The 2009 wildflower season has long been over and we’ve been enduring rain and gray days without complaint because of what promises to be another great year of botanical wonders. My backyard Miner’s Lettuce crop is blooming at this time so the local wildflower season can’t be too far away.

This newsletter, long overdue, will finish up 2009 odds and ends and prepare the way for the coming (soon!) season.

We’re always looking for members to submit articles and photos, lead trips, host meetings and provide any other support they can muster. Thanks in advance for your help.

For information, please call (209) 477-3966 or (209) 943-2277, or email vbromper@aol.com

Crown Jewels

By Martha Mallory
May 30, 2009

We were reluctant to leave Ring Mountain on the Tiburon Peninsula last year. In the late afternoon light *Calochortus tiburonensis*, the rare Mariposa Lily that crowns the mountain, was backlit, a tapestry of maroon and cream colored petals. We had found the plants hidden among the dry grasses and serpentine rocks of the barren hillside, each with its own individual patterns and hues.

David Marraccini, Maxine Schwab, Bob, and I agreed that these rare lilies, found nowhere else on earth, were miracles of nature. Miraculous too was the fact that the plants had survived, unknown and unprotected, surrounded by Bay Area development.

It wasn’t until June of 1971 that Dr. Robert West, a native plant enthusiast who lived nearby, discovered the flowers camouflaged in the dry grasses as he walked the slope of the mountain. He found nothing like this species in either the Marin Flora or Munz. Dr. West’s new treasure eventually came to the attention of Albert Hill of the U.C. Botanical Garden who named the species *Calochortus tiburonensis*.

A chance meeting with Dr. West established him as a friend and mentor who often alerted our Stockton group when the plants were peaking. We were saddened by his death a few years ago. We remembered Dr. West on this field trip and hope that someday a plaque commemorating his discovery of *C. tiburonensis* will be found among the dry grasses and rare floral jewels crowning the slopes of Ring Mountain.

Note: *Calochortus tiburonensis* is now protected in Ring Mountain Preserve on the Tiburon Peninsula.

April plans...

Early April (to be arranged).
Chico Grunerd’s Table Mountain near Oakdale. Myriads of goldfields and meadowfoam decorate vernal pools atop this volcanic plateau overlooking the Stanislaus River.
(phone 477-3966)

Tuesday April 6, 6:30 pm.
Nature center, Oak Grove Regional Park at the corner of I-5 and Eight Mile road in Stockton. "Sexual Encounters of a Floral Kind." You’ll never look at flowers in the same way again after viewing this mind-boggling DVD about how far flowers will go to attract pollinators. Prior to the DVD, Stockton area CNPS members will lead a brief tour of the native plant habitat garden next to the nature center. The program is free, but there is a $5 entry fee to the park. Phone 953-8814.

April 15-18 Death Valley area.
We’ll try and capture the beauty of the magnificent Panamint daisies (Enceliopsis covillei) as they raise their huge yellow petals skyward in Wildrose Canyon (the rare Panamint daisy is the CNPS masthead logo). We’ll also study some of the late-blooming flowers on the valley floor.

For additional fieldtrips in April please phone 477-3966.
Del Puerto Canyon
by David Marraccini

Martha, Bob, and David traveled to Del Puerto Canyon to see the Golden Eardrops (Ehrendorferia chrysanth.) in flower. Currently, Golden Eardrops belongs to the poppy family (Papaveraceae). Previously the name was Dicentra chrysanth and belonged in the Bleeding Heart family (Fumariaceae).

The interesting flowers are yellow gold in color and the leaves have the look of the common garden variety of bleeding heart plants. We found the plant growing on the side of the road up on a hill in the canyon. The Golden Eardrops seem to grow in the grassland oak woodland habitat, where it does not have to compete with other plants. We also saw Blazing Stars (Mentzelia sp.) with their impressive showy flowers.

Bob also took pictures of Yarrow (Achillea millefolium) and a Mariposa lily species.

