
Obispoensis

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



May 2024

Surf Thistle *Cirsium rhotophilum*

Dr. Dirk Walters

Craig Cunningham's photo on the cover of this issue of the *Obispoensis* is Surf thistle (*Cirsium rhotophilum*). This is a plant of which it can be said there is good news and bad news. The bad news is that it is on the CNPS List 1B, which means that the species is rare and/or endangered in California and elsewhere. The plant is also listed by the State of California as threatened. The good news is that its rareness is recognized, and this offers it some protection. Its protection also spreads to the more common species with which it grows. Surf thistle is restricted to the immediate coast where it can be found growing in semi-stabilized hillocks just above the high tide level from Pismo Beach south into Northern Santa Barbara County. It is also reported from rocky coastal cliffs, although I'm unfamiliar with it growing in this type of habitat.

The genus *Cirsium* is one of the more difficult genera in which to identify species. Every recent flora mentions how difficult the genus is due to the fact that the species are poorly defined, extremely variable, and/or engage in inter-specific hybridization. However, *C. rhotophilum* is an easily recognized thistle, which can't be confused with any other thistle with which it might grow. It is one of two SLO County thistles that can grow this close to the ocean's edge, the other being the Compact cobweb thistle found on the coastal bluffs from Cambria northward. The *C. rhotophilum* leaves are whitish in color due to the thickly matted white wool that hides the spines on its leaf margin. Its leaves are quite thick and tend to be very wavy. The plant's flowers reveal an obvious affinity with other thistles. The numerous white to pale yellowish flowers are surrounded by several series of bracts (phyllaries) which are quite prickly. In this they resemble the typical thistle head.

Being a threatened species, it is protected by law from collecting. Therefore, any possible hobby use of the plant is out of the question. But we still might wonder about the derivation of its names. The name thistle is derived from Middle English "thistel"; which comes from the Old English, "distel", which is a direct cognate from the German "distel". All these name variations can be used to refer to any spiny herb. There is also an implication that the referred to plant is worthless, i.e. a weed. The genus name, *Cirsium*, is a Latinized version of the Greek word, *kirsion*, which also refers to a kind of thistle.

One might think that the name 'surf' refers to the fact that the species grows in dunes just above the highest reaches of the surf. Although, in fact, this is its correct habitat, the name might also refer to where the species was first collected, i.e. its type locality. The species was described and named from plants collected near Surf, California in Santa Barbara County. Therefore 'surf' could mean Surf, a geographic location. On the other hand, the name, surf, could have a double meaning and refer to both. The specific epithet, *rhotophilum*, could answer the question. *Rhoto-* refers to surf, while *-philum* means loving. So the scientific name means a surf-loving thistle. So, *Cirsium rhotophilum* is the surf-loving thistle from Surf, California.



The hairy flower heads of *Cirsium rhotophilum* (left) and *Cirsium occidentale* var. *compactum* (right).

As both species are subject to the windy conditions adjacent to the shoreline, the hairs are probably a defense against desiccation.

Both photos by Craig Cunningham

URGENT 'LAST MINUTE' REQUEST FOR HELP

MANY OF YOU WILL SEE THIS JUST BEFORE APRIL 23 AND APRIL 24, WHEN THE SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS WILL VOTE ON APPROVING THE DANA RESERVE SPECIFIC PLAN. WE HAVE TOLD YOU IN THE PAST THAT THE PROJECT AS PROPOSED TAKES OUT FAR TOO MANY OAKS AND BURTON MESA CHAPARRAL, JUSTIFIED ON THE FALSE BASIS THAT THE NEED FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUMPS MOST OF THE CONSERVATION STANDARDS IN PLACE. **THERE IS ROOM FOR BOTH HOUSING AND OAKS.** IF YOU CAN MAKE IT AND GIVE THE 2-3 MINUTES OF TESTIMONY ALLOWED, IT WILL HELP COUNTER THE STRONG SUPPORT OF THIS PROJECT BY THE CONSTRUCTION UNIONS, HOUSING-AT-ANY-COST ADVOCATES, AND SADLY, THE PLANNING DEPARTMENT THAT IS SWEEPING CONSERVATION STANDARDS ASIDE.

