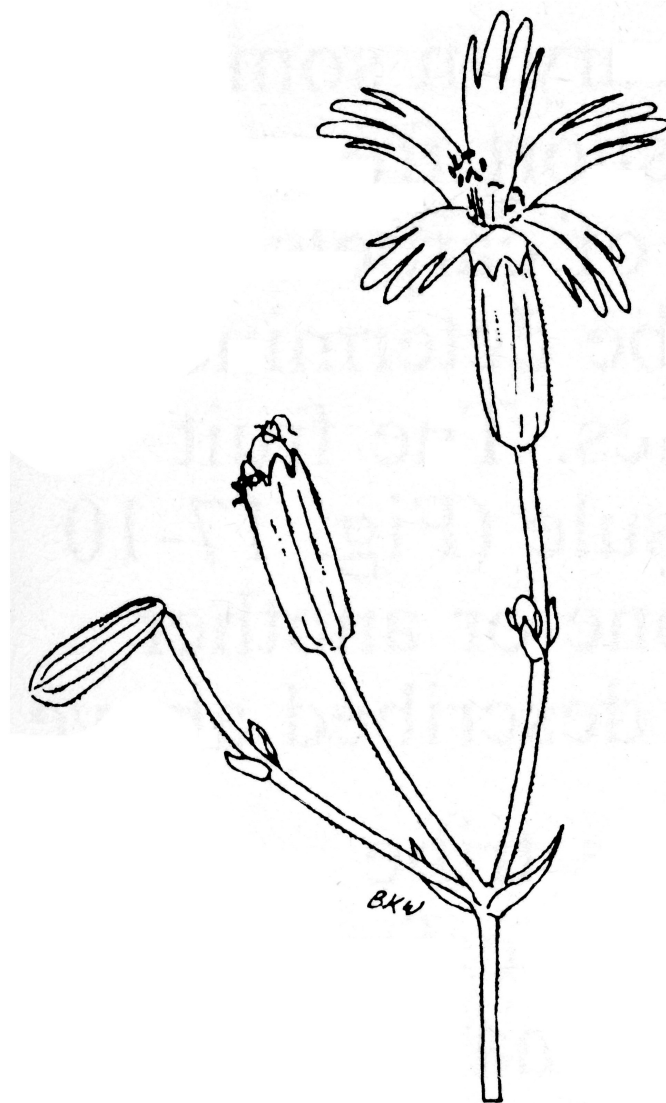


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# *Obispoensis*

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

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OCTOBER 2013

## Coastal catchfly (*Silene laciniata*)

Late summer or early fall (or more appropriately “late dry season”) is a down time in our local wilds. This is especially true after essentially no significant rain after December. Even the animals seem to be resting. But if one looks carefully in our coastal dune scrub, one may just see a FEW bright red flowers. They are most commonly called around here, Indian pink. Indian pink is also the name in RF Hoover’s, *Vascular Plants of San Luis Obispo County*. I found a better common name on the internet, cardinal catchfly. Either way it’s *Silene laciniata*. Since it has very weak stems it has the habit of using other plants for support. So look for it growing out of the canopies of relatively short plants. Its usually hidden, paired leaves are broadly joined at their bases and appear, at first glance, to be quite grass-like. But no grass has opposite leaves and a close examination of the leaf blades will show a single, larger midrib. Our Chapter area is near the northern extent of this species range. It can be found on our coastal dunes and further inland on serpentine outcrops.

An examination of Bonnie’s drawing shows what appear to be the five fused petals at the end of a long tube. The tube is formed by the fused sepals (calyx). The petals are actually separate. If one were to slit down the side of the calyx tube, the five separate petals would simply fall away from each other. Each petal consists of two quite distinct regions. The showy part is bright red and is called by botanists the blade. Each thin basal portion, called the claw by botanists, is the length of the tube and basally attaches separately to the receptacle below the ovary. The sepals and stamens also attach to the receptacle. So, in spite of casual appearance, the ovary is superior.

