

# LASCA LEAVES



Los Angeles County Department of Arboreta and Botanic Gardens



LuAnn Munns

*A new redwood sign goes up, welcoming visitors to the renovated garden.*

## SUNSET MAGAZINE MODERNIZES DEMONSTRATION HOME GARDENS

THE MYRIAD DETAILS that make the Demonstration Home Gardens so appealing to visitors at the Los Angeles State and County Arboretum were all carefully scrutinized during a recent facelift. Representatives from Sunset magazine worked with the Arboretum staff to revamp the four "idea gardens" that were first opened in 1958. The improvements were made possible through a generous contribution from Sunset magazine.

The most obvious change was the labeling of every element throughout the gardens in keeping with the Arboretum's present program of providing scientific as well as cultural information on plant characteristics.

New Metalphoto signs list not only the scientific and botanical names of individual plants but also give pertinent horticultural information that helps gardeners decide on appropriate uses for eyecatching plants. Free-standing redwood lecterns now support signs describing the hypothetical lifestyles the different gardens are meant to serve.

Each of the four gardens came in for attention as details were changed or added to give a fresh, contemporary look. In the garden designed for easy maintenance the deck and fence were repainted a medium brown to blend better with modern exteriors. A group of pots featuring easy-care plants now provides a focal point for the deck.

The entertainers' garden features a modernized food preparation area with a quarry tile counter surround-

ing the stainless steel sink. Slim wooden battens that decorate the base extend upward behind the center to screen the Administration Building from the garden.

In the plant hobbyist's garden new benches were constructed and a number of new plants added to the collection. The family garden also benefited from fresh paint, new trellises, improved plantings and general refurbishing. Containers of annuals and perennials as well as exotic specimen plants will be rotated throughout the gardens to add seasonal color.

To celebrate the re-opening of the gardens, Sunset featured them in a major publicity campaign throughout the Southland. The magazine showed them in a photographic feature in the March issue and broadcast a series of inviting advertisements on local stations.



## COLORFUL AVIAN VISITORS FLOCK TO ARBORETUM LAKE

**B**ESIDES ITS RENOWN with botanists of the world, the Los Angeles State and County Arboretum also seems to enjoy a growing popularity among members of the bird world. Of course, the more than 200 resident peafowl with the brilliant blue and green trains are a regular attraction. They are, however, only one of the many fascinating bird species that either live here year around or stop by on their annual migrations.

Visitors during the Christmas holidays were treated to the spectacle of a great egret swooping down on the unsuspecting koi, bass and catfish in the 4-acre Lasca Lagoon. According to Edna Fiore, active in both Las Voluntarias and the Audubon Society, the bird was one of many passing through on its way to the Salton Sea.

This snow-white giant with its 7-foot wing span was nearly extinct by the turn of the century when fashion called for ladies' hats to be adorned with filmy egret feathers. Fortunately, early environmentalists intervened and the few surviving birds were protected until a viable population once again flew the now-friendly skies. But they still face other threats. They are losing their habitat to increased development of our wetlands, and pesticides are affecting egret eggs. As with another winged monarch, the California condor, the egrets' eggs shells are much thinner than normal, causing them to break frequently, thus lowering the birds' reproductive rate.

Brandt's cormorant, a 3-foot tall black seabird, normally travels in flocks numbering in the hundreds, scavenging along the Pacific Coast and nesting in seaweed. Occasionally, a few get lost and stray from the rest. One place they may end up is at the Arboretum where they were spotted last fall and winter catching their fish in the early morning.

Presently there are over a dozen herons both the blue-crowned night heron and the green heron, staked out strategically around the lake. These predators epitomize the virtue of patience, often sitting stone-still for what seems like hours awaiting their finned prey. They seem to have a favorite spot near the Queen Anne Cottage where on a Saturday in March, 11 herons were seen in a single tree.

