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# *Obispoensis*

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

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MARCH 2011

## Desert Bells (*Phacelia campanularia*)

February is a problematic month for illustrators and writers of serialized plant articles, especially for those who have been doing it for a while. Bonnie's first *Obispoensis* cover drawing was in 1974 and my first article was a few years later. The main problems are that relatively few plants are in bloom at this time of the year and those few that are have already been done. So for this time, we decided to dust off some archives. Bonnie's drawing was first done for our Chapter's 1987 Banquet program. I don't have a record of it being used for anything else. The program that year was by Dr. Robert Thorne entitled, "The Vegetation of California's Deserts." As would have been appropriate, Bonnie chose to draw a plant characteristic of the California deserts. It was desert bells, *Phacelia campanularia*. Desert bells is a true desert dweller; it doesn't even occur in our almost desert found in our East County. According to the current *Jepson Manual*, it is found in open, sandy, or gravelly areas in the Mohave and Sonoran Deserts below 4800 feet (1600 m). I remember it being one of the most beautiful of the many desert spring wild flowers. Its bright blue bell-shaped corollas were definitely a treat to find.

Back when I found and photographed this species on one of my relatively few desert trips, I was able to trace its identification to the waterleaf family or Hydrophyllaceae. As we learned from our last banquet speaker however, when the NEW *Jepson Manual* comes out, the Hydrophyllaceae will disappear from California. All of its species will be moved into another family, the borage family (Boraginaceae). Both of these families share the characteristic of having their flower clusters (inflorescences) unfold in a pattern resembling the scroll of a violin. Botanists called this type of inflorescence a scorpioid cyme; we amateurs called it, in its extreme form a "fiddle neck." A common weedy genus in the Boraginaceae, *Amsinckia*, even goes by the common name fiddle neck. In the past, or classically, however, the borages and the waterleaves were distinguished primarily on fruit type and to a lesser extent of leaf complexity. Borages had fruits that separated into four distinct pieces (nutlets) whereas waterleaves produced many-seeded, dehiscent capsules. Borage leaves tended to be simple, entire to variously toothed whereas water-leaf leaves tended to be deeply lobed to compound. Apparently "modern" DNA based evidence indicates that we should pay more attention to the inflorescence character than was done in the past. I have to admit that I'm not having much trouble grasping this change in nomenclature. In fact it actually makes a lot more sense to me than the old one which had the borages and the mints (Labiatae or Lamiaceae) as kissing cousins. – Dirk Walters, Illustration by Bonnie Walters

## President's Notes

Those of you who missed Bob Stafford's wonderful talk on the wildlife of the Carrizo Plain and Chimineas Ranch areas can have another chance to learn about the area at our March 3 meeting in Atascadero. Following the sanfu last year when we posted insufficient information on time and place, we want to make sure you find your way to the AARP building at the rear of the Lake Pavilion in Atascadero Lake Park. Dirk Walters and myself have developed a slide show on the wildflowers and

landscapes of the area, and will start at 7:30 after the social gathering at 7:00.

After a month with no rain, I am getting worried that all the field trips planned by us and other organizations for celebration of California Native Plant Week may be too late for short-lived annuals. Right now, Montana de Oro State Park has nice displays of shooting stars and chocolate lilies along the East Boundary Trail, and trillium in Coon Creek. Snag them while you can.

I encourage you to use our Facebook page to post wildflower sightings and fast breaking news at <http://zh-hk.facebook.com/CNPSSLO>

–David Chipping

## Conservation

We are still trying to force some decent mitigation built into the First Solar project in the Carrizo. We are concerned that pressure for jobs and tax income might cause local government to allow the project to go forward without securing off-site mitigation. Our main concerns lie in the southwest corner of the project, and the positioning of Arrays 8 and 9 in a recognized wildflower field. If you have seen the spring flower displays on the north side of Belmont Trail, then you know what is at stake. If you don't know about these displays, come to our next meeting in Atascadero.

– David Chipping

## Marlin Harms Receives Hoover Award

Marlin Harms' quiet enthusiasm and his wondrous photographs are vital both to conservation and appreciation of our county's wildflowers. His contribution was recognized as this year's honored recipient of the Hoover Award, presented at our chapter's annual banquet in January.

Marlin takes stunning photographs. His work is featured prominently throughout "Wildflowers of San Luis Obispo" including the cover photograph of a *Calochortus venustus* display at Laguna Lake.

