



the Phlox Phlyer

Columbia Basin Chapter, Washington Native Plant Society • P.O. Box 221, Richland, WA 99352 • <http://www.wnps.org/cbasin/>

Greetings from the Chair – *Bob Fortman*

The following is an abridged version of a chapter of the book “Walking in the Beauty of the World” by Joseph Arnett and published by the Washington Native Plant Society. It is a fitting introduction to our May speaker. The chapter is titled “The Fascinating Insect World of J Henri Fabre”

“This essay is not about insects: it is about weeds, but it is also about the observation that a person doesn’t have to travel far to find unknown worlds, that there are great opportunities for exploration at our own feet. As I started to write this, I kept thinking about Fabre, and how much there is to learn, how much he *did* learn, on one little plot of ground.

Two years ago I spread gravel along the street in front of my house, in a patch ten by sixty feet, to keep my truck from sinking into the mud. I spread and raked it smooth; vehicles and foot traffic packed it hard. It was completely devoid of visible plant, and I mused, “Here is a clear piece of ground, a blank slate, and an inhospitable one at that”.

Or so I thought. Immediately a gang of weeds showed up, and I have never really caught up with them. Packed gravel, it turns out, is a better growing medium than I expected. It supports a diverse and aggressive flora quite different from the adjacent garden, though some species do well on either side of the fence.

Fortunately, a couple of weeks ago I discovered an antidote to obsessing over perfect weed control. I started making a species list, and now I look forward with excitement to new arrivals. I know they are out there, because I see them, within feet in all directions, waiting to make the leap to my gravel study plot.

My list quickly grew to twenty-one species, one with unidentified member of the mint family (I think) that I am sparing until it flowers and I can identify it. At least occasionally there is an advantage to being unknown.

The most obvious characteristic shared by these species is that not one is native to the town where I live. They are all relatively recent arrivals (as I am). Most are Eurasian. Generally, they are not closely related: fifteen families are represented.

My no-longer-barren rectangle of gravel is populated by questions of taxonomy, biogeography, and ecology; where did these species originate, and what route led from there to my house? How did these plants come to be adapted to gravel driveways? Where else in the world do they grow now? What are their phenological differences? What would happen if I stopped weeding entirely and let succession have its way?

Fabre also asked many questions and responded to a longing to move slowly and look carefully. He was rewarded with insights into biological realms that no human had yet glimpsed.

Even in our own back yards, or our own driveways, nature still conceals unexplored realms. Each of the weeds in my driveway also has a story, complex and undiscovered. Fabre’s fascination opened his eyes to the insect lives around him and gave him the persistence to pursue his questions for a lifetime. Whatever our vocation, I believe that we can hear the call to new worlds and follow. And that we don’t have to travel far from where we stand.”

Wildflowers – Mary Ann Simmons

With our dry spring, now is the time to see the wildflowers in the Columbia Basin. Several areas in the Tri-Cities offering easy access to the flowers include McBee Road, Badger Mountain, and behind the Highway Patrol on Highway 395. McBee Road is off the I-82 Benton City exit, turn left toward Webber Canyon Road, McBee is to the right and is a dirt road; there is a pullout on the left, or you can go all the way to the top for a spectacular view of the area. There are 2 trails on Badger, one is off of Shockley and Queensgate – this one is fairly steep at first; the other is off Dallas Rd (Keene to Dallas) and has a gentler grade. The Highway Patrol is near the intersection of 395 and I-82 in Kennewick. If you know of other areas, email me (msimmons_1@charter.net) and I will post it on our web page (<http://www.wnps.org/cbasin/index.html>)

