
Obispoensis

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



April 2016

Ookow, Blue Dicks *Dichelostemma capitatum*

This month's plant is one that I thought I had discussed and Bonnie had drawn long before this. I was amazed that we had no record of it. I suspect that there are two possible reasons for this. First, it is essentially impossible to photograph the whole plant. The flowers are isolated on the top of a foot or more long thin stalk (scape) and the usually single leaves/scape arises from the top of an underground corm. All the photos I've seen are of the flower cluster (umbel). Bonnie's drawing was able to do something photographers can't do. She shortened the scape; it should be longer relative to the flower cluster. The second reason is because it's so common that it's taken for granted. It is seen on practically every CNPS field trip in our area, since we often encounter open scrub and woodland.

The plant is *Dichelostemma capitatum* which is currently in the asparagus family, Themidaceae. More on its scientific name later. First, why didn't I give it a common name? The most commonly used name for it in our area is "blue dicks." On a recent field trip I was asked, what is the origin of that name since it sounds a bit risqué. Truth is, I didn't know. It turns out there is a web site that asks the very same question. It had only two responses, both of which admitted they didn't know either. However, one of them tried to come up with an answer anyway. It stated the blue comes from the color of the flowers and "dicks" comes from the first syllable of genus name, *Dichelostemma*. That is, *Dich* is pronounced "Dick" when said out loud. It's as good as any other explanation of the name. The questioner then went on to ask if there were any other common names for the plant. Many years ago, Dr. Richard Pimentel, who taught Natural History at Cal Poly for many years, said he preferred a name he said came from the Native Californians. It was *ookow*. I think it's a good alternative name in spite of the fact most of the web sites apply this name to a different species of *Dichelostemma* (*D. congestum*) which is a species found mostly east and north of our area. After all, we can call it what we want since common names are not regulated. If you don't like *ookow*, the web suggests several alternatives: school bells, wild hyacinth, fork-tooth.

Its scientific name has been quite variable over the years. Dr. Hoover, in his *Vascular Plants of San Luis Obispo County*, gave it the name *Dichelostemma pulchellum* and placed it in the Amaryllis family (Amaryllidaceae). Over the years it has also been given the name *Brodiaea pulchella*. The current *Jepson Manual* gives it the name *Dichelostemma capitatum* and places it in the Brodiaea

family (Themidaceae). Why the confusion? First a little background. *Ookow* is in a group of monocots with showy flowers and whose perianth (sepal + petals) are brightly colored and similar in size and shape. When sepals and petals are \pm identical and can be recognized primarily by position (sepals are always the outer whorl of flower or perianth), the individual elements of the perianth have been labeled tepals. There are over 5,000 species of these tepal monocots worldwide. Over the years, botanists have tried to divide this large complex of species into smaller, more manageable groups. Unfortunately, they haven't agreed on the criteria. During the last century, the divisions were based on such things as inflorescence (umbels in the Amaryllidaceae and racemes and panicles in the Liliaceae) and succulence in the Agavaceae. As has been mentioned before, the genera in these classical (old) families have been totally rearranged into quite different assemblages among which are a number of new families. The characters defining these families are also less obvious than succulence and inflorescence. For example, the two very similar genera *Allium* (onions) and *Muilla* were so similar that the author of the younger name, *Muilla*, chose that name to indicate that *Muilla* differed from onion primarily in its lack of odor. By the modern family definition, these two genera are now placed in separate families based on chemical and developmental characteristics. The most easily observed character that can be used to separate the Themidaceae (*Muilla*) from the Asparagaceae (*Allium*) is that members of the Themidaceae produce corms (underground fleshy stem with scale leaves) while the Alliaceae produce a bulb (minimal underground stem with succulent leaves). Apparently there is still much confusion as to exact family definitions in this group.

