Wilson-Lee, a scholar of late medieval and early modern literatures as well as the history of print and libraries, has created a cabinet of wonders with this book. It encompasses the biographies of Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) and his son Hernando (1488–1539) and the saga of an extraordinary library “that would collect everything.” As a child, Hernando served the court as a page; at 13, he was a crew member on Columbus’s fourth voyage; as a young man, he ventured briefly in his father’s New World domain; and he was his father’s biographer. Wilson-Lee also brings to rich life the cultural milieu of the age—the rituals of court life and the political intrigues during the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella. But most of all, this is a biography of a library: having inherited his father’s collection, Hernando made it his mission to acquire every printed thing he could, traveling all over Europe to acquire 15,000–20,000 printed materials, including some images and music. The ravages of inheritance disputes and time has reduced the remaining number of items to less than 400. Wilson-Lee’s fascinating account brings back to wholeness “the largest private library of the day” while revealing the son of a renowned man as, among other things, a master librarian. Illus. Agent: Isobel Dixon, Blake Friedmann Literary Agency. (Mar.)

Wild LA: Explore the Amazing Nature In and Around Los Angeles

In introducing readers to the wild side of Los Angeles, this remarkable field guide from Higgins, who oversees the community science program at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles, and Pauly, the museum’s assistant curator of herpetology, reveals a surprisingly biodiverse urban landscape. The book’s first part discusses the natural history of the greater L.A. area and the forces that shaped its geography and fantastic variety of flora and fauna. The second part surveys 101 different species, with intriguing notes about each—for instance, that monarch butterflies, known for migrating to Mexico when temperatures drop, stay in L.A. even during colder months, since “winters are mild and food is available year round.” The book’s third section outlines 25 field trips, ranging from multiday opportunities in the Angeles National Forest to more relaxing bird-watching or kayaking forays along the surprisingly vibrant Los Angeles River or in local public parks. No matter how much one thinks one knows about L.A., this travel companion will shed new light on all that flourishes and flowers, or creeps and crawls in the vast urban-yet-still-wild sprawl of the city and surrounding area. (Mar.)