California Native Plant Society
Sanhedrin Chapter Newsletter
Winter/Spring 2011

Calendar of Fieldtrips, Meetings, and Events

Saturday, February 26 – Friends of Lake Mendocino
Attention Lake Mendocino boaters, fishermen, campers and neighbors who want to make Lake Mendocino even better, come join in the formation of Friends of Lake Mendocino, a non-profit cooperative association, where voices can be heard. Come join the Friends of Lake Mendocino and make a difference. Friends of Lake Mendocino will help improve recreation facilities, develop environmental education programs and natural resource projects as well as enhancing the visitors' experience. Make a difference, join Friends of Lake Mendocino on Feb. 26 at noon at 1160 Lake Mendocino Drive for a special event and meet fellow Lake Mendocino enthusiasts. Refreshments will be provided. Please call 467-4235 or e-mail Ondrej.m.macejko@usace.army.mil for more information and to let us know you are coming.

Saturday, March 5 – Lichenising Locally
Join Vishnu to learn to identify some of the local lichen flora of Low Gap Park in Ukiah. We will meet on the bridge crossing Orr Creek at the entrance to Low Gap Park at 9:30 am. Following a brief introductory talk to explain, or remind you of, what a lichen is and how it reproduces itself, we will spend a few hours examining the rocks, trees, and ground for various lichen species. Bring a field guide and hands lens if you have one, but if you don't there will be some available to borrow. Light rain will be welcomed but heavy rain cancels. Water, some lunch & appropriate clothing is advisable. Your pre-field trip assignment is to begin reading the Wikipedia article at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lichen
You should read as much as you can bear, but at least the first paragraph. The first 5 paragraphs are recommended, and anyone reading the entire article will be mandated to co-lead the trip.

Saturday, March 13 - Broom Pull on Orr Springs Road
Moderate to difficult exertion performing hand pulling and weed-wrenching. Meet at the north side of the Mendo Mill parking lot in Ukiah at 9am for safety training. Wear long-sleeved shirt, long pants, bring gloves. Participants must be 16 or over. Trip Leaders: Chuck Williams 462-8984 and Tara Athan 485-1198.

Thursday, March 24 - Chapter Board Meeting
All chapter members are invited. Come meet the board members; learn how our chapter fosters native plant conservation and education; take a leadership role. 7:00-9:00pm, Ridgewood Mobile Home Clubhouse, off the Willits grade. 459-3689

Saturday, March 26 – Habitat Gardening for wildlife with California Native Plants
Habitat gardening with native plants is not only good for the birds and the bees, it is an increasingly popular way to reduce water use, create an interesting and attractive garden, and to connect with the true essence of California’s seasons. A garden rich in a wide assortment of native plants is far more likely to attract and to help support native animals than one full of plants from elsewhere. This is especially true if significant numbers of other gardens in the area reinforce habitat value in their plantings. Habitat gardening can play an important role in sustaining biodiversity, but perhaps most importantly, it can connect us to our natural environment. This connection is at the very least soul satisfying and at best can also educate us so we are knowledgeable stewards of this earth. How can we hope to save our environment if we aren’t aware of what we’re loosing? Join Phil Soelen, co-founder of the California Flora Nursery in Fulton, Sonoma County to learn more.
Where: Rancho De La Fuente, 2290 Soda Bay Road, Lakeport. From Highway 29 take the Soda Bay exit toward the Konocti Vista Casino. Turn south onto Soda Bay Road and follow it past the casino to Rancho De La Fuente. We will meet in the barn.

Sunday, March 27 - Montgomery Woods
We’ll look at trees, shrubs, and vegetation types, using the recent revision of A Manual of California Vegetation to learn more about the structure and composition of plant communities. With winter rains and warming soils to our benefit, we’ll also explore the rocky outcrops I call “Franciscan barrens,” home to numerous spring-blooming annual wildflowers. We’ll meet at 9 a.m. at the Pruitt Creek trailhead gate (Orr Springs Road, about 1 mile east of main Montgomery Woods parking lot), for a full day of spring revelry.

Saturday, April 2 – Low Gap Plant Walk
Join Mark Albert on this traditional early season field trip to Ukiah’s Low Gap Park. Meet at the parking area just past the Playhouse, opposite Ukiah High School on Low Gap Road at 9:00am. Our annual early spring botanizing in a familiar place always leads to questioning what we thought
we knew about the common local wildflowers. Bring a light lunch and a hand lens. This will be our 29th year at Low Gap!

**Saturday, April 16 – Carl Purdy Exhibit**
Opens at the Mendocino County Museum in Willits – See article in this newsletter.

**Sunday, April 17 – Ridgewood Native Plant Walk**
Join Marisela on this delightful early season wildflower hike through mature oak woodlands, colorful grasslands, and riparian wetlands. This is about a 2 mile walk all together. People need to wear good hiking shoes and bring water and lunch. Meet at the trailer park entrance at the bottom of the Ridgewood Ranch Road (take the road in and then veer to the left). For more information call Marisela at: 459-2681.

