



# INSIGNIS

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CALIFORNIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY  
ALTA PEAK CHAPTER NEWSLETTER

Please send changes of address to Membership Chair,  
Janet Fanning, 41118 Blossom Drive, Three Rivers, CA 93271

## President's Message

We wish to thank everyone who helped out at our successful plant sale and to welcome all you wonderful new members. We also would like to thank those of you who renewed your memberships during the year. We are all looking forward to seeing our new flora burst forth with new growth in the spring and show off for us. We had a good turnout at our program in September prior to the sale. Melanie Baer-Keeley did a great presentation describing the features of most of the items on our plant list. Thank you Melanie. We have a wonderful program for you in February and look forward to seeing you all there.

The Other End of the Rainbow - Highway 190, with Rosemary Donlon.  
Friday, February 21, 2003, 7:00 P.M., at the Springville Veterans  
Memorial Building, 35944 Highway 190, Springville.

Formerly a national monument, Death Valley has been a national park since 1994. It encompasses 3.4 million acres of the northern Mojave Desert. Death Valley's geologic history, topographic diversity, and climatic extremes make it home to a specialized and fascinating flora. Plant inventories have identified nearly 1000 species, of which 22 are not found elsewhere. The El Nino rains of 1997 deposited four times the average rainfall for this region. Many plants bloomed in record profusion, some for the first time in many years. Rosemary will share with us her photographs of the greatest floral display of the past.

Rosemary Donlon is the Chapter Council Representative for the CNPS Monterey Bay Chapter and is past president of that chapter. She works as a landscape/horticulture consultant in Carmel. She studied horticulture and botany at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo where she began a research project on the writings of noted native plant horticulturist Lester Rowntree (1879-1979), the fruits of which she has previously presented to our chapter. She is currently compiling and editing a collection of Lester Rowntree's articles on the horticultural use of California native plants.

Join us for this fascinating program. Books and posters will be on display and available for sale. Refreshments will be served after the meeting. To arrange a carpool from Three Rivers to Springville, contact Janet Fanning at 561-3461. See you there.

### Field Trips/Hikes/Exploring

CNPS has worked with local land trusts for several years, first with the separate groups in the two watersheds (Tule and Kaweah Rivers), and more recently with SLTLT (Sierra Los Tulares Land Trust), the organization that combines land trusts in Tulare County. With this alliance in mind, we want to expand our outdoor exploring walks this year to more than plants---every outing will have a vegetation theme but many will add another focus. Some will be hikes, moderately strenuous or in higher elevations, while others will be shorter walks and accessible to all.

With a general purpose of Sharing Special Places, we've asked several outdoor people to give us ideas. If we haven't yet contacted you, call us to suggest a trip you would like to lead or help plan. First and foremost, we continue to seek places where we can enjoy flowers, and some of these places may well offer other interesting features. The first three, in winter months when higher mountain meadows and trails are closed by seasonal weather, are closer to the Valley and to populated areas.

#### January 25 [10:00 am until 1:00 pm].

Cathy Capone, local Oak Census record-keeper, will lead us around Porterville on an 'Urban Oaks Tour' showing some of the best examples of our 'urban forest' (oaks, in this case) and talking about how these trees can be kept healthy for another hundred plus years. We plan a three-hour ride-walk tour of the highlights of the Valley Oak forest in and around Porterville, visiting individual outstanding Valley Oaks and groves within and beyond the urban area. Different landscaping uses will be observed and discussed and tree ordinances that affect Tulare County will be reviewed.

Each walking section will be less than a mile, but some will be partly over damp, weedy, uneven terrain where sturdy shoes will help you enjoy the morning. Water, snacks, family, as you choose. The trip will continue in light rain or fog. Meet at the covered arbor in Veteran's Park at the corner of Morton and Newcomb. Directions---from Highway 65 take the Henderson exit and turn west. Get into the left hand lane and turn left at Prospect at stoplight; turn right at Morton stoplight. Park on the right hand side before the next stoplight or turn right at Newcomb and park. Be at the Arbor ready to begin the tour at 10:00.

