



# The Shooting Star

SIERRA FOOTHILLS CHAPTER

CALIFORNIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

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## *Taking time to look*

[Editor's note: In January 1939, Georgia O'Keeffe wrote a piece entitled *About Me* to accompany an exhibition of her oils and pastels in New York City. Here is an excerpt from that piece dealing with flowers.]

“A flower is relatively small. Everyone has many associations with a flower - the idea of flowers. You put out your hand to touch the flower - lean forward to smell it - maybe touch it with your lips almost without thinking - or give it to someone to please them. Still - in a way - nobody sees a flower - really - it is so small - we haven't time - and to see takes time like to have a friend takes time. If I could paint the flower exactly as I see it no one would see what I see because I would paint it small like the flower is small.

“So I said to myself - I'll paint what I see - what the flower is to me but I'll paint it big and they will be surprised into taking time to look at it - I will make even busy New Yorkers take time to see what I see of flowers.

“Well - I made you take time to look at what I saw and when you took time to really notice my flower you hung all your own associations with flowers on my flower and you write about my flower as if I think and see what you think and see of the flower - and I don't.”



Jimson Weed, 1936 by Georgia O'Keeffe



Red Poppy, 1927 by Georgia O'Keeffe

If you change your mailing or e-mail address, please inform Melissa Booher ([ellenbooher@gmail.com](mailto:ellenbooher@gmail.com)) and/or the CNPS state organization in Sacramento so that the change(s) get recorded.

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*Dedicated to the Preservation of  
California Native Flora.*

# Wildflower Progressions

D. Krajnovich

My favorite wildflower destinations in Mariposa and Tuolumne counties, outside of Yosemite National Park, are Hite Cove and Red Hills. Both places, for me, are a cross between classroom and cathedral. They sit low enough in elevation that snow and hard frosts are infrequent. Thus, even in November and December, you can usually find a few blooms if you look hard enough. As the accompanying chart shows, April and May are the “peak months” for species diversity at both locations. But if you only visit at peak, you will miss quite a few species that conclude their business earlier, or wait until later to open up shop. I try to visit both places every January, to welcome the first wildflowers of the New Year: Chaparral Currant and Manzanita at Red Hills; Western Rue Anemone and Waterfall Buttercups at Hite Cove. If you wait until May, these flowers will be long gone. Both places remain botanically interesting in the hot summer months – if you can take the heat. Some of the most interesting Red Hills species do not start to bloom until late May or June. I would venture to guess that many locals have never noticed the second most prolific wildflower at Red Hills: a white *Lessingia* (*nemaclada* and/or *virgata*) that peaks in August or September. (In my judgment, Buckbrush is #1.) In September, I doubt that you could find any place to stand in Red Hills without having *Lessingia* flowers within spitting distance. If *Lessingia* flowers were as big as poppies, the Bureau of Land Management might be inclined to re-name the place White Hills.

While preparing the attached chart, I reviewed all of the species that I have seen at both locations over the years. My list undoubtedly contains mistakes, but this is what I got:

# species common to both locations = 88

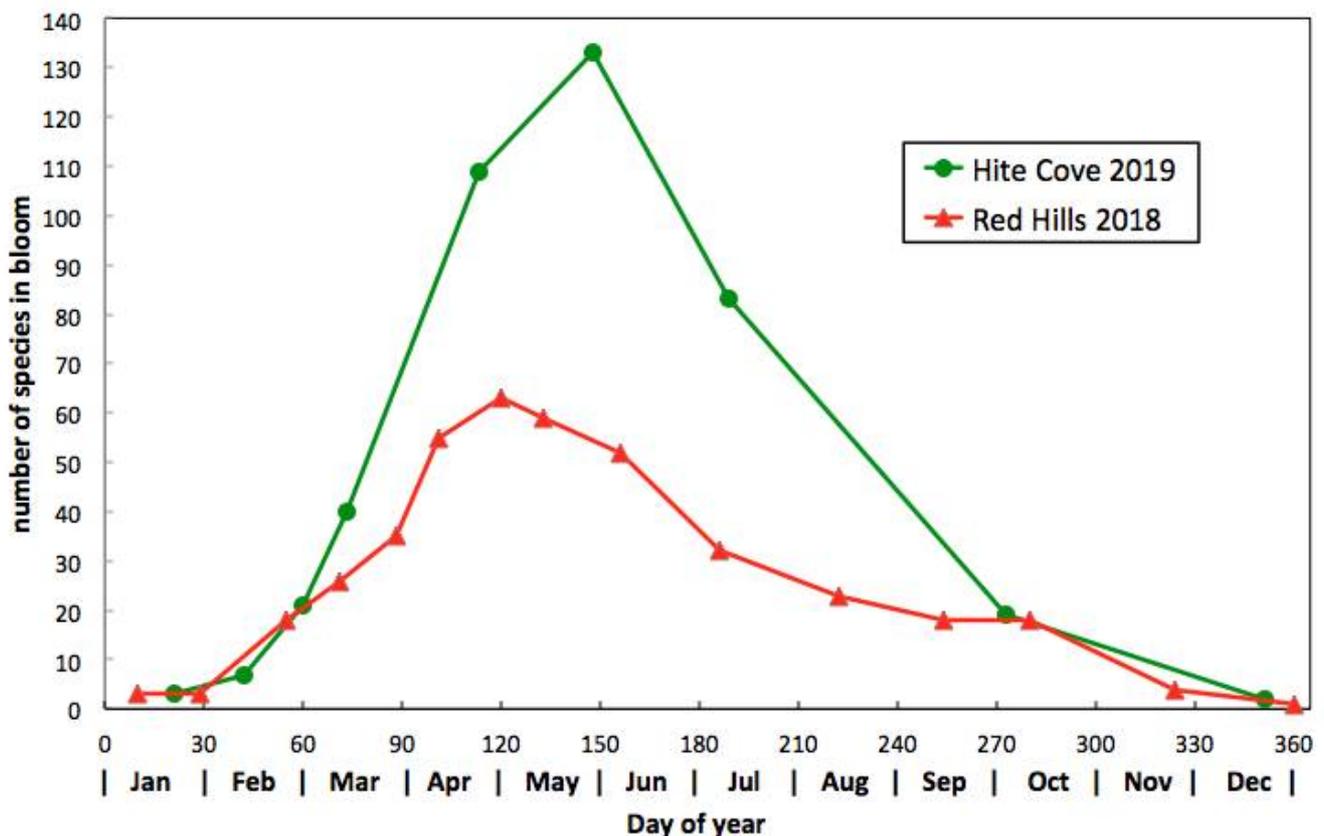
# species seen at Hite Cove but never at Red Hills = 170

