
Obispoensis

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



Bonnie K. Walters

May 2012

About the Cover

Bonnie's cover for this *Obispoensis* was used for a banquet program cover back in 1984. We have no record of it ever being used as a newsletter cover. We would welcome a note from anyone who might remember it (drwalters@charter.net or 543-7051). You might notice something else about the appearance of the drawing. It has much more fine detail than Bonnie's drawings used in Dr. Keil's and my textbook or more recent newsletters. This is because it was done to size (3½ x 3½ inches) using fine drawing pens. It was not drawn to be reduced or enlarged. Bonnie's more recent drawings are done with in less detail because they are meant to be reduced. Also, Dirk encourages simple drawings that distill the plant down to basic characteristics.

The plant is *P. heterophyllus* (or *Penstemon heterophylla*) depending on which flower book is used. I've seen both in the literature. The most recent *Jepson Manual* uses the name, *P. heterophyllus*. The correct ending depends on whether one considers the genus name, *Penstemon*, to be masculine or feminine or neuter. Of course, in reality, it is both as the flowers contain both male stamens and a female pistil. But in Latin, which all scientific names are considered, almost everything has to be assigned a gender whether it was appropriate or not. Second, in Latin, an adjective usually has the very same ending as the noun it modifies. For example, the scientific name for our common black sage is *Salvia mellifera*. However, following Latin rules can create exceptions. The most common one is with trees.

Trees were considered by the Romans to be feminine. Therefore the masculine noun for the oaks is *Quercus* but the adjectives that make up its specific epithet must be feminine. So we get the scientific name for the coast live oak, *Quercus agrifolia*. The other exception is when the noun or the adjective is irregular. When this occurs, one almost just has to memorize the endings since rules don't seem to work. At least, I haven't been able to make consistent sense out of them.

I've found two common names for this plant. They are foothill penstemon and blue bedder penstemon. The former name refers to its habitat or range. It is widespread in the interior foothills up to over 5,000 feet (1700 m) throughout much of interior California. I've observed it to be particularly common in the mountains behind Santa Barbara and in the Sierra Nevada. (We should see much of it on the President's Trip this coming June 16-17.) I've found it to be quite variable in flower color. Most of the time it is a bright bluish pink color, but it can be pinkish blue or even completely blue. Its habit is to branch profusely with its branches lying flat until they turn up at the tips. Note Bonnie's habit sketch. This habit would make it an excellent plant to fill in a flower bed, thus the latter common name, bedder penstemon. Although blue flower color is less common than pink, many of the pictures of this plant I saw on the Web were of plants bearing large, dark blue flowers. I interpret this observation to mean that what are being put on the Web are garden plants selected for their larger size and bluer colored flowers. Since the plant is commonly found on disturbed edges of roads and paths or where vegetation is scattered, I suspect it should readily adapt to the organized disturbance we call gardening.

Oh, most important, the most easily recognized character of this species is its YELLOW BUDS!

Lastly, I haven't mentioned the family to which this plant belongs. If you think it is obviously in the figwort family you would be behind the times. It seems that a number of species were hiding in this family. Recent taxonomic work using newly discovered tools of DNA sequencing and sophisticated computer based comparison methods discovered their deceit. Before the availability of these modern tools, taxonomists depended on characters that were relatively "visible" to the naked eye or simple microscopic and biochemical characters. Similarity was determined by the taxonomist's gestalt and/or with the help of relatively simple computer programs that assess similarity. One obvious character that separated the old Scrophulariaceae from the old Plantaginaceae (plantains) was the size of their flowers. Plantains had very tiny, tightly clustered flowers so that casual observers would often not even know they were in full bloom when they were. In contrast, almost all the old Scrophulariaceae had large, readily visible flowers. So, seemingly it was easy to tell the two families apart. But, if one got out the microscope and examined the tiny flowers in the plantain family, one discovered that they were, in fact, just tiny figwort flowers. This became clearer when the newer computer analysis determined that most of the genera of these two families fell out in same cluster, i.e., they were more similar to each other than they were to the few genera left in Scrophulariaceae – e.g. figwort, *Scrophularia*. So, beautiful, large-flowered foothill penstemon was transferred to its rightful place in the formally all small-flowered Plantaginaceae. – Dirk Walters, Illustration by Bonnie Walters

President's Notes

California Native Plant Week has passed, and we were treated to a really unusual assemblage of blooms. In Coon Creek there were still large masses of trillium, which is usually long gone. There were great displays of false solomon's-seal, but very few annuals. In Shell Creek our annual field trip found strange associations, such as baby blue-eyes, *Chorizanthe* and Chinese houses in flower together. Cerro Alto had wonderful *Ceanothus* showings, and there was a big bloom of California poppy at the south end of Montana de Oro. Who knows how the rest of the season will go, but don't expect too much from the annuals. We will keep posting flower-viewing updates on the chapter Facebook page.

