General Meeting
Diversifying the Farm Landscape
February 15, 7:30 PM
Speaker: Rose Roberts

By choosing farming practices that mimic how nature works, while considering the economic, ecological, and social impact of their business decisions, farmers can restore and enhance the ecological health of the farm and the surrounding landscape. Using principles of agroecology and ecological restoration, Rose Roberts of Farm Stewards helps farmers restore and enhance on-farm habitat for native species, including native pollinators, as well as beneficial insects and birds that reduce pests on the farm. Habitat creation and restoration has many co-benefits, including improved soil & water quality and adaptation and mitigation of the effects of climate change.

Speaker Bio: Rose Roberts completed a PhD in Neuroscience at MIT at age 26. She studied organic farming at the Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems at the University of California, Santa Cruz. After completing a 6-month residential apprenticeship in all aspects of organic farming and gardening, Rose earned a Certificate in Ecological Horticulture. She spent 6½ years managing Ecological Restoration programs at Circuit Rider Productions, a non-profit organization dedicated to the restoration and enhancement of human and ecological systems. Her responsibilities included managing the Native Plants Nursery, the Russian River Giant Reed Removal and Habitat Restoration Program. Rose founded Farm Stewards to unite her passion and experience in the areas of sustainable farming and ecological restoration, and to make this experience and passion available to her clients, the land owners and land managers of Northern California, who work each day to steward the land under their care.

Plant ID Hour
You see the plants blooming but the names are unclear? No need to fret, Plant I.D. Hour is here! Arrive at 6:45 p.m. before the General Meeting, and bring specimens of plants you want to identify. At Plant I.D. Hour you can see plants up close and key them to species, while getting to know fellow Milo Baker Chapter members. Plants that you key out or learn with friends are easily remembered! Bring in some mystery plants to challenge us. I’ll bring in the dissecting microscope and some flowering plants from the local area. Keying is worthwhile and challenging for all of us, but it’s fun to work through them together, and learn what distinguishes this plant from that one.

Join us for Dinner before the Meeting:
We’ll gather for dinner at 6PM at Kirin Restaurant, 2700 Yulupa Ave. We hope our speaker will join us, but we always have an enjoyable group of fellow members and a delicious Northern Chinese meal in any case. Please contact Liz Parsons, 833-2063, lizpar8993@aol.com by Jan.17th if you plan to attend.
President's Report

The Milo Baker Chapter is without a President for the first time in its history. As the vice president, I conducted the first Board meeting in January. Wendy Smit will conduct the February meeting. We will be led by Board members, each serving for a month. This is an unfortunate state of affairs, but we must make the best of it. Past-president Lynn Houser served for 3 years and we are very grateful to her for her service. Lynn will become our Publicity chair. The Chapter needs new Board members. Please think about becoming a Member-at-Large and helping to guide the chapter in the decision making. We meet on the second Tuesday of the month at the Environmental Center on Ridgeway in Santa Rosa at 7 PM. The State Legislature has declared that the third week in April will be Native Plant Week. From April 17 to April 23 there will be celebrations of our California Native Plants throughout the state. Milo Baker Chapter’s general meeting on April 19 will have a special speaker to be announced soon. This recognition of our native plants is an important milestone for CNPS.

Liz Parsons, Vice-president Milo Baker Chapter

Gardening with Natives

“GRASSES ARE THE HAIR OF MOTHER EARTH”

