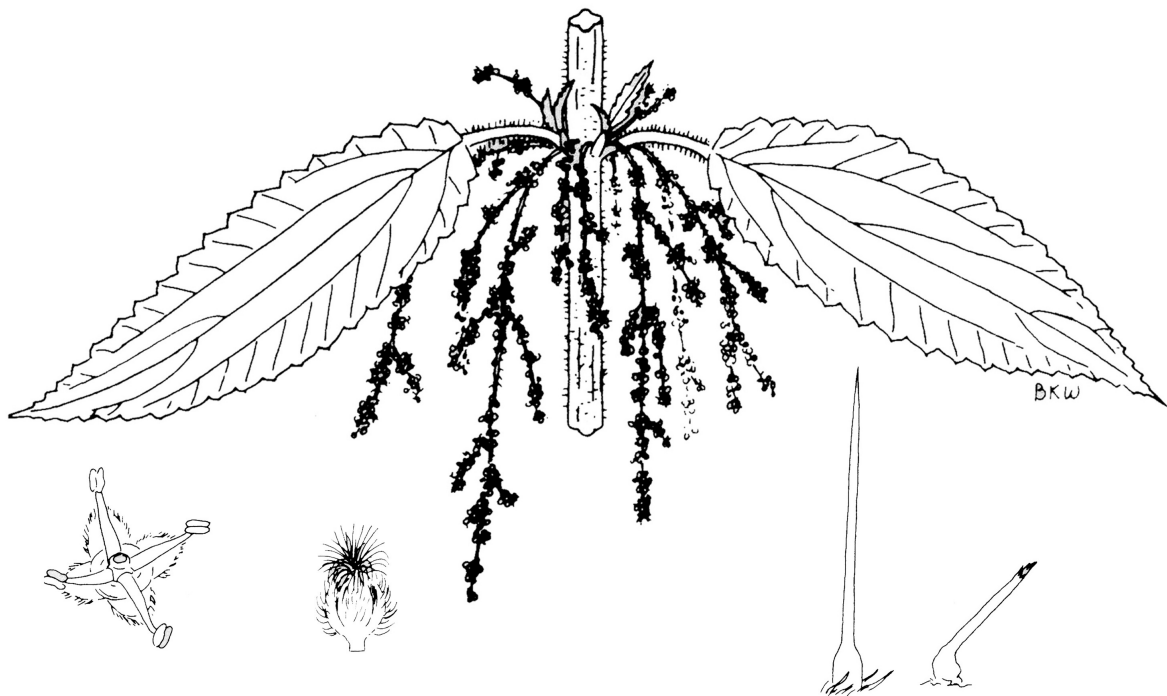

Obispoensis

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



JUNE 2012

Hoary Stinging Nettle

Urtica dioica subsp. *holosericea*

About the cover: This month's plant is one most of us try to avoid. This is because of the trichomes (hairs) that cover its stem and leaves. The hairs have a bulbous base filled with a fluid that when deposited on unprotected skin causes a burning or stinging sensation. Bonnie has drawn a couple of these hairs. It turns out that the irritating fluid is most effective if deposited in a cut. To insure this cut, the sharp point of the hair breaks off leaving a jagged tip which when dragged along the skin results in a tiny cut. While the cut is being made, lateral and/or downward pressure on the hair's base causes the fluid in the hair to be forced up and out the hollow hair stem to be deposited in the fine cut caused by the broken tip. That is, the stinging hairs are each tiny hypodermic needles. If you haven't guessed the plant by now, it's the true stinging nettle, *Urtica dioica* subsp. *holosericea*. Our common or hoary stinging nettle is a subspecies of a very wide ranging species that is found throughout the North American and Eurasian continents. The new *Jepson Manual* indicates that our subspecies are native. However, the Eurasian subspecies, *U. dioica* ssp. *dioca*, is an extremely widespread weed as it has been widely introduced in North America. Apparently there is at least one unconfirmed report of the Eurasian subspecies in California.

So what does one do if one runs into a patch of stinging nettle? My professor in college told us to "wash the itchy area well and then douse it with rubbing alcohol which will cause the itch to disappear in one-half hour." He would then add, "If you do nothing the itch will go away in 30 minutes." I'll let each of you decide whether to treat stinging nettle irritation or not. Dr. Rhonda Riggins added one additional stinging nettle story. On field trips, when she would find stinging nettle, she would say that she was so strong, that the nettle didn't bother her. To prove it, she would grab a nettle plant and pull it out. Her students were impressed. However, she had a trick! She was careful to limit her exposure to the palm of her hand where she, as well as most of us, have thick calluses. In other words, the delicate hairs couldn't penetrate these calluses, so didn't cause any harm.

