

Plants = Life

"Our world is solar powered and plants are the generators. Without the spectacular array of trees, grasses, wildflowers, seaweeds, and microscopic plants, we would not exist. It's as simple as that.... Plants are the lungs and heart of the planet. They give us air and food and they give us beauty. Plants are life." - Entrance to the Sydney, Australia Botanic Garden

Extinction Is Forever

"Can we risk losing them (any organism)? Think about it this way. Would you risk flying on a plane with one rivet missing? Two? Three? How many rivets before you don't fly? How many species lost before our world becomes unsafe? How many will be left for our children and grandchildren?" - Paul Ehrlich

Today, 90-95% of California's wetlands are gone. The animals that relied on the plants in these wetlands are similarly diminished. Carpinteria Salt Marsh is one of the last remaining fully-functioning salt marshes on the California coast but it is threatened. One of these threats are non-native plants. These plants crowd out native plants and deprive our animals of their last vestiges of marsh habitat.

When these non-native plants grow in place of the native plants, the animals that have evolved to seek food and shelter from these plants die. At the Carpinteria Salt Marsh Nature Park we have burr clovers and sweet clovers from Europe covering up the seedlings of golden bush. Golden bush is a favored nectar plant of the western pigmy blue butterfly which is one of the smallest butterflies in the world. It is considered an endangered butterfly as there are few salt marshes left with the necessary plants to keep these butterflies alive.

Bermuda grass is another plant that does not allow the seeds of native plants germinate and actually grows over adult plants, covering the leaves, not allowing the plant to photosynthesize and steals the moisture from nearby plants. Cape or German ivy copies this lifestyle. Smilo grass, veldt grass and pampas grass all crowd out other plants, decrease the moisture going to the native plant, and supply no food or shelter for native animals. Kikuyu grass grows in the sand dunes, taking up the upper portion of the sand with roots and stems, blocking the paths of endangered globus dune beetles. When the grass grows, it creates an impenetrable mat that crowds out dune plants and keeps the tender leaves of dune plants from reaching the sand and rotting to become food for the dune beetles. If there is not enough for the dune beetles to eat, they will die off or move elsewhere depriving the rare legless lizard of one of their food sources and so the dominoes fall.

What can we do to prevent these problems in the salt marsh? Join us for monthly weed days when we pull these alien plants out. Another way to help is to not plant invasive garden plants. Santa Barbara County Weed Management Area has lists of garden plants that escape home gardens and wreak havoc in wild lands. November 3, 2003, the County of Santa Barbara is sponsoring a noxious weed seminar. For information on County events, you can call the agricultural commissioner at (805) 681-5600. To help at the Carpinteria Salt Marsh Nature Park please call (805) 684-8077.