

Blue Ridge Wildflower Society

A CHAPTER OF THE
VIRGINIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

Vol. 18, No. 2

April, 2001

Schedule of Events

- April 14** **Waid Park Field Trip.** 10:00 a.m. This park, located about eight miles out of Rocky Mount, is part of the original Carolina Road. Take Route 40W out of Rocky Mount. Turn onto Six-Mile Post Road (Route 640) at the traffic light at Forty West Food Faire. Go to Route 800 then turn left. Bring your lunch. Al & Vi Sheridan, leaders, 540-721-8189.
- April 21** **Green Hill Park Field Trip,** 10:00 a.m. Take West Main Street in Salem to just west of Old Virginia Brick Company. Turn onto Duiguid's Lane, cross the bridge and turn right into the park. Bring lunch.
- April 22** **Glen Maury Park Field Trip** in Buena Vista. Meet at 1:15 p.m. at the BB&T bank in Boonsboro Shopping Center or at 2:00 p.m. inside the park's entrance. See Lynchburg Area Column for additional details.
- April 27-29** **Great Smoky Mountains National Park 51st Annual Wildflower Pilgrimage.** Many of our members have attended the pilgrimage in past years and can attest to the richness and diversity of the Smokies as well as to the renowned speakers and leaders who are featured. We strongly encourage your participation. The BRWS and the Science Museum of Western Virginia will not be holding a pilgrimage this year. For additional information, contact the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, 107 Park Headquarters Road, Gatlinburg, TN 37738, 865-436-1290, or visit their web page at <http://www.goldsword.com/wildflower/pilgrimage.html>.
- April 29** **Buffalo Creek Field Trip.** Meet at 2:00 p.m. at the Westvaco parking lot on Route 24. There should be a wealth of spring flowers at this VNPS Registry Site including Virginia bluebells and dwarf ginseng.
- May 5** **Glen Alton Field Trip.** New area. An old farming estate with several good sized frog ponds, streams, and old fruit trees which should also be an excellent area for birds. Take Route 460 out of Blacksburg toward Pembroke and turn right onto 635 just before the New River. Stay on 635 until you come to Glen Alton Road on the left. There should be a green street sign. (The road on the right across from it is Nettle Hollow Road.) We were unable to get mileages for these. It is approximately 1½ miles before White Rock Campground. About 100 yards after turning left, there is a small bridge. Stay to the right; you will come to a gate and can park there. If ever in doubt which way to go, stay on the hard surface. Meet at the gate at 10:00 a.m. **PREFERRED** if starting east of Christiansburg: Meet at the Orange Market at Hanging Rock, I-81 exit 141, at 9:00 a.m. to carpool. Bring lunch and perhaps binoculars.
- May 6** **James River Foot Bridge Field Trip.** Meet at 2:00 p.m. across from Hercules Road on Route 501 near Snowden. New Area. See Lynchburg Area Column for additional details.
- May 12** **Seventeenth Annual Spring Plant Sale,** Community Arboretum on the campus of Virginia Western Community College, from 9:00 a.m. until noon. No plants sold before 9:00 a.m. Rain or shine!
- May 19** **Grassy Hill Field Trip.** Meet at 9:30 a.m. at the Virginia Western Community Arboretum parking lot to carpool from the Roanoke area. From other directions, take the northernmost Rocky Mount exit from Route 220. Go to the traffic light. Turn right to Grassy Hill. Meet there at 10:00 a.m. We'll have lunch at a nearby restaurant. Paul Clarke, leader.

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President's Letter

From time to time during our gatherings plant rescue is discussed. Finding a plant in danger of being destroyed and transferring it to a safe place is an admirable activity. However this is only one type of plant rescue. There are many other ways that we can insure healthy populations of native plants. Protection of habitat areas is vital in maintaining our native plants. Wildlife areas are altered or destroyed daily. There are ways we can help. Knowledge is the key. We need to be aware of what's happening in our natural environment and how people are affecting changes. And then we need to take action when necessary.

