



Bulletin

A publication of the VIRGINIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

Conserving wild flowers and wild places

<http://www.vnps.org>

Annual Meeting

The theme is water; the place is Virginia Beach

The 2014 Annual Meeting of the Virginia Native Plant Society to be hosted by the South Hampton Roads Chapter in Virginia Beach, will be unlike any other. To start with, the meeting is a month later than usual, October 17-19, and the focus will be on water—fresh, brackish, and salty.

Members can look forward to visiting some special places and seeing unique plants to the east coast of Virginia. Annual Meeting Committee Chair Steve Stasulis notes that the chapter has arranged full-day tours Friday and Saturday at False Cape State Park and Cypress Bridge Swamp Natural Area.

Full-day tours for Saturday include Zuni Pine Barrens, Great Dismal Swamp, Pleasure House Point (a new park in Virginia Beach that borders on the Lynnhaven River near where it joins the Chesapeake Bay) possibly combined with a tour of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation's new LEED-certified Brock Environmental Center in that park. There will also be trips to local, state, and regional parks and gardens, including some easy walking tours at places such as the Norfolk Botanical Garden's native plant garden and the Hermitage Museum and Gardens in Norfolk.

The October meeting means that temperatures should average around 70 degrees for a high and in the mid-50s for a low. The area is a few weeks behind most of Virginia for end-of-the-season blooming, so most plants will not have gone into dormancy. Expect to see long leaf pine, mountain laurel, several species of goldenrod, and native hibiscus. Mid-October is high season for migrating birds and monarch butterflies that often follow the Eastern Shore and cross the Chesapeake Bay. Expect to see osprey,

(See Annual Meeting, page 6)



Those attending the Annual Meeting will have two opportunities for an all-day visit to False Cape State Park. (Photo by Nancy Sorrells)

American chestnut restoration under way in Shenandoah Valley

Part of the strategy of the Virginia Chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation is to form regional restoration groups of individuals with knowledge of their area and willingness to volunteer their time toward restoring the American chestnut [*Castanea dentata*] to its former range in the state. Following up on the interest generated by the Frontier Culture Museum lecture series on the American chestnut held in Staunton earlier this year, the Virginia Chapter held a meeting in June to sample local

(See Chestnut restoration, page 8)

Plan now for 2014 Annual Meeting October 17, 18, & 19



From the president

The change of seasons is fun to watch

One of the wonderful aspects of our climate is our change of seasons. Our landscape is ever-evolving, and there is always something of interest. Do you have a favorite natural area in which you watch for seasonal changes? Our gardens offer the opportunity to see the progression, but sometimes we are almost too close to notice imperceptible changes.

Harry and I make weekly visits to the biologically diverse Huntley Meadows Park in Fairfax County with its forests and wetlands, and I chronicle those visits with photographs. We're part of a birding group that Harry leads, but regular visits allow for the study of changes in the plant life as well. This time of year, the meadows and wetlands are full of colorful blooms that attract dragonflies and pollinators such as butterflies, bees, and other insects. Blue flag (*Iris versicolor*), swamp rose (*Rosa palustris*), elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*), and lizard's-tail (*Saururus cernuus*), lead to rose mallow (*Hibiscus moscheutos*), buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*), turtlehead (*Chelone glabra*), and cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*). Many birds are engaging in post-nesting dispersal, and immature birds are learning to forage while still begging their parents to feed them.

The park recently completed a wetland restoration project that will maintain the central wetland as a hemi-marsh through an adjustable water control system. Siltation and debris from nearby development had affected the water level and species diversity; the project restored the depths to 1980s' levels. While part of the

forest was flooded as a result of this project, it offers a fascinating view of how one habitat makes way for another. If you would like to watch the weekly changes at this fabulous park, check out the regular Monday postings on my Facebook page. It is open for all to view.

I hope that by now many of you have visited the "Flora of Virginia" exhibition at the Library of Virginia in Richmond. The full exhibition will be on view only through September 13. Don't be dissuaded by the downtown city location at 800 East Broad Street. It's easy to find from Exit 74C off Interstate 95, and the library has free underground parking. This gorgeous exhibition is not to be missed!

Watch your mailbox for a chance to help botanists from the Division of Natural Heritage in their quest to survey a number of rare plants. These plants have not been sighted in a number of years, and botanists need to establish whether they still exist where previously reported. If documented, these plants could lead to more habitat protection. This project is the subject of our annual fundraiser, which we hope you will support generously.

