

Sego Lily

Newsletter of the Utah Native Plant Society

Summer 2025 Volume 48 Number 3 Part 1



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The summer edition of Sego Lily is divided into two parts. This is Part 1. Part 2 is devoted to an article by Braydon Lake: In the Company of Moonworts: The Flora of Heliotrope Mountain

Ribes oddities of Utah: novel sympatries, huge disjunctions, and a new state record

by Will Pearce. Photos by Will Pearce.

Hi all! My name is Will Pearce and this is my first submission to the *Sego Lily*. I have probably met many of you readers before, but for those who aren't familiar, I'm an undergraduate at the University of Utah set to graduate in the spring. I love searching for, photographing, and cultivating native plants.

If you have met me, you're probably aware of my obsession with the genus *Ribes*. It began as passive curiosity about what these funny looking wild berries might taste like, but as I began to learn more about the genus, I fell in love with the amazing amount of floral and ecological diversity exhibited by the group. As such, many of my botanical expeditions are focused on finding awesome *Ribes*. I've made a few cool discoveries regarding the genus this field season, so I thought I'd share some of them with you all today.

***Ribes velutinum* flower color: first recorded instance of sympatry**

Ribes velutinum (desert gooseberry) is an unusual species in a few ways. First, it is able to tolerate much more xeric habitats than is typical for this genus. I've seen it growing extensively in Piñon-Juniper forest near Ely, Nevada, sandy flats near Carson City, and dry desert grasslands in the Stansbury range. Most *Ribes* species in Utah tend to prefer mesic sites, and most grow at higher elevations, which makes *R. velutinum*'s desert affinity all the more unusual.

Furthermore, the species is very early-blooming. In most of the Great Basin sites I've collected it, *R. velutinum* is the first woody species to come into flower, beating *Purshia* species by at least a week, and it is usually one of the first plants of any kind to bloom. Thus, it is a crucial source of early-season nectar and pollen to hungry bees, flies, and pollinators just waking from their slumber.

Besides providing valuable floral resources, the flowers smell really nice, with a subtle sweet scent similar to that of golden currants (*R. aureum*). Whenever I collect this species, I'll usually clip off branches in the field and stick

them into a ziplock bag – when opening the bags hours later to press them, the smell from the flowers has become concentrated, and always makes the whole room smell pleasant.

Adding to the intrigue of these flowers is their notable range of color diversity. Generally speaking, there are two color forms: a white-pink form, and a yellow-orange form. Flowers of the white-pink form are usually white with a moderate pinkish tint. However, flowers can be found stained deep pink throughout, and some are pure white with no tint. Likewise, the yellow-orange form is usually yellow, with a moderate orange-red tint, but can range from deep orange to solid yellow. Various levels of tint can sometimes be found on the same plant.

Generally, these two color forms are thought to be allopatric. The white-pink form occupies the northern part of the species' range, and the yellow-orange form holds the southern. To my knowledge, there had never been a recorded instance of these forms occurring in the same population – that is, until I discovered one this spring.

In mid-April of 2025, I spent a day hiking around the west slopes of the northern spine of the Stansbury Mountains to see the desert coming into bloom. I had seen a small population of *R. velutinum* here last year, but they were mostly done flowering, and the blooms I found were all white-pink in color – exactly the form one would expect to see this far north. However, today I hiked much further up the foothills, to the sheer, vertical rock walls near the top of the spine. Growing there were yellow-orange flowered plants growing side-by-side with the white-pink form. I did some extensive photography to document the variation in flower color. Orange, pink, white, and yellow flowers, as well as various shades in between, recorded together for the first time!

Later that month, I embarked on a week-long collecting trip focusing on the Washoe Valley near Reno and the central Great Basin to further map the distribution of these forms. I found that the white-pink and yellow-orange forms were, indeed, mostly allopatric, except for that population in the Stansburys as well as a few sites in the Washoe Valley. This was part of a larger project I've been working on to examine the intraspecific variability and species boundaries of *R. velutinum*.

I think these findings indicate that flower color in *R. velutinum* is more complicated than ever thought. It is still



Left: The dry, exposed spine of the Stansburies, where *R. velutinum* is common. Right: flowering branch of *R. velutinum*.



Left: fruiting branch of *R. velutinum*.

Right: diversity of flower colors of *R. velutinum* on the north end of the Stansburies, showing the range of variation within the white-pink form (top) and the yellow-orange form (bottom), as well as the variation between these forms.

unknown exactly why the white-pink and yellow-orange color forms are so strongly allopatric, but we also now have evidence of some instances where they are sympatric. Further examination of what causes the distribution patterns of these forms could tell interesting stories of biogeography, dispersal, and pollinator preference.

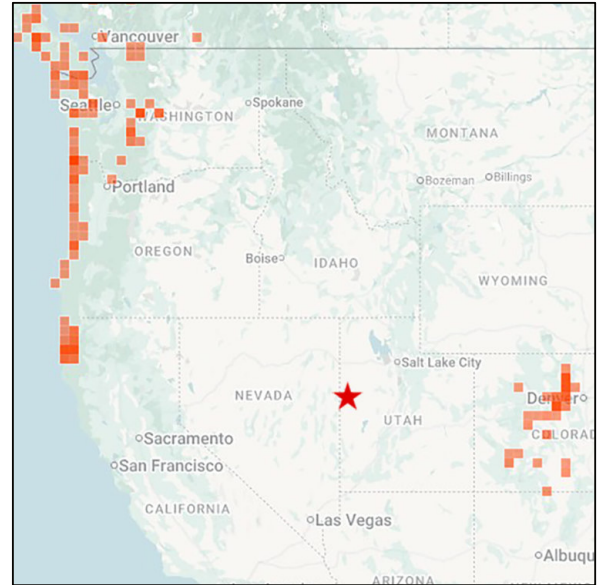
I went out to the same population in early July this year to collect fruits and seeds. The berries have a slight sweet taste to them, but the chewy, fibrous texture makes them

largely unappetizing. However, I hope to use the seeds to propagate this species and introduce it to cultivation, as the value they provide to pollinators is plenty justification for its spot in the garden. Next time you see *Ribes velutinum* in flower, take a second to pay attention to what flower colors you can find – you might end up discovering something new yourself!



Left: front view of *R. laxiflorum* flower, showing the open nectar disk.

Right: *R. laxiflorum* patch near moist soils in the wooded slopes of Tom's Creek Drainage, north of Ibapah Peak.



Left: dappled sunlight in a portion of conifer woods near Tom's Creek with large boulders and fallen timber, possibly the exact locality that S. Goodrich collected *R. laxiflorum* in 1983.

