



SPRING NEWSLETTER

Enhancing public awareness of the importance of maintaining and restoring the unique natural habitat within Chino Hills State Park through interpretive and educational activities

AT A GLANCE

- Castor Bean - Not our friend
- How not to be a Search & Rescue Customer
- Interpreter's Corner
- Odds & Ends

The Health Dangers and Invasive Impact of Castor Bean (*Ricinus communis*)

The Chino Hills State Park ecosystem is home to a large array of native flora and fauna, but invasive species can have a serious impact to the native flora and fauna. In addition, invasive species can have hidden health danger. One invasive plant that unfortunately poses a serious threat to the delicate habitat within CHSP is the Castor Bean plant. While its striking foliage and rapid growth may seem harmless, this plant is far from benign.

Health Dangers of Castor Bean

One of the most alarming aspects of Castor Bean is it is extremely toxic. The plant contains ricin, a highly potent toxin found in its seeds. If ingested, ricin can cause severe symptoms such as vomiting, diarrhea, dehydration, seizures, and even death. The danger extends beyond humans; native animals are also vulnerable to poisoning if they consume the seeds.

Beyond its well-known toxicity, Castor Bean plants can also cause skin irritation upon contact. Handling the plant can cause skin irritation, making it a hazard for park visitors and wildlife alike. Some individuals experience allergic reactions to the plant's pollen, leading to respiratory issues. It is important that you know the features of this plant and what it looks like so you can avoid it.

Impact on Native Plant Species

Castor Bean is an aggressive invader, particularly in riparian areas, chaparral, and sagebrush habitats; all prime habitats in CHSP. It thrives in disturbed soils and spreads rapidly, forming dense Castor Bean clusters that shade out native seedlings and groundcovers. This crowding out of native vegetation disrupts the food chain, depriving pollinators and herbivores of essential resources.

Castor Bean's ability to self-seed aggressively makes it a particularly horrible invader. The plant's spiny seed pods burst open, forcefully dispersing seeds over distances, allowing it to colonize new areas rapidly. Once established, it outcompetes native shrubs and grasses, reducing biodiversity and altering soil composition.

Wildlife & Bird Impacts

The unchecked spread of Castor Bean reduces habitat quality for native wildlife. Birds and small mammals that rely on native plants for food and shelter may struggle to find adequate food sources in areas dominated by this invasive species. Also, the toxic seeds pose a direct threat to animals that unknowingly consume them. Many animals instinctively avoid Castor Bean due to its toxicity, but accidental ingestion remains a risk. Birds and animals may unknowingly consume seeds, leading to poisoning.

Managing the Spread

To protect California's wildlands, early detection and removal of Castor Bean are crucial. Hand-pulling young plants by professionals with appropriate protective clothing, applying targeted herbicides, and restoring native vegetation can help curb its spread. Furthermore, if you are a Park visitor, your awareness and education about the dangers of this invasive species will also play a key role in preserving the Park's natural beauty.



How not to be a Search & Rescue Customer

Here in Southern California, the search and rescue incidents you often hear or read about often occur in the mountains of the Angeles or San Bernardino National Forests. It makes sense, these contain high altitude mountains with many terrain hazards, in addition to extreme alpine conditions during the winter months. However, just because Chino Hills State Park may not have high mountains or seemingly endless wilderness terrain, does not mean the Park is immune to search and rescue efforts.

In the recent past, a female hiker in the park was bitten by a rattlesnake. Fire department personnel provided the first response, but soon, a sheriff's rescue helicopter was required to hoist the victim for quicker medical aid. On another occasion, sheriff's search and rescue ground personnel searched the Park throughout the night for a missing boy.

Luckily, soon after sunrise, and with the help of helicopter crews, he was located safe and uninjured. These are just a couple of examples of people needing assistance in CHSP over the years. Most ended with a positive outcome, but over the years have also been a few fatalities within the Park. The bottom line is CHSP is definitely large enough to have its own set of hazards that require a search and rescue response.

So, what can you do to help lessen the odds that you will be a search and rescue "customer"? Here are a few easy-to-follow suggestions to make sure you get back from your day at the Park safely and without a search and rescue response.

Have a hiking plan

- Tell someone where you will be hiking and when you expect to return.
- Know the name of the trail in CHSP you will be hiking on and have a map.
- Never go off trail.
- Think about the weather; If it is extremely hot, hold off for cooler temps.
- Know where you are going and know what kind of terrain you will be hiking on.
- Don't hike alone - it's safer and more fun to do the trail with a friend.
- Know your limitations. Don't do more than you are able.

Have the essentials

- Bring plenty of water (One quart for short hikes - much more for longer hikes).
- For longer hikes, bring high energy snacks and food, such as sports bars.
- A back pack is preferable for you to keep your hands free while hiking.

- A cell phone, and if you have one, a personal locator beacon device.
- Be prepared for weather changes, layer your clothing.
- Wear appropriate footwear, preferably hiking boots.
- Bring a hat, sunblock, and basic first aid supplies.

What to do when you need help

- S.T.O.P. (Stop, Think, Observe, Plan). Your brain is your #1 survival tool.
- If you are lost or injured, do not panic.
- If you need help, first try your cell phone, if not working, shout loudly and wave your arms to get another person's attention.
- If there is more than one in your party, send someone for help.
- Know your location. Look for the nearest trail marker or any noticeable landmark such as a bench, wash or tree.
- Identify the emergency situation (Be specific regarding the injury condition).



Interpreter's Corner

Campfire with Friends: A New Tradition at Chino Hills State Park

This spring, Chino Hills State Park launched the Campfire with Friends program at our amphitheater—a warm nod to the golden days of classic family camping, when evenings were spent around a glowing fire enjoying songs, skits, and s'mores together. Now, on the first Saturday of each month, one hour before the park closes, visitors of all ages—families, friends, and solo explorers—gather with park staff and volunteers for an evening of laughter, learning, and community. From interactive games and singalongs to stories about the natural and cultural heritage of the park, every program ends on a sweet note with a gooey s'more for each guest.

Staying overnight? Make the most of your visit with a stroll around the nearby historic barn and cattle chute. And if you're looking to keep the fun going, join us throughout the month for Junior Ranger, Shrub Club, and Community Days—a full lineup of hands-on, family-friendly adventures!

Odds & Ends

Check out our social media for current information about the Park at:

<https://www.facebook.com/10CHSPIA>

<https://www.instagram.com/chspinterpretiveassociation/>

Dogs are welcome in the Park on the paved Bane Canyon Road. While dogs are not allowed on any of the dirt trails in the Park, bring your pup out on Bane Canyon Road while still enjoying the Park.

Do you know of any groups that may want to support the Park? Does your employer have a matching donation program that you can target towards CHSPIA? Let us know, or if you have any questions, please email eric@chinohillsstatepark.org.

Reach out to us

For questions, feedback, article ideas, or story contributions, email info@chinohillsstatepark.org.

If you want to volunteer at the park, for more information go to:

<https://app.betterimpact.com/PublicOrganization/9c092e9f-8c6e-46e9-b19f-48d3f4f3a41c/1>

If you are looking for great gift ideas and want to support CHSPIA, stop by the gift store at the Discovery Center.

Help the Park and make a tax-deductible donation to CHSPIA at www.ChinoHillsStatePark.org or at this QR Code:

