

Blue Ridge Wildflower Society

A CHAPTER OF THE
VIRGINIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

Vol. 20, No. 3

July, 2003

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

- July 12** **Mabry Mill and Tuggles Gap Field Trip.** Meet at 9:00 a.m. at Buck Mountain Overlook, Blue Ridge Parkway milepost 123.2. We plan on enjoying a late lunch at Tuggles Gap Restaurant. Butch Kelly, 540-384-7429.
- August 9** **Paint Bank, Route 600 and Interior Field Trip.** This trip will include a bog area. Meet at the Homeplace Restaurant on Route 311 at 10:00 a.m. If you wish, join us for dinner as we meet between 3:30 and 4:00 at the Homeplace. Bring your lunch. Butch Kelly, 540-384-7429.
- August 17** **Smith Mountain Lake Picnic with the Sheridans.** Bring a covered dish. Al & Vi will provide the meat, lemonade and coffee. We will eat around 4:00 p.m. but come any time after 2:00 to enjoy their gardens and the lake. Please call the Sheridans at 540-721-8189 by August 12 if you plan to attend.
There will be a board meeting at 2:00 at the Sheridans.
- August 23** **Fern Foray.** Meet at the Peaks of Otter Visitor Center at 2:00 p.m.. We will check for ferns and late summer plants. We'll plan on a picnic supper at the Big Spring Picnic Area. A fern identification book, a Newcomb wildflower field guide and a hand lens will make this trip more enjoyable for you. Dot Bliss, 434-845-5665.
- September 6** **Fall Plant Sale at the Randolph-Macon Woman's College in Lynchburg** from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. See article in this Newsletter for additional information. Sandra Elder, 434-525-8433.
- Sept 12 - 14** **VNPS Annual Meeting** hosted by the Prince William Wildflower Society. This year's meeting will be held in Prince William County. Michael Kieffer, Executive Director of the Bull Run Mountain Conservancy will be the keynote speaker. He will present a slide program on Friday evening and lead a field trip on Saturday to the Bull Run Mountain Natural Area preserve. See the June VNPS Bulletin for more details.
- September 22** **General Membership Meeting,** 7:00 p.m., Center in the Square. Carol Davit will present a program on Prairie Flowers.
- October 11** **Fall Work Day at the Randolph-Macon Woman's College Botanic Garden.** Bring gardening tools and help bed the garden for winter. We'll work from 2:00 - 4:30. See Lynchburg Column for additional information. Rain date is October 18. Dorothy Bliss, 434-845-5665.
- October 27** **General Membership Meeting,** 7:00 p.m., Center in the Square.
- 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.

E-Address Request

In the April Newsletter we mentioned the BRWS website Tom Brock has developed. He is asking you to please send him your e-address. He can be reached at
blueridgewildflowersociety@cox.net

President's Letter

Butch Kelly

Recently Betty and I have been really busy contemplating and preparing ourselves for a trip to Alaska. The beauty of Alaska is beckoning us. The fjords, glaciers and spectacular scenery will be exciting. The beauty of the lush green fields and forests of Catawba Valley have become a blur on our daily commute to and from work. The anticipation of our journey has made us oblivious to our surroundings. Regardless of what our trip brings we will not see any place any more pleasing than the ridge and valley region of Virginia.

It seems many of our members have taken our surroundings for granted this spring. The attendance at our wildflower walks has been dismal this year. Granted the weather has been anything but perfect. Perhaps we have become complacent in planning our trips. Many of our walks were to very familiar haunts. In order to put some spice into the summer we are planning to return to some places which we have not visited in many years. Please read this newsletter carefully. Some of the places offer unique species and habitats.

Our recent plant sale was evidence that people in the Blue Ridge Wildflower Society area are quite interested in wildflowers. If you know folks who bought flowers, whether neighbors or friends, entice them to accompany you on one of our walks. In June we have the opportunity to see both Catawba and Rosebay Rhododendron. A familiar trip is the one to the Peaks of Otter. Not only does it offer spectacular viewing of the Catawba Rhododendron, but many other late spring flowers. The vistas of the parkway always cause one to realize how lucky we are to live in such an area. The trip to Altavista is a study in contrasts. While the Peaks of Otter trip has little walking, the Altavista trip is a short but steep walk. Just think, one weekend we can visit the rugged mountains of the Blue Ridge and the next weekend can offer the soft pleasing rolling hills of the Piedmont. As the Russian used to say on a popular TV commercial, "I just love this country."

In July we will go south on the parkway. It is a different world. Instead of rugged mountains there are valley views beyond pastoral fields and open

space. There may be some surprises on this trip to places not visited before. There are always the fields and bays filled with the yellows of summer flowers.