OUR LETTER TO THE BOARD WILL BE SENT TO YOU UPON YOUR REQUEST TO dchippin@calpolydotedu

Chapter Monthly Program

Thursday, May 2nd, San Luis Obispo Vets Hall

(corner of Mill St. and Grand Ave)

**Asteraceae Workshop 6-7 pm (Open to All), Social Gathering 7pm;
Business and Program Starts 7:30pm.**

Asteraceae, the largest family of flowering plants in California, includes many commonly encountered plants as well as uncommon and rare species. Asteraceae (also known as Compositae) are characterized by a set of distinctive features. Terms that botanists use to describe these features will be introduced and their variations illustrated by close-up photos, mostly of San Luis Obispo County members of the family. With an understanding of these features, users will be better able to navigate identification keys and gain a deeper appreciation of this fascinating group of plants.

Dr. David Keil is Professor Emeritus of Biology at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo. Dave has had a lifelong interest and enthusiasm for botany. He received his B.S. and M.S. in botany from Arizona State University and his Ph.D. from Ohio State University. At Cal Poly he taught for 39 years, with courses in general botany, plant taxonomy, field botany, evolution, and biogeography. For many years Dave served as Curator of the Robert F. Hoover Herbarium at Cal Poly. He has authored scientific papers, textbooks, and study guides, and has been a major contributor and editor to *The Jepson Manual* and the *Flora of North America*. His research interests include Asteraceae systematics and floristics of Western North America. He edited both editions of the *Wildflowers of San Luis Obispo* and has just published the second edition of the *Vascular Plants of San Luis Obispo County, California*. He was elected as CNPS Fellow in 2018. He has served as Editor of *Madroño* and *Systematic Botany Monographs*.



CNPS-SLO Mini-Keying Workshop: Asteraceae!

- ❖ Free pre-meeting keying workshop
- ❖ May 2, 2024, 6-7 pm*, SLO Vets Hall
- ❖ Facilitated by Drs David Keil and Dena Grossenbacher
- ❖ Learn about key characteristics to identify Asteraceae species
- ❖ Practice keying Asteraceae species collected from our area
- ❖ Bring a 10x hand lens, headlamp, dissection tools, and your Flora of San Luis Obispo County**



Photo: Slender sunflower by David Keil

* Desktop seating is limited – please arrive a few minutes early
** Some extra loaner supplies will be available



All Plant Photos by David Keil. Right from top to bottom: *Achyrachaena mollis*; *Cirsium occidentale venustum*; *Agoseris heterophylla cryptopleura*; *Layia jonesii* Left from top to bottom: *Ambrosia acanthicarpa*; *Madia elegans*



Saturday and Sunday, April 27th and 28th, 2024, Cambria Wildflower Show

(see more on next page)

Sunday, April 28th, 2024, 8:30 am, possible rescheduling of “Back roads of the Carrizo Plain”

Please wait for confirmation, either by visiting the website and/or receiving a CNPS-SLO email announcement.

Saturday, May 4th, 2024, 10:00 am, Plants of the U.C. Sedgwick Reserve, Santa Ynez Valley

The Sedgwick Reserve encompasses 5,896 acres, with two watersheds of oak woodland, savanna, grassland, sage scrub, and riparian areas. We will meet local docents to visit these diverse habitats, and discuss the research work currently in progress at the Reserve. This outing will last the entire day and there is a limit to 20 participants. Please meet at the corner of Hwy 154 and Roblar Ave. (34.650228, -120.094607) at 9:30 am, and from there proceed to the Reserve as a group. Bring adequate water, food, and dress in layers for the weather; a hat and sturdy shoes are advised. For carpooling from the San Luis Obispo area, meet at the Halcyon Park and Ride, located on the south side of Hwy 101 at the Halcyon Rd. exit at 8:30 am (35.123094, -120.590477). Please sign the Liability Waiver and register for this event on our website. For more questions and more information contact Bill Waycott, (805) 459-2103



[Click Here](#)

To Sign the Liability Waiver and Register for the Event.

