



THE PAINTBRUSH

MARCH — APRIL 2004 NEWSLETTER

SAN GABRIEL MOUNTAINS CHAPTER
CALIFORNIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

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DATES TO REMEMBER

Sun., Mar. 14, 9:00 am: *Eaton Canyon Plant Walk* with Eva Morgan

Thurs., March 25, 7:30 pm: *The Missing Middle: Threats and Opportunities in Conserving the Puente-Chino Hills Wildlife Corridor* by Claire Schlotterbeck

Sun., Apr. 11, 9:00 am: *Eaton Canyon Plant Walk* with a knowledgeable Chapter member

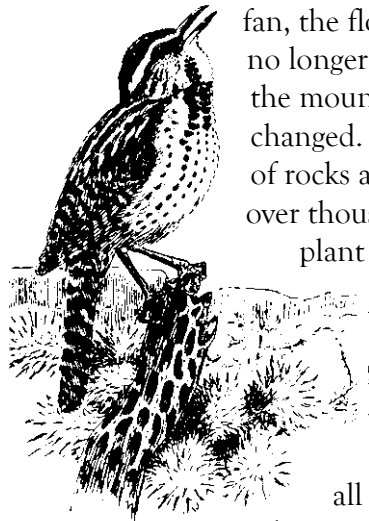
Thurs., April 22, 7:30 pm: *A Vascular Flora of the Owens Peak Eastern Watershed* by Naomi Fraga

Sat., April 24, 9:00 am: *Wildflower Tour of the San Gabriel Canyon Burn Areas, Second Year*

Where the Funny Plants Grow

By Gabi McLean; illustrations from *A Natural History of the Sonoran Desert*, Phillips and Comus, editors

A vast expanse between the mountains and the ocean starts where the San Gabriel River empties into the valley. With every winter storm, the old river used to heap more sand and gravel onto the huge alluvium of the Los Angeles basin. Today, the forces of the river are reined in upstream by Morris Dam and San Gabriel Dam. Just a trickle of water reaches the valley now. The alluvial fan, the flood plain, and the ocean's beaches are no longer naturally replenished with sand from the mountains. But the lay of the land hasn't changed. The sandy soil on top of ancient layers of rocks and gravel, washed out of the mountains over thousands of years, supports a curious mix of plant species. While most of this alluvial scrub has given way to development, there are a thousand acres of this now rare habitat still intact, just north of the Santa Fe Dam Recreational Area.



CACTUS WREN ON
CHOLLA CACTUS

Last fall when I visited the dry shrubs all looked alike at first glance. But soon I began to notice differences in the color and height of the stems, their growth pattern, the remnants of leaves and fruit. I came to recognize the bare straight stems of poison oak with its dry berries. Sagebrush formed a messy mass of thin, brittle branchlets, often with tiny, dried fruit along the tips—its ever-present fragrance helped me identify it. Scale broom made itself known by the long, parallel, dark brown branches, and the persistent dried flower remnants looked like stenciled flowers in a picture book. Sturdy redberry gave itself away by its thorn-like branchlets, sticking out at right angles. I recognized black sage with its black, dried-up flower clusters along the squared stems. Walnuts and elderberries had lost their leaves, and only their silhouette and shaggy old bark gave me the hints of their identity. Some of the most massive elderberry trees that I have ever found are here.

(Continued on page 3)

OPPORTUNITIES: Secretary, Membership, etc.

Years ago, in the fall of 1995 I answered Becky Rothenberg's humorous "personal" ad in this newsletter and began helping with its publication by arranging the calendar, writing book reviews and attending the "fold, sort and mail" parties. A year later I was in charge, having assumed the editorship. Then in 1999 with the arrival of Sharon Green's baby, I took on Membership duties as well.

It's time for other members to step forward now. The Board needs some new help these days. Steve Fischer, our excellent Secretary, has resigned for personal reasons [Thank you Steve, for a job very well done!]. Would someone be willing to take on this not very time-consuming job? It involves taking minutes at the quarterly Board meetings and distributing the minutes to Board members. The Secretary also writes thank you's to program presenters.

I would like to pass the Membership duties on to other hands. This task involves updating an Excel spreadsheet monthly using the e-mail reports sent from the CNPS State office. The up-to-date file is emailed to the newsletter editor for printing newsletter mailing labels four times a year. Training is available and I'll gladly answer any questions.

