

THE PAINTBRUSH

MARCH – APRIL 2006 NEWSLETTER

SAN GABRIEL MOUNTAINS CHAPTER
CALIFORNIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

IN THIS ISSUE:

February Field Notes	1
Native Plant Gardening Corner	2
Chapter Events	3
Programs and Outings.....	3
Research Natural Areas in the San Gabriel Mountains.....	3
Sechingly and Trade: <i>Acacia gregii</i> , Cat Claw.....	4
Chapter Information & Map	6

DATES TO REMEMBER

Sun., Mar 12, 9:00 a.m.: *Eaton Canyon Plant Walk*
led by Eva Morgan

Thurs., Mar 23, 7:30 p.m.: *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know*
About Native Plant Gardening with Mike Evans

Sat., Apr. 1, 9:00 a.m.: *Field Trip to Fern Canyon, San Dimas*
Experimental Forest led by Mike Oxford

Sun., Apr 9, 9:00 a.m.: *Eaton Canyon Plant Walk* led by
Orchid Black

Sat., Apr 22, 8:30 a.m.: *Field Trip to Bonelli Park Restoration*
Area led by Gabi and Cliff McLean

Thurs., Apr 28, 7:30 p.m.: *Wildflowers of Santa Clarita* with
Ian Swift

FEBRUARY FIELD NOTES: TREES

By Gabi McLean

On a recent trip after a much appreciated winter storm, we journeyed from the valley into the foothills, watching for signs of spring. We found subtle hues of colors on the hillsides, the smell of a damp earth, and the promise of rebirth; we did not find showy annuals, but many, many tiny flowers - hanging in droves on long and short catkins from a variety of trees.

Trees – it’s easy to overlook our broadleaf trees since our most prevalent plant communities – coastal sage scrub and

chaparral – consist mainly of shrubs. Would you believe that we have at least 15 species of native broad-leaf trees in our foothills? First come the oak trees: Coast Live Oak, *Quercus agrifolia*, Canyon Live Oak, *Q. chrysolepis*, Interior Live Oak, *Q. wislizenii*, and Engelmann Oak, *Q. engelmannii*. All of these have catkins with male flowers, loaded with lots and lots of yellow pollen. I spotted the first one in the Glendora Hills on a Coast Live Oak. I even – for the first time – discovered a pair of tiny female flowers tucked in the leaf axil of an Interior Live Oak, along Angeles Crest Highway.

Along just about every natural waterway, we found White Alder, *Alnus rhombifolia* (5), faithfully marking the stream’s winding course along every bend. The leaves and the new flowers were not out yet, but we found the brown, limp catkins with the remnants of male flowers, and the erect, cone-like structures that held the female flowers and fruits from last season, looking brown and worn.



I found another common tree, the Western Sycamore, *Platanus racemosa* (6) in flower in San Gabriel Canyon, with tiny, brick-red female flowers, bunched together on three to five globes hanging on a “string”, competing for attention with the emerging woolly leaves. I puzzled over the smaller, greenish-yellow

male flower globes that were still developing and didn’t have any pollen yet.

Also along the creek, and sometimes right in the water, were the willows. While the shrub-like Arroyo Willows were already in flower at the West Fork of the San Gabriel River and in Eaton Canyon, the tree-sized Red and Black Willows, *Salix laevigata* and *S. gooddingii* (7 & 8) were just in bud. The willow catkins sit up straight, both the green catkin with the female flowers, and the yellow catkin with the male flowers, full of yellow pollen.

On the West Fork, the Black Cottonwood, *Populus balsamifera* (9), and the Fremont Cottonwood, *P. fremontii* (10) graced the river. Most of the cottonwoods were large, impressive trees. Deciduous like the willows and alders, the leaves were only in bud but the black cottonwoods were already in flower. The long, drooping catkins displayed many of the tiny male flowers in bunches that look like they were shaded by cream or green umbrellas, and sometimes by bright red ones.



In the Glendora Hills on the Conservancy property, the Southern California Black Walnut, *Juglans californica* var. *californica* (11) showed off its long male catkins, hanging plentifully in thick

bundles and announcing spring with the same saturated green as the newly emerging leaves. This tree used to be common in the San Gabriel Valley and lower foothills, but now the walnut woodlands are all but gone, with just a few exceptions, because we have changed and developed these areas almost completely.