<https://app.waiversign.com/e/605434825bd9a600198d4bcc/doc/605436925bd9a600198d4c79?eventName=SLOCNPS-Sedgwick%20Reserve%20Field%20Trip-2024>

Sunday, May 5th, 2024, 9:30 am to 2:00 pm, Plant Identification in the Field – Intermediate level field-based keying workshop, Johnson Ranch Open Space, San Luis Obispo. (see more on next page)

Saturday, May 18th, 2024, 10:00 am, the Milpitas Special Interest Area (the “Indians” Memorial Park), Los Padres National Forest, near Jolon, CA (36.117857, -121.465024).

This is a joint field trip with the CNPS Monterey Bay Chapter. The Milpitas SIA contains approximately 9,500 acres located in the upper watershed of the San Antonio River, much of which is within the Ventana Wilderness, approximately 17 miles from Mission San Antonio near the border of Fort Hunter Liggett. This outing will last the entire day. Meet at the Templeton Park and Ride at 8:15 am for caravan and carpooling options (35.553966, -120.713761). Bring adequate water, food, and dress in layers for the weather; a hat and sturdy shoes are advised. Please sign the Liability Waiver and register for this event on our website. For more questions and more information contact Bill Waycott, (805) 459-2103

[Click Here](#)

To Sign the Liability Waiver and Register for the Event.

<https://app.waiversign.com/e/605434825bd9a600198d4bcc/doc/605436925bd9a600198d4c79?eventName=SLOCNPS-Indians%20Memorial%20Park%20Field%20Trip-2024&eventDate=2024-05-18T23:59:59.99Z>



16th Cambria Wildflower Show

See hundreds of fresh wildflowers in all their diversity under one roof.



- **When:** Saturday, April 27 from 12 to 5 pm, and Sunday, April 28 from 10 am to 4 pm
- **Where:** Cambria Veterans Memorial Hall, 1000 Main Street, Cambria, CA 93428
- **Admission:** \$5 donation for adults; free for students of all ages

The show is a comprehensive tour of the floral diversity of northern San Luis Obispo County from the Monterey County line to the Morro Bay Estuary and from the coastal bluffs to the ridge of the Santa Lucia Mountains. It showcases the remarkable range of floral colors, scents, and sizes found right here in SLO County.

If you would like to volunteer to help with this show - collecting or identifying, plant display or show set-up, please contact Jo Ellen at joellen927@gmail.com

CNPS WILL HAVE BOOKS AT THE CAMBRIA FLOWER SHOW, INCLUDING A VERY LARGE COLLECTION OF EXCELLENT SECOND-HAND BOOKS



Registration Open Now

Plant Identification in the Field
Johnson Ranch Open Space, San Luis Obispo

Sunday May 5, 2024
9:30 am - 2:00 pm

Intermediate Level
Field-Based Keying Workshop



REGISTRATION IS NOW FULL AND A WAIT LIST HAS BEEN CREATED. Local botanists Kristen Nelson and Dena Grossenbacher will lead a field workshop to help biologists improve their plant keying skills. We will use the meadows at Johnson Ranch Open Space in the City of San Luis Obispo as our classroom. Participants will key plants in the field to family, genus, and species using the new edition of the [Flora of San Luis Obispo County, California](#) (FSLOC) by Dr. David Keil.

The workshop will be outdoors, hiking up to 1 mile, sitting on uneven terrain, and will be cancelled or postponed if the forecast calls for more than a few sprinkles. Participants should bring a hand lens (10x recommended), field notebook, and the Flora of San Luis Obispo County (hardback or e-version); loaner copies will be available. Participants should have working knowledge of plant terminology and dichotomous keys. Bring water, snacks, hat, sturdy shoes, and dress in layers for changing weather. A plant list for Johnson Ranch can be found on our website [here](#).

