



Thursday, June 21, 2001

FAMILY

For Cool Fun, Night Is Right

Stargazing, anyone? How about bat-watching? It all begins when the sun goes down.

By BRENDA REES, Special to The Times

It's summertime, and the warm evenings are perfect for exploring the "dark" side of Southern California.

When the sun goes down, many families opt for some safe outdoor fun that brings them a little closer to nature. These events happen only when the stars come out.

Stargazing

At Griffith Park Observatory (2800 E. Observatory Road, Los Angeles), visitors can check out the heavens with the observatory's telescope, which is opened to the public 7 to 9:45 p.m. daily. One Saturday a month, local astronomy clubs hold "star parties" on the front lawn, where members set up telescopes and offer free viewing to the public. During star parties, the grounds are open until 11 p.m. instead of 10 p.m. The next star parties are Saturday, July 28 and Aug. 25. For information about star parties, contact the Los Angeles Astronomical Society at (213) 673-7355.

The Ventura County Astronomical Society holds public star programs at the Charles Temple Observatory at Moorpark College (7075 Campus Road, Moorpark). Each program begins at 8:30 p.m. with a short slide presentation, followed by looking through the observatory telescope and members' scopes. Programs are appropriate for children 8 and older. Upcoming programs: June 30, Mars; July 28, meteor showers; Aug. 25, the moon. Call the society for more information: (805) 520-9666.

During the summer, the Orange County Astronomers offer public programs at several wilderness parks. Viewing starts about half an hour after sunset. Upcoming dates and locations: Saturday at Ranch Mission Viejo Land Conservancy, June 30 and Aug. 11 at Riley Wilderness Park, July 14 at Crystal Cove State Park and July 21 and Aug. 18 at Palomar Mountain. For directions and information, call the society at (714) 751-6867.

Hikes and Campfire Fun

TreePeople (12601 Mulholland Drive, Beverly Hills) lets young and old howl at the moon during full-and nearly full-moon hikes (July 3, Aug. 3). After the walk, visitors are treated to entertainment in the amphitheater. Call (818) 753-4600 for hike times.

Check out night flyers at Franklin Canyon Ranch (2600 Franklin Canyon, Beverly Hills) during bird walks held July 14 and Aug. 11 at 7 p.m. At the nearby Sooky Goldman Nature Center, kids 8 and older can explore "Night Crawlers" on July 21 and Aug. 18 at 7:30 p.m. Call (818) 858-7272 for more information.

A new Saturday series at the Satwiwa Cultural Center (4126 Potrero Road, Newbury Park) has Native American representatives sharing traditional stories, songs and dances around a campfire. The programs are 5 to 9 p.m. during the summer. Call (805) 495-4754.

The moon is your guide at a series of evening hikes at Eaton Canyon (1750 N. Altadena Drive, Pasadena). Hikes start at 8 p.m. with a requested \$2 donation. Moonlight hikes are July 6, Aug. 3 and 31. Also, twilight programs 7 to 9 p.m. offer crafts activities, storytelling and songs around the campfire for a \$3 donation. Programs are June 30, July 28 and Aug. 25. For reservations, call (626) 398-5420.

The newly opened Stough Canyon Nature Center (2300 Walnut Ave., Burbank) offers "Story Time Under the Stars" (June 30 at 6:30 p.m.) and family nights (July 14, Aug. 18 at 6:30 p.m.), during which kids make ice cream and learn about stars. In addition, the center has easy full-moon hikes on July 5 and Aug. 4 at 7:30 p.m. Call (818) 238-5440.

The Nature Conservancy at the Irvine Co. Open Space Reserve has a variety of locations for evening hikes, so it's best to call ahead for specific directions and park access. Kids 5 and older might enjoy the easy 2 1/2-mile hikes (July 6; Aug. 3 and 18); older kids might be up for the 5-mile twilight hikes (July 14 and 28, Aug. 25). Experienced bikers (at least 16 years old) can join the evening mountain bike rides on July 6 and 21; Aug. 3 and 18. For hike times and more information, call (714) 832-7478.

Do they really fly into your hair? Learn about bats in a series of walks offered by the Sea and Sage chapter of the National Audubon Society at the San Joaquin Wildlife Sanctuary (off Michelson Drive between Jamboree Road and Harvard Avenue in Irvine). After a short program, families tour the nearby marsh and use bat detectors to track the creatures. Walks are held 7:15 to 9 p.m. and cost \$10 per adult, \$5 for children younger than 10. Bat walks are Wednesday and June 29, July 18 and 20, Aug. 15 and 17. To register, call the Audubon House at (949) 261-7963.

The Nature of the Night series at Riley Wilderness Park (30952 Oso Parkway, Coto de Caza) offers programs that feature snakes (July 14), owls (Aug. 25) and "Things That Go Bump in the Night" (July 28, Sept. 8). Programs are 8 10 p.m. and cost \$4 per person. Call (949) 459-1687.

Evening Rides

Catch the Fillmore and Western Railway Co.'s diesel engine train for a spaghetti Western dinner, an evening of food and roaming cowboys telling stories and singing songs in the antique train cars. Spaghetti trains board the second Friday of every month at 6:30 p.m., pulling out of the station at 7:30 p.m. Adults \$40; kids younger than 12, \$20. Call (800) 773-8724 for reservations.

Saddle up at Sunset Ranch (3400 Beachwood Drive, Los Angeles) for two-hour evening horse rides through Griffith Park (\$40 per person). The dinner rides leave at sunset and take riders up and over the park to a Mexican restaurant and then back (\$35 per person). No reservations are taken for the Friday dinner rides; show up, pick a horse and go. Call (323) 464-9612.