Typical of Marlin's enthusiasm was his effort to locate and photograph, missing subjects for that book. Marlin is never content with just a pedestrian image, he wants to improve and highlight each species with his art.

Marlin is pushing enthusiastically to help germinate the Chapter's next big publication, a guide to the Carrizo wildflowers. He has already spent innumerable hours gathering new images, confessing, "I'm early, but there are some species already in bloom, and I'm getting to see new things and new, really special places, like the Salcito Rocks." (*continued*)



## Marlin Harms continued

Marlin has played a behind-the-scenes, but vital role in the successful conservation campaigns preserving so much of our county. His photographs of Hollister Peak, the Sur Sur Ranch, the East West Ranch, and the Palisades property in Los Osos presented to foundations, Congress, and the Legislature generated the excitement and support for those conservation victories.

Marlin has contributed plants he has grown from seed to our annual plant sale for more than 15 years, quietly supporting our chapter's centerpiece fund-raiser.

Marlin came to the county in alternative service in Conscientious Objector status during the Vietnam Era. He served at Atascadero State Hospital, and continued in that career for 38 years until retiring in the beginning of 2009.

His senior thesis studied brown pelicans in Morro Bay finding that conservation and the undisturbed Back Bay were important to immature birds. He has also volunteered to monitor and photograph sea birds on the Farallons and California gulls at Mono Lake. Marlin was awarded a degree in Biology from Cal Poly while still working at ASH.

Connie, Marlin's wife, recounted a week that began with a dolphin rescue for Marlin's volunteer work with the marine mammal rescue, the next day had him serving as a docent at the Morro Bay Art Center, and the days that followed included photographing flowers at the Chimineas with CNPS member (and fellow Hoover recipient) George Butterworth, elephant seals were shoehorned into his schedule, before ending the week with sunset photographs at Morro Bay.

Our Chapter is fortunate for the energy and commitment of Marlin. We are proud to honor his accomplishments with our 2010 Hoover Award.

– John Chesnut

## Banquet Thanks

I want to thank everyone who helped with the Annual Banquet. Your participation makes it easy for me to keep it organized and running smoothly. I had some observations and comments to make it even better next year and welcome any additional comments you may have (e-mail: lbrown805@charter.net). I'm looking forward to doing it all over again next year.

– Lauren Brown

## Native Garden Open Today

SLO CNPS board members are hoping to celebrate the California Native Plant Week, April 17-23, 2011 with as many native-plants-meet-people-events as possible. One event we'd like to see happen, would be for our members who have native plant gardens (or mixed native-nonnative gardens) to open their garden for tours for one day during that week. It would give people who don't realize how to tuck natives here and there a chance to see how you do it, and to hear about your successes and failures. It is an opportunity to express why you feel it is important to plant natives. One of our members has already offered her garden and we'd like to have one or two gardens to visit in every SLO area city or locale. If you would be willing to open your garden for one day during this week in April please give me a call. Thank you, Heather Johnson, 528-0446

## Chapter Meetings

**Monthly Chapter Meeting:** Thursday, March 3, 2011, 7 p.m. The San Luis Obispo Chapter of the California Native Plant Society will present a slide show and lecture entitled "The Carrizo Plains: A Wildflower Wonderland" on March 3, 2011, at 7:00 p.m. in the Atascadero Association of Retired People building, 7484 Pismo Avenue, adjacent to the Lake Pavilion, **Atascadero**, off Morro Road (Hwy 41). Speakers will be Dr. Dirk Walters and Dr. David Chipping, both Emeritus Professors from Cal Poly. A large selection of natural history and botanical books will be offered for sale. The lecture and slide show are free and open to the public, but arrive early as seating is limited. Call 441-3777 for more information.

**April 2** Malcolm McLeod Memorial Field Trip Meeting at Shell Creek

**May 5** How Native Plants have become a priority for UCSB open space areas by Lisa Stratton, the Director of Ecosystem Management for UCSB's Cheadle Center for Biodiversity and Ecological Restoration (CCBER).

