

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 29, Number 3

September 2019

President's Message

news from Barbara Brydolf
Page 1

Value-added Ranching...

Its relation to Plant Conservation
Page 2

Native Plant Sale

October 5, 2019
Page 2 and 8



Fire Recovery Guide

New from CNPS
Page 3

Meadow Monitoring with NPS

A report from the field
Page 4

Rare Plant Report

Learning about rare local natives...
Page 5

Chapter Board Meeting

Coming September 11 - all members welcome!
Page 6

Tule River Parkway

new native gardens...
Page 6



Annual Foothills Festival

Coming November 2 - Native plant sales, family friendly events!
Page 7



President's Message
by Barbara Brydolf

It's been a while. A year, in fact since our newsletter *Insignis* was last published. It was a casualty of volunteer organization syndrome (I just made that up), where too few people try to do too much for too long. Fortunately, we got some help, in the form of Springville's own Rob Hodges. Rob has kindly volunteered to edit our newsletter for us, and is learning on the job. Some of you may know Rob already- he is a musician and landscaper who has installed the labyrinths at River Ridge and Lindsay City Hall. Welcome, Rob, and many thanks!

I want to direct your attention to the upcoming plant sale. As usual, we will be holding our annual sale in Three Rivers at the Arts Center on October 5. In the interest of decreasing our carbon footprint, we have emailed the pre-order form to those who have expressed a preference for electronic communications. If you didn't see the email come in last week, check your various boxes for an email from Rob. The form can also be downloaded from our website: altapeakcnps.org. If you prefer to continue receiving the pre-order form by mail, let us know. We will also have native plants for sale at the Foothills Festival in Springville on Nov. 2. See inside for details.

Also this fall, we will be involved in creating a native plant garden in the Tule River Parkway in Porterville. We can use all the help we can get. More information inside.

Mary Merriman has submitted two articles on rare plant surveys that were conducted this spring and summer. In addition, as part of a statewide program, we collected seed from some of those plants to be stored in seed banks. And here I must confess to being shortsighted. Previously, I was less than enthusiastic about rare plants. I felt that I had enough on my hands just trying to learn about the common ones, let alone the rare. And we know how very many different plant species California has! However, this year's experiences have taught me that rare plant work has a very significant value. Because of the way our laws are written, rare species must be taken into account whenever land use plans are being made. And one of the great limitations on planning is knowledge. Agencies have limited resources, and surveying for rare plants is not very high on the list of priorities. Too often, they don't know where the plants are, if the population is stable, or what factors can adversely affect them. Therefore, the conservation planning is compromised because the data are not available for them to make good decisions. Or perhaps the lack of data can be used as an excuse not to act. That is where citizen science projects like rare plant surveys can make a crucial difference, and why I'm now a convert. Knowledge is power.

Happy fall!

Annual Native Plant Sale

Presented by the Alta Peak
Chapter of the California Native
Plant Society

Saturday, October 5, 2019 from 9 am—2 pm
Three Rivers Arts Center
41763 North Fork Dr., Three Rivers, CA 93271

Because autumn is the best season to plant California native plants, we will once again be bringing to you a wide assortment of beautiful, hardy native plants! More than anyone, our chapter members realize that native plants succeed and thrive in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada. Well-chosen drought tolerant native plants are survivors, having adapted to this sometimes unforgiving climate. These plants fit both aesthetically as well as physiologically. Each bit of created habitat as well as protected wild lands provide critical food and shelter that sustains the varied wildlife dependent on it.

CNPS members receive a 10% discount on plants and 20% off book purchases. Membership information can be found on page 8 of the newsletter.

Pre-Order Plant Sale Forms (for members only) and deposits are due September 14, 2019.

Send pre-orders with deposit to: Alta Peak CNPS, PO Box 217, Three Rivers, CA 93271.

Plant order pick up will be on the day of the plant sale—Saturday, October 5, 2019 after 9 am.



Bush lupine photo by Melanie Keelie

Value-added Ranching and Plant Conservation. What Does It Mean?

by Gary Adest

The following is *Part One* of a multi-part article contributed by Gary Adest of River Ridge Ranch and River Ridge Institute, in Springville.

Let's start with the meaning of the word 'ranch'. Commonly, it's associated with raising some form of livestock, although when I moved to California over 50 years ago, I learned that one can ranch avocados as well as alfalfa. Weird, but, California, right?