We are going to have our first mini-plant-ID Workshop before our regular meeting at the SLO Vets Hall on May 3 between 6:00-6:45. It will concentrate on manzanitas, but bring any "unknowns" as photos or specimens and our experts will try to fathom them out for you.

North County members should come and search us out at the Paso Robles Festival of the Arts on May 26 in the City Park. We will have a display of native plants suitable for the North County yard, but no sales. Bring your kids to do Leaf Art with us.
– David Chipping

Conservation

Our Chapter Board has voted to make a substantial financial contribution to the purchase of more serpentine habitat above the City of San Luis Obispo. We believe that as serpentine floras are some of the most unique assemblages in California, our money will be well spent.

As you may remember, our chapter made a cash contribution to the purchase of the Wild Cherry Canyon, which would extend Montana de Oro Park to Avila. This has been stymied by P.G. & E. failing to complete needed actions, which if not completed quickly, would kill the purchase. We hope this issue will be resolved promptly.

We are pleased that the Local Agency Formation Commission is blocking Pismo Beach's annexation of lands on its eastern edge, although the blockage is based on water supply and not degradation of oak and Pismo clarkia habitat.

We are still collecting plant lists from all parts of the County. These are being posted on our web site. Keep them coming. — David Chipping

Field Trips

Saturday, May 5, 9 - 11 a.m. "Learning among the Oaks" Hiking tour of the Learning Among the Oaks Trail at Santa Margarita Ranch. The meeting location is at the Santa Margarita School parking lot, 22070 H Street, Santa Margarita. The hike will begin at 9:30. Participation is limited to 60 so preregistration is recommended to reserve a spot. RSVP to LC@LCSLO.org. For more info about the trail, visit www.smcf.org.

Sunday, May 13, 9 a.m. Irish Hills Natural Reserve Hike. The Irish Hills stretch along the southern side of Los Osos Valley from Hwy 101 to the coast, and the Reserve encompasses over 700 acres of oak woodland, grasslands, chaparral, and superb views. Total distance of hike is 5 miles, 700 ft. gain, taking about 3 hours. The trail head is located at southern end of Madonna Road in San Luis Obispo. Bring water, snacks, and dress in layers for changing weather. A hat and sturdy shoes are advised. Possible sightings of some SLO Co endemics including the Chorro Creek bog thistle. Information: Bill Waycott, (805) 459-2103 or bill.waycott@gmail.com

June 16 and 17, Saturday and Sunday: Overnight - "President's Field Trip" to Sierra Madre Range, Cerro Noroeste, & Mt Pinos.

Chapter Meeting

Thursday, May 3, 6 p.m. Plant Identification Workshop, 7 p.m. Business Meeting. Veterans Building, 801 Grand Avenue, San Luis Obispo

The Workshop

We will be hosting the first mini plant ID workshop at the monthly meeting on May 3, 2012, from 6:00 to 6:45 p.m. The focus of this mini workshop will be manzanitas (*Arctostaphylos* spp.). Please bring a copy of the new *Jepson Manual* 2nd edition, if you have one, and a hand lens. Collections of several of our local manzanita species will be provided. Workshop participants may also bring in their own manzanita collections to identify. Please join us for this new opportunity, which is sure to be fun and informative event!

The Program

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 *Dysphnia* 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*.



Nuri Benet-Pierce

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 and cnpslo.org.

Gardening Corner

By John Nowak

Now that winter is over it's time to start thinking about spring garden cleanup. By the time you read this, most of your gardens will be full of ceanothus blooms, your salvia will be covered with pollinators, and the weeds will be everywhere. You ask how this can be. We received hardly any rain until March. Where did all the weeds come from? Well, even though we did not receive much rain the soil is full of seeds from last year's big growing season. If you want to break this infestation cycle, you will have to remove them. So now you ask, "What options do I have?" Well, the most effective way to get rid of weeds is to hand pull them. I like to do this right after a rain when the soil is moist. The best time of day to pull is after the sun has dried the leaves off, usually mid day. The reason for this is a dry plant won't be as slippery and your gloves won't get wet. A wet leather glove will bleed tannins onto your skin which might cause a bad skin reaction. If you must pull wet plants use cloth gloves dipped in latex. They will stink but won't damage your skin. When pulling your weeds you may notice that they have not started to set seed yet. If this is the case than you could compost them. Composting is fun, easy, and cost effective. The easiest way to compost is throw the weeds into an old trash can with the bottom cut off. The can won't decompose because it's plastic and it's a way to take a bad plant and make something good out of it. You can also put waste from the kitchen in there to heat

things up. Wet the plants well and watch them turn into compost.

