

Blue Ridge Wildflower Society

A CHAPTER OF THE
VIRGINIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

Vol. 19, No. 1

February, 2002

Schedule of Events

- February 16** **Altavista Skunk Cabbage Field Trip.** Meet at 10:00 a.m. at the Ross Laboratories in Altavista to go looking for early signs of spring. From Roanoke, take the 460 Bypass to the Route 29S Danville exit which is near Lynchburg airport. Take the first exit and turn left at the end of the ramp. This will take you to Altavista. Ross Labs has a large sign and is by the railroad track. Bring your lunch. Sandra Elder, 434-525-8433.
- February 25** **General Membership Meeting,** 7:30 p.m., Center in the Square. Either Monte McGregor or Mike Pinder with the Virginia Dept of Game and Inland Fisheries will be guest speaker.
- March 9** **VNPS Winter Workshop,** held at the University of Richmond. The focus will be on the benefits of conservation easements. A portion of the program will demonstrate the importance of conservation by linking the environment of 100 years ago with that of today. Details will come from VNPS.
- March 16** **Randolph-Macon Woman's College Botanic Garden Work Day.** Bring gardening tools and plan to work Saturday afternoon from 2:00 - 4:30 p.m. We need your help preparing the garden for spring. Rain date is March 23. Sandra Elder, 434-525-8433.
- March 23** **Waid Park Field Trip.** Meet at 10:00 a.m. Take Route 40W out of Rocky Mount; turn onto Six-Mile Post Road (Route 640) at the traffic light by Forty West Food Faire. Go to Route 800 then turn left. This park is part of the original Carolina Road. Bring your lunch. Al & Vi Sheridan, 540-721-8189.
- March 25** **General Membership Meeting,** 7:30 p.m., Center in the Square.
- April 6** **Oriskany Field Trip.** Join us for this trip along Craig Creek. Meet at 10:00 a.m. at the Daleville Park and Ride by the Exxon station, exit 150B from I-81 North. This is a new area for us. Julie Alexander, 540-427-0117.
- April 6** **Identification of Spring Wild Flowers** through slides and living specimens. This Saturday evening program will be held in the Martin Science Building, Room 225, Randolph-Macon Woman's College campus. Bring Newcomb or other field guides. Carolyn Bates and Dorothy Bliss, 434-845-5665.
- April 20** **Birds and Blooms Field Trip.** This is a joint hike with the Bird Club of Arcadia. Meet at the Botetourt Commons Shopping Center in Daleville at 7:30 a.m. Julie Alexander, 540-427-0117.
- April 22** **Arbor Day Excursion.** We will plant trees in honor of Earth Day and Arbor Day. Details pending.
- April 27** **Mill Mountain Zoobilation.** Volunteers are needed to lead hikes at the Mill Mountain Wildflower Garden. Please contact Julie Alexander as soon as possible.
- May 4** **Bent Mountain Field Trip.** Meet at 10:00 a.m. at the Bent Mountain School. Bring binoculars to enjoy the abundance of birds and butterflies. Allen & Robin Austin will provide lunch after the trip. Robin Austin, 540-929-9071.
- May 11** **Eighteenth Annual Spring Plant Sale,** Community Arboretum on the campus of Virginia Western Community College from 9:00 a.m. until noon. No plants sold before 9:00 a.m. Rain or shine! Rich Crites, 540-774-4518.
- May 20** **General Membership Meeting,** 7:30 p.m., Center in the Square. Note: This is the third Monday in May.
A board of directors meeting will precede the membership meeting.
- May 25** **Jeeters Chapel Field Trip.** This area, near Thaxton, will be a new field trip for us. Meeting place and time will be announced. Allen & Robin Austin, 540-929-9071
- June 8** **Rhododendron Day on the Parkway.** Meet at the Peaks of Otter at 8:30 for breakfast or at the Visitor Center at 10:00 for the field trip. Bring your lunch. Julie Alexander, 540-427-0117.
- June 22** **Rhododendron Day at Altavista.** Meet at 10:00 a.m. at Ross Laboratories. See February 16 field trip for directions. Bring your lunch. Sandra Elder, 434-525-8433.

President's Letter

Julie Alexander

Sitting here with the first nice snowfall of the year certainly doesn't seem to be the time to be thinking of wildflowers. Yet that's just what we'll be doing tomorrow at the Board Meeting. I am looking forward to a trip that I have planned in conjunction with the Birding Club. On April 20 we will be hiking the trail at Arcadia to observe the birds and the blooms of that area. The blooms we hope to see are bloodroot, spring beauty, violets, polygala, and more. In addition there are some unique trees there. With all those blooms, we are sure to see many different species of birds. It will be a great opportunity to observe and learn. This trip is for the stout of heart though. "The early bird gets the worm" so we will be meeting the members of the Bird Club at 7:30 a.m. at the Botetourt Commons Shopping Center in Daleville. Hope to see you there.

