



NEVADA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

Connie Douglas, Lifelong Student

by Lily Rice

The rank and file of our society is composed of people from all levels of botanical expertise. Professional botanists bring renown and global recognition through their works. I would argue it is those on the opposite end, the passionate amateurs who are the past, present, and future of our group. For this final issue, we learn about Connie Douglas, amateur native plant admirer, and lifelong convert to broadening her horizons.

Connie Douglas grew up in Reno, Nevada. Her interest with the natural sciences began in her twenties when she spent her time fishing. During her periods of piscine-solitude, she began to notice the complex webs connecting separate animal groups. Fishing turned into birdwatching which turned into a lifelong passion she still holds, maintaining a membership in the Audubon society. Her friends encouraged an appreciation for plants which eventually led to her joining the Nevada Native Plant Society in the 1980s. Since then, Connie has kept busy both in and out of the Society. A student for life, Connie has taken advantage of the noncredit courses offered through the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of Nevada Reno since 2009. Additionally, Connie spent most of her career devoted to increasing access to information through her position as a librarian for Washoe County. Within the Society, Connie has served a variety of roles.

Currently, she is the Society's Archivist, but she has led several field trips and mailed out the Newsletter back when snail mail was our method of dissemination.

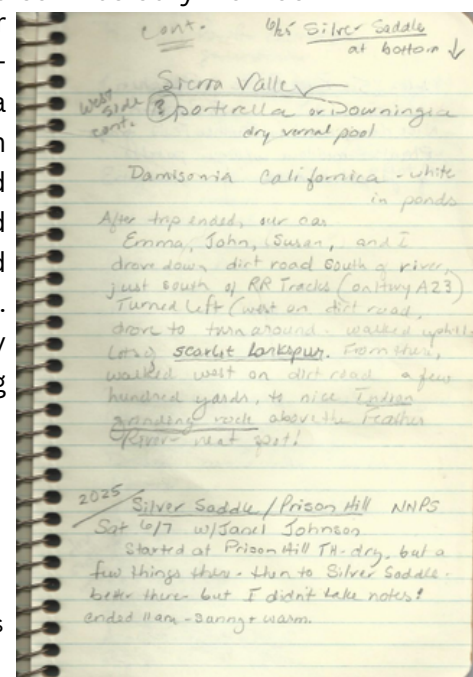
As an amateur admirer of the living world, building up your knowledge base can be the most difficult part of your journey; often you must rely on those around you.

Lily: "Were there any early members who particularly influenced or inspired you?"

Connie: "Margaret Williams. I knew her when I started in the group and we'd go to her house for little field trips or meetings; and of course, Jerry Tiehm. Whenever I go out on a field trip with Jerry I'd see a bunch of new stuff. One more person was Gary Monroe.

Gary was another one who just always had such a strong interest in native plants and going out and finding them and identifying them... Yeah, so Gary Monroe was a big influence for me."

Excerpt from Connie's
field notebook
©Connie Douglas



In my interview with John Weiser, John also mentioned Gary and his field expeditions as a strong influence on his time within the Society. Connie sought out knowledge from these other influential members, which developed her identifying skills. To aid in identification and assist in the edification of copious scientific names, Connie keeps rigorous notes of the flora she encounters while out on field trips.

Lily: “What were your biggest challenges in your journey as a botanist?”

Connie: “I have a definite lack of knowledge of botanical terms. I'm bad about families [but] I don't have a problem learning botanical names. I enjoy learning them and learning how to pronounce them and I get so annoyed when people say something like, “that's a Queen Anne's Lace” well, come on, that can be 15 different plants, give me a scientific name. I want [scientific names] because that defines it for me. I know I was that way many years ago too. I just didn't have space in my brain, but then at some point I said, no, I need to learn these names.”

Lily: “So, we talked about your greatest challenges, now, what are your greatest personal achievements [in] your time as an amateur plant enjoyer?”

