
Volume 17 No. 1 January 1997

NEXT CHAPTER MEETING

Wednesday, January 29th, 7:30 p.m. White Mountain Research Station, Bishop. Kirk Halford, Archaeologist for the BLM's Bishop Resource Area will present a slide show on the archaeology of the Dry Lakes Plateau, a prehistorically and floristically diverse volcanic plateau on the northern edge of the Bodie Hills.

Reminder: Bishop members please bring a treat to share.

NEXT CHAPTER BOARD MEETING

Tuesday, January 21, 7:00 p.m. at Doris Fredendall's residence in Big Pine. All chairpersons are welcome and encouraged to attend.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Another new year already! What happened to 1996? From the rain we have been getting in the past three months it is looking really good for a fine year of wildflowers. I sure hope the rains continue for the next few months as well. Now is the time to give Mark Bagley our new Field Trip Chair a call and volunteer to lead a field trip or two. Everyone loves to go on the field trips but we can't have our usual great array of trips if no one leads them (hint, hint). The flowers should be good in the Mohave and Death Valley this year and we have a couple of trips scheduled to visit those regions soon.

As you're out enjoying this spring's bloom keep your eyes out for ripe seeds. We will be having our first annual plant sale this year and we sure like to grow what we sell. It's great fun growing plants from native seed so I want everybody out there to get their green thumbs ready!

Our chapter is also looking for someone to take over poster sales. Vince has been doing it since the beginning of time and now it's time for somebody else to give him a break. It doesn't take a lot of time to do and our chapter can make some great revenue selling those posters.

That reminds me, how come I'm still the T-shirt salesperson? I've been trying to bow out of this position for quite some time. Anybody can do it because the shirts are so beautiful they sell themselves. If I can sell them you can too. If you are interested in these chair positions or any of the others just let me know. Have a great new year!

.....Scott Hetzler

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Upcoming Events

Sierra Spring Sojourn

The Bristlecone Chapter is sponsoring its second annual Sierra Spring Sojourn, a flower filled weekend of field trips, slide programs and camaraderie all in the splendid eastern Sierra region. The dates for this year's event will be **May 16-18**.

We will be using the facilities of Camp Inyo at the Bernasconi Education Center, located in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada just west of Big Pine, at an elevation of 5,000 (1525m).

In addition to sleeping dorms, participants will be allowed to park their own RV's (no-hookups), or erect tents on the grounds. Motels are also available. The number of participants will be limited and available on a first-come, first-served basis, so sign up early!

We are looking forward to a great wildflower display this year thanks to early and abundant rain and are planning a variety of field trips to cover the diversity of our area. We have lots of new trips in store including a botanical sketching trip and some of your old favorites.

For further information regarding registration please send a self-addressed envelope to:

Kathleen Nelson
Rt. 1, Box 45c
Gerkin Road
Bishop, CA 93514

Bristlecone Chapter Spring Field Trips

It's still early in our rainy season, but it looks promising for a good display of wildflowers in the desert this spring. Join us as we check it out in March and April. Additional trips are being planned for May through October. Look for details in the March newsletter. If you would like to lead a trip or need more information, contact Field Trip Chairperson Mark Bagley at (619) 873-5326.

For all field trips, be sure to bring plenty of water, lunch, good walking shoes or boots, and appropriate clothing for hot sun and/or inclement weather. Also useful would be a hand lens, binoculars, camera, floras, and plant lists. Trips will leave at the time announced, so please arrive at the meeting sites a few

minutes early. Unless indicated, the average car should do fine. Carpooling is encouraged. Everyone is welcome, but please no pets.

March 22, Saturday. Death Valley. Leader: Mark Bagley. Meet at 10: a.m. in Death Valley, at Stove Pipe Wells in the parking lot in front of the store. It's a good place to gas up your vehicle and buy cold drinks, etc. We will try to go where the wildflowers are blooming best at that time; in creosote bush scrub, desert saltbush scrub and alkali sink scrub communities on the lower elevations and bajadas. Easy walking, with lunch at the vehicles.

April 12, Saturday. Alabama Hills. Leader: Vince Yoder. Meet at 9:30 a.m. about 2.5 miles west of Lone Pine on Whitney Portal Road, at its junction with Movie Road. Join Vince, who's been studying the plants of the Alabama Hills for over 15 years, on this trip to see the spring wildflowers. There will probably be two one-mile walks; one before lunch, the other after, with lunch at the vehicles. Both walks will be fairly easy, one will have some up and down crossing washes and low hills, the other will be fairly flat.

