

FIELD OBSERVATION REPORT

By Mary Wilson
October 15, 2017

Poppy Reserve

Turkey mullein still has some plants that are green. The long stem buckwheat still has a few white colored flowers but they are now a darker pink to purple color. When driving you will see large fields of these purple flowers. The ragweed has produced the male flowers and are starting to produce green female flowers. There are still some sandasters with blooms. The vinegar weed still has some flowers but are also starting to produce seeds. The tumbleweed are starting to produce the white and pink flowers. The rubber rabbitbrush is producing flower buds and some are starting to bloom.



Poppy Reserve -Vinegarweed



Ripley—Autumn Vinegarweed



Poppy Reserve—Long-stemmed Buckwheat



Ripley—California Buckwheat

Arthur B. Ripley Desert Woodland State Park

California buckwheat flowers have turned brown, there are still some autumn vinegar weed in bloom as are the sandasters.

Male Juniper cones are turning brown. Female trees have not produced receptors as yet.

NEWS FROM THE PAST

The following article was applied to mat board. It was written by Milt Stark. Unfortunately there is no name or date of the newspaper but was probably either the Ledger Gazette or the Antelope Valley Press. Milt had his own style of writing and I wonder if there are still flowers in the areas he found the ones for the articles. Hope you enjoy the article as much as I did.



New wildflower column

Identifying wildflowers

By MILT STARK

In this column, we will be writing about wildflowers which are currently in bloom, how one can identify them, where they may be found, interesting information about the flowers and tips on photographing them. This should be a great wildflower year so we should have much to write about.

Although Antelope Valley usually celebrates its wildflower season in March and April when there are fields of wildflowers of spectacular beauty, in reality if one includes the surrounding foothills and mountains, wildflowers may be found somewhere in the area from February to late October.

The beginning photographer is usually attracted to wildflowers because of the spectacular displays of blooming plants, but really the most satisfying pictures are closeups, depicting either a single flower or even the complicated inner structure of the flower. Invariably, when the photographer produces a pleasing image of a single blossom, he or she wants to know the name of the flower.

It sounds kind of dumb to show a photograph to your friends, telling them that this is a pretty little blue

flower that blooms in Leona Valley in July and August and closes up at 10 o'clock in the morning. You certainly impress them much more when you can say to them, "This is Chicory"!

That, I guess is the real reason for this column; to tell photographers or painters or just plain lookers, what they are looking at. We will emphasize common names, because those are the most easily remembered. However, just in case there are a few botanist looking in or if any of you photographers or lookers want to increase your store of information, we will include the botanical names also.

**Manzanita Arctostaphylos
Heather Family**

Shrub or tall tree up to 25 feet. Simple grey-green leaves with characteristic "rooked" branches with smooth red brown bark. The common name comes from the Spanish meaning "Little Apple" while the botanical name comes from two greek words meaning "Bear Berry."

Most people recognize this shrub because of its extremely attractive smooth red brown bark. However, how many people are aware of its equally

beautiful clusters of sweet scented, white or pinkish, urn-shaped flowers. These appear as early as February in Bouquet Canyon and as late as March in the higher elevations such as Big Pines. Because of its blooming season, it is much more of a "Snow Flower" than its cousin (both are in the Heather family) Snowplant SARCODES SANGUINEA which blooms in April and May.

Manzanita of various species is an important component of the chaparral. The two main species in our area are the Bigberry Manzanita, ARCTOSTAPHYLOS GLAUCA (pictured above) and Eastwood Manzanita, A. GLANDULOSA.

Of the 43 species of Manzanita in California, most were used for food by the Indians and early settlers. Berries were eaten fresh, dried and squeezed to make a drink or jelly or fermented to make an alcoholic beverage. Berries were beaten to a fine flour to be eaten dry, as a mush, or made into thin cakes. Leaves were used for medicinal purposes, purportedly effective in curing poison-oak sores, headaches and colds. The wood was used to make spoons, wood pipes and arrowheads.

