

# Claytonia



Newsletter of the John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

Volume 24, Number 1

January–March 2008

## Officers

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## Our next meeting on January 17

Byron Carmean and Gary Williamson will tell about the discovery and exploration of an ancient (1500+ years old) water tupelo (*Nyssa aquatica*)-bald cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) swamp forest in Southampton County at our January membership meeting. The meeting will begin at 7 pm at a new meeting site: the James City County/Williamsburg Community Recreation Center on Longhill Road.

Please come to hear and see what Byron, Gary, and others found when they explored this deepwater swamp and learn their theories about why it has survived to the present.

**Donna Ware**

## Directions

Take VA Rt. 199 to Longhill Road. Exit on Longhill Rd. If you are coming from the west (e.g. by way of Exit 234), turn **left** on Longhill Rd.; if you are coming from the **east** (e.g. by way of Exit 242A), turn **right** on Longhill Road. Follow Longhill Road as it curves to the right around a large water tower. After passing the tower, you will see the large parking lot of the meeting site on the **left**. Its address is 5301 Longhill Road. We will meet in **ROOM B**.

## A memorable walk through an old growth forest

A number of chapter members visited this site with Byron Carmean and Gary Williamson this past fall; here is an eloquent account of one member's experience in this awesome place.

Rare in this world is the place where the activity of man is absent, either as disturber or as make-up artist. But a couple of years ago, Byron Carmean found such a place in a swamp on the Nottaway River in Southampton County. Tucked inside an 1100-acre tract owned by International Paper is an untouched cypress-tupelo old growth forest covering nearly 40 acres.

Trees in this area are estimated at 1500 to over 2000 years old. They are larger than those reliably measured at other sites to be that old, but may just have better conditions, leaving estimators uncertain. What is certain is that their august presence creates a world apart, where awe and wonder are spontaneous and refreshment of spirit makes any visitor long to return.

Nine curious visitors gathered on the banks of the Nottaway, after our various journeys—six of us John Clayton people leaving from Williamsburg, a couple of other VNPS'ers from Virginia Beach and the paper company forester charged with arranging the sale of this property (more on this later), under Byron's capable leadership. Serenity seeped into us as we waited our turns on the riverbank to be ferried across in Byron's canoe. The river was broad and slow. Even here on the edge of a logging road, an unusual parsley hawthorn in bright berries caught our attention.

As we were deposited two by two in the quiet swampland, we were met by *Nyssa aquatica*—a water tupelo with a large "cave" in the buttress of its lower trunk. It looked big enough for 3 or 4

persons, but attempts to get a picture with someone in the cave stopped when the river sucked off a boot and left a far less intrepid explorer floundering knee-deep on a sinking, sandy bottom. Discretion prevailed, the boot was rescued and on that occasion only damp feet resulted. Later explorations did leave one person fully soaked after slipping in the spreading waters, and the unwary found cypress knees to be a real hazard. We learned to keep our eyes down when walking and stop when looking up. Looking up (or down) was so filled with interest and beauty that no one thought of cutting the walk short.



Photo: Helen Hamilton  
Byron Carmean carried passengers across the river.

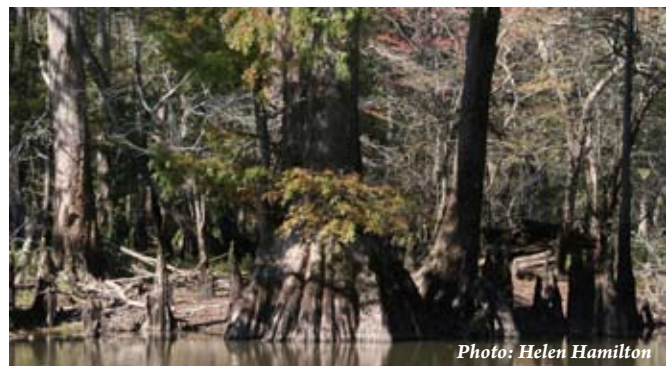


Photo: Helen Hamilton  
Our view as the canoe approached the disembarking point.

