Claytonia

Newsletter of the John Clayton Chapter, Virginia Native Plant Society

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Our May 16 Meeting: Linda and Robert Scarth speak on "Reverie: Images from the Prairies, Woodlands and Wetlands of the Midwest"

Photographers Linda & Robert Scarth worked together developing their art—nature photography—while pursuing careers in academia and industry in the US and Australia. They continue to do so and say they make photographs because they must. Natural subjects can be abstract or realistic simultaneously, a fact which they often emphasize in their work.

The Scarths are members of several environmental organizations. Linda is the current president of the Iowa Native Plant Society. They blog about nature and photography from their web site www.scarth-photo.com, present programs, show their work in galleries, submit to publications and offer images for sale. The University of Iowa Press published their book *Deep Nature: Photographs from Iowa* celebrating the small creatures and plants found in Iowa and elsewhere in the Midwest. Their work is in several other native plant books. Thirty of the Scarths' images are in the well-respected University of Iowa Hospital & Clinics art collection and are displayed throughout their facilities.

From their home base in Cedar Rapids, Iowa the Scarths photograph locally and travel to find and make images to entice people to really look at the wonders of the world—both large and small. They have programs of plants and animals found in Botswana, Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands, Costa Rica, the Falkland Islands, Kenya and Tanzania, as well as throughout the US.

They summarize the basic principles in play in their work as follows:

- presenting the natural world in visually satisfying ways that inspire, refresh, challenge, sooth, invigorate and motivate.
- learning and teaching about the art and science of photography and the subjects and circumstances portrayed.

- expressing the idea that 'the best place is here and the best time is now', or said another way, always being present and aware as they work.
- telling a story when appropriate while inviting viewers to interpret their own stories of what they find in their images.
- focusing on the ephemeral as well as the everlasting in nature.

And most importantly, their work gives them great pleasure and in turn, they hope also provides pleasure to the viewer while encouraging protection and conservation of the natural environment.

The meeting begins at **6:45 PM** at the Yorktown Public Library at the intersection of Battle Road and Route 17 in Yorktown. **See you there!**

From the President

So with the warm weather finally here, and the plant sale coming up as I write this, I'm starting to think about my own yard. I've recently moved out to Lanexa and finally have a place big enough to plant a collection of trees. Right now my property has an understory packed full with American holly, but I'm planning to clear some of that out and liven things up with a bit more variety. I've got a big-leaf magnolia that I dug up from my previous house and a pyramid magnolia that I've managed to keep alive in a pot for about 10 years. To round out my magnolia collection I'd like to get some sweetbay, umbrella, and cucumber magnolias. Another understory tree I'd like to plant is Indian cherry *(Frangula caroliniana)*. There's a bunch of it growing behind the Governor's Palace so I've got a ready seed source. Also at CW, there are two Ogeechee tupelos *(Nyssa ogeche)* that litter the ground with large date-like seeds every year. Something that might be harder to find is horsesugar *(Symplocos tinctoria)*. There are masses of it over at the New Kent Forestry Center, but I'll have to research how best to cultivate it. And here's a special plea to Mary Turnbull: please save me some seeds from your alternate leaf dogwood! So what are you planning to grow this year? Look up the John Clayton Facebook page and let us know what you got at this year's plant sale! **Phillip Merritt**

"America's Treasure: Our Native Azeleas" was the topic at our March meeting

Our speaker, Don Hyatt, grew up in McLean, VA and lives in the home his parents built in 1951, surrounded by gardens and azaleas he began planting there as a youngster.

Don has traveled all over the U.S. to seek out azaleas and photograph them. He began his talk with a description of the native members of

the genus *Rhododendron* we call azaleas and the three color groups into which they can be divided—white, pink, and orange—illustrated with photographs of blooming plants in each group.

The Southern Appalachians are particularly rich in azaleas, in part because glaciers did not reach this far south during the Ice Ages, and he gave us an illustrated tour of sites throughout the Southern Appalachian Highlands where beautiful native species abound, including Peaks of Otter in Virginia, Mount Pisgah in North Carolinia, and Roan Mountain in Tennessee. He also described ongoing efforts to replant habitats with native azaleas, and suggested donations to the Save the Azalea Campaign associated with the National Arboretum. **Louise Menges**

New members

Welcome to new member **Kristine Wessler** of Yorktown.

