

The Leaflet

Chapter Annual Meeting—Marjorie Prochaska

WINTER 2013

Our Piedmont Chapter held its annual meeting in the Northern Fauquier Community Park in Marshall on October 20th. We met at noon in a covered pavilion overlooking a pond in this relatively new park and declared it an undiscovered gem. Its facilities are spacious, the grounds ample, and Carrie Blair assures us that there are some interesting natives to be found in the small wetland areas in season, particularly the Purple Passionflower (*Passiflora incarnate*) and the Great Blue Lobelia (*Lobelia siphilitica*).



In true chapter form, we began with a delicious buffet, which warmed us up considerably, as the day was sunny, but brisk. In fact, we sat in the sun for the short business meeting conducted by past president Marjorie Prochaska. Number one on our agenda was the election of officers and new board members. Sally Anderson is our new chapter president, Robin Williams, vice-president, Brenda Crawford, secretary, and Cathy Mayes, treasurer. Sally, Robin, and Cathy all return to the Board after a hiatus of one year, along with Carrie Blair, director. We welcomed new directors Cindy Blugerman and Emily Southgate to the Board. Carla Overbeck, Mary Keith Ruffner and Blanca Vandervoort rotated off the board after years of splendid service keeping us organized. Chris Lewis, David Roos, Richard Stromberg and Kristin Zimet continue as directors.

Marjorie next introduced our speaker, arborist and landscape design consultant David Means, who is based in Front Royal. David spoke of his work as a Front Royal/Warren County Tree Steward and as a member of the Urban Forestry Advisory Commission. He has been very involved with populating the Front Royal Greenway with appropriate trees. While not all urban plantings are natives, he has worked to make certain that no undesirable species are planted and championed the planting of natives. The greenway concept has been very well received in Front Royal, and it encourages us to work with the various jurisdictional authorities to foster our goals of planting native species wherever possible and appropriate.



The Virginia Native Plant Society (VNPS), founded as the Virginia Wildflower Society in 1982, is a non-profit organization of people who share an interest in Virginia's wild plants and habitats and a concern for their protection.

The Piedmont Chapter is a geographically defined subgroup of VNPS in the northern point of Virginia east of the Blue Ridge Mountains. It includes Loudoun, Fauquier, Culpeper, Rappahannock, Warren, Clarke, and Frederick counties.

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The Leaflet can be seen online in color at www.vnps.org/piedmont

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Plants and Pollinators Web Site—Jocelyn Sladen

Approximately 200,000 different species of animals around the world act as the pollinators, responsible for the survival of plants, thus keeping food on our table and natural communities intact. Of these, about 1,000 are vertebrates, such as birds, bats, and small mammals. The rest, in overwhelming majority, are invertebrates, including bees, beetles, butterflies, moths, and flies. It is a disturbing truth of today's world that so many of these vital and often beautiful life forms are experiencing drastic population decline. As native plant advocates, we can help directly offset losses through choices we make in our own gardens and landscape management, and indirectly by setting examples within our communities. The Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Wildlife Habitat Council have produced an outstanding leaflet, available online, offering a wealth of information on a varied range of pollinators, from bats to butterflies and bumblebees and more, detailing specific needs, including native plant choices and garden tips. You can find the leaflet at http://plants.usda.gov/pollinators/Native_Pollinators.pdf or find the site via your search engine by entering 'Native Plants Native Pollinators' and you should find 'Native Pollinators - USDA Plant Database' at the top of the list.

Go Native Go Local Guide—James Barnes, Sustainable Habitat Program Manager, Piedmont Environmental Council

The Piedmont Environmental Council is pleased to release the inaugural edition of our "Go Native Go Local" Guides. Three guides, one for the Charlottesville area, one for the Northern Piedmont, and one for Loudoun county, can be found at www.pecva.org/gonative.

The purpose of this guide is to provide landowners of the Virginia Piedmont with a central listing of businesses, most of them local, that offer products and services which promote our native biodiversity. "Go Native Go Local" aims to strengthen the local economy and is a sister publication to PEC's [Buy Fresh Buy Local guide](#).

I would welcome your feedback on the first edition of this resource. I can also provide printed copies for distribution -- let me know if you would like copies.





SCBI Van Tour of Endangered Animals—Carla Overbeck

The Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute outside of Front Royal has always seemed mysterious to me. What goes on there? If it's part of the National Zoo, why isn't it open to the public like the National Zoo in Washington? Mystery was lifted on November 6th, when 25 chapter members and guests toured some of the animal conservation areas at SCBI. A major thrust of SCBI is to conserve species and train future generations of conservationists. Genetic diversity was mentioned several times during the 3-hour tour by our knowledgeable, engaging guides, Sally and Posey, who each drove a 13-person van.