I am really excited about the trip to Paint Bank in August. There are roadside ditches filled with Cardinal Flower. A special treat is a wetland with orchids and Grass of Parnassas just to name a few. This trip will require boots or shoes suitable for wet areas. We will also be visiting yet another geographic province "the Alleghanies". Put on your travelin' shoes, grab some friends, a wildflower book and join us this summer,

A Swift Sell Out

Cindy Burks

This year I was spring plant sale coordinator. I was nervous, worried that something wouldn't go quite right. I should have known that with BRWS members, it would be a delight! I cannot thank you enough for what you all did to make the sale successful.

The 19th annual spring wildflower sale was held on Saturday, May 10, 2003, at the Virginia Western Community College Arboretum. Earlier in the spring, Rich Crites invited BRWS members to thin the wildflower beds at the Arboretum and pot wildflowers for the sale. Paul Cowins had ordered pots and labels, and members brought more pots and flats. Among the plants we gathered were Virginia bluebells, wild ginger, wild columbine, wild geranium and Celandine poppy. The plants went home with club members, who tended them until the sale. Thanks to frequent rain showers, they didn't have to be watered after the first week.

Rich submitted a Facility Request form and made the arrangements to hold the plant sale at the Arboretum. He also got the stakes and twine for displaying plant photographs to me. Rich and Connie had travel plans and would not be able to attend the sale, but his legwork made it all possible.

Sandra Elder took the plant photographs and clothespins for hanging them to my Mom's so I could pick them up when I visited. We swap the photographs back and forth for the spring and fall plant sales.

A couple of days before the sale I visited Rudy and Marcia Albert and picked up the plants Rudy was donating. His plants are always such good quality. As a bonus I got a tour of

their garden and Rudy's propagation beds. It was a visual treat as well as being educational.

Pam Wieringo placed a wonderfully visible ad in the Extra section of the Roanoke Times. Posters announcing the sale were displayed all over Roanoke. Pam also provided money to make change.

On the morning of the plant sale, I arrived at the Arboretum just after 7:00 and began setting up. Soon after, Joan Derenge arrived with her car completely packed with plants, including some beautiful ferns. Next came Dora Lee Ellington with her car full of plants. Soon Esther Atkinson arrived with the card table, money box, and flower seeds. Esther always shares the seeds from her plants and they make nice "bonuses" to give to our customers. More of our members arrived with plants and to help out. Paul and Lucille Cowins drove all the way from Lynchburg to bring plants. They always have excellent plants too. When Malcolm and Jimmie Black pulled up we all ran over to their truck to see what they had brought. Each year Malcolm brings so many beautiful plants and he enjoys providing an unusual plant or two. This year he brought pawpaw trees and pachystima.

About 8:20 the first customers arrived. (No surprise.) They waited patiently, looking at the unbelievable variety and quantity of plants available. At 9:00 the sale was on! Club members happily shared their plant wisdom with the buyers. By 10:15 there were only a few plants left. When we closed around 11:30 we had taken in \$1,672. We were tired and happy.

Again, thank you from the bottom of my heart. I am honored to be a part of your Blue Ridge Wildflower Society.

Note: Over the years some of the photographs we display at the plant sales have gotten lost or damaged. If you have extra wildflower photographs you can donate to the club, please contact Sandra Elder at (434) 525-8433 or Cindy Burks at (540) 977-0868.

If you need pots and/or labels to get ready for the fall plant sale or the 2004 spring plant sale, please contact Paul Cowins at (434) 239-4884 or Cindy Burks at (540) 977-0868. The fall plant sale will be held on Saturday, September 6, 2003, from 10:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. at the Randolph-Macon Womens College Botanical Garden in Lynchburg.

Falling Oaks

Dorothy C. Bliss

This past week a large southern red oak, three and a half feet in diameter fell across Woodland Avenue at the junction with Sumpter Street, just a block from my home. This huge monarch had snapped off at ground level. There were few roots visible, instead there was a gaping hole with evidence of fungal growth on the matted dead roots. Although inconvenienced since I had to walk home from this point, I was more intrigued since another of these apparently healthy oaks just across the street had crashed last fall, again, with few living roots. There was no splintering of the trunk, no strong winds involved but the massive oak had just toppled over. Why? This set me on a trail to try to find a reasonable explanation.

In talking with Don Davis, our city extension agent, I learned that a half dozen large oaks in Miller Park in the City of Lynchburg had met their demise in a similar manner. The internet was helpful in providing some current facts on diseases of oaks and other hardwoods. Even more enlightening was the information presented in Charles E. Little's book, "The Dying of the Trees", a book I have brought to your attention recently. (See "Our Dying Forests" in the January, 2001 Newsletter.)