Disjunction in the Deep Creeks: *Ribes laxiflorum*

The Deep Creek mountains are sometimes called Utah's best kept secret, and it's not hard to see why. Spanning roughly 32 miles from north to south, and reaching over 12,000' at its peak, this massive range boasts incredibly varied geology and some of the most pristine environments on the continent. Surrounded by desolate salt flats and desert scrub on all sides, the cool forests and high alpine zones of the mountain create ample opportunities for unique and disjunct populations of plants to thrive.

There are two interesting species of *Ribes* that occur in the Deep Creeks. First, the range holds a few populations of *Ribes oxyacanthoides* var. *setosum* (inland gooseberry) – these are the southernmost known occurrences of this variety. In Utah, it can also be found in the Raft River mountains, as well as the north and south slopes of the Uintas.

Secondly, there is an amazingly disjunct population of *Ribes laxiflorum* (trailing black currant), known only from the Tom's Creek drainage. This species usually has two centers of population – one is on the Pacific coast, where it is abundant from northern California all the way to Alaska. The other is nestled within the high Rockies, from central



Left: aptly named inflorescence of polychrome lupine (*Lupinus arbustus*), common in the Deep Creeks.
Right: closeup of giant *Pediocactus simpsonii* in the Deep Creeks with scale.

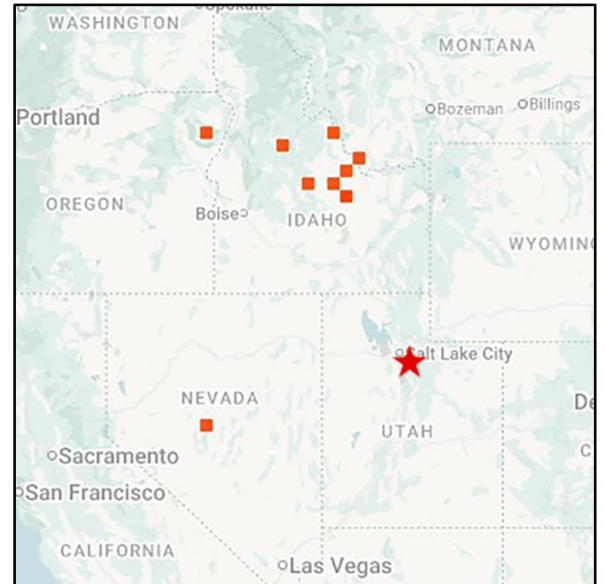


Left: involucres of the strikingly woolly *Erigeron grandiflorus* in the high Wasatch.
Right: leaves of *Oxytropis borealis* var. *viscida* in the high Wasatch, with the copious resin dots of its namesake.

Colorado to northern New Mexico. Evidently, this species prefers sites that are cool, shady, and moist; usually in dense coniferous woods near the coast or high in the mountains.

The population in the Deep Creeks is, thus, a severe oddity. Located over 500 miles from the other known occurrences, it is emblematic of the contradictions of the Great Basin; how, looming over the bleached, cracked soils of the Bonneville Basin can be a refuge for a species otherwise known from temperate rainforests and high mountains.

Whenever I learn of a disjunction like this, I always wonder what could have caused it. One theory is that it is a Pleistocene relic – a remnant from a time when the Earth was moister and cooler, and where much of the interior west was climatically suitable for the species. As the Earth has warmed and dried over the past 12,000 odd years, *R. laxiflorum* was pushed up in latitude and elevation, and forced to small pockets of suitable habitat, being either the coast or the high Rockies and Deep Creeks. The other idea is that it could be a more recent dispersal – the result of a bird, perhaps, transporting seeds in its stomach, before



Left: *R. hendersonii* on the steep red quartzite talus just north of the Red Top Mountain summit, Salt Lake County.
Right: iNaturalist distribution map of *R. hendersonii*. New state record shown by star.



Left: flower comparison of *R. montigenum* (top left) and *R. hendersonii* (bottom right).
Right: *R. hendersonii* branch against the red quartzite of Red Top Mountain.

depositing them in the Deep Creeks, where they were able to succeed.

Of course, the isolation that allows such a disjunction to form also makes for a challenge. The Deep Creeks are not an easy range to access, requiring over an hour of driving on dirt roads, with no cell service, to even reach the foothills. Not to be deterred, I set out for the range in late May with my cactus enthusiast brother, determined to see some cool plants, and aiming to re-document the population of *R. laxiflorum* (it had not been collected since the 1980s).

We began our trek at the base of the Tom's Creek road, just before it heads up into the foothills. The road is pretty nice

up to the base of the hills, but I would not recommend taking a vehicle other than an ATV or a Jeep up into the mountains – the road is too washed out and rocky for most cars. For about the first mile and a half, it is a trek through pristine Piñon-Juniper woodland, where we saw a lot of *Allium acuminatum* and *A. nevadense*, as well as some bizarre looking *Caulanthus crassicaulis* and some mistletoes parasitizing the piñon. Afterwards, you reach the river of the drainage, which is surrounded with stands of aspen and Engelmann spruce. There are also some old mining cabins that make for a nice stop.

Moving further up the road, it is impossible to ignore the beautiful displays of *Lupinus arbutus* (polychrome lupine)

covering the hills. As the name implies, this species has multiple flower colors, with yellow and purple blooms sometimes even occupying the same inflorescence. As we passed a dry subalpine field, we were delighted to see a population of *Pediocactus simpsonii*, with some individuals being as large as soccer balls!

Eventually, the rough road will end, and there is only a foot trail continuing to the west. This was our stop, though, so we headed south, towards the river; the same place that Goodrich collected *R. laxiflorum* in 1983. It is a steep hike down to the riverbed, and the mass of fallen trunks makes it tricky to navigate. We found a small waterfall flowing down from Ibapah Peak, and hiked a small amount up before finding some of our target! An inconspicuous little shrub, hiding out in these dense woods, hundreds of miles from its kin. I located at least a few dozen plants, in two main subpopulations, but didn't have time to survey extensively. I suspect that they may be much more common on the shaded conifer slopes north of Ibapah peak, but the steep aspect and fallen logs of the terrain may have impeded their discovery.

Having completed our mission, we hiked back down the drainage to the car. We spent the rest of the evening looking for cacti in the desert nearby, and managed to locate much *Echinocereus engelmannii*, *Escobaria vivipara*, and even one of the rare *Sclerocactus pubispinus*.

The Deep Creeks were an amazing experience, but I know I've only scratched the surface of its plant life. I hope to go back and climb Ibapah peak some day, as well as see the *Ribes oxyacanthoides* var. *setosum* in person. Of course, the Deep Creeks are only one of many isolated ranges in the Great Basin, so perhaps *R. laxiflorum* is hiding out in many more basin ranges, waiting to be discovered.

***Ribes hendersonii*: a new state record for Utah**

Last summer, I took an expedition to central Idaho to look for a bucket list species of mine: *Ribes hendersonii*, the neglected gooseberry. (Technically, POWO and iNaturalist are treating it as *Ribes oxyacanthoides* var. *hendersonii*, but in my opinion it should obviously be considered its own species – however, that's a conversation for another time).

