

Insignis

Newsletter of the Alta Peak Chapter, celebrating and supporting the native plant communities in Tulare County, serving the Central Valley and Sierra Nevada Mountains and Foothills.

Volume 26, Number 2

April 2016

Rare Plant Award

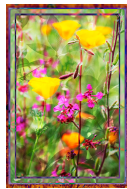
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Chapter President's Message

by Melanie Keeley

What a joyous wildflower year this has been, all the more so because it seems, at least for the moment, an end to the brutal drought Tulare County has been suffering. I have spent extensive time over the past month enjoying stunning landscapes throughout California. With amazing ocean views from Tomales Point Trail in Point Reyes National Seashore, I encountered football-field-sized patches of blooming purple Douglas Iris.

Driving to Santa Cruz and south along the magnificent Route 1 to Cambria, I admired blue-carpeted cliffs of *Ceanothus thyrsiflorus*, also known by its familiar name Blue Blossom. While in search of the lovely, elusive Striped Adobe Lily, *Fritillaria striata* in the foothills of Tulare County, I waded through a wealth of wildflowers to do so. Tooling around Lone Pine on the east side of the Sierra Nevada, with its unparalleled rugged beauty, then visiting Death Valley reminded me how actually full of life and color and diversity deserts really are.

I get the inside scoop for great wildflower viewing from the best sources—knowledgeable locals. Not that I know people from far reaches of California, but, by perusing the State

CNPS public group on facebook ([facebook.com/groups/38417209275](https://www.facebook.com/groups/38417209275)), you can see notices where spectacular or unusual botanical sightings can be found. You'll find that botanists and serious native plant aficionados post fantastic photos often with specific information on where to see what, when and why. You can inquire for more information and connect with plant people from all over the state.

Often various chapters also have special plant-oriented field trips or events that they are offering the public. The same certainly applies for seeing the fantastic flowering currently here in Tulare County!

Go to the Alta Peak Chapter of facebook page at [facebook.com/altapeakchapterCNPS](https://www.facebook.com/altapeakchapterCNPS) to catch updates on both Tulare County wildflower hotspots, as well as our chapter's great events. (Hint: Check out the next field trip on Saturday, April 9, from 9 – noon to see Herbert Preserve's Vernal Pools -- in their prime, with botanical experts.)

What could be better? Finding the best wildflower hotspots while learning and enjoying a new experience in a new location during this remarkable springtime wildflower pageant!



Chapter Field Trips Report

from Ginger Bradshaw

All Chapter field trips are free and open to everyone.

Saturday, April 9, 2016, 9 - Noon

Vernal Pool at James K. Herbert Wetland Prairie Preserve

You might have heard the term “vernal pools.” Do you know what makes them so special and unique? Looking like muddy cow wallows or dry, crusty, salty flats over the summer and into early winter, you wouldn’t expect that they were something special. But, in the springtime, these ethereal pools can light up in brilliant blooming glory. As the pools dry out, the wildflowers form colorful concentric rings taking on its shape and contour. Other exotic plants generally cannot tolerate the extremes of inundation, desiccation and drastic changes in diurnal/nocturnal water chemistry. The specialized native flora and fauna that has evolved under these stressful conditions occupy this specific niche, surviving and even flourishing. So, appreciate that these vernal pools are dwindling, colorful gems in our native landscape.

In this rainfall-plentiful year, you will get a chance to visit vernal pools. The Alta Peak Chapter, together with Sequoia Riverlands Trust, is excitedly co-sponsoring a field trip to explore the Central Valley’s Herbert Preserve Vernal Pools. We are fortunate to have two distinguished ecologists who will be leading this tour—Dr. Jon Keeley, who has studied the characteristics of vernal pools and their uniquely adapted plants in Mediterranean regions throughout the world, and regional expert, Bobby Kamansky, who has also studied them at length and has successfully restored and recreated them in the Herbert Preserve will provide their individualized perspectives on these priceless, endangered systems.

Meet at 9 am at the middle parking area, which is west of the intersection of Farmersville Road (aka Road 168, South of

Highway 198) and the Tulare Lindsay Hwy (aka Hwy 137 east of Highway 99). There will be banners on the fence along the highway indicating the parking area. Come prepared with water, sunscreen, hat, and walking shoes. Surfaces may be muddy and slightly slippery, but will generally be flat. Learn more about the James K. Herbert Wetland Prairie Preserve at sequoiariverlands.org.