Since becoming president, I have received much information about environmental issues. Whether they pertain specifically to native plants, all environmental issues should be of concern to us.

The Virginia General Assembly had over two dozen bills affecting the

environment during the recent session. That's a lot to keep up with. I have found that the Internet is a great resource for concise information. For areas of national interest, you can go to congress.org or <http://capwiz.com>. Virginia has its own site at <http://www.thedigitaldominion.com>. These sites contain legislative information including bills proposed and whether they have passed and who voted how. They also provide links so that you can contact your legislator via e-mail. The Virginia homepage has a *Citizen's Guide* which is very helpful.

In this newsletter, we have included information about how to contact state and national leaders so that when environmental issues arise we can provide our input. As wildflower enthusiasts we are in the "wild" much more than any of our legislators. We have information and opinions, which are important and hopefully influential.

February Field Trip

Sandra Elder

After three days of clouds and rain the 17th of February dawned sunny, cold and windy. A perfect winter day to go in search of a harbinger of spring, skunk cabbage, *Symplocarpus foetidus*.



Skunk Cabbage

On this field trip to our registry site in Altavista I was accompanied by Lucille and Paul Cowins, Simone Fraser, Cindy Burks and her mother Jo Burks. Our first order of business was to sign in at Abbot Labs. We signed new release forms and got visitor badges then we were off to the registry site.

As we drove up the hill we were treated to the beautiful sight of a red tailed hawk swooping over a field of amber broomstraw that undulated with the wind. The route from the top of the hill down to the creek took us by a patch of trailing arbutus, *Epigaea repens*, past a few purple backed leaves of crane fly orchid, *Tipularia discolor*, and some nice groups of the heart-shaped leaves of evergreen wild

ginger, *Asarum virginicum*. Crossing the creek, swollen from the recent rain, was a challenge but fortunately everyone was up to the challenge — no one fell in. The woods were lovely with beige beech leaves clinging to their grey branches and the tall pine trees swaying in the wind.

Upstream, where the soil remains damp, we found many skunk cabbages in bloom. Tucked inside each purple striped spathe was a knoblike spadix covered with tiny foul smelling flowers. This odor attracts their pollinator, carrion flies. The tips of the leaves were barely visible. By June, when we return to see the Rosebay Rhododendron in bloom, the leaves of the skunk cabbage will have grown to twelve inches or longer. The young leaves can be eaten if boiled several times and the roots become edible after roasting.

Finding skunk cabbage blooms in winter is reassuring because it means the cycle of rebirth has begun anew and that there still exists a wet woodland undisturbed by development and the blade of a bulldozer.

Annual Spring Plant Sale

Our Seventeenth Annual Plant Sale is scheduled for Saturday, May 12th, at the Community Arboretum at Virginia Western Community College. The sale is from 9:00 a.m. until noon or until the supply is exhausted. No plants will be sold before 9:00 a.m.

Now is the time to begin potting your plants. They need three to four weeks to become established before the sale. As you thin or divide your garden plantings, be thinking of what you might like to share for our sale. If you need pots or have questions, contact Rich Crites, 540-774-4518, or Paul Cowins, 804-239-4884.

All plants need to be at the Arboretum no later than 8:30 a.m. **PLEASE HAVE THEM LABELED.** Although taxonomic names are preferable, they are not necessary. However, please at least have the common names.

This is an excellent opportunity to not only share what you have but also to purchase plants for yourself and for friends.

