



Claytonia

Newsletter of the John Clayton Chapter, Virginia Native Plant Society

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Our March 19th Meeting: “Native Plants in Marginal Landscapes and the Virginia ‘Pollinator-Smart’ Program”

Come hear **Dr. Doug DeBerry** from William & Mary and VHB, Inc. speak on the process of using native plantings in “marginal” landscapes to increase ecological integrity. Marginal landscapes are defined as physical settings that are incidental to human development: abandoned sites, fallow fields, maintained utility easements, transportation corridor right-of-ways, agricultural fringes, perimeter lands in industrial settings, and so on. Using native species to improve ecosystem function and aesthetics as well as reduce the burden of management in marginal lands is a potential win-win for stakeholders, but not all are convinced that the effort is worth the expense. Dr. DeBerry will speak about current trends on this topic, including the field of Integrated Vegetation Management (IVM) and its role in establishing self-maintaining and sustainable native landscapes. Finally, Dr. DeBerry will introduce the brand new Virginia DEQ- and DCR-sponsored “Pollinator-Smart Solar Industry,” including the unique challenges that solar power generating facilities present as marginal landscapes, and the approaches that the state is advocating to promote healthy habitats in this burgeoning Virginia land use.



Douglas A. DeBerry is a Research Assistant Professor of Environmental Science and Policy (ENSP) at William & Mary. He is also a Senior Environmental Scientist and Associate at VHB, Inc., a private consulting firm. He received his PhD in Marine Science from VIMS, his MA in Biology from William & Mary, and his BA in Environmental Science from the University of Virginia. Under the ENSP program at W&M, he teaches courses in restoration ecology, applied ecological methods, and contemporary issues in environmental science. He has been on faculty at W&M since 2009 and has been a private-sector scientist for 27 years. His academic research focuses on ecosystem dynamics in compensatory mitigation, including biological invasion and ecological integrity.

He also conducts research on floristics and conservation, with a geographic emphasis on the mid-Atlantic region.

The meeting begins at **7:00 pm** in **Room A** of the **James City County Recreation Center**, 5301 Longhill Road, Williamsburg, Virginia 23188-2700. **See you there!**

From the President



This is it! Spring is coming soon! On February 2, the groundhog told us that we have only six more weeks of winter. My early daffodils are beginning to bloom. As I cut back the ornamental grasses, I noticed a lot of green activity among the native plants. They are already beginning to show signs of growth, I feel like cheering them: grow baby grow!

Our plant sale inventory is bigger than last year, thanks to the many digs in which we participated. We are planning another plant dig in March at Stonehouse Elementary Habitat Garden. The exact date has not yet been set; we will send an email closer to the date. This year, our plant sale will be on Saturday, May 2, 2020 at the Williamsburg Community Center located at 401 North Boundary Street near the library. We plan to start the sale at 9:30 am and end at 1:30 pm. That is earlier than last year. We need your help more than ever, since the Bird Club members who helped last year will be unable to do so as they will be involved here in Williamsburg in a statewide Bird Club meeting that weekend. The Master Gardeners will have their plant sale on the same date. To say Williamsburg is going to be a busy place that weekend is an understatement. Like last year, the sale will happen in one very busy day: transport plants, set up the sale, sell, and clean up after the sale. Volunteers are essential to making this happen. Please consider helping us and volunteering to help with one of the aspects of the sale or, if you are a super hero, helping us all day. Send an email to Adrienne Frank at adrienne-gary@cox.net or Sue Voigt at svoigt1@cox.net if you can help. One thing is important for you to know: we love to have you bring plants from your gardens to sell. Please bring them to the Etchberger's home during our March potting party. The address is 100 Woodland Road, Williamsburg, 23188. If you are unable to come to our future potting party, drop your plants off at my house, 229 West Queens Drive, Williamsburg, VA 23185 (cell 757-784-2882). We absolutely cannot accept any plants on the day of the sale, since there will be no time to label, price, and place plants in the appropriate location during the sale. In March, we expect that during a work day to be announced we will move the plants that need extra help emerging to the hot house that the Etchbergers are building for us. We thank them for their help on our behalf.