The blue-crowned heron is unusual in that it tends to be a loner, fishing and nesting by itself. These herons can be recognized by their 3-inch beaks, 3- to 5-foot wing span and harsh "kwok" that resounds over the lake area. Like most of the other predators, they are out bright and early catching breakfast.

Two of the most beautiful ducks on the grounds are the wood ducks and the ruddy ducks. The wood ducks — glossy green and purple with white stripes, chestnut breast and black back — habitually winter in the southwestern states and Mexico. Once



Jim Johnson

they find a location to their liking, they are inclined to return each year. This spring there are several pair who appear to have found Lasca Lagoon ideal. According to Mrs. Fiore, they seem to be extending their migratory range, so we could expect to see more and more of them during the next few winters. The ruddy duck, his entire body a bright chestnut brown that contrasts with his sky-blue beak, is a year around resident that Mrs. Fiore affectionately calls "the clown of ducks." Catch them at their antics



Jim Johnson

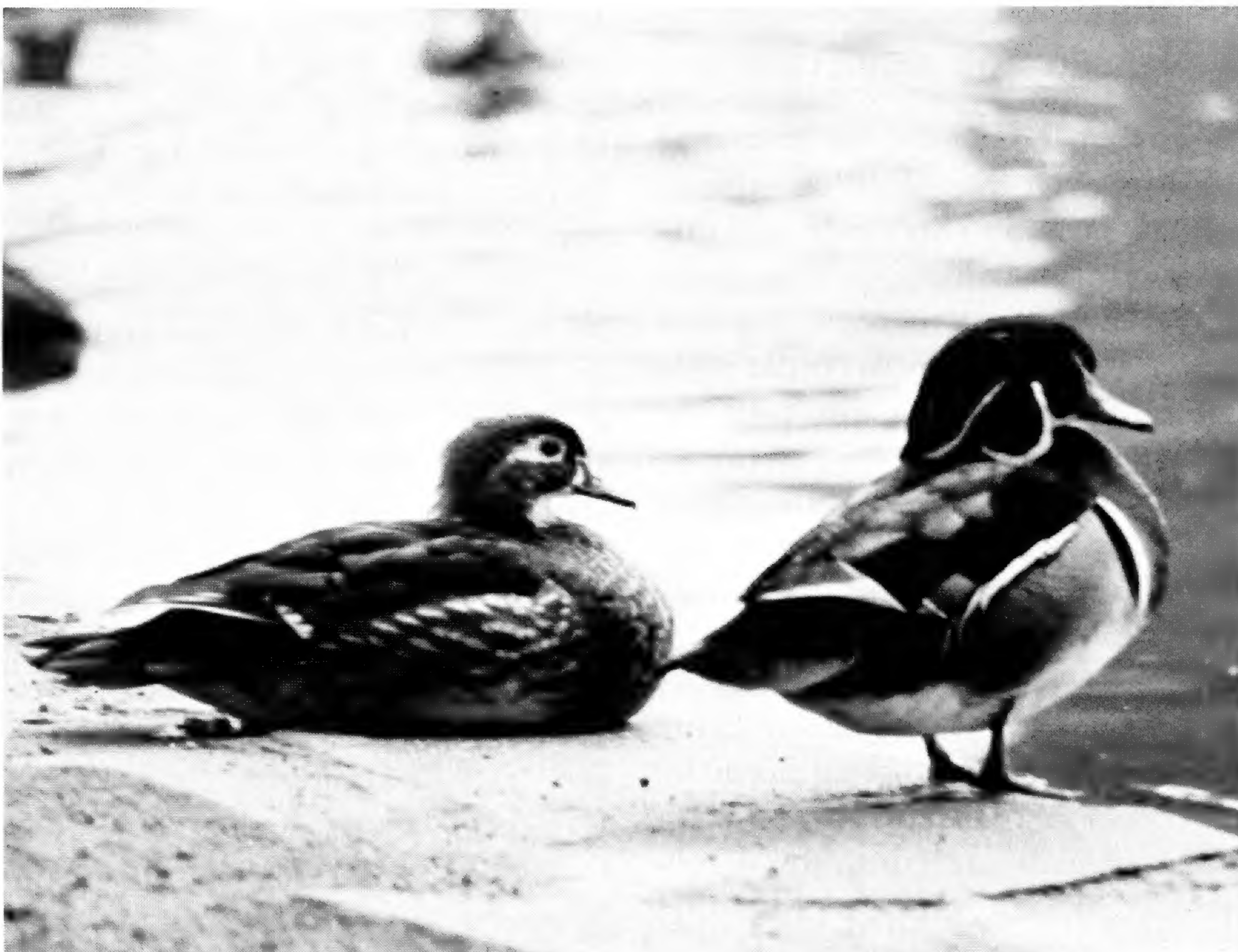
*One green heron perches on the Lasca Lagoon bridge as another in the upper photo skims across the water.*





