



ARTICLE

An Endangered Herb's Annual Checkup

Point Reyes National Seashore (<https://www.nps.gov/pore/>)



Sonoma spineflower is an endangered herb found in the sandy, well-drained grasslands of Marin County. For over 70 years, it was thought to be extinct until it was rediscovered near Abbotts Lagoon in 1980.

Meghan Garfink / Point Reyes National Seashore Association

August 2020 - Just like most of the rest of America, I've spent my summer months stuck inside. For this reason, when I was invited to help join the vegetation management crew to monitor plant species in Point Reyes National Seashore, I eagerly agreed. I'll take any excuse to spend the day along the coast.

Once a year for the last 15 years, conservation staff and volunteers have monitored the Sonoma spineflower: an endangered herb found in the sandy, well-drained grasslands of Marin County. For over 70 years, the Sonoma spineflower was thought to be extinct until it was rediscovered near Abbotts Lagoon in 1980. Now, annual surveys are helping illuminate why the plant is successful in certain plots of land and not others. There is some evidence suggesting that the flower survives best on soil types atop of historic sand dunes (like that of Abbotts Lagoon), though more research is necessary to support this hypothesis.

We spent the day laying out transects and counting plants in a small plot of ranch land overlooking the lagoon. I was shocked by how many individual plants we counted. With the knowledge that it was endangered, and previously thought to be extinct, I expected to count 10, MAYBE 20 plants in total, but there was so much spineflower that I had to watch my step to make sure I didn't step on it. In the end, we counted 4,662 plants!

Not only did this experience allow me to spend the day in my favorite park, but I also received some of the best news I've heard in awhile. This previously thought to be extinct, rare plant species is being well protected, studied, and cared for in Point Reyes, despite potential setbacks from COVID-19. The population we surveyed has fluctuated over the years, but there have been no significant declines overall. Based on the plots we surveyed, ecologists estimate the full population consists of around 279,720 plants this year, a little bit above the 15-year median population size. In addition, Point Reyes has seeded Sonoma spineflower in alternate plots in nearby parts of the park with similar soil types. With more than one population in more than one place, the species is now more likely to survive should any extreme events come along in the future.



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By Point Reyes National Seashore Association Science Communication Intern Meghan Garfink

For more information

- CA Department of Fish & Wildlife [Sonoma spineflower information](https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Plants/Endangered/Chorizanthe-valida) (<https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Plants/Endangered/Chorizanthe-valida>)
- Contact Point Reyes Vegetation/Wetland Ecologist [Lorraine Parsons](https://www.nps.gov/common/utilities/sendmail/sendemail.cfm?o=678AC9A99CDAA1B9AB8B12BDEA18A5BE6693569C12B18389&r=/articles/000/an-endangered-herbs-annual-checkup.htm) (<https://www.nps.gov/common/utilities/sendmail/sendemail.cfm?o=678AC9A99CDAA1B9AB8B12BDEA18A5BE6693569C12B18389&r=/articles/000/an-endangered-herbs-annual-checkup.htm>).

[See more from the Bay Area Nature & Science Blog](https://www.nps.gov/rlc/pacificcoast/blog.htm)
(<https://www.nps.gov/rlc/pacificcoast/blog.htm>).



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