
Obispoensis

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



December 2023

Creeping snowberry (*Symphoricarpos mollis*)

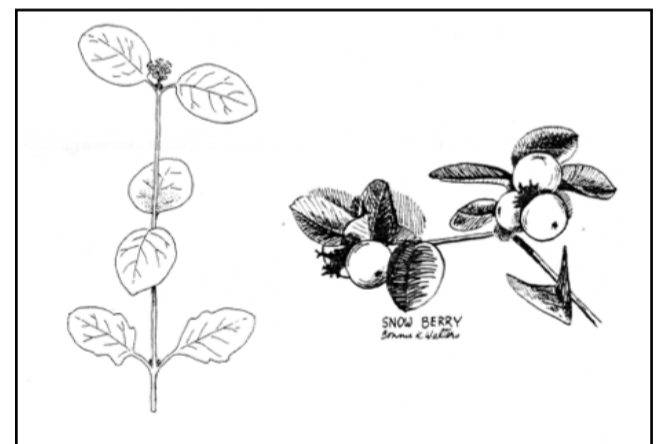
Dr Dirk Walters

The snowberry species most common in our area is probably the more widespread and flamboyant relative, the common snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus* var. *laevigatus*) with which creeping snowberry is often mistaken. These are the only two species Dr. Keil lists for our county, but both species are widespread throughout most of the western states. Additionally, common snowberry has become naturalized in the Eastern U.S. Separating these two highly variable species is quite difficult. They differ only in degree. Common snowberries are said to be taller and straighter, with larger, narrower leaves. Creeping snowberries are said to be shorter with weaker stems that often spread horizontally, creating a loose mat. Creeping snowberries, therefore, more closely resemble a tall groundcover than a true shrub. Its leaves are also supposed to be smaller and more rounded (oval). However, both species produce individuals whose characters fall into the range of the other. The characters used in Dr. Keil's flora are habit as well as flower and fruit size. Other characteristics cited by other flora include the number of flowers per cluster (inflorescence), presence of nectar glands below the petal lobes, and whether the floral tube bulges at the base. Creeping snowberry produces few small flowers per inflorescence, has nectar glands below its petals and no floral tube bulge. Common snowberry usually produces many large flowers per cluster and a single large gland enclosed within a bulging tube. Creeping snowberry has a greater tendency to produce leaves covered by fine trichomes (hairs). Creeping snowberry, according to the books, is more common in brushy areas whereas common snowberry generally inhabits shaded canyons.

The white berries are smaller in creeping snowberry than in common snowberry, but they are both probably poisonous. A saying coined for poison oak is equally valid here: "Berries white; poisonous sight". Further evidence of their poisonous nature is the tendency for the fruits to remain on the plant long after they are produced. That is, wild animals seem to be avoiding them. According to Fuller and McClintock, *Poisonous Plants of California*, common snowberry possesses Chelidonine, an isoquinoline alkaloid. The authors also note but a single case of poisoning by common snowberry recorded in the U.S. Apparently, there have been no recorded cases of creeping snowberry poisoning, which I assume is because they are very distasteful. I would further suggest that it is much more difficult to collect their fruits since they are small and few in number which would make collecting them a major chore.

The authors, Carol Bornstein, David Fross, and Bart O'Brien, in their *California Native Plants for the Garden* recommend this species as a ground cover capable of withstanding the shade and chemistry under live oaks. Even in the wild, the ground under live oaks is usually devoid of anything but poison oak. Creeping snowberry can and does thrive here. I suspect that after it gets established it could even prevent the establishment of poison oak.

The adjacent illustration by Bonnie Walters of creeping snowberry (*Symphoricarpos mollis*) was drawn in two very different styles. The fruiting branch on the right was done using drawing pens which yield lines of varying widths, probably for one of our banquet program covers. The drawing of the flowering leafy branch on the left was done for this article using a rapidograph pen. This type of pen is designed for engineering drawings and results in uniform width lines.



Compare the fruit (left) of *Symphoricarpos mollis* and the flower (on the cover) with those of *Symphoricarpos albus* on the next page.

