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# Obispoensis

Newsletter of the San Luis Obispo Chapter of the California Native Plant Society

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May-June 2017

# The Sargent Cypress Botanical Reserve: A Hammock Forest

WOODY FREY, Professor emeritus, OH Department, CalPoly, San Luis Obispo

(This article was first published in Pacific Horticulture and is reprinted here with permission)

Six miles north of San Luis Obispo, California, up a winding road off Highway 101 at an altitude of about 2,500 feet is what the locals call Cuesta Ridge. Here is found a remarkable grove of trees some 700 acres of *Cupressus sargentii*. The area, which is known as the Sargent Cypress Forest, was first mentioned in the 1900s by a U.S. Geological Survey team. Charles Sprague Sargent included the tree in the description of *Cupressus goveniana* in his *Silva North America* (1896). Willis Lynn Jepson named *C. sargentii* in honor of Sargent, author of the monumental *Silva* and first director of the Arnold Arboretum. Sargent cypress forests form plant communities found only in California on serpentine soil atop fog-shrouded mountains from Zaca Peak in Santa Barbara County to Red Mountain in Mendocino County. The forest on Cuesta Ridge, in the Santa Lucia Mountains of San Luis Obispo County, is the only undeveloped site that can be easily visited. A paved road was built along the ridge and through the forest as part of a firebreak system in the late 1960s. Sargent cypress trees in this area grow close together and forty to fifty feet in height. Their lower branches fall and the trunks become bare with fibrous, rough, dark reddish or grayish brown to almost black bark. Many trees, especially along the road, have had additional branches removed as part of the early firebreak activities. Looking through the forest of older trees and seeing these pole-like trunks one may imagine that they have been conveniently placed to support a thousand hammocks. Sargent cypress forms a fire-dependent closed cone coniferous plant community. The cones, which remain on the trees for many years, need heat to open and to treat the seeds for germination. Since there has not been a significant fire in the area since the late 1930s, there are few seedlings. Sites of many old fires, however, are evident from the even-aged stands of reseeded trees that give the scene an undulating checker board pattern. (*Obispoensis editor's note... since this article was published, the Highway 41 fire swept unevenly through the forest and hundred of trees sprouted in the ashes*). Many of the trees appearing to be seedlings are in fact stunted due to poor soil and harsh growing conditions on the exposed ridge. Pygmy forests of stunted trees can be seen in some areas. The soil is derived from serpentine rock formed during the Jurassic Age. Exposed to air and moisture it turns reddish from large deposits of waterborne iron. The soil is alkaline, coarse, gravelly, porous, highly mineralized, low in calcium and high in magnesium. Although thirty to fifty inches of rain fall each year, most is quickly lost through the loose soil. Plants in this area probably depend on moisture from fog to survive. The tree line seems to follow the mean fog line, and the forest starts and stops abruptly because of this. There are some unusual plants in the Sargent cypress forest, many of which show forms and shapes adapted to the serpentine soil darker green and thicker leaves, bushier, more compact habit, and brighter flowers. Many of these plants have considerable ornamental potential.

Bulbous plants, found deep in the soil, may last many years. One plant of *Chlorogalum pomeridianum* var. *pomeridianum* (soap plant) I have been keeping track of for twenty-five years. *Zigadenus fremontii* is most common, *Friiillaria biflora* and *F. lanceolata*, the chocolate and checkered lilies, are sparse. A special treat in late spring is *Calochortus obispoensis*, with its hairy, multi-colored petals.

*Carex obispoensis* covers the damp forest floor in many places, remaining green during the summer from the fog that condenses on overhanging branches and drips to the ground. *Sidalcea hickmanii* ssp. *anomala* is a rare spring-blooming herbaceous perennial in the *Malvaceae* that is endemic in the forest's northwest edge. (*Obispoensis editor's note... after the Highway 41 fire the Sidalcea became very common for a few years*) *Chorizanihe breweri*, a low and compact herbaceous buckwheat, grows in reddish drifts in open spaces on the rocky soil. A rock fern, *Onychium densum* (Indian's dreams or cliff-brake), is common elsewhere, but rare this far south. Unusual strains of *Ceanothus cuneatus* (buck brush) have flowers of a much brighter blue than those found elsewhere in California. *Monardella palmeri*, a pennyroyal, is associated with the serpentine soil; on hot days it permeates the air with its pungent minty odor.

