

Blue Ridge Wildflower Society

A CHAPTER OF THE
VIRGINIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

Vol. 16, No. 4

October, 1999

Schedule of Events

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| October 16 | Randolph-Macon Botanic Garden Work Day from 2:00 - 4:00 p.m. Details are in the Lynchburg Area column. Rain date is October 23. |
| October 25 | General Membership Meeting , 7:00 p.m., Center in the Square. Jay Stipes will present "Famous Patients." |
| October 30 | Bottom Creek Gorge Field Trip . Meet at 1:00 p.m. at Bent Mountain School. Butch Kelly and Cindy Sandberg, leaders. This is a strenuous walk. |
| November 22 | An Evening of Shared Memories . This is our time for sharing photographs, slides or short videos from the past year. Bring five to ten of your favorites for us to enjoy. A seed exchange will follow. Meet at 7:00 p.m., Center in the Square. |
| December 4 | Lynchburg Evening Program . Meet at 7:30 p.m., Room 225, Martin Science Building on the Randolph-Macon Woman's College Campus. |
| February 28 | General Membership Meeting , 7:00 p.m., Center in the Square. |

John Clayton Herbarium

The Natural History Museum in London has been working on a Linnaean Plant Typification Project. As part of the project, 710 Clayton herbarium sheets have been scanned into a computer to create the John Clayton Herbarium database.

Most of these specimens were sent from North America to Europe during the early 1700's and were studied by Gronovius and later by Carolus Linnaeus. When preparing *Species Planetarum* (which introduced standardized nomenclature), Linnaeus relied greatly upon these specimens. We continue to use many of the names he assigned plants.

The database can be accessed at www.nhm.ac.uk/botany/clayton. Don McKelvey of the John Clayton Chapter researched this site and brought it to the attention of VNPS. As Mike Sawyer, also

with John Clayton Chapter, pointed out, when you view these images, you are viewing an image of the actual specimen prepared by John Clayton more than 250 years ago.

Special thanks to Don for locating this site. We have read or heard of it from several sources since that time, so we hope more people will access and appreciate an opportunity to see this part of our natural history.

August Picnic

For several years, Al and Vi Sheridan have invited members of the BRWS to their home at Smith Mountain Lake for a picnic.

On August 22, we enjoyed a delightful afternoon relaxing and sharing a delicious meal. The lake was down from the drought but despite some exposed lakebed, the view was lovely and peaceful.

Al and Vi are gracious, relaxed hosts who enjoy sharing their home with friends. We appreciate this time of fun and fellowship.

In Sympathy

Our sympathy is extended to Sandra Elder on the death of her father, Charles E. Parker, September 3. Mr. Parker lived in Amherst the latter part of his life. Sandra has been an active member of the BRWS for many years.

Our sympathy is extended to Butch and Betty Kelly on the death of his mother, Dorothy Kelly, on September 29th. Mrs. Kelly lived in Thurmont, Maryland.

Butch is a former BRWS President and currently serves on the VNPS Board and Betty in BRWS Secretary.

Letter From The President

Cindy Sandberg

Isn't it a good feeling to watch a child's expressions when doing something for the first time? It's exciting to experience that sense of wonder as an adult, too. The opportunities to learn in the natural world are endless. We will never run out of new material to study. We are fortunate in this area to have so many "outdoor classrooms" as well as formal classes, nature-based organizations, and hands-on activities that offer educational, entertainment and social opportunities if we choose to participate.

In a recent eight day period, I joined a hiking group for a walk by the light of the harvest moon near the Blue Ridge Parkway, saw a "moondog" (I'd never heard of that before), heard Mike Hayslett's talk on vernal pools, climbed Buffalo Mountain with guides from two nature groups, who offered plant information and a geology "lesson", saw more bottle gentian than I've ever seen at one wild place and enjoyed spectacular views, went on a witness tree walk and saw a healthy American elm, heard an ode to the tree (printed in this newsletter with permission from Dr. Jay Stipes, a fine poet, in my opinion) and visited an individual's wildflower propagation area and gardens. While that was a lot in a short period of time, the feelings I had during and after these activities were exhilarating, not exhausting! The stories I heard from other individuals participating were better than any programs on television and I am still enjoying the wonder of it all, still looking up information on the things I heard about and saw. I've also been blessed to share the joy of a friend who found a spotted salamander which she was able to identify because she also attended the vernal pools lecture. Her enthusiasm was contagious!