The recent rains had sent water down the river from the west and water was slowly rising over these bottom-lands as we walked. The area where we left the canoe in 4–5 inches of water had been dry two days earlier, and had 8–10 inches of water by the time we returned. The tupelo fruits were floating in large numbers, looking like elongated black olives on the surface of the very clear water. Byron explained that they will float until the water recedes and then sprout and root where they are deposited. Millions will grow each year; already much of the ground was heavily covered with them. But, if the rains continue, as they normally do, all will be drowned by the coming spring. Only in a prolonged drought (3–4 years in duration) will the young trees develop sufficiently to withstand the annual flooding. Such droughts are often more than 100 years apart. (As an aside, Byron told us that it has recently been established that the Jamestown settlers arrived at the end of a 7–8 year drought that was unprecedented in the region. They were not feckless farmers, but were working in adverse conditions of which they were unaware, and the Indians had little to share at the time.)

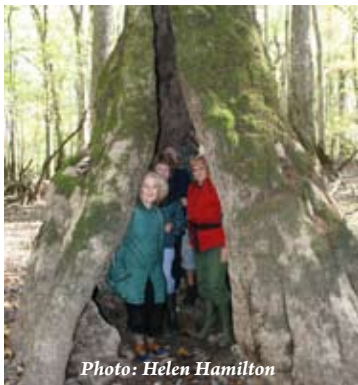


Photo: Helen Hamilton

Half of them are hidden from view, but there are 8 people inside the hollow buttress of this water tupelo!

One of the strangest sights was that of hardwood trees (ash, black oak, elm, maple) perched on stumps of cypress or tupelo. These strong, ancient “mounds” held the young (comparatively, though some were more than four feet around) trees up out of the water, while providing a continuous moisture channel for them. As these stumps slowly rotted away, the young hardwood roots would reach down in intricate lacy patterns, supporting themselves on “stilts”.

Walking into the swamp, sometimes on dry land not yet reached by the spreading water, we found old growth tupelo often hollowed out at the base, while remaining green and healthy. All of us stepped inside one of these tree caves while Byron took our picture.

Everyone was standing at full height, and there was room for more.



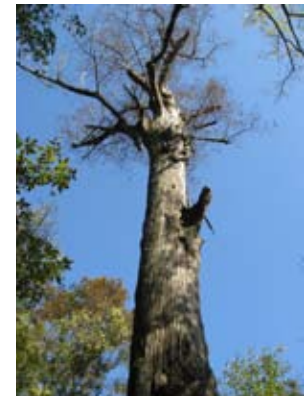
Photo: Lucile Kossodo

Ancient trees were accompanied by many tupelo of “middle age”—matrons with swirling skirts hurrying, it seemed, to the ball. This charming effect was created by a swirling series of lines, like a DQ cone turned upside down, in many, though by no means all, of the tupelos. Tupelos are thickest in the wettest sites, often crowding out the cypress.

We finally arrived at Big Mama, the largest cypress tree in Virginia. Her top is broken off, and still she reaches to 123 feet. All around her trunk, red-blooded sap “beads” sparkled in the sun. While cypresses do not create the cave hollows in their bases that tupelos have, they are nevertheless hollow. And Byron amazed and entertained us all by drumming on the hollow buttress of Big Mama, producing a deep booming sound that reverberated.

This place that seems so pristine has nevertheless been reached by the hand of man; quite near to Big Mama is the 8-foot stump of another huge cypress that was logged out by helicopter two years ago. Footholds were cut with saws into the buttress for the men to stand on, and the tree was neatly sawed right at the top of the buttress and lifted out with no visible damage to the surrounding forest.

While the great trees dominate the landscape, smaller species are plentiful as well. Resurrection ferns were green and very live on many tree trunks in the wake of the rains, and aromatic swamp camphor perfumed the air in many places. We saw *boltonia* flowering—even looking up at us from underneath the rising water—and shade mudflower, very rare in Virginia, as well as false nettle, *Pilea pumila*, pink and white *Polygonum* and *Hibiscus laevis*. *Carya aquatica* (water hickory), Carolina ash, river birch (many of which have drowned in the floods since 2003), and the Virginia champion *Quercus laredo* (overcup oak) were frequently seen.



Photos: Mary Turnbull

Big Mama is just too big to fit in one photo.





Photo: Lucile Kossodo

A gathering of knee gnomes.

Many different mosses grow here, both aquatic and not. The highwater line on the trees (about 5 feet) is defined by a moss that will not grow if submerged, while the lower parts of the trunks are often covered in a variety of mosses that can survive submersion. The cypress knees are frequently covered in long flowing strings of a black moss, making them look like groups of gnomes standing about the forest floor.