Recent JCC walks

A walk around the 'Burg on March 24

A few intrepid people braved chilly weather and a light sleet to walk around Colonial Williamsburg on March 24th. Unfortunately, this year's cold winter kept our plants a week or two behind schedule. In previous years we might have been able to see things like dogwood, redbud and oak flowers beginning to open, as well as amalanchier and Carolina jessamine in full bloom. But not this year. It seemed like winter was dragging on and on—we actually had one of our few snowfalls the next day.

So we walked around the historic area grateful for whatever we could find. Though there weren't many natives in bloom, we did identify a few non-natives. And part of the process of learning natives is learning to identify what's not native (at least that's how I rationalized it). Along Nassau Street we found some mahonia sporting yellow flowers. This plant is not native on the east coast, but it is worth noting that you will often find this shade loving plant popping up in wooded areas around town. Luckily, though it tolerates woodland shade, it doesn't seem to be particularly aggressive. Another non-native blooming with yellow flowers was Cornelian Cherry dogwood. From a distance it might look like spicebush, but it's interesting to note that it has the familiar opposite leaves and prominent veins of its native cousin, flowering dogwood.

Colonial Williamsburg is a great place to see native trees, and they often use natives in ways you don't see elsewhere. In addition to the familiar red maples in bloom, there were some more unusual species used as street trees. Ironwood was easy to identify by its muscled trunk and catkins. But I was puzzled by another tree planted near the

Public Hospital. It had a very coarse branching character, sort of like black walnut, but with a distinctive bark with wavy plates. It took me a while, but I finally remembered that I had seen that bark on a Kentucky coffeetree in another part of CW. Kentucky coffetree leaves are bipinnately compound and are the largest of any tree in Eastern North America. One of the field trippers noted that it didn't have any seed pods, so there's a good chance that it was a male tree. In this setting it might be a good thing, since coffeetree pods look a bit like dead rats hanging from the tree.

"Dead rats" hang from a female Kentucky Coffeetree *(Gymnocladus dioicus)* in CW.

After the public hospital area, we went across the street to walk around the site of the John Custis Garden. Custis corresponded with many notable plantsmen in the 18th century and created a impressive 4 acre garden. Nothing remains of that garden other than an old yew tree that may be the sole remaining plant from the garden. Although there is a lot of invasive vinca and ivy on the site, there are some interesting natives trees to be seen, including a nice large black walnut and a huge eastern cottonwood. Along the wooded path behind the property we did find one paw paw bud that was about to burst open and finally, a spicebush in full yellow bloom. That spicebush saved the day! **Phillip Merritt**

Spicebush *(Lindera benzoin)* in bloom.

Upcoming walks…

A look at campus trees on Saturday, May 4 at 9:30 am

Join retired **Botany Professor Dr. Marty Mathes** for a walk around the campus of the College of William and Mary. Dr. Mathes was responsible for many of the plantings on campus and will have some interesting stories about the trees.

Meet in front of Phi Beta Kappa Hall at 9:30 am (parking is free on weekends).

A walk at Mary Turnbull's home on Saturday, May 25 at 9 am

A walk through **Mary Turnbull**'s wooded property off Jamestown Road in Williamsburg should provide glimpses of eighty-four identified native plant species, forty of which were present when the Turnbulls built their

home; one tree species on their property not often found in this area is alternate-leaf dogwood *(Cornus alternifolia)*. The terrain is somewhat hilly, but alternate paths are available. Refreshments will be served after the walk.

The Turnbull's address is 109 Woodmere Drive, The Woods. To register, contact Mary Turnbull at petalpower@verizon.net or at 757/810-8382.

From Lucile Kossodo: Where did we get plants for our 2013 Sale?

The main source of our plants is those we get when plants are divided at Stonehouse Habitat. This is our biggest plant source; in fact you could say it is our nursery. We began collecting plants last summer late in the afternoon on one hot day. At that point we began potting and dividing plants such as Joe Pye Weed, Ironweed, Maryland Golden Aster and Great Coneflower. These are plants which are slow to emerge in the fall and are very visible in the Garden. It was hot, but we dug and potted them and I brought them home to nurse until fall, when the Etchberger's yard became our staging area.

