China Creek Update
Warren Shaw

On Saturday, January 23rd we held our first workday of 2010. We were pleased to find the park in better shape than we had expected, given reports of vandalism. Park neighbor and member Hank Urbach told us that Fresno County personnel had been working to clean up tagging and vandalism at the gate and kiosk and had emptied the garbage. We certainly appreciate these efforts knowing the County's financial straits. In the last months of 2009 we worked with park neighbors to place gates across Smith Avenue at Rainbow to prevent access to the park at night. So far this seems to be helping to prevent vandalism.

It was a gorgeous day and we had a good turnout. We replaced the paper sign on the gate with a new one and cleaned the Plexiglas cover. Most of our efforts were spent spreading mulch on the trail. New piles of mulch had been dumped on the trail after I had previously asked that no more such material be left in the park. We already have a lifetime supply. We may have to address this further in the future.

Noting that a large old Valley Oak had fallen near the entrance we’ve asked permission from the County to have the trunk milled for rough lumber to build benches and/or a picnic table. This has been tentatively granted. The County has also given qualified permission for us to establish and treat yellow star thistle with approved chemicals in two test plots. The star thistle is up early, so we hope to start treatment at our February workday (2-20). We also hope to continue trail work. We'll be working from 8-12, and we'd love to have you join us, with hats and gloves, rakes and pitchforks.

Sequoia Chapter – Upcoming Activities

Windshield Wildflower Tour
Saturday, March 27, 9 am

This could be the wildflower tour for you! Many people who enjoy seeing our local foothill wildflowers in the spring are no longer able to hike into the foothills or just don’t care for walking.

Come with us for an easy, relaxed look, with little walking, at the variety of spring wildflowers in the foothills. We’ll meet in the Centerville area at 9:00 a.m., form carpools, and caravan in a loop taking us along Pine Flat Lake and over the ridge to Watts Valley, with stops for closer looks and photo ops. An expert botanist will be available to assist in pointing out and identifying the many species of California native plants.

In Watts Valley, we’ll stop for lunch and bathroom break at the Shaws' place. After lunch it’s back to the starting point via Watts Valley Road, through blue oak woodlands, the serpentine area of Hog Mountain, and down along Fancher Creek. Free.

Contact Warren or Helen Shaw (559-855-4519) by Wednesday, March 24th, for details and to put your name on the list.

Smart Gardening Conference
Saturday, February 27, 2010

We will have a table at this event (8 am to 5 pm). Contact Marian Orvis at mforvet@earthlink.net or 559/226-0145 if you can help for any part of the day.

Home & Garden Show.
Friday-Sunday, March 5-7, 2010

We will have a booth at this three-day event that always draws big crowds. Please contact Marian Orvis mforvet@earthlink.net or 559/226-0145 if you can help on any of the days even for only an hour or two.

An Evening with John Greenlee, “The Grassman”
Thursday, March 18, 2010, 7-9 pm

The Sequoia Chapter of CNPS and the Clovis Botanical Garden are jointly sponsoring this event. Attendance is free but seating is limited. R.S.V.P. required by February 28. R.S.V.P. to ebg.cnps@yahoo.com or call Anne (559.493.8052) or Thelma (559.323.8962).

A $100 donation helps to sponsor this event and grants one person to an exclusive pre-event dinner with John Greenlee. Visit www.greenleenursery.com to learn more about John Greenlee and his passion for meadow gardens.
Observations

Warren Shaw writes “Here in the foothills, remarkably, spring has started. Twinberry is in full leaf and should be blooming soon. Our big old manzanita is loaded with pink blossoms. Buckeyes are in full leaf at lower elevations and ours (at 2000 feet) are starting to pop. Poppies are blooming, as are Popcorn Flower, the little Fiddleneck, and Red maids. Blue Dick, Ithuriel’s Spear, and Curly Leafed Soaproot are up, and the hills are bright with annual grasses. Can Baby Blue Eyes be far behind?”

It’s shaping up to be an early bloom in the foothills. Our Windshield Wildflowers tour could be just the ticket for someone who hasn’t the ability or desire to hike. See details on page one.

Spring comes fast and furious to our Mediterranean climate. Jeanne Larson lives in the midst of Fresno and along her “wildflower” walk around the neighborhood she finds that many lawns are unmowed because it’s been so wet (yay!). That means there is an abundance of plant life, native and non-native. “What an array – miner’s lettuce, chickweed, common and mouse-ear chickweed, dandelions, pineapple weed, Lactuca, and Senecio. Fiddleneck, ripgut brome is headed out, bitter cress, henbit, mallow, shepherd’s purse, and verdant filaree, soon to bloom. And, of course, lots of a real weed – annual bluegrass.”

In her garden Jeanne’s Bee’s Bliss Sage has lots of bloom heads and the Frosty Blue Ceanothus is getting ready for a big show.

Late winter in Mediterranean climates feels a lot like spring in other parts of the country. Plants emerge with a vengeance, especially after some good rain. No doubt it’s impressive and beautiful but I find it visually noisy, too. The two quiet times of the year (winter and summer) suit me best and I now find myself looking for the last remnants of winter’s above-grown lull.

