

Blue Ridge Wildflower Society

A CHAPTER OF THE
VIRGINIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

Vol. 14, No. 3

July, 1997

Schedule of Events

- August 16** Fern Foray. Meet at 2:00 P.M. at the James River Visitor Center, Blue Ridge Parkway milepost 63.8. See Lynchburg Area Members column for additional information. A hand lens and a fern field guide will be helpful. Bring your supper.
- August 24** Picnic at Smith Mountain Lake at the home of Al & Vi Sheridan. Bring a covered dish (vegetables, salads, desserts, munchies) and soft drinks. The Sheridans will provide the meat, lemonade and coffee. We'll plan to eat around 5:00 or 5:30 but feel free to come earlier to play or sit by the lake. A map is enclosed. **Please call Vi at 540-721-8189 if you plan to attend.**
- There will be a 2:00 P.M. Board Meeting at the Sheridans for planning fall events.
- September 6** Fall Plant Sale at Randolph-Macon Botanical Gardens in Lynchburg from 10:00 till 2:00. Rain or Shine! Please see article below for details.
- September 19-21** VNPS Annual Meeting in Williamsburg. The John Clayton Chapter will host this year's meeting. Details were in the last Bulletin and will probably be in their upcoming issue. If you need information immediately, please contact Frank Coffey, VNPS President, at 804-332-5757.

Fall Plant Sale

by Sandra Elder

The Lynchburg Fall Plant Sale will be held on Sept. 6th from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm beside the Randolph-Macon Botanic Garden.

Any help you can offer would be appreciated.

If you have plants to contribute but need pots call Rich Crites at (540) 774-4518 or Paul Cowins at (804) 239-4884. Label all Plants!

If you can help work in the Botanic Garden—pulling weeds, putting down mulch etc. call Dot Bliss at (804) 845-5665.

If you can help in any way on the day of the sale call Sandra Elder at (804) 525-8433.

Fern Foray

Time: 2:00 P.M.

Date: August 16

Place: James River
Visitor Center

Bring your supper.

1997 Wildflower Pilgrimage A Success

by Jennifer Hollingsworth-Austin

For more than a quarter century, the Native Plant Society and Science Museum jointly celebrate the arrival of Spring with the Wildflower Pilgrimage. Designed as an outreach program, for years the Pilgrimage offered the public opportunity to enjoy the great outdoors while learning more about the flowers which color the early Spring.

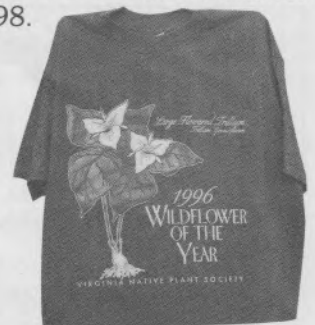
This past April, with the help of a dedicated cadre of volunteers, the Science Museum and Blue Ridge Wildflower Society celebrated the 28th Annual Wildflower Pilgrimage. Over the weekend of April 25, 26, and 27, over 470 participants enjoyed bird-watching walks, hikes on trails and exploring both private and public gardens.

Through the hard work of the volunteer guides and other club members who supplied time and other forms of support, including food, The Blue Ridge Wildflower Society deserves due credit for spreading the news about wildflowers in this area. Whether sharing their time and knowledge with other plant aficionados or guiding a young person to the correct identification of a flower, your membership is to be commended for working to broaden the public knowledge and educate.

I thank you for a great event, and look forward to the 29th Annual Wildflower Pilgrimage already slated for April 24, 25, and 26, 1998.

Tee-Shirt Sale

Our Trillium Wildflower of the Year shirts are still available. The bright blue shirts feature white *T. grandifolium* with shaded green leaves. Prices have been reduced to \$8 for short-sleeved and \$10 for long sleeved. For information, contact Karen Shepard, 540-772-2733, or Frank Coffey, 804-332-5757.



Letter From The President

by Karen Shepard

Thanks to everyone who helped make the Wildflower Pilgrimage a success. A special thanks to Paul James for the outstanding Friday evening program, to Judy Boteler for organizing the reception, and to Rich Crites for coordinating the leaders. This was the first year for walks especially designed for the students doing wildflower projects. The effort was most worthwhile and there were positive responses from guides, students and parents.

The day of our annual Plant Sale was cold, cloudy, and windy. In spite of this, members showed up with great looking plants and willing hands. The weather did not deter those wanting to purchase wildflowers. By 11:00 AM we had few plants left. After thirteen years our reputation of providing quality plants at a very low cost has grown. We appreciate the space the horticulture department of Virginia Western Community College provides for our sale and again thanks to Rich for his help.

