



GOLD FIELD NOTES

EL DORADO CHAPTER ❁ CALIFORNIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY ❁ JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2005

SURVIVING THE BLOOMLESS BLUES

By Shellie Perry

The shorter days of autumn can beg the question: what do I do with myself now that the flowers have done blooming? Is it really worth my braving cloudy skies and muddy, flowerless trails, or should I just spend the next six months hibernating in front of the television, watching as my mind and body slowly turn to pudding?

Well, fellow plant-lovers, I am here to remind you that the fall and winter months offer their own attractions. First, the trees put on a show - red Dogwood and Liquidambar, golden Black Oak and Bigleaf Maple, flaming Aspen - even the invasive Chinese Pistache trees are gorgeous. Fall breezes (and occasional gales) slowly defoliate the deciduous trees, and the fallen leaves now decorate the forest floor instead of the trees. Frost-rimmed fallen leaves are surely magical.

They almost look sugar-glazed, like something fairies would nibble while sipping berry juice and whispering about moonbeams and stuff. Interspersed with the yellow-brown leaves are bright, emerald-green mosses and silvery lichens. No longer brown and withered with the summer heat, these little spore-producers sparkle with dew. Lichens come in an amazing variety of forms, textures and colors. Cloudy, damp weather accentuates their peculiar beauty. Lichens actually span two taxonomic kingdoms; they are half algae and half fungus. How did this strange arrangement evolve? Somehow, in the dim and distant past, some fungi learned to capture and cultivate their own algae, forming a partnership. The algae produces food

through photosynthesis, and the fungus provides shelter for the algae, allowing it to thrive in all kinds of environments that would otherwise be lethal for a defenseless, little algae. Crustose, foliose or fruticose, yellow-green, silver-grey or weird orange, slimy, spongy, leafy or stringy - lots of pretty lichens!

Autumn is a great time to begin studying and enjoying mushrooms. Mushrooms are actually the fruiting bodies of fungi. They exist to perpetuate the species by producing spores, much as flowers exist to produce seeds. In our yard, the first boletes start popping up in early October, but not everywhere - only under the fruit trees, where they have been watered all summer. Boletes make their living by forming symbiotic relationships with the roots of certain trees. Like most mushrooms, they are fairly

high in protein, and deer consume them eagerly, jockeying for position, and pawing up the mulch to get at the emerging buttons. In January, we will have boletes all over the property, far too many for the deer to eat them all. Woody places will also feature orange Chanterelles, beautiful and toxic Amanitas, brown Honey Mushrooms

and the occasional Oyster Mushroom, probably growing on a tree branch. Open, grassy areas may feature *Bolbitius vitellinus*, a cute, little yellow mushroom which is coprophillic, meaning that it likes to grow on poop. It is very common in the American River Parkway, (LOTS of people walk their dogs there) along with *Volverella*

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California Black Oak (*Quercus kelloggii*)

CALENDAR

January 18 (Tuesday)

Monthly program.

Plant Species Diversity in California Serpentine: Regional Patterns and Possible Causative Factors. Ecologist Hugh Safford will tell us about serpentine soils in California and the unusual plants that grow on them. Details on this program inside this newsletter.

January 27 (Thursday)

Trip planning meeting.

Join us at 6:30 PM at Round Table Pizza on Ray Lawyer Drive for the annual trip planning meeting. Bring maps, books, etc., of your favorite walks and be prepared to lead the hikes you suggest.

February 15 (Tuesday)

Monthly program.

CNPS member Ernie Hartley will present a program on Albert Kellogg [1813-1887], physician, California botanist who made the earliest scientific description of the big trees of California [1845]. He explored the republic of Texas with John J. Audubon, and later made botanical explorations along the western coast of America from Terra del Fuego to Alaska. Kellogg helped found the California Academy of Sciences. Our Black Oak [*Quercus kelloggii*] honors him as do many other California plants.

March 1 (Tuesday)

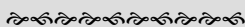
Grant deadline.

Clark Youth Fund grant applications due. See inside newsletter for details.

April 2 (Saturday)

Twice yearly plant sale.

Native plants and books on gardening and nature will be on sale from 9 am to 1 pm at Building "C" of the El Dorado County Government Center in Placerville.



Monthly programs are held on the third Tuesday of each month with the exception of August and December. Programs begin at 7 PM at the Placerville Public Library, 345 Fair Lane, Placerville.

