
PHYLLIS M. FABER: A TRIBUTE

edited by Diane Renshaw

IN JUNE 1996, WHEN the CNPS Board of Directors named Phyllis Faber as a Fellow of the California Native Plant Society, all those present rose spontaneously in a standing ovation, the only such occasion that I can recall in my eleven years on the Board. The Board was keenly aware of the importance of her enormous contributions to CNPS and felt the need to express its appreciation beyond the mere bestowal of a title. Phyllis has recently retired from her long-standing tenure as editor of *Fremontia*, and from her transformative role as CNPS Vice-president of Publications. Her generous gifts of time and talent have helped CNPS become what it is today, and for that we are grateful. Phyllis built on the format and content of *Fremontia* created by her predecessor, Margedant Hayakawa, and on Harlan Kessel's beginning of the CNPS publications program. For many, Phyllis came to be synonymous with CNPS publications and the stream of exciting, high-quality publications that carried our message to the world. Her crowning achievement was the 1997 publication, *California's Wild Gardens*, which cost her much pain and frustration, as evinced in regular reports to the Executive Council over several years. We hope the brilliant success of the product has erased all memories of that difficult time.

An official announcement of Phyllis' election as a CNPS Fellow and a more personal appreciation written by Wilma Follette appeared in the January 1997 issue of *Fremontia*. Statements about her service on numerous public bodies such as the California Coastal Commission and the boards of the Planning and Conservation League, League for Coastal Protection, and Marin Agricultural Land Trust (of which she was a founder) only hint at the breadth of her activities. The CNPS Board had ample opportunity to become familiar with the full range of Phyllis' interests and passions, which doubtless was in Board members' minds when they paid her tribute.

Phyllis' vision for CNPS was many-faceted: raising the botanical literacy of California's citizens and their elected representatives, so as to promote preservation of its native flora through legislation and public agency policies; a larger and better-funded Society, able to support its programs; expanding the public's awareness of our native flora through beautiful, well written publications; closer ties between the Society and universities, schools, and other organizations; CNPS as the center for botanical literature in California. These goals are all stated in our strategic plan and go to the heart of our thinking.

The partnership between CNPS and Phyllis served both well. Her commitment of time and creative energy was necessary for the big job of developing the CNPS program

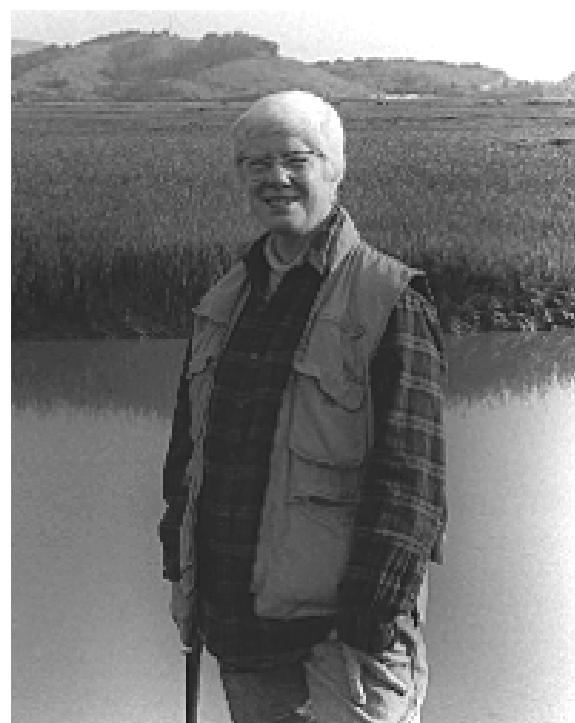
that exists today. If Phyllis had not devoted herself to the task, we either might not have a publishing program or it might be a pale imitation of what we do have. On the other side of the equation, CNPS and its inspiring mission provided the vehicle for Phyllis to grow as a publisher. It was a beneficial symbiotic relationship. I must mention an important benefit: the revenue stream that ensued from the produced books has helped to fund the Society's programs and has contributed significantly to some of our successes.

