27, 2025. In 2001 she became a founding member of the Friends of Hendricks Park. She championed the Tuesday Rhododendron Garden volunteer group, wrote the newsletter, managed to get the Native Plant Garden sign installed after many delays, and, in 2006, spearheaded commemoration of the 100th anniversary of Hendricks Park. Not least, she delighted volunteers for many years with her marvelous baking.

Thank you, Joan. ❖





FoHP Board Changes

Julian Savala is graduating from the UO and is leaving the Board to return to the Bay Area. Thanks, and good luck, Julian!

Three new Board members have joined as of April. Jim Caughlin and Leanne Ellis moved to Eugene seven years ago. They joined the Tuesday Rhododendron Garden volunteers during Covid and love it! Making friends, being outdoors, and helping make the Park ever more lovable inspired them to take the leap to the Board together. Leanne is also an artist and photographer, sending out pictures (so attractive they make a bloom blush) of the Rhodie Garden after every Tuesday.

Tom Beatty is a plant enthusiast with a horticulture degree from OSU and a career with Salem Parks, which included working with volunteers. He has enjoyed Hendricks since the '80s, and when he retired, he decided to volunteer here. Besides Tuesday mornings in the Rhodie Garden, he is president of the Eugene Chapter of the Rhododendron Society, and pitches in with several other park and conservation groups. Welcome, Jim, Leanne and Tom! ❖

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT : CAMILLE STEWART



Camille loves native plants! So, it was a natural to join the Native Plant Garden Thursday work parties four years ago, after moving to Eugene. She enjoys them so much, she is turning her yard into her own native plant garden. Favorite native plant? Hard to pick just one -- columbines, buttercups, shooting stars, camas, for starters. Favorite weed to pull at Hendricks? That's easy. Nipplewort.

Volunteering is about much more than the plants. The people she works with and the satisfaction of contributing to the community keep her coming back even on those cold wet winter days. Turns out native plants have helped Camille feel like a real Oregon native herself. ❖

Dear Aunt Rhodie

Sometimes I see rabbits along the Ribbon Trail and in the Hendricks Park forest-- what kind are they?

Dear Rabbit Wonderer:

Good question! Only a lucky few have seen these rabbits. You must like to hike early morning and at dusk. Could be the native Brush rabbit, or the introduced Eastern Cottontail: both call Eugene home. It is difficult to tell them apart. No wonder you are perplexed. Here are some clues to the riddle.

True to their name, Brush rabbits love thickets, and often hop into them at first glimpse. Cottontails do too, although they also love to bask in the sun. Brush rabbits are smaller, 1-2 pounds & 10-14 inches long, compared to the heftier 2-4 pounds & 14-19 inches of cottontails. The brush rabbit has darker, grayer fur and slightly shorter rounded ears, while the cottontail's reddish-brown fur is lighter with whiter underparts. To make matters even more confusing, they both have white tails; worse still, they hybridize.

So, Rabbit Wonderer, if you see a rabbit, any rabbit, count yourself lucky. If you see a group of rabbits, called a fluffle (no kidding!), take a photo and send it in. And if you see rabbits laden with baskets of chocolate Easter eggs, Aunt Rhodie wants to know...immediately. ❖



Hendricks Park Birding



Spotted Towhee

Birds are a veritable sound and flight show in Hendricks Park. Like the flowers, they are at their best in the spring. Year rounders are joined by splashy migrants, and everyone gets busy nesting and feeding their young.

Mieko Aoki and Donna Albino have been leading spring and fall bird tours at Hendricks for many years. Mieko has some pointers for those of us who love birds but are just getting started.

Getting up at the crack of dawn is not obligatory! Come anytime. Find a bench. Just sit. Look and listen. Get familiar with the birds that you see most often. Many birds, such as resident song sparrows and spotted towhees, forage and nest around eye-level, and they are abundant at Hendricks. Plunk yourself down by the Powell fountain or get close to many native plants in bloom to see and hear hummingbirds buzzing – mostly Anna's, some Rufous. You might notice old friends -- chickadees, juncos, and robins. What is that in their beaks? Through June, it could be nest material, insects (like those abundant oak caterpillars) for their little ones, or nestling droppings. Jays and crows may be among the less showy local birds, but some say they are the smartest. They often seem to be watching us more than we watch them.

The carnival of migrants sweeps in during April and May. Who is that bird

with streaks of yellow flame and a redhead? It may be a western tanager, playing hide and seek among conifer boughs. Why isn't a black-headed grosbeak called an orange-bodied grosbeak? Warblers? Hard to tell them apart without more experience.

Listen for sound bites. Have you ever noticed the haunting upward trill of the Swainson's thrush, so familiar in evergreen forests? You will not be the first to fall in love with this incomparable song. Other birds, way up high and hidden by branches, are harder to see, but we hear them too. What sounds like monkeys calling to each other might be the pileated woodpecker. Crick your neck, look up, focus on their stunning red cockade, and try to imagine how your neck would feel if you hammered away on wood all day.



