

**DEDICATED TO THE PRESERVATION OF THE CALIFORNIA
NATIVE FLORA**

The California Native Plant Society



Bristlecone Chapter

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July-August 2012

FROM THE EDITOR

Next Newsletter Deadline: August 25, 2012
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.

Newsletter editor sought – if interested, please contact the email address above.

Special July ice cream alpine meeting

Wednesday, July 18, 2012, 7:15 pm at the Inyo Council for the Arts, 137 S. Main St., Bishop.

After a brief ice cream social, Jim Bishop, of the Mt. Lassen Chapter, will present a talk entitled “Plant life above the trees... making it in the harsh alpine environment.” Seemingly delicate, beautiful and beautifully-adapted plants grow on high mountain summits above the life zone of any tree. It is always cool, sometimes bitterly cold. How do plants manage to survive where trees cannot, and to handle the severe environmental stresses? Jim will consider these questions and others, examining the varied microclimatic conditions that define alpine habitats and the interesting adaptations that suit plants to this demanding world.

September Board Meeting

Wednesday, September 19, 2012, 7:00 pm at the ESICE office, 512 N. 2nd St., Bishop. Members are welcome. No board meeting in July.

EVENTS

July 7, Saturday -- *Witcher Meadow Wildflowers and Weeding.* Leader: Stephen Ingram. Start the holiday weekend off right with a combination botanizing and weed-pulling trip in a beautiful meadow surrounded by Jeffrey pine forest at 7640'. We may still see shooting star, but will definitely see rein orchid, bog-orchid, spike-mallow, Kelley's tiger lily, starwort, and many other wildflowers, grasses, and sedges. The drier areas surrounding the meadow should have blooming porcupine prickly-pear. Easy terrain with moderate walking. After botanizing for an hour or so, we'll work at eradicating goat's beard, *Tragopogon dubius*, an invasive, weedy dandelion. Lunch among the pines

and return shortly afterward. Meet at the gravel pit on Sky Meadow Road in Swall Meadows at 9:00 am. High-clearance 4WD needed, but we will carpool. Bring gloves, food, water, hat, sunscreen; bags will be provided. Contact person: Stephen at ingram@bishopwireless.net or 760-387-2913 for more information.

July 14, Saturday -- Lichen field trip, Tioga Pass area. Leaders: Kate Kramer, Sue Weis, and Kerry Knudsen. Join lichenologist Kerry Knudsen, lichen curator at the UC Riverside Herbarium and Forest Service botanists Sue Weis and Kate Kramer for an informal lichen expedition along Tioga Pass in the Inyo National Forest on July 14, 2012. We will meet at the Mono Basin Visitor Center at 9AM. From the Visitor Center, we will carpool to several stops along Tioga Pass (Highway 120) and spend the morning and early afternoon looking at the lichen flora of this area. Bring lunch, water, a hand lens and wear good hiking shoes. Contact persons: Sue Weis at sweis@fs.fed.us, Kerry Knudsen at kerryknudsen999@gmail.com or Kate Kramer at kakramer@fs.fed.us.

July 21, Saturday -- Devil's Postpile Rainbow Falls weed pulling. Leader: Holly Alpert. 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 person: Holly Alpert; 760-709-2212; holly.alpert@gmail.com.

July 20, Friday -- Horseshoe Meadow Rare Plant Treasure Hunt Leader: Danny Slakey. We will join Danny Slakey, Project Coordinator for the Rare Plant Treasure Hunt and Rare Plant Program Assistant, for a day trip to Horseshoe Meadows, west of Lone Pine off Highway 395. This spectacular alpine meadow is easily accessible and is home to several rare plants, including Sharsmith's stickseed (*Hackelia sharsmithii*) and Tulare rockcress (*Boechera tularensis*). Some of us may also venture about a mile beyond the meadow to Mulkey Pass, where we may find the rosette pincushion cryptantha (*Cryptantha circumscissa*

var. *rosulata*), which has been seen by only a handful of people in the past 20 years!

