Blue Ridge Wildflower Society
A CHAPTER OF THE
VIRGINIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

Vol. 14, No. 4 October, 1997

Schedule of Events

October 11 **Terrapin Mountain Field Trip.** Meet at 9:30 at the Big Island Elementary School on North 122, approximately 3 miles south of Route 501. Please park at the far end of the lot. Bring a sandwich and we'll have lunch at the Cowins. They will furnish drinks and dessert. Sandra Elder, leader, 804-525-8433.

October 27 **General Membership Meeting,** 7:00 p.m., Center in the Square.

Wildflower Pilgrimage Planning Committee will meet at 5:45 p.m., Center in the Square. If you are interested in helping with the planning of next year's Pilgrimage, please join us at this time.

November 24 **An Evening of Shared Memories.** This is our time for sharing slides and photographs from the past year. Bring five to ten of your favorites for the enjoyment of the group. A seed exchange will follow, so if you have extra seeds you would like to offer others, please bring these, also. Meet at 7:00 p.m., Center in the Square

December 13 **Saturday Evening Program** at 7:30 p.m., Room 225, Martin-Science Building, Randolph-Macon Woman's College, Lynchburg. A slide program, "Winter Evergreens," will be presented. Free wildflower seeds will also be available.

Fall Plant Sale

by Sandra Elder

The plant sale held in Lynchburg on September 6th was a wonderful success. The weather was beautiful and so was the Botanic Garden at Randolph - Macon Woman's College.

The area adjacent to the Botanic Garden was an ideal location for our plant sale. After seeing the beautiful native wildflowers in the Botanic Garden people were eager to purchase some for their home garden.

Many people contributed to the success of this event. First, everyone who helped make the Botanic Garden beautiful by planting, weeding and mulching. Second, the people that furnished plants for the plant sale. And third, those who helped on the day of the plant sale. Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

Terrapin Mountain Field Trip

Time: 9:30 a.m.

Date: October 11, 1997

Place: Big Island Elementary School

Percival's Island Program & Field Trip

Dr. Gwynn Ramsey, retired professor of biology at Lynchburg College, will present a slide lecture entitled "Rare Plants at Your Backdoor: The Plant Diversity of Percival's Island" on November 20 at 7:30 P.M. in Dillard Fine Arts Center Theater at Lynchburg College.

On November 22, Dr. Ramsey will lead a field trip to Percival's Island to view and identify rare plants discovered through his research.

For additional information, contact Bob Eubank through the Lynchburg Department of Parks & Recreation, 804-847-1640.

Letter From The President

by Karen Shepard

This has been a good summer with a variety of field trips not only in our area but also to other locations in southwest Virginia. In addition, four members of The Blue Ridge Chapter were able to join others from across the state and Maryland on the VNPS trip to The Bruce Peninsula, Canada.

The Nature Conservancy's Buffalo Mountain Preserve was impressive. We saw many plants that are generally found in the northern U.S. or Canada, but rare in Virginia. Standing on the summit with the wind blowing, looking down on vultures soaring was like being on top of the world.

The overnight trip to Saltville, Mount Rogers, White Top and Grayson Highland Park was a great experience. After that trip no one can say that wildflower enthusiasts are not interested in a variety of topics. We had the good fortune (thanks to Frieda Toler) to have two local guides give us in-depth tours, one to the site of the Saltville archeological excavation and the other to the Madam Russell Historical Methodist Church. Both of these gentlemen had a wealth of information and a genuine love of their town and its history. Hugh and Bunny Smith's respective backgrounds in geology and earth science also enhanced the trip. Their explanations of the events that formed and shaped the Appalachians made the rocks and mountains come alive. Another highlight, thanks to Rich Crites, was Sugar Grove, the only known global site, (outside of cultivation), of the once believed extinct, round leaf birch, *Betula uber*. Rich has a special gift for sharing his enthusiasm, appreciation and knowledge of our native flora.

Al and Vi Sheridan again did an outstanding job of hosting the annual picnic. Their lake house is surrounded by landscaped gardens of cultivated plants, wildflowers and cool wooded areas. Everyone enjoyed touring the grounds, visiting with friends and eating the wonderful food.

This year the fall plant sale was held at the Randolph-Macon Woman's College Botanic Garden. Sandra Elder, Dorothy Bliss and Paul and Lucille Cowins deserve a big THANK-YOU for all their hard work. Paul contributed a large number of the plants for the sale.

