

The Golden Hour President's Message December 2018

Photographers love working during the “golden hour” – the time at the beginning and end of the day when the sun is low in the sky and diffused light casts a magical glow. This time, also called the magic hour, actually lasts less than an hour. When is it? You will probably not be surprised but there are apps for that! I downloaded one (“Golden Hour”), allowed it to read my location and learned that the golden times for today (Sunday, November 25) were 6:40 – 7:10 am and 4:05 – 5:00 pm with the “peaks” occurring at 6:37 am and 4:43 pm. Of course during this time of year in the Northern Hemisphere, we have more diffused golden light throughout the day due to the lower angle of the sun. Autumn also casts a golden glow due to the colors of death and rebirth as some plants are shedding leaves while others are taking advantage of milder temperatures to bloom and create seeds for regeneration.

What creates fall color in the desert? My favorites are perennials including buckwheats and members of the sunflower family, mostly in the genus *Ericameria*. There are more than 100 species of buckwheat in California. Eight grow on the Poppy Reserve including the dramatic California Buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*). It flowers in the late spring and continues to bloom through the summer and as late as October. By fall, the frilly, pink and white flowers turn a showy rust color. The flowers attract many species of butterflies and birds and mammals eat the seeds. It has become a popular plant for gardeners who want an easy to grow native.

Providing complementary colors to the rust colored buckwheat during autumn in the desert are the golden blooms of the several species of rabbitbrush, a member of the sunflower family that blooms in September through October.



California Buckwheat - [Calflora](#)

Rubber rabbitbrush (*Ericameria nauseosa* var. *mohavensis*) is common throughout the Antelope Valley. It grows on the Poppy Reserve along with green rabbitbrush (also called sticky leaf or yellow rabbitbrush.) During World War II, rubber rabbitbrush was investigated as a possible source of rubber as its stems produce a good quality latex. This effort was eventually discarded as being too labor intensive and costly. However, studies have recently resumed. This time the University of Nevada Reno is studying rabbitbrush not only a source of rubber but also as a potential source of both biofuel and adhesives.



Rubber Rabbitbrush with Painted Lady

Photo from Ripley

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Yellow blooming desert plants of autumn include species of goldenbush. While hiking in early November at Joshua Tree National Park, my husband and I came across several bushes of cliff goldenbush (*Ericameria cuneata* var. *spathulata*) covered in deep yellow blooms. This perennial produces flowers from September through November and favors rocky soils and the crevices between boulders. Later in the month, we were amazed by a large expanse of alkali goldenbush (*Isocoma acrademia*), growing in the Big Morongo Canyon Preserve in Morongo Valley. These natives, that grow almost exclusively in California, bloom in the fall and winter.



Cliff Goldenbush - Joshua Tree National Park

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Alkali Golden Bush - Big Morongo Canyon Preserve

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In the Antelope Valley, linear-leaved goldenbush (*Ericameria linearifolia*) is a common perennial that blooms in the spring. When growing near California junipers, as at Ripley Desert Woodland State Park, it provides nectar for the juniper hairstreak butterfly that depends on the California junipers for food for its larvae. Ripley is also a good place to look for the rust colored displays of the California buckwheat. So take advantage of the golden glow of autumn and consider a visit to this park, just 8 short miles west of the Poppy Reserve! Be on the lookout too for the yellow blooms of rubber rabbitbrush.



Linear-leaved Golden Bush

Arthur B. Ripley Desert Woodland

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