
Obispoensis

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



April 2020

The Morro Manzanita Chaparral Natural Community

Melissa Mooney

In our November 2019 newsletter we discussed the Los Osos Habitat Conservation Plan, a plan prepared by the County of San Luis Obispo to address the impacts of development in Los Osos. In that plan there is a great deal of discussion of the Morro manzanita, *Arctostaphylos morroensis*, a plant that is listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) as Threatened under the authority of the federal Endangered Species Act. It is also a list 1B species, indicating rarity in California and elsewhere. What may not be as well known is that Morro manzanita is also the dominant vascular plant species of a rare natural community known as Morro manzanita chaparral, the *Arctostaphylos morroensis* **Shrubland Alliance**, as defined by the Manual of California Vegetation (Sawyer, Keeler-Wolf and Evens, 2009). This is an example of a natural community that is dominated by a listed species. Not all sensitive natural communities are.

Morro manzanita chaparral has a global ranking of G1 and a State ranking of S1, which is the highest (and rarest) ranking a natural community can have. Remember the Giant coreopsis scrub that we reviewed in our last newsletter? That community was G3, S3, also sensitive, but not as sensitive as the Morro manzanita chaparral, at least according to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) VegCAMP program. The Program and the CNPS Vegetation Program review the rankings, which are based on the NatureServe's Heritage Methodology.

Morro manzanita chaparral occurs in three primary areas in the Los Osos/Montana de Oro area. It occurs north of town in the Elfin forest and northeast of the Middle School; south of town on the north-facing slopes above Highland and Rodman Drive; and in two large stands in Montana de Oro State Park. The Plant Communities committee of the SLO Chapter has sampled each of these areas using the Rapid Assessment techniques of the VegCAMP program, and we have found that in the 4 stands sampled, the cover of Morro manzanita varies from 23 to 85 percent, with the average being 53 percent. Other species occurring in these stands include chamise, wedge-leaved Ceanothus (*Ceanothus cuneatus*), and coast live oak. There are many other species, such as monkeyflower, black sage, and phlox-leaved bedstraw (*Galium andrewsii*), but they occur at very low cover values. The stands are almost impenetrable due to the low shrubby branches of the manzanita, and if it weren't for already created trails in some of these areas, it would be difficult to walk through them. Two stands we sampled are located on north slopes; one on a south slope, and another on a fairly flat surface. On the *Geologic Map of the San Luis Obispo-San Simeon Region* (1979), all are shown to be on dune sands, but there are outcroppings of soft shales in the Cabrillo Heights area.

Many interesting mushrooms, bryophytes, and lichens occur in this community. One of my favorite lichens is the pixie-cup lichen (*Cladonia* sp., see photo), which can be found on the moist soils alongside the trails beneath and sometimes on the lower bark of the Morro manzanitas. There are several species in the area. One very rare species, *Cladonia firma*, occurs primarily in the coastal sage community just north of the Morro manzanita chaparral in the Morro Dunes Ecological Preserve, but it also filters into the chaparral in some areas where the two communities intermix as a mosaic. A unique mushroom I found two years ago in the stand south of Highland Drive is the coral mushroom (*Ramaria* sp., see photo). I almost felt as if I was underwater when I saw it! It was growing under the manzanita in colonies with other mushrooms.

Also occurring within this community is the Indian Knob mountainbalm (*Eriodictyon altissimum*), a species that is listed by the USFWS and the CDFW as Endangered and by the as Endangered. It is also a 1B species. This species occurs in only a few other areas in San Luis Obispo County, at Indian Knob near San Luis Obispo, and in Hazard Canyon at Montana de Oro. It appears to establish clones from rhizomes, and, like the Morro manzanita chaparral, is fire-dependent.

Morro manzanita chaparral is a very rare natural community that is seriously threatened. It's location near Los Osos provides a unique habitat for contemplation, exercise, and enjoying nature. However, in some areas, it is being loved too much. Individual plants are being trimmed haphazardly by unofficial trail makers. Erosion of the very sandy soils is sometimes severe, creating extensive scars, exacerbated by foot and horse traffic. The issue of fire clearance to keep the public safe needs to be studied and addressed if it proves to be detrimental. And, although some populations are preserved, as always, we need to be ever vigilant of development being proposed within the area.