We will meet at the Inyokern Post Office at 8:00 am to carpool. Be prepared for sun, wind, hot and cold. Bring food and drink, and have your fuel tanks full. Those coming from points north can meet the group at 10:00 am at the Horseshoe Meadow parking area (far west end, near the restrooms & trailhead information kiosks). Contact person: Kathy LaShure; 760-377-4541 or desert_encelia@verizon.net.

July 28, Saturday -- Duck Pass Tail, Mammoth Lakes Basin. Leader: Jerry Zatorski. This will be a backcountry hike from the Mammoth Lakes Basin. We'll begin the hike at 9100 ft and go up from there on a trail that climbs up through the sub-alpine forest. We should see many classic mountain species from inch-high forbs to towering conifers. The route will take us through forest, meadows and over rocky outcrops, where a different collection of species can be found in each habitat. This is a moderately strenuous hike at high elevation. This trip will take most of the day and participants should bring plenty of fluids and food, field guide, camera, and a hand lens. We will meet at the Duck Pass trail head at 8:00 AM. From Minaret Rd. in Mammoth Lakes take Lake Mary Rd. 3.5 miles up to the lakes basin. About 0.3 mile past the Mammoth Pack Station, take a left onto Around Lake Mary Rd., take this 0.6 miles and take a left at Cold Water Creek Campground Rd., follow this 0.7 mile to the trail head. This is a popular area so be sure to be prompt because the parking lot will fill up. Contact person: Jerry at 760-387-2920 or jerryzat@gmail.com

July 29, Sunday -- White Mountain alpine flora Leaders: Catie and Jim Bishop. This is a joint field trip with the Mount Lassen Chapter of CNPS. For more details attend the Bristlecone Chapter general meeting July 18, 2012 (see front page).

August 11, Saturday -- Return to Osa Meadow, Kern Plateau. Leader: Kathy LaShure. This is a Creosote Ring Sub-Chapter event. Last summer we could not access our planned Kern Plateau location and visited Osa Meadow instead. It was fabulosa! So much so that we're going back this year. The meadow has not been grazed by cattle for a number

of years and has rebounded floristically. Three rare species were sighted in 2011 and there are at least 6 other possible CNPS Rank 1 or 2 rare plants that we can search for this year. High clearance vehicle required. 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. This will be a full day outing. 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. Contact person: Kathy LaShure; 760-377-4541 or desert_encelia@verizon.net.

REPORTS

Blackrock meadows Field Trip June 2, 2012

This was no ordinary CNPS field trip. There were no hand lenses in sight, no botanical keys or wildflower books, and only a minimal amount of plant identification was done in the field. The purpose of this trip was to explore a rare California plant community—alkali meadow—and its range of responses to water table drawdown from extensive and continuous groundwater pumping. Trip leader Daniel Pritchett led the group of seven participants through a sequence of three monitoring sites in close proximity to the Black Rock Springs Fish Hatchery which have been photo-documented since the 1980's. Touching on topics from geology and hydrology to water law and politics and supported by colorful graphics and data tables, Daniel provided participants with the information needed to understand the sites that were visited.

The trip began with background information including an overview of the geological structure of the Owens Valley, a brief history of hydrologic exploration and water table mapping in the valley, and an overview of the major plant communities that characterize different parts of the valley. Sunny and thankfully breezy conditions prevailed as the caravan set out from Independence to the first stop—an overlook of the valley from a vantage point above the level of the valley floor. The tour that followed gave participants a first hand comparison of the condition of the three sites in the 1980's (through photographs) to their present state. The pictures were certainly worth a thousand words. The three sites exemplified a range of

variation from one which was nearly identical to its condition in the 80's, to one which was dramatically different, as in alkali meadow being replaced by desert shrubs and dusty soil prone to blowing away. Getting this fascinating look at the incontrovertible evidence of damage resulting from unchecked groundwater pumping was also an education in frustration with the complex water politics in the Owens Valley.

