

Pacific Dogwood (*Cornus nuttallii*)

Ghosts of winter light
pale lanterns floating
in the dark green air
whorls of four or five or six
petals made up to look like
magnolias in May not
actually even flowers
but involucre or bracts
the real flower a small
offering at the center
of a white jade bowl
a cluster of tiny
dark inflorescences
which by summer will be
the red berries favored
by band-tailed pigeons
almost as much as by
naturalists the flower
first correctly i-d'd
by Thomas Nuttall
on the Wyatt expedition
to the west 1834
later named after him by
his friend Audubon who
put both flower and berry
in *Birds of America* with
the pigeon according to
Donald Culross Peattie's
*Natural History of Western
Trees* and not one of these
eminent naturalists can
resist poetic excess in
their amazement at its
bright unveiling in the
darkness of the western
forests any more than I can
resist the naturalists'
obsession with naming
the details of that white
breast and its flower.