We could also use a few more members to lead the Sunday Plant Walks at Eaton Canyon.

Please contact President Lyn McAfee at 626-359-5278 or LynMcAfee@aol.com if you can help with these Chapter

2 responsibilities.

CHAPTER EVENTS

Meetings are held at Eaton Canyon Nature Center (map on back cover) on the fourth Thursday of the month. Informal plant identification and social time from 7:00 to 7:30 pm; programs start promptly at 7:30 pm.

PROGRAMS

Thurs., March 25, 7:30 pm: *The Missing Middle: Threats and Opportunities in Conserving the Puente-Chino Hills Wildlife Corridor* by Claire Schlotterbeck, Executive Director of Hills for Everyone. The Puente-Chino Hills stretch along Orange County's northern border with Los Angeles County. They form an undeveloped corridor allowing wildlife to wander from the north end of the Santa Ana Mountains to the Whittier Narrows and on to the San Gabriels and Santa Monicas. *Hills for Everyone* has long worked to preserve these rolling hills, which are now known as a "hot spot" of biodiversity. To date 4,000 acres have been saved on the west end and 13,000 acres on the east. But 6,000 acres in the center remain at risk, as does the \$200 million public agencies have spent so far to protect the land. Claire has been involved in preservation of the Puente-Chino Hills for over two decades and played a key role in the formation of Chino Hills State Park.

Thurs., April 22, 7:30 pm: *A Vascular Flora of the Owens Peak Eastern Watershed* by Naomi Fraga, PhD candidate at Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden.

A thorough understanding of a region's botany must begin with a basic flora. Owens Peak and its eastern watershed lie at the southern end of the Sierra Nevada within the Owens Peak Wilderness Area in Kern County, California. Owens Peak itself is the highest in the Southern Sierra rising to more than 2,600 meters (8400 ft). The location's floristic composition is unusual, possessing elements of the southern Sierra Nevada, the Great Basin, and Mojave Desert. This area has had little botanical exploration in the past, therefore a flora is of pivotal importance to catalogue the diversity of this unique location. Since 1984, two new taxa have been discovered within the confines of the study area, as well as range extensions for several rare endemic species.

OUTINGS

Sun., Mar. 14, 9:00 am: *Eaton Canyon Plant Walk* with Eva Morgan

Sun., Apr. 11, 9:00 am: *Eaton Canyon Plant Walk* with a knowledgeable Chapter member

Sat., April 24, 9:00 am: *Wildflower Tour of the San Gabriel Canyon Burn Areas, Second Year*. USFS ranger/naturalist, Steve Segreto, provides us with an opportunity to search for wildflowers in a burn area. Meet at the San Gabriel Canyon Environmental Education Center on Highway 39. Donation is \$5.00 per person. No Adventure Pass needed. Please RSVP to Steve at 626-335-1251, ext 225. Identify yourself as a member of CNPS-SGM. He will give priority to our members.

(Continued from page 1)

Not everything was dry though. I found a variety of colors in the evergreens: the ancient juniper, the ever-present lemonadeberry, the occasional white sage and sugar bush, the different species of prickly pear cactus, and the unique and much-treasured valley cholla.

When winter brings cold, snow and ice to the North and the near-by mountains, here in the valley spring begins. The new leaves of the golden currant were the first, announcing the change of the season. Then cactus pads and the sagebrush started greening up, and in just a few weeks, we enjoyed our first flowers. The golden currant started blooming in January, followed by lemonadeberry. Sunflowers, purple nightshade, and four-o'clock continued the bloom sequence. On Valentine's day, we discovered a few of the tiny but oh-so-beautiful and bright ground-pink. Black sage and the many elderberry trees started leafing out, and golden currant and lemonadeberry were still in bloom in mid-February, several weeks after they first started flowering.

Now I am looking forward to the special mix of wildflowers at the dam's natural area. I remember last year's gilias and canchalonga, gold cups and penstemon, western thistle, and the beautiful, salmon-colored prickly pear flowers. I remember the stunning profusion of dudleya flowers and scarlet larkspur in May and June when the phainopepla (pictured at right) visits from the desert and raises its second brood here.