Ookow is a major wildlife food. Its corms are dug up and eaten. A few years ago at Shell Creek, a group of feral pigs dug up a patch of *ookow*. The area looked like it had been plowed. We all thought that it was terrible! But a few years later, the patch had lots of small, widely scattered *ookow*. How did this happen? It turns out that *ookow* produces tiny cormlets at the end of short rhizomes (horizontal underground stems). These are so tiny and scattered that the pigs didn't waste effort in to find them. So as they rooted up the patch, they scattered these tiny cormlets over an expanded area. Also, since there are no large corms left at the site, the pigs won't root there for several years giving the cormlets time to grow into mature corms which will produce a new crop of flowering *ookow*. Even nasty behavior of plant predators can be turned to good. ☘

Dirk Walters, illustration by Bonnie Walters

CONSERVATION

The Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes National Wildlife is presenting a Comprehensive Conservation Plan and its Environmental Assessment to the public with a comment period that ends on April 16. A public meeting will be held at the Ramona Garden Park Center in Grover Beach on March 22, 5:30-7:30. The Refuge's Draft Vision Statement is "To conserve the dynamic landscape and imperiled natural resources..." and "... we protect the Dunes Complex for everyone's enjoyment..." and "...the service works cooperatively with other agencies, non-profit organizations..." The history is that the refuge has probably been successful in the protection of certain species, especially snowy plover, and CNPS serves on an advisory committee regarding weed abatement. Issues of public interaction have improved lately.

The plan cites three alternatives. Alternative A is "No Action" which would continue management as in the past. Alternative B increases actions to protect species, and increase interaction with the public. Specific mention is made of protecting habitat for La Graciosa thistle and marsh sandwort, while directing foot traffic away from plover nesting areas. Alternative C is rather troubling, as it "will take into consideration the forecasted decline in budgets for the NWRS, proposes to reduce or eliminate many of the current management activities occurring on the refuge, as well as close the refuge to all public access." The clear interest of CNPS is support of Alternative B, but also to offer CNPS as a more active partner in conservation of the dune habitat. Alternative C must not happen as it would, among other things, shut CNPS out of the refuge and access to Coreopsis Hill. You can send comments to: Pacific Southwest Region, Refuge Planning, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 2800 Cottage Way, W-1832; Sacramento CA 95825

You can email comments to fw8plancomments@fws.gov including "Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes CCP" in the subject line. ☼ David Chipping

Seed Exchange in October

A seed exchange is being planned as an activity for the workshop time slot before the October meeting.



to gather, how to prepare, and a bit about seeds in general. This should provide a fun event for those interested in growing natives from seed.

This seed exchange is intended for native plants on your property. If collecting elsewhere, make sure you have the correct permits or permissions. Collection of seeds without permission is illegal. If you have rare plants please do not collect seed for this exchange. You might want to coordinate with the rare plant group to possibly collect those seeds for seed banks.

Seeds should be labelled with Genus and species if known. Label also with date, location obtained and your name. Either prepare individual packets (recycling junk mail envelopes works here) or bring in bulk but have envelopes for people to use. It is preferred that seeds be cleaned but this is not absolutely necessary. This is intended as a free exchange. Do not plan to sell seed.

If you don't want to participate in the exchange but would be willing to donate seed for the fall plant sale please label your seed as above and give to Marti Rutherford. In addition the propagation group would like to experiment with seeds that are difficult to germinate. These are often not appropriate for the casual gardener because of the germination difficulty but the group could play with some seed treatments to see what might improve germination. Seeds from plants such as manzanita, bush poppy, matilija poppy, blue eyed grass, wooly blue curls fall into this category. We recognize that there is some debate about whether garden grown plants are a good source of seed for restoration. But this will allow us to experiment with techniques.

Any seed left behind at the exchange will either be packaged to sell at the plant sale or given to individuals in the propagation group.

Information regarding seed collection will be available soon on the website. ☼ Mardi Rutherford

President's Notes

By Bill Waycott

I recently attended the CNPS Chapter Council meeting, held from March 11 to 13, 2016 in Southern California. The Chapter Council is the governing body of CNPS where representatives from each of the 35 chapters throughout the state along with administrative staff, meet during a weekend every three months to discuss the current issues facing this organization. If there is a need for new policy or changes to existing programs, the council deliberates the issues and takes a vote to accept or reject.

