

Early wildflower season in Lake Tahoe



Wildflowers in Washoe Meadows State Park. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

MEYERS – Wildflower season in Lake Tahoe is going to be a bit unusual this year because of the drought. There is less of everything now compared to this time last year.

Lisa Berry with the California Native Plant Society on June 1 led two dozen people on an excursion to find wildflowers in Washoe Meadows State Park. And while there were plenty to see, it was better with an experienced guide because some of them are so tiny the average person would just walk on by.

But two flowers that might be more prolific because of the drought are death camas and Sierra wall flowers, according to Berry. She added, that this area is already in midseason when

it comes to wildflowers.



Lisa Berry shows the various aspects of a flower.

Some people were rather serious during the three-hour trek as they took copious notes and a multitude of photos. Others admitted to having guidebooks they didn't find useful, while some said they identify flowers by nothing more than color.

"All of these wildflowers do not like a controlled environment," Berry told the group. This means they want freedom to grow and not to be given water like one does to flowers at their home.

Sunday was also a lesson in anatomy as Berry went over the different parts of a flower that went well beyond flower, stem and petal. Berry talked about the long stock starwort having "a superior ovary." There are four main parts of a flower's anatomy – pistils, stamens, petals, and sepals. Those are all important so they can reproduce.

Nuttall's larkspur is one of the taller flowers with its deep lavender petals. This is the most common larkspur.



Suzanne Stone uses a discovery scope to better see small flowers.

For some of the smaller flowers Berry passed around a discovery scope which magnifies the image. The anatomy is much easier to understand this way.

Wild strawberries are tucked just off the trail and about 12 feet from where a distinct bear paw print has been left in the mud. And while this fruit, which is part of the rose family, is edible by humans, usually critters get to them before people ever can.

The hike is also a lesson in the importance of vernal pools – like the one that sits in front of the old Celio barn in one of the meadows, as well as fens that filter out sediment.

Some of the other flowers along the walk included graceful phlox, paintbrushes, star lily, cinquefoil, ladies tresses, dwarf monkey flower and pussypaws.

Washoe Meadows Community organized the free excursion.

“We like to get people to know about the park,” Lynne Paulson with the community group told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Washoe Meadows Community is fighting California State Parks over its desire to move part of Lake Tahoe Golf Course into the park area. Berry said it would be a mistake to encroach on this area with its wild flora.

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Notes:

- Lisa Berry is teaching Wildflower Hikes at Lake Tahoe Community College in July. The course number is WLD-137C.
- The Lake Tahoe chapter of the California Native Plant Society is online.
- More info about Washoe Meadows Community is online.