Blue Ridge Wildflower Society

A CHAPTER OF THE

VIRGINIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

Vol. 20, No. 4 October, 2003

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

October 27 **General Membership Meeting.** 7:00 p.m., Center in the Square. John Siler, dendrologist from Virginia Tech, will present a program on the Basics of Woody Plant Identification. He will also discuss some of the online sources for identification.

November 24 **An Evening of Shared Memories.** Bring 5 to 10 of your favorite slides or photographs or a short video from the past year to share with the group. A seed exchange will follow. Bring a friend and come meet at 7:00 p.m., Center in the Square.

Fall Plant Sale

Sandra Elder

September 6th was a beautiful sunny day with a hint of fall in the air. A great day for the tenth Annual Wildflower Plant Sale in Lynchburg. The success of this event was due to the efforts of many people. Because of the dream of Dorothy Bliss to have a botanic garden at Randolph-Macon Woman's College and her will to make that dream happen, we have the perfect setting for our plant sale. Our plants for sale are displayed in the area below the fish pond. When people at the sale ask what a small plant will look like when it matures, we can say, "Come, walk down this garden path and I'll show you." We had a large number of nice plants to sell, many of which came from the Botanic Garden.

Thanks to all the people who came one day in August to help pot them. Robert Ferrell took many of them home to tend them until the sale. Other plants were furnished by Lucille and Paul Cowins, Vi and Al Sheridan, Elizabeth Henderson, Margaret Wenning, Ruby Albert, Dora Lee Ellington, Cindy Burks, Alex Newmark, John Snead, Dorothy Bliss and me. (I hope I didn't leave anyone out.)

Brenda Hickman, Lynn Shelton, Jim Elder and Robert Ferrell came early to help Dorothy and me set up and label plants. Betty Kelly did a great job as hostess at our information tables. Our faithful cashiers, John Snead and Elizabeth Henderson, made collecting money go smoothly. We made $912 this year. All of us involved with this sale enjoyed sharing our experience with and love for native plants.

President's Letter

Butch Kelly

Oh, how quickly the summer has flown. As everyone is aware, this year has been one of the wettest on record. It was quite a change from last year. The weather ,played havoc on many of our field trips. This year's VNPS annual meeting in Manassas was much like the rest of the summer. Three folks from our chapter attended. Betty, Pam and I signed up for the all day trip to Bull Run Mountain. The sky opened up with a deluge. We opted out of hiking and returned for the afternoon trip. As we started to hike again, it rained. We did, however, have a great time meeting new folks and renewing old acquaintances. The annual meeting was brief and the meal was good.

There was much good news announced. The trip to Newfoundland was quite spectacular. All those who went made it sound like a good trip for next year. The trip to the Bruce Peninsula was also a big success. The "Flora of Virginia" project is progressing nicely. President Nicky Staunton reported that the VNPS is no longer in the red financially.

It is good to hear that things are looking up with our state organization.

Paint Bank Field Trip

Frieda Toler

Saturday, September 21, 2003, two days after Hurricane Isabel went through our area, the BRWS held a field trip to Paint Bank, Craig County. We met at the Farmhouse Restaurant on Route 311. From Route 311 we turned at the general store in Paint Bank and took Route 600. This route ends at the Virginia/ West Virginia line and for a few miles we were in Monroe County, West Virginia, on Route 17 and crossed the Great Eastern Divide - elevation 2,704 feet. When we re-entered Virginia, we were on Route 635 in Giles County.

We simply walked, talked, looked and enjoyed the beautiful fall day and the natural beauty of Craig County. There were a lot of plants to see. We counted about 70 plants, some in bloom and some which had gone to seed. There were several asters as well as goldenrod and thistle, but we did not key each one to decide which it was. The cardinal flower and great lobelia were especially pretty. The yellow flowers that are always difficult to identify were wingstem, Jerusalem artichoke and several others. There were monkey flowers, virgin's bower and some of the early summer bloomers such as knapweed, black-eyed Susan and Queen Anne's lace that were still pretty.

We ate lunch at Cherokee Flats fishing area for the handicapped. From the table we could see coral fungus, partridge berry, running cedar and American holly.

Of particular interest to me personally were the wild orchids. We saw the leaves and seed head of the downey rattlesnake plantain, *Goodyera pubescens*, and the yellow fringed orchid, *Platanthera ciliaris*. There was one more orchid which I had in my notes as having seen a number of years ago and that was a variation of nodding ladies' tresses or fragrant ladies' tresses, *Spirantes cernua* var. *odorata*.