Stinging nettles are partial to moist soils and are found most often near streams. They can also be found near springs or in hollows in coastal sand dunes that are low enough to approach the water table. The genus name, *Urtica*, is derived from Latin and means "to burn" referring to the stinging sensation one receives when brushing up against the plant. I have to admit that I prefer to say the genus name reminds us that to come in contact with this plant (h)urts! Also of note, is that stinging nettle pain begins immediately on contact. This is in contrast to poison oak (*Toxicodendron diversiloba*) which usually

takes ½ hour or more to stimulate your immune system for itching that lasts much longer than ½ hour. The species epithet, *dioica*, is short for dioecious. Dioecious is a fancy botanical term for stamens and pistils borne in separate flowers on separate plants. Therefore the plants are considered to be unisexual or bearing either staminate (male) or pistillate (female) flowers but not both. According to *The Jepson Manual* our western variety of stinging nettle is the hoary (stinging) nettle. "Hoary" is used in the common name to indicate that this subspecies has many more stinging hairs than the other subspecies found in California. The common name, nettle, is used for many plants, not just ones possessing stinging hairs. It's used for any plant that possesses hairs that look like they might sting. Our most common example of this use is the totally unrelated mint, hedge nettle, *Stachys bullata*. Hedge nettle is common along streams too.

Having spent all these words, telling why you should avoid this plant, I need to point out that the Eurasian subspecies of this plant has been widely used in the old world as a spinach substitute and rennet. Boiling denatures the irritating fluid and softens the hairs. Boiling the roots can produce a yellow dye. Stems produce a strong fiber which has been favorably compared to another stem fiber, linen. ❀

- Dirk Walters, illustration by Bonnie Walters

President's Notes

As most of you know, the June meeting is our last until we start the new season in October with our annual "show us your pictures-enjoy desserts" show. I am sorry this spring was such a let-down as far as annual flower displays are concerned, but forecasts suggest that the La Nina conditions will transition to a possible El Nino next year. Let's hope! I'll take this time to thank all of you who contributed to our chapter efforts, came on field trips etc. during this last season, especially our hard working Board. I am hoping that some more chapter members will consider joining or helping out the Board next season... talk to me about it.

A big thank-you to John and Esther Gowan who will donate a copy of the new *Jepson Manual* to the SLO public library. Another thanks to Kristie Haydu, Matt Ritter, and manzanita gatherers for the excellent keying workshop before the last meeting. Using the new Jepson-2 manzanita key, it is quite surprising how different it is from the Jepson-1 key by Wells, or Hoover's 1970 key.

Many of you would have received the flyer on the May 26th Phenology Workshop in Cambria via our electronic mailing list. If you didn't get it, and want to be informed of CNPS-related events, email or (Continued on page 3)

call me and you will be added (or subtracted). The project will train us how to collect data from plants of our choosing (in the wild or garden) so that, after many years, trends will start to emerge from the annual scatter of data points. Is the climate actually changing? Once we have some local interest, we can expand local data collection and get some insight into trends. This in turn may play a role in future conservation strategies at the landscape scale. ☼ David Chipping

Conservation

All the action seems to be in the south county. I am commenting on the Recirculated Draft EIR for Laetitia Winery, which appears to be a well constructed document describing a less than desirable project. There have been some reductions in the project, and possible alternative designs are much better for oak and water conservation than the project as currently described. The proposed project consists of the agricultural cluster subdivision of 21 parcels (totaling approximately 1,910 acres) into 106 lots, including 102 residential lots of one acre each; four build-able open space lots totaling approximately 1,787 acres; and approximately 25 acres of internal residential roads. Approximately 6.6 percent of the 1,910-acre project site would be developed by residential lots and internal access roads. Oak woodland and coastal scrubs are at risk.

A much larger project involves annexation and development of the hills east of Price Canyon. The parcels of South Ranch, Loughead Ranch and Godfrey Ranch are combined as the 1,264 acre Spanish Springs Specific Planning Area. This is composed of 422 single family homes, 51 multi-family and 360 senior-housing units, 150 hotel rooms, a 9-hole golf course, vineyards and more. Not much room for nature. As you may know a much smaller annexation at Los Robles del Mar was turned down by LAFCO, which is now being sued by the developers. Water was an issue in that project, and remains a key issue for Spanish Springs.