My fascination with this species stems from its enigmatic nature. *R. hendersonii* is pretty poorly collected, with only 15 iNaturalist observations and exactly 20 collections listed in IRHN. There are several reasons why this taxon may be undercollected. First, it is highly specific in its habitat, being restricted to very high alpine talus above the treeline, usually on limestone substrates. Second, the tiny flowers and fruits are borne on short pedicels hanging beneath the densely spiny stems, making them hard to spot. Finally, and probably most important, it is vegetatively near identical to the much more common and

widespread *Ribes montigenum* (alpine prickly currant), with which I suspect *R. hendersonii* is often confused.

Anybody who has done high elevation hiking in Utah needs no introduction to *R. montigenum*. This wickedly spiny shrub can be found in basically every montane habitat across the state, where it is often a dominant member of the plant community. Because of how common *R. montigenum* is, I suspect that many botanists have begun to more or less tune it out when encountering it in the field, which might be fine were this species not so similar to the rarer *R. hendersonii*. Both taxa are low, spreading shrubs with highly glandular leaves and extremely spiny stems, and they often grow side-by-side in alpine scree, making them tough to differentiate.

Botanists making alpine collections may pass right by *R. hendersonii*, erroneously assuming it to be the same *R. montigenum* they already collected earlier in the day! The only foolproof way to tell them apart is through their flowers and fruits – *R. hendersonii* has bell-shaped flowers and smooth fruits, whereas *R. montigenum* has flat flowers and glandular-hairy fruits. However, as noted earlier, the flowers and fruits are so hard to spot, I can't blame anybody for missing them.

Most current collections of *R. hendersonii* are from central Idaho and adjacent Montana, but there is a suspiciously disjunct population in the Toiyabe range of central Nevada. As Quinn P. Sinnott states in a 1985 paper discussing *Ribes*, "this relatively diffuse distribution is probably in part due to the lack of extensive alpine and subalpine collections rather than the rarity of this subspecies." I agree with Sinnott that *R. hendersonii* is yet to be discovered in several of the states and ranges adjacent to its current range due to its inaccessible habitat and due to confusion with *R. montigenum*. This is supported by the fact that iNaturalist user jareddodson discovered the species in Oregon for the first time in 2024.

Due to the existing collection from the Toiyabe range, I've long suspected that *R. hendersonii* may be located in some of the higher Great Basin ranges in Utah such as the Deep Creeks and the Stansburies. The species may still be in those ranges, but I recently discovered it in Utah for the first time, and from a place I never expected to find it – in my home county of Salt Lake County, near the peak of Red Top Mountain in the Wasatch range.

The main motivation for my hike that day was actually to find *Oxytropis borealis* var. *viscida*. This is a delightful little legume that, as the name implies, is covered in attractive, crystalline yellow resin glands. However, I was also on the hunt for any other alpine beauties covering the nearby ridges.

I began my day by parking at Snowbird, after which I hiked up the Gad Valley Road to Gad Valley Gulch. After about 3

Species	<i>R. hendersonii</i>	<i>R. montigenum</i>
Fruit/ovary texture	Glabrous (smooth)	Covered in long glandular hairs
Flowers	Bell-shaped, greenish-white; in clusters of 1-3	Flat & open; in longer racemes of 3+
Stems	Stems usually about pencil-thick; bark often pale-gray to white	Stems usually thinner, more brown and dark in color
Leaves	Densely glandular, appearing sticky or resinous on the surface	Densely glandular, but more shiny than sticky in appearance
Habitat	Confined to exposed alpine talus above treeline; usually on limestone substrates	Variety of montane habitats and elevations, from coniferous understory to subalpine meadows to high talus

Figure 1: Table showing differences between the visually similar *R. hendersonii* and *R. montigenum*

and a half miles, I was close to reaching a ski lift, following which my trail became more or less self directed. Heading south and west, I reached the top of a nearby ridge, after scrambling up alpine slopes covered in the *Oxytropis* as well as the adorable *Erigeron grandiflorus* with its beautiful dark, hispid-woolly involucre. Continuing south on the ridge towards Red Top Mountain, I saw the striking *Senecio atratus* as well as some tiny *Saxifraga rivularis* growing underneath the rocks.

Just as I was crawling across the striking red quartzite talus some tens of feet below the peak of Red Top Mountain, I paused for some water right next to a patch of *R. montigenum*. Except, something was off about these ones. As I took a closer look, I noticed that the stems and the leaves weren't quite right. Getting even closer, I gingerly lifted the nastily armed branches and inspected their underside. After some 10 tense seconds of searching, I saw them. I was too late for fresh flowers, but there were some dry, remnant blooms still attached. These were unmistakably the flowers of *R. hendersonii*, making this population a state record – the record that I had been searching for.

I excitedly searched the rest of the population for any fresh flowers still lingering, but there was no luck. I did manage to find 2 immature berries, but most of the flowers appeared to have dried up without attempting to produce a fruit. Unfortunately, I was running low on water and time, so I had to head east on the ridge towards the Twin Peaks.

In total, I located 3 subpopulations of *Ribes hendersonii*, with 6, 3, and 1 individual, respectively.

After summiting the Twin Peaks, I began a steep, treacherous descent down the ridge east of the peaks, heading towards the Snowbird tram. I would recommend not taking this route up or down; approaching and exiting Red Top and the Twin Peaks from the west is longer and more circuitous, but far easier and safer than taking this ridge from the east. I hopped on the tram just before it began its descent, and headed home to rest.

Next time you're on the top of some high peak in Utah, I'd encourage you to take a closer look at the spiny *Ribes* that may be growing amongst the rocks. (See table above, detailing the differences between the two species). Odds are high that it is the same *Ribes montigenum* that is well-known in the state, but if you're lucky, you could end up documenting a new mountain range for *R. hendersonii*, helping to dispel some of the mystery surrounding this tough little alpine plant.

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Intermountain Botanical Foray 2025

North Slope of the Uinta Mountains

by Connor Wehner

The Uinta Mountains, a rugged east-west range along the Utah-Wyoming border, are home to more than 1,000 plant species and a wide array of other wildlife. With scenic alpine meadows, extensive mixed forests, and lush riparian habitats, these mountains are the perfect place to spend a long weekend botanizing. That's exactly what we did in June 2025 during the 3rd Annual Intermountain Botanical Foray – thank you to all the participants (including UNPS members) who made it another unforgettable year!