Cover Photo Credits: From top, clockwise: Inside the Manzanita Canopy: David Chipping, Coral Fungus: Melissa Mooney, Morro Manzanita Flowers: David Chipping, *Cladonia* sp. Melissa Mooney

Matteo Garbelotto's Letter on our next Sudden Oak Death (SOD) Blitz

We had some great results last year and participation continued to be good, but we need to work hard to keep a solid involvement of our communities. The USFS has just released the 2019 tree mortality data, and in 2019 alone, a million tanoaks were dead because of SOD. SOD is moving to new Counties outside of the current area of infestation, and even in our Bay Area neighborhoods, SOD of 2019 is not the same SOD of 10 years ago: different distribution, new local outbreaks, and new hosts are emerging, as the disease becomes more and more established in its new home. Two new dangerous SOD strains are at the doors of our forests, and - believe it or not- the SOD Blitzes are the only hope for their early detection. If these new strains arrived and spread in our forests, they could deliver a fatal blow to our forests: by collecting symptomatic plant material in your neighborhood, volunteers will make the most significant contribution possible to intercept these strains. Starting in 2019, we are asking participants in the SOD blitzes to quantify their effort to stop SOD: this information will be essential to leverage assistance money from the State. We also have enhanced the benefits for tree care professionals who participate in the blitzes: besides offering free bay and tanoak tests for their clients, we now offer them free enrollment in a satellite program called Oakstep, that allows them to test oaks for infection by SOD. Let's try to increase participation by tree care specialists: it could be enormously beneficial to everybody.

Set aside May 15 and May 16 for the SLO County SOD Blitz. Details in the next issue of Obispoensis



The 15th Annual Cambria
Wildflower Show

Saturday afternoon (12-5pm) April 25
Sunday (10am-4pm) April 26

Cambria Veteran's Memorial Building

Hundreds of Central Coast wildflowers and other flora
will be presented and described

•
All freshly collected

•
Edible, Medicinal, Rare, Invasive and Poisonous
plants will be identified

•
Botanists will be on hand to answer questions

•
Often antique and sometimes rare bottles
will display the specimens

•
A+ Treats from the Wildflower Café

•
Seeds, T-shirts and Helpful Books, etc

•
Admission is free for students of any age,
otherwise it's a \$5 donation to this worthy cause

•
**Brought to you by Friends of the Fiscalini Ranch Preserve
and many, many volunteers**

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Plant Identification *In the Field*

May 16, 2020
8:30 am – 1:00 pm
Reservoir Canyon



MAY CNPS WORKSHOP

Registration is now open! Presented by local botanist Kristen Nelson, this field-based workshop in one of San Luis Obispo's most unique and diverse habitats. Learn the difference between morphological variability and key characters that distinguish species, and how to interpret difficult keys and plant characters. Requires a short, moderately strenuous hike. Intermediate level - participants should have working knowledge of plant taxonomy and keying. **Advance registration required - closes May 10. \$30 members, \$40 non-members.** For more information and to register, go to cnpslo.org.

WANT COLOR? The latest edition of our monthly newsletter *Obispoensis* is available for download as a PDF file from the link below. Find out about upcoming events, field trips, local issues impacting native plants, invasives to be on the watch for, horticulture tips for growing natives, contact info and more in each issue: <http://cnpslo.org>

Having trouble opening the file? You need to have Adobe Acrobat Reader installed on your device. It can be downloaded here:

<https://get.adobe.com/reader>



Sunday, March 22nd, 9:30 am, Pecho Coast Trail to the Point San Luis Lighthouse. Come learn about the native plants that thrive along the Pecho Coast Trail and discover their medicinal uses. California Native Plant Society botanists Kristin Nelsen and Bill Waycott along with Pecho Coast Trail docents, will be helping you explore the beauty of the local flora and learn how the Native Americans and pioneers utilized these plants for their nutritional and medical uses. The hike is 3.75 miles round trip and will depart from Port San Luis at 9:30 am. Return time is around 1:30 pm. The hike is along the coastal bluffs leading out to the Point San Luis Lighthouse, with a break being taken at the Lighthouse's events building. This event is a fundraiser for the Point San Luis Lighthouse Keepers in honor of their 130th Anniversary. The fee of \$50 per ticket goes directly towards the restoration effort of this beautiful historic site. You will be given a guidebook to take home, and a luncheon will be provided by the Point San Luis Lighthouse Keepers featuring the opportunity to taste some of the edible plants that are found along the Pecho Coast Trail. It is recommended that you wear sturdy footwear like hiking boots, bring water, and carry a light jacket for the hike.

