

# Blue Ridge Wildflower Society

A CHAPTER OF THE  
VIRGINIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

Vol. 21, No. 2

April, 2004

## SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

- April 24** **Randolph-Macon Woman's College Botanic Garden and Buffalo Creek Field Trip.** We will begin with a guided tour of the Garden at 11:00 a.m. You can either bring your lunch or have lunch at a nearby restaurant. (Magnolia Foods is very close and has good food). After lunch, we plan to continue our search for spring flowers at Buffalo Creek Nature Preserve. Sandra Elder, 434-525-8433, and Dot Bliss, 434-845-5665, leaders. In the Roanoke area, contact Butch Kelly, 540-384-7429.
- May 8** **Twentieth Annual Spring Plant Sale.** Community Arboretum at Virginia Western Community College, 9:00 a.m. - Noon. No plants may be selected or sold prior to 9:00. If you need pots to prepare for your donations to the sale, contact Paul Cowins, 434-239-4884, or Cindy Burks, 540-977-0868.
- May 15** **Parkway South for Flame Azaleas.** Meet at Buck Mountain Overlook, milepost 126, on the Blue Ridge Parkway, at 9:00 a.m. Bring your lunch; we may decide to go to Tuggles Gap Restaurant for dessert. Butch Kelly, 540-384-7429.
- May 24** **General Membership Meeting,** 7:00 pm., Center in the Square. Kerry Huffman, a student in Plant Taxonomy at Virginia Tech, will present a program, "Interactions Between Insects and Common Milkweed—A Naturalist's Talk on Research Done at the Mountain Lake Biological Station". Kerry will show slides of natural history and her work on common milkweed and nectar-seeking insects. It will be a special treat to have Kerry with us as she is one of our scholarship recipients. (See Scholarships article in this Newsletter.)  
There will be a Board of Directors meeting at 5:00 p.m. Bring your supper and we will eat as we work.
- June 5** **Rhododendron Walk.** Meet at 2:30 p.m. at the Peaks of Otter Visitor Center. Rich Crites, 540-774-4518, leader.

### Other Events of Interest

- April 19-25** **Great Smoky Mountains 54th Annual Wildflower Pilgrimage.** A week's worth of activities, lectures and field trips. Contact them at Great Smoky Mountains National Park, 107 Park Headquarters Road, Gatlinburg TN 37738, 865-436-1290 or <http://www.springwildflowerpilgrimage.org>
- May 14-16** **Wintergreen Nature Foundation 21st Annual Spring Wildflower Symposium.** Lectures, workshops and field trips. Contact them at Wintergreen Nature Foundation, P O Box 468 Nellysford VA 22958, 434-325-8169, or [www.twnf.org](http://www.twnf.org)

## President's Letter

### There Is Hope!

*Butch Kelly*

Early in March Betty and I headed out in search of skunk cabbage. Winter has seemed like it has been longer than usual. Betty says that every year. We drove to our usual haunt, which is Trout Creek in Catawba. The day was sunny and unseasonably warm. The skunk cabbage was just beginning to peak through. We then got our flower spotting eyes working like it was peak spring. There were at least a dozen in all phases of emergence. What a treat; I could see a gleam in the old girl's eye.

After observing the skunk cabbage for a while, we decided to head up the Appalachian Trail. The south facing slope was warm and sunny. We puffed up the trail. Once at the top, we were in the middle of the remnants of the 1994 forest fire site. The fire cleared out all the underbrush. This left lots of sites for small plants to push through. Soon Betty spotted the leaves of galax. That was followed by the leaves of trailing arbutus. No sooner had she identified them, than there on the rocks was the scarlet glow of British soldiers. The color of the British soldiers was quite a contrast to the drab browns and grays of the dry mountainside. The brilliant red jumped out at us. Betty's eyes lit up and she exclaimed, "There is hope".

Winter still had several weeks to go. This hike on a Sunday afternoon was just the medicine Betty needed to make it through the remaining gray days of winter. Now that spring is in full force we will enjoy all the splendor of the spring ephemerals.

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## Annual Spring Plant Sale

Our Twentieth Annual Spring Plant Sale is scheduled for Saturday, May 8, 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 selected or sold before 9:00 a.m.

Now is the time to begin potting as plants need three to four weeks to become established before the sale. As you divide your garden, be thinking of what you might like to share for the sale. If you need pots or have questions, contact Cindy Burks, 540-977-0868 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.

Don't miss this opportunity to share what you have or to purchase plants for yourself and for friends.

Your help is needed not only donating plants but also arranging and pricing prior to the sale and helping people make selections or carry their purchases to their vehicles. We hope to see you there.



**Cardinal Flower**

## Scholarships

The Blue Ridge Wildflower Society has again awarded scholarships to biology and horticulture students.

