Obispoensis

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



Salt Grass (Distichlis spicata)

It's getting harder and harder to find a fall plant in flower or fruit to profile. So I'm going to wander off into the salt marsh or the alkali flats of the interior. This plant is quite common in these habitats, but I suspect that most don't even notice it, or if they do, they ignore it as uninteresting. I place myself in the last category at least I would until I did a little research on the internet. The plant is "common" salt grass. It is also known as sea shore salt grass, desert salt grass, interior salt grass, alkali salt grass, desert spike grass or more commonly just plain salt grass (Distichlis spicata). As the common name implies it is member of the grass family (Poaceae) which usually grows in areas possessing salty or alkaline soils. Thus its common name can refer to its preferred habitat or its habit of excreting salt water onto leaf and stem surfaces. When the salt water evaporates from its surfaces, it leaves behind salt crystals. It appears to me that salt grass also does best where the salty soils are periodically wet. So I would expect to find it in coastal salt marshes and the edges of interior salt flats or in any situation where evaporation exceeds precipitation. Salt grass is native to North America and can be found growing in practically every state in the lower 48 except the well-watered, landlocked Midwest such as Michigan, Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia, and Arkansas. In these areas, there is enough rain or snow to leach surface layers of soil free of salt build up. It has also been introduced into every continent except Antarctica.

The genus name Distichlis refers to a characteristic of its leaf arrangement. This accompanying illustration is a photo-scan of some salt grass shoots. Even though the shoots were placed on a scanner with the lid closed, the leaves are not twisted in any way. That is because all of the leaves arise from the stem in a single plane, and that is precisely what a distichlis leaf arrangement is. Like most salt marsh plants, salt grass is a perennial. Annual plants are at a disadvantage because they must produce enough seed every year to assure that at least one of its seeds finds a suitable open site in which to germinate and grow to maturity. In hard to grow areas like salt marshes open sites are extremely rare and short lived. This is because competing species also live for several to many years (perennial) and thus are able to hold a site for a long time by simply occupying it. Thus open sites are extremely rare. Salt marsh plants also tend to expand latterly via vegetative means which takes less energy and is more certain than sexual reproduction. This means that the rare open site will likely be filled by neighbors expanding vegetatively into it rather than by a seedling establishment. Salt grass expands via stout horizontally growing underground stems (rhizomes) that have sharp, hard tips. Because it spreads from below the soil surface and its aerial shoots are thin and grass-like, it can often be found sticking up among shoots

of other salt marsh species. Where it lacks competition, salt grass forms a solid stand that has been called a turf. Where this occurs the plant has been used by grazing animals, but mostly only after other more palatable forage has been eaten. Because it is salt tolerant and easily grown, it has also been used to reclaim pastures that must be watered using salt water in the interior Southwest U.S.

Salt grass does produce flowers, fruits, and seeds. The specific epithet *spicata* refers to the fact that the spikelets (clusters of tiny flowers (florets)) are borne directly on a central axis. However, not all of its spikelets are capable of producing seed. Only the female or pistilate flowers produce seeds and these are borne on individual female plants. The male flowers (staminate) are produced on

separate male plants and produce only the pollen which produces the sperm. The reproductive shoot that bears reproductive structures (spikelets) in the illustration is female. This can be discerned in the photo-scan because the spikelets are buried among the terminal leaves. Male bearing spikelets are usually borne on a longish stalk which raises them high above the foliage. This exalted place-



ment of the pollen bearing flowers allows the wind to spread the pollen over a wider area. One other interesting factoid that is mentioned in several internet postings and is based primarily on the work of Sarah Eppley and associates in California is that male and female plants have slightly different distributions within the same salt marsh or flat. Female plants tend to be lower or closer to the water than the male plants. In some plants (and a few animals such as crocodiles) sex is determined by the environment but this is not the case in salt grass. DNA studies as well as reciprocal transplant studies have shown that sex is determined genetically. Garden studies have shown that female plants are able to tolerate longer emersion by salt water possibly because they attract symbiotic (mycorrhizal) fungi to attach to their roots. The fungi would potentially protect the female plants by providing extra nutrients. Also, growing female salt grass plants appear to inhibit germination and establishment of male plants but not vise versa. - Dirk Walters

PRESIDENT'S NOTES

Thank you to all the volunteers who made our annual plant sale a great success. Thanks also to the customers, and to the excellent weather. I also want to especially thank the growers who gave us an excellent selection of plants. I am trying to boost the stewardship side of CNPS, in which we work to protect either particular populations of plants, or areas that a prime examples of a vegetation association. Following a now-defunct statewide project of The Nature Conservancy, I think we have a duty to identify places that we are physically capable of protecting plant populations against the many threats of a fast-changing world. Let is know if there is some location that you consider "special" and worry about. By working with public and private property owners, and by developing protection programs, we can fulfill the mission of CNPS.

