



Santa Clara Valley Chapter

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# THE BLAZING STAR

September-October 1995

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## GENERAL MEETING

Friday, September 22, 7:30 p.m., Saratoga Library

### **Some Interesting Plants of the Northeast Bay Region**

*Speaker: John Game*

John Game is familiar to many of us who go on CNPS outings. Co-chair of the East Bay chapter field trips committee, he has coordinated field trips for eight years and has been a CNPS member since 1980. He describes himself as a serious amateur botanist, and lately his interest has been wildflower photography. When in town John is a molecular biologist at the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory. It has been a pleasure to

have his company on some of our chapter trips, where he has been a valuable resource for identifying unusual plants.

Directions to Library: Exit Highway 85 on Saratoga Avenue. Head south, toward the hills, and take the first driveway on left after Fruitvale into the library parking lot. (See map on page 5.)

Join us for a pre-meeting dinner with John Game at 6 pm at Chef Chau's (formerly Tin Sheng) in Saratoga, 14510 Big Basin Way. Please call Jean Struthers by Wednesday, Sept. 20, if you plan to attend. If you sign up but cannot come, please call her to cancel. 415 941-2586.

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

**Highway 280 Revegetation Effort Needs New Leader(s):** Zoe Chandik, who has led the effort to revegetate a stretch of Highway 280 between Edgewood Road and Farmhill Blvd, would like to retire from this position. She is also co-chair (with Toni Corelli) of the Rare and Endangered Plant committee, which is so on to publish a book of rare and endangered plants of our area. Call Zoe for the particulars: 415-7427-9620.

**New Board Members:** At the last general meeting, it was my pleasure to announce our new **Escaped Exotics chairs: Ken Himes** (North) and **Don Thomas** (South). Don Thomas was Escaped Exotics chair in years past. Ken and Don, **Elly Hess**, who has been leading weeding efforts at Edgewood for years, and myself, have already walked through Edgewood Preserve to plot strategy. We brought along for good measure **Jake Sigg**, an active member of the California Escaped Exotics Pest Plant Council (CalEPPC), as well as president of the Yerba Buena chapter.

Beginning soon after our last general meeting, Ken led weeding expeditions at Edgewood every evening for a solid week, coordinating anywhere from four to 18 volunteers. This group stacked bag after bag of yellow starthistle and other noxious weeds on the service road for the county personnel to clear away--that much less in the seedbank! This effort augmented the years-long campaign Elly Hess has lead against weeds at Edgewood; she and her crew of volunteers are out there just about every Friday morning. Ken and Elly are working with San Mateo County Parks personnel on more aggressive strategies, especially for yellow starthistle, whose population has exploded this year at Edgewood. Ken is mapping weed populations in the preserve.

Don Thomas is looking at sites around Stevens Creek as the focus for Santa Clara County exotics removal efforts. Don, Ken, Elly, and Susan Sommers are attending the CalEPPC symposium in October.

**Steve Buckhout**, a former board member, will be taking over from Ken as treasurer. And handling book sales along with **Sonja Wilcomer** will be new member **Paul Heiple**. Paul has been deeply involved in native plant societies in other localities. Representing us at the San Mateo County Trails Advisory Committee will be **John Allen**, who is also president of the Friends of Edgewood--an appropriate match!

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## CHAPTER ACTIVITIES

### Weed Removal at Edgewood Preserve:

**Every Wednesday evening** at 5 pm Ken Himes (415 591-8560) will be at the Highway 280 and Edgewood Road Park and Ride to meet whomever volunteers to help. If he has already left to start work continue under the underpass entrance to the park and proceed to the kiosk at the junction of the Serpentine loop and Edgewood Trail.

**Every Friday morning** Elly Hess also will meet helpers at the Park and Ride. She works between 7 and 10 am, but call her first for location information: 415 368-8993. If you can only work part of this

time, she will still very much appreciate your help.