As the season draws to a close, the wildflowers have faded and the gardens and roadsides are a collection of seed capsules dancing in the wind and tempting the goldfinch. However, the days ahead hold the promise of brilliant blue skies, crisp breezes, migrating birds and walks in the woods. For those of us who usually focus on wildflowers, walking this time of the year is a unique experience. It's fun to discover woodpecker holes, abandoned bird nests, deer tracks, and to glimpse the bright flash of a red-tail hawk. Stumbling upon the fruit of jack-in-the-pulpit, solomon's seal or doll's eyes is also thrilling, for these are signs that the cycle continues and spring is more than a promise.

Buffalo Mountain

by Betty Kelly

A group of 15 people on June 25 braved the rugged terrain of this recently acquired state Natural Area Preserve. As we viewed this local landmark from the Blue Ridge Parkway, it was truly the shape of a buffalo hump.

Buffalo Mountain provided us with 360 degree vistas and is among the highest peaks in Virginia at 3,971 feet. The high elevation, wind-exposed openings and magnesium-rich soils produce a unique natural habitat. Plants here are similar to ones found in Northern US and Canada.

Some plants spotted included three-toothed cinquefoil, mountain rattlesnake root, mountain sandwort, leather flower, dutchman's pipe, whorled loosestrife, summer bluet, flowering raspberry, fire pink, purple fringed orchid, spiderwort, sundrops, skullcap and yellow star grass.

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Bruce Peninsula

by Betty Kelly

Several members of our chapter joined other members of the Virginia Native Plant Society for a trip to Canada's Bruce Peninsula in Ontario. Visions of orchids, lilies and other wildflowers danced in our heads on the trip north. Thanks to the Tolers for a wonderful dinner and slide show to get us more excited about this trip.

Upon our arrival at the Wildwood Lodge, we were greeted with botanists, birds and homemade bread. Ted Scott did a great job of planning and directing our activities while he was recuperating from a recent injury. Nicky Staunton took charge of our group in the field and we all thank her for a job well done.

Dorcas Bay provided us a view of Ramshead orchids, Lake iris and Butterwort. Our picnic lunch of fried chicken and potato salad that day was served on real plates. A spectacular day at Flower Pot Island let us spend time seeing Calypso orchid, Twinflower, Canda mayflower, the flower pot rock formations which give the island its name, and a cave. The roadsides provided us with lots of yellow lady-slipper, Indian paint brush, starry false Soloman's seal and gaywings. The last day the showy ladyslipper brought us an awesome sight to end a terrific week.

Thanks to my van buddies — Butch Kelly, chauffeur, Karen Shepard, food vendor, Frances Newcomb, flower-hound and Elaine Smith, navigator — for a memorable week.

Internet News

The Virginia Native Plant Society has a homepage on the Web. It offers information on plant of the year, board members, annual meeting info, alien invasive plant info, registry, nursery list, events, plant sales, seminars, etc. To access it, get on http://www.hort.vt.edu/VNPS. It is a fine advertisement for our organization. Richard Moss, President of The Pocahontas Chapter, designed it. Richard had an article "Good Native Plant Info to be Found on The Net" in the May issue of the *Bulletin*. You may want to go back and read it if you missed it before.

Blazing Stars

(Liatris species)

by Marion Lobstein

Associate Professor, Biology, NVCC

Liatris spicata, commonly called spiked blazing star, along with three other less common *Liatris* species in our area are perennial members of the Asteraceae or aster family. The bright lavender to rose purple colors of the masses of flower heads of all these species begin to appear in July and add color to meadows, fields, and roadsides through September and even early October. The three less common species found in Northern Virginia are grass-leaved blazing star *(L. graminifolia)*, large blazing star *(L. scariosa)*, and scaly blazing star *(L. squarrosa)*. The habitat of spiked blazing star is in wet to moist meadows and other open habitats while the other three species are found in drier, open habitats. The range of spiked blazing star is from Florida and Louisiana north to New York and Michigan. The other three species generally have a fairly wide range up and down the eastern part of the United States. The genus name of *Liatris* is not known. The species names of *graminifolia, scariosa,* and *squarrosa* mean, respectively, grassleaved, scarious, and with spreading teeth. The other frequently used common name for this group is gay feathers.

