

Blue Ridge Wildflower Society

A CHAPTER OF THE
VIRGINIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

Vol. 19, No. 2

April, 2002

Schedule of Events

- 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.** Meet at 7:00 p.m. at Fallon Park School off Route 24 (on the hill behind the pool), Vinton. We will plant trees, donated by Robin & Allen Austin, in honor of Earth Day and Arbor Day. Julie Alexander, 540-427-0117.
- April 27** **Mill Mountain Zoobilation.** Al & Vi Sheridan will be leading walks at 10:15 a.m. and 1:15 p.m.
- 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. Jim Bush, leader, 540-929-4775.
- May 4** **Trillium Slopes Field Trip.** Meet at 2:30 p.m. at the Thunder Ridge Overlook, Blue Ridge Parkway milepost 74.7. Picnic supper at the James River Visitor Center. Dot Bliss, 434-845-5665.
- 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,** 7:00 p.m., Center in the Square. Note: This is the third Monday in May. Liz Belcher with the Greenway Committee will be our guest speaker.
- A board of directors meeting will precede the membership meeting.
- June 8** **Rhododendron Day on the Parkway.** Meet at the Peaks of Otter at 8:30 a.m. for breakfast or at the Visitor Center at 10:00 a.m. 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. From Roanoke, take the 460 Bypass to the Route 29S Danville exit 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.
- Sept. 13-15** **VNPS Annual Meeting.** Hosted by the Pocahontas Chapter, this year's meeting will be held in Richmond. Field trips will cover both Piedmont and Coastal Plain areas. More details will be sent from VNPS as the event draws closer.
- Sept. 21** **Fall Plant Sale** at the Randolph Macon Woman's College in Lynchburg. Tentatively scheduled from 10:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. Sandra Elder, 434-525-8433.

President's Letter

Julie Alexander

In a recent memo, Nicky Staunton, President of the Virginia Native Plant Society, requests assistance from the chapters in compiling information regarding the educational component of the VNPS. The VNPS is trying to obtain a grant from the Virginia Environmental Endowment. In order to get this grant, VNPS must show work in the areas of education as well as conservation. While VNPS work in the area of conservation is well-known, its educational efforts are not.

The VNPS memo asks the following:

- Are you giving scholarships?
- Do you help school wildflower gardens?
- Do you take programs to schools?

At our last meeting we voted to give scholarships to Virginia Western Community College. We also voted to donate money for educational signs at the Waid Park Vernal Pool and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries Wetland Site in Patrick County. We donated money to Woodpecker Ridge, the VWCC wildflower garden, and the Randolph-Macon Botanical Garden. We voted to make a donation to the Mill Mountain Discovery Center for educational purposes. I am glad we are putting our money where our mouth is more.

As an educator, I understand the importance of promoting our ideas to young people. They are the ones who will be deciding on environmental issues in the future. Knowledge and appreciation of our natural world does not come automatically these days. People must be involved in the natural world to understand and appreciate it. And young people are not the only ones who could be educated. Reading Esther Atkinson's article in the newsletter about taking the Monarch

Butterfly to the nursing home made me realize that the more everyone feels a connection to the natural world, the more they will want to preserve it. Our educational efforts can be expanded to include as many people as possible.

I would like to recognize some efforts already being made. Vi Sheridan has led three wildflower walks at Waid Park. And if you have ever been with Al and Vi on one of those walks, you know that they educate you on so much more than just the wildflowers. The Sheridans will also be leading walks through the Mill Mountain Wildflower Garden as part of the Zoobilation program on April 27. Robin and Allen Austin are donating and planting trees at my school in April. Come and help us out on April 22 at 7:00 p.m. at Fallon Park School. I have been working to establish a butterfly garden at Fallon Park School (where I teach). The children have been involved in planting, weeding, and learning in the garden. And I would love to hear more - like Esther's visit to the nursing home.

I hope we will continue to make financial contributions and to learn and educate ourselves further. But I also would like to see us expand our efforts in different ways. Getting young people and others involved in learning about native plants will help us grow as an organization.

Golden Wood Poppy

During April and May your eye may be caught by the brilliant golden-yellow blooms of the wood poppy, *Stylophorum diphyllum*.

This herbaceous plant grows 12 - 18" tall and has one to four incised basal leaves. Blooms are one and a half to two inches wide, four petaled, and appear at the top of the stem from a stalk which originates near the base of the stem leaves. There are numerous stamens with very slender filaments and narrow anthers. There is one pistil with a two to four-lobed stigma. The calyx has two slightly hairy sepals which soon drop from the plant.

Seed pods mature to a rough, hairy, dry ovoid containing multiple seeds which are conspicuously crested.

While not a true rhizome, the underground stem is thickened enough to be considered rhizomatous. The plant has the saffron-yellow juice typical of

many members of the Papaveraceae or poppy family.

This native, also known as Celandine poppy, is much more attractive than its similar European cousin, *Chelidonium majus*, known simply as Celandine. It makes an attractive addition to shady borders and the wild garden. It needs rich, neutral or slightly acid soil.

Attempts have been made to use this plant for the same medicinal purposes as *C. majus*. There has been some success in treatment of jaundice, ringworm and corns using compounds derived from the plant's juices.