SCBI does research to aid in the survival or recovery of threatened species and habitats. We did not see all of the endangered species at SCBI, mainly because some of the species need to be more isolated, don't do well with human tours, or would hide if they see humans. We missed the Red Pandas and Clouded Leopards but did see the Red Panda huts and the buildings that house the Clouded Leopards from the top of Race Track Hill, which was our first stop and the only place we were able to walk around freely. Race Track Hill gives a great view in all directions, including some fields which have been planted in native warm-season grasses as experimental fodder with good acceptance by the animals except for the elephants. SCBI also has an experimental grove of American Chestnut trees. Race Track Hill is also the location of a horse cemetery, a remnant of the government remount station once housed on the property. After taking pictures and hearing more about what goes on at SCBI, we took to our vans and had a guided tour of some of the endangered species.

SCBI has three types of cranes: White-naped, Red Crowned and Hooded. We also saw a Persian Onager, several Przewalski's horses and a number of antelope-type ungulates.

Probably the most interesting animals were the five Cheetahs and a Maned Wolf we saw near the end of our tour. We took pictures and heard discussions of the animals from the vans but did not leave the vans because visitors milling around the enclosures could distress the animals.

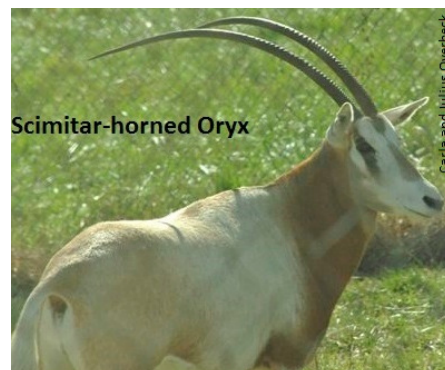
Sally and Posey were full of interesting stories and anecdotes about the research at SCBI and about the quirks of some of the individual animals and species. Five Cheetahs



louning on the grass and walking around the enclosure seemed oblivious to the people peering through the van windows. Cheetahs were also interesting because they are one of the few species at SCBI that do not undergo artificial insemination. Female Cheetahs are allowed to choose a mate among a few carefully selected males that are allowed to approach a female one at a time. Interestingly enough, female Cheetahs lose romantic inter-est in males they interact with all the time, so a male is led into a female's separate enclosure when mating is desired.

The lone Maned Wolf we saw seemed to want to put on a show for his visitors. He moved around enough to make picture-taking difficult, but also sat several times facing us to allow for some good still pictures. At one point he leapt off the ground and pounced at something on the ground. Whether he caught anything is up for grabs.

Piedmont chapter may book another tour next year. Let us know if you would be interested.





Second Sunday Walk at SCBI Deer Exclosure—Richard Stromberg

Fascinating as SCBI van tours are, they are not particularly relevant to the Virginia Native Plant Society objectives. The tours look at animals not plants, and none of the animals are native. But SCBI does have activities that involve plants. In the article above, Carla mentioned the experimental grove of American Chestnuts and the fields planted in native warm-season grasses. SCBI coordinates studies for the Virginia Working Landscapes project, collecting data on birds, pollinators, and plants in large fields/meadows. The SCBI native grass fields are part of the project.

Our September Second Sunday Walk went to the bottom of the SCBI property into forested Posey Hollow, where the tour vans do not go. We walked in and around a ten-acre area surrounded by a fence high enough to keep deer out—a deer exclosure. It has been there for 25 years. The picture shows a corner of the exclosure. To the right where deer have been excluded there are young trees, but on the left, where deer can graze, no young trees, but, instead, alien invasive Japanese Stilt Grass (*Microstegium vimineum*).



The exclosure is now in the middle of a 25 hectare Smithsonian Institution Global Earth Observatories (SIGEO) plot, one of SIGEO's world-wide forest plots for studying forest function and diversity. Five years ago, 20 meter squares were marked off in the plot and every stem greater than one centimeter in diameter 4.5 feet from the ground was tagged and its diameter and position in the plot recorded. This summer they were all re-measured. One of the objectives is to determine how much carbon is sequestered in the forest. Soil samples were also evaluated and litter falling from the trees was collected every two weeks from randomly spaced baskets in the plot and weighed to help determine carbon sequestration.



Second Sunday Walk at Shenandoah U. Shenandoah River Campus—Cindy Blugerman

Our walk on November 10 was preceded by the release flight of one Bald Eagle and ended with the sighting of two bald eagles. More than 100 people gathered to watch the release of a male Bald Eagle at Shenandoah University's Shenandoah River Campus at Cool Spring Battlefield. The raptor was released on the Shenandoah by veterinarian Belinda Burwell of the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center, which had rehabilitated it after it had sustained significant wounds during a fight with another bald eagle on the Potomac.