The blue oak woodland is dominated by its namesake, the Blue Oak (Quercus douglasii). The Blue Oak is a large tree with blue-green leaves, contrasting with gray-whitish bark. The blue leaves are covered with a wax which cuts down on water loss in the hot dry environment in which they grow. We also saw Gray Pine; this beautiful gray-needled pine is also well adapted to a dry climate and it’s a vertically challenged tree that seems to have a hard time growing straight up and down.

Another treat on the same trip was seeing Great Horned Owls at the locally-named “Owl Rock.”

Photos by Bob Stahmer
Become a Master Gardener
by Mark Brunell

"Advice to grow by" is the motto of the California Master Gardener program. Part of the University of California's Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR), the California Master Gardener Program is charged with conveying the University's gardening and pest management knowledge to the public. Ultimately, this knowledge comes from research specialists at the University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE), which is the public outreach division of ANR. Here in the San Joaquin Valley, we have ready access to the main UCCE offices located at UC Davis and Berkeley, and the local office in Stockton. The California Master Gardener Program is one of fifteen ANR statewide programs; other programs include the Center for Water Resources, the Integrated Pest Management Program, and the Renewable Resources Extension Act Program.

Forty-five California counties have Master Gardener programs, with Marin and Sonoma counties having especially large programs. Master gardeners are volunteers from the community that are trained by UCCE Specialists and other professionals in a training program that covers core programs in horticulture and pest management. There is a fee for the program, and fingerprinting and background checks are required. The San Joaquin County program is not taking new members this year, but will resume training classes in 2011. In addition to the course work, Master Gardeners must complete a certain number of volunteer hours their first year, and then maintain a lower level of volunteer work every year thereafter. They must also undergo continuing education. Volunteer work takes many forms, including writing articles, conducting plant clinics, staffing the plant "hotlines" and booths at various farmers markets where they answer the public's questions, assisting schools in setting up gardens and other educational workshops, and in developing demonstration gardens. Some county programs also operate experimental gardens, such as the Lake Merritt Trials Garden in Alameda County, which began operation in 2007.

Master Gardeners in Stockton are ready to help anyone with plant or pest questions. A Master Gardener is present in the UCCE office from 9 am - 12 pm Tuesday - Thursday. They can be reached by telephone at 209-953-6112, by email at mgsanjoquin@ucdavis.edu, or by visiting the office at 2101 E. Earhart Ave Ste 200, Stockton, CA 95206.

In an effort to promote sustainable landscaping, Master Gardeners are involved with disseminating information about native plant species and assisting in the establishment of demonstration gardens featuring natives, as well as assisting in the research aimed at observing the behavior, requirements, and performance of natives under cultivation. Master Gardeners are involved in the testing and observation of natives making up the UC Davis Arboretum All-Stars for Valley-Wise Gardening. This is a set of 100 species that the UC Davis Arboretum has identified as being water-wise, attractive, and easy to grow. The list includes 13 native species, some well known to CNPS members: Serpentine Columbine (Aquilegia eximia), Blue Grama Grass (Bouteloua gracilis), Berkeley Sedge (Carex tulemica), Western Redbud (Cercis occidentalis), Toyon (Heteromeles arbutifolia), Coral Bells (Heuchera 'Rosedale'), Canyon Snow Pacific Iris (Iris 'Canyon Snow'), Silver Carpet California Aster (Lessingia filaginifolia var. californica 'Silver Carpet'), Deer Grass (Muhlenbergia rigens), Santa Margarita Foothill Penstemon (Penstemon heterophyllus 'Margarita B.O.P.'), Valley Oak (Quercus lobata), California White Sage (Salvia apiana), and the Giant Chain Fern (Woodwardia fimbrata). The arboretum is actively working to expand this list and in the future the Master Gardeners will be an integral part of the testing of these species in demonstration gardens throughout the state.

In the future, the Master Gardener Program will continue to serve in the development of natives as garden plants and the transfer of gardening knowledge to the public. Further information about the Master Gardener Program can be found at http://cagardenweb.ucdavis.edu/.
2009 - Snapshots to the Rescue  

by Bob Stahmer

The year 2009 was drawing to a close and I was feeling a bit down that I’d been on what I’d remembered as few outdoor excursions compared to previous years. The fact that it had been a month or two since the last outing might have made the memory a bit foggy because when I checked the 2009 scheduling book I realized that I’d gotten out of the house plenty of times! Maybe I’d even taken too many trips! Naw!