as they busily bob around Lasca Lagoon and you'll see why.

Not only are the birds at the Arboretum beautiful, this year they are especially plentiful. If Nature is kind, these unusual transients may become regular visitors to the Arboretum grounds.



Jim Johnson

*A pair of wood ducks rests beside Lasca Lagoon during a spring stopover at the Arboretum.*

## SELLOUT CROWD ATTENDS FIRST GARDEN SEMINAR

A SELLOUT CROWD of enthusiastic gardeners attended the first of three all-day seminars at the Los Angeles State and County Arboretum on Feb. 23. Most of the 100 people there were members of the California Arboretum Foundation, not because of any formal restriction, but simply because members filled the classes when they were given the opportunity to make advance reservations.

"Members came from all over," said Wendy Sekovich, Arboretum education specialist and program coordinator. "We had people from the San Fernando Valley on the west to San Bernardino to the east and Long Beach on the south," she added.

The level of information as presented by the six gardening experts seemed to be just right for the audience. Terms such as microclimate, compost, bud graft and anti-siphon valve fell on the ears of gardeners who already knew something about

the subjects and were eager to learn more. Judging by the energetic tone of conversations during intermissions, everyone was anxious to go home and put the newly acquired information to use in his or her own

landscape.

The rest of the spring series is also filled, and many people are already pressing Ms. Sekovich for information about plans for subsequent seminars.



Joe Erby

*After learning about irrigation in theory, gardening seminar students get to handle the hardware.*



## ARBORETUM CLIPPINGS CHEER DEPRESSED ZOO GORILLAS

**A**PES ARE CONSIDERED to be among the most intelligent of animals, perhaps second to only man and dolphins. In the wilds there are plenty of real-life situations occurring that tend to keep the average gorilla busy, certainly not bored. But pity the captive gorilla.

According to Laine Courtney, an official ape observer at the Los Angeles County Zoo, gorillas are easily bored and can drift into a state of listless depression. Imagine, they almost never leave their constant living quarters, never interacting normally with other animals.

Zoo officials are currently experimenting to see if a more varied diet would lift the apes' spirits and various plants have been tried in an attempt to determine the most appealing delicacies. Mrs. Courtney said that impressive results have been recorded since the program began six months ago. Data are constantly being compiled not only in areas such as the types of food the apes prefer but their favorite colors as well. This is where the Arboretum plays a major role.

It was Mrs. Courtney who initially approached Director Francis Ching with a proposal to collect plant cuttings to see if the apes liked the different new tastes. Mr. Ching was delighted that the Arboretum was asked to participate and promised full cooperation.

One reason that the Arboretum was selected over other noted botanic gardens is mostly because the zoo cannot use any plants or trees that have been treated with systemic chemicals. The Arboretum doesn't use toxic chemicals on the vegetation in question.

So each Wednesday morning a zoo representative stops by the Arboretum and picks up from one to four large plastic bags full of clippings collected by Arboretum gardener

Kenji Tokushige.