Photo: Lucile Kossodo

This is a place that has to be seen to be believed—and even more, must be felt—as a presence of quiet majesty set apart from day-to-day concerns. There is hope that it will be placed in a preserve. The state is currently negotiating for purchase of the tract, but many legal and financial

hurdles—all those day-to-day concerns—must be faced and overcome. And its magic would be quickly effaced if trails and daily tours were provided.

**Eunice Hyer**



Photo: Helen Hamilton

Byron Carmean, Shaune Reams, Lucile Kossodo, Lee Bristow, Helen Hamilton, Eunice Hyer and Patsy Wells pause during their walk for a group photo.



Photo: Lucile Kossodo

Some cypress knees were only inches high, while others were taller than some visitors.



Photo: Phillip Merritt

Phillip Merritt, Mary Turnbull, Donna Ware and Louise Menges fit comfortably inside a hollow at Big Mama's base.



Photo: Lucile Kossodo

Byron leans on a “no visible means of support” tree as he explains how it came to be on its “stilts”.



Photo: Mary Turnbull

Adrienne Frank, Mary Turnbull, Donna Ware and Gary Williamson examine a detail with a hand lens.



Photo: Mary Turnbull

We waited here to be ferried back to our cars—Byron and his canoe can be seen approaching from behind a huge tupelo.

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## In Memoriam

With sadness we report that Jim Guckeyson passed away at his home in North on December 1, following a brief battle with pancreatic cancer. We extend our most heartfelt sympathy to Betsy, and to their two sons and their families. In Jim's honor, the chapter has made a donation to the Gloucester Library for purchase of a book related to native plants which we hope will be useful to the literacy volunteers working at the library.

## President's report 2006

Another vigorous year for John Clayton Chapter with well-attended field trips and excellent speakers. Many thanks to our chapter members who organized these events. It is such a joy to work with members who generate good ideas, *and* follow-through with action! For example, Ralph and Carolyn Will who promised to provide the snacks at the annual meeting, and were present for the entire event, and Gloria Diggs, who volunteered free snacks and delivered them early each day—she was at Watermen's Hall before 7 am on Sunday, carrying in trays of goodies.

Outreach has expanded with the launching of our very own website (thanks, Jan!), the John Clayton Chapter t-shirt, displays at events in Yorktown, CNU, and Farmer's Market in Williamsburg, publication of Native Plants for Tidewater Gardens by Sue Voigt, newspaper publications featuring a wildflower of the month, and the travels of the Jamestown lily to local events (thanks, Cynthia!).

Chapter members continue offering service by regular maintenance of Melissa's Meadow and the Ellipse Garden at Freedom Park, and presentations to garden clubs and Master Gardener groups.

Our fund-raising efforts were wildly successful this year—the plant sale and raffle at the Annual Meeting, allowing us to fund two Nature Camp scholarships and to present a book to York County Library.

My personal gratitude and thanks to all who made this year exciting and productive—I could *not* do it without all of you!

**Helen Hamilton**

## Libbey Oliver's presentation at Quarterpath Park

Our speaker at the November 15 meeting was chapter member and manager of the Williamsburg Farmer's Market Libbey Oliver.

Libbey spoke on the environmental and health benefits of sustainable agriculture in our area and nationwide,

and stressed the importance of buying local and supporting our local farmers. Gloria Diggs provided refreshments made from nuts, vegetables and herbs that she grew. The next date for the Williamsburg Farmers' Market is February 9. For more info visit [www.williamsburgfarmersmarket.com](http://www.williamsburgfarmersmarket.com) or call 757/259-3768.

## The Chapter makes a gift to W&M's Herbarium

In early 2007, acting curator Beth Chambers led a tour of The College of William and Mary Herbarium for members of the chapter. In appreciation, the board voted to donate a volume of the *Flora of North America* to the Herbarium. Below is a letter of thanks we received in October from Beth.

Dear Officers and Members,

Today the Herbarium of the College of William and Mary received Volume 24, *Magnoliophyta: Commelinidae (in part): Poaceae, part 1*, of the *Flora of North America* that you purchased as a gift. The *Flora of North America* is a valuable and frequently consulted part of the herbarium's library, used by students and faculty for research. We are sincerely grateful for your generous gift of this reference text. Your monetary support is a generous addition to the continual time and specimens donated to the herbarium by John Clayton VNPS members.