The Foray is an excellent opportunity for botanists of all experience levels to come together and enjoy the world of plants. Previous forays included trips to the Desert Experimental Range in the Great Basin cold desert ecosystems, and the Wasatch Plateau to explore the montane habitats of central Utah. Each day is spent exploring diverse habitats and documenting observations

through plant collections and iNaturalist observations. Evenings are devoted to identifying and pressing plants in our new canvas “botany tent”, while sharing knowledge and enjoying one another's company. Highlights from the day and stories from past adventures are exchanged over dinner, fostering a strong sense of community among participants. The Foray is organized by the Intermountain Herbarium at USU – we hope you'll join us next year (details tbd)!

Our efforts this year resulted in over 1,700 iNaturalist observations, and a bountiful supply of herbarium specimens! While identifications are still ongoing, our preliminary total is 355 species of plants and fungi. You can check out our iNaturalist project here, and we'd welcome any help with identifications:

<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/intermountain-botanical-foray-2025-north-slope-of-the-uinta-mts>



2025 Intermountain Botanical Foray Participants. Top row left to right: Connor Wehner, Zachary Nielsen, Julia Hobbie, Montana Horchler, Parker Lloyd, Margaret Haney, Nate DuCasse, Otto De Groff, Mike Mancuso, Kris Valles. Bottom row left to right: Hannah Kang, Carl Rothfels, Andrey Zharkikh, Will Pearce, Robert Fitts, Sam Kurkowski, Abigail Lazier. Not pictured: Cathy King, Bill King, Susan Fitts, Allison Izaksonas, and the Weber crew.



Thermopsis montana putting on a display near Beaver and Slate Creek. Photo by Parker Lloyd.



Caltha and *Trollius*. Photo by Cathy King.



Julia Hobbie photographing *Oxytropis sericea* spotted from the road. Photo by Carl Rothfels.



Delphinium nuttallianum, with a seemingly white variety too. Photo by Andrey Zharkikh.



Calypso bulbosa along Soapstone Basin Road. Photo by Andrey Zharkikh.



Andrey, Julia, Kris, and Carl getting a close look at some small plants! Photo by by Connor Wehner.

This year, we set up camp at Stillwater Campground on the north side of the Uinta range. Many participants camped communally in tents, while others came and went throughout. Stillwater Campground is surrounded by towering *Pinus contorta*, with clearings of sagebrush intermixed with species like *Delphinium*, *Astragalus*, *Allium*, and *Erigeron*.

As expected, many of the early snow-melt species like *Erythronium grandiflorum*, *Claytonia lanceolata*, *Lewisia pygmaea*, and *Viola adunca* were abundant across the board. Masses of *Caltha chionophila*, *Trollius albiflorus*, and *Primula pauciflora* greeted us at many of our wetland stops.

A few of the many highlights of the trip were the glimpses of *Calypso bulbosa*, which proved elusive due to the plant's diminutive size. Although most ventures were fruitful, we



Calypso bulbosa about to be pressed. Photo by Cathy King.

did have a few unsuccessful attempts at locating *Cypripedium fasciculatum* in a patch of dense coniferous forest where it had been reported previously. Along with the incredible floral diversity, we were pleasantly surprised by the variety of fauna encountered on our excursions. There were a variety of insects, frogs, a porcupine, and a couple distant mountain goats. And a close encounter with a moose certainly made for a memorable stop near Elizabeth Pass!

Sometimes, a glimpse from the car is all it takes to add another species to the trip — like a whitish flowering plant spotted alone on the elevated roadside as we drove by one day. We took a mental note of the spot and stopped to check it out on the way back. To our delight, a beautiful *Oxytropis sericea* sat there waiting for us to arrive. Likewise, we spotted what turned out to be *Draba oligosperma* from the car, and a closer look revealed it was part of a beautiful



Carl Rothfels and Robert Fitts. Photo by Bill King.

community of understated plants on top of a small rise: *Selaginella densa*, *Astragalus spatulatus*, *Erigeron compositus*, *Potentilla concinna*, and *Artemisia frigida*. Small plants, big impact!

We hope you will consider joining us next year! If you'd like to join the informational email list, please email kristian.valles@usu.edu or join directly here: <https://lists.usu.edu/www/info/foray>.

The list of species recorded in 2025 can be found on the UNPS website main menu section Resources/"Botanical Forays" or use this link: https://www.unps.org/Forays/Botanical_Foray_2025_final_species_only_list.html.



Geum triflorum. Photo by Julia Hobbie.



Herbarium presses. Photo by Carl Rothfels.



Compiling notes and pressing specimens. Photo by Carl Rothfels.

Clematis of Northern Utah

by Parker Lloyd

Strangely familiar seedheads, clusters of feather-like structures called achenes, dot an all-encompassing vine, in such quantities as to resemble locks of coarse, gray hair, imparting a recognizable whisper into the botanizer's ear; it is in *Clematis*, the same genus of plants as the popular horticultural vine found in suburbs and garden centers across the Northern Hemisphere. Many botanizers in Southern Utah have encountered *Clematis ligusticifolia*, the so-called "old-man's beard." This widespread genus in the buttercup family brings adventurers back to the garden-lined streets of suburbia, foiling their attempt to escape the city. In growth, this plant is reminiscent of the horticultural clematis - a large, scrambling liana encumbered with patches of dead-seeming stems (the removal of which will terminate your healthy growth). Unlike most horticultural varieties, the flowers that precede these beards are smaller, white flowers, found in clusters—a mass of stamens framed by four creamy-white sepals, in classic Ranunculaceae fashion. *Clematis*



Clematis ligusticifolia, Old-man's beard. Photo by Parker Lloyd, Grand County, UT



Clematis occidentalis var. *grosseserrata*, Western Blue Clematis. Photo by Parker Lloyd, Salt Lake County, UT

ligusticifolia can be found throughout the canyon country, clambering around willows and other creekside shrubs, or as a standalone plant growing on adequately moist scrubby hillsides (the closest plants to Salt Lake City I have encountered are in such a spot, alongside Highway 6 in Spanish Fork Canyon) and indeed can be found in such exposures across Western North America. That is, until one reaches California, where lookalikes humiliate a confident plant identifier in both the coastal chaparral and the Mojave Desert.

