

# THE DECLARATION

SUMMER 2021



## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Chapter Meetings	2
Chapter Announcements	3
Member Contributions	4
Partner Events	8
Learn More About VNPS	9

## October Plant Potting Event

By: Phil Stokes, Plant Sale Chair

You're invited to join us Sunday afternoon at 1:00 PM on October 10th to help prepare for the Jefferson Chapter's Annual Native Plant Sale. Volunteers will be trained in best practices for potting plugs and bare root wildflowers.

Chapter Member, Fran Boninti has graciously made her spectacular garden available located just west of Charlottesville in the Ivy area at 2505 Holkham Drive.

Please join us rain or shine for this annual tradition. And don't hesitate to bring a friend, there will be plenty of covered workspace available.



Sunday afternoon spent potting plants

We'll have deep plug trays with 50 plants each of 14 species and a few hundred bare root favorites.

Volunteer positions for soil preparation, labeling, watering, and moving flats are available.

The event is casual, with volunteers free to tailor their

schedule around other commitments. Drinks and snacks will be provided.

And of course, you'll want to peek at Fran's splendid garden. There's plenty of street parking. No need to sign up in advance.

Mask requirement to be determined in advance of the event.

## Earthworms... Friend or Foe?

By: Marjie Giuliano

I'd always taken some odd delight in seeing the little castings of earthworms in my garden, feeling assured they were a sign that the earth was being enriched by their underground workings. That is, until last summer. I was fishing at Beaver Creek, when I had a sudden memory of having seen large worms in my garden and became suspicious. At the time, I'd been surprised to find several very active worms close to the surface in the leaf litter among my native plants. Upon reflection, I was more and more convinced that it might be too good to be true.

To help keep everyone safe during COVID-19, the September chapter meeting featuring an educational speaker will be held **virtually**

The September meetings will be accessible through Zoom. Login information is provided via email to Chapter members.

For help accessing the September meeting email Chapter President, Mary Lee Epps (mse5e@virginia.edu).

## Chapter Meetings

Jefferson Chapter will be offering our usual monthly talks through the Fall. The September meeting will be held via Zoom. October and November meetings are planned for in person but may change depending on how Covid develops. Preliminary information on the talks is below. Watch for more details on the presentations with links to the Zoom meetings in the upcoming weeks.

### **Wednesday, September 8, 7:00-9:00, Online Access | Cicadas, Brood X and Impacts on Forest Communities**

Dr. Zoe Getman-Pickering is a postdoctoral scientist working with John Lill at George Washington University researching the ways that cicada outbreaks shift forest herbivore communities. Her graduate studies at Cornell focused on tritrophic interactions between plants, herbivorous insects, and arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi. Specifically, she worked on the conditionality of this plant-fungus mutualism, and the biotic and abiotic factors that shape the plant's susceptibility and resistance strategies to herbivory.

### **Wednesday, October 13, 7:00-9:00, Ivy Creek Education Building | Seasons at the Quarry Gardens**

Neither Armand nor Bernice Thieblot has any formal education in botany, environmental science, or garden design. Armand was a professor at the University of Maryland's School of Business and Bernice ran a company that consulted with and provided creative services for the marketing programs of a national clientele of colleges and universities. They lived over the company's store in a converted firehouse in downtown Baltimore until 2013.

Their native plants education has been a slow process, begun when they purchased land in Schuyler in 1990. Since 2015, they have had a continuing relationship with Charlottesville's Center for Urban Habitats, which surveyed the quarry site's biota and designed the plant galleries. Both Armand and Bernice are Master Naturalists and QGs' tour guides. They know they are stewarding more than 500 species of native plants—and are still learning new identifications every day.

### **Wednesday, November 10, 7:00-9:00, Ivy Creek Education Building | Update on the Botanical Garden of the Piedmont**

Jill Trischman-Marks, Executive Director of the Botanical Garden of the Piedmont, will briefly outline what has already been achieved in the process toward building the garden, give insight into the road ahead, and provide information about how the Garden is responding to needs in the community.

So far, Botanical Garden of the Piedmont (BGP) has been driven by the community's input, aspirations, insights, and desire to be a place of healing, unity, education, and beauty. The design and construction of Botanical Garden of the Piedmont is a very ambitious project. For more information about the Garden visit <https://piedmontgarden.org/>

## Chapter Announcements

### **Volunteers Needed for Native Plants Walks at Ivy Creek Natural Area**

We are working to increase the number of folks who can help and/or lead our VNPS-sponsored walks at Ivy Creek. We lead walks in all months except December, January, and February. This is a great way to learn to identify more plants and help us inform more community members about the value of native plants (we also identify invasive plants). The number of people taking advantage of our plant walks is growing, so we need more folks to help with our monthly walks. The trails at ICNA are often quite narrow so it often doesn't work for everyone on the walk to hear what the leader is saying. Please contact Mary Lee ([mse5e@virginia.edu](mailto:mse5e@virginia.edu)) to get more information and/or volunteer.

