

inBLOOM

NATIVE PLANTS IN YOUR WORLD



In Anza Borrego Park in 1998, sand verbena flowers (*Abronia villosa*) were seen against the backdrop of the San Ysidro Mountains and a setting full moon.

PHOTOS BY RICHARD DICKEY

Magic Carpet Ride

Blooms that blanket the California landscape are at risk



WILDFLOWER FACT Desert wildflower seeds may remain dormant for decades, being blown and moved about with the desert winds. With carpet blooms, factors such as changes in cryptobiotic soils and fluctuations in insect species may play a role as much as seasonal rains and temperatures. The displays are a phenomenon requiring exacting conditions, with many years passing before the next event. Even the combinations of species and colors that do bloom are unique.

IN HONOR OF OUR first issue of *Wildflower*, we turn our attention to a phenomenon so rare and spectacular it would appear a fantasy. Without regularity, the California desert is home to what are known as “carpet blooms” — a rare display of flowers on a scale and magnitude unseen anywhere else on earth.

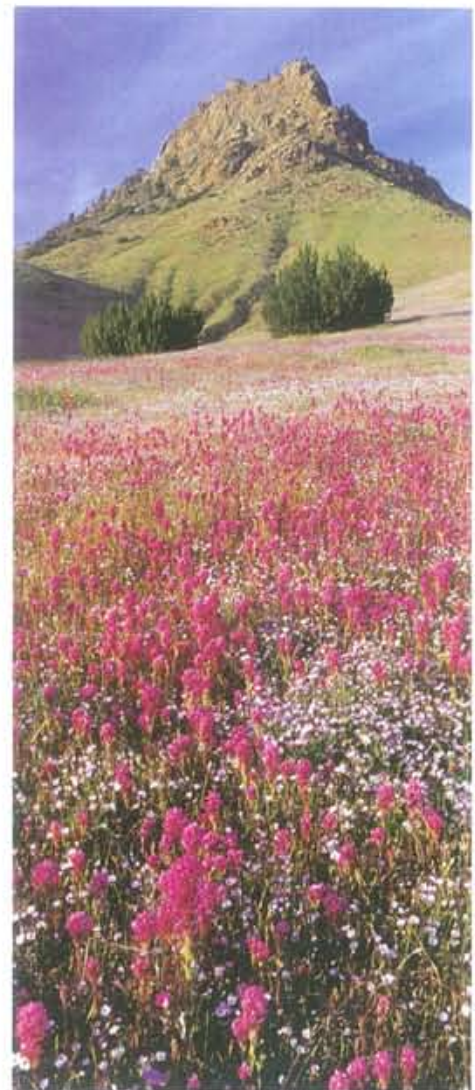
Twenty years ago, photographer Richard Dickey stumbled upon a vast three-

mile expanse of California poppies (*Eschscholzia californica*) so brilliant it required sunglasses to look upon. He set out to capture on film the desert’s “feral flowers,” learning that it takes just the right timing and combinations of rainfall and temperature to set off such dazzling events and that many years may pass before the next display.

Sadly, these treasures are at risk. Their home in the California Floristic Province is



CLOCKWISE Left In 2001, evening snow (*Linanthus dichotomus*) and California poppies just before sunset in Antelope Valley. **Below** In Sequoia National Forest a cathedral of rock surrounded by owl’s clover (*Castilleja exserta*) and Davy gilia (*Gilia latiflora*). **Bottom left** Owl’s clover and *Monolopia* sp. in the Tehachapi Foothills.



a biodiversity hotspot as defined by UNESCO and Conservation International. Of nearly 3,500 species of vascular plants in the hotspot, more than 2,120 (61 percent) are found nowhere else in the world.

Wilderness destruction caused by commercial farming is a major threat for the region, as the California Floristic Province generates half of all the agricultural products used by U.S. consumers. The hotspot also is

heavily threatened by the expansion of urban areas, pollution and road construction.

An artist turned educator and activist, Dickey’s photography collection represents his 20-year pursuit of capturing the threatened phenomena on film and can be seen at www.feralflowers.com.

For more information on the California Floristic Province, visit www.conservationinternational.org.