



Claytonia

Newsletter of the John Clayton Chapter, Virginia Native Plant Society

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www.claytonvnps.org

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Our May 17 meeting: "Grafton Ponds"

Our speaker will be **Zachary R. Bradford**, Chesapeake Bay Region Steward for the Virginia Department of Conservation & Recreation's Division of Natural Heritage, who will talk about the Grafton Ponds, a valuable resource located on the Virginia Peninsula.



Our speaker, Zachary Bradford, left; and a view of a portion of Grafton Ponds

The Grafton Ponds are a collection of seasonal depression ponds in one of the last large forested areas of the rapidly developing Virginia Peninsula. Collectively, they are among the most important biological areas in the state and are home to several extremely rare plants, animals, and natural communities. Through a partnership with Newport News Waterworks, the northern portion of the pond complex is protected in perpetuity as the Grafton Ponds Natural Area Preserve. However, the ponds still face numerous threats, and much about the hydrologic regime of the pond is still unknown, so additional protection and management is essential to secure the ecological value of the Grafton Ponds.

The meeting will be held at **7 pm on Thursday, May 17** at the **James City County Recreation Center, 5301 Longhill Road, Williamsburg 23188.**

See you there!



From the President

Spring is here at last. It reminded me of the line “April is the cruelest month” from the poem by T. S. Eliot. It would tease us by having a decent weather day followed by snow and freezing cold. Not really the meaning of the poem, but true as a sentence for this April.

Many of the plants we potted last fall appeared to have died either this winter with the below our zone 7B cold or came up in spring only to die when it froze again. The milkweeds seemed never to come up. My fig tree and a few beautyberries look dead. Yet, at last, it does look like spring with the most beautiful flowering dogwoods, brighter than we have seen for such a long time. It was worth the wait...

April was our Annual Plant Sale, and sell we did! Customers were buying fast. In barely an hour, entire tables were emptied. Thanks to our super organized plant sale leaders, Adrienne Frank, Sue Voigt, and Catherine Flanagan, we were ready for customers in advance. We had substantial plant donations from members and non-members, and enough drivers, trucks, and SUVs to transport plants. Many enthusiastic volunteers helped our sale. Our Boy Scout volunteers with their leader, Jim Etchberger, assisted in organizing the traffic, helping place the plants on the correct tables, and helping customers carry their plants to the holding area, the checkout, and their cars. My gratitude goes to everyone!

It is important to remember that we should be careful in judging young immature plants. They can look somewhat different or even very different from their adult counterparts. It happened that during the sale, young Swamp Milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*) on Table 1 (Butterfly host plants) was mistaken for Tropical Milkweed, which was considered harmful to Monarchs. After this incorrect conclusion had been made by five members, I believed that we could not sell those young plants. However, they were purchased from a reliable grower of native plants only. When I contacted him after the sale, he most vehemently assured me of Swamp Milkweed authenticity. And when I look at some Swamp Milkweed plants that I planted before the sale, I now clearly see how their baby leaves had morphed into the elongated leaves of natives. It reminds me of Hibiscus leaves that can start out very simple and change into one more type of leaves before the regular ones appear. So, let's all remember that baby and adult plants may not look the same.

Lucile Kossodo

New Members

We welcome **Linda Cole**, **Carol Schrader**, **Pat Murphy**, **Linda Neilson**, and **Saleh Sheikh** (all of Williamsburg), **Savannah Saint America** of Newport News, and **Lois Radcliff** of Yorktown to the John Clayton Chapter.

In Review: "Bay Friendly Gardens and Shorelines" at our March meeting

At the Yorktown Library, on March 15, the chapter welcomed **Karen Duhring**, marine scientist, from the VIMS Center for Coastal Resource Management. The center, mandated by the Commonwealth of Virginia, conducts research, and serves in an advisory role for the general assembly. The center has 25 scientists doing applied research, GIS, outreach, and education. The Clean Water Act of 2010 mandated that action be taken to reduce sediment, nitrogen, phosphorous and chemical contaminants in the bay. To that end, the bay is currently on a pollution “diet” with a total maximum daily load (TDML) of each. Ms. Duhring currently teaches training courses for Virginia Master Naturalists and Master Gardeners and provides advisory services in shoreline and wetlands management. Her in depth presentation to our chapter described the actions that contribute to the problem and those that can help.