"It's the Water!" The annual meeting October 16-18 in Virginia Beach is quickly approaching! There are many botanical hotspots in the area and, to accommodate as many participants as possible, field trips to some of those special areas will be offered more than once over the three-day weekend. Watch for more details here in the *Bulletin* and on our website, vnps.org.

Your president, Nancy Vehrs

New logo, new website, new options for VNPS members

The VNPS website is now offering new options for members to participate in the Society's events and affairs and to connect with each other. You can now:

- Join and renew online
- Sign up to receive the state newsletter, *The Bulletin*, electronically. This option is found on the Membership Directory page underneath "Join".
- Use a password protected directory to find other members. Directions for getting signed in and receiving a password are also found on the Membership Directory page underneath "Join". Only members who are willing to share their email addresses can be listed in the online directory; please be patient as we get your new information properly categorized and updated.
- View a unified calendar that shows VNPS events across the state. This can be located under "Calendar".

We also will now have the opportunity to contact members with important news through these group

emails. The first one was sent out this spring to members who shared their email addresses. We promise not to write too often! Enjoy the *Bulletin* in full color faster (often with bonus pages and photographs), read about next year's fundraising focus, and much more at www.vnps.org.

This year for the first time we will be able to accept online payment for our Annual Meeting. A notice will be emailed when registration is open.

Finally, our new blog is featuring a wide variety of news, plants profiles, and reports of events, as well as pulling in new traffic to our website. We are inviting your active participation! If you would like to contribute to our web content, please email the webmaster, Sue Dingwell at suzdingwell@gmail.com.

—Sue Dingwell,
VNPS Webmaster



Coral honeysuckle easy to propagate with cuttings

One of my earliest botanical/horticultural memories involves time spent with my dad taking cuttings of ornamental plants. Every spring, he would start several dozen new chrysanthemums from carefully overwintered stock plants. He was also fond of long yew hedges that he developed by taking numerous cuttings from just a few original shrubs in our yard. And, from time to time, both my grandmothers would propagate, via cuttings, house plants like geraniums, African violets, and Christmas cacti. But I think it was my dad's comparatively larger scale operation that fascinated me; with just a little effort, a single shrub could yield dozens of brand new plants—and, with just a little ingenuity, all these new plants would be created for free! I still take great pleasure in making new plants this way. This article focuses on propagation via cuttings of the VNPS 2014 Wildflower of the Year, *Lonicera sempervirens* (coral honeysuckle), a topic that, one might say, takes me back to my roots.

Coral honeysuckle, like all species of *Lonicera*, propagates easily by cuttings. In fact, a quick perusal of all our Wildflowers of the Year for the past 26 years suggests that it and partridge berry (*Mitchella repens*) are likely to be the easiest of the bunch to propagate this way. Although many stems of coral honeysuckle climb, this plant also produces stems that creep along the soil surface and, like those of partridge berry, these creeping stems spontaneously strike root at their nodes. No doubt, their natural tendency to form new roots explains their ease of propagation via cuttings. If you have just one vigorous specimen you should be able to start several new plants to increase your enjoyment of this excellent, colorful vine that will attract humming-birds to your yard. With a modicum of care, success should be guaranteed.

Perhaps the easiest and most straightforward technique for taking cuttings of coral honeysuckle is softwood stem tip cuttings. One should wait until the early spring flush of

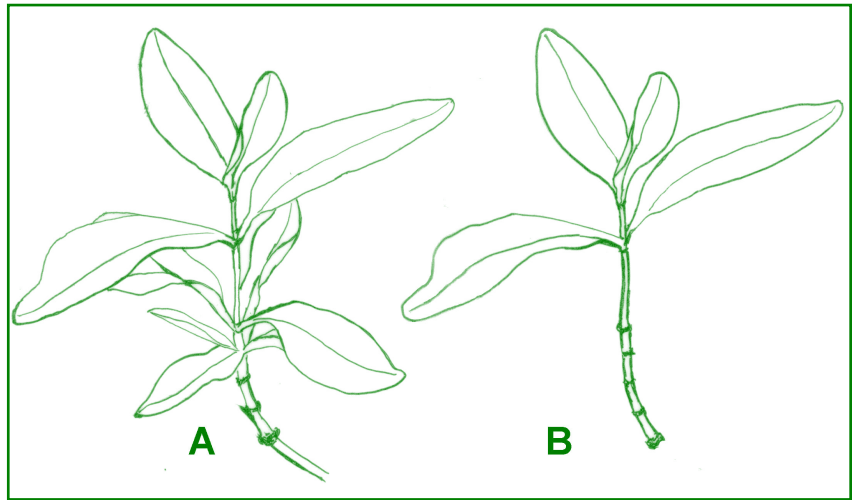
flowers has tapered off. Then—or anytime thereafter until, say, midsummer—the plant will make vigorous non-flowering branches appropriate for softwood cuttings. In this context, “softwood” refers to a particular developmental stage of growth in woody stems: the stem several inches below the shoot apex is no longer elongating and is becoming moderately stiff (stiffer than the immature tissues near the stem tip, but still more flexible than woody twigs one or more years old). Coral honeysuckles will make a few flowers periodically through the summer and it is recommended that branches selected for cuttings be growing vigorously with no sign of floral buds.

