

Blue Ridge Wildflower Society

A CHAPTER OF THE
VIRGINIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

Vol. 16, No. 3

July, 1999

Schedule of Events

- August 15** **Fern Foray.** Meet at 2:00 p.m. at the James River Visitor Center, Blue Ridge Parkway, milepost 63.8. A fern book, Newcomb Field Guide and a hand lens will be helpful. We will have a (brown bag) picnic after the walk.
- August 22** **Picnic with the Sheridans at Smith Mountain Lake.** Bring a covered dish. Our hosts will provide the meat, lemonade and coffee. We will eat around 5:00 p.m. but feel free to come any time after 2:00 p.m. to play or sit by the lake. **Please call Vi at 540-721-8189 if you plan to attend.**
There will be a board meeting at 2:00 p.m. at the Sheridans.
- September 11** **Fall Plant Sale at Randolph-Macon Botanical Gardens** in Lynchburg from 10:00 a.m. till 1:00 p.m. See article on this page. Rain or shine!
- September 17-19** **VNPS Annual Meeting.** South Hampton Roads Chapter will be the host this year. Don't forget to purchase your raffle tickets; the order form is in the May Bulletin.
- September 27** **General Membership Meeting,** 7:00 p.m., Center in the Square.



T. ERECTUM

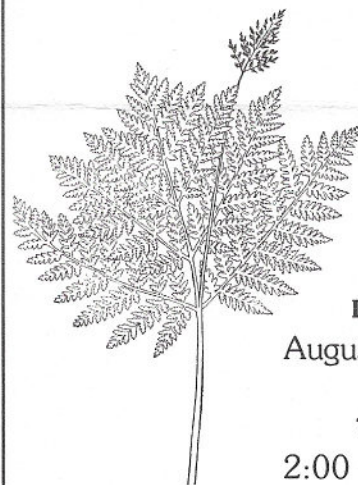
Fall Plant Sale

Sandra Elder

Our Fall plant sale will be held on Sept. 11 from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. beside the Randolph-Macon Botanic Garden in Lynchburg. Any contribution of NATIVE plants will be appreciated. If you have plants to contribute but need pots and labels call Rich Crites in Roanoke at 774-4518 or Paul Cowins in Lynchburg at 239-4884.

Please get plants to the sale before 9:00 a.m. and have them labeled. If you have questions or can help with the sale call Sandra Elder at 804-525-8433.

FERN FORAY



DATE:
August 15

TIME:
2:00 p.m.

PLACE:
James River Visitor Center
Blue Ridge Parkway
milepost 63.8

Letter From The President

Cindy Sandberg

Spring was a busy time for BRWS members. The flurry of activities seemed endless. Many thanks to all who gave their time, skills and knowledge to make these activities successful.

Despite a very windy day, the BRWS information booth at the Earth Day Celebration was an eye-catcher, luring many visitors, thanks to Bobby Toler's gorgeous color photographs. Hugh Smith answered questions about wildflowers, and his ingenuity kept the display from blowing away.

Our field trips provided opportunities for fellowship and education. Some participants became new BRWS members. Thank you, leaders, and welcome, new members!

The spring plant sale was a whirlwind success! It is wonderful to see so many people interested in using native plants in their gardens. Thanks to everyone who provided plants and for assistance at the sale. Now is the time to pot plants for the fall plant sale, September 11.

The 30th Annual Wildflower Pilgrimage was declared one of the best ever! Again, BRWS members are to be thanked: Rich Crites for coordinating walk leaders, Butch Kelly for arranging the Friday night speaker, Elaine Williams for the lovely flower arrangement for the reception, Mary Dalton for coordinating the reception, everyone who provided refreshments, Malcolm Black for donating the Twinleaf bell for the raffle, to all walk leaders and site registrars, and especially to Bobby Toler for attending every pilgrimage planning meeting to help Stephanie Garst and me with our first pilgrimage. Without the help of our loyal members, this event could not have been the success it was.

We are grateful to Bill and Marian Danco and to Paul James for graciously opening their gardens to us for pilgrimage weekend. What inspiration you give us!

Thank you to Linda Corey and the Roanoke Bird Club for their help on

pilgrimage walks and with the reception.

Bobby Toler has printed some of his fabulous wildflower photographs into notecards, and offered BRWS a donation from the sale of the notecards. There are different varieties, all beautiful and useful - a perfect combination!

T-shirts featuring Virginia wildflowers will be on display at our annual picnic at Al & Vi Sheridan's home in August. (See Schedule of Events.) We will be taking orders for the shirts, rather than buying them outright.

It is with sadness I report the death of long-time member Bunny Smith. Bunny was a very active, supportive member of BRWS. We will all miss her.

