FIELD OBSERVATION REPORT

By Mary Wilson
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Poppy Reserve - This year's wildflower season is winding down. The wildflowers are losing their petals and forming their seeds, which they will disperse and then will be ready for the next wildflower season. There are still some poppies, California prim- roses, mustard, and forget-me-nots still have flowers. As the poppy plants mature the flowers will turn yellow around the edges and they will lose their petals and form their seed pods.

Ripley Desert Woodland— In bloom are Desert dandelion, mustard, filaree, Mormon tea males have the catkins, linear-leaf goldenbush, chia, blue sage, forget -me-nots, combs-bur, scarlet bugler, sun cups, goldfields and comet blazing stars.

The 2020 burn still has Desert tidy tips, Desert dandelion, chia, coreopsis and scarlet bugler in bloom.

George Bones Sanctuary—still has Desert dandelions and lacy phacelia but now has prickly poppies.

Bouquet Canyon Road—There are a few poppies, mustard, Russian thistle, wild-iris, Hooker primrose, golden yarrow, Indian paint brush, Jimson weed, yellow monkey flowers, and western wallflowers in bloom. Also in bloom is yerba santa, tamarisk trees, Desert tobacco and elderberry trees, and there is a nice showing of yucca (Lord's candles) on the hillsides.

PAINTED ROCKS

Have you ever been hiking on a trail, looked down and saw a painted rock? What is that all about?

Rock art has been around since ancient or prehistoric times and done in caves. However, the latest craze can be traced to 2015, when Megan Murphy founded the Kindness Rocks Project. Murphy was looking for certain kinds of rocks as a sign from her late parents. She wondered if others would be receptive to rocks bearing messages, so one day she picked up a marker and wrote an inspirational phrase on five rocks for walkers to find. By coincidence, a friend of hers found one of the rocks and she texted Murphy that she had found an inspirational rock and it made her day. Murphy new she was on to something and started painting rocks and leaving them for people to find.

Soon, people all over the country and beyond were painting rocks. Local groups created Facebook pages where painted rock enthusiasts could post photos. It became a social connection and people could support each other—rocks of kindness.

Groups were created by women who wanted to do community art projects with students and the idea took off. It was spreading kindness one rock at a time. The process was simple: you gathered rocks, bought acrylic paint, sealer, paint brushes to decorate, paint the rocks, let them dry and then hide them in spots like parks, playgrounds and family-friendly hiking trails. Soon toddlers, teens, moms, dads and grandparents were enjoying painting, hiding and hunting the rocks together.

The rocks could have painted flowers, birds, insects, animals and some could have inspirational messages. If you found a rock you could either re-hide it or keep it. They would check the back of the rock as it could have instructions spelled out to post a photo and put it on Facebook.

The idea of kindness rocks grew and rocks started showing up in places they were not wanted. A squabble started on Facebook and social media about so many rocks being found everywhere and it should be stopped or regulated. Na-tional Parks in the 1980 established the Leave No Trace Principles which included, “Dispose of Waste Properly, Leave What you Find, Respect Wildlife and Be Considerate of Other Visitors. Amid the name calling and finger-pointing on rock hiding and collecting everyone agreed where to draw the line between recreation and preservation. Megan Murphy admitted she didn’t know about leave-no-trace principles and now that she was better informed, she promoted the principles which include packing out trash, respecting wildlife, and leaving plants, animals, artifacts and (non-painted) rocks in parks. She said, “The whole point of it is kindness so we have to make sure we are also kind to nature.”

Do not hide rocks in national parks or state parks, or on private property. Some local parks, schools and businesses will let you hide the rocks when you ask permission. How about your own back yard or a neighborhood rock hunt? So don’t give up on the kindness rocks and let the children and adults paint them and hide them—play hide-go-seek or have a Treasure Hunt.

GOLDEN EAR-DROPS

Ehrendorferia chysantha

This flower is in the Poppy Family (*Papaveraceae)*. The leaves are similar to the California poppy and there are smaller alternate leaves up the stems. The stems are erect, hairless, hollow-stemmed up to 12-inches long. The flowers are aromatic and are produced at the top of the stem with four petals; there are two petals in the middle that face upward and then there are two petals that curve outward
and down. They like dry, brushy areas prone to wildfire in diverse regions of California and Baja California. The seeds are in a capsule 1-2 cm long and need to be scarified, usually by fire, in order to germinate. Other populations can occur in the moving gravels and sands of steep slopes, where the grinding action will break the seed coat.

They can be biennial having a life cycle that normally takes two seasons from germination to death to complete, flowering biennials usually bloom and fruit in the second season.

Note: I have only seen this plant twice, once after a 2013 fire in Tehachapi and the second in Portal Ridge after the Bobcat Fire.

WESTERN WHIPTAIL

Aspidoscelis tigris munda)

Also known as the California Whiptail and can be found throughout most of the south-western United States and northern Mexico. It lives in habitats of the deserts and semiarid shrubland, usually in areas with sparce vegetation. It has a long and slender body with scales on its back and larger rectangular scales on its belly. The upper side often has light stripes. Its body can be about 4 inches in length and a maximum total
length including its tail of about 12 inches. They mate from April to May and around June the female will lay 1 to 4 eggs.

Their diet consists of insects, spiders, scorpions, butterflies, moths, crickets, grasshoppers and beetles. They use their jaws instead of their tongue to capture their prey. Their predators include snakes, larger lizards, and birds like hawks, vultures, and owls, When being attacked by a predator, the western whiptail will drop its tail. The muscles in the tail will continue contracting causing the tail to flop around and distract the predator from the lizards. This is a last ditch effort and very stressful for the lizard and it takes a lot of energy to regrow the tail and the lizard will lose a lot of stored food.

PORTAL RIDGE WILDLIFE AREA

On April 9th the Transition Habitat Conservancy (THC) hosted the Annual Wildflower Celebration at the Portal Ridge Wildlife Area. There were guided tours and I chose to stay in the immediate area for my tour. One of the first flowers I saw was Parry Gilia (Milt Stark's book "A Flower-Watcher's Guide"). Windy Walker, our tour guide, said they were Sandblossoms (She had Pam Mackay's book "Mojave Desert Wildflowers"). I have both books so when I got home, I looked up both flowers. The descriptions were similar and both books showed Parry's Linanthus as another name for the flower. They both showed Linanthus parryae and that the flower was in the Phlox Family. So I went online and put in Parry Gilia and what came up was Sandblossoms. I checked Calscape and Calflora and it was Sandblossoms. Isn't research fun? So here is a photo of this mysterious flower.

Sandblossoms

For more confusion, Jane Pinheiro called them "boutonnieres...of pink, and lavender-blue, and white Parry Gilia… Sometimes it seems as though some jesting sprite had strewn the ground with flowers as it danced through the forest in the moonlight, for here is one, there a cluster, over yonder a long drift, and again, a solid patch of these fragile, pert flowers, set tight to the ground. These are truly some of the most beautiful 'belly flowers'." (She called them Fairy Boutonnieres)

For the rest of the tour, we were in sink on the names of flowers. We saw lupine, coreopsis, and chia. Also saw:

Bush Poppy

Thickleaf Yerba Santa

California Poppy

Jewel Flower

Mojave Sun Cups

Golden Yarrow

Whispering Bells