

River View

By Janet Aird

It is a massive concrete trough built by the Army Corps of Engineers. The floor is dry much of the year, except for the stream flowing through a channel carved deep into the center. It looks sterile, harsh, unyielding. It is possibly the most citified river in the world.

In some places, dusty oleanders line the narrow path that separates the river from condominiums and commercial buildings. In others, the paths are wider, and beyond them the occasional rabbit scampers among the cactus, sage and wild mustard. Hundreds of red- and black-winged birds whirl and skim along the shallow water in a telepathic ballet. In still others, whimsical wrought iron gates and fences frame pocket parks landscaped with native flowers and trees. Even deep inside the concrete canyon, life abounds. Islands grow from the forbidding floor. The river has laid down stepping-stones to some.

On one of these miniature wildernesses, it is possible to imagine that the canyon does not exist. Whips of green willow branches drape down to the water's edge, so thick that they enclose the tiny

clearing within. Fluffy seeds float through the air. A nest lined with down lies hidden deep in the brush. Ducks paddle nearby, patrolling the shore. A sharp smell of decay comes from the black muck, the decay that will bring forth more life.

The Los Angeles River never stops flowing, never stops recreating itself. It is ours to discover in all its incarnations.

Things to Do

Friends of the Los Angeles River is looking for volunteers to help monitor water quality of the river and tributaries, including the Arroyo Seco. For information call 213-381-3570 or visit its website at www.folar.org.

The group sponsors river walks the third Sunday of every month, beginning at 4:30 p.m. and lasting 2-3 hours:

- * July 15—Lower Arroyo Seco: Meet at Montecito Heights Park at end of Mosher Ave., north of Ave. 42.
- * August 19—Chinatown Yards and Zanja Madre: Meet at corner of Solano and North Broadway.
- * September 16—Maywood River Park: Meet at the corner of 59th St. and Walker Ave. in Maywood.