Chapter Highlights

Tri-Cities –

April Meeting and Hike - Janelle Downs

Early April blooms were the focus for the April 2, 2008 CBNPS meeting and hike on the Horse Heaven Hills. The meeting was attended by more than a dozen hearty souls that braved the cool evening to visit the lower and upper slopes along McBee grade and assess the recovery of native grasses and forbs after the 2007 lightening-caused wildfire. We tramped through the grasses and flowers alongside a group of para-sailers taking advantage of evening breezes. Because the spring months have been cooler and drier than normal, early spring bloomers were the most evident. Yellow bells (*Fritillaria pudica*) and pepper and salt (*Lomatium gormanii*) were the most prevalent flowers blooming. Puccoon (*Lithospermum ruderale*), nine-leaf lomatium (*L. triternatum*) and fringe-cup or prairie star (*Lithophragma bulbifera*) also were scattered amidst the grasses. Bunchgrasses stole the show at lower elevations. Without last year's standing dead leaves and flower stalks (burned in the previous summer fire), the green grasses were nearly iridescent in the late evening light. Cusick's bluegrass (*Poa cusickii*) was beginning to flower and impressed all with its abundant fine leaves and feathery inflorescence. Although much of the microbiotic crust (lichens, moss and algae) was damaged by the fire, many areas showed signs of live soil crusts that will recover. The fire did not appear to have severely affected bunchgrasses, and most perennial grasses survived the fire to regrow. However, some steep draws were bare of plant cover. We speculated that tumbleweed accumulations in the draws had burned at extremely hot temperatures and sterilized the soil of vegetation, leaving it vulnerable to water and wind erosion. On the top of the ridge, wooly-pod milkvetch (*Astragalus purshii*) showed off purple and violet blooms amidst hundreds of pepper-and-salt lomatium. Rosy balsamroot (*Balsamorhiza rosea*) was just emerging, and only a few buds and blooms were found.

Badger Wildflower Walk – Janelle Downs

The April 17th field hike up the west end of Badger Mountain was full of flowers. If you can, now is the time to go and see wildflowers galore. The trail follows a fairly gentle contour through big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*) and winterfat (*Krascheninnikovia lanata*) from the parking lot area just off Dallas Road to the top of the mountain along the west and north sides of the hill. Although only a small group made the hike, the flowers were worth the effort. Blooming that evening were: big seed lomatium (*Lomatium macrocarpum*), silky lupine (*Lupinus sericeus*), Carey's balsamroot (*Balsamorhiza careyana*), crouching milkvetch (*Astragalus succumbens*), and Nuttall's larkspur (*Delphinium nuttallii*). Along the upper slopes of the ridge, rosy balsamroot was making a grand show with other lithosol species.

Photo Contest – Mickie Chamness

Our goal with the low-key photo contest is twofold. First, we love to give people an excuse to get out and look at wildflowers, and second, there are several kinds of photos that we'd like to have for displays and other educational purposes. The photos may be used in displays or in presentations by our chapter. We'll have a judge or small jury chose



The **Phlox Phlyer** is the newsletter of the Columbia Basin Chapter, Tri-Cities and Walla Walla, Washington Native Plant Society.

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the top 3 in each of the following categories. There will be small prizes, but the contest is mostly for fun this year and the honor of having “Best of Category”.

1. Photos that help identify native plants – this could be a series of photos of a species as seedlings, mature flowering plants, and then dormant or it could be a photo that really shows the characteristics that would help someone identify a plant (this may be something other than the flowers)
2. Native plants being used by wildlife – insects, birds, or mammals
3. the beauty of native plants – which will probably include all of the photos in my unbiased (not!) opinion.

Walla Walla – Laura Maier

Plant Sale - April 26

Our plant sale was a great success, mainly because of the many people who either contributed plants or helped out. Our cashiers were Sara Moore, Sue Osterman, Nancy Miles, and Mary Patton. Linda and Jim brought tables on Friday so we could set up ahead of time. Sue brought the Information Table. Sara Wyman and Laura arranged the categories and put on the pricing stickers, for several hours on Friday. We are grateful for the generosity of the many donors of plants. Nancy Berlier was traveling, but she had left her offerings at the Humane Society. Jim Swayne brought in a few dozen of his *Lewisia* treasures to our plant sale. We used Marianne Uyeda's photos of plants blooming in the garden to show prospective customers what these natives looked like.

The success of the sale was more than earning money to pay for brochures, new tools, and items for the Humane Society Landscape. It was the getting together. It was like a native plant festival or celebration. Since we had plenty of help, Betsy, Jim, and I could spend time chatting with new customers, advising them about what plants might be good for their situation or taking them around the Demonstration Garden to show them what a plant looked like. Also, our policy is to dig a desired plant at the customer's request, if we have plenty of it. Betsy and I do that. Two customers wanted the *Rosa woodsii*, even though we carefully explained how it can claim new territory. Our strawberry groundcover also was in demand. Families coming to the Humane Society to check out the dogs looked in on us.

We had a table of items from the Currans Family Farm: *Artemisia tridentata*, *Betula occidentalis*, *Salix scouleriana*, *Symphoricarpos alba*, *Monardella odoratissima*, *Penstemon fruticosus*, *Penstemon richardsonii*, and *Castilleja* sp. We purchased plugs that spent the winter in the Currans Family Farm plant cooler. The Currans Family Farm is now organized as Rugged Country Plants. They have a new website: www.ruggedcountryplants.com and a new phone number: 541-938-3970.