For more information and to join the waitlist;

<https://cnpslo.org/event/plant-id-in-the-field-2024/>

Contact Kristen Nelson or Dena Grossenbacher with questions:

knnelsonDOTnativeplantsATgmailDOTcom
denagrosATgmailDOTcom

2024 Sudden Oak Death Blitz May 24th-28th

Sudden Oak Death (SOD), a serious exotic disease, is threatening the survival of tanoak and several oak species in coastal forests of California, between Del Norte and Monterey Counties. The disease spreads during wet years on leaves of California bay laurels and tanoaks.

The presence of SOD symptomatic bay leaves generally precedes oak infections. Therefore timely detection of the disease on bay laurel leaves is key. SOD blitzes inform and educate the community about SOD, get local citizen scientists involved in detecting the disease on bay laurel and tanoak leaves, and produce detailed local maps of disease distribution. Additionally, the samples collected during the SOD blitzes allow for genetic screening to detect if a new and more aggressive variant of the disease is present. Given the amount of rainfall in 2024, SOD is expected to be spreading and may have arrived at a site near you.

Currently we do not have SOD on vegetation in San Luis Obispo County, but it is very close and surveying symptomatic bay laurels is critical so we can act promptly if found. If you want to be part of the solution, become a volunteer at one of the 2024

SOD Blitzes: schedule, locations, and other info at sodblitz.org

Please register with us locally in order for enough collecting packets to be made available.

Registration: <https://ucanr.edu/sodblitz2024>

On-Line Training for Collectors www.sodblitz.org

Packet Pickup & Drop-off Locations:

San Luis Obispo Agricultural Commissioner's Office – 2156 Sierra Way # A, San Luis Obispo, CA 93401. Drive around to the parking lot in the back. Follow signs and look for plastic bin near back door by the picnic table on the Johnson Ave side of the building. Hours: Friday, May 24th after 1:00PM through Tuesday morning, May 28th at 10:00AM – Available ALL HOURS.

–San Luis Obispo Agriculture Department in Templeton - 350 N Main St, Templeton, CA 93465. Bin will be located outside by the front doors. • Hours: Friday, May 24th after 1:00PM through Tuesday morning, May 28th at 10:00AM – Available ALL HOURS.

Collecting – Saturday, Sunday & Monday – May 25, 26, 27. All of the materials necessary for the training and the collecting will be provided. **PACKETS WILL BE PICKED UP AT EACH LOCATION BY 10:00AM ON TUESDAY MAY 28th**



Santa Cruz Island Oak (*Quercus parvula* var. *parvula*)

Another population of *Quercus parvula* var. *parvula*, Santa Cruz Island Oak, has been found in Montana de Oro State Park. It is growing in older sand dune deposits on the Rim Trail, which runs up the ridge line on the northern edge of the Park. Calflora lists six county occurrences, three of which are in similar geology in the sandy slopes near the southern extension of Broderson Avenue in Los Osos and almost due north of the Rim Trail location. The shrubby trees are located at 35.29584,-120.85388 on a short spur trail leading to an overlook on the south side of the Rim Trail. Dr. Keil notes that the Los Osos specimens are indistinguishable from those found at Vandenberg's Space Force Base, which also has an extensive cover of older dune sand. Santa Barbara County and Santa Cruz Island join SLO County in being the only locations for this oak.



LOOKING BACK: WHAT THE OLD MAY NEWSLETTERS TELL US

May 2014: The drought was killing Morro manzanita in Montana de Oro S.P. We had a joint meeting and potluck picnic with Morro Coast Audubon Society at Santa Margarita Lake. Sharon Lovejoy and Jeff Prostovich hosted a garden tour. Dr. Keil gave us a presentation on grasses and their identification. The Rare Plant Treasure Hunt program was arranging hikes into the Ventana Wilderness and Indians Ranch in Monterey County. The conservation program was looking at plans to expand the Nipomo Phillips Refinery.