On a brighter note I would like to thank State Parks for killing a large number of the pampas grass that was invading the botanically rich coastal terrace north of Arroyo de la Cruz. This terrace is probably the richest botanic treasure in the county. I will encourage members to get back to me in identifying small areas that they consider of exceptional botanic value that could be defended from invasive weeds through our labors. Last week I encountered an almost pristine patch of *Monardella undulata* in the Los Osos dunes with a single large veldt grass clump in the middle... I yanked that sucker and it felt really, really good. ☼ David Chipping

Chapter Meeting

**Thursday, June 7, 7 p.m., Veterans Building
801 Grand Avenue, San Luis Obispo**

Nuri Benet-Pierce is a Research Associate at San Diego State University and is currently working on various taxonomic problems in the genus *Chenopodium*, the "goosefoots."

She has also worked on pollen hetero-morphism in the monocot family Haemodoraceae, which entailed field work in Australia and resulted in a publication (Australian Systematic Botany 22: 16-30, 2009). Nuri is co-author of the *Chenopodium* and



Nuri Benet-Pierce at Montaña de Oro

Dysphania treatments for *The Jepson Manual* 2. Her work on *Chenopodium* has resulted in the recognition of a new species in California, *Chenopodium littoreum* Benet-Pierce & M. G. Simpson (Madroño 57: 64-72, 2010). Her presentation will review how this recognition came about and address some basic taxonomic issues in *Chenopodium*.

The next chapter meeting is Thursday, October 4, 2012.

Plant Identification Workshop

Before the June 7 chapter meeting starts we are 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 June 7 chapter meeting will cover the California tarplants (also known as tarweeds). Several aromatic, sticky, summer blooming native wildflowers in the composite family can be found in the grasslands around SLO county. 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!



Field Trips

Friday June 8, 10:00 a.m., Arroyo De La Cruz - Part I. This is the first of two field trips to one of the “hottest” spots for botanical diversity in San Luis Obispo Co. Matt Ritter and David Keil will lead an outing to the northern coastal portion of the county. Arroyo De La Cruz features a variety of plant communities and a number of endemics, found only in this relatively small area, full of rare and endangered plants. Meet at the parking lot of Spencer’s Market in Morro Bay, 2650 Main Street, at 10:00 a.m. From there we will drive north with a brief stop at the Elephant Seal Overlook (at 10:30 a.m.), to pick up any participants from Cambria and the North County, and then proceed to Arroyo De La Cruz. The field trip will last about 3 hours.

Saturday-Sunday, June 16 -17, “President’s Trip” overnight to the Sierra Madre Range and Cerro Noroeste in Santa Barbara County, and the Mt. Abel-Pinos Area in Ventura-Kern Counties. Meet Saturday at 9 a.m. just off Hwy 101 near the beginning of Hwy 166-East, just north of the Santa Maria River. We will visit a diversity of altitudes as well as witness the effects of the Northern Santa Barbara County fires in recent years. There should be flowers, especially mariposa lilies at these elevations, even in June. We are planning to dry camp at a camp ground off of the Cerro Noroeste Road. You will need to bring plenty of water, food for two lunches as well as supper and breakfast. Hopefully we can re-fuel our vehicles in New Cuyama, but please begin this trip with a full tank of gas. For more information call Dirk Walters (805) 543-7051 or email:

drwalters@charter.net.

Sunday, July 8, 9:00 a.m., Arroyo De La Cruz - Part II. This is the second of two field trips to one of the “hottest” spots for botanical diversity in San Luis Obispo Co. Our leader will be D.R. “Doc” Miller. Doc will take us to see blooming specimens of the rare Douglas’ mesamint (*Pogogyne douglasii*), the ruby chalice clarkia (*Clarkia rubicunda*), the Arroyo del la Cruz mariposa lily (*Calochortus clavatus* var. *recurvifolius*), the bluff California lilac (*Ceanothus maritimus*), and possibly the dwarf goldenstar (*Bloomeria humilis*). Arroyo De La Cruz features a variety of plant communities and a number of endemics, found only in this relatively small area, full of rare and endangered plants. Meet at the parking lot of Spencer’s Market in Morro Bay, 2650 Main Street, at 9:00 a.m. From there we will drive north with a brief stop at the Elephant Seal Overlook (9:30 a.m.), to pick up any participants from Cambria and the North County, and then proceed on to Arroyo De La Cruz. The field trip will last about 3 hours.

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*. Websites: **cnps.org** & **cnpslo.org**



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