A visit to the area is always worthwhile if only to enjoy the outstanding views from the ridge. But spring is perhaps the best time to visit. Everything is fresh and green; most plants are in bloom; and the lichens present a kaleidoscopic display of color and pattern. The chaparral on the outskirts of the forest also is in bloom - *Fremontodendron californicum* var. *obispoense* spills its yellow flowers over the ground; *Ceanothus foliosus* and *Dendromecon rigida* with their blue and yellow flowers stand out against the backdrop of the magnificent *Actostaphylos obispoensis*, a taller shrub with pink or white flowers.

Although the forest and its surroundings have been touched by mining from the early 1900s to the 1950s and by the firebreak activities of the 1960s, the area has not experienced much development. For this reason, in 1968 the Sargent Cypress Forest and surrounding areas totaling 1,300 acres within the Los Padres National Forest were designated a botanical reserve.

(*Obispoensis editor's note...I thought we have enough about the Carrizo Plain, and as there is a new road into the Cypress grove, it would be a worthwhile excursion for coastal folks. Thanks to Heather and Jim Johnson for finding this great article Older members will recall that our chapter got formed as a result of conservation activism against a giant firebreak that USFS was planning through the heart of the tree grove. Visitors will now see a "doghair forest", where trees are crowded together, small and in competition with each other for resources. This is typical after wildfire results in simultaneous seed release*).

## CNPS BOARD CONTACTS

### President

Bill Waycott (805) 459-2103  
bill.waycott@gmail.com

### Vice President

David Keil  
dkeil@calpoly.edu

### Secretary

Melissa Mooney:  
mjmoon@charter.net

### Corresponding Secretary

Marti Rutherford  
slomire@msn.com

### Treasurer

David Krause (805) 927-5182  
dkincmbria@aol.com

### Chapter Council Rep.

Cathy Chambers (805)  
528-1395 chambersvgardens  
@hotmail.com

### Chapter Wholesale Contact

Linda Chipping (805) 528-0914  
lindachipping@yahoo.com

### Conservation

David Chipping (805) 528-0914  
dchippin@calpoly.edu

### Education

Susi Bernstein (805) 481-4692  
fiddle58@att.net

### Field Trips

Bill Waycott (805) 459-2103  
bill.waycott@gmail.com

### General Book & Poster Sales

June Krystoff-Jones (805)  
460-9611  
junemkj@gmail.com

### Historian

Dirk R. Walters (805) 543-7051  
drwalters@charter.net

### Horticulture & Plant Sales

John Nowak (805) 674-2034  
gritlys@gmail.com

Suzette Girouard (805) 801-4806  
suzette.girouard@gmail.com

John Doyle (805) 748-7190  
doyle5515@sbcglobal.net

### Hospitality

OPEN:  
YOUR NAME HERE?

### Invasive Plants Control

Mark Skinner  
mskinner@coastalred.org

### Legislation

David Chipping (805) 528-0914  
dchippin@calpoly.edu

### Membership

Holly Sletteland  
hslettel@calpoly.edu

### Newsletter Editor

David Chipping (805) 528-0914  
dchippin@calpoly.edu

### Photography

Marlin Harms  
marlin93442@gmail.com

### Publicity

Judi Young  
judi@judiyoung.com

### Chapter Publications

YOUR NAME HERE?

### Rare Plant Coordinator

John Chesnut (805) 528-0833  
jchesnut@slonet.org

### Webmaster

Judi Young  
judi@judiyoung.com

# CHAPTER MEETING

**MAY 4TH IS OUR NEXT MEETING**  
**A Photographic Journey of California Lupines**

Stuart Wilson has long held a love and fascination of the genus *Lupinus*. After many springs spent photographing our local species, he decided to embark on a project to photograph every species and variety (104) found in California. Traveling throughout the state in 2015 and 2016, he has reached his goal (with a few noteworthy exceptions). He will give an overview of the great variety of forms found in the genus with tips on identification.