The local common name, Indian pink, I believe to be the less desirable today because of the use of “Indian.” The name, Indian, often indicates that the plant in question was used in some way by the native North American peoples. I didn’t find any reference to their use of this species either on line or in my library. I’m guessing that the use of the word, “Indian,” here simply refers to it being native to California. The second name, pink, refers to a common trait in its family, Caryophyllaceae or pink family. Pink, in this case, does not refer to the flower’s color, which is bright red, but to the fringed petals. That is, it refers to the tailors’ practice of cutting the edge of unsewn fabric with pinking shears to leave it toothed to prevent it from unraveling. Now cardinal catchfly is a much better name. First, the flowers are bright red like the plumage of a cardinal. The term, catchfly, refers to a common trait

found in many flowers that produce many special trichomes (hairs) on their sepals. These individual trichomes resemble the colored pins often used to stick into maps; they have short shafts and large round heads. When mature, these “heads” break down into an acrid, terrible tasting glob that is sticky enough to ensnare small insects such as flies and bees. Why would this be an advantage to the flower? Many flower visiting insects, when prevented from entering the flower the correct way will attempt to steal nectar by biting a hole through the base of the flower or calyx. This is pure thievery as the insect gets the costly nectar without pollinating the flower.

How might a cardinal catchfly be pollinated? First thing we need to do is note that the only possible (legal) entrance to the deep, relatively narrow floral tube (where the nectar is produced at its base) is via a very tiny hole through which the style and stamen filaments emerge. So a pollinator would have to be either small enough to enter the hole (not likely) or have a very long, thin proboscis or tongue. That eliminates essentially all flies, bees and beetles, which have short chewing mouth parts. That leaves three common long-proboscis pollinators – butterflies, moths and hummingbirds. Butterflies usually require flowers that provide a landing platform. The cardinal catchfly is orientated so that the showy parts (blades) of the petals are vertical, which does not provide a landing platform for butterflies. Cardinal catchflies bloom during the day so that should eliminate most moths. Further, I haven’t noticed any pronounced floral odors produced by this flower. A day-flying pollinator that hovers in front of the flower, possesses a long, thin beak (and tongue), and with keen eyesight in the red portion of the spectrum would be a humming bird. In addition, birds tend to have little sense of smell. It’s a conclusion that could have been gotten easily from the internet, but not nearly as fun. — Dirk Walters, Illustration by Bonnie Walters

## PRESIDENT'S NOTES

Welcome to the 2013-2014 cycle of programs and events, which will kick off with the slide/digital pics presentation and dessert potluck. While at the Chapter Council meeting in Humboldt County, we got an actual clickety-clack slide show, so I will have a projector available (let me know in advance). Bring your pictures. I would deeply appreciate if photo presenters would arrive close to 7:00 so we can load them into a single computer from your CD or thumb drive. Label slides in alphabetical order to ensure sequencing order. I will also be able to load PowerPoint, but save your program as “.ppt” and not “.pptx” if

possible. A title “slide” would be helpful, and no more than 15 pictures per person. They can be of any interesting subject you like, although plants are appreciated. We are, as always, at the Vets Hall in SLO on the first Thursday in October.

The Humboldt County meeting centered on the importance of disturbance in ecosystems, with notes on the dire effects on plants like western lily when grazing is ended, or fire frequency is changed. We have such issues in our local parks. As change happens slowly, it is important to have photographs of the same area several decades apart, and there is no program for accumulating a “landscape” photo library. I am suggesting that CNPS becomes the repository for GPS-re-locatable photographs, and I would like to kick this off in our chapter. We can start by going through slide collections for pictures of landscapes taken from as far back as we can, and then scanning them and locating where they were taken via Google Earth. There may not be much change between the “thens” and the “nows,” but they could be valuable in 100 years when we are all boiling hot and submerged in the ocean. — David Chipping

## CONSERVATION

*By David Chipping*

It seems that local opposition and worries about water and traffic have slowed the progress of the Price Canyon developments which will become part of Pismo Beach. It is possible they will go back to the drawing board if there are substantial changes. CNPS is concerned about oaks and *Clarkia speciosa* ssp. *immaculata*, but battle lines are being drawn on other issues.

Even through the precipitous drop in Paso Robles aquifers is a tragedy for those people losing their wells, the bright spot is that it might slow the conversion of grasslands to crops over the basin. Grasslands are a valuable habitat, but the general psyche is that a tree is bigger and better than a shrub, and a shrub is bigger and better than grass. There has been little or no effort to conserve grasslands in the county.