**Thursday, April 21 – Jenner Headlands**
See description of trip at end of section

**Saturday, April 23 – Oaks, Wildflowers, and Grasses**
Chapter members Eileen Mitro and Joel Levine have extended a generous invitation to share the bucolic oak woodlands in their care. Amidst a marvelous stand of blue and other native oaks, wildflowers and native grasses (and at least a few non-native ones, too) abound. We’ll have an opportunity to explore and document the flora of this beautiful property, situated above the northeast shore of Lake Mendocino, with a rather leisurely ramble across their 35 acres; Some slopes are steep, so wear good supportive footwear. Please contact Peter for ride-sharing and other information prior to the walk. Contact for these 2 trips: Peter Warner – (707) 829-1183; phytopagan@gmail.com

**April 30 & May 1 - Boonville Wildflower Show**
Have an unknown wildflower you can’t put a name to? Bring it to the annual Boonville Wildflower Show where local expert botanists will be on hand to identify your plant. This weekend event is located at the fairgrounds and features hundreds of local native and naturalized wildflowers on display.

**Saturday, May 7 – Jenner Headlands**
See description of trip below:

**Jenner Headlands (Sonoma County)**
The splendid biological diversity and enthralling aesthetics of the Jenner Headlands beckon to all. This terrestrial jewel, acquired by the Sonoma Land Trust in 2009, offers sweeping -- or fog-enshrouded -- coastal vistas, deep forested canyons, and grasslands bedazzling in spring’s tapestry of flowers. This spring, 2 field trips to the property will focus on plants and plant ecology, specifically arranged with CNPS members in mind. Reservations are required to participate in these trips.

The April 21 walk will be include a workshop on rare plant monitoring and reporting. The pace will be slow and mildly strenuous, an exploration of the serpentine-influenced flora of grasslands just upslope from the village of Jenner. This walk is recommended for those who want to visit the property without significant foot travel. The May 7 hike will be moderately to quite strenuous, covering several miles with substantial elevation changes, and will provide a broader look at the topographical and vegetational diversity of the property. Cameras, field guides, and hand lenses are among recommended companions for your tour of the Jenner Headlands.

Both walks start at the Russian Gulch State Parks parking area on Highway 1 about 3 miles north of the village of Jenner. The April 21 walk will end about 3 p.m.; on May 7 we’ll be out until 4 p.m. or perhaps later.

Contacts: To reserve your attendance on one of these walks, please email Kristin Martinez at Kristinm@twc-ca.org. Otherwise call Peter Warner at 829-1183 for your reservation or further information.

**Field Trip Protocols**

1. Call or email the trip leader or designated contact person to reserve your space on the trip, unless specifically noted not to do so in the announcement.
2. Call or email the trip leader or contact person if, and as soon as, you decide not to attend, if you’ve already made a reservation.
3. Share transportation means and expenses whenever possible.
4. Be punctual to keep others from waiting for you.
5. Bring what you personally need for any particular trip, especially appropriate clothing, water, and food.
6. If the announcement is unclear, become familiar with the nature of the walk: distance, terrain, elevation changes, stream crossings, hazards, etc.
7. Clean boots and clothing of mud and plant debris before leaving home to reduce the potential for weed dispersal.
8. Stay with the group unless you make arrangements with the trip leader to leave early or wander on your own.

**Opportunity for Botanists and Data Nerds**
Botanical voucher specimen collections and associated documentation continue to be a critical source of information on plant biogeography, ecology, and biology. Public and private herbaria, collections of preserved plant specimens, are among the most important resources for such information. Some data on plant specimens housed in herbaria – alas, not the specimens themselves -- are now available on the internet, through the Consortium of the California Herbaria (http://ucjeps.berkeley.edu/consortium/). However, the availability of collections information is dependent upon its compilation for digital access, and many institutional and private herbaria do not have the means to provide their data to the Consortium.
The Sonoma State University Herbarium is a vital botanical reference collection for northern California, and includes specimens originally collected by Milo Baker and many other local botanists. Yet, to the best of my knowledge, none of this herbarium’s data is available through the Consortium’s website. I have arranged with the SSU Herbarium curator, Dr. Richard Whitkus, to compile the necessary data for use by the Consortium, and we welcome additional assistance. Most of this work will involve the use of computers to tabulate existing collections data (so you need not be a botanist!), and will provide an inside look at the efforts needed to maintain scientifically generated information about plants. Please contact Peter Warner at (707) 829-1183 or phytopagan@gmail.com if you are interested in assisting in this effort.

“A Passion for Plants” Exhibit at Mendocino County Museum by Dot Brovarney

A Passion for Plants & Place: Carl Purdy of Mendocino County will open at the Mendocino County Museum in Willits on Saturday April 16. The homegrown exhibit celebrates Purdy’s 150th birthday year. The show will look back at Purdy’s life and work and, at the same time, explore ideas that still resonate in Mendocino County today. Guest Curator and Landcestry historian Dot Brovarney is creating the exhibit with the assistance of historical researcher Mike Williams. University of California Davis ethnobotanist Dr. Kat Anderson and members of the Sanhedrin Chapter of CNPS are also collaborating on the project.

