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## A Few BFS Rarities

Stephen Dreher, BFS Manager

Any regular visitor to the BFS can point to a few plant and animal species that dominate the landscape. California sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*), California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*), Golden Currant (*Ribes aureum* var. *gracillimum*) and the California ground squirrel (*Otospermophilus beecheyi*) immediately come to mind. All are numerous and none are at risk of immediate extinction. However, it is worth bearing in mind that even “common” species are at risk for long-term survival as the last wildland remnants of Southern California are relentlessly bulldozed by urban land speculators. For example, California sagebrush clearly dominates the coastal sage scrub plant community. By that measure, it is “common”. Yet California’s entire coastal sage scrub landscape is considered one of the most endangered habitats in North America, with up to 90% of it estimated to have been lost so far. Laws like the Endangered Species Act provide a somewhat false sense of security – only species at their last gasps have a chance of making it onto that list and, if populations occur entirely on private land, there are no enforcement mechanisms. The Act also does little to protect landscape level habitat, in which rare species exist. Rare species are those that were rare even before habitat destruction reduced the places they could live even further.

There are rarities right here on the BFS, not necessarily “endangered species” list candidates, but taxa represented by only a few individuals with populations that are becoming increasingly fragmented and rare in the inland “empire” landscape as a whole (open spaces outside the mountains are disappearing weekly). Here are several:

***Leymus condensatus*** – giant wild rye. This species is distributed through coastal southern California and is the only native grass found on the BFS. The grass expands from rhizomes and grows up to 6 feet tall. Two small colonies remain on the entire station.

***Delphinium cardinale*** – scarlet larkspur. A beautiful scarlet-red flowering perennial, with a basal leaf mat and flowering stalks up to 6 feet tall. Striking when in full bloom, there are again only two small clusters of plants on the BFS, located at different sections of the property. Recently, large populations have been bulldozed for the 210 freeway extension and the accompanying urban sprawl along it.

***Delphinium parryi* ssp. *Parryi*** – Parryi’s larkspur. Another *Delphinium* species, this time with deep purple flowers on a 1-1.5 foot tall plant. I’ve spotted a total of two individuals on the entire field station, both occurring near the wash.

***Rumex hymenosepalus*** – wild rhubarb. This belongs to the buckwheat family and the genus *Rumex* is often referred to as “dock”. The plant has somewhat plantain-type leaves, with a large stalked inflorescence, the sepals being a showy pink. There is only a single small colony on BFS, growing pretty much by itself on a small mound along the wash.

Plant occurrence and distribution is always a bit mysterious. What causes California sagebrush to be so abundant over the station’s 85 plus acres, while the scarlet larkspur makes only a couple of scattered appearances on the same soil type and topography? The Parryi larkspur and wild rhubarb occur along a narrow wash, a channel once connected to the vast San Antonio alluvial system draining water from the nearby mountains. Those species, and a few others, are limited to that wash and perhaps require the type of occasional flooding and disturbance that was once routine. The BFS may simply have a few remnants of that ecological mechanism. The natural alluvial system is now gone, turned into suburbs and concrete channels, but the remaining stretch on the field station provides a small window into what once was a vast network of seasonal streams.

### To get info about the BFS:

You can get information about the history and features of the station, as well as about its plants and animals (and some great pictures) at

[www.bfs.claremont.edu](http://www.bfs.claremont.edu)

### General Plan Revision Update

As mentioned in the last issue of the newsletter, Claremont is about to begin a revision of its General Plan which will provide long-term, comprehensive guidance for the physical development of the city and for land outside of its boundaries over which it has control.

As you know, in the fall the City called for volunteers to help in determining what changes should be made. About 40 of the 100 or so who applied are employees of the Claremont Colleges. It was decided to accept everyone who lives in Claremont. However, a number of applicants do not live in Claremont and the City has not yet decided whether or not to appoint them to the committee. It may make a decision at the meeting on Feb 24. Please call or email the City (see back of newsletter) if you think the Citizens Advisory Committee for the General Plan should be restricted to people who actually live here.



***“A tour of the property readily convinces visitors of the importance of keeping such a beautiful expanse of land, shrubs, and trees for scientific purposes .”***

Robert J. Bernard in “An Unfinished Dream”

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