### **Serpentine Wildflower Restoration along Hwy 280:**

This spring there was a beautiful succession of wildflower shows along our section of the highway between Woodside Road and Edgewood Road. Mother nature cannot manage this all alone; she needs our help in getting rid of the weeds that crowd out the native plants. Every month on the second Friday we meet at the Edgewood Park and Ride at 9 am to work on the Adopt-a-Highway Wildflower Project for the morning. For those who would like to start work earlier in the morning, at 7 or 8 am, we can arrange for one of the committee members to meet you then. We have work gloves, orange vests, hard hats, safety goggles, etc. for you to wear. If you have clippers or pruners to bring they often come in handy. For questions call Zoe Chandik, 415 747-9620, or Chuck Baccus, 408 244-2923. Our next work dates are Sept. 8, Oct. 13, Nov. 10, and Dec. 8.

### **Edgewood Docent Training:**

Members: the flowers at Edgewood will be blooming in six months! It is time to sign up for the Edgewood Preserve Docent Training. The introductory session will be Thursday, October 19. This is a very enjoyable, educational, flexible program, taught by Edgewood docents. You will learn about the natural features of this exquisite preserve and feel comfortable in sharing your knowledge with others. Please call me for more information: Jan Simpson, 415 368-1057.

### **Gardening with Natives Group:**

We will be meeting Thursday evening, September 7, 7:30 pm, at Foothill College, room 66, in the Ornamental Horticulture (OH) unit. There will be a discussion about irrigation techniques and practices, as well as the very popular seed exchange. Information: Wendy Winkler, 415 851-2596.

### **Nursery news:**

The shade structure is working nicely and the plants are doing well with daily water. I've put in a temporary automatic watering system which I hope will allow us to get on with other parts of this project. It has been a long, hot summer!

### **Plant propagation:**

There is still time this fall to try cuttings of perennials and shrubs. See the last issue of the *Blazing Star* for suggestions. October and November are good months to make divisions of Douglas iris and start seeds of shrubs and trees. Please save empty gallon cans and return to Jean Struthers at either the meetings or plant sale.

**California Native Plant Sale**, Saturday, October 28, 10 am to 4 pm, Peninsula Conservation Center, 3921 E. Bayshore Rd., Palo Alto.

Timed to occur as the days shorten and cool, the perfect time to garden in our part of California, this is your opportunity to obtain both tried and true natives as well as those that are unusual and more of a challenge. Numerous sales folk will be on hand to discuss your needs and answer questions. Books, seeds, and bulbs will be available. Plant sales are our primary fund raisers. Support your chapter, encourage the native birds, butterflies, and other animals, and conserve water! This is a wonderful opportunity to get plants in the ground before the autumn rains begin.

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## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

- **Two marriages to celebrate:** President Carolyn Curtis and Conservation chair (south) Don Mayall had a small, serpentine wedding at Edgewood Preserve recently. Carolyn was instrumental in stopping the golf course plans at Edgewood. We are delighted for them both. Jeff Caldwell, long time chapter member now living in Texas, married Linda Bordeaux in April. Jeff's new address is 5106 N. Lamar #169, Austin, TX 78751.
- Judith Larner Lowry, proprietor of Larner Seeds, is writing a book on **restoration ecology for California backyard gardeners**. She would like to list the names and addresses of landscape architects, designers, and gardeners who use native plants. Send information to Larner Seeds, PO Box 407, Bolinas, CA 94924. If you would like a copy of her catalog call 415 868-9407.
- **Jepson Herbarium Weekend Workshops:** a series of intensive courses on the systematics and ecology of botanical groups. In response to requests, they have expanded into the ecology of selected

## HIGH SIERRA OUTING

Nearly two dozen alpine plant enthusiasts gathered in and around South Lake Tahoe the weekend of July 21-22 (1995). Some of us stayed at the Struthers cabin on the Upper Truckee River, others at the Geggatt house on the lake, some in motels.