If pulling is not for you or if there is just too much to pull then mulching is your next best approach. Mulch must be placed on top of the weed plants at least three inches thick. The mulch will block the sun and the weeds will die from lack of food. I don't like to put plastic or landscape fabric down because it can cause loss of water penetration.

In some cases you might want to remove the mulch before it breaks down and changes the organic structure of your soil. Most plants in sandy soils can be adversely effected by too much organic material in the soil. Organics can increase nitrogen levels which accelerate growth and cause the plants to grow themselves to death. To avoid this, after the weeds are dead rake the mulch off and save it for next year's weeds.

Last on the list is using some kind of spray. I don't recommend spraying unless you have a very bad problem. If you have to spray you can cover small plants with a bucket to keep them from being sprayed. There are some organic weed sprays out there. Most work by burning the plants with vinegar or salt. These sprays won't work on weeds that have rhizomes like Bermuda grass.

Well, I do hope this helps you with any questions about weeding that you might have. If you ever have any other questions about gardening, e-mail me at Gritlys@sbcglobal.net. Until then happy gardening!

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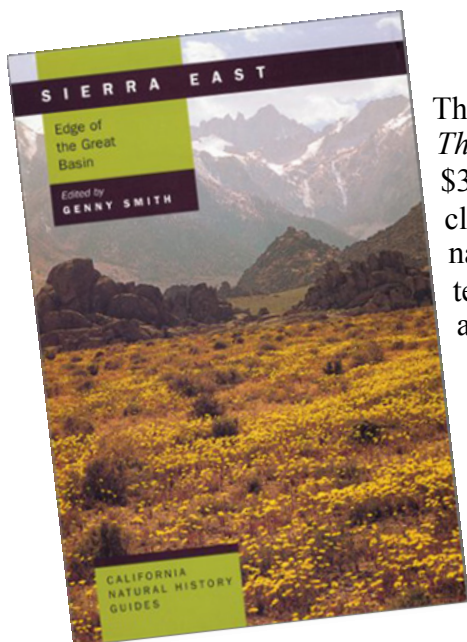
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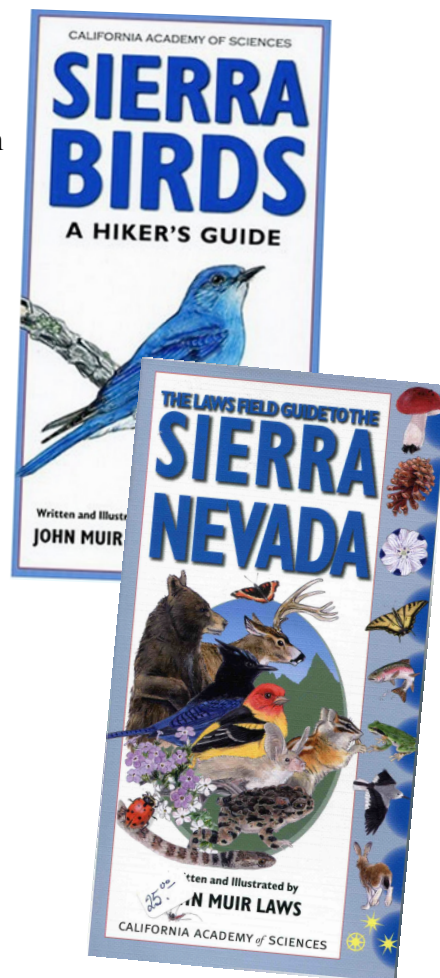
If you are planning (or dreaming) a trip to the Sierra this summer here are three books you might want to consider taking with you. First is John Muir Laws' book *Sierra Birds, A Hiker's Guide*. Only \$10.00, light weight, easy to carry, with beautiful pictures of all the birds you could meet on a Sierra trip.

The second book is *The Laws Guide To The Sierra Nevada*, again by John Muir Laws (don't you just love the name?) \$25.00. John spent 10 summers in the Sierra painting the pictures for this book. Incredible pictures of fungi, trees, shrubs, wildflowers, spiders, fish, reptiles, birds, mammals, tracks, weather, and stars. Very comprehensive.



The third book is *Sierra East, Edge Of The Great Basin*, edited by Genny Smith, \$30.00. Articles on geology, weather and climate, plant communities, arthropods, native fish, reptiles, birds, mammals, water, and wonders. A wonderful book about an area with so much to offer.

Good reading! – Heather Johnson



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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*.



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