



## **2024 Annual Report From The Las Cruces Chapter of The Native Plant Society of New Mexico**

### **Officers**

President - Gordon Berman  
Vice President - Matthew Becker  
Treasurer - Mary Steigman  
Recording Secretary - Cheryl Beymer  
Membership Secretary - John Freyermuth  
State Board Representative - Jackye Meinecke

### **Councils and Committees**

Communications Council Co-Chairs - John Freyermuth and Mary Selfridge  
Conservation Chair - Ken Steigman  
Dripping Springs Garden Interim Chair - Ken Steigman  
Hospitality Chair - Jamie Blair  
Programs Chair - Matthew Becker  
Student Grant Interim Chair - Joan Woodward  
State Conference Co-Chairs - Jamie Blair and Mary Steigman

### **Outgoing**

We are a better organization thanks to:

- Joan Woodward for years of service as our State Board Representative and for serving as co-chair to kick off the 2025 State Conference. Always ready with a smile, a standup comic's delivery, and a warm welcome for all, Joan continues to serve as Student Grant Interim Chair.
- Ken Steigman brought energy, expertise, and enjoyment to his dual roles as Vice President and Program Chair. Ken found engaging speakers, led field trips, gave public voice to our ecological mission, and expanded our involvement in new projects. Ken continues to serve as Conservation Chair and Dripping Springs Garden Interim Chair.
- Lyn Hoffmann's efforts helped us reach out to the community at large by creating our Facebook page, posting photographs and narrating our journeys. Lyn also used her considerable academic and research skills to help shift BLM to a greener focus.

## Incoming

During February's meeting, we searched for a successor to serve as Vice President. A face we barely recognized, a name we hadn't spoken, a "what luck" moment when Matt Becker offered to help. Matt brings enthusiasm, dedication, and creativity as VP and as Program Chair -- our "new Ken". And, we get his Mom, Mary Selfridge, as she steps in to Co-Chair the Communications Council. Jackye Meinecke brings experience and energy as our new State Board Representative. Jamie Blair is the mortar filling gaps in Hospitality and state conference planning and whatever else needs doing.

## Talks and Walks

Led by Ken Steigman and Gordon Berman, we began the year with a well-attended walk up Soledad/Bar Canyon. Thick tree stands near the trailhead and at the trail's end and sporadic cactus clusters focused our attention - oaks of uncertain lineage, hackberries, big tooth maple, mountain mahoganies, Mexican buckeyes, scarlet hedgehogs, New Mexico rainbows - all inviting return trips to catch them in color as flowering and fruiting hosts for deer, squirrels, butterflies, bugs.

In February, Matt Becker led locals and a migratory flock of snow birds through the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park with its rich diversity of grasses, shrubs, forbs, agaves, sotol, and cacti - yet seemingly devoid of weeds and invasives.

Gardening enthusiasts greeted landscape designer Leslie Bezner during her March presentation "Landscaping Your Backyard". Audience participation planted questions; Leslie sprouted answers. Ken led a colorful field trip showcasing primrose, lyre leaf jewel flowers, Texas stork's bills, and globe mallows on either side of Slot Canyon which has become a favored destination for many.

NMSU grad and barefoot Botany Professor at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada, Root Gorelick returned to Las Cruces in April and shared with us his exploratory discoveries - Cacti of Anthony Gap. Those who heeded his call to the limestone outcrop north of Hwy 404 were rewarded with spectacular blooms of *Glandulicactus uncinatus* and Texas rainbows - both species heavily populated within narrow confines.

Matt Becker and Gordon Beerman led the scheduled field trip to the White Sands National Park Dune Trail. All but buried canopies of Cottonwoods captured our curiosity. Rich Spellenberg explained their likely development - from interdunal sprouts to trees keeping pace ahead of shifting sands.

In May, Rachel Burke spoke to us behalf of Agave Restoration Initiative and Bat Conservation International - groups dedicated to maintaining healthy populations of native agaves and bats - both plagued by climate change adversity and spirit world harvesting. Supported by her bat woman field work (plus maps, charts, research), Rachel and her groups help indigenous villagers in Mexico raise agave crops sufficient in yield to turn a profit margin from an increasingly popular spiritual indulgence, to nourish migratory bats pollinating their paths to southern New Mexico, and to harvest agave seeds for generations to come.

