



# The Shooting Star

SIERRA FOOTHILLS CHAPTER

CALIFORNIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

APRIL 2020

## Botanizing Close to Home

When we held our field trip planning meeting on February 22, there were 15 known cases of COVID-19 in the U.S. When we mailed out the field Trip Schedule & Newsletter on March 12, there were 2,200 cases. As I type this – on April 14 – there are 589,048 cases and 25,163 deaths in the U.S. alone. The magnitude of the problem is staggering. Our field trips ground to a halt before they even got started.

My mind oscillated back and forth over whether it made sense to put out an April Newsletter. On even-numbered days, I thought we should do it. On odd-numbered days, I thought it was in bad taste. A few days ago, Don Kurtz, who had volunteered with his wife to lead the first two field trips to Peoria Flat and Red Hills, sent me an e-mail with a photograph of a wildflower growing close to their home. The same day, another friend sent me pictures of a very common flower in his yard that he had never noticed before. These e-mails lifted my spirits somewhat, so I decided to prepare this “shelter in place” edition of the Shooting Star Newsletter, with contributions from present and past field trip leaders.

Don & Nancy Kurtz lead off with several flowers blooming near their home in Copperopolis. Barry & Judy Breckling are up next, with some great information on our mascot, the Shooting Star. Peggy Moore shares Indian Warrior, one of her favorites from the Broomrape family. Lynn Robertson shares two: Baby Blue Eyes from the Borage family & Purple Sanicle from the Carrot family. David Campbell shares photos of poppies, lupines, and a rare endemic sunflower that are blooming close to his home in El Portal. Your editor shares Thymeleaf Speedwell – a petite flower in the Plantain family that he stumbled on at a park close to his home in Merced.

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If you would like to share a close-to-home wildflower in the next Newsletter, please send a brief description (and a photo if you have one) to the editor, Doug Krajnovich, [djcran@comcast.net](mailto:djcran@comcast.net).

Please include your home town, and indicate whether I can publish your full name or only first name and last initial.

## Field Trips canceled through June

While we've cancelled field trips at least through the end of June, and are unsure what the rest of the year will hold, we hope that everyone is experiencing some beautiful blooms wherever you happen to live. There is a chance that the field trips scheduled for July and August could still take place. It all depends on the success of containment efforts and the lifting of restrictions on travel and private/public gatherings. If there are changes to the field trip outlook between newsletters, they will be posted to the chapter website. The link appears in the bottom-right corner of every Newsletter.

The Sierra Foothills Membership Coordinator position is currently vacant. If you change your mailing or e-mail address, please inform the CNPS state organization in Sacramento so that the change(s) are recorded.

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*Dedicated to the Preservation of  
California Native Flora.*

## Don & Nancy Kurtz (Copperopolis)

“We live in Copperopolis at 1000' in a blue oak savannah eco system. There are a half dozen dominant wildflower species in most years. We had anticipated a very light bloom given the dry start to winter. TOP: We chose Popcorn flower (*Plagiobothrys sp.*) because there must be millions of individual popcorn flower people in our area – they won the vote just on sheer numbers. BOTTOM LEFT: We chose to highlight Plectritis (*Plectritis ciliosa*) as it is not common here – only one isolated population. BOTTOM RIGHT: Meadowfoam (*Limnanthes sp.*) is easily visible in local creek drainages, but you have to be up close to see the yellow portions of the flower structure. That yellow makes the large patches a cream color from a distance.” Photos © Don Kurtz.



### Barry & Judy Breckling (Greeley Hill)

“The Shooting Star, our chapter's mascot, is just starting to bloom in Greeley Hill in mid April. Some years, it blooms as early as February. The genus was *Dodecatheon*, which in Greek means ‘twelve gods’, because the flowers were said to be favored by the 12 Olympian gods. Not long ago, its genus was changed to *Primula*. Shooting Stars are found in North America and part of northeastern Siberia. They are also called mosquito bills, mad violets, and sailor caps. The petals open from the bud and fold all the way around until they are pointing backwards. They look like the ornamental plant called Cyclamen, to which they are related. They can grow thick enough to give a fine magenta color to hillsides. Bumblebees have a pollen-gathering method called ‘buzz pollination’ that they use on shooting stars. They hang from a flower and vibrate their flight muscles without moving their wings. The vibration shakes the pollen loose onto the legs of the bees. The pollen provides food for the bees and the bees pass the pollen on to the stigma of other plants. Bumblebees also use the wing-muscle-vibration to produce heat to warm their bodies so that they can fly on cold days, even on a bright, freezing February morning.”