Photo from Coon Creek by D. Chipping

CAPRIFOLIACEAE • THE HONEYSUCKLE FAMILY

In our area, the family is represented by two genera, *Symphoricarpos* and *Lonicera*, the latter bearing the common name Honeysuckle. The name refers to the tubular flowers, typical of the family, that attract hummingbirds that 'suck' nectar from the flower's base. *Lonicera* was named in honor of Adam Lonicer, a German botanist working in the mid-1500s.



Symphoricarpos albus var. *laevigatus*
Common Snowberry, showing the larger
flowers and fruits compared to
Symphoricarpos mollis. All from Coon Creek.

Photos D. Chipping

Editor's Note: Read more about snowberry in John and Suzette's Horticulture Now Column. John and Suzette cover different aspects of the two species than does Dirk, and so the two articles together will give you a pretty comprehensive look at these members of the Honeysuckle family.

.....so what else is 'snowy'?

As maybe fits our local climate, not much. One shrub, the Snowdrop bush (*Styrax redivivus*), has a single known population on Pine Mountain, east of Huasna and southeast of Caldwell Mesa. The plant is the only member of the Storax Family in our county. It is associated with Yellow Pine Forest, and can be found along the crest of the Santa Ynez Mountains behind Santa Barbara and also in the pines surrounding the Sacramento Valley.

Photo left: © 2022 Matt Berger CC-BY-NC 4.0



Rather more common is *Linanthus dichotomus* subsp. *dichotomus*, Common evening-snow, found in sandy area of the central and eastern parts of the county, and opening in the evening and night, closing during the day.

(Photo upper right: D. Chipping)

Less common is *Linanthus bigelovii* subsp. *johnsonii*, Small-flowered evening-snow, which is found in the Carrizo Plain and surrounding mountains. (Photo lower right: Richard Spellenberg 2 (CC BY-NC-SA 3.0))



**Celebrate
The Season!
Bring a
dessert to
share**

Chapter Monthly Program December 7th San Luis Obispo Vets Hall

(corner of Mill St. and Grand Ave)

Social Gathering 7pm; Chapter Business and Program Starts 7:30pm.

**Celebrate
The Season!
Bring a
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Dr. Katharina Ullmann

Encouraging Native Pollinators in your Garden and Beyond

Pollinators are essential to life as we know it - they bring beauty and wonder to the world, help sustain our natural areas and provide critical ecosystem services. In this talk we'll spend some time exploring pollinators, with a focus on bees native to California. We'll learn who they are, factors that threaten them, and how we can support them in our gardens. We'll also think beyond our individual gardens and learn how different communities are coming together to encourage these important insects.

Katharina Ullmann's experiences are rooted in pollinator conservation, agriculture, and experiential learning. This includes developing and testing native bee citizen science training guides, and identifying and testing farm management

practices that support pollinators (e.g. hedgerows, wildflower strips, crop rotation practices, and tillage practices). She received her PhD in Entomology from UC Davis in 2015. Most recently she directed the 23 acre student farm at UC Davis.



It's Planting Season! The Seed Table will be at the Meeting

Thank You from the Seed Table Crew

I just want to extend a big thank you to all who participated in the seed sales at the fall plant sale. From those who gathered seeds, to those who staffed the tables, to those who bought the seeds, all of you are greatly appreciated. I am so pleased to see the seeds get into the hands of those with interest in growing from seed. Happy planting. Marti Rutherford slomire@msnDOTcom

Photo by Steve Schubert





Sunday, December 10, 2023, 10:00 am, Los Osos, CA. Manzanita Field Trip #8.

This is a CNPS outing to study the morphologies of two manzanita subspecies. If you have ever wondered how lines are drawn in plant taxonomy, especially between two subspecies, join us in the Los Osos maritime chaparral to review two of the subspecies of *Arctostaphylos crustacea*: subsp. *crustacea* (brittle leaf manzanita) and subsp. *rosei* (Rose's manzanita) that occur within a one-mile radius of each other.

- Subsp. *crustacea* - Stem: twig (and nascent inflorescence) short- and long-stiff-nonglandular-hairy, occasionally sparsely glandular. Leaf: abaxially +- nonglandular-hairy, in age glabrous.

- Subsp. *rosei* - Stem: twig (and nascent inflorescence, pedicel, ovary) generally short-nonglandular-hairy. Leaf: blade abaxially glabrous.