Thank You Sincerely,  
Martha Case, Director  
Beth H. Chambers, Curator



*Libbey Oliver holds a commemorative poster for the Farmers' Market, and Gloria Diggs a canvas tote bag. Both items are available at the Farmers' Market.*

**Pat Baldwin**



## **New Quarter Park meadow restoration is proposed**

At the January board meeting, Shirley Devan, chapter member and President of the Williamsburg Bird Club, proposed the chapter join with the Bird Club and Master Naturalists to work toward restoring habitat for bobwhite in a meadow at New Quarter Park. Bobwhite populations in our area have long been declining due to growth of human populations and the inevitable loss of habitat this brings, and sightings are becoming more and more rare. If this proposal is accepted by the two other organizations as well, the chapter plans to provide plant identification, advice, labor and up to \$100 to this endeavour in 2008.

## **Trees bare their all for us!**

**Nude Tree Walk Saturday, Feb. 9 at 1:30 pm**

Back by popular demand! Dendrologist Dr. Stewart Ware will lead us through the mysteries of bark and twigs as he helps us identify bare trees. The walk will take place in the Williamsburg area of James City County. (Rain date is Saturday, Feb. 16.) For the past two years this walk has attracted 40 participants, in spite of the cold weather, so you'll want to register early by calling the Wares at 757/565-0657. Location and directions will be given when you register.

## **From Mary Berg...**

**Do you have suggestions for future field trips?**

If there is a location you think would make a good field trip destination, but we haven't visited yet, or you think we should revisit one, Mary Berg would like to hear from you! Alternatively, do any of you belong to other organizations which might like to invite our members on *their* field trips? Give her a call at 804/693-3568.

**...and a reminder**

Now through February is the best time to transplant trees!

## **The VNPS site registry program and the Clayton Chapter's registry sites**

The VNPS Site Registry Program began in 1990 with the registry of the G. Richard Thompson Wildlife Management Area in Fauquier Co. where masses of *Trillium grandiflorum* grace the forest floor for many square miles. A total of 17 sites have been registered to date. These sites are protected by strictly voluntary, non-binding commitments by the landowner.

To be eligible for registry, a site must be significant regionally or statewide because of its unusual native plant species, communities, and/or pristine habitat. The VNPS

Botany Chair reviews applications. During the registry process, knowledgeable members from the VNPS (aided by advice from conservation agencies) discuss with the land owner how best to protect the site. Members of the registering chapter make follow-up visits annually to watch for any changes in its status over time.

The John Clayton Chapter has registered two sites, both in James City Co.: Grove Creek (1995) in Grove and Greenhaven (2001) in Norge. Both sites are within deep ravines formed by streams cutting downward through strata bearing fossil shell beds. The soils of such ravines are calcium-rich due to the weathering of the shells. In the coastal plain, species known as "mountain disjuncts" are largely restricted to these basic soils. These "mountain disjuncts" probably once flourished from the mountains to the coast during early post-glacial times. Today, although their primary range is more or less restricted to the mountain and western Piedmont provinces, they continue to persist in a limited way in calcareous ravines in the coastal plain.

The Grove Creek registry site is owned by the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and Busch Properties and is sandwiched between The Country Road and Busch Gardens. It is part of a ravine system that supports a greater number of "mountain disjuncts" (31) than any other area yet reported. Among the "mountain disjuncts" growing within the registry site are bishop's cap (*Mitella diphylla*), mountain camellia (*Stewartia ovata*), zigzag goldenrod (*Solidago flexicaulis*), silvery spleenwort (*Deparia acrostichoides*), and glade fern (*Diplazium pycnocarpon*). Southern species near their northern range limit also inhabit this site, including southern sugar maple (*Acer barbatum*). Busch Gardens continues to expand, and there is urgent need to protect more of this ravine system.

