DEDICATED TO THE PRESERVATION OF THE CALIFORNIA NATIVE FLORA

The California Native Plant Society



Volume 32 No. 4 July-August 2011

No General Meeting in July

The next general meeting will be September 28, 2011. Details will be in the next issue of the newsletter and on the chapter website at www.bristleconecnps.org

No Board Meeting in July

See the chapter website at www.bristleconecnps.org for information about the next board meeting.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Bristlecone Chapter Goes Social!

The Bristlecone Chapter now has a **Facebook** page – for those of you on Facebook, head on over to http://facebook.com/bristleconecnps and "like" us. We'll be sharing links of interest, post timely reminders of field trips and other events, and we hope that folks will also share wildflower hotspots and photos and links of interest on our page, or just stop by to say "hi"!

There are also tabs on our Facebook page, which show recent Wildflower Hotspots posts and also our Calendar, so you can keep up with everything in one place.

And if you are *not* on Facebook, you can still see our Facebook updates on our website here: http://bristleconecnps.org/facebook.php. Updates will include links of interest, reminders of trips and events, photographs, and more. Go have a look!

We also have a new **Wildflower Hotspots Google Group**. You can share photos and locations of your favorite wildflower areas, hotspots for

spring blooms, photos, et cetera. Go here to join: http://groups.google.com/group/wildflower_hotspots
Once you are a member, you may post your reports and/or photos and view other posts either online or through email. Come sign up! It's free, easy, and you can use your normal email address. You may also see the latest posts from this group on our website here:

http://bristleconecnps.org/native_plants/hotspots/group.php Maggie Riley, Webmaster

FROM THE EDITOR

Next Newsletter Deadline: August 26, 2011

Send articles to: newsletter@bristleconecnps.org

If you still receive this newsletter via US Mail, please send your email address to the editor (email address above) so you can receive the electronic version. Please help the Bristlecone chapter save money, energy, and trees

A Bristlecone member from Big Pine Said, "Internet service is divine"

I gave them my email

And since then without fail

My newsletters get here online

--Anonymous

UPCOMING EVENTS

NEW July 8, Friday – CNPS Field Trip: McGee Canyon. Leaders: Cathy Rose and Sue Weis. This trip will be a flowery walk to the collapsed bridge keeping our eyes out for birds. We'll hike up the canyon at botany speed for a couple of hours with possible wet feet along the way. We'll have lunch near the bridge, then stroll back down by early afternoon. This is one of the Wildflower Hotspots in the new guide, available at visitor centers in the Eastern Sierra. Bring water, lunch, and all the usual hiking gear. Meet at the McGee trailhead at 9:00 AM. Contact Sue Weis at 760-873-3485 or sueweis@aol.com for further information.

July 10, Sunday – CNPS Field Trip: Convict Lake. Leader: Holly Alpert. Come check out the best of both Sierra Nevada and Great Basin wildflowers and woody plants. This is a truly special place. We will walk around the lake (2 miles, fairly flat) and may head up the Convict Creek trail if time and interest permit (uphill). Meet at 9:00 at upper parking lot near entrance to Convict Lake campground. Contact Holly Alpert at 760-709-2212 or holly.alpert@gmail.com.

NEW July 17 Sunday - CNPS Field Trip/Work Day: *Devil's Postpile / Rainbow Falls weed pulling.* Leader: Holly Alpert. [Rescheduled from June 25th because of snow.] This will be a work day to help remove cheatgrass

This will be a work day to help remove cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*) from Devils Postpile National Monument and surrounding areas. We will hike from the Rainbow Falls trailhead to areas of known infestations. Hiking distance may be 2-4 miles and may be over rough terrain. Bring your gloves and some garbage bags. Wear long pants and layers. Meet at Minaret Vista at 9:00 am and we will carpool from there. Contact Holly Alpert at 760-709-2212 or holly.alpert@gmail.com.

July 23 field trip moved to August 20 – see below

August 6, Saturday – CNPS Field Trip: White Mountains buckwheats. Leader: Scott Hetzler. Go on a hunt for buckwheat treasures in the Whites. Meet at the parking lot at the intersection of 395 and Highway 168 at 9:00 AM. Contact Scott at 873-8392 for further information.