For updates between newsletters
www.eldoradocnps.org

INFORMATION SOURCE FOR WILD PLANTS

www.calflora.org

Want to know about the plants growing in wildlands? CalFlora is the answer to your questions. The El Dorado Chapter donates money to help support this plant database and in return, all chapter members may use the site. To register and access the site, go to: www.calflora.org. Click "Register as a User." Then click "Register as a personal user or guest." Fill in the required information on the registration page and click on "create account." At the payment page, select "Prepaid Account Group" for the Payment Method. Then, on the following page, enter the following Prepaid Account Group code: `el-dorado-cnps`



SURVIVING THE BLOOMLESS BLUES

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speciosa, a medium-large, handsome, silvery-white mushroom. While some ground-dwelling species of mushrooms are tall, and therefore easy to spot, others are shy, and hide themselves under the forest's leaf litter. So, if you are walking down a woody path and notice kind of a big lump in the leaf litter, gently part the leaves and look a little more closely; you may just find a beautiful blue *Russula* or a big, white *Tricholoma*. If you want a good field book, I recommend "All That the Rain Brings", by David Aurora. It is informative, easy to read, has excellent pictures, and is locally relevant, because the author actually lives in California.

While you are looking for mushrooms, don't be surprised if you find some nice ferns. Many of our native ferns are evergreen, and easier to see when you are not distracted by blooming plants. Some, such as Polypodys and Maidenhair Ferns, commence putting out fresh, new fronds as soon as the seasonal rains wet the soil.

The "Pacific Coast Fern Finder" is an easy-to-use field guide, and small enough to fit in a pocket.

If all of these beauties and curiosities fail to muster your interest, if you simply MUST have flowers - well, heck - go to the ocean. With frost-free winters and quick-draining soils, the bay area offers something blooming every month of the year. Our mid-November trip to Point Reyes revealed a surprising number and variety of flowering plants at the base of the cliffs overlooking Kehoe Beach. We saw Seaside Daisy, (*Erigeron glaucus*), Great Valley Gumweed, (*Grindelia camporum*), Horned Searocket, (*Cakile maritima*), and plenty of others as well.

The point is: get yourself outside! Unlike much of the country, our area is blessed with mild winter weather, so we should get out regularly to enjoy it. Watch the birdies, look for animal tracks in the mud, or just gaze at the starkly beautiful silhouettes of the bare trees. Learn to enjoy all that our wonderful open spaces have to offer - not just the flowers.

INVASIVE SPECIES HUNT: LIQUIDAMBER AND BLACK LOCUST

John Hunter is helping with the California Invasive Plant Council's review of its list of invasive plants. He is particularly interested assessing the status of liquidambar (*Liquidambar styraciflua*) and black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*). John is inviting those who have seen these trees in wildland settings (not someone's yard or a park) to contact him with information about where they are living.

Black locust is found in the delta, along streams in the Sacramento Valley, scattered in ravines in the Sierran foothills (at least between Nevada and El Dorado County), and in similar locations in the San Francisco Bay Area. Liquidambar, however, does not seem to be found in natural vegetation anywhere in the state.

If you have observed either of these species in natural vegetation (except black locust in the areas mentioned above), please let John Hunter know. He would like to know the following about such

CNPS GRANTS FOR NATIVE PLANT GARDENS AND ACTIVITIES

Once again the El Dorado Chapter of the California Native Plant Society is pleased to announce that applications for Clark Youth Fund grants for activities about California's native plants are now being accepted. This annual grant program is available to schools and other organizations supporting school-aged children in El Dorado County. Applications for funding are to be post-marked by March 1, 2005. You will receive a response and/or funding by mid-April 2004.

The Clark Youth Fund was established by the El Dorado Chapter of CNPS in honor of George Clark, past president of the California Native Plant Society and long-time teacher of the variety and beauty of California's native plants. Over the past seven years, grants have averaged \$50-\$100 and have been used to purchase books, gardening supplies, native plants, and marking tags for native plant trails. For more information about requirements and the simple application process, contact:

Gloria Brown
530-626-3241 or
gloriahb@comcast.net

or write to:

El Dorado Chapter, California
Native Plant Society
PO Box 1948
Placerville, CA 95667

occurrences of these trees:

1. the vegetation type you observed the species in;
2. the species abundance;
3. is it associated with heavily disturbed sites; and
4. any other observations you suspect are relevant to assessing its invasive potential.

If you are aware of either of these species in the circumstances described above, please notify John Hunter at:

johnhunterca@sbcglobal.net

January Program: PLANT SPECIES DIVERSITY IN CALIFORNIA SERPENTINE: REGIONAL PATTERNS AND POSSIBLE CAUSATIVE FACTORS

Presented by Hugh Safford, Ph.D.

Hugh's talk will provide the audience with a basic understanding of the ecology of the vegetation of ultramafic ("serpentine") outcrops in California. He'll cover topics ranging from geology to soil to the vegetation itself. The first part of the talk will cover the geologic origins of serpentine, and how the idiosyncrasies of ultramafic rocks influence soils, soil productivity, and the growth

and composition of vegetation. The second part will focus on patterns of plant diversity (especially endemic diversity) on California serpentine, and what the primary environmental factors are that correlate with these patterns.

The third part will be a "virtual gazeteer" of selected serpentine sites in California and their endemic plants.

