



The California Native Plant Society

Bristlecone Chapter Newsletter

Volume 33 No. 6
November-December 2012

Bristlecone Chapter

November Meeting & Program

Wednesday, November 28, 6pm, White Mountain Research Station, 3000 East Line Street, Bishop

Potluck & Social, 6pm, WMRS Dining Room

The November General Meeting of the Bristlecone Chapter will be our Annual Holiday Potluck, followed by the program described below. Please bring a dish and/or drinks to share, as well as your own place setting. See you at 6:00 pm for dinner, followed by a talk by Joy England at 7:00 pm.

A Flora Revisited: Survey of Vascular Species in the Upper Rock Creek Watershed

The speaker for our November program will be Joy England, a graduate student at Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden in Claremont. Her topic is "A Flora Revisited: Survey of Vascular Species in the Upper Rock Creek Watershed."

Upper Rock Creek, from high alpine Little Lakes Valley to winding Rock Creek Canyon south of Toms Place, hosts impressive species diversity. With an altitudinal range of 11,000 feet at the headwaters to about 7,000 feet at the canyon bottom, the watershed includes a wide array of plant habitats. Botanist Frank W. Peirson, in his 1938 checklist, postulated that some Sierra Nevada plant species may reach their highest elevation in the Rock Creek Basin.

Joy's thesis project aims to expand the known number of taxa in the Upper Rock Creek watershed and produce a revised checklist of vascular plant species. Her talk will present an overview of field work during summer 2012 and will include research goals for 2013.

November Board Meeting

Wednesday, November 14, 7pm, at the Friends of the Inyo office on 819 North Barlow Lane, Bishop. Members are welcome.

Thank you for your years of service

Serving on the Board of the Bristlecone Chapter of the CNPS is "a labor of love" in support of our local native plant communities. I wish to thank two dedicated members of our Board who have recently resigned for their many years of service. Departing Membership Chair Sally Manning's insight and long-term knowledge concerning local environmental issues have been invaluable and her advice will be missed from our Board's discussions. And Daniel Pritchett has worked hard in support of our on-going outreach efforts while serving as both our Chapter's Newspaper Editor and Conservation Chair.

We have been fortunate to have had both of these knowledgeable naturalists dedicate their time to serve as members of our chapter's Board. Thank you Sally and Dan.

— *Yvonne Wood, President*

The Only Constant is Change...

The Bristlecone Chapter is undergoing profound changes. There are currently several vacancies on the Board, including Newsletter Editor, Membership, Publicity, and Conservation Chairs. The first two are particularly critical; in truth without a Newsletter Editor and a Membership Chair, it will be difficult to continue to function as a chapter. Current Board members were able to get this issue out, but for future issues we need members who wish to see the chapter continue to step up and become more involved. If you are willing to give one of these jobs a try, or want additional information, contact me or any other Board member.

By the way, if you are looking at a printed newsletter, you are missing some great photos. To get the most out of our newsletter, and to save us time, printing costs, and mailing costs, please sign up for the web-based version of the newsletter—just send a message to: newsletter@bristleconecnps.org.

— *Steve McLaughlin, Past-president*

Report: Bishop Native Plant Sale, 2012

On the day of the Bishop native plant sale, I got to the “station” about 7 a.m. to do the final set up. This year I tried having coffee and Julie Ann brought treats so I had to get the coffee pots going and that table set up. At 7:30 I took my truck and parked it across the street from the entrance to the research station and hang the “Plant Sale” banner on it. As I was walking back through the parking lot some people got out of a van. Upon questioning them, I found out they were there for the sale and had been there since 5 a.m.! It was their first sale and they didn’t know quite what to expect. I explained that they could look and figure out what they wanted but had to wait until 9 when the sale would begin. This family of 4 was very organized, each member had a picture of the plant they were suppose to get on their electronic device, and they had plenty of time to find them all.

This year’s sale was calmer than those in the past, besides the 5 a.m. family only a few people came early and they were there only 15 min. before the sale started. As usual, the rush was from 9-11 a.m. and then the whole experience was over. During that time 67 people bought 595 plants. These numbers are down from last year (84 people and 689 plants), however, we held 4 other small plant sales during the spring and when I factor in those numbers we sold almost as many plants as last year.