Lately the gorillas have sampled passion vine, roses, banana and grape leaves (but not the fruit) and their favorite, paperleaf mulberry, said Mrs. Courtney.

"They really go for the diversity, all the different tastes. Our youngest gorilla is seven years old and he prefers roses. Not just the flower, but the stem, the thorns, the whole thing," she added.

Another of the more interesting results of this study was in the field of color preference and differentiation. "When we first started experimenting we were kidding around to see if they preferred leaves and flowers of any particular color. Now that we've observed them for awhile we definitely think that they do indeed prefer certain colors to others,

especially yellow and certain whites," she explained.

An experiment with regard to the psychological effect of different colors on the apes is still just an unproven hypothesis. The theory, if proven, would state that apes are affected by certain colors in much the same way as humans. It is now generally accepted that red aggravates humans while blues tend to induce a calm, peaceful state of mind in most people.

Thanks in part to the Arboretum, these and many other experiments will provide previously unknown answers to questions about apes and other primates. As an understandably pleased Laine Courtney puts it, "So far, it's a very surprising experiment that's working out very, very well."



LuAnn Munns

*Apes at the Los Angeles zoo will soon be munching on the twigs that Kenji Tokushige is gathering from a strawberry tree (Arbutus unedo).*



# Figs at the Arboretum

By EDWARD MURRAY



**M**OST OF THE ROUGHLY 800 trees, shrubs and vines in the tropical fig genus could be grown in Southern California. E. J. H. Corner reported some 470 species in the Australasian-Asian region alone with the rest found in Africa and tropical America. Milky sap is found in most species. The unusual fruit, a fleshy, pear-shaped receptacle or fig, is most often fertilized by only one species of wasp. This fact is of great interest to the scientists who study insects, especially wasps. The wasp enters through the small hole at the top of the fig, unknowingly bringing along pollen from another fig, and incidentally pollinating the stigmas while finding a place to deposit eggs for the next generation. This mutually beneficial relationship between the fig and the wasp has intrigued scientists and amateurs for decades.

The most familiar of the *Ficus* vines is the climbing fig (*F. pumila*) which readily clings to buildings, walls and fences as well as tree trunks. This fig makes a fine ground-cover except that it tends to climb any shrub, tree or wall within reach. As a vine it is unsurpassed on the north-facing side of a building. The delicate tracery of the small, rounded leaves of its juvenile foliage is in contrast with the much coarser, larger and thicker adult foliage on

flowering and fruiting branches. Apparently the plant needs to gain only a very few feet of altitude to permit the adult growth to appear. At the Arboretum the creeping fig is used both inside and outside the west wall of the tropical greenhouse. Here one may observe both the adult

and the juvenile growth.

The tree form is the most common within the genus. One of the most popular weeping trees is the Benjamin fig (*F. benjamina*). Actually it is the cultivar 'Exotica' that is most often noticed in Los Angeles County. There is another, more handsome



*The asymmetrical leaves of Roxburgh's fig (Ficus auriculata) are about one and one-half feet long by a foot wide.*





The stout branches of the sycamore fig (*Ficus sycomorus*) on Tallac Knoll are feathered with immature fruits that will never develop further because the wasp that pollinates them does not live in Southern California.

cultivar, *F. benjamina* 'Variegata,' which should be more widely grown because most of the leaves are cream with some green variegation or mottling. This makes for a very striking color contrast against the background of preponderant greens in the landscape.

Another beautifully variegated fig is the clown fig (*F. aspera* 'Parcellii'), that is often mistakenly called *F. parcellii*. Its leaves are handsomely marbled cream and green; in fact there are two shades of green, a pale, gray-green and a deeper, medium matte green. There is also a soft, felty-hairy feel to the obliquely based leaves. In the shade on Tallac Knoll it has developed into a beautiful small tree quite well-suited to the small suburban garden. Some shade and protection are recommended for it to succeed in our climate.

