President’s Message:
Utah juniper (Juniperus osteosperma) in Kern County
by Rich Spjut

California and Utah junipers are distinguished more by their geography than by their morphology. Only the California juniper is currently recognized in Kern County (in addition to Sierra juniper) by the Jepson Manual and the Kern County Flora; however, I occasionally see junipers that fit the key characters for Utah juniper, while it may be noted that the Consortium of California Herbaria cites records of Utah juniper having been collected just west of Walker Pass and two miles south of Kernville. Most of my observations of the Utah juniper in Kern County are along the Old Kern Canyon Road, Erskine Creek, an OHV area south of Kernville off the east side of Lake Isabella near Kernville, and in Kernville.

The authors for the Jepson Manual treatment of junipers, Robert P. Adams and Jim A. Bartel, distinguish California juniper as having several trunks, an obvious leaf gland (near mid-leaf), and by the pollen and seed cones developing on separate plants (dioecious), in contrast to the Utah juniper having a single trunk, an obscure leaf gland, and pollen and seed cones on the same plant (monoecious). From my field observations of junipers in California, Nevada, Utah, and elsewhere, the Utah juniper often has multiple trunks, the leaf glands are not always conspicuous on Kern junipers, and the plant’s sex habit is probably the most reliable character, 98.1% dioecious for the California juniper according to Adams (Phytologia 90: 265, 2008), compared to 10% for the Utah juniper.

The best time to sex the junipers in Kern County is early February, when pollen cones reach full development before falling — after shedding pollen, while seed cones still remain from the previous season. Although monoecious and dioecious may be strictly defined by whether both sexes can be found on the same or different plants, there is considerable variation in percentage of pollen and seed cones on monoecious individuals. In February 2012, I surveyed three populations of Utah juniper in Lovell Canyon in the Spring Mts. of Nevada, an area where only Utah juniper supposedly occurs. Within each population, limited to 10 trees selected as encountered, about 50% were predominantly one sex or the other, but none of the trees were entirely unisexual. Of thousands of cones present on an individual male tree, for example, I estimate 99.9% were pollen cones; but it seems that I could always find a branch with both sexes. The 99.9% was also the case for female trees. While statically a tree may appear mostly male or female, all it takes is one male
cone and one female cone to make a baby juniper! So it would seem that for all practical purposes, the Nevada populations were monoecious.

I have placed on calflora.org other images of Utah juniper taken along Old Kern Canyon Road.

Thank you to:

... Ann Howald, for her enjoyable presentation on the flora and beauty of Mono County
... Camdilla Wirth, for her informative presentation on the Sequoia Riverlands Trust
... Nick Jensen, for updating us on CNPS conservation issues and projects at the May meeting.
... Monica Tudor and Dorie Giragosian, for selecting plants and traveling many miles to pick up, deliver and organize plants for the the 2019 Bakersfield College GardenFest Plant Sale.
... Clyde Golden and Rich Spjut, for collecting, identifying, labeling and displaying many many plants for the wildflower exhibit at the GardenFest and for Rich’s presentation on surprising similarities between Kern and Patagonia vegetation.
... Patty Gradek, for the hours she spent putting together the annual report.
... Dorie Giragosian, who, with help from Lucy Clark, Gurleen Kaur and Fred Chynoweth, represented us well at the Wind Wolves Spring Nature Festival.
... Vonnie and Don Turkal, for imagining and creating a CNPS display table for CALM’s (California Living Museum) birthday, May 18 — building, decorating, creating flower displays and manning it by themselves with help from Brooke Stutz, Lucy Clark and Ellen Cypher.
... Monica Tudor, who coordinates food and to all the folks who bring edible treats to our meetings.

Garden Notes:
Traditional Yard Goes “Native”
by Monica Tudor

LITTLE BY LITTLE, HOME OWNERS AND BUSINESSES are discovering the benefits of drought-tolerant native gardens. Here’s my story of how we changed our front yard to a beautiful low-maintenance, drought-tolerant, native garden, and are loving it.

I’ve wanted to ditch my lawn in favor of a native garden for several years, but had to get my husband, Ed, on board before embarking on such a dramatic change.

We already had a nice “California garden” in the back 50 feet of our yard, but otherwise our house looked like any other typical suburban home. The front yard was grass with flowerbeds along the edges, a few purple plum trees and some rose bushes. When we moved in we actually would put in seasonal annuals twice a year. And it looked wonderful! But after a few years of that, we decided to put in plants requiring less maintenance (and that were less expensive). So we put lantana in the flowerbeds and set up a border of river cobbles along the house and around the trees. That looked great for a while, too. But we still had lots of maintenance: trimming the lantana, pruning the roses and the purple plum trees, putting in rye grass, mowing...you get the picture.

Periodically, I’d suggest converting the front yard, but my husband liked the traditional look. A few years ago during a visit to Palm Springs, he noticed the desert landscaping and started to appreciate its esthetics and water-saving aspect.

Then last year our Kern Chapter of the California Native Plant Society had a garden tour and I convinced Ed to go with me. Even though our back yard was the first stop on the tour, it turned out that he was impressed with the front yards he saw that day. So, the next time we talked about our front yard, he said we could go “native”!