February 15 we'll walk over Lewis Hill, north of Porterville to see Fritillaria in full bloom. This is one of two special wildflowers that grow on adobe soil in 2-3 places in the area. The Tule Oaks Chapter of the land trust acquired this property several years ago, and manages it primarily for the protection of the two plant species. Other flowers bloom throughout the spring season; a plant list for the site now includes at least 60 species. Fritillaria striata, the Striped Adobe Lily, is a bulb-plant that last year reached its peak bloom mid-February, so we have scheduled this trip accordingly. It makes an exquisite photograph, so those of you who like to use a camera to capture natural loveliness, be prepared.

(February 15 Cont'd.)

The distance we walk is not far, maybe a couple of miles total, but we do go up the somewhat steep hill, cross-country style, and then down again, on the south side. Meet on Plano roadside on the downhill Strathmore side, at 10:00. Bring lunch, or at least snacks to make a leisurely explore of this land trust Preserve. (There also are birds and other wildlife to be seen.)

**March 29th**, with Denise Robertson, Ranger at Lake Kaweah, we will have a chance to see several sites managed by Army Corps staff. First, a short loop nature trail will introduce us to the natural riparian vegetation in the area. A short drive will take us to a 'growing ground' nursery area where they are propagating a variety of taxa for a restoration project designed to mitigate for loss of vegetation when the level of the lake is raised. One or more additional sites may be visited, depending on weather and what is in bloom.

Bring lunch/snacks, and come out for an opportunity to better understand how the lakeshore and adjacent lands are managed for natural resources, and what the vegetation resource is! Elevation is about 1,000', walking will be level and easy, and Denise welcomes children. Meet at 10:00 a.m. at the Horse Creek Campground, on the north side of Highway 198---before the construction zone if you are coming from the west.

The schedule for the following months will be included in the next *Insignis* issues. We have been invited to visit the Packsaddle Sequoia Grove, to see *Clarkia springvillensis* on River Ridge Ranch, will again try for a fair-weather day for the twice cancelled Flume Walk, and special meadow sites will be selected to find 'orchids and onions', and associated plant species.

#### **CDFA Cuts Biocontrols, Weed Eradication Programs**

Responding to the governor's request to reduce budgets, the California Department of Food & Agriculture has focused its cuts almost entirely on weed control programs, indicating that these projects are not considered "core" parts of the department's mission. The department, asked to trim \$1 million from their general fund budget of approximately \$30 million, cut \$750,000 from weed programs, whose total budget is \$2-3 million. These cuts come from two important weed programs: biocontrols, and weed eradication. The first researches, releases, and monitors biocontrol agents to control invasives such as yellow starthistle, tamarisk, arundo, and Cape ivy. The second program identifies and controls A-rated noxious weeds before they get out of control. District biologists under this program work closely with counties and Weed Management Areas to respond to new weeds coming into a region. For instance, new knapweed infestations originating with gravel deliveries from Nevada were recently detected through this program. In addition, the GIS specialist dedicated to weeds has been reassigned to support other non-weed programs.

**Please register an opinion** with Secretary William Lyons, Jr. at CDFA, 1220 N Street, Sacramento, CA 95814. Send messages via his secretary Sue Hessing at [shessing@cdfa.ca.gov](mailto:shessing@cdfa.ca.gov).

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## Orchids

Orchids are far from our paths these early days of winter, with hillsides brown and grey, many of the seasonal streams quiet and still, and the underlying soil of high mountain meadows not yet soaked and renewed. So, perhaps this is a good time to recall, anticipate, the flowering of local species of one of the favorite plant families. Interestingly, Tulare County is home to sixteen documented species, in eight genera. (In the entire state, there are eleven genera.) Two reach their statewide southern limits in our back country (*Goodyera oblongifolia*, and *Piperia colemanii*) while several others grow no further south than Tulare County in the Sierra, but also occur in the coast ranges.

The most common one is *Epipactis gigantea*, found in the three forks of the Tule River, and along small drainages in all the slopes that feed into the main branches. Not really a giant at all, it is mostly a 1-2 foot high plant that emerges from the wet ground as the water level drops, and begins blooming in the early summer. The flowers are pale cream-color to greenish, with purple-red veins and indeed, except being barely two inches across, look just like some of the huge tropical blossoms one buys in florist shops. This one is simply called Stream Orchid, and is probably the one most likely seen in our area.

