



The Shooting Star

SIERRA FOOTHILLS CHAPTER

CALIFORNIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

NOVEMBER 2020

*** * * December Meeting * * ***

Cynthia Powell, Calflora's Executive Director, has agreed to host a Zoom meeting for our chapter on Thursday, December 3 at 6 p.m. For details, see Cynthia's standalone PDF file that accompanies this newsletter. If you are interested, mark your calendar or set an alarm on your phone or computer.

Late Bloomers

Q: How long is wildflower season in our chapter area?

A: The season begins earliest and lasts the longest at our lower foothill elevations: March, April, May are peak months. At intermediate elevations (e.g., Calaveras Big Trees, Hetch Hetchy, Yosemite Valley), the busiest months are May and June. Along the Sierra Crest (e.g., Carson Pass, Tioga Pass), the bloom window is narrower and timing depends on snowpack. The best sub-alpine and alpine displays can occur as early as the Fourth of July or as late as mid-August, but if your timing is off by a few weeks, you will miss out. Therefore, if you are willing to chase the flowers from low to high elevation, you can botanize blissfully in our chapter area for six or seven months out of every year (February to August).

Q: What about the rest of the year?

A: In this newsletter, we are going to focus on plants that wait until almost everything else has gone to seed to strut their stuff. We're not talking wilted, last gasp straggler blooms on plants that are way past prime. We're talking plants that are just getting rev'ed up in the heat of summer. Some of these plants retain beautiful flowers until the first hard frosts.

Don & Nancy Kurtz lead off with three late bloomers from their yard in Calaveras County. Peggy Moore shares four late bloomers from Mariposa County. Your editor chips in with a favorite late bloomer from Merced (slightly outside our chapter area). We conclude with comments from Barry Breckling on a familiar class of late season "flowers" that you won't find in Jepson.

On naming plants

"I have no objection to giving the names of some naturalists, men of flowers, to plants, if by their lives they have identified themselves with them... But it must be done very sparingly, or, rather, discriminatingly, and no man's name be used who has not been such a lover of flowers that the flowers themselves may be supposed thus to reciprocate his love."

– Thoreau's Journal, August 31, 1851

If you change your mailing or e-mail address, please inform Melissa Booher (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.*

Three “Late Bloomers” from Don & Nancy Kurtz (Copperopolis)

Photos © Don Kurtz

Hummingbird Sage – *Salvia spathacea*

We cut this plant back to the nubbins in early winter (elevation 1,000' foothills). The foliage returns quickly in spring/summer but the wait for the blooming stalk is excruciatingly long - finally coming in the height of summer. I imagine the plant structure storing energy before attempting to launch such profuse and lovely flowers. And yes, members of the local Anna's Hummingbird gang (13+ strong) do enjoy the nectar.



Desert Willow – *Chilopsis linearis*

I asked our landscaper for a plant that would cover our homely and hard-featured utility meters. The wispy 5 gallon pot she delivered passed thru the normal native growth phases (sleep, creep, leap) to become a 6' tall beauty that shapes easily and places its upper flowers at eye level so you are forced to admiringly look down the throat as you walk by.

Epilobium canum "Solidarity Pink"

100+ flowers on one plant, a surfeit of delicate beauty, stubborn to my suggestions to limit the display to one or - at most - two flowers as a means of focusing our attention.



Four “Late Bloomers” from Peggy Moore (Mariposa)

(See photos on next page)

Heermann’s tarweed (*Holocarpha heermannii*)

I’m familiar with most of the plants on my Mariposa property, but I set a new procrastination record for the years it has taken me to identify one of the most common ones. By late summer, the most colorful and abundant flower turns out to be Heermann’s tarweed. As scrappy as its appearance is from a distance, it is fascinating up close. Tarweeds get their common name from the scented, resin-like secretions emanating from the hairs on the leaves, bracts, and even flowers. This herbivore defense is responsible for the plant’s fragrance and sticky feel when touched.