The Greenhaven site is owned by Wayne and Delores Moyer of Norge. Stunning numbers of dwarf ginseng (*Panax trifolium*), known from only 6 counties in the Virginia coastal plain, and dog-violets (*Viola labradorica*), a mountain disjunct, carpet the floor of this steep-walled ravine. Other inhabitants include such charismatic species as shining clubmoss (*Huperzia lucidula*) and blue monk'shood (*Aconitum uncinatum*). Clayton Chapter members have generated an extensive plant list for the Greenhaven site which will soon appear on our website, [claytonvnps.org](http://claytonvnps.org). The Moyers are dedicated conservationists who plan to protect this site in perpetuity. See the January 2001 issue of *Claytonia* for previous articles about Greenhaven and calcareous ravine communities

**Donna Ware**

## News from Patti Gray about the 2008 Plant Sale April 26...

(Location: the Williamsburg Community Building, 401 North Boundary Street)

Seems like I have just put the garden to bed for a long winter's nap, and already I am bringing soil inside to start seeds for the plant sale. In order to have a small pot with a promising plant by the end of April, I will need about 3 months of growing. And to prepare for planting, I look for Harry Phillips on the book shelf—*Growing and Propagating Wild Flowers*. Concerning timing, Phillips suggests, "In general, seedlings remain in the seed flat for three to four weeks after germination and then in individual containers for five to six weeks more."

I find his general advice about planting seed indoors to be helpful, so I am passing it along for your consideration.

*"When seed is to be sown in pots, flats, or other containers, follow this procedure:*

*Make sure containers are at least 3 inches deep (to avoid their drying out so quickly) and fill the containers to their tops with seed mix.*

*Tamp the mix lightly but firmly to ½ inch below the top of the container.*

*Moisten the mix; it should be moist but not wet at the time of sowing.*

*Scatter tiny seeds on the surface and cover with a dusting of soil. When possible, sow seed thinly to avoid crowding later. Larger seed should be sown in rows at ¼ inch spacing and covered with an amount of soil twice the seed diameter.*

*Label containers with the species and sowing date.*

*Water small seeds from below, that is immerse the container in a shallow tray of water until the surface of the soil is moist. Water larger seed from above using a water breaker or rose.*

*A thin layer of milled sphagnum moss may be spread over the surface of the seed mix after sowing to retain moisture and inhibit fungal growth."*

His book also gives specific advice for dozens of native plants. If each of us only planted one variety of seed, just think of how many home grown plants we would have by April! If you wonder what was in demand at last year's sale, here is a short list of what I remember customers asking about: Spiderwort ( the VNPS 2008 Wildflower of the Year), Butterfly Weed, Columbine, Foamflower, Green and Gold, Bleeding Heart, Wild Ginger, Jacob's Ladder, Coreopsis, Great Blue Lobelia, and all the other usual favorites that you provided. Of course, the shrubs and trees (especially the large donations by Sylvia and Sid Sterling and John McCloskey) were also in great demand.

Potting parties will be held again this year and that schedule will be announced at the March meeting and posted on the JCC website. Please contact me if you have any suggestions or questions: Patti Gray, 757/645-4164, [patriciagray67@juno.com](mailto:patriciagray67@juno.com).

### ...and Cynthia Long could use your help!

Is anyone interested in helping Cynthia start plants for the sale in April?

She has 1,000 seeds planted in flats, each of which will need to be transplanted into pots before the sale, so call Cynthia Long, 259-9559, and offer your services!

## Nature Camp Scholarships

John Clayton Chapter is now considering candidates for scholarships for Summer 2008 sessions of Nature Camp at Vesuvius, Virginia. The Camp is a coeducational, academic camp that emphasizes education in natural history and environmental studies. It is intended for those with a genuine interest in the out-of-doors and the natural world. Campers attend class daily and are expected to complete a project, typically written, for each class.

More information and application forms are online at [www.naturecamp.net](http://www.naturecamp.net).

Session One, June 15–June 18, Grades 9,10,11,12

Session Two, June 29–July 12, Grades 8, 9

Session Three, July 13–July 26, Grades 6, 7

Session Four, July 27–August 9, Grades 5,6

Interested scholarship applicants must submit an essay to John Clayton Chapter covering the following points:

1. Why are you interested in Nature Camp?
2. How do you expect to benefit from the experience?
3. How might you use the knowledge gained from Nature Camp?

Send the essay for scholarship competition to Helen Hamilton, 952 Wood Duck Commons, Williamsburg, Virginia, 23188 or [helen44@earthlink.net](mailto:helen44@earthlink.net), before March 1. The John Clayton Board will be making decisions shortly thereafter. Scholarship winners will be notified by March 15; results will be posted online at [www.claytonvnps.org](http://www.claytonvnps.org). For more information, call 564-4494.