Connie: “My personal achievement... is just learning to recognize plants. I love going on the native plant trips because other people know more, and know less than I do, so you learn from each other, right?”

The desire to pass on information is a main pillar of what makes groups like NVNPS so successful. Enthusiastic newcomers, as Connie once was, absorb the passion from their more-experienced contemporaries and eventually become that same “influential member” for someone else later on down the road.

Lily: “what advice would you give to today's members about carrying the mission forward?”

Connie: “Well, I would say thank you first to



Connie with *Delphinium*

all those people who have come before and the people who currently keep the society going. Continue to take up those roles of stewardship, publicity, field trips and programs.”

Lily: “What legacy do you hope NVNPS leaves for future generations of plant enthusiasts and conservationists?”

Connie: “Again, education. I think educating people as to what's out there and what we need to do to protect our native plants; [and] to encourage our government agencies to protect them.”

Lily: “If you had a message to the public about why native plants are important, what would you say?”

Connie: “I would say because existence, our lives, on the earth are so magnified... by understanding our native surroundings and learning more about them.”

With all of Connie's emphasis on self-education it should come as no surprise that she enjoys being a botanical liaison to the public; with her background she understands what it is like to learn without the guidance of a teacher. In one story she recounted volunteering at the Earth Day table where a person wanting to share their appreciation of Nevada's floristic beauty proclaimed their love of the purple waves of

[cheat]grass along the foothills. As more and more people find solace in the breathtaking vistas of Nevada's wild spaces it's important we give them a nonjudgemental space to understand the importance of native habitats and the threat invasive species like cheatgrass pose.

Lily: "How has public interest in Native plants changed since NVNPS began?"

Connie: "I think there's more interest and there's more awareness among people, and part of that is the reason we try to go to events and do things to inform people."

Overcoming plant blindness is often the biggest challenge when it comes to reaching the public. So many people have been unconsciously trained to see plants as background instead of main actors within our lives. Whether an inherent part of human psychology or heavily influenced by culture, plant blindness studies have found humans perform poorer in identifying plants over animals in rapid image sequences (Balas & Momsen, 2014).

Lily: "Have you found being at these events trying to circumvent plant blindness, [that there] is something that works?"

Connie: "Well, you know, Emma has brought together a lot of good materials and particularly things with pictures that we can show people. Kind of a little quiz thing that she has set up to show off pictures of plants. You know, I really think it helps to teach people..."

Lily: "Is one of your favorite parts of being a [member] of NVNPS the public dialogue?"

Connie: "Oh yeah, I think so, yeah."

Lily: "I have one final question for you, Connie, and then I'll let you go about your evening. What actions do you think Nevadans should take to protect Nevada's native habitats, especially in regard to the threats the state has seen this past year?"

Connie: "I think we need to keep getting out to those areas and using wild spaces and our trails... being active there and letting our

government... know that you appreciate trails. Let your voice be known: whether you go to public hearings or fill out a comment form, try to get your voice heard... Just help to build more awareness. Among your friends and let them know about these spaces that maybe are in danger."

From a growing amateur botanist to another, thank you all for reading along on this 50th anniversary founding members column. As a recent addition to this impassioned group, it has been an honor to learn more about what makes Nevada, its flora, and its people so special. Thank you to Alison for encouraging me to write for the paper, thank you to Emma for your helpful insights, and finally thank you to Jim, Jerry, John, Rose, Jan, and Connie for the conversations.

Citation: Balas, B., & Momsen, J. L. (2014). Attention "blinks" differently for plants and animals. *CBE—LSE*, 13(3).