The *Atlas of the Virginia Flora* indicates *C. majus* has been found in 34 counties. *S. diphyllum*, on the other hand, has been found in only six counties, all in the southwestern portion of the state. It is often found along the edges of forests or in very light, open woods. If it's blooming nearby, it will definitely catch your eye.

Annual Spring Plant Sale

Our Eighteenth Annual Plant Sale is scheduled for Saturday, May 11th at the Community Arboretum at Virginia Western Community College. The sale is from 9:00 a.m. until noon or until the supply is exhausted. No plants will be sold before 9:00 a.m.

Now is the time to begin potting your plants. They need three to four weeks to become established before the sale. As you thin or divide your garden plants, be thinking of what you might like to share for our sale. If you need pots or have questions, contact Rich Crites, 540-774-4518, or Paul Cowins, 434-239-4884.

All plants need to be at the Arboretum no later than 8:30 a.m. **PLEASE HAVE THEM LABELED.** Although taxonomic names are preferable, they are not necessary. However, please at least have the common names.

Remember, our sale takes place rain or shine, so don't let cloudy skies or a sprinkle deter you from attending or bringing your plants.

Your help is needed, whether donating plants, helping with arranging and pricing prior to the sale or helping people make their selections and carry these selections to their vehicles during the sale. Can we count on you?

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For The Bookshelf

Growing & Propagating Showy Native Woody Plants by Richard E. Bir. University of NC Press, Chapel Hill, 1992.

We know herbaceous plants with their striking blooms, fruits or foliage add drama to the home landscape. Color and texture are not limited to the low growing plants or common shrubs which normally come to mind, however.

The recent wave of interest in using native plants has given us many new resources for methods of propagation. Even so, the focus has been on plants for commercial use. Little has been written on the propagation of woodys for use in the home landscape.

In this book, Dr. Bir showcases the most visually spectacular woody plants of the eastern United States. He discusses more than 90 species, most of which include a color photo. At least several of these would be suitable to every need the typical homeowner would encounter. Many could be used to add that missing element to the lawn or garden.

Written in conversational style, the book explains the uses and value of the plants as well as scientific aspects. Language and terminology are non-technical, so it is easily usable by both the novice and the veteran.

Propagation by various methods, such as seeds, clippings and root cuttings as well as cultivation, is covered. Also included are the expected elements such as a hardiness map.

Appendices include listings for plants suitable for special areas such as alkaline or moist areas, as well as sources or hormones and other supplies.

Dr. Bir is a professional horticulturist with more than 30 years experience. He is extension horticulturist with the Mountain Horticulture Crops Research Center of North Carolina State University. For years he was director and program chairman for the Conference on Landscaping with Native Plants held annually at Cullowhee, NC.

In Sympathy

Our sympathy is extended to Esther Atkinson at the loss of her mother, Helen Noel on Feb 6, 2002. Mrs. Noel was a lifelong resident of Botetourt County.

Skunk Cabbage Field Trip

Sandra Elder

On February 16th I was accompanied by four others to our registry site in Altavista.

As we approached the site we were greeted by a pair of bluebirds. I was reminded of Thoreau's words. He said the eastern bluebird "carries the sky on its back." Today's sky was not as blue as the bluebird's back but it was a beautiful day.

We found skunk cabbages although not as many as last year. The spadix of many plants were shriveled and black, probably due to the drought. There was plenty of water in the creek but the surrounding ground was dry where it is usually moist.

On this winter day the beauty of the sycamore trees was appreciated. The peeling bark revealed soft shades of gray, tan and green, looking like living art objects against the blue sky. In Peattie's book *A Natural History of Trees* he tells of Andre Michaux finding sycamores in the Ohio valley with a diameter of 13 feet. I stood in the middle of my living room, of about the same dimensions, and tried to imagine what it felt like to stand inside a tree that size. The pioneers often stabled their livestock in living hollow sycamore trees and sometimes a family would live there until their cabin was built.

Before heading back uphill we stopped for a closer look at a specimen of this year's wildflower of the

year, Witch Hazel, *Hamamelis virginiana*.

As we drove back through the field a gray fox emerged from the hedgerow and observed us for a few moments before disappearing in the tall grass.

After returning our badges to Ross Labs we enjoyed a great lunch at a Chinese restaurant in Altavista.

Hummingbirds

Hummingbirds normally arrive in Virginia sometime during April. If you are on the net, visit www.hummingbirds.net to find out when they will arrive in our area. If you sight them, enter their location and the date on the United States map found at the website. Watch the sightings as hummers migrate up the coast.

Thanks to Marie Minor, former VNPS President and Pocahontas Chapter member, for reminding us of this resource.



Wild
Bleeding-heart

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 online, 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.twnf.org.
- May 10-12 Shenandoah National Park's 16th Annual Wildflower Weekend.** Hikes, slide presentations and children's activities. Programs are free but there is a \$10 per car park admission fee. Contact them at 540-999-3397 or www.nps.gov/shen.