In Environmental news, there were some very sad news as this year began. In Mexico, the body of one of the “guardians” of the Monarch sanctuary was found murdered. Shortly afterward, a second person involved with the monarch sanctuary was murdered. The Monarchs we so much treasure and love overwinter in Mexico and there is very little we can do to protect them there. Some Mexicans invade the sanctuary to cut the trees for fire. Those are the only trees on which the monarch butterflies attach themselves so they can survive the winter. The second news was the article in the *Guardian* written by Phoebe Weston about British hedgehogs. Britain’s hedgehogs could be at greater risk after Brexit because hedges may no longer be protected by EU agriculture regulations, a report says. Under EU law, hedgerows cannot be cut during the bird-nesting season and two-metre wild “buffer” strips cannot be doused with pesticides or ploughed up. This prohibition is designed to protect hedgerow habitats that provide refuge for 80% of woodland birds and 50% of all mammals. Unless new legislation is enacted in Great Britain there can be a significant loss of habitat for the country’s dwindling hedgehog population, which has already fallen by 97% since the 1950s, according to a 2018 report. Nests of woodland and farmland birds such as linnets, yellowhammer, and turtledoves could also be destroyed. Mammals such as field voles and hazel dormice are also at risk. While as a gardener I do not like voles, I am very fond of cute hedgehogs.

On a positive note, in a story on February 5 I read that Israeli scientists have been able to grow date palms from seeds that date from the time of Jesus. These seeds were found in the Judean desert. The seeds were carefully chosen to be intact and free from insect damage. Interestingly, those ancient seeds are 30% bigger than current seeds. The scientists have grown both male and female palms and they hope to have fruit-bearing trees soon! However, I did learn that most dates, then and now, do not come from seed grown plants, but from clones of very high producing date palms. Another positive story in the *Guardian* was that of an unlikely request by the new President of the British Ecological Society and Ecology Professor at Bristol University, Jane Memmott: Gardeners should avoid mowing over dandelions on their lawn if they want to help bees. Dandelions—which will start flowering in the UK this month—provide a valuable food source for early pollinators coming out of hibernation, including solitary bees, honey bees and hoverflies. Each dandelion head contains up to 100 individual flowers, known as florets, which contain nectar and pollen. “There are 240 species of dandelion in the UK,” Ms. Memmott said. “If dandelions were rare, people would be fighting over them. Because they’re common, people pull them out and spray them off and all sorts of horrible things. Just let them flower.” Maybe we all need to have a change of viewpoint of that little yellow flower we all like to exterminate in our lawns.

Lucile Kossodo

New Members

We welcome six new members to the John Clayton Chapter:

Shea Stahmer of Poquoson, **Timothy Morgan** of Cardinal, **Sieglinde Smith** of Mathews, and **Cynthia Abbott, Julie Kelly, and Roy Gee** of Williamsburg.

Upcoming Plant Walks

Saturday, March 14 at 10:00 am: Naked Tree Walk at Freedom Park

Join **Charlie Dubay** for a walk around Freedom Park on Saturday, March 14th at 10:00 a.m. to identify trees in their winter condition. Learn how to distinguish woody plants by their growth habit, bark, buds, bud scales and leaf scars. Meet at the Freedom Park Interpretive Center parking lot, 5537 Centerville Rd., Williamsburg.

Contact **Meegan Wallace** at clm003@verizon.net for more information. Saturday, March 28th will be our backup date in case of inclement weather.



Flowering Dogwood's bark ...and its twigs and buds

Saturday, April 4 at 10:00 am: Matteson Trail Pawpaw, Hampton

This walk will attempt to catch Pawpaw in bloom. We will also see Cottonwood, Shagbark Hickory, and what appears to be American Elm, as well as lots of Jack in the Pulpit. We will walk in 1 mile and then backtrack to the parking lot for 2 miles in all. This is a wide, paved trail, suitable for wheelchair or stroller as well as sneakers. The area is very damp, so if you wish to follow on the brief off-trail jaunts, waterproof shoes or boots are recommended. Meet in the parking lot of the Hampton Performing Arts/Hampton Youth & Aquatic Center, 300 Butler Farm Rd, Hampton, VA.