April 26-27, Saturday-Sunday. Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge. Leaders: Mary DeDecker and Betty Gilchrist. Meet at 11:30 a.m. at the Death Valley Junction at the junction of Highway 190 and 127. Ash Meadows, just across the state line in Nevada, is a very special desert oasis with extensive spring-fed wetlands in alkaline desert uplands. Ash Meadows has the highest concentration of endemic species in the United States, at least 24 plant and animal species are found here and nowhere else in the world. Rare plants we will see include *Calochortus striatus*, *Astragalus phoenix*, *Nitrophila mohavensis*, *Enceliopsis nudicaulis* var. *corrugata*, and *Grindelia fraxino-pratensis*.

No camping is permitted in Ash Meadows; campgrounds are located in Death Valley Nation Park, about 35 miles west, and in Pahrump, about 22 miles southeast. Primitive camping is possible in portions of the Park and on BLM lands in the vicinity. Hotels are available in Death Valley Junction and at the new Longstreet Inn and Casino, seven miles north of Death Valley Junction on Highway 127, at the Nevada stateline. The Longstreet Inn is the closest accommodation; single or double rooms are about \$63/night, \$13/night in the RV park with full hookups (prices include tax). If we reserve enough rooms ahead, we can get a group rate of about \$43/night at the Longstreet Inn; contact Mark Bagley, at 873-5326, by March 15th if you are

interested in this rate. Contact Mary DeDecker at (619) 878-2389, with other questions about the trip.

The Jepson Herbarium Weekend Workshops

The Jepson Herbarium is continuing to offer intensive weekend workshops on the systematics and ecology of botanical groups. The workshops are limited to 20 participants and fill up quickly! All enrollment is on a first-come, first-served basis.

Cost per workshop: Jepson Herbarium Members: \$135; Non-members: \$150 plus room and board for field station workshops. For further information, contact **Susan D'Alcama at the Jepson Herbarium, (510) 643-7008.**

The following is a partial list of upcoming workshops.

**Class VI - Fire Ecology
March 15 & 16
Tom Parker**

**Class VII - Flora of Santa Cruz Island
April 10 - 13, 1997
Dieter Wilken**

**Class VIII - Northern Vernal Pools
April 18-20, 1997
Bob Holland and Virginia Dains**

The following article by Mary DeDecker is the twelfth in a series on native plants that will focus on ecology, taxonomy and other natural history information.

Wax Currant

The genus *Ribes*, composed of deciduous shrubs, is well represented in eastern California. Those with thorns are known as gooseberries and the thornless species as currants. They have been considered members of the Saxifrage Family (Saxifragaceae) but some botanists now are giving them their own Gooseberry Family (Grossulariaceae). There are about 150 species of *Ribes*, 31 of which are listed in the new Jepson Manual, seven of these are known in the Bristlecone Chapter's region.

Ribes Cereum (wax currant) will be discussed in this issue. It is the most common and widespread of the species which occurs in this region. It ranges from about 6000 to 12,300 feet in elevation and thrives in the desert ranges as well as the Sierra Nevada. *Ribes* is an Arabic name for a plant with an acid juice, which was actually a species of rhubarb. *Cereum* means waxy. This species lacks thorns. It varies in height from 3 or 4 feet at the lower elevations to less than half that tall at the upper sites. The leaves are glossy green, roundish in form, tending to be 3 or 5 lobed, ½ to 1 inch wide, and with finely toothed edges. They resemble tiny fans and are clustered at the ends of spur-like branches. The flowers are greenish-white to pink, tubular, about 3/8 of an inch long, and 3 to 7 in a raceme. The bright red fruit ripens in September. It is edible but not very flavorful.

It is an important food source for birds and small animals. Of course it was valued by the Indian tribes as an easily obtained food. They ate it raw and used it make pemmican, a mixture of dried meat and berries.

Other *Ribes* species in the region are *Ribes amaraum*, bitter gooseberry, of wooded canyons below 5,000 feet, mostly in the southern Sierra; *Ribes aureum*, golden currant, which grows on moist banks; *Ribes inerme*, white-stemmed gooseberry, of moist, shady places; *Ribes montigenum*, scraggly mountain gooseberry, of rocky places, mostly above 9,500 feet in the Sierra Nevada; and *Ribes nevadense*, Sierra currant, an attractive pink-flowered species of stream courses on the Sierra's east side and *Ribes velutinum*, plateau gooseberry, mostly in the desert ranges. The

fruit of the scraggly mountain gooseberry has the best flavor of all. We have enjoyed it for breakfasts on family camping trips. *Ribes inerme* also has a good flavor. All of these species have edible fruits, but not all of them pass the taste test.