Stuart Wilson has been interested in photography since high school. After college in Orlando, Florida, he moved to Santa Barbara to study at Brooks Institute. He has traveled extensively in pursuit of nature subjects such as insects, amphibians and reptiles, and other small animals. He markets his photography through Science Source, a stock agency based in New York. He produced most of the photographs for Joan Lentz's book *A Naturalist's Guide to the Santa Barbara Region*. He is a past president of Channel City Camera Club in Santa Barbara.

Visit Stuart's website to get a taste of the beautiful photographs featured in his talk.



(above) Our May speaker **Stuart Wilson** With his beloved lupines

## **JUNE 1 IS OUR LAST MEETING TILL FALL** **DEVELOPING A WEB-BASED TREE IDENTIFICATION** **KEY**

The June speaker will be our McLeod scholarship grad student awardee, **Kyle Nessen**. Kyle's project is in collaboration with CalFire to create a photographic key to tree identification on the Urban Forest Ecosystems Institute website.

Kyle Nessen (right) and one of the beautiful photos in the tree key he will be sharing with us (left)



## **INVASIVE SPECIES REPORT** by Mark Skinner

There is a weed removal initiative underway called the South Central Coast Invasive Species Eradication Project. Funded by the Wildlife Conservation Board and matching partners the \$600K project joins CalIPC with multiple partners in a merged region of San Luis Obispo County and Santa Barbara County with help from the Weed Management Area of San Luis Obispo County. This effort is targeting weeds with a realistic chance of eradicating 95% of their populations in five years. The weeds selected for removal include: *Limonium ramosissimum*--Algerian sea lavender, *Limonium duriusculum*--European sea lavender, *Elymus farctus ssp. boreali-atlanticus*--Russian wheatgrass, *Cirsium arvense*--Canada thistle and *Linaria dalmatica ssp. dalmatica*--Dalmation toadflax. The sea lavenders are at threat to *Cordylanthus maritimus ssp. maritimus*—salt marsh bird's beak and *Suaeda californica*—California seablite. They have appeared along the boardwalk in Morro Bay State Park In the Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes Russian wheatgrass can take over areas that are habitat for *Atriplex leucophylla*—Saltbush, Beach-Bur, Red Sand-Verbena and Dunedelion. The agencies eradicating the weeds will track their progress through CalWeedMapper that CalIPC arranged. Partners will meet annually to report on progress.

PLEASE STINK LESS! Did you know that urban pollution reduces the distance where insects can detect flowers by smell from about 4,000 feet to 1,000 feet. Pollution particles absorb scent chemicals, stripping them from the air. I don't think the little hanging pine thingy for your car mirror will help.

## MEMBERSHIP CORNER

Holly Slettland (hslettel@calpoly.edu)

Spring is a time of renewal, and we have a number of members who did just that last month. We owe our gratitude to all of those who extended their support of CNPS in its efforts to protect native plants:

Kathryn Bay  
Christina & Eric Bird-Holenda  
Liz Curren  
Suzette Girouard  
Geoff Hoetker

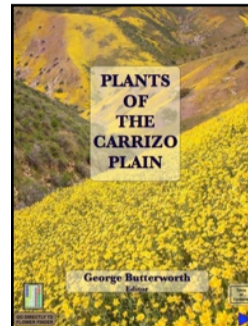
James & Heather Johnson  
Erik Layman  
Ruth Madocks  
John Pierszalowski  
Christopher Winchell

The reasons for doing what we do are all around us in this season of nature's exuberance. I hope that all of you have had a chance to catch the wildflower show in one or more of its spectacular displays. If you haven't, you simply must. There's still time for the late spring bloomers, like the clarkias. And I imagine the summer and fall flowers will be superb this year as well, if not quite as showy as spring. As Charles Dickens noted, "Nature gives to every season, a beauty all its own."