June 25, 2016, at 12 Noon

High Meadow Field Trip in Sequoia National Park

Take a stroll with National Park Service Plant Ecologist, Erik Frenzel around Long Meadow (in the Wolverton area). Long Meadow is at 7,250 ft elevation, two miles north of the General Sherman tree in Giant Forest. This is one of the most gentle and botanically lovely walks in the front country of Sequoia National Park. The trail is flat to moderately sloping for less than two miles, looping around the open Long Meadow, with shaded portions that dip into the surrounding upper mixed conifer forest. Along the way, the group will catalogue the plants that are discovered and learn about the ecology of the meadow.

For directions, it’s best to follow the park map that is given at the Ash Mountain entrance station of Sequoia National Park. Be prepared to pay \$20 entrance fee if you do not have an annual pass. The Wolverton turn off is two miles north of the General Sherman Tree. The drive to Wolverton from then entrance station to Giant Forest in Sequoia National Park takes about 45-60 minutes.

Meet at 12 noon on the deck of the Wolverton snack shop (closed) that overlooks the meadow, where we will gather for lunch (bring your own). The guided walk will begin after lunch, around 12:30 pm. This is a field trip for all ages and is open to everyone. Bring sack lunch, water, hat and sunscreen.

If possible, please RSVP to Ginger Bradshaw, by email at gingerbradshaw936@gmail.com or by phone at 559-827-7604.



photo credit: Bobby Kamansky

Rare Plant Treasure Hunt Award for Alta Peak Chapter

Congratulations! Our Rare Plant Team was awarded the 2nd place State CNPS award for documenting the most rare plant occurrences. Thank you to Ann Huber and Mary Merriman, for leading the team, with Bill Thiessen contributing.

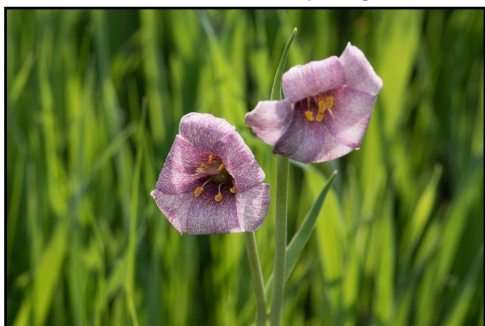
Mona Robison, Ph.D., CNPS Rare Plant Program Manager, writes: Alta Peak Chapter had a small contingent of dedicated volunteers get their RPTH project off the ground last year. These volunteers attended several training events, and undertook the rigorous tasks of acquiring collecting permits and collecting specimens. We look forward to seeing more of what Alta Peak Chapter will accomplish in upcoming years!

2015 was a busy year for the CNPS Rare Plant Treasure Hunt (RPTH) program. We would like to thank our former RPTH Coordinator, Danny Slakey, for making it happen and selecting these award recipients based on their data submitted and time spent in the field. We have a new RPTH Coordinator this year, Steve Schoenig, who is busy setting up trips and contacting volunteers to help make this another outstanding year. He can be contacted at sschoenig@cnps.org.

The complete list of individual and group awards for 2015 can soon be found on the Rare Plant Treasure Hunt page on the CNPS State website at cnps.org/cnps/rareplants/treasurehunt.

The Rare Plant Treasure Hunt (RPTH) is a citizen-science program started by CNPS in 2010 with the goal of getting up-to-date information on many of our state's rare plants, while engaging chapter members and other volunteers in rare plant conservation. Many of California's rare plant populations have not been seen in decades and some parts of the state have seen little to no botanical exploration to date.

This program helps conserve our rare flora by providing valuable data to the CNPS Rare Plant Program and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Treasure Hunters can join an organized rare plant search or learn how to plan their own trips by attending one of our training events scheduled for 2014; those who already have botanical experience can start leading their own trips! You can also sign up for the mailing list to be notified of upcoming events by sending an email to treasurehunt@cnps.org.



