



# INSIGNIS

late Fall  
Winter 2004 -

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## CALIFORNIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY ALTA PEAK CHAPTER NEWSLETTER

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

**FEBRUARY 19...PROGRAM IN  
SPRINGVILLE.....7:00...Saturday Evening**

### "Diminutive Beauties

#### (Desert Belly Plants)"

Our California Deserts are renowned for their vast open spaces where rocks, strange-looking plants, canyons and mountains are truly 'awesome'. In certain years something special and unpredictable happens - desert surfaces become a mass of unimaginable color and texture. Much of this phenomenon is due to rain interspersed with warmth, when diminutive and short-lived plants can quickly carpet the soil surface. These have been referred to as "belly plants" because you have to get close to admire their form and color. Join us on an up-close look at the exquisite, stunning diversity of desert "belly flowers".

Botanist Heene Anderson, Southern California Regional Botanist with the California Native Plant Society, has spent years working and enjoying the Mojave and Colorado deserts. Her program on 19 February will introduce species that are likely to be found in the Mojave desert this coming spring, based on the weather in recent weeks.

Program at 7:00 is free, open to all, as are all CNPS events. At the Veterans Memorial Bldg in Springville, lots of parking, and a warm, beautiful way to spend a winter evening!

### LOCAL CALENDAR Events (walks, talks, ??) of Botanical Interest:

Last spring CNPS was asked if we could develop an ongoing 'master calendar' of events that involved seeing, discussing, working with native plants and vegetation. The Tulare County Land Trust (Sequoia Riverlands) has events on their preserves, community groups are developing demonstration gardens that feature native plant species, or are sponsoring projects that involve planting native vegetation for various reasons. Our membership overlaps with these, as well as other nature-related organizations, and it is frustrating to have to choose among activities all scheduled for the same day. Is there some way dates might be coordinated? As a start toward this purpose, if the persons who plan events that draw from a common pool of members could send me a calendar (quarterly?), we will try both to avoid conflicts with CNPS dates, and to distribute the information via *Insignis*.

As a start, "**Wild Gardens**", a program for the Porterville Branch of AAUW on 12 Feb. at 2:00 at the Porterville Adult Day Care Services, 277 East Oak. The CNPS field trip to Lewis Hill, cosponsored with Sequoia Riverlands Trust on the next day (13 February) gives us our annual chance to ooh and aah over *Fritillaria striata* that blooms early on this hill just north of Porterville. We will meet at 1:00 PM on the east side of Plano, over the hill beyond Reid Ave., about two miles north of Henderson.

Repeating last year's notice, the hillside preserve has long been recognized by nearby ranchers and orchard owners as place with special plants. The Striped Fritillary is in a genus related to tulips of Eurasia, and is restricted to just a few sites in our foothills. Come and see the flowers, and additionally smell them! We plan to have a handout with further information about the species and its habitat.

We will not have trails to follow, and if the grass is wet on the steeper parts of our path, footing may be tricky. Elevation is about 1000'. Dress warmly; car pool if you can as parking is along the roadside. No dogs, please, a good walk for children. Call Joan to confirm.

**Plant Sale Report.** We had a very successful plant sale again this year. Even though we lowered the prices, we still made just over \$1200. Some wonderful help were on hand. Fletcher Linton arrived on Friday with the genera signs and organized the setup. Carol Clum, Al Lowery, Joyce Bergtholdt, Marilyn Messa, Don Peter, Gwen Warner, and Janet Fanning unloaded the truck, pulled orders, and priced the items. Everyone took their orders home and Janet returned later in the afternoon and watered all the remaining plants.

Saturday we had more help. Much thanks to Melanie Keeley who stayed all day and answered customers' questions about the plants and choice planting sites. Linda Franson (our biggest customer of the day), Kathleen McCleary, and Peyton Ellas were the work horses while Elsay Cort and Janet Fanning took care of the cashiering. Thank you all for making this a great day... customers and workers.

#### **Interested in Plants "useful" ..to humans ?**

Stories, lore, about plants as integral to past and present human survival, have been part of the culture of all peoples

"forever"; as food, medicine, enjoyment they are tightly linked with civilization. This is of course assumed as the basis for much of the history of mankind; recently (and it may well be simply coincidence) a string of articles, books have come across my desk dealing with "botanical influences on illness", to quote the title of a book by one of our local CNPS members. Mel Werbach gave me a copy of this somewhat technical (but with a very readable introductory section) volume recently and I have been fascinated with the entries that deal with familiar taxa. The ingredients, chemical compound, or plant part that has been used to treat specific conditions is identified, and then relevant studies are described with brief summaries of benefits that are documented by the research. The information is compiled from world-wide medical and laboratory literature; a new edition updates the 1994 first edition.

