FIELD OBSERVATION REPORT

By Mary Wilson
July 2021

Wildflower Report—Angeles Forest Highway had mesa phlox, California buckwheat with the white clusters of flowers, some of which were starting to turn brown, Spanish broom, Lord's candles that were going to seed, mustard in bloom and the Elderberry trees were finishing their blooms.

Angeles Crest Highway had black sage, mountain lilac still had a few flowers left and the Lord's candles still had some flowers.

Mesa Phlox

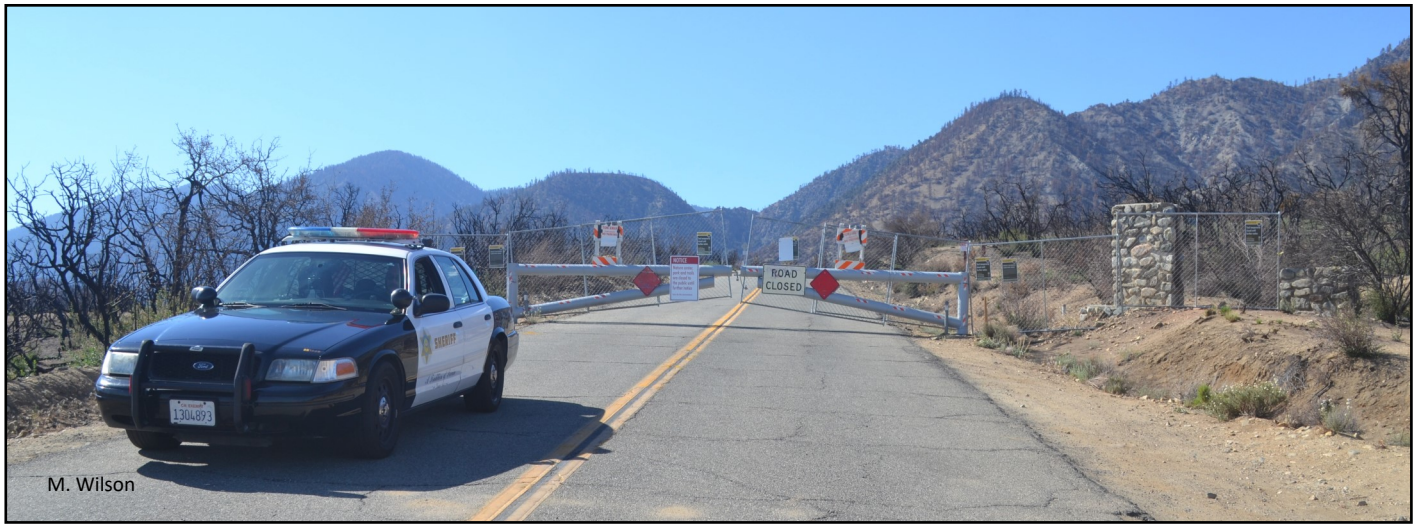
Eriastrum densifolium ssp. mohavense

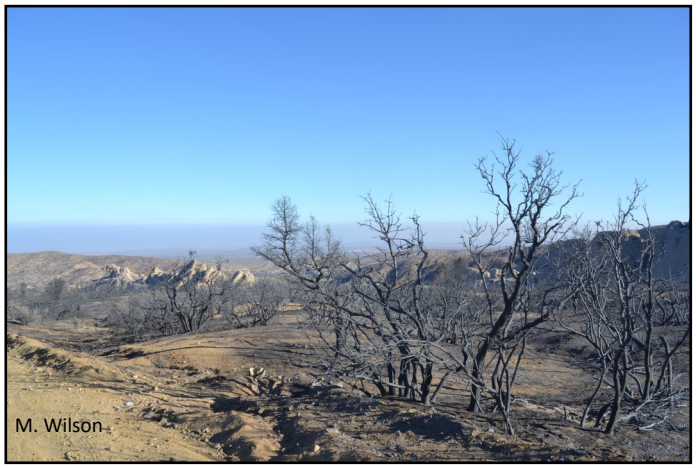
Also known as Woolly Star-flower. This is a native perennial herb that grows in southern and central California. It grows in dunes, dry riverbeds and open slopes at the elevations from 2600-9200 feet. It grows from Red Rock Canyon to the southwestern Tehachapi Mountains, Edwards Air Force Base and along Angeles Forest Highway. The flowers are a beautiful blue with clusters of trumpet-shaped flowers. They bloom in June when most other flowers have dried and gone to seed and the ground is powdery dry. In "A Flower-Watcher's Guide" by Milt Stark, he states: "It is quite startling to round a bend in the road and come upon patches of these strikingly beautiful flowers."

