Upcoming Field Trips

**August 9 – Budd Lake**: Leader – Peggy Moore. Hiking Level: Difficult because of elevation starting at over 8500 ft then going to about 10000 ft. Our date has now been decided by Peggy and is firm. Plan on meeting in Yosemite NP at 9:30 AM at the Cathedral Lakes trailhead (roadside parking) toward the west end of Tuolumne Meadows. We should discover some really interesting plants along the way to the lake. **A reminder that rain will cancel this field trip.** Bring lunch/snacks and plenty of water. Remember that the group size is limited to 8 on this cross-country hike, so please contact Peggy Moore for reservations to sign up and any more info at 209-966-5728 or pemooore4@gmail.com.

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**Bob Brown, Field Trip Coordinator**

**September 20 – MiWok Grove Pacific Yew**: Leader – Margaret Willits. Hiking Level: Moderate – short distances, but some steep slopes and a creek crossing. Meet at 9:00 AM at the Junction Shopping Center in Sonora at the back of the parking lot between the McDonalds and Kohl’s. I welcome suggestions of where else to go in addition to the yews. For more info, contact Margaret at mwwillits@gmail.com.

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**Jennie Haas**, Field Trip Coordinator

**START PLANNING YOUR DROUGHT TOLERANT GARDEN**

As we go through this year of drought, many of you are thinking about using more drought tolerant plants in your garden. Here at CNPS, we have the perfect answer – California Native Plants. This summer is the perfect time to start planning how you can incorporate drought tolerant natives into your garden. Then, in the fall, you can bring your list to our plant sale. We will have many different species of shrubs and perennials that need minimal water, once established, during our hot summers. At the sale, there are always many knowledgeable people to answer your questions and help you choose the appropriate e-Shooting Star mailing list, plant for your location.

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Check in often for updates to our website: [www.sierrafoothillscnps.org](http://www.sierrafoothillscnps.org)
What's Blooming This Month

In wet meadows and wet shady areas at this time of year, at elevations between about 5,000 and 10,000 feet, you're likely to encounter a beautiful trio of brightly colored flowers that make the meadows particularly delightful. The trio in question consists of the brilliant orange Sierra Tiger Lily (Lilium parvum), the royal blue-violet Monkshood (Aconitum columbianum), and the bright yellow Arrow-leaved Ragwort (Senecio triangularis).

Sierra Tiger Lilies have beautiful orange flowers with yellow splotches. The flowers face outward or sometimes upward. Their tepals (three sepals and three petals that look alike) flare out in trumpet fashion. The Tiger Lily has a larger relative, the Leopard Lily (Lilium pardalinum) that grows at lower elevations, mostly below 5,500 feet in our area. The flowers are easily twice as large as those of the Tiger Lily, and they face downward. The tepals curve backward, with the tips almost touching. Tiger Lilies grow along streams and in other wet places. During June and early July, they're usually in full bloom in a stretch of drainage along the road to Hetch Hetchy.

Monkshood got its name from its upper sepal, which resembles the hood of robes worn by medieval monks. The plants are so poisonous that in areas of Alaska a single native whale hunter would go out in a kayak with spears prepared with Monkshood. After a whale was speared, it became paralyzed and drowned. Other indigenous people have used arrows tipped with Monkshood to kill prey and to kill their enemies in warfare.

Arrow-leaved Ragwort is impressively tall (up to 5 feet), has triangular or arrow-shaped leaves, and grows in wet places. The species is common throughout the western states, north through western Canada, and into Alaska. Although the plant contains a number of dangerous alkaloids, the Cheyenne Indians used parts of the plant to make a medicinal tea that relieved chest pain and acted as a sedative.

--- Barry Breckling

Calaveras Big Trees State Park Field Trip Report

Seven wildflower aficionados gathered at Big Trees in the morning of June 1st. We did not know what to expect after the long dry winter followed by two storms, the one a month ago left five inches of snow! We started out in the cool of the shady North Grove and finished at the warmer, south facing Scenic Overlook area. Some wildflowers had come and gone and some had not yet come, particularly those of the meadow.