Saturday, March 28th 9:00 am, LPNF and CNPS "Drive and Stroll Tour" of Figueroa Mountain, at the Figueroa Fire Station: The Santa Lucia District, Los Padres National Forest (LPNF) will hold its fifteenth annual Wildflower Weekends on Figueroa Mountain in conjunction with the California Native Plant Society (CNPS). Meet at 9 AM at the Fire Station on Figueroa Mtn. Rd. Turn at the SR 154-Figueroa Mtn. Rd intersection near Los Olivos and proceed to the Fire Station parking lot. In view of this year's early rains and current dry spell, Helen Tarbet is guessing early peaking of blooming this year. Sturdy shoes, lunch and liquids, and camera and binoculars recommended. Call Helen Tarbet at (805) 925-9538 ext. 246 or Charles Blair (805) 733-3189 for details.

Saturday, April 4th, 8:30 am, Malcolm McLeod Annual Fieldtrip. The destination for this year's McLeod fieldtrip will be determined one week beforehand, based on spring flower availability. For current information, visit the SLO CNPS webpage (www.cnpsslo.org). An e-mail announcement will be sent to members signed up for this service (request at info.cnpsslo@gmail.com). Be sure to bring your wildflower guides, adequate water and food, a hat, sturdy shoes, and dress in layers for the weather. For more information contact Bill, (805) 459-2103. Rain or the threat of rain cancels.

Saturday April 11th 9:30 am, CNPS and LVBHS, La Purisima Burton Mesa Wildflower Walk: Meet at the La Purisima Mission Parking Lot, corner of Purisima and Mission Gate Rds. (2295 Purisima Rd. Lompoc) at 9:30 AM for this annual California Native Plant Society and LVBHS spring tour of the beauties of the Burton Mesa Chaparral. Sturdy shoes, lunch & liquids, camera and binoculars advised. For more information, call Charlie at (805) 733-3189

Sunday, April. 19th, 9:00 am, Santa Rita Creek Rd. mountain bike ride. This will be an out and back ride of about 2 hours with a one-way distance of roughly 6.5 miles on a mostly unpaved road. Santa Rita Creek Road hugs Old Creek for several miles until it climbs out of the canyon for a spectacular view of North County. There is a steady elevation gain towards the end, leading up to the crest, where we plan to turn around. Bring your bike, helmet, other appropriate gear, and water/snacks. Meet at the corner of Old Creek Road and Santa Rita Creek Road, 3.8 miles from Hwy 1 in Cayucos, on Old Creek Road (GPS: 35.47250N 120.8558W). For carpooling from San Luis Obispo, meet at Santa Rosa Park at 8:30 am and RSVP if you plan to carpool. Contact Bill, (805) 459-2103. Rain or threat of rain cancels.

CARRIZO COLLOQUIUM

FRIDAY APRIL 10

SLO City Library Community Room

This year's topics include occupancy of California Valley Solar Ranch by endangered Giant kangaroo rats, San Joaquin antelope squirrels and San Joaquin Kit Fox, climate change addition to the Carrizo Plain Ecosystem Project, advances in establishing wildlife connectivity corridors, water for Carrizo Plain wildlife – Buttonwillow Springs and Jenks Pond enhancements, news about the Goodwin Ranch and other updates. **Stay tuned to <https://ecologistics.org/carrizo-colloquium/> for registration information.**

Registration Open for Rare Plant Communities Workshop

Sign up now for the "Rare Plant Communities in Coastal San Luis Obispo County" workshop, Saturday April 18, 2020, 8:30am - 12:30pm, San Luis Obispo. Presented by Melissa Mooney and local botanists. Participants will learn how the State defines and classifies plant communities and about rare plant communities in our area. We will have a short lecture followed by a field trip to see some local rare plant communities. Intermediate level - participants should have working knowledge of plant taxonomy and keying. Registration closes April 10; advance registration required; \$30 members, \$40 non-members. For more information and to register, go to cnpsslo.org.