And I remember my young neighbor as I asked if she knew about the natural area of Santa Fe Dam. She nodded emphatically, "You mean where the funny plants grow?" This area is full of surprises. Where else do you find junipers among the alluvial scrub, or valley cholla providing nesting places for the cactus wren? Where else do you find Whipple yucca's leafy rosette taller than a person, or golden currant 8-feet-high, thriving among the cactus in sunny, dry, sandy places, not in oak understory or woodland. No other place in the Los Angeles basin offers such richness of sage scrub habitat and wide-open space. Come and see for yourself what a great opportunity this area provides to enjoy and observe wildlife and wilderness so close to home and your heart.

There isn't much except the rains to mark the changing of the year in California. ... Rain makes the year, the lack of rain mars it, and the seasons depend upon it absolutely. If the rains are scanty, everything and everyone is worried and depressed. If, as sometimes actually does happen, they are plentiful, the whole state and all therein—except perhaps the winter tourist—rejoices.

—LESTER ROWNTREE

Flowering Shrubs of California and Their Value to the Gardener, 1947

Our usual February rains came a bit late this year but they arrived as I was putting the finishing touches on this newsletter. So my hopes have rebounded for a glorious spring full of wildflower bloom. Here are some suggestions for Spring outings.

Consider joining the April 24 field trip (details on page 2). Consult the Wildflower Hotline at www.theodorepayne.org for up-to-date sightings. Visit a local botanical garden (www.cnspsgm.org for list and links) to see what would look really wonderful in your native garden and make notes for your purchases at next fall's *Under the Oaks* Chapter fund raiser.



WELCOME! New members
Carolee Campbell
Daniel Geiger

Thank you to renewing members
Please consider renewing at a higher level. Your support of our native flora is much appreciated!

The Newsletter of the San Gabriel Mountains Chapter of the California Native Plant Society is published bi-monthly and is free to Chapter members. Non-member subscription is \$5.00.

To join the California Native Plant Society, write to CNPS, 2707 K St., Suite 1, Sacramento, CA 95816-5113.

Please specify San Gabriel Mountains Chapter. Enclose check payable to CNPS.

Membership categories: Individual/Library - \$35; Student/Retired/Limited Income - \$20; Family/Group - \$45; Supporting - \$75; Plant Lover - \$100; Patron - \$250; Bristlecone - \$1000.

Little Known Plants of
Eaton Canyon:
Streambank Springbeauty
By Jane Strong

Streambank springbeauty. What an evocative name! And a very descriptive one! It grows along the banks of streams and has minute, but lovely, white blossoms in the early spring. Two fused leaves clasp the stem beneath the flower stalks presenting a tiny bouquet that looks like it is wrapped in translucent green tissue paper.

I found it in the canyon near the West Bank Trail. There's a rusted wire fence dangling over a gully on the west side north of the junction with the Midwick Trail. I climbed under the fence and up the gully and came upon an emerald-green glade surrounded by coast live oak. These little treasures were at the base of a very old, very mossy terrace remnant along with chickweed and vulpia, the annual fescue grass.

Glistening drops of rain, larger than the flowers of the springbeauty, decorated the blades of grass.

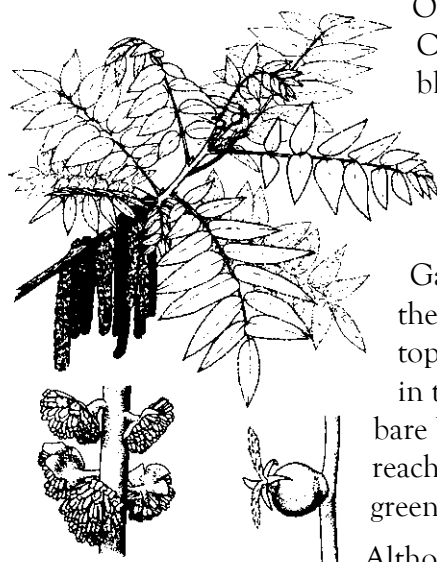
Its scientific name, *Claytonia parviflora* var. *parviflora*, means small-flowered plant named for John Clayton, a colonial American botanist. And small-flowered it is, each of the five white petals is no bigger than 2 mm.

It is in the same genus as the much better known miner's lettuce, *Claytonia perfoliata*. It differs from miner's lettuce in that the leaves at the base of the plant are very long and skinny, at least three times longer than wide, where the leaves at the base of miner's lettuce are delta-shaped.

