

October 1 2023 Vol 13 No 4 Betsy Kaido, Editor

# **Bulletin 2023: Quarter 4**

This quarterly Bulletin of the Gila Native Plant Society of Silver City, New Mexico provides the latest communications between the society and the members. It is also available on the GNPS website <a href="http://www.gilanps.org">http://www.gilanps.org</a>.

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# **President's Message**

We've been cooking at the Gila Native Plant Society in the last quarter, and not just due to the relentless number of 90-degree days. It was a busy and, at times, exhausting summer. I'm grateful for our hard-working volunteers; in the future, it is clear that we need more members to help. Later in October, we will send out a list of jobs where we need your support.

On August 5, we had a public open house at the Silva Creek Botanical Garden to introduce the long-range Master Plan. The plan will be implemented in phases; the open house announced Phase I, with an accompanying \$75,000 fundraising drive. This phase includes the new habitat thicket, improvements to the children's butterfly garden, an attractive redesigned front entrance, interpretive signs, and a tile mural. Check out the new pages on our website for additional information: <a href="https://gilanps.org/scbg-home/">https://gilanps.org/scbg-home/</a>, along with how to donate: <a href="https://gilanps.org/scbg-donations/">https://gilanps.org/scbg-donations/</a>.

Don Graves and the Native Plant Sale Committee held another wildly successful sale at the Gough Park parking lot. There was a great turnout, and the vendors looked forward to participating next year.

The lack of rain made the search for wildflowers challenging, but Andrew Tree scouted out locations and led two wonderful field trips. Don organized an inspiring tour of a downtown home landscaped with native plants. These trips all had participation limits and filled up quickly – even the one with the poison ivy warning.

We continued our cooperative efforts with Bat Conservation International to provide food for nectar-feeding bats. Don lined up local landowners, and our volunteers helped plant 300 agaves, bringing the total number of agaves planted to 900. The 240 agaves we helped rescue at Chino Mine in June will become part of the planting effort. (See the *Return of the Bat People* article later in this issue.)

Our booth at the two-day Hummingbird Festival was another successful event, including activities for children organized by our Education Committee.

We have a very active chapter, and as this is the last Bulletin of the year, I want to thank all of you who volunteered in 2023 – including helping at events, serving on committees, working in the botanical garden, and being on our Board. I'd also like to express my appreciation to some individuals who have helped make my job as President doable: Betty Spence, Susan Thompson, Betsy Kaido, and Wendy and Don Graves. I'm grateful to all of you, and I hope our members are too.

# **Activities for This Quarter**

This fall evening programs will be on the third Friday of the month in October and November at 7:00 pm. Programs will be hybrid – live and via Zoom. To attend live, come to room 111 in Harlan Hall on the corner of 12th and Alabama Streets. Gila Chapter members will automatically receive a Zoom link by email. Any others may request a Zoom link from GNPS at <a href="mailto:gilanative@gmail.com">gilanative@gmail.com</a>. All are welcome.

Sunday, October 15, 2023, 11:30 am - 1:30 pm. Lunch Social at the Silva Creek Botanical Garden.

Please bring your lunch and a favorite beverage to the Silva Creek Botanical Garden for a member social — we'll supply some cookies. There is seating in the amphitheatre, but we recommend bringing a cushion. Or if you have a folding chair, please bring it. We hope to see both long-time members and new ones.



Friday, October 20, 2023, 7:00 to 8:30 pm:

Presentation by Mallory Davies, "Delinquent latenight pollinators: A story about nectar bats, agaves, and what's happening in the Gila". The shape, color, and timing of nectar release of agave flowers indicates a co-evolution and mutualistic relationship with the nectar bats that pollinate it. However, nectar bats are found visiting hummingbird feeders in Silver City late into the fall, months after local agaves have finished flowering. Mallory is investigating the factors that influence this timing mismatch. She will discuss current research, preliminary findings, and how GNPS members can get involved.

Mallory is a PhD student in the Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Conservation Biology at Colorado State University and is associated with the Stoner Lab at the University of Arizona.