There are a number of activities to look forward to in the next months. The annual picnic at the Sheridans is scheduled for August. Al and Vi have a wonderful place on Smith Mountain Lake with a great view and terrific flowers. Then September brings the annual VNPS state meeting in Williamsburg. Check the schedule of events for details.

The summer months offer some of the most brilliant wildflower colors. Finding Butterfly Weed, Cardinal Flower or Ironweed, just to mention a few, is a sure way to restore perspective after a long hot stressful day. So don't put away those field guides because in the world of wildflowers there is always something waiting to be discovered.

Lady's Slipper Walk

by Dora Lee Ellington

May 24th was such a nice day for a wildflower walk on the Parkway and about thirty members and visitors met at the Peaks of Otter Visitor Center for our yellow lady's slipper walk. We car pooled and drove to milepost 76.5 which is at Apple Orchard Mountain Overlook. This is the highest point (elevation 4229) on the Virginia portion of the Blue Ridge Parkway.

We walked along several side roads and a portion of the Appalachian Trail in search of the lady's slippers. Sam Ellington was first to find them in bloom as we walked a road leading to Sunset Field. They were much smaller than usual, probably due to the extremely late and cold spring. A few wood anemones were still blooming along the way. We also found coltsfoot seed heads, which, looking much like cotton grass, were a pleasant addition to our sightings. The interrupted ferns were spectacular, clearly showing their interruptions and why they were so named.

The Pinxter and Roseum azaleas, usually in bloom near the Thunder Ridge Shelter, were only in bud. We did find pink lady's slippers, birdfoot violets, wood anemones, wild oats and solomon's seal in bloom as well as clintonia in bud. We found a stand of the yellow lady's slippers with over 29 blooms and lots of buds. The flowers, however, were only about half the usual size.

Our walk concluded with lunch at the Big Springs Picnic area. Everyone appeared to have had an enjoyable day.

Help, Please

The wildflower prints used during our plant sale were misplaced after the sale. These are important in helping customers visualize how the plants will look when in bloom. They are desperately needed before the fall sale. If you have them or can remember seeing them being packed after the sale, please contact the Tolers, 540-366-0239.

They Came, They Saw, They Bought!

by Rich Crites

On May 10, the Blue Ridge Chapter held it's annual spring wildflower sale at the Community Arboretum at VWCC. This was probably our biggest sale yet. There was a large variety and a large number of wildflowers for sale. Our crowd was quite large and "hungry" to buy wildflowers. Many of our customers were repeats and a number commented about how they were enjoying their plants from previous sales. Many look forward to our sale!

This sale works only because a great number of our members want to share their love for wildflowers with others. So a "GREAT BIG THANK YOU" to all who made a cool windy day in May a very special day.

Pilgrimage Reception

The lovely reception following Paul James' lecture attested to Judy Boteler's flair as a hostess. She planned and coordinated the event, adding those gracious touches which made it special. Judy, we appreciate you and all you did.

The floral centerpiece gracing the main table was the handiwork of Elaine Williams. Again, it was one of the special touches which helped make the difference. Thank you, Elaine.

Also, thank you to everyone who contributed to our desserts.

Rhododendron Day

by Rich Crites

On June 7, about 20 people met at the Visitor Center at the Peaks of Otter to enjoy the Rhododendron along the Parkway. A number of these people were not members of our chapter but do plan to join. The Rhododendron show was not at its peak; the cool, windy and cloudy weather had delayed the opening of the flowers. However, a number of other wildflowers were blooming so a good time was had by all. Trillium and wood anemone were still blooming on Apple Orchard Mountain.

Permission is hereby given to reprint.
Please give credit.

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Great Smoky Mountains Revisited

by Dorothy C. Bliss

In mid-April Laura Bliss, Sandra Elder, Carolyn Bates, Pam Wieringo, later joined in mid-week by Paul and Lucille Cowins and I spent a week exploring trails in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park where we identified and photographed the wildflowers that were at their peak of bloom. Even the weather cooperated by raining only on our arrival and leaving days! One very interesting trail was the Kanati Fork Trail, a few miles south of Newfound Gap. Here there were numerous painted trilliums which are uncommon in our area, being found only at higher elevations and especially in spruce-fir communities. A few plants of interest were the Fairy bells or Mandarin, the long-spurred violet and the Canada ginger, *Asarum canadense* var. *acuminatum* with long slender tapering calyx lobes. In Cades Cove we discovered a curious anomaly of spring beauty, a double-flowered pink form growing next to a normal 5-petaled flower. Wouldn't clones of this intriguing pink bloom be a great addition to the woodland garden? Many species of Trilliums were in bloom but Vasey's was only in bud. The forest floor at the upper elevations was covered with white Fringed Phacelia and the creeping Houstonia with scattered groups of spring beauties. Populations of an albino form of the Houstonia were observed frequently among the usual blue ones.