Magazine articles that focus on plants' roles in making us healthier fall into various categories. An international plant conservation journal (Plant Talk) recently reviewed the tropical rainforest canopy as source of medicinal substances. Interesting to me was the consideration of why this particular group of species appears to offer "greater plant secondary products or phytochemicals, both in diversity and concentration" than the associations lower in forests or on edges of vegetation near human habitation. Referring to the ecology of this canopy mass, greater herbivory there may increase the evolution and production of chemicals that protect the plants (these often are the same chemicals that are active in our medicines), and greater harshness of the environment (light intensity, abrasion from rain/wind) may also increase production of these molecules.

In 1998 two European botanists proposed the theory that there could be a

greater likelihood of discovering new drugs in the tropical canopy layer and summarized preliminary supporting evidence—subsequent research has shown “that the canopy foliage produced over four times as many compounds at more than four times the total concentration than did the foliage of the understory saplings....all of the species had compounds with potent biological activity against the sample bacteria...” thus offering strong support for the hypothesis of rainforest canopy chemistry.

Another publication (ZooNooz, Oct. 04) introduces a series on “Achilles Heal”, in this way: “Long before there were drugstores, prescriptions, and tamper-proof pill bottles, folks gathered plants to use for curing their ills. They made potions, poultices, and ointments to ease their diseases, and many of their natural remedies actually worked. Quite a few of them—or their lab-created versions—can still be found in our medicine cabinets today.” The author then gives examples from southern California trails and gardens.

Other articles report on uses by native Americans of native plants for many purposes, not only as curing herbs. And there is wide interest in natural plant substances (as opposed to commercial or manufactured compounds) to maintain or improve human “wellness”. Because much of this information is anecdotal, opinions differ about the actual utility of such treatments. Which is a reason why Mel Werbach’s book is a welcome addition to the literature on the subject.

Timber Press publishes books on this general topic. Other Chapters offer programs, with local speakers e.g. Medicinal Uses of San Diego Native Plants.

If there is someone receiving this Insights who is interested in pursuing this topic, from a local perspective (what plants in our own area are of special interest?), let me know.

## LOOKING BACK

A brief History of our Chapter was requested by the Fremontia Editor, for use in the journal mailed to all members. Not sure when it will appear, we include it here for your preview!

Early in 1991 a group in Three Rivers, on the Kaweah River, became concerned about the effects of certain proposed developments in the area that would affect the natural riparian system on the middle and north forks of the River. Catherine (Elsah) Cort, a local artist with a studio and gallery near the river, began gathering information that would support the position of those questioning some of the infringements along the edges of the river channel. This led to the group’s affiliation with CNPS, and the sponsorship of programs in the community related to native plants: from Theodore Payne on growing them, from Rob Hanson, biology faculty at College of the Sequoias in Visalia on relationships between grasslands and fire, then Dave Graber of Sequoia NP talked about plant communities. A year later Alta Peak (named for a peak that stands out on the horizon as you drive up Hwy 198 toward Three Rivers, en route to the Park) was “accepted by the Executive Council” as a Chapter.

Catherine-Elsah Cort was the first President, with the Insights chosen as the name of the newsletter (she also was Editor) and logo. Brodiaea insignis, a CNPS List 1B species, grows only locally in the drainages of the Kaweah and Tule Rivers. Gwen Warner took the job of Historian, and it is only because of her careful compilation of information that today this chapter story can be written!

Alta Peak Chapter took positions on setbacks along river corridor, land use issues, drafting a County Foothill Management Plan, sand/gravel mining in/near river beds (Dave Chipping was invaluable advisor on this issue), and effects of commercial development on



river banks. In all these we encountered the prevalent opposition from others in the area who spoke of the "confiscatory attitude" (of Fish and Game), the right of property owners to "control" their land, ("if it's yours, you have right to use it"), and similar expressions. Being active in the name of CNPS was generally not a pleasant role, and we acknowledge the courage, perseverance, and willingness to "stick with it" that these Three Rivers people demonstrated.

A Land Trust was established in 1993, and some of their goals overlapped, enhancing CNPS presence in the community. A widely publicized, well attended, open-to-all workshop, Living With a River, rallied growing support for CNPS work. We participated in shared events such as an Earth Day Fete, and sponsored a native plant garden. Programs and field trips continued to draw new faces.

In 1994 Janet Fanning became President (and continued until end of 2003). Moving beyond land use issues, drawing interest from members in other parts of the County, management of public lands following fire, and problems with non-native invasive species came to the forefront of Chapter concerns.

CNPS, a local rancher, many citizens between Three Rivers and Visalia, took the lead in trying to protect Sycamore Alluvial Woodland stands from sand/gravel extraction in Dry Creek. F&G was a valuable ally in this 'battle'--we lost in one sense, as the permits were given, but just recently the property, abandoned by the concrete company, was bought by the land trust and restoration processes will be initiated.