Bring a hand lens, note pad, and pencil, as well as adequate water, snacks, and dress in layers for the weather; a hat and sturdy shoes is advised. This outing is 2 miles in length, with 200 ft. elevation gain, lasting 2 hours. Meet at the intersection of Bayview Heights Dr. and Bay Vista Ln. in Los Osos (35.305432, -120.831412). Parking is available on Bay Vista Ln. Contact Bill, 805-459-2103. Rain or the threat of rain cancels.



Photo Bill Waycott:: *A. crustacea* with long hairs.

Sunday, January 28, 2024, 10:00 am, Santa Margarita Lake. Manzanita Field Trip #9.

Join us to study the manzanitas that are adapted to the interior areas of San Luis Obispo County: big berry manzanita (*Arctostaphylos glauca*) and Eastwood's manzanita (*A. glandulosa*). Meet at the River Road (Blinn Ranch) entrance to Santa Margarita Lake County Park (35.315849, -120.417921). Total hike distance is 4 miles with an elevation gain of 500 ft., and a duration of 3.5 hours. From San Luis Obispo, the trailhead is 40 minutes' drive. For those wanting to carpool, meet at the Park & Ride area, just east of the Santa Margarita Exit off of Hwy 101 on Hwy 58 (35.383409, -120.626885). Bring adequate water, snacks and/or a lunch, and dress in layers for the weather; a hat and sturdy shoes is advised. Contact Bill, 805-459-2103. Rain or the threat of rain cancels.



Photo Bill Waycott:: Big-berry manzanita *A. glauca*

TBD January Mushroom Walk (The Fungal Foray) on Fiscalini Ranch, Cambria

Fall Plant Sale a Great Success

At least 16 volunteers pitched in to make the November plant sale a great success. Over 243 volunteer hours were recorded for this sale, and in the organization of the pre-ordering program. We sold over 900 plants and earned more than \$6,000 to support our chapter activities. The 2023 sales table at both the spring and fall sales did very well. Seed sales were brisk and a very popular feature. Particular thanks go to plant sale chairs John Doyle and David Krause and all the volunteers.



(left) Pre-ordered plants are lined up for collection

(right) The plant sale tables, with plants grown by CNPS volunteers and by Clearwater Color Nursery



McLeod Scholarship Awardees

The Malcolm McLeod Scholarship Fund is a dedicated chapter program to support botanic research at local institutions of higher learning. The latest group of four awardees is composed of students from Cal Poly.

Sam Balthazard is working on a Masters thesis in Environmental Science and Management at Cal Poly. Sam's research focuses on sudden oak death as a driver of ecological change via its impact on California's coastal forest canopies and understory plant communities. Sam will use long-term monitoring data to investigate overstory and understory community shifts to understand how sudden oak death is modifying California forests. This work will be used to better prioritize management strategies.

Rachel Friesen is a Master's student at Cal Poly, where she will examine the impacts of climate change on alpine plant communities in Yosemite National Park. She hopes her findings will inform the broader ecological theories about colonization and extinction, and the emerging concept of climate refugia. Her research may also inform adaptive management strategies which include reducing non-climatic stressors in refugia, such as rerouting trails away from sensitive areas, or conserving populations vulnerable to extirpation through seed-banking.

Magdalene Lo is a Master's student at Cal Poly. Her thesis project is exploring how adaptations to abiotic factors, like soil, can produce different color morphs and produce fitness tradeoffs in varied landscapes. *Linanthus parviflorus* exists in three petal color morphs: pink, white, and yellow, often in polymorphic populations. Pink morphs tend to occur more frequently on serpentine soil and non-pink on benign soil. Magdalene plans to explore the mechanisms of how color chemistry can provide fitness advantages in harsh serpentine soil or drier climate conditions and compare this to the fitness of non-pink morphs. To do this, she will conduct greenhouse reciprocal transplants in serpentine and non-serpentine soil and drought treatments. Her work will inform our understanding of the role of trait variation in allowing plants to persist across variable soils and drought conditions in California, a topic of high relevance to predicting and managing populations under climate change.

