
Obispoensis

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



April 2013

Asparagus Fern or Bridal Creeper

Asparagus asparagoides

This month's plant is a South Africa native that has become naturalized in Southern California where there has the potential to become an extremely troubling weed species. It is already considered so in some localities in Southern California, New Zealand and Australia. It had become a major infestation in the oak grove near Lupine Point in the Los Osos Elfin Forest until it was successfully removed after much effort. The problem with its eradication is obvious from looking at the cluster of corms that form just under ground. If left to multiply, this corm mat forms an extensive, impenetrable mat just below the soil surface that prevents other plant roots from getting to the nutrients they require. A second problem with the corm cluster is that if one just goes out and attempts to pull them up or cut them down, the corms just send up new shoots. One would have to repeat the removal process until the corms have been starved to death. That would be a long arduous process. The fast and extensive stem and leaf growth is also a problem. It allows the asparagus fern to cover existing plants so well that sunlight can't get to them.

I asked Bonnie to draw the plant with flower buds only because plants currently available to us are at that stage. I suspect that, if deadlines weren't a consideration, a plant with fully open flowers might have been found since its blooming period is from December through April. But more importantly, this species' vegetative state is so distinctive that the smallish, nondescript flowers are often overlooked anyway. A word of warning, written descriptions of this plant in many books are totally deceptive. First, what looks like leaves are in fact flattened stems, which botanists often term cladodes. Unfortunately I also ran across several other technical terms for them. How does one know they are "flattened stems" and not what they actually look like – "leaves." All vascular plants have the same leaf-stem morphology. First the stem is divided into alternating nodes where the leaves are attached and internodes where there are no leaves. The exterior nodal structure includes the leaf and a bud found in the upper angle between the leaf base and the stem. When the bud germinates it produces a new stem which then can produce more leaves. This means that a given portion of stem produces a leaf only once or leaves are produced only during the first year of that particular stem's life. Remember, buds produce new stems only. So a re-examination of Bonnie's drawing shows the green flattened stems (cladodes) arising from the angle of a small grayish scale. That scale is all there is to the true leaf. Using flattened stems for leaves is considered an adaptation to

drought conditions. As an example of how confusing this can be, look at the identification keys in the New Jepson Manual. The keys from group to family to genus to species all assume that you know that the leaves are those tiny, insignificant, hardly visible scales under the things that everyone but a botanists would assume were leaves but aren't. Bonnie has drawn a couple of flower buds coming from the axil of leaf whose bud grew into the cladode. Examine the node again very carefully. You will note that there are actually three scales visible. The largest one is the leaf and the two smaller ones just visible are the bracts (leaves associated with flowers) whose buds germinated to produce the flowers. Botanists consider flowers to be highly modified leafy branches. Why they think this must be the subject for another time. Oh yes, that means this plant must produce 3 leaves and buds per node. Two of them only develop when that node produces flowers, otherwise they would be invisible.

The plant has a number of common names as might be expected of a plant used by humans. Its primary use is in floral arranging. Its thin stem and abundant dark green cladodes together give it a kind of filmy or ferny appearance which explains the "asparagus fern" name. Its long use in bridal bouquets explains its African bridal creeper, bridal-veil creeper, or merely bridal creeper names. Other names that I've seen include Gnarboola, Smilax or Smilax asparagus. The last two names should be forgotten as they indicate it is related to the genus, *Smilax*, which it is not. I assume Gnarboola is its name in its native Southern Africa. The genus, *Asparagus*, belongs to a group of monocots that produce flowers with a perianth of six sterile elements that are more commonly called sepals and petals. This genus' flowers have 3 greenish-white sepals and 3 identical greenish white petals. When sepals and petals are identical except for position (sepals are always the outer whorl and petals interior to the sepals) botanists use the term "tepals." There is a large assembly of tepal plants including the lilies, amaryllis, tulips, onions, and garden asparagus. The list could go on and on. The problem with this group is that all their flowers are built on the same plan and whenever this happens taxonomist often can't agree on family or even ordinal boundaries. For example, a search on my library and internet finds this genus placed in the lily family (Liliaceae – order Liliales) or the Asparagus family (Asparagaceae – Asparagales). Added to this the current distinction between these orders has to do with different DNA sequences and unique chemical constituents found in their seed coats, neither of which are hardly field characters. For the record, the new *Jepson Manual* puts this plant in the Asparagales and the Asparagaceae.☘

Dirk Walters, illustration by Bonnie Walters

President's Notes

Our annual north county meeting, featuring Bruce Delgado, was a great success, not only because of the great talk, but because we filled the room and saw people we normally don't see in the sultry south. We will definitely repeat this again next year.

