

OBISPOENSIS

Newsletter of the San Luis Obispo Chapter of the
California Native Plant Society for San Luis Obispo
and Northern Santa Barbara Counties



Bonnie K. Walters

MAY 2007

About the Cover

The drawing on the cover on this issue of the *Obispoensis* is one that Bonnie drew for our yearly banquet back in 1986. I have no record of it ever being used on a newsletter cover. The plant is one of our more common wildflowers. What is it? My guess that all who have at least a passing acquaintance with our local wildflowers will recognize it. Am I right? It is blue-eyed-grass or a name from the 1910 edition of the *Cyclopedia of American Horticulture* by L.H. Bailey, satin flower or rush lily. The scientific name is *Sisyrinchium bellum*. The genus name, *Sisyrinchium* comes from a name used by Theophrastus for another species in the iris family. In my *Dictionary of Word Roots and Combining Forms*, it has come to mean simply an iris-like plant. The specific epithet, *bellum*, is Latin for beautiful. In our Chapter area can be found blooming from February into August or September although blooms become relatively rare after June. It can be found in almost any open habitat. It is especially common in our grasslands. It can also be found commonly in openings along the Santa Lucia Crest. Although less common in East County it can still be found there with not too much effort.

The common names of blue-eyed grass and satin lily are both misleading for it is neither a grass nor a lily. It is a member of the iris family, Iridaceae. Its relationship to iris is most obviously shown by its leaves. Even in the drawing it is apparent that the flowering stem arises from inside the leaves that are folded in half lengthwise. A leaf arranged and folded in this way is said to be equitant. This characteristic is universal among members of the iris family and rare elsewhere.

This species is also fairly easy to grow, I've been told. I have to admit that I tried to establish it in my 'native' garden but failed. On the other hand, Mary Coffeen writes in her book, *Central Coast Wildflowers* that she brought home a pot of blue-eyed grass from our Chapter plant sale and planted them in her window box where they not only grew, they prospered. Mary's experience would indicate that if you can get it to grow and it becomes established, it could actually become weedy. It would be nice if all weeds were as beautiful. The next year she found seedlings coming up in her garden where they had spread from seed released by the window box planting. Paul Munz and David Keck in their book, *A California Flora*, indicate that the species is extremely variable in size and flower color. To me this would indicate that horticultural selections available would be most likely be the best way to go in getting in into ones garden.

Illustration by Bonnie K. Walters
Text by Dirk R. Walters

President's Message

Hello SLO CNPS Chapter members, we still need help to prepare for the CNPS State Chapter Council Meeting: We would like to get volunteers to help with the following:

- **Place to stay:** We expect it will be a busy time in Morro Bay, if you have a guest room or extra bed that you can offer for Friday and Saturday night, please contact Susi Bernstein evenings or weekends at 805-878-4287. Please include specifics (i.e., type of bed, must like kids, dogs, cats, etc.) and your contact information. We are looking for places in the vicinity of Morro Bay. You can expect the guest to arrive Friday evening, spend Saturday at the meeting, dinner and program, and leave Sunday morning. You are not expected to provide any meals. We will coordinate potential guests with potential hosts and then provide the contact information to individuals.
- **Homemade goodies:** Do you have a special muffin or cookie recipe you want to try? The group is about 50 people, so a small selection of items would cover it. We would need to have these ready on Friday so we could arrange to pick them up. Please contact Lauren Brown at 438-4645 or brownla@saic.com.
- **Volunteers on Saturday:** We have the Native Rooters group (many thanks to these fine folks) ready to help with the evening event; we need volunteers to help in the morning with setting up and refreshments and perhaps a couple more people to help in the evening. Please contact Lauren Brown at 438-4645 or brownla@saic.com.

If you have any question, please feel free to call, (805) 570-7993, or Email me. Thank you, Lauren.

