

"NEWS FLASH"

PROSPECTS FOR 2018 SEASON FADING FAST

By
Michael Powell
With
Marsha Neill

Marsha and I returned to the Reserve on 23 Jan '18 with three objectives: 1) Install as many of the new rain gauges as possible, 2) Re-inventorying the monitoring plot inventoried on 18 Jan '18, and 3) Inventory other permanent monitoring plots.

Based on today's monitoring plots inventorying results, my expectations for the upcoming wildflower season has faded substantially. The re-inventorying of the plot reported on in my last report resulted in only six additional poppy cotyledons being located. These six are added to the four poppy cotyledons located in the first inventory but one of the original counted cotyledons turned out to be a different species so there are only nine known poppy cots growing within the one square meter plot. A monitoring plot located on the east ridge, off the north loop of the Antelope Trail, was also inventoried today. As reported in my previous report, I expected to find more poppy cotyledons in this area than in the first inventoried plot so it was totally unexpected and surprising that no poppy cotyledons were found. Now being fifteen days since the 8-9 January rainstorm, it is expected that poppy cotyledons should have emerged by this time. Again, a re-inventory of this plot in a few days is required to confirm today's results. It is obviously risky to make a prediction for the 1700 acre Poppy Reserve based on two point inventorying observations and further observations are needed, especially in areas that historically have had the best poppy color displays, but it can be said that the first indication is that the 8 January rainstorm did not trigger wide spread or large numbers of poppy seed germination and additional germination triggering rainstorms are needed for a good wildflower season this spring and that window of opportunity could be rapidly closing or has already closed. Although it is only anecdotal at this time, no expected poppy seed germination was observed following a few late winter rainstorms in past years. It is possible poppies are seasonal dormant. It does make sense. A poppy seed might say "Hey, if I germinate now, it is unlikely that I will have time to grow to a large plant with lots of blossoms, fruits, replacement seeds before I die so it is better if I take my chances and just wait for next winter."

There is another window of opportunity also closing; time spacing between rainstorms. Small plant seedlings seem to do fine if the rainstorms follows the germination triggering storm come within three to four weeks. For longer periods, we have observed young plants become stressed, start to wilt, and even die off. Currently, there are no rainstorms predicted for the Reserve through at least 3 Feb '18 and that is starting to push the limits for the young seedling plants that did germinate from the 8 Jan storm. Therefore, it is possible that even the poppy plants currently growing on the Reserve will be lost with no possibility for replacement germination. That doesn't bode well for any wildflower season at all.

The Reserve's other plant species continue to develop. Whereas it was difficult to find true leaves on the filaree seedlings during the previous visit on 18 Jan '18, now they can be widely observed five days later; even a few seedlings have multiple true leaves, see Figure 1. I'm not positive but believe true leaves are starting to form on the Fiddlenecks as well, Figure 2. True leaves can also be found on a few of the pygmy-leaved lupine seedlings, see Figure 3.

Rather surprisingly, a perennial sandaster plant was found along the Antelope Loop Trail still with a few open pink and yellow blossoms. Observations from previous visits had indicated that this species had gone to dormancy some time ago.

A few perennial jimson weed plants are now starting to grow new leaves.

The only other notable plant observation during this visit was the large numbers of new looking galls located on a few of the now dormant rabbit brush plants.

Although I didn't report any observations about the animal species we find on the Reserve in our first "News Flash", they are equal members of the Reserve's ecology and worthy of noting. Both the 18th and 23rd January were sunny, warm and having relatively mild winds. On both days, we observed a few harvester ant colonies with active ants. We also observed a dragonfly or damselfly on the 23rd but were unable to take a clear enough photograph of it to identify it. On both days, lizards were active. This raises the question "Is the Reserve's snake population also starting to break brumation?" Although we didn't directly observe either, Marsha believes she heard both meadowlark and quail calls. A few smaller unidentified birds were also observed flying about the Reserve. What appeared to be a raptor was observed flying just above the ground (even landing several times) on the southern flats west of the District Office. From its flight pattern, we tentatively identify it as a Northern Harrier. Harriers have been observed wintering on the Reserve during many years. We believe we saw one earlier in the winter but haven't seen it again during the most recent visits to the Reserve. I also saw a raptor pole sitting along Ave. K on my way to the Reserve. This large bird had a cream colored breast with brown speckles so I believe it was likely a red-tailed hawk. Noticeably missing was the painted lady butterfly. I haven't check our notes from past years but this butterfly species typically start showing up on the Reserve about this time each year. Because they seem to prefer near the top of Kitanemuk Vista Point and we didn't hike up that way, maybe we just missed them. A cotton tail rabbit was observed near the Visitor Center before is scooted off into the brush.