Friday, November 17, 2023, 7:00 to 8:30 pm: Presentation by John Gorey, "Graham's Thistle update 2023; and new thistle species of the high Mogollon Mountains". While researching the rare Graham's Thistle (*Cirsium grahamii*), John discovered another thistle that may be a species new to science. He has followed up with surveys for this rare plant in new areas in 2023. He will present his findings, as well as a new exciting, rare plant expedition in the high elevation Mogollon Mountains.

John received his bachelor degree in wildlife biology from Murray State University and has spent the last 14 years as a wildlife biologist studying birds, insects, plants, and habitats



across the US. Since moving to New Mexico he has focused his research efforts on Southwestern New Mexico.

# Sunday, December 10, 2023, noon to 3:00 pm: Holiday Party

Our annual Holiday Party lunch will be held this year at the Silver City Women's Club at 411 Silver Heights Blvd. Plan on bringing a potluck offering and your own plates, cups, and utensils. Note that the Women's Club does not allow alcohol on their premises. More details will follow as the date nears.

### Silva Creek Botanical Garden

On August 5, we sponsored a public open house to unveil the long-range Master Plan for the Silva Creek Botanical Garden. During this event, members of the SCBG Steering Committee and other volunteers stationed around the garden explained the plan's elements to visitors, including improvements for existing features and the creation of new ones. About 70 people attended, with many comments, questions, and a high level of interest.

The habitat thicket, reported on in the last Bulletin, has continued to develop, with more plants added, including milkweeds along the fence on Virginia Street. A group of students from Aldo/YCC helped with work on the paths.

The lack of rain made keeping the garden watered challenging. Still, many visitors commented that it looked good—many thanks to Susan Thompson for all her watering efforts and Christopher Kunz for mowing and trimming. We also appreciate all of you who helped at our garden work parties. It takes many hands – and hours – to keep the garden ship-shape.

In many years, we have had drifts of Siberian Elm seedlings in the pathways. This year, the seedlings grew in and under native plants, camouflaged until they grew taller. Betsy Kaido and Jeanne Martin spent hours in September helping pull them. We are also grateful for help from Bill Norris, who brought his Range Vegetation class over, and they pulled a real trophy out from the middle of a Creosote bush (*Larrea tridentata*). They used the latest addition to our suite of garden tools, a weed wrench.





Weed wrench

Range Vegetation students triumph. (photo courtesy of Bill Norris)

#### -- Margie Gibson

# **Return of the Bat People**

The last three days of August saw the return of four Bat Conservation International (BCI) workers, complete with 300 agave plants, shovels, picks, wire mesh and burlap, all in preparation to team up, once again, with Gila Native Plant Society (GNPS) volunteers to plant agave on six parcels of land owned by GNPS members. From XYZ Road to the Mimbres River Valley to Whiskey Creek Zo'calo, dozens of GNPS volunteers worked alongside BCI technicians to get those agaves in the ground, whether in clay, rocky soil, caliche or ridiculously easy digging sandy loam! Standing, bending or sitting, our volunteers got the job done.







(photos courtesy of Don Graves)

With the planting of this last round, our GNPS/BCI collaboration has close to 900 agaves securely in the ground locally. Why are we planting so many agaves, you might be

wondering? As the migratory patterns of the Lesser Long-nosed Bat (*Leptonycteris yerbabuenae*) and other nectarivorous (nectar-feeding) bats change due, in part, to climate change and issues with dwindling wild populations of agave in northern Mexico as a result of the increasing popularity of mescal, which is made from various species of wild agave. Providing nectar corridors from Mexico to southern New Mexico, Arizona, and Texas, BCI is planting the agave necessary to help augment our native, wild populations of nectivorous bats. BCI plans on planting over 2,000 agave plants per year and our GNPS contribution is important!

There are several ways in which you can help our endangered nectar-feeding bats:

- 1. When GNPS puts out requests for volunteers to help plant agave, you can sign up for a planting session, which usually takes about two hours. Don't worry, there are many options for volunteers, from easy to more challenging.
- 2. A second way for you to help is to offer your property of two acres or more to our planting efforts. These planting areas should include open spaces in full sun, but the bats don't care if you are in the city limits or out in the hinterlands.