Karl Foerster, the author of this quote, was a dedicated, life-long German horticulturist and gardener. Perhaps we see grasses in the way he did; they don’t stand out; they are not as visible as the colorful flowers; they don’t contrast against shrubs as do the flowering perennials. Grasses are used differently than trees, vines, shrubs and perennials. They are becoming more popular as garden or yard subjects for many reasons. Due to the interest in using grasses, many more are available in the nursery trade, and several books assist the gardener in making good choices for the yard. Grasses add wonderful shapes, colors and textures to a garden. They can be delicate, graceful and soft, or a tall thicket of dense, spiky, bold leaves. Some are so feathery you must reach out a hand to feel their plumes. The upright stiff bunch grasses provide a solid background on which to spotlight a planting of buckwheats, lupines or poppies. Grasses can be mixed in plantings of meadows with oaks, manzanitas and ceanothus, all of which provide habitat for pollinators and birds. Bunch grasses constitute what are called “ornamental grasses” and are not the lawn grasses that reproduce by underground stems, or rhizomes. Bunch grasses clump and grow outward, expanding gradually; some put out seeds that may or may not sprout and grow. Our bunch grasses come from hills, meadows, coastlands, mountains, woodlands, in essence, grasses come from all over the world. Some are highly invasive as they are aliens to our county and may out-compete our native plants. A horrific example is the pampas grass, and a trip to the Bodega Bay area will prove this point. There, entire hillsides have become overgrown with pampas grasses, to the exclusion of native buckwheats, sea thrift and seaside daisies. Some nurseries still sell these pampas grasses, Cortaderis selloana and C. jubata, although several groups are working to inform nursery buyers of the dangers of stocking these plants. Another pervasive grass, crimson fountain grass, or Pennisetum setaceum, is from Africa. Nurseries sell it, advising us to trim off the seed heads, but that doesn’t necessarily happen. There are so many native grasses to choose from that there is no reason to risk growing non-natives. Very broadly, grasses may be classified as cool-season or warm-season growers. Temperature, light and moisture generally govern the growth factors. Thus, a gardener, knowing the genus and species of the grass he is purchasing, will be able to modify his selection of site or optimum planting or dividing times, or how much to water. Grasses need little maintenance, which contributes to their popularity. Nor do they need fertilizing. They are generally pest-free, deer-resistant, and do not require any special soils. They are especially drought-tolerant. Cutting them back once a year keeps them strong and viable. Nature of course does not trim them back; fires kept their growth clean and strong. Combing through the grasses...
with fingers is sometimes enough to pull out the old foliage.

There are a fair number of books available on gardening with grasses. Rick Darke and John Greenlee are two of the reigning grass authors. They cover all the grasses, not just those native to California; many are not native and are considered invasive here in northern California. “California Native Plants for the Garden” by Bornstein, Fross and O’Brien and “Designing Native California Gardens” by Keator and Middlebrook are excellent for names, photos, and descriptions of native grasses.

Many of the wineries are landscaping with grasses due to ease of maintenance. The Plaza in downtown Cotati has several grasses, as does the walk along the Laguna de Santa Rosa channel off La Salle, south of Oliver’s Market in Cotati. The Bouvier Preserve in Glen Ellen is doing reconstruction with native grasses. They may be noticed in many gardens when one begins to look for them. They may not be as spectacular as many other plants, but they are indeed, the “hair of the earth.”

Judy Brinkhoff  
joobrink@comcast.net

Next month: Cool and warm season grasses for your garden.

Previously printed in the Sonoma West Times & News

Invasives Corner

Good Destructive Beetles, etc.

Sampling the various sites on invasive plants in California, I found a short sentence about controlling yellow star thistle with insect predators in a Contra Costa ag publication. I attend Marin Sonoma Weed Management Area meetings, and folks there are almost always talking about getting rid of invasive plants (when they aren't being silly which is why I go to these meetings). I don't recall ever hearing about how some agency in our vicinity was using biological control for weed outbreaks. Plants have insect predators and diseases that evolved along with them, but when the plant is introduced outside its native range, the predators are usually left behind allowing the plant to run amok. So using biocontrol sounds like a no-brainer. Marin County ranchers, particularly the organic dairy ranchers, are really wound up about how distaff thistle is taking over their rangelands. Their cows find it distasteful and really hard on the tongue. They even tried to train cows to eat the young thistles with diminishing amounts of molasses. Unfortunately those efforts turned out to have little effect. Because organic dairies can't use any pesticides and distaff thistle has so many ways of defending itself from apoplectic farmers, one would think biocontrol with an insect predator from the plant's homeland might fix the problem. But there is another problem: safflower has a very similar set of genes to wooly distaff thistle, and researchers are not about to take the blame for the economic collapse of the safflower industry. Cali-IPC's newsletter describes a beetle which would control the very invasive tamarisk. After ten years of testing, the beetles were finally released in the Mohave and other sites in 2004, but CDFA stopped prescribing it because bird species used tamarisk as habitat. Even so some scientists say willow would have done just as good a job and been a better citizen.