Like other members of the composite family, the "flowers" of these plants are actually heads of many individual flowers. Most composites such as the common daisy have heads both of petal-like or ray flowers and of tubular or disk flowers. Species of blazing stars have flowering heads of only tubular or disk flowers. Each individual flower has a series of modified sepals that are bristles (collectively known as the pappus), five fused petals, five united stamens, and a pistil with two stigmas and an inferior ovary. In all four species pollination is by insects. The fruits formed after fertilization are achenes with small barbs. Individual flower head sizes vary from less than an inch to over an inch in diameter. The arrangements of the heads is that of a spike except in large blazing star which has heads in a more open raceme. The two species most easily confused are the spiked and the grass-leaved. The grass-leaved species has soft hairs inside each tubular flower while the spiked species is hairless.

Height of these four species range from six inches in scaly blazing star to almost four feet for spiked blazing star. The leaves are linear in all but the large blazing star which has broader more ovate leaves. All four species have underground storage stems such as corms or rhizomes and fibrous roots.

The medicinal uses of members of the blazing star genus are limited. Some Indian tribes and herbalists used root teas made from various blazing star species as a diuretic, tonic, and sore throat gargle. Other uses have been to treat gonorrhea, menstrual cramps, and kidney/bladder problems. Poultices made from the root were used to treat snakebite.

With their displays of colorful heads of flowers, our species of blazing star add much to the beauty of meadows and other open areas in late summer and early fall. This fall take time to examine a single head and a single flower of this handsome composite family member. One excellent site to see scaly blazing star is at Deep Cut in the Manassas National Battlefield Park.

[*L. squarrosa* is not in the Blue Ridge area. We do, however, have *L. aspera*, rough blazing star, and *L. turgida*, inflated blazing star. - Ed.]

Blazing Stars

(Liatris spicata)

by Nancy Arrington, Propagation Chairman

Of the several *Liatris* species I've tried, *L. spicata* is the most satisfactory mainly because it's been the most permanent. While others have succumbed to rodents or poorly drained soil three original plants of this species are sizeable clumps that have begun to produce a few seedlings.

It's native to wet meadows, roadside ditches, and other low, moist areas from New York to Michigan and south to Florida and Louisiana. It isn't shown in Prince William County in the *Atlas of the Virginia Flora*, but grows in Fairfax, Loudoun and western mountain counties.

Though the origin of the genus name is unknown, spicata means spike and refers to the three-to five-feet tall spikes rising from clumps of dense grass-like foliage. Alternate narrow leaves are about six inches long at the bottom of the stem and are progressively smaller toward the top. The 12- to 18-inch inflorescence consists of numerous small rosy lavender thistly-like flowers that begin blooming at the top. This trait, the exact opposite of most flowers, adds to blazing star's attractiveness in the garden and as a cut flower because spent blossoms can be snipped off. Its importance as a nectar plant for butterflies is another good reason for growing it.

This beautiful composite can be grown in any garden setting from perennial border to a wildflower meadow. In the fertile, slightly moist soil it prefers, spikes will be tall and slender. Drier, less fertile soil produces shorter, stockier plants. Soil should be fairly well-drained during winter.

Blazing star is a wonderful vertical accent for the summer and fall garden. Good native companions that bloom at the same time include mistflower (*Eupatorium coelestinum*), summer phlox (*P. paniculata)*, blue lobelia (*L. siphilitica*), ironweed (*Vernonia noveboracensis*), and blackeyed Susans (*Rudbeckia spp.*). One of its best companions in my garden is *Kalimeris pininifitida*, a Japanese aster with very fine foliage and small white flowers that blooms from July until frost.

In *Growing and Propagating Wild Flowers* Harry Phillips suggests an easy seed growing method: When seed is ripe, cut the stalk and lay it down in an outdoor seed bed or cold frame and cover with a half inch of soil. Seedlings will appear in the spring.

From *Wild News*, Newsletter of the Prince William Wildflower Society, September-October, 1994.

Lynchburg Area Members

by Dorothy C. Bliss

This autumn because of the extended summer drought we may see a premature dropping of many leaves. In late August along 460 east of Lynchburg, I noted many tulip poplars which had already turned yellow and would soon be losing their leaves. Whether these September rains will prevent more early leaf drop is an unanswered question at present.