The smaller-flowered ones are less widespread and grow at higher elevations. Of these montane taxa, six are species of *Piperia*, with short spurs on the lower petal (lip). Referred to as *Habenaria* in older wildflower books, Rein Orchid has been a widely used common name. Yet these often are abundant in dryer meadows, in not-obviously-wet woodland, and occur in many lower elevation habitats. Up to one hundred tiny flowers grow clustered closely along an erect stalk. *Piperia colemanii*, ranging from Siskiyou in the north to Fresno County and recently recorded from Tulare County, is about 18 inches high, with a few basal leaves that most often are withered by the time the flowers open. This is presently considered a rare taxon, described only in 1993; many of the 19 known populations are in national forests.

Two other species of *Piperia* (*P. leptopetala*, *P. michaelii*) that have been found in our County are of particular concern because in some areas they are rare and rapidly disappearing. Damage to these local populations comes from loss of habitat, damage from road or trail use/development, logging, or collecting for horticulture. This last continues to be a major cause of loss of many of the wild orchid species. The three more common, and widely distributed species (*P. transversa*, *P. unalascensis*, *P. elongata*) are similar with conspicuous basal leaves, small flowers along an erect stem (spike), and generally white to cream to greenish in color. The fruit pods are erect, clustered close to the stem, and up to an inch long.

The other orchid species (*Goodyera oblongifolia*) that barely reaches into Tulare County has the peculiar common name of Rattlesnake Plantain. The leaves are conspicuously white-veined or spotted, and all basal.

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Flowers are again small, on an erect stalk. This genus has tropical representatives, and typically grows in dry coniferous forests, often in the layer of needles and litter that accumulates under trees. Let me hear of any sites you find it.

*Corallorhiza maculata*, Spotted Coralroot, is often seen in coniferous forests, growing from beneath the layer of needles and litter that accumulates from year to year. It is abundant throughout California, adaptable to diverse habitats, and with major populations within State and National Parks, and in wilderness areas. It is extremely variable in size (up to nearly a meter tall, but often only 5-10 inches). Stems can produce up to forty flowers that range from 0.5 to 1.5 inches across. The lower 'petal', or lip, usually is dotted with reddish or purplish spots, giving it its common name. The shape of the several parts of the flower also varies, and flower color varies from pale to lemon yellow, to white, reddish brown, purplish, with intergrading plants occurring within the same area. This genus depends on soil fungi for 'food' and leaves are reduced to small bracts. It is one of the longest blooming orchids, and one of the first to bloom. In our part of the southern Sierra, where Pinedrops (a member of the family that includes manzanita and rhododendron) also grows in this forest type of vegetation, superficially the two taxa resemble one another, especially in the seed capsule stage. But pinedrops fruits are round rather than elongate as orchid fruits uniformly are in the species we will find locally.

*Cephalanthera austini*, very appropriately called the Phantom Orchid, has a white stem, sometimes close to 2' high, with twenty-five plus flowers each about half an inch across, and rather like those of the much more common *Epipactis* of our lower streamsides. Phantom Orchid depends on a fungus that lives in and around the orchid root mass, and if the fungus dies, the orchid dies. Lacking chlorophyll, leaf-like bracts, flowers, and seed capsules are all without color, and when hundreds of stems occur together in the litter under coniferous forests high in our mountains, the sight can be stunning. It only comes as far south as Tulare County in the Sierras.

*Listera* is a worldwide genus, with three species in California. Two are rare and found only in the northwest counties, but *L. convallarioides* grows from southern California into Canada, and across to New England. Flowers are tiny, green, and because the plants generally grow hidden in moss or grass or among larger shrubs along banks of streams, it is not easily found. ... "Frequently found in damp spots in sequoia groves" suggests where we might look for it locally. In most habitats, large colonies can develop, appearing as a ground cover. A distinctive character is the pair of opposite leaves that grow about halfway up the stem.