PLANT PROFILE:

Juglans californica v. *californica*, California Black Walnut
Juglandaceae; Walnut Family

Text by Kathy LaShure, Illustration from Munz' A Flora of Southern California



Juglans californica
CALIFORNIA WALNUT
with flower & nut detail

On a recent early February hike in Chino Hills State Park, under brilliant blue cloudless skies, wearing shorts and t-shirt, I wondered "Can this really be winter?" Of course all I had to do was gaze northward to the snowy high country of the San Gabriel Mountains for my answer. Also, the North Ridge Trail, our route to the top of Gilman Peak (1685 ft, high point in the park), was lined with gray winter-bare branches of California Black Walnut reaching upward away from the writhing green tendrils of Wild Cucumber.

Although we saw many of these small multi-trunked trees on our hike, both on north-facing slopes and in the bottom of Telegraph Canyon, its range in Southern California is

constantly being eroded by new home development; so it is considered uncommon though not rare. However its close relative from Northern California, *J. californica* var. *hindsii* is rare (this variant has been used as a rootstock for the commercial growing of English walnuts). It occurs on slopes and in canyons up to 3000 feet throughout Southern California except the desert regions.

Hiking the same trail in late spring or summer, one would be glad to have the leafy shade provided by these trees, which can grow up to 50 feet high. Mature branches and trunks have dark gray to brown rough bark. The deciduous leaves are odd-pinnately compound, alternate, 6" to 12" long with oblong-lanceolate leaflets 1½" to 3" long. They are fragrant, somewhat citrusy. The male flowers appear as 2-5" catkins with profuse pollen, while the female flowers come as smaller catkins at the tips of new twigs. Both appear March-May. They are followed by small nuts encased in a hard shell and leathery husk that starts out bright green but ages to leathery brown. While tasty, they are very hard to shell and best left to our wild friends.

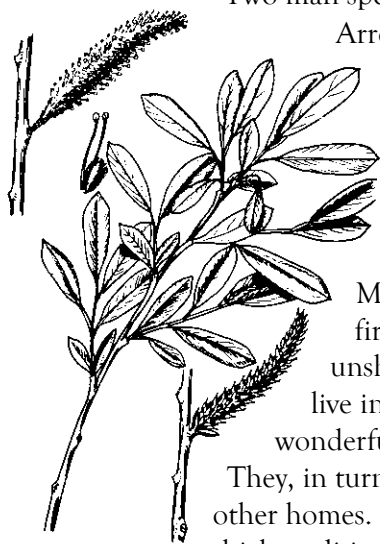
If you're planning a wildlife-friendly garden, California Black Walnut would make a fine small specimen tree, as long as it's planted where the nut husks won't stain concrete surfaces. As companion plants, you might consider any of the local *Ribes* species (*R. aureum*, *californicum*, *indecorum*, *malvaceum*, *viburnifolium*), snowberry, redberry, wild rose, coffee berry (particularly 'Eve Case'), or any cultivars of coral bells. You could create a charming mini-woodland with these plants.

The Tree that Binds the Village

Sashat "Willow"

By Mark F. Acuña, *Gabrieleno-Tongva*; Illustration from Munz' A Flora of Southern California

While *Wet*, the Oak, was the primary tree for food, *Sashat* the Willow, was the tree that was the foundation of village life. For from the Willow, the Tongva built their homes, arbors, the small family sweat houses and the great communal sweat lodges, fences, acorn granaries, cradleboards to hold their infants, seed beaters to gather the numerous tiny seeds for cakes and soups, and fish traps to ensnare the great steel head trout that spawned in the great rivers of *Tovangar*, the world. Without *Sashat* there would have been no villages and towns.



Two man species (Sandbar Willow, *Salix hindsiana*, and Arroyo Willow, *Salix lasiolepis*, pictured at left) were used. But where other species were found, they too were part of Tongva plant life. The myths tell us that the first willow and reed house was a gift from the giant *Nekish*. He wore a basket cap made of willow and reed which *Chehooit*, Earth Mother, had made for him. When he saw the first humans, he pitied them in their cold unsheltered nakedness and gave them his cap to live in. Since he was a giant, his cap made a wonderful large home for the first ancient ones. They, in turn, used his cap as a model for the building of other homes. Birds and squirrels ate open the first door which traditionally faced east to greet the rising sun.