Well we installed one more new rain gauge during this visit. If I hadn't forgotten to bring the required adaptor plate made to mount the new rain gauges to the existing mounting stakes, we would have been able to install one more gauge when we visited the east ridge monitoring plot. During the 18th Jan visit, we installed both a new style rain gauge as well as an old style gauge near the maintenance yard weather station to obtain a direct comparison between both styles of collection rain gauges and the "official" digital rain gauge of the maintenance yard weather station. Figure 4 shows one of the new style rain gauges.

I'm going to attempt to prepare and post "News Flashes" for individual visits to the Reserve to report the major findings but won't promise to cover each and every Reserve visit. It would be valuable to receive feedback if these postings are enjoyed. My email address is: mfpowell@verizon.net

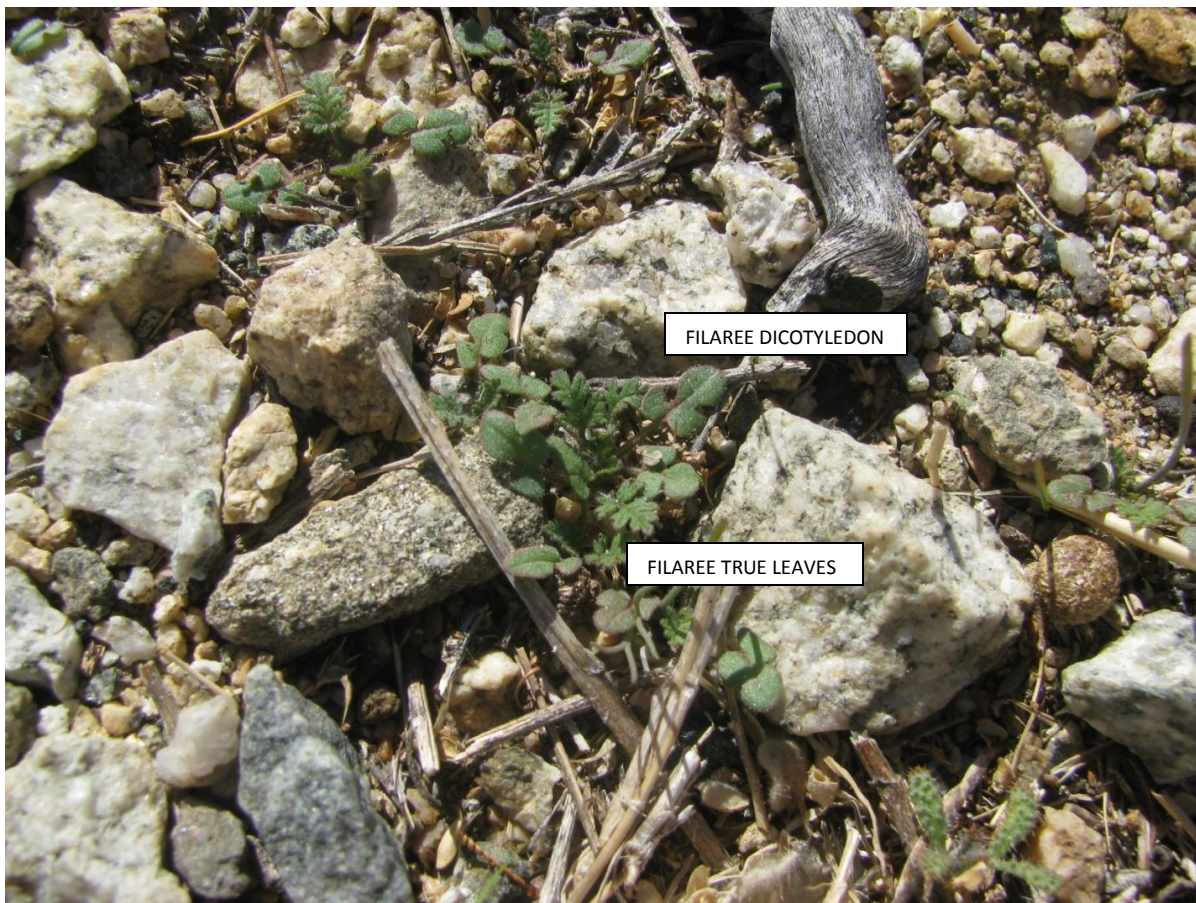


FIGURE 1: FILAREE SEEDLINGS WITH COTYLEDONS AND TRUE LEAVES



FIGURE 2: FIDDLENECK SEEDLINGS WITH COTYLEDONS AND POSSIBLY TRUE LEAVES



FIGURE 3: PYGMY-LEAVED LUPINE SEEDLING WITH COTYLEDONS AND TRUE LEAVES



FIGURE 4: NEW STYLE COLLECTION RAIN GAUGE