My opinion is that the reason there aren't enough biocontrol projects to address more than a few species of invasive species, is that the research is time-consuming and expensive. Though there are other factors that cause a plant to be overly successful, the fact that imported beetles released in 1944 successfully controlled Klamath weed in Mendocino County without harming other plant species illustrates that biological control could be the answer in many situations where mechanical or chemical means won't work. Unfortunately legislators and the public see attractive animals when they see the word "endangered", and unattractive insects when they see the words "invasive species" - not plants. We can help by talking about invasive plants, especially when our companions aren't aware of what damage invasive plants cause. Of course if you are conversing on the strange behavior of the opposite sex, it might be hard to fit in, but I'm convinced you can find a way! For instance if you were talking about how John or Mary always has to have his or her own way, you could put on your most earnest face and say, "Yes, isn't it terrible how men/women insist on dominating. That reminds me of how invasive plants always have to have their own way. Why look at that Vinca on that
creek bank. blah, blah." And maybe your friend inherits a billion dollars and gives it to a research institute studying biocontrol because of what you said. No, seriously...

M.L. Carle

Plant Sale News

On December 18, we had a very successful PCN Iris workshop. 8 people came to help pot up 178 native iris. Thank you to Penny Dalton, Mary Aldrich, Pat Chan, Kathi Dowdakin, Alan Brubaker, Alison Willets, and Jim Corson. We look forward to offering these very popular plants at the sale on October 8. Our second potting workshop of the season will be held at Liz Parsons’ house in Kenwood on Sunday, February 27 at 11 AM. See the Events section for more information.

This year will be the 40th Annual Native Plant Sale. It would be nice to do something really special to mark this anniversary. I would like to re-issue the Milo Baker Gardener in a book form. In 1978, some of the first members of the Milo Baker Chapter -- Betty Guggolz, Ruth Hass, Vanette Bunyon, Liz Jungsten, and Jean Ireland -- created one of the first organized efforts to gather together all of the available information on growing California native plants. Marjorie Schmidt’s book, “Growing California Native Plants” was published by UC Press in 1980. “The Milo Baker Gardener” was a 12 page stapled pamphlet. I would like to work with a group of people to re-write and update the information. Ideally, it could be sold at the 40th Annual Native Plant Sale and in this way commemorate the anniversary with a tribute to the early efforts of our chapter to promote growing California native plants. This new book would include many new plants and new information in the more accessible book form. Anyone who would like to help with this effort can give me a call and we will begin the work.

Liz Parsons

Events and Items of Interest

Laguna Foundation
Wednesday, Feb. 2, 2011
International recognition for an important local treasure! The Laguna de Santa Rosa and surrounding Wetland Complex will be named a Wetland of International Significance on World Wetlands Day, February 2, 2011. February 2nd will be the 40th anniversary of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. Signed 40 years ago in Ramsar, Iran, this treaty recognizes the importance of wetlands worldwide and the ecosystem services they provide. The Laguna de Santa Rosa Wetland Complex will join only 27 other sites in the nation and 1904 sites worldwide to receive this important distinction.

The Laguna de Santa Rosa Wetland Complex is located in Sonoma County, California, west of the City of Santa Rosa and east of the city of Sebastopol. The site is within the Laguna de Santa Rosa watershed, with the Laguna de Santa Rosa being the largest tributary to the Russian River. The Laguna Wetland Complex is of particular international importance due to the rare and endangered plant and animal species it supports, the biodiversity of the region – one of the world’s few diverse “hotspots,” and the presence of unique vernal pool environments.