Smoky Mountain Memories

Sandra Elder

In April I joined Dorothy Bliss, Laura Bliss, Lucille and Paul Cowins and Carolyn Bates on a trip to the Smoky Mountains. On the drive down, the wind tried to push our cars sideways across the highway and continued throughout the week, making photography a challenge. We would wait patiently for a lull in the gusts then shoot quickly.

There was no shortage of beautiful plants to photograph. Some of the white *Trillium erectum* had petals three or four times larger than usual. Along the road were beautiful displays of white fringed phacelia, purple phacelia and phlox.

One morning all the trees at Newfound Gap were covered with hoarfrost that sparkled in the early morning sun.

Ocanaluftee is a wonderful Cherokee word meaning "by the water". We found almost fifty species of plants in bloom as we walked along the Ocanaluftee River Trail.

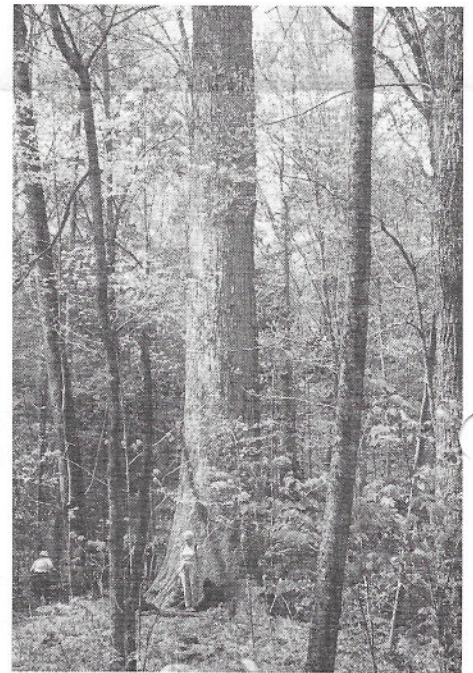
Another day we went in search of the Catesby's trillium and were thrilled to find some. I had only seen these in wildflower gardens before and it is so much more exciting to discover them growing in the wild.

The Smoky Mountains provided many memorable moments but the best memory of all was our visit to the Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest. This is a small part of the Joyce Kilmer - Slickrock Wilderness, located in the Nantahala National Forest.

The figure-eight National Recreation Trail is two miles in length. The 1/4 mile lower loop crosses the Little Santeetlah Creek twice. The creek is lined with rhododendron. The upper loop is home to enormous tulip (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) trees, some are 100 feet tall and 20 feet in

circumference. The forest floor is a carpet of wildflowers, ferns and moss covered logs. There is openness in this virgin forest, unlike the crowded conditions in a forest that has been logged. Another notable difference is the absence of exotic invasives, those opportunists that move in when land is disturbed. There was an aura of harmony and balance. As I stood there with these magnificent trees towering above and a carpet of wildflowers as far as I could see, my spirit was renewed. How wonderful this place where nature rules.

There are over sixty miles of trail in the Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness, I hope to return for more memories.



JOYCE KILMER-SLICKROCK WILDERNESS
(Notice person at base of tree)

Spring Plant Sale

Our reputation for selling healthy, reliable plants has spread throughout the area and because of it, our plant sales are consistently successful. This spring was no exception.

On May 8, the BRC held its fifteenth annual spring plant sale. Again, we were able to hold the sale at the Community Arboretum on the Virginia Western Community College campus. This location provides a shaded area for both plants and people, a nice parking area and gives workers and attendees an opportunity to stroll through the Arboretum.

It is only the dedication and generosity of our members which allows us to continue these sales. Sharing your time, your labor and the wealth of your garden demonstrates your love for wildflowers.

Thank you!

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Green Hill Park Walk

Bobby & Frieda Toler

It was a crisp overcast morning when the Green Hill Park walk began at 9:00 a.m. on April 24, 1999. Sixteen people of all ages from students to retirees and one very well behaved dog came to enjoy the walk. After a while the sun came out and it was a glorious day.

The group met in a parking lot across from the Caboose. From there we walked a short distance along the Roanoke River to see phlox, bluebells, pawpaw and a few other plants.

We then drove to the ball fields parking lot. As we walked in an open grassy area we found campion as well as some of the common plants such as henbit and purple nettle. They are small flowers and since they are invasive, we have a tendency to ignore them. Use a hand lens and look at them close up; they are very pretty.

