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# *Obispoensis*

Newsletter of the San Luis Obispo Chapter of the California Native Plant Society

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**JUNE 2008**

## Wooly phlox (*Eriastrum densifolium* var. *densifolium*)

Bonnie's drawing for this issue of the *Obispoensis* is a beautiful plant that shows up in late May or early June. It is *Eriastrum densifolium* var. *densifolium*. It is of some interest that most wildflower books for amateurs don't mention this plant at all. It has many common names as there are floras that recognize it. In Clifton Smith's, *A Flora of Santa Barbara County, Ca.* it is called mesa phlox, in *The Dune Mother's Wildflower Guide* it is dunes blue phlox or wooly blue star and in Mary Coffeen's, *Central Coast Wild Flowers* it is simply wooly star or *Eriastrum*. The genus name, *Eriastrum*, refers to the silvery wooly hairs (*eri-*) surrounding the star-like (*-astrum*) flowers. Most references note its likeness to the genus, *Gilia*, but note that it differs primarily in wooly phlox flowers having sepals of different sizes. Our coastal variety grows in open areas within stabilized coastal dunes from Monterey County south where it forms tight to straggly gray mounds covered with usually pale blue flowers. White flowered plants are also reported, but I personally have not seen them. The plant produces herbaceous shoots from a woody root crown. It is, therefore, another one of those plants sometimes treated as an herb and sometimes as a shrub.

Our coastal wooly star is somewhat of an oddity in the genus, *Eriastrum*. All other California members of its genus are both annuals and inhabitants of interior dry mountains, valleys, and deserts. In other words, this plant is one of several coastal dune species that seem to have a coastal and desert distribution. In most, like the dune almond (*Prunus fasciculata*) a case can be made for Native Californians carrying or trading these useful plants that they then planted or allowed to escape into the coastal dunes. However, I think it would be difficult to make that case for this plant as I could find no reference to any human uses for the plant.

In her book, Mary Coffeen relates a story of a friend and her collecting seed and trying to grow it. They reported no success and even asked their readers to report if they had had any. Obviously the authors of the treatment of *Eriastrum* in *The Jepson Manual* also thought it worthy of the garden. However, they noted the difficulty in cultivating it. It would certainly make a beautiful garden plant for a sunny, sandy patch.

Dirk Walters, Illustration by Bonnie Walters

## President's Message

In perhaps one of the most exciting moments in the history of the chapter, we approved the new by-laws at the May general meeting, despite the mob with pitchforks and torches that was demanding that the Corresponding Secretary be retained. Seriously though, at that meeting we were treated to a very interesting talk from David Magney about how he used existing laws to get Ventura County to address the issue of "locally rare" flora and their protection. He also showed us some really beautiful pictures. It is interesting that about half of the species in Ventura county exist in ten or fewer populations, and it occurs to me that in SLO County we may not have the information to know how many populations of each species we actually have.

We really could use a whole lot more dialog between ourselves on what and where we have seen plants, conservation emergencies, and more, especially during the long summer lull between June and October (when we meet again for our "stuff ourselves with desert and look and look at slides/digital pictures-event".) I have a couple of summer events that are NOT nailed down yet that would involve doing some plant mapping on Camp Roberts, summer hikes along the coast and more. I would like to both tell you about these events so you can join in, and also hear about interesting stuff that comes up, plus pass "what the heck is this?" digital pictures around, post gardening questions and the like.

Now for some unknown reason, when I have asked members for e-mail addresses to be put on my CNPS information mailing list, I have not received much interest. So please, if you would like a to-and-fro on anything about local native plants, contact me by e-mail.

Send me an e-mail, subject: "Add to CNPS List", to me at "dchippin@calpoly.edu". Please. It won't cost you any gas.  
David Chipping

## Chapter Meeting

**Thursday, June 5.** Neil Havlik, Natural Resources Manager for the City of San Luis Obispo discusses serpentine grasslands and other serpentine flora that can be found near the city. Veterans Hall on Grand Avenue, San Luis Obispo. 7 p.m. social half-hour, 7:30 business meeting.

This is the last meeting of the season. The next meeting is October's Dessert Potluck and Members' Slide Show. Take pictures of your adventures this summer to share at the meeting.