The word ranch comes from Spanish *rancho* and the original meaning refers to a place where people gather to have meals. That etymology gives me license to play with both the meaning and the practice and, so, I'm going to continue to call our property River Ridge Ranch, even though all livestock have left. Really what I'm talking about are working landscapes and the importance of keeping them working, especially in California.

Let me state that I am a proponent of ranching and grazing, not so much because I come from a family tradition of doing so, but because grazing lands make up 80% of California, by some measures, and as they say, *The worst-run cattle ranch is better than the best-run condominium complex*. For the last 20 years, we've owned and managed a working cattle ranch that was leased to a grass-fed, grass-finished beef operation. In other words, a pretty high-end approach to carnivory and marketing and one that can be lucrative. But, we, as the recipient of grazing lease fees didn't make much income, let alone profit, after all the dust, urine and manure had settled.

We did, however, go to work from Day One to try and create as many parallel revenue sources as possible by venturing into anything that wasn't either illegal or downright dumb. Over these two decades, we've turned what was 100% of the land revenue from grazing into what became less than 10% of the annual income. We did that by diversifying and by keeping some fundamental biological and economic principles in mind. The first being that diversity is paramount and, so, we set about having numerous income streams that allowed us to buffer ourselves against the inevitable failure of some of those. Another principle was to never do anything that yielded only one output. In other words, if we needed to prune some branches near a pasture, we piled them for wildlife habitat and, ultimately soil generation. In the process, we avoided burning and sending carbon into the air and also chipping, with its particular use of fossil fuel. Nor did we haul them to

Continued on Page 3

Continued from Page 2

the landfill with all those attendant negative consequences. Twenty years later, these habitat piles are still hatching quail and sheltering towhees, lizards, snakes and a variety of small mammals.

We also reduced the cattle lease fees because we wanted to have an approach to grazing that did not maximize the biomass of beef at the expense of the soil, vegetation, waterways and wildlife. That created a grazing relationship in which we could propose weird approaches to land management and still be met with acceptance, albeit sometimes reluctant assent.



Turning this bunch of characters...

Additionally, we began to remove some acreage from full-time access to cattle because these areas supported Valley Oaks and a quick walk-through told anyone that there were no seedling or sapling *Quercus lobata* to be found. We figured that if cows had full-time access, there would be no Valley Oaks left in a few decades or a century and that meant the loss of a keystone species. That did not bode well for soil moisture, shade, habitat or water quality because the oaks grew along seasonal streambeds that provided habitat for obligate and facultative riparian species and breeding grounds for aquatic species, such as Pacific Tree Frog and Western Toad, along with their predators the garter snakes and racers.

The results of this experiment are that unfenced Valley Oak stands on the ranch have few to no young oaks, flash-grazed stands have some new recruits and a stand with no grazing for over two years has hundreds of young recruits.

Along with those oaks of two species, we have seen passive restoration recruitment of *Carex barbarae* (Santa Barbara Sedge) and *Leymus triticoides* (Creeping Wildrye), as well as *Muhlenbergia rigens* (Deergrass) and a significant increase in height and diameter of *Cephalanthus* (Buttonbush) and *Salix* (Willow). The streambed now supports a healthy population of *Mimulus* (Monkeyflower) and *Stachys* (Hedgenettle), too. Somehow, the cows have managed to prosper and find shade outside the exclosures, thanks to the overhanging limbs of those magnificent oaks.

All our pursuit of “value-added” has led to the fact that we didn’t make much money having cattle on the ranch and, so, with no excuses left, we could consider: What might happen if we stopped the grazing?

Tune in for Part Two.



...into this bunch of characters

CNPS Fire Recovery Guide

What should you do with your land after a wildfire?

The **CNPS Fire Recovery Guide** addresses that question in an easy-to-use booklet, which includes:

- Frequently Asked Questions
- Dos and Don'ts
- Care and Recovery
- Erosion Control
- Fire Preparedness
- Seeding
- Helpful decision trees, and more

Get your
free digital
copy now!

cnps.org/fire-recovery



Stay Tuned! Further information regarding this valuable, 95-paged Fire Recovery Guide will follow in subsequent editions of our newsletter, *Insignis*.