The pathogen or fungal causative agent of these root and butt rot diseases of hardwoods is caused by a basic diomycete which is probably a species of *Armillaria*, perhaps *A. calvescens*. This fungus may be spread by direct contact of the fungal threads (Mycelia) in the soil or by growth of fungal strands through the soil to uninfected trees or by spores. The most apparent observable signs of distress is the dieback of twigs and branches in hardwoods.

There is a large oak just outside the Randolph-Macon Woman's College Botanic Garden which has an excessive amount of dead and dying branches that continually litter the lawn and the edge of the garden. Thirty or more years ago, an oak had died in this spot. I was told that the disease of this oak was spread by root contact and within a few years several other oaks had died in a similar manner. I never saw the roots of the previous tree but suspect that it probably showed

evidence of root decay and fungal growth. How long will the present oak remain standing before it, too, succumbs to root rot?

Although the fungus is the primary cause of the decay of the usually swollen butt, other agents may be involved. An urban setting is not an ideal environment for the growth of an oak which is usually a component of a forest. Acid rain, smog and other types of pollution may affect the vigor and health of the tree. In a city, lawns are frequently limed since grass grows best under alkaline conditions while oaks prefer deep fertile soils on the acidic side. In addition, compaction of soils and pollutants from rain water contaminated with street drainage may be of significance. How many more oaks that add so much to the beauty of our city lawns and streets will be lost in the coming years?

Charles Little describes how the oak trees and other hardwoods in the mixed mesophytic forest of the eastern United States are weakened by pollution and how ozone and the altering of the carbon/nitrogen ratio and the resulting root growth is impaired. The fungi grow rapidly in the weakened tissue. This results in the decay and rotting of the roots and the eventual toppling of the tree.

The death of the oaks is not an isolated incident but major forest trees are dying at an unprecedented rate, from the California coast to the sugar maples in New England to the eastern mesophytic forest. In a few words, our forests are dying.

The disastrous changes taking place in our forests is clearly described in Mr. Little's book which is available in most libraries and may be purchased in many bookstores.

Wildflowers of the Smokies

Expanded Second Edition by Peter White, Carol Ann McCormick, Keith Langdon, Janet Rock, Tom Condon, and Pat Beaty

People have long said that Great Smoky Mountains National Park could just as easily have been named Wildflower National Park. Some 1,600 varieties of flowering plants grace the Smokies, including spectacular species like Turk's cap lily, Vasey's trillium, columbine, gaywings, passionflower, lady's slippers, bluets, and Dutchman's britches.

The expanded Second Edition of Wildflowers of the Smokies boasts 31 new pages of wildflowers by Carol Ann McCormick, Assistant Curator of the UNC Herbarium, including uncommon but flamboyant species such as Carolina ruellia, monkey flower, willow amsonia, pale meadow beauty, and false dragonhead.

The 1996 pocket-sized first edition of Wildflowers of the Smokies was an instant hit, winning a first prize in natural history writing from the National Park Service. Publisher Great Smoky Mountains Association has upgraded many of the photographs in the second edition to offer more realistic reproductions. The 240-page, full-color guide is available at the Garden's Gift Shop – the price is \$12.80; \$11.50 members, tax included (add \$5/book if you order by mail.) Inquire at 919-962-0522).

Dr. White and his co-authors receive no royalties for sales—these directly support education and research in Great Smoky Mountains National Park. If you buy the book at the Garden, 50% of the sales price goes to the Garden!

From North Carolina Botanical Garden
Newsletter Volume 31, Number 3

Fall Plant Sale

Sandra Elder

On Saturday, August 2nd, Dorothy Bliss and I will be in the Randolph-Macon Botanic Garden to pot up plants for the fall plant sale. If you can help, please come anytime between 8:30 a.m. and noon. Pots and soil will be furnished but if you have a favorite garden tool, bring it with you. If you can take some of the plants home to care for them until the plant sale on September 6th, that would be great.

This will be our tenth plant sale in Lynchburg and our seventh one at the Randolph-Macon Botanic Garden.

You can help make it a success in many ways.

1. Furnish plants for the sale
 2. Work in the botanic garden
 3. Come to the plant sale and bring a friend or two, or more.
 4. Help pot up plants on August 2nd
 5. Tell your friends and relatives about the sale
 6. Help with the sale on September 6th from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.
- If you have questions or suggestions, call me at 434-525-8433.

Lynchburg Area Members

Dorothy C. Bliss

Weatherwise, this spring has been in great contrast to the drouth conditions of last summer and fall. Now in mid-June, there is an excess of nine inches of rainfall over the long term average. Only one year since records began has the rainfall been greater than this year. Surely this has begun to replenish the depleted water table and to restore the water levels in some of the wells. Many plants have prospered but some are struggling to survive in waterlogged soils and on eroding hillsides. Because of the lush growth of leafy tissue, the shade in our woods is much denser than usual and borderline plants may not survive.