Avin Niknafs will research local adaptation using the reciprocal transplant method. She will carry out a study observing fitness differences between *Erythranthe guttata* and *Erythranthe serpicicola*, two San Luis Obispo County natives (one of which is a 1B.1 ranked rare species). While these species occur in quite a few areas throughout the County, Avin's study site at Laguna Lake is unique in that these individuals are sympatric and face challenges of gene flow. Interestingly, the two species are completely interfertile in the greenhouse and overlap in flowering time in the field, meaning gene flow is possible. Avin seeks to test whether these two species are locally adapted to their respective micro-environments at Laguna Lake (rock outcrop vs. perennial serpentine seep). Her work will contribute to our understanding of whether species differences can be maintained by natural selection in the face of ongoing gene flow.

WE WELCOME DONATIONS TO AUGMENT THE McLEOD SCHOLARSHIP FUND

PLEASE SEND CHECKS TO McLEOD SCHOLARSHIP FUND, C/O DAVID KRAUSE, CHAPTER TREASURER, 2706 NEWTON DRIVE, CAMBRIA 93428

Lichen of the Month: *Bryoria capillaris*



The fruticose *Bryoria capillaris* was photographed on shrub branches in the chaparral at the west end of Los Osos Oaks Reserve. It is light brown in color, justifying the common name of Horsehair lichen. It is relatively uncommon in our area, and more common in conifer forest habitats. The photobiont is green algae. It is often associated with the extremely common, gray-green *Ramalina menziesii* which has a wider thallus. It is very similar to *Sulcaria badia*, which has a groove on the thallus and is State Listed Rank 4.2, and the extremely rare *Sulcaria isidiifera* with a rank of 1B.1.

Photo: D. Chipping

HORTICULTURE NOW

Welcome to Horticulture Now, a column featuring articles about gardening with California native plants. Some of these articles are newly written and others will have been previously published. Some months the column may feature a guest author. Hope you enjoy December's article. Happy Holidays.

With delicate pink bell-shaped flowers followed by white berries throughout its branches, it is a member of the honeysuckle family. This month's article features, *Symphoricarpos albus* var. *laevigatus* or the Common Snowberry, which is found growing under coastal oaks.

Throughout California, from north to south and east to west, Snowberry ranges from sea level to 10,500 feet. In San Luis Obispo County, *Symphoricarpos albus* var. *laevigatus* is one of the four species and six varieties existing within the state. Once rarely thought of as threatened, today their habitat is under constant threat due to climate change, fire, development. Someday the snowberry may not be so common.

Here on the central coast, snowberry can be found growing with oaks on north-facing slopes with two other plants that enjoy the same habitat, *Stachys bullata* (California hedge nettle) and *Scrophularia californica* (California figwort or California bee plant). Both these plants find support leaning on snowberry's 12 to 24 inch tall. This trio of plants share a bloom period from February to June, providing an important supply of nectar for insects and pollinators.

Snowberry can spread underground via special roots called rhizomes, creating dense mats. Its pink bell-shaped flowers are followed by white berries in the Fall and Winter. Their fruits are really not berries but rather are drupes, each drupe contains two seeds. Drupes are a common feature of the honeysuckle family. These fruits are an important food source for birds, such as the California thrasher (*Toxostoma redivivum*), and small rodents such as the Valley Pocket Gopher (*Thomomys bottae*) or the Western Harvest Mouse (*Reithrodontomys megalotis*) which nest above the ground in snowberry branches.

These same fruits are poisonous to some mammals, including humans, due to chemicals called saponins, which can cause stomach distress. This might be why deer tend not to browse the plant while snowberry is in fruit. Interestingly, some early pioneer accounts mention the Chumash Indians crushing the fruits and floating the fruit mush on stream waters and retrieving stunned fish. This was probably due to the saponins, which are toxic to fish.

Snowberry has very few insect problems and can handle varied soil types, but does need adequate moisture to do its best. Deer will browse during flowering and up to fruit set. Woodrats (*Neotoma macrotis*) chew the branches to build protective piles for their homes which is most likely in remote wild areas.

In the garden setting, the snowberry does best in semi-shade to sunny areas and provides much needed nectar for insects and pollinators. It can be used to stabilize slopes in disturbed, shady areas. Snowberry spreads by underground rhizomes. These rhizomes spread out like a web, holding soil in place. Pruning will help to stimulate new growth and is best done after the fruits have dropped.