There were three different plants that were not familiar to any of us in this open area. After looking through wildflower guides of the eastern United States (when we got home) and not being able to identify them, we looked in several of the guides from other areas of the country and finally identified two of them. One was fivespot, *Nemophila maculata*, from **Peterson Field Guides Pacific States Wildflowers**. The other was Blue Phacelia, *Phacelia patuliflora*, from **Wildflowers of the Texas Hill Country** by Enquist. The third is our little pink mystery plant. How did they find their way to Green Hill Park? That is a good question. One theory is the seeds were in the grass seed that was used in a maintenance project by the park several years ago. It will be interesting to monitor them to see if they reseed themselves and if they survive in our climate.

From there we passed horsetails in a wet area and then went through a lovely wooded area which had many of the early wildflowers everyone wants to see. There were hepatica, spring beauty, ginger and geranium to name a few. There were a few firepink in full bloom.

After about a three-quarter mile walk, we came to the real show stopper, the large flowering trillium. They were absolutely beautiful.

Most of the people who attended the walk used one of the museum plant checklists. They were great.

Many thanks to Eddie Carter and Julie Alexander for leading the walk. They were interesting and very knowledgeable. Over the years we have met so many nice people who share a common interest in wildflowers.

Congratulations to the Science Museum on thirty years of pilgrimages and hopefully there will be many more.

Comptonia peregrina - Sweet Fern

When a "fern" is found growing in this part of the United States as a low bush with a woody stem and branches, it is almost certain to be sweet fern. A member of the Myricaceae, Wax Myrtle Family, it is closely related to Bayberry (*M. heterophylla*, *M. cerifera*) and Sweet Gale (*M. pensylvanica*).

The 2-6" alternate leaves are deeply cut into numerous lobes, giving it the appearance of a pinnately-lobed fern. The upper surfaces are dark green while the undersides are lighter green. They are usually downy on the underside and, younger plants particularly, will have numerous small resin dots on both surfaces. The dots bear a vague resemblance to sori further rationalizing the common name. The leaves have astringent and tonic properties and were once used in home remedies and as a substitute for tea.

The tiny male flowers which appear between April and June are in cylindrical clusters or catkins at the tips of the branches. The female flowers grow farther back along the same twigs in bristly clusters resembling tiny pine cones which point upward, collecting wind-blown pollen. The leaves appear after the blooms and do not interfere with pollination.

In September or October the olive-brown nutlets appear. They are surrounded by pointed bracts and borne in little burrlike heads. Most other members of the wax myrtle family bear waxy fruit.

Summer's leaves may remain into winter, curling as they dry and turning a lovely deep reddish brown. The leaves may be intermingled with shoots tipped with spiraled winter catkins, providing another of nature's "winter floral arrangements."

When crushed, the aromatic twigs release an herbal fragrance which some compare to pine. The sweetest fragrance, however, is in spring or fall, early in the morning, as the sun is beginning to dry the dew from the leaves.

Sweet fern is a pioneer plant in that it colonizes areas stripped of vegetation. The roots join with bacteria in transforming atmospheric nitrogen into a usable form readily available for other plants, thereby enriching the soil. The roots send up new shoots by means of underground runners, quickly creating small groves which prevent soil erosion.

It grows in dry, sandy, rocky or recently disturbed soil. It will grow in sterile soil, on steep slopes, along road banks or on the banks of ponds. It will grow where little else will grow. It particularly likes mountains and the *Atlas of Virginia Flora* shows it in 38 counties, especially prominent sweeping down through the Blue Ridge Mountains. It cohabitates with gray birch, lowbush blueberry, huckleberry and bracken fern.

Rapid colonization makes sweet fern an ideal native shrub to plant where you do not want to mow. It can grow to 5' but 1-3' is more common. It requires little watering and even less maintenance. The only drawback is that it is heavily browsed by whitetail deer as well as ruffed and sharptail grouse.

Peregrina means foreign and this plant is somewhat foreign to the general gardening public. Only a few mail order catalogues carry it. An alternate source might be plant sales held by various VNPS chapters or other native plant groups.

The Plant Puzzle

Neal Fletcher

Can you identify this wildflower? Unless you think you can recognize the description of the plant, then use the keys found in a wildflower guide such as Newcomb's Wildflower Guide. Once you think you know what it is, then look for the answer elsewhere in this issue.

The yellow flowers of this summer flowering herbaceous perennial arise from the stem in the angle formed by the leaves (axils). There are four broad, yellow petals which are **not** notched at the tip. The four green sepals (calyx) form a tube that adheres to the ovary up to its top and then spread outward. The ovary and sepals later form a seed capsule that is square at its top. The blossoms are 1/2 to 3/4 inch across. They are perfect and symmetrical and have a stem (pedicle) of their own. The leaves are lanceolate, pointed at both ends and are alternate on the erect stems. The leaves have no teeth or lobes. A plant of damp places.