*Platanthera* is represented by three species in Tulare County...all of them commonly referred to as Bog Orchids. These were formerly placed in the genus *Habenaria*, (as were many species today allied as *Piperia*) and even separated out as a distinct genus *Platanthera* remains worldwide, often common, and variable within a species. The two I find most often

lost to invasive exotic pest plants than to development. Much is currently written and discussed about the impacts of invasive weeds in a whole-ecosystem context. Los Angeles has prepared a children's booklet on the subject; San Diego City Council proposed a ban on the sale by nurseries of certain targeted species. A formal policy, adopted by the State CNPS Board in 1996, outlines actions that are recommended for all who are responsible for land management. Only a few years back, being a weed warrior was a kind of lonely activity for the dedicated few. Although many CNPS chapters had Invasive Exotics committees, the issue of wildland weeds received scant attention from other environmental organizations or government agencies. All this is changed.

The Nature Conservancy has hired a staff person to focus exclusively on exotics. The national Natural Areas Association and a large number of local societies, reserves, neighborhood work teams, and park supporters have put invasives control at the top of their agendas. California Exotic Pest Council (CalEPPC) now has a full-time Executive Director. Overall, there is a tremendous increase in awareness of and efforts toward this issue both on a national and an international level.

With this background, here's a short report on our local Weed Management Area and the Tulare County Noxious Weed Task Force, which is attempting to deal with both ag-land and wildland plant pests. CNPS is represented on the Task Force, which is chaired by Joe Williams of the Natural Resource Conservation Service (USDA). In the past two years of work, a brochure (Identifying And Controlling Tulare County's Invasive Weeds) treating our 12 "worst"\* pests has been produced and distributed. Data has been contributed to statewide mapping work. A Strategic Plan 2001-2006 has been written; a large number of control treatments on private farm/range lands have supported land owner efforts to remove (mostly thistles). In Three Rivers a local project to remove Arundo has been coordinated, and a power point presentation on Noxious Weed Control has been made available for general use. In cooperation with UC Cooperative Extension personnel, funds have been obtained to assist additional educational and eradication projects. One type of help that the group needs from everyone is accurate data on where invasive weeds occur. An ongoing, always changing task is to map the distributions of some of the most important species, with the goal of containing their spread. As with fighting fire, one works to shrink or at least maintain the perimeter of an outbreak; attacking the center of an infestation is less critical in the early stages of control.

So, look over the list following and if you find a few plants in an isolated occurrence, eradicate them if you can, but at least note the date and location and relay the information to Janet Fanning or Joan Stewart and they will get it to the appropriate office.

\*Yellow Star Thistle, Tocalote, Bull Thistle, Italian Thistle, Scotch ("Cotton") Thistle, Milk Thistle, Tumbleweed, Giant Reed (Arundo), Cocklebur, Spanish Broom, Tree of Heaven, Puncture Vine/Goat Head

**Dedicated to the Preservation of the Native Flora**

The California Native Plant Society is a statewide non-profit organization of amateurs and professionals with a common interest in California's native plants. The Society, working through its local chapters, seeks to increase understanding of California's native flora and to preserve this rich resource for future generations. Membership is open to all.

Membership includes informative publications, free field trips and monthly programs and discounts on books and posters. Also included is the *Bulletin*, a quarterly statewide report of activities and schedules, and the chapter newsletter. Please call the membership chairperson for more information.

**New Membership Application**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Tel. \_\_\_\_\_

**I wish to affiliate with:**

\_\_\_\_ Alta Peak Chapter (Tulare County)

\_\_\_\_ Other

**Membership category:**

\_\_\_\_ Student, Retired, Limited income, \$20

\_\_\_\_ Individual, Library, \$35

\_\_\_\_ Household, Family, or Group, \$45

\_\_\_\_ Supporting, \$75

\_\_\_\_ Plant Lover, \$100

\_\_\_\_ Patron, \$250

\_\_\_\_ Benefactor, \$500

\_\_\_\_ Life, \$1000

**Mail application and check to:**

Membership Chairman, California Native Plant Society, 1722 J Street., Suite 17, Sacramento, CA 95814

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