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Blue Ridge Wildflower Society

A CHAPTER OF THE
VIRGINIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

Vol. 29, No. 1

Fall 2008

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

September 22

Field Trip & Membership Meeting,

This day will feature both a rare field trip on a Monday afternoon and our regular September meeting in the evening.

Field Trip: The day will begin with a field trip. It will feature a tour of the "Big Trees of the Roanoke Valley". Join our guest speaker and trip leader Jeff Kirwan, Professor of Wildlife at VPI&SU for a memorable day. Jeff Kirwan is a co-author of the new book *Remarkable Trees of Virginia*. This field trip will tip off our fall programs. We will meet at 1:30 p.m. at the Orange Market off Thompson Memorial Drive in Salem. Take Exit 141 off I81 and go north to the intersection of Rt. 419 and Thompson Memorial Drive and Rt. 311. Turn at the traffic light into the Orange Market lot and park in the lot in front of the store. We will begin our journey by traveling to Fincastle to see Virginia's largest Honey locust tree (the second largest in the U.S.) We will also look at several other majestic specimens throughout the valley, including a huge American elm and white ash. We will car pool from the Orange Market. Contact Butch Kelly 384-7429 for more information.

General Membership Meeting, 7:00 p.m. Roanoke Church of Christ at 2606 Brandon Ave. The program will be a presentation of the *Remarkable Trees of Virginia*. Our speaker Jeff Kirwan, will present a slide program on the contents of a new book he has co-authored with Nancy Hugo. He will take us on a journey showing some of the most photogenic as well as the largest trees in our great state.

October 25

Field Trip, Fall Color on the Blue Ridge Parkway. Did you ever wonder why some trees are yellow, while others are red and orange? Here is your chance to find out. We will look at trees up close and at great distances and learn not only what species you are looking at, but why they look the way they do. Join leader Rich Crites 774-4518, at the Peaks of Otter Visitor Center (milepost 86) at 9:30 a.m. There will be little walking. Early birds will meet at the Peaks Restaurant for breakfast at 8:00 a.m.

October 27 **General Membership Meeting, 7:00 p.m.** Roanoke Church of Christ 2606 Brandon Ave. Join Jim Bush for a DVD show entitled "Garden Gala" on gardens of the world. Jim will share photos and stories from England, Hawaii, Idaho, and Kentucky among others.

November 24 **General Membership Meeting, 7:00 p.m.** Roanoke Church of Christ 2606 Brandon Ave. Join us for an **evening of shared memories and seed exchange**. Bring a few of your best slides or digital photos to share with friends and guests. Please bring seeds to share with all.

Refreshments are served at all meetings. Visitors are welcome. All field trips are free to anyone anxious to learn about wildflowers and the diversity of life we are lucky to have in this beautiful valley and its surrounding hills.

BRWS 2008 Picnic

Many, many thanks to Jim and Rosemary Bush for hosting the annual chapter picnic. A big thank you also goes out to Robyn and Allen Austin for donating the burgers and dogs and allowing us to tour their gardens.

The great fellowship and pleasant weather made the day one for the memory bank. The food, as usual was good for the palate. Thanks to all the work of many super cooks.

After lunch, some members viewed plants at Jim and Rosemary Bush's property. This was followed across the street at the Austin's gardens. Many late summer native plants were seen.

2008—2010 Slate of Officers Nominated

The following list of nominations will be presented at the September meeting and voted upon at the October meeting.

President—Rich Crites
Vice President—Rudy Albert
Secretary—Marci Albert
Treasurer—Rosemary Ellis
Historian—Betty Kelly

Many thanks to these members for agreeing to lead us over the next two years.

BRINGING NATURE HOME

How Native Plants Sustain Wildlife in Our Gardens

By Douglas W. Tallamy

Reviewed by Doris Flandorffer

This book stresses the importance of planting native plants in our gardens in order to sustain the insects that are eaten by birds, spiders, bats, frogs, toads and other wildlife, many of which are endangered.

We are trading our wild lands for uncontrolled expansion at an alarming rate. We are more and more replacing native plants with aliens in our gardens. The wild creatures we enjoy and would like to have in our lives will not be here in the future if we take away their food and the places where they live.

