

LOCAL NEWS

Audubon program focuses on Native uses of area plants

CONTRIBUTED BY LEN MCKENZIE

Cultural interpreters and Midpines residents Ben and Kimberly Cunningham-Summerfield will present "California Indian Uses of Native Plants," a program featuring slides and hand specimens, at the monthly program of the Yosemite Area Audubon Society Thursday, Feb. 11, at the Mariposa Methodist Church parish hall on Sixth Street between Highway 140 and Bullion Street. The program will begin at 7 p.m.

In her book "Tending the Wild," ethnobotanist Kat Anderson wrote, "Every day of every year for millennia, the indigenous people of California interacted with the native plants and animals that surrounded them. They transformed roots, berries, shoots, bones, shells, and feathers into medicines, meals, bows, and baskets and achieved an intimacy with nature unmatched by the modern-day wilderness guide, trained field botanist, or applied ecologist."

Ben, a Mountain Maidu, and Kimberly, a Tsalagi (Cherokee), will present a brief overview of the various uses of some native plants by the tribes of California, emphasizing those that are important locally. They will discuss traditional uses, both past and present, of flora that may be found near and about local residents' homes. They will reveal how many of those uses have changed over time and have been revitalized in the last decade or so.

The Cunningham-Summerfields will also share Native American insights about a number of well-known plants and display some products made from native flora. Many of those plants will be featured in a new



THE YELLOW-GREEN FLOWERS OF A SOURBERRY (*RHUS TRILOBATA*) STAND OUT AGAINST THE PINK BACKDROP OF A REDBUD (*CERCIS OCCIDENTALIS*), BOTH OF THEM IMPORTANT BASKETRY PLANTS FOR AMERICAN INDIANS OF THE SIERRA FOOTHILLS. "CALIFORNIA INDIAN USES OF NATIVE PLANTS" IS THE TOPIC OF THE YOSEMITE AREA AUDUBON SOCIETY'S MONTHLY PROGRAM.

Sierra Foothills Native Plant Demonstration Garden, now under development by the Mariposa County Resource Conservation District at the Mariposa County Fairgrounds, a project funded by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy.

Ben earned his bachelor's and master's degrees from California State University, Chico. During the last 23 years he has studied botany from several different perspectives, including rangeland management, uses of native plants, traditional uses of fire and as a native cultural practitioner. As a national park ranger he has worked in natural resources management, fire management and interpretation. His passion for the environment is inherent from family endeavors and his cultural background. He has provided programs for various universities, science academies, international and na-

tional conferences, state and national parks, museums, live radio, special-interest groups and other organizations. Topics of instruction and demonstrations have included native uses of plants, intellectual properties, musical performances, storytelling, wildlife, geology and indigenous traditional skills.

Kimberly has been demonstrating and presenting programs since her teenage years in the 1970s. She is a cultural practitioner who teaches weaving, cordage making, food preparation, gathering, uses of fire, tool-making and storytelling. Her audiences have been local, national and international, representing a wide variety of backgrounds and ages. She will assist her husband in this presentation.

The Cunningham-Summerfields' presentation is open and free to the public, although donations to de-

fray program costs and to support Audubon's local activities are welcome. Re-

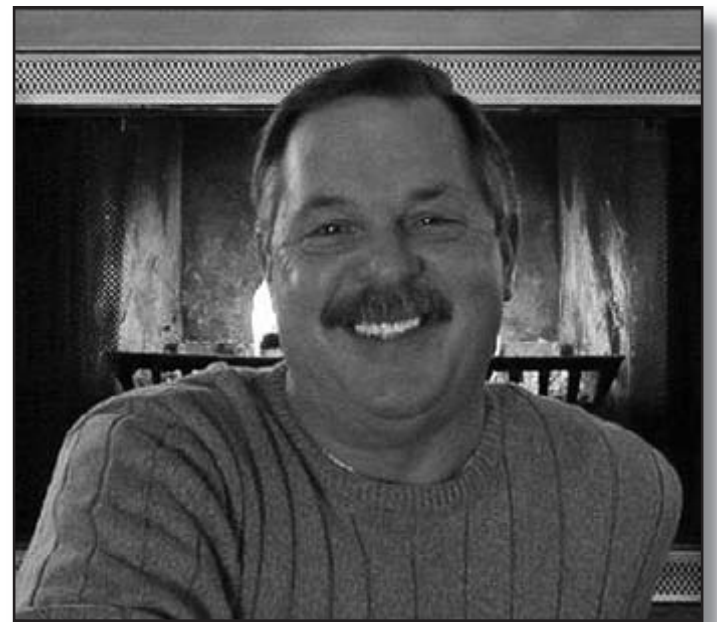
freshments will be available.

The Yosemite Area Audubon Society will also offer a birding trip to the Merced National Wildlife Refuge on Saturday, Feb. 20, beginning at 8 a.m. at the Mariposa Rest Area on Highway 140 adjacent to the history center. The trip is free and the public is welcome. Wear warm clothing and bring binoculars, field guides, wet-weather gear, lunch and water.

Call 742-5579 for additional information about either the program or the birding trip.

The Yosemite Area Audubon Society is affiliated with the National Audubon Society. Both the national organization and the local chapter are dedicated to the preservation of natural habitats and native species, and to educating and inspiring others to help protect those resource values.

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