August 7, Sunday – CNPS Field Trip: Casa Diablo buckwheats. Leader: Scott Hetzler. Another buckwheat day, this time along Casa Diablo road in the tablelands. Meet at the intersection of Five Bridges Road and Fish Slough Road near the interpretative signs at 9:00 AM. Bring lots of water because it will probably be hot. For more information contact Scott at 873-8392.

August 20, Saturday - CNPS Field Trip:

Saddlebag Lake and the Conness Lakes. Leader Jerry Zatorski. This will be a backcountry hike from the parking lot at Saddlebag Lake. The trail around Saddlebag Lake is well maintained and the views of the back side of Yosemite are at the very least spectacular. The hike around Saddlebag Lake is relatively flat, and once on the northern end of the lake we'll head west making our way up to the Conness Lakes area both on trails and cross country. Most of this area is in the alpine zone, above tree line, and we should be greeted by many alpine species.

Depending on your level of fitness, this is a moderate to strenuous hike at high elevation (all above 10,000 ft), and is only recommended for those in good hiking condition. This trip will take most of the day and participants should bring plenty of fluids and food, field guide, camera, a hand lens, and dress for weather. We will meet at the Saddlebag Lake parking lot at 9:00 AM. From Lee Vining, go west 9.8 miles up SR 120 (Tioga Pass Rd), just after the first lake on the left(Ellery Lake) take the right turn to Saddlebag Lake and go 2.5 miles to the trail head. For more information contact Jerry at 760-387-2920 or jerryzat@gmail.com.

August 27, Saturday - CNPS Field Trip: Bishop Creek high country. Leader: Mark Bagley. We will start at North Lake and hike to where the wildflowers are in bloom. With the deep snow and

slow melt-off this year, it is still a bit hard to predict exactly where this will be. However, Mark will scout it out ahead of time and take us up either the North Fork trail or the Lamarck Creek trail. Late August is often the end of the bloom, but this year we should still find many areas in full bloom. We will meet at 9:00 am at the North Lake trailhead parking lot, near the pack station.

North Lake is at about 9,200 ft elevation and we will be hiking up from there, so be prepared for a high elevation hike. This will be a moderately difficult on-trail hike, but with many stops to look at the plants. We will be out all day, so bring plenty of water, lunch, snacks, sunscreen, hat, etc. Plan on returning to the parking lot by about 4:30 pm.

August 27, Saturday - CNPS Creosote Ring Sub-**Section Field Trip**: *High Meadow east of Sherman* Pass: From Aspens to Orchids. Leader: Judy Breitenstein. This meadow, at about 9000 ft, is the last before Sherman Pass. It's sheltered enough for late bloom and varied enough to host a wide floral variety. Most of the meadow is damp, spring-fed, but some is dry and some quite wet. It is located on the eastern Sherman Peak slope about 60 miles from Hwy 395. The road is paved all the way up. There are no facilities, and parking is meager. We will stop at a site with facilities on the way up. The Sherman Pass Road goes through burn areas and we can stop if anyone wants to check regrowth or fire follower succession. If there is time, or if you haven't been there, it's a short way to Sherman Pass afterward. The view is spectacular and there will be a few blooms as well.

Be prepared for sun, wind, hot and cold. Bring food and drink, and have your fuel tanks full. The Black Rock Information Station and the Kennedy Meadows Store have no fuel. We will meet at the Inyokern Post Office at 8:00 am to carpool. Those coming from points north can meet the group at 8:30 am at the 9-Mile Canyon Rd turnoff from Hwy 395. Because of the very limited parking at the meadow, reservations are needed. Please contact Kathy LaShure (760-377-4541 or desert encelia@verizon.net).

