

Blue Ridge Wildflower Society

A CHAPTER OF THE
VIRGINIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

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Dr. John T. Walke Honored

Rarely do we have an opportunity to publicly pay homage to a person we deeply admire and respect. On January 11, however, the Blue Ridge Wildflower Society did have this privilege. In spite of snow and ice, approximately 75 friends and family members gathered at the Community Arboretum to recognize Dr. John T. Walke for his many contributions to the Arboretum by an announcement naming the Children's Garden Plant Zoo in his honor.



Two years ago the Arboretum Council decided to establish a children's garden featuring a maze or labyrinth and a plant zoo. The distinctive feature of a plant zoo is that common names of the plants are animal names. For example, there will be Lamb's Ear, Monkey Grass, Turtlehead and Pussy Willow. Forty or more trees, shrubs and perennial flowers will be featured.

Our chapter wanted to join the Arboretum in honoring John with a reception at which the Walkes and their family were honored guests. Professor Lee Hipp, Director of the Arboretum, welcomed the guests and Susan Barton, Friends Coordinator for the Arboretum, presented an engraved plaque to Dr. Walke. Later, a large bronze plaque will be erected in the garden at the formal dedication.

Since the Arboretum's establishment in 1986, John and Evelyn have been faithful supporters of the project. Several years ago the Walkes donated

their extensive collection of orchids to the Horticulture Department at Virginia Western Community College. It now provides pleasure and educational opportunities to students and visitors.

The Walkes have been members of the BRWS since it was organized in 1984. Through the years, John's work and dedication to our chapter has been greater than most of us have been aware. In his typical, quiet, behind-the-scenes way, he has been busy year-round, either potting, growing or helping with our plant sales. He has actively worked to conserve all plants but has been especially active with the beautiful and rare Showy Lady's Slipper, *Cypripedium reginae*. In spring of 1989, John, Sam Ellington and Bobby Toler went to a small, hidden bog within the Monongahela National Forest, Greenbrier County, WV, and helped put fencing around a colony of these orchids which were being destroyed by animals.

Our chapter has a small wildflower garden at the Arboretum and one at Woodpecker Ridge Nature Center. John has been active in the development and planting of these gardens and has spent many hours weeding and tending them. Wherever there has been a need, John has been there with a helping hand.

He is a gracious and gentle man with a gift for making all with whom he comes in contact feel special because he sees them as special.

What choreography could create a more perfect arrangement than the harmony of a pediatrician, botanist and birder with a plant zoo in a children's garden.

Letter From The President

by Karen Shepard

It is a privilege to have the opportunity to serve as president of the Blue Ridge Wildflower Society. Thank you for your support and confidence. I also want to thank the other officers and board members. Together we will work toward planning exciting field trips and interesting programs.

As always, the fourth weekend in April will be the annual Wildflower Pilgrimage which we cosponsor with the Science Museum. I am extremely pleased to announce this year's keynote speaker will be Paul James who not only was BRWS first president but is also a renowned horticulturist. We are planning to have the pilgrimage brochure available for distribution by March 1, 1997. We have also added walks designed especially for the school student doing wildflower projects. Remember you don't have to be an expert to be a guide.

So, as winter settles over the Blue Ridge bringing short cold days and long cold nights, dust off your wildflower books and field guides and dream of spring. Keep warm and wait.



Symplocarpus foetidus



Cypripedium reginae

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Season Opener (1995)

by Karen Shepard

According to the Almanac, spring arrives March 21 with the vernal equinox — when the sun crosses the equator and day and night are of equal length. Throughout the centuries there have been many rites and rituals associated with this longed for renewal of the earth.

For me the first day of spring has been whatever date my friend Kay and I discovered our first Skunk Cabbage, *Symplocarpus foetidus*. Perhaps this ritual won't go down in the annals of history, but for us "going Skunk Cabbaging" has become our harbinger of the season. We started discussing this event in January when the ground was frozen and barren and there was a winter storm watch for the Roanoke Valley. Just the fact that we found Skunk Cabbage last year on February 19, made the approaching storm more bearable. Probably to our acquaintances who are not wildflower enthusiasts (and we do have a few) the allure of finding Skunk Cabbage is somewhat elusive, if not downright strange. To us it is the Season Opener, marking the first of many field trips in the search for wildflowers.