Roxburgh's fig (*F. auriculata*) is a small to medium-sized tree whose immense leaves have a few small teeth along the leaf margin. These ever-green leaves create a bold, tropical look. There is no confusing this large-leaved fig with the other trees in the fig collection.



As the climbing fig (*Ficus pumila*) clammers upward, coarse adult foliage replaces the smaller, round juvenile leaves.

Of the shrubs, the most commonly cultivated worldwide is the common edible fig (*F. carica*) which may be used as a tub plant or as a large, deciduous shrub or small tree for the home orchard. In California there are usually two crops: the first comes in June from last season's growth; the second crop comes from August to November on the current season's growth. One may find it necessary to cover the shrub or small tree with mosquito netting to keep the birds from devouring the figs. Plant young figs in wire baskets to protect the roots from pocket gophers. Three of the better cultivars for the home garden are 'Blue Celeste' whose fruit resists spoilage, 'Genoa' which performs well in the home garden and 'Mission' whose black-purple figs are borne on large trees.

The Indian laurel fig (*F. microcarpa*), native to the Indo-Malayan region of southern and southeastern Asia, is used as a heavily sheared street tree in Glendora, Pasadena and Hollywood. If allowed to grow on its own it can become a large, tall tree. The common cultivar is 'Nitida' with dense foliage and a more upright growth habit. Its leaves are a shiny green and the leaf-tips are bluntly pointed. It was once called *F. retusa* 'Nitida.' Fortunately the name 'microcarpa' (meaning small-fruited) aptly describes the decidedly small figs of the Indian laurel fig.

The Peepul or Bo tree (*F. religiosa*) is the sacred Indian tree beneath which Gautama Buddha is said to have received divine inspiration. This species may live to be 2,000 to 3,000 years old. A Bo tree planted at Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka is known to have been planted in the year 288 B.C. An almost continuous record has been kept of this particular tree and the steps that have been taken to preserve it through the successive centuries. In the village of Dean-Pitya in Sri Lanka over 100 huts stand in the shade of one Bo tree.



The tree is hardy in Southern California but it grows better in the higher humidity of Florida and Hawaii. At the Arboretum there is a nice specimen in the bowl on top of Tallac Knoll. Look for the fig with very long, slender leaf tips.

The sycamore fig (*F. sycomorus*) not only has its own wasp for pollination but was known in Biblical days as one of the few broad-leaved evergreen trees that could be cultivated in Palestine. In both the Old Testament of the Jews and the New Testament of the Christians there is mention of the sycamore fig. In fact, a rather short man named Zaccheus purportedly climbed a sycamore fig in order to catch a glimpse of Jesus. The best tree of this species at the Arboretum is in the circle atop Tallac Knoll.

In the Virginia Robinson Gardens in Beverly Hills there are several trees that appear to be Watkin's fig (*F. watkinsiana*) displaying aerial roots which eventually reach the ground to help support the heavy limbs. The medium-sized leaves of this Australian native are a handsome dark green and the smooth trunk is gray. The combination of higher humidity and temperatures that are warmer in winter and cooler in summer near the Pacific Ocean probably accounts for the aerial roots in Beverly Hills. In Arcadia it is drier and few aerial roots form.

The Arboretum has a very fine collection of figs primarily due to the efforts and generosity of Dr. Ira J. Condit who was a professor of horticulture at the Citrus Experiment Station of the University of California at Riverside. Dr. Condit is well-known for his study of the cultivated figs and his numerous articles and books on the subject. His book *Ficus; the exotic species* (1969) is considered the "Bible" for horticulturists who grow figs. Dr. Condit also wrote about the common cultivated fig (*F. carica*) and its numerous cultivars.