Conservation

Last month I talked about the Native Tree Inventory for the City of Atascadero, and how that really wasn't saving trees. I got a letter from the chair of the Atascadero Planning Commission pointing out that CNPS members are seldom, if ever, seen in the audience of city meetings defending the environment. Point well taken! I stick a whole bunch of Atascadero-bound labels on newsletters, so I know you are out there, folks. We can't leave it all to the wonderful Atascadero Native Tree Association. As I said last time, city business is found at "<http://www.atascadero.org>".

In another tree-related issue, the Fire Marshal in Cambria is attempting to set land clearance regulations that are quite and unnecessarily Draconian. Greenspace is carrying the torch for the enlightened, trying to get the Marshal to pay attention to biological needs as expressed in the

important Cambria Forest Management Plan which was generated in part due to the problems associated with tree mortality from pitch pine canker disease. Greenspace can be found at <http://www.greenspacecambria.org>. CNPS will be doing its part to ensure that some good points in the plan are implemented, such as a major attack on invasive exotics. However there is too much removal of downed wood, and no apparent protection of young trees from being cleared as underbrush. There is no recognition that certain native shrubs such as coffeeberry and poison oak do not provide much fuel. David Krause, our treasurer and a Cambria resident, will be riding point on this, but, as in Atascadero, we could use some solid backup from Cambria CNPSers. Our chapter has provided some funding to help create an informational public education mailer (not a CNPS project) that will, we hope, prevent wholesale removal of forest understory.

You can find the Forest management Plan at http://frap.cdf.gov/pitch_canker/research/Cambria_Forest_Management_Plan_4_02.pdf

Some interesting things happened at the County Water Advisory Committee when a representative of Santa Margarita Ranch said that the data provided by their consultant on the water supply portion of the DEIR was wrong. This is a problem, seeing they provided the data that seems to show that they are going to be way short on water, thus threatening water tables and riparian corridors. We don't know if they will do the same with the biological data, but the integrity and legal validity of the DEIR is now threatened.

In possibly good news, the State Dept. of Water Resources is now holding hearings on regulations to backfill with state law the big hole left by the Supreme Court's SWANCC decision that effectively stripped Clean Water Act protection from vernal pools and isolated waters not adjacent to navigatable waterways. You can bet that Big-Ag and Big-Builder will be in opposition, as they are trying to turn most the Central Valley vernal pools into either grapes or housing tracts. . - David Chipping

PROJECTOR FUND. We have received a couple of donations to the video projector fund, and we thank those people very much.

We still have a long way to go, and so if you feel generous due to your tax refunds or recent bank heist, we will gladly accept your kind donations. Please send them to David Krause, our treasurer.



Meetings

San Luis Obispo Chapter Meeting, Thursday, May 3, 7 PM: The May program is titled "Habitat at Risk: Trees, birds, grasses and grapes". The main presenter is Andrea Jones, Important Bird Areas Program Coordinator for Audubon, California, with some additional information from David Chipping. Andrea and David will look at the relationships between the important oak woodland and grassland vegetation associations and bird life, and will also look at the common interests of CNPS and Audubon in plant and bird conservation. The proposed development at Santa Margarita Ranch will also be discussed, with emphasis on the losses to these two vegetation communities and the animals that live in them.

Meet at the Veterans Building, Grand Avenue & Monterey Street, San Luis Obispo.

Field Trips

Mardi Niles Field Trip Chair

Sunday, May 6, 2007, MCAS-CNPS Picnic at Santa Margarita Lake

See the back page, The Picnic

Friday, May 11, Field Trip to San Carpoforo with John Chesnut. Starting at 9:00 a.m., Field Trip to the coastal bluffs between Arroyo de la Cruz and San Carpoforo Creeks, home to a suite of rare species, pocket dunes and unique wind-sculpted chaparral. Meet at the Elephant Seal overlook, south of the Piedras Blancas lighthouse at 9 a.m. First stop will be just south of Arroyo de la Cruz at 9:30.