Though hardly a lookalike, the Wasatch Front is home to a clematis of similar, but reduced form - the western blue clematis, *Clematis occidentalis* var. *grosseserrata*. Unlike the old-man's Beard, this plant prefers a far colder climate and will not be found growing in the canyons of Southern Utah. However, it is hardly endemic, as it is prolific throughout the Rocky Mountains, extending far north into



Clematis occidentalis var. *grosseserrata*, Western Blue Clematis.
Photo by Parker Lloyd, Salt Lake County, UT



Clematis occidentalis var. *grosseserrata*, Western Blue Clematis.
Photo by Parker Lloyd, Salt Lake County, UT

Alberta and British Columbia. In Utah populations, the sepals are typically pale blue, but within their range, these flowers can vary from white to blue, purple, and lavender. More of a scrambler, the flowers are delicate, as if handcrafted from tissue paper; the nodding blossoms gently catch a mountain breeze and sway above whatever shrub or rock they have found to dangle from. By the mountain's calendar, it is an early wildflower. These peak



Clematis hirsutissima, Hairy Clematis. Photo by Parker Lloyd, Summit County, UT



Clematis hirsutissima, Hairy Clematis. Photo by Parker Lloyd, Summit County, UT



Clematis columbiana var. *tenuiloba*, Rock Clematis. Photo by Parker Lloyd, Salt Lake County, UT

in June, and by July, the only sign of a once showy blue flower is the developing achenes, a ball of feathers built as if for a house cat. Preferring the cool, shady understories of mixed conifer forests, Western Blue Clematis will take advantage of sudden clearings or disturbed banks alongside trails to become a thicket of handsome foliage. A botanizer may find such a wonderful environment alongside the trail to White Pine Lake in Little Cottonwood Canyon, where the would-be adventurer may become distracted, if not entangled, in the numerous plants.

Venturing east from Salt Lake City, the high-altitude sagebrush steppe hosts a strange and unassuming clematis - *Clematis hirsutissima*, the Hairy Clematis. Without blooms (and honestly with blooms), this plant would hardly be recognizable as a clematis if one's only exposure to this fantastic genus is the horticultural varieties. Vastly contrasting its scrambling relatives, this species is entirely herbaceous! The short sepals, fused into an urn-like bell with the tips turned outwards, are relatively stiff and almost spongy in texture. This trait is

consistent with the *Viorna* group, to which the hairy clematis is taxonomically assigned. These bells rise above a small shrub made of deeply lobed and hairy foliage. The *Viorna* group, including *Clematis viorna*, is prominent in the Southeastern United States and is known as "Leather Flowers" for their rigid and fleshy blooms. *Viorna* types seldom make it west, except *Clematis hirsutissima*. Their range is extensive, encompassing the intermountain states of Utah, Colorado, New Mexico, Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho, as well as Nebraska and Kansas, and extending into far eastern Oregon and Washington. They are also found in Arizona, near Flagstaff, on the Kaibab Plateau, and the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. With a range as expansive as this, and given the existing taxonomic struggles of the subgenus *Viorna*, numerous splits, divisions, and re-classifications have been proposed and received with varying tepid responses. However, most taxonomists, as well as *A Utah Flora* (Stanley L. Welsh, N. Duane Atwood, Sherel Goodrich, and Larry C. Higgins), agree that the plants found east of Salt Lake City, between the Wasatch and Uinta Mountains, belong to *Clematis hirsutissima*.

Neither an herbaceous shrub nor a true liana, this alpine clematis emerges around boulders near scree fields. Mostly deciduous stems are followed by handsome bells, far smaller than *Clematis occidentalis*, but still delicately formed of crepe paper—the rock clematis, *Clematis columbiana* var. *tenuiloba*, is a delight to encounter on a mountain scramble. Unlike the plants found on the high mountain peaks of Montana and Wyoming, this population lives luxuriously, in dappled shade from nearby spruce trees. This site, located at an elevation of over 9,000 feet, still faces harsh conditions year-round, from intense UV radiation to snow drifts and extreme winds, yet thrives in the sheltered cracks between exposed boulders, neighbor to pikas, and carving out an existence in a space few others could. If any clematis were to appeal to a rock gardener, it would be the rock clematis.

A reader with a membership in the North American Rock Garden Society (NARGS) may recall an article from earlier this year that featured the horticultural potential of US-native clematis, such as *Clematis texensis* and the aforementioned *Clematis viorna*. This article highlighted the surprising diversity of these charming vines found in the Southeastern United States. Unsurprisingly, Utah, as the most botanically rich landlocked state, has its own diversity of native (and introduced) species. As for the horticultural potential of Utah's native clematis, they are low-maintenance, water-wise, and support pollinators, in addition to being beautiful. The greatest challenge in growing these plants is finding a nursery from which to purchase them.

UNPS Grants Report

We have completed the Grants-in-Aid project for 2025. We are proud to announce that UNPS was able to fund 8 grants totaling \$13,800. We awarded 5 research grants and 2 educational grants all of which involved botany or ecology students. We also were able to provide seed money for a new and needed guide book on the flowers of the Great Basin Desert.

A big thank you goes out to all 30 UNPS members who donated anywhere from \$20 to \$2500 for a total of \$10,910 since the first of the year. Additionally \$2,890 was donated from UNPS reserve general funds with board approval, largely from past poster sales and membership dues. So thanks go out to all members who pay their dues or purchase our wildflower posters too. UNPS financials remain strong.

With the current conditions in Washington, the need for research and educational grants will be even greater. Please consider donating again next year to help support this important program.

Bill King, Chair, Grants Committee

Nominations Now Open for UNPS Board of Directors 2025-2026

The UNPS nominating committee, headed by president Cathy King, is now taking nominations for the board of directors of the Utah Native Plant Society for the fiscal year 2025-2026.

There can be as many as 20 people on our board of directors or as few as 10, the current board has 16 members. Board members must be currently paid up UNPS members. This volunteer position helps decide on UNPS policies and how to allocate our resources. Consider joining our board of directors to help protect the native plants of Utah.

The nominated persons will be voted on at the UNPS Annual Meeting in October, the date still to be determined, and will be announced by email to the general membership.

The board of directors meets on Zoom or in person for 1-2 hours about 10 times a year. In addition, as a working board, members are encouraged to serve on committees or projects of their choosing as long as they further the goals of UNPS.

UNPS members can nominate themselves or be nominated by others but anyone nominated must agree in advance to serve on the board.

UNPS is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to the appreciation, preservation, conservation and responsible use of the native plant and plant communities found in the state of Utah and the Intermountain West.

Anyone interested in serving on the board of directors please contact Cathy King, UNPS Nominating Committee chair at: cathy.king@gmail.com.

UNPS Award Nominations Wanted

UNPS has two awards that we award periodically: the **Lifetime Achievement Award in Utah Botany** and the newer **Ty Harrison Service award** for exceptional service for UNPS efforts.

We usually make the Botany award at the Rare Plant Meeting in the spring and the Service award in the fall at the Annual meeting. Some years in the past we have not made the awards to anyone due to a lack of outstanding candidates.

The UNPS board has the ultimate decision but we invite you to suggest those whom you think are worthy of receiving these awards. If you have in mind someone who qualifies for either of the awards please contact any UNPS board member and they will pass the name along at decision time or send us an E-mail at unps@unps.org.

***Castilleja tenuis*: Utah State Record**

by Ava Brinkley

In recent years, we have seen a number of developments in our botanical understanding of the Wasatch Back. From Blake Wellard and Jason Baker's recognition of *Stephanomeria occultata* to Sherel Goodrich's recent description of *Pyrrocoma wyethiana*, it seems there is still much to learn about this region of our state.

