



Insignis

Spring, 2004

Vol. 14, No. 1

California Native Plant Society
Alta Peak Chapter Newsletter

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

ANNUAL WINTER PROGRAM FEBRUARY 6, FRIDAY EVENING, 7:00 PM The Southern Sierra Nevada: Ecological Crossroads and Rare Plant Hotspot

The Southern Sierra Nevada is a floristic melting pot between the Central Valley and the Mojave Desert and also between the High Sierra to the north and the Southern California Mountains. This confluence of diverse floras creates a high density of rare endemic plants and many interesting plant communities.

Come enjoy a spectacular slideshow tour of this area and the unique plants which it supports, with Fletcher Linton, the Forest Botanist on the Sequoia National Forest. This CNPS-sponsored program is free and all are welcome.

We will gather between 6:30 and 7:00, at the Veteran's Memorial Bldg. in Springville, to mingle with one another and enjoy the customary punch, coffee, and cookies (donations gratefully accepted). The program will begin at 7:00 (following a very brief "official" meeting of the Alta Peak Chapter---as required by our bylaws, members will elect 2004 officers. If anyone has any other item of business needing attention, please contact president Janet Fanning prior to that evening).

The Memorial Bldg is just east of the center of Springville, on the north side of Hwy. 190. Questions? Call Joan Stewart at 539-2717.

SATURDAY 24 January, 9:00 AM ---- with Tule River Parkway.

The walk will be along existing and future **Tule River Parkway** sections. The first third of the walk follows the newest section on a paved path lined by young shade trees. We will then walk the section of the Parkway

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that will be built during 2004. Participants can compare how the river area looks during the winter before path construction, with the way already-built paths have improved access to the river. The future section lies between Jaye Street and Main Street. Cathy Capone will highlight the City of Porterville's plans for the Parkway in this area. Coots and Mallard ducks are plentiful and Great Blue Herons are frequently seen in this area. Participants will view the existing mix of native plants and non-native invasive weeds including Arundo. Native trees include Valley Oak, Cottonwood, and Willows. At Main Street we will look at the Parkway's section between Main and Plano, still being planned.

The walk is one and one half miles long with opportunities for frequent stops to enjoy the plants and animals. Families with children are welcome; there is a possibility that offensive graffiti will be on the railroad or Main Street bridge. Dogs are welcome. Frequently we will see dogs on and off leash along the river.

The Tule River Parkway plans to schedule walks along the Tule River in Porterville four times a year. Seeing the river in different seasons will show us how the river, its fringing vegetation, and associated wildlife change with seasons

Meet at the Tule River Park and Ride lot on Jaye Street between the Tule River and the apartment building, at 9:00 am. Bring sturdy shoes, water, and dress for winter weather. Contact number 784-8203 or 783-0201, Cathy Capone.

SUNDAY 15 February, 1:30 PM

On 15 February, an afternoon walk over **Lewis Hill** is an opportunity to see some wildflowers unique to Tulare County. This hill that rises northeast of Porterville was acquired by the Tule Oaks Land Trust from a group in Kern County, then subsequently became an SRT property when the three land trusts of Tulare County merged. The site was recognized as a place with special plants many years ago because of the populations of *Fritillaria striata* and another species that blooms later in the year.

The Striped Fritillary, in a genus closely related to the tulips of Europe and Asia, is found only in the foothill regions of Tulare and Kern counties where it is very uncommon. Petals of the flowers are about one inch long, white to pink, often with narrow red lines, wonderfully fragrant. Buds, then flowers, typically develop in late winter, and depending on weather, will bloom into the spring. Around Porterville, populations are known from near Lake Success as well as on Lewis Hill.

The soil over the upper slopes is rich in magnesium, one of several soil types with high concentrations of heavy metals. These "serpentine soils" occur in scattered spots throughout California and because of the high concentrations of heavy toxic metals and the low amounts of calcium, nitrogen, and phosphorus that are necessary for plant growth, they only support plant species that are adapted to these conditions. Blue and live oaks are among those species that do not tolerate serpentine soils. The magnesite on Lewis Hill was mined in the early part of the 20th century and old diggings can be seen. In addition to the *Fritillaria* which will (we hope) be in full bloom by mid February, many other wildflower species will be enjoyed.

There are no trails for us to follow; if recent rains have left the grass wet there could be slippery places. Our route will follow the contours of the hill most of the time but several short up/down stretches will be moderately steep. We will move west over the northern slope, then up to the top of the

ridge close to 1000 feet in elevation, across to the southern slope, then down to the roadside.