The Struthers cabin was surrounded with Scarlet gilia and other annuals and botanizing began here before breakfast on Saturday. Joanne then led us on the Tahoe Rim Trail near Grass Lake. We saw fields of blue and yellow: stickseed, looking very much like our Hound's tongue, and *Senecio aronicoides*. Pinkish-red Mountain pride lined the rock ledges everywhere.

Next we checked out the shore of Grass Lake and found Sierra rein orchids. The rest of the day was spent at the Osgood Swamp, a fen on the edge of residential South Lake Tahoe. This unusual habitat has been preserved from further development. Here we saw the banks of Mountain spiraea, Sundew, and Mountain yellow-eyed grass familiar to those of us who had previously visited this spot. On the edge of the swamp we found Bog wintergreen, (*Pyrola asarifolia* ssp. *asarifolia*) not found on any of Joanne's previous visits to Osgood. That evening Joanne and Jean fed the entire group at the beautiful lakeside Geggatt home.

On Sunday morning we gathered at Carson Pass. Our leader was Cathy Rose, a student of Carl Sharsmith and veteran trip leader in the High Sierra. She concluded the trail to Winnemucca Lake would be too muddy for our group, and instead took us south from the pass to Meiss Ridge. The walk was the equal of the Winnemucca Lake trail, at first forested with Western white pine, Western juniper, and Red fir. Among the many plants Cathy pointed out were Steer's head, Davis' knotweed (bright red stems emerging from the ground) and Three-leaved lewisia. We then climbed above the tree line to Meiss Ridge, a fell field with sweeping views of the high Sierra and Caples Lake below. There were low-growing flowers in profusion among the rocks. "Now I have shown you my treasures, don't you call them belly flowers," Carl had told her. There were two *Astragalus*, *Penstemon*, buckwheat, *Geum*, an aster, a violet--in all, a spectacular display. The highlight of this walk was the discovery here of the rare Parry Townsendia.

We appreciate the efforts of Cathy, Joanne, and Jean in making this possible. We were pleased to learn subsequently that Cathy is willing to lead us on a trip to Anza-Borrego next spring.

*Don Mayall*

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## HOW MANY BOTANISTS ARE ALSO POETS?-- Adalbert von Chamisso

*By Carolyn Curtis, first printed in the Edgewood Explorer, 1995*

In 1817, the Romanzov discovery expedition, sent out from imperial Russia, put in at San Francisco Bay. On board were a 36-year-old botanist, novelist, and poet, Adalbert von Chamisso, and his friend, the young ship's doctor Johann Friedrich Gustav von Eschscholtz. Their names have passed into the botany of California; this article presents a little background.

Though Chamisso and Eschscholtz spoke German with each other, it was Chamisso's second language. When he was 8, his aristocratic family left France, driven out by the Revolution, to settle in Berlin, which in those days afforded some political and religious freedom. Chamisso not only mastered this second language, but as a young man became one of the major lyric poets of the day. Some of his poems are known in their musical settings, such as the touching song cycle *Frauenliebe und -Leben* ("A Woman's Love and Life"), memorably set by Schumann. Chamisso is also known for the novella "Peter Schlemihl's Remarkable Story," the tale of a

man who sells his shadow to the devil for a bottomless purse, but ends up wandering the world searching for peace of mind; he finds it in nature, and not in endless wealth.

Eschscholtz was born in present-day Latvia, then part of the German-speaking territories. The tricky spelling of our state flower (*Eschscholzia californica*) results from the vagaries of transliteration. The family name was originally Escholtz, but relatives who spent time in Russia transliterated it into Russian as Eshcholts, which is pronounced just the way it looks, with separate sh and ch sounds (all written with one letter in Russian). When this version of the name was later transliterated back into German, it became Eschscholtz, the "shch" returning to "sch" but getting doubled in the process.

When Chamisso wrote the official description of the California poppy, he spelled *Eschscholzia* three different ways (orthography not being an exact science in those days). The type specimen, that is, the poppy that Chamisso pressed that day, is still preserved in St. Petersburg.