On the afternoon of May 24th, a temporary break in the seemingly continuous rainy pattern lured Laura Bliss and me to venture along the Blue Ridge Parkway to observe some of the late spring flowers. Following our luncheon at the Otter Creek Restaurant, on a drive north on the Blue Ridge Parkway, we marveled at the luxuriant displays of mountain laurel, *Kalmia latifolia*. In some areas the Parkway was bordered with masses of these white and pink flowers.

As we turned south we crossed the James River, its muddy water overflowing its banks, leaving the trees and shrubs along its margins partially submerged. The forest trees at the lower elevations were in full leaf with the tulip poplars in magnificent flower. We spotted only a few specimens of mountain laurel, these clinging to the rocky outcroppings. At Thunder Ridge Overlook, the mayapples, still in bloom, covered the forest floor. No Trilliums were evident, either crowded out or otherwise destroyed. The wooly adelgid continues to raise havoc with the once healthy Carolina hemlocks, *Tusga carolinia*, now either dead or dying. Several Catawba Rhododendrons, *R. catawbiense*, were in bloom along the Appalachian Trail and below the overlook. Today the view of Natural Bridge from this vantage point was obscured in the mist in the valley below. Before leaving, we paused a moment

to enjoy the clove-like fragrance of the mountain or rose azalea, *Rhododendron roseus*.

We continued climbing on the Parkway to Apple Orchard where we noted a distinct change in the vegetation. Here the gnarled and stunted red oaks with their leaves just emerging gave an almost wintry aspect. In our drive from an elevation of 668' at the James River to an elevation of 3950' on Apple Orchard, we had gone from a forest in full leaf and flower to one just breaking dormancy.

Soon we reached our destination, Onion Mountain Overlook, with its well-worn and rocky trail through masses of Catawba Rhododendrons. Some shrubs were in full bloom but, strangely, other specimens growing adjacent and presumably under similar environmental conditions were still in tight bud. This striking difference in blooming time seems difficult to explain. Any suggestions? The Rhododendron trip scheduled for BRWS on June 7 was cancelled because of rain and thus we have no record of the state of the Catawba blooms at this later date.

Randolph-Macon Woman's College Botanic Garden

In the Botanic Garden in early June, The Catawba Rhododendron and mountain laurel were past their peak of bloom but the swamp azalea, *Rhododendron viscosum*, creeping blueberry, *Vaccinium crassifolium*, and teaberry or wintergreen berry, *Gaultheria procumbens*, were in full flower. The creeping blueberry has flowered for several years but it has never produced any berries but each year I'm hoping.

Did you notice the several specimens labeled American ipecac, *Porteranthus* (or *Gillenia*) *stipulatus*, when they were in bloom in May? The myriads of star-like flowers with their pinkish-white petals are eye-catching above the leafy foliage. This species is known in Virginia in Halifax County. The more common species, Bowman's root or Indian physic, *Porteranthus* (or *Gillenia*) *trifoliatus*, occurs in nearly all the

counties in Virginia except on the coastal plain. American ipecac is a long-lived, drouth tolerant perennial that seldom (never?) needs dividing. The Indians and later the American colonists used an extract from the powdered roots as a laxative and emetic as indicated by the common names. The two species are easily distinguished by their leaves. Bowman's root has three serrated leaflets and two small awl-shaped stipules that are inconspicuous. The American ipecac appears to have five sharply toothed leaflets but the two lower are actually stipules nearly as large as the leaflets. The plant is attractive throughout the summer and into the fall when the leaves turn yellow to orange. We have already potted up several of the seedlings from underneath the parent plants and hope to have them at the plant sale on September 6.

Fern Trip

Saturday, August 23, Meet at the Peaks of Otter Visitor Center at 2:00 p.m. We will check several areas in the vicinity of Abbott Lake for ferns and late summer blooming plants. Let's have a picnic supper at the Big Spring Picnic Area. A fern guide and Newcomb will be helpful.

Fall Work Day

Saturday, October 11. Fall Work Day at the R-MWC Botanic Garden. Bring gardening tools and help prepare the Garden for winter. We'll work from 2:00 - 4:30. Come and join the crew. Rain date is October 18.

Permission is hereby given to reprint original material. Please credit author, if named, and source.

Richard J. (Butch) Kelly,
President
(540) 384-7429

Pamela M. Wieringo, Editor
(540) 343-8596

P.O. Box 20385 • Roanoke, VA 24018



WANTED

Happy, Healthy, Native Plants

Potted and labeled
to sell at the Plant Sale,
September 6th at the
Randolph-Macon Botanic Garden
in Lynchburg

REWARD

Knowing you have helped the
Blue Ridge Wildflower Society,
The Randolph-Macon Botanic Garden
and encouraged the use of native
plants in the home landscape.

*For more information call
Sandra Elder (434) 525-8433*