



The Shooting Star

SIERRA FOOTHILLS CHAPTER

CALIFORNIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

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Foothill Poppy



Poison Sanicle



Spring Vetch

*Photographer for March
Bob Brown*

APRIL PLANT SALE IN SAN ANDREAS

This April, the site of our sale will be at the newly landscaped Calaveras County Water District building in San Andreas. Judy Dean, CNPS Board Member, has designed the landscape with a combination of native and non-native plants. With this new location, we will be able to provide on site examples of landscaping with natives. As an added bonus to our plant sale, we will be offering tours of the newly landscaped garden during the plant sale.

As with all our plant sales, we are volunteer driven. No volunteers, no plant sale. And, we reward our volunteers; you get to select plants BEFORE the sale is open to the public. There are many different ways you can help. We need help setting up before the sale. During the sale, we need cashiers, tag pullers and knowledgeable people to answer questions.

Our sale is on Saturday, April 26th from 10 am to 1 pm. If you would like to volunteer or if you have any questions, please contact Stephanie Garcia at sjarcia@mlode.com, or Judy Dean at goldrushdean@yahoo.com

-- Stephanie Garcia, Plant Sale Co-Chair

Check out our new website:



www.sierrafoothillscnps.org

If you change your mailing or e-mail address, be sure to send a note to these people. This will keep your newsletter on time!

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California Native Plant Society
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Sacramento, CA 95816
www.cnps.org

Dedicated to the Preservation
of California Native Flora.

NATIVE PLANT GARDENING

Eight years ago, I purchased a snowberry plant during one of our native plant sales. I noticed today, that this plant has persisted with years of no maintenance (just a bit of water in the beginning), heavy snows, dry and barren winters, and constant influx of non-natives that require more of my time than this sturdy yet elegant native specimen. I do take time to notice and revel in its beauty, so maybe that is all it has required to survive in my home's landscape.

Native plants can adapt well to each year's precipitation offering and conserve their resources in times of drought—every year my snowberry bush maintains its soft, green leaves and tear resistant roots and stems.

Intensive care of native plants is typically not necessary. They already know how to grow in efficient form and don't need fertilizer, pesticides, and pruning. In other words, native plants are low maintenance.

Native plants are smart beings. I remember this when I see how adaptable they are to variable habitats. Native plants have adapted strategies to resist infestation from pests and diseases; thus, those critters will move elsewhere to a juicier target (i.e., rose bushes?). Finally, with native plants' subtle beauty, a soft landscape can be viewed and wildlife will descend upon the habitat created in your yard. These neighborhood habitats can provide a corridor to ecological communities which sustain our pollinators (bees, hummingbirds, butterflies, and insects). These corridors may even become the seasonal habitats these animals rely upon to conserve their energy, as drought conditions reduce the productivity in wild habitats for pollinators.

-- Quinn Young, Newsletter Editor

What's Blooming This Month?

What's Blooming?

Our location for this month will be the Natural Bridges trail just north about a mile from the Parrot's Ferry bridge. This is a nice easy grade and relatively short trail that has quite a variety of flowers over its length. I've chosen some blooms that are likely to be some of the earlier bloomers in this area. These photos were taken from the middle to the end of March in a fairly average rainfall year.