The second source for our plants is the group which was grown from seed. Our Seed Queen, Cynthia Long, and I grew milkweeds, both Butterfly Weed and Swamp Milkweed, in the fall of 2011. We had a controlled fire so as to have ashes to place on the seeds as we had learned in a presentation at a Virginia Native Plant Society meeting. These milkweeds, as well as some other seeds, emerged in the Spring of 2012 and they were potted and taken to my garden where they spent the whole summer along with other plants I grew from seed that spring. Indeed, now we are going to transplant seedlings we see emerging for next year.

Potting parties hosted by several generous homeowners supplied a third source for our plants. This year began with a potting party at Stonehouse on March 17. We were expecting a warm spring day but what we got was a wintry day with blustery cold winds and even some snowflakes; Stonehouse had little to offer in visible plants but thanks to Jan Newton's good memory we dug some plants that barely showed. The few volunteers who worked very hard on that day were a hardy brave type. We dug and potted from 9:30-1:30 pm. This was a day for hard workers and we all worked hard.

The second potting party was on March 23 at Dorothy Geyer's home. The day was beautiful and with many friendly volunteers who worked together. At the end we had some wonderful woodland plants.

March 23 was sunny but chilly! From left: Phillip Merritt, Lucile Kossodo, Kathi Mestayer, Judith Kator, Dorothy Geyer, Jim Cole, Louise Menges, and Cynthia Long.

The next potting party was supposed to be on April 5 in Gloucester, but the strong rain showers on April 4 made me realize that we should change the date (as potting party coordinator one has to make a quick decision and be available when the homeowners are able to reschedule). We changed the date to Monday, April 8 in the afternoon. That day was hot, but the wonderful hosts, Hayes and Joyce Williams, made sure we had plenty of beverages and snacks. The many volunteers came from areas all around and worked all afternoon digging and potting in the Williams' beautiful garden.

April 8 was much warmer. Judith Kator is watering newly potted plants. Behind her are Belinda Hicks, Kathleen Gierlak, John Powell, Lucile Kossodo, Chris Gwaltney and Charlotte Boudreau.

The next potting party was supposed to be a fern dig on April 6 at the Will residence. The day was a pretty one but alas, the ferns had not emerged. In fact we had to cancel it, as ferns were so spooked by the cold that they were not even up the following week! At the time I am writing I am not sure if ferns, other than Christmas and sensitive from other sources, will be available. *(Editor's note: Other ferns did become available, among them Christmas, Lady Fern, Cinnamon, Hay Scented, Kunth'a Maiden, Netted, Ostrich, Royal, and Sensitive.)*

The fourth source for our plants includes those we get from donations. We get many trees and shrubs from a donor who grows them in Gloucester and some from Williamsburg, as well as some ferns from a donor in York County. Also, some members give us plants they have dug and potted from their own gardens.

The last source is made up of plants we purchase because we know that these plants are very popular and not available from our own gardens. We bought most of our plants from Denise Greene's Sassafras Farm. We also bought some natives from Sandy's Plants in Richmond. And this year we are offering plants we have never sold before from Forest Lane Botanicals in James City County. Because these plants are not free to us, we have to charge a little more for them.

Remember the Plant Sale is our only source of income for the Nature Camp Scholarships, donations to worthy causes such as Eco Discovery Park, botanical research at William and Mary, and to fund our out of town speakers. Each one of you who volunteers and buys plants helps our cause of educating the public to grow natives. To all who have helped in big and little ways we give many thanks. **Lucile Kossodo**

May–June 2013 Wildflower profile: Equisetums

The bamboo-like dark green stems of Scouring Rush (*Equisetum hyemale* ssp. *affine)*, 3–5 feet tall, look like nothing else—they are unbranched, ridged vertically, stiff and hollow. Each joint (stem node), ringed with a black band, has a whorl of tiny, scale-like leaves fused into a sheath fringed with teeth. Lacking conventional leaves, in this plant photosynthesis is restricted to these stems. From May through September, some of the stems will produce tiny, cone-like fruiting heads at the tips, which produce numerous spores.