Connie resting in a meadow along the Mount Rose trail

Featured plant: *Taraxia tanacetifolia*, tansyleaf evening primrose

by Emma Wynn

Taraxia tanacetifolia, tansyleaf evening primrose, is a plant that brings me a great deal of joy. Its vibrant yellow flowers, sitting atop a bed of lacy leaves makes me smile whenever I encounter it. The fact that this sunny flower thrives in cracked, drying mud, creates a striking contrast that adds to the pleasure of finding it. The binomial name, *Taraxia tanacetifolia*, rolls smoothly off the tongue, adding to its charm and finally it is easy to identify!

Tansyleaf evening primrose is a low growing, perennial with a rosette of basal leaves and a tuft of central flowers. It lacks stems. The leaves are 5-20 cm long and 1-3.5 cm wide. The blades range from narrowly to broadly lanceolate or oblanceolate with sinuate-pinnatifid margins. The slender petioles range from 1/2 to nearly as long as the blades. The leaves are covered with dense, short hairs which give a bluish cast to the leaves. It has four yellow petals which age to a red-purplish color. The petals range from 10-16 mm long with rounded to blunt tips.

The stamens are unequal in length, with the longest about 1/2 the length of the petals. The style is longer than the stamens and the stigma as is globose.

Tansyleaf evening primrose may be found in moist soil, which dries later in the season, on receding shorelines, in meadows, swales, roadsides, and along riverbanks in the sagebrush plains or in ponderosa pine forests. It is often found in large populations and can be the most abundant and colorful plant in receding shoreline habitats.

I tried to find the etymology of the

genus name. According to *California Plant Names: Latin and Greek Meanings and Derivations - An Annotated Dictionary of Botanical and Biographical Etymology* compiled by Michael L. Charters "Tarax'ia: so named because it had leaves similar to *Leontodon taraxacoides*. The Greek word taraxia means "eye disorder." Other words which this epithet may be related to are taraxis, "disorder" or "tumult," and a-taraxis, "tranquility," or "absence of disorder." The name was originally published by John Torrey and Asa Gray, and clearly has some relationship to the name of the dandelion, *Taraxacum*." The species epithet, *tanacetifolia* means with leaves like *Tanacetum* (tansy).

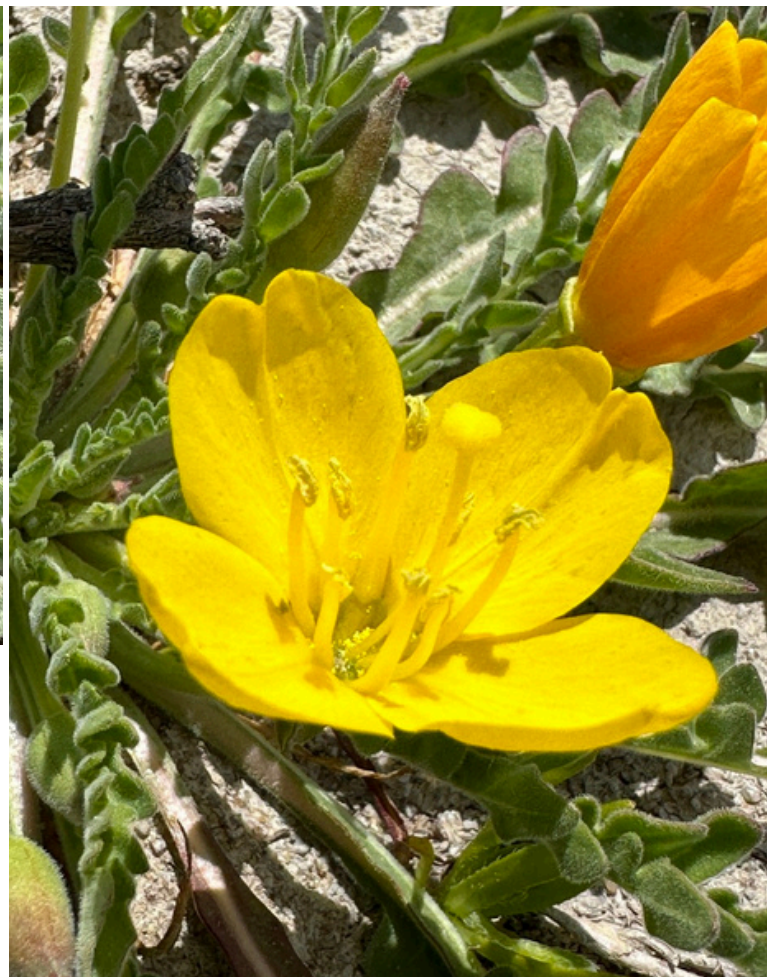
Note: *Taraxia tanacetifolia* is the currently accepted name, it has had several synonyms including *Camissonia breviflora*, *C. tanacetifolia*, *C. tanacetifolia* ssp. *tanacetifolia*, *Oenothera breviflora*, *O. tanacetifolia*, *T. breviflora*, *C. tanacetifolia* ssp. *tanacetifolia*, over the decades.



