

**UC SANTA CRUZ CAMPUS NATURAL RESERVE**

# MARSH ZIGADENUS



**Josephine Taylor**

**Scientific Name:** *Toxicoscordion fontanum*

**Common Names:** Marsh Zigadenus or Smallflower Deathcamas

**Global Rarity:** Vulnerable

**State listing:** Vulnerable; California Rare  
Plant Rank 4.2

**UCSC Rarity:** Rare



## General Description

Marsh Zigadenus is endemic to California. This toxic perennial herb blooms from mid/late spring to mid-summer (April-July). With 6 stamen and 3 styles within each flower, this monocot is classified within the Bunchflower family (Melanthiaceae). This species can be found in wetlands, including wet coastal prairie, and has been documented within mixed evergreen forests and chaparral as well. It is similar to the tall form of *Toxicoscordion fremontii*, but has a narrower inflorescence (flower cluster), more bell-shaped flowers, and usually grows in wetter areas.



## Identification

**Flower Color:** White with yellow inner markings

**Flower Shape:** Radially symmetrical, +/- bell-shaped

**Petals:** Tepals arranged in 2 whorls of 3

**Anthers:** White/off-white

**Stigma:** White/off-white

**Leaf Shape:** Erect, linear leaves 10-15 mm wide arising from base of plant, often longer than 60-80 cm hairless stem.

## Geographic Range

Marsh Zigadenus has a range primarily restricted to the California northern and central coast from Humboldt Co. in the north to San Luis Obispo Co. in the south, with an isolated inland record from 1952 along a Kern River tributary in Kern Co.





## UCSC Distribution

Small populations of Marsh Zigadenous can be found within three coastal prairie patches on the UCSC campus, where it grows within lower, wetter areas.

## Life history

*Toxicoscordion* was first described as a genus in 1903, primarily found on the West coast from North America to South America. *Toxicoscordion fontanum* is a toxic, perennial herb that specializes in growing along vernal wet or marshy areas, often in serpentine areas. On the UCSC campus, it emerges from its perennial bulb, grows, and blooms later than the similar *T. fremontii*, providing yet another way to distinguish between the two species.

## Threats

### Statewide:

1. Development and disturbance of coastal prairie habitats
2. Competition with non-native and invasive plants
3. Prolonged drought

### UCSC campus:

1. Prolonged drought
2. Competition with non-native and invasive plants

## Conservation Status

### California Native Plant Society Rare Plant Rank 4.2

Plants of limited distribution; fairly threatened in California (20-80% of occurrences threatened)

## Ways you can help

1. Support the California Native Plant Society and volunteer with habitat restoration projects
2. Avoid off-trail travel in wet coastal prairie
3. Raise awareness of rare native plants
4. Document the plants you encounter with the app iNaturalist

## References and Photo Credits

Calflora: Information on California plants for education, research and conservation, with data contributed by public and private institutions and individuals, including the Consortium of California Herbaria. [web application]. 2021. Berkeley, California: The Calflora Database [a non-profit organization]. Retrieved from <https://www.calflora.org/app/taxon?crn=11102> on 7 July 2021.

McNeal, D.W. & W.B. Zomlefer. 2012. *Toxicoscordion fontanum*, in Jepson Flora Project (eds.) Jepson eFlora. Retrieved from [https://ucjeps.berkeley.edu/eflora/eflora\\_display.php?tid=89162](https://ucjeps.berkeley.edu/eflora/eflora_display.php?tid=89162) on 7 July 2021.

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