One problem that development brings is “hardscape” which is impervious to rain or snow. Heavy rain flows over hard surfaces and into waterways, carrying with it soil, excess nutrients, and pesticides. Storm water runoff and excess nutrients in the air lead to large growths of harmful algae blooms (July-Sep). When the algae die, the bacteria come in and the bacteria consume oxygen.

Shoreline “armoring” of waterfront property to prevent erosion is another major concern. The native vegetation is often removed, leaving it open to invasive species or covered over by lawn right up to the bulkhead. This leaves a narrow or absent intertidal zone, no room between low and high tide, and pesticides and fertilizers spilling into the waterway.

Discussing the best practices in response to these problems, Karen stressed the importance of maintaining a wide marsh to intercept flood water. It should mimic a natural gradual slope. The plants and trees should consist of “layers” meaning tall trees for a tree canopy, an understory of smaller trees and shrubs, perennials, ferns, ground cover, and leaf litter. Suitable plants must be salt, wind, and flood tolerant with deep roots for erosion control. They must also have some winter plant structure above the ground. The tidal marsh has different zones and different plants are required for each. Due to sea level rise, a tidal marsh must have room for plants to “migrate” upward. Very few plants meet the requirements for low marsh, but Salt Marsh Cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*) is one that can withstand being flooded every day. Saltmeadow Hay (*Spartina patens*), Switch Grass (*Panicum virgatum*), Marsh Elder (*Iva frutescens*), and Groundsel (*Baccharis halimifolia*) are suitable for high marsh. In the transition zone, suitable choices are Wax Myrtle (*Myrica*), Eastern Red Cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*), Bald Cypress (*Taxodium distichum*), and Yaupon Holly (*Ilex vomitoria*). Other possibilities are to mix hibiscus and goldenrod with

switchgrass, as high marsh grasses can be extended into the transition zone. Karen also pointed out the need for soil testing before adding amendments. Earthworms provide beneficial bacteria, and fungi and the soil community is very sensitive to inorganic chemicals and pesticides. Before summarizing, Karen stressed to keep in mind that many small actions can effect change.

For further information Karen recommends:

VIMS Living Shorelines website: http://www.vims.edu/ccrm/outreach/living_shorelines/index.php

Chesapeake Gardening and Landscaping. The Essential Green Guide by Barbara Ellis, 2015

VIMS Open House May 19, 2018.

Cathy Flanagan

Chapter Honors Boy Scout Troop 103

At the March 15 meeting at the Yorktown Library, our chapter honored Boy Scout Troop 103 with the John Clayton Community Service Award. This will be the seventh year the troop has assisted with the native plant sale in Williamsburg—which was held this year on April 28th at the Williamsburg Community Building. The scouts work hard directing parking, helping customers put plants into their cars, staffing the holding area for plants, and moving pots, carts, and boxes to wherever they are needed. The plant sale would be much more difficult to accomplish without their help! Assistant Scoutmaster **Jim Etchberger** and Eagle Scout **Charles Krohn**, who accepted the award for the troop, told us that the scouts aren't just moving the plants around, however. After attending a few plant sales, the scouts begin to take interest in the plants and find they keep learning as time goes on. Some may even continue to pursue their interest in plants further. Jim Etchberger knows the kids like to learn and would like to see John Clayton Chapter recruit more young scouts and get them interested in plants earlier. It's a partnership that can has many benefits for the scouts and the community.



In this photo taken at the March meeting, Donna Ware is flanked by Eagle Scout Charles Krohn, left, and Assistant Scoutmaster Jim Etchberger.