Whenever such stems are present, softwood cuttings can be made by severing the stem just below a pair of leaves, yielding a tip cutting 3 to 6 inches long (Figure 1A). A clean cut made with a sharp knife or single-edge razor blade is better than a ragged wound. The lowest one or two pairs of leaves should be removed, again with a sharp, clean, cut (Figure 1B). Given the proclivity of honeysuckles to strike root, application of rooting hormones (more about this later) is optional. The cut end of the stem should then be inserted about one inch deep into a suitable con-

tainer (flower pots or sturdy trays with drainage) containing moistened rooting medium. Appropriate rooting media include natural clean sand, coconut coir, and horticultural products like perlite, vermiculite, and rock wool. Two factors are critical regarding the rooting medium; it must hold sufficient water to keep the cut plant tissue well hydrated and, simultaneously, it must hold enough air that the stem and developing roots have sufficient oxygen to stay alive. The whole operation should be accomplished as quickly as possible to prevent wilting of the cuttings.

Once the cuttings have been inserted into the rooting medium, they just need time, moderately humid air, and moderately bright light in order to establish their new roots. As with so many other things in life, striking a good balance is important; bright sun and dry air will shrivel the cuttings in short order, and stagnant air with 100-percent humidity and dim light is a recipe for rot; some happy medium should be sought. A clear plastic cover that also allows a bit of ventilation can be helpful in maintaining humidity, and bright shade or very lightly dappled sunshine should be appropriate illumination.

(See *Rooting process, page 5*)



Softwood stem cuttings of coral honeysuckle. A. Vigorously growing stem tip severed from the parent plant. B. Same, after removal of leaves from lower nodes; this cutting is ready to be inserted into rooting medium. (Illustrations by Sheila M. Hayden)

Plants may hold clues to climate change

Shenandoah National Park is home to two plants that, though globally common, are considered rare in Virginia. And they might be able to reveal the impacts of climate change.

Botanists with the park will spend the summer monitoring the three-toothed cinquefoil [*Sibbaldia tridentata*] and Appalachian fir clubmoss [*Huperzia appressa*] that grow on the park's rock outcrops. Both are considered imperiled in the commonwealth, according to park botanist Wendy Cass.

The plants usually grow in the north, so those found in Shenandoah National Park are in the southernmost areas of their range.

"Because the communities are so restricted and at the very edge of their geographic range, they're going to be more sensitive to any kind of stress, whether it be lack of rain or changes in temperature," Cass said.

If it gets warmer here, Cass pointed out, the plants will be more likely to retreat to the north.

"We're trying to use them as an indicator of stress to a larger system," she said. "If you suddenly see all your rare plants at the southern edge of your range dying off on the rock outcrops, then you know there's some big change afoot that could impact things on a much wider scale."

The two main stressors possibly impacting the plants would be either climate change or acid deposition from acid rain.

The monitoring began in 2010 with a graduate student working for Cass. He selected monitoring points, documenting their positions and photographing the plants.

Now, Cass and her team will go back out to those exact positions to recreate the photos exactly as he took them, matching up to a precise grid through which they can compare the plants then and now. In three to four more years, she said, they will repeat the process.

"So you're getting these little points in time to watch the change," she said.

The rock outcrops on which the plants are growing are also quite special, Cass said. She described them as the "most botanically valuable in Shenandoah National Park."

Four globally rare plant communities are found only on rock outcrops in the park, one of which is endemic, meaning it is found nowhere else in the world.

"These high elevation greenstone outcrop barren communities make up less than one tenth of one percent of the park's vegetation, so they're extremely restricted," Cass said. "They're the rarest and most sensitive plant communities."

Studying extremely sensitive plants in this capacity will help the team develop a real understanding of global warming. Cass said she is

oftentimes asked how climate change is impacting the park.

