

Naturalist notes

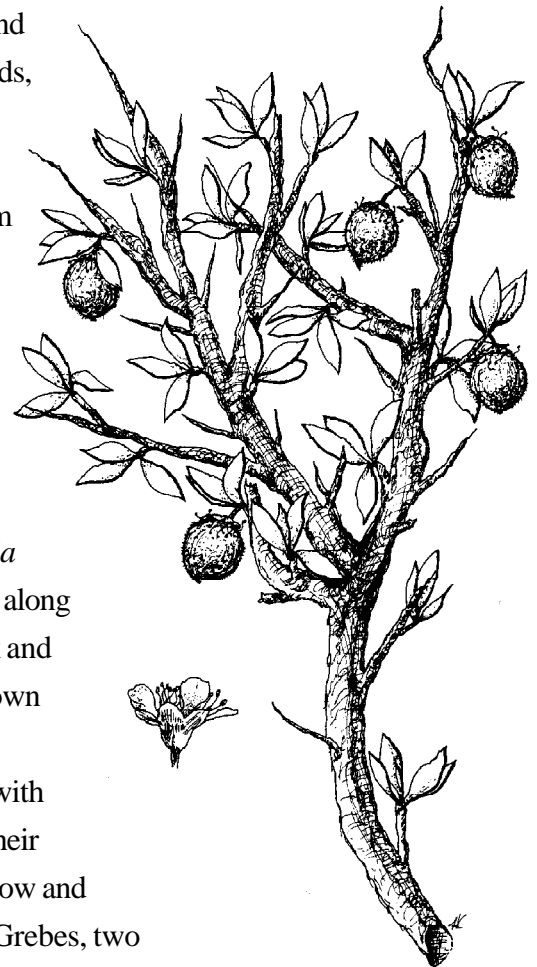
A Mono Basin chronicle

April: a Horned Grebe in bright breeding plumage in a shallow lagoon near the shoreline with six American Wigeons ... Yellow-headed Blackbirds, Northern Orioles, Western Tanagers, and Yellow-rumped Warblers bring a bright array of color to Mill Creek's budding willow (*Salix spp.*), black cottonwood (*Populus trichocarpa*), and aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) ... Double-crested Cormorants and Common Mergansers on Grant Lake ... desert peach (*Prunus andersonii*) lights up in pink patches and the no-see-ums will get you with their little itchy bites if you stop to admire the flowers for too long ... days of wind and snow, but the weather is warm and forgiving for the opening day of fishing season ... and a remarkable number of alkali flies line the shore despite the high wind ...

May: lupine (*Lupinus spp.*), Indian paintbrush (*Castilleja angustifolia*), Western wallflower (*Erysimum capitatum*), and skunk monkey flower (*Mimulus jepsonii*) can all be found down at the lakeshore ... the constellations of Castor and Pollux, the twins of Gemini set over the Sierra in the early evening twilight ...

evenings down at the lake bring the telltale cloud formations of summer, and after the Sierra Wave fades to grey spotlights of sunshine light up the islands, the Mono Craters, and sometimes the White Mountains ... bitterbrush (*Purshia tridentata*), prickly phlox (*Leptodactylon pungens*), and arrowleaf balsamroot (*Balsamorhiza sagittata*) join the wildflower bloom ... birds to note include a Lazuli Bunting and a Yellow-breasted Chat ... and a Swamp Sparrow, and a Black-and-white Warbler both out of their common range ...

June: a Green-winged Teal eating brine shrimp just offshore ... it has to snow at least once every June it seems, and this year is no exception ... yet many wildflowers survive ... sulphur flower (*Ergonum umbellatum*) in yellow, orange, and red spots through the sage (*Artemisia tridentata*) ... Western tiger swallowtails and morning cloak butterflies flit along Lee Vining Creek ... Rose-breasted Grosbeaks down at the County Park and nine Brants off the end of the boardwalk ... a covey of California Quail down by the piezometers on Lee Vining Creek ... the newly planted Jeffrey pine (*Pinus jeffreyi*) trees are being nurtured to grow tall and strong and will, with some luck, eventually emit the sweet scent of vanilla from the furrows of their bark ... prickly poppy (*Argemone polyanthemus*) blooming in bright yellow and white ... three Western Grebes, two American Avocets, a handful Eared Grebes, two Black-crowned Night Herons, and a pair of Osprey nesting atop a tufa were spotted from canoes floating on a nearly glassy lake ...



Drawing by Helen Constantine
Desert Peach, *Prunus andersonii*.