Recent Plant Walks

Stalking the Southern Twayblade on March 25

We met at the Newport News Park Discovery Center the afternoon of March 25, a chilly, breezy day, but at least we had the sun on our side. We went a very little way off trail in a soggy area where walk leader **Susie Yager** had found Southern Twayblade a few days before. These little gems are so “introverted,” it was hard to find them even knowing where to look.

But find one, and then two and three, and suddenly they are all around and you need to step carefully. Some were in bloom and some still tightly budded. In another spot identified a year ago, everybody got into the search. Chuck found the first specimen and then we found more and more. We walked the 2.6 mile White Oak Trail loop, also finding Crane-fly Orchid, Spotted Wintergreen, Rattlesnake Weed, and Water Hemlock in leaf, and a few small, tight buds on Pawpaw. Another bright green presence was a patch of Sphagnum.

Lise Schioler continued stalking the Southern Twayblade all the way around and found more in a number of locations. It seems this tiny orchid may not be so infrequent as *Flora of Virginia* indicates...it's just something people don't notice during its brief above-ground stage. James Pajot, who joined us from the Orchid Society specifically for the Southern Twayblade, found the other gem of the day, Spring Beauty in bloom. *Flora of Virginia* shows Spring Beauty as common throughout the Coastal Plain, but on this walk we found only a few plants.

The last order of the day was to share the location of a known colony of Pink Lady's-Slipper. They had not leafed out yet, but we found one stalk with an empty seed pod still standing after the winter's abuse and sporting the first hint of a green bud just above ground. That stalk anchored the colony location, and we made notes aloud of visual clues to help walkers to return to the right spot in about a month for another blooming treat.



Keith Navia's photo of a blooming Southern Twayblade (minus the background distraction of leaf litter)



Sphagnum Moss growing along the trail



The walk's participants: Keith Navia, Chuck Deffenbaugh, Lise Schioler (hiding behind Chuck), Jeanette Navia, James Pajot, Meegan Wallace

Susie Yager

Matteson Trail Pawpaw Walk on April 8

Susie Yager led the walk, with participants Merry Kennedy, Cathy Frey, Meegan Wallace, Chuck Deffenbaugh, Amber Boehnlein, David Boehnlein, Francoise Veland, Ben Davis, Allison Watts, Ray Yoh, Jeanette Yoh, and Patty VonOhlen.

The walk was scheduled for the morning of Saturday April 7, but was postponed to the following afternoon due to inclement weather. April 8 was a calm, sunny day and made for a much more enjoyable walk! Many of the registrants were Virginia Master Naturalists and on suggestion had brought their Va. Dept. of Forestry tree and shrub books to practice using the identification keys.

Though some shrubs had begun to leaf out, most of the trees were bare. We were first greeted by some lingering Spicebush blooms. Around the bend we found some interesting specimens and got out the tree and shrub identification books. The walkers collaborated in reading and answering the questions in the keys, and enjoyed the group successes in finding the right IDs. Since most trees hadn't leafed out yet, we used fallen leaves and seeds along with bark and bud scars to identify Eastern Cottonwood, American Elm, Hackberry, and Blackhaw Viburnum. The Hackberry warts were more imposing than most, and the Cottonwood had an impressively large gall.

Further along the trail we identified Shagbark Hickory, which some sources do not show occurring in SE Virginia, but all evidence pointed to the Shagbark, most especially the long, light gray bark plates curling outward at both ends. We also identified a few young starts of Elderberry, and then Adder's Tongue showed up nearby...and then again over here and over there.



Pawpaw blooms

Having timed the walk right to catch Pawpaw in bloom, we were treated to the most floriferous Pawpaw specimen any of us had seen. We also found, as expected, Jack in the Pulpit emerging and sporting a few flowers. The walk was planned with most of these native plants in mind, but the



Adder's Tongue



Ben and Patty point out a Cottonwood with a huge gall.



The Hackberry's warty trunk

Blackhaw, Elderberry and Adder's Tongue were pleasant surprises. **Susie Yager**

Some Upcoming Plant Walks...