There were other things to see such as buffalo at Hollow Hill Farm, deer and a turtle. Also, monarch, yellow tiger swallowtail, black tiger swallowtail butterflies and an orange skipper (also a butterfly).

Then we went back to the Homeplace Restaurant where some of the group enjoyed a delicious dinner.

This was a new area to explore for a field trip and those that attended enjoyed a real treat.

With both sorrow and hope, we thought about the death and destruction caused by Isabel in other parts of Virginia and surrounding states and counted our blessings.

A special thanks to Betty Kelly who was the leader.

In Memoriam

We are saddened to learn of the passing of Sally M. Nelson on June 28, 2003. Sally was an avid supporter of the conservation of wildlife, both plant and animal. She was a long-time member of the Blue Ridge Wildflower Society.

She was also a member of the Appalachian Trail Club and the Roanoke Valley Bird Club. Until recently, Sally was also actively involved with the Virginia Western Community Arboretum.

Our sympathy is extended to her family.

Round-leaved Sundew
Drosera rotundifolia

Giant Hogweed
An Attractive but Dangerous Noxious Weed

Dorothy C. Bliss

Recently a dangerous invasive plant, Giant Hogweed, *Heracleum mantegazzianum*, has been in the news. From several pertinent sources I have gleaned the following information. This tall showy member of the carrot family was introduced from Eurasia around 1917 and sold as an ornamental plant. It is listed as an invasive exotic of disturbed areas along roadsides and stream banks. It occurs as an escape from cultivation in Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Vermont, Connecticut, West Virginia, New York, Washington and Oregon. As yet it has not been found in Virginia.

This biennial or perennial may reach 15' in height and with leaves up to 5' wide and flowers in flat-topped white umbels up to 3' across. The stem may be 2"-4" in diameter, is hollow and ridged with coarse hairs and purple blotches. Hardin and Arena M.D. (1974) in "Human Poisoning from Native and Cultivated Plants" state that the sap causes severe painful blisters and rash. Scarring and brown discoloration of the skin may last for years. It is particularly dangerous to children since the hollow stems are well suited for pea shooters and whistles. Blisters and scarring follow around the mouth and eyes. Eye contact may result in blisters and blindness. The sap which contains furocoumarins as the active principles sensitizes the skin resulting in blisters. This plant is so dangerous that it should not be touched and it is recommended if it is located one notify the State Department of Agriculture who will handle control.

Iranian cooking utilizes the dried fruits as a spice. In April 1989 large quantities of Giant Hogweed seed were intercepted with the aid of the cooperation of the importer in California. Tests indicated that the seeds were 35% viable.

Cow-Parsnip or Cowbane, *Heracleum maximum*, is a robust relative of the Giant Hogweed and occurs in the Blue Ridge Mountains and the Shenandoah Valley in about 25 counties in Virginia. It may cause irritation in some individuals. This plant was used by the Indians for medicinal purposes and the roots and young shoots and stems were cooked for food. Cow-Parsnip reaches a height of 6'-8', its flower clusters are 6"-10" across, leaves are 1' across and the thick stem has fine hairs and much less purple on the stem than Giant Hogweed. Because of the similarity between these two species and other poisonous members of the carrot family positive identification is essential.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has listed the Giant Hogweed as a noxious weed and, therefore, it is against the law to grow, sell or distribute it.

Various sources were utilized in gathering information for this article. I wish to thank Elizabeth Henderson for locating pertinent data from several Web Sites.

For the Bookshelf

by James MacDonald

Life in the cold:
An Introduction to Winter Ecology
by Peter J. Marchand 1996,
University Press of New England.

As a propagator I've many times heard the question, "Do you think freezing will hurt these seeds?" A glance out the window on a frosty January night makes the answer obvious. The problem is that most of us have no direct experience of winter. We usually see winter by looking out a window. But, for plants and many animals life continues even at -10°F in exactly the same spot where they spent the summer. This book does an admirable job of explaining how they do it.

Life in the Cold succeeds in part because it is so eclectic. This is ecology at its best and includes elements from natural history, physiology and cellular biology. It weaves these many parts of the story together and manages to paint a clear picture of what is happening on a hillside as the temperature slips from 40°F to 30°F to well below zero. Life continues, but it is very different in the winter.