## Hospitality chair needed

Betsy Guckerson finds herself unable to continue as hospitality chair, and we are hoping to find another member willing to take over the responsibility for providing light refreshments for chapter meetings. Volunteers, anyone?

## Gloria's Goodies

At November's chapter meeting, we were treated to delicious homemade nibbles provided by Gloria Diggs, some of whose ingredients came from her own property. I asked Gloria if she would be willing to share her recipes, and she graciously agreed. Here's the first installment. Enjoy!

**Louise Menges**

### Pecan/Black Walnut Tassies

For the pastry:

1	stick butter	cream together
6 oz.	cream cheese	
2 cups	flour	add to above
pinch	salt	
¼ cup	semisweet chocolate, grated	

Combine above ingredients with a little ice water to form a soft dough (you can make this ahead and freeze)—use to make crusts for very small muffin cups.

For the filling:

¼ cup	light brown sugar
¼ cup	dark brown sugar
⅔ cup	light Karo syrup
2 cups	chopped pecans (or a mixture of pecans and black walnuts, if they are available)
2	well-beaten large eggs
1 tsp.	vanilla
¼ tsp.	lemon or almond extract

Mix filling ingredients in a large bowl, and use it to fill small muffin cups that have been lined with the pastry above. Bake in a 400° oven for 10 min., then reduce heat to 325° and bake until crust is browned. Be careful not to overcook.

Note: Sometimes I add chocolate or butterscotch morsels (¼ cup or so) to the filling mixture.

## Membership Form for VNPS (Place checks in the boxes below next to your selections.)

Yes, I want to  **join**  **renew my membership in** the John Clayton Chapter.

Name		
Address		
City	State	Zip
email	Phone	

### 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 VPNS  to John Clayton Chapter

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

## Calendar

January 17	<b>7 pm:</b> John Clayton Chapter meeting at the James City County/Williamsburg Community Recreation Center on Longhill Road. Bryon Carmean and Gary Williamson talk about an old growth tupelo-cypress forest in Southhampton Co. (for more, and for directions, see Page 1).
January 22	<b>10 am</b> at Williamsburg Library: the Virginia Garden Clubs host a talk by Chris Ludwig, principal author of <i>Flora of Virginia</i> .
February 2	<b>10am</b> at Williamsburg Botanical Garden: Pruning Clinic, taught by Art Gustafson
February 9 (a busy day!)	<b>8 am:</b> Williamsburg Bird Club walk at New Quarter Park <b>9:30 am:</b> Birders should have reached the proposed bob white habitat and can join us for an inventory and appraisal of existing plants in meadow. For details, call Helen Hamilton at 757/564-4494. <b>1:30 pm:</b> Nude Tree Walk in Williamsburg area, led by Stewart Ware; call the Wares at 757/565-0657 to register for this popular event. Location and directions will be given when you register. (See Page 5.)
March 8	VPNS annual workshop on Virginia's native orchids at University of Richmond; members will receive a flyer in January with more information.
April 13 and 15	Dragon Run Open Paddle Days—kayaks supplied ( <b>limit 12 people each day</b> ) Contact Teta Kain by phone: 804/693-5246, or email: <a href="mailto:teta@vims.edu">teta@vims.edu</a> ( <b>preferred</b> ). A rare special opportunity to paddle down the Dragon!
April 26	John Clayton Chapter Plant Sale at the Williamsburg Community Building, 401 N. Boundary St. (across from the Williamsburg Regional Library). Contact Patti Gray for more info (see Page 6).
May 31–June 7	VPNS trip to Kansas Tallgrass Prairies; check the VPNS Bulletin for more details.

### Let's go green!

We are trying to do our small part to reduce the amount of unnecessary paper cluttering our recycling boxes by posting this edition of our newsletter on our website, [www.claytonvnps.org](http://www.claytonvnps.org). We will continue to mail the newsletter to our members who prefer a paper copy. If you'd rather view Claytonia on-line and receive an email notice when the newsletter is posted to the web, you can let Helen Hamilton know at [helen44@earthlink.net](mailto:helen44@earthlink.net).



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Note expiration date; please renew as needed.  
Renewal form page 7