Email **Susie Yager** at soozigus@cox.net to register.



A Pawpaw blossom

Friday, April 24 at 10:30 am: Zuni Pine Barrens Natural Area Preserve

Join Natural Heritage Southeastern Land Steward **Darren Loomis** for a walk to see the rare pine barrens community in the spring. The state-rare pixiemoss and sheep laurel as well as most of the blueberries and huckleberries, dwarf iris, and other species will be flowering. The site is about 1.5 hrs from Williamsburg and 1 hr from Newport News. We will meet at the main gate for the preserve located near 24326 Thomas Woods



Pixiemoss

Trail, Zuni, VA. Be advised that field trip attendees should dress in long pants and sturdy shoes and that there are no facilities at the preserve. Packing a snack and water is also recommended.

Contact **Meegan Wallace** at clm003@verizon.net for more information.



Sheep Laurel

Saturday, May 23 at 10:00 am: Mountain Laurel Meander at Mariners' Museum Park

Enjoy meandering through a natural bower of mature Mountain Laurel. 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. We will walk an older, unimproved trail through the woods, in places steep, slanted, soft, or uneven, with loose logs, protruding roots, fallen trees, an occasional depression or hole, and possibly mud. Spray feet, ankles and cuffs against ticks and chiggers. The mountain laurel bloom season is short and its timing is variable depend-



Mountain Laurel

ing on weather conditions; we will hope to catch this spring's bloom. We will also see masses of Christmas Fern, Bracken Fern, and Galax, with a smattering of May-apple and Trailing Arbutus. The walk will be led by **Susie Yager** and **Larry Lewis**. 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 Yager** at soozigus@cox.net to register.

From Helen...

Wildflower of the Month for February:

Skunk Cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*)

Skunk Cabbage is the first flowering plant of spring, sometimes appearing in January, but the bloom is not at all typical. Poking up through the snow is a purple-brown and green mottled hood, which is a modified leaf, 2–5 inches long. Inside is a nearly round flower head with many small, tightly packed individual flowers. They “bloom” when stamens emerge above the four tiny sepals. After the pollen has been released, the stamens wither, and a style grows out of the middle of each flower to be pollinated by insects with pollen from other flower heads.

The flowers of Skunk Cabbage have no colorful petals to attract pollinating insects. Instead, they emit an odor similar to decomposing flesh which attracts the first insects of the year, usually carrion and dung flies, but also beetles, bees and mosquitoes.

Biologists have found the flowers produce warmth over a period of 12–14 days, remaining an average of 36 degrees F above the outside air temperature, day or night. Like a warm-blooded animal, they can regulate their warmth. The heat and foul smell attract the first pollinating insects of the year, usually flies.

After the plant blooms, large oval leaves resembling cabbage unfold and can grow 3–4 feet long. By mid-May a wetland can be covered with skunk cabbage leaf rosettes. By June the leaves begin to decay; since the plant forms no woody fibers, a large part of the leaf and stem is water, and the leaves simply dissolve. By mid-June the fruit heads are roundish balls, wine-red, about two inches in diameter. In August the fruit head falls apart, leaving seeds on the ground to be eaten, to decompose, or to germinate. By the end of summer, no trace of the plant is left, but a fully-grown Skunk Cabbage has a massive root system, with several years' reproductive parts partially formed within.

Skunk Cabbage is widely distributed in the state of Virginia, and its range extends from Quebec and Nova Scotia to North Carolina and west to Minnesota and Iowa. A nearly identical plant of northeast Asia is a close living relative. Three other members of the huge, mostly tropical Arum family are familiar in the Coastal Plain—Jack-in-the-Pulpit (*Ariseama triphyllum*), Arrow Arum or Tuckahoe (*Peltandra virginica*), and Golden Club (*Orontium aquaticum*).