.....Mary DeDecker

Native Plant Notes

Native Plant Notes is a column for sharing techniques about how to grow our native plants. All contributions are welcome so let your ideas germinate.

Water Birch

The bare, rich bronze branches of the water birch (*Betula occidentalis*) are a beautiful and common sight in the eastern Sierra in the winter along steams and in moist places. The leafless twigs are a delicate, reddish blur above the branches, adding another color to the subtle palette of the winter landscape. In the summer this tree is a vivid green, while autumn finds the tree in pleasing yellow tones, though not as stunning a spectacle as its sometime neighbor, the aspen.

The water birch is either a small tree or a large shrub that can reach 25 feet in height with a rounded, spreading shape. It is native to western North America and is tolerant of both the hot and cold temperatures of our high desert area. The most important clue to its success in growing is given in part of its common name - **water** birch. This tree requires constant access to water but good drainage as well. Planted in fast draining, granitic soils near a creek or pond is the ideal setting for this beautiful native tree.

While the water birch is not often seen in gardens now, it is beginning to receive some notice as a good landscape tree for certain situations. In Bishop, I have seen the water birch growing on the edge of a small pond, where it provides welcome shade in the summer and where its arching branches reflect peacefully on the water. The tree is reputed to grow willingly from cuttings and is also available from local nurseries.

.....Karen Ferrell-Ingram

Tree Lore

Tree Lore is a series by Andrew Kirk that will be devoted to the identification, distribution and natural history of our native trees.

While Christmas is still fresh in our minds, I thought it might be interesting, if far afield from this column's usual fare, to consider the place of evergreens in Christmas' past and present. Our ritual of decorating conifer trees at Christmas is as old as recorded history (though not as old as the ancient Bristlecone Pines). It appears to have begun as early as 800 B.C. with the religious mysteries of Ancient Phrygia (now Turkey). There a pine tree was erected each winter solstice as a symbol of immortal principles.

Other civilizations - notably the Egyptians, the Chinese and the Hebrews - likewise used evergreen trees, wreaths, and garlands as symbols of immortality. Holly, ivy, and mistletoe were also symbols of life and hope in the dark winters of more northerly peoples. (As I write this, already past the winter solstice, I take hope from several vigorous young willow trees - species unknown until spring - in my yard).

By the Middle Ages, celebrants were decorating their "paradise tree" (usually a fir) with apples, in preparation for a December 24 drama which seems to have combined symbols of the Garden of Eden with the birth of Jesus.

By the 16th century the evergreen tree was well established as the symbol for Christmas. The idea of the Christmas tree spread rapidly through Christendom. Oddly, there is an alternative legend in which German theologian Martin Luther, inspired by the sight of evergreen trees under a starry winter sky, created the first Christmas tree.

Today, the Christmas tree is one of our most powerful and enduring symbols. Children call any conifer a "Christmas tree". Indeed, green paper triangles, cones made of strands of lights, sometimes even the smell of "Pinesol", are enough to set visions of sugar plum fairies dancing in our heads.

The Christmas trees that grace American homes are harvested from plantations of Scotch pine, eastern white pine, Norway spruce, white spruce, balsam fir, Fraser fir, white fir, Douglas fir, Leyland cypress,

and others.

The United States alone consumes ~40,000,000 plantation Christmas trees annually. It is a substantial industry and, in some locales, a substantial disposal challenge.

Here in the eastern Sierra, the homegrown Yule tree of choice is the single-leaf pinyon pine (*Pinus monophylla*). Currently, the Inyo National Forest is closed to Christmas tree cutting. However, cutting is permitted on the Toiyabe National Forest and the Inyo National Forest office in Bishop issues ~ 250 permits annually for the Toiyabe. The areas, near Bridgeport, open to Christmas tree harvesting harbor abundant young (5-15 year old) pinyons. Their abundance is a result of over 60 years of fire suppression and cattle grazing. These forces have allowed both pinyon and Utah juniper to encroach into meadows and grasslands throughout the Great Basin. By judiciously harvesting pinyon pines, Christmas tree cutters may help invigorate an altered habitat, thereby participating in the same immortal natural principles which their Christmas trees symbolize.

.....Andrew Kirk

Conservation

The Owens Basin Wetland and Aquatic Species Recovery Plan

When the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service called for a Owens Basin multi-species recovery plan it was a bold new concept. Former recovery programs had addressed specific sites, each to protect a given species. This single species management approach in turn garnered few success stories. The basin-wide proposal would protect not only the few endangered species named but would also provide support for the many species of concern which could be headed for the endangered species list.

