



Blue Ridge Wildflower Society

A CHAPTER OF THE
VIRGINIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

Vol. 23, No. 2

April, 2006

Calendar of Events

- April 21** **Randolph-Macon Woman's College Botanic Garden Friday Work Session.** Meet at the Garden at 2:00 p.m. The session will end at 4:00.
- April 22** **Randolph-Macon Woman's College Botanic Garden Saturday Work Session.** Meet at the Garden at 9:00 a.m. and work until 11:00 a.m.
- April 22** **Buffalo Creek Nature Center Wildflower Walk.** Meet at 2:00 p.m. in the visitor parking lot at the Nature Center. This is on Route 24 about 2 miles east of the Bedford/Campbell County line. Buffalo Creek is one of the sites on our VNPS Registry. Expect to see a good variety of ephemerals. Sandra Elder, leader, 434-525-8433.
- April 24** **Wildflower Walk/General Membership Meeting,** Meet at 6:00 p.m. at the Roanoke River Overlook on the Blue Ridge Parkway. If raining, meet at the Roanoke Church of Christ at 7:00 for an indoor program. Rich Crites will be our leader/speaker, 540-774-4518.
- April 29** **Wildflower Walk at the home of Malcolm Black at Bent Mountain.** Meet at 11:00 a.m. at Bent Mountain Elementary School. Bring your lunch.
- May 6** **Twenty-second Annual Spring Wildflower Sale,** 9:00 - Noon, Community Arboretum at Virginia Western Community College. No plants may be selected or sold prior to 9:00. If you need pots, contact Paul Cowins, 434-239-4842, or Cindy Burks, 540-977-0868.
- May 13** **Blue Ridge Parkway South.** Meet at 10:00 a.m. at Buck Mountain Overlook, Blue Ridge Parkway milepost 123.2. Bring your lunch although we may decide to eat at Tuggle's Gap Restaurant. Rich Crites, 540-774-4518, or Butch Kelly, 540-384-7429, leaders.
- May 20** **Wildflower Walk and Wildflower Gardening Demonstration.** Meet at 11:00 a.m. at the James River Visitor Center, Blue Ridge Parkway, for a short walk or at Noon for lunch. Bring your lunch or eat at Otter Creek Restaurant. At 1:00 p.m. we will carpool to the Cowins' farm for the demonstration. Paul & Lucille Cowins, 434-229-4884, leaders. This takes the place of our May General Membership Meeting.
- June 3** **Blue Ridge Parkway North.** Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the Peaks of Otter Lodge for breakfast before the walk or meet at 10:00 a.m. at the Peaks of Otter Visitor Center for the walk. Rich Crites, leader, 540-774-4518.
- June 17** **Rosebay Rhododendron Registry Site Walk at Altavista.** Meet at 2:00 p.m. in the parking lot of Ross Laboratories in Altavista. From Roanoke, take Route 460 Bypass to the Route 29 South, Danville, exit (near the Lynchburg airport). Take the first exit and turn left at the end of the ramp which will take you to Altavista. Ross Labs has a large sign and is by the railroad. Sandra Elder, 434-525-8433, leader.
- August 20** **Picnic with the Cowins.** Our annual BRWS picnic will be at the Cowins' farm near Big Island. Plan to come any time after 2:00 p.m. We will eat around 4:00-5:00. Directions will be provided with the July Newsletter.
- There will be a Board of Directors meeting at 2:00 p.m.
- Sept. 23-24** **VNPS Annual Meeting hosted by the Shenandoah Chapter.** Doug Coleman will be the keynote speaker.

President's Letter

Cindy Burks

Spring is here! I don't recall ever being as anxious for it to arrive. Our first field trip of the season was to Arcadia. More field trips are planned and I hope you will all be able to participate in them, as well as attending our meetings. We've had two very informative general membership meetings so far. In February Rich Crites presented a program on local native plants and, in March, Joe Penn presented a program on wildflowers of the Canadian Rockies. A special thank-you to Rich and Joe, as well as to Connie Crites and Evelyn Walke for providing the refreshments for our meetings.

If you have the opportunity this spring, visit the Randolph-Macon Woman's College Botanic Garden in Lynchburg. The garden is easy to access and includes benches to relax while you take in the beauty of the garden. To get there, take Route 29 North (Lynchburg Expressway) to the second downtown exit. There is a RMWC sign pointing the way. Turn right onto Main Street and continue to the intersection with Fifth Street. At that point, Main Street becomes Rivermont Avenue. Follow Rivermont Avenue to the intersection with Norfolk Avenue. Turn right onto Norfolk Avenue and park along the street or in the parking lot to the right. The entrance is on the left side of the street. Just inside the brick wall, walk to the right into the garden.