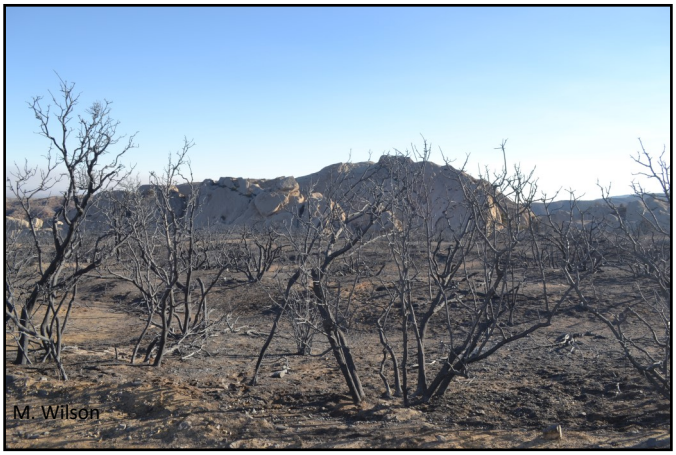
Fire in the Valley—June 17, 2021 a fast-moving brush fire broke out around 3:30 p.m. and burned approximately 350 acres amid triple-digit temperatures. The area was between Avenue K and Avenue L and between 80th and 90th Street West. There were approximately 200 firefighters as well as air and ground units. There were evacuations but no structures burned and the fire was under control around 4:30 p.m.

DEVIL'S PUNCH BOWL

On June 28th I drove to the Devil's Punch Bowl area to see if it was open. It was not and there was a Sheriff in his car and I stopped and talked with him. My first question was, "When do you think the park will open?" He stated it could be at least 2-years. He also stated that what you see burned in this area is pretty much what you will see at the park.







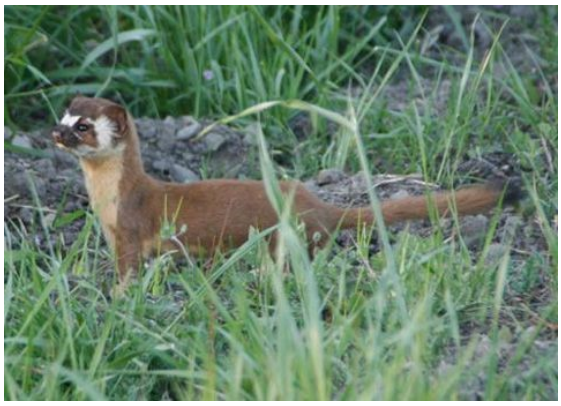
He also said buildings burned and the trails were destroyed so the park service will have to start from scratch. They will have to put underground and above ground pipes for water and wiring before they can start building any structures. All this will take time because the land is owned by locals, L.A. County and State and they will have to get permits, permission, etc. to get items done.

They have started working on the trails and have named the project Devil's Punchbowl Bobcat Fire Trail Stabilization and Recovery Project. The Project Description is: "The Devil's Punch Bowl Bobcat Fire Recovery Project will provide for the construction of a shaded seating area at the trailhead; replacement of a map board kiosk destroyed during the fire; replacement of destroyed signs and trail markers; and trail stabilization and reconstruction."

The Poppy Reserve Mojave District Interpretive Association (PRMDIA) had a program for students to be awarded a $500.00 Research Grant. From October 2006 through September 2007 Cindy Curtis (with help from her Dad Ken) did research at the Antelope Valley CA Poppy Reserve on Watchable Wildlife. She did such a wonderful job on her project she was awarded the $500.00 at the November 2007 Annual PRMDIA Luncheon by PRMDIA member, Mary Wilson. She was able to capture a photo of the Long-Tail Weasel with a trail camera. Most people who work at the poppy reserve or visitors really never get to see one of these animals—in my 20 years of research I had never observed one.

Cindy's Photo of the Long-Tail Weasel ▲

LONG-TAIL WEASEL
Mustela frenata



The long-tailed weasel—like its taxonomic brethren, the least weasel and the short-tailed weasel (also known as ermine or a stoat) - may seem as endearing as a curious, lively kitten, but in fact, ounce for ounce, it ranks as one of natures most relentless and ferocious predators. Indeed, it has been called "nature's psychopath.". Written by Jay Sharp –Desert USA.

The long-tailed weasel appeared in North America around 2 million years ago and this species thrived during the Ice Age because of its small size and long body that allowed it to operate beneath snow, as well as in burrows.