More information is available online at the Laguna Foundation’s website: www.lagunafoundation.org or at www.ramsar.org.

Contact Hattie Brown, Conservation Science Program Manager at 527-9277 x105 or by email hattie@lagunafoundation.org

Rare Plants of the Central Valley
Feb 15, 2011
Carol Witham
UC Davis, Center for Plant Diversity
Instructors: Carol Witham with assistance by CNPS Rare Plant Botanist, Aaron Sims
Course Description: Many view the central valley as a place to get through. No so for John Muir when he first visited the area in 1866. He described it as “all one sheet of plant gold”. Since Muir’s time, the central valley has been invaded by a plethora of European annual grasses that have displaced much of the great displays of annual forbs. However,
from intertidal mudflats in the delta to the oak savanna covered foothills, the central valley habitats are refuges for many native species including a large number of rare, threatened and endangered plants.

This one day laboratory course will focus on identification of the rare plants of the Sacramento Valley. While much of the emphasis will be on vernal pool taxa, we will also explore those of the grasslands and riparian areas. Participants will learn characters used to distinguish the rare species beyond those used in the typical dichotomous plant key. Specific microhabitat for the species will also be discussed. Participants will receive numerous handouts to aid their future rare plant survey work.

Cost: CNPS members: $150
Non-members: $175

For more details and registration please go to http://cnps.org/cnps/education/workshops/index.php

WILDCARE’S Family Adventures/Aventuras Familiares
Saturday February 12/ Sábado12 de Febrero:
Family Love at the Ponds/ Amor Familiar en la Charca

Programs begin at 10:00 a.m. at the trailhead. If you would like to carpool, meet at 9:30 a.m. at the Canal Alliance headquarters at 91 Larkspur Street in San Rafael.

Todos los programas comienzan a las 10:00 a.m. en el parque y terminan antes del medio día. Si prefieres seguir al guía desde San Rafael, nos reuniremos a las 9:30 a.m. afuera de las oficinas del Canal Alliance en 91 Larkspur Street, San Rafael, CA 94901 y luego manejaremos a cada parque.

Questions? Contact Juan-Carlso Solis at 415.453.1000, ext.17/ juan-carlos@wildcarebayarea.org.

Laguna Docent Training Class Now Forming
February 15, March 2 - Information Meetings

Expand and share your knowledge and love of nature—train to become a Laguna de Santa Rosa docent. Volunteers learn about the natural and cultural history of Sonoma County’s unique natural treasure, the Laguna de Santa Rosa, then lead dynamic, hands-on environmental education activities in 2nd - 4th grade classrooms throughout the watershed and during field trips to Laguna Preserves. Training starts March 2011 and informational meetings will be held from 6:00-7:30 pm on Tuesday, February 15th at the Sebastopol Library and on Wednesday, March 2 at the Central Santa Rosa Library. For information, including the application and training schedule visit www.lagunafoundation.org or contact Christine Fontaine, Laguna Foundation Education Programs Director: 527-9277 x102
christine@lagunafoundation.org

Docents & Jungle Guides Needed at San Francisco’s Conservatory of Flowers
February 16

Share your love of botany and tropical plants with Conservatory visitors!
Jungle Guides lead tours for 2nd-5th grade classes. Tours are held Tuesday-Friday from September through May at 10:00 a.m. Docents lead daily free tours and special guided tours for groups to educate adult visitors about the Conservatory’s collection of tropical plants.

Training Program The Conservatory welcomes volunteers of all ages and experience levels. The seven session training program will be held 2:00 – 5:00 p.m. on Wednesdays from February 16 to March 30. The $60 cost of the training program covers all mandatory training materials. We ask all volunteers to commit to two shifts per month for at least one year. In return for this commitment the Conservatory offers a comprehensive training program, ongoing educational and social opportunities, a 25% gift shop discount, and annual guest passes.