If you're interested in either of these two opportunities, you can email GNPS at <a href="mailto:gilanative@gmail.com">gilanative@gmail.com</a> right now. I'll put you on a list, and we'll contact you when we have dates and times for these activities.

Finally, if you are looking for an adventure coming up soon, BCI and GNPS will be collecting seeds from this year's native agave bloom in mid-November. Yes, it involves some hiking, a sheet under the agave spike and a whole lot of shaking! Stay tuned for details of where and when!

-- Don Graves

# **Plant of the Quarter**

## **Southwestern Prickly Poppy**



The Southwestern Prickly Poppy (*Argemone pleiacantha*), a member of the Papaveraceae family, flaunts lovely white flowers with crumpled petals and orange-yellow stamens. The three-to-four-inch blooms attract pollinators, including bees, butterflies, and beetles. Quail and other birds feed on its seeds. This species flourishes in New Mexico and Arizona, as well as Chihuahua and Sonora. It is one of 15 poppy species in the U.S.

The erect, deep-rooted plant reaches a four-foot height, and its blue-green leaves are divided into sharp, toothlike lobes. Its spiny stems and prickly leaves discourage foraging

predators, including cattle, as does the poisonous sticky alkaloid sap exuded from its broken leaves and stems. Shoshone and the Paiute peoples used the plant to treat burns and sores, making a salve from the crushed seeds.

The Southwestern Prickly Poppy prefers full sun and low moisture and thrives in sandy, gravely soils. It grows in dry woodlands and on slopes of foothills and



mountains. You may also find it along roadsides, in old fields, and in other types of open spaces.



The frothy white flowers and playful nickname, "Cowboy's Fried Egg," belie the plant's invasive nature. If you invite it into your landscape, do so carefully. The flowers mature into prickly 4-6 chambered capsules that split open to disperse seed. You can spread seeds by inverting a partially opened capsule, however, you'll need to be proactive to prevent aggressive spreading. Once the tricky prickly

poppy is established, remove and dispose of the seed pods before they dry out and open up. You could also cut and dispose of the flowers before they go to seed.

(Photos courtesy of the Dale A. Zimmerman Herbarium, WNMU)

#### -- Cathleen Norman

For comments, corrections, or suggestions, contact Norman.cathleen@gmail.com.

# The Southwest New Mexico Seed Library Can Use Your Participation



Collaboration between the Gila Native Plant Society and the Southwest New Mexico Seed Library continues to grow. From 2021 to 2022 the number of different kinds of native seeds provided to our communities increased from five varieties to 22! We are hoping to increase that number again in 2023 and appreciate GNPS's efforts to share their collected seeds. The Seed Library utilizes <a href="Vascular Plants of the Gila Wilderness">Vascular Plants of the Gila Wilderness</a> to identify native plants. If there are GNPS members willing to

compile best propagation practices for native plants, it would greatly improve success rates in growing native plants from seed.

Now is the time to start thinking about collecting native plant seeds for the SWNM Seed Library and your help is crucial! Information helpful in ensuring success includes:

- Common name
- Scientific name
- Variety (if any)
- · Location and date of harvest
- Notes about growth, habitat, color of flower, etc.

You can bring your seeds in envelopes to the Commons at 501 13th Street, on Tuesday afternoons from 1:00-3:00. Stay and help clean and package seeds if you feel the urge!

#### -- Chris Jepson

# **Works By Members**

Dennis Switzer photographed these two flies in the Silva Creek Botanical Garden.



Condystylus quadricolor is an apt name for this guy. Yes, four colors.



Sarcophaga carnaria (common flesh fly). Imagine this guy digging into some tasty flesh.



#### Our mailing address is:

PO Box 457 Silver City, NM 88062

The Gila Native Plant Society is committed

- To promoting education, research, and appreciation of the native flora of the Southwest
- To encouraging the preservation of rare and endangered plant species
- To supporting the use of suitable native plants in landscaping.

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