REPORTS

Field trip report: June 11, Blackrock Meadows. On June 11, 2011 Daniel Pritchett led a field trip to

the Blackrock area north of Independence, specifically Blackrock parcels 94 & 99. Parcel 99 is doing quite well, with the native grasses hanging onto their territory one might say, against all odds. With all the pumping of ground water that happens in the Owens Valley, that is some good news. In Blackrock 94, on the other hand, the alkali meadow grasses have given way to shrubs because the ground water level is too low. Sally Manning and Daniel explained why this was happening in such a way that I came away with a lot more knowledge about the history and the present day problems. It was a fascinating field trip and among the many things I learned was that before LA started pumping so much water out of the Blackrock area. natural springs produced ~8,000 acre feet of water annually, which was plenty to sustain the fish hatchery. Now those springs are literally gone.... the hatchery wells are LA's mitigation for the problem they in fact caused in the first place. Because they are mitigation these wells run constantly.... draining water out of that part of the valley, causing the loss of the alkali meadow of parcel 94. [Desertification in the name of mitigation! – ed.] I understand that LA is planning on pumping 91,000 acre feet of water this year and asked Daniel about that. In answering the question he explained that pumping has dried up springs throughout the valley which used to flow at about 40,000 acre feet per year and end up in the Aqueduct. Therefore pumping anything less than 40.000 acre feet wouldn't even make up for all the springs that the pumping dried up in the first place! That was a shocking statistic. I am no expert on these many water issues but am an interested citizen and learned a lot from the field trip.

Roberta McIntosh

Plant sale update: time for attitude adjustment!

I have been working on a new and improved plant list for the native plant sale. In this list there will be a picture of the plant, the Latin and common name and a brief description of where the plant would do well in the garden. Next to that will be the number of plants I hope to have available at the plant sale. I asked a friend, who is an avid native gardener to write some of the descriptions for me. When she came to *Calystegia longipes*, Desert morning glory she wrote "honestly I think this is a weed."

This reminded me of a conversation I had with another friend. I had *Erigeron eatonii*, Eaton's daisy, show up in my garden and was complaining that I had to keep weeding it out. This friend exclaimed "Why would you want to get rid of it? I've been trying to get it to grow in my garden and can't get it started. It's a great plant and blooms all summer with beautiful little flowers!" So I went home and looked again at this little daisy and decided she was right. Why weed out a little flower that blooms all summer just because I hadn't planted it? Since then Eaton's daisy has spread around my yard. I have clusters of white flowers popping up all over and they look very nice.

It appears that gardening with natives takes a bit of an attitude adjustment. We need to change our expectations of garden plants. Big showy blooms all summer just aren't going to happen with the natives, but in exchange we get hardy plants that grow well, give us a short show of flowers and leave us with beautiful shapes and textures. Ericameria cooperi, Cooper's goldbush, comes to mind. There were mounds of yellow flowers all over the desert in June as this plant was in full bloom, and now that it is done flowering it is a mass of verdant green foliage. Quite often next to it is growing Krascheninnikovia lanata, Winterfat, which is a lovely silver green bush, but doesn't stand out until the beginning of July when it blooms. The flowers look like little tufts of cotton stuck to the plant and when the sun gets behind them they seem to be glowing white. The contrast of the goldbush and the winterfat is exquisite.

The list of available plants for the sale will be out shortly so keep checking the web and facebook pages

Katie Quinlan, Plant Sale Coordinator

Fire on the Mountain

It's been heartbreaking reading about the wildfires in eastern and southeastern Arizona this past month. Large, intense, and mostly uncontrollable fires have burned up three of my favorite places—the White Mountains, where I did my dissertation research almost 40 years ago, the Chiricahua Mountains, and the Huachuca Mountains. Jan and I hiked all over the Huachucas while doing research on its exceptionally rich flora. Such massive fires could also occur here in the Eastern Sierra. The Bureau of Land Management is rightly concerned about the potential for such

fires in the Bodie Hills, and is proposing an ambitious vegetation management program to reduce the risks. The BLM's task is not just a daunting one, but a largely unprecedented one.

Fire is clearly a natural ecological process, particularly in the semiarid forests, woodlands, and shrublands in the West. Tree-ring research in Arizona has provided clear evidence that those forests whose loss I mourn experienced low-intensity, mostly ground fires, at 7- to 10-year intervals right up until about the start of the 20th Century. But in the last 100+ years humans have significantly altered western ecosystems in at least three major ways—and possibly four—which have interacted to profoundly alter fire regimes.