RETAIL SALES POSITION OPEN

Do you love books? How about selecting books that are on our Sales Table at most meetings and some events? If so, we would be excited to hear that you would be interested in becoming our Retail Sales Manager. If you've spent time gazing at the sales table, you know how wonderful the selection is. There are volunteers who help to staff the table, so help is always available. This is an opportunity to be creative, try new titles and stock the reliable titles, select T-shirt colors and share your enthusiasm for books with the folks that browse the table. If you are interested or have questions, contact Melissa Mooney. Stop by the sales table at the Cambria Wildflower show on April 25th or 26th and chat with the people who are working the table for that event.



THE GARDEN CORNER

My garden is small compared to the ones I manage in my horticulture business, but it's still a hideaway for the birds, bees and native plants. It's calming and is a source of tranquility for myself and my family. During difficult times, and I'm sure you have experienced them and know what I mean, the backyard can be a peaceful and serene place. Sometimes however, the garden can also create stress.

Gophers, spider mites and water bills, to name a few, can detract us from our beautiful garden. But keeping this in mind, we must remember we share this space with the critters and the insects. These are all part of the fabric of nature.

Just like fertilizer and compost, gas and electricity bills, we have to budget for this special place. It doesn't matter if it is a drought resistant native garden or even a cactus garden. There will be maintenance involved. Weeding can take us away from family and friends, however, I have found over the years, for me, the yard has been a great investment.

When I think about the hours of enjoyment I have experienced watching the birds, bees and plants in my garden grow, these times have been some of the best I ever had. So looking forward to the future and what it might hold, I'm hoping you will find that the investment of time, energy and money in your garden, is one that is well spent. Until next time, collect rain water and happy gardening.

John Nowak

CNPS DEATH SQUAD RECRUITING

Made you look? Actually this is death to invasive weeds. We are recruiting CNPS volunteers for a workday in April in Montana de Oro State Park. This event will be co-hosted by the Coastal San Luis RCD and Morro Bay State Parks. Work will involve a half-day of pulling New Zealand spinach (with hand tools) along the bluff trail and mulching areas that we've completed. We're looking for 12-15 volunteers who will be supported by State Parks and RCD staff.

This event is the beginning of a desire to form a CNPS weed-pulling and early detection crew. At this point, we'd like to have monthly gatherings in the spring and summer and see what momentum develops. Email your interest to Lindsay Ringer <lringer@coastalrcd.org>



Poetry Initiative --- 50-year Anniversary of Earth Day

This project is a Call for Ecological Poetry/Prose/Art and Discourse throughout SLO County to unite with the cause initiated 50 years ago. Gathering stories to be Stewards of the Earth, this perspective can help direct hope for Earth, Forever.

If you have a venue or poem and would like an Earth Day Poem reach out to muebersax61@gmail.com Mary Uebersax, EarthTones Gifts, Gallery & Center for Healing – 805-238-4413

Two components of the Morro Manzanita Chaparral Natural Community. Left: *Galium andrewsii*; Right: *Ceanothus cuneatus* var. *fascicularis* Photos: David Chipping

CHAPTER MEETING, Vets Hall, Grand Avenue at Monterey, SLO. Thursday April 2nd 2020

7pm social, 7:30pm program

Listing, Recovery, and Management of San Luis Obispo County's Rarest Plants

Kristie Scarazzo



Photo: Kristie Scarazzo

Kristie Scarazzo is currently the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service botanist responsible for the listing and recovery of species included in the federal Endangered Species Act for San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara Counties. Please join us to hear Kristie discuss ongoing projects being implemented for the management and recovery of some of San Luis Obispo's most imperiled taxa, including Nipomo lupine (*Lupinus nipomensis*), La Graciosa thistle (*Cirsium scariosum* var. *loncholepis*), marsh sandwort (*Arenaria paludicola*), and Pismo clarkia (*Clarkia speciosa* subsp. *immaculata*). She will also discuss the process of listing new species under Section 4 of the Endangered Species Act and the potential for working with USFWS in local partnerships.