Highlights included more Hartweg’s Iris (Iris hartwegii), blooming than in recent years, lots of Star Flower (Trientalis borealis ssp. latifolia), and Wood Strawberry (Fragaria vesca), in open areas. A few Purple Trillium (Trillium angustifolium), Wild Ginger, (Asarum hartwegii), Red Baneberry, (Actaea rubra), False Solomon Seal (Maianthemum racemosum), and Thimbleberry (Rubus parviflorus), were found in the deep woods. Bleeding Heart (Dicentra formosa), Soap Plant (Chlorogalum pomeridianum) and Crimson Columbine were near the new Visitor Center.

Our other area of investigation was at the Scenic Overlook on the Parkway. Here we were pleasantly surprised to see the abundance of some species this dry season including the largest Pussy Paws (Cistanthe umbellata) I have ever seen. Dried out were the Red Sierra Onion, (Allium obtusum) and Lesser Star Tulip (Calochortus minimum) which were so abundant a month ago. Other wildflowers still in bloom here included Gay Penstemon (Penstemon laetus), Harlequin Lupine (Lupinus stitversii), and Wholly Sunflower (Eriophyllum lanatum). Deer Brush (Ceanothus integerrimus) was abundant along the Parkway and the Western Azalea was just starting to flower at the Beaver Creek picnic area.

--- Steve Stocking, Education Chair and Field Trip Leader
Thistles - Another View

Thistles are one of my favorite weeds to complain about. Many are invasive exotic pests. They displace native plants, consume valuable water resources, and have colonized millions of acres of agricultural land and natural habitat throughout California. Moreover, most have nasty spines that can impale humans and other animals. Some thistles (e.g., yellow star thistle and Russian knapweed) contain neurotoxic chemicals that can severely poison horses. These poisons build up in the body over time when horses routinely graze on the thistle plants.

For the above reasons, land managers spend millions of dollars and thousands of hours every year eradicating, or at least limiting the spread of thistle plants throughout California. However, thistles do have a few redeeming values. Their leaves provide food for a number of butterfly larvae, including American Painted Lady, Black Swallowtail, and Skipper. Goldfinches and other birds find thistle seeds quite tasty. And humans also find some thistles to be quite edible. The stems of Cirsium species may be eaten raw, steamed, or boiled, after stripping off the leaves and spines. Cooked Cirsium, served with butter, salt and pepper, is a delicious green vegetable. Another savory thistle is Cynara cardunculus (wild artichoke). Cynara is the naturally occurring form of the globe artichoke. Cynara produces edible stems and flower heads that may be cooked and eaten just like its domestic sibling.

While I will always be troubled by the negative impacts that thistles wreak on our natural environment, it lightens my heart to find something positive to say about these invasive weeds.

--Alan Leavitt, Invasive Exotics Chair

Traditional Uses of California Native Plants

Arctostaphylos is a large, diverse genus that can be found from coastal bluffs to mountain summits just below 10,000 feet. The different species are drought tolerant, and generally prefer full sun and well-drained, acid soils. They have leathery oblong to oval leaves, with a vertical alignment that minimizes exposure to the hot sun. The leaves have an alternative pattern and range in color from deep green to a pale grey green. Their flowers are white to pink urn-shaped bells. They produce green to red little fruits that appear like tiny apples, and account for their common name “manzanita”, or “little apple” in Spanish. Their smooth, reddish brown toned bark and graceful branching pattern adds to the distinct beauty of this plant.

Medicinally, arctostaphylos leaves, especially the species uva-ursi, has been used for problems of the urinary tract system. Cystitis, nephritis, urethritis have all been treated with it, as well as when a diuretic is needed. Also it has been used for heavy or painful menstruation. It is taken as a strong tea or tincture several times a day until symptoms resolve. Native Americans made a juice or lotion from the leaves to help treat skin sores, ulcers, or the rash from Poison Oak. The dense, hard wood was used for various tools and utensils such as spoons, scrapers, bowls, and digging sticks. The berries have been eaten raw, pulverized with water to make a drink, and ground into flour for cakes or mush. Bears and other critters are fond of these fruits, which accounts for the name: “arktos” in Greek means bear, as well as the Latin “ursus”, also meaning bear, in the species uva-ursi. Bears and humans alike have appreciated the charms and uses of this lovely plant over the years.

Sources:
Discover California Shrubs, Mary Ruth Casebeer
Medicinal Plants of the Mountain West, Michael Moore
The Way of Herbs, Michael Tierra

--Stefani Reichle
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