CONSERVATION

Hurricane Sandy seems, at long last, to convince skeptics that something is happening to the weather. The arguments persist that Sandy was a freak event and not indicative of a trend. The cry, as always, is "give us more data and then we will decide." This November, the Morro manzanitas in my yard were in full flower at the start of November. This seems incredibly early, but is it? I have spoken before about the California Phenology Project, which will track key events during a perennial's year and the date when it was observed. The following plants may be within easy viewing distance of chapter members, and I am asking volunteers to find one of more plant individuals that will be monitored over many years. In cases where perennials are short-lived, a local population could be monitored. We expect to collect data for many decades, and at the end of that extended time some trends will hopefully emerge. Please contact me if you would be able to volunteer... pick plant sites that you will see often and preferably a true local native and not some horticultural variety of uncertain geographic origins. Here is the list:

Blue Oak (Quercus douglasii); California Bay (Umbellularia californica); California Buckeye (Aesculus californica); California Buckwheat (Eriogonum fasciculatum); California Live Oak (Quercus agrifolia); California Poppy (Eschscholzia californica); California Wild Rose (Rosa californica); Chamise (Adenostoma fasciculatum); Common Snowberry (Symphoricarpos albus); Coyotebrush (Baccharis pilularis); Sticky Monkeyflower (Diplacus aurantiacus); Valley Oak (Quercus lobata)

The Phenology Project outreach to CNPS comes from a team at U.C. Santa Barbara, and at this time buy-in is com-

ing from other government agencies. The National Park Service site will give you a good idea about how the process works. If interested, I will help you get started. The NPS URL is:

http://www.usanpn.org/cpp/sites/www.usanpn.org.cpp/files/pdfs/Interpretation%20Guide-062912.pdf

David Chipping

CHAPTER MEETING

Thursday, December 6, 2012 Gardening in California's Mediterranean Climate The speaker: Nan Sterman

Plant ID Workshop 6:15 p.m. Visiting and Book Purchasing from 7:00 p.m. Meeting and Program Begin at 7:30 p.m.

Veterans Hall, 801 Grand Avenue, San Luis Obispo

Because California has a classic Mediterranean climate, gardening here is different from anywhere else in North America. In this talk, we discuss what it means to live and garden in California's Mediterranean climate. Nan talks about soil, rainfall, plants, and techniques for creating productive and beautiful gardens that thrive in our climate. She also shows examples of gorgeous gardens in many different styles, yet all done with a Mediterranean plant palette.

In early childhood, Nan tried her hand at growing radishes and carrots but with limited success. It wasn't until college that Nan re-discovered a love of all things green. Nan studied botany at Duke University. In the summers, she worked in the fledgling sustainability movement, though it wasn't called that at the time. She interned at the Farallones Institute's Integral Urban House in Berkeley, California where she was in charge of organic, raised-bed vegetable gardens, compost, chickens, and rabbits. Another summer Nan worked in Washington D.C. for a non-profit that focused on issues surrounding food justice. After Duke, Nan earned her first graduate degree in the Biology department at UC Santa Barbara.

In the early 90s, Nan and her husband Curt Wittenberg, bought their first home and right away, she planted a garden.

After a second graduate degree, this one in training and education development, Nan spent a decade consulting to Fortune 500 companies, non-profits, school districts, museums, zoos, aquaria, and botanical gardens. Then came the day that she was asked to review the first generation of garden design software for National Gardening magazine. That article lead to another, then another continued on page 4

Chapter Meeting continued



Nan Sterman

and before long, Nan was garden editor for San Diego Home Garden Lifestyle Magazine.

Today, Nan writes award-winning articles for the Los Angeles Times, the San Diego Union Tribune, Sunset Magazine, Organic Gardening Magazine, Pacific Horticulture, and others. She contributed to the 2008 edition of Sunset Western Gardens as well as other books on gardening.

In 2007, Nan published her first solo effort, *California Gardener's Guide vII* (Cool Springs Press) which is about gardening in California's Mediterranean climate; gardening with low water, climate appropriate plants that grow with little maintenance,

little fertilizer, but give lots of reward.

In 2010, Nan published *Waterwise Plants for the Southwest*, with co authors Mary Irish, Judith Phillips, and Joe Lamp'l. This book expands the waterwise palette with plants from the world's desert regions.