Although native, tarweed is associated with disturbed areas, and, as a result, methods for reducing or controlling it are often sought by ranches or farms with grazing animals. I’m just grateful to have it establishing on cut banks and heavily mowed area in place of much more troublesome non-native invasive species like yellow star-thistle.

Sticky western rosinweed (*Calycadenia multiglandulosa*)

I was surprised by more than one late-flowering species in my neighborhood that I had not encountered before. One of them was sticky western rosinweed. Interestingly, the flowers of this species may be white, yellow or rose; I have only seen it with white flowers. The flower heads are in dense cyme-like clusters at each node and the central lobes of the ray flowers are much narrower than the lateral. The phyllaries and bracts below the heads have what are described as tack-like glands as well as long, white, marginal hairs. The similar soft western rosinweed (*C. mollis*) has these glands only on the comparatively wider bracts.

Glandular hareleaf (*Lagophylla glandulosa*)

I learned this species from a friend who took me out to see it in June after newly discovering it herself. It has 5 broad, sunshine-yellow ray flowers, but the central lobe of each is much narrower than the lateral lobes. Like some of the other late-flowering species in the sunflower family, its foliage is defended from herbivores by golden resinous glands on small stalks. It is more common in the foothills around the Sacramento Valley than on the slopes above the San Joaquin Valley, so I’m glad we get to include its cheerful yellow flowers among our late-blooming sunflowers.

Autumn willowweed (*Epilobium brachycarpum*)

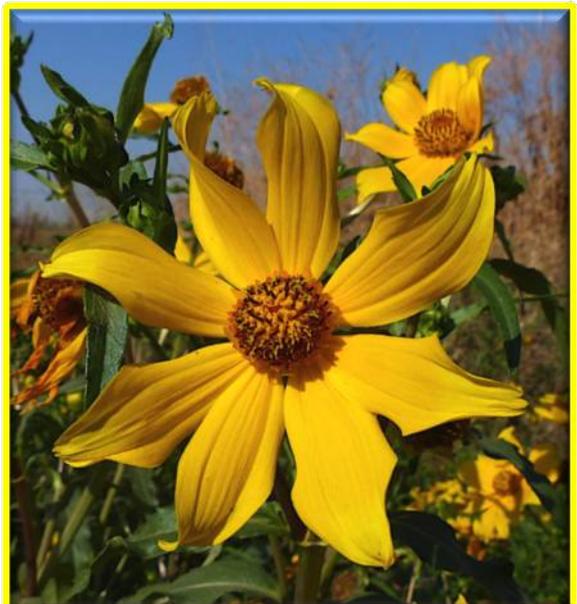
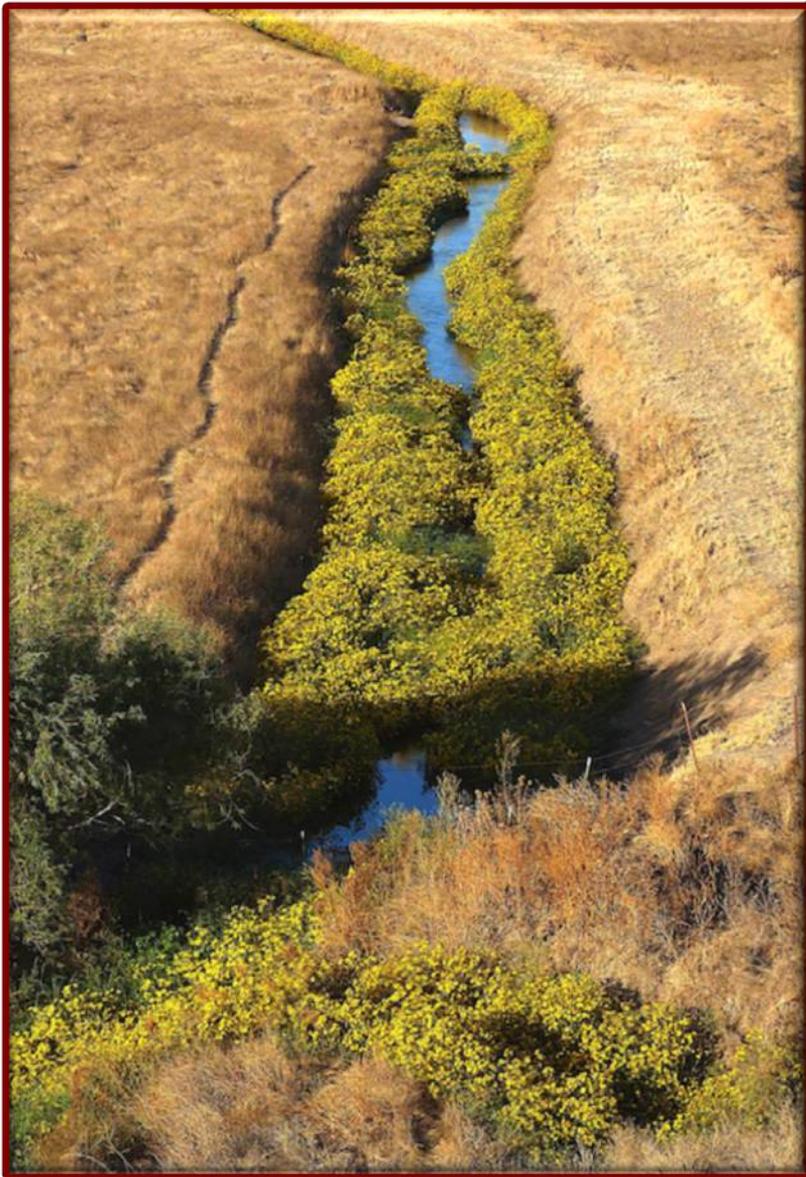
Whereas many late-flowering species begin blooming once most other wildflowers are past in early to late summer, autumn willowweed did not even begin to flower until the middle of September this year (normal range Jun-Sep). This astonishing plant not only flowers and sets fruit when the soil is driest, it has reached 5 feet in height this year (typical range is 0.5 – 6.5 feet). Long, plumose hairs on its seeds indicate autumn willowweed is wind-dispersed, so perhaps attaining such a height – unusual in most willowherbs – is a great advantage for dispersal and may be a trade-off for a slow rate of growth. We have only two other annual willowherbs in our region – California willowherb (*E. foliosum*) and minute willowherb (*E. minutum*) – and they both grow to less than 1.5 feet high.