The first driver of ecosystem change was overgrazing. Large numbers of livestock in the late 19th Century, a time of widespread droughts, severely reduced or often eliminated the perennial grass cover in shrublands, woodlands, and forests. Perennial bunchgrasses provided a discontinuous fuel layer that supported slow-moving ground fires. Such fires killed seedlings and saplings of trees and shrubs, maintaining open plant communities with a comparatively low density of woody plants and a significant cover of perennial grasses. With the loss of native grasses, fire frequency decreased.

The second driver was fire suppression. Gifford Pinchot's National Forest Service, established in 1905, set as its highest priority the elimination of fire from the nation's forests. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries the nation had experienced several large, destructive wildfires, including the 1910 "Big Burn" in western Montana, northern Idaho, and eastern Washington. While in hindsight the resulting buildup in stand densities and fuel loads seems obvious, it's hard to fault Pinchot for not foreseeing the consequences of his policies 50 to 100 years in the future, when we can't see now beyond the next quarter. But 100 years of fires suppression is likely to continue to fuel catastrophic fires in the 21st Century.

The third driver, especially here in the Great Basin, is the invasion of exotic species, particularly the Eurasian annual cheatgrass. This species was accidentally introduced toward the end of the 19th Century, greatly expanded its range in the early 20th Century, and continues to increase in density and area today. The invasion of cheatgrass was facilitated by the overgrazing that removed the established native perennial grasses. Unlike the

native bunchgrasses, cheatgrass forms a finetextured, continuous fuel layer that facilitates rapid expansion of wildfires. While the native bunchgrasses can outcompete cheatgrass as mature plants, the exotic annual is much more competitive at the seedling stage. So following wildfires, cheatgrass increases while the native perennials continue to decline.

These three drivers have interacted to substantially modify fire regimes throughout much of the west. Perennial grass declines due to overgrazing have allowed cheatgrass to invade and expand exponentially. Fire suppression has allowed fuels to build up. Cheatgrass has provided the continuous fuel loads that allow for rapid wildfire expansion. The occasional low-intensity ground fires have largely disappeared, and in their place we have large-scale destructive wildfires that kill most of the canopy shrub and tree dominants. Following such wildfires, cheatgrass rapidly germinates and comes to dominate the site.

Climate change is a potential fourth driver, but I don't know how it will interact with the other three drivers. There are both ample evidence and scientific consensus that global temperatures have increased and will continue to increase. Precipitation patterns are much more difficult to predict using global circulation models. On average, precipitation will probably increase globally but we can't predict the changes in local patterns with any confidence. The 2010-2011 water year has been a wet one, due largely to precipitation in January and March. For whatever reasons, cheatgrass responded with a banner year, germinating early, surviving the mid-winter drought, and outcompeting the native annuals to take full advantage of the late spring rains. Next year there will be more cheatgrass than ever in the seed banks.

How does all this relate to the Bodie Hills? A Conservation Action Plan (CAP) for the Bodies was prepared for the BLM by The Nature Conservancy. Major concerns identified by the CAP are the build-up of fuels, the decline of native bunchgrasses, and the increase in cheatgrass—the exact conditions that have led elsewhere to the conversion of shrublands and woodlands to exotic grasslands. Neither the CAP nor the vegetation management plan critically address the decline of native perennial bunchgrasses.

The BLM would like to reduce fuels while

minimizing the spread of cheatgrass. The goal is the right one, but no one has yet figured out how to achieve it. Range managers developed an experimental prescription in the 1950s and 1960s: chain sagebrush, juniper, and pinyon, or kill the plants with 2,4-D, treat the soil with atrazine to kill germinating cheatgrass seeds, and then treat again with paraquat to get any seedlings that escaped the atrazine. Finally, seed the range with another Eurasian exotic, the perennial crested wheatgrass, which does compete with cheatgrass while providing forage for livestock.

Fortunately the BLM's planned treatments are less draconian, but are still likely to be controversial. But one thing is clear to me—doing nothing while fuels continue to accumulate is a management strategy with eventual catastrophic results. What land management agencies would probably like to do is return to a regime of frequent but low intensity ground fires. But with loss of the perennial grass cover, continued episodes of excessive grazing, the ubiquitous annual exotic grasses, and climate change, it may be too late for that.