Eileen Burger

Garden Report

As I started my third year of propagating native plants I tried experimenting with a few things. My first experiment was to seed some of the plants in December and January. This worked really well. Plants like *Menzellia laevicalus*, *Lupinus pratensis*, *Helianthus nuttallii* and *Encelia actonii* were ready to sell by April. I am building a greenhouse in my back yard so I can start more plants early and have them ready for the spring plant sales at Alabama Hills Day, Earth Day and Eastern Sierra Land Trust's Garden Fest.

My second experiment was to plant all plants into the deeper plastic pots and do away with the paper cups. So far that has been a very good move. All the plants are looking really good. The deeper pots have ridges along their sides, which encourage the roots to grow down and not circle around in the pot. They also have a big hole in the bottom, which keeps the roots from sitting in wet soil and rotting.

Using the deeper plastic pots has also allowed me to fit more plants on the tables. Using the paper cups I could only put 9 cups in a crate, with the plastic pots I can fit 15. Next year I will have to plan better for the extra space and hopefully grow some more plants. The plastic pots cost more than the paper cups, but I am hoping people will return them to either the greenhouse or Eastern Sierra Land Trust so we can keep the plant prices down.

My third and fourth experiments were forced upon me. As soon as I had seeded the plants into the greenhouse I went on the offensive to get ahead of the little varmints that got the best of me last year. I put out Tero so the ants couldn't eat the peanut butter and nuts that were bait for the mousetraps. Last year the ants ate all the peanut butter before the mice had a chance to get caught. And then I put out the mousetraps with nuts super

glued to them to catch any mice before they started digging up the desert peach and lupine. Last year the mice were actually removing the nuts without springing the traps. This year, over the course of the green house season, I caught 4 mice and only lost 4 plants to their digging. I was patting myself on the back on how well my proactive precautions worked. Oh, but pride comes before a fall!

The mice weren't done yet. Once the plants were out in the shade-house they started some serious foraging. They dug up half the lupine and peach trying to find the seeds, they ate the *Encelia actonii* and *Xylorhiza tortifolia* to the ground. The *Calestygia longipes* had their leaves carefully removed.

This meant war! I removed what seemed to be the tastiest plants to the mice to my house, where I built a shade bench for them to recover on. I set up a water mousetrap. The kind where you take a rope and string an aluminum can onto it lengthwise, then string that across a bucket of water and smear the can with peanut butter. The idea being the mouse will go out on the rope to get to the peanut butter, the can spins and the mouse goes into the drink and drowns.

The first day I went to check on it, I had visions of several mice in the bottom of the bucket, because it certainly would have taken several mice to do the damage done to my plants. Instead of finding dead mice I noticed that all the peanut butter was licked off of the can. Hmm, I thought. Maybe the dogs had come into the greenhouse and licked it off, so I dropped the sides of the greenhouse and closed the door to make sure dogs couldn't get in. The next morning I came back to find the rope chewed through and the cans gone. That was when I realized I was dealing with raccoons and not dogs. They had even taken my tin of nuts I had set aside for the mousetraps!

I had put two mousetraps with glued nuts out on the shade tables and caught one mouse. So I set six mousetraps out on the shade tables. I came back the next day to find all the traps sprung and the nuts gone with no mice. I had fed the raccoons, again! Then I noticed that where some of the plants had been eaten it looked like a larger animal had been cruising through the plants. So I assumed that rabbits had figured a way to get up onto the tables.

Out came the bird net with the idea being that the combination of having to hop up onto the table and deal with the netting would be enough to

discourage the bunnies from foraging in the plants. I spent a day moving plants around and consolidating the space so I could cover all the tables with bird net. So far it seems to be working and I haven't seen any more damage.

Despite my trials with rodents and raccoons the plants are doing well and look really good. The inventory on the plant list has been updated so you can see what will be available at the sale. As events can change and with plants you never know, I will update the list again as we get closer to the sale on September 8th.