We are happy that Phyllis' new role producing the California Natural History series at the University of California Press will continue to provide outlet for her creative energies. We hope that CNPS Press and UC Press will continue the productive cooperative relationship they have long enjoyed. It is with great pleasure that we present this collection of anecdotes and vignettes as an appreciation of her contribution to the Society and to the world. May she have a long and productive career.

Jake Sigg, President of CNPS

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IFIRST MET PHYLLIS nearly twenty years ago at a dinner gathering prior to one of the lecture programs of the California Botanical Society. We didn't become good friends, however, until about a decade ago when she signed on for one of the Costa Rica Natural History tours that I led for the California Academy of Sciences. I distinctly remember one evening on that trip, sitting with the group on the spacious upper veranda at the working ranch and guest house at Los Inocentes in north-



Phyllis Faber, outstanding in her field (in this case, a wetland). Photograph by Nancy Kittle.

ern Costa Rica. Phyllis asked me what area of the world I would like to visit that I had not already seen. I told her that I had been longing to visit Madagascar ever since I had read an article in *National Geographic* in 1967. Phyllis talked about an attempt she had once made to get a group together for a Madagascar adventure, but which had failed to materialize. We looked at one another and said simultaneously, "Let's do a trip to Madagascar!" At that time there was precious little travel literature about Madagascar. I sent Phyllis a copy of Hilary Bradt's *Guide to Madagascar*, and she wasted no time in engaging a travel agent. Before I knew it she sent me a possible Madagascar itinerary for review. We were fortunate to be able to enlist the companionship of five other adventurers and spent a glorious month in the fall of 1993 touring the grand island of Madagascar. What a trip that was! Everything about it was exotic and other-worldly—the people, the flora and fauna, the magical landscapes, and that wonderful quality of light in the southern hemisphere.

For those who know Phyllis well, I need not emphasize that she is always quick to exhort others to "climb every mountain," and to follow your passion. Little did I know that we were not only going to Madagascar to study the biota, but that Phyllis had also arranged a meeting with the mayor of Antananarivo, the capital of Madagascar, to explore the possibilities of establishing a sister city relationship with San Francisco. Our visit was in no way an official one, but Phyllis exuded an air of commanding authority that led the mayor to think that we were an entourage to reckon with. Consequently we were wine and dined for an evening in a fashion that I suspect was typically reserved only for dignitaries. If the mayor had perceived Phyllis as a San Francisco politician with clout, which I suspect he had, he must have been equally impressed and probably surprised when she asked him if he knew about the Malagasy vangas. When he indicated he did not, she proceeded to give him a mini-lecture on this extraordinary family of endemic birds with bill forms that reflect a spectacular range of evolutionary adaptations.

Although Phyllis' interests are many and varied, one can truly say that one of her greatest passions is plants—learning about them, teaching others to appreciate them, and promoting the need for conservation and habitat restoration, at home and abroad. After traveling in Madagascar for a month, one cannot help but be haunted by the poverty and the rampant habitat destruction, especially in the eastern rain forests. Toward the end of our trip Phyllis told me that she wanted to do something for the country. She was genuinely troubled that there was no information about plants anywhere in the one and only natural history museum in the country, at the Tsimbazaza Zoo in Antananarivo. I had been photographing plants all over the country during our travels. She came up with this wonderful idea of taking a selection of these slides, enlarging them, and having them mounted for museum display with interpretive text translated into French and Malagasy. Upon

our return to the Bay Area she proceeded to turn this idea into reality, and, about a year later, four lovely didactic panels about the Malagasy flora were ready for delivery to the Tsimbazaza Zoo. Because these panels were large, we were reluctant to send them through normal mailing channels. This meant we would have to deliver them ourselves. So in March of 1996 we made yet another trip to Madagascar to deliver the botanical exhibit, which was gratefully received by the director of the zoo. Phyllis' exhibit is now part of the permanent natural history display at the zoo. Due to her efforts, present and future generations of Malagasy children and other visitors will be able to learn something about baobabs, the succulent flora, the spiny desert, the medicinal properties of the Madagascar periwinkle, and other endemic plants of Madagascar.