Steve McLaughlin

Mary's Notes: A Bristlecone Chapter Flora and Plant Lists in Digital Format

Among Mary DeDecker's notable accomplishments was the creation of a notecard database for the flora of eastern California. Mary typed meticulous notes of plant observations on 5 x 7 in. notecards and stored them in four boxes, organized by plant family. She created a card for each of the 3000+ taxa she observed in our chapter area, and continued to add to each card over a period of more than four decades - an amazing source of inspiration and treasure hunts for any plant enthusiast that has seen them. On each card, she recorded her own plant collections and informal observations, plus collections and observations made by others, and found though personal communication, literature, and herbarium searches. In addition to her own notes, some of the most valuable records are the hundreds of observations from local naturalists, including Doris Fredendall, Derham Giuliani, Mary Ann Henry, and others. Mary's notecards contain more than 16,000 individual records.

In honor of Mary, the Bristlecone Chapter carries on the tradition of recording observations as

a resource for plant enthusiasts. Thus far, we have collected records from numerous herbaria, theses, more than 100 plant lists, and, so far, 1/3 of Mary's cards into a digital database with more than 28,000 records. Original plant lists and combined and updated versions with updated taxonomy can be retrieved. New plant lists can be generated based on geographic range, from mountain ranges to specific canyons.

The Bristlecone Chapter welcomes your contribution of plants lists for our area- Inyo and Mono counties, primarily. You can submit plant lists or requests for lists to be retrieved to Michèle Slaton (mslaton02@gmail.com). Lists in spreadsheet or Word document format are preferred, although hard copy and scanned lists are welcome. In return, we ask only that you re-submit any plant lists, along with additions, and checkmarks for those species you observed, plus the date.

Michele Slaton

FEATURES

Birch Creek Journal

Here along Birch Creek, the water is up, the wind is down, and beefsteak tomatoes are hanging green and heavy on the vines, apparently waiting for a signal from the tomato gods to turn red and sweet. I've been picking early-season tomatoes for almost three weeks, now, but their flavor leaves something to be desired. They mostly function to make me even more impatient for the main event. I went to a lot of work to get those early tomatoes: planting out in late March, protecting them in Walls of Water at first, then in well-wrapped tomato cages when they outgrew the walls; unwrapping the cages on warm days so the plants would remember what sunshine looked like and wrapping them up again at night; carefully watering by hand so as not to splash soil on the leaves; battling the wind's unceasing efforts to wrench the cages out of the ground; and, for two solid months, worrying, worrying, worrying. A more patient person would have simply waited until late May or early June to plant, but as my husband would be happy to tell you, Patience is not my middle name.

Meanwhile, our native plant garden has been blooming for three months, requiring a minimum of effort and absolutely no patience at all. We started in 2008 with maybe two dozen plants

from the Bristlecone Chapter's native plant sale and have added a few more every year. By this point, we have native color from spring into summer, starting with purple sage (Salvia dorrii) in early April and ending with red penstemon (Penstemon rostriflorus) in July. We have tried maybe fifteen species so far, some with more success than others. Initially we underestimated the voracity of our local rodents, and in the garden's first few days, a ground squirrel or packrat ate most of the Mojave asters (Xylorhiza tortifolia) and tufted evening primroses (Oenothera caespitosa). I caged the survivors in chicken wire, whereupon gophers destroyed them from below. Now I cage everything from both ends but the animals are more desperate and ingenious than I am. There will be more losses, no doubt. Last year gophers, this year rabbits, next year something else-deer, perhaps, or, given global warming, tree sloths.

I put up with these modest depredations because the native plant garden brings many unexpected rewards. The only time I've seen an anise swallowtail butterfly in our neighborhood was when the mountain pennyroyal (Monardella odoratissima) first bloomed. Mountain pennyroyal is a classic butterfly flower with purplish-pink corollas in flat-topped clusters, and although native to the mountains, it manages to hang on through our summers with supplemental irrigation. The butterfly was almost too big for the flower heads and had to support itself as it fed by beating its large, black wings. The common checkered skippers and western sulphurs that came to our mountain pennyroval in other years were a much better fit for the plant. Thanks to the native plant garden, we have butterflies galore. A month ago, clouds of square-spotted blues rose from every patch of damp earth that I passed. Two seconds later, they settled back down again. As for many other blues, the larvae feed on species of *Eriogonum*, and I suspect that their abundance around our house can be attributed to naked buckwheat (*Eriogonum nudum*), which blooms here from the end of April to the end of May.