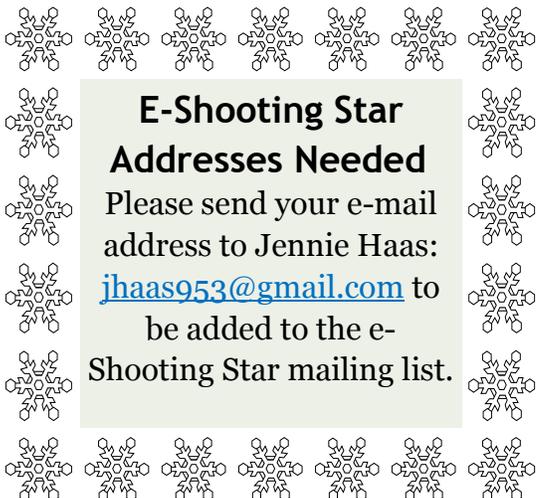


Foothill Poppy
Photo: Bob Brown

My first flower is the Foothill Poppy, (*Eschscholzia caespitosa*), a member of the Poppy family, Papaveraceae. It is a very common bloom in our area and a lot of people just think that it is more of its cousin, the California Poppy. The plant is typically smaller in size than the more widely seen relative. The second bloom is that of the Poison Sanicle, (*Sanicula bipinnata*), a member of the Carrot family, Apiaceae, and is found in many of our foothill grassland and woodland habitats. It has yellow flowers and is one of five of the *Sanicula* genus that are early bloomers within our area. Our last flower is that of Spring Vetch, (*Vicia sativa*), a member of the Pea family, Fabaceae, and in many of the lower elevations it is one of the first blooms that you will see in early spring or late winter. It is not a California native even though its pretty two colored blooms of light orchid and a darker purple are often found in areas with lots of native plants.

Once again I hope these pictures will encourage you at least to get out and explore the many native wildflowers in our area that bloom throughout the year in their many and varied habitats.

-- Bob Brown, Field Trip Coordinator



E-Shooting Star Addresses Needed

Please send your e-mail
address to Jennie Haas:

jhaas953@gmail.com to

be added to the e-
Shooting Star mailing list.

Field Trips

If you would like to be on our field trip alerts e-mail list, send an e-mail with the subject line "Field Trip e-mail List" to Jennie at jhaas953@gmail.com.

-- Bob Brown, Field Trip Coordinator

VERNAL POOLS WITH CATTLE OR ALMONDS

If you have traveled up Highway 4 between Farmington and Copperopolis in the last few years you may have noticed a zone of profound conflict. This low foothill area, above most irrigated agriculture and below the Foothill Woodlands is an area of rapidly disappearing vernal pools, grazing cattle, and greatly expanding acreage of almonds.

You may have heard that almonds are an excellent snack food and that they have been become a profitable export crop to areas such as China and India. Here in the low foothills of the Sierra Nevada are vast acres of gently rolling foothills which can be relatively easily converted from cattle grazing land to almonds and other nuts such as walnuts and pistachios. The acreage of these nut crops has been increasing rapidly in recent years. But there is conflict. This area is occupied by many of the remaining vernal pools. The loss of vernal pools in range land of California has been estimated to be at least 50% and possibly as much as 85%. There is little information available. A few vernal pool areas are protected in preserves but many of the largest pools are gone including one the size of a small lake which once existed east of Turlock. I have seen foothill acreage which included pools converted to orchards from Tulare County in the south to the Chico area in the north all on the east side of the Central Valley.

This land sells for such more as orchard land than for cattle grazing. The water is there, underground where it is being “mined” for irrigation. Few varieties of almonds have been developed which do well in these soil and water conditions. But well managed grazing land protects and can enhance the pools. Conversely the development of the land for orchards involves “deep ripping” of the soil to break up the shallow hardpan soil layer. This destroys the vernal pools forever.

This time of year you can still see some vernal pools ringed by white meadowfoam, *Limnanthes* sp. The disturbance by the cattle grazing helps to control invasive, weedy species. Other species, some endangered, occupy the pools. These include colorful species of *Downingia* and *Blenosperma*. Many species are endemic to the pools and some such as *Orcutt Grass* are vernal pool obligate species and grow nowhere else. Other species occur in the pools and in other grassland wetlands such as “swales” where the rain runoff flows slowly unlike in the pools where it sits above the hardpan.

There are also unusual animal species which occur in the pools such as Fairy Shrimp, Tadpole Shrimp, Red Legged Frogs, solitary bees and the California Tiger Salamander.

Many of the ranchers want to keep ranching and some are involved in efforts to protect the pools and their inhabitants. Studies sponsored by the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition are starting this year to assess rangeland management practices and their impacts on wetland, riparian, and upland habitat to improve rangeland, protect valuable habitat and ensure that rangeland remains productive in the future.

-- Steve Stocking, Education Chair



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