There was a scoping meeting for a planned expansion of the ConocoPhillips refinery in Nipomo, which is adding a whole bunch of railroad sidings. John Chesnut supplied written commentary, particularly in regard to Nipomo lupine, and I went to the meeting. There is something very strange happening, as they tacked on a study for a possible southern entrance to the OHV area, which has nothing to do with the refinery. I did not receive any sort of explanation of a credible CEQA

nexus, so those of you concerned with the integrity of the sand dunes should be vigilant.

As I mentioned in “President's Notes” please look at your old photographs that show vegetation so we can start an audit of long term changes.

## San Luis Obispo Chapter Meeting

Thursday, October 3, 7:00 p.m.

Dessert Potluck and Members' Slide Show

Bring a dessert to share and your 15 best photos, slides and digital pictures. Meet at the Veterans Hall, 801 Grand Avenue, San Luis Obispo.

## Plant Sale November 2

Suzette and I would like to say welcome back to all of our members. We hope your gardens are growing fine and you had a wonderful summer. Along with encouraging you to come to our first meeting, we would also like to ask you again to volunteer at this year's plant sale. The annual plant sale is our chapter's primary fundraiser and the proceeds really do pay the bills. We are sure to have lots of plants and other good things for sale. So if you can't help please just stop on by to say hi and visit. There are always many tasks to do, so if you would like to help just fill out the volunteer form located on the back page of the newsletter and bring it to our next meeting. If you prefer you could email me at [grityls@sbcglobal.net](mailto:grityls@sbcglobal.net) or call 805-674-2034 with any questions. We are looking forward to seeing you at our first meeting, your Plant Sale co-chairpersons, John and Suzette.

## BOOK ENDS

It is always a treat to start our new meeting year off with an evening of great trip pictures and dessert! I was a child of the 50's and grew up watching my family's and their friends slide shows. The technology has evolved, the camaraderie remains.

New this year– Jim and I will only be bringing books, tees, etc., to FOUR meetings. If you are interested in tees, you really need to find the box with your size and look at all the beautiful jewel tone colors of tees. Short sleeve are \$18.00 and long sleeve are \$20.00 each. See you at the October meeting.

–Heather Johnson

*Obispoensis* is published October through June except January. Items for submittal to *Obispoensis* should be sent to [rhotaling@charter.net](mailto:rhotaling@charter.net). The deadline is the 10<sup>th</sup> of each month. Botanical articles, news items, illustrations, photos, events and tidbits are welcome!

Visit the websites [www.cnps.org](http://www.cnps.org) and [www.cnps-slo.org](http://www.cnps-slo.org)

## THE CRAIG CUNNINGHAM SLIDE COLLECTION

CNPS thanks Becky Daugherty and others in her family for the generous donation of her father's botanical slide collection to the SLO Chapter. Craig was a member of the chapter board for several decades and worked with Malcolm McLeod and others in cataloging the county flora. His photographs were not only excellent in picking out details for keying the species, but were most often works of art. Some of you will have seen them in the program we presented at an Atascadero meeting, a small selection of the approximately 5,000 slides in the collection. We made a DVD of the movie of that slide show and presented it to Craig and his family just before his death. This is a fitting time to remember not only his leadership of the photographic committee but also the field trips he would lead to his favorite locations, including Carson Pass in the Sierras and along Santa Rita Creek in Templeton. For these trips he created extensive plant lists and a remembered library of little tidbits of information about each plant. He suffered increasing deafness in his later years, but continued to present multi-projector slide programs with a pre-prepared recorded narration. When I remember Craig it is to think, "What a sweet, kind guy!"

— David Chipping



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## Field Trips

**Saturday, October 19, 9:00 a.m. Fall Plant Walk, La Purisima Mission.** Charlie Blair will be leading a tour of fall-blooming plants of the Burton Mesa Chaparral. Come and see what is out at this sometimes forgotten time of the year. Meet at 9:00 a.m., east end of Burton Mesa Boulevard (1550 E. Burton Mesa Blvd.) in Mission Hills at the Community Service District Office. From the north, take the Constellation Road off-ramp from SR 1, heading left, then turn right on Burton Mesa Boulevard. From the south, Burton Mesa Boulevard can be accessed from either Harris Grade Road or Rucker Road; again, turn right on Burton Mesa Boulevard. Call Charlie Blair, 733-3189, for details.