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I encourage you all to take advantage of the opportunities we have and encourage others to do so as well. Invite someone for a walk, share your knowledge of plants with them, encourage learning about our natural world, ask them to participate in Blue Ridge Wildflower Society activities. Above all, be thankful for all that's ours to learn and enjoy.

Caterpillar Book Available

Several months ago, we mentioned a booklet "Caterpillars of Eastern Forests" available from the US Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. We have learned a booklet entitled "Caterpillars of Pacific Northwest Forests and Woodlands" is also available. These booklets include color photographs of many butterfly and moth larvae, major identifying factors and information about host plants.

To order either or both, contact Lisa Cress, USDA Forest Service, 180 Canfield Street, Morgantown WV 26505 or e-mail to lcress/na_mo@fs.fed.us. There is no charge for either booklet.

Fall Plant Sale

Sandra Elder

This year's plant sale far surpassed my expectations. Considering the drought conditions this past summer I didn't expect there would be many plants to sell. Blue Ridge Chapter members really came through. A huge THANK YOU to everyone who contributed plants. I don't even know who some of you are. Some plants just magically appeared. Please know that your contribution was greatly appreciated. We made \$1,467 which was the second best we have ever done at the fall sale.

From the questions asked and comments made, I sense a growing interest in the Lynchburg area for the use of native plants in home landscapes.

The Randolph-Macon Botanic Garden provides the perfect location for our sale. Many thanks to Dorothy Bliss, the garden's founder, and the volunteers that keep it beautiful. Both the Botanic Garden and the Lynchburg Plant Sale originated in the fall of 1994. Let us hope they will both continue to prosper in the future.

Rosebay Registry Site Visit

Sandra Elder

On June 23 Carolyn Bates and Margaret Wenning accompanied me on my annual visit to Altavista. After first signing in at Ross Laboratories we drove the short distance to the site. Our walk on this ten acre site begins on top of a knoll. We then walked downhill about a quarter mile through open deciduous woods until we reached the creek. After crossing the creek we proceeded upstream another quarter mile to the property boundary.

The Rosebay Rhododendron (*Rhododendron maximum*) showed signs of stress caused by the drought with some branch dieback and smaller blossoms. There were some nice blooms and more buds yet to open. We found the foliage of only one featherbell (*Stenanthium gramineum*) with no indication of buds. The princess pine (*Lycopodium obscurum*) is spreading to areas downstream. The ferns near the property line were lush. Ferns found here include netted chain, sensitive, tapered, lady and royal.

Although situated between busy Rt. 29 bypass and the Ross Laboratories plant, this site provides a retreat to the natural world. The tree canopy muffles the sounds of a busy world, replaced by nature's symphony of a babbling brook and the beautiful melodies of a wood thrush, a scarlet tanager and a red eyed vireo.

If you have never seen this registry site I encourage you to plan a visit in the future.

James River State Park

Sandra Elder

In late August I visited Virginia's newest state park. James River State Park encompasses 1,440 acres and features three miles of river frontage and three ponds. There are hiking trails, restrooms and picnic tables.

Of particular interest to wildflower enthusiasts is a large field beside the river where I found New York ironweed, Joe-Pye, swamp milkweed, mist flower, rose-mallow and goldenrod. At a nearby pond, spatterdock and arrowhead were in bloom.

This park looks promising for future field trips. It is located near Bent Creek off Rt. 60.

Pet Pointers Avoiding Holiday Hazards

The gifts are wrapped, dinner is in the oven, the guests will arrive at any moment. What you do not want at this time is a trip to the veterinary emergency hospital! Here are a few thoughts to help you help your pet have a wonderful holiday, too.

Don't feed your pet "people" food. Especially avoid chocolate as it contains theobromine which can cause seizures and death. Rich gravies can cause serious diarrhea.

Don't let pets have poultry bones as they splinter and fragment easily. The sharp edges can not only damage the mouth but small fragments may be swallowed causing blockages or puncturing the esophagus, stomach or intestinal track.

Know the genus and species of every plant in your house and yard. Be aware of the potential dangers of holiday plants. Many cause cramps, vomiting, uncontrollable drooling, diarrhea or seizures. Mistletoe berries can cause severe gastroenteritis and cardiovascular collapse.

Beware of the dangers of cats climbing the Christmas tree. (How's a pussycat to know a tree will topple if he or she climbs to the top? Take my word for it, the sound of a fully decorated tree crashing onto a hardwood floor at 3:30 a.m. is more than a little disconcerting.) Very large dogs can also topple a tree in the excitement of the moment.