In 2005, Nan and her business partner Marianne Gerdes produced the first episode of A Growing Passion, a television show about ordinary people who are extraordinary gardeners. The show's emphasis on low water and sustainable landscapes; gardens was one of the first and aired on San Diego Public Television. It was followed up with several episodes that aired on cable TV.

Nan is a regular guest on Midday Edition, talk show on public radio in San Diego. She has appeared on national television shows for the DIY network, San Diego Public Television, and Growing a Greener World that airs on PBS nationally.

Nan is a popular speaker at garden shows, botanical gardens, to garden clubs and botanical societies throughout the State. She consults to The Water Conservation Garden in El Cajon, California, creating and teaching the very popular Bye Bye Grass class. She is also on the garden's Blue Ribbon Committee.

Nan serves on a voluntary advisory committee for the San Diego County Water Authority, and chairs the Encinitas Garden Festival & Tour. Nan is a founding board member of the San Diego District of the Association of Professional Garden Designers (APLD) on the board of the Garden Writers' Association, manages a 5,000 square foot school garden, and is involved in many other volunteer activities.

In recent years, Nan added garden design to her bag of tricks. She specializes in colorful and beautiful waterwise gardens that are also low maintenance, edible, and environmentally friendly.

Plant ID Workshop

Before the December 6 chapter meeting starts Matt Ritter will be

having a free plant ID workshop for our members and other participants who are interested in practicing their identification skills, learning the local flora, and looking at live material more closely in a casual and fun setting.

The workshop for the December chapter meeting will cover the common conifers of the Central Coast. We have several iconic, majestic, and interesting conifers on the Central Coast and we will focus on identifying and learning the important characters for the most common species. The workshop will be from 6:15 to 7 p.m.. Please join us for this fun and informative event!

Plant Sale Thank You

Suzette and I want to say, "job well done" to all the volunteers who spent their Saturday helping at the plant sale. I am always amazed how you all turn out and really give it your all. We sold lots of plants, books, seeds, and other stuff. With your help the chapter will be able to continue teaching the public about native plants and the importance of protecting them for future generations to enjoy. I also want to thank you all for wishing me a happy birthday that really made my day. As we look forward to next year's sale, I hope you had fun and will be willing to sign up again to help. Once again thank you for making this year's sale a success.

Your plant sale chairpersons, John and Suzette

2012 Most Valuable Volunteer

John and I felt this year it would be fun to begin acknowledging a Most Valuable Volunteer for our annual plant sale or our MVV! This decision was difficult because we have so many outstanding volunteers; however, one stood out amongst the group. And that person is Susan Grimaud! Susan spent many hours collecting, cleaning, and preparing seed packets for the sale. This may not seem to be a large task; however, it truly is time consuming. She donated her time without being asked and spent most her the day selling and instructing customers on propagating her seeds. Susan, thank you so much for volunteering your seeds and time. Congratulations you are this year's MVV. & John & Suzette

Where the Heck is Bear Canyon?

by Neil A. Havlik, PhD

The Santa Lucia fir (*Abies bracteata*) is one of the rarest and most beautiful of all the fir species in the world. It is confined to a narrow strip of the Santa Lucia Mountains in the Big Sur area of Monterey and San Luis Obispo Counties, California, extending from about Uncle Sam Mountain in the north to Marmolejo Canyon on the Hearst Ranch in the south, a distance of about 60 miles. The range is even more narrow or restricted on an eastwest basis, extending from within two miles of the Pacific Ocean at its closest to Anastasia Canyon in Monterey County, about 13 miles inland in a direct line from the ocean at that location on the inland or "dry" side of the Santa Lucia Range.

The author has enjoyed hiking in the Santa Lucia Mountains for many years, especially in the southern portion of the range, including areas such as Villa Creek, Salmon Creek, and San Carpoforo Creek. The occasional occurrence of stands of Santa Lucia fir in those areas has been a constant source of interest and delight, and led to a further interest in the behavior of the species as it occurs in those lower, drier, generally hotter locations, where the species becomes much more restricted compared to its fairly widespread occurrence in the higher mountains in the Big Sur, Little Sur, and Carmel River watersheds. The "southern portion" of the fir's range is defined as that portion south of the Nacimiento-Ferguson Road. North of this road the mountains are higher and coniferous forest is of more general occurrence; this forest includes ponderosa pine, Coulter pine, sugar pine, and incense cedar, as well as Santa Lucia fir.