## Field Trips

**Saturday, February 26, 9 a.m., Late Winter BMC Chaparral CNPS Field trip at the La Purisima Mission.** The California Native Plant Society and Lompoc Valley Botanic and Horticultural Society will hold their annual winter field trip to the Burton Mesa Chaparral on the La Purisima Mission grounds. Meet at the east end of Burton Mesa Boulevard in Mission Hills at 9 a.m. for a chance to see the early bloomers and interesting scenery. To reach Burton Mesa Boulevard, go to SR 1 north of Lompoc. At the signal where SR 1 turns down hill toward Lompoc, take Harris Grade Road north to Burton Mesa Boulevard and turn right (east). For more information call Charlie Blair at (805) 733-3189.

**Saturday, March 5, 9 a.m., Visit to Islay Hill, San Luis Obispo,** led by John Doyle and Mardi Niles. Meet at the cul-de-sac area of Sweet Bay Lane in southeast San Luis Obispo at 9:00 a.m. for a three hour walk on Islay Hill. This will be a moderate hike of 1.5 to 2.0 miles and 500 feet elevation gain. March is an excellent time of year to see many of our blooming natives (*Fragaria*, *Salvia*, *Fritillaria*, *Solanum*, *Sambucus*, etc.) and perhaps some unexpected finds, including non-natives. To reach the trailhead, travel southeast on Orcutt Road from SLO or east on Tank Farm Road until they meet. About 1/4 of a mile after the intersection turn right onto Spanish Oaks Drive then left onto Sweet Bay Lane (about 1/3 of a mile later) and go to the end. Wear sturdy shoes, bring water, and dress in layers. This walk will be held rain or shine. For more information contact either John Dolye (805) 748-7190 or Bill Waycott, bill.waycott@gmail.com, (805) 459-2103.

**Saturday, March 5, 9 a.m. LVBHS Burton Mesa Chaparral AHC Interpretative Area Clean-up.** The annual "Spring Cleaning" of the BMC Interpretative Area on the Lompoc Allan Hancock College Campus will begin at 9 a.m., Saturday, March 5. Each year, the LVBHS clears the trails and removes some of the dead vegetation. The Lompoc AHC Campus can be reached

form SR 1 between Vandenberg Village and Lompoc. Turn onto the campus at the signal then immediately right, follow the road to the BMC area. Please bring tools and gloves if needed. Call Charlie Blair (805) 733-3189 or Mimi Erland (805) 733-2323 for more information.

**Saturday, March 12, 8:30 a.m., Reservoir Canyon and Bowden Ranch.** Join us for a moderate hike through the lushly wooded Reservoir Canyon located directly behind San Luis Obispo and then over the backbone ridge, ending at San Luis Obispo High School. Plants, animals, and the geology of the area will be topics during the hike. Spring wildflowers will be at their peak and this hike covers some of the best display areas around the city. Meet at the eastern corner of the SLO High School parking lot near the corner of Johnson Avenue and San Luis Drive. A few cars will ferry the hikers to the trailhead in Reservoir Canyon. Total hike distance is five miles with an elevation gain of 1000 feet, and a total hike time of 3 hours. Once completed, drivers with cars parked at the trailhead will be driven back to retrieve their cars. Bring adequate water, snacks, and dress in layers for the weather; a hat and sturdy shoes are advised. Rain cancels. For info, call Bill at (805) 459-2103 or bill.waycott@gmail.com.

**Saturday, late March, Hike to Coreopsis Hill**  
Arrangements for this event are in process (for the end of March). Please visit our website for updates, hike description, and meeting time/place, [www.cnps-slo.org](http://www.cnps-slo.org). You may also call or e-mail Lauren Brown (lbrown805@charter.net, (805) 460-6329).

**Saturday, March 26, 10:00 a.m.** This special event is a **Field Trip to the San Joaquin Valley side of Tejon Ranch Conservancy** for our SLO-CNPS chapter members and friends. Tejon Ranch Conservancy, led by Mike White, conservation science director, will host a 3 to 4 hour walk, choosing the best location to see the spring wildflower bloom within the 240,000 acre Tejon Ranch in the Tehachapi Range. Last year's Tejon trip featured carpets of spectacular flowers. To decide if this trip is for you, please visit the website: <http://www.tejonconservancy.org/>, then go to Events, 2011 Community Hike Program, and Under General Information scroll down to "For more information on what to bring and restrictions, click here."

Traveling to the Tejon Ranch: It is about a three to three 1/2 hour drive from SLO to the Tejon Ranch taking Hwy 101, Hwy 166 and Hwy I-5. Specific traveling instructions will be emailed to registered participants once the location for the best spring bloom is determined by the Tejon Ranch Conservancy leader, about a week before 3/26.