Above: *Leaves of the Bo tree (Ficus religiosa).*

Below: *Aerial roots of a fig that is probably Ficus watkinsiana.*

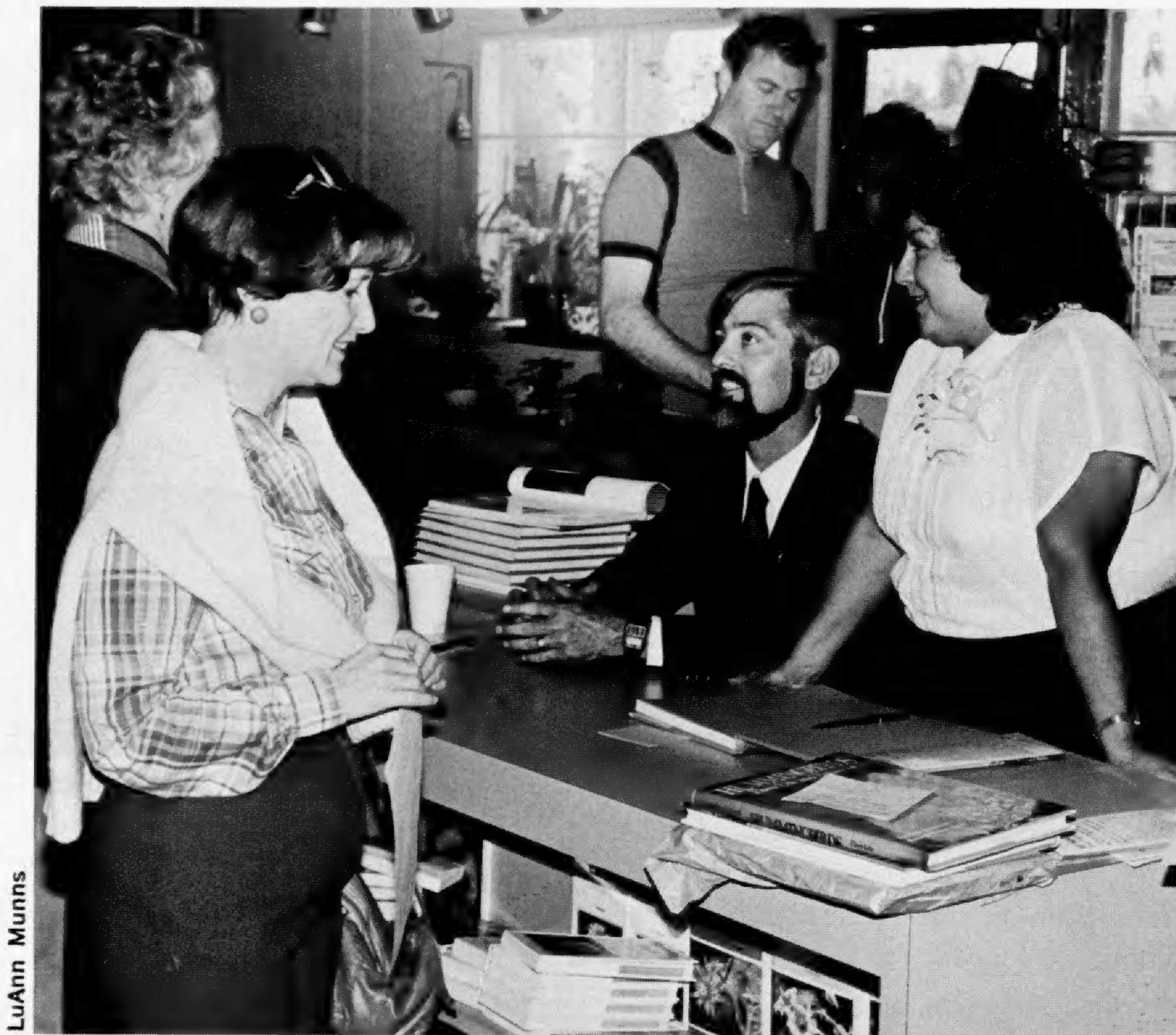


A visit to Tallac Knoll to see the variety of fig trees would be very rewarding. The figs are located along the tram road west of the grove of native oak trees.