Striped Adobe Lily (*Fritillaria striata*) photo credit: Bill Thiessen

Calscape: a Gardener's Resource

by Melanie Keeley

The California Native Plant Society has created an impressively helpful, online native plant landscaping resource. Located on the State website —cnps.org— under the “Gardening” tab at the top of the home page, you will find the “Calscape Native Plant Database.” Calscape showcases a comprehensive, visual and descriptive collection of native plants found throughout the entire state. Just click on the map, and voila, you’ve got a subset of plants particularly suited and native to your area. Along with each plant’s image, you will see recommended site characteristics and care requirements. You can select from various categories that provide you with a palette of “very easy plants” or “drought tolerant plants” or “ground covers”.

Under the “Gardening” heading, highlight the “Planning Your Garden,” “Sample Native Garden Plans.” Available are designs for various situations—whether for patio gardens, clay soil, parking strips, full or part sun flowering meadows, or habitat gardens. These pre-planned landscapes come complete with plant species listings and follow-up care and maintenance recommendations. Another section entitled, “Ditch Your Lawn,” is outstanding in its breadth and application. It includes basic, practical landscaping principles that will make your gardening experience much more successful, such as “Use plants that are as local as possible” and “Pair plants that grow together in nature,” (for example, in “Chaparral: plant drought-tolerant woody shrubs: *Ceanothus*, *Heteromeles*, *Arctostaphylos*, *Eriogonum*, and some oaks”, or in “Oak woodlands and their understory: plant gooseberries, irises, hummingbird sage, and coffeeberry.”)

Other really reasonable, yet often overlooked, suggestions are offered: “Rely on natural rainfall as much as possible: Plan your garden so that it can exist on natural rainfall” and “Keep as much rainfall on your own property as is possible via bioswales, contours, and permeable surfaces.”

The “Grass Removal” section describes tried and true techniques such as sheet mulching, solarization, sod cutting, to name a few, along with the pluses and minuses of each approach. Other topics broached are mulching, irrigation, minimizing weeds, allowing plants to achieve their natural size, and soil fertility.

Just about when you’re overwhelmed with all of this, the “Find a Professional” section thankfully pops up. Sources for buying native plants are provided by region and include commercial and non-profit organizations like botanic gardens or chapter sales. It even instructs on native plant propagation and recommends additional references. Finally, if you are wanting for still further know-how, join the Calscape Gardening Blogs and CNPS Discussion Forums! Find these sources at calscape.cnps.org and you’ll be glad you did!

Rare Plant Team Report

by Mary Merriman

Although we did not conduct a Rare Plant Treasure Hunt in 2015, we did form a rare plant team for our chapter. Ann Huber leads the team with Mary Merriman, and Bill Thiessen contributing. We attended workshops on specimen collecting and vouchering sponsored by CNPS, several plant identification workshops from Jepson, and the CNPS Conservation Conference in San Jose.

Collecting permits were obtained from Sequoia National Forest, BLM and some private landowners. We hope to continue Rare Plant Treasure Hunt field trips in our local areas and do some rare plant monitoring. A survey was done of a population of *Iris munzii*. A new occurrence of the rare plant *Allium abramsii* was discovered and vouchered from Blue Ridge. This is the only occurrence of this *Allium* west of the Great Western Divide.

On February 27, Sequoia Riverlands Trust and Alta Peak Chapter sponsored the annual wildflower walk at Lewis Hill Preserve near Porterville. This field trip was a resounding success with 70 participants of all ages enjoying botanist Fletcher Linton. His colorful descriptions of the geology regarding the formation of adobe soils in the Sierra foothills made a complex history very understandable. Perfect clear warm weather prevailed with singing meadowlarks, enough wind for kite flying and a picnic at the top.

The wildflower walk was combined with a CNPS Rare Plant Treasure Hunt to survey the beautiful striped adobe lily (*Fritillaria striata*). Few of us had ever seen this jewel of a flower or enjoyed the delicate sweet fragrance. Ann Huber passed out colored flags with instructions on how to recognize and flag the plants. People fanned out across the hillside and worked their way slowly to the top, flagging new plants along the way. About 250 lilies were flagged and the inventory will be sent to CNPS for the Alta Peak Chapter.

Besides the usual masses of black mustard, there were lovely displays of glassy onion (*Allium hyalinum*), fiddleneck (*Amsinckia eastwoodiae*, sp.), *Dichelostemma capitata*, *Lomatium* sp., *Lomatium* sp., and caterpillar phacelia (*Phacelia cicutaria*). *Mimulus floribundus* (now *Erythranthe floribundus*) peeked out from the rocks.