"It's a very complicated question to answer because there are so many different things that could potentially impact a plant that you come across, maybe it was eaten by insects, maybe somebody sat on it, maybe it was just hot," she said.

The rock outcrops she and her team will be monitoring are out of the way, so are likely not going to be bothered. It will present a clearer image of widespread changes.

"It may be one small indicator of climate change amidst many others," Cass said.

Special thanks to Northern Virginia Daily staff writer Katie Demeria for giving permission to run her article, which originally ran on June 12, 2014. Demeria can be contacted at kdemia@nvdaily.com.



A plot grid is held over plants growing on a rock outcrop in the park. Botanists will compare the photos to others taken later on in order to fully understand the impacts of climate change on plant communities. (Courtesy Northern Virginia Daily)

Border walls create serious environmental crisis



You may or may not have heard of the Real ID Act that became federal law in 2005. This law, designed to improve national security, became effective in 2008. What you might not know is how that law, in which 37 environmental and cultural laws, including the Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act, were waived (the most laws waived at once in U.S. history) has had a devastating effect on habitats across the U.S.-Mexico border. Under the new law, Congress has been able to throw money at poorly-conceived building projects to create new

stretches of border wall-fences through wildlife refuges and natural preserves. The result is fragmented habitats, genetic isolation of rare wildlife populations, increased flooding, erosion and sedimentation, introduction of invasive plant species, and high mortality of certain wildlife species.

I recently witnessed the impact of these new border walls, thrown up haphazardly and in unconnected sections, in south Texas' Rio Grande Valley. This area represents one of

(See Border wall, page 6)

Rooting process remarkable

(Continued from page 3)

Gentle bottom heat usually hastens the rooting of cuttings, but like everything else, this can be overdone to the detriment of your hoped-for plants. For easy-to-root honeysuckles, bottom heat can be omitted without qualm. Within a few weeks, you may see resumption of growth from the stem tips and, upon gently tugging the cutting's stem, you should feel a slight resistance to your pull, confirming that roots are present. Declare success, and put your newly rooted cuttings in appropriate-size pots with any good-quality potting soil mix, watering carefully when you are done.

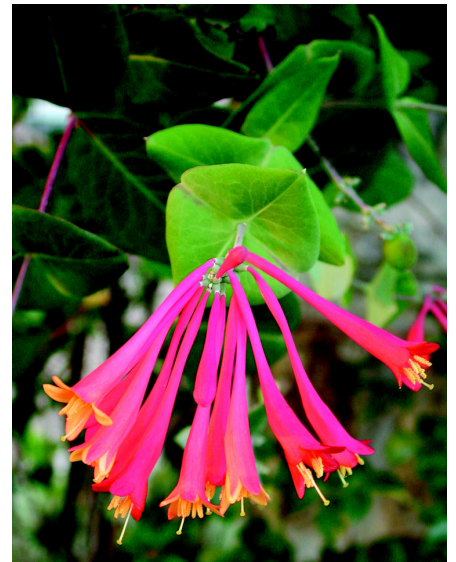
Rooting cuttings is such a routine practice in horticulture that it is easy to forget how remarkable the process really is. Initially, the cutting consists of stem and leaf tissue, snatched from branch tips far removed from the parent plant's root system; nevertheless, the cutting's stems and leaves are able to generate, *de novo*, the missing organ. How do plants manage this remarkable feat?

To explain root formation on cuttings, one should first observe that not all plants have this capacity. Some, like coral honeysuckle, root easily, others strike root only if coaxed and coddled, and others are stubbornly recalcitrant in their disinclination to make new roots. But for those plants that do root easily, part of the process can be explained by the action of the plant hormone, auxin. In actively growing shoots, auxin molecules are synthesized by cells at the shoot tip (a shoot's apical meristem) and by vigorous, healthy, young leaves. Further, auxin tends to be transported basipetally, i.e., downward from shoot apex to root, through either the phloem or living parenchyma cells. This basipetal auxin flow controls multiple aspects of plant growth. In spring, the surge of auxin made by newly active shoot tips and expanding leaves is the signal for the vascular

cambium to resume activity and to start making that year's increment of wood and inner bark. In many plants, the presence of auxin from an actively growing stem tip inhibits branch formation from lateral buds, a process called apical dominance. And auxin controls the bending of stems in response to both light and gravity. In the case of softwood stem cuttings, vigorous shoot tips of the severed cutting still produce auxin, which continues to flow basipetally, eventually building up abnormally high concentrations at the cutting's severed bottom end. This abnormally high auxin concentration is a signal to cells in that region to begin formation of one or more new root primordia. This is the reason that, in some plants, the application of a product that contains auxin can coax root formation.