Thank You

We don't often say it but we truly appreciate every member of our Blue Ridge Wildflower Society. Some of you are able to be very active, some of you can be somewhat involved. Others of you support us in concept but for any of various reasons are rarely, if ever, able to participate in our activities. A number of you live in other parts of the state, in other states or even other countries but know and love our Blue Ridge areas.

During this season of reflection, we want each of you to know we are glad you are a part of our chapter and want to encourage you to join us whenever possible.

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Toler's Coralroot Orchid

Stan Bentley

In mid-April of 1995, a group of college students and their teacher, Rich Crites, were on a biological study outing in the Jennings Creek area of Botetourt County, Virginia. The group came upon a large population of Wister's coralroot orchid (*Corallorhiza wisteriana*). The general group of orchids known as coralroots (*Corallorhiza*) is a genus of plants that have no leaves. The lack of leaves, of course, means no chlorophyll is present to convert into food. All orchids are dependent upon some type of mycorrhizal fungus for at least part of their nourishment. With no leaves, coralroot species are particularly dependent upon their fungus and the relationship of that fungus with other plants. This unusual arrangement alone makes coralroots interesting plants to study.

Coralroots ordinarily have very beautiful but tiny flowers. So when one comes in contact with these plants, there is a rare treat in store for the observant nature lover. Prior to 1995, all of the then known species of coralroots in North America except Wister's coralroot (*Corallorhiza wisteriana*) were known to have a particular color form variation. This color form occurs rarely and is often referred to as an "albino form." These forms are not really albinos in the strict sense but rather are a pale yellow in color and lack the gorgeous purplish-red spots and markings seen in most flowers of coralroot plants.

On that fateful day along Jennings Creek, some of the students noticed that a few of the Wister's coralroot plants were yellow. Rich Crites knew that the plants were special, just how special became the question of the day. Crites had the foresight to contact his friend Bobby Toler and tell him about the plants. Bobby then contacted me. Bobby and I were soon on our way to Jennings Creek. I was really excited to see these plants that I had never before seen. But, I too, was not aware just how special the plants were. There were only four yellow plants. Although they had been stepped on, likely by trout fishermen, the plants were still in good enough condition for pictures.

I began to research these yellow colored Wister's coralroots as soon as I got home. After several days, I began to realize that these particular plants had likely never been scientifically described or named. I called Bobby and he agreed to go with me to take a specimen that would serve as a voucher to be placed in the herbarium at Virginia Tech. During the course of research for my book *Native Orchids of the Southern Appalachian Mountains*, I still never ran across any reference to a yellow form of Wister's coralroot orchid. I then decided to formally describe this new form in my book. Scientifically, the yellow forms of other coralroot species have generally been referred to as forma *flavida* – meaning yellow. To separate this new yellow form of Wister's coralroot further from yellow forms of other species I decided a new variation could be applied in naming the form. In recent years, new scientific names for plant species have often been taken from the name of the discoverer or another prominent botanist – usually one associated with the area of botany from which the new plant comes. Recent new orchid names have somewhat followed this trend i.e. Keenan's fringed orchid (*Platanthera xkeenanii*) a new hybrid was named in 1993 for the late Phil Keenan of New Hampshire; Jones' twayblade (*Liparis xjonesii*) another new hybrid discovered by the author in 1992 and named for the late Bus Jones of Tennessee a founder of the now defunct "American Association of Field Botanists"; and Bentley's coralroot (*Corallorhiza bentleyi*) a new species discovered by the author and later named for the author by Dr. John Freudenstein of Ohio State University in 1999. With this research in mind, I formally named the yellow form of Wister's coralroot Toler's coralroot (*Corallorhiza wisteriana* forma *toleri*) in my book, *Native Orchids of the Southern Appalachian Mountains*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 2000.

Unfortunately, in the six flowering seasons since the discovery of Toler's coralroot, these yellow plants have not reappeared. But someday they will and this fact alone makes Toler's coralroot a very rare plant indeed. Watch for it, I do – every year.

Lynchburg Area Members

Dorothy C. Bliss

Sub-shrubs or Under-shrubs

Recently I was intrigued by an interesting article by George Ellison in "Chinquapin", the newsletter of the SABS, in which he described a category of plants as sub-shrubs. The term sub-shrub or under-shrub in Webster's Collegiate Dictionary is defined as "a perennial plant having woody stems except for the terminal part of the new growth which is killed back annually." I proceeded to see how different botanists treated some of these small evergreen plants that appear to lie between herbs and shrubs as usually defined.