Meet at 1:30 along Plano, two miles north of the intersection of Plano and Henderson. Car pools are encouraged. Cars will park along the roadside and the fewer the better. Probably about 3 hours will be spent wandering over the site. Dress warmly, wear sturdy walking shoes, no dogs, please. For confirmation of details call 539-2717 or 539-0207.

SATURDAY 20 March, 9:30 AM---

This hike combines an exploration of the landscape on which an early (1910) small hydroelectric power plant was built, with a chance to see several shrubs of special interest, and springtime wildflowers in a mid-elevation area of our foothill region. We will hike to the **ridge top above the PG&E power plant** on Hwy 190 above Springville, on a dirt road that takes off from the road to Doyle Springs/ Wishon Campground. We cross the Wishon Fork (the north fork of the Middle Fork of the Tule River, to be accurate) where we have spectacular views of the river canyon. Continuing gradually up the hillside, we pass through canyons with ferns and shade-loving plants and trees, and through exposed chaparral vegetation with its own assorted species. The area is relatively undisturbed and "natural", perhaps why some rather uncommon shrubs can be seen including one that is close to its southern limit of distribution--*Staphylea bolanderi*, Bladdernut.

At the top of the ridge, about 4000' elevation (we begin at close to 3000') we meet the open-ditch flume that carries water diverted from the river near Wishon Campground. A short steep climb, still on the road, takes us to the knoll where the water enters a pipe that drops steeply to the power plant.

Most of the walk is a gentle climb up, then an easy stroll down the same route; perhaps two hours to the top where we can have lunch or snacks. Views from the top can

be gorgeous on a clear day, looking down the canyon and beyond. Dress warmly with good walking shoes. Call 539-2717 for details or to confirm if weather is questionable.

Meet at 9:30 at the small paved parking area (the "Stairs") on the right side of Highway 190 about 6.5 miles from the White Barn. This is just before the highway goes under the wooden flume.

SATURDAY 27 MARCH, 10 AM ---

A walk on **Battle Mountain Ranch**, led by John Grant, with local archaeologist Douglas McIntosh and botanist Joan Stewart is an opportunity to explore Native American archaeology, learn something about the history of this foothill region, and to see plant and animal life in early spring. We'll see artifacts, grinding locations, the breastworks employed by the Indians during the 1856 historic battle which gave the ranch its name, and the labyrinth of house-sized boulders where the Indians retreated when cannons changed the tide of the battle. Published accounts of this Remnants of the Ranch's early irrigation systems and orchards as well as structures including parts of the main house and bunks remain along our route. The top of Battle Mountain at about 2600' (a short but steep elevation gain of about 200') gives a commanding view of the geography, geology, and botany of the North Fork of the Tule River watershed.

Meet at Battle Mountain Ranch on Balch Park Road above Springville at 10:00 AM. Bring a lunch, and wear appropriate clothing and sturdy walking shoes. Carpooling encouraged. No dogs, please. This walk will take about 3 hours. For details call 539-3840.

SATURDAY 17 April, 10:00 AM

A gentle meander of two to four miles over the rolling foothills of the **Circle J-Norris Ranch** near Springville, which is owned and managed by the Tulare County Office of Education as a campus of SCICON. We will walk through fields of wildflowers, have an opportunity to see a variety of birds along the

way, ducks and turtles on the five-acre pond, perhaps even a bald eagle or osprey, and possibly other wildlife, such as coyote and bobcat.

This is an easy walk over dirt roads and trails with slight elevation change (200 feet at most). Families with children over (7? 5?) are welcome. Sorry, but **DOGS MUST STAY HOME**.

Meet in the parking area by the barn at 10 a.m. (Allow 40 minutes from Porterville; 10-15 minutes from Springville.) Wear sturdy walking shoes and hat. Bring sunscreen, water and bag lunch and a knapsack for carrying them. Binoculars and cameras are advised.

Directions: From Springville, turn left at the Big White Barn (Springville Ranch) onto Balch Park Road. Come six miles; county road sign says turn left to Exeter, Highway 98, and Visalia. That is Yokohl Valley Drive (the road sign has disappeared). Turn left and come to the **SECOND DRIVEWAY ON THE LEFT**, 41463 Yokohl Valley Drive. Note the large sign, Circle J-Norris Ranch. Enter and drive to the barn and park. Leaders will meet you there.