I stumbled across a quote not long ago: "In spring, at the end of the day, one should smell like dirt." Now is the time to "pot up" plants from your garden that you can donate to our spring wildflower sale. If you need pots or labels, call me at (540) 977-0868. I'm dividing plants from my own garden, so I'll probably smell like dirt but I will bring the pots and labels to you.

I will be traveling (for business) throughout West Virginia over the next few weeks. I hope to have time in the early evenings to explore the areas I'll be visiting. I will be on the lookout for wildflowers and locations we might possibly visit as a group. In your own travels, if you discover areas you think we might enjoy, please let me know.

What is a Weed?

Dorothy C. Bliss

If asked to name a common weed, I presume that many of us in this section of Virginia would usually name the dandelion as our first choice. The dandelion is that very visible bright yellow flower in our lawns, gardens and roadsides. This spring my answer to that question would probably be bittercress, a small white-flowered plant that is very prominent in our lawns and gardens this year. (More about this species at a later date.) Why do we consider a plant as a weed?

The following are several definitions of the term "weed". The Merriam Webster dictionary defines a weed as a plant that is not valued where it is growing; especially one that tends to overgrow or choke out more desirable plants.

Gray's Manual of Botany defines a weed as a troublesome or aggressive plant which intrudes where not wanted.

USDA publication "Common Weeds of the United States" says plant species are considered weeds when they interfere with man's activities or his welfare.

In reading these definitions, we see that they are dependent upon our value of the plant and thus it appears there is no exact scientific basis for designating a plant as a weed. What, then, is your basis for considering dandelion as a weed? Perhaps a little more information on the dandelion will help answer the question.

The Virginia Atlas lists only one species, *Taraxacum officinale*, which is found in every county in the state. Several taxonomic books list *T. erythrospermum* with red achenes (seed covers) as occurring in Virginia. The new Virginia Flora will probably answer this problem.

Presumably, the ubiquitous (I love that word) dandelion was brought into this country by the early European settlers who prized the plant because of its many uses and perhaps because it reminded them of their former homeland. The "greens" or leaves are edible if picked before flowering but very bitter after blooming. While I was growing up on a farm in New England, my mother frequently boiled these greens and usually changed the water once or twice to remove any bitterness. The leaves may also be eaten raw in

salads. I have not tried this! I have read that deer relish the leaves but I have seen no evidence of a preference for the plant. Today one must be very careful in eating any wild plant because of the possibility of herbicides, etc. In the past, the dandelion was used medicinally as well as for dyes - yellow from the flowers and magenta from the roots; wine was made from the blossoms, a coffee substitute from the roasted roots and tea from the leaves.

Have you ever been curious about the common name dandelion? From the dictionary, I learned that this name is derived from 14th century French "dent de lion" or lion's tooth, referring to the cut margins of the leaves. The basis for the common names, blowballs or parachute heads, are easily traced from the childhood games most of us played, trying to blow off all the seeds or achenes in one breath for then our wish would come true.

A few years ago while driving south on the Newfound Gap Highway in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, I was surprised and curious upon seeing an expanse of brilliant yellow flowers along the edge of the road. When I drove off the highway and looked more closely, I recognized the flowers as the common dandelion. I was so impressed I took several photographs. Would I consider these plants, in this instance, as weeds? No! But if they had been in my lawn or garden, I would want to remove them as I would consider them weeds.

Now, can you answer the question, "What is a Weed?"

Wildflower Video

Spring Wildflowers of the Mid-Atlantic Region, a video created by Marion Lobstein, associate professor of biology at Northern Virginia Community College, includes information on nearly 100 species of spring wildflowers and features slides that provide details for identification as well as enjoyment of the beauty of wildflowers. Lobstein produced the award-winning video along with two former students in 1998. DVD and VHS copies of the video are available for \$20 plus \$3 for shipping and handling. All proceeds are donated to the Flora of Virginia project. To order, contact Marion Lobstein@nvcc.edu or (703) 257-6643.