My experiment with using just the deeper pots has worked out well. Both Sherry and I have found that we can grow much healthier plants with the deeper pots. The other advantage to the deep pots is that I can fit more plants on a table. So far 45% of the tree pots have returned and 11% of the deep gallon pots are back. I am hoping as people get their plants in the ground more of the pots will come back. They can be returned to The Eastern Sierra Land Trust at 176 Home St. in Bishop, or to the Greenhouse at White Mountain Research Station. Both locations have trash cans with “pots for Native Plants” signs on them.

Someone asked me if I was relieved when the sale was over. At the propagation center the sale is just

another day in the cycle of things. I am relieved to get those plants that are ready to go out of the way so I can repot others and fill the tables again. For example, the plant sale plants took up 3 tables worth of space and now are only using ¼ of a table. But within 3 weeks of the sale those 3 tables were filled with repotted bitterbrush seedlings that need to grow out for another year before they can go in the ground. And now as fall starts winding down and we get hints of winter I anxiously wait for the restoration plants to be planted out so I can use those pots for more plants that need to over-winter. When



November rolls around and the plants are tucked in under the row cover, then I clean all the seeds I have collected, or others have collected for me, to get ready to start again in January.

There are a few plants left, so if you missed the sale you can contact me at kquinlan2@verizon.net and arrange a time to meet at the greenhouse to buy them. Otherwise, they will be at one of the spring sales.

(Alabama Hills Day, Earth Day, or the Eastern Sierra Land Trust Garden Fest).

I do enjoy the plant sale. I love to see all the enthusiasm people have for growing natives and meeting these incredible enthusiastic folks who drive from far away and get up at unreasonably early hours of the morning to be the first at the plant sale. The proceeds for all the plant sales go toward the DeDecker Grants.

The plant sale could not happen without the tremendous amount of help I get from lots of volunteers. I have a cadre of planters who come throughout the season and help seed and repot plants and would like to thank them all for the many hours they put in: Elsbeth Otto, Hillary Behr, Kirsten Dutcher, Kathy Duvall, Julie Ann Hopkins, Rosemary Jarrett, Laurie Morrow, Mignon Moskowitz, Martin Oliver, Hilary Parish, Margaret Phelps, Richard Potashin, Terry Russi, Steve McLaughlin, Jim Varnum, Sue Weis, Kay Wilson, and Yvonne Wood.

– Katie Quinlan

Native Demonstration Garden Plot in the Bishop Community Garden

Working with the Inyo Mono Master Gardeners and the Friends of Eastern Sierra Community Gardens in the newly established Bishop Community Garden, Sue Weis and Katie Quinlan have planted a native plant demonstration plot using plants grown in the Cooperative Plant Propagation Center. The community garden is on the east side of Bishop Park and includes about 30 plots for community members who need garden space, which is fenced, and several planned demonstration plots. An eagle scout installed the water system for the community plots as his service project, and Dan Holland, volunteer, worked on the water system for the demonstration plots and roto-tilled the whole garden area several times.

The native garden was the first of the demonstration plots to be planted, in the late fall of 2011, after the plot was solarized to reduce the weeds and grasses that are present. A drip irrigation system was installed early this summer and the plants appear to be doing very well.

Ten to fifteen members of the public attended fall workshops on native plant use at the plot in 2011 and 2012. There were planting demonstrations by Sue and Katie, assisted by other Master Gardeners and some of the attendees, and discussions of soil preparation and watering.

Stop by and see the garden and give us your suggestions and comments. There are some other demonstration plots in various stages of planning, including a pollinator garden sponsored by the Audubon Society, an edible landscape and vegetable growing plot, a First Bloom garden involving the local tribes, and a perennial flowers plot that the Rotary Club has adopted. There are still xeriscape and meadow plots (native grasses) waiting for ambitious garden designers, installers, and keepers. If anyone is interested in helping with the upkeep of the native plant plot or becoming involved in any of the other demonstrations, contact Sue sueweis@aol.com or Katie kquinlan2@verizon.net.