### **Volunteers Needed for Chapter Sale Potting Event October 1<sup>st</sup>**

Volunteers are needed on Sunday Oct. 10 at 1:00 PM to help prepare for the Jefferson Chapter's Annual Native Plant Sale. Join us to pot plugs and bare root flowers in the comfort of Fran's lovely garden (2505 Holkham Dr. west of Charlottesville in the Ivy area). Drinks and snacks will be provided. Ample street parking. No need to sign up in advance. Mask requirement to be determined.

### **2021 Annual Meeting**

The VNPS 2021 Annual Meeting will be held via Zoom on the evenings of Friday, September 17 and Saturday, September 18. The Meeting and Presentations are free and open to the public; donations are most welcome. For more information visit <https://vnps.org/events/vnps-2021-annual-meeting-via-zoom/>

### **News from the Board**

In mid-July, the Jefferson Chapter Board met at Marjie Giuliano's house for their big planning meeting of the year. Happily, our spring plant sale was quite successful (despite the unusual format with pre-orders and pick-up by appointment) so that we again have a good reservoir of funds for donations and other activities.

A key discussion focused on how we might memorialize Pat Wyllis, who passed away in September of 2020. Pat had been a dedicated member of VNPS almost since its beginning and had served as Chapter president and, most recently, as treasurer. We decided to establish a scholarship fund at PVCC in horticulture to honor Pat. While details are still being finalized, we hope to make the first awards to students in this fall's class.

We also decided to again give \$1000 to Ivy Creek, part of which may be reserved for covering fees associated with use of the Education Building for meetings and the barn for the annual plant sale.

We also voted to again fund two scholarships to Nature Camp for students with financial need (valued at a little less than \$2000 total), \$500 to the Botanical Garden of the Piedmont, and \$250 for the pollinator garden at Ivy Creek. Finally, we voted to donate \$500 to either the Flora of Virginia project or to the state VNPS' annual fundraising campaign.

We would very much like to add a couple of new members to our Board. If you have an interest in joining, please email Mary Lee Epps at [mse5e@virginia.edu](mailto:mse5e@virginia.edu).

## Member Contributions

### Earthworms... Friend or Foe?

By: Marjie Giuliano

Continued from page 1



Photo: Invasive Jumping Worm  
Credit: Megan Sever,  
ScienceNews September 29,

It later dawned on me that suspicious worms might be the invasive jumping worms that I'd only just learned about. The worms are known to wreak havoc on native plant gardens because they consume all the nutrition in soil.

Just a little bit of research proved their presence to be right under my nose (or fingers, to be more accurate). To identify an adult jumping /crazy worm, notice the whitish clitella. The whitish clitella is the reproductive area close to front of the worm. This area holds a cocoon containing eggs and sperm, which is deposited in the soil for overwintering as the adult worm dies from cold.

Unlike nightcrawler or red wigglers (both nonnative), these worms don't make castings, which aerate the soil by tunneling down a few inches. Instead, they stay within the top 2 inches, leaving castings which appear much like coarse coffee grounds atop the soil. These castings become very easy to notice once you have a reference.

While the adults do not overwinter, their young do. Staying protected in cocoons (about the size of a small pea) they stay in the soil, until emerging in the spring. Camouflaged in the soil, they are difficult to spot in this stage and are commonly, and problematically transported very efficiently in flowerpots and leaf mulch. In addition, they are a favorite of fisherman (and bait stores) who appreciate these large, lively worms easily found close to the surface. If cut in pieces and left on the ground, especially near to streams where ground is moist, they can regenerate as well.

Long story short, there's another invasive to complicate our gardening efforts! Be on the lookout and be sure to check your flowerpots, mulch, leaf litter, and fishing gear.



Orange Milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) & Unexpected Tiger Caterpillar (*Cycnia collaris*)



Orange Milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) & Unexpected Tiger Caterpillar (*Cycnia collaris*)



Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) & Unexpected Tiger Moth (*Cycnia tenera*)

## Expecting the Unexpected

By: Betty Truax

I found a “new” caterpillar on the common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) growing in my gardens. It was orange and hairy and had what looked like thick black eyebrows. The only caterpillars that I had seen eating milkweed prior to this discovery were those of Monarch and Tussock moths.