Saturday, May 12, 2007, California Native Plant Society Home Garden Tour featuring California native plants. Tour contact person, Bill Shearer, will coordinate this tour through gardens in Atascadero. Bill Shepard and Alison Goers have graciously offered their gardens to view a use of California native plants. Our CNPS Horticulture Chair John Nowak will be on hand to provide his professional expertise. The tour will start at 9:00 a.m. in the entrance parking lot of the Atascadero Lake Pavilion (9315 Pismo Avenue, Atascadero). Bring a picnic lunch to enjoy upon our return to the pavilion. Dress as though working in the garden. Following lunch we will proceed to John Nowak's to pot up some native plant seedlings for our fall plant sale. For additional information call Bill Shearer 481-2849.

Saturday, May 12, 9:30 a.m. Los Padres National Forest and the California Native Plant Society, Pozo Wildflower Weekend at the Pozo Fire Station. As part

Field Trips continued

of the Seventh Annual Wildflower Weekend of the Santa Lucia District of the LPNF, we will meet at the Pozo Fire Station on Pozo Road, south of SR 58 at 9:30 a.m. This will be a “drive & stroll” tour of wildflowers along Hi

Mountain Road, including some serpentine areas, and the Lookout Station, now a focal point of the Condor Recovery Program. Sturdy shoes, lunch and liquids, and camera and binoculars recommended. Call Helen Tarbet at 925-9538 ext. 246 or Charles Blair 733-3189 for details.



Malcolm McLeod Memorial Field Trip Meeting at Shell Creek April 7

Photo by Mardi Niles

Help! Native Plant Nurturers Wanted

Pismo State Beach native plant gardens could use some volunteer plant lovers to help with maintenance. We plant, prune, water, weed, label, and maintain an accurate list of over 150 San Luis Obispo County native plants. We maintain the garden adjacent to the Nature Center building in addition to the main native plant gardens that lie within Oceano campground. The bulk of the native plant garden is divided into plant communities of riparian, woodland, chaparral, coastal scrub, and dune habitat. Of special interest is the demonstration garden containing plants the Chumash Indians were thought to have used in their daily living. All the gardens and especially this one are used by docents and park rangers during walks organized for the benefit of visitors and school children.

Grace and Jack Beagle whom many of you know have retired to Pacific Grove for a well deserved rest. They started this Pismo State Beach native plant garden nearly 14 years ago devoting much time and effort to making it the wonderful garden it now is. Their departure has left a void that needs filling with people willing to put in a few hours once a week. Male and female, young and old, all are welcome.

Perhaps some CNPS members will bring their knowledge and enthusiasm to our small but dedicated group. We meet on Tuesday mornings at 9 a.m. in front of the Nature Center on Pier Avenue just inside the entrance to Oceano campground. Stop by even if it's only for a chat. For information call Susan Grimaud, 543-2141.

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Project Budburst

By Diana Hickson, Sacramento Valley Chapter and Dr. Susan Mazer of UCSB

Phenology is the timing of seasonal events such as germination and flowering time in the spring. Early clues to the onset of spring have been used for centuries by farmers to time sowing in order to maximize crop production. Today, phenological patterns are used to track the effect of climate change on plants and animals, to anticipate wildflower displays (and allergies), and to make predictions about fuel loads and about when to plant our gardens.

The U.S. National Phenology Network (NPN) was created in 2006 to facilitate the collection and sharing of phenological data. **Project BudBurst** is an annual campaign designed for the public; it's the collective effort of scientists and educators interested encouraging citizen scientists to record flowering times in nearby natural areas.

Six steps will enable you to complete your phenological investigation:

- 1) Go to the Project Budburst website, www.budburst.org, where you may subscribe (it's free) and find complete directions at the **Participate!** link. Here you will:
- 2) Select and identify one or more species using the plant list or by geographic area;
- 3) Locate the site where you may observe each species, including its latitude and longitude;
- 4) Determine which phenophase (phenological stage) you are looking for (i.e. Budburst/First Leaf, First Flower). For help, you may download plant descriptions by selecting species from the "**Plants by List**" link.
- 5) Report your observations (the dates of each phenophase) online.
- 6) Compare your observations on our maps to thousands of others around the country.