Natives are often underappreciated during the less flowery days. I like that I can provide a pile of branches around for the songbirds. They find spiders and other sources of protein and they take shelter there when it rains. Just yesterday I watched American Goldfinches nibbling the seed from the long seed pods of the Desert Willows. Who else except Lesser Goldfinches could perch on a narrow seed pod five inches long and 3/8” in diameter?

Perhaps one of the best parts of late winter here in the lower elevations is the birds. The more natives you have, the more likely you’ll see bird and butterfly action. For example, white crowned sparrows are highly attracted to Coyote Bush. Many foothill shrubs are great in the garden – ceanothus, toyon, different varieties of manzanita. Those white crowned sparrows are hungry, hungry right now. They fan out across the areas where needlegrasses have dropped their seed. They congregate and sing from inside the cleveland sage. It doesn’t get much better than that.

Flowers and newts

Jane Pritchard

On January 29 Roxy, Bess the dog, and I had a beautiful hike. Poor Peg had to stay home for a propane delivery. Anna decided to stay home and get some work done. My philosophy: If I die tomorrow, what would I rather have done – work or have fun? Easy choice. We drove the back roads from the Auberry Park & Ride to the end of Pine Flat Reservoir: L/168 to Lodge, L/Maxon Creek, L/Trimmer Springs to Big Creek Road at the bridge where Trimmer turns south along the lake. We parked at the intersection, hiked a little ways on the dirt road, then went up to an old road that follows along above the dirt road.

The sky was overcast with hazy sun in the afternoon and full sun around 3 p.m. Big Creek runs along the dirt road and had lots of water rushing down it. Innumerable shades of green provided background for a few flowers. A few poppies were open even though it was overcast. Maybe they haven’t had a chance for sunny skies lately. Fiddleneck was the most abundant flower. I saw one blue dick in bloom. Fringepod only about 6 inches tall with one-inch diameter flower heads covered a steep slope. This area has lots of native bunch grass in habitat favorable to and thick with introduced grasses. Why haven’t the natives been crowded out?

We ate lunch in a spot beside a tributary that flowed into Big Creek from the west. Water fell down the hill over bare rocks and formed a quiet pool with a rock and sand bottom. Numerous newts covered the bottom and rose to the surface for air once in awhile. There were no mating balls but several couples. We felt sorry for our friends who had missed the day.

Big Creek Road has lots of flowers later on including the bright yellow blazing stars. It connects to several back roads that lead to Soaproot and Peterson Mill Roads, Blue Canyon Road, Dinkey Creek Road, and Shaver Lake. I have wanted to explore those roads for more than 10 years.

Shooting Stars from Complete Garden Guide to the Native Perennials of California by Glenn Keator
**Membership**

**Helen Shaw**

As of early February, Sequoia chapter has 110 members, many of whom have been supporting CNPS for a number of years. This includes several who are charter members, joining when the chapter formed some thirty years ago.

Whether your membership is recent or long-standing, we are appreciative of your support of our chapter and the California Native Plant Society.

If you have membership questions or would like to receive the newsletter electronically (with a page of color photos) let Helen Shaw know. If you have an email address you’d care to share with us, Helen would thank you for that also. <helshaw@netptc.net>

The IRS considers dues in excess of $12.00 per year and all gifts to CNPS as tax deductible.
Bush Lupine
Madeleine Mitchell

I’ve chosen to feature the *Lupinus albifrons*, Bush Lupine for February since it’s showing some color in my native garden bed. The two-toned lavender flowers contrast nicely with the silvery grey leaves. My oldest plant is about five feet tall and receives no summer water. This is important because they live longer if left dry in the summer. It gets full sun along with the reflective heat off the asphalt street. Last year’s seedlings are also coming up and transplant well if they are taken when the root is still short. I gave some to a friend last week, who has removed her lawn and is waiting for other native species to grow.

My original seed came from Paul Slocumbe who lived at Yosemite Lakes Park in Madera County.

He’d collected seeds from plants on his property and put them into a film canister that rolled around on the dashboard of his truck. He cautioned me that they might be too old to germinate.

I had just started my native garden in 1991 and all my plants were small so I just threw the seed out and many of them came up. When those plants produced seed pods, I collected seed and tried starting them in potting mix to share. I had no luck. Some time later I attended a talk on the germination of natives by Ray Laclergue from Intermountain Nursery. I learned that lupine seeds need heat to germinate, explaining why those original seeds in the film canister were prolific.
Left side:
- Foothill morning
- White crowned sparrow on Coyote Bush (*Baccharis pilularis*) + blossom closeup
- Miners’ Lettuce (*Claytonia parviflora*)
- Wooly Blue Curls (*Trichostema lanatum*) early blossom
- Moss and lichen

Right side:
- Mexican (*A. pungens*), Harmony (*A. densiflora*) early blossoms
- Manzanita in full bloom (foothills)
- Baby Blue Eyes (*Nemophila menziesii*)
- California Wild Rose (*Rosa californica*) stem emerging from cane
- Wood’s Rose (*Rosa woodsii*)
- Redmaids (*Calandrinia ciliata*)
- Blue Elderberry (*Sambucus mexicana*)
- White crowned sparrows on California Wild Grape canes (*Vitis californica*)