May 2004: CNPS testified again along with other organizations at the Arroyo Grande Planning Commission to get a minimum buffer around Pismo Clarkia populations. The green-washing "Native Tree Committee of San Luis Obispo County" removed the guideline "*Encourage public agencies to continue implementing policies that favor oak woodland conservation*" from a former draft of their toothless "Voluntary Guidelines". We had field trips to Hi Mountain, Leaning Pine Arboretum and an overnight trip to Wind Wolves Preserve. Our general meeting featured Marc Lea from the SLO County Weed Management Area.

May 1994: A very short newsletter included a summary of April's Wildflower Weekend in which the chapter conducted 19 docent-led hikes and provided 684 meals for the 127 guests. Field trips included Shell Creek, Native Sons Nursery, Montana de Oro, and Work Ranch in southeast Monterey County to look at holistic range management.

May 1984: Taken from the March newsletter, Dr. Keil gave a wildflower slide show at the May general meeting. We hosted the third Wildflower Weekend. CNPS and PG&E came to an agreement on conservation of Nipomo Lupine with Bonnie and Dirk Walters to do the bulk of the restoration and research at a PG&E substation adjacent to the oil refinery.

Lichen of the Month- *Niebla homalea*



Niebla homalea, the Armored sea-fog lichen, is a species of fruticose lichen that grows on rocks in foggy areas along the Pacific Coast of North America, from Mendocino County, California south to Bahía de San Quintín on the main peninsula of Baja California. There is an isolated occurrence further south on vertical rock faces above Punta Camachos, and other occurrences in the Channel Islands and on Guadalupe Island. This specimen was found on the Neil Havlik trail loop on the Irish Hills Preserve, unusually far inland from the ocean. The epithet *homalea* suggests it was in regard to the branches appearing flattened.

Photo: D. Chipping

News from the Seed Side

The seed gathering season has begun. I am getting a few seeds from my *Claytonia* and hope to have enough to offer at the seed exchange and/or sale. My wildflower production is not very exciting. I am not sure whether it was the different potting soil I used or just the weather, but many of my plants are not very happy which will mean I will be relying on others to fill in what I am missing. I hope the rest of you are having better luck. And I hope many of you will be willing to do the watching and waiting for mature seeds. If you need any hints on how to do this, there is a bit written up on the CNPS SLO website under resources.

My manzanitas are a different story. After two months of impatient watching, they finally decided to show me that they actually survived and now I have more than fifty pots of manzanita and, three months down the road, I am still seeing a few laggards show up. I am trying something different this year so hopefully I will have better survival than last year. I transplanted into a cactus mix and have added a bit of soil from under some pine and manzanita plantings to mix in with that soil. Perhaps the mycorrhizae that should be in that soil will help.

So, I am not completely frustrated. Manzanitas, *Ceanothus*, Redberry, and *Fremontodendron* all came out of the frig sometime in January and germinated really well. What am I going to do with more than 30 *Ceanothus impressus nipomensis*? I will see what survives and then cross that bridge. But the wildflowers, that is what most people are looking for and for much of that I will be depending upon the rest of you. So happy seed collecting.

Marti Rutherford

CNPS-SLO Facilitates 2ND Printing of Dr. Keil's *VASCULAR PLANTS OF SLO COUNTY*

As you may know, the initial printing of Dr Keil's new SLO County Flora quickly sold out. Our Chapter has volunteered to support the 2nd printing of the Flora, which is a valuable educational resource for those interested in the plants of our county. The CNPS-SLO Board of Directors voted to invest almost \$15,000 for the reprinting. [Pacific Street Publishing](#) will handle the sale of the books and CNPS will receive a small profit from each sale. When the books are printed, our Sales Table will also have a few copies for sale at upcoming events. We are so glad this important botanical resource will once again be available. Check the Pacific Street Website to pre-order. (see adjacent link)