Some of the conditions we encountered camping in the rain in Madagascar were truly a test of Phyllis' enduring enthusiasm, incredible adaptability, and unflinching good humor. These are traits that she brings to everything she does. In addition to all these admirable attributes, she is caring, loyal, entertaining, and a lover of good conversation and friendships. Life is one big adventure for her and I, for one, wish her well in her new endeavors. May her creative energy, exacting standards, and generosity live on in the pages of this journal and in all future publications the CNPS chooses to undertake.

Frank Almeda, Department of Botany, California Academy of Sciences

IKNEW PHYLLIS FABER long before she became editor of *Fremontia* and chair of the CNPS Publications Committee, but I came to know her much better and more intensively after she assumed those positions.

Early in the 1990s, Phyllis took on the editor/publisher role for a book that four of us had been writing about the vegetation of California and how that vegetation had changed over the past two centuries. Our manuscript had already been rejected by several publishers for a variety of reasons, none of which we felt was correctable. But where those publishers had seen problems, Phyllis saw opportunities. She was able to focus our writing, making us write three more drafts before she was satisfied. She had us restructure some sections, acquired outstanding color slides of vegetation and plants, hired an excellent production editor, and found a printer who could produce the book (with full color throughout) at a price that CNPS could afford.

California's Changing Landscapes was to be the first book that CNPS published. Its success stimulated Phyllis to do more. A glance at the most recent CNPS publication list shows just how voluminous and diverse that catalog is today.

Over the course of a decade, Phyllis was able to bring CNPS along on more than a dozen book projects. Most editors have to worry only about motivating authors, but on each project Phyllis also had to convince and reassure the

CNPS Board. In addition, some of the projects involved complicated joint efforts with the University of California Press, which were negotiated and managed by Phyllis.

CNPS was a difficult organization for which to serve as editor, and only someone with Phyllis' drive, conviction, patience, and record of success could have pulled it off. The thousands of readers who have been charmed and educated by CNPS books are indebted to you, Phyllis. And so am I, both as a reader and as one of the many authors you helped.

—Michael Barbour, Plant Ecologist,
University of California, Davis

PHYLLIS FABER RECENTLY retired from her sixteen-year career as editor of *Fremontia*. This noteworthy event and the commitment it represents mark only one "career" and one transition in a life-long metacareer as environmental and community activist. My association with Phyllis began more than thirty years ago when we were parents at a Mill Valley neighborhood school. Along the way, we were teachers of ecology before that became a household word. We were also partners in a start-up environmental consulting firm when environmental impact reporting was still in its infancy, and our interest in profit was, at best, a side-bar to our larger goal of saving the earth. Our career paths eventually parted, and we pursued our environmental interests in different ways, but the character traits she displayed in our early associations continue to define this remarkable person: intellectual curiosity and willingness to continue learning, evident in the wide range of *Fremontia* topics; determined stubbornness in the face of apparent obstacles, maddening if you were the "obstacle;" perpetual optimism, in spite of occasional setbacks and family illness; an irresistible penchant for impishness that might produce a salt-marsh harvest mouse sculpted of cream cheese, resting on a bed of pickleweed and dribbled with Worcestershire sauce; generosity of time and interest that could set a budding young environmentalist on a new career path; and, above all, passion for the environment, whether it be saving the entire California coast, or fostering the survival of an endangered plant.

All these—and more—are Phyllis Faber. I wish her all the best in her next several "careers."

