

## **Welcome to Black Swan Ranch. Nestled at the base of Volcan Mountain in Wynola, California**

Wynola has been named "the banana belt" because of its interesting micro climate. With an elevation of 3600 ft., the winter temperatures are not as extreme as they are in surrounding areas like Julian and in the Laguna Mountains. This makes gardening a little less challenging than in the higher elevations. Wynola is located 6 miles NorthWest of Julian in Santa Ysabel and has a culture of it's own. Usually the summer temperatures are at least 10 degrees cooler than in the neighboring valley communities of Ramona making this an ideal place to live.

BSR is home to a bounty of wildlife. There are several species of birds that call the ranch home and where many choose to raise their chicks. There is a pair of Red Shouldered Hawks, a family of Mountain Blue Birds, Wild Turkeys, Turkey Vultures, Crows, Jays and Woodpeckers. We hear owls at night and find their pellets all over the grounds informing us that they are keeping the mouse, rat and even gopher population down in numbers. Many migratory birds stay with us while visiting this part of the world to take advantage of our fountains and bird baths that we keep fresh and cool for them. White Tailed Deer frequent the property to graze, drink and rest in the shade of the oaks during the hot summers. There are some critters I could do without, such as squirrels, moles and gophers as they make gardening a real challenge. Rattlesnakes are often found on the ranch and are not tolerated as they pose a danger to us all. The ranch is also visited by coyotes, fox, raccoons and a mountain lion, usually visiting at night when the dogs are inside and our other animals tucked safely in their barns. These nocturnal predators pass through leaving only occasional clues that are mostly picked up by the dogs.

The native vegetation here is some of the most beautiful that San Diego's back country has to offer. Manzanita, the common name for many species of the genus *Arctostaphylos*, thrives here. Some manzanita species are among the rarest plants in the world. The wood is often collected for its unusual shapes and given the nickname "mountain driftwood". Manzanita is protected due to over harvesting for many years. Toyon also grows very well here. This native shrub was used by indigenous people for food and as a stomach remedy although, the plant can be toxic if not prepared correctly. The bush grows tall and has beautiful red berries. In the 1920s, collecting toyon branches for Christmas became so popular in Los Angeles that the State passed a law forbidding collecting on public land or on any land not owned by the person picking any plant without the landowner's written permission. A variety of additional native plants are found growing on hillsides including sages, Monkey Flowers, Ceanothus, Chemise and many more. Oaks of several varieties

are abundant in the area, however the drought and the Golden Spotted Oak Borer have taken a toll on these giants. The outlook isn't very good but fortunately our oaks are holding up to the threat pretty well. Although not native, Lilacs are abundant in the area and folks come from all over to take the fragrant bundles back home with them. Lots of fruit varieties can be grown including apples, pears, cherries and some types of blueberries. Veggie gardens do well if protected from wildlife and short season varieties are used.

The ranch sits on 2.5 acres of usable flat land. Our large oaks, pine, cedars and junipers help shade the grounds. Large stands of manzanita line our property and surround a large meadow where native plantings are being added as water allows. The end goal for the ranch is having little to no supplemental irrigation, (the exception being the veggie garden and a few fruit trees of course). Wild Fire is a reality in this part of the country and Wynola is the classic Wildland/Urban Interface. Keeping fire fuel down is paramount and the goats help out with this.

The pace is slower here than it is in the city, the sky is a deeper blue, the stars more plentiful and bright. It is quiet and peaceful where one has the ability to stretch out and take in all that Mother Nature offers up on a daily basis. It is truly a gift to live on Black Swan Ranch with Tim and our critters.