Plants blooming at the Demonstration Garden

Some of the *Camassia* are about to bloom, one plant has two plump buds, already blue, but not open. The *Thermopsis montana* is looking at its best, definitely a golden pea. The serviceberry, *Amelanchier alnifolia*, is covered from head to toe with white blossoms.

We have a new native making a start, *Clarkia pulchella*, just emerging from the soil. Meriwether Lewis wrote on June 1, 1806, "met with a singular plant today in blume, of which I preserved a specimen. It grows on the steep sides of the fertile hills near this place." At this stage, our *Clarkia* looks like reddish curled moss. The seeds were planted in March. We are hoping to be able to maintain self-seeded patches. Well-drained soil in full or partial sun are recommended, and no fertilizer. Well, we don't use any fertilizer at the garden. Will the *Clarkia* grow this year -and another year- in our Garden?

Plant Identification Booklet (in the Walla Walla Ranger District) progress.

We have begun writing trial descriptions of the plants we have chosen, to go with Jean Ann Mitchell's drawings.

Other News

Ethnobotany in the Columbia Basin – Carol Coker

When you look out across the shrub steppe, do you think “supermarket?” To the native peoples, plants and animals of eastern Washington have always provided food, tools, building materials, fiber for baskets and ropes, clothing, dyes, and personal care products such as hair tonic. Plant chemicals have been used for treatment of various ailments, for disinfectants, and even for paralyzing fish. And certain plants and animals have spiritual importance.

Saturday, April 26, Eugene Hunn spoke at the CWU campus about his research as a Professor of Anthropology at the University of Washington. His talk was titled “Ethnobotany in the Columbia Basin.” Professor Hunn has spent 35 years

studying the cultural ecology of Sahaptin-speaking people of the Columbia River basin. His work connected him to the Yakama Nation Cultural Heritage Center and James Selam and to the CTUIR Tamastlikt Cultural Institute and Thomas Morning Owl. The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation includes the Cayuse, Umatilla and Walla Walla.

The Sahaptin language includes over 500 names for plants and animals. Fish was a staple food, but roots and berries were equally important. People moved back and forth between sheltered spots along the Columbia River and the mountains to take advantage of the natural harvest. Meadows below Mount St Helens were especially rich in important plants. Valued foods were acorns from the Garry Oak; roots of bitterroot, *Tauschia* (umbrellawort), and a number of lomatiums; and bulbs of fritillaria, triteleia (*brodiaea*), allium, calochortus, and camas. Also eaten were stems of balsamroot and certain lomatiums. Precise harvest times and cooking methods for all these foods are essential (don't try this at home). Berries are very important, and include chokecherry, serviceberry, elderberry, currants, grouseberry, strawberry, and especially huckleberries. Plants used for fiber include tule, hemp (dogbane), cedar roots, and beargrass. Some medicinal plants are purple sage, geum, cleome, yarrow and some lomatium. *Ceanothus* and *clematis* extracts were used on hair and skin.

Professor Hunn has published a book, *Nch'i-Wana, The Big River: Mid-Columbia Indians and Their Land* (1990), University of Washington Press. Much of the information in his presentation is included in the book. The presentation was sponsored by the Central Washington Chapter with help from an educational grant from the WNPS State Education fund.

Upcoming Events

Tri-Cities

May 3, 2008, Saturday, 8:30 a.m. CIC Parking Lot – Floods and Flowers. Join geologist Bruce Bjornstad and ecologist Janelle Downs in a springtime trip to Frenchman Coulee to view Ice Age Flood features and see the diverse habitats and glorious spring flowers across the Columbia Basin landscape. The field trip is co-hosted by the Ice Age Floods Institute, Lake Lewis Chapter and the Washington Native Plant Society, Columbia Basin Chapter. On the field trip, a short (1 mile) hike and a longer (2 to 3 mile) hike can be taken at your choice, and several flood and flower vantage points will offer stops on our way to the coulee. Meet in the parking lot of the CIC (Consolidated Information Center--library) at Washington State University - Tri-Cities Campus. We will be taking personal vehicles and can arrange car pools at the CIC. Cars must have a Vehicle Use Permit (available at Joe's Sports, Fred Meyers, Ace Hardware, Wal-Mart for \$10.95). Bring sturdy footwear, water and lunch. More information: [Janelle Downs](#), 509 531-4237.

