

GILA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

A CHAPTER OF THE NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY OF NEW MEXICO



B U L L E T I N

APRIL, MAY, JUNE 2012

Editor: Charles Holmes

PROGRAMS

All programs are free and open to the public. Meetings are usually the third Friday at 7:00 pm at WNMU's Harlan Hall, with refreshments following the program.

Activity updates and further details will be posted on our website www.gilanps.org. You will also receive a reminder before the date of the program.

April 13th – Our own Russ Kleinman will speak to us about the “Mosses of the Gila.”

Kleinman, a retired surgeon, is a highly accomplished botanist with a contagious enthusiasm for native plants, and a special passion for native ferns and mosses.

In recent years he has intensely studied the flora of the Burro Mountains and constructed a website (www.gilaflora.com) featuring most of the flora of the local area. He has also facilitated several workshops sponsored by the Gila Native Plant Society, and, no doubt, will offer many more in the future.

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FIELD TRIPS

Hikers meet at 8:00 am in the south parking lot of WNMU's Fine Arts Theatre on the morning of the hike to arrange car pooling. Participants must sign a release-of-liability form at that time, and will receive a list of native plants in the hiking area. Bring water, lunch, a hat, sunscreen and good hiking shoes. For more information, call Deming Gustafson, 575-388-5192. Destinations may be changed because of weather conditions; activity updates will be posted at www.gilanps.org.

April 15th. Gene Jercinovic will lead a hike in the desert area around Deming, celebrating the results of some of this year's wet winter storms.

May 20th. We will make a visit to the southern Burros, probably near C Bar Ranch Road, to discover if the dry stalks seen last spring come back as the plants we thought they were.

June 17th. We will be heading up to the coolness of Signal Peak where native flora should abound after all the good winter moisture.

A N N O U N C E M E N T S

NATIVE PLANT SALE PLANT PICK UP

The plant pick-up will be on Friday, April 20th between 11:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. at the parking lot south of Gough Park on 12th and Pope Streets. We will keep you updated if there are changes. This year, Earth Day (April 21st) will be happening at Gough Park instead of Penny Park. As always, we are dependent on your purchases and your contributions as volunteers to make the sale successful.

REPORTS

On January 20th Patrice Mutchnick, the Biology Lab Director at WNMU, gave us a detailed slide presentation of her research and plant collection activities in two areas of tropical rain forest, one in Central and the other in South America. Her first venture was into the famous Peten region of Guatemala, known especially as one of the centers of Maya civilization. She associated with families of local people to learn about the mechanisms of their civilization and more especially the practical usage of native tree species. Many of these species were cultivated by the locals to bring them in close proximity to their living spaces. Vestiges of those cultivated tree "gardens" are still visible among certain Maya ruins. Many slides were used to demonstrate how the wood from the trees is still used as it was a thousand years ago.

Later in her career she was employed by the Smithsonian to collect museum-quality specimens from among thousands of species of native plants in parts of Guyana. Patrice presented slides of the process of collection and professional preparation of the specimens. She also gave us a glimpse of the fantastic terrain and the difficulty of transport through it, usually by water. We were treated to many vignettes of her experiences in this rather remote and quite primitive area of the world.

On February 17th, Mark Dimmit of the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, gave us a summary of recent botanical surveys in the Madrean Sky Island Archipelago, a 70,000 square mile region stretching from southern Sonora, Mexico, into southeastern Arizona, including the Chiricahua and Huachuca Mountains. The region is a unique intersection of tropical and temperate climates, harboring over half of the bird species of North America as well as over 3,000 species of plants and 104 species of mammals.

Mark displayed widely diverse slides of trees, shrubs, herbs and mammals. Some of us verified that quite a few of those native plants existed in our area also. One of the outstanding facts that got our attention was the one which declared that over thirty species of oak exists in parts of Sonora! Other very interesting data described some of the forests of southern Sonora as tropical. Many species of orchid are found flourishing in the trees of that area, as well as on the ground.

The last part of his information dealt with the recent wide spread fires in the Huachucas which devastated wide areas of that range but has not turned out to be as disastrous as originally estimated. He showed us slides of how rapid is the recovery of some species of low growing plants. There seems to be considerable resistance among many of our natives.

On March 16th, Mike Natharius, Forest Soil Scientist for the Gila National Forest, explained the Forest Service's regional Mid-Scale Vegetation Mapping Project. This project was initiated in 2004 to map all forests in the region, which includes some of Arizona and New Mexico. A similar project started in the Gila Forest in 2007. The primary data came from satellite images and the processing of those images. The principal need for such projects is to provide basic data for forest management planning and also vegetation information for business interests.

Of particular interest was the inability to incorporate riparian areas in this particular survey because of certain technicalities. However, there is a similar project for just riparian areas slated for the future.

In the Q&A period afterwards, Mike assured us that the Gila Forest managers are making great strides in their comprehension of how best to manage its needs and requirements.

SPECIAL FEATURES

Juniperus scopulorum (Rocky Mountain Juniper)

This is a local species that, in fondness, I call "Old Droopy." You will learn why later in the description. This is a species of Juniper native to western North America and parts of far southwestern Canada. It also extends into Sonora, Mexico. You will find it existing in dry soils, often with other junipers, like *Juniperus monosperma*, but locally we often find it near stream beds.

It is considered a small tree, averaging about 30 ft. tall with a trunk sometimes reaching 4.5 feet in diameter. The leaves (which many of us "unwashed" call "needles") are in opposite pairs, occasionally in whorls of three. But, very distinctively, many branches of this species that we see in our locality are actually drooping. This is almost a "dead giveaway" for species identification. Another feature which stands out are the seed cones; they are berry-like, globose, smallish, and dark blue with a pale blue-white waxy bloom.

We know that junipers and some of their relatives can be some of the oldest living things on record. A dead trunk found in New Mexico was determined to have 1,888 rings; older trees in the same area are suspected to exceed 2,000 years. Some western Indian tribes boiled an infusion from the leaves and inner bark to treat coughs and fevers. The berries were also sometimes boiled into a drink and used as a laxative and to treat colds.

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See! Droopy.