The range of Santa Lucia fir was first described by Charles Sargent in his great, fourteen volume treatise *Silva of North America*, published between the years 1890 and 1902. In Volume 12, published in 1898, Sargent wrote

the following about the distribution of the Santa Lucia fir:

The most southern point from which *Abies venusta* has been reported is in Bear Canyon, which faces the east, and is about twenty-five miles south of Los Burros Mines, near Punta Gorda, where there is a grove of about 200 trees.

Sargent then goes on to describe other stands further to the north. This description, however, is significant because it appears that both Jepson and Sudworth "picked up" that location, but abridged the description, such that the location of "Bear Canyon" (or "Bear Basin" as Sudworth called it), was not described exactly as Sargent described it. As Sudworth described the location, it read, "200 trees on north slope of Bear Basin on east side of range south of Los Burros Mines and near Punta Gorda." Jepson stated the location as "Bear Canyon, near Punta Gorda, facing east."

So where is Bear Canyon? There is no Bear Canyon shown on recent USGS maps of northwestern SLO County, nor on earlier maps that I have seen. Twenty-five miles from the Los Burros mines would place this canyon near Rocky Butte behind Cambria. Marmolejo Canyon, which does have a fine grove of firs which mostly face northeast to east-northeast, is about eighteen miles south of the Los Burros Mines, so I have begun to wonder whether Bear Canyon is an old and now forgotten name for Marmolejo Canyon.

Hopefully old maps, old descriptions of the areas, or the memories of long-time residents may provide the answer. This is what is known as forensic botany. Any ideas out there?

Take Advantage of This Limited Plant Offer

A few plants remained from the Plant Sale, so if there's a place in your garden that you are still looking to fill, consider some of these. Some of these are not often found in the retail trade. Google their names, and see if it's right for your yard. 1 gallon: 3 *Vitus californica* 'Rodger's Red' California grape, and 2 *Iris douglasiana* PCH hybrids. 4" pots: *Frangula californica*, Coffeeberry; *Heuchera pilosissima*, Hairy Alum-Root; *Grindelia arenicola*, Coast Gum Plant; and, *Potentilla Glandulosa* ssp. *glandulosa*, Stick Cinquefoil. 1 gallons are \$5, and 4" pots are \$2. A native plant retailer in the Bay area says this about the *Grindelia*, "Soon to become a superstar among groundcovers, you can't ask for much more than what this durable & stepable California native provides. Creating an almost flat, super-dense, evergreen, trailing carpet, it blooms from May all the way to October with 2.5" sunny yellow blooms. DROUGHT, CLAY, SAND & salt tolerant, it's long lived and excellent for parking strips & hillsides. Great habitat plant & deer resistant!" The plants will be available at the December chapter meeting, or email lindachipping@yahoo.com for other information. 1 gallons are \$5 each and the 4" pots are \$2.

California Native Plant Society SLO Annual Banquet

The Annual CNPS Potluck Dinner will be held on Saturday, January 26, 2013, at the Morro Bay Community Center. The speaker will be Kat Anderson, author of *Tending the Wild: Native American Knowledge and the Management of California's Natural Resources*. Cost is \$10 per person with CNPS providing beer, wine and other beverages. The details and reservation form will be included in the flyer, which will be mailed in January. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Lauren Brown, lbrown805@charter.net, or 460-6329.

Dr. Anderson's talk, "Salinan Ethnobotany and Associated Land Stewardship," will highlight some of the rich Salinan uses of our native plants for basketry, cordage, foods and other purposes, gathered from John P. Harrington's field notes and her own ethnobotanical research conducted among the Salinan in the oak savannahs, chaparral, marshes and other vegetation types of west-central California in what is now Los Padre National Forest, Salinas Valley, and Fort Hunter-Liggett. She will explore the rich stewardship practices that the Salinan applied to wilderness areas to influence plants and ecosystems for cultural purposes, and the potential associated ecological effects that might have resulted from these techniques.

Kat Anderson is an ethnoecologist of the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service and a lecturer in the Department of Plant Sciences at UC Davis. She is also associate ecologist with the Agriculture Experiment Station.

She reconstructs the plant uses, harvesting strategies, and land management practices of indigenous peoples in the United States with an emphasis in California. This work involves the use of both qualitative and quantitative research methods. A unique feature of her research is the use of the western scientific experimental approach to simulate indigenous horticultural practices and assess their potential ecological effects on the productivity and yield of wild plant populations. This information in turn can be used to assess the potential application of traditional ecological knowledge for restoring traditional gathering sites, and the biodiversity of degraded ecosystems.

Kat received a Masters and Doctorate in Wildland Resource Science from the University of California at Berkeley and Bachelors in Environmental Planning and Management from the University of California at Davis.