– Sue Weis

Birch Creek Journal

Autumn slipped into our neighborhood while Steve and I were out of town for five days. Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus vitacea*) is turning red, Fremont cottonwood (*Populus fremontii*) is turning yellow, and water birch (*Betula occidentalis*) is turning bronze. All of a sudden, I need a sweater when I start my morning walk, and when I pick tomatoes off the vine, they feel as chilly in my hand as if refrigerated. I took down the hummingbird feeder before we left, but an Anna's hummingbird ignored the hint and will probably stick around until the last flowers of autumn sage (*Salvia greggii*) either fade or freeze. I used to worry that these laggardly hummers would be caught by the first winter storm until a knowledgeable birder assured me that they can get to Ridgecrest in a few hours. We had a day of intermittent rain earlier this month, but it hardly qualified in my mind as a winter storm, and the hummingbird evidently agreed.

My vegetable garden, like the world beyond, has registered the change to cooler nights and shorter days. Tomatoes crack less but (because there's no silver lining without its cloud) now taste more like food for mere mortals than ambrosia for gods.

Eggplant leaves have faded like swatches of velvet left in the sun, and flower production has slowed to a standstill. Cucumber vines stagger onward, producing a pound or two of fruit every week, despite a leafhopper infestation of Biblical proportions. These tiny green bugs are so numerous that every time I enter the garden I must cover my face with my hand lest they leafhop right up my nose or down my throat. When days were warmer, dragonflies perched on tomato cages and hawked the leafhoppers out of the air. I applauded their efforts, but truth to tell, they hardly made a dent in the population. The curious thing is that I never saw leafhoppers in the garden before this summer, or maybe just a few. Same thing with tomato fruitworms. Nary a fruitworm in previous years; this year, a dozen or more. Be grateful if you've never seen one of these insidious borers. The first sign is a perfectly round hole in what appears to be a perfectly good tomato. Don't do what I did and take the fruit indoors for final ripening. The only thing worse than having a living fruitworm invisibly riddle a tomato as it ripens on your counter is having a dead fruitworm,

(Continued next page)

Birch Creek Journal (continued)

gray and limp, flop out of said tomato after you've parboiled and cut it open.

That rainy day earlier this month dropped two-tenths of an inch of rain at our place—perhaps as much as a quarter of an inch, depending on which of our two rain gauges you feel inclined to trust. I felt revived after the storm, and I enjoyed the novelty of sinking ever so slightly into damp soil on my morning walk, but desert vegetation around our house seemed essentially untouched. Mojave indigobush (*Psoralethamnus arborescens*) remained in a state of profound dormancy, as did hopsage (*Grayia spinosa*), horsebrush (*Tetradymia axillaris*), and other dominants. Leafless they were before the storm, and leafless they remained afterward. I should not have been surprised. It wasn't much rain, after all. In a multi-year study of plant phenology in the Mojave Desert, ecologist Janice Beatley found that most shrubs needed an inch of cool-season rain to break the long dormancy enforced by summer heat and drought.

Growth patterns of some desert plants are plastic enough to respond to unseasonal moisture, as long as there is enough of it. Up the road from our house is a cattle trough filled by pipe from Birch Creek. The trough overflowed for several consecutive weeks this summer, making a moist swath of earth on the downhill side. A dense stand of downy monkeyflower (*Mimulus pilosus*) germinated in the wet soil and many shrubs within reach of the wet zone put out fresh shoots and leaves, among them Mojave indigo bush and cheese bush (*Ambrosia salsola*). One small plant of California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*) even bloomed, perhaps for the first time ever. Steve and I saw the same thing in our native plant garden, which we soaked with a sprinkler once a month this summer. Desert brittlebush (*Encelia actoni*), we learned, will bloom all summer long if given enough moisture. We found that flowering of desert fernbush (*Chamaebatiaria millefolium*) can be prolonged in this way, too. But certain other shrubs, such as desert peach (*Prunus andersonii*), grape-soda lupine (*Lupinus excubitus*), desert purple sage (*Salvia dorrii*), and Mojave aster (*Xylorhiza tortifolia*), did not respond to sprinkler irrigation, perhaps because the normal cues for flowering—cold nights or increasing day lengths, for example—were missing.

This is the time of year when I amaze myself with the

sheer abundance of rubber rabbitbrush (*Ericameria nauseosa*). The golden masses of blossom make the plants leap out of obscurity, and every year I have the same thought: "Wow, I never realized that there was so much rabbitbrush out there." (The corollary is that I am reminded, year after year, of how extensively the Owens Valley was farmed in the decades before DWP, rabbitbrush being an early occupant of old fields.) Given the general lifelessness of natural desert vegetation right now, the abundance of flowers on rubber rabbitbrush is most welcome. Green rabbitbrush (*Ericameria teretifolia*) is flowering now, too, also in apparent defiance of the odds. A quarter-inch of rain is hardly enough to wash the dust off these plants, much less bring them into bloom, yet they flower luxuriantly every autumn nonetheless, as yellow as the best Irish butter, as unyielding as death and taxes.