I've been spending more time on the Wasatch Back in recent months, in part to escape the heat and in part because I've become infatuated with our seasonally-wet meadow habitats. My first encounter with sage-swale meadows came in 2021 with the Utah Rare Plant Program in Box Elder County, but it is only in the last couple of years that I have begun to pay more attention to these beleaguered systems. These meadows have been under the knife since Mormon settlement of the state nearly two centuries ago, as these are some of the places best suited for agriculture: the soil is often well-developed and water is (relatively) abundant.

Unfortunately, this also means that these systems are likely misunderstood, as many of the remnants available to us are heavily degraded. In shadowing Blake Wellard into wet places of our state for the past five years, I've come to associate these sorts of places with creeping thistle, sulphur cinquefoil, teasel, and an unfortunate variety of invasive graminoids. On the rare occasion that our wetlands aren't choked out by this roster, however, you can find yourself transported to a Utah that's increasingly unfamiliar. Prairie species of the midwest mingle with the occasional extension out of the Pacific Northwest in lush, green spaces that can power through the dog days of summer—assuming the water isn't diverted or drained for irrigation canals, subdivisions, or highway expansions, all of which continue to reshape our remnant wetlands today.

I recently encountered something unusual lurking in one of these fragments in Summit County, not twenty feet off a popular trail. At first, I thought it might be an unusual *Orthocarpus*. Yellow owl's-clover (*O. luteus*) can be found nearby, so it wouldn't come as a shock to me—but these flowers were decidedly white. And more importantly, they were the trisaccate (three-pouched) flowers of *Castilleja*





species to our south and west. I looked around to determine the extent of this thing, and... there wasn't much to be found. I checked neighboring pockets of similar habitat to no avail. After about half an hour of looking, I snapped some photos, collected a couple stems for an herbarium voucher, and headed home to make sense of what I'd found.

Upon further examination, these plants seemed to best fit *Castilleja tenuis* (common name hairy paintbrush—*romantic*). In herbarium records, this species ranges from the Sierra Nevada and Cascades to Boise and central Nevada, more than 200 miles from where I'd encountered it. I've had brief communication with Mark Egger, who is solidly in agreement that these plants do, in fact, belong to *C. tenuis*, a state record for Utah found within view of someone's back porch.

A week later, I returned to the area with Blake in an attempt to turn up another location. A single location might be waved off as a recent introduction (however unlikely), but if we could establish its place in the broader landscape, I'd feel more confident this species simply went overlooked in nearly two centuries of settlement, quietly biding its time in wet meadows, narrowly escaping extirpation. And sure enough, we found it again about two miles away in a slightly disturbed area of a seasonally wet meadow. Though localized, there were hundreds of individuals here, indicating a fairly robust population—and all but cementing in my mind that this plant belongs here. It is not an artifact of recent introduction.



Whether this plant persists in other wet meadow systems of the Wasatch Back (or elsewhere) remains to be seen. It's easily overlooked, maybe six inches tall, and relatively ephemeral. But its presence here gestures at a Utah with less interrupted hydrology, at meadows that were once part of larger, connected landscapes long maintained by the Indigenous residents of this place. Hairy paintbrush, along with camas (*Camassia quamash*), corn lily (*Veratrum californicum*), and meadow stars (*Hesperochiron nanus*) point to a past floristic alliance with the Pacific states that is rapidly disappearing under the pressure to build out, not up. May this record be a reminder of what careful attention can still reveal, even in the margins.

The Colossus of Rhododendron

by Parker Lloyd

In contemplating Utah's flora, greasewood or juniper may come to mind, and, on closer consideration, the pinyon pine or sagebrush; an adequately versed botanizer should be aware of the staggering diversity of *Penstemon*, *Astragalus*, and *Eriogonum* species within the state. But even a well-traveled naturalist may not initially be mindful of the diversity of orchids to be found, nor Utah's lone representative of the widespread and beloved genus of blueberry relatives, *Rhododendron*. There are a couple of reasons for the absence of these plants when building associations for the flora for one of the driest states in the nation - orchids and rhododendrons like moisture, after all. But indeed, moist pockets, seeps, and even bogs can be found throughout the eruptive mountains and haphazardly eroded river valleys. There is another condition Utah is famous for, and that is minerality - we are a basic state, in no small part due to the towering cliffs of limestone, shale, and calcium-based sedimentary rocks crumbling before the power of weather, as well as the self-contained hydrology of the Great Basin creating evaporative fields of salts, further compounding the hostile alkalinity. And this is not to discredit the halophytes or limestone endemics - indeed, the exploitation of these harsh, toxic conditions has led to an incredible speciation of otherworldly plants; a near-endless series of habitats builds a catalogue of precious



Cypripedium fasciculatum, Clustered Lady's Slipper - Photo by Parker Lloyd, Salt Lake County, UT

and rare flora. However, geology does not care for the manufactured borders of nations, and the rocks of the West weave their own map. In scattered pockets of Utah, one escapes the graveyards of ancient seabeds and finds a more civilized mineral: quartzite (or granite, if your silica hardened in the magma chamber of a long-dead volcano). Little Cottonwood Canyon, along the Wasatch Front high above Salt Lake City, hosts these silica-based



Cypripedium fasciculatum, Clustered Lady's Slipper - Photo by Parker Lloyd, Salt Lake County, UT



Rhododendron columbianum, Western Labrador Tea - Photo by Parker Lloyd, Salt Lake County, UT

minerals: the Tintic Quartzite of Mt. Baldy, the reddish-brown quartzite of the Big Cottonwood Formation, and lightly-colored leucocratic quartz monzonite slowly eroding into the canyon below. Considering snowmelt and seepage of groundwater, coupled with the mixed conifer woodlands (which may or may not have fared well, persisting through the negative interventions of industry which plague Little Cottonwood Canyon's bigger brother), prime conditions in which typically mesic plants can thrive are created.

The orchid family (Orchidaceae) is one of the most species-rich families of plants - 28,000 species, spanning 700 genera, found on every continent (except the obvious one). Most orchids are epiphytes, plants that grow on other plants (i.e., "airplants"). Growing on the mossy sides of trees, their exposed roots are primarily structural, gripping an advantageous exploitation of vertical habitat, while also absorbing moisture and nutrients from the air. Because of this proclivity to humid environments, the overwhelming majority of orchids are found in tropical latitudes. Ecuador, for example, has over 4000 described species of orchids.