Mr Tallamy emphasizes the fact that insect herbivores are important to the health of all terrestrial ecosystems. Worldwide, 37 per cent of animal species are herbivorous insects. These species are collectively very good at converting plant tissue of all types to insect tissue, and as a consequence they also excel at providing food—in the form of themselves—for other species. A large percentage of the world's fauna depends entirely on insects to access the energy stored in plants. Birds are a particularly good example of such organisms. Of all of the terrestrial bird species in North America, 96 per cent, or nearly all of them rely on insects and other arthropods, (typically the spiders that eat insects), to feed their young,

“And no wonder! Insects are unusually nutritious. Pound for pound, most insect species contain more protein than beef, and their bodies are extremely high in valuable energy. The renowned ecologist E.O. Wilson has called insects ‘the little things that run the world,’ in part because of their role in transferring energy from plants to other animals that cannot eat plants directly. If we want to have members of higher trophic levels in our managed ecosystems, we must also have their primary food source: insects.

Problems for biodiversity in North America started when humans began destroying diverse forests and grasslands that once covered the continent in order to plant crops and create living spaces. We left islands of suitable habitat in which most of the plants and animals that survive today found refuge. At first these habitat patches were relatively large, but today they are miniscule, far too small to sustain populations of most living things for very long. The consensus among landscape ecologists is that 3 to 5 per cent of the land remains as undisturbed habitat for plants and animals.

The answer to this is to make our gardens more hospitable to wildlife, especially by growing native plants. Insects cannot use aliens for growth and reproduction. Ornamental plants that are ‘pest free’ are favored by the industry specifically because they are unpalatable to insects. Many of these plants have subsequently become invasive. Native plants and insects have evolved together over long periods of time, and some insects feed on only one species. Some have adapted so that they can feed on related plants, but most have not. By favoring native plants over aliens in the suburban landscape, gardeners can do much to sustain the biodiversity that has been one of this country's richest assets. The natural world is both beautiful and full of life.

The common theme of this book is that we humans have disrupted natural habitats in so many ways and in so many places that the future of our nation's biodiversity is dim unless we start to share the places in which we live—our cities and, to an even greater extent, our suburbs—with the plants and animals that evolved there. Because life is fueled by the energy captured from the sun by plants, it will be the plants that we use in our gardens that determine what nature will be like 10, 20, and 50 years from now. If we continue to landscape predominantly with alien plants that are toxic to insects—the most important herbivores in our suburban ecosystem in terms of passing energy from plants to other animals—we may witness extinction on a scale that exceeds what occurred when a meteor struck the Yucatan peninsula. If instead we use plants that evolved with our local animal communities as the foundation of our landscapes, we may be able to save much of our biodiversity from extinction. In essence, we will for the first time coexist with nature rather than compete with her.

The choice is clear. The costs of increasing the percentage and biomass of natives in our suburban landscapes are small, and the benefits are immense. Increasing the percentage of natives in suburbia is a grassroots solution to the extinction crisis. Our success is up to each one of us individually. We can each make a measurable difference almost immediately by planting a native nearby. As gardeners and stewards of our land, we have never been so empowered—and the ecological stakes have never been so high.

BRWS WEB SITE

The Blue Ridge Wildflower Web Site is being updated. It is a work in progress. As of now much of the information is out of date. The chapter has hired a consultant to help us get it back on line. Some members are being trained to use the web site. Hopefully it will be back and up to date within the next couple of weeks. For access to the web site go to:
blueridgewildflowersociety.tripod.com.

Saltville/Mt. Rogers Field Trip

Nine folks attended the trip led by Rich Crites. The trip included great weather and interesting plants. The group enjoyed good Chinese food and lots of beautiful scenery. The high mountains of the Mt. Rogers area was invigorating. The 2 mile hike through the rich spruce-fir forest was a refreshing way to escape the heat of the valley below. Rich did a great job of explaining the interrelationships of the plants and animals of a world similar to the forests of New England and Canada.

The trip to Saltville was also interesting. The group was very fortunate to have a local historian at the Saltville museum take a real interest in giving us a personal tour. His passion for his community was refreshing. Thanks again to Rich for a great trip. There are many unique places in Virginia and West Virginia. We should take advantage of them and visit them more often.

Society Tries To Save Money

If you have an e-mail address, the chapter could save lots of money by sending you the newsletter on line. If you would like to receive the newsletter on line please send your e-mail to Butch Kelly at butch2410@msn.com. If you fail to receive it on line please call me at 384-7429 or e-mail me.

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