Lynchburg Area

This spring the weather has been very erratic and changeable, unseasonably warm one week and near freezing temperatures the next. There has been very little snow and the rainfall is about four and a half inches below normal as of April 1. The ground is extremely dry and hard in sunny areas. It was interesting to note, however, that much of the soil in the Randolph-Macon Woman's College Botanic Garden, which lies in the shadow of the Martin Science Building, was moist and very workable. Evidently this section does not receive as much sun and was able to retain some of the moisture from the few showers we had.

Several work sessions have been held in the Garden this spring, beginning with March 11. On that day, 12 volunteers raked up masses of leaves and picked up many fallen branches, with those of the China fir the most evident (obnoxious) with their sharp pointed leaves and cones. Some aggressive plants and dead stalks of last fall's flowers were cut back. Several R-MWC students have volunteered their services on Friday from 2:00-4:00 and Saturday 9:00-11:00 through the month of April with the exception of Easter weekend, April 14 and 15. Their work was extremely helpful this past weekend but, unfortunately, the semester at R-MWC is over by the end of April. I am hoping for more volunteers who will be able to assist in the Garden, especially in the months of May and June. Removing weeds and adding mulch are important activities through early summer. Most of the bittercress that had infiltrated so much of the creeping Juniper and fern bed has been dug away but there are many dandelions, common violets, wild garlic (onion), etc., that need to be removed or exterminated, if possible.

Let us turn our attention to a brighter and more uplifting topic. Many of the spring flowers we expect in March or early April have not made their appearance and I expect that the drought and fluctuating temperatures are possible explanations. This year the earliest flowers to bloom were bloodroot, Greek valerian and toothwort in early March and by April 1, nine

more species had made their appearance. These included rue anemone, columbine, Dutchman's breeches, wild geranium, bluets, Virginia bluebells, Alleghany spurge, blue phlox and, yes, the common violet, *Viola palmata*. The spring flowers should be at their peak by the end of April. This would be a good time to visit the Garden. Perhaps it will give you inspiration as you walk along the paths or rest on one of the benches. Hope to see you there.

Remember the work sessions in the Garden Friday, April 21 from 2:00-4:00 and Saturday, April 22 from 9:00-11:00!

Spring Plant Sale

Our twenty-second Annual Plant Sale is scheduled for Saturday, May 6, at the Community Arboretum at Virginia Western Community College. The sale is from 9:00-noon or until our supply of plants is exhausted. No plants will be sold before 9:00 a.m.

Now is the time to pot your plants as they need about three weeks to get established. Call Paul Cowins, 434-239-4884, or Cindy Burks, 540-977-0868 if you need pots.

Plants need to be labeled and at the Arboretum no later than 8:30 a.m.

Rain or shine, our sale takes place, so come and help us. Bring plant donations, help arrange and price or help customers make selections. Be a customer, too.

Other Events of Interest

April 24-30 Great Smoky Mountains 56th Annual Wildflower Pilgrimage. Activities, lectures and field trips by well known speakers and leaders. Contact them at Great Smoky Mountains National Park, 107 Park Headquarters Road, Gatlinburg TN 37738, 865-436-1290 or <http://www.springwildflowerpilgrimage.org>

May 19-21 Wintergreen Nature Foundation's 23rd Annual Spring Wildflower Symposium. Lectures, workshops and field trips. Contact them at Wintergreen Nature Foundation, PO Box 468 Nellysford VA 22958, 434-325-8169 or www.twnf.org.

Reviews

Canadian Rockies Program

Joe Penn was the guest speaker at the March 27th meeting of the Blue Ridge Wildflower Society. Joe's program was on wildflowers of the Canadian Rockies. Joe shared information about that area, as well as terrific photography tips. His slides were fabulous! Many of the plants were similar to plants in our geographical area. The ending to the slide presentation took us all by surprise. While Joe was taking a photograph, a brown bear had come close by and sat down to eat the vegetation. Joe got a really great photo of the bear, too.

Arcadia Field Trip

The morning started out cloudy and cool. We met at the bridge at Jennings Creek and Rich Crites led as we walked along the roadside. We saw wild ginger, saxifrage, bleeding heart, Virginia bluebells, spice bush, bloodroot, cutleaf toothwort, hepatica and hazelnut blooms. We also saw partridgeberry and teaberry. As we made our way along, we noticed cars coming down from the mountain covered with snow. By the time we left, the wind was blowing fiercely and it snowed all the way back to Troutville. Even so, it was good to get out in nature. Thank you, Rich, for leading this walk and sharing so much native plant information with us.

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