I didn't find any flowers nor leaves on the common Mexican Elderberry, *Sambucus mexicana* (12) as it, too, is deciduous. I couldn't even identify it with certainty unless I found a leaf bud breaking open and revealing the bright-green, compound leaf. Equally difficult to identify was the Velvet ash, *Fraxinus velutina* (13), bare of leaves and flowers. Only a few remaining old seedpods gave away its identity at the West Fork.

In San Gabriel canyon and along Highway 2, at the West Fork, the Arroyo Seco, and Eaton Canyon, I encountered the evergreen California Bay, *Umbellularia californica* (14). Upright bunches of small, cream-colored flowers nestled in bright green, shiny leaves. I so enjoyed the pungent aroma of its leaves, a reminder of pleasant kitchen comforts of times long gone. In the same canyons, I also found the deciduous Big-leaf Maple, *Acer macrophyllum* (15). I recognized its rough, salt-and-pepper bark, and its thumb-sized, dark-red buds, reaching to the sky on opposite branches. I know in due time the scaly buds will open and the leaves emerge upright, while the flowers spill over in huge clusters.

I like February. It's a month when I revel in the discovery of small signs of resurgent life, like leaf buds and bird songs and trickling water, when storms clean the air and winds blow away old dirt and weak limbs, and prepare us for a season of abundant growth.

NATIVE PLANT GARDENING CORNER

This is a new area for our newsletter. Barbara Eisenstein has generously offered her expertise and that of Rancho Santa Ana Botanical Garden's vast resources to answer your questions regarding native plant gardens. Barbara has recently joined Rancho Santa Ana Botanical Garden as Horticultural Outreach and Information Coordinator. She can be found on Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday mornings at her desk ready to answer questions. Before joining Rancho Santa Ana Botanical Garden, Barbara was at Rutgers University where she worked with high school teachers, university faculty, and scientists producing educational materials on topics of current scientific interest. Barbara's horticultural background derives from course work at Mount San Antonio College, volunteer work in the Cultivar Garden at Rancho, and her own native plant garden in South Pasadena. You can either call Barbara at 909-624-0838 or e-mail her at rsabg.hortinfo@cgu.edu with any questions or concerns you may have in regard to native plant gardening. Please let her know that you are from our chapter. We will publish some of these interchanges in the newsletter, and may add some comments and advice from board members as well.



Quercus chrysolepis,
Canyon Live Oak.
Illustration by Fred M.
Roberts, Jr. in *An Illustrated
Guide to the Oaks of the
Southern California
Floristic Province*, 1995

CHAPTER EVENTS

Meetings are held at Eaton Canyon (map on the back of the cover) on the fourth Thursday of the month with the exception of July, August, November, and December. Informal plant identification and social time 7:00 to 7:30 p.m.; programs start promptly at 7:30 p.m.

PROGRAMS & OUTINGS

Thursday, Mar. 23, 7:30 p.m.: *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Native Plant Gardening* with Mike Evans.

Mike Evans established the Tree of Life Nursery in 1976, making it one of the oldest native plant suppliers in California. With his experience in native plant production, design, landscaping, and ecological restoration, Mike is an advocate for a California that deserves to look like the real "California". Tree of Life native plants are available through Casa La Paz where plants and books are on display for retail sales. Visit Mike's website, www.CaliforniaNativePlants.com for more information.

Saturday, April 1, 9:00 a.m.: *Field Trip to Fern Canyon, San Dimas Experimental Forest (SDEF)*, led by Mike Oxford.

The SDEF is a protected field laboratory for studies of hydrology, fire, and other topics relating to the ecology of chaparral and related ecosystems. The trip will be led by Mike Oxford of the Forest Service who will provide information on local flora and on some of the current SDEF research projects during an easy-to-moderate hike. This was a great trip several years ago, and should be as good if not better this year. We will meet in the village of Mt. Baldy at 9:00 a.m. and carpool to the trailhead. From the 210 Freeway in Claremont, exit and go north on Mountain Avenue. After a few miles, the road intersects with Euclid Ave; go straight through the stop sign and follow the road (veers left) to continue on Mountain Ave. Drive past the Forest Service Fire Station to the next stop sign. Turn right onto Mt. Baldy Road and drive north for 4 miles. After passing a yellow, blinking light, a schoolyard on the right, and a post office on the left, enter the parking area to the left of Mt. Baldy Lodge. The hike will take approximately 3 hours. Please bring water, sunscreen, snacks, and if preferred a bag lunch. If you have any questions please call Andrea Warniment at 626-353-4077.