The reasoning was that it is far better to prevent a species from reaching an endangered status than to wait until it is actually threatened with extinction. A basin-wide plan would restore some of the wetlands which have been lost or altered due to Los Angeles's water export program, overgrazing, off-highway vehicular use, or invasion by exotic species. It would provide a relatively natural environment, basin-wide, which would avoid the necessity of closing waters to the public.

Unfortunately, this plan has met with strong suspicion. Perhaps this is to be expected in an area which has been the victim of so much abuse. Anti-environmentalists see it as objectionable control. Local government considers it a threat to its jurisdiction. It is even criticized by environmentalists who fail to analyze its long term benefits. In reality it provides a painless, far reaching program under which all would benefit. It is designed to provide recovery for the species of most concern, while many declining species could be brought back to a healthy balance.

In the beginning, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service made sure that all entities which might be affected by the proposal were notified. Less effort, however, has been made to present the plan so that all will understand just what is involved. That has made it difficult for the supporters to defend it.

Details for implementing such a comprehensive plan will still have to be worked out. It is a new concept which will need some fine tuning. This is where constructive comments will be extremely valuable. It has the potential of developing into an admirable step in overcoming past abuses.

.....Mary DeDecker - Rare Plant Chair

Bristlecone Chapter Highlights

Bank of America Helps Funds Native Plant Propagation Center

Last May the Bristlecone Chapter submitted a grant to the Bank of America's recently established foundation for the Environmental Community Grants Program. The program is designed to support projects that promote conservation and provide an opportunity for Bank of America employees to get involved with local community projects.

Local Bank of America President Tony Ghigo supported our proposal to help fund construction of more growing benches, plant propagation materials and a small greenhouse at the "Deepest Valley Cooperative Native Plant Propagation Center" at the White Mountain Research Station in Bishop. The facility which is cooperatively run by local agencies, the University of California and the Bristlecone Chapter grows native plants for small scale restoration projects, research and educational projects and will be where many of the plants for our first annual native plant sale will be grown.

Our grant was submitted after Mr. Ghigo's review and in November \$1,000 was awarded to our chapter. We are very excited about this support and thank Mr. Ghigo and Ms. Caroline O. Boitano (grant coordinator) for this opportunity. We will be in contact with Mr. Ghigo in spring and summer to get interested Bank of America employees excited about helping out with our plant sale and hopefully cultivate some new chapter members as well!

.....Anne Halford

New Funding Committee Established

Last year our Bristlecone chapter received a very generous \$4,000 anonymous donation which was to be used to help fund projects and studies that support our goals of native plant conservation. A special funding committee was in turn established by our chapter to review submitted proposals.

To date the funding committee, and other chapter members have approved funding for the "Deepest Valley Native Plant Propagation Center" (\$500). Itemized accounting of all purchases will be submitted at monthly board meetings.

Other proposals that are currently in the works include a proposal to fund an intern or student to input all of Mary DeDecker's extensive floristic data into a computer data base and a U.S. Forest Service proposal to enhance botanical educational facilities (interpretive signs, etc.) at the Bristlecone Visitor's Center.

For more information about the funding committee and specific projects contact Treasurer Mary Allen.

.....Anne Halford

New Members

The Bristlecone Chapter Warmly Welcomes the
Following New Member

Richard Dodge
Inyokern

Next Newsletter Deadline: February 27th.

THE CALIFORNIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY - Membership Application

The California Native Plant Society is an organization of lay persons and professionals united by an interest in the plants of California. It is open to all. The society, working through its local chapters, seeks to increase the understanding of California's native flora and to preserve this rich resource for future generations. Varied interests are represented.

Name _____ P.O. Box or Street _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____ Phone _____
 I wish to be affiliated with the Bristlecone Chapter _____ Other _____.

Membership Category

<input type="checkbox"/> Student/Retired/Limited Income	\$20.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual or Library	\$35.00
<input type="checkbox"/> International	\$35.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Family or Group	\$45.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Supporting	\$75.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Plant Lover	\$100.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Patron	\$250.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Life	\$500.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor	\$1,000.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Corporate	\$1,000.00

Please make check payable to: The California Native Plant Society. **Mail to:** Bristlecone Chapter, CNPS. HCR 67 Box 35, Independence, CA 93526.

Gift Contribution: Where most needed _____ Conservation _____.

THE BRISTLECONE CHAPTER NEWSLETTER comes out bimonthly. It is mailed free to members of the Bristlecone Chapter, CNPS. The subscription is \$5.00 per year for others. Editor: Anne Halford.

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