For more information, contact:
Erika Frank, Director of Volunteer Services
Conservatory of Flowers
(415) 637-4326
efrank@sfcf.org

Workday at Live Oaks Ranch
Fri., February 18, 10am–2pm
Come lend a hand and join a stewardship workday at SLT’s new Live Oaks Ranch near the town of Calistoga. Volunteers are needed to help remove invasive
broom and Douglas fir seedlings that are encroaching upon the preserve’s oak woodlands and riparian areas. Douglas fir can eventually shade out oak trees and seedlings, and non-native broom often grows densely over large areas to the detriment of native species. Bring a bag lunch for a picnic along the creek.
For more information email: volunteer@sonomalandtrust.org

Milo Baker Chapter Plant Division Workshop
February 27 11 AM
Second potting workshop of the season will be at Liz Parsons’ house in Kenwood. We will divide bleeding hearts, wild ginger, goldenrod, zauschneria, and other plants that are easy to divide. Call at 833-2063 for more information. Bring lunch if you would like to stay and discuss the annual plant sale and the dates for the last two workshops.

Golden Trout Wilderness Botanical Workshop
Flora and Natural History of the Southern Sierra
July 3 – 9, 2011
Registration deadline: March 15, 2011
Location: Golden Trout Wilderness Camp
Instructors: Tim Thomas, Pam McKay and Paul Collins
Workshop Organizer: Susan D’Alcamo
Don’t miss this amazing botany workshop that will teach us about the flora and natural history of the Golden Trout Wilderness, Cottonwood Lakes Basin and the John Muir Wilderness. Spend the week exploring high Sierra alpine habitats. Daily guided hikes and interpretive talks will be led by our experienced trip leaders. Lectures, slide shows and an opportunity to key plants with dissecting scopes will fill the evenings. We will see an abundance of wildflowers in alpine meadows and encounter endemic plant species while taking in the incredible Sierran vistas. Plant, animal and bird lists will be provided.
Cost: $525.00 (includes meals from Sunday dinner through Saturday lunch)
For information, brochure, and registration contact: Susan D’Alcamo: sdalcamo@calacademy.org, Cell# (925)899-0719

Riverkeeper Stewardship Park Volunteer Days
On the entire 110 miles of the Russian River this is the place to see and participate in riverbank stewardship. Everyone and all ages are welcome to visit or volunteer. No experience necessary. Enjoy time on the Russian River every Wednesday except when there is enough rain to need a raincoat. Please join us from 8:30 - 11:30 am, for all or part of the time. We suggest that you bring your own drinking water and wear sturdy footwear. The Park is located at 16153 Main St., Guerneville on the north bank of the Russian River directly upstream of the pedestrian bridge. Access is down a driveway in front of Sonoma Nesting Co. At the bottom of the driveway look for the blue and white sign that says, “Russian Riverkeeper Demonstration Riparian Restoration Project Future Community Park.” Parking is available near the sign. For more information contact Victoria Wikle at 865-2474 or VictoriaWikle@usa.net.
We are pleased to announce that we have an exciting new website, designed by Creekmore Behasa. This is a huge milestone for us and represents countless hours of work! We hope it grows into a comprehensive collection of resources related to the Russian River and on a greater scale, to water issues worldwide. We have made it easy for users to submit links, photos and videos for us to consider for inclusion on the site. Please visit the new site at www.russianriverkeeper.org and let us know if you have any input!

2011 Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour
Registration for the Sunday, May 1, 2011 Tour is now open!
Register now at http://bringingbackthenatives.net to receive your garden guide in the first mailing. This event is expected to fill; registering at this time will reserve your place on the tour. A variety of bird- and butterfly-friendly, pesticide-free, water conserving, low maintenance gardens that contain 50% or more native plants will be open on Sunday, May 1, 2011, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at various locations throughout Alameda and Contra Costa counties. More than 40 garden talks will be scheduled throughout the day.
Visit “Preview the Gardens” http://bringingbackthenatives.net/preview-2011-gardens to read garden descriptions, view garden
photos, and download plant lists. Native plants will be sold at numerous locations over the course of the week-end in the Tour’s Native Plant Sale Extravaganza; details will be added to the website soon.