Colorful masses of goldenrods and asters are blooming in profusion along our roadsides, woodland trails and in the fields. Goldenrod - 35 species are known to occur in Virginia - is often maligned by allergy sufferers but in reality its pollen is too heavy and large to travel far and is distributed by bees and other insects. The real culprit is the light airborne pollen of ragweed which also blooms in the autumn and it is this that is responsible for the itchy red eyes and runny noses of many allergy sufferers.

The R-MWC Botanic Garden

Several goldenrods are in bloom in the Garden and one of these *Solidago odora*, sweet or anise scented goldenrod, is one of my favorites. This species has long been used in Folklore medicine and as an herbal tea for medical purposes is still recommended. Following the Boston Tea Party when there was no tea available, the leaves of sweet goldenrod were used to make a brew called Liberty Tea. Later these leaves were exported to China for tea making! The flower heads are also used as a source of yellow dye (from Magic and Medicine of Plants, a Readers Digest Publication).

This summer the endangered Kankakee mallow, *Iliamna remota,* in the Botanic Garden has grown luxuriantly and from a small plant has spread by woody rhizomes and now covers an area 10 x 10 feet. It bloomed in August with a profusion of pale lavender-rose flowers. Why is it endangered in the wild, when without any special care this plant can invade such a large area?

The addition of permanent, engraved identification markers for each species of plants has added much to the beauty and usefulness of the Garden. Each label includes the scientific and common name and family. In addition the signs are color coded, white letters on dark red for herbaceous plants, black letters on cream for woody plants and black letter on light gray for ferns. This is a great time to visit the Garden with its several species of goldenrods, asters, coreopsis and gentians in bloom. Through the fall the beauty berries and deciduous hollies will add spectacular color.

We have a nucleus of great helpers for the Garden but there is a need for more volunteers for numerous routine tasks that are necessary to maintain the Garden. If you can give a few hours occasionally, please contact me at 804-845-5665.

December Meeting

Our Lynchburg fall meeting will be held on December 13, Saturday Evening, at 7:30 PM in Room 225, Martin Science building on R-MWC campus. Slide program on Winter Evergreens. Free wildflower seed distribution. This is a great opportunity to meet other Lynchburg members. Come and bring a friend or two.

Rosebay Rhododendron Registry Site

by Sandra Elder

On the afternoon of June 26th, Dorothy Bliss, Janet Cofer, Margaret Wenning and I visited the Rosebay Registry Site in Altavista. The day was very hot and humid but the sight that greeted us made the trip worthwhile.

There was a profusion of blooms on the Rosebay Rhododendron, *Rhododendron maximum*. This was the best bloom year since the area became a registry site. As we walked along the creek each blossom seemed more beautiful than the one before.

The population of ferns (Christmas, Ebony spleenwort, Lady, Royal, Cinnamon and Chain) was also thriving.

We were especially glad to see that the Princess or Ground Pine, *Lycopodium obscurum,* was recovering following the flood of 1995.

High Altitude Forests

by Dorothy C. Bliss

In an article in our last newsletter I commented on the tragic loss of the high altitude spruce and fir trees in the Great Smoky Mountain National Park due to the affects of such polluting agents as smog and acid rain and the attacks of the balsam wooly adelgid. Recently hikers on Mt. Rogers witnessed hundreds of dead or dying sugar maples, beech and yellow birch, all of which were leafless in August. With the opening of the canopy, a ground vegetation of blackberries flourished. This premature leaf fall continued to the summit where the spruce and fir forest exhibited similar destruction. On later hikes it was found that Roan Mountain, Grandfather Mountain and portions of the Black Mountains were also devastated. Scientists have begun a study to try to pinpoint the actual cause of this massive dieback. (From: "Northern Hardwoods are dying along with the Spruce-Fir" by Howard Ayers in Sierra Club/ Appalachian Voice, 1997)

Thank You

Woodpecker Ridge Nature Center would like to thank you for your recent gift which we will add to the 1997 fundraising account.

Your generosity again this year will enable us to continue to feed the birds, plant wildflowers, plant for wildlife, maintain the trails, and other undertakings at the nature center.

Your gift is even more important for it reminds us why we are so involved in trying to make WRNC a place for you and others.

Again a big THANK YOU

to

The Blue Ridge

Wildflower Society

from

Woodpecker Ridge Nature Center