



Public Garden

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WATER LILIES

WINGED WONDERS

BOTANICAL BOOKSHELF

PERENNIALS

GARDEN PROFESSIONAL SPOTLIGHT

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TELL US ABOUT YOUR JOURNEY IN THE GARDEN INDUSTRY.

My name is Kekoa Cantwell and I'm the Tribal Climate Resilience Specialist for the San Diego Botanic Garden (SDBG). My journey into the world of public gardens happened by chance; I found my job posted on the internet and immediately applied after reading the description. Some context on my life before SDBG: I graduated from San Diego State University with a Bachelor of Liberal Arts and Science degree in Sustainability in May 2024, and started working for SDBG in October 2024. My previous work throughout college encompassed conservation education and environmental services management, making my journey a bit unorthodox compared to my new colleagues. The knowledge and experience I've retained did allow for easier comprehension of the intentions and benefits of plant conservation, rare and endangered species stewardship, and other pillars of conservation my position interacts with. I'm very thankful for the opportunity to work for a great organization, and I'm especially grateful for the unique and amazing opportunities I've been presented with while facilitating collaborations between SDBG and our Indigenous partners.

TELL US ABOUT A RECENT PROJECT YOU WORKED ON.

A recent project that I enjoyed was coordinating a Plant Workshop with the Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians, and various partner conservation organizations including the



Morton Arboretum, Resource Conservation District, River Partners, San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance, and the U.S. Forest Service. The one-day workshop was coordinated with the intention to share information about plant surveys, native plant identification, habitat restoration, invasive species management, and seed collection and propagation. This included a field component with hands-on activities such as using the app 'Seek by iNaturalist' to discuss initiating field surveys and citizen science, followed by a series of presentations detailing various conservation engagements and how they may relate to Tribal conservation support. The day ended with Viejas' Environmental Department leading an activity for their local youth, sowing vegetable seeds in pots to take home.

WHAT DO YOU FIND TO BE THE MOST REWARDING THING ABOUT WORKING IN THIS FIELD?

One of the most rewarding aspects of working in this field is contributing to a network for conservation and seeing the culmination of that work manifest into real-world happenings, like the described workshop or the formation of new partnerships. For me, it's been so energizing being at the frontlines of bridging Western science-based conservation and Traditional Ecological Knowledge because I believe in the power of collective action. Through supporting botanical capacity development of our partner Tribal Nations and their governments, I've found myself at a nexus of positive change for plant conservation in San Diego County.