

**Letting Nature Be**  
**By**  
**Dan White July 21, 2025**

Recently, I wrote the following to the membership of the Friends of Madera Canyon in our monthly newsletter:

*We were preparing to move things around in our yard when we discovered the quail's nest. One dozen speckled eggs underneath a work bench. We had seen a female going back and forth in the area but never dreamed that she could have wedged herself into that small space enough to sit on the nest.*

*Not knowing how long we would be waiting for hatch day (and they would all hatch on the same day), we delayed our rearranging. Three days later, we saw fluff balls chasing after a female, a male atop the fence above keeping watch. But we counted only six chicks. When we moved the work bench a few days later, we saw that the other six eggs were still in the nest, intact. Was this partial hatch Nature's response to our dry winter and spring?*

*Over the next several days, when we looked into the yard, it was hard to miss the frenetic little balls of feathers as they stuck close to mom. It was also hard to miss that the six became five which turned into four, then three, then two. When time to fly away occurred, there was only one little chick going out into the world beyond our yard.*

*Quail chicks do not have a corner on being cute. The young of many species elicit "so darn cute" from many of us. Quail chicks also are not the only cute little things that comprise some of the diet for roadrunners, hawks, and a variety of other critters just needing a meal. Intellectually, we all understand "the Circle of Life," but sometimes the urge to protect the little guys is strong.*

*We were in the Canyon late last month to work on the bench project. My wife, Judy, is one of the education docents, and as we walked the Proctor Loop, she took note of aspects of the natural wonders to which the 4<sup>th</sup> graders are introduced on their field trips to the Canyon that were obviously stressed by the absence of rain. We were not in any position to alter the situation— there is no drip system or other way to provide needed water. All we could do was hope for rain.*

*It helps to remember that Nature is resilient, accustomed over the millennia to ebbs and flows. 2025 is not the first dry year in the history of Madera Canyon nor will it be the last. As for the chicks, when a pair parent a dozen, if they all survived, we would soon be awash in quail. As humans, we have the capacity to feel emotions about conditions we wish did not exist or the matter-of-factness of predators and prey. So, we are obliged to remember that nature bats last, and that it is up to us to let nature be.*

*That means we need to leave only footprints and take away photos and memories.*

Among our friends are several people who have been diagnosed with, and survived, some form of cancer. Included in that group are folks for whom the success in overcoming the disease has depended upon treatments discovered by researchers over time. We also have friends who have

heart conditions kept in check through medications resulting from discoveries made in research labs.

It is fair to conclude that cancer and heart issues are part of nature, abnormalities though they might be. Before treatments came along, the course of nature—letting nature be—would have ended the lives of those affected. It is also fair to conclude that the women and men involved in the research resulting in treatments and cures have not been content, in this instance, to let nature be.

People of a Certain Age, have you discovered, as have I, how often what seems to be an absolute has some pretty big exceptions? In the context of a forest or a lake or life in the ocean, letting nature be seems an important means of ensuring that we, as the current stewards of the earth, pass along to future generations the opportunity to enjoy the natural world as we have been able to. In the context of finding ways to extend life beyond what might be the expected outcome of nature taking its course, I am thrilled that there are people who are not content to give in to nature.

The plants in Madera Canyon and the quail population, insofar as we know, do not think about their position in the natural world. Humans do and have done for our entire history. In all likelihood, figuring out our relationship with nature or whether there are absolutes or not will be the lot of humanity well after we are gone.

In the meanwhile, is there not comfort in knowing that *as a species, Gambel's Quail is likely to survive and that someday soon, the Creek will be flowing again and the flora will be lush, serenaded by the songs of the myriad birds who call the Canyon home, even if only when migrating?*

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