Explore the Watershed

Hunting for Osoberry

May Chen

In search of Osoberry cuttings for the nursery, Jay and I located the famed female plant on the Old Canon Trail, a short distance from the Benevides Trail. It had already started to bloom, and a close examination of its flowers confirmed that it was indeed the plant we were seeking. Osoberry is dioecious, with male and female flowers on separate plants. In our area male plants far outnumber the female plants almost 9 to 1.

A female flower of Osoberry. For much better pictures: Oregon Flora Project

I was excited to see an insect on a cluster of flowers. On closer inspection it turned out to be a dead fly hanging by a strand of spider silk. Probably a victim of crab spider predation. I saw hints of the spider's front legs under the leaf from which the fly is hanging. I wonder who pollinates the Osoberry flowers? Flies like this unfortunate one in the photo below?

A fly in the Osoberry, and maybe a spider leg?

These flowers barely managed to emerge from the deformed leaves

There were numerous leaf galls on the tips of the branches. I collected some of the galls to raise them out at home. Ron Russo, whom I consulted, confided that these galls are induced by gall midges in the genus *Dasineura*, family Cecidomyiidae, although that information is absent in his field guide.

Jay and I were thinking that there has to be a male plant somewhere close by for this particular female to be setting fruit. Then Jay spotted a possible candidate. Whacking through blackberry brambles, we managed to get close to the plant, only to discover that it was growing among a thicket of Poison Oak.

Surprise! A quick look at the flowers revealed the plant to be another female.

Note the flower in the center already has developing ovaries at the base of the corolla. Looking around we didn't see another Osoberry plant within sight. "Maybe the species is self-compatible," I mused. But that's not possible if the flower doesn't produce any pollen, duh! Surely, dioecious plants by necessity have to be cross-pollinated?

I'm so glad there's no shortage of mysteries to be solved out there!

--*May Chen, FOSC Member*

Photo credits: May Chen