In *Gray's Manual of Botany* by Fernald the following shrub-like plants more or less came under the above classification.

Arctostaphylos uva-ursi, Bear Berry

"a trailing shrub with papery, reddish to ashy exfoliating bark"

Ascyrum hypericoides, St. Andrews' Cross

"low rather shrubby pale-green plants – ascending shrub"

Epigaea repens, Trailing Arbutus

"a prostrate or trailing scarcely shrubby evergreen"

Gaultheria procumbens, Tea Berry

"extensively creeping shrub or almost herbaceous plant"

Pachistima canbyi, Mountain Lover

"low evergreen shrub"

Pachysandra procumbens, Allegheny Spurge

"low procumbent sub-shrub"

Mitchella repens, Partridge Berry

"trailing small evergreen herb"

This latter species would not be placed in the sub-shrub category in *Gray's Manual*, but in *Petrides' A Field Guide to Trees and Shrubs* it is described as "a delicate barely woody trailing evergreen plant". In *Nelle Ammon's Shrubs of West Virginia*, she lists 14 genera under Key 1, "Shrubs low mostly decumbent or creeping, evergreen."

After perusing several recognized taxonomic studies on woody plants, one can only conclude that Sub-shrub or Under-shrub is a somewhat ambiguous category but perhaps one can point out that plants have no say or part in their placement in this or any other category!

Five of the above named plants may be found in the R-MWC Botanic Garden. Perhaps on one of our warmer winter days you might drop by to see how conspicuous these low evergreens are in the winter ground vegetation.

Lynchburg – Spring Clean-up

Although it is only early January as I write these notes and an icy rain is coating the shrubs and trees outside, spring will soon be here when we begin to prepare our gardens for the resurgence of growth. The March work-afternoon in the R-MWC Botanic Garden is one of the most important activities in our maintenance program. Several of the shrubs need to be trimmed or thinned. Always the species of *Callicarpa*, Beauty Berry, must be cut back to 6" to 8" in height as the berries develop on the new branches. Fallen leaves should be lightly raked from the beds so that the spring growth is not smothered. During the fall and winter when I wander over the garden, I try to uncover the basal rosettes of the Cardinal flowers as the leaves must be exposed to the sun to allow continual photosynthesis. The branches of the China fir that drop throughout the year are a constant problem. A few inches of mulch is needed around many of the plants but not against the branches or trunks of woody species as this can encourage mice and voles and also rot if the trunk remains wet over a period of time. These sprucing-up activities enable the garden to get a good start for the resurgence of spring growth. Please volunteer for our scheduled spring work trip on **March 16**. Your help is needed. See below.

Programs

For several years we have had an evening VNPS program in Lynchburg in early December and in late March. This is a special opportunity for local members to get-to-gather as a group. In discussing this with several of you, the consensus is that we should continue these bi-annual meetings. This year we expect to hold the fall program in late October or early November. I would appreciate your ideas for these meetings and for selection of dates which is always flexible. Our spring program on **April 6** will emphasize the field identification of the early flowering plants. This will be an excellent opportunity to gain experience in use of keys and become acquainted with our native flora.

Schedule

Saturday, March 16, 2-4:30 p.m. Workday in R-MWC Botanic Garden. Bring tools. We need your help! Rain date March 23.

Saturday, April 6, 7:30 p.m. in Martin Science Building, Room 225 on R-MWC campus. Identification of Spring Wild Flowers through slides and living specimens. Bring Newcomb or other Field Guide. Carolyn Bates and Dorothy Bliss.

Other Events of Interest

April 22-28

Great Smoky Mountains 52nd Annual Wildflower Pilgrimage. This year's program will include an entire week of activities with field trips led by Park personnel during the early part of the week. Contact them at Great Smoky Mountains National Park, 107 Park Headquarters Road, Gatlinburg, TN 37738, 865-436-1290 for information. You can register on-line, beginning March 1 at <http://www.goldsword.com/wildflower/pilgrimage.html>.

May 10-12

Wintergreen Nature Foundation's 19th Annual Spring Wildflower Symposium. Lectures, field trips and workshops. Contact them at Wintergreen Nature Foundation, P. O. Box 468 Wintergreen VA 22958, 434-325-8169, www.twmf.org.

Without fanfare or fuss – with barely a sound – the snow falls, creating a landscape of pure beauty and rare tranquility. Important things become more evident, the rest become part of the past.

The year is new and all things are possible.

Nature is resting, renewing herself for spring.