Preferring medium to wet soils, Scouring Rush will grow in up to 4 inches of standing water, in full sun to part shade, and tolerates a wide range of soils. This evergreen perennial can be aggressive, spreading by branched, creeping rhizomes, any small piece of which can sprout a new plant. In the home garden, its growth can be restricted by planting in containers. In the winter landscape the green stems are particularly noticeable.

Native to nearly every county in Virginia and all over the U.S. and Canada, Scouring Rush is also native to large portions of Eurasia. It typically occurs in wet woods, moist hillsides and stream banks; locally it is often associated with shell marl outcrops.

Stems of *Equisetum hymenale* (Scouring Rush)

With a 15% silica content, its stems were used by early Americans for polishing pots and pans, and as sandpaper to give a very fine, satiny finish to wood, hence the common name. The silica is water-soluble and has been used as a tea for bladder ailments. Reported as a substitute for asparagus, the plant can interfere with vitamin B metabolism if eaten in large quantities, and is toxic to livestock.

This plant is not a rush, nor a fern. *Equisetum* is the single surviving genus of a class of primitive vascular plants, which included huge tree-like species, dating back to 350 million years ago. They are grouped with "fern allies" because, like ferns, they do not have flowers or seeds, and reproduce by spores. Only four species of *Equisetum* are found in Virginia; the other 3 are the smaller, much-branched plants known as horsetails. Only one of these three is common in this area, Field Horsetail, *Equisetum arvense*.

Sterile stems of *Equisetum arvense* (Field Horsetail)

Field Horsetail produces separate soft, light brown unbranched stems early in the spring, with cones at the tips. After the spores are shed, the stems wither and green sterile stems start to grow, with their characteristic regular whorled branches ascending to a foot tall. While these stems die back in winter, this is a perennial, and will return in the spring from the wide-creeping rhizomes. This plant is found frequently in floodplain forests, tidal swamps, calcareous marshes, and moist to wet disturbed sites such as ditches and roadsides.

As an herbal remedy, Field Horsetail dates back to ancient Roman and Greek medicine, and has been used to stop bleeding, heal wounds, and to treat tuberculosis and kidney problems. Containing silicon, it has been suggested as a treatment for osteoporosis. Horsetails have been found to accumulate traces of gold and have been assayed for a clue to its presence(!)

The genus name comes from Latin *equus*, "horse," and *seta*, "bristle," referring to the coarse black roots of one species. The species names are *arvense*, "of cultivated fields," and *hyemale*, "of winter," referring to the evergreen stems of Scouring Rush. **Helen Hamilton**

Notes from left field, a column by Kathi Mestayer

Question to Stephen Living (DGIF): *Why no native honeybees?*

Stephen Living's reply:

Honeybees are entirely non-native, essentially they are tiny little six legged livestock. They have been selectively breed for millennia to maximize honey yield—producing much more then a colony needs for its own survival. Honeybees have been present in North America since the 1600s—and I'm guessing that raccoons and bears started raiding hives shortly thereafter. In short order bees would have swarmed and gone "wild," forming hives away from human cultivation. These would have been utilized by wildlife. These wild hives are susceptible to the host of pathogens and parasites that plague domestic bees. Without the regular care of a beekeeper these wild hives don't tend to do very well and are increasingly rare. Much of the image of bears raiding honey may derive from Eurasian bear species raiding honeybee hives.

Bumblebees do form small colonies (most other native North American bees are solitary or semi-solitary). Their hives are provisioned largely with "bee bread" (pollen mixed with nectar), although they may produce very small quantities of honey. There are a variety of "stingless" bees that produce honey—and in fact were cultivated by Pre-Columbian Mesoamericans for the purpose for harvesting honey. I don't believe that the production levels are anything like the European honeybees though, and they are not part of our North American insect fauna.

Who knew? Bumblebees prefer a buffet lunch.....

Native ground-nesting bumblebees, which don't produce honey but are important pollinators of crops and wild plants, have become increasingly rare, but a new study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences by biologists from the University of Texas–Austin and the University of California–Berkeley has turned up potentially simple solutions to the decline. The research, focused on a native California bumblebee species, found that pavement for roads and other structures was a key factor in the bee's nesting decline.

A bumblebee at lunch in an Eastern prickly pear cactus *(Opuntia humifusa)* blossom along the Colonial Parkway near Yorktown.