At the higher altitudes, above 6000 feet, the former Fraser fir forest is now an area of stark dead trunks. The devastation of these endemic firs, now more than 95% destroyed, continues, due to the attacks of the woolly balsam adelgid, which combined with the effects of acid rain and other forms of pollution have wiped out nearly all the canopy trees. The species of the balsam woolly adelgid is *Adelges piceae* whereas the hemlock woolly adelgid, that has destroyed many of the latter species, is *Adelges tsuga*. On the slopes of Clingman's Dome there appears to be a healthy population of young firs but it is unknown if these will survive to maturity. The forest service collected seeds a few

years ago from some of the remaining mature trees and plantations have been started in other areas to prevent the total loss of this species. For those of us who knew these spruce-fir forests when they clothed the mountains in a mature healthy forest, it is especially devastating to witness the destructive activities of this introduced organism.

Some Rare and Threatened Plants

by Dorothy C. Bliss

In recent years along our mountain slopes and valleys, we have been confronted with the dying-off of our majestic hemlocks from a woolly adelgid (similar to an aphid). The near total destruction of the Fraser Fir in the Great Smoky Mountains has resulted from a combination of acid rain, pollution and the attack by the balsam woolly adelgid. Today more than 95% of these mature trees are only stark skeletons. Many of the flowering dogwoods in our deciduous woods are disappearing from an introduced fungal anthracnose disease. For more information on the decline of the Fraser Fir population see the excellent article by Leon Howlett in the *Appalachian Trailways News* for Nov-Dec 1995.

Two herbaceous plants which are threatened in our mountains are ginseng and Gray's lily, Ginseng, *Panax quinquefolius*, is recognized by its three rather large palmately compound leaves each consisting of five toothed leaflets. The single cluster of small greenish white flowers arises from the center of this whorl of leaves but it is in late summer and fall that these plants are more easily recognized with their conspicuous cluster of bright red berries. Wild sarsaparilla which is frequently encountered in the Blue Ridge Mountains is similar in appearance but the three flower clusters are produced on long stalks that arise from the base of the plant.

The roots of ginseng are widely sought by "sang" hunters who sell the dried roots to Southeast Asia, especially China, where they are highly valued for their acclaimed aphrodisiac properties. In 1995 the price per pound for the dried roots was around \$500. This has spurred many people to seek out these

plants, threatening the species' very existence in the wild. Permits for digging and selling ginseng roots are required in Virginia and many other states. Recently two N. C. men were sentenced to 6 mos. in prison for collecting ginseng roots within the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Today because of many years of over-harvesting, ginseng is only seen occasionally in the wild and at least 31 states consider this plant rare or threatened in their areas. How rare is ginseng in our Blue Ridge Mountains? I would be interested in hearing of encounters along the Appalachian Trail or elsewhere in our woods.

One of the rarest of our showy wildflowers is Gray's lily, *Lilium grayi*, which in Virginia is known from only six counties including Bedford Co. The flowers are red with dark purple spots inside the perianth which is less than 5 cm. long, straight, neither nodding nor recurved. The red-form of the Canada lily is nodding with the recurved perianth segments more than 5 cm long. Gray's lily is a plant of mountain meadows, grassy balds and other forest openings. This lily has been diminishing in numbers in recent years because of habitat changes. As these open areas including the grassy balds are gradually invaded by woody vegetation, Gray's lily is crowded out. To maintain some of these openings, prescribed burning and mowing are being employed to discourage the growth of trees and shrubs.

Several years ago Gray's lily was occasionally encountered along the trails on Thunder Ridge. Does it still occur in our area? If you are hiking in the Blue Ridge in June or July and if you should come across this rare lily, I would welcome reports of its presence.

This article also appeared in the 1997 summer issue of the Natural Bridge Appalachian Trail Club Newsletter, *The Virginia Hiker*.

Quilt Raffle Tickets

Remember, it's time to purchase your tickets for the queen-size quilt being raffled for our Annual VNPS Meeting. Tickets are \$1 each or \$5 for 6. Contact Betty Kelly, 540-389-7429

A Special Thank You

by Mary Dalton

Many thanks to Helen Barranger for her donation of plants from her beautiful wildflower garden.

Helen was gracious enough to share many of her native plants with us for our annual Spring Plant Sale.

