

## Ojai Valley Defense Fund hosts field trip

The Ojai Valley Defense Fund hosted a special day for valley residents on April 3, exploring some unique activities in and around neighboring Santa Paula.

The invitation was extended to all valley residents, and the first 40 to respond enjoyed a day of friendship and adventure. The group's first stop was to Santa Paula's Steckel Park, where longtime caretaker, John Eckert, provided a historical overview and explanation of the park's aviary. A wide variety of birds, including peacocks, lovebirds, and an animated cockatoo named "Julie," greeted the group with squawks and coos.

OVDf guests headed from there into the velvety green and yellow hillsides of Balcom Canyon, for a

private tour at the Matilija Native Plant nursery.

Nursery owner Bob Sussman, a passionate, knowledgeable, and fascinating mathematician-turned-nursery-proprietor toured the grounds with the group, explaining how he propagates native plants — including with principles of fire ecology. Nursery offerings include native trees, ground cover, bushes, milkweed for monarch butterflies, and stunning iris and iris hybrids.

Guests were fed a gourmet picnic lunch prepared by OVDf donors, purchased plants at a generous discount from the nursery, then headed off to see the Alpacas at Windy Hill Farm.

Owner Cindy Harris led a tour of the grounds, including details about alpaca fleece farming. The

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help veterans recovering from post-traumatic stress disorder.

The Ojai Valley Defense Fund will continue to invite valley residents to take part in local adventures; both as a way to share its commitment as an organization to the environmental well-being of the Ojai Valley, and also to show valley residents what grand adventures await us just outside the valley. For more information, [www.ovdf.org](http://www.ovdf.org); to join the contact list, follow them on Facebook, Instagram, or by emailing [info@ovdf.org](mailto:info@ovdf.org).

Alpaca farm is a local nonprofit that engages student volunteers and includes the Good Shepherd Alpaca Sanctuary, the mission of which is to



Julie the Cockatoo at Steckel Park.



Photos by Stephen Adams  
Ojai Valley Defense Fund shoppers pick out their favorite plants at the Matilija Native Plants Nursery.



A curious alpaca greets Ojai Valley Defense Fund visitors.



Carolyn Vondriska is delighted with her native iris find.

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