Thirty-two people participated in the VNPS walk that was led by Shenandoah University Environmental Sciences Professor Woodrow Bousquet. The 195-acre Cool Spring property, which most recently served as a golf course and historically was a part of the 1864 Battle of Cool Spring, was acquired by the Civil War Trust in 2012 and then turned over to Shenandoah University in April 2013. The university, as stewards of the land, will transform it into an outdoor classroom. Future stewardship projects will involve planting native warm-season grasses, conducting biological inventories, and managing invasive exotic plant species. More information about the Shenandoah River Campus property can be found at <http://www.su.edu/blog/cool-spring-protecting-land-for-future-generations/>.

Dr. Bousquet's initial discussion focused on Bur Oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*). It is common in the Great Plains states but is classified as extremely rare in Virginia. Woody indicated an area on the property that had two Bur Oak trees and we stopped there to search the ground for the large fringed acorn caps that one could unknowingly mistake for a walnut or a lost golf ball if they were to tread upon the hefty fruits. We walked along the paved paths on the former golf course grounds and scouted the surrounding areas for more Bur Oak trees. We found two more Bur Oak trees that were identified by Chris Lewis, who was able to identify them by the characteristic corky ridged bark of the branchlets.



Our nature jaunt also revealed some very large specimens of American Sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*) along the Shenandoah River. At one spot we were treated to an unobstructed view of the multiple nests of a great blue heron rookery in a tree across the river. We followed the path up a hill and enjoyed a panoramic view to the northwest of the valley and eastern mountains of West Virginia.

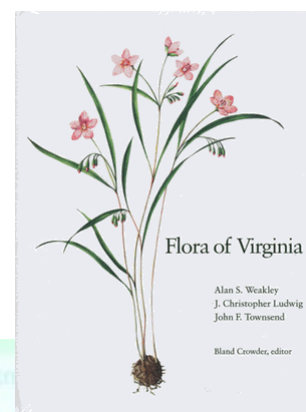
On the return walk, toward the end of our two hour jaunt, I noticed two large birds flying near each other, high above us. Even at such a great height, my companions and I could clearly see that both of the birds had white heads and necks. So, as it turns out, both the Bald Eagle release and the search for additional Bur Oak trees resulted with us seeing twice the original, or expected, number of both species by the end of the walk. I would definitely chalk that up as a good day.



Sunday	December 8	1pm	Second Sunday Walk
England Mountain in the Wildcat Mountain Natural Area, leader Carrie Blair. This is a 3 hour walk with terrain change. Wear orange because hunting is allowed nearby. Limited parking so RSVP to piedmontvnps@gmail.com .			
Sunday	January 12	1pm	Second Sunday Walk
Hill School, Middleburg, leader Carrie Blair. Contact Carrie at horseblanketcb@yahoo.com for details.			
Sunday	January 26	2-3:30pm	Winter Speaker Series: How's Your Habitat?
Tri-County Feeds meeting room (upstairs), Marshall. Jennifer Seay, Piedmont Natives LLC. For more information, email piedmontvnps@gmail.com .			
Sunday	February 9	1pm	Second Sunday Walk
Morven Park woods, Leesburg, Leader Chris Lewis. For more information, email piedmontvnps@gmail.com .			
Sunday	February 23	2-3:30pm	Winter Speaker Series: How's Your Habitat?
Tri-County Feeds meeting room (upstairs), Marshall. James Barnes, Sustainable Habitat Program Manager for PEC. For more information, email piedmontvnps@gmail.com .			
Sunday	March 9	1pm	Second Sunday Walk
Old High Acre Farm, near The Plains, leaders Sally Anderson and Mary Keith Ruffner. For more information, email piedmontvnps@gmail.com .			
Sunday	March 23	2-3:30pm	Winter Speaker Series: How's Your Habitat?
Tri-County Feeds meeting room (upstairs), Marshall. Charles Smith, Prince William Wildflower Society and Fairfax County Park Authority Natural Resources Protection Manager. For more information, email piedmontvnps@gmail.com .			

Presentation of the Flora of Virginia to Shenandoah University

The Piedmont Chapter purchased a copy of the new Flora of Virginia and formally presented it to Shenandoah University on September 18th in Hester Auditorium in Henkel Hall at Shenandoah University's main campus in Winchester. Environmental Sciences Professor Woodrow Bousquet received the Flora from Piedmont Chapter board member Cathy Mayes (both shown in the picture). Flora co-author Chris Ludwig, Virginia Natural Heritage Inventory Chief Biologist, spoke about the effort to put the Flora together. Professor Bousquet spoke about restoring the flora of Abrams Creek.





Persimmons—Richard Stromberg

The native Persimmon trees (*Diospyros virginiana*) in my yard did not have any fruit this year. They are tall and spindly because they have to compete with other trees. The tomato-sized persimmons you get in the grocery store are *Diospyros kaki*, which are not native and are not hardy, so they will not grow here. The native fruits are much smaller, up to 1½ inch in diameter, and have several large seeds so there is much less edible pulp than the Japanese species. The fruit of both species have high tannin content which makes the immature fruit astringent and bitter, so you want to be sure they are ripe, *i.e.*, soft, so the tannins are reduced and sugars increased. By the way, like tomatoes, *Diospyros* fruit are berries.