The smallest twig of a beech, *Fagus grandifolia*, can survive for days at temperatures below 0°F. The tree itself lives on even when the temperature is well below -30°F. As endotherms we are so limited in our temperature tolerance that this is difficult for us to understand. Intuition betrays us as we attempt to extrapolate from our own experience to the plants situation. The beech has many strategies that allow it to cope. As the temperature goes down it slowly changes. It disposes of its leaves. It changes the chemical composition of its cells. It moves water into the intracellular spaces. And finally, in a very methodical and controlled way, the twig freezes. When the temperature rises above 32°F it thaws again and lives on. On warm days the chlorophyll in its bark will even start to photosynthesize. As the temperature falls again it goes back through the same steps. Throughout the winter this whole processes is run again and again and the twig may freeze and thaw many times. This book describes a large number of remarkable strategies employed by a host of species to survive the winter.

For most of human history we spent our winters on that hill beside the beech and we then had a much more realistic and detailed understanding of life in

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Lynchburg Area Members

Dorothy C. Bliss

R-MWC Botanic Garden and the Deer Problem

During the past two years the following plants have been eaten or severely damaged in the R-MWC Botanic Garden - Blackeyed Susan flowers nipped off, Touch-me-not, Canada violet and pink Turtlehead. For all of these except Turtlehead and Touch-me-not they left the basal leaves and consumed the flower heads but for the latter two the deer have eaten the upper half of the plant with flowers and buds.

We are not alone in our ongoing problem of damage to native plants. It was reported in Arbor Vitae, the newsletter of FOSA (Summer 2003). that the Native Plant Trail at the State Arboretum suffered considerable damage as many of their young tree plantings, some of which are not protected with circular wire cages. The large Arbor vitae in front of the Quarters have been heavily pruned by deer during the winter when food was scarce.

Some plants appear to be somewhat deer-proof but if food is scarce they will eat most any plant! The solution to this problem is difficult, especially when large areas of plants are affected. The Milorganite recommended in an article in the Lynchburg newspaper has not proved effective in the few areas we spread it in the Botanic Garden. Most sprays and similar applications such as hair (human), soap, etc., must be re-applied following rain. If anyone has a satisfactory control suggestion (other than 7' fence!) I would be glad to consider it for the Botanic Garden.

The Fern Trip

Our Fern Trip at the Peaks of Otter on a warm but pleasant afternoon on August 23 was enjoyed by several members of the BRWS and friends. Among the ferns encountered along the Elk Run Trail were the Christmas, Ebony Spleenwort, Cinnamon and Royal ferns and several Botrychiums. A new fern for most of the group was the Marsh Fern, *Thelypteris palustris*, which resembles the New York or tapering fern with which it was intermingled here. The New York Fern, *Thelypteris noveboracensis*, is easily distinguished by the rapidly decreasing size of pinnae of the frond. Much of the forest floor was washed showing evidence of erosion on the hillsides from the excessive rain of the winter and spring. A very prolific finger-like white fungus on these slopes may be *Clavulina rugosa*, a common fungus along woodland paths.

A short walk part way around Abbot Lake yielded one specimen of the Broad Beech fern. Also of interest around Abbot Lake were the fruits of Silky dogwood, *Cornus amomum*, green at this time but would soon turn an attractive slate-blue in color. Also noted were a bull thistle with many butterflies flitting over the blossoms, the ghostly Indian pipe, the green fruit cluster of a large colony of cattails on the edge of the lake. A doe and two fawns emerged from under a willow tree and calmly watched us as we walked by. The gaunt skeleton of a pair of Canadian hemlocks gave silent testimony to ravages of the invasive adelgid.

Suddenly there was the sound of thunder and few drops of rain. We rushed to our cars and shelter, as the clouds released torrents of rain without ceasing for a half-hour. No picnic!

Fall Work Day

I hope to see many of you on the afternoon of **October 11, 2:00 - 4:30 p.m.** for the fall clean-up in the Randolph Macon Woman's College Botanic Garden! If you have questions, contact Dorothy Bliss, 434-845-5665.

For the Bookshelf

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the cold. This book, for instance, describes the "quinzhee" which is a quickly and easily built Athapaskan temporary shelter. It is made from the loose snow that is found in a forest. The natural properties of snow make this shelter warm and totally secure on the coldest night. We have forgotten what we once knew about snow because we have forgotten what we once knew about life in the cold. This book reminds us. I recommend it highly.

From "Native News," the Newsletter of the Maryland Native Plant Society V. 2, #1

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