—Nona Dennis, retired environmental consultant and
part-time instructor, University of San Francisco

IF I HAD ONLY ONE word with which to describe Phyllis, it would be "remarkable"—a strong intellect, a mover and shaker, brave, determined, and very human. Our connection began with a shared love and admiration for another remarkable person, Larry Heckard, curator of the Jepson Herbarium at U.C. Berkeley. I had gone to work as a volunteer for Larry in 1979. Phyllis would come to see Larry often and I would catch snatches of

conversations over the herbarium cases that separated the space Larry and I shared in the Life Sciences Building. I was always intrigued by the adventuresome trips they were planning. Phyllis would often bring lunch into the herbarium, and I was privileged to join them and Jim Hickman in lively discussions on botany or publication projects for CNPS, or hear tales of their adventures. Phyllis knew so many people, had done so many different things, and traveled so extensively, I was in awe of her experiences and connections.

As the Jepson Manual Project took shape, Phyllis contributed advice and support and we spent more time together, becoming friends and colleagues. At the end of the project, Phyllis invited me to work with her on one of the books she was developing for CNPS. While it proved not to be a viable arrangement, it was fun and interesting working with her and I learned a lot about book building. We also had a wonderful adventure to Ecuador that she planned. She is a great traveler, inspired about where to go, how to get there, and who to meet. And she knows her tropical plants. All those things she could put names to were just a maze of tree trunks and vines to me. I have great admiration for Phyllis. Her friendship has enriched my life. I want to recognize her accomplishments with the publications program for CNPS, and I am pleased to participate in giving her the credit she so richly deserves.

—Susan M. D'Alcorno, Public Programs Coordinator,
Center for Biosystematics, University of California, Davis

IT WAS THE CNPS RARE Plant Program Botanist from July 1980 until October 1986. Some of my fondest work memories are from this time in my career. Prior to a CNPS board meeting in San Diego in 1984, I learned that CNPS was experiencing some budget problems, and that some difficult financial decisions were going to be made at the meeting to put CNPS back on firmer financial ground.

Since I was the only full-time CNPS employee, I was feeling quite vulnerable. In addition, my wife and I were new parents, our son Adam having been born just a few months earlier, and we also had house payments. We were quite concerned about my hours being cut, or worse, losing my job. I needed to do something to try to influence the Board's decision; however, I was not certain there was much I could do.

Phyllis came to the rescue. During the debate over which budget items should be cut or eliminated, Phyllis made it very clear to everyone that there were two budget items she felt should not be touched. First, as you would expect, the *Fremontia* editor argued that the journal's budget should be left intact. And second, much to my delight, she argued just as forcefully that the CNPS Botanist budget should also be spared. Her argument was quite simple. She stated that *Fremontia* and the CNPS Rare Plant Program and botanist were the most visible things CNPS was doing at that time, so it would be detrimental to

the Society's overall effectiveness if their budgets were cut. Phyllis then added, "and besides, how can we cut the CNPS Botanist budget? He's got a family to feed."

When it came to a final budget vote, the Board unanimously agreed with Phyllis' budget proposal. Thanks, Phyllis.

—Rick York, Staff Botanist,
California Energy Commission

WE HAD MANY opportunities to share our thirty-year collection of slides of the flora of western America with appreciative and knowledgeable viewers, thanks to Phyllis, who used them regularly to illustrate articles in *Fremontia* and other CNPS publications. I gave many copies of *California's Wild Gardens* to our siblings and children, not only so they could take pride in Bill's photographs (seventeen were published in this book), but also to send them the vital message of the importance and beauty of our native flora that this publication presents so well.

I am so grateful to Phyllis for her good companionship on the numerous, sometimes lengthy, trips to CNPS State Board meetings and the accompanying wonderful field trips all over the state; for witty, far-ranging conversations en route; for her invaluable, astute navigation through the mine fields of the greater Los Angeles freeways; for her lack of snoring in shared accommodations; and for her always paying up on numerous ten-cent bets on botanical matters that we each were sure we knew correctly.

Above all, my appreciation and admiration is unbounded for all the wonderful publications she produced, educating the citizens of our state about the value of preserving our native flora in its habitat. California's native flora needs all the friends it can muster, and Phyllis is not only one of its best friends, but her CNPS editorship has enlightened and recruited many new supporters.