I want to tell you about a Persimmon tree I saw when I hiked with a group from the Northern Virginia Hiking Club along the east ridge of the Massanutts. We started at the Foster's boat landing parking lot on the west bank of the South Fork of the Shenandoah.

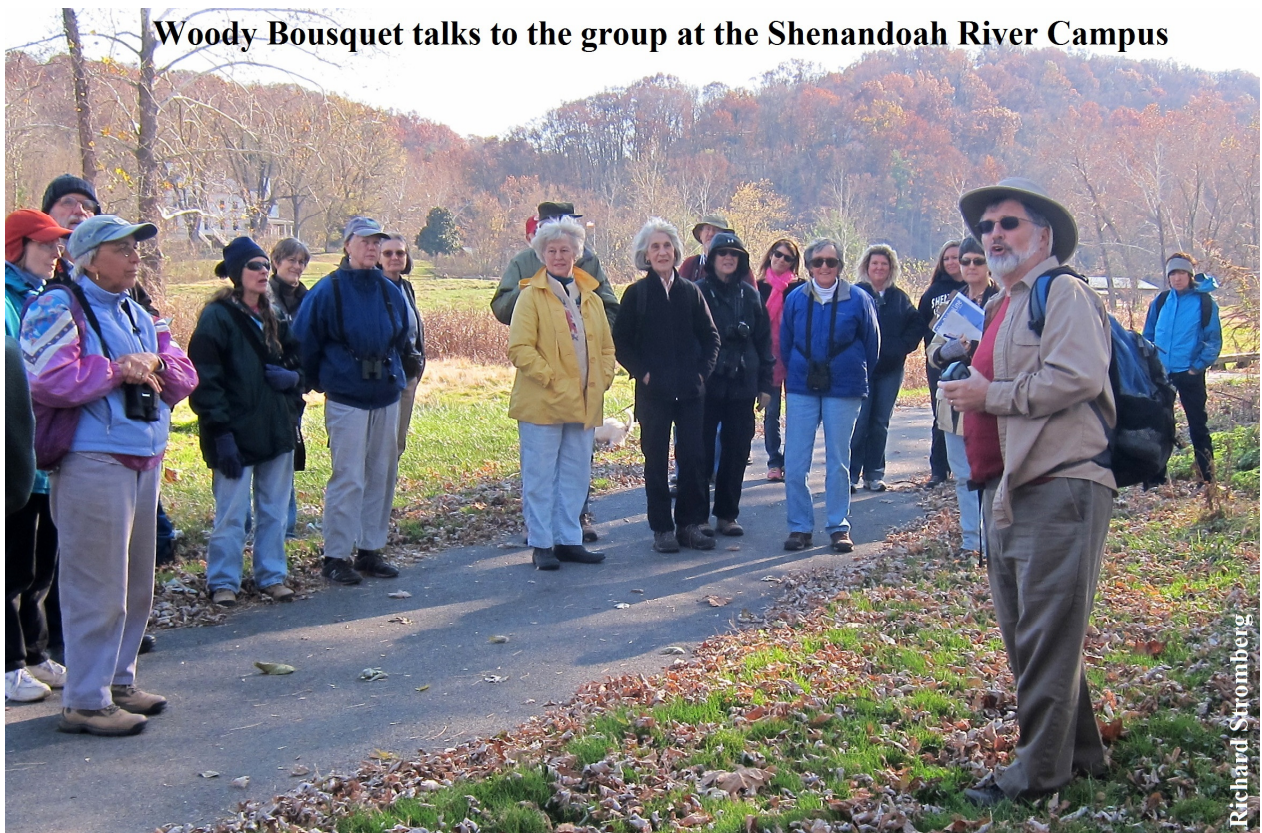
In the parking lot was the biggest Persimmon tree I have ever seen. It had more fruit than I have ever seen. Most of the leaves had dropped so the fruit stood out clearly. (I ate one I found on the ground and brought three home.) The tree stood pretty much by itself with only some Redcedars a few feet away, so little competition. And the river was only a few feet away, so it has abundant water, though they do well in dry conditions as attested by a tree that yielded us some fruit up on the ridge. On my drive home I thought, "That tree must have hundreds of fruit on it." Looking at my pictures, it must be thousands! I checked the state and national "Big Tree" lists, and this tree cannot match the 33 inch diameter and 120 feet height of those trees, but do the list leaders produce so many fruit?





View from Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute Racetrack Hill

Richard Stromberg



Woody Bousquet talks to the group at the Shenandoah River Campus

Richard Stromberg