But *Sashat* offered more than shelter. Willows contain salicin a substance from which aspirin is derived; thus, *Sashat* became one of the great medicinal plants. Every family availed itself of the great pharmacy which *Nekish* and *Chehooit* had provided. The roots were made into a decoction for diarrhea and fever, and a thick tea was made to produce vomiting to purge the body of "infected blood". The leaves and flowers were made into a mild tea for colds and to soothe sore throats, to alleviate general aches and pains, and to reduce mild fevers.

Leaves, combined with bark, twigs, and roots, were turned into a tea, dried and pounded into powders for washes and poultices for swellings, fevers, infections, and bleeding. Smashed leaves were used in a wash for sore eyes. The bark was made into a poultice for skin eruptions. *Sashat* tea was prescribed for headaches and the bark was chewed for toothaches.

The leaves were also dried and used by the elders as a simple tobacco. The elders always warned that the tea made from roots alone was often fatal.

Willows are large riparian trees and blossom from March to May. *Salix hindsiana* can be found along ditches and sandbars below 3000 ft. *Salix lasiolepis* is common along streams below 7000 ft. Occasionally Willows can even be found in the desert where they provide a clue that water is below the surface.

NATIVE BOOKSHELF

Important Bird areas of California by Daniel S. Cooper, 2004, Audubon California, Pasadena, 286 pp. \$19.95

Reviewed by Mickey Long

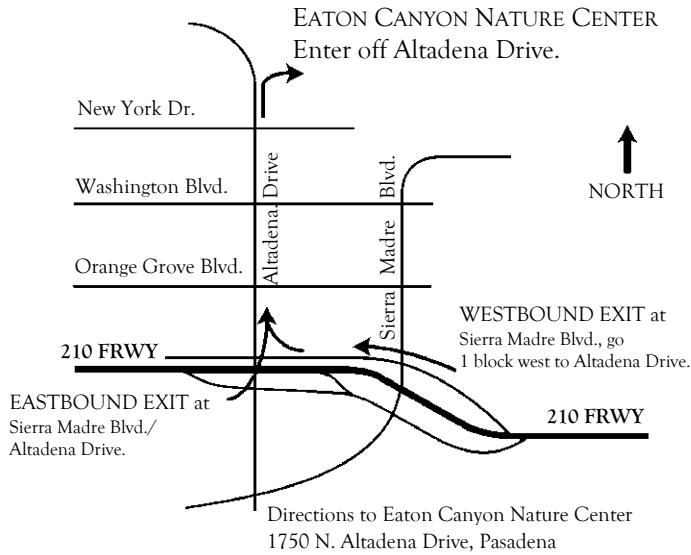
Why review a bird book in a plant Newsletter? This new work summarizes at least two full years of research by Dan Cooper and additional background work by his predecessors. It is a geographic unit of a world-wide effort by *BirdLife International* to identify and protect global sites critical to birds. The book is well-researched and heavily referenced, covering approximately 150 areas throughout the State. Each site gets a one-to-three page treatment briefly describing the habitats, the birds found, including interesting numbers for populations of Rare, Endangered and Threatened species the site supports, and the relevant Conservation issues.

Closest to our Chapter's area would be the Los Angeles Flood Control Basin (discussing Whittier Narrows, Rio Hondo, Santa Fe Dam, Hansen and Van Norman Dams) the Lower Los Angeles River, and Puente-Chino Hills. All of the bird areas outlined in this book are habitat-based, that is to say the only places left in California that support high diversity of bird species or high bird concentrations are places with plants for food, shelter, migration stopover sites and nesting sites. These are great places to visit and important places to support.

The Eaton Canyon Nature Center gift shop is stocking the book. Come in and browse!

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Dedicated to the Preservation of the California Native Flora

The California Native Plant Society is a statewide nonprofit organization of amateurs & professionals with a common interest in California's native plants. The mission of the Society is to increase understanding & appreciation of California's native plants & to conserve them and their natural habitats, through education, science, horticulture & advocacy. Membership is open to all.

Membership includes the quarterly journal Fremontia, the quarterly Bulletin which gives statewide news & announcements of Society activities & conservation issues, & the chapter newsletter.



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