A few days later, Chapter members indulged themselves with a pot luck meal at the Aguirre Springs Group Site. Special thanks to the Blairs (Jamie and Robert) and the Steigmans (Mary and Ken) for organizing.

As stakeholders of the Organ Mountains Desert-Peaks National Monument, our Chapter paid close attention in June to BLM's adoption of a new Resource Management Plan. We emphasized a limit on cattle grazing, preservation of natural resources, and remediation of lands damaged by commercial excesses.

Ken and Mary Steigman led a leisurely hike up Little Cherry Creek through balmy blooms, birds, butterflies - followed by friends with picnic benefits.

Rather than test spontaneous combustion on a mid-July field trip, Mary and Ken Steigman hosted a plant party at their wondrous home in Picacho Hills. Food, drink, clouds, shade, flowers, mountainous vistas, birds calling!! Do I hear a Motion to make this an annual event?

At our August meeting, U S Forest Service workers Adam McCullough and Spencer Johnson shared their pleasure exploring and tending the Lincoln National Forest. Their colorful slides of native plants and mineralized spring waters generated enthusiasm for a follow-up guided hike to Bluff Springs between Cloudcroft and Sunspot. The creek was running, the flowers were blooming, the bugs didn't bite. If you went, you're probably going back.

September's presentation revisited an all-too-common theme - "Understanding and Managing Dryland Ecosystem Transitions". The goals of scientifically designed efforts underway on the Jornada Range hope to restore native grasses, reduce wind-blown erosion, and reduce encroaching shrubbery.

Matt Becker led September's field trip (our longest of the year) to Valles Canyon, a remote outpost within Organ Mountain Desert-Peaks National Monument. Grazing cattle had apparently been removed from the trail. Hopefully, their removal will be permanent. Little noticed but well-defined grinding holes bore into an off-trail rock shelf midway on our journey. Further along, we were all delighted by the petroglyph gallery within the narrow confines of vertical canyon walls - a convenient place to rest, lunch, take photographs, imagine what the glyphs depicted, and then retrace our steps.

In October, following her week-long immersive study of bees (a tutorial led by the inspirational Olivia Messinger Carril), Rachel Giannini, Assistant Professor at NMSU, presented a colorful, informative, and amusing slide show of New Mexico's backyard bees. Often solitary and hidden from view, native bees pollinate our plants and devour pesky bugs. Rachel encouraged us to recognize and leave undisturbed plant detritus, tiny sand burrows, and rocky crevices as reproductive nesting grounds.

Thanks to successful funding efforts, our student grants in November awarded \$500 to undergraduate Mickie Barraza for her study of side oats grama and the \$1,000 John Freyermuth/Carolyn Gressitt Award to postgraduate Sara Isabel Ruiz Flores for her study of sotol.

Matt Becker led November's field trip to the Mesilla Bosque State Park. The Park's rich habitat includes mammoth cottonwoods, river bank willows, vast fields of butterfly-loving milkweed, corn dog shaped cattails, ground covers of alkaline globemallows, and medicinally valued Yerba Mansa. Plus, a solitary wild asparagus plant discovered by Matt.

Throughout much of the year, we continued to nurture the Dripping Springs Visitor Center Garden. Led by Ken Steigman, we installed and repaired drip lines (all credit to Ken and Craig Severy), repaired the water feature (Craig mostly), weeded, pruned and lopped overgrown vegetation, added native plants, installed signage, and smiled as visitors praised the Garden's beauty. We have a persistent group of eager, monthly volunteers.

Cheryl Beymer, devoting hours of time on a weekly basis, helped out at NMSU's world class Chihuahuan Desert Herbarium under its Curator, Zachary Rogers. Zach and Dr. Sara Fuentes-Soriano graciously made their NMSU classroom available for each of our monthly meetings. Wonderful hosts, brilliant botanists, even better friends.

In December, we went dormant

Gordan Berman, President