Katie Quinlan

Book Review

Gruell, George E., with Sherman Swanson. 2012. *Nevada's Changing Wildlife Habitat: an ecological history*. University of Nevada Press, Reno. 178 pp. ISBN 978-0-87417-871-5

For about half of my life I was a teacher, but I'd like to think I have always been a learner. And one way I continue to learn is through my reading. So from time-to-time I'd like to share with Bristlecone Chapter members books that I have found relevant and insightful to understanding of plant life in our region.

Nevada's Changing Wildlife Habitat is one such book. Although dealing specifically with the Great Basin region of northern Nevada, its subject matter applies equally to the western Great Basin region here in Eastern California. Gruell is a retired Forest Service wildlife biologist who has pondered deeply on the current conditions of wildlife habitats in the Great Basin and how these have evolved over the last several thousand years. He draws on his own research and field experience, the scientific literature, and historical documents in developing a detailed ecological history of the region.

One widely cited study of the vegetation of the Great Basin prior to settlement concluded that the area was mostly a sea of sagebrush with limited grass cover. The author of that paper based his conclusions on accounts written by immigrants of what they saw along the wagon routes. Gruell goes more deeply into the historical literature, examining accounts by trappers, explorers, and early scientists and settlers, and presents evidence that upland habitats, away from the valley bottoms traversed by immigrants, were relatively open stands of

CONSERVATION

sagebrush with a substantial cover of perennial grasses which burned frequently. Bighorn sheep and pronghorn antelope were favored by this vegetation, but mule deer and sage grouse were uncommon.

Gruell argues that overgrazing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reduced the cover of perennial grasses, which in turn greatly reduced the incidence of fire. The absence of fire allowed shrubs to increase in cover and density and pinyon-juniper woodlands to expand in area. These changes initially improved the habitat for mule deer and sage grouse. Improved livestock management allowed perennial grasses to recover (somewhat). But in the last half of the twentieth century, shrub and tree canopies have closed reducing the cover of the herbaceous plants that sage grouse depend on, while increasing cover of cheatgrass and other exotic annuals in drier sites have promoted destructive fires that eliminate many of the browse plants that mule deer need.

Gruell concludes that today there are two distinct fire problems in the Great Basin: (1) too much fire in lower elevation Wyoming big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata* ssp. *wyomingensis*) habitats where cheatgrass has largely replaced perennial grasses, and (2) too little fire in mountain big sagebrush (*A. tridentata* ssp. *vaseyana*) habitats and dense pinyon-juniper woodlands.

High-intensity fires may be unavoidable in sagebrush steppe and pinyon-juniper woodlands where woody fuels have been accumulating for 150 years. Prescribed fire may help in the upper elevation habitats where cheatgrass is not yet abundant, but solutions for areas where cheatgrass has replaced the native perennial grasses have yet to be found. Gruell has synthesized a great deal of information to paint a coherent picture of how habitats came to be in their current condition. The one thing that is lacking is an examination of how climate change might influence future conditions. Warmer conditions may facilitate the expansion of cheatgrass into higher elevation mountain big sagebrush and pinyon-juniper woodlands, initiating another era of habitat change unfavorable to all species of wildlife.

Steve McLaughlin

A stroll down memory lane

It is April 2001. Birds sing, the sun shines, but in DWP headquarters the mood is bleak. Why? Because the Inyo County Water Department (ICWD), for the first time, had actually used monitoring data gathered according to DWP-approved protocols to challenge DWP's 2000 pumping plan. Even worse, ICWD is about to do it again and challenge DWP's 2001 pumping plan! Inyo seems to think DWP should actually understand monitoring data and use the data to manage groundwater pumping. What a betrayal! DWP is clearly being victimized by those treacherous DWP-haters at ICWD!

A brainflash in the mind of a DWP manager: Hire a consultant! DWP proposes to the LA Board of Water and Power Commissioners that the Montgomery Watson Americas consulting firm should be given a three year contract (Agreement #47026, April 17, 2001). To persuade the Board to approve the contract, DWP asserts, in writing:

“LADWP has been at a severe disadvantage when participating in Technical Group and Standing Committee meetings, because *it lacks the expertise and resources to adequately review motions put forth by the Inyo County Technical Group representatives...* LADWP is also at a disadvantage when ICWD decides to implement study results on their staff's evaluation...