*Obispoensis* is published October through June except January. Items for submittal to *Obispoensis* should be sent to [dchippin@calpoly.edu](mailto:dchippin@calpoly.edu). The deadline is the 10th of each month. Botanical articles, news items, illustrations, photos, events and tidbits are welcome! Visit the websites [www.cnps.org](http://www.cnps.org) and [www.cnps.org](http://www.cnps.org)

### FULL SALES TABLE AT MAY MEETING

June is bringing a crammed-full sales table to the May meeting. Think of all those birthday gifts you have to buy, all your ugly T-shirts that need replacing, the thank-you gift to your maiden aunt, and the financial support you wish to give CNPS.



#### NEW ITEM JUST IN TIME FOR SUPER-BLOOM.

As well as the downloadable version, we have a CD with two versions of the program available at the sales table



**Editor's Note: Readers of the paper version of *Obispoensis* will miss the color photos that you can see in our downloadable web site version.**

## OH MY GAWD!

This is an exact quote from a CNPS member on seeing the super-bloom on the Carrizo Plain. Below is Marlin Harms' picture of our field trip. While national press has focussed on the wonderful color in the Temblors, there are great flower displays on the west side of Caliente Mt., including the largest displays of desert candle I have ever seen. Color seekers might consider the trail through the wooden gate just north of the corrals where the road comes closest to the hills after passing Wallace Creek.



April Field Trip to the Carrizo Plain: photo Marlin Harms











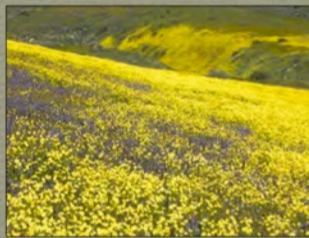



Desert candles on the west side of Caliente Mt.: photo David Chipping

## Conservation News

Against what earlier seemed to be against all odds and to our grateful surprise, the Board of Supervisors approved the Oak Protection Ordinance. CNPS really called out the troops, with Holly Slettland mounting a support petition that gained over 1,000 signatures. We had help from Janet Cobb, of the California Wildlife Foundation, other out-of-the-area conservation organizations, the Sierra Club, Audubon, and a host of others. We and the trees thank everyone, and a shout-out to all you good CNPS members that either wrote a letter or testified at the meeting.

In other news we wrote a comment letter on the EIR for the Eagle Ranch development in Atascadero. This takes ranch land to the southwest of the city, and adds several hundred houses. The number of units has been vested by the original E.G. Lewis tract maps from the early days of Atascadero, and the issue is placement with the least environmental damage. We expressed concern over serpentine endemics and riparian setbacks.