Calcium oxalate crystals in the leaves are irritating if eaten and may be toxic. With these crystals and the disagreeable scent, most animals will avoid eating them except when the leaves are young in the spring. The roots are considered toxic, but Native Americans used them for cramps, convulsions, toothaches and as a poultice for wounds. Early physicians used the leaves for coughs, asthma, and externally in lotions for itching and rheumatism.



Helen Hamilton

Emerging leaves and flower of Skunk Cabbage, above, and a peek inside its flower hood, below



Lisa Nickel



Helen Hamilton

Skunk Cabbage leaves later in the spring

Wildflower of the Month for March: Red Maple (*Acer rubrum*)

One of the first signs of spring is the red haze over the bare limbs of our local maple trees. This would be the male and female flowers of Red Maple. Typical of many species, the male flowers appear first as a yellowish pink, closely followed by the darker pink blossoms of the female trees. When fertilized, the familiar maple “keys” form and drop from the twigs like miniature helicopters.



Helen Hamilton



Helen Hamilton

Left, the “keys” of fertilized female Red Maple flowers
Above, its male flowers

Red Maple is a medium-sized tree with smooth gray young trunk bark and broken darker older bark. The highly variable leaves have 3 to 5 lobes and are whitened underneath. It is well named, as its flowers, petioles, twigs and seeds are all red to varying degrees. However, this tree is most well known for its brilliant deep scarlet foliage in autumn. Many cultivars are available with varying shades of red and leaf shapes.

One of the most common and widespread deciduous trees of eastern North America, Red Maple ranges from Minnesota east to Newfoundland, south to Florida, and southwest to Texas. Usually occurring in low, wet sites, this tree is adaptable to a very wide range of site conditions. It can be found growing in swamps, on poor dry soils, and most anywhere in between.

Red Maple will tolerate some air pollution and is easy to transplant. With striking fall foliage and pleasing form, it is often used as a shade tree for landscapes. Maple syrup and lumber production occur on a small scale from red maple.

Helen Hamilton

Our 2020 Native Plant Sale is on Saturday, May 2!

Our annual native plant sale is the way we educate the public about using native plants in the landscape, and it helps raise funds for our educational programs and Nature Camp scholarships. This year's sale will be held on Saturday, May 2 from 9:30 am to 1:30 pm. The location is the same as last year, the Williamsburg Community Building, 401 North Boundary Street, which is across from the Williamsburg Regional Library.

Along with selling plants that are native to Virginia, we offer expert information about the plants, growing conditions, and attracting wildlife. Additional resources will be available at our display.

We need your help! In preparation for the Plant Sale, we need to pot, sort and label plants. We need volunteers on Tuesday afternoon, March 17 starting at 1 pm at 100 Woodland Road in Croaker (Joan & Jim Etchberger's home) to help organize and inventory the plants we potted last fall.

Anyone willing to donate some native plants from their own garden should contact Sue Voigt (svoigt1@cox.net) or Lucile Kossodo (lkossodo@cox.net). If possible, those plants should be potted and brought on March 17.

On the day of the sale, volunteers are needed to help deliver plants and set up for the sale. During the sale, volunteers help with monitoring tables, tallying prices, and cashiering. Of course, at the end of the sale, we will need help with clean up.

Please sign up to volunteer for the sale by email to Sue Voigt or at the Chapter meeting on March 19. Thanks to the members who already signed up at the January Chapter meeting.

Thank you from the 2020 Plant Sale Committee:

Adrienne Frank, Cathy Flanagan, Lucile Kossodo, Cynthia Abbott, and Sue Voigt



John Clayton Chapter Calendar

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(More on Page 4.)

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(See Page 4 for more details and directions.)

**Saturday,
May 2**

9:30 am–1:30 pm: John Clayton Chapter's Annual Plant Sale at the **Williamsburg Community Center**, 401 North Boundary Street across from the Williamsburg Regional Library.

(See Page 8 for more info.)

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Email **Susie Yager** at soozigus@cox.net to register.

(Details and more directions on Page 5.)

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.