Wilma and Bill Follette, botanists and photographers

LONG-TIME FRIEND, colleague, scholar, editor, writer, botanist, inspired teacher, and fanatical protector of the environment—Phyllis is all of these and much more. I first met Phyllis on her return to Marin from Connecticut, where she had just received an MA in microbiology from Yale. She was looking for a new career, and joined a group of us in a biology consulting organization called Natural Science Education Resources; later, this firm evolved into Madrone Associates, where Phyllis shared a leadership position. I also worked with Phyllis in the Audubon Canyon Ranch training program and in the Environmental Forum of Marin, but what I cherish most in our relationship were field trips we took with the California Native Plant Society and the special excursions with Wilma Follette, Phyllis, and myself. Over many years the three of us have been celebrating one or

more of our birthdays by planning a day's outing to some place of interest. We visited the Monterey Aquarium when it first opened. We often took hikes on Mt. Tam and once drove to Wilma's cabin in Mendocino. Regularly each fall we had a huckleberry-picking day in Inverness. One unique event was an outing to Santa Rosa Island in the Channel Islands with The Nature Conservancy as our host. It was an incredible two-day adventure, botanizing over the whole island with a special guide, and finally being flown back to the mainland in a small private plane. One thing I recall about Phyllis on these trips was her tireless enthusiasm for keying out plants. She would keep going for hours, long after my stomach told me it was time to stop for nourishment. Phyllis had the knack of juggling countless events and appointments, and she often was late because she had squeezed too many things into her schedule, but somehow it has all worked out satisfactorily so far.

**Virginia Havel, long-time CNPS
member and past board member**

AROUND 1986, SHORTLY after I first joined CNPS as a charter member of the Shasta Chapter, I read a note in the *Bulletin* that Phyllis was looking for someone to take over the job of compiling the biannual index to *Fremontia*. At the time I was living in a one-room cabin in the backwoods near Mt. Lassen, but I did have a word processor, and I volunteered right away for the job, eager to contribute something worthwhile to the native plant cause. Phyllis was "delighted," and I found her delightful too, ever the professional Yale biologist and ever the essence of the CNPS kindred spirit. So began our correspondence over the span of twelve years or so. While the rest of the world went from kilobytes to megabytes to gigabytes, I plodded along in WordStar and never heard a word of complaint from Phyllis, although I am sure that converting the formatting from my archaic system was quite problematic.

The price of living a simple life close to nature is often a significant reduction in earning potential. In 1992, when Phyllis suggested I compile a twenty-year index for *Fremontia*, she insisted that I get paid to do it. I don't know where she got the \$1,500 that she sent me when the job was completed, but I was able to fly to Florida with my two children to see my parents because of that generosity. And since my father died not long after our last visit, I will be forever grateful to Phyllis for her thoughtfulness.

In 1998, when Phyllis upgraded her own system, she asked me if I wanted her IBM 486 computer. Of course I did! When I visited Phyllis at her home in Mill Valley, one of the first things I noticed was an exquisite photo print of our favorite shrub in full bloom—the lovely fremontia.

I will miss working with Phyllis. Her professionalism and flair for getting things done were indisputable. Her leadership ensured that CNPS publications were of the

very highest quality, and that has contributed tremendously to the respect and credibility of our organization. Thank you, Phyllis.

**Vivian Parker, biologist, and resource protection
associate with the California Indian
Basketweavers Association**

I HAVE HAD THE GREAT good fortune to have known Phyllis Faber for close to twenty years. Phyllis has edited several of my contributions to *Fremontia* over this time. She has been a joy to work with. My memories of working with Phyllis as deadlines have approached, or even have passed, are all very positive. On the occasions when I have been late, a call from Phyllis always left me feeling encouraged and empowered to move ahead. This is a rare leadership skill that she possesses. Her intelligence, good humor, and grace have been, and continue to be, a model for my own life.