**Sunday, October 27, 10:30 a.m. Montaña de Oro State Park.** Join leaders from the Morro Coast Audubon Society and the California Native Plant Society for a walk along the coastal strand looking for shorebirds and coastal dune plants. Meet at 10:30 a.m. at the end of Sand Spit Road in Montaña de Oro State Park. We will walk down to the beach, then north along the ocean side of the dunes for a couple of miles, cross over to the estuary side, then eventually head back to the parking lot. Low tide occurs at 12:32 p.m. on Sunday, so walking on the beach should be possible and perhaps shorebirds easier to spot. Restrooms are available at the Sand Spit parking lot. Bring water and dress in layers for the changing weather. A hat, sunscreen, and shoes adapted to walking in loose sand are recommended. For more information, call Bill at (805) 459-2103 or email: [bill.waycott@gmail.com](mailto:bill.waycott@gmail.com). The plants, birds, animals, and geology of the area will be hot topics during the walk.

## NIPOMO NATIVE GARDEN FALL PLANT SALE SUNDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2013, 9AM TO 2PM

- OVER 1000 CALIFORNIA NATIVE DROUGHT TOLERANT PLANTS FOR SALE
- DROUGHT TOLERANT PLANTS
- HATS AND TEE SHIRTS
- USED GARDEN BOOKS FOR SALE
- GREAT NATIVE PLANT BOOKS FOR SALE BY THE CALIFORNIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY
- NEWSLETTERS & MEMBERSHIPS
- TALK WITH MEMBERS REGARDING APPROPRIATE PLANTS FOR YOUR SPECIFIC LANDSCAPING NEEDS
- PROPAGATION TECHNIQUES AND TRANSPLANTING TIPS
- COME FOR EARLY FOR BEST PLANT SELECTIONS
- INFORMATION: 929-3589 OR 929-6710

This year, the quantity and variety of plants offered is the best ever!

Directions: From the 101 freeway take Tefft Street west to Pomeroy Road, turn right onto Pomeroy, turn left onto Camino Caballo, turn right up Osage Street to the Nipomo Native Garden Parking lot.



## *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 Luis Obispo Chapter of the California Native Plant Society*

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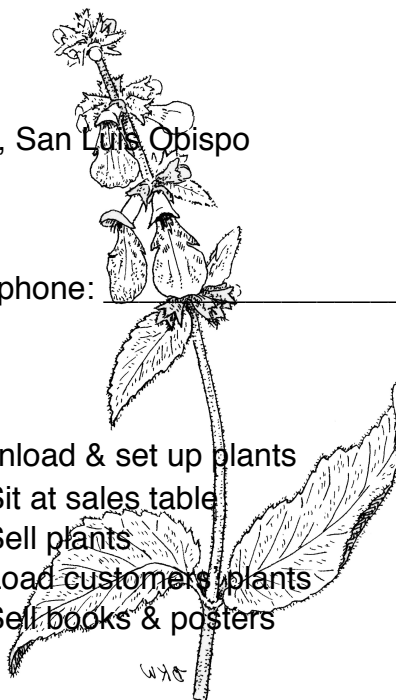
## CNPS Native Plant Sale Volunteer Sign Up

Pacific Beach High School, 11950 Los Osos Valley Road, San Luis Obispo  
Saturday, November 3, 2012

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Please mark the hours you can help

- |                                       |                  |                          |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 7 - 8 a.m.   | • Help as needed | • Unload & set up plants |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 8 - 9 a.m.   | • Set up tables  | • Sit at sales table     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 9 - 10 a.m.  | • Hang Signs     | • Sell plants            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 10 - 11 a.m. | • Sell seeds     | • Load customers plants  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 11 - 12 p.m. | • Cashier        | • Sell books & posters   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 12 - 1 p.m.  |                  |                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 - 2 p.m.   |                  |                          |



Please complete this form and bring it to the October meeting for John Nowak or mail it to him at 8605 San Gabriel Road, Atascadero, CA 93422.