In the case of honeysuckles, it has often been observed that preformed root initials can be present at the nodes of intact stems. It is as if new roots are "ready to go" before the cuttings are taken from the parent plant. One might postulate that the auxin concentration threshold for root formation in honeysuckle stems is very low, reflecting the proclivity of its trailing stems to root spontaneously, as noted above.

But it takes more than a hormonal signal to make a new root: living cells need to receive the signal and then respond to it. In honeysuckles, it is parenchyma cells of the leaf gap that respond by initiation of root growth. Normally these would-be mature cells are no longer undergoing cell division, but another response to auxin is the reversion of these mature leaf gap parenchyma cells to a meristem-like state, producing a cluster of rapidly dividing cells that eventually self-organizes as a root apical meristem. In other plants there may be different locations for new root initial formation, but it is always near the stem's vascular tissue. Some commonly noted-locations include between the xylem and phloem of a vascular bundle, completely within the ph-



VNPS 2014 Wildflower of the Year
Coral Honeysuckle

loem, or from the parenchyma cells between adjacent vascular bundles.

Regardless of the details of how new roots form on cuttings, this mode of propagation yields new plants that are genetically identical to their parent. The new plants are, in fact, clones—and cloning is nothing new to botanists and horticulturists! Consequently, when (not if!) you successfully produce a dozen or so new coral honeysuckles from the same source, all will be exactly the same, genetically. This may not be the best situation if you wish your coral honeysuckles to produce fruit and seed to feed the likes of robins, goldfinches, and hermit thrushes. For many plants, cross-pollination between genetically different individuals often results in greater fertility than self-pollination does. But this is a problem that should be easy to solve: coordinate with your friends and trade your homegrown cuttings taken from different sources so that your garden plants will have some genetic diversity. You may well see more coral honeysuckle fruits if you do this.

On the other hand, if you wish to maintain a particular cultivar, for example, the yellow-flowered cultivar 'John Clayton,' clonal propagation via cuttings is essential. The unique combination of genes that defines

(See *Coral honeysuckle*, page 8)

Annual Meeting offers a variety of field trips

(Continued from page 1)

great blue herons, and pelicans on your visit east.

Speakers for the Annual Meeting hail from the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Lynnhaven River Now, and the Elizabeth River Project. The focus this year is on the water. South Hampton Roads has several rivers that empty into the Chesapeake Bay, as well as rivers that flow south into Back Bay and Albermarle Sound.

The host hotel is the Virginia Beach Resort Hotel (757-481-9000 or 800-468-2722). Rooms will be available for \$109 if you mention the Virginia Native Plant Society and are available if booked prior to September 15. That rate is good for the dates of the conference and for three days preceding and three days following, so, come early, stay late! The conference center is on the beach, a few miles from where the Chesapeake meets the Atlantic.

Box lunches will be available Saturday for an extra fee. The price for the conference is \$125 per person. Watch for registration forms at VNPS.org or in the next newsletter.

—Steve Stasulis, Annual Meeting Committee Chair



Sunset on the Lynnhaven River, the site for one of the field trips at the Annual Meeting. (Photo courtesy Steve Stasulis)



More places to see at the October Annual Meeting: The plant life has overwhelmed what remains of the nearly forgotten communities at False Cape, left. (Photo by Nancy Sorrells) Hebdon Cove on the Lynnhaven River, above, provides plenty of natural beauty. (Photo courtesy Steve Stasulis)



• Border wall

(Continued from page 4)

the most diverse habitats in the United States, with 520 species of birds, 115 species of reptiles and amphibians, and 45 species of mammals. The sabal palms located on a 557-acre National Audubon Society preserve represent the last remnant of that native species that once lined the Rio Grande.

More than 100,000 birders a year

flock to the Valley to walk the border lands and view the wildlife. Now they have to walk behind the wall. That's the irony of it all—the border wall is not on the border at all. It is anywhere from a half mile to a mile north of the river, which marks the border. And it is not continuous. Without regard for potential environmental impacts, cement walls as much as 16 feet in height

have been built and topped with 30-foot impenetrable fences. Each section runs for a few miles at spots where it was thought that it would be most effective in stopping illegal immigration.

