

Update, February 27, 2021
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Clearly, with a total seasonal rainfall of less than two inches this winter, it doesn't look good for this upcoming wildflower season. In past seasons, the minimum total rainfall that resulted in reasonable poppy color has been six to eight inches and the Reserve is a long ways from there. On 24 February, a few, widely scattered young poppy plants were observed in select areas. The most prevalent plants seen were filaree, which is not unexpected, but there was even modest amount of filaree compared to most years. We also observed a few young fiddleneck plants and even fewer pygmy-leaved lupine.

What was totally unexpected was that there were not any poppy cotyledons. With the end of January rain storm depositing approximately 0.9 to 1 inch of rainfall at the Reserve, a moderate to good number of poppy cotyledons was expected with the plant's first true leaves now starting to develop. It is almost like the late January storm didn't occur. The poppy plants that were found were small but relatively well developed with multiple true leaves so it is likely the observed poppy plants actually germinated following the end of December rainstorm which deposited only a half inch of rainfall. With no observed seed germination from the January storm, this upcoming season will have to make due with the few poppy plants that came from the weaker December storm. Being drought stressed, the plants are small so the plants that survive will typically have only one or two open blossoms at any time. The prediction is that there won't be much poppy color this season.

Although unexpected, the lack of poppy seed germination following the late January rainstorm is not the first time this has been observed. The volunteer researchers recall not seeing expected poppy seed germination following late season rainstorms once or twice in past winters but the end of January seems too early.

In past winters, very little young, just emerged poppy plant mortality has been observed until there is a five to six week period of no rainfall and that hasn't happened, yet. Right now the Poppy Reserve's weather forecast predicts a slight chance of rain on 3 March so we can hope that that rain storm does make it to the Reserve and waters the Reserve's few growing poppy plants.

Although no open poppy blossoms were observed during the 24 February Reserve visit, an already blooming desert parsley plant was seen; come rain or shine the wildflower season has to just march on. Attached is a photograph of that blossom as well as a photograph of two small poppy plants we did find.