Hidden among local foothill chaparrals and woodlands lies one of California’s little known yet highly attractive shrubs.

When stumbled upon, it is a real sight to see—especially in the spring. This obscure shrub is snowdrop bush, and while considered sporadic and infrequent throughout much of its range, in the Redding area we are fortunate to live where the species is relatively common and easily found.

Snowdrop bush, *Styrax redivivus*, is a deciduous shrub in the Styracaceae, or storax family. Also known as California styrax, snowbell bush, or bitternut, the species is endemic to California, meaning it doesn’t live elsewhere.

Snowdrop bush occurs in the inland hills surrounding the Central Valley and in the mountain ranges of southern California. The shrub grows in chaparral, foothill woodland, and yellow pine habitats below approximately 5,000 feet elevation. It typically occurs as an understory shrub, although it’s also found in full sun depending on location.

Snowdrop bush is a graceful multi-stemmed shrub with smooth, silver-gray bark that gives the plant an attractive look during winter. Most shrubs are 4 to 6 feet tall, although some specimens can reach 10 to 15 feet. Extending from the stems are many horizontal twigs that hold rounded dark green leaves. In spring, clusters of pendant, white bell-shaped flower blossoms

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**QUITE A SIGHT**

**CALIFORNIA NATIVE STUNNER DRAWS BUTTERFLIES, BEES, HUMMINGBIRDS**

by *Len Lindstrand III*

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Snowdrop bush flowers attract avian and insect pollinators including hummingbirds, butterflies, native bees, and other insects.

Photo by *Len Lindstrand III.*
resembling snowdrops nod below the twigs. These blossoms turn to large, attractive flowers up to 1 inch long. As the flowers emerge, they hold a subtle citrus smell and clusters of bright yellow stamens. The petals soon fall and leave the impression of snow below the shrub.

Many of our local hiking trails provide great locations to see snowdrop bush, including the Cloverdale trails above Horsetown-Clear Creek Preserve, trails in the eastern portions of Whiskeytown Park, the trails on both sides of the Sacramento River between Keswick and Shasta Dam, and the trails at Shasta Lake.

Snowdrop bush is available from many native plant nurseries and is usually at our local Shasta Chapter, California Native Plant Society plant sales. If you want to try propagating one on your own, just hit one of those trails during fall, find a shrub, and collect a handful of nuts. Place the nuts in a small ziplock bag and store in the refrigerator for 2 to 3 months. Then plant them in a container filled with potting soil either outside or in a window sill during late winter. By late spring you should see seedlings ready to plant or transfer to larger containers in the fall.

However you choose to do so, be sure to get out and find this shrub. Snowdrop bush is a real eye-opener and locally we have many easy opportunities to see this uncommon and largely unknown California native.

In spring, clusters of pendant, white bell-shaped flower blossoms nod below the twigs of snowdrop bush. 
Photo by Len Lindstrand III.

Following the flowers, a whitish-yellow fruit develops that persists until fall. As the fruits reach maturity, their skin opens and reveals a brown nut roughly the size of a marble. The leaves also change during fall as they turn from dark green to various shades of yellow and provide nice late-season color.

Like most multi-stemmed shrubs, snowdrop bush provides good cover for many wildlife species. The large flowers attract both avian and insect pollinators including hummingbirds, butterflies, native bees, and other insects.

In the garden, snowdrop bush is versatile, and a welcome addition that deserves a special location. The shrub makes an excellent understory plant under oaks, or looks great when placed among other native shrubs with similar requirements such as mock orange, spicebush, California buckeye, and redbud. It needs no supplemental watering and will grow well in locations with partial shade to full sun. Snowdrop bush requires no special maintenance, although it can handle pruning if necessary.

Snowdrop bush is one of California’s little known, yet highly attractive shrubs. Photo by Len Lindstrand III.