Our collection of native plants attracts a diversity of bees as well as butterflies, probably many more species than I realize. I recognize the big, black carpenter bees, but the identity of most other bees will no doubt remain a mystery to me until someone publishes an illustrated field guide. Meanwhile, I can only wonder who I am watching.

At our house, carpenter bees visit almost anything in bloom, from wild licorice (Glycyrrhiza lepidota) down by the creek to red penstemon in the native plant garden. They cannot fit inside the penstemon flowers yet manage to get nectar by slitting holes in the floral tubes and sticking their tongues through the slits. Along with bees and hummingbirds, I love penstemons and plan to grow many more. Every spring, when Death Valley penstemon (Penstemon fruticiformis) blooms in our native plant garden, the plants are a mass of white. The display always attracts dozens of medium-sized black bees that are just the right size to fit inside the flowers. This year, the bees had a few lurking attendants, perhaps a species of parasitic fly, that never entered any flower but simply hovered behind the hard-working bees and occasionally pounced at them, perhaps to deposit eggs that the bee would then carry back to her nest. These same bees, or another species much like them, positively revel in the flowers of great blazing star (Mentzelia laevicaulis). This gorgeous wildflower has long, pointed petals the color of lemon peel and numerous stamens as fine as hair. Sometimes as many as three or four bees tumble over one another amongst the stamens in their eagerness to get at the pollen. The bees all but line up in early evening to be the first on hand when the flowers open.

When we negotiated with the builder who put up our house, the initial contract had a line item for a lawn. We laughed and crossed it out. In Tucson, where we came from, summer water bills were commonly two hundred dollars a month, making lawns a luxury. During our thirty years there, we gradually learned to appreciate a different aesthetic, one in which home landscapes feature attractive arrangements of native or nearly native plants that thrive in the arid climate. Here in Owens Valley, water is much cheaper, and no one who wants a lawn or a rose garden needs to go without one because of cost. I suspect that almost anyone from Bishop or Big Pine who happens to drive by our house might wonder at the absence of grass and trees, roses and honeysuckle vines. I am just as susceptible as anyone to the lure of deep green, and I sometimes wonder, too. But in spring and early summer, when the native plant garden bursts with bloom and butterflies and bees, I am content with the choice we made. No lawn could possibly provide as many hours of entertainment.

Jan Bowers

CONSERVATION

The Inyo Register giveth and the Inyo Register taketh away

The degradation of parcel Blackrock 94, a subject I have written about for years, recently got some much-needed attention. In May and June I wrote several letters to the Invo Register about DWP's excessive groundwater pumping, and the desertification of parcel Blackrock 94 in particular. One of the Inyo Register writers then joined the fun. He quoted my letters in not one, but two front page articles. In the second article, the author even publicized my annual Blackrock field trip. All this free publicity, of course, came with a price. The price was that the Inyo Register printed the wrong date and time for the field trip its front page article. Our chapter publicity chair had submitted the correct information which was printed in the "Calendar" section of the same issue! Sure enough, the morning after the trip I received a call from four people who had followed the Inyo Register's erroneous instructions; several others planned to attend and only learned of the error at the last minute. One step forward and one step backward. **Daniel Pritchett**

MEMBERSHIP

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. To join, please see back of the newsletter. The Bristlecone Chapter warmly welcomes the following new members:

Cole Hawkins, Lee Vining Kathleen Hilimire, Mammoth Lakes Becky Hutto, Bishop Mignon Moskowitz, Bishop Gerald Wise, Bishop

To RENEW: please contact Sally Manning or **RENEW ONLINE**: with a credit card, go to <u>www.cnps.org</u> and click on the JOIN button.

The California Native Plant Society

Bristlecone Chapter P.O. Box 364 Bishop, CA 93515-0364

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CNPS – Membership Coordinator

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Conservation

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Bristlecone Chapter Directory

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