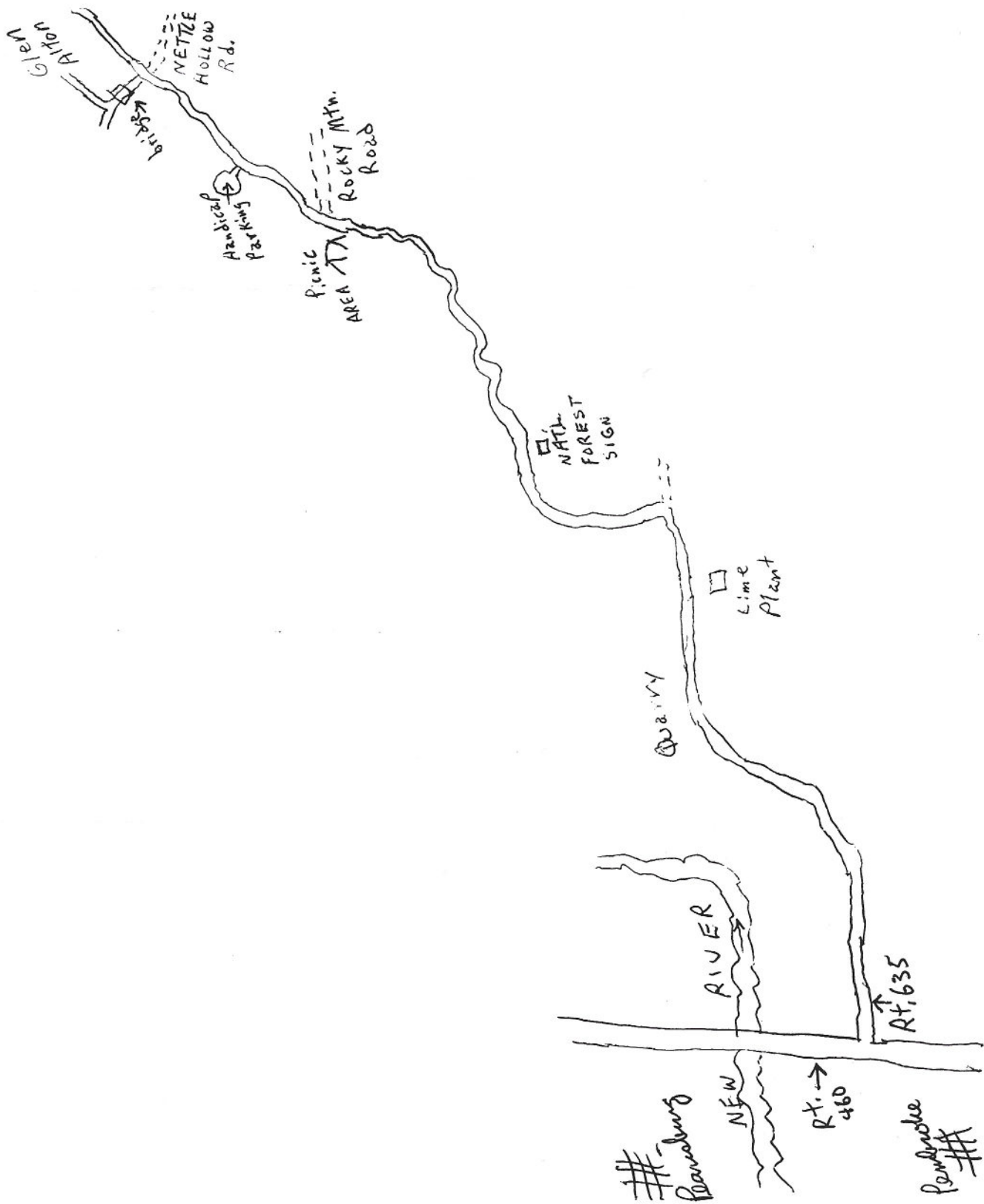
Remember, our sale takes place rain or shine, so don't let cloudy skies or a sprinkle deter you from attending or from bringing your plants.

Your help is needed, whether donating plants, helping with arranging and pricing prior to the sale or helping people make their selections and carry those selections to their vehicles during the sale. Can we count on you?

In Memoriam

It was with sadness we learned of the death of James Louis Bass III on February 16, 2001.

Lou was a Biology Professor at Virginia Western Community College. He was a long time member of the Blue Ridge Wildflower Society. Our sympathy is extended to Jill and the members of his family.