The meeting was held in the Deane Dana Friendship Park Nature Center on the Palos Verdes Peninsula, overlooking the Long Beach Harbor. On Friday afternoon, I participated in the State Board meeting where it was decided to expand the administrative group by opening an office in the SF Bay Area. During the Saturday session, there were presentations by the executive director, the legislative liaison, the board president, and the director of conservation. Highlights included news of a budget surplus and the idea of creating a rain-day fund, the need to support new legislation currently moving through the California Senate and Assembly, the new five year strategic plan, new publications (available at the CNPS May meeting), and a presentation on the newly protected lands in the California deserts. Sunday, I attended a workshop on BMPs (best management practices) for preventing the spread of the new strains of *Phytophthora* fungus that have contaminated some commercial nurseries in this state. In the workshop, we

learned how to grow healthy California native plants without exposing them to these diseases.

The next Chapter Council meeting is scheduled for 3rd to 5th June in the Tahoe area and 9th to 11th September in San Luis Obispo County. As the local hosts of the September meeting, we are starting preparations now. Members with an interest to participate in the planning and logistics for this meeting are asked to contact Bill Waycott (bill.waycott@gmail.com). We will need to arrange for a couple of meeting venues, organize meals for 75 plus participants, prepare a list local accommodations and camping options, schedule field trips, and invite a banquet speaker. As with all Chapter Council meetings, this meeting will be open to local member participation. Please help us prepare.

Our local SLO Chapter Board of Directors held its bi-monthly meeting Thursday evening, 17th March 2016 in the community room of Whole Foods Market in San Luis Obispo. Our next meeting will be Thursday, 19th May 2016 from 6 pm to 8 pm. All members are welcome to participate.

For more information on topics covered in the March Chapter Council meeting and the SLO Chapter Board of Directors meeting on 17th March, please contact Bill Waycott (bill.waycott@gmail.com):

1. New legislation moving through the CA Senate and Assembly
2. New five year CNPS Strategic Plan
3. The latest information about the CA Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan
4. Notes from the SLO Chapter BOD meeting on 17th March 2016

Invasive Species Watch

by Mark Skinner

I'm pleased to start an Invasive Species Watch column to Obispoensis. I've been in the invasive species removal business since 1999 mainly working in the Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes and San Luis Obispo Creek. Those that know me many not think of me as a warrior however many people (thanks CCC's!) and I have been battling bad guys such as Arundo, jubata grass, veldt grass, European beach grass, Russian wheat grass (some of the most insidious weeds are grasses!) cape ivy and ice plant for a long time. The satisfaction of this work arrives when a formerly infested area is re-taken by native plants. The best memory I have is from 2002 when a heavy veldt grass infestation was sprayed out at the then Tosco Buffer (now Phillips 66) which was followed by a lush wildflower display of goldfields, dune larkspur, owl's clover, baby blue eyes, blue dicks, sky lupine, and fiddleneck. I'm still working on the same weeds and I'm seeing progress: Russian wheat grass and jubata grass have been nearly eradicated from the Dunes! In future pieces I'll be describing specific invasive species and what's being done to control them.



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.

FIELD TRIPS

Saturday, March 26, 2016, 8:30 a.m., Carrizo Plain National Monument Wildflower Extravaganza. Meet at the Santa Margarita Exit Park and Ride. Bring your “Wildflowers of Highway 58” and “Wildflowers of the Carrizo Plain Area” plant guide or plan to purchase them on the trip. We will visit some of the best wildflower areas in the Monument, including some vernal pools. Bring adequate water, food, and dress in layers for the weather; a hat and sturdy shoes is advised. For more information contact Bill Waycott, (805) 459-2103, bill.waycott@gmail.com.

