

Xasáuan Today

Because Nature Bats Last

Wildflower of the Week: Silver Lupine



<http://xasauantoday.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/dsc02536.jpg>

Well, we've fallen a little behind in choosing a wildflower of the week, so we're going to make up for it by choosing silver lupine (*Lupinus albifrons*): one of California's most ubiquitous flowers. Although it leaks across the border a little into Southern Oregon and Northern Baja, this perennial shrub is a true Alta Californian. These are blooming near Soberanes Creek (<http://xasauantoday.com/2011/05/16/soberanes-wildflowers/>) in Garrapata State Park – one of the many State parks scheduled to be “closed” (<http://xasauantoday.com/2011/05/14/biennial-park-closure-list-released/>) this year.



<http://xasauantoday.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/dsc04050.jpg>

The name “silver” comes from the silver tint of the leaves. These are blooming along the Boronda Trail (<http://xasauantoday.com/2010/05/16/boronda-cisco/>).



<http://xasauantoday.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/dsc06019.jpg>

The silver leaves make *L. albifrons* easily distinguishable from Yellow Bush Lupine (*Lupinus arboreus*), the common bush lupine of our coastal terraces – many of which produce blue/purple, rather than yellow, flowers. Note the smooth green, silver-free leaves of this *L. arboreus* coming into bloom on Granite Point at Pt. Lobos (<http://xasauantoday.com/2010/05/02/pt-lobos-wildflowers/>).



<http://xasauantoday.files.wordpress.com/2010/03/dsc03252.jpg>

A member of the Pea Family (the *Fabaceae*), silver lupine can be found blooming in our area from soon after the fall rains begin, on into the summer. It prefers dry hillsides and the disturbed soil along the edges of roads and trails. This one is growing in the proposed East Molera Wilderness (<http://xasauantoday.com/2010/03/28/proposed-molera-wilderness/>) with Pico Blanco in the background.



<http://xasauantoday.files.wordpress.com/2010/04/dsc03494.jpg>

Silver lupine's flowers generally range from sky blue to magenta ...



<http://xasuantoday.files.wordpress.com/2010/05/dsc03989.jpg>

But there are always exceptions. These (<http://xasuantoday.com/2010/05/09/mt-carmel-in-may/>), growing on the slopes of Devil's Peak (<http://xasuantoday.com/2012/02/22/skinner-ridge-devils-peak/>) in the Ventana Wilderness, are white.



<http://xasauantoday.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/dsc05766.jpg>

Silver lupine is toxic to livestock, but dearly loved by a wide variety of insects, including these bordered plant bugs (*Largus californicus*?). It is also highly prized by bees and is suspected of being very important to native pollinators. Silver lupine is, in fact, one of only three species of lupine that hosts San Francisco's extremely endangered Mission Blue Butterfly (*Icaricia icarioides missionensis*), whose range is now restricted to Twin Peaks, San Bruno Mountain and a small area around Ft. Baker. These butterflies are notable for having a symbiotic relationship with a species of ant. The caterpillars secrete a sweet substance that the ants find delectable and, in return, the ants protect the caterpillars from predators. The caterpillars also absorb the lupine's toxins, making the adult butterflies unpalatable to most birds. They do not have a defense, however, against the loss of the lupine they depend on – and the urbanization of their territory hasn't left much lupine behind.



<http://xasauantoday.files.wordpress.com/2009/05/dsc01253.jpg>

As a legume, silver lupine is handy for building up the soil, as it is capable of fixing nitrogen from the air. These were vigorously growing and vibrantly blooming in an area burned down to bare soil by the Chalk Fire (<http://xasauantoday.com/2008/09/28/chalk-fire/>) only seven months before.



<http://xasauantoday.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/sldcsf2.jpg>

Silver lupine blooming on the south face of the Double Cone.

This entry was posted on Monday, March 26th, 2012 at 10:16 pm and is filed under Big Sur, Insects, Plants, Santa Lucias, Wildflowers. You can follow any responses to this entry through the RSS 2.0 feed. You can leave a response, or trackback from your own site.

5 Responses to *Wildflower of the Week: Silver Lupine*

eastofedencook says:

March 27, 2012 at 8:15 am

Lupine is a peak of early spring and a reminder that yes, we most certainly do have seasons here along the coast! This last weekend I saw not only lupine but California poppies along River Road.

eastofedencook says:

March 27, 2012 at 8:22 am

Early spring has arrived with lupine and California poppies! Just last weekend I saw them busting forth in a riot of color along River Road.

Chris L says:

April 2, 2012 at 12:40 am

Love your wildflower reports. Here's an addendum — with some beautiful photos by Debi — from upper Rocky Creek.

<http://redeggallery.squarespace.com/sarhentaruc/2012/3/29/the-world-globes-itself-in-a-drop-of-dew.html>

Kurt Wx says:

April 23, 2012 at 12:06 pm

I found a tiny seedling of this bush lupine two years ago along a road cut in Big Sur and thought I should "rescue" it and bring it to my house. I yanked it out of the soil and damaged all of its roots and just stuck in the soil outside my front door. It wilted and nearly died, but suddenly it doubled in size in a month, doubled again the next month then doubled the next month. It began to block the way in and out of the front door but I loved its symmetrical silvery sphere shape of dazzling leaves, and the next spring it became covered in stunning blue enormous flower spikes. I could not bring myself to "prune" the thing, and now it is approximately five feet in diameter, again covered in enormous deep blue flower spikes that bees love. It has produced a single offspring which I've planted in the terrible coastal sand soil in the front yard where it has begun to double in size. Thanks for this great blog entry. If anyone would like a specimen for their own property, I highly recommend this plant.

George Davis says:

October 22, 2012 at 8:42 am

Your wildflower photography is spectacular! I feel like I'm right there down on the ground only inches away! I can almost smell them from over here, some 2,000 miles away. Brings back memories of the time I lived in Monterey some 30 years ago.

Thank you so much!

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