Peggy Moore (cont'd.)



TOP ROW: Heermann's tarweed (*Holocarpha heermannii*).
BOTTON ROW: Sticky western rosinweed (*Calycadenia multiglandulosa*); Glandular hareleaf (*Lagophylla glandulosa*); Autumn willowweed (*Epilobium brachycarpum*).
Photos © Peggy Moore.

One from your editor



Bur Marigold (*Bidens laevis*)

In September of 2017, I drove to Illinois to attend a funeral. I did a little botanizing along the way, but mostly I was just driving. In my mother's hometown of East Moline, I saw a sunflower blooming along the Mississippi River that I didn't recognize. From the front, it resembled many other radiate sunflowers, but from the back, the twisted phyllaries gave it a special look. After I got home, I identified the plant as Bur Marigold, and I learned that the species is also native to California. Less than two weeks later, I identified the same plant at Lake Yosemite County Park in Merced. It blooms profusely starting around Labor Day, and keeps blooming until Halloween. It likes to keep its feet in the water, but the water doesn't have to come from the Mississippi River. Merced River water will do. (NOTE: Lake Yosemite is a man-made lake charged by the Merced River.) LEFT: Bur Marigolds thriving in an irrigation ditch fed by the lake. RIGHT: front & back details. Photos © D. Krajnovich.

Rain Flowers

“Not all ‘blooming’ flowers have petals, sepals, and seeds. Some have gills, or pores and spores. Now is the time to look for Rain Flowers, otherwise known as mushrooms. There are a lot of good books on mushrooms but for the serious mushroom hunter, David Arora's *Mushrooms Demystified* is the bible.”

– Barry Breckling

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