## Serpentine Shelly. Serpentine!

Some of you will remember the hilarious scene between Peter Falk and Alan Arkin in 1979's "The Inlaws" where Falk advises Arkin (Shelley) how to run for cover under sniper fire. Our local rock which forms the hills east and southwest of SLO City is not dashing madly from side to side, but did wiggle its way up to the surface, and while it was doing so, produced a unique botanic resource. The unique rock lacks many chemical elements that are usually necessary for plant growth, especially calcium, nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium, and is enriched in potentially toxic trace elements nickel, chromium, and cobalt. The dominant elements are magnesium and iron combined with silica. Actually, to be more precise, the word "serpentine" refers to an assemblage of minerals within the rock and the rock is correctly called serpentinite. The rock has tended to keep invasive exotic grasses at bay, while allowing some native plants to adapt to the severe conditions. As a result adaptive evolution has produced a large number of serpentine-limited endemic species.



By now CNPS members would have received the latest "Fremontia" with its story on the conservation of serpentine flora at Edgewood Park, but locals should know that a far larger area is preserved in the SLO hills. The first to be preserved is along the spine of West Cuesta Ridge, which supports the Botanic Area of Sargent cypress, a unique dryland endemic sedge (*Carex obispoensis*), and Hickman's sidalcea. Our chapter came into being partly as a fight to protect the cypress grove from Forest Service fire road construction, and as a result the "Botanic Area" was established. The hills between SLO City and Reservoir Canyon and those south of Los Osos Valley have been protected by the city's open space program, and contain some rare serpentine grasslands, the serpentine oak (*Quercus durata*) and other great resources such as field of lilies. This amazing resource is within easy walking distance of the city.

Our June meeting will feature Neil Havlik, City of San Luis Obispo Natural Resources Manager, who has been a very significant force in the protection of this extremely valuable habitat. This is going to be a wonderful

opportunity to learn about "what is where" in the lands around the city, and should set us up for summer hikes at a time when the county interior is shimmering in the heat.

David Chipping

## Field Trips

**Sunday, June 22, 8:30 am. A Horticulturist's Walk in the Wild: Cerro Alto Loop.** Meet at the Morro Bay Miner's parking lot off Hwy 41 at 8:15 am to carpool or meet us at the Cerro Alto trailhead at 8:45 am. A \$5 Adventure Pass is required to park at this trailhead (for info call the U.S. Forest Service 925-9538). We'll start out along the east fork of Morro Creek through lush riparian woodlands which gradually give way to chaparral as we climb higher until we reach the Cerro Alto trail after ~1 1/2 miles. There we can choose to climb the steep mile to the summit and enjoy spectacular views of the coastline or to proceed to the 1 mile descent back to the campground. Bring plenty of water. Well socialized dogs on leash welcome. Rated moderately strenuous, 4 hours. Please confirm with leader Dagmar Collins via e-mail: dagmar@slonet.org, or phone: 528-7533.

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The San Luis Obispo Chapter of CNPS holds its meetings the first Thursday of the month, October through June, except January, at the Veterans Hall, Grand Avenue, San Luis Obispo. Refreshments at 7:00 and program at 7:30 p.m. You don't have to be a CNPS member to attend!

*Obispoensis* is the newsletter of the San Luis Obispo Chapter of CNPS. It 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 the preceding month. Botanical articles, news items, illustrations, events, and tidbits are welcome!



To find out more about the California Native Plant Society visit our websites, [cnps.org](http://cnps.org) and [cnps-slo.org](http://cnps-slo.org).

## VEGEPALOOZA

Fourteen of us enjoyed Chimineas on a mid-April weekend. We had many interesting plants, fine accommodations, and a grand tour of quite a natural area.

Claudia Russell, who grew up on the ranch, joined us and provided some great history; for example, how Chickenwater got its name (the watering trough looks like a giant chicken watering device).

We stopped first on Saltos Road and saw *Fritillaria*, *Eriophyllum multicaule*, *Mucronea perfoliata*, *Emmananthe penduliflora*, *Pectocarya setosa*, *Gilia clivorum*, *Loeseliastrum*, *Chorizanthe xanti*, and *Quercus john-tuckeri*.

On Taylor Road in Saltos we saw the 1B *Erodium macrophyllum* (Calif. m.), with *Guillenia lemmonii* and *Amsinckia tessellata*.

Another stop on Taylor Road was for a beautiful orange-yellow blend of *Mentzelia pectinata* and *Monolopia lanceolata*.

At Sand Ridge we saw *Salvia carduacea*, *Abronia pogonantha*, *Rumex hymenosepalus*, *Atriplex canescens*, *Camissonia campestris*, and *Astragalus lentiginosus var nigracalycis*.