Meadow Monitoring with the National Park Service

by Mary Merriman

In August, Alta Peak Chapter members Melanie Baer-Keeley, Sue Carter, Denise Griego, Catie Karplus and Mary Merriman joined Ann Huber, Plant Ecologist for Sequoia and Kings Canyon, and Tom O'Day, Biological Science Technician, on Rock Creek at 9,600 ft along the Pacific Crest Trail south of Mt Whitney. Backcountry Rangers, Laura Pilewski and Chris Gooch added their expertise to the survey. All were treated royally by Chris, the Rock Creek Ranger. The strenuous 15 mile backpack over Cottonwood Pass at 11,400 ft amid towering peaks and magnificent foxtail pine forests was a significant challenge.



Lupinus lepidus var. ramosus

However all enjoyed the fantastic weather with no thunderstorms. Denise spotted deer and coyote in addition to the abundant golden mantle ground squirrel. Carpets of purple-blue *Lupinus lepidus var ramosus* (Branched tidy lupine), greeted us from Siberian Outpost as we passed. As always we were bolstered by the camaraderie of fellow plant enthusiasts.

Sequoia and Kings National Parks conducts ongoing surveys to compare meadows grazed by stock with meadows not grazed by stock. Not only Ann and Tom are working on this project over most of the summer, but the Backcountry Rangers are also trained in meadow monitoring. Management decisions about the level of grazing allowed are made based on scientific surveys. Each meadow is surveyed every 5 years. Examples of other meadows surveyed are East Lake and Hockett Meadow. This is the most comprehensive meadow monitoring program in the entire National Park Service. Logistics are somewhat complicated including planning and arranging food/equipment to be packed in by horse, training volunteers on the radio procedures and park safety procedures and instruction about the plants before departure.

Our first day in the field was spent in instruction from Tom O'Day, collecting voucher specimens and identifying all plants. Tom was able to teach us the difficult nuances among the sedges which had to be identified without inflorescences!

Small seedlings were the subject of much consideration. Comparison of the beautiful grasses waving in the wind, each with its own unique gestalt became easier as time progressed. We enjoyed the purple mist created over the meadows by the inflorescences of *Calamagrostis breweri* (Short hair reed grass). The almost invisible *Agrostis idahoensis* (Colonial bentgrass) was hard to spot at first with its dainty stems. The abundance of yampah (*Perideridia parishii*), flowering among waving grasses of intense green and soft purple created an image hard to forget. Tiny yellow monkeyflowers (*Erythranthe primuloides*), hid deep inside our survey plots. Even up this high, two invasive plants were found, the common garden dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*) and Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*).

Because we had so much help, the surveys took 2 1/2 days instead of the 4 allowed. The walk out was significantly easier with all of us acclimatized, carrying less weight, and with a few more muscles!

Our collaboration with Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks is helping the management and preservation of these high altitude meadow gems.



Erythranthe primuloides



Rare Plant Treasure Hunt

Short-Leaved Hulsea
(*Hulsea brevifolia*)
and
Springville Clarkia
(*Clarkia springvillensis*)
by Mary Merriman

RPTH in Sequoia National Park for *Hulsea brevifolia* July 23, 2019

The rare *Hulsea brevifolia* - Short-leaved Hulsea- is a lovely, small yellow *Asteraceae* (daisy family) which ranges from Tulare County in the south to Mariposa County in the Yosemite area. *Hulsea brevifolia* is ranked 1B.2 which means endangered or rare in California. Although its distribution occurs over several counties, it seems the populations are relatively few. The .2 means it is moderately threatened, in this case by road maintenance. Does this golden annual actually increase in disturbed areas, while paradoxically threatened by the same plowing and scraping? Only a few populations have been found this far south, two in Sequoia



Hulsea brevifolia
photo: Mary Merriman

Park and a few in Sequoia forest. The Sequoia Park population was last surveyed in 2003 and approximately 750 individuals were found. Elena Dupen (an undergraduate botany student at Oregon State University) conducted a Rare Plant Treasure Hunt with participation by CNPS Alta Peak members Barbara Brydolf, Emma Adest, Bill Thiessen and Mary Merriman and NPS staff, Jonathan Humphrey, Mandy Proudman and Anne Russell. Plants were counted individually, then flagged and recorded with waypoints and photographs. *Hulsea brevifolia* occurs in difficult areas, namely very steep hillsides in loose dry soil and on roadside

cutbanks. Our hardy participants tackled a steep slope to cover the entire population from 10:30 AM until 1:30 PM. The weather smiled on us with some slight overcast shade for the rough terrain. The complete count tallied over 1,200 individuals!