Lynchburg Area Members

Dorothy C. Bliss

In April on a drive around Cades Cove in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, I had my first view of Catesby's trillium, *Trillium catesbaei*. On the roadside banks, Sandra Elder spotted several clusters of rosy flowers with pink recurved petals which are bent downward. Upon close inspection these were identified as Catesby's trillium and we were rewarded with several close-up photographs of this beautiful flower. Later I read that the nodding trillium is very similar and differs in having pink or purple anthers and stigma rather than yellow anthers and stigma as in Catesby's trillium.

Upon my return to Lynchburg, I made a close examination of the trillium in the Randolph-Macon Woman's College Botanic Garden labeled as *T. cernuum*, nodding trillium. The anthers and stigmas were a clear yellow which identifies it as Catesby's trillium. This species occurs in the Carolinas, Georgia, Alabama and Tennessee but is not known from Virginia. Since some of these counties border southern Virginia, is it not possible that populations of this species might eventually be found in our state? The nodding trillium is a more northern species and is listed in the Virginia Atlas as occurring in only four northern counties in Virginia.

Mark Catesby (1679-1749), a gifted English naturalist and artist, spent several years in Virginia, South Carolina and the Bahamas exploring and sketching the plants and animals. He is credited with the discovery of 171 plants and several animals. While in the New World, he collected seeds and plants for friends in England. Among his publications was a work illustrated with lively drawings entitled "The Natural History of Carolina, Florida and the Bahamas" (1731-1743).

The R-MWC Botanical Garden Wins Recognition

Those of you who have visited the Botanic Garden this spring have been rewarded with a breathtaking display of spring flowers. In the next several weeks many of the summer flowers presenting a showcase of color will include Stoke's aster, black-eyed Susan, beardtongue and several Echinaceas.

I was surprised and delighted to learn a few weeks ago that the Keep Lynchburg Beautiful Commission had voted to give me the Lynchburg Civic Appreciation Award for the contribution the Garden has made to the beauty of the city. It is the dedication of all of you who have given of your time, money and gifts of plants that this award is being given. As a result of recent publicity, the Garden is becoming better known and more visitors are strolling its paths.

[Ed note. An article on the Botanic Garden, along with two photographs, is included in the Summer, 1999, issue of *Chinquapin*, the Newsletter of the Southern Appalachian Botanical Society.]

Bartram Stamp

Recently the U. S. Postal Service issued a 33¢ stamp illustrated with a beautiful picture (unlabeled!) of the Franklinia flower. This stamp commemorates the 300th anniversary of John Bartram's birth in 1699 and also honors the achievements of his son William. This issue should be available at your local post office.

Fern Foray

Our annual fern trip has been scheduled for Sunday, August 15 at 2:00 p.m. when we will meet at the James River Visitor Center on the Blue Ridge Parkway at milepost 63.8. We will explore the trails along the river and creek where we will note some of the summer flowers as well as ferns. A fern book, Newcomb, and a hand lens might be helpful. A picnic supper will follow. Let's make this a great trip.

Pilgrimage Kickoff

Cindy Sandberg

On April 23, 1999, members of the Blue Ridge Wildflower Society and guests from all over Virginia spent an unforgettable evening with noted author, Leonard Adkins. The event kicked off our 30th Annual Wildflower Pilgrimage weekend.

Mr. Adkins combined breathtaking slides of wildflowers, wildlife and scenery along the Appalachian Trail with a wealth of plant information, humorous anecdotes and stirring music to share with us his genuine joy in the treasures of our natural world.

His admonition to leave plants where they are, as they are, so they may live out their lives in their native surroundings is in keeping with our organization's motto, "Conserving Wild Flowers and Wild Places."

Mr. Adkins' love for and knowledge of his subject made this one of our most entertaining and educational programs ever. It was as if we'd all shared a glorious walk along the Appalachian Trail. The smiles on everyone's faces clearly expressed, "What a wonderful time we've had! Let's go there again!"

In Memoriam

We are greatly saddened by the death of Bernice "Bunny" Smith on June 5, 1999.

She was Hospitality cochair (a gourmet cook) and helped with plant sales for the BRWS but most of her work was behind the scenes and known only to a few members.

Bunny began work for the Science Museum of Western Virginia in 1976 and is directly responsible for many of its programs. A number of its permanent exhibits are the direct result of her dreams and guidance. She retired as Curator of Collections in 1998 but returned to help design the new Geology Gallery and help prepare the museum for accreditation.

As Rich Crites said at her memorial service, "Success is like a butterfly . . . If you relax and focus on the task at hand, it will come and softly land on your shoulder." If fit Bunny.

Our sympathy is extended to Hugh and their families.

ANSWER TO PLANT PUZZLE: *Ludwigia alternifolia*, L., "Seedbox"