*Dr. Murray, who obtained his PhD at the Pennsylvania State University, is a staff biologist at the Los Angeles State and County Arboretum. (Photos by LuAnn Munns)*



Off to a flying start Robert Tyrrell (seated) and his wife, Esther, talk to admirers about their book "Hummingbirds; Their Life and Behavior" during an autograph party in the Gift Shop on March 3. The Tyrrells were featured guests at the Arboretum's first-ever book party, which turned out to be even more successful than anticipated. According to Gift Shop manager, Norma Johanson, the authors signed 144 copies of their first book for the kick off party.



LuAnn Munns

## LOS ANGELES STATE AND COUNTY ARBORETUM, Arcadia

- MAY 5 — 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.**  
BALDWIN BONANZA XV  
California Arboretum Foundation
- MAY 19 — 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.**  
Epiphyllum Show  
Epiphyllum Society of America
- MAY 25, 26, 27 — 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.**  
Bonsai Show  
Santa Anita Bonsai Society
- JUNE 1, 2 — 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.**  
Satsuki and Azalea Show  
Satsuki and Azalea Society
- JUNE 8, 9 — 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.**  
Gladiolus Show  
Southern California Gladiolus Society
- JUNE 15 through 30 —**  
9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.  
Mixed media art show  
Women Artists of the American West
- JULY 6, 7 — 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.**  
Cactus and Succulent Show  
Cactus & Succulent Society of America
- JULY 13, 14 — 1 to 4:30 p.m. Saturday**  
9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Sunday  
Miniature Rose Show  
San Gabriel Valley Rose & Horticultural Society
- JULY 20, 21 — 1 to 4:30 p.m. Saturday**  
9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Sunday  
Begonia Show  
San Gabriel Valley Begonia Society

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

MAY, JUNE, JULY 1985

- JULY 22 through 28 —**  
9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.  
Art Show  
Mid-Valley Arts League  
*All events sponsored by the California Arboretum Foundation*

### DESCANSO GARDENS, La Canada

- APRIL 26 through MAY 30 —**  
9 a.m. to 5 p.m.  
Artist of the Month  
Lynn Fash
- MAY 11, 12 — Noon to 5 p.m. Saturday**  
9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday  
Geranium Show and Sale  
International Geranium Society
- MAY 18, 19 — 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.**  
Chrysanthemum Sale  
Glendale Chrysanthemum Society
- MAY 26 through JUNE 2 —**  
9 a.m. to 5 p.m.  
Antique Doll and Toy Exhibit  
Museum of Childhood
- JUNE 8 — 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.**  
Hemerocallis and Amaryllis Show  
Southern California Hemerocallis and Amaryllis Society
- JUNE 22 through 30 — 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.**  
Bonsai Show  
Descanso Bonsai Society  
*All events sponsored by the Descanso Gardens Guild*

### SOUTH COAST BOTANIC GARDEN, Palos Verdes Peninsula

- MAY 4, 5 — 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.**  
FIESTA DE FLORES  
South Coast Botanic Garden Foundation
- MAY 12 — 2 p.m.**  
Special Mothers Day Program  
El Camino College Band
- MAY 18, 19 — 1 to 4:30 p.m. Saturday**  
10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Sunday  
Rose Show  
South Coast Rose Society
- JUNE 1, 2 — 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Sat.**  
10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday  
Fuchsia Show  
South Coast Branch of the National Fuchsia Society
- JUNE 8, 9 — 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.**  
Cactus and Succulent Show  
South Coast Cactus & Succulent Society
- JUNE 23**  
Book Signing Party  
"Hummingbirds: Their Life and Behavior"  
Robert and Esther Tyrrell
- JUNE 30 — 2 p.m.**  
"Learn to Have Fun Arranging Flowers from Your Own Garden in an Informal Fashion," a lecture  
Dorothy Copeland  
*All events sponsored by the South Coast Botanic Garden Guild.*