The striped adobe lily is only found in Kern and Tulare Counties on specific adobe soils. It is listed as endangered by the State of California and listed as 1B by CNPS.

Citizen science is alive and well in Tulare County! If you would like to be part of the Rare Plant team and receive email notices about future outings (sometimes with short notice), please contact Ann Huber at ahuberdas@gmail.com. Volunteers will be given training and instruction for assisting with Chapter-sponsored Rare Plant Treasure Hunts.



San Joaquin Adobe Sunburst (*Pseudobahia peirsonii*)
photo credit: Ann Huber



Mary Merriman documenting the rare plant,
San Joaquin Adobe Sunburst (*Pseudobahia peirsonii*)

Conservation Report

by Joan Stewart

Conservation issues are in holding patterns these past months, with no agreed-upon proposals to deal with the dead/dying forest tree concern. We read articles such as "the four horsemen still threaten Sierra's trees", but no single answer will suit the various questions. We interject a concern for riparian systems, however, into the various "restoration" ideas. So, we wait.

A big move ahead is the expected completion and distribution of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Forest Plan Revision for Inyo, Sequoia, and Sierra National Forests. Our Chapter will read and comment as needed.

Oak Trees in California

by Melanie Keeley

Golden savannas peppered with towering valley oaks, cool shade cast by broad blue oak canopies, twittering live-oak-clad canyons alongside trickling streams—these are some of the memorable landscapes that reflect California. For thousands of years, oaks have lent character, beauty, comfort, and inspiration, as well as food and shelter, to residents of this state. They increase the value of land, enrich the soils, protect the watershed and simply create an incomparable environment.

Though there are almost 8 million acres of oak woodlands in this state, over 1 million acres have been lost over the last century. Not only are mature oak trees dying or being removed in staggering numbers, they are unable to regenerate as they once did because of population-related pressures, livestock grazing, agriculture, competition with exotic weeds and grasses and either too frequent fire return intervals or fire suppression practices. Hundreds, if not thousands, of wild species are dependent on these trees, relying on them for food and shelter. With oaks at the center of an intricate web of life, this loss clearly has broader critical implications.

The genus *Quercus* literally means “fine tree.” Oaks are characterized by thick, sometimes corky bark, lobed or entire leaves, catkins, wind pollination, hard wood. They are long-lived, up to 200 or 300 years and as much as 600 years. *Quercus* may be separated into one of three lineages—White Oaks, Black Oaks and Golden or Intermediate Oaks, depending upon one or two year acorn ripening, type of acorn cap, leaf shape and spininess, wood and bark type.

Eighteen species of oaks inhabit the whole of California. Half are shrubs and half are trees. Five of those nine trees are deciduous, either winter-deciduous or drought deciduous, (*Quercus douglasii*, *Q. engelmannii*, *Q. lobata*, *Q. kelloggii*, and *Q. garryana*), and four are evergreen (*Q. agrifolia*, *Q. wislizenii*, *Q. chrysolepis*, *Q. tomentilla*). Here in Tulare County, five tree oaks dominate: Canyon Live Oak (*Q. chrysolepis*), Blue Oak (*Q. douglasii*), Black Oak (*Q. kelloggii*), Valley Oak or White Oak (*Q. lobata*), and Interior Live Oak (*Q. wislizenii*).

Oaks occur either in gallery forests, where branches and leaves overlap, in woodlands, where leaves do not overlap thereby allowing more sunlight with lower soil moisture levels, or savannas, where trees remain far apart, scattered throughout grasslands.

Adapted to fire, some species and seedlings survive either by crown sprouting or by sprouting from adventitious buds under bark. Oak trees are not considered a fire hazard. In fact, it is thought that due to exceedingly high water content, evergreen oaks may even resist fire.

Understanding the life cycle of an oak facilitates caring for a mature specimen as well as for establishing newly planted trees. In nature, acorns drop from oaks during October

Tips for Safely Landscaping Under Oaks

- Plant no understory plants within 10' of trunk
- Landscape with plants with the same life cycle as oaks
- Minimize impacts by planting small, spacing widely
- Leave natural leaf litter because it gives life and nutrients back to the soil, keeping it rich, moist and friable

and November germinating with the warm, moist conditions of spring. As germination is initiated, a long, deep taproot is sent into the ground to ensure a continuous source of critical moisture. Green leaf growth begins which produces energy to be used to develop a horizontal network of roots that will conduct most of the water and nutrient uptake. Most of these roots are concentrated in the top three feet of soil and within the drip line of the canopy, though they do spread well beyond the canopy. In later maturity, vertical roots called sinkers drop from the lateral root system to further stabilize the tree. Hopefully, by summer the sapling is well-established enough to endure periods heat and drought. At this time, its metabolism slows, entering into a rest period in which water use is reduced. Fall's cooler temperatures and higher humidity signal activity and growth to begin again.