# Some of the Superbloom Yellows in the Carrizo Plain

<p><b>Fremont's goldfields</b> <i>Lasthenia fremontii</i> ASTERACEAE - Sunflower Family</p> <p><b>Description:</b> Annual. Leaf usually lobed</p> <p><b>Habitat:</b> Vernal pools, wet areas. North of Soda Lake, Belmont Trail</p> <p><b>Flowers:</b> Petals c. 1/4 in. long (5-7 mm)</p> <p><b>Blooming Period:</b> March-May</p>  <p>David Chipping</p>  <p>Marlin Harms</p> <p>89</p>	<p><b>Common tidy tips</b> <i>Layia platyglossa</i> ASTERACEAE - Sunflower Family</p> <p><b>Description:</b> Annual with dark anthers</p> <p><b>Habitat:</b> Sandy soil in grassland, flower fields, and other habitats. Many places, sometimes abundant</p> <p><b>Flowers:</b> c. 1 in. diameter (3 cm)</p> <p><b>Blooming Period:</b> February-May</p>  <p>Bill Bouton</p>  <p>Marlin Harms</p> <p>93</p>	<p><b>Leafy-stemmed tickseed</b> <i>Leptosyne calliopsidea</i> ASTERACEAE - Sunflower Family</p> <p><b>Description:</b> Annual. Leaves with linear segments. Phyllaries wide. Can form blankets of deep yellow</p> <p><b>Habitat:</b> Grassland, flower fields; in loose soil such as alkaline clay on Simmler Rd. Many places</p> <p><b>Flowers:</b> c. 1 1/2 in. diameter (4 cm)</p> <p><b>Blooming Period:</b> February-May</p>  <p>Marlin Harms</p>  <p>Bill Bouton</p> <p>94</p>
<p><b>Short-rayed hillside daisy</b> <i>Monolopia stricta</i> ASTERACEAE - Sunflower Family</p> <p><b>Description:</b> Annual. Smaller than <i>M. lanceolata</i>, petals slightly lobed</p> <p><b>Habitat:</b> Grassland, flower fields, clay. Many places, e.g. Simmler Rd. (Soda Lake), mountains</p> <p><b>Flowers:</b> Petals c. 1/4 in. long (3-6 mm)</p> <p><b>Blooming Period:</b> February-May</p>  <p>George Butterworth</p>  <p>Dirk Walters</p> <p>97</p>	<p><b>Common hillside daisy</b> <i>Monolopia lanceolata</i> ASTERACEAE - Sunflower Family</p> <p><b>Description:</b> Annual. Colors hills yellow.</p> <p><b>Habitat:</b> Grassland, flower fields, open clay slopes. Abundant in many places</p> <p><b>Flowers:</b> Petals c. 1/2 in. long (10-15 mm)</p> <p><b>Blooming Period:</b> February-May</p>  <p>George Butterworth</p>  <p>George Butterworth</p> <p>96</p>	<p><b>Common goldfields</b> <i>Lasthenia gracilis</i> ASTERACEAE - Sunflower Family</p> <p><b>Description:</b> Annual</p> <p><b>Habitat:</b> Huge numbers form blankets of rich yellow. Grassland, flower fields, and other habitats. Many places</p> <p><b>Flowers:</b> Petals c. 1/4 in. long (5-10 mm)</p> <p><b>Blooming Period:</b> February-May</p>  <p>Marlin Harms</p>  <p>Craig Cunningham</p> <p>90</p>

If you are going to see the bloom in the Carrizo Plain, go quickly. The bloom is still increasing as this goes to press in mid-April, but hot days will take a fast toll. With luck the colors will hold through the first couple of weeks in May. There is a lot of yellow, so there are a few pages from the downloadable **Plants of the Carrizo Plain**, available on our chapter web site.

Places on the Carrizo Plain worth visiting. (1) Belmont Trail, the first paved cross street south of the California Valley fire station. About a mile after pavement ends is an area of vernal pools. Continue east, crossing 7 Mile road and ending on Elkhorn Road. (2) Go south on Elkhorn Rd., pass under the large PG&E power lines, pass the Wallace Creek San Andreas fault site until the road turns east right up to the edge of the steep Temblor Range. This is where the "big color" is that has attracted international attention (3) Continue south to Hurricane Rd., and drive east up to the top of the Temblor Range (high clearance recommended). The blue-purple colors are *Phacelia* and the orange *Mentzelia*. A redder purple is *Eremalche*. Yellows are the two *Monolopias* and *Leptosyne*. (4) return to Elkhorn Rd. return past Wallace Creek, under the power lines again and turn west on Simmler Rd. Many of the species of the Temblors are here plus blue *Delphinium* and *Lasthenia*. Cross the south end of Soda Lake. (5) Reach paved Soda Lake Rd., go south to visitor center. (6) explore southward along Soda Lake Rd. or (7) drive to the top of Caliente Mt, next road (dirt) south of visitor center. (high clearance strongly recommended). (8) From summit continue west past the avionics tower a couple of miles, before returning. This is a "don't miss" mass of color and one of the largest displays of Desert Candle ever seen.

Don't be just a 'big color' person. It is likely that there will be a lot of later flowering species through the summer and into the fall.