California Native Plant Week is the third week in April, so celebrate with a CNPS field trip or by doing something to benefit the flora (rain dance, anyone?). The drought continues and we expect flower viewing to be below-par for the month of April. I have checked out several areas, and I think there will be decent enough displays on the west side of the Santa Lucia mountains and especially along the coast. However the Carrizo Plain is another story, as it has what appears to be a record low rainfall of around 1 inch (average is 9 inches). The long term forecast does not suggest a different weather pattern. In mid March there were lots of shooting stars at Red Hill road, but they were all about one inch high. There are some flowers out at Shell Creek. I would suggest that anyone finding a nice display post to our Facebook page.

On a housekeeping note, we need some more volunteers to back up the existing small but wonderful cadre that help out at the CNPS booth at events, or could learn from one of the existing Board members to act as back up for some of our vital functions.

If you wish to receive e-mail notification of CNPS events

April Chapter Meeting

This month's meeting is the Malcolm McLeod Memorial Trip to Shell Creek. See Field Trips, Saturday, April 6. There is no meeting at the Veterans Hall.

and are not currently getting anything, please e-mail me at <dchippin@calpoly.edu> and I will add you to the list.☼
David Chipping

Conservation

I have been working with Conservation Director Greg Suba in a strong objection to the Cal Fire Draft Program Environmental Report on fire management that applies throughout the state. Greg did a terrific job of analysis, together with conservation people in other chapters. CNPS joined a number of other organizations in commenting on the badly conceived program and inadequate DPEIR, which is a top-down one-size-fits all approach that essentially removes local input on fire management plans, gives insufficient attention of the very different kinds of vegetation and species needs, allows needless destruction of back country vegetation far from the Wildland-Urban interface and more. I was agreeably surprised to see the L.A. Times March 11 editorial that Cal Fire should start over from scratch as the DPEIR is beyond tweaking.☼ David Chipping

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Field Trips

Saturday, April, 6, 2013, Malcolm McLeod Annual Field Trip Meeting to Shell Creek lead by Dirk Walters.

This is our monthly meeting for April. Meet at the SLO Vets Hall, 801 Grand Ave. (corner of Grand & Monterey Blvd.) at 8:30 a.m. and/or Santa Margarita Park & Ride at 9:00 a.m. "Wildflowers of Highway 58" plant guide by Dr. Malcolm McLeod will prove useful. Also, bring lunch, camera and binoculars. For more information call Dirk Walters at 543-7051.

Sunday, April 7, 2013 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 Rd. Lompoc) at 9 a.m. for this annual California Native Plant Society and Sierra Club 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 733-3189 or Connie at 735-2292

Saturday, April 13, 2013. Carrizo Field Trip. Meet at Hwy 101 and 58, the Santa Margarita park and ride, at 8:00. We'll try to get up on Caliente Mountain, so you will need a truck or SUV, or have a ride arranged in one. Before 4/13 I will help organize rides; some may have extra seats or some may need a ride. Please help with gas money if you're a rider. Rain cancels. Wow! If it rains April 13 that will be amazing. Very little rain so far. Rain just before April 13 means we'll go somewhere else on Carrizo besides the mountain. All day trip. Have clothes for any weather, water, food, and a full tank of gas. Sign up with George Butterworth, leader: 438-3641, gbutterworth8@gmail.com.

Saturday, April 20, 2013 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 eleventh annual Wildflower Weekends on Figueroa Mountain in conjunction with the California Native Plant Society. This tour will feature a local celebration of the second California Native Plant Week (3rd week in April, the 14th - 21st this year). Meet at 9 a.m. at the fire station on Figueroa Mountain Road. Turn left at the SR 154-Figueroa Mountain Road intersection near Los Olivos, and proceed to the fire station parking lot.

This will be a "drive and stroll" tour of this year's flower display. Sturdy shoes, lunch and liquids, and camera and binoculars recommended. Call Helen Tarbet at 925-9538 ext. 246 or Charles Blair 733-3189 for details.

Saturday, April 20, Los Padres National Forest, Southern Monterey County.

Join us for an exploration of the area northwest of Mission San Antonio known as Indians, within the Milpitas Special Interest Area, LPNF. We will travel along the headwaters of the San Antonio River and over into the headwaters of the Arroyo Seco River. Both rivers are part of the Salinas River watershed. This area has an unusual mix of plants and geological formations. Meeting points: Meet in SLO at 7:30 am at Santa Rosa Park. In Templeton at 8:00 am at the Park & Ride, west side of US Hwy 101 at Los Tablas Road. Head north on US Hwy 101 and just north of Bradley; take G18 that becomes G14 to Jolón. Turn onto Mission Road and meet here at 9:00 am. Take Mission Road to Del Venturi Road that becomes Milpitas Road and ends at Memorial Park, LPNF. Meet at Memorial Park at 9:30 am. Be sure to have a full tank of gas before leaving town. Bring adequate water, lunch, 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 or Mardi Niles (805) 489-9274 mlniles@sbcglobal.net.