In search of more of this new caterpillar, I found a few of them on the whorled milkweed (*Asclepias verticillata*) and then I found dozens of them on orange milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*). I was able to photograph them eating the orange milkweed.

After some research, I suspected I was looking at unexpected tiger caterpillars (*Cycnia collaris* - formally *Cycnia inopinatus*, *Hyphantria collaris*) also known as an Unexpected *Cycnia* (pronounced Sick-nee-a). Milkweeds are the only host plants these caterpillars eat.

Thanks to VNPS board member Rob Evans, who put me in touch with our state zoologists. Virginia DCR Staff Zoologist, Dr. Steven M. Roble, confirmed that my garden was hosting unexpected tiger caterpillars. He also confirmed that my garden was the only known sighting in Fluvanna County, earning my garden a place in the state database. The only other Virginia counties with sightings are Nottoway and Dinwiddie in according to the Virginia Rare Species database.

The unexpected tiger caterpillars were munching on the stems of the individual flowers and dropping them to the ground, which made the plants look pretty bad pretty fast, but I always say that I garden to feed the critters.

The orange milkweed gives good camouflage. However, given the caterpillars were consuming milky latex sap, which is very toxic to most creatures, they may not need much camouflage.

This is not a common moth. Its habitat is dry grassland and oak barrens. Much of the grasslands in Virginia are now pastures causing fragmentation of habitat. It overwinters above ground in leaf litter, so fire and leaf removal also create problems. This moth does not migrate. In fact, it is rarely seen very far from a patch of milkweed. I photographed what I believe to be an Unexpected Tiger Moth resting on a milkweed leaf but haven’t confirmed the identification. I expect to find more unexpected tiger caterpillars in my gardens in coming years.

## White Snakeroot (*Ageratina altissima*)

BY: Mary Lee Epps

White snakeroot (*Ageratina altissima*) is a handsome, fall-blooming member of the aster family (Asteraceae), related to boneset, thoroughworts and Joe-pye-weeds. The flower clusters are in loose groups with shaggy, bright-white florets. The leaves are opposite, coarsely toothed with elongated tips, and roughly twice as long as wide. Lower leaves have long petioles. White snakeroot is a woodland plant that can grow to four or more feet tall.

The most fascinating aspect of the plant is that it contains a chemical that is toxic. Cattle, horses, sheep and goats that eat white snakeroot develop a disease commonly called “the trembles” and the toxin builds up in their meat and milk, which can poison humans if ingested in quantity. During frontier times, the illness in humans was called “the slows” because of the lethargy it caused. It was greatly feared, caused much illness and many deaths, and is believed to have caused the death of Nancy Hanks Lincoln, Abraham Lincoln’s mother. Gradually it was established that drinking contaminated milk was a major cause of the sickness in humans, and the disease became known as “milk sickness”. It was also found that if a person with the disease stopped drinking milk he frequently recovered and that affected cows often improved when moved to a different pasture.

Bess Murray, in a Natural History Note broadcast in 1995 on WTJU, UVA’s radio station, tells the story of milk sickness vividly, explaining how the mystery was finally solved. The following is from her broadcast:

“In 1860 William Jerry of Madison County, Illinois, ate what he thought were common nettle greens and fell ill, not completely recovering for several years. And in 1867, the Missouri Republican, a St Louis newspaper, published an account of Jerry’s illness and identified the plant he’d eaten as white snakeroot—which has now gone through four Latin name changes.



White Snakeroot. Picture By Mary Lee Epps.

The discovery was given wide publicity and by the end of the 19th century it was common knowledge to most farmers that trembles and the slows could be avoided by keeping livestock out of the woods. That’s where white snakeroot mostly grows; it’s rarely found in open pastures.

But for another three decades, scientists went off on the wrong track trying unsuccessfully to find a milk sickness bacterium. Then in 1927 J.F. Couch, a U.S. Department of Agriculture chemist, isolated a principle from white snakeroot which he called, appropriately, trematol, a hydrocarbon, soluble in alcohol but not water, with a pungent aromatic odor. Early pioneer doctors often commented on the smell of a room where a patient had milk sickness, and sometimes made an immediate diagnosis based on the smell.”

I found this account particularly fascinating because we have a cattle farm and white snakeroot grows on our property. Happily, I have only found it in one area, which we fenced off when we bought the property, and we have never had a problem with our cattle getting “the trembles”.