This year the much anticipated day arrived Sunday, February 25. The morning dawned clear and sunny; by one o'clock, when I met Kay at the bottom of Bent Mountain the temperature was 60 degrees. After such a long frigid winter, the air felt like the warmth of summer.

We head south on the Parkway to milepost 147. There, in an area by a stream the ground is wet and squishy — perfect habitat for Skunk Cabbage. We walk slowly looking intently for the sharp, pointed spathe pushing out of the ground. Suddenly we spot the tip of one and then we see them everywhere. We echo each other saying, "there's one, there's one!"

The minute flowers are located on the spadix and are hidden within the purple-green spathe. The best way to get a good look at them is to use a hand lens. Contrary to its name the odor is not strong unless the plant is

bruised or broken. We are careful where we step!

Just for the fun of it, we drive on to Rake's Mill Pond, Milepost 162. Kay and I walk down to the water which is teeming with minnows. Much to our delight we find Skunk Cabbages in all stages of development. Everywhere we look, families of fat, green striped ones and small bright purple ones are pushing through the ground. After a hundred, we lose count and decide to cross the road and explore another area.

As we bushwhack our way through thickets and brambles, startled finches and chickadees take flight. In a clearing is an old ramshackled house. We peer in the broken windows at the dust and cobwebs and wonder aloud about the people who once lived here. Signs of birds, field mice and snakes are evident. These meadow creatures who once would not have been welcome are now the house's only occupants. As always, nature reclaims her own. This sobering thought brings our day to a close.

The sun is going down and the air is getting cool as we start for home. We know, however, that Old Man Winter is not through. The north wind will blow and perhaps even bring another snow. Nevertheless, the Skunk Cabbage is blooming and Kay and I have celebrated our annual rite of spring.

What nature delivers us is never stale. Because what nature creates has eternity in it.

Isaac Bashevis Singer

Native Plant Web Site

The Native Plant Conservation Initiative Web Site is up and running at <http://www.aqd.nps.gov/natnet/npci>. If you have a web page or e-mail address that they have not included but which would be an appropriate addition, please let them know.

Schedule of Events

- February 24** General Membership Meeting, 7:00 P.M., Center in the Square. "Go West . . ." will be presented by Bobby and Frieda Toler.
- March 22** VNPS Winter Workshop on Virginia's Trees will be held at the University of Richmond. A brochure detailing times, topics and speakers will be mailed to all VNPS members within the next few weeks.
- March 24** General Membership Meeting, 7:00 P.M., Center in the Square. "Spring in Bloom" will be a presentation by several of our members focusing on the flora which might be seen during spring. Excellent for new botanists who want to know what to expect and when (early, mid or late season), as well as areas in which to look.
- March 29** Arcadia Field Trip. Meet at 10:00 A.M. by the bridge over Jennings Creek on Route 614 as we search for spring ephemerals. Bring your lunch. Rick Crites, leader, 540-774-4518.
- April 12** Field Trip. Details will be announced later.
- April 24-27** Twenty-eighth Annual Wildflower Pilgrimage by the Science Museum of Western Virginia. Co-sponsored by the Blue Ridge Wildflower Society. Paul James will be the key-note speaker this year. Our involvement with the Pilgrimage takes the place of our April General Membership Meeting.
- May 4** The Randolph-Macon Women's College Botanic Garden will be the focus of this Sunday evening program in Lynchburg. Meet at 7:00 P.M. in the garden to see the early spring flowers. The walk will be followed by a slide program (Room 225, Martin Science Building, on the R-MWC campus) showing the development of the garden. Come and bring a friend.
- May 10** Thirteenth Annual Plant Sale at the Community Arboretum on the Campus of Virginia Western Community College from 10:00 A.M. until 2:00 P.M. Members may begin purchasing at 9:00 A.M. Rain or shine!
- May 19** General Membership Meeting, 7:00 P.M., Center in the Square. The program details will be announced later.
- Please note the *change of date* to the third rather than fourth Monday of the month in order to avoid conflicts with Memorial Day plans. Also, we will be meeting in a classroom down the hallway from our regular meeting room.
- A board meeting will precede the general meeting.
- May 24** Lady's Slipper Walk. Join us at 8:00 A.M. for breakfast at the Peaks of Otter Restaurant or meet at 10:00 at the Visitor Center. We will go to Sunset Field and possibly Wilkerson's Gap, Powell's Gap or Thunder Ridge Shelter area. Some of these sites have limited parking areas. Carpooling from the Visitor Center is encouraged. Sam and Dora Lee Ellington, leaders.
- June 7** Rhododendron Day on the Parkway begins with breakfast at the Peaks of Otter Restaurant. We will meet at the Visitor Center at 10:00 for the field trip. Bring your lunch.
- There will be no General Membership Meeting in June.
- Sept. 19-21** VNPS Annual Meeting in Williamsburg. The John Clayton Chapter will host this year's meeting.