With your help, we will compile phenological information that will be compared to historical records to see how our backyards, parks, and forests are changing. You can do your part by participating in Project Budburst!



Rhamnus purshiana DC

Obispoensis is published October through June except January. Items for submittal to *Obispoensis* should be sent to rhotaling@charter.net. The deadline is the 10th of each month. Botanical articles, news items, illustrations, photos, events and tidbits are welcome!

Visit the websites: www.cnps.org & www.cnps-slo.org

Dedicated to the Preservation of the California 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 mission of the Society is to increase understanding and appreciation of California's native plants and to preserve them in their natural habitat through scientific activities, education and conservation. Membership is open to all.

Membership includes the quarterly journal, *Fremontia*, the quarterly *Bulletin*, which gives statewide news and announcements of the Society activities and conservation issues, and the chapter newsletter, *Obispoensis*.



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THE PICNIC

At Santa Margarita Lake
SUNDAY, May 6

Plan to attend the 2nd Annual Collaborative Morro Coast Audubon Society and California Native Plant Society Picnic. Enjoy field trips and good company. Both members and the general public are welcome! Day use fees will be waived for all picnic participants.

Schedule of Events

WHITE OAK PICNIC AREA ACTIVITIES (handicap accessible)

9:00 am BIRDING with Mike Stiles

10:00 am KAYAK/CANOE with Joe Dickerson, bring PFDs, sunscreen, and binoculars

10:30 – 11:30 am BEGINNER'S WATERFOWL WATCH with Stephanie Little. Kids and beginning birders learn to use binoculars and field guides (both provided)

11:00 – 12:00 am PLANT WALK with John Nowak

11:00 – 12:00 am MOUNTAIN BIKING join Ken Klis – participants must be at least 10 years old and wear a helmet

11:00 – 1:30 PACIFIC WILDLIFE CARE Enjoy close up encounters with live birds

NOON PICNIC Join us for an old-fashioned and new-fangled PICNIC. Bring your own sandwich or something to grill, a side dish, snack, or dessert to share and your own reusable place setting and cup. Throw in your picnic tablecloth if possible. Assorted drinks provided by MCAS.

1:00 – 2:00 pm WATERCOLORING WILDFLOWERS with Janine, materials provided

2:00 – 4:00 pm DESTINATION HIKE with Ken Klis

RIVER ROAD ACCESS

8:00 – 11:00 am BIRDING Meet up with Roger Zachary for an easy 3-mile walk along the Salinas River. Appropriate for all experience levels.

ONGOING THROUGHOUT THE DAY

WATERFOWL AND WOODPECKER WATCH Bird watching around the picnic area

FISHING Kids' Cove (for kids only) and shore fishing around picnic area

HIKING Grey Pine Trailhead located at picnic area

JUNIOR RANGER PROGRAM Self-directed activities for school-age children

For information contact Al Schmierer at aaschmierer@yahoo.com or 772-2026 or Mardi Niles at mlniles@slonet.org or 4899274

DIRECTIONS to Santa Margarita Lake White Oak Picnic Area: Hwy. 101 to Santa Margarita (Highway 58 exit). Drive through Santa Margarita. Turn right on to Highway 58. At the junction with Pozo Road (approx. 2 miles) stay on Pozo Road for approximately 7 miles and follow signs to Santa Margarita Lake turnoff. Turn left and drive one mile to the park entrance. Turn right after entering gate and follow the road for one mile to the White Oak Picnic area. Allow 30 minutes from SLO.

DIRECTIONS to RIVER ROAD: Follow above directions until Santa Margarita Lake turnoff. Instead of turning, continue driving straight on Pozo Road for approximately 7.8 miles. Immediately after bridge, turn left on River Road and continue another 2.2 miles to the staging area on the left side of the road. Allow 45-50 minutes from SLO.