Volunteers are needed to spend a morning or afternoon greeting tour participants and answering questions about natives. Complete the Volunteer section of the registration form if you would like to help out this year. You can choose the garden you want to volunteer at. For more information, go here http://bringingbackthenatives.net/tour-volunteer-information, or e-mail Kathy Kramer at mailto:Kathy@KathyKramerConsulting.net, or call (510) 236-9558 between 9 am and 9 pm.

Applications for the 2012 Tour are now being accepted. You can download the application form from the Tour website at http://bringingbackthenatives.net/garden-host-application. Garden visits will be made in May and June.

Opportunity for Botanists and Data Nerd

Botanical voucher specimen collections and associated documentation continue to be a critical source of information on plant biogeography, ecology, and biology. Public and private herbaria, collections of preserved plant specimens, are among the most important resources for such information. Some data on plant specimens housed in herbaria -- alas, not the specimens themselves -- are now available on the internet, through the Consortium of the California Herbaria (http://ucjeps.berkeley.edu/consortium/).

However, the availability of collections information is dependent upon its compilation for digital access, and many institutional and private herbaria do not have the means to provide their data to the Consortium.

The Sonoma State University Herbarium is a vital botanical reference collection for northern California, and includes specimens originally collected by Milo Baker and many other local botanists. Yet, to the best of my knowledge, none of this herbarium’s data is available through the Consortium’s website. I have arranged with the SSU Herbarium curator, Dr. Richard Whitkus, to compile the necessary data for use by the Consortium, and we welcome additional assistance. Most of this work will involve the use of computers to tabulate existing collections data (so you need not be a botanist!), and will provide an inside look at the efforts needed to maintain scientifically generated information about plants. Please contact Peter Warner at (707) 829-1183, or phytopagan@gmail.com if you are interested in assisting in this effort.

Field Trips

Introduction to Fungi of Salt Point State Park
Feb. 5th, 2011, 10 am

Please join us for a hike through bishop pine and tanoak forest to see mid-winter fungi. We'll focus on the basics of fungal identification, diversity, ecology, and collecting etiquette. Learn about the "fifth kingdom" and, if we're lucky, find a few choice edibles.

Meet at the North trailhead, on the east (inland) side of Hwy. 1, about 1 mile north of Woodside campground. Parking is along Hwy. 1. Due to budget cuts, there may be no open toilet facilities or open picnic areas. Please BYO water, lunch, TP, and a small wicker basket or cloth bag for fungi. Heavy rain cancels. Drizzle makes the mushrooms grow...so much the better for mushroom hunting.

Tina Wistrom is member of the Sonoma Co. Mycological Association (SOMA) and the East Bay Chapter of CNPS. She grew up in Sonoma Co., and has been a fungiphile since studying fungal plant diseases and mycology in graduate school.

Montgomery Woods (Mendocino County)
Saturday, March 26.

We’ll look at trees, shrubs, and vegetation types, using the recent revision of A Manual of California Vegetation to learn more about the structure and composition of plant communities. With winter rains and warming soils to our benefit, we’ll also explore the rocky outcrops I call “Franciscan barrens,” home to numerous spring-blooming annual wildflowers. We’ll meet at 9 a.m. at the Pruitt Creek trailhead gate (Orr Springs Road, about 1 mile east of main Montgomery Woods parking lot), for a full day of spring revelry.

Contact: Peter Warner – (707) 829-1183; phytopagan@gmail.com

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The chapter website www.cnpsmb.org contains a wealth of information plus current and archived newsletters.

For newsletter mailing/membership issues, contact: Gary Hundt, ghundt@gmail.com