For The Bookshelf

Native Orchids of the Southern Appalachian Mountains is meant to be used as a field guide with all the expected data. However, it is so interesting and easily readable you won't limit your time with it just to field trips. In addition to the botanical portion, there is a portion written in conversational style which nicely rounds out the book, making it so much more than simply a reference.

Printed on high quality paper and with a flexible binding, this book handles nicely – it feels good in your hands.

For a more complete review of Stan's book, see our January, 2001, Newsletter.

In Sympathy

We were saddened to learn of the death of Edwin F. Steffek, Jr., on October 27, 2001.

His gentle, quiet spirit and love of beauty are reflected in the H. L. Blomquist Garden which he designed and created. Chapter members who were able to visit the Sarah P. Duke Gardens in Durham, N.C., on one of our bus trips will recall the many special cameo-like settings tucked away throughout the Garden.

Ed was with the Gardens for 24 years and many of the accents were his handiwork. The granite grotto, which he fashioned completely by hand one summer, is only one of many of his personal touches.

Along with his accomplishments in the Garden, he also authored several books, among them *The New Wildflowers and How to Grow Them*.

He will be greatly missed but has left a legacy of such beauty he will not be forgotten.

Mr. Monarch Goes To The Nursing Home

Esther Atkinson

Raising two monarch butterflies from ugly caterpillars for the first time was an interesting experience. When releasing the first one, he acted as if he'd been incarcerated. He disappeared in a hurry. Two days later, Mr. Monarch broke from the chrysalis. What a beautiful specimen. (The first one didn't stay around long enough to be named.)

Knowing the residents at the nursing home where my mother lives do not get to enjoy many things in nature, I decided to take Mr. Monarch for a visit. He was transported in his birthing jar, strapped in the front seat of my vehicle. He didn't seem to mind the trip at all. Passing the jar around and showing him off to one another, as if he were a new baby, many residents had questions for me. They wanted to know: Where did I buy him? How did I catch him? How did I get him in the jar? They thought his coloring was outstanding. Even those who pay very little attention to anything seemed to take notice although they did not comment.

After returning safely to Roanoke, Mr. Monarch was released. Apparently he liked his surroundings. He "hung out" in the back yard the rest of the day enjoying the nectar of the late blooming flowers.

Highlights of sights and discoveries on the "Back Roads, 2001"

A male Diana and other unusual butterflies

A newborn fawn

Twin fawns

One black bear . . . Teenager?

Looking for a home?

Flocks of wild turkeys

A fish building a birthing bed

A small stand of Rose Pinks . . . according to one botanist, rare in this part of the country

Watercress and mushrooms . . . watercress sandwiches . . . yum . . . yum and fried mushrooms

Showy and yellow fringed orchis

Wild grapes that made delicious jelly

Lots of adult deer

Sigh . . . If only there were two Aprils on the calendar instead of one February and one April

Propagation by Layering

In-ground layering is one of the simplest and most successful methods of plant propagation home gardeners can use. Layerings can be described as cuttings being rooted while still attached to and receiving nourishment from the parent plant.

There are three commonly used methods. Single branches may be partially buried; the tips of branches may be buried; or, the entire lower

portion of a plant having multiple stems may be mounded over with soil. We will be discussing the first method.

A good time to begin this process is early summer, mid to late June, when the new spring growth has hardened.

Select strong, young branches growing close to the ground or those which can easily be bent to the ground. Bend the branch so that new or year-old growth near the tip of the branch touches the ground. Mark the spot and work some extra peat moss or sand into the area. Scoop out a hole about 4" deep to receive the branch. Long, flexible branches may have two areas buried, as in the illustration.

Bend the branch down and cut partway through the top side, at an angle, going no more than halfway through the stem. This is where new roots will form. A tiny amount of rooting hormone may be applied to the cut but it is not necessary.

Secure the stem in the hole using a piece of bent wire, a forked branch, or other method of your choosing. Cover with sand and peat moss, being careful to leave the tip of the branch uncovered and upright. Large, heavy or springy stems may need to have a brick or stone placed over the area to help secure their placement. The depth of burial varies with the size of the parent plant, size of the stems, etc. Logic will say a partridgeberry will need to be lightly covered but a woody shrub will need to be more heavily covered.

Water thoroughly and continue to keep constantly damp but do not soak the area.

Herbaceous plants may root in as little as a few weeks but woodier plants may require a year or more. When a good root system has been established, the new plants may be severed from the parent and established in their desired settings. Herbaceous plants do well when cut and set out in early fall. Woody plants are often better left through winter and not cut off until the following spring. A mulch of leaves can be spread over the buried area during winter to help protect the new root system. If mulched, allow the leaves near the tip of the plant to remain exposed.