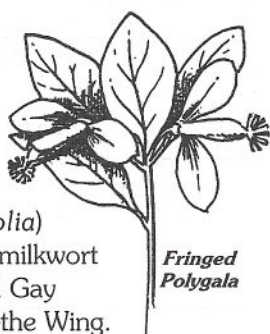


Fringed Polygala

by Dora Lee Ellington

While walking in the woods you may be fortunate enough to find patches of Fringed Polygala

(*Polygala paucifolia*) a member of the milkwort family, also called Gay Wings or Bird-on-the Wing.



and pistils protrude, forming a fringe or beard. The fringed part of the corolla is called a keel. The plant is well adapted for pollination by bees.

We are very fortunate to have the very rare and beautiful pure white flowered form in our area. The foliage though similar to the magenta form has distinct paler green leaves with no reddish cast on the under surface.

The showy flowers of the Fringed Polygala produce few seeds but throughout the summer and fall small cleistogamous (closed, self-pollinated) flowers are produced on the subterranean branches. As the two-parted seed capsules mature they are thrust up through the soil to ripen above ground. Much like the violets, this double system of propagation ensures rapid spreading. It is also easily propagated by stem and root cuttings taken in summer.

Fringed Polygala is a choice plant for a woodland garden where sunlight filters through the trees in spring and makes a very nice ground cover.

Reference: Wildflowers of the Alleghanies, Joseph E. Harned.

This plant is a low-growing, evergreen wildflower, three to five inches, with prostrate stems and fibrous roots. Near the top of the stems are a few ovate evergreen leaves, dark green above and reddish purple beneath. These leaves are very thin, not leathery like most of our evergreen ground covers such as galax, trailing arbutus, pyrola, wintergreen and wild ginger.

In May and June one to three dainty magenta-pink orchid-like flowers appear which are less than one inch long. The two lateral sepals being much longer and wing shaped, thus the common names of Gay Wings or Bird-on-the Wing.

The three petals are united, forming a tube through which yellow stamens

Events of Interest

May 11-13

Wintergreen Nature Foundation's 18th Annual Spring Wildflower Symposium

P. O. Box 468
Wintergreen VA 22958
804-325-8172

June 7-9

Millersville Native Plants in the Landscape Conference

Millersville University
P. O. Box 1002
Millersville PA 17551
717-872-3030

July 25-28

Cullowhee Native Plants Conference

Western Carolina University
Cullowhee, North Carolina 28723
828-227-3653

Correction: In the January 2001 Newsletter, Nancy Hugo was mentioned as Public Relations Chair for VNPS. She is the former Chair and currently serves as a Director-at-Large. Bruce Jones is the current Public Relations Chair.

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS - continued from page 1

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| May 21 | General Membership Meeting , 7:00 p.m., Center in the Square. Note: This is the 3rd Monday in May. |
| May 26 | James River State Park Field Trip . Meet at 10:00 a.m. at the entrance to the park. New area. See Lynchburg Area Column for additional details. Note: There is a small admission charge per vehicle. |
| June 1-3 | VNPS Annual Meeting . The Piedmont Chapter will host this year's event. Headquarters will be the Holiday Inn, Winchester. |
| June 2 | Rhododendron Day at Roaring Run . Along with the rhododendrons, expect to see what some consider the best waterfalls in the area. Meet at 10:00 a.m. at the Daleville Park & Ride across from Western Sizzlin', exit 150B from I-81 North. Bring lunch. |
| June 9 | Rhododendron Day at Onion Mountain . Meet at the Peaks of Otter Visitor's Center (milepost 86) at 9:30 a.m. We plan to take a leisurely drive north on the parkway to enjoy the Rhododendron displays and various June flowers on Onion Mountain (milepost 79.7) and other overlooks. Plan on a mid-day lunch at James River Picnic Area or Otter Creek Restaurant (milepost 60.8). |

Lynchburg Area Members

Dorothy C. Bliss

Early Spring Flowers

Probably the lowly skunk cabbage is the flower that each of us would name as the first native herbaceous plant to bloom in the spring since its brownish-purple spathe can be found in moist areas in late February or early March. At about this same time the flower buds of my pussy willow, *Salix discolor*, often produce their mature furry catkins. Among our early attractive blooming trees or shrubs are the red maple, spice bush, shadbush and redbud. The VNPS Wild Flower of the Year for 2001 is the trailing arbutus or mayflower, *Epigaea repens*, whose fragrant pinkish-white flowers often herald spring in February. Each year we search for these tiny trailing evergreen plants on the rocky exposed slopes in Arcadia on one of our early spring trips but frequently the flowers are already fading or gone.