Photo © Barry Breckling



### Peggy Moore (Mariposa)

“My husband and I have lived on our property near Mariposa for over 23 years. Early on, I discovered we were lucky enough to have Indian warriors (*Pedicularis densiflora*) growing under the live oaks above our home. Also known as warrior's plume, this hemiparasitic perennial plant begins flowering in February at our 2400 ft. foothill location. What is different this year is that the length of the flowering period has been extended by weeks due to the cool, wet weather we had for much of March. There are still many in flower 10 days into April. Although our plants seem most closely associated with interior live oaks, the species preferentially parasitizes plants in the heath family, such as manzanita. Therefore their roots may be reaching many feet away to nearby whiteleaf manzanitas for nutrients. I learned years ago from one of our members, Alison Colwell, just how far parasitic-plant roots of will travel for their pilfered nutrition.” Photo © Peggy Moore.

## Two from Lynn Robertson (Mariposa)

### Purple Sanicle

“While walking my local roads, I have been noticing many plants of Purple Sanicle (*Sanicula bipinnatifida*). This plant has been fascinating to me because it is usually yellow in the Sierra but purple elsewhere in the state. Most sanicles are yellow, including the *Sanicula bipinnata* I have seen in the same area.” TOP: yellow Purple Sanicle near my house. BOTTOM: purple Purple Sanicle from Fresno County. Photos © Lynn Robertson.