It turned out that I’d been on 22 adventures from 1-day to week-long! I’d like to blame part of this syndrome on digital photography. On almost all these sojourns I find myself so absorbed in trying to document the trip’s scenery, plants, people and wildlife that I encounter that I forget to stop and enjoy the moment. The flipside, that I can’t imagine doing without, is the ability to relive each trip over and over again after returning from the hunt. The trips, several of which were CNPS and/or CNPS/University of the Pacific combination trips were all great except one fighting brutal headwinds in a kayak on Elkhorn Slough.

It’s always a bit sad when the trips are over but I perk right up when the day’s photos are uploaded to the computer and ready for the show! It’s then that I get that Christmas morning feeling.

I’ll try to get a good sampling of shots from some of the trips together for the next sub-chapter meeting. Meanwhile, you’ll find a few on one of the following pages of this newsletter. Enjoy.

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So just where in California did I wander in 2009?

San Luis Wildlife Preserve out of Los Banos
Elkhorn Slough at Moss Landing
Rock Creek Canyon Road and Salt Springs
Oak Grove Regional Park in Stockton
Merced River Canyon (see Spring ’09 newsletter)
Owl Creek Ranch table mountain beyond Oakdale
New Idria
Flood & Waverly on the east side of San Joaquin Co.
Kiln Canyon at Carnegie in the Tracy hills
Lake Berryessa
Kern River Canyon
Bull Run Trail - in Kern Co.
The Kern River Audubon Preserve
Del Puerto Canyon
Feather River Canyon
Ring Mountain near Tiburon
Lake Tahoe
Mount Shasta vicinity

Seeing the list, I feel better knowing I did get out of the house in 2009 after all. So, don’t cry for me CNPSers!
Nature Conservancy Hikes: Dye Creek Preserve & Vina Plains Preserve

Chico, California — The Nature Conservancy is hosting free hikes on the Dye Creek Preserve, located near Los Molinos, and the Vina Plains Preserve. The preserves are on working cattle ranches and the tours provide spectacular landscapes with guides who will provide cultural, geological and biological information. Hikes held rain or shine. Sturdy footwear/hiking boots required. Wear layered clothing, a hat, plenty of drinking water, and a lunch. Plan to arrive 15 minutes early. Space limited to 25 persons, so book early by contacting Andrea Craig of The Nature Conservancy at (530) 527-4261 or aclay@tnc.org.

**Vina Plains** – March 27 and April 3, 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM - Distance: 1 mile. The vernal pools here support rare, threatened or endangered species and attract waterfowl and shorebirds that feast on pool creatures at this time.

**Dye Creek Canyon** – March 27, April 10, and May 1, 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM - Distance: 4-5 miles. Cuts through Dye Creek, which cuts through volcanic buttes, hills and blue oak woodlands, before emptying into the Sacramento River. Also explore a cave thought to be frequented by Ishi, the last survivor of the Yahi Indian Tribe. Hike challenges are a creek and rocky terrain.
Mushroom Alert
by Bob Stahmer

Although the main mushroom season is mostly past now it’s always a good time to give a warning to the outdoor adventurers which include the native plant people. There will still be flushes of toxic mushrooms throughout the wildflower season so all should beware of the potential hazards, especially if your interest is culinary.

Unfortunately, Grover Bethards and I were called upon to give a refresher to the Lodi Lake Docents and anyone else that desired to show up, on basic mycology, especially with respect to mushrooms. The “unfortunate” part was that there had already been serious poisonings in our area including one fatality.

Each year Californians are poisoned by mushrooms. Certainly, natural allergic reactions in individuals even to commercially-grown mushrooms occur, but invariably, we find someone who can’t resist the allure of free wild mushrooms. Most of the poisonings resulting in death in California are due to eating *Amanita phalloides*, commonly known as the “Death Cap.” In ancient history, this mushroom is suspected to be the one that ended the reign of Emperor Claudius of Rome.

