

GILA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

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Betsy Kaido, Editor

Bulletin 2024: Quarter 1

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 <http://www.gilanps.org>.

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President's Message

We are feeling very happy going into the new year. Our \$49,865 grant request for Phase

One of the Master Plan has been fully funded by New Mexico Outdoor Recreation's Trails + grants program! In addition, you, our friends, and members have made up the difference in financing this first part of the Master Plan; we've reached our \$75,000 goal! A key to qualifying for the grant was showing community support, and we are so very grateful that you have shown how much you care about our garden.

Trails+ is a program created by lawmakers to support outdoor recreation opportunities. It funds conservation-minded shovel-ready projects, and we are both! Letters supporting our grant came from the Town of Silver City, Upper Gila Watershed Alliance, Southwestern New Mexico Audubon Society, Southwest New Mexico ACT, Native Plant Society of New Mexico, Jose Barrios Elementary School, Heart of the Gila, Gila Resources Information Project, and Bear Creek Herbs. We very much appreciate all of them.

Denise Smith and Marty Eberhardt completed much of the 19-page grant application, which included many essay questions. I was recruited under protest, and we had to interrupt Wendy Graves while she was on vacation to get a "Unique Entity Identifier" from the federal government. Denise enjoyed participating – Marty and I planned never to write grants again – but we love the garden, and it was a pleasure working with Denise.



I want to thank Beth Leuck for her years of service on our Board and Rick Lass, Mary Barrett, David Becker, and Wendy Graves for serving on it for all or part of 2023. I'm grateful Marty Eberhardt and Elroy Limmer will stay with us for another term. We look forward to working with our new board members, Dinah Demers, David Phillips, and Stacy Sollisch. As a reminder, at-large board members begin a two-year term in even years, and for officers, the term starts in odd years.

We had a lot of board turnover last year, and our Policies in Effect will help avoid that in the future. What are they? I inherited several boxes, three-ring binders, two accordion files, and a grocery bag as the GNPS "archives." While organizing these materials, I found a document, Policies in Effect, by then-outgoing president Angela Flanders, from September 2009. After some revisions and additions by our Board, we posted our policies on the GNPS website, where everyone can find them. They will help guide us moving forward.

Best wishes for the New Year!

-- Margie Gibson

P.S. Please let us know if you have materials that should be added to the archives.

Thank you for your generous support
of the Silva Creek Botanical Garden

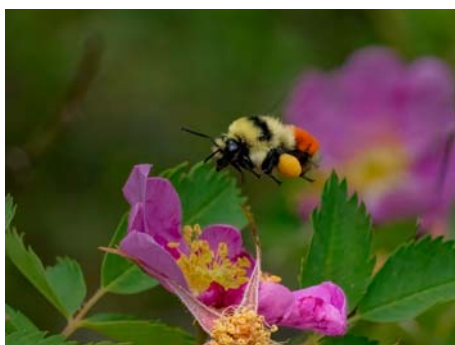
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Green Gentian by Elroy Limmer.

Activities for This Quarter

Monthly evening programs will resume in January on the third Friday of the month at 7:00 pm. Programs will be hybrid – in person and via Zoom. To attend live, come to Room 111 in Harlan Hall on the WNMU campus; Harlan Hall is at the corner of 12th and Alabama Streets. GNPS members who would rather attend online will automatically receive a Zoom link by email about 10 days ahead. Any others may request a Zoom link from GNPS at gilanative@gmail.com. All are welcome, in person or online.



Friday, January 19, 2024, 7:00 pm—Evening Program: “If You Plant It, They Will Come: Meet the bees in your neighborhood and their favorite native plants!” presented by Oliver Neria, PhD student at the University of Texas at El Paso. Oliver will give a brief overview of our native bees and their life histories, floral preferences, and nesting behaviors, as well as strategies that thoughtful gardeners can use to create useful bee habitat.



Friday, February 16, 2024, 7:00 pm—Evening Program: “The History of the Silva Creek Botanical Garden” presented by Elroy Limmer and Betsy Kaido. GNPS members Elroy and Betsy will trace the development of the garden from a barren mass of weeds to the beautiful native plant garden it is today. Photos of the garden's development and the many volunteers who made it happen will provide the base for this presentation.

Friday, March 15, 2024, 7:00 pm—Evening Program. Although our program schedule for March is not yet finalized, we are planning a program, then or later, on plant propagation by Patty Manning of Twin Sisters Natives in Alpine, Texas – participants at the NPSNM

conference will remember how knowledgeable she is.

In either March or May, UTEP PhD candidate Christopher Joaquín Muñoz will tell us about his work on the phylogenetics of the milkwort genus *Herbecarpa* and what that has to tell us about patterns of evolution as well as millions of years of paleoclimate history in North America.

(photos by Elroy Limmer)

Silva Creek Botanical Garden



Naava Konigsberg and Aldo Leopold Charter School's Youth Conservation Corp students began work on improvements for the Children's Pollinator Garden last fall. They moved plants to create room for flagstones to outline the original butterfly and placed the stones. It's a bit rough and needs more work, but the flagstones help the butterfly stand out.

Once it warms up, there will be lots more activity as part of the Master Plan – and our usual work parties to help the garden look its best.