Some pets, particularly young ones, like to chew on everything within reach so be careful about cords for tree lights, tinsel and popcorn strings. All three are potentially lethal.

Candles create a wonderfully warm, intimate mood but are very hazardous. Never leave burning candles where your pet can reach them and either turn them over or drag ribbons and papers near the flames.

Keep the telephone number of the **ASPCA National Animal Poison Control Center** at the University of Illinois posted. Their number is **800-548-2423**. This number may not be in your local telephone directory so you will want to put it in a permanent location now.

Remember, holidays can be stressful for all of us. Take a few minutes to spend quiet time with your pet "child" and you will both be blessed by it.

Nature's Splendid Wineglass (*Ulmus americana* L.)

Towering palm-tree mimic,
With green gushing fountains from overflowing crowns,
Weeping, limp branches cascading down.

Vernal displays of muted, reddish flowers,
You announce the advent of the long-awaited spring.
You promise unfailingly forthcoming seed and leaf.

Shiny, saw-toothed, rich-green leaves,
You give ornament, richness, fullness to otherwise desolate skeletons.
You forgive the toxic gaseous garbage by converting it to sweets!

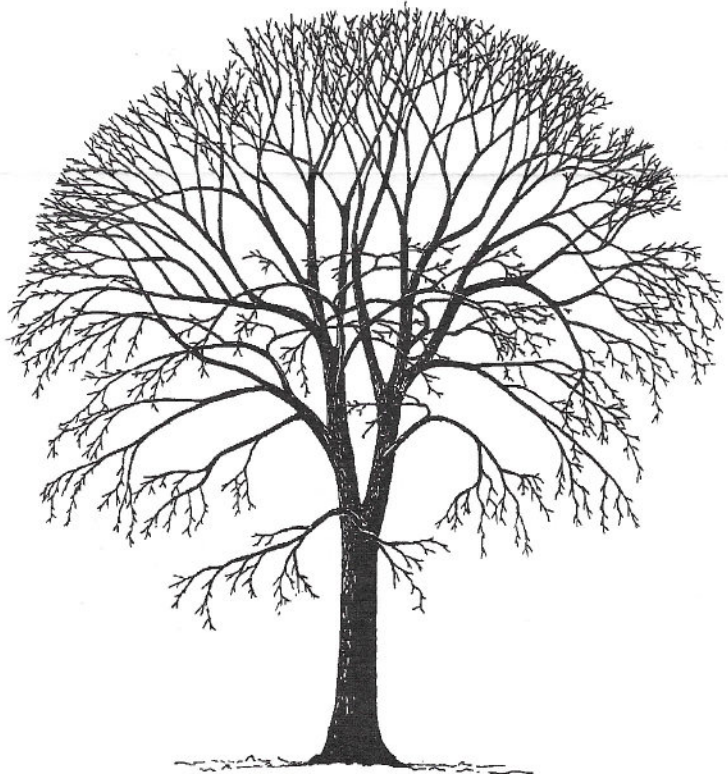
Most elegant, eye-catching, regal, spectacular of all trees.
Your street-lined alleys of tall green gothic arches are living cathedrals, no less.
Vast, awesome, inspiring.

Saintly, exemplary Christians, you!
So forgiving of human insults —
Smashed feet and toes, packed soil, ruthless butchering, imprisoned feet.

Sentinel of time and human events,
You witnessed history being made;
Washington's command of the Revolutionary Army,
Chief Logan's memorable speech,
Penn's arrival to the New World.
If you could but speak, what messages could be divulged!

Undeserving martyr to man's intrusive Trojan Horses,
You battled the blights, and made spectacular victories.
Though many giants have fallen prey to the Grim Reaper,
Many skirmishes were avoided, and you remain still vast numbers, unconquered!

RJStipes, Nov., 1996
(No poet and he knows it!)



Lynchburg Area Members

Dorothy C. Bliss

After months of drought the welcome rains of September in our area resulted in the greening of lawns and a general improvement in many of the herbaceous perennials. Damage to some of the shrubs may be irreversible. One of my azaleas appears dead following the browning and shriveling of the leaves which still cling to the branches. The loss of some leaves off a tree may be beneficial during a dry spell since this prevents some of the loss of water - transpiration - which occurs principally from leaf tissue. Many of these trees may simply go into early dormancy. It is too early to predict whether or not our autumn color will be as brilliant as usual.