“Purdy is a fascinating individual who achieved great success in the larger world beyond Mendocino County,” says Brovarney, who has spent several months researching him and his work. “However, what impresses me most is that, despite his accomplishments as a botanist, landscaper, and international flower, seed and bulb businessman, Purdy, a Ukiahian since age ten, chose to remain in Mendocino County. He gave up lucrative job opportunities in the Bay Area, as many of us have, so that he could enjoy this beautiful, rural place.”

Self educated after 8th grade, Purdy passed his teacher’s exam and taught for seven years in local schools. However, his primary love from boyhood was plants, which he first learned about from his gardening sister, Flora. A few years later, Purdy family friend and neighbor, Alexander McNab, gave seventeen-year old Carl a letter from a nurseryman and commissioner for New York’s Central Park who was seeking hardy Western native plants. This letter changed the young man’s life. Within a few years, he left the classroom for the wild world of California native plants and a life’s work in botany and horticulture.

Purdy himself identified and described a number of native plants, including his very first find, Calochortus amabilis. Alice Eastwood, Curator of the California Academy of Sciences, named Iris purdyi for him, among several other plants. Purdy wrote extensively about native wildflowers for both botanical journals and popular gardening magazines. In 1901 the California Academy of Sciences published his revision of the genus Calochortus.

In his autobiography, published posthumously in 1976 as My Life and My Times, Purdy defended himself against criticism that his bulb harvesting business had depleted wildflower populations. Debate on this point continues. The exhibit will explore changes in botanical practice over time and address current practices regarding conservation and restoration of wildflower species. In terms of historic perspective, U.C. Davis Arboretum Superintendent Emeritus Warren G. Roberts argues that settler agricultural practices, particularly grazing, caused the lion’s share of damage to California native plant growth. Roberts claims that Purdy’s practice of separating and returning smaller bulbs into the soil encouraged plant growth and continued the longtime Native American tradition of cultivating bulbs, although for the benefit of gardeners, rather than as a food source.

A Passion for Plants & Place: Carl Purdy of Mendocino County will explore the range of Purdy’s involvement with plants as well as his associations with other early California plant specialists, including Willis Jepson and Luther Burbank. Among his landscaping projects were the 1915 Panama Pacific International Exposition (P.P.I.E.) in San Francisco; the Pleasanton estate of Phoebe Apperson Hearst (c. 1909-1914); and the Ahwahnee Hotel at Yosemite where he worked with landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. (1929).

Brovarney has identified a number of primary sources of information about Purdy besides what he recorded in his life story. Both the Jepson Herbarium Archives and the Bancroft Library at U.C. Berkeley have original correspondence by Carl Purdy.

The Jepson material includes a number of letters from Purdy to botanical colleagues Katharine and T.S. Brandegee and John Lemmon, focused largely on questions of plant identification as well as sources for collecting specific plant material. Both the Jepson and U.C. herbaria at Berkeley house plant specimens collected by Purdy.

At the Bancroft Library, Brovarney uncovered twenty letters written by the Ukiah nurseryman to Phoebe Hearst...
between 1909 and 1914. Hearst employed Purdy as manager of the landscape at her Pleasanton estate. Most of the correspondence pertains to his planting plans, bulb availability, and schedule for visiting. However, several contain intimate details about Purdy’s family. Two in particular, including one written by his wife Vesta, discuss personal feelings about the recent marriage of son Elmer in 1912. Such letters indicate a closer bond between Mrs. Hearst and the Purdys than one might expect to find in a business relationship.

Dr. Kat Anderson, an authority on Native plant management traditions is providing, not only her expertise, but also bulb sketches and a reproduction mahogany digging stick.

On the home front, descendants of Carl Purdy are generously sharing their collection of historic photographs, letters, and manuscripts, early Purdy bulb catalogs (including one printed in 1891!), and original journals and magazines containing articles authored by Purdy. The family also is loaning artifacts connected with Purdy’s bulb and seed business and his desk, a unique piece of furniture refashioned from an organ. Wildflower-filled landscape sketches by Grace Hudson, whose parents were close friends of Purdy’s parents, will be part of the exhibit, courtesy of the Grace Hudson Museum.

Please join the celebration of Carl Purdy’s 150th birthday at the Mendocino County Museum in Willits from 3 – 6 p.m. on Saturday, April 16. A public program is in the works for a weekend in May, Heritage Month in Mendocino County. In addition, “Purdy Plant Walks” will be part of Sanhedrin’s spring wildflower hikes this year. If you would like to contribute to “A Passion for Plants and Place” exhibit and program fund, please send your donation to Mendocino County Museum/Special Project Fund, 400 E. Commercial St., Willits, CA 95490. Support at levels $50 and above will receive public acknowledgment. To get updates about the exhibit and programs, see www.mendocinomuseum.org or call 459-2736.