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## Sudden Oak Death Blitz: Native oaks need our help

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On a recent wildflower walk, strolling along a backroad in a canyon near Lake Hennessey, our little troop spotted at least 30 species of wildflowers within two hours. Some were true California natives and some were exotic plants crowding and displacing the more delicate native plants. Along the way, I spotted something more ominous than the invasive exotic plants: a dying coast live oak.

The walk was organized by the Napa Chapter of the California Native Plant Society and informally guided by local naturalist Benjamin Parmeter. “Mike” as he prefers to be called, is known worldwide as an expert and author on birds. We had walked only a few yards when it became obvious Mike is also well-versed in California native plants.

Stepping up close to the wildflowers sprinkled on the hillside he told us the names of the plants, all the while listening and identifying birds by their songs alone:

“Purple sanicle, goldback fern, birdseye gilia, baby blue eyes — ooh, that was a pygmy owl!”

In all, I counted nine bird species he identified without seeing them: pileated woodpecker, flicker, acorn woodpecker, dark-eyed junco, orange crown warbler, warbling vireo, purple finch, and black phoebe.

It was a lot to take in in a short time.

As we walked, I scanned the dense woods in the steep canyon above the creek. Madrones were in full bloom, California bay laurels were scattered here and there along with the native oaks. Down the slope, that dying coast live oak showed possible symptoms of Sudden Oak Death infection. The pathogen, *Phytophthora ramorum*, is a different kind of “exotic” organism that is creeping through California, killing countless numbers of coast live oaks.

Of course, oaks die of any number of causes. And, as far as I know, this particular area has not yet been scouted or had an

Sudden Oak Death confirmation. But this tree had “the look” that makes me wonder.

Many portions of Napa County have yet to be included in the annual SOD Blitz, an ongoing effort by the UC Berkeley Forest Pathology and Mycology Lab in cooperation with local volunteers. This year it is enhanced by the local chapter of the California Native Plant Society

Henny Cohen, a participant in last year’s Blitz and president of the Napa Chapter, says “Napa Valley California Native Plant Society supports the SOD Blitz efforts and encourages all members to act as citizen-scientists by joining the effort.”

Dr. Doug Schmidt, who represented the Berkeley Lab at the first two Napa SOD Blitzes says, “The SOD Blitzes would not exist without the volunteers. Environmentally relevant research can and should be performed by means of strong and durable collaborations between scientists and grassroots. It is my pleasure to welcome the California Native Plant Society as a co-host with UC Berkeley for many of this year’s blitzes.”

The lab is establishing “permanent monitoring trees”— California bay laurels, the biggest carrier of the disease. Schmidt says “This may be instrumental in finding out which trees in your neighborhood allow for survival of the SOD pathogen during droughts. In a research study, only 5 percent of bay trees seemed to be able to do that. Now the task is to figure out which trees may be in that 5 percent in your neighborhood.

In order to be able to tag a tree as a permanent monitoring tree, you will need to have a GPS device or a phone with GPS function. So if you are interested in doing that, come to the blitz meeting with such a device. We will provide you with everything else you need.”

The Napa SOD Blitz is scheduled for Saturday June 15, 9 a.m. at the UCCE meeting room, 1710 Soscol Ave. There is no fee, the lab work is free, and there is no need to pre-register. Just be prepared to collect California bay laurel leaves in an area of your choice.

Even if you don’t have a GPS device or smartphone with GPS, the Blitz effort needs your help. And it is a great opportunity to learn about SOD and some of California’s biggest native plants.

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