Consultant [Montgomery Watson Americas] possesses the required scientific and technological expertise...*Consultant will also train LADWP personnel.* During the next three years LADWP will be hiring additional permanent personnel to perform most of the tasks the Consultant is being retained to perform. *There will be a transfer of knowledge during the three-year period. Consultant will train existing and new LADWP personnel* to enable LADWP to take over the temporary functions of the consultant. (italics added)”

To make sure the Board of Water and Power Commissioners understands what a crisis DWP faces, DWP continues:

“There is an urgency to hire the Consultant. LADWP has been unable to

pump its full entitlement as provided for in the 1991 Agreement [the Inyo-LA Long Term Water Agreement]. ICWD has created obstacles that have resulted in significant loses [sic] of groundwater for LADWP. *The Agreement allows for an average annual pumping of 105,000 acre-feet; LADWP has been limited to an average annual pumping of 65,000 acre-feet...*(italics added)

The Board of Water and Power Commissioners approves the contract, to the tune of \$8,000,000, and extends the contract in 2004 for 6 more years to the tune of \$22,965,000.

Fast forward 11 years to the Technical Group meeting May 9, 2012. The agenda contains yet another attempt to determine if significant, pumping-induced vegetation change is occurring at Parcel Blackrock 94 (see previous issues for the appalling history of this issue). DWP's Gene Coufal begins the discussion of the agenda item by *apologizing* (literally) because no one at DWP has the expertise to understand a particular statistical analysis done by ICWD 15 months before (February 2011). As a result DWP is sorry but there can be no progress made toward resolving the issue at this meeting.

So... DWP spends \$31,000,000 on a contract explicitly justified by the urgent need for the consultant to train DWP staff so they will have the expertise to adequately review motions put forth by ICWP Technical Group representatives. Eleven years later, by its own admission, DWP staff still lacks the expertise to adequately review motions put forth by ICWD Technical Group representatives. Will DWP managers who squandered \$31,000,000 resign in disgrace? Will they be held accountable in any way at all? Does anyone on the current Board of Water and Power Commissioners even realize what has occurred?

Consider the outright lie DWP told the Board of Water and Power Commissioners in the 2001 contract justification. *"The Agreement allows for an average annual pumping of 105,000 acre-feet; LADWP has been limited to an average annual pumping of 65,000 acre-feet..."* There is no way DWP's long term average annual pumping back in 2001 was 65,000 acre-feet – this number is 14%- 50% too low, depending on which years are averaged. Furthermore the LTWA doesn't guarantee DWP any specific volume of annual

pumping. Just as Mulholland frightened LA voters into approving Aqueduct bonds back in 1905 by fabricating a drought, so DWP in 2001 frightened its Board of Water and Power Commissioners into approving the Montgomery Watson Americas contract by fabricating low volumes of pumping.

Consider that L.A. Water and Power Commissioner David Nahai publicly directed DWP to "make this [management at Blackrock 94] a priority" at a Standing Committee Meeting way back in 2008. In response, DWP didn't analyze the relevant monitoring data or avail itself of Montgomery Watson America's expertise to train its staff, or take any action at all. DWP waited three years for ICWD to make an analysis in February 2011, then waited 15 more months before declaring it lacked staff with expertise to understand ICWD's analysis. And even lacking expertise to understand ICWD's analysis, DWP staff nonetheless wrote a 41 page rebuttal in October 2011, seven months before asserting its staff lacked expertise to understand ICWD's analysis.

Finally, consider the relative size of the two agencies' budgets. DWP has a multi-billion dollar budget. It is over three orders of magnitude larger than ICWD's budget. Yet DWP is the agency delaying the proceedings by using the excuse of not having adequately trained staff.