Many factors, in addition to genetic makeup, affect the flowering time of each species. The type of soil, the exposure — sun or shade, north or south facing slopes, protected or exposed sites, elevation, etc. All these may increase or decrease the temperature which is probably one of the most important external influences. In addition too little moisture, especially drought conditions, may delay or even prevent buds from opening.

For the past several years I have been keeping a log of the opening date of the first flowers of each plant species in the R-MWC Botanic garden. The very earliest buds to open are on the shrub, leather-leaf, *Chamaedaphne calyculata* var. *angustifolia*. By mid-February rows of tiny bell-shaped flowers cover the tips of each branch and by early March the blooms are beginning to fade. On March 3 in 1998, Greek Valerian and Hepatica were in flower but this year — 2001 — the latter did not bloom until March 10 and the former was still in bud on March 15. Shortia and bloodroot were in full flower on this latter date and bluebells, golden ragwort, bleeding heart and shale-barren phlox should follow in a few days.

My records for blooming dates in the garden encompass too few years to be of any significance but perhaps there will develop a trend during the next several years that could be another bit of evidence of global warming of our planet.

Since we live near the Blue Ridge Mountains, if we have missed some of the early flowers, a drive along the Blue Ridge Parkway will always reward us with a progression of blooms with increasing elevation from the James River at 649 feet to Apple Orchard Mountain overlook at 3950 feet.

Field Trips in Lynchburg Area

April 22 Glen Maury Park in Buena Vista. Meet at 1:15 PM at the BB&T bank in Boonsboro Shopping Center or at 2:00 PM inside park's entrance. On April 16, 1994, we recorded 26 spring flowers in bloom including the sessile Trillium, spring beauty and bluebells. A picnic supper at the pavilion in the park will close our afternoon.

April 29 Buffalo Creek. Meet at 2:00 PM at Westvaco parking lot on Rt. 24. There should be a wealth of spring flowers at this VNPS Registry Site including Virginia bluebells and dwarf ginseng.

May 6 James River Foot Bridge. Meet at 2:00 PM across from Hercules Road on Rt. 501 near Snowden. After crossing the foot bridge we will walk along the Appalachian Trail to discover what spring flowers may be found on the riverbanks and rocky ledges. New Area. Plan for a picnic supper at the James River Visitor's Center Picnic Area.

May 26 James River State Park. Meet at 10:00 AM at entrance to park. Directions: take Rt. 60 East from Amherst and at Bent Creek turn left on Rt. 605. Go 7 miles and turn left at Rt. 606 to park. Since this is a new area we will explore the woodland and lake trails. There may be some surprises! Bring a picnic lunch. **Note: There is a small admission charge per car.**

June 9 Meet at Peaks of Otter Visitor's Center (MP 86) at 9:30 AM. We plan to take a leisurely drive north on the parkway to enjoy the Rhododendron displays and various June flowers on Onion Mountain (MP 79.7) and other overlooks. Plan on a mid-day lunch at James River Picnic Area or Otter Creek Restaurant (MP 60.8).

The January Newsletter included names and contact information for some of our legislators. Here are some additional contacts.

During the legislative session you may express opinions on issues by calling the Constituent Viewpoint operators at 800-889-0229. When the General Assembly is not in session, call the Legislative Information Office for the House of Delegates at 804-698-1500 or for the Senate at 804-698-7410.

Delegate Kathy J. Byron

District Number/Party:

022/REPUBLICAN

Address:

P. O. Box 406

General Assembly Building, Room 414
Richmond, VA 23218-0406

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Senator Charles R. Hawkins

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Congressman Virgil H. Goode

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