Sources:

*Flora of VA*

Murray, Bess, “White Snakeroot and Milk Sickness”, Broadcast on WTJU, Sept. 11, 1995, Wikipedia, “*Ageratina altissima*”, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ageratina\\_altissima](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ageratina_altissima)

## Chapter's Virtual Plant Sale a Success

BY: Phil Stokes, Plant Sale Chairman

### Rising to the Occasion

Unlike any previous plant sale, this spring's virtual version of the Jefferson Chapter VNPS Annual Plant sale presented the greatest challenge. The outbreak of Covid-19 in early spring of 2020 led to the cancelling of last year's sale, which left us with 1,200 potted plants. Plant Sale Chairman Phil Stokes and Will Shaw continued care of these plants plus prior year leftovers through the summer and into late fall. After having determined viability of most of the plants, a preliminary inventory count was prepared in December showing we had about 1,600 plants representing 47 species. In January the board agreed to have a virtual sale with all customer orders being placed by email and then confirmed orders would be picked up on May 1st.

Phil and Tana Herndon took the lead in handling the complexities of order processing. This involved creating an order form, setting up to receive and reply to emailed orders, tracking inventory availability, allowing customers to make substitutions, confirming orders, and scheduling pickups.

All the planning was done not knowing how many orders to expect.

Plants were priced close to the levels offered at previous sales. Of great concern was if customers would order plants unseen. But we had an amazing response thanks to publicity handled by Chair Emily Byers directed to membership, Facebook, and word of mouth.

### Overwhelming Success

Beginning at midnight on April 14<sup>th</sup>, when email ordering opened, we were overwhelmed by receiving 40 orders in the first four minutes. By about 7:00 am we had received nearly 80 orders which when processed depleted our inventory to a level at which additional orders couldn't be adequately filled.

Unfortunately, approximately half of the orders received by the order placement deadline could not be filled. Our apologies were sent to those customers.

Confirmed orders were scheduled time slots for pickup on May 1st at Phil's residence. Through the generosity of Rigid Products, in Orange, Emily was able to meet our boxing needs with re-useable boxes. Kudos also to the seventeen volunteers who boxed-up the 79 customer orders, directed car access, and quickly and accurately loaded plants.



Photo: Volunteers at VNPS Jefferson Chapter Annual Plant Sale 2021

The customers were remarkable too, nearly all arriving at appointed times with payment in hand. Treasurer Beth Mizell commented that this was the easiest sale she's had with collecting funds. She reported that the sale grossed \$ 7,189 in sales. An excellent result considering that we didn't have the usual spring potting event or member donations of plants that would have added to the available inventory.

### Thank You, But Never Again

Thank you to all who made this virtual sale a success! While some customers may prefer the ease of the virtual format it was too demanding for those volunteers who processed the emailed orders for this type of sale to be repeated.

## Partner Events

### **A Series of Four Virtual Lectures - Botanical Garden of the Piedmont**

Consecutive Thursdays in September at 7:00 PM

September 9th – Nature: Healing the Individual – Carolyn Schuyler

September 16th – Nature: Healing Communities – Donald A. Rakow

September 23rd – Healing Nature – Lee Schulmeisters

September 30th – Panel discussion and Q&As

Individual evenings: \$15.00

Package of 4 evenings: \$55.00

A limited offer: Receive an Ian Robertson Hydrangea with a purchase of 4-evenings \$80.00. All proceeds support the educational programming and future design of this new admission-free public garden. The Ian Robertson Legacy: Lectureship honors the late Ian Robertson, master horticulturist, renowned landscape designer, educator, and author, by providing educational lectures as a source of funding for the Botanical Garden of the Piedmont. Purchase Tickets here: [https://app.etapestry.com/onlineforms/McIntireBotanicalGarden\\_1/Lecture-1.html](https://app.etapestry.com/onlineforms/McIntireBotanicalGarden_1/Lecture-1.html)

The Virginia Native Plant Society is dedicated to the protection and preservation of the native plants of Virginia and their habitats, in order to sustain for generations to come the integrity of the Commonwealth's rich natural heritage of ecosystems and biodiversity for purposes of enjoyment, enlightenment, sustainable use, and our own very survival.

The Jefferson Chapter serves the counties of Albemarle, Fluvanna, Greene, Louisa, Madison, Nelson, Orange, as well as the City of Charlottesville.

*Submissions of articles, events, photographs, and other information of interest to the chapter are welcome. Please submit them by email to Annemarie Abbondanzo at: [annemarie@ecosystems-services.us](mailto:annemarie@ecosystems-services.us) with the subject line "Newsletter Submission".*

**Virginia Native Plant Society, Jefferson Chapter**

P. O. Box 6281  
Charlottesville, VA 22906

**Contact:**

Mary Lee Epps  
Chapter President  
(434) 973-8172  
[mse5e@virginia.edu](mailto:mse5e@virginia.edu)

Conserving Wild Flowers  
and Wild Places