To Register: Because SLO-CNPS has made special arrangements with the Tejon Ranch Conservancy all participants must register prior to this event. Limited to 25 people. Please contact Lynne Peterson, email: [lynne1112@hotmail.com](mailto:lynne1112@hotmail.com), or by phone: (805) 706-0301, for questions or to make your reservations. For additional information: Contact Bill Waycott (SLO CNPS' new field trip chair) by email, [bill.waycott@gmail.com](mailto:bill.waycott@gmail.com), or by phone, (805) 459-2103.

**Saturday, April 2, 8:30 a.m. Annual Malcolm McLeod Memorial Field Trip Meeting to Shell Creek** led by Dirk Walters and David Chipping. Meet at the SLO Veterans Hall at 8:30 a.m. and at the Santa Margarita Park & Ride on the south side of Hwy 58, just east of the Hwy 101 intersection, at 9:00 a.m. Our first stop will be at Santa Margarita Park to use the bathrooms, there will be no other bathrooms available after that point. We will then drive east on Hwy 58, about 18.5 miles, and make a left hand turn on to Shell Creek Road. Park there and the group will meet somewhere near the windmill. We will walk through the fields along both sides of Shell Creek Road looking at wildflowers. We will visit spots with shell fossils, that give this area its name. We will meet as a group for lunch along Shell Creek Road. This will end the morning part of the trip. In the afternoon some people may wish to explore other

spots in the area, while others may want to return to town. Consider the afternoon options when making travel arrangements. Bring water, lunch, cameras, dress in layers and don't forget your "Wildflowers

Highway 58" plant guide by Dr. Malcolm McLeod or plan to purchase one on the trip. For more information call Dirk Walters at [dwalters@charter.net](mailto:dwalters@charter.net), (805) 543-7051, Dave Chipping at [dchipping@calpoly.edu](mailto:dchipping@calpoly.edu), 528-0914, or Bill Waycott at [bill.waycott@gmail.com](mailto:bill.waycott@gmail.com) or (805) 459-2103.



*Cardamine californica*

**Saturday, April 9, 9 a.m. CNPS and Sierra Club Spring La Purisima Burton Mesa Wildflower Walk.** Meet at the La Purisima Mission Parking

Lot, corner of Purisima and Mission Gate Roads. (2295 Purisima Road, Lompoc) at 9 a.m. for this annual spring tour of the beauties of the Burton Mesa Chaparral. Optional afternoon tour. Sturdy shoes, lunch & liquids, camera and binoculars advised. For more information, call Charlie at (805) 733-3189.

**Saturday, April 16, 9:00 a.m. LPNF and CNPS Wildflower, Native Plant Week, and Earth Day Weekend Figueroa Mountain,** at the Figueroa Fire Station. The Santa Lucia District, Los Padres National Forest will hold one of its annual Wildflower Weekends on Figueroa Mountain in conjunction with CNPS. This tour will start a local celebration of the first California Native Plant Week (3rd week in April, the 16th to 23rd this year). Meet at 9 a.m. at the Fire Station on Figueroa Mountain Road. Traveling east on SR 154 turn left at Figueroa Mountain Road near Los Olivos and proceed to the Fire Station parking lot. This will be a "drive and stroll" tour of this year's spectacular display. Sturdy shoes, lunch and liquids, camera, and binoculars recommended. Call Helen Tarbet at (805) 925-9538 ext. 246 or Charles Blair, (805) 733-3189, for details.

## Thank You from Marlin Harms

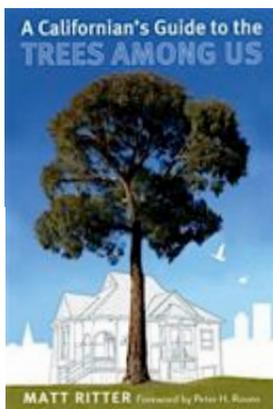
Though I am a man of few words, I amazed myself that I could say no more than "Thank you" when I received the Hoover award at the banquet in January—perhaps because I was so surprised. So a few words here. First, I am extremely honored to receive the award and humbled to join the distinguished list of previous Hoover recipients. I am grateful that David Chipping invited me in the late 1990's to join the Morro Estuary Greenbelt Alliance, a grassroots land conservancy group to which I contributed photos. That led to a series of San Luis Obispo County projects with the Trust for Public Lands, all of which projects I worked on jointly with Dennis Sheridan. I am still proud and amazed that nearly all the local land conserving projects of these two organizations were successful. And the recent "Wildflowers of San Luis Obispo, California" book, to which I contributed many photographs, was an obvious group collaboration. I feel lucky to have had these relationships that have allowed my love of plants and the land to be shared with others through my photographs. The praise that John Chesnut gave me when handing me the award, while sincerely appreciated, should be shared with all these other energetic and motivated people.