**Sunday, May 14th, 9:00 am, Arroyo de la Cruz, North SLO County.** Join us for this Mother's Day visit to one of the "hottest" spots for botanical diversity in San Luis Obispo Co. Our leader D.R. "Doc" Miller will take us to see the unique species located on these coastal bluffs. The Arroyo de la Cruz area features a variety of plant communities and a number of endemic and rare plants found only in this relatively small area. Meet at the Elephant Seal Overlook (first entrance on the left going north) at 9:00 am. The field trip will last roughly 3 hours. Be sure to bring water, snacks, sturdy shoes, sunscreen, a hat, and layered clothing, as needed. For those wanting to carpool from the south, meet in the parking lot of Spencer's Market in Morro Bay (2650 Main Street) at 8:30 am. For more information, please contact: Bill Waycott, (805) 459-2103, [bill.waycott@gmail.com](mailto:bill.waycott@gmail.com).

**To find out the latest CNPS field trip information for outings throughout the summer months, please link to our webpage: <http://cnpslo.org/>. You may also receive automatic e-mail updates by entering your name and e-mail address in the boxes entitled "Send CNPSSLO an E-mail" provided at the lower right corner of the page, via the link: <http://cnpslo.org/about/contact/>.**

## **PRESIDENT'S NOTES Native Plants are the Best!**

The great out-of-doors is becoming an increasingly popular destination in our communities. On one of the guided plant-walks this spring, organized by the City of San Luis Obispo's Park and Recreation Dept. in the Reservoir Canyon Natural Reserve, more than 100 participants turned up at the trailhead, on a Sunday afternoon. There were people of all ages from toddlers in backpacks to seniors, all prepared for a guided tour through the natural splendor of our coastal hills. As I observed all the excitement of getting out in nature, I recalled the results of a study I had seen, emphasizing that children spend more time outside their homes and class rooms, in natural surroundings - just being kids.



The crowd at the Reservoir Canyon Trailhead: photo Bill Waycott

In the article published in The Guardian newspaper, Aug. 16, 2010, Jon Henley reports there is a growing body of knowledge illustrating the importance for children to be out in nature. Results of studies done in the past several years suggest that if children don't spend time in nature as they mature, their development as individuals is impacted, and the whole society, is too. In one Kaiser Family Foundation study, the average amount of time eight-to-18-year-old Americans spend using "entertainment media", has grown to more than 53 hours a week; that's about 7.5 hours per day.

BILL WAYCOTT

## **OCTOBER SEED EXCHANGE - Marti Rutherford**

**There WILL be a seed exchange at our October meeting, and so we will need seeds. Many of our natives are just beginning to flower. But seed set has already occurred on some plants, such as manzanita. So keep your observational skills tuned and your collecting bags ready. Don't forget the flowers that bloom in the summer and early fall**

# San Luis Obispo County Sudden Oak Death Blitz, 2017

Sudden Oak Death (SOD) is a serious exotic disease that is threatening the survival of tanoak and several oak species in California, including coast live oak. Currently SOD is found in 16 coastal counties, from San Luis Obispo to Humboldt counties. SOD spreads from infected California bay laurel leaves to oaks during wet weather. Management options are available but they are only effective if implemented before oaks and tanoaks are infected, so timely detection of the disease on bay laurel is essential! This is where volunteers like you can help out and sample suspected bay laurel leaves at this year's SOD Blitz in SLO County. The purpose of the SOD Blitz is to inform and educate the community about the disease and its effects, get locals involved in detecting the disease, and produce detailed local maps of disease distribution. The maps can then be used to identify those areas where the infestation may be mild enough to justify proactive management.

The SOD Blitz begins with a training session/presentation where information on the disease and its symptoms on both oaks and California bays are presented, as well as how to collect and record samples of bay leaves. Volunteers then collect suspected bay leaves as well as information about trees and locations over the week-end. Collecting is done individually or in groups, and you can collect as many or few samples as you have time available before dropping off samples at the collection locations by noon Monday. All collecting materials will be handed out at the trainings. Suggested survey and collection locations will also be posted at the trainings, although you are welcome to identify your own property or area of interest. The collected samples are placed in bins at designated collection spots by Monday before noon so they can be sent to the Berkeley Lab for processing. This year, we will expect to have at least 2 free training sessions, one in North County and one in San Luis Obispo, and all materials needed for collecting will be provided.

