“WOW” MOMENTS: WILDFLOWER STAND-OUTS, SPRING 2021
by Nancy Nies

In this year of extreme drought, Paul and I didn’t expect to see many wildflowers this spring on the weekly day-trips we’ve been making since March 2020. It’s true that in the spring of 2021 we did not see the vast expanses of color we saw last spring, such as the Antelope Valley, with its bright-orange carpet of California poppies, and the fields along Shell Creek Road, thick with lupine, tidy tips, desert dandelion, and owl’s clover.

Nevertheless, we did experience a number of “wow” moments this spring, each one remarkable not only for the particular wildflower that stole the show on a given day, but also for because of the spectacular setting in which we found it. Here are ten examples, in chronological order:

1 - 1 JANUARY - Nightmare Gulch, Red Rock Canyon State Park:
On this New Year’s Day, amidst the colorful, otherworldly rock formations, we found much *Eriogonum deflexum* (flat-top buckwheat), but only one bearing deep-pink flowers — the only plant we saw all day that was not still “hibernating”.

2 - 10 FEBRUARY - Gorman Post Road:
This back-road is set against the hills behind Gorman — hills famed for their incredible wildflower displays in good years. In early February of a drought year, you would not expect to see flowers, but on this day, a flash of bright orange at the roadside caught our eye. It was our first sighting this year of *Eschscholzia californica* (California poppy). The plant’s dozen vibrant blooms seemed to defy the drought and signal the start of spring.

All photos courtesy Nancy Nies
3 - 31 MARCH - Wallace Creek area, Carrizo Plain National Monument:

Hiking across the seemingly barren hills flanking the east side of the monument, we took in breathtaking vistas of the Carrizo and Soda Lake. While looking for a lunch spot, we nearly missed seeing the small pinkish-lavender blooms at our feet. Excitedly discovering more, we realized that we had found a colony of a rare endemic, Eremalche parryi subsp. kernensis (Kern mallow).

4 - 2 APRIL - Foothills near Woody:

Our hosts on this sunny spring morning were Lucy Clark and Clyde Golden, who showed us the thriving population of Diplacus pictus, formerly Mimulus pictus (calico monkeyflower), surrounding a group of boulders on their land. A short climb rewarded us with the opportunity both to see this rare species in bloom and to enjoy panoramic views of the green foothills.

5 - 16 APRIL - Sand Ridge Wildflower Preserve:

On previous spring visits to Sand Ridge, we had missed the bloom-time of another rare endemic — the Bakersfield cactus — and hadn’t even been aware of how abundant it was in that place. This year, however, the invasive grasses and mustard had been cleared away, giving us an unobstructed view of dozens of clumps of Opuntia basilaris var. treleasei, their intense magenta blooms vivid against a backdrop of mountains and farmland.

6 - 21 APRIL - Lehigh Trails, Tehachapi:

Our hike on this windy day, overlooking the Tehachapi Valley, afforded not only beautiful scenery but also more flowers than expected, including paintbrush, blue dicks, wallflower, and phacelia. The stand-out, however, was a clump of Balsamorhiza sagittata (arrowleaf balsamroot) in full bloom. With its bright-green leaves and large yellow flowers contrasting with the brown, bone-dry hillside from which it grew, it was the eye-catcher of the day.

7 - 20 MAY - Greenhorn Range:

Exploring along a dirt road, in a forested area on the south side of Cooks Peak, we came upon checkerblooom, wallflower, lupine, and another rare endemic, Calochortus westonii (Shirley Meadows star tulip). Last but certainly not least, we found what we’d been searching for — our second rare endemic sighting of the day — a healthy specimen of Fritillaria brandegeei (Greenhorn fritillary), with no fewer than seven showy flowers gracing its long stem.
CNPS is the leader for providing reliable information on California native plants and plant conservation. Comprehensive information about California’s flora and vegetation communities is available throughout the state for conservation and educational purposes. CNPS’s leadership influences personal ethics and actions, as well as public policy for native plant protection.
President’s Message:
by Rich Spjut

I-Plants of the Kern River Parkway Preserve

DURING APRIL AND MAY, DON TURKAL, Diane Mitchell and myself, accompanied by Bill Cooper and Eddy Laine, completed a preliminary survey of plants along ~4.1 miles of the Kern River — from the eastern boundary of Hart Park upstream to ~200 meters beyond the Pyles Camp parking area— near the southeastern boundary of the Kern River Golf Course. We prepared a list documenting species we observed in the new preserve that we arbitrarily divided into four sections:

- Hart Park
- CALM
- Lake Ming
- Pyles Camp

This checklist\(^1\) of the new Kern River Parkway Preserve is posted on our chapter website (kern.cnps.org) with links to Calflora showing photos that I took during the survey, including a few from the Panorama Vista Preserve. Endnotes mention the dates field surveys were made, and the taxonomy applied to distinguish problem species, especially in the genera Salix and Sambucus. The list is considered preliminary because it was very dry this past winter/spring, and that we often walked along the dry side of the riparian vegetation. Native spring annuals were rare. Including trees, shrubs, and perennials, we recorded 118 species, ~75% of them native.