Dissertation work undertaken in the Owens Valley by our own Sally Manning helps explain why this is so. Sally's comparative studies of green rabbitbrush, which blooms in autumn, and the closely related Cooper's goldenbush (*Ericameria cooperi*), which blooms in spring, showed a strong contrast in rooting patterns. The taproot of green rabbitbrush reached a depth of 56 feet, whereas Cooper's goldenbush penetrated to 39 feet at most. Moreover, the root system of green rabbitbrush branched little until it got down to about two feet, while that of Cooper's goldenbush branched just below the soil surface. Clearly, the deeper roots of green rabbitbrush—and of rubber rabbitbrush, as well—tap a layer of soil moisture not available to most other desert shrubs, enabling them to bloom at a time of year when drought-induced dormancy should prevail.

I keep thinking about that quarter-inch of rain and its minuscule effect on native vegetation. My hope for this winter is for more rain than last. More rain, fewer leafhoppers, and no tomato fruitworms. Is that too much to ask? We'll see. Meanwhile, I take comfort in the knowledge that, no matter what the winter brings, deep reserves of soil moisture can be tapped by rabbitbrush when autumn rolls around again.

— Jan Bowers

"Autumn is a second spring when every leaf is a flower."

~Albert Camus

DeDecker Botanical Grants

In 2001, the Bristlecone Chapter established a grants program as a fitting tribute to our chapter's founder and renowned local botanist, Mary DeDecker. Our goal is to facilitate research and projects that increase the understanding and appreciation of native plants and ecosystems in the Eastern Sierra.

Anyone may apply for a grant, but we are especially interested in helping graduate students, college students, and primary and secondary students (K-12). Research projects need not be academic or scholarly but must be relevant to the native plants of the northern Mojave Desert, Sierra Nevada, and Great Basin portions of eastern California.

Grant recipients receive up to \$1,000 each for expenses and are asked to present their results to the Bristlecone Chapter either at a regular meeting or in the chapter newsletter. Recipients must submit a progress report at the end of the year.

We have awarded grants to graduate students for research on various ecological, taxonomic and physiological aspects of our native flora. We have also helped to fund an education program on native plants for local schools, a mural project which included native plants, native plant gardens and invasive weed eradication projects.

Submit written proposals of no more than two pages in length to the Mary DeDecker Grant Committee. Each should contain title, objectives, methods, expected final product, brief statement of applicant's qualifications, and breakdown of proposed costs. Students should include a letter of support from their advisor or teacher.

This year's Deadline is December 10, 2012. All applicants will be notified of the committee's decision by January 28, 2013.

Send proposals or requests for information to:

Jan Bowers
Mary DeDecker Grant Committee
P. O. Box 819
Big Pine, CA 93513

Proposals and requests for information may also be submitted by email: grants@bristleconecnps.org.

Future Farmers Go Native!

On September 25th, 30 students from the Lone Pine FFA program spent the morning learning how to pot bitterbrush seedlings. These plants will be used in a restoration project on some land up in Swall Meadows. This work project came about through a joint grant between the BLM and FFA. Lone Pine High School now has a greenhouse and the students will learn to grow native plants that will be used for restoration projects in the lower end of the Owens Valley. Last year the students spent hours cleaning 600 desert bitterbrush seeds and cold stratified them, but their greenhouse wasn't ready when the seeds were so they saw all that hard work go to waste. This year Katie Quinlan is working more closely with the students and Brenda Lacey, their instructor, to make sure the facilities will be ready when the plants are, and the students will experience more success with growing the plants. Katie greatly appreciated the help from the students potting up 200 of the bitterbrush seedlings.

Membership

The California Native Plant Society is an organization of laypersons 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.

To Join or Renew Online: Go to cnps.org and click on the JOIN/renew button at the top of the page, or mail in the form on the back cover of this newsletter.



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_ Benefactor	\$600
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CNPS Membership Coordinator
2707 K Street, Suite 1
Sacramento, CA 95816

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