## **The 2017 SOD BLITZ Trainings will be held on:**

- **Thursday May 11 from 1-4 pm at SLO County Department of Agriculture**, 2156 Sierra Way, San Luis Obispo, CA (limited to 50 participants, registration is suggested but walk-in are welcome as long as space is available). Those of you that have collected past and want to collect in your areas in 2017, please let us know before the Blitz and we provide an updated map.

- **Friday, May 12, 6pm to 8pm, SLO County Atascadero Library**, Martin Polin Community Room, 6555 Capistrano Ave, Atascadero, CA.

**Collecting will take place on Saturday and Sunday, May 13 and 14.** Register for Training: <http://ucanr.edu/2017sodblitztraining> NOTE: Additional information will be posted on the CNPS SLO Chapter website ([cnpsslo.org](http://cnpsslo.org)) and we will include a reminder in the May newsletter. Or, you can contact Lauren for additional information ([lbrown805@charter.net](mailto:lbrown805@charter.net), 805-460-6329).

## **NEW VEGETATION COMMITTEE BEING FORMED**

Are you interested in vegetation sampling? Do you have a favorite plant community, alliance or association? Then please contact Melissa Mooney, chair of the newly-enlivened Vegetation/Plant Communities committee of our SLO Chapter (email: [mjmoon@charter.net](mailto:mjmoon@charter.net)). We've been in touch with Julie Evens and Jennifer Buck of the State CNPS Vegetation Program, and will be coordinating with the folks in the East Bay Chapter who are doing similar work. First order of business will be to prioritize what communities need focus for possible assessment and mapping and lay out our goals. Serpentine communities? Morro manzanita maritime chaparral? Valley Oak Savanna? Get those ideas coming and lets do some sampling!

## **CAMBRIA FLOWER SHOW**

Presented by Friends of the Fiscalini Ranch Preserve.

The show will be held on Saturday, April 29, from noon until 5:00 pm and Sunday, April 30, from 10:00 am until 4:00 pm at the Cambria Veterans Memorial Building, 1000 Main St. You will see a display of fresh wildflowers collected from the Monterey County line to the Morro Bay Estuary and from the coastal bluffs to the ridge of the Santa Lucia Mountains. An entry donation of \$3 is requested, Students are free. There will be:

- Hundreds of bouquets of fresh flowers labeled with botanical/common names.
- Rare and endangered, invasive and poisonous plants will be identified.
- Plants are displayed in antique and interesting bottles and vases.
- Botanists will be on hand to answer your plant questions.
- Great treats at the wildflower Café.
- Helpful books, plant lists, wildflower seeds, Native Plant Society and Fiscalini Ranch Preserve apparel.

The purpose of the show is to enhance the enjoyment of wildflowers by educating, through viewing. Permitted and trained teams of collectors will be picking flowers for educational purposes, from habitats with large populations, so that people can learn to enjoy them in their natural habitats without picking the flowers themselves. For more information, please call 927-2856 or e-mail us at [ffrpcambria@sbcglobal.net](mailto:ffrpcambria@sbcglobal.net).



*Dedicated to the Preservation of the California Native Flora*

The California Native Plant Society is a statewide non-profit organization of amateurs and professionals with a common interest in California's plants. The mission of the Society is to increase understanding and appreciation of California's native plants and to preserve them in their natural habitat through scientific activities, education and conservation. Membership is open to all. Membership includes the journal, *Fremontia*, the quarterly Bulletin, which gives statewide news and announcements of the activities and conservation issues, and the chapter newsletter, *Obispoensis*.



San Luis Obispo Chapter of the  
California Native Plant Society  
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P.O. Box 784, San Luis Obispo, CA 93406

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