Entire form of *T. tanacetifolia* ©Gary Munroe



Leaves close-up ©Emma Wynn



Flower close-up ©Emma Wynn



Habitat close-up ©Emma Wynn



Superbloom of *Taraxia tanacetifolia* ©Margaret Williams

Margaret Williams Grantee Report

by Samantha Ingram, CalBG PhD Student

My first field season as a PhD student was both remarkable and unforgettable. I feel incredibly fortunate to have received financial support to cover the costs of fieldwork and labwork during this first year of research.

My dissertation focuses on *Ericameria parryi*, a widespread shrub in the sunflower family (Asteraceae) that includes twelve described varieties distributed across the western United States. This summer, I successfully collected six of those twelve varieties, including three that are endemic to California (vars. *imula*, *latior*, and *vulcanica*). Two additional varieties (vars.

nevadensis and *monocephala*) were especially exciting to collect due to their type localities being in Nevada.

One of the highlights of the season was hiking Mount Rose in mid-August, where I gathered field samples among spectacular mountain views. It was one of the most memorable hikes of the summer. Along the way, I had the opportunity to meet people curious about my field press and research, leading to great conversations about botany and the importance of botanical research.

By the end of the season, I had collected a total of 60 samples representing six *E. parryi* varieties. These collections will form



E. parryi flowers and Samantha collecting in the field

I want to extend a heartfelt thank you to the Nevada Native Plant Society (NVNPS) for the generous financial support that continues to fund my lab work. This support allowed me to accomplish far more in my first year than I ever could have imagined.

Conservation news:

Will Congress Take Charge of Public Land Disposals?

by Rose Strickland

Recent attempts to sell off our public lands this year have been met with broad-based opposition in Western states and from public land supporters all over the country. Recently, the Administration has nominated Steve Pearce as director of the Bureau of Land Management. A former congressman from New Mexico, Pearce has been a strong advocate for prioritizing resource extraction and privatizing or selling off all public lands.

In response to the sell-off threats, two Congress members, Ryan Zinke (R-CO) and Gabe Vasquez (D-NM) have introduced a bipartisan bill, entitled the Public Lands in Public Hands Act. 9 other Representatives are sponsoring the bill, including 5 Republicans and 4 Democrats, mostly from the West. The bill has been referred to two committees. See: [congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/718/cosponsors](https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/718/cosponsors)

The 4-page bill would ban the sale or transfer of most public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service except under specific conditions and where required under

previous laws. The bill also requires Congressional approval for disposals of publicly accessible federal land tracts over 300 acres and for public land tracts over 5 acres if accessible via a public waterway.

In our August NVNPS newsletter, we expressed our opposition to these attacks in an article "Public Lands Not For Sale." We urged our members to contact their Congressional representatives to let them know how much we appreciate the public lands for their biodiversity and their social, cultural, recreational, and economic values and requesting that they do every thing in their power to protect our public lands.