Saturday and Sunday, April 27 (12 p.m. - 5 p.m.) and 28 (10 a.m. - 4 p.m.): Cambria Wildflower Show at the Cambria Veterans Building, Main Street and Cambria Drive. Imagine the visual feast of more than 500 bouquets of wildflowers and all under one roof! The purpose of this show is to enhance the enjoyment of the area's native plants. CNPS will be there with a large assortment of wildflower and plant literature. For more information or to volunteer to help, call (805) 927-2856 or e-mail ffrcambria@sbcglobal.net. Students of all ages FREE. All others, a \$3 donation.

Saturday, May 4, 9 a.m., Buds, Birds, and Blooms field trip, River Road, Santa Margarita Lake. Enjoy a late spring outing, sponsored by the California Native Plant Society (CNPS) and the Morro Coast Audubon Society (MCAS). Join leaders Bill Waycott (CNPS) and Chuck Woodard and Jan Surbey (MCAS) at the River Road access of Santa Margarita Lake. Expect to see a variety of spring wildflowers along with observing nesting behavior ►

Field Trips continued

of birds, sightings of spring migrants, and possibly wood ducks. Participants will be walking on gentle sloping terrain for about 3-4 miles (out and back). The daily vehicle fees (\$3) will be waived for trip participants. There is a portable restroom in the parking lot at River Road. Trip participants should bring snacks and water (no potable water available at River Road) and are welcome to enjoy a picnic lunch at the conclusion of the trip (no tables available, so bring along a blanket etc.).

Directions: From Hwy. 101, take the Santa Margarita (Highway 58) exit and drive through the town of Santa Margarita. Turn right on Highway 58. At the junction with Pozo Road (in approximately 2 miles), stay on Pozo Road for approximately 14.8 miles (passing the turnoff to the "front" of Santa Margarita Lake at about mile 7). After crossing a small bridge, turn LEFT onto RIVER ROAD and continue approximately 2.3 miles. The parking lot for the River Road access will be on the left side of the road. Allow 50-60 minutes from the San Luis Obispo area. Please e-mail Jan (jansurbey@earthlink.net) or Bill Waycott

(bill.waycott@gmail.com) for directions and further information.

Saturday, May 11, Big Sur Botany Hike from Cruickshank to Soda Springs trailheads. Join Neil Havlik and Bill Waycott on an outing focused on the floristic diversity of the southern Big Sur coastal mountains. The hike will make a series of short breaks along the route to discuss the changes in plant communities. This hike is moderately strenuous, 10-mile hike, 2200 ft. gain. The trail begins with ascent to panoramic overlook of the southern Big Sur coastline, then enters Villa Creek Canyon and to Buckeye Camp for lunch, and finally across Redwood Creek to Soda Springs trail junction. Bring lunch, snacks, water, and dress for the weather. Ticks and poison oak are possibilities. Meet at the Santa Rosa Park in SLO at 7:15 am or at Washburn Day Use Area in San Simeon State Park at 8:00 am. From there, we will drive 40 miles to Cruickshank trailhead, first leaving a shuttle car at Soda Springs trailhead 4 miles south. To participate in this hike, you will need to contact Bill Waycott, bill.waycott@gmail.com, (805) 459-2103 to be included.

Sudden Oak Death (SOD) Blitz

Friday, Saturday and Sunday – May 3, 4 & 5, 2013

San Luis Obispo

What is Sudden Oak Death?

Sudden Oak Death (SOD), a serious exotic disease, is threatening the survival of tanoak and several oak species in California. Currently SOD is found in 14 coastal California counties, from Monterey to Humboldt. Researchers have discovered that *Phytophthora ramorum*, the pathogen that causes SOD, spreads most often on infected California bay laurel leaves.

Some management options are available, but they are effective only if implemented before oaks and tanoaks are infected; hence, timely detection of the disease on bay laurel leaves is key for a successful proactive attempt to slow down the SOD epidemic.

What is SOD BLITZ?

A community meeting/training session held on a Friday evening followed by collection of leaf samples by volunteers on Saturday and Sunday. Samples and accompanying forms are then turned in at a central location Saturday and Sunday evenings.

We will provide a list of recommended areas for sampling at the meeting and divide into groups for collecting. Ideally, one person in a group will have a GPS device, or tablet or phone with GPS ability.

The training is free although space is limited

If you are interested, please submit your name and contact info to:

Lauren Brown lbrown805@charter.net (805) 460-6329 or

Kim Camilli kim.camilli@fire.ca.gov (805) 550-8583)

San Luis Obispo SOD BLITZ Training and Collecting Dates

Training - Friday, May 3, 6:30 to 8:30 pm, SLO County Department of Agriculture, 2156 Sierra Way, San Luis Obispo, CA [Map Link](#)

Collecting – Saturday and Sunday, May 4 and 5 (Locations TBD). All of the materials necessary for the training and the collecting over the weekend will be provided.

Purpose of SOD BLITZ

The SOD-blitz is to inform and educate the community about the disease and its effects, get locals involved in detecting the disease, and produce detailed local maps of disease distribution. The map can then be used to identify those areas where the infestation may be mild enough to justify proactive management.

For additional information, please visit - <http://www.sodblitz.org>