I look forward to working with Phyllis on some of my future projects.

Tom Griggs, Chico State University

I 'VE KNOWN PHYLLIS since 1969, when she became a science teacher for Audubon Canyon Ranch and the Environmental Forum of Marin. Since then I've seen her career expand: editor of *Fremontia*, member of the California Coastal Commission, a founder of Marin Agricultural Land Trust, author and publisher of native plant books. But my favorite memory of Phyllis is a May canoe trip down the wild Eel River canyon when our group was caught in a three-day deluge without rain gear. Dripping wet, we improvised with large green plastic bags, looking and feeling like giant mushrooms. Phyllis is not only a wonderful friend, but a leader who has left an indelible mark on California.

**—Dr. Martin Griffin, co-founder, Audubon Canyon
Ranch, Environmental Forum of Marin, and author of
*Saving the Marin-Sonoma Coast***

I ARRIVED IN CALIFORNIA in 1975, fresh from graduate school, and found a job with a small environmental consulting firm in San Rafael. Phyllis Faber was one of the three women running Madrone Associates; she enjoyed a good day in the field, she knew the native plants, and she seemed to know all the key people involved in the nascent field of environmental planning and regulation, from Governor Brown's office on out to the dairy farms in West Marin. Her intellectual curiosity and enthusiasm powered her drive to make things happen, and Phyllis eventually left Madrone to go on to the Coastal Commission and points beyond. Over the years Phyllis kept me in her circle of associates; she sent me a hand-addressed copy of the July 1983 issue of *Fremontia*, her first as editor; and she flattered me tremendously by asking me to

help out as guest editor on occasion when she could not pass up travel opportunities.

Although Phyllis has worn many hats, one theme ties it all together—her deep and abiding interest in the environment, particularly wetlands and wetland ecology. Field work in the wetlands with Phyllis has left me with fond memories: waiting for the tide, or for the boat; peering down a transect or into a sampling square, estimating percent cover; slogging and slipping through the mud, sometimes hip-deep; keying out plants over the telephone. Without asking permission, I adopted Phyllis as one of my mentors years ago. I see no reason to quit now, and I am eagerly watching to see what new adventures lie ahead on her path.

Diane Renshaw, consulting ecologist

PHYLLIS FABER IS amazing. Her enthusiasm and passion for things botanical are something to behold, and her tireless efforts on behalf of California's native plants have been truly heroic.

I first met Phyllis in 1985 when I took over the design of *Fremontia*. Eight years later, we collaborated on our first book for CNPS, Barbour *et al.*'s *California's Changing Landscapes*, and our relationship entered a new and far more challenging phase. Since that first book, Phyllis and I have produced some seventeen books for the Society. Thanks to Phyllis's remarkable energy and dedication, CNPS Press has made a significant contribution to the literature on California's native plant conservation and ecology.

What started as two or three weeks of contact every three months to work on *Fremontia* ultimately became an association and friendship that I have grown to cherish deeply. Over the years, Phyllis has progressed from client to friend, from travelling companion to confidante.

One of the most memorable and exotic experiences we have shared was two weeks in the Far East in August of 1998, when Phyllis travelled with me to Hong Kong for a press check of *California's Wild Gardens*, the book she edited and I designed for CNPS and the California Department of Fish and Game. The three of us (Phyllis, Peter, my companion of thirteen years, and I) enjoyed an extraordinary trip that included crossing the South China Sea to Macau in a typhoon, and a wedding. Phyl was my "bridesmaid" when Peter and I were married in a traditional ceremony in a Shinto shrine in Kyoto, Japan.

Certain rare people can affect one's life profoundly, changing its direction or quality. Phyllis is one of those people; she whirls through life like a tornado, raising dust devils everywhere she goes and leaving swirling eddies in her wake. My life has not been the same, either professionally or personally, since Phyllis swept into it nearly fifteen years ago.

Beth Hansen-Winter, photographer and graphic designer

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