For information call Joan Stewart at 539-2717 (or Elli Norris, 539-2482, before April 15).

SATURDAY 17 APRIL

A hike in the Three Rivers area, perhaps over lower slopes of Case Mt. or into Sequoia park, is scheduled but plans aren't definite at this time. Watch for announcement in papers or via postcard.

Looking ahead beyond April, we will again climb Jordan Peak to see *Erythronium* (fawn, or glacier lily), explore the Slate Mt. Botanical Area with Fletcher (see program announcement above), perhaps visit the Dillonwood area with an ecologist from Sequoia Park, or take-first-time easy hikes to Mule Peak and the Blue Ridge Fish and Game preserve in the drainage of the south fork of the Kaweah. These are places you have asked about. We plan field trips to meet your

interests, so let us know about places that need to be seen, with unusual or ooh ahh kinds of flowers!

CNPS IN TULARE COUNTY

At our December Chapter Board meeting, President Janet Fanning indicated she would need to resign this position early in 2004. During the ensuing discussion of how to keep CNPS alive and well in Tulare County we considered a general shuffling of tasks, and recognized that we need new support from our (more than 75) members. A volunteer to work on preparing this newsletter has already stepped forward, and two others have expressed interest in working on the October Plant Sale (Janet has also held this job). Janet will continue to maintain financial and membership records. We will have a complete slate of nominees ready for the February 6 general meeting, when (according to our ByLaws) elections will be held. Please call me, Joan, or Janet to ask about what is involved in filling the various positions listed on the back of this *Insignis*. A few new faces, some sharing of tasks, will go a long way toward letting us achieve CNPS goals in our area.

Now and then many of us stop and ask "why care". Some of the answers fall into a Profit category, assessing the economic value of natural vegetation for food, products, medicines, ecosystem functions, and for tourism. Others might cite the psychological need for humans to sense and be supported by connections to a natural world – Nurture: Understanding interactions, interdependent relationships among animals, plants, our environment is important to many--Nature. And Fun, the enjoyment of natural areas, the challenge of recognizing different plants, or from growing these species in gardens, learning about a special flower, fern, tree, drawing or painting what we see, sheer aesthetic pleasure in the complexity of our landscapes. For all of these reasons we come together to act to help keep these landscapes intact, selfishly, and for those to come.

The statewide organization works

through three major programs...where does Tulare County fit?

Education/Horticulture

Throughout the state, public gardens are tended by CNPS volunteers as a means of letting more folk see 'for real' and up close what our California native plants look, smell, feel like. The afternoon session at the December State Chapter Council meeting in Berkeley included show and tell talks from the Napa, Sacramento, and Willis Jepson (Sonoma County) chapters. Two of these gardens are in somewhat traditional sites, but Sacramento Chapter has taken on a very old section of the city cemetery for beautifying. Long deserted, neglected plots are planted and maintained with different assortments of native species, living monuments in an historic scene.

Chapters confront very different **conservation** concerns. Southern California members are taking part in discussions about development in the Santa Clara River Valley (including the proposed Newhall Ranch). They work with Riverside County planning staff to try to achieve a balance between sprawl and habitat for plants and animals (other than poodles and canaries and goldfish). They provide information about plant occurrences in places where unregulated OHV entry (access/excess) into otherwise protected public lands is a problem. Along the central coast chapters are concerned about encroachment by a single species (us) into dwindling habitat for others.

Tulare County CNPS has not been particularly involved or focussed in the environmental issues receiving more recent attention in this area. Air and water quality, sand and gravel mining, casino locations do not directly impact plant populations and as an organization we "stick to plants". Special plants are cared for by managers of BLM, Army Corps (reservoir sites), National Park and Forest Monument lands. State Fish and Game oversees small preserves that shelter remnant populations of wild flowers, and a growing number of the public understand the

importance of holding on to the remaining oak woodland vegetation.

Our members also are often members of the Tule River Parkway Association and the Sequoia Riverlands (Land) Trust and there is a lot of cross-fertilization of information, opinion, and support for each other's work.

Just because we have not been noticeably active on conservation issues doesn't mean that there are not places where native plants need to be looked at critically when changes to the ground are proposed. Speak up, to any of the officers or board members to let us know about something needing CNPS attention.