Saturday, Apr. 22, 8:30 a.m.: *Field Trip to Bonelli Park Restoration Area.*

Join a hike organized by the Sierra Club's Natural Science Section. Gabi and Cliff McLean, along with naturalist expert Mickey Long will lead this visit to a coastal sage scrub restoration project. We expect to see wildflowers, cactus

wrens, possibly California gnatcatchers, raptors, water birds, and the endangered multi-stemmed live-forever. We will meet at 8:30 a.m. at the Via Verde Park and Ride on the 57 Freeway, Via Verde exit, just across from the Frank. G. Bonelli Regional Park entrance, San Dimas, and carpool into the park. The park entrance fee is \$6.00 per vehicle. This is an easy 3-mile walk. Bring water, sunscreen and snacks.

Thursday, April 28, 7:30 p.m.: *Wild Flowers of Santa Clarita* with Ian Swift.

Ian Swift is the Director of the Placerita Canyon Nature Center in Santa Clarita, California. He has actively pursued an interest in botany, and is currently working on the floras of the Los Angeles County Natural Area Parks, and a CD guide to Santa Clarita Valley Wildflowers. We had the pleasure of Ian's company and knowledge when he was affiliated with Eaton Canyon Nature Center for several years.



RESEARCH NATURAL AREAS IN THE SAN GABRIEL MOUNTAINS

By Andrea Warniment

Illustrations of *Pinus ponderosa* from the *Jepson Manual*

The U.S. Forest Service has established Research Natural Areas (RNAs) to provide research and educational opportunities, and to preserve biological diversity. They are particularly valuable for studying long-term ecological change in both common and unique ecosystems, such as succession and the effects of global climate change. RNAs are also utilized for other types of non-destructive monitoring and educational activities.

Within the San Gabriel Mountains portion of the Angeles National Forest, two RNAs exist. Falls Canyon RNA is a 1,440-acre site located in "Angeles Uplands West"; it was established in 1998 to preserve its Bigcone Douglas Fir (*Pseudotsuga macrocarpa*) and Canyon Live Oak (*Quercus chrysolepis*) woodlands. "Bigcone Douglas-fir grows in

relatively dense stands on steep slopes in this RNA, where it has been largely protected from fire. The oldest trees have been determined to be over 350 years old and have survived several historic fires. Falls Canyon is a tributary of the west fork of the San Gabriel River on the slopes of Mount Wilson. Elevations range from about 3,400 to 5,700 feet within the RNA. Access is from the Mount Wilson road and various trails that border and traverse the area.”

Fern Canyon RNA was established in 1972 in the “Angeles Front Country” to protect Chamise (*Adenostoma fasciculatum*) chaparral and Canyon Live Oak woodlands. “A relict stand of low-elevation ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*) also occurs in the RNA at Brown’s Flat, a shallow 80-acre bowl created by an ancient land slump. The RNA covers 1,400 acres and ranges in elevation from 2,592 to 5,512 feet. Fern Canyon RNA falls entirely within the San Dimas Experimental Forest, which is managed by the Pacific Southwest Research Station and is closed to general public use ... The entire RNA was affected by the 2002 Williams Fire. Burned and partially burned vegetation is expected to recover naturally.”

This information is taken from the *Land Management Plan: Part 2, Angeles National Forest Strategy* published in September 2005 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region, and is currently available online at: www.fs.fed.us/r5/scfpr/projects/lmp/.



SECHINGILY AND TRADE

Acacia gregii – Cat Claw

By Marc Acuna, with illustration
from Munz 1974

One of the forgotten elements of California Indian culture is the sophisticated and complex network of trade and trade routes, and the scope of the trade culture and the breadth of items traded across “America” from Alaska to Mexico and from the Pacific and Atlantic deep into the interior of the continent. Pacific abalone is found in Cahokia and parrot feathers from southern Mexico made their way north and decorated northern California head gear.

The Tongva (the Gabrieleno indigenous people of the Los Angeles Basin) were part of that web of trade routes. They traded up and down the coast from the Chumash to the Kuechnajuichon, from the Acjachemen to the Payoomkawichum. In the interior they traded with their neighbors the Kumitaraxam and the Kokoemkam, the

Tataviam (very close cousins), the Kitanemuk and the Tubatulabal and on occasion even with the warlike Colorado river people, the Chemehuevi.

Sechingily (Cat Claw is its common name in English) was one of the trade items that the Tongva traded with the Kumitaraxam (the Cahuilla) and the Kokoemkam (the Serrano). The spiny shrub is found in washes and canyons below 6,000 ft from Creosote Bush Scrub to Pinyon-Juniper Woodland and in both the Colorado and south Mojave deserts.