This weasel has a long body, short legs and it has a brownish-colored fur on its back, sides and tail with a buff-colored fur on its undersides. The tail is long and brown with a black tip. In the Southwest it will have white on its face. During winter in northern regions the fur will turn entirely white but will keep the black tip on its tail so it can navigate and not be seen in the snow. In lower elevations with little snow they will stay brown. They range from 11 to 22 inches in length with the tail measuring an additional 3 to 6 inches and will weight between 3 and 9 ounces with the males being about twice as large as the females. The long-tailed weasel has well-developed anal scent glands, which produce a strong musky odor and will rub its body over surfaces in order to leave the scent, to mark their territory to attract a mate or discourage a predator.

These weasels live in dens in ground burrows, under stumps or beneath rock piles. It usually does not dig its own burrows, but uses abandoned burrows or it will take over the burrow of a former occupant that was it's latest kill and meal. They are carnivores that prefer their prey to be fresh or alive, eating only the carrion stored within its burrows. Rodents are almost exclusively taken when they are available. Its primary prey consists of mice, rats, squirrels, chipmunks, shrews, moles and rabbits. Occasionally it may eat small birds, bird eggs, reptiles, amphibians, fish, earthworms and some insects. They have been known to steal chicken eggs and it will remove each egg from its nest one at a time, then carries it in its mouth to a safe location where it bites off the top and licks out the contents or if they have babies in the den, they may hold the egg in their mouth to take back to them.

The long-tailed weasel is a fearless and aggressive hunter which may attack animals far larger than itself. They will rush the prey and kill them with one bite to the head. With large prey, such as rabbits, it will strike quickly, taking its prey off guard. It grabs the nearest part of the animal and climbs upon its body, maintaining its hold with its feet. It will then maneuver itself to inflect a lethal bite to the neck.

In early to midsummer, the long-tailed weasel foregoes his solitary lifestyle long enough to mate. During the mating season, the male may couple with several different females. A pregnant female's fertilized eggs will not be implanted on her uterine wall until early spring—the event that triggers embryonic development. Effectively, she delays the birth until the most favorable time of year for delivery. During this time she can make her den in the burrow of one of her prey, lining the walls with the fur of the victim and with straw from nearby grasses. In mid-spring or late spring she will deliver three to eight blind, helpless and finely haired kits, each weighing roughly a tenth of an ounce. The babies growth rate is rapid and by the age of three weeks, the kits are well furred, can crawl outside the nest and eat meat. At five weeks the kit's eyes are open and the young become physically active and vocal. Weaning begins at this stage, with the kits emerging from the nest and accompanying the mother in hunting trips. The kits are fully grown by autumn, at which time the family disbands. The females will reach sexual maturity within in about 3 months, and the males within about 12 months.

Weasels do not pose a threat to humans other than threatening the poultry industry. Weasels are a benefit in that they destroy much of the rodent population that harms crops. They are not considered an endangered species. The main threats to weasels are often predators such as the gray fox, red fox, coyotes, bobcats, hawks, large snakes and owls. Man is the weasel's greatest enemy as weasels are taken for their pelts, even though the fur itself is not of great value.

NATIONAL TAPIOCA PUDDING DAY
July 15, 2021

Remember tapioca pudding? Perhaps your mom or grandmother made it. Most puddings we buy today are made from cornstarch (yep, made from corn). Puddings of the past were cooked but now we just pour the package of pudding in a bowl and add milk. Tapioca is different. It is not made from corn but from the starch extracted from the roots of the cassava plant. Cassava is native to South America but it also grows in Africa and Asia. The edible root is often ground into powder or into pearls (the round balls in tapioca pudding) that are produced by passing the moist starch through a sieve under pressure and dried. Look for the tapioca pearls in the flour section of the grocery stores or at health food stores. Tapioca has been used by natives of South America for hundreds of years. It became a popular dish to make in England and in the U.S. by 1861.

Tapioca pudding was a bit of labor to make. You had to soak the pearls in water over night, then drain and cook with milk, sugar, then add eggs that you had to temper, and cook for a hour. Today you only have to soak the small pearls for about 30 minutes before you cook with the rest of the ingredients and cook until it becomes thick and the pearls are soft. I even found a recipe to make tapioca pudding in a slow cooker where you put in everything and no soaking.

Recipe for Slow Cooker - 4 cups milk, 2/3 cup white sugar, 1/2 cup small pearl tapioca, 2 eggs, lightly beaten, and 1 tsp vanilla. Direction—Stir milk, sugar, tapioca pearls, lightly beaten eggs together in a slow cooker crock. Cook on Low, stirring once per hour, for 6 hours. Unplug cooker and stir in the vanilla.

So, if you have never had tapioca or have fond memories of this pudding with the soft pearls, cook up a batch and serve on July 15th. You can eat this pudding either warm or cold and you can add any condiments like ice cream syrups, fresh fruit or just plain like grandma use to make. Enjoy!