Snowberry is not commonly available at retail nursery centers. It is easiest to find at nurseries that specialize in California natives. Here on the central coast, the authors found the largest selections of snowberry species at Las Pilitas Nursery. Also, snowberry is easy to propagate by those same rhizomes I mentioned earlier. Just divide the roots in late fall, plant them in rich soil, and provide moisture if rain is not adequate. Once established, water monthly over the summer to keep them fresh looking.

In conclusion, *Symphoricarpos albus* var. *laevigatus* is an important component of the oak woodland and chaparral communities. Its ability to restore and revegetate disturbed areas, along with providing food and shelter to animals and insects, earns its place as plant of the month.

For now, Happy Gardening: *John Nowak and Suzette Girouard.*

The Coon Creek Fire Remembered



Steve Schubert, with these photographs, reminds us of the November 13th 2012 Coon Creek Fire. The fire was to have been a controlled burn on the steep slopes on the south side of Coon Creek, with the specific goal of creating a stand replacement burn in the then-senescent stand of Bishop Pine, a species that requires fire to regenerate. Planned for a burn of 430 acres, the fire escaped fire lines at the base of the hill in the middle of the night when a strong wind reversed direction. The fire spread quickly to the north, consuming plants on the south and west flanks of Valencia Peak, and raising concern for Los Osos. Luckily Cal Fire and the SLO County Fire Department acted swiftly and contained the blaze after two days. The top two photos were taken during the fire, the middle two show conditions right after the fire and the current success of natural regeneration of fire-adapted vegetation. The bottom two photos show the complete removal of the grove of Bishop pine right after the fire, and the progress today in the regrowth of the forest.



Not everything is working out well after the Coon Creek Fire. Stand replacement of native shrubland by invasive non-native grassland is taking place, with the water-robbing grasses inhibiting re-growth of the shrubs. Photos on the left are from the Rattlesnake Flats Trail on the north side of Coon Creek. Photos D. Chipping

The Case of the Forgotten Mimas

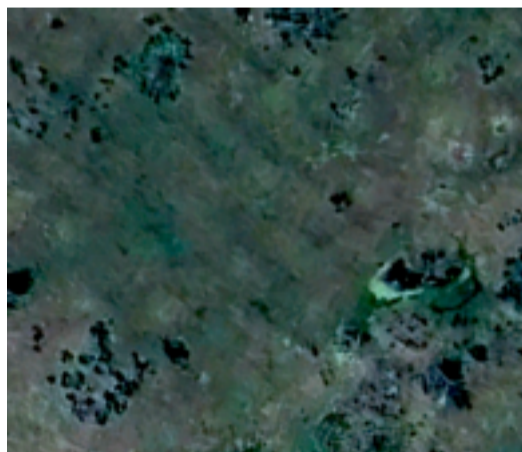
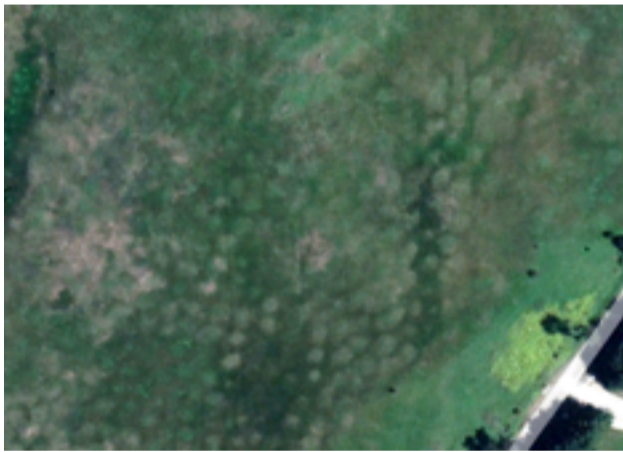
Many years ago the California Department of Fish and Wildlife purchased a large acreage of land across San Simeon Creek Road from the campground entrance. The purchase was intended to protect a very unusual topography called mima mounds, and the associated wetland swales. Mima mounds are built by burrowing rodents that build low mounds above their burrows. Such mounds are very evident on the alluvial fans of the Carrizo Plain, but are rare along the coast. The low spots between the mounds can become vernal pools, although such pools do not seem to be present at this site. However, some historical Google Earth images do seem to show areas of greener vegetation in the area between the mounds than is seen on the mounds themselves.

