

CALIFORNIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY MARIN CHAPTER

December 2023 Newsletter



Polypodium californicum - CA polypody fern near Rock Springs Photo by Ann Elliott

Marin Chapter December 2023 Meeting

“Plants of Mt. Tamalpais, a Field Guide”

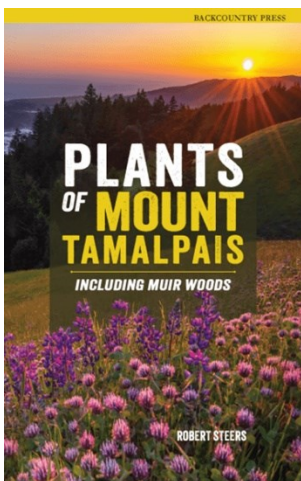
Guest Speaker: **Robert Steers**

Monday, December 11 @ 7:30 pm

For this Chapter meeting, Robert Steers is thrilled to share an overview of a new field guide to the [plants of Mt. Tamalpais](#), published by Backcountry Press. He hopes you will find the book very useful and a complement to other excellent resources available for Marin County and beyond.



View of Bon Tempe Lake and Mt Tamalpais
Photo by Robert Steers



Robert's botanical journey started in high school doing invasive plant removal volunteering at a local land conservancy in southern California. He was always drawn towards science and attended Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo where he majored in Ecology and Systematic Biology; then, he received a Ph.D. from UC Riverside in plant ecology. Robert has worked as a botanist/ecologist for various agencies, academic institutions, and consulting firms since 2000. Through his past roles, he has botanized all over California, ranging from Modoc National Forest in the northeast corner of the state, to Edwards Airforce Base in the Mojave Desert, to regional parks in San Diego County, and many other locales.

Robert has resided in Marin County for well over a decade. He previously served as the regional vegetation ecologist for the San Francisco Bay Area Network of National Parks where he managed plant monitoring programs in Golden Gate

N.R.A, Muir Woods N.M., Point Reyes N.S, and other units. He now does contract work for land management agencies in Marin County, mostly related to rare plants. Robert also works in the tech

industry as an engineering program manager on hardware and software products. He is passionate about science, technology, and preserving California's amazing biodiversity.

[Register for this Zoom meeting here.](#)

Information on how to receive a 30% discount on Plants of Mount Tamalpais will be provided at the December 11 public meeting.

CNPS Marin Chapter Election

December 11 is our annual meeting. We will vote on the proposed officers and directors for the Marin Chapter Board. Members, please vote when asked at the beginning of the meeting.



Co-President: David Long
Co-President: Kristin Jakob
Vice-President: Open
Treasurer: Bonnie Gosliner
Recording Secretary: Woody Elliott

Directors:

Eva Buxton	Harriet Casserly
Paul da Silva	Bayley Elenzweig
Ann Elliott	Carolyn Longstreth
Laura Lovett	Stacey Pogorzelski
Eddie Robertson	Kate Wing



Drymocallis glandulosa var. *wrangelliana*
Photo by Robert Steers

Update from Your Field Trip Planning Team

Susan Schlosser and Carolyn Longstreth

We find it hard to believe that it has been 8 years since we took on the job of planning and leading plant walks for the Marin Chapter! Time flies when you're having fun!

As we take our customary break in December and January and rains begin to fall, we start imagining bountiful wildflower displays along our favorite trails next spring!

At the same time, we take this opportunity to invite Marin Chapter members and native plant enthusiasts to join our team with a view toward eventually taking on this outreach. This would involve meeting with us, in person or online, in January to scope out plans for the first half of 2024, taking on some of the tasks involved and perhaps even leading some hikes.

We are eager to train our replacements. We have archives of the past decade or more of field trip write-ups and plenty of experience and ideas to share. We hope to get a good response from you all! Think it over and please respond to cklongstreth@gmail.com and scschlosser52@gmail.com. Talk to you soon!



Susan and Carolyn at Table Mountain,
Butte County 2019 Photo by Woody Elliott

Marin Chapter Field Trips

As organized field trips are on a hiatus for a couple months, consider a botanizing adventure on your own. Even around the neighborhood, you can find interesting plant features to note and record with your pocket computer.



Ken Howard, Mary Stevens, Virginia Norris, Jake Sigg, Wilma Follette, and Bob Allen on serpentine outcrop near Rock Spring, Mt. Tamalpais August 1995 monitoring *Streptanthus glandulosus* ssp. *pulchellus*, *Eriogonum luteolum* var. *caninum*, and *Astragalus breweri* in conjunction with MMWD controlled burn of invasive yellow star thistle. Photo by D. Smith

Marin CNPS Micro Grants 2024

The Marin Chapter of CNPS is accepting applications for our 2024 Micro Grants, intended to assist with projects that advance our mission.