Much of the riparian vegetation is a narrow strip of secondary growth of shrubs with emergent or remaining trees of Fremont cottonwood (Populus fremontii), California sycamore (Platanus racemosa), Goodding’s willow (Salix gooddingii), and blue elder (Sambucus mexicana) that extend into the extensive exotic grassland. Broad areas of riparian vegetation occasionally occur in patches, especially around Lake Ming and near Hart Park. In the shrub understory, or dominant in shrub alliances, are arroyo willow (Salix lasiolepis), mule fat (Baccharis salicifolia), elders (Sambucus spp.), and button-willow (Cephalanthus occidentalis).

Mule fat, generally common throughout the preserve, formed thickets along much of the river margin nearly half-way from the Pyles Camp area downstream to Lake Ming. An extensive arrow-weed (Pluchea sericea) patch in the western Hart Park Region was shown on a Google Earth map in the last Mimulus Memo, and polished willow (Salix laevigata) was frequent just east of Lake Ming. Common perennial herbs throughout the preserve were tarragon (Artemisia dracunculus), silver wormwood (A. douglasiana), and stinging nettle (Urtica dioica subsp. holosericea). In the swampy areas were tule (Schoenoplectus acutus var. occidentalis), various rush (Juncus spp.), and paniced bulrush (Scirpus microcarpus). Native grasses such as
annual beard grass (*Polypogon monspeliensis*) was often near the river margin, and away from the river was beardless wild rye (*Elymus triticoides*).

Among the nonnative woody species, tobacco bush (*Nicotiana glauca*) is common along the river edge in all sections. Localized thickets were observed for tree of heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*) in the Lake Ming section, Athel tamarisk (*Tamarix aphylla*) near the upstream limits of the preserve, and Mexican palo verde (*Parkinsonia aculeata*) near east boundary of Hart Park and northwest corner of Lake Ming. Another non-native tree, Mexican fan palm (*Washingtonia robusta*), occurs sporadically along the river. Among the rush species, we discovered a new invasive species to Kern County, *Juncus usitatus*, native to Australia, New Zealand and New Caledonia; otherwise, reported further north in the valley. A nonnative nettle, generally not recognized in our flora (e.g., *The Jepson Manual*; Moe, *Kern County Flora*), *Urtica dioica* ssp.

Comparison: *Washingtonia filifera* and *Washingtonia robusta*:
*Washingtonia filifera* —
Top Left — Palm Canyon in the San Jacinto Mts. south of Palm Springs, CA. Top Right — Mouth of Kern River Canyon, *Ephedra californica* in foreground. Observe pale (silvery) green color of leaves in both photos.

*Washingtonia robusta* —
Bottom Left: Palms along the Kern River Parkway Preserve, between Hart Park and CALM. Leaves green but not reflective. Right — Close view of green leaves persisting along the columnar shoot for a short distance, in contrast to *W. filifera* leaves radiating out from just the apical area of the stem.
flooding or clearing,” although elder alliances were not shown to occur in Kern County (A Manual of California Vegetation, Sawyer et al., 2009, CNPS). The Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle, a federally listed endangered and threatened species, lives exclusively on elders, but apparently not in Kern County. Indeed, in 2010, Bakersfield spent $350,000 or more “to transplant an elderberry shrub in the pathway of the Westside freeway to a shrub ranch in Northern California,” only to later find out there was no proof of the bug’s existence (LOIS HENRY: Oops, wrong beetle! May we get a refund? Bakersfield.com ², Sep 14, 2014, Sep 28, 2016).

Additionally, I suggest there is more than one elder species in elder-willow alliances. At Pyles Camp parking, Bill Cooper and I counted leaflets on elders ranging from 3 to 9 that included even-numbers of leaflets per leaf. Elder leaves generally have 5 or 7 leaflets throughout the preserve, 5 among willow alliances and elder savannas, or 7 in understory of patchy forests. The localized variation near Pyles Camp parking would seem to be evidence of hybridization involving more than one species.