Hugh D. Safford is the Regional Ecologist, USDA-Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region, and has a research faculty affiliation with the Department of Environmental Science and Policy at UC-Davis. As such, he is the chief vegetation ecologist for the USFS in this part of the country (Pacific SW Region: California/Hawaii/Pacific Islands). Hugh has a

PhD in ecology from UC-Davis, an MA in secondary education from San Francisco State, and a BS in geology from Montana State. He did his PhD dissertation on fire and vegetation ecology and biogeography of high elevation grasslands and shrublands in the mountains of SE Brazil (in the Atlantic rainforest). He has been working in serpentine ecology since 1999, focusing on (1) effects of disturbance (esp. fire and grazing) on serpentine vegetation, (2) patterns of species diversity on serpentine outcrops and environmental correlates with these patterns, and (3) the ways in which the island-like nature of serpentine outcrops ("habitat patchiness") influences the relationship between local and regional diversity in these systems.

DECK THE HALLS WITH BOUGHS OF HOLLY

by Steve Perry

I'll bet most of us have heard and sung that festive holiday carol hundreds of times. People have been decorating their houses with holly for thousands of years (mainly because it was one of the few plants that remain green all winter long). But did you ever think about this traditional holiday song from a botanical point of view? The Latin name for English holly is *Ilex aquifolium*, and it's the only genus and species in the Holly family (Aquifoliaceae) found in California. It's a native of Europe and Western Asia that has naturalized in Sonoma, Mendocino, and Humboldt Counties. In fact, the genus name, *Ilex*, comes from the Latin name for Mediterranean holly-oak, *Quercus ilex*. And even though it's not a California native, it's listed as a pest plant of lesser invasiveness by the California Invasive Plant Council (CalIPC), so we don't have to organize any holly-whacking work parties just yet.

But if you have a hankering to deck

those halls during the winter holidays, why not try Oregon grape (*Berberis aquifolium*, formerly *Mahonia a.*)? It looks a lot like holly (hence the species name *aquifolium*), except that it has edible blue berries instead of toxic red berries, and it's a California native plant. In fact, we often sell it at our plant sales. It's a hardy plant that grows all the way from San Diego to Siskiyou County. Native Americans are also reported to have used the plants as a herbal remedy for a variety of ailments from poor appetite to skin irritation. But mainly it's a pretty evergreen, shade-tolerant shrub that grows almost anywhere in California. And when people gather at your house to sing their fa-la-la's, they won't know the difference.



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Another popular plant this time of year is mistletoe, sprigs of which lurk above doorways during the holiday season. Because people originally thought that mistletoe grew from bird droppings, the name literally means dung-on-a-twig (sorry about that). Sacred to the Druids, used for medicine purposes, but hated by homeowners, almost all varieties of mistletoe are actually California natives (and,

oddly enough, the state flower of Oklahoma). Members of the Mistletoe family (Viscaceae), there are 22 species of mistletoe in three genera found in California. The only non-native species is *Viscum album*, which is so far only found in Sonoma County. In El Dorado County we mostly see three varieties: *Phoradendron villosum*, oak mistletoe, and from Placerville to the Sierras, *P. juniperinum*, the juniper mistletoe, and *P. libocedri*, incense cedar mistletoe. While traditionally viewed as a parasitic plant that sends homeowners running for the pole saw, recent studies have shown that mistletoe may not always be harmful to the host tree. And now that we know that it's a native plant, we might not be so quick to reach for the pruning saw, but enjoy the color that it adds to bare trees in the winter.

For adding more winter color in the yard, consider planting some snowberry bushes. At our chapter plant sales we usually offer *Symphoricarpos albus* or *S. vaccinooides* (mountain snowberry), now known as *S. rotundifolius*. The genus name comes from the Greek words *symphorein*, meaning "borne together" and *karpos* "fruit", so "fruit borne together" because of the clusters of berries. Both varieties have pretty pink flowers in the late spring and early summer, and bunches of white berries in the winter, hence the name.

Whichever plants you use to add color to your home this winter, have a happy and safe holiday season!



El Dorado Chapter
 California Native Plant Society
 P.O. Box 1948
 Placerville, CA 95667

January-February 2005

January 18, 2005

Hugh Safford will tell us all about
 the unusual plants
 growing on serpentine soils.

Details inside.

Learn more about State CNPS at:
www.cnps.org



**DEDICATED TO THE PRESERVATION OF
 CALIFORNIA'S NATIVE FLORA**

The California Native Plant Society is a statewide nonprofit organization of amateurs and professionals with a common interest in California's native 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 quarterly journal, *Fremontia*, the quarterly *Bulletin* which gives statewide news and announcements of Society activities and conservation issues, and the chapter newsletter *Gold Field Notes*. To join, call our main office in Sacramento, (916) 447-2677.

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