Many different species grace a northern slope and grow around fences in her yard. Wild geranium, columbine, bellwort and trillium bloom together in drifts of color and shades of green. Helen grows many beautiful pink and white lily-of-the-valley, as well as wild phlox, golden seal and green and gold, to mention only a few.

Over 100 pots of plants came from her garden and were donated to BRWS for our plant sale in May.

Pilgrimage Kick-Off

by Rich Crites

On Friday, April 25, Paul James was the kick-off speaker for the Annual Wildflower Pilgrimage weekend. The Planetarium in Center in the Square was standing room only. Paul presented a slide/lecture program focusing on many of our natural areas and some of the plants found in them. He brought to our attention the rich and diverse flora that we enjoy in this part of the country. And yet as some of these areas are being stressed, plant populations and distributions are changing.

Certainly Paul's presentation was an excellent way to kick off a good weekend to focus attention on our local flora. Thanks Paul!

IN MEMORIAM

Charlie Crites passed away
June 18, 1997.

On July 18, 1997, Charlie Crites, father of former BRWS President, Richard Crites, passed away in Olney, Illinois.

Our sympathy is extended to Rich and his family and to other members of the family.

Coneflowers

by Dorothy C. Bliss

An article in National Wildlife for June-July 1997 intrigued my curiosity to learn more about the species of *Echinacea*, large daisy-like purple flowers that are familiar to many of us as garden flowers. According to the Virginia Atlas, *E. pallida*, pale cone flower occurs in Montgomery and Franklin counties and *E. purpurea* (or *E. laevigata*) is known from 12 counties, chiefly in the mountains and western Piedmont. *E. laevigata*, smooth cone flower, although not recognized as a separate species in the Atlas, is listed under the Virginia Natural Heritage Program as endangered and very rare globally. Several other species of *Echinacea* occur in the prairie states where it is a conspicuous wild flower in the open fields.

Did you know that the roots of coneflowers are the top selling herbal product in the U.S.? I was not aware that these roots have been used medicinally by the Indians for hundreds of years for snake bites, toothaches, etc. Doctors in the 19th century also prescribed this herbal product for many ailments including colds and flu. Scientists are testing these roots for their possible use as an external antiseptic and as a stimulant to the immune system.

Today with the increasing interest in herbal medicines, the price of these roots has risen to more than \$21 a pound. This has encouraged many unscrupulous gatherers to denude whole fields of coneflowers by digging up plants wherever they may be found growing. The populations that are already threatened may soon be wiped out if this illegal practice continues. Since the coneflowers are easily cultivated, commercial production could be profitable to the grower and discourage the threatened extermination of the wild-grown plants by poachers.

Dedication of The Children's Garden

by Dora Lee Ellington

The cold and windy weather on May 10th, 1997, didn't keep the dedication of the Community Arboretum Children's Garden at Virginia Western Community College from being well attended and a huge success.

An introduction was given by J. Lee Hipp, Arboretum Director. The welcome was extended by Charles L. Downs, College President. Dedication remarks were given by Susan Barton, daughter of Paul W. Fries, for whom the maze is named, and Aaron Gard, a grandson of John T. Walke, for whom the Plant Zoo is named. The ribbons were cut by Susan and Evelyn Walke, John's wife. The dedication concluded with the grandchildren of Mr. Fries and Dr. Walke setting some plants in the Garden.

Following the dedication children and adults walked along the paths enjoying the large number of well-marked plants, all of which bear animal names. You can be sure the Children's Garden will be a very, very popular and educational part of the Community Arboretum with both children and adults.

What a wonderful way to pay homage to Paul W. Fries and John T. Walke.

Old Newsletters

A limited number of most earlier Newsletters are still available. If you are interested in a particular issue, please contact Frieda Toler, 540-366-0239. They will soon be discarded.

Workday at Community Arboretum

by Bunny Smith

Six members met at 8 a.m. on the first day of summer. Joining Dora Lee Ellington were Bunny and Hugh Smith, Bobby and Frieda Toler and Evelyn Walke. We dug, pruned, pulled, trimmed, tidied up, talked and spread mulch for the next 1½ hours. The wildflower garden was trim, neat, and lovely when - in spite of the ice water and goodies provided by Dora Lee and Frieda - the heat forced us to quit.

I'm ashamed to say this work day was the first for Hugh and me. What a wonderful opportunity it was for us to have fun and to learn about care and upkeep of our own fledgling wildflower gardens from experts! It won't be our last work day. If anyone reading this wants a similar chance to get a lot of expertise painlessly we'll look forward to your joining the work group next time!