The study also found that bees were more attracted to species-rich patches of flowers than to dense patches of a

few species. Reducing local use of pavement could improve nesting opportunities for wild bees, the researchers conclude, and increasing the number of species-rich flowering patches in suburban and urban gardens, farms and restored habitats could offer the bees better forage and improve pollination over larger areas. "We are potentially in a pollinator crisis," says Shalene Jha, lead author and assistant professor of biology at the University of Texas. "Understanding how bees move around the landscape can help us both preserve biodiversity and improve crop yields." Animal pollination is estimated to be worth more than $200 billion in global crop production. **Kathi Mestayer**

Clayton Chapter outreach activities

Hampton Roads Garden Show February 9

At our display at the Hampton Roads Garden Show, Charlotte Boudreau and Phyllis Putnam helped children decorate an envelope with stamps and then pick from a flower picture poster which native plant seeds they would like in their envelopes.

First Colony Garden Club presentation April 15

Jan Newton had a conflict on a Monday evening so I filled in with her scheduled talk, "Invasive Plants and Native Alternatives," presented to the First Colony Garden Club on April 15. Twenty interested attendees listened carefully while I reviewed the major nasty plants that no one wants in their gardens nor landscapes.

Helen Hamilton

At the First Colony Garden Club meeting: From left, Carolyn Morris, Ann Hunt, Helen Hamilton, Georgia Allen.

James River Fest at Eco Discovery Park on April 20

On a cold April morning kayaks, canoes, and paddle boards were launching from Jamestown Marina while Patti Gray and Louise Menges were setting up a native plant display for the James River Fest at Eco Discovery Park. A steady stream of visitors came by during the morning and afternoon, and left with either a small pot of blue mist flower or green headed coneflower, seed packets prepared by Cynthia Long, and brochures on our John Clayton Chapter. We did our best to answer questions and encourage planting natives.

Eco Discovery Park is located at the Jamestown Marina across from Jamestown Settlement. The Park is a non-profit organization established to create an environmental learning center and to promote adventure and recreation that appreciates our natural world. The John Clayton Chapter donated $500 to Eco Discovery Park from our 2013 budget for plants, soil, and signage for plants. Members of our Rescue Committee have been clearing areas and planting at the Park since February, and additional volunteers would be welcome.

Patti Gray

Mary Turnbull

Patti Gray, in red sweater, answered questions from visitors to our booth and promoted the use of native plants in gardening.

Calendar

Saturday, May 4 **9:30 AM: A look at trees on William and Mary's campus with Professor Marty Mathes.**
(See Page 4.)

Saturday, May 25 **9 AM: A plant walk on Mary Turnbull's wooded property in Williamsburg.**
(See Page 4.)

There may be walks in the works which did not make this issue, s**o keep a lookout for announcements about additional walks and events** on our website at **www.claytonvnps.org.**

If your renewal date is 12/31/12 or earlier, this is the last issue you will receive until you renew.

Contact Membership Chair **Patti Gray** at 757/645-4164 or at *patriciagray67@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

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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

If you would like to place an order for Helen Hamilton's wildflower book before it hits the shelves around the end of June, below is a form you may use to order directly from the publisher, BRIT Press. *Editor*

Pre-Order Form (through June 2013)

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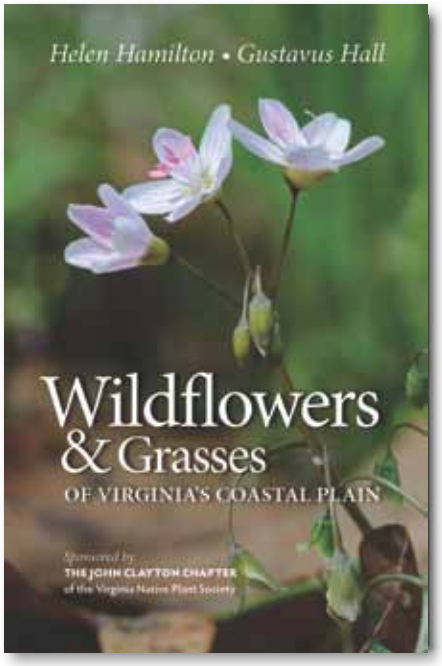

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