

Introduction to

High Country Plants & Habitats



Ann Howald
August 8-10, 2008

\$150 per person / \$135 for Mono Lake Committee members
enrollment limited to 15 participants

Welcome to our field seminar on the plants and habitats of the Mono Basin high country! During our weekend in the eastern Sierra we will visit a variety of high country habitats: sub-alpine meadows and forests, shores of clear blue sub-alpine lakes, streams that cascade down to water Mono Lake, and natural rock gardens. We'll learn to recognize the common trees, shrubs, wildflowers and ferns that are characteristic of each habitat. We'll see some of the resident birds, insects and other wildlife, and discuss many of the ways that plants, insects, and animals rely on each other for food, seed distribution, nesting sites and other necessities.

Wildflowers will be at their prime during our visit and we expect to see scarlet paintbrushes, purple monkshood, red columbines, blue lupines and larkspurs, pink penstemons and primroses, and an assortment of yellow "daisies," just to name a few.

This workshop is perfect for those visiting the Mono Basin for the first time, and also is valuable for natural history enthusiasts who want to know more about the plants, wildlife and habitats of the Mono Basin high country. We'll learn to recognize plant communities by their dominant species, and the soil and terrain they commonly occupy. We'll learn to identify by sight many common plants, using flower, fruit and leaf characters. We'll use common names for the most part, for example, "fireweed" and "common monkeyflower." Plant lists prepared for this class include both common and scientific names.

We will also explore plants' connections to their environment—how special adaptations permit them to survive the cold, wind, snow, and drought of high altitudes, how they reproduce, and the essential relationships between plants and their insect, bird, and mammal neighbors. For example, many alpine plants are quite small but with large, bright-colored flowers—what better way to advertise to pollinating insects searching the slopes that sweet rewards await them in this or that rocky nook.

Your instructor, Ann Howald, was trained as a plant ecologist. She is a consulting botanist who focuses on rare plant surveys and conservation issues. Ann is also an active volunteer for the California Native Plant Society. She lives in Sonoma, and spends some of each summer studying plants in the Eastern Sierra.

Although our walks will be at a leisurely pace, and over level to moderately steep terrain, two to three miles/day, please note that this seminar takes place at elevations of 9,000 to 10,000 feet above sea level. Before beginning this seminar, at least 24 hours of acclimation at an elevation of 6,000 to 7,000 feet is highly advisable. Those restricted to lower elevations should not enroll. Anyone with a history of heart, ear, or respiratory problems should consult with their doctor before choosing to participate in this class.

ITINERARY

Friday, August 8: Meet at 6:45 pm at the Mono Lake Committee Information Center & Bookstore in Lee Vining. We'll introduce ourselves, distribute course materials, discuss a few basics of plant identification and plant names, and then enjoy a slideshow preview of the habitats and some of the wildflowers that we expect to see on Saturday and Sunday. We'll also go over the details of where and when to meeting on Saturday and Sunday, which will be determined by where the flowers are at their best during our class. Sample locations from past workshops include the Hall Natural Area, the Warren Fork of Lee Vining Creek, the Tioga Lake area, and the Nunatak Trail area.

Saturday, August 9: Meet at 8:00 am at a location we will discuss on Friday night. Detailed directions will be provided Friday night. Bring a packed lunch, plenty of water, and other supplies as described below. Plan to hike 3–4 miles at a leisurely pace. Our day will end around 5:00 pm. During past classes, many of us have had dinner together at a local restaurant on Saturday night, which is totally optional.

Sunday, August 10: Meet at 8:00 am, location and directions to be provided Friday night. Bring a field lunch, water, and other supplies. We will visit one or two different locations, hiking about 2–3 miles total. We usually end the day around 3:00 pm so that folks have time to drive home.

High Altitude Cautions: Remember to bring (and drink!) lots of water because your body loses more water at high altitudes. Experts recommend that you begin drinking extra water as you drive to higher elevation in order to prevent dehydration and headaches. Also, the sun is rather fierce at high elevations, capable of burning even on cool days, so be sure to protect yourself thoroughly, using sunscreen, sunglasses, hat and don't forget a bandanna to protect the back of your neck. If you have a history of heart and or respiratory related problems, please consult with a doctor before joining this field seminar. We will spend most of our time at 9,000 to 10,000 feet in elevation.

MEALS

Bring a packable picnic lunch and snacks for both days. On Saturday we'll definitely have lunch along the trail, and it's likely we'll do the same on Sunday.

TO BRING

- lunch, both days
- plenty of water
- notebook or clipboard & paper
- hat, bandanna
- camera and binoculars (optional)
- 10X hand lens
- field guide
- sunscreen
- mosquito repellent
- pens & pencils
- sunglasses
- light, portable field chair (optional)

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

There are *many* books on the Eastern Sierra. Here are some to consider, depending on your special interests and budget. Most of these are available at the Mono Lake Committee Bookstore.

Smith, Genny. *Sierra East*. UC Press, 2000.

A well-illustrated, thorough introduction to the geology, weather and climate, plants, arthropods, fishes, amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals of the Eastern Sierra. Now available in paperback.

Whitney, Stephen. *A Sierra Club Naturalist's Guide to the Sierra Nevada*. Sierra Club Books, 1979.
Good background for the entire Sierra, however, it has limited coverage of the Eastern Sierra.

Wiese, Karen. *Sierra Nevada Wildflowers*. Falcon Guide, 2000.
Good photos arranged by flower color. Includes many of the plants we will see on our walks.

Munz, Philip A. *Introduction to California Mountain Wildflowers*. (edited by Dianne Lake and Phyllis Faber), 2003.
Munz's original guide has been thoroughly revised, with many new photos, updated information.

Blackwell, Laird R. *Wildflowers of the Eastern Sierra & Adjoining Mojave Desert & Great Basin*. Lone Pine Publishing, 2002.
Some like this book for its broad habitat coverage, however, photos are of variable quality and the inclusion of many non-native "weeds" is puzzling.

Neihaus and Ripper. *Pacific States Wildflowers*. Houghton Mifflin, 1976.
Drawings, some in color; no shrubs or trees; covers California, Oregon, and Washington; not "Jepsonized."

Weeden, Norman F. *A Sierra Nevada Flora*. Wilderness Press, 1996.
No photos but useful for those who have keying experience. Includes almost all plants we will see in the high country. Recently reprinted, so date may differ.



Mono Lake Committee Field Seminars

P.O. Box 29 • Lee Vining, CA 93541 • (760) 647-6595 • www.monolake.org