In October, Southwestern NM Audubon hosted a Big Sit in the Garden, an event designed to make birding more accessible to everyone. Participants identify birds from a 17-foot diameter circle – in this case, from our amphitheater. Organizer Emily Pollom “praised the Gila Native Plant Society for their care in making Silva Creek Botanical Garden an accessible space,” so hats off to our garden work party volunteers who ensured pathways were clear and in good condition before the event.

(photo by Margie Gibson)

-- **Margie Gibson**

Plant of the Quarter

Mountain Mahogany (*Cercocarpus* sp.) is a shrub or small tree in the Rosaceae family, native to the western United States and northern Mexico. It typically grows at elevations of 4,500 to 7,000 feet on mountainsides, rocky bluffs, rimrock and breaks, as well as in canyons and open woodlands. Desert Mountain Mahogany (*Cercocarpus breviflorus*) grows in middle elevations in the piñon-juniper woodlands. Alder Leaf Mountain Mahogany (*Cercocarpus montanus*) is another mountain mahogany species seen in our region.



Mountain mahogany is a deciduous to semi-evergreen shrub with oval leaves with serrated edges on the distal half. Ranging 2 to 20 feet in height, the plant has upright, spreading branches; its trunk and branches may be a favorite host for various lichens.

The plant's early-summer flowers are insignificant, arising from alongside the leaf fascicles and ripening into feathery, corkscrew-shaped plumose-style seeds.



Its botanical name combines two Greek words, kerkos, tail, and karpos, fruit, characterizing the seeds with their airy, feathery tail.

Heat and drought tolerant, mountain mahogany prefers full sun. The slow-growing plant reproduces by self-seeding. You may find "volunteers" showing up in your yard thanks to air-borne seeds, especially if you live at the edge of piñon-juniper woodlands. Several planted themselves in my yard under a prickly pear cactus, sheltered from the browsing bunnies.

Several USFS and USDA websites suggest mountain mahogany can be propagated from seeds or cuttings or may be transplanted, however the process seems complicated and there is only a "poor to fair ease of establishment."

Mountain mahogany provides wildlife habitat, and it furnishes forage for deer and livestock especially in winter. Native peoples used the dense wood to make digging tools, arrow shafts and prayer sticks. The strong stiff branches also make great sticks for marshmallow toasting! *Cercocarpus*' bark tea has been used for treating colds and making a reddish-brown dye for leather.

(tree and flower photos courtesy of the Dale A. Zimmerman Herbarium, WNMU; leaf and seed photo by Elroy Limmer)

-- Cathleen Norman

for comments, corrections, or suggestions, contact norman.cathleen@gmail.com.

Education Committee Event at Silva Creek Botanical Garden

On Friday, October 27, the Education Committee presented a hands-on introduction to plants for about 35 Jose Barrios Elementary School fourth graders and their teachers (Melissa Hughes and Ben Duran). We had three rotating stations at the Silva Creek Botanical Garden:

- Nature art with Les Brandt
- What are native plants, including learning examples with Ed Valentine
- A quick garden tour and selected plant identification with Karen Valentine.



The students spent one hour at the garden in small groups of 5-6, and did drawings and took notes while learning about native New Mexico plants and pollinators. We even

observed a few monarch caterpillars eating milkweed in the butterfly garden! We had excellent support from GNPS volunteers Cathleen Norman and Susan Malter, who helped with group transitions and timing. We would like to have a follow-up visit with the same group to observe the garden in different seasons and continue our plant and pollinator discussions!

(photos by Ben Duran)

-- **Karen Valentine**

Bat Conservation International Agave Restoration Initiative



We at the Gila Native Plant Society want to thank you for your involvement in the Bat Conservation International (BCI) Agave Restoration Initiative this year! In 2023, GNPS volunteers helped rescue 240 agaves from Chino Mine land that will be replanted, and together with GNPS volunteers, 600 more agaves were planted on nine properties, all in support of the lesser long-nosed bat.

In addition, several GNPS members collected eDNA samples from their hummingbird feeders to detect the presence of local nectar-feeding bats.

Bat Conservation International is currently working in Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas to try to identify the migratory pathways and foraging areas of three species of nectar-feeding bats that migrate annually between Mexico and the United States. GNPS eDNA samples will help BCI to identify these sites that will then be targeted for their ongoing agave restoration efforts, ensuring these bats have plenty of agave nectar to fuel their migrations long into the future. BCI has brought on Rachel Burke as their new Agave Restoration Coordinator and Rachel Burke will be leading their agave restoration efforts in this tri-state region.



We already have a list of landowners who have expressed interest in having agave planted on their land, so if you have at least five acres, room for 50 agave plants, and are interested in getting on our list, you can email Don Graves at the GNPS email address. Thanks to all of our GNPS volunteers who have been such an important part of BCI's Agave Restoration Initiative for the past four years! To learn more about the interconnectedness of bats, agaves, and people, check out BCI's webpage "We Belong Together" at <https://www.batcon.org/agave>.

(photos courtesy of Horizonline Pictures, Bat Conservation International)

Works By Members



Elroy Limmer's color photos have graced many of the Bulletin's articles over the years. Here, he gives us a striking black and white image of an Engelmann prickly pear (*Opuntia engelmannii*) pad's decaying skeleton.

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Our mailing address is:

PO Box 457
Silver City, NM 88062

Our email address is:

gilanative@gmail.com

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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