RPTH at River Ridge Ranch for Springville Clarkia May 4, 2019

A large group of plant enthusiasts turned out for this tour on private property to survey *Clarkia springvillensis* - Springville Clarkia- on a typical gorgeous spring morning, including Amy Patten, the Rare Plant Coordinator for State CNPS and two members from Kern CNPS Chapter, Lucy Clark and Clyde Golden. Martha Widman, Jonathan Vaughn, Cathy



Clarkia springvillensis
photo: Amy Patten

Capone and a few new folks joined in the Hunt. Led by Alta Peak Chapter President Barbara Brydolf, who also owns the property, we crossed the North Fork of the Tule River, walked past restored pasture lands and up a dirt road to the treasured Clarkia! It seemed happiest there on a steep slope in filtered shade of Canyon Live Oak. While Springville Clarkia looks almost like the more common Elegant Clarkia (*Clarkia unguiculata*), it has a calyx without any hairs and small lavender dots on the corolla. Individual plants were tallied and report made to California Natural Diversity Database by Amy. Later in the day another survey was made at SCICON with the help of Nancy Bruce. Several uncommon small Purple Navarretia (*Navarretia pubescens*) were also discovered at River Ridge. This Clarkia has a very limited distribution. With the

Continued on Page 6

Calling All Alta Peak Chapter Members!

We want you! We know you are strongly committed to the mission of this society. Now is the time to show that commitment. Giving back to this worthy organization can be very satisfying work. Please consider joining the Chapter Board of Directors. See open positions on page 7 and contact President Barbara Brydolf for ways to participate.

**Next Board Meeting on September 11, at 9 am
at the Springville home of Barbara Brydolf**

Call 559-539-2927 for directions. Chapter members are welcome.

Tule River Parkway Demonstration Gardens - Update

Alta Peak Adopts Plot in Tule River Parkway

The Alta Peak Chapter has decided to support the Tule River Parkway Association, the City of Porterville, and to demonstrate the use of native plants for gardening and wildlife, by adopting a garden plot along the Tule River in Porterville. This project, still in its infancy, is to adopt out multiple garden plots to different groups that they will plan, execute, and maintain, all to showcase native plants. The group also plans to remove invasive plants and replant natural areas with locally sourced natives. We will be prepping and planting our garden this fall.

Alta Peak is planning the following dates to work at the Tule River Parkway:

9/14 Garden Prep and Clearing

10/26 and 10/27 Garden Planting

11/9 Mulching

11/30 Garden Maintenance

12/18 and 12/19 Restoration Work and Planting.

Work will start at 9 am and continue until we finish or get too tired. The Tule River Parkway can be accessed from Jaye St. off 190. The entrance is on the west side of Jaye, north of W. Springville Ave. and just south of the bridge crossing the river (hard to see). If you are coming from the south (Hwy 190), you will not be able to make a left turn into the driveway, so continue across the bridge, make a U-turn, and come back south on Jaye. Our plot is just past the end of the parking lot - you won't be able to miss it.

Want to have a hand in the design of the plot? If you wish to become an official part of the group, email me at bbrydolf@gmail.com.

Continued from Page 5

This *Clarkia* has a very limited distribution. With the exception of a lone Kern County record in 1922, all records occur in the Tule River drainage. Patches of plants are often mixed in with Elegant *Clarkia* and can be easily missed. We are lucky to have several populations that are protected.

Rare plant surveys were also conducted for *Hulsea brevifolia* in Sequoia Forest and for *Fritillaria brandegei* (Greenhorn Fritillary) in the Camp Nelson and Johnsondale areas. If you wish to be added to the Rare Plant Team to help with surveys, contact Mary Merriman at (559) 679-9152.