Utah, on the other hand, boasts a staggering 24 known species. Given the habitat most orchids have evolved to exploit, these contrasting numbers are not surprising; if anything, one might be surprised that Utah has that many. At least 17 species can be found in Salt Lake County, including the critically imperiled Clustered Lady's Slipper (*Cypripedium fasciculatum*). Lady Slipper orchids are so named for the unique pouch-like structure, called a labellum, gently clasped by a pair of horizontal petals and vertical sepals. The primary pollinator of the Clustered Lady's Slipper is a tiny species of wasp, attracted to a

smell produced by the flower, which the predator associates with its primary food: fungus gnats. Instead of finding prey, the wasp will become briefly trapped in this pouch, and while attempting to escape, a sticky, wax-like ball of pollen called the pollinia, tactfully placed along the only point of egress, will stick to the wasp. When this olfactory-induced entrapment is repeated, pollination may occur. Judging by the swelling fruits on many of the plants in this surprisingly large population, this technique is successful.

Lady slipper orchids thrive in the dark, cool understory of mixed conifer forests, content in evenly moist duff. Like most terrestrial orchids, they develop complex symbiotic relationships with the fungi contained within the soil. Other protections and the ethics of poaching aside, because of these delicate mycorrhizal relationships, transplanting these wonderful little plants will almost always end in failure; seed germination is challenging without these native soil conditions, and difficult to recreate even in laboratories. In the wake of receding groundwater and increased recreational pressures, ex-situ conservation is challenging. More so than any other, these plants are best observed in the wild where they belong.

Rhododendrons

Growing up in the Pacific Northwest, rhododendrons were certainly accessible, if not common. Our farm had numerous mature specimens, as did many homes in the area. The gardens surrounding Oregon's Statehouse are famous for their century-old stands of rhododendrons - a so-called forward-thinking industrialist could craft sturdy furniture from the trunks of these colossal sentinels of



Neottia convallarioides, Broad-lipped Twayblade orchid. Photo by Parker Lloyd, Salt Lake County, UT

that state's democracy. In any forest beyond the city, bushes of all sizes adorned with bowls of rosy pink or white stars kissed as though by a sunset were prolific. Speciality nurseries, dedicated entirely to rhododendrons, bred exotic colors or extended bloom seasons, pushing the marketability and hardiness of these relatively sensitive shrubs ever forward. Venturing to the deep wilderness of the Siskiyou Mountains, we could explore botanical waysides and fens full of endemic plants to be found nowhere else in the world, and still be plagued by the ever-present, over-the-top azalea, their scent heavy in the air. Moving to the arid, Intermountain West, I had at last escaped. Imagine my surprise to find rhododendrons growing in the mountains above Salt Lake City.

Utah's native rhododendron is called western Labrador tea, *Rhododendron columbianum*. Widespread throughout the West, these are found along the West Coast from British Columbia to San Francisco, with their range extending south via the Klamath and then the Sierra Nevada Mountains. The Columbia Plateau splits these Western populations, a segregation that continues

south, framed by the Great Basin and Colorado Plateau, running along the Rocky Mountains of northern Idaho, western Montana, and Wyoming, nearly stopping in Yellowstone, *except* for a sizable population in the Uinta Mountains, an unsuspecting holdout in Nevada's Ruby Mountains, and these scattered plants in the Wasatch Front. Progressing further up the mountain, another plant caught my eye, more than a thousand feet higher and in a, I believe, separate creek system. I would be unsurprised to find these are far more prevalent in adequately moist, acidic conditions in Little Cottonwood Canyon, and perhaps even growing in multiple drainage systems in northern Utah. Unfortunately, it is rather late to appreciate these handsome shrubs, but a worthy candidate to "rediscover" next June.

A final honorable mention to the charming flora of this canyon goes to the Twayblade orchid. Utah is home to three separate species of *Neottia*, and while no more than one species has graced my trails, it is a delightful find each time.

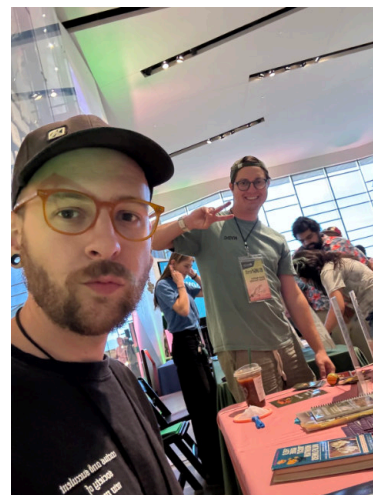
UNPS Outreach Volunteers



Bug Fest at NHMU.
Photo by Zach Nielsen



Bug Fest NHMU.
Photo by Parker Lloyd.



Parker Lloyd and Zach Nielsen at Bug Fest. Photo by Parker Lloyd.



Zach Earl and Tim Remkes at NHMU Bug Fest
Photo by Parker Lloyd.



Zach Earl at Pia Okwai plant sale May 03 2025.
Photo by Parker Lloyd.

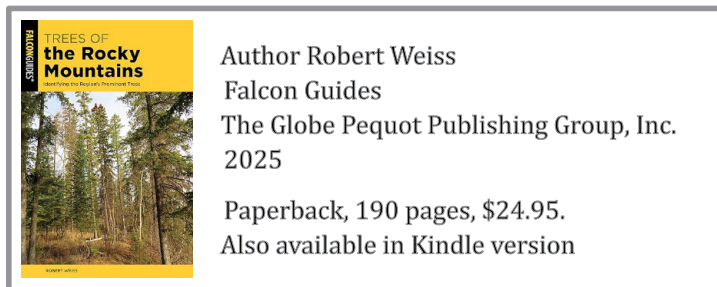


Brighton Wildflower Festival Jul 12 2025
Photo by Parker Lloyd.

***Thank you,
UNPS volunteers!***

Trees of the Rocky Mountains: Identifying the Region's Prominent Trees

a book review by Bill and Cathy King



Author Robert Weiss
Falcon Guides
The Globe Pequot Publishing Group, Inc.
2025
Paperback, 190 pages, \$24.95.
Also available in Kindle version

A Falcon Guide has recently been published that contributes to the understanding of the predominant tree species of the Rocky Mountain region which also includes much of the Intermountain area. *Trees of the Rocky Mountains: Identifying the Region's Prominent Trees* written by botanist, ecologist and board certified arborist Robert Weiss is a continuation of his previous book *Trees of the Northern Pacific Coast*.

Mr. Weiss earned his bachelor's degree in plant resources sciences at Washington State University in 1994 and master's degree in forest ecology at Utah State University in 1997. He subsequently worked for many Pacific Coast utility companies surveying trees along property right-of-ways and writing evaluations of the tree ecosystems. He now considers himself retired and spends his time writing books and traveling. He has also volunteered for native plant societies on the West Coast.

Although the title implies identification of trees, the book includes much more information about the process of identification and the causes of mortality of mature trees. The first 29 pages are a primer on the process and includes forest types. The author does not define what constitutes a mature tree other than height and does not include a discussion of old growth forests.