David Krause & Susi Bernstein



[PREORDER HERE FROM PACIFIC STREET PUBLISHING](#)

Out in Nature with Children

On April 9 and 10, CNPS-SLO members participated as Walking Docents for the annual program organized by the Atascadero Land Preservation Society (ALPS) at their Adobe Springs property. Four classrooms of third graders from Santa Margarita and San Benito Elementary Schools spent a couple hours at the site, guided by Walking Docents to four different stations where the kids learned about the artesian spring which bubbles up on the property; beavers and importance of dams in rivers like the Salinas River (courtesy of Beaver Brigade); the Salinan Tribe's use of natural resources in daily life; and the history of the Estrada Adobe, which was once present near the spring. Our job was to get the children from station to station, but there was also time to divert their attention to the galls growing on the valley oaks, to recognize the differences between the willows, cottonwoods and oaks along the pathway, to sniff the fragrant *Ceanothus* flowers and California everlasting leaves, to throw bedstraw at each other and wonder why the plant has the ability to stick, and to look closely at the sky lupines and determine which flowers had been pollinated. It was fast and exhilarating, and we all enjoyed the little moments where a child (or adult!) responded to a native plant information nugget. Many thanks to Jonalee Istenes and Mike Orvis of ALPS for orchestrating the Interpretive Program so successfully. If you would like to assist CNPS-SLO with this event in the future, please let Susi Bernstein know so that we may call upon you.

Susi Bernstein



Adobe Springs is located in Atascadero off of Traffic Way (visible in background), and accessible through an ALPS docent. Photo by S.Bernstein



Learning stations were located throughout the property, connected by a mowed pathway. (Photo courtesy of ALPS)

News From The Chapter's Education Program

Bill Waycott, Zach Tanner and Susi Bernstein gave a presentation in March at the Nipomo Library on native plants suitable for local gardens. Susi collected a number of native plants to show their beauty. The program was very well received.



(above left) Elliot Paulson hosts CNPS at Clearwater Color Nursery.

(above right) An unusual population of all-white *Lupinus bicolor* at a rainy Rancho El Chorro Park visit.

(below right) Cindy Roessler found this member of the Walking-Stick family of insects during the sketch walk at Three Bridges. It is called a Timema (*Timema californicum*).





California Invasive Plant Council

Find out more about Cal-IPPC by visiting their web site <https://www.cal-ipc.org/>. As an item of trivia, the very first conference of what was then called the California Exotic Plant Council was hosted by Jack Beigle and David Chipping of our chapter at the Inn at Morro Bay.

Field Trip to Shell Creek April 6, 2024



Steve Schubert's photos of the Shell Creek Field Trip, showing clockwise from bottom left: Dirk Walters explaining about *Lupinus concinnus*, Shell Creek meadow, liverwort (*Asterella palmeri*) in fruit, Shell Creek in full flow, and the checking for desert flowers on the northern road cut.



Carrizo Plain on April 16, 2024



It has been a very strange year on the Carrizo Plain. A month ago the Temblors were turning to their usual bright yellow, but suddenly it all faded. There is no color on the east slopes of Caliente Mountain (bottom left). The southern slopes of the clay dune on Simmler Road had some impressive color a month ago, but most of that has vanished (center right). There are some patches of goldfields and owl's clover on the valley floor that are still looking good (center left, top right). On this date, a lot of roads were closed following heavy rain over the preceding weekend (top left). The lake is close to full (bottom right). Interestingly, some of the best flower fields are on recently retired agricultural land across from the school on Highway 58, and now are covered in *Layia*, *Leptosyne*, and owl's-clover. Old-timers might remember big masses of blue *Phacelia* in these fields, none of which was evident. I have to catch myself always comparing what I was seeing with the super-blooms, but the large number of very happy visitors enjoying the color made me realize that the place was still extremely pretty. On the way back I checked out Shell Creek, which is still very pretty.

David Chipping

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.

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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, *Artemisia*; 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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Websites: www.cnps.org (State) & www.cnpslo.org (Local)

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