Applications are due Dec 16, 2023 and recipients will be announced in February 2024. Please see details about eligibility and application process [here](#).

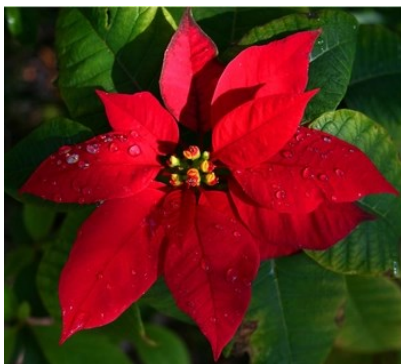
[Read more...](#)



Native habitat garden near Town Park, Corte Madera by Refugia Marin

Botanical Bits by Eva Buxton

Poinsettia - the Christmas Flower



When you leave your homeland, you don't just leave family, friends, language, familiar places behind – you also leave traditions and trappings associated with them. For me, one such thing is a planter with 5-6-inch-tall red tulips set in reindeer moss (*Cladonia*, a lichen) (Fig.1) or moss, perhaps decorated with some small pinecones and a couple of fly agarics (*Amanita muscaria*) made of papier-mâché. For the first few decades in this country, I looked for bulbs of short, red tulips year-round, but there were none to be found. All tulips were - and still are too tall!



Fig 1. Tulips with Christmas Tree

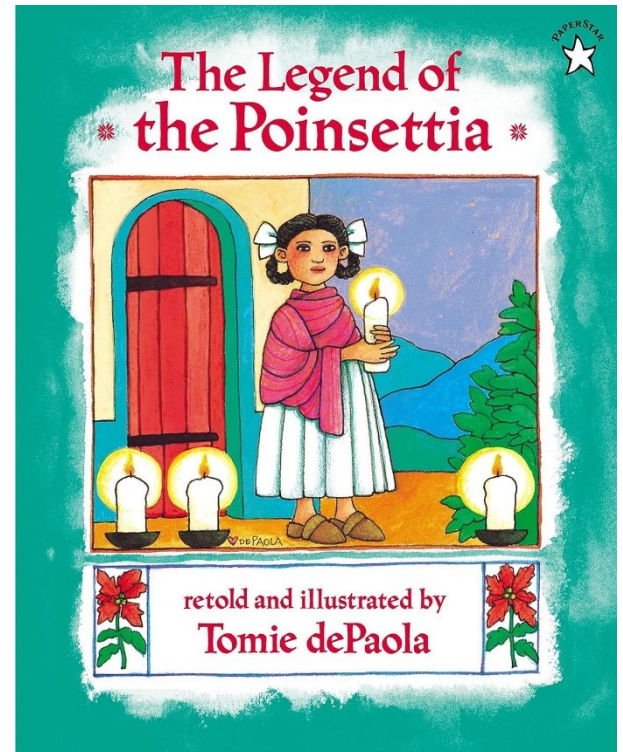
Nowadays, like most Americans, I associate Poinsettia (Fig. 2) with Christmas and so do people in Sweden and other countries around the world. At least in California, the plant floods nurseries and box stores even before Thanksgiving. Poinsettia for most people symbolizes good cheer and wishes for mirth and celebration at Christmas time. In religious communities, the shape of the red parts of the plants may symbolize the Star of Bethlehem and the red color the blood of Christ.

A Legend

According to legend, Poinsettia as the Christmas flower started several centuries ago on Christmas Eve in a small Mexican village. A little girl named Pepita had no gift to present to the Christ child at the Christmas Eve service. As Pepita walked slowly to the chapel with her cousin Pedro, her heart was filled with sadness rather than joy. Pedro tried to console her, telling her that even the humblest gift, if given in love, would be acceptable in His eyes. Not knowing what else to do, Pepita knelt by the roadside and gathered a handful of common weeds and fashioned them into a small bouquet. Looking at the scraggly bunch of weeds, she felt more saddened and embarrassed than ever by the humbleness of her offering. She fought back tears as she entered the small chapel. As she approached the alter, she remembered Pedro's words: "Even the humblest gift, if given in love, will be acceptable in His eyes." She felt her spirit lift as she knelt to lay the bouquet at the foot of the nativity scene. Suddenly, the bouquet of weeds burst into blooms of brilliant red, and all who saw the flowers were certain they had witnessed a Christmas miracle. Thomas Anthony "Tomie" dePaola, an American writer and illustrator, offers a retelling of the timeless legend in his children's book *The Legend of the Poinsettia*, published in Spanish and English in 2008