While the fences have not been successful in stopping humans, the cement walls have kept the Rio Grande from spreading out into its normal flood-

(See *Impacts*, page 7)

Impacts

(Continued from page 6)

plain, forcing the waters to scour and erode rare habitat. When the waters recede, the bodies of thousands of drowned reptiles can be found at the base of the walls. The swath of cleared land and roads on either side of these walls has favored the growth of invasive non-native plants.

Less than five percent of the Valley's native habitat of scrub trees and cacti is extant due to heavy agricultural practices and development. Now what is left is heavily threatened. Ocelots and jaguarundi have now become genetically isolated from their Mexican cousins and will probably cease to exist in the U.S. Not only have wildlife corridors become fragmented by the cleared areas and the walls themselves, but with the constant noise, lights, and lack of cover, those that could make it through the small wildlife openings do not venture near. Videos have shown toads jumping into the wall again and again until they perish from heat exhaustion.

One of the most solemn individuals I met was Ernesto Reyes, director of the Lower Rio Grande Wildlife Refuge near McAllen. When the congressional delegation came to visit him sev-

eral years ago, he was told to shelve any environmental impact statements and decide then and there exactly where the section of the wall was going to be built. He estimates that 60 to 70 percent of his refuge has been negatively affected. Because of the wall, some animal populations in the refuge can no longer reach the Rio Grande for water, for instance.

Ironically the population least affected is the birds, but the people coming to see those birds must walk in fear behind the walls, on the lookout for customs patrols and dogs ready to round up those seeking to scale a fence that is more effective at stopping four-legged creatures than two-legged ones. On our visit as we walked through a mesquite and cactus forest in the refuge, a half-mile inside the United States but a quarter-mile south of the wall, we were met by members of the customs patrol who advised us that it would be safer to go back on the levee at the wall as they were looking for some people hiding out in the shrub forest. Ten vehicles, a he-

licopter and several dogs soon flushed two men out of hiding.

Sadly, these hastily constructed barriers are harming our fragile natural environment and rare habitats, while pitting conservation against national security. If you would like to learn more about this serious national conservation issue along our entire southern border, visit www.sierraclub.org/borderlands or read *Continental Divide* by Krista Schlyer.

--Nancy Sorrells, Bulletin editor



Looking down the border wall at the Lower Rio Grande NWR. Note the wide swath of cleared land, the cement wall, the 30-foot fence, and the lights. (Photos by Nancy Sorrells)

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 The deadline for the next issue is **July 15, 2014.**

•Chestnut restoration

(Continued from page 1)

interest in forming a restoration group for the central Shenandoah Valley.

Chapter Vice President for Education Kathy Marmet presented the history of the American chestnut, including its subsequent decline as a dominant forest species due to the chestnut blight early in the last century. She detailed the work done to breed blight-resistant trees by backcrossing American and Chinese chestnuts until reaching the present generation of seedlings that are 93.75 percent American chestnut. These seedlings are now being planted out in a variety of sites across the state to test their survivability.

Chapter President Jack LaMonica showed the group how to identify the American and Chinese chestnuts and the native chinquapin. He also showed how chapter volunteers pollinate selected trees, then he led a field trip to see a large surviving American chestnut near the Confederate Breastworks on Shenandoah Mountain.

Marmet's presentation also laid

out an ambitious to-do list for potential volunteers:

- Help find local trees to include in the breeding program
- Help carry out controlled pollination of local mother trees
- Establish backcross orchards
- Care for and maintain orchards
- Conduct educational outreach
- Hold ceremonial plantings

Some 30 people attended the Saturday afternoon session. A follow-up meeting will be scheduled for later in the summer to organize volunteers interested in taking on some of the opportunities offered. If you are interested in volunteering with the American Chestnut Foundation in the Shenandoah Valley, contact Mark Gatewood at mwgatewood@gmail.com.

—Mark Gatewood
Shenandoah Chapter member

•Coral honeysuckle

(Continued from page 5)

the desirable characteristics of the cultivar are not likely to be maintained in the gene shuffling that occurs in pollen and ovule stages of sexual reproduction by seed.

Anyone with a fistful of dollars can go to a garden center and buy a plant—not that there is anything wrong with doing so. But those same dollars cannot buy the pride and satisfaction of propagating your own plants by your own hand, or the goodwill that comes from sharing your homegrown plants with others. It is more or less like parenting, all it takes is a little knowledge, a bit of care, and time to enjoy watching your little ones grow.

—W. John Hayden
VNPS Botany Chair

More glimpses of Annual Meeting field trip sites