Lynchburg Area Members

Dorothy C. Bliss

The Promises of Spring

A favorite quotation of mine is from P. B. Shelley's poem "Ode to the West Wind" "Oh Wind, if Winter comes can Spring be far behind?" Now that the calendar tells us that spring has arrived, we are seeking early signs of rebirth in the out-of-doors. The first flowers to appear in profusion are those ubiquitous weeds some of which have been with us through the winter, *Lamium amplexicaule*, henbit and *L. purpureum*, purple dead nettle. Now they are in full bloom. Having been away for a couple of months, I have missed some of the early awakenings but at the end of March the first white to pale pink flowers of *Erigeron philadelphicus*, common fleabane, are just emerging. The plants are low, hugging the ground but soon they will produce upright stems more than two feet tall. The common dandelion naturalized from Europe, *Taraxacum officinale*, has been blooming sporadically even in the winter months but now is showing its golden head rather brazenly in our lawns and gardens. These early flowers are so beautiful they even appear welcome but soon comes the urge to remove them so that the lawn will appear as a green expanse unbroken by these yellow splashes. The hairy bittercress, *Cardamine hirsuta*, a small member of the mustard family with overwintering green leaves bears tiny white flowers soon to be displaced by a slender capsule or silique which on contact will spread its seeds far and wide assuring us that each plant will produce an explosion of progeny far from the parent, only to be removed later.

The furry catkins of the pussy willow, *Salix* sp, that began to appear in early February are but shaggy reminders of their former beauty. The redbud trees, *Cercis canadensis*, are easily spotted in our woodlands with their clusters of pea-shaped lavender flowers. The white or pinkish clusters of blooms of the shadbush, *Amelanchier arborea*, are conspicuous in the understory of our deciduous woods. They are all reminders that spring is on its way.

The R-MWC Botanic Garden

My first opportunity this spring to visit the Botanic Garden was on March 27 when only a few of the spring ephemerals had made their appearance. Among those in full flower were bloodroot, *Sanguinaria canadensis*, Greek valerian, *Polemonium repens*, and the shale barren Phlox, *Phlox subulata*. Some of the flowers of the latter had already developed into fruit. A lone flower and a few clusters of buds were poking up through the netting over the Dutchman's breeches, *Dicentra cucullaria*, that had developed from some corms I had been given last fall and planted under the netting for protection against voles and squirrels. Just emerging from the dark red leaves of Oconee bells, *Shortia galacifolia*, were several beautiful pinkish white blooms. The leaves develop these anthocyanin pigments in response to the cold and UV light and as the temperature rises, the plants will again sport their glossy green color. There is an excellent detailed article on recent research on the role of anthocyanin pigments in the Spring 2002 Issue of the Chinquapin Newsletter of the Southern Appalachian Botanical Society. The flowers of bleeding heart, *Dicentra eximiana*, were in dark red clusters that will soon expand to display the lovely lavender blossoms of the summer months. The Virginia bluebells, *Mertensia virginica*, were evident as dark purple buds but had not expanded to show their dual nature - colors from pink to bluish lavender. Large dark knobs pushing up through the soil gave evidence that soon the Trilliums will add their flowers to the landscape.

The most prolific blooms were those of the Greek valerian which of its own volition had scattered its progeny far away from where it was planted. The most colorful and striking flowers were those of golden ragwort, *Senecio aureus*, which brightened the ground under the China fir with its clusters of intense yellow blossoms. Truly if winter comes can spring be far behind?

Spring Workday - March 16

My special thanks go to the volunteers who worked diligently most of that Saturday in spite of a little shower, preparing the garden for

Spring. Sandra and Jim Elder, Elizabeth Henderson and Bob Eubank accomplished wonders and the garden is in great shape. Again Thanks! It is only through efforts such as you displayed, that the garden can continue to fulfill its promise.

I hope that those of you who were not able to help out earlier will be able to join us to spread mulch and do some weeding around the plants during the months of April and May. I'll be calling you!

Field Trips

There is so much for us to enjoy in nature as spring merges into summer that I hope you will join some of the field trips scheduled in April, May and June. Already in the calendar are two trips in the Lynchburg area, on **June 8th**, Rhododendron Day on the Parkway and on **June 22** Rhododendron Day in Altavista. I am adding an excursion in May to the Trillium slopes on Apple Orchard, one of our favorite haunts in past years.

May 4, Saturday, The Trillium Slopes. Meet at 2:30 p.m. at the Thunder Ridge Overlook on the Blue Ridge Parkway, MP 74.7. Picnic supper at James River Visitor's Center.

A Glimmer of Hope

Mike Sawyer wrote, in the February Bulletin, of the memories which were lost when the Appalachian chestnut forests were lost.

The American Chestnut Foundation has just confirmed the existence of an American chestnut, *Castanea dentata*, with a circumference of 36", in Kentucky. To their knowledge this is the largest specimen east of the Mississippi. Washington state has the two largest known specimens, with circumferences of 75 and 79 inches.

It seems almost impossible that we will ever again see forests filled with even tiny saplings of these magnificent trees. We know few chestnut saplings live to become young adults, unfortunately. The existence of every mature tree, however, does give us cause to rejoice. It also gives us cause to be even more alert for we are the guardians of our world.