Some of you may be familiar with the vernal pools and associated mima mounds adjacent to the east end of Washburn Campground. These pools all sit on a tableland at an elevation of about 210 feet, which has poor drainage and very low, or no, slope gradients. The mima mounds near the campground entrance are on a moderate slope with an elevation drop of about 100 feet across the parcel from Van Gordon Creek Road to Highway 1.

The problem of the moment is that State Parks has been planting what appears to be Monterey pine on the property, and driving all over the landscape to service the young trees. This was NOT the intended use of the land when it was purchased.



Plantings of Monterey Pine (need field verification) on the mima mounds adjacent to San Simeon Creek State Park: Taken from Google Earth Street View from Highway 1



(top left) The mima mounds adjacent to the entrance to San Simeon Creek Campground, which lies in lower right corner of picture. Note the darker green surrounding some of the mounds. (Google Earth).

(top center) Mima mounds and a large vernal pool, seen as a bright spot, adjacent to Campground. (Google Earth).

(top right) Multiple vehicle tracks on the mima mounds near the campground entrance. (Google Earth).

(left) Monterey pine plantings immediately north of the main campground entrance. (Google Earth Street View from San Simeon Creek Road)

LOOKING BACK: WHAT THE OLD NOVEMBER NEWSLETTERS TELL US

Looking back 10 years to December 2013, we were concerned about the proposed expansion of the Price Canyon oilfield and removal of 1,650 oak trees and 1,200 manzanitas dominated by the List 1B.2 *A. pilosula*, and an acre with Pismo clarkia. The vegetation map of the Carrizo Plain by the CNPS Vegetation Program was completed.

Looking back 15 years to December 2008, we reported that Santa Margarita Ranch's plan was rejected by the Planning Commission, but we thought that the intent was to force an appeal to the current development-friendly Board of Supervisors who would approve the project before a new Board was seated in 2009. (They did approve the project.) CNPS was also working on the Laetitia Vineyard's proposed agricultural cluster. We had a field trip to the Arroyo Hondo Preserve on the Gaviota coast.

Looking back 25 years to December 1997, we were able to keep Lucia Mar School District from building in Nipomo Regional Park and took part in a 'Celebration of the Dunes' in support of the Morro Estuary Greenbelt Alliance's work in conserving a Los Osos greenbelt. We were active on the Morros Advisory Committee, which in the end accomplished very little.

Looking back 30 years to December 1993, we joined the San Luis Obispo Environmental Quality Task Force. A new population of Chorro Creek bog thistle was discovered near Cerro Alto. We were researching evidence of recruitment in oak woodlands.

Looking back 35 years to December 1988, apart from field trips, things were quiet.

CNPS-SLO Mini-Keying Workshop: Manzanitas!

- ❖ Free pre-meeting plant keying workshop
- ❖ Facilitated by Bill Waycott and Dr. Dena Grossenbacher
- ❖ January 4, 2024, 6-7 pm*
- ❖ Learn about key characteristics to identify manzanita species
- ❖ Practice keying manzanitas collected from our area
- ❖ Bring "Vascular Plants of San Luis Obispo County", "Field Guide to Manzanitas", a 10x hand lens, narrow-pointed dissection tool, and headlamp**

* Please arrive a few minutes early so we can start promptly

** Bill and Dena will provide some loaners resources

Photo: Terry LePage, CANativeGarden.blogspot.com. Used by permission



ELECTION OF CHAPTER BOARD OFFICERS

At the December meeting we have our annual election for officers on the SLO Chapter Board. These are President, Vice-President, Treasurer, and Secretary. If you wish to stand for any of these positions, please notify Dena Grossenbacher (denagross@gmail.com), member of the Nominating Committee.

THE GOOD PEOPLE WHO MAKE THE CHAPTER 'HAPPEN' AND HOW TO FIND THEM

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WE ALWAYS NEED PEOPLE TO HELP OUT. OUR MISSION IS VITAL AND OUR FLORA IS AT RISK.

Newsletter Editor David Chipping (805) 528-0914 dchippinATcalpolyDOTedu

Protecting California's Native Flora since 1965

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, *Artemisia*; the quarterly *Flora*, 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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