Saturday, May 12, 10 am: Mountain Laurel Meander at Mariners' Museum Park, Newport News

Enjoy meandering through a natural bower of mature Mountain Laurel with **Susie Yager**. Mountain Laurel is infrequent in Virginia's outer Coastal Plain, but these plants were brought in by the property owner ages ago and positioned near the water's edge. There's no good place along the Noland Trail for close observation, so we will not walk the Noland Trail, but instead follow an older, unimproved trail through the woods, in places steep, soft, or uneven, with loose logs, protruding roots, and fallen trees. Spray feet, ankles and cuffs against ticks and chiggers. We will also see masses of Christmas Fern, Bracken Fern, and Galax, with a smattering of Mayapple and Trailing Arbutus.

Meet at the Mariners Museum Park's meadow area across from Warwick High School's athletic fields. If you're using GPS, go to the Warwick High School Soccer Field on Warwick Blvd, but turn into the meadow *across* from the soccer field. Email Susie at soozigus@cox.net to register.

Saturday, June 9, 10 am: Campus Trees

Join **Beth Chambers** for a walking tour of the **College of William and Mary** campus, highlighting the history of campus trees and recent restorations in the Crim Dell meadow area. Meet in front of W&M's **Wren Building** at the west end of Duke of Gloucester Street, Williamsburg.

Contact Beth at 757-221-2213 to register and for more information.

Saturday, June 16, 9 am: Plants of a Salt Marsh

A walk into the JBLE-Langley salt marsh with natural resource manager **Alicia Garcia** to see grasses, sedges and wildflowers that grow in challenging habitats. Along with an abundance of wildlife, there is a pair of breeding bald eagles in the vicinity. This is a sensitive area, with procedures for entering the base, and the walk will be limited to **15 attendees**. You must register by June 10th by emailing Alicia at alicia.m.garcia81@gmail.com; she will supply details about where to meet for the walk. Langley Visitors Center, 15 LaSalle Ave, Hampton, Va 23665.

Saturday, July 14, 9 am: Ferns, Mosses, and Forest Plants

Join **Helen Hamilton** to look for summer forest plants, ferns and mosses, on a short trail in **Freedom Park**. The Historic Rivers Chapter of Virginia Master Naturalists was involved in developing a path that leads to a deep ravine heavily covered with low herbaceous plants. Bring a magnifier to look at tiny plants and a camera to photograph the larger ones. Park by the playground near the Go Ape facility. Contact Helen at 757-564-4494 or helen48@cox.net for information.

...and Other Events

Sunday, May 20, 2:30–6 pm : A Class on Nonnative Invasives at Williamsburg Unitarian Church |\$25

The Williamsburg Learning Tree, a local nonprofit that facilitates sharing of classes in the community, is offering a class on nonnative invasives. The description is below. If you'd like to sign up, go to the webpage, here:

<http://www.williamsburglearningtree.org/course-catalog-spring-2018/>

and scroll down to the course (they are listed alphabetically).

INVASIVE PLANT IDENTIFICATION AND TREATMENT METHODS | Non-native invasive plants are quickly overwhelming many properties by tearing down the forest canopy and overtaking our native plants. Invasive plants are also overwhelming the ability of many landowners to understand what invasive plants exist on their land and what it will take to control them. This session will cover how to identify and treat some of the most common invasive plants in the area, pros and cons of different methods to remove plants, and what time of year can different methods be applied. **Rod & Maggie Walker** are landowners in western Albemarle County who have been actively working with invasive plants on their own property. They have been instrumental in the formation of the Blue Ridge PRISM (Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management).

Thanks to Ruth Douglass, VNPS, for connecting us with Rod and Maggie Walker, the instructors.

Kathi Mestayer

Plant Profile: The Family Iris

Iris plants cannot be mistaken for anything else because the flowers are showy and face upward, with three sets of colorful petal-like parts. The sepals are large and drooping, very petal-like, and are called “falls.” Alternating with them are three large, more or less erect petals, called “standards.” In the center of the flower are three more petal-like segments which represent the enlarged styles of the flower, each of which overarches a stamen.

