



Brother Alfred Brousseau, © St. Mary's College

common name	White Meadowfoam
scientific name	<i>Limnanthes alba</i>
family	Limnanthaceae (meadowfoam)
habitat	wet grassland, seeps, pools
size	plant up to 12 inches tall; flower about 2.5 cm across
fun facts	This plant may save the whales because its seeds produce an oil which can be used to lubricate (make slippery with oil) machinery.

description Member of the meadowfoam family. The lower stems and leaves have long silky hairs. The outer sepals are also hairy. Note the distinctive venations (arrangements of veins) on the petals which serve as nectar guides for pollinators.

There are no other species of large white flowers at Mather Field which could be confused with White Meadowfoam. Meadowfoam is not common in the Mather Field vernal pools and grassland.

life cycle White Meadowfoam is an annual. It germinates in wet areas soon after the rains begin in the fall. Its oily seeds float and in particularly wet years the plant can occupy vast areas. White Meadowfoam can bloom as early as March, often while its roots and leaves are still under water.

ecology Meadowfoam is pollinated by solitary bees. The bees gather pollen and nectar to feed their offspring and, in so doing, pollinate the plant. Their large, oily seeds may be highly nutritious to some insects, birds and rodents.

How can Meadowfoam save whales?

Whale oil, made from the blubber of sperm whales, can lubricate fine machinery, even under conditions of high heat and friction. As a result it is used to lubricate fine machinery. Many, many whales are killed every year to supply this need. Meadowfoam seeds contain an oil which is very similar to the whale oil. Commercially grown meadowfoam oil may someday replace whale oil and eliminate the need to kill these magnificent creatures for their fat.