Chamisso's name also presents some ambiguity: his given name is spelled Adelbert or Adalbert, and he was christened Louis-Charles-Adelaide Chamisso de Boncourt. Chamisso wrote a haunting poem (*Das Schloss Boncourt*) about the family castle in the Champagne region, remembering the courtyard, the well, the chapel with its ancestral graves, knowing that it has all vanished and that someone now plows the ground where it stood. The poet blesses the ground and the plowman, takes his lyre, and roams the far reaches of the earth, singing from land to land. Despite this loss and exile from the land of his birth, Chamisso was always on the side of the common people, using his lyric gifts to create poems advocating social reform.

When Chamisso joined the Romanzov discovery expedition as a botanist, he was an established man of letters; he had published the story of Peter Schlemihl the year before. However, he had also studied medicine and natural science. After the expedition, Chamisso remained active in science, pursuing investigations into zoology, as well as later becoming curator of the royal botanical collections in Berlin. Another interest, also typical for the Romantic period, was philology: Chamisso became known for his studies of Australasian languages.

Chamisso did his best to immortalize his friend Eschscholtz in plant nomenclature, and Eschscholtz returned the favor ten years later. On another voyage of discovery in California, he noted a showy shrub growing near the coast and named it *Lupinus chamissonis*. Though this lupine is not one of Edgewood's four species of lupine, two plants in the genus *Camissonia* grow here: *graciliflora* (the slender-flowered primrose) and *ovata* (sun cups). The common name chamise (*Adenostoma fasciculatum*) is also derived from this remarkable visitor's name.

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## CONSERVATION REPORT

Santa Clara County is considering a proposal to develop a private Country Club and Golf Course in the Santa Cruz Mountains west of Highway 17. A subsequent phase wanted by the developers would include three housing developments. This area in the redwoods has been given a high priority for open space preservation by the county. Completion of the development would mean the irrevocable loss of habitat, removal of hundreds of trees, further urban sprawl in the hillside area.

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## FALL DECORATIONS USING NATIVE MATERIALS

*By Marjorie Schmidt*

From *Native Plants for your Garden*, a collection of articles on gardening with California native plants, CNPS Special Publication # 11, May 1990. (Original title: "Holiday Decorations I")

Nature's bounty provides an almost endless supply of interesting shapes and colors in pods, cones, acorns, colored foliage, dried flowers, ferns and grasses. Many only require a bit of grooming before they can take their place in a natural-looking dried arrangement.

Besides the familiar cones, many other kinds of dry materials can be enjoyed indoors. Seed vessels are a favorite of mine; the wild iris capsule, which opens in three sections, reveals the shiny, deep beige interior. Shooting star capsules form a candelabrum-like set of tiny, light brown cups very nice for a dainty arrangement. Acorns in tight or open clusters provide their special shapes, while a fan of dangling, purplish redbud pods offer another dimension to any arrangement. Look for the large, warty, cucumber-like milkweed pods, but do remove the fluffy-tailed seeds before bring them indoors.

Another type of material is bark and twigs. collect only fallen pieces so as to avoid injury to living trees. Many have lichens on them and these, too, can add texture, shape and color to an arrangement. Look for silvery gray lichens on oak bark and brilliant yellow-green on conifer bark.

Several types of materials need to be processed for more durability. A few pine cones are very pitchy; place these on a layer of heavy foil and heat in a 250 degree oven for about an hour. Cut sprays of buckwheat and artemisia and hang them upside-down in a cool, dark place until dry to preserve their shapes. Press clusters of flame-colored oak leaves under pads of newspapers wighted with a heavy book. This reduces the moisture in the leaves and helps the leaves to stay intact on their stems.

Many fresh materials can be used immediately to best advantage. Construct and decorate a wreath of long-lasting pine needles and cones, then decorate with clusters of native toyon berries which will be presentable for about two weeks.

**Editor's note:** Marjorie Schmidt wrote the U.C. Press California Natural History Guide #45, *Growing California Native Plants*, 1980. It is available for purchase at our book table at meetings and the plant sale.

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