# species seen at Red Hills but never at Hite Cove = 74

To catch the majority of species blooming at either location, you would need to visit at least four times (e.g., February, April, June, October).

My aversion to driving has prevented me from adopting similar classroom-cathedrals in Calaveras and Amador counties. I occasionally join a field trip in the northern half of our chapter area., but on such occasions I feel more like a tourist than a serious student. Wherever you live, I encourage you to pay close attention to your local flora all year round, or as weather permits. As Thoreau once noted in his Journal,

“The gardener with all his assiduity does not raise such a variety, nor so many successive crops on the same space, as Nature in the very roadside ditches.” (September 14, 1856)



## *Alaska Days with John Muir*

A Presbyterian missionary named S. Hall Young was one of John Muir's companions on two of his Alaska canoe expeditions into the area now known as Glacier Bay. (Stickeen, – the dog immortalized by Muir in an essay of the same name, – belonged to Rev. Young.) In 1915, Young published a memoir entitled "Alaska Days with John Muir." Young's book is an excellent addition and complement to Muir's "Travels in Alaska." I probably learned more about Muir's nature philosophy and work habits from "Alaska Days" than from Muir's own book. The following excerpt describes Muir's amatory approach to botany. – Editor

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"Three hours of steady work brought us suddenly beyond the timber-line, and the real joy of the day began. Nowhere else have I see anything approaching the luxuriance and variety of delicate blossoms shown by these high, mountain pastures of the North. 'You scarce could see the grass for flowers.' Everything that was marvelous in form, fair in color, or sweet in fragrance seemed to be represented there, from daisies and campanulas to Muir's favorite, the cassiope, with its exquisite little pink-white bells shaped like lilies-of-the-valley and its subtle perfume. Muir at once went wild when we reached this fairyland. From cluster to cluster of flowers he ran, falling on his knees, babbling in unknown tongues, prattling a curious mixture of scientific lingo and baby talk, worshiping his little blue-and-pink goddesses.

'Ah! my blue-eyed darling little did I think to see you here. How did you stray away from Shasta?'

'Well, well! Who'd 'a' thought that you'd have left that niche in the Merced mountains to come here!'

'And who might you be, now, with your wonder look? Is it possible that you can be (two Latin polysyllables)? You're lost, my dear; you belong in Tennessee.'

'Ah! I thought I'd find you, my homely little sweetheart,' and so on unceasingly.

"So absorbed was he in this amatory botany that he seemed to forget my existence. While I, as glad as he, tagged along, running up and down with him, asking now and then a question, learning something of plant life, but far more of that spiritual insight into Nature's lore which is granted only to those who love and woo her in her great outdoor palaces. But how I anathematized my short-sighted foolishness for having as a student at old Wooster shirked botany for the 'more important' studies of language and metaphysics. For here was a man whose natural science had a thorough technical basis, while the superstructure was built of 'lively stones,' and was itself a living temple of love!

"With all his boyish enthusiasm, Muir was a most painstaking student; and any unsolved question lay upon his mind like a personal grievance until it was settled to his full understanding. One plant after another, with its sand-covered roots, went into his pockets, his handkerchief and the 'full' of his shirt, until he was bulging and sprouting all over, and could carry no more. He was taking them to the boat to analyze and compare at leisure. Then he began to requisition my receptacles. I stood it while he stuffed my pockets, but rebelled when he tried to poke the prickly, scratchy things inside my shirt. I had not yet attained that sublime indifference to physical comfort, that Nirvana of passivity, that Muir had found."

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