– Marlin Harms

## BOOK NEWS

We have two wonderful books ordered and hopefully they will arrive before the March 3, 2011 meeting in Atascadero.

The first exciting new book is by our own Dr. Matt Ritter. *A Californian's Guide To The Trees Among Us* features 150 of California's most commonly grown trees. Some native, some introduced, these trees create wildlife habitats, reduce pollution, provide shade, muffle noise, and enrich our lives in so many ways. One of my favorite quotes about this book says, "this superb book will introduce Californians to what is interesting and wonderful about the trees in their neighborhoods." Mike Sullivan, San Francisco Recreation and Parks Commissioner.



Our second wonderful book will be coming in from Chumash Press. *Reimagining The California Lawn: Water-conserving Plants, Practices and Designs* by Carol Bornstein, David Fross, and Bart O'Brien. Carol is the director of the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden, David owns our local Native Sons Wholesale Nursery, and Bart is Director of Research at Santa Ana Botanic Garden. The previous book by these three was *California Native Plants For The Garden*. This new book promises to be another smash hit as it helps us replace our water-sucking lawns with meadows, grasslands, and prairies. The pictures will make your mouth water. Let's hope these arrive soon! – Heather Johnson

## Horticulture

Everybody knows that this year's rainfall has been very unpredictable. First we had an abundance of moisture, and now things have dried up. I have been receiving questions asking if it is time to water now, what should be done if we end up having less than average rainfall, and how will the lack of rain effect native plants. I know these are hard questions to answer but maybe I can offer some advice.

Seasons that are below average rainfall are not uncommon in California. If you look back over the last twenty years, you will find that only thirty percent of those years have had average rainfall. The other twenty five percent have produced above average rainfall and about forty five percent have been below average. During those dry years, we have had some very wet months and some months without any rain at all. Not trying to make things more complicated, we have also experienced as many as four years in a row with below average rainfall. These extended dry periods are called droughts. It's during these consecutive drought years that our native plant gardens will suffer. The effects could be live oak trees going completely deciduous and not producing acorns, ceanothus shrubs and trees barely blooming, and willows and small herbaceous plants completely dying. These dry years also cause insect populations to explode due to that lack of cold which usually follows northern storm fronts. So back to the questions, what should we do?

First, if you have new plants that you purchased at the plant sale this fall, yes, you should be watering! A good rule of thumb would be to water your new plants every three weeks unless it has rained at least an inch. These plants do not have much of a root system because they are not established yet. It usually takes at least a year for a plant to get established. Second, if we have not received rainfall for a month, put the rain-bird out. Even well established oak trees and native shrubs need water during the rainy season. So during these dry months when we may go four to five weeks without rainfall, we should provide extra irrigation. This extra moisture will keep our native trees and shrubs from going into drought stress. As long as it rains at least an inch every three weeks we won't need to water. If the rains stop, it's back to the watering schedule until April. April is the end of the rainy season and watering will not be needed after then except for special situations such as new plantings, herbaceous perennials, and ferns. Well, I hope this helps a little with your watering questions. As always, if you have any questions please feel free to call me. Until then, happy gardening!

– John

**A Warm Welcome to New Member:** Christina Adinolfi

**Thank you to our chapter Renewing Members:**

Ray Bedford, Melissa Boggs, Dixie Burnett, Patricia Cullinan, Chuck French, Samantha Kaisersatt, Linda Karr, Laura Kass, Peter Kinkade, Jenny Langford, Yee Lee-Wolfe, Scott Loosley, Nancy Mann, Steven Marx, Kathleen McCarey, Anne Power, Jeanette & Darwin Sainz, Pete Sarafian, Mark Skinner, Janet Swanson, Mike Walgren, Bill & Diana Waycott and Karen Wood

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



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Websites: [www.cnps.org](http://www.cnps.org) & [www.cnps-slo.org](http://www.cnps-slo.org)

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