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Lynchburg Area Members

by Dorothy C. Bliss

SPRING OR WINTER?

A few days ago the temperature was in the 70's, today snow has fallen and an icy rain is rapidly covering the white blanket. No wonder some of our plants have been confused! While doing some last minute weeding during a recent spring-like day, I noticed that clumps of the hairy bittercress, *Cardamine hirsuta* were in full bloom. This is a very common annual or biennial (weed) from Europe that is naturalized in our lawns, gardens and roadsides. The basal leaves form an attractive crowded rosette. The clusters of tiny white flowers usually bloom in March but undoubtedly the warm and wet fall and early winter have signaled the plant to flower.

This unseasonable weather also encourages the precocious development of other flower buds. Several of my hyacinths have pushed above the soil, their buds now exposed to the elements. I have received reports that daffodils are also up and budded in some gardens. We expect the winter-flowering jasmine, *Jasminum nudiflorum* to burst forth in February or March but by the first of January some of these shrubs were in full bloom. There may be some damage to opening buds later this spring because of this early winter bud stimulation. It is of interest to note that all of these plants that I have noted are introduced not native.

THE AMERICAN ELM

For many years we have watched the once beautiful American elm, *Ulmus americana*, gradually succumb to the Dutch Elm Disease. From a recent article by Don Davis in the Lynchburg News and Advance, I learned that The U. S. National Arboretum has announced the development of two new disease-tolerant American elms, Valley Forge and New Harmony, which are expected to be available in nurseries

by 1999. This is great news as many of us remember when this stately and graceful shade tree lined our city streets and driveways, Perhaps that day will return.

GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE?

Is there any validity to the Greenhouse Effect Theory? I read an interesting but disturbing article this week that points to scientific evidence that the temperature of our earth is increasing and that the cause of this change is man-made pollution. This readable account is divided into 13 predictions with the scientific facts to support these statements. If you are interested you will find this information in the Jan.-Feb. 1997 issue of International Wildlife. If you do not have a copy, you may find it in your local library.

LYNCHBURG SPRING PROGRAM

A spring program is planned for Sunday evening of May 4th. We will meet in the R-MWC Botanic Garden at 7:00 p.m. for a stroll along the paths to see the early spring flowers. This will be followed by a slide program in Room 225, Martin Science Building, R-MWC Campus, depicting the development from the bare hillside three years ago to the present garden with more than 200 species of native plants. Specific mention will be made of some of the special plants that have been established.

Community Presentations

From time to time various schools, garden clubs and other organizations request the Blue Ridge Wildflower Society present a program for them. Often the same few people from our chapter take their personal slides and give these programs. We feel we have other members who would be available and willing but either do not have the necessary slides or feel slightly uncomfortable creating the presentation.

With these facts in mind, our chapter has recently purchased four videos to be used either within the chapter or for presentations given to other groups. There are three on seasonal wildflowers; i.e., spring, summer and fall. The fourth is entitled "Woodland Harvests" and depicts, as the name implies, fruits, nuts and berries. It is narrated by Charles Kuralt.

Dr. C. Ritchie Bell wrote the script and his wife, Anne H. Lindsey did the filming. Dr. Bell is Director Emeritus of North Carolina Botanical Garden and botany professor at University of North Carolina. The music was composed by Scott Pearson to both compliment and complement the individual tapes.

These videos are educational as well as colorful and entertaining. They contain information on where to find and how to recognize the various species and even tell how to grow some of the plants being shown. There is also a multi-page natural history guide included on the cover so the presenter can preview or follow along as the tape is being viewed.

If you are interested in becoming part of our speakers bureau, please contact either Karen Shepard or Pam Wieringo.

GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

February 24, 1997 7:00 PM

Program: "GO WEST..."

Speakers: Bobby & Frieda Toler

Place: Fifth Floor, Center In The Square