He lists abiotic causes of mortality for mature trees such as fire, wind, lightning, drought and biotic causes such as insects, animals, mistletoe, diseases and rot. Many of these problems are illustrated with photographs.

The next section is a 28 page, non-paginated section of reference tables that includes a 4 page conversion chart names of tree species from the scientific name to the common name (also including the scientific family). This chart is important because both names are used throughout the book and the species are organized alphabetically by scientific name. There is also a list of biotic and abiotic causes of death for trees, and a lengthy physical identification key for species included in the book. That is followed by a separate key for *Cupressaceae* (Junipers and Cypress) and also a winter tree key for deciduous species

included in the book. This is a tremendous amount of information and is a valuable resource guide.

The actual "Species Entries" begin on page 58 with Balsam Fir, *Abies balsamea* and ends on page 179 with Siberian Elm, *Ulmus pumila*. One needs to be familiar with the scientific name of each species to locate them alphabetically, hence the importance of the earlier mentioned conversion chart. There are about 59 separate species entries and each one includes the following: quick identification; bark, needle and cone description; height (in both meters and feet); geographic and elevation range; habitat; associated tree species; similar looking trees; tree risk hazard assessment of mortality; species distribution map; and 3-5 identifying full-color photos of the species.

The photos are of good to excellent quality and all are useful. Almost all the photos in the book were taken by the author. Some of the entries also mention closely related species that are also listed in the reference table described above.

At the back of the book is a useful, if not somewhat limited, glossary of botanical terms and a bibliography for further reference. The paperback edition of the book lacks an index, but the Kindle version should be searchable.

We found it surprising that the Utah Juniper, *Juniperus osteosperma*, did not merit its own individual listing as it is such a ubiquitous tree across much of the West, but other species of lesser prominence did. Also, a little unsettling was the inclusion of invasive species such as tamarisk, Russian olive and Siberian elm. Perhaps it is important to increase awareness and identification of these noxious invasives.

There is a separate description for quaking aspen (*Populus tremuloides*), however the author fails to mention that it can reproduce asexually through its root system and can produce giant clones of itself. "Pando," a Utah clone, has been estimated to be over 16,000 years old and may be one of the oldest living organisms on earth.

We would recommend this book for arborists, government agencies (especially the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management), firefighters, and anyone who owns or manages land in the Rocky Mountain region. Members of the general public may find it a bit tedious to use unless they have some background in botany or science. However, the photos and descriptions of the trees should help with the identification process for anyone.

Trees of the Rocky Mountains: Identifying the Region's Prominent Trees is a valuable resource manual. It would make a good addition to your library.

Grow Native

A couple of golden-asters for the native garden *Chrysopsis jonesii* and *C. villosa*

by Catherine King



Jones' golden-aster in bloom at Red Butte Garden. Photo by Andrey Zharkikh.

A gardening friend gifted me with a gallon pot of *Chrysopsis jonesii* about 20 years ago (back then it was still called *Heterotheca jonesii*) and it has been a favorite in my rock garden ever since. Known by the common name Jones' golden-aster, it is a low-growing, mounding and compact perennial composite in the Asteraceae family and deserves a location where it can be highlighted and appreciated.

Jones' golden-aster is a rare endemic known only to three counties in southern Utah and nowhere else in the world. Fortunately, it is not threatened or endangered as are so many other rare endemic plants, but it is on the Utah Native Plant Society "Watch" list which indicates potential vulnerability.

The plant is a dense cluster of tiny, grayish-green, hairy leaves edged with white hairs, from which perfect yellow daisy-like flowers emerge early in summer and continue to flower sporadically until frost. Jones' golden-aster will amble over the soil and rocks in your garden, forming a pleasing carpet.

Walking through Red Butte Garden recently in Salt Lake City, I photographed the very lovely specimen that is growing right next to the path, just before you turn into the rock garden above the Children's Garden. It's been there a while, because I found other nice photos of it taken by Tony Frates and Andrey Zharkikh over the past ten years.



A handsome mat of silver-leaved *Chrysopsis jonesii*, Jones' golden-aster, ambling through the rocks at Red Butte Garden. Photo by Cathy King.



Jones' golden-aster flower close-up. Photo by Tony Frates.



Mature seeds of *Chrysopsis villosa*. Photo by Matt Lavin.



Cheerful yellow flowers on the hairy golden-aster, *Chrysopsis villosa*. Photo by Matt Lavin.



Chrysopsis villosa, the hairy golden-aster, plant in habitat. Photo by Matt Lavin.

As a side note, I highly encourage a visit to the Waterwise Garden at Red Butte Garden which has matured so beautifully in the past few years. Just in the last year or so, they have planted a new section at the very top of the garden composed of mixed drought tolerant and native plants that are a great example of how your water-wise garden could look at home. Even this late in the summer, there are many plants flowering that are attracting native bees, bumblebees and birds like crazy. It's a wonderful place to be. We are lucky to have such a garden right here in the city, as well as the Conservation Garden at the Jordan River Water Conservation District, another great resource for ideas when planting native and water-wise gardens.

Another very garden worthy plant to consider is *Chrysopsis villosa* (synonym *Heterotheca villosa*), the hairy golden-aster. Native to almost every county in Utah, as well as throughout the central US and up into Canada and as far down as the Baja Peninsula in Mexico, this golden-aster is a

taller and looser form than Jones' golden-aster. The leaves tend to be a brighter green than the Jones' golden-aster and are not as compact or hairy.

According to the description by Stan Welsh in *A Utah Flora*, *Chrysopsis villosa* is highly variable. Plant Select introduced a hybrid named 'Goldhill,' that is a selection of a natural cross between *Chrysopsis jonesii* x *C. villosa*. 'Goldhill' is commonly offered in plant nurseries and is a wonderful plant that blooms with cheerful yellow daisies from spring to fall.

Both Jones' golden-aster and the hairy golden-aster can be found at local nurseries and from online sources as well as companies that sell seeds. Remember, as the heat of summer subsides, fall is an excellent time to plant and give these perennials a chance to get established before next spring.

Your Membership

Your membership is vital to the Utah Native Plant Society. It is important that your information is correct and up to date for notifications and the delivery of The Sego Lily newsletter.

Any questions about your membership, Contact Tony Stireman, tstireman@gmail.com.

It is always time to consider the next issue of the Utah Native Plant Society *Sego Lily* which relies almost entirely upon articles from the society's membership. Please submit articles of your native plant stories and photos from hikes and field trips, conservation activities... whatever might be informative and interesting to fellow members.

The *Sego Lily* editors can use most any text format for articles (**PDFs can be troublesome**). Photos are always best submitted in original resolution and as individual files **separate** from text. You can indicate desired positioning within a document. We are looking forward to hearing from you. For submissions and/or questions: newsletter@unps.org or cathy.king@gmail.com



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UNPS Chapter Map ^{*Inactive}