In November 2009, after some heavy rainfall and mild temperatures, a flush of mushrooms occurred in the Lodi area. Even though there are not that many species of North American mushrooms that are deadly, the most plentiful mushroom in the Lodi Lake nature area at the time was probably the Death Cap. Not far behind in numbers was the Death Cap’s toxic relative *A. muscaria* or “Fly Agaric.” The Fly Agaric is much easier for new mushroomers to identify by it’s iconic red cap with white spots.

The report of the poisoning of a family of three surfaced soon after mushrooms started appearing this past fall. Death Cap toxin affects both liver and kidney functions and can result in death. One of the three victims did die and one other reportedly received a liver transplant. There is no known antidote available in this country. A medicine used in Europe derived from the milk thistle is not approved by the FDA but has, at times, been allowed to be imported and used in emergency cases.

The Death Cap has a cap which varies in color from white to metallic green, pure white gills underneath, often a “skirt” up on the stem and usually a cup at the bottom from which the stem emerges. Even though the genus *Amanita* contains one of the most toxic mushrooms on the planet, another species in this group is eaten by some bold hunters and reported to be tasty. The Death Cap is usually found associated with live oaks and seems to be spreading in California. Those who have been poisoned have said that the mushroom tasted very good. Once the toxins are in the person’s system and begin cycling through the liver, damage begins. One of the problems is that the person usually does not feel ill until some time after eating, allowing the toxins to begin having an effect before the victim is aware that there is a problem.

Some believe that if an animal is seen eating mushrooms they must be safe. This and other “wives’ tales” will get you into big trouble. One problem with this observation is that substances toxic to humans may be metabolized differently in other animal species. A second problem is that unless you follow the animal around for the next week or so, you won’t know if he got sick or died from eating the mushroom. Most poisonous mushrooms do not produce symptoms instantly after being eaten.

As a final word, if you aren’t an expert in mushroom identification, leave them where they lay and appreciate them for their beauty and their role in breaking down organic matter and returning nutrients to the ecosystem.
Spring Wildflowers of 2010

By Mark Brunell

Spring is upon us once again, and many plants did not bother to wait for the Vernal Equinox (March 20th) to start their show. A report from Trent Burckett (Department of Visual Arts, University of the Pacific), who visited Del Puerto Canyon on March 13th, reported carpets of flowers throughout the canyon, with Blue Dicks (*Dichelostemma capitatum*, Thymidaceae) in great abundance, including a few albino forms. Another report given on March 14th by Bob Stahmer indicated that the Lake Berryessa area in Napa County is still a bit early bloom-wise, however hundreds of Abode Lilies (*Fritillaria pluriflora*, Liliaceae) were in bloom with no unopened buds in evidence. It would seem that spring has come a bit early this year.

From Southern California have come reports of heavy rains in the deserts and therefore extensive spring blooms are anticipated. For our area, the rainfall data for Sierran (CVT, Calaveras Big Trees State Park), Desert (DTV, Death Valley), North Coast (NSH, Napa Fire Station), and South Coast Range (PNH, Panoche) stations are shown in the figure (data from California Data Exchange Center, http://cdec.water.ca.gov/).

The transition from September to October 2009 was very abrupt, with October being a very wet month, followed by a dry November and then generally typical patterns until present. For the CVT station, October rain was over twice the 10-year mean for that month, and November was the driest in a decade at a paltry 1.28 inches. For the DTV station in the desert, October through December were very dry, but January and February were much wetter than average. This pattern differs from last year where November was wet and January dry. Comparing this seasons rainfall totals with last years, all four stations had more rain this season than last. The CVT station had little change, DTV had about 1.5 inches more, NSH has over 5 inches more, and the PNH station had almost 5 inches more than last year. Therefore, the Coast Ranges received a lot more rain this season than last, however more interior stations did not.

We can all remember the great bloom from last year and with the increased rain this season the bloom is bound to be even better this time.