Kerry Huffman, a biology student, is a second time scholarship recipient from our Society. She is studying plant taxonomy at Virginia Tech. She has been asked to teach some junior level plant identification

classes at Tech. Kerry recently spoke with Rich Crites and asked if she could present a program to our group. We will have an opportunity to hear her May 24.

Tara (Corkey) Hendricks, is an artist and horticulturist. She received her formal art training at Central Virginia Community College then transferred to Virginia Western to major in horticulture. She has a 3.8 GPA, is secretary of the Horticulture Club and works at Riverside Nursery in Salem. Corkey will graduate in 2005.

Mike Ragone is a graduate of UVA with his degree in English. He decided to attend Virginia Western when he qualified for Trade Act-Career Retraining benefits. Mike has a 4.0 GPA, is president of the Horticulture Club and will graduate this summer.

We wish these students well as they pursue their careers and congratulate them on their accomplishments.

## A Skunk Cabbage Excursion

*Esther Atkinson*

When a friend calls and invites you to go see skunk cabbage on a day in winter, you seize the opportunity. The weather is doing its best to act like spring but hasn't reached the point of perfection. It's so close to spring temperatures, you'll go see anything green after a long, dreary winter.

Bent Mountain was our destination. The climate at that elevation is just right for our famous Bent Mountain cabbage in the fall, so it has to be just as good for skunk cabbage in the spring. I had never thought of that connection.

There's a colony of this plant on private property in Franklin County, but the hill is so steep leaving the spot that it becomes

an endurance test to climb out of the hollow. My son-in-law said when they were young, they would get a cabbage plant at this place and put it in a young man's car trunk when they knew he had a date. Can you imagine?

Once we passed the post office on Bent Mountain, we turned right onto Tinsley Road and circled the open field at our right. Our thoughts were of all the beauty that field produces in fall wild flowers. Continuing by Bent Mountain School, we turned left onto Poor Mountain Road, heading toward the television towers. Spring branches (some wet-weather creeks) produce lots of swampy areas along this road and skunk cabbage was at its peak. There were lots of plants of various sizes and color variations. Such a pretty plant with such a stinking name. We realized when they are gone, this same area will glow in the fall with asters, ironweed, joe pye weed and lots of other wild flowers.

We also saw colt's foot. The leaves can be boiled with sugar and made into cough drops.

We chose to save the top of Poor Mountain for another day. Dora Lee wanted to join Frieda Toler and me but had to prioritize her day and preparing her federal tax papers outplac'd botanizing. She's probably seen more skunk cabbage than we have since she once lived on the Mountain. We did pay her a visit on the way home.

Page 293 in Audubon Society's wildflower field guide and page 369 in Peterson's field guide show skunk cabbage.



**Skunk Cabbage**

## Favorite Wildflower Areas

*Anonymous*

The BRWS has many field trips during the year. For one reason or another many cannot attend. Some work and others have family responsibilities. The weather is not always agreeable. We urge you to participate in the walks because there is always an excellent leader who will call attention to and identify plants along the path. It is also a wonderful time to meet other members and share plant information.

Listed below are some suggestions for a walk:

Surely the list must begin with the Blue Ridge Parkway. It is a national treasure just a few miles from our doorsteps. About mid May, milepost 126 will have flame Azaleas in full bloom. Early June at Onion Mountain Overlook north of the Peaks, the rhododendron puts on its show and what a show it is.

The Mill Mountain Gardens provide an easy, very pleasant walk.

Green Hill Park in Salem is a good area in late April. There is a trail through a wooded area that has many of the spring wildflowers. Next to the picnic area is a hillside covered with trillium.

Randolph-Macon Woman's College in Lynchburg has a great Botanic Garden. Native plants have been used throughout the garden and there is almost always something in bloom.

Bent Mountain provides a pleasant drive from Route 221 to the top of Poor Mountain. The meadow at Tinsley Road is beautiful during August, September and October when Asters, Ironweed, Joe Pye Weed and Cardinal Flower are in full bloom. Along the road to the television towers are Knapweed, Queen Ann's Lace and Milkweed,

which butterflies love. March and April should be a good time to see skunk cabbage.

Enjoy your favorite spot. Remember, take only pictures, leave only footprints.

## Tough Plants

*Frieda Toler*

You know hope springs eternal in the hearts of all gardeners. Most farmers will tell you it is either too hot or too cold - too wet or too dry. At some point most gardeners must admit that not all plants grow well for them.

Moisture is very important. Remember our drought of two years ago. There are some plants that are drought-tolerant and they are worth considering when planning a flower bed - a few shrubs might be added to the list.

Shurbs may be: Barberry, Pyracantha, Spirea, and Lilac.

Perennials are: Lily of the Valley, Yarrow, Dames Rocket, Joe Pye Weed, Coneflower, Black Eyed Susan, Day Lily, and Coralbell.

Shade plants that require a good soil are: Wild Geranium, Celendine Poppy, Spiderwort, Skull Cap, and Jacobs Ladder.