Fig 2. Poinsettia (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*)



(Fig. 3). Fig 3. Legend

Classification, Habitat and Morphology

Poinsettia - also called Christmas star, Lobster plant, Mexican flame-leaf, et al. in English (Julstjärna in Swedish!) - is in Euphorbiaceae (Spurge family), one of the largest plant families in the world. The genus *Euphorbia* to which Poinsettia belongs (see below) consists of about 2000 species, making it one of the largest genera of flowering plants. (*Euphorbia antiquorum* (Malayan tree spurge) is the type species for the genus *Euphorbia*, described by Linnaeus in 1753.) *Euphorbia* members all share the feature of having a latex-like sap, more or less poisonous depending on the species.

Poinsettia is a perennial plant, native to southern Mexico and Central America, where it grows as a shrub in mid-elevational, deciduous, tropical forests. Most populations are reported to grow on west-facing slopes in steep canyons.

If the subject of Poinsettia comes up in a conversation, many people immediately declare – “the red parts are not petals but leaves,” which is correct; what surrounds the small flowers in the middle of the plant are large, red bracts, which are modified leaves. The knoblike flowers in the middle of the red bracts are cyathia, the floral characteristic that puts Poinsettia in the genus *Euphorbia*. A cyathium in *Euphorbia* consists of unisexual flowers, both staminate (male) and pistillate (female) flowers without sepals and petals, borne within a campanulate involucre, a ring of small bracts around the flower cluster.

Some History

I will admit that until I started researching the topic of this article, I thought *Poinsettia* was a generic (genus) name. The ending “ia” is not uncommon in generic plant names, for example, *Begonia*, *Forsythia*, and *Magnolia*. Now I know that a German scientist, J.F. Klotzsch, described the plant as a new species in 1834 (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*) (specific epithet meaning ‘most beautiful’), and that the plant’s common English name is derived from Joel R. Poinsett (1779-1851) (Fig. 4), a physician, diplomat, botanist, the first appointed U.S. Ambassador (Minister) to Mexico, and a U.S. Secretary of War. Poinsett had found the plant in Taxco in the 1820s, became enchanted by the red “blooms” and sent some cuttings to his home in Greenville, South Carolina, where he later began growing them. Now there are more than a hundred varieties of *Poinsettia*, grown in every State in the U.S., with “blooms” in shades of pink, white, yellow, purple, or multicolored. The red variety is, however, the most popular.



Fig 4. Joel R Poinsett (1779-1851)
Wikipedia

Poinsettia, called *Cuetlaxochitl* by the Aztecs, was a symbol of purity and cultivated by them long before the European colonization of the Americas. The red pigment was used as a dye and the milky sap as a medicine to “control fevers.” After the Spanish conquest during the 17th century, Franciscan friars named the plant with the “bright red flowers” *Flores de Noche Buena* (Flowers of the Holy Night or Christmas Eve flower), because it bloomed each year during the Christmas season.

A Quandary?

You may be aware that the American Ornithological Society has announced that it will rename all birds currently named for people. The new names will reflect the species’ appearance or habitat, i.e., some trait associated with the actual bird and not with the “colonial explorer” who first identified it. The Ornithological Society maintains that some of the birds (not all) were named for people who held views considered “repugnant” today. For example, John James Audubon, the naturalist for whom the Audubon’s shearwater is named, was “an unrepentant slaveholder who opposed emancipation” and Winfield Scott, for whom the Scott’s oriole is named, “led the forced eviction of the Cherokee along what is now known as the Trail of Tears.”

Would American plant societies do the same or are there just too many plants? Many botanists agree that scientific plant names (the specific epithet) should be descriptive and not include people’s name. Does a common name (what birders use) or a scientific name of a plant associated with something or someone we consider “repugnant” today warrant change? Should the genus *Claytonia*, named in honor of John Clayton, be changed, because he owned slaves to work his tobacco plantation? (Should Sir Francis Drake Boulevard be changed to the Coastal Miwok Trail?) Do we no longer want to call the plant we associate with Christmas ‘*Poinsettia*,’ because Joel R. Poinsett was a proponent of slavery and owned slaves himself; as Secretary of War oversaw the Trail of Tears; and presided over the continuing suppression and relocation of the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, et al.?

Would ‘Christmas Star’ (Swedish translation) ever catch on?

Comments: evabuxton@sbcglobal.net

Ring Mountain Wildflower Docents - Spring 2024

Join the Marin Chapter of CNPS and Marin County Parks for this great opportunity to share your love of Ring Mountain's unique ecology, wildflowers, and unusual serpentine grassland habitat with the general public, while also fostering stewardship of this Marin landmark.

