

NEWS RELEASE

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ONCE THOUGHT EXTINCT, VENTURA MARSH MILKVETCH PLANTS ARE SURVIVING, EVEN REPRODUCING AT INTRODUCED SITES

CLAREMONT, Calif., March 27, 2003 – Less than 10 years ago Ventura marsh milkvetch, *Astragalus pycnostachyus* var. *lanosissimus*, was thought to be extinct. Center for Plant Conservation scientists have new reason to be hopeful the federally endangered plant will recover in the wild.

This past spring, Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden, a Center for Plant Conservation participating institution, introduced more than 300 milkvetch plants at two different locations in Ventura and Santa Barbara counties. This introduction was an experiment to learn about the habitat requirements of the plant and to establish additional populations in the wild. Scientists were glad to see the plants responding positively to this preliminary experimental introduction.

- About two-thirds, or 67 percent, of the plants survived after one year.
- More than half, 53 percent, of the introduced plants reproduced.
- Last month, 46 new milkvetch seedlings were found at the reintroduction sites.

“We did not expect the milkvetch plants to reproduce much nor to find any seedlings within only a year from introduction,” said Valerie Soza, botanical field studies coordinator at Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden. “A primary goal of this experiment was to determine habitat



Ventura marsh milkvetch

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Milkvetch

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preferences of the milkvetch, and we are pleased to observe the plants taking relatively well to introductions at about half of the experimental sites that were selected.”

Rancho Santa Ana scientists and volunteers planted the milkvetch at two different locations. At each of these locations, the plants were installed into five microhabitats. Researchers conducted soil analysis at each of the 10 microhabitats and documented associated vegetation and habitat characteristics. Results indicated that the plants preferred microhabitats in coastal dune swales or along freshwater/brackish marsh areas.

The California Department of Fish and Game will continue to monitor the introduced populations to determine the experiment’s long-term results.

Ventura marsh milkvetch, a short-lived perennial herb in the legume family, was presumed extinct until its rediscovery in 1997, when wildlife biologists discovered the plants growing in the sandy soil covering an oil dump in Oxnard, Calif. Historically, the plant grew along the coast of southern California, from Orange County north to Ventura County. Scientists carefully collected seeds from the discovered plant to store and use in a number of recovery and research projects for the species. Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden, along with Santa Barbara Botanic Garden, added this seed to the Center’s National Collection of Endangered Plants, a living conservation collection of seeds and plant tissue. The National Collection safeguards plant material needed to conduct restoration work.

The Center for Plant Conservation is dedicated solely to preventing the extinction of America’s imperiled native flora. The center is a coalition of America’s leading botanical institutions. By conducting conservation programs in horticulture, research, restoration, awareness and information exchange, the center’s network is striving to save America’s most imperiled plants from being lost forever. For more information about the Center for Plant Conservation, please visit www.centerforplantconservation.org.

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Photos of Ventura marsh milkvetch are available. To request an electronic copy, e-mail jessica.little@mobot.org.