Saturday, April 2, 2016, Malcolm McLeod Annual Field Trip Meeting to Shell Creek co-lead by Dirk Walters and David Chipping. This is our monthly meeting for April. Meet at the San Luis Obispo Veterans Hall, 801 Grand Avenue (corner of Grand & Monterey Boulevard) at 8:30 a.m. and/or the Santa Margarita Park & Ride (intersection of Hwys. 101 and 58) at 9:00 a.m. Bring your “Wildflowers of Highway 58” plant guide by Dr. Malcolm McLeod or plan to purchase one for \$10 on the trip. For more information call Dirk Walters at 543-7051 or Dave Chipping at 528-0914.

Sunday, April 3, 2016, 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 Road, 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. This is turning out to be a good year for wildflowers, annuals as well as shrubs. Optional afternoon tour. Sturdy shoes, lunch & liquids, camera and binoculars advised. For more information, call Charlie at 733-3189.

Saturday, April 9, 2016, 9:00 a.m. Drive and Stroll Tour of Figueroa Mountain
The Santa Lucia District, Los Padres National Forest will hold one of its thirteenth annual Wildflower Weekends on Figueroa Mountain in conjunction with the California Native Plant Society. Meet at 9 a.m. at the Fire Station on Figueroa Mountain Road. Turn left at the SR 154-Figueroa Mtn. 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 hopefully abundant 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 16, 2016, 7:30 a.m., Caliente Peak in the Carrizo Plain National Monument. This trail leads to the top of the highest mountain in San Luis Obispo Co., it is long and moderately strenuous (8.3 miles one way) with a 2,500 foot elevation gain. The trail follows the beautiful Caliente Ridge providing incredible views of much of the Carrizo Plain and parts of the Cuyama Valley. Meet at Santa Rosa Park parking lot at 7:00 am and at the Santa Margarita Exit Park and Ride at 7:30 am. Bring adequate water, food, and dress in layers for the weather; a hat and sturdy shoes is advised. For more information contact Bill Waycott, (805) 459-2103, bill.waycott@gmail.com. Rain or the threat of rain cancels.



Sunday, April 17, 2016. Annual Hike to Coreopsis Hill (in the Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes), is scheduled for Sunday, April 17, 2016, from 9 a.m. to around noon. This hike is sponsored by the San Luis Obispo Chapter of CNPS, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and The Dunes Center, and will be led by Lauren Brown, Dirk Walters, and other local botanists and volunteers. The hike will begin at 9:00 a.m. (please plan to arrive between 8:45 and 9:00), leaving from the south end of Beigle Road at the USFWS access road (fenced road). It will be a casual walk through the dunes to the top of Coreopsis Hill. This is a moderate hike, about 3 hours round-trip. Dress in layers, bring water and snacks, and have your “Dune Mother’s Wildflower Guide” by Dr. Malcolm McLeod for the trip. Long pants and closed shoes are recommended as the habitat is coastal dune scrub and there is the possibility of poison oak and ticks in the natural dune

(continued on next page)

Field Trips *continued*

areas (we will watch for and point these out so they can be avoided). For more information call Lauren Brown at 460-6329 or 570-7993. **Heavy rain cancels this trip (light rain, bring appropriate clothing).**

Directions from the north: Take Hwy 101 south from San Luis Obispo. Turn right (west) at the new Willow Road off ramp (Exit 180). Proceed west on Willow Road for about 4.3 miles, to Highway 1. Turn left (south) on Highway 1 and proceed for 2.7 miles, to Oso Flaco Lake Road. Turn right (west) on Oso Flaco Lake Road. Proceed west on Oso Flaco Lake Road for 2.5 miles to Beigle Road. Look for a 6 ft. tall wire mesh fence and steel gate.

Directions from the south: Take 101 north to Santa Maria and take the Main Street exit toward the town of

Guadalupe. Turn right onto Highway 1 and head north to Oso Flaco Lake Road (about 3 miles north of Guadalupe), turn left onto Oso Flaco Lake Road and proceed 2.5 miles to Beigle Road (on left).