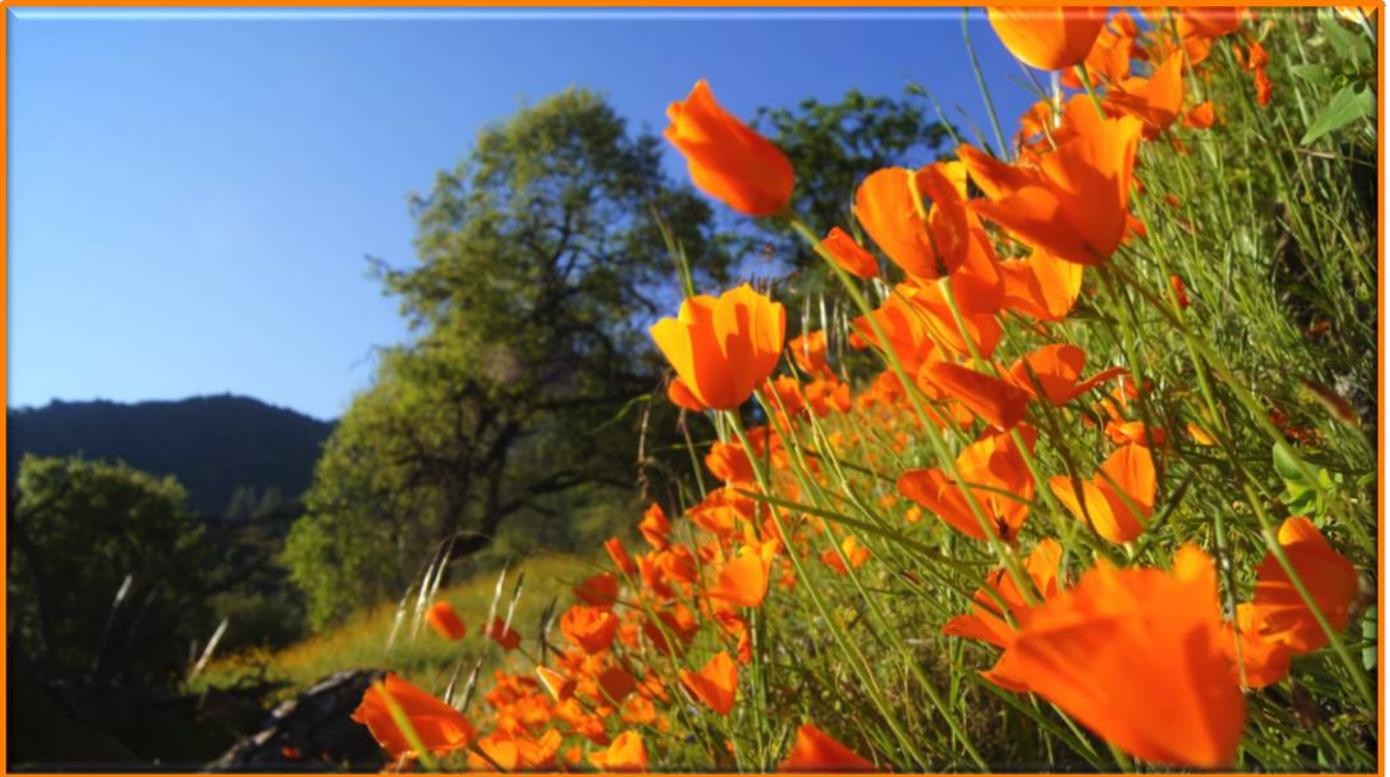
### Baby Blue Eyes

“Baby Blue Eyes (*Nemophila menziesii*) was described by botanist David Douglas as ‘a humble but lovely plant, **the harbinger of California spring**’ (cf. California's Frontier Naturalists, Beidleman). They were named for the blue color of Caucasian babies' eyes. In earlier times, they covered many of the hills and plains of our state. The delicate blue veins lead its pollinator bees to a rich nectar supply. It is cherished by gardeners here and in Europe. Their appearance each spring to my roadsides brings me big smiles. They are beautiful and charming, and tell me that wildflower season has begun.” Photo © Lynn Robertson.



## David Campbell (El Portal)

“Even with low rainfall, it's turned into a great year for spring wildflowers in the Merced River Canyon. Many of the hillsides are more orange than green this year with tufted poppy, *Eschscholzia caespitosa*, as illustrated in the top picture. The next picture shows two lupines hanging out together: White flowered (*Lupinus microcarpus*) and spider lupine (*Lupinus benthamii*). The last picture shows Congdon's woolly sunflower (*Eriophyllum congdonii*), one of our rare, endemic spring wildflowers, found only in Mariposa County.” Photos © David Campbell.



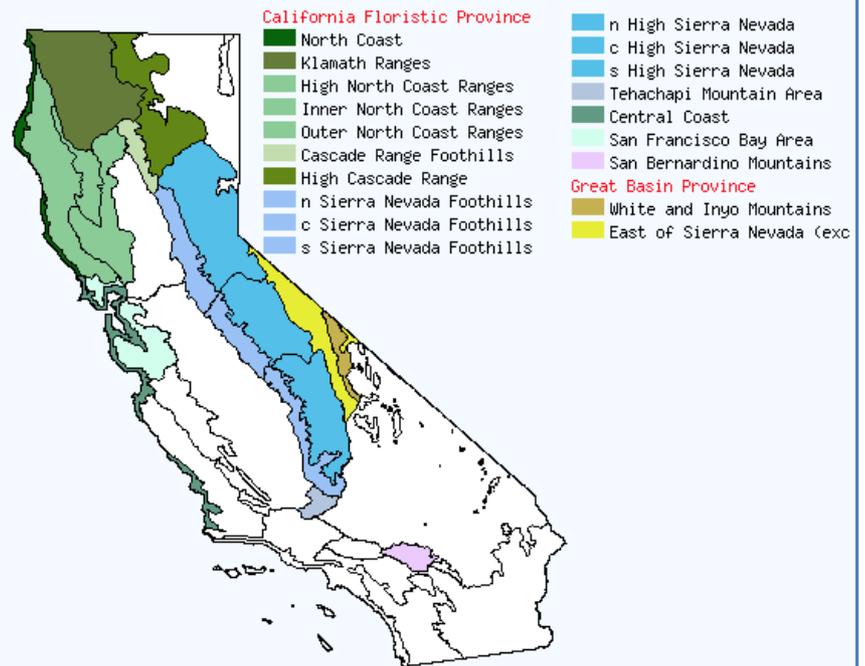
## Doug Krajnovich (Merced)

“First, our field trips got canceled. Then Yosemite closed down. Then Merced County issued stricter shelter-in-place orders. I quit thinking about going anywhere outside my home town. As a result, I found myself spending a lot more time in Lake Yosemite County Park, which is only a few miles from my house. I mainly go to this park to bird, but the park also has a wide assortment of native and non-native wildflowers. Most of them are small & short – because they have to survive a giant lawn mower that runs over them every week or two! I thought I knew all of the wildflowers in this park – the good, the bad, & the ugly. Last week I met a beautiful stranger. I stooped down to check a little white flower that I expected to be something routine like pocornflower or chickweed. Lo and behold, it was a species that I had never seen anywhere before: Thymeleaf Speedwell (*Veronica serpyllifolia* ssp. *humifusa*). According to Jepson, this plant *should not* be growing in Merced. In prior years, I have kept an eye out for this plant in our chapter area – where it is *supposed* to grow – and never found it. This year, when I am not looking for it, I find it in my hometown, where it is *not* supposed to grow. Most likely, it has been here every year around this time. I was simply too ‘busy’ to notice it. It took the lockdown to get me to pay attention to something right under my feet.”

Photo of hand-held sprig © D. Krajnovich. Range map © Jepson eFlora website.



Geographic subdivisions for *Veronica serpyllifolia* subsp. *humifusa*:  
NW, CaR, SN, CCo, SnFrB, SnBr, SNE



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