This opportunity will run weekends from April through mid-June 2024. Participation in virtual and in-person training is required for all new volunteers. Virtual weeknight training will be held 7 - 8:30 pm (March 12, 19, 26, and April 2), and in-person weekend field trips will be held on March 23, April 7, and May 18 from 10 am – 2 pm.

No experience is necessary, but some familiarity with native plants is helpful.

For [additional details](#), questions, or to sign up, please contact Amanda Magallanes at Amanda.Magallanes@marincounty.gov.



Ring Mountain Wildflower Docent shares flower identification cards with visitor.

Plant Diversity And Viability In Uncertain Times



Northern California Botanists

Northern California Botanists will host its 12th botanical symposium on January 8-9, 2024 on the campus of California State University in Chico. The sessions will also be available online. Optional workshops will be held on Wednesday, January 10. A 2-day schedule of presentations by working botanists will include sessions on Vegetation Classification, Climate Change, Grassland Restoration, Bryophytes, Locally Rare Plants, Now the Good News, New Discoveries, and a session of Lightning Talks.

The symposium will also include an evening reception, banquet, and keynote speaker John Vollmar, of Vollmar Natural Lands Consulting, addressing "The Heart of Conservation-Engaging Human Passion for Conservation Success." The symposium is open to anyone: botanical enthusiasts, professionals, and students.

[Read more...](#)

Upcoming Marin Chapter Events

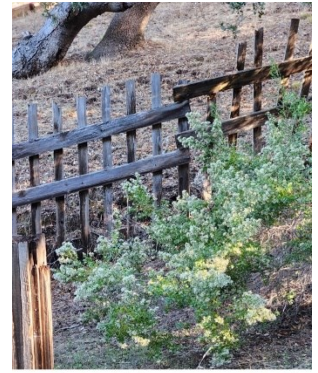
- 12/11 7:30 pm Chapter Meeting: ["Plants of Mt. Tamalpais"](#), Guest Speaker: **Robert Steers**
- 12/16 [Micro Grant Application Deadline](#)



Clintonia andrewsiana
Photo by Robert Steers

Other Activities in Marin and Nearby

- Thru 1/6/24 [Mt. Tamalpais Florilegium](#) exhibit at Fairfax Library
- 12/3 10 am - 2 pm [Indian Valley Preserve](#)
- 12/6 10 am - 2 pm [Tennessee Valley](#)
- 12/9 9 am - noon [Roy's Redwood Trail Work](#)
- 12/16 8 - 10 am [Fungus Among Us](#)
- 12/17 9 am - noon [Restoration at Hal Brown Park](#)
- 12/17 10:30 am - 1 pm [Mycoblitz Mushroom Foray](#) Stafford Lake Park
- 12/19 10 am - noon [Senior Stroll: Bothin Marsh](#)
- 12/21 7 - 8:30 am [Sunrise Solstice Hike](#) Deer Island Preserve
- 1/6 9 am - noon [Broom Busters of Old St. Hilary's](#)
- 1/7 10 am - 1 pm [Family Walk: Blackstone Canyon](#)
- 1/14 19 am - noon [Planting at Stafford Lake](#)
- 1/14 7:30 - 8:30 pm [Distribution and Ecology of Vernal Pools](#) Yerba Buena Chapter
- 1/14 10:30 am - 1 pm [Mycoblitz Mushroom Foray](#)
- 1/16 10 am - noon [Senior Stroll: Corte Madera Creek](#)
- 1/21 10 am - 2 pm [Deer Island](#)
- 1/24 10 am - 2 pm [Estero Trail](#)
- 1/27 10 am - 1 pm [Ring Mountain Grassland Restoration](#)
- 1/28 9 am - noon [Restoration at Hal Brown Park](#)



Baccharis pilularis - Coyote brush
Marin Highlands neighborhood -
Stacey Pogorzelski



Grindelia stricta var. *platyphylla* -
coast gumplant at Abbotts lagoon
Photo by Stacey Pogorzelski

Be sure to periodically check [CNPS.org/events](https://www.cnps.org/events) for interesting talks and field trips sponsored by CNPS Chapters and staff throughout the state.

Botanizing on Your Own?

Send me a snapshot or a short report to include in our newsletter.

Please send me information on events and other items that our members might enjoy.

Ann Elliott, Newsletter Editor

annonfire@gmail.com



Pseudotsuga menziesii - Douglas fir nr Rock Springs
Photo by Ann Elliott

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