Parking: We will have people posted at the entrance of the USFWS fenced road to direct parking. The gate will be open around 8:30. Please do not park on Oso Flaco Lake Road near the gate as there is not much room and it could be hazardous. There should be plenty of room to park along the USFWS access road. The Oso Flaco Lake State Park lot is another $\frac{3}{4}$ miles west of Beigle Road, if you need to use a restroom before the hike (there are none along the hike route).

Note: Pets, smoking or tobacco products, or alcohol are not allowed on the Refuge, including the parking area, or other properties accessed during the hike (i.e., State Parks and Private Property). Pets may not be left in cars in the parking areas.

Additional Information:

The Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes-Point Sal Coastal Area contains the largest, relatively undisturbed coastal dune tract in California and was designated a National Natural Landmark in 1974. Five major plant communities are represented including pioneer/foredunes; coastal dune scrub; riparian woodland; coastal dune freshwater marshes, ponds, and swales; and active interior dunes. The flora includes many endemic plant species and the dunes habitats support numerous rare, threatened and endangered plants and animals.



Shell Creek, John Chesnut March 15, 2016

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New and Renewing Members

We have a BIG list of people to thank for their new and renewed memberships this month, as I'm afraid I missed the newsletter deadline last month. Not a good one to miss as it turns out, as a large number of you apparently start the year off right by supporting worthwhile endeavors like protecting native plants.

Thomas Becker
Melissa Boggs
Carly Boyd-Dovideo
Wendy Brown
Lauren Brown
Mark Brunschwiler
Mike Caouette
Kathy Cinowalt
Bobby Close
Brandon Cornejo
Laura Cornett
Margaret Crockett
Patricia Cullinan
Ted Fainstat
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John & Alison Goers
David Gurney
Neil Havlik
Peggy Heathcote
Deborah Hillyard
David Horwitz
Bob Hotaling
Elizabeth Johnson
Lionel Johnston
Kathleen Jones
Peter Kinkade
Jerry Kirkhart
Penny Koines

We thank you, and Nature thanks you with fields of wildflowers popping up everywhere. It may not be the end of the drought, but at least we have a reprieve of sorts, with bright green hills adorned with splashes of brilliant yellows, blues and orange. Do make time to enjoy them!

Sheri Kosh
June Krystoff-Jones
Jeff Kwasny
Dan & Sara Levi / Kocher
Scott Loosley
Nancy Jean Mann
Tim Matthews
Wallace McCray
Kate Montgomery
Kristen Nelson
Mardi Niles
Jennifer Nix
Al Normandin
John Nowak
Virginia Ortega
Beatrice Parker

Jim Patterson
Elliott Paulson
Linda Robertson
Peter Sarafian
Kathy Schartz
Douglas Shinoda
Kevin & Marilee Statom
Paul Townsend
John Veres
Wendy Visser
Michael Walgren
Christopher Wassenberg
Thomas Wheeler
Lindsey Whitaker

11th Annual Cambria Wildflower Show, presented by Friends of the Fiscalini Ranch Preserve

The show will be held on Saturday, April 23, from noon until 5:00 pm and Sunday, April 24, from 10:00 am until 4:00 pm at the Cambria Veterans Memorial Building, 1000 Main St. You will see a display of fresh wildflowers collected from the Monterey County line to the Morro Bay Estuary and from the coastal bluffs to the ridge of the Santa Lucia Mountains. Fresh flowers will be labeled with its botanical name and family, along with its common name. Over 400 individual specimens are expected to be on display.

The purpose of the show is to enhance the enjoyment of wildflowers by educating, through viewing. Permitted and trained teams of collectors will be picking flowers for educational purposes, from habitats with large populations, so that people can learn to enjoy them in their natural habitats without picking the flowers themselves.

The wildflower show will be free to students of all ages, but we will be asking others for a \$3 donation at the door to help cover costs. A reference list will be provided to everyone attending and a species list will be available for purchase. These will be valuable aids to those who would like to continue investigating the wildflowers they see every day.

Wildflower books and seeds will be for sale. Light fare and beverages will be available in the "Wildflower Café" during the wildflower show.

For more information, please call 927-2856 or e-mail ffrpcambria@sbcglobal.net.