What's new, you're thinking? DWP acting in bad faith implementing the Inyo-LA Long Term Water Agreement is the status quo – it's not new or news. I've strolled down memory lane not just to show DWP's bad faith in dealings with Inyo County, but to show DWP's repeated bad faith in dealings with its own board. This, in turn, is a way to communicate the magnitude of the problem Inyo faces.

DWP is a multi-billion dollar rogue agency. As seen in this example, it openly manipulates and ignores the Board of Water and Power Commissioners, its own governing body. DWP's exploitative management in Inyo County and abuse of the Inyo-LA Long Term Water Agreement are best understood as symptoms of this much larger governance problem. So long as Inyo focuses only on symptoms i.e. specific violations of the LTWA, without attempting to address the underlying governance disease, it is playing defense and is unlikely to have much success.

It is time for Inyo County to play offense and take its complaints to Los Angeles. Every time the Board of Water and Power Commissioners meet, the county should have a representative present to at least speak at public comment period. The county's representative would also then be available to LA media. Having a political presence in L.A., giving DWP bad press, and publicizing the fact that DWP continues to make fools of Water and Power Commissioners would be the most cost-effective strategy Inyo County could follow.

Daniel Pritchett

News from the front

In the last issue I described DWP's recent aggressive behavior in the Eastern Sierra as a "war." I cited DWP lawsuits against Mammoth Lakes Community Water District, and Great Basin Unified Air Pollution Control District, and disputes with Inyo County under the Inyo-LA Long Term Water Agreement. Below is an update from the Mammoth Lakes front line.

In response to DWP's lawsuits, Mammoth has hired a public relations firm (as well as attorneys). This has led to an article in the LA Times, (articles.latimes.com/2012/jun/29/local/la-me-mammoth-water-20120629) which euphemizes DWP's war as "a new assertiveness" and points out that DWP is facing an estimated "\$238-million budget deficit." The article also points out that DWP claims its dust mitigation effort at Owens Lake "unfairly raises rates for its customers by an average of at least \$20 a year."

DWP is getting revenge for having to spread water on Owens Lake (thereby reducing aqueduct flows) and is attempting to reduce its deficit on the backs of residents of Mammoth Lakes. In its lawsuit it claims senior rights to all the water currently used by Mammoth Lakes, and as a settlement proposes to sell the water back to Mammoth residents at average rates 100% above current ones.

The manager of the Mammoth Community Water District accused DWP of trying to "intimidate" his agency with the high cost of litigation. Mammoth Lakes is already teetering on the brink of bankruptcy due to a recent breach-of-contract judgment, and the Water District's attorney said the DWP lawsuits could be the last straw. He pointed out that a bankruptcy filing by

Mammoth Lakes would bring "a huge return to LA's investment in attorneys' fees."

While defending itself in the court of law, Mammoth is also attacking DWP in the court of public opinion. In addition to hiring a PR firm, it is encouraging residents to "swamp the DWP and Los Angeles City officials with complaints."

(www.therepublic.com/view/story/9f56140a825441dba225b89f8a1/CA--LA-Sierra-Water-Battle). In other words Mammoth is following a strategy of taking the battle to LA I have advocated for years (including my article "A walk down memory lane, above). The strategy is starting to have some success. In addition to the LA Times article already cited, it has caused DWP General Manager Ron Nichols to issue a rather defensive press release, which, in turn generated more bad press for DWP.

I hope Inyo County leaders learn from Mammoth's example. I hadn't envisioned Inyo actually hiring a PR firm (too expensive), but had imagined Inyo staff and/or Supervisors and/or residents speaking at Board of Water and Power Commissioners meetings. Let Water and Power Commissioners hear arguments un-filtered by DWP. Let Inyo generate bad publicity for DWP by telling the truth in LA about what DWP does here.

Daniel Pritchett

MEMBERSHIP

The Bristlecone Chapter heartily welcomes the following new members:

Carmen Kappos, Mammoth Lakes

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 newsletter.

To RENEW: please contact Sally Manning or

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Using a credit card, go to www.cnps.org and click on the JOIN button

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