The leaves are erect or weakly arching, sword-shaped and in two rows, with overlapping bases. All are perennials, spreading by rhizomes. Iris is Greek for “rainbow,” possibly referring to the variety of colors seen in iris. “Flag” is from the middle English *flagge*, meaning “rush” or “reed,” in reference to the habitat of these plants.

Southern Blue Flag (*Iris virginica*) grows wild in Virginia's Coastal Plain, in swamps, wet meadows, edges of streams, ditches and beaver ponds. The sepals are light to deep blue with a yellow midrib and a bright yellow spot near the expanded tip.



Helen Hamilton

Southern Blue Flag

Petals are smaller and without markings. Since this plant prefers wet conditions, it is a good candidate for rain gardens. Less common in our area is Slender Blue Flag (*Iris prismatica*), found in a few counties south of the James River. This is a wetland species and the leaves are narrow and shorter than those of *Iris virginica*.

Dwarf Vernal Iris (*Iris verna*) is found in dry forests, clearings and roadsides through most of Virginia other than the northern coastal region. This iris is about six inches tall, vivid blue petals with golden yellow spots standing above the leaves. Dwarf Iris grows wild in part shade, dry to moist soils that are often nutrient poor and acid. A similar species, Dwarf Crested Iris (*Iris cristata*) is native to the southern mountains of Virginia and Piedmont, most frequent in cove forests in the mountains. Its leaves are over a centimeter wide and the sepals (falls) bear crest-like ridges.

The popular bearded iris or German iris (*Iris germanica*) is European in origin, now naturalized all over the world as thousands of colorful cultivars. Gardeners use these large, showy plants in sunny beds and borders, but they have major disease problems from bacteria, fungus infections, and insects like the iris borer. Leaves and especially rhizomes of this and some other *Iris* species may cause dermatitis if handled and are poisonous if eaten. Native iris species are adapted to local conditions and can be grown in a healthy garden without major problems.

Yellow Flag (*Iris pseudacorus*) is an introduced species which can become invasive. Growing in the Coastal Plain, the mountain region, and northern Virginia, it seems to be spreading. The only yellow iris growing wild, Yellow Flag was introduced into the United States in the mid-1800s as an ornamental from Eurasia or Northern Africa. Like cattails, Yellow Flag forms colonies of dense monotypic stands, outcompeting other plants.

Another introduced member of this family is Blackberry-lily (*Iris domestica*), which doesn't look anything like a typical iris. There are six flat orange petal-like parts, mottled with purple. The fruit capsule opens to expose a mass of round, shiny, black seeds, which together resemble a blackberry. Now placed in the *Iris* genus, the plant has been known as *Belamcanda chinensis*, and is sold for use in flower gardens. The name suggests its origin in China and Japan; the seeds can be toxic if eaten.



Dwarf Vernal Iris



Yellow Flag

Sisyrinchium, Blue-eyed Grass, is the second genus in the Iris Family. While the leaves are grass-like, the flower resembles neither a grass nor an iris, and does not have a blue eye. Six tepals (petals and sepals) grow in a whorl around a yellow center. The flowers are tiny, never more than an inch across, blooming April through May. These plants grow best in full sun—in shady habitats the leaves and stems are much longer. After the flowers fade, clumps of the narrow leaves are an attractive groundcover throughout the summer and into fall. The plants look great in a rock garden or along a border and can naturalize in the lawn. Propagation is by seed or division; they will self-seed, but not aggressively.



Blue-eyed Grass

Narrow-leaved Blue-eyed-grass (*S. angustifolium*) has been found in virtually every county in Virginia, growing in woodlands, fields, meadows, upland and floodplain forests. Eastern Blue-eyed-grass (*S. atlanticum*) has lighter green leaves and grows in sandy or rocky woodlands, roadsides and dunes in the Coastal Plain and southern mountain region but is uncommon in the Piedmont. Stems of the flower-clusters of *S. atlanticum* are under 3 mm wide, while those of *S. angustifolium* are broader.