Manzanita Flowers



Manzanita Berries



Chicory





STRIPED SKUNK

Mephitis mephitis

The photos of the striped skunk were caught on motion cameras in the area of the burrowing owls. These skunks have black fur and white stripes, even from birth. They are around the size of house cats and are approximately 20-30-inches long (including the tail) and weigh 6 to 10 pounds. Although they have excellent senses of smell and hearing, they have poor vision, being unable to see objects more than about 10-feet away.

Skunks live in forest edges, woodlands, grasslands and deserts. They will make their homes in abandoned burrows, but will also live in abandoned buildings, under large rocks and hollow logs. They have strong forefeet and long nails, which make them excellent diggers. Skunks are nocturnal and are solitary animals when not breeding. They are not a true hibernator in the winter, but do den up for extended periods of time. The females will huddle together but the males will often den alone.

They are omnivorous, eating both plant and animal material and will change their diets as the seasons change. They will eat insects and larvae, earthworms, grubs, rodents, lizards, frogs, snakes, birds, moles and eggs. They will also eat berries, roots, leaves, grasses, fungi and nuts. They are one of the primary predators of the honey bee, relying on their thick fur to protect them from stings. The skunk will scratch at the front of the beehive and will eat the guard bees that come out to investigate.

Skunks mate in early spring (April to early June) and males will mate with more than one female. The gestation is around 66 days and the female will excavate a den and have four to seven kits. When born the kits are blind, deaf, and covered in a soft layer of fur. They open their eyes in about three weeks, are weaned in about two months and will stay with their mother until they are ready to mate at about one year. The males play no part in raising the young. They have short lives and live only 2 to 4-years in the wild.

Skunks are notorious for their anal scent glands, which they use as a defensive weapon. These glands produce the skunk spray and is a mixture of sulfur-containing chemicals which have an offensive and nauseating odor. This spray is powerful enough to ward off bears and other potential attackers and they can spray with a high degree of accuracy as far as 10-feet. Skunks will usually only attack when cornered or defending their young and spraying is not the first method of defense. A skunk will growl, spit, fluff its fur, shake its tail and stamp the ground to get the intruder to leave. If the intruder does not leave then the skunk will lift its tail and spray. They are reluctant to use this spray and they carry just enough of the chemical for five to six uses because it can take up to 10-days to produce another supply.

Most predators like wolves, foxes and badgers seldom attack skunks out of fear of being sprayed. The spray can cause irritation and even temporary blindness, and is powerful enough to be detected by a human nose up to a mile down wind. The exceptions are dogs and other predators who try to attack and get sprayed. The greatest predator is the great horned owl.

The skunk is currently not considered endangered. They have been kept as a pet with the scent glands removed, however, it is illegal in most US states.



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First one fledgling appeared



Then two



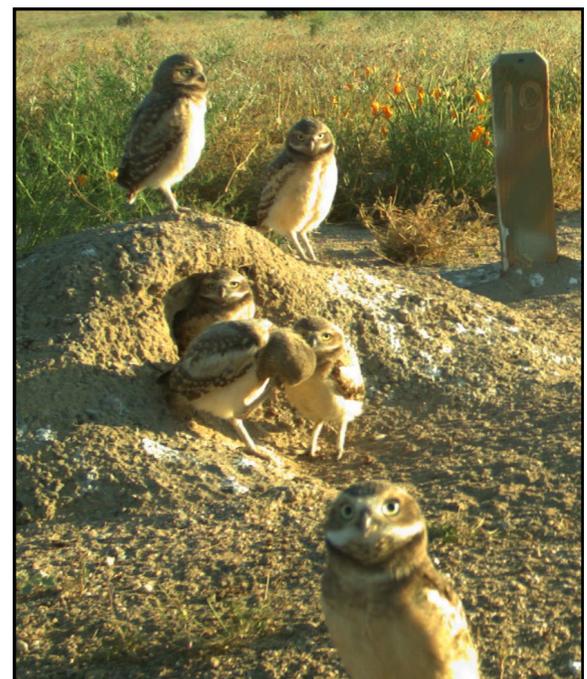
Then three



Then four



Then five



Then six ►

Then seven appeared. Meet the 2017 family of fledglings at one of the Poppy Reserve habitats.