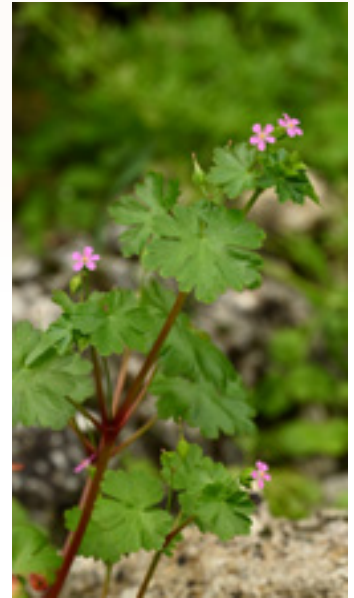
Western Tanager



Song Sparrow

There are so many kinds of birds to try to keep straight! Just like it's hard to keep plants and flowers straight. But there's no need to identify every petal or flash of feather. Let what you see tantalize you, whet your appetite. Next time, bring your binoculars. Download the Merlin app to your phone. Consider waking up with the birds at dawn to hear their chorus like at no other time. And consider joining Mieko and Donna at 8 AM on June 21 for an opportunity to sample more of what the park has to offer. ❖

Invasive Plant on the Most (Un)Wanted List



Shining Geranium -- *Geranium lucidum* for Latin lovers, Gelu for short -- is an invasive plant that hails from Europe. Gardeners brought it to the Pacific Northwest, and it has been spreading ever since. Over mere decades, it is now found all over the Northwest. Eugene and environs have become an epicenter. Hendricks Park is no exception.

Gelu hitchhikes on the feet of people and animals. One plant can produce up to 1000 seeds (although the average is “only” less than half that, those seeds are 100% viable at two years). Plants can bloom and fruit up to five times per year, but, around here, spring and fall with a die-off during the hot dry summer is most common.

It explosively projects seeds up to 20 feet -- and a few feet up tree trunks, where it is often seen in moss. On the ground, it grows so thickly that it prevents native seeds from germinating and crowds out existing natives before they have a chance. Once established, it is considered impossible to eliminate. The US Dept of Agriculture has estimated it

could eventually become a “major” invader in 80% of the American continent. Success can only be measured by containment, and our goal at Hendricks is to forestall damage as long as we can. At present, the Hendricks Park forest is the only natural area in Eugene in which a sustained effort to contain Gelu has been attempted.

For the last 15 years, we have invested much energy and attention to contain Gelu in the park. The project is labor-intensive. It is mostly by hand weeding, as herbicides can cause much collateral damage. The challenge is formidable, but unless we take aggressive action now, much of our forest biodiversity will suffer. The spring profusion of flowers and leaves of annuals and perennials will otherwise thin. ❖

New and Renewing Friends who donated after 10/14/25 will be listed in the fall 2026 newsletter.
 Donations to Friends of Hendricks Park may be made by Venmo, Paypal or credit card at www.friendsofhendrickspark.org. Thank you!

Yes! I WANT TO BECOME A MEMBER OF FRIENDS OF HENDRICK’S PARK

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DUES

- Senior/student/limited income \$20
- Individual \$30
- Family/household \$50
- Sponsor/business \$100
- Sustaining \$250
- Guarantor \$500
- Benefactor \$_____

ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS

- Forest restoration
- Native Plant Garden
- Rhododendron Garden
- Unrestricted Gift
- Memorial/commemorative gifts \$_____

Contributions are tax deductible to the extent permitted by law. Tax ID #93-1330075

ENDOWMENT FUND

- Rhododendron Garden
- Native Plant Garden
- Forest Endowment
- General Endowment \$_____

TOTAL ENCLOSED: \$_____

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FRIENDS OF Hendricks Park

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Erik Fisher
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Rachel Foster

DESIGN BY

Sarah Decker

HENDRICKS PARK WALKING TOURS • SPRING 2026

MAY 3rd at 1 PM

BOTANICALLY SPEAKING

Field botanists Howie Brounstein and LEAH KAYES lead our spring tour in the Native Plant Garden. Learn to identify and use edible and medicinal plants with two of the preeminent herbal educators in the northwest.

May 24th at 1 PM

RHODODENDRON GARDEN

Walk the meandering paths of the resplendent Rhododendron Garden with Emily Aune, Hendricks Park head gardener. Unique trees and ornamental shrubs. Tips on how to care for rhododendrons. Park history and heritage.

May 31st at 1 PM

KALAPUYA WAYS

For thousands of years the Kalapuya People visited the land we call Hendricks Park. Karen Rainsong, Director of Singing Creek Educational Center and long-time student of indigenous people, introduces us to the food, clothing, and cultural practices of the Kalapuya.

June 21st at 8 AM

BIRDING

Join birders and avian educators Donna Albino and Mieko Aoki for this early morning park stroll. Learn bird identification through observation of field markings, behavior, listening to songs and calls. Stories and lore.