When dealing with oaks, these cycles should be maintained to keep tree vigorous. It is especially important to continue these natural regimes in the case of mature oaks. Ideally, no new landscaping should occur under an oak canopy at all. However, in the real world, it happens. Maintaining an unplanted ten foot radius from the trunk, and landscaping sparingly under the rest of the canopy using plants compatible to the oak, should keep the tree healthy and vigorous. Most mature oaks do not require supplemental watering except during extended drought. If it is necessary to water, do so deeply for a day or two, outside of the 10' margin from the trunk. Another possible strategy is to extend the natural rainy periods by watering on cool days into May and June then again in September and October when temperatures are lower. Also, retaining oak leaf mulch under the entire canopy area will serve to keep the roots cool and moist longer.

cont'd on pg 6



Blue Oak (*Quercus douglasii*), photo credit: Melanie Keeley

Chapter Grant Program

by Betty Avalos

The newly formed River Ridge Institute in Springville was awarded \$500 as part of the Alta Peak Chapter's 2016 grant program. River Ridge Institute is taking over the education program of River Ridge Ranch and is revising part of the curriculum to teach students about native plants, their identification, natural history, ecology and a bit of anatomy and physiology.

To do this, they are creating a teaching module called "Nature Printing", in which students will identify native trees and shrubs with emphasis on California sycamore, interior live oak, valley oak, Oregon ash, willow and redbud. Students will collect a leaf, identify its anatomy and understand the structure and function of venation. In addition, they will relate plant structure to capturing incoming solar energy, conversion of carbon to carbohydrate and the importance that plants play in providing habitat and food for wildlife and humans. After studying the leaf, students will make a print, rubbing or cast that will be theirs to keep.

The Alta Peak Chapter is pleased to support River Ridge Institute's mission to provide quality native plant education to Tulare County students. Information about our California Native Plant Grant Program for 2017 will be available in October of this year. The Board of Directors encourages schools, organizations and individuals involved in California native plant education, conservation or restoration to apply for grants in the amount of \$250 - \$500. Contact Betty Avalos, Education & Grants Chair, at bvavalos@hotmail.com for information on grant applications.



new green buckeye tree leaves

photo credit: Barbara Brydolf

Learn more at riverridgeinstitute.org

Oak Trees *cont'd from pg 5*

Pruning out dead, damaged, diseased or threatening material is advisable, although remove no more than 20% at a time. Prune winter-dormant species during the winter and evergreen species during their summer-semi-dormancy.

Oak root fungus (*Armillaria mellea*) and crown rot (*Phytophthora* spp.) are the most widespread pathogens leading to mortality in oak trees in Tulare County. Infection can be accelerated by summertime watering as fungus thrives in warm, moist, poorly aerated soils. Mature trees are far less resilient to changes in culture. The best way to prevent disease infestation is by keeping the tree healthy and vigorous by following nature's seasonal cues.

At present, the devastating fungus, Sudden Oak Death (*Phytophthora ramorum*), occurs only in coastal California counties from Monterey to Humboldt and in southwest Oregon. The white oaks, including blue and valley oaks tend to be more resistant to infestation; less so, the black oak group. Most susceptible are the trees in the red oak group, including coast live oak, California black oak as well as the canyon live oak.

If symptoms of fungal attack are noticed, it is best to: 1) remove any understory plants that require irrigation, 2) remove accumulated soil down to natural trunk flare, 3) discontinue watering under the oak canopy, 4) make certain water drains away from trunk.

Of the thousands of insects associated with oaks, very few need to be controlled. It is only when an oak is under duress that insect populations grow out of balance, threatening the life of the tree. Three of the most prevalent insects that, if infestation occurs, could result in the loss of a mature specimen: oak pit scale, carpetworm larvae and oak bark beetles. For control, make every attempt to keep the tree healthy—neither chemical or biological controls seem to be very effective.