Clarkia speciosa subsp. *immaculata*

Photo: Kristie Scarazzo



Stinking Gourd (*Cucurbita foetidissima*) from the middle of a Native American midden at Shark Inlet, Morro Bay. It is all alone. Was this introduced by the original inhabitants that created the midden? I think we define this as 'native' although it was probably 'introduced', as anything established prior to European invasion is counted as native.

Invasive Species Report: Purple Ragwort *Senecio elegans*

An attractive member of the *Asteraceae* (Sunflower) family *Senecio elegans* is an erect annual herb, up to 1 ft. tall and to 1.5 ft. wide. It is native to Southern Africa and is distributed along coastal California. In northern San Luis Obispo County there are groups at San Simeon Point and at the other end of the county in the Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes. Local CNPS members have located them in the Dunes as follows--1984: Hidden Willow Valley by Malcolm McLeod and Austin Griffiths; 1986: Kathleen Jones; 1990: south of Oso Flaco Lake by Lynne Dee Althouse and David Keil. Germinating following rainfall, leaves have blades which are deeply cut (pinnately lobed), into several toothed lobes and are sticky to the touch. The spectacular fuchsia colored, daisy-like inflorescence bears flower heads lined with black-tipped phyllaries (leaf-like plant part located just below a flower). They contain many (100+) deep yellowish disc florets at the

center. Each has 13+ fuchsia colored ray florets. The flower heads turn into fluffy white seeds, ready for the wind to disperse the seeds. *Senecio elegans* is an escaped invasive weed where it spreads rapidly, displacing indigenous vegetation such as Dunedelion (*Malacothrix incana*). Control is achieved by pulling it before flowering. I've been able to easily pull many hundreds in the Dunes south of Oso Flaco.



Photo: Mark Skinner

Mark Skinner: Invasive Species Chair

DESERT TO DUNE

The Morro manzanita requires a sandy substrate, and in Los Osos is confined to older dune sands. Among the plants also found on our local dune sands are the pink sand-verbena and the sand almond, both restricted to the dune sands. A visitor to Joshua Tree National Park will find a very similar sand-verbena, and a very similar sand-almond, both living in sandy substrate. Is there a connection? One speculation is that, as desert comes very close to the coast along the southern border, a long-ago dry period would have enabled desert plants to reach the coast, and then migrate northward along the coast. During the Ice Ages the ocean was hundreds of feet lower, and coastal configuration would have been different with a more continuous chain of dunes reaching from San Diego to Los Osos. Even today, there was a very long dune chain in Los Angeles and Orange Counties, since obliterated by development.



Abronia pogonantha



Abronia umbellata

Sand verbena from the desert (far left) and local dunes (near left). Sand almond from local dunes (near right) and the desert (far right). Photos: David Chipping except far right © Steve Matson (CC-BY SA 3.0)



Prunus fasciculata var. *punctata*



Prunus fasciculata var. *fasciculata*

UPDATE ON MAKING OBISPOENSIS ELECTRONIC-ONLY

We have approval from membership, based on communication to the editor, to transition to an electronic-only newsletter format. As you may know, our web guru Judi Young already sends out a reformatted web-friendly version of the newsletter to all those who have submitted their email address. To sign up, go to <https://cnpsslo.org/> and scroll to the green sign-up form on the right side. The PDF file of the current format is also available for download at <https://cnpsslo.org/obispoensis/>. The URL for this PDF file is given in each email newsletter for you to download if you choose.

PLEASE EMAIL dchippin@calpoly.edu IF YOU REQUIRE FURTHER INFORMATION

Kieran Althaus joined our team last fall doing Social Media work along side Judi Young for the chapter. He is soon going to start his Masters Degree at Cal Poly in Biology with Dr. Matt Ritter and Dr. Jenn Yost. In the mean time he is staying occupied with the Plant Science Club at Cal Poly, as well as working on a variety of Botany projects.



THE GOOD PEOPLE WHO MAKE THE CHAPTER 'HAPPEN' AND HOW TO FIND THEM

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WE ALWAYS NEED PEOPLE TO HELP OUT. OUR MISSION IS VITAL AND OUR FLORA IS AT RISK
CNPS SLO Chapter gratefully acknowledges French Hospital and the Copelands Health Education Pavilion
for the use of their facilities for our Board meetings.

Protecting California's Native Flora since 1965

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 *Flora*, 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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