Fern Foray

On a recent warm Sunday afternoon in August twenty fern enthusiasts joined in the fern walk along Otter Creek, extremely low because of the continued drought, and north around Otter Creek Lake. Among the 15 species of ferns identified were an abundance of the silvery glade fern, *Athyrium thelypteroides*, several in the genus *Botrychium* and, in spite of the dry conditions, masses of the hay-scented and tapering or New York fern. Underneath the large boulders on the southside of the lake the tiny fern identified as *Asplenium montanum* was probably *A. pinnatifidum*, pinnatifid spleenwort. The former species had been found there on previous trips but had temporarily, I hope, disappeared because of the extreme dryness of the thin soil. Among the interesting plants in bloom were the yellow passion flower and cardinal flower on the margin of the lake and bottle brush grass in fruit along the path. The paw paw trees were laden with unripe fruit resembling clusters of fat green bananas. Many of the large hemlocks were dead or dying from the ravages of the wooly adelgids. Several of the trees near the edge of the lake wore "wire skirts" as a protection against the destructive activity of the beavers.

While enjoying a picnic supper on the banks of the James River, the group had an opportunity to recount the activities of the afternoon.

Pocket-Size Field Guides

Many of us have Wherrys, Cobbs or other fern books which are excellent but are awkward to use in the field. Recently I have been aware that John Snead has been using a much smaller guide that is easy to use, well illustrated with good identification keys and fits easily in one's pocket. This Fern Finder by Anne and Barbara Hallowell is inexpensive, around \$3, and would be a great asset for any of our field trips. It is sold in the Blue Ridge Parkway Visitor Centers, Wintergreen Nature Foundation, etc. In this same series there is a Tree Finder, a Winter Tree Finder and a Flower Finder that are worth investigating.

The Virginia Dayflower

Recently Sandra Elder noticed an unusual dayflower with three blue petals in bloom along the banks of Buffalo Creek, one of our registry sites. The common dayflower, *Commelina communis*, an introduced invasive, has two blue petals and one white in contrast to the native Virginia dayflower, *C. virginica* which has three blue petals. This latter species is not recorded for Campbell County in the current copy of the Virginia Atlas.

Although on the following day Sandra and I walked a distance along the creek no other populations were noted. Birds or other animals or even the flowing water could have introduced this plant to the area.

While checking my home plant press I discovered a specimen of running clubmoss, *Lycopodium clavatum*, from Fauquier County, collected in 1995. This also is not included in the Atlas for this county and I will check further to see if these two species have been reported to the current committee working on an update of the Atlas.

Botanic Garden Workday

Our spring workday in the R-MWC Botanic Garden was so successful we have scheduled a fall workday on Saturday, October 16, from 2-4:00 in the afternoon. There will be a general clean-up, removal of some of the goldenrods and asters that have taken over too much of the hillside and addition of mulch where needed.

We hope to remove weeds from the new expansion of the garden and then cover this area with mulch. Since this site is in the deep shade of a large oak tree, ferns and other shade-loving plants will be planted here. If anyone has Christmas ferns, ebony spleenworts, maiden-hair ferns, shield or wood ferns and other non-invasive ferns, we would welcome receiving specimens.

Hope to see you in the Botanic Garden on October 16, 2-4 p.m. (October 23 - rain date)

Evening Program

An evening program will be held on December 4 at 7:30 in Room 225, Martin Science Building on the R-MWC campus. This speaker will be announced later.

Birch Bark - A Lifesaver?

During the 86th annual meeting of the American Association of Cancer Research in early 1995, Dr. John Pezzuto discussed studies underway using chemical compounds found in birch bark. Dr. Pezzuto is head of the University of Illinois at Chicago's department of medical chemistry and pharmacognosy. Researchers there were testing the effects of betulinic acid, found in abundance in birch bark, on various cancers and the human immunodeficiency virus.

During government sponsored screenings in which thousands of natural substances are tested for potential use against cancer and HIV, betulinic acid showed great promise.

For decades, botanists and pharmacologists have known medicinal uses for the substance and have tried it against various forms of cancer with little or no success. Only during the past decade has it been tested for use in the treatment of melanoma, an often fatal form of skin cancer. Tests on lab mice indicated no significant side effects even at high doses. Clinical trial on humans began in late 1995.

Results of tests conducted during the first three years have recently been published and betulinic acid continues to prove promising. Though it is not a magic cure and, as with all drugs, is ineffective for some people, it has proven highly useful. Further testing will be required before it becomes routine protocol and is added to the arsenal of weapons against these diseases.

Here is another example of the need to protect our environment for the sake of ourselves and our heirs. It is also another example of the mysteries and secrets locked within our flora.