Medium shade - partial sun plants are Columbine, Goats Beard, Phlox, Dwarf Crested Iris, and Firepink.

Full sun plants are a delight to plant and enjoy. Try some of these: Asters, Primrose, Liatris, Goldenrod, the Sunflower family, the Coneflower family.

Poor soil is a challenge - try these plants: Blanket Flower, and Butterfly Weed. Also Creeping Juniper is a good choice. These are only a very few suggestions to get your flower gardening started. Most often success or failure is by trial and error - ask another gardener for help or ask at the local garden center. Good gardening!!

# Lynchburg Area Members

Dorothy C. Bliss

## Harbingers of Spring

Spring was ushered in with the blooming of many of our introduced trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants. The star magnolia was white with masses of flowers by mid-March and was followed by the pinkish lavender blooms of the saucer magnolia and the red flowers of Japanese flowering quince. Soon the ground was colorful with hyacinths, daffodils and the invasive periwinkle. In my yard and garden ubiquitous clumps of the naturalized hairy bitter cress, *Cardamine hirsuta*, with its multitudes of tiny white flowers followed by innumerable seedpods, has spread rapidly, invading nearly every niche. More attractive are the native yellow flowers of pale corydalis or fumewort, *Corydalis flavula*, a member of the poppy family. Field garlic, another species from Europe and now naturalized, has developed into a serious pest of lawns and gardens. One of the earliest shrubs or trees to bloom was the native pussy willow on which I observed the catkins in late February and in early March. They had matured and it was too late for me to gather fresh branches for dried arrangements.

Skunk cabbage is usually one of our first native woodland flowers to bloom, occasionally appearing in February. Not being the favorite flower of many, we usually think of hepatica, bloodroot, spring beauty and Dutchman's breeches as among our earliest blooms. Let us fast forward to March 20th, the official beginning of spring. A walk in the Randolph-Macon Woman's College Botanic Garden revealed clusters of bloodroot flowers dotting the hillside above the pools. Bloodroot, *Sanguinaria canadensis*, a member of the poppy family, is known by many common names, Indian paint, red

puccoon, redroot, tetterwort, etc. As you can see, some of these names have been inspired by the red-orange juice in the underground rhizome. This colored sap was used by the native Indians as a red dye for clothing, baskets and war paint. The white flowers emerge from the rhizome and are enveloped by the solitary leaf that enlarges and remains long after the flower has disappeared. Because of its short life span, we may use the term ephemeral in referring to its brief existence. For hundreds of years, the American Indians and early settlers used bloodroot for medicinal purposes. Because of its poisonous properties, it is now listed as unsafe by the Food and Drug Administration.

A quote from Cullina's "Growing and Propagating Wild Flowers" expresses in colorful language the beauty and uniqueness of this early spring flower:

"Its snow white flowers with propeller-blade petals spring from the unfolding leaves like doves from a magician's hat at the first sign of a permanent thaw. Like twinleaf, the flowers last only a few days, the petals falling to the ground in confettiesque heaps before the leaves fully expand. They have a pure, crystalline quality so befitting one with a life so brief."

On this first spring day, only a few other plants were in bloom but the Greek valerian displayed several clusters of white flowers and there were a few pale blue flowers on the shale barren phlox. This phlox exhibits many color forms and is frequently cultivated in rock gardens and as a ground cover in yards. The golden ragwort, *Senecio aureus*, revealed a few scattered yellow daisy-like blooms but the mass display would not be out for another week. The

herbalists used this species to treat many diseases but it is now known to contain toxic alkaloids and is not recommended for internal use. The bright green leaf rosettes of *Dodecatheon madia* had just emerged from the soil and soon the interesting backward pointing petals that gives this plant its common name, shooting star, will appear.

These few flowers described above are only the beginning of the magnificent floral display that will reach its maximum beauty around the end of April or early May.

## April Field Trip

If you wish to see the Botanic Garden at its peak of spring flowering, join the field trip on April 24 which will begin with a tour of the Garden at 11:00 a.m. Then, following lunch, the group will drive to the Buffalo Creek Nature Preserve and hunt for spring flowers. Please see the schedule for further details.

## Spring Work Session

A very successful clean-up was held in the R-MWC Botanic Garden on the afternoon of March 13 with sixteen volunteers pruning shrubs, cutting back dead stalks, raking, mulching and doing other chores as needed. At the end of the afternoon, the spruced-up Garden was ready for the new year of active growth. The volunteers included Paul & Lucille Cowins, Jim & Sandra Elder, Al & Vi Sheridan, Robert Ferrell, Leonard Johnson, John Snead, Miriam Casey, Elizabeth Henderson, Molly McClenon, Evelyn McMinn, Gene Moore, Beth Weiland and Margaret Wenning. I give my deep appreciation and thanks to each of you who worked so diligently and accomplished so much. The Garden could not exist without your help. Thank you again!