In the Hart Park section Bill Cooper noted that valley oak (Quercus lobata), Douglas oak (Q. douglasii), interior live oak (Q. wislizenii), Hind’s walnut (Juglans hindsi), and Oregon ash (Fraxinus latifolia) were planted 20 or more years ago along an irrigation line that needed repair. Hind’s walnut and interior live oak are suspected to have since spread closer to the river, while the occurrence of Oregon ash along the river is natural.

II-The BC Herbarium

List of the Bakersfield College Herbarium Plant Species ¹ by family / genus / species and number of specimens for each species. This list, 27 pages, accounts for 4,019 herbarium specimens classified by family (108)/ genus (487)/ species (1,199), and the number of specimens for each species. The classification follows The Jepson Manual (1st ed.). I scanned the list as a pdf document and placed it on our chapter website under “Checklists”. The herbarium list was reportedly last updated January 1997, while the date of January 1996 is indicated on the first page.

III-Adobe House Project Meeting, July 24

I had earlier attended a meeting in place of Don Turkal. Three of our chapter members attended July 24, myself, Diane Mitchell and Suzanne Weller. Diane and I each introduced ourselves. My introduction included our chapter’s contribution to a preliminary checklist of plants we completed along the Kern River Parkway Preserve.

In previous chapter e-mail discussions on our chapter’s involvement in the Adobe House Project, it was not clear as to how we might contribute to exhibits, or what the relationship of restoring the Adobe House was to a proposed native garden. In review of the documents handed out at the Adobe House meetings, the Adobe House is stated to be a nature center that will be open four days a week “where visitors can take a self-guided walking tour and learn about local indigenous flora and fauna.” However, both Don and I have independently questioned exhibiting plants from other California ecoregions that, with few exceptions, do not occur naturally along the Kern River Parkway Preserve.

The exhibits are proposed to be “about the natural history of the Kern River Parkway, from its origins as inland seas to its present day form.” “The purpose...is to increase understanding of the geological, biological and cultural history of the region with focus on the Kern River Parkway alignment from I-5 at the west end to the east end near the Kern Canyon portal.”

Visitors besides those that normally visit Hart Park would include tours for elementary school children. Members of our chapter who wish to contribute exhibits should keep in mind that space is limited and that exhibits will be rotating. ✯

² https://www.bakersfield.com/columnists/lois_henry/lois-henry-oops-wrong-beetle-may-we-get-a-refund/article_390e6e1b-7a67-5db4-9e24-3bdaee982722.html
Chapter ZOOM Meetings

upcoming TOPICS

October 21, 2021 — 4 pm
Presenter: Brooke Stutz,
Staff Biologist, Padre Associates
Topic: Harry Potter’s Muggle’s Guide to Native Plants

REGISTER for these events:
E-mail Paul Gipe (pgipe@igc.org)

Security Notes:
1. Please arrive early. Late arrivals admitted at discretion of host.
2. Use your real name, NOT a screen name, alias or name of your device.
3. Do NOT share the link to meeting with anyone.

Dear Rich, Monica, Dinah, Paul, and CNPS Kern Chapter,

Thank you for your $300 donation to Calflora received on August 27, 2021 providing a portion of the match for our Fall Fundraiser. As a non-profit organization, we rely on CNPS Chapter support to maintain the Calflora database as an unparalleled community resource.

With your Chapter's help, Calflora continues to provide the most accessible and up-to-date information for over 10,000 California wild plants. Whether you use Calflora to find what's blooming on your favorite hiking trail, check scientific name spelling, or crosswalk old and new plant names, Calflora is here for you.

Thank you for being there for Calflora.

Sincerely,

Cynthia

Cynthia Powell, Executive Director
https://www.calflora.org

Thank You to:

... Christina Varnava, of California Botanical Gardens, for showing us the beauty and variety of the flora of the Sespe Watershed.

... Ryan O’Dell, from the BLM Central Coast Field Office for sharing the oft-overlooked flora of the San Joaquin Desert.
Inside this Issue:

WOW MOMENTS

PLANTS OF THE KERN RIVER PARKWAY PRESERVE

THE BAKERSFIELD COLLEGE HERBARIUM

The Kern Chapter of the California Native Plant Society meets the third Thursday of each month at:
Kern County Superintendent of Schools
City Centre, Room 1A or 1B
1300 17th Street, Bakersfield, CA.
Chapter website:

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