Plant Science includes paying attention to individual species and to defined groupings of taxa that are termed alliances and associations. A task for Tulare Co CNPS: we have been asked to serve as a 'pilot' project team to evaluate the accuracy of a list of plant communities (alliances) that are listed in a data base as "likely to occur in southern Sierra foothill regions". Just a quick scan of the list makes me sure that many are not likely to be found....all that is asked is P/A (presence/absence) information, meaning that we note wherever and whenever we find one of the alliances. We will take the master list on all of our walks and hikes, and if you want to take part on your own in the exercise, call Joan at 539-2717 for descriptions and names of vegetation types that might occur in areas you expect to visit. This will be ongoing...we'll continue to work on this.

STATE BOARD AND CHAPTER LEADERS COME TO TULARE COUNTY...

First weekend in June, 4-6, the Alta Peak and Sequoia (Fresno County) Chapters will host state board members, delegates and Presidents from the other 31 chapters at SCICON. They will gather informally on Friday evening, and an all day meeting on Saturday will end in dinner and program to which all of you are invited. Field trips Sunday morning will include exploration of the riparian and foothill vegetation in the Bear

Creek drainage around SCICON, and a trip to see the Giant Sequoia groves in Mountain Home/Balch Park sites. All our Tulare Co. members are urged to attend, share, help with the meeting work. We need snack-food (cookies, or?) to go with morning and afternoon break 'coffee'. Would you like to host a delegate in your home? More of this in next *Insignis*.

A late-winter SPECIAL SPECIES

Asarum hartwegii

Wild ginger is neither limited in its distribution over the western U.S., nor rare in any region, but the purplish-brown flower that most people never see makes it worthy of special attention as we hike cold-weather forest trails. To find the flower, look at the base of leaf stems, close to the ground. You probably will need to lay back some of the leaves, fold them over. The flower is an "ooh, aaah" kind of experience, something you would expect to see hanging from a vine halfway up a tree trunk in some faraway tropical forest. Do I exaggerate? Well, see for yourself.

As for the 'ginger' in the common name, a tea from leaves has been reported to sooth stomach and intestinal disorders, and other uses are referred to in writings about natural medicinals. I vouch for none but simply enjoy seeing the clumps on the forest floor. They spread from rhizomes, so where you find one there usually will be others nearby. Leaves are large, heart-shaped with distinctive venation...we'll look out for them on this season's hikes.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE...

I want to thank everyone who turned out to help at our successful plant sale. With these winter rains my new plants are thriving. I hope yours have also thrived.

I find that I need to cut back my activities somewhat and have resigned from my position as President and will back away from most of the work regarding the plant sale. I hope to see you all at the general meeting February 6 in Springville.

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. _____

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

I wish to affiliate with:

____ Alta Peak Chapter (Tulare County)

____ Other

Mail application and check to:

Membership Chairman, California Native Plant Society, ~~1722 J Street~~, Suite ~~13~~, Sacramento, CA 95814
2707 K ST. / 16

Chapter Board Members And Committee Chairs, January 2003

PRESIDENT: Janet Fanning.....(559) 561-3461 h
41118 Blossom Drive, Three Rivers, CA 93271
email: gardner@theworks.com

VICE PRESIDENT: Elsay Cort (559) 561-4671 h
P.O. Box 245, Three Rivers, CA 93271

SECRETARY: Marilyn Messa (559) 561-3479 h
P.O. Box 174, Three Rivers, CA 93271
email: bbbirdz@theworks.com

TREASURER: Janet Fanning (559) 561-3461 h
MEMBERSHIP: Janet Fanning (559) 561-3461 h
41118 Blossom Drive, Three Rivers, CA 93271
email: gardner@theworks.com

CONSERVATION: Elsay Cort..... (559) 561-4671 h
P.O. Box 245, Three Rivers, CA 93271

POSTER SALES: Janet Fanning (559) 561-3461 h
41118 Blossom Drive, Three Rivers, CA 93271
email: gardner@theworks.com

HISTORIAN: Gwen Warner (559) 561-0407 h
42261 Mynatt, Three Rivers, CA 93271

LEGISLATION: Marilyn Messa (559) 561-3479 h
OUTREACH: Marilyn Messa (559) 56103479 h
P.O. Box 174, Three Rivers, CA 93271
email: bbbirdz@theworks.com

NEWSLETTER EDITOR: Joan Stewart (559) 539-2717 h

SPRINGVILLE LIAISON: Joan Stewart (559) 539-2717 h
37759 Highway 190, Springville, CA 93265, email: tori2toli@aol.com

Insignis News, CNPS

Alta Peak Chapter
c/o Janet Fanning
41118 Blossom Drive
Three Rivers, CA 93271