May 7, 2008, Wednesday, 7:00 p.m. – Monthly Meeting Our May speaker will be Julie Beckstead, Associate Professor at Gonzaga University. She will talk about the “Invasive Cheatgrass and a Seed Pathogen: Consequences for Co-occurring Species” (aka The Attack of the Black Fingers of Death). Meeting will be in the East Auditorium at WSU. Note this is a new location and is accessible from the main WSU entrance off Sprout Rd. The auditorium is in the East Building. For more information, contact – Mary Ann Simmons (946-8080).

May 18, 2008, Sunday, 9:00 a.m. – Wildflower Trip to Saddle Mountains. Meet at the WSU CIC parking lot for a trip to the Saddle Mountains to see bitterroot with Steve Link. Bring a lunch, water, and sun screen. We should return by 3:00 p.m. or earlier.

May 19, 2008, Monday, 8:25 p.m. – Full Moon Hike, Badger Mountain. Join us for a hike up Badger Mountain to enjoy the Flower Moon. Meet at Westcliffe Park in Richland (take Shockley Road to the end, proceed onto Queensgate Drive up the hill to the park). Wear sturdy walking shoes, and bring water and a flashlight.

Walla Walla

May 2, 2008, Friday, 1:00 p.m. - At the Demonstration Garden, located at the Blue Mountain Humane Society, 7 East George St. Help remove Cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*), a non-native invader from southwestern Asia, whose sharp-tipped seeds can be harmful to pets. Cheatgrass is a prolific seed producer in early spring. It has displaced native grasses, fuels wildfires, and has reduced forage for native wildlife species. Wear gardening clothes

May 3, 2008, Saturday, 8:30 a.m. – Wildflower Field Trip; meet at Whitmans' Harper Joy parking area to carpool to a local area for a 2 mile hike to view early wildflowers. Bring water and lunch.

May 8, 2008, Thursday, Noon – First Thursday Lunch; Meet at the downstairs table at the Reid Campus Center, at Park and Boyer. Informal discussion of issues related to native plants. Bring a book to exchange, if you like.

May 10, 2008, Saturday, 8:00 a.m. – Nursery Field Trip; at Whitmans' Harper Joy parking area to carpool to the CTUIR plant nursery near Pendleton. Ruth will provide tour of the nursery and then a hike to nearby tribal areas to view native plants. Bring water and lunch, for this day-long outing

Every Friday at 1:00 - 2:30 - Gardening at the Demonstration Garden at the Blue Mountain Humane Society. Call Laura at 525-1079 or Nancy at 529-2253.

Other Events

First Saturday Bird Walk – May 3, 2008, 8 a.m. Wye Park. The Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society leads a bird walk on Bateman Island the first Saturday of the month. Meet at the Wye Park off Columbia Parkway, Hwy 240. Go to: <http://www.lowercolumbiabasinaudubon.org/Batemanwalk.htm> for more information.

Second Saturday at McNary Education Center – May 10, 2008, 9am to noon. Migration – New Visitors! Directions: From the Tri-Cities, turn left on Hwy.124, go through Burbank Heights. At the fire station, turn right on Lake Road. McNary NWR Environmental Education Center, is at 311 Lake Rd. For more information, leave a message at: (509) 543-8322 or go to: <http://www.nwr.mcnary.wa.us/>

Duties for Officers of the Columbia Basin Chapter of the Washington Native Plant Society

In June we will be electing new officers. None of these offices requires a knowledge of latin plant names or a vast background in botany, so if you would like to get more involved with the chapter, please contact: Cheryl Smith (cysmith@moellerinc.com) or Dave Nelson (daveandlin@verizon.net). Also, the President and Vice-President are limited to 3 years in office, so becoming an officer is not a life-time commitment!

President - presides over the monthly meetings and board meetings (September through June); writes a short column for the newsletter; attends 2 State meetings, one in Seattle and one in Ellensburg (this is not mandatory); communicates with the State office

Vice-President – assists the President in their duties, as needed

Secretary – keeps the minutes of the monthly meetings and board meetings; writes up the minutes for the newsletter

Treasurer – has custody of the CBNPS funds; deposits all monies, writes checks, provides a monthly financial status to the board, and prepares an annual report to the State; the treasurer also checks the mail. The mailbox and bank are located in Richland.

******Receiving the newsletter via the mail? How about an electronic version? Save some trees and increase the money we have for other causes. You'll also receive updates on events. So if you are wired, email me – msimmons_1@charter.net and I'll put you on the LIST!**

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