Today, two or three programs each year are offered to the surrounding communities. Field trips (hikes, walks) begin in February and continue into late summer. The Insignis is mailed quarterly. A large amount of Board business is

conducted via email, but we get together several times a year for group exchanges. In many ways we could be categorized as a "small, less-vigorous" Chapter; certainly we are rural, dispersed, and in a decidedly private-property-rights, anti-regulatory part of California.

No major conservation issues currently confront us-- we work with agencies, organizations with related purposes, and county planning staff to interject ideas and information about native plants and landscape-scale vegetation.

### an End-of-the-Year Thank You:

The Alta Peak Chapter and the state organization of CNPS wish to thank all our old and new members for continuing support. Although we are a small chapter (84 members), we hope we are spreading the word about the necessity of preserving intact pieces of our native flora and keeping our river banks clear from the invasion of undesired species.

The following people joined our chapter in 2004. Thank you all and also those who renewed their memberships this year.

Valerie Deveraux, Three Rivers  
Pamela Krase, Springville  
Cecil Frasier, Hanford  
Gloria Gaylord, Three Rivers  
Gary Kelley, Visalia  
Fred and Jann McGuire, Lindsay  
Virginia Ortega, Porterville  
Johanna Lombard/Bobby Kamansky,  
Three Rivers  
Doug Smith/Judith Zyskind, La Jolla  
Carol Zeigler, Springville  
Ken & Caurie Bevestein, Springville  
Duran Randolph, Visalia  
Robert De Matteis, Porterville  
Jean & Nicholas Winkler, Visalia  
Scott Barker, Springville  
Mel & Gail Werbach, Tarzana

## **LOOKING AHEAD**

Reading this brief history of CNPS activities in Tulare County, we wonder if there are ongoing land use, planning, issues that might affect our various 'back yards'. Often questions about particular, local, concerns are the basis for the "conserve them (native plants) and their natural habitats through science, education, advocacy, horticulture and land stewardship" language in the CNPS Mission statement. Are you aware of, wondering about, something in your part of the County that might involve a population of some species that might need attention? Again, you need to speak up—at least to one of the chapter officers.

Nor is it too soon to think about our next Plant Sale. Shall we continue to use the site in Three Rivers? We can earn more profit by having members grow plants and donate them....thus we needn't buy as many from commercial growers. We might repeat the Propagation Workshop that was described in the Fall *Insignis*.

## **Alta Peak Chapter Board**

Board members are a subset of CNPS members in Tulare County who accept the responsibility (and fun) of linking our local projects and efforts with the larger organization (32 Chapters throughout the state), and of providing our own membership with opportunities to enjoy, help preserve, and learn about native plant species from valley floor to mountain top, and all the foothills, meadows, and forests in between.

Officers are elected (rather informally in most cases—I can't remember ever having a contested election!), and other board members take on particular tasks. The back of this *Insignis* lists some of these tasks; new names would be welcome as we begin a new season of activity.

Joan (Springville) is replacing Janet (Three Rivers) as President, and needs a

volunteer to help prepare and produce this newsletter. Planning field trips for the 2005 season is fun....we already have one person interested, but a second person, with new ideas would add to the list of potential areas to explore. Are there any issues that affect native plants in ongoing County land use plans? And member-grown, donated plants (but they should be carefully identified by name and where seeds/cuttings were obtained) for the plant sale, increases our profit. The fall plant sale is our only fundraising event, so we depend on it to support all the other needs of the Chapter.

## **TO CONCLUDE THE WINTER ISSUE**

No matter how much newsworthy "stuff" is included in our quarterly newsletter, as one who believes that perhaps our primary mission is simply to share our enjoyment of native flowers-shrubs-trees-landscapes, I can't let this *Insignis* go out without inserting something about a seasonally-special species. Sitting here beside the river, wild grape is flaunting its leaves as it wanders and circles skyward over the sycamores. *Vitis californica* is a deciduous vine found from Kern County northwards in California. Thick stems can climb to 60 feet. Fruit is a cluster of small grapes, with a small amount of sweet flesh (mostly skin and seeds in my experience). Early writers in California described the many food and medicinal uses for the fruit and leaves. Probably a bit unwieldy for a garden, but a spectacular component of our autumn-early winter scenery. [note from Janet Fanning: I have 40 feet (and still growing) of one plant on the north fence of my vegetable garden and make a beautiful grape jelly every year. This plant also supplies food for the quail, deer and other wildlife in the middle of August.]

**DON'T FORGET TO MARK 19 FEBRUARY ON YOUR CALENDAR !!!!!**

**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, and includes informative publications, free field trips, programs, and discounts on books and posters. Also included is the *Bulletin*, a quarterly statewide report of activities and schedules, and this 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

\_\_\_\_ Other: \$1000, 2500, 5000, 10,000

**Mail application and check to:**

Membership Chairman, California Native Plant Society, 2707 K Street, Suite 1, Sacramento, CA 95816

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**Insignis News, CNPS**

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