Canyon 79 became a hot hike but yielded *Caulanthus inflatus*, as well as *Chaenactis fremontii*, which was a first for me.

Red Rock Pass was the next stop, coming up Carrizo Canyon, for the beautiful 1B *Caulanthus coulteri var lemmonii*.

Our last stop Saturday was in the upper Carrizo Canyon, for a yellow form of *Castilleja foliolosa*.

On Sunday morning we went west, past reservoir #3, and saw a hillside grassland with *Viola douglasii*; a very interesting lion grotto; *Astragalus macrodon* (CNPS 4); and, at the reservoir called Anna, *Nasella cernua*, *Linanthus liniflorus*, *Hazardia stenolepis*, and *Navarretia jaredii* (CNPS 4).

The variety of habitats is a striking feature of Chimineas. We encountered shrubland, such as interior goldenbush or sage; chaparral; grassland and open herbaceous; juniper and scrub oak; blue oak; and ponds and riparian.

George Butterworth

## Gardening With Natives

With summer just around the corner I thought now would be a good time to talk about watering. Watering natives can sometimes be confusing especially if you are just starting out. Most experts would agree that California native plants require less water than their European counterparts to get established. This can be a huge advantage if you just recently planted your garden. Experts also agree that after the second to third year summer watering are only necessary if you want your plants to remain somewhat more lush. Keeping this in mind I'm going to go over some basic rules.

First, if you just planted your plants last fall it would be best to give your plants water every other week. I prefer turning the hose on really slowly and letting it soak the hole root ball area for at least one hour. I move the hose end around the plant ever thirty minutes or so. Some people prefer overhead watering and put a ring sprinkler near the plant and soak a larger area. This kind of watering can promote weeds and is best used with areas that are well mulched.

If your plants are on their second or third year, you can use the same method as discussed but the frequency should be increased to monthly. Also, this watering should be for a longer time, maybe two hours. In all cases do not use fertilizer when watering natives. California native plants are adapted to poor soils and using fertilizer can cause them to grow too fast and die. For plants three years or older watering is not necessary unless they are very stressed. In this case once a summer should be enough.

I hope that helps clear up any questions. Hope you all have a great summer in the garden and remember if you have any questions just give me a call.

Happy Gardening, John

## Third Annual SYVNHS Plant Sale Fundraiser

The Santa Ynez Valley Natural History Society is having its third annual plant sale this year at the Dunn School campus in Santa Ynez, Roblar Street Entrance. The plant sale will feature native plants, many of which have been propagated from materials of local origin. This includes native grasses and hard to find bulbs. Other plants that should thrive in the Valley will also be available, along with expert horticultural consultation.

Saturday & Sunday, September 27 and 28, 2007. The public is welcome on both days starting at 10 a.m. SYVNHS members will be admitted at 9 a.m.

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## CNPS 2009 Conservation Conference: Strategies & Solutions PHOTO CONTEST Subject & Criteria

“California Native Plants” - Photos must be taken in California (or California Floristic Province) and feature plants native to the state. Images may be species specific macro shots, wide angle landscape photos, or pictures of people or animals interacting with the natural environment of California. Photos may be of- but are not limited to- rare or common plants, flowers, trees, shrubs, vines, grasses, bryophytes - surprise us!

**Digital or Film:** Photographer's Choice, however entries must be accompanied by high resolution digital copies of photos on CD.

**Size and Format:** 5x7" or 8x10" photos. (Slight variations in size will be accepted.) Please- no mats, no frames, no glass. Photos must be mounted on foam core or backing mat board and enclosed in a clear poly envelope for display at conference. Please mark back of entry with title of the piece and name of photographer.

**Deadline for Entries:** November 15, 2008. Entries will be accepted by mail September 15- November 14, 2008 and for drop-off Saturday, November 15, 2008 at the CNPS state office in Sacramento, CA.

**Deliver/Ship to** the state headquarters of CNPS at the following address:  
CNPS Photo Contest, 2707 K Street, Suite 1, Sacramento, CA 95816

**Visit the CNPS Conference web site at [www.cnps.org](http://www.cnps.org). Questions?  
Email Stacey Flowerdew at [sflowerdew@cnps.org](mailto:sflowerdew@cnps.org)!**

Strategies & Solutions



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## 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 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*.



*San Luis Obispo Chapter of the  
California Native Plant Society*  
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