

FIELD OBSERVATION REPORT

By Mary Wilson

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Antelope Valley California Poppy Reserve

Sunflowers, turkey mullein, desert straw, common sandaster, slender stem buckwheat, and jimson weed still have blooms. Vinegar weed are starting to produce their flowers. The spurge, tumbleweeds, tarweed, and ragweed are still green but no flowers. Freckled milkvetch (loco weed) has gone to the seedpod stage.



▲ Turkey mullein grows in a dome shape and as it matures it forms a flat top. The seeds are eaten and distributed by wild turkeys and doves, thus the name. The foliage is toxic to animals, and the crushed plants were used by Native Americans to stupefy fish and make them easy to catch.



◀ Vinegarweed is of the mint family. The common name 'vinegarweed' originated due to its foliage containing volatile oils that have a strong vinegar odor. If you touch the leaves, your fingers will have a vinegar smell. The oils have phytotoxic properties, which help the plant compete by killing or injuring other plant species.

The indigenous people of California used this as a traditional medicinal plant, as a cold and fever remedy, a pain reliever, and a flea insect repellent.

A few years ago there was a small field of these plants on the Poppy Trail North Loop by the second bridge and you could smell the vinegar quite a distance away.

Arthur B. Ripley Desert Woodland State Park

California buckwheat has turned to the rust color now, there are a few desert straw in bloom along with autumn vinegar weed (photo below). Joshua trees have dropped their seedpods.



There was a research question last report, “Will they (the male Juniper trees), have a second season or producing cones and will the female trees grow the receptors to receive the pollen?” Looks like the first part of the question is yes—the male Juniper trees are forming new cones. In the photo below you seen new growth on the branchlets, the brown cones are from the spring season and there are green cones which are forming now. As for the female trees we will have to wait to see if they will form the receptors for the pollen.



New growth on the branchlets.

New green cones.

Brown cones from the spring season.

BURROWING OWL—COURTSHIP

Creating a healthier appearance is used to attract a mate. A more attractive bird will attract a stronger mate and have a better chance of raising many strong, healthy chicks.



▲ Cleanliness—Burrowing owls take dirt baths or sand baths. The dust is worked into the feathers to absorb excess oil to help keep the plumage clean and flexible for more aerodynamic flight and efficient insulation. Regular dusting may help smother or minimize lice or parasites.



▲ Preening—This keeps each one of the feathers in good condition. It moisturizes with preen oil from the preen gland near the base of the tail. This helps waterproof feathers and keep them flexible and aligns the feathers for less energy in flight.



▲ Decorating—During the nesting season, burrowing owls will collect a wide variety of materials to line their nest, some of which are left around the entrance to the burrow. The most common material is mammal dung. Researchers believe the dung helps to control the microclimate inside the burrow and to attract insects, which the owls may eat.



▲ Giving presents—like presenting a nice grasshopper, beetle or mouse to show they are interested in probable mating.



The Burrowing Owls perform mutual preening. This behavior is practiced by both mates is shared in a peaceful and non-aggressive way, often on head and face of the other bird, and may play a role in feather care and during courtship.

Some displays are observed, with the male calling, performing circular flights and other aerial displays such as rising quickly, hovering for a few seconds, and dropping from about 15 meters. It repeats this scene many times.

They also practice billing between mates, bowing and scratching, and these displays can be accompanied by calls.



The owl standing on the entrance mound is winking—perhaps a mate has been found.