At one time it appeared that the oak woodlands of California seemed plentiful to the extent that exploitation of these resources went uncontrolled. It is now painfully clear that these resources are finite, and irreplaceable once lost. As many times as we have enjoyed the breath-taking beauty of California's oak-enriched environment, is as many times as we should have thought to replant and foster its successors.

**The California Oak Foundation projects
"that one million acres of oak woodland will
succumb to development over the next 30 years
and 750,000 more acres will be threatened. That's
on top of the million acres of oak woodland
already lost to development since 1950."**

californiaoaks.org

Chapter Board Meeting

April 2, 2016 at 9:30 am

Home of Melanie Keeley in Three Rivers

Call Melanie at 559-799-7438 for directions.

We may have a working lunch, so, please bring a brown bag lunch.

Melanie will supply morning snacks and beverages.

Chapter Board meetings are open to all Chapter members. If you are interested in joining the Board, contact Melanie Keeley for a list of possible openings.

The Board of Directors has expanded and reorganized in the last few months. Melanie Keeley is continuing as Chapter President and organizer for the annual Chapter Plant Sale. Denise Griego is continuing as Secretary. Barbara Brydolf has taken over the position of treasurer, formerly held by Ann Huber. Ginger Bradshaw will now coordinate field trips and membership. Joan Stewart will continue as Conservation Chair, but is stepping down as Chapter Council Delegate. Cathy Capone will represent the Chapter as Chapter Council Delegate and continue as Horticulture Chair. After several years, Capone is also stepping down as editor of the newsletter. Elsay Cort returns as newsletter editor and continues as Outreach Chair (website, facebook) and Vice-President. Betty Avalos continues as Education Chair and Grant Program Coordinator. Ann Huber and Mary Merriman are heading the new Rare Plant Team

Editor's Note

by Elsay Cort

You are invited to receive your newsletter via email with a color pdf file. If you wish to discontinue your paper copy, or just want to see the newsletter in color, please send an email to altapeakchapter@gmail.com with your name. You will receive a reply email verifying your request.

You will also be placed on a Chapter email list for occasional updates for Chapter events like added field trips or changes in programs. You will not be inundated with emails from the Chapter.

Call for Contributors for Chapter Newsletter

Chapter members are encouraged to send articles, topics, photographs, and interesting native plant tidbits to include in our newsletter and /or online sites. The contributors for this newsletter have been primarily Board members, but we would love to hear the voices of our general members.

You can share stories about your personal experiences with native plants, learning about them, finding them in the natural landscape or how you have integrated them into garden landscapes.

Send contributions to altapeakchapter@gmail.com.

Alta Peak Chapter ❖ Online Resources

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facebook page: facebook.com/altapeakchapterCNPS

email: altapeakchapter@gmail.com

CNPS State Website: cnps.org

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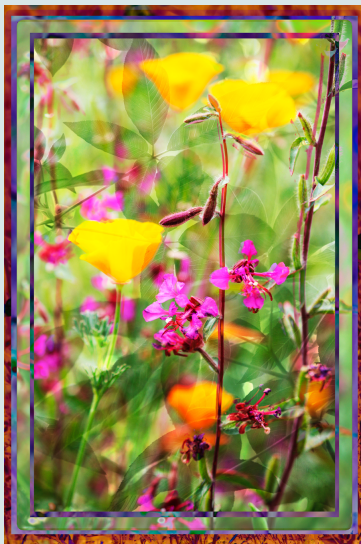
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Alta Peak Chapter Annual Native Plant Sale

October 1, 2016



Three Rivers Arts Center
North Fork Drive in Three Rivers

image: elsahcort.com

CNPS MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name: _____

Address: _____

City / Zip: _____

Telephone: _____

Email _____

(optional): _____

I wish to affiliate with: ____ Alta Peak Chapter

Other Chapter _____

Membership Category:

____ Student/Limited income, \$25

____ Individual, \$45

____ Family \$75

____ Plant Lover, \$100

____ Patron, \$300

____ Benefactor, \$600

____ Mariposa Lily, \$1500

Mail with check to CNPS, 2707 K St., Suite 1, Sacramento,
CA 95816, or you can join or renew automatically year
after year via the website — cnps.org — and click on JOIN.

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