LOST AND FOUND

At the Oct. C.N.P.S. meeting someone left a black vest, size L, women's Columbia Sportswear Co., zip up side pockets. I tried to give it away at the November meeting and at the plant sale but no one claimed it. If it is yours please pick it up at the book table at the December meeting, after that it goes to Goodwill.

FOUND: Did you buy a book at the book table, then put it down and forget to take it home? I have your book and receipt. Name the book and it is yours at the December book table.

BOOK TABLE

We have new tees in EVERY size! Small, medium, large, extra-large, and XXlarge. We have long sleeves and short sleeves in lots of pretty colors, so if you have been wishing for a new tee, now is the time with the best selection.

THANK YOU SUSAN

A big thank you to Susan Grimaud for all the seeds she brought to the plant sale. So many many people got to pick up seeds which Susan brought. She grew the plants, collected the seeds, cleaned them, packaged them, labeled them and then brought them in for all of us to enjoy. Thank you Susan for a job well done!

-Heather Johnson

Sweet Springs Preserve Volunteer Opportunity

The holidays are about caring & sharing. Give something back to Nature this season by joining Morro Coast Audubon & friends on Saturday, December 8th from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. to help restore this beautiful coastal habitat on the shores of Morro Bay. We'll be planting lots of wildlife friendly shrubs like dune lupine, buckwheat, black sage, and lots more. We have about 3000 plants that need to go in the ground this winter, and it all has to be done by volunteers. Bring a shovel with your name on it, if you have one. Otherwise, just bring yourself, your friends & family of all ages to the Sweet Springs Nature Preserve on the corner of 4th Street and Ramona Ave in Los Osos. Our planting days are December 8th and January 12th. Tools, tips & holiday treats provided – even prizes for correct answers on our Nature quiz! More info: 239-3928; mcas@morrocoastaudubon.org.

Field Trips

Saturday, December 1, 2:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., Mitchell Park, San Luis Obispo. Join Dr. Matt Ritter for a tree walk through downtown San Luis Obispo. The walk will begin at Mitchell Park and we will stroll along the city sidewalks ending at Mission San Luis Obispo. In California, there is no need to travel to an exotic location to be awed by nature when much of the world's amazing plant diversity is represented in our neighborhood parks and gardens, and on our streets. Dr. Ritter will share his favorite natural history stories and identification tips, and reveal the secrets behind San Luis Obispo's many beautiful heritage trees. Wear comfortable shoes and warm clothing. The walk is limited to 25 people. To participate in the walk, contact Bill Waycott at (805) 459-2103 or (bill.waycott@gmail.com) and leave your name and contact information. This walk is sponsored by the Santa Lucia Chapter of the Sierra Club. Rain or the threat of rain cancels.

Saturday, December 15, 9 a.m. Fungal Foray, Cambria, led by David Krause, Mark Brunschwiler, and Dennis Sheridan. On this morning field trip we will be looking for mushrooms growing in the Monterey pine forests of Cambria. Meet at the San Luis Obispo Vets Hall parking area on Grand Avenue at 8 a.m. Meet at the Cambria Vets Hall at 9 a.m. How to get there: Traveling north on Hwy 1, take a right at the stop light at Cambria Road,

Cambria, go one block to Main Street and take a left and then a left again into the Cambria Vets Hall parking lot. There is no public restroom here. Bring water, your field guides and a mushroom basket for you may want to collect some edible varieties. Dress appropriately for the weather. Be prepared for poison oak. The hike will be easy, about a 3 hour stroll through the woods. For additional information e-mail or call David Krause (dkincmbria@aol.com (805) 459-9007) or Bill Waycott (bill.waycott@gmail.com (805) 459-2103).

Saturday, December 22, 9:30 a.m., Point Buchon Trail, Montaña de Oro State Park. The Point Buchon trail stretches south along the coast at Montaña de Oro State Park. The trail gives us access to a wide coastal shelf between the local hills and the rugged coast line of the Pacific Ocean. The area is relatively undisturbed and early winter wild flowers should be in evidence. Meet at the parking lot at the southern end of Montaña de Oro SP at the start of the Coon Creek trail. Bring adequate water, snacks, and dress in layers for the weather; a hat and sturdy shoes is advised. For info, call Bill at (805) 459-2103 (bill.waycott @gmail.com). This walk is jointly sponsored by the Santa Lucia Chapter of the Sierra Club. Rain or the threat of rain cancels.

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



San Luís Obíspo Chapter of the California Native Plant Society P.O. Box 784 San Luis Obispo, CA 93406 Nonprofit Organization U.S. Postage Paid San Luis Obispo, CA Permit No. 114

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