Needle-tip Blue-eyed-grass (*S. mucronatum*) is unbranched; “needle-tip” describes the violet-blue tepals that have a short point on the tip. Found in almost every county of Virginia, this species grows in fields, forests, clearings and dry woodlands.

Annual Blue-eyed-grass (*S. rosulatum*) is not native; the petals are lighter, and a conspicuous dark ring surrounds the center. This introduced species is common in the Gulf coastal states, and is spreading northward, growing in fields and disturbed ground.

The flowers of Eastern Yellow Stargrass (*Hypoxis hirsuta*) are yellow and the leaves are grass-like. Growing in woodlands and clearings, this little plant is conspicuous in roadsides ditches on Jamestown Island and is common throughout eastern and central U.S. and central Canada. A member of the Stargrass Family Hypoxidaceae, these flowers have six rather than three stamens; they are included here because the shape of the flowers and the grass-like leaves suggest those of the Blue-eyed-grasses.

Helen Hamilton and Gustav Hall

Our 2018 Annual Native Plant Sale

Our Treasurer reports a net profit of \$3359.14 from this year's sale. Not bad, considering that our purchases of plants and seedlings from nurseries this year were up due to cold weather that damaged or slowed the growth of the plants we were growing ourselves for the sale!

It takes a village to hold our plant sale each year, and we have a lot of people to thank—*Thank You All!*

Here are a few of the jobs that were filled by volunteers:

- ❁ Potting plants from their gardens or at a Potting Party
- ❁ Storing plants (special thanks to the Etchbergers for long-term caring)
- ❁ Collecting pots for plants
- ❁ Collecting boxes at grocery stores to use at the plant sale
- ❁ Transportation—loading and moving plants
- ❁ Picking up plants at garden centers/nurseries
- ❁ Preparing plant lists and other forms
- ❁ Compiling handouts to distribute at the sale
- ❁ Greeting people during the sale
- ❁ Monitoring the tables and providing guidance
- ❁ Answering questions about plants
- ❁ Tallying costs of plants
- ❁ Cashiering and helping customers
- ❁ Set-up and clean-up
- ❁ And more...

Thanks to all for their help in making our 2018 plant sale a great success. We had a great turnout of volunteers and buyers. Thanks so much to everyone—we couldn't do it without you!

The Plant Sale Team



Cathy Flanagan

This year's venue, the Williamsburg Community Building



Cathy Flanagan

John Clayton Chapter members preparing for the onslaught

John Clayton Chapter Calendar

- Saturday, May 12** **10 am: Mountain Laurel Meander at Mariners' Museum Park, Newport News**
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(See Page 7 for details and directions.)
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Keep a lookout for announcements about additional walks and other events in the local newspapers and on our website at www.vnps.org/john-clayton.

Below is a membership renewal form. Please contact Membership Chair **Cathy Flanagan** at 757-879-1997 or at **flanagan.catherine@gmail.com** with questions about your membership.

Membership Form for John Clayton Chapter, Virginia Native Plant Society

(Place checks in the boxes below next to your selections.)

I am a **new member** of the John Clayton Chapter **renewing member** of the John Clayton Chapter

Name		
Address		
City	State	Zip
Email*	Phone*	

I would like to receive my newsletters electronically at the email address above.

Membership dues

Individual (\$30) Family (\$40) Patron (\$50) Sustaining (\$100) Life (\$500)

Student (\$15) Associate (\$40) —for groups who designate one person as delegate

I wish to make an additional contribution in the amount of \$ to John Clayton Chapter to VNPS

This is a gift membership; please include a card with my name as donor.

I have time a little time no time to help with activities.

I do not wish to be listed in a chapter directory.

**Please Note:* John Clayton Chapter does not distribute any of our membership information to other organizations. It is used only by the officers and chairpersons of our chapter.

Make your check payable to **VNPS** and mail to: VNPS Membership Chair
400 Blandy Farm Lane, Unit 2
Boyce, VA 22610