While depending on this bill requiring Congressional approvals of public land disposals may not be the best or only solution to these repeated attacks on public lands, it is an opportunity we do not presently have for Congress itself to preserve and protect our public lands. Please contact the Nevada delegation and ask them to support and consider co-sponsoring H.R. 718 to keep public lands in public hands.

Can Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge be Saved... Again?

by Rose Strickland

Once again, the minerals underlying the Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge in southern Nevada have attracted a mining proposal to drill 43 holes up to 200 feet deep, at a site about 3 miles west of the Refuge across the California state boundary. The St. Cloud Mining Company proposes to mine a low-value clay called Zeolite, which is used for various applications including kitty litter,

according to the Amargosa Conservancy.

After massive opposition by Refuge supporters and the surrounding communities, the Nevada Bureau of Land Management (BLM) not only rejected a mining proposal by Rover Metals for lithium which also involved drilling dozens of holes into the water table, just north of the Refuge, but also initiated a process for permanent mining

withdrawal to protect groundwater and groundwater-dependent ecosystems on public lands around the Refuge and local communities whose wells are also dependent on the aquifer.

Last May, a broad coalition of 10 non-profit organizations submitted 60 pages of comments on a draft environmental assessment written by the BLM's Barstow Office in California, on their concerns about multiple failures in the document to meet the requirements of the National Environmental Quality Act. However, the California BLM issued a Record of Decision approving the mining proposal after finding no significant environmental impacts of the proposed drilling on the shallow groundwater table, on which endangered Refuge plants and animals depend on for their survival and on other Refuge resources.

Last month, the Amargosa Conservancy and the Center for Biological Diversity filed a formal notice of their intent to sue the BLM for violating the Endangered Species Act by permitting mining exploration drilling on public lands adjacent to the Refuge. The legal notice concerns three federally protected plants - Amargosa niterwort, Ash Meadows gumplant, and spring-loving centaury - that are reliant on groundwater and grow near the proposed drilling sites. The plants could face extinction if aquifer levels drop, according to the Amargosa Conservancy.



Amargosa niterwort (left), Ash Meadows gumplant (bottom right), spring-loving centaury (top)

©Larry Lodwick

Society updates

Grant applications due

The NVNPS Margaret Williams Research Grants provide up to two annual awards of no more than \$2,000 each to support basic botanical research on Nevada's native or naturalized flora, spanning topics from individual species to whole ecosystems. Proposals—due February 1, 2026—must be concise and include a title, objectives, methods, expected products, applicant qualifications, and a budget, with a faculty letter required for students. See our website for more details: nvnps.org/grants.

Wild Nevada filming was a success!

PBS Reno's *Wild Nevada* filmed a segment with former NVNPS president Janel Johnson that will air in January. Janel took the film crew up Prison Hill this summer to celebrate our 50th anniversary.

50th anniversary merchandise still available

The temporary online store to sell limited edition NVNPS merch can still be found here: [NVNPS Bonfire Store](https://nvnps.org/bonfire-store).

Monthly meetings back after the holidays

Monthly meetings are on holiday break until February 5th.

Bylaw revisions in the New Year

All members will be receiving an email in the New Year asking for approval to update our Society bylaws, so keep an eye out!

Welcome new members!

A special thank you to our new members who joined in October and November:

- Lara Derasary, Ely
- Lisa Burton, Spring Creek
- Kim Brock, Reno
- Shannon Murphy, Reno
- Deborah Whitehouse, Reno
- Lyndsey Langsdale, Reno
- Ceana Olson, Reno
- Melissa Sinka, Gardnerville – welcome back!
- Lexi Settles, Reno
- Allison Peterson-Park, Reno
- Harrison Peterson-Park, Reno
- Brenna Glimp, Las Vegas
- Casey Flinspach, Las Vegas



Janel Johnson with the crew of PBS Reno's *Wild Nevada* (Chris Orr with cameramen Tim and Josh)
©Emma Wynn

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