Fritillaria brandegei

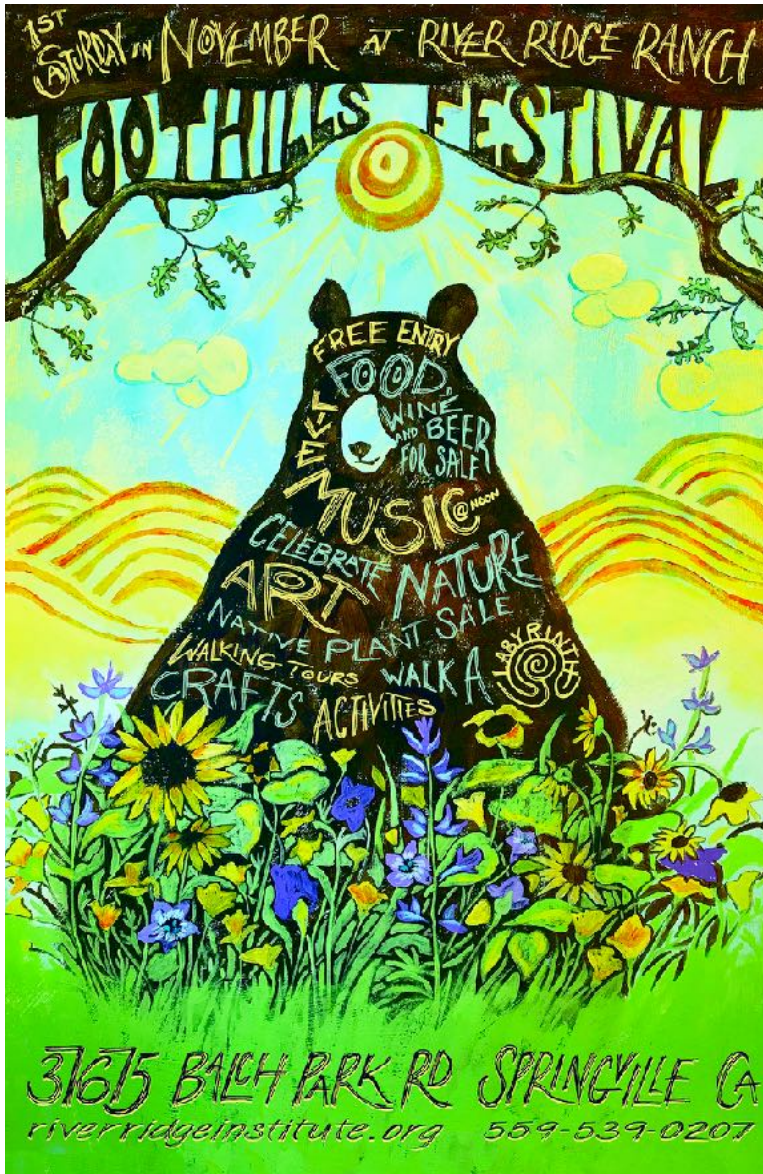
Photo: Amy Patten



Navarretia pubescens

Photo: open source

COMING SOON!
Third Annual Foothill Festival
River Ridge Ranch in Springville



Poster Art by Shelley McKnight

Come enjoy a day on the Ranch in the cool November weather. Native Plant Sales by Alta Peak members; Live music; Arts / Craft demonstrations and sales; Walking tours; Activities for kids (of all ages); Labyrinth walks; Wine, beer, and food for sale...and MORE!

Saturday November 2 - Gate open from 10 a.m. till 4 p.m.

Chapter Board of Directors

President / Treasurer / Conservation

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559-359-2827
bbrydolf@gmail.com

Vice President, Plant Sale, Books

Melanie Keeley
559-799-7438
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Rare Plants

Mary Merriman
559-679-9152
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Historian, Website

Elsah Cort
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Programs

This position is open....

Field Trips

This position is open...

Legislation

This position is open...



Alta Peak Chapter Annual Native Plant Sale

October 5, 2019



Three Rivers Arts Center
North Fork Drive in Three Rivers

image: Melanie Keeley

The Evolution of a Format

In an effort to become more ecologically sustainable and responsible, we are moving in the direction of digitizing our print materials (newsletters, PSAs, etc.) and mailing them electronically. Those members who have indicated a preference for mailed, paper copies of materials will continue to receive them as such. Thank you! Ed.

CNPS MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name: _____

Address: _____

City / Zip: _____

Telephone: _____

Email
(optional): _____

I wish to affiliate with: ____ Alta Peak Chapter

Other Chapter _____

Membership Category:

____ Student / Fixed Income \$25

____ Individual, \$50

____ Plant Lover, \$120

____ Supporter, \$500

____ Patron, \$1,000

____ Benefactor, \$2,500

**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 — click on JOIN.**

CNPS / Alta Peak
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