Sechingily provided a variety of valuable products and materials. The pods of *Acacia gregii* were ground and made into mush or cakes. When traded early enough the pods were eaten fresh and also made into a tea. Acorns, basket work, and shells were Tongva trade items for baskets of pods. The stems, roots, flowers, and leaves were all made into a tea and the seeds were stored, roasted, ground and made into small cakes.

WELCOME! New members:

Jean Casselman and Suxanne Exner

Have you forgotten to renew your membership?
Please renew so Chapter numbers are maintained. There continues to be a noticeable number of members who have not renewed.

Thank you again to **BONTERRA CONSULTING** for printing and mailing our newsletter. BonnTerra Consulting provides environmental planning, biological surveys, natural resources management, and city and regional planning services to the public and private sector clients.

<http://www.bonterraconsulting.com>

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR – Tom Hood

This is a reminder for all contributors to send their articles to me by the deadline. Putting the newsletter together is a wonderful experience. Getting it all to come out evenly is a total challenge. If articles are kept to a word length of 300 to 450 words, it makes my job easier when formatting the final copy. Thank you to all of you who give your time generously by contributing interesting, and informative articles to the *Paintbrush*. Your love of nature, and especially that of the native flora in our area shine through in your writing.

JOIN CNPS NOW!!

Learn to understand California's unique flora and help to preserve this rich heritage for future generations.

Dues are tax deductible. You will receive this newsletter, the informative quarterly journal *Fremontia*, and the statewide news *Bulletin*. If you would like to receive only this newsletter, the price of a subscription is \$5 per year.

Yes, I'd like to affiliate with San Gabriel Mountains Chapter

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The Newsletter of the San Gabriel Mountains Chapter of the California Native Plant Society is published four times per year, and is free to Chapter members. Non-member subscription is \$5.00.

<http://cnps-sgm.org>

Check your Chapter's web site frequently for up-to-date information on Chapter events and for links to other organizations' field trips and classes. It's one stop browsing!

JUNIOR RANGER PROGRAM

This is an invitation from the Eaton Canyon Nature Center for young people 6 to 12 years of age to explore nature. There are seven classes that run on consecutive Thursdays from April 6th until May 25th. The class times are 3:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. Tuition is \$95.00. If you are interested in enrolling any of your children, please call Anne at 626-398-5420.



Polypodium californicum, California Polypody. Illustration by Fred M. Roberts, Jr. in *A Checklist of the Vascular Plants of Orange County, California*.

I believe that ferns are an often-overlooked part of our native plant life here in Southern California. We would welcome an article dealing with these primitive yet beautiful plants for the next issue of the newsletter. . . . Editor

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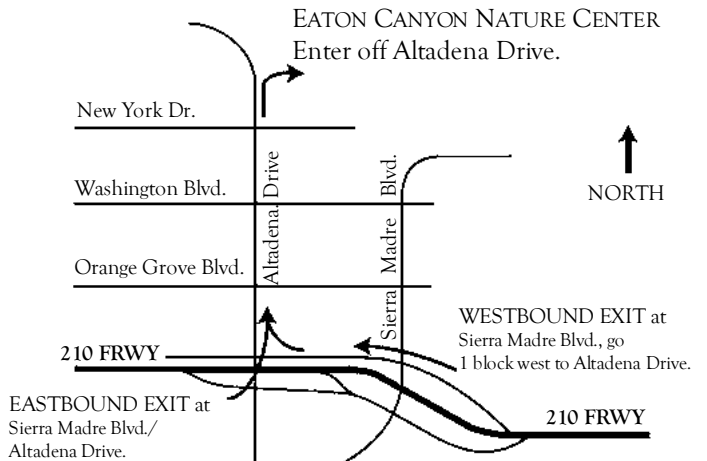
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Directions to Eaton Canyon Nature Center
1750 N. Altadena Drive, Pasadena

Web site: <http://cnps-sgm.org>

Dedicated to the Preservation of the California Native Flora

The California Native Plant Society is a statewide nonprofit organization of amateurs & professionals with a common interest in California's native plants. The mission of the Society is to increase understanding & appreciation of California's native plants & to conserve them and their natural habitats, through education, science, horticulture & advocacy. Membership is open to all.

Membership includes the quarterly journal Fremontia, the quarterly Bulletin which gives statewide news & announcements of Society activities & conservation issues, & the chapter newsletter.



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