

# New River News

January 2024

New River Chapter, VNPS

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## Programs for Spring Semester (Mary Rhoades)

We will have four programs this spring: **February 13, March 12, April 9, and May 14.** Meetings start at **7 pm.** All meetings will be run with a Zoom component.

Our meeting location will be in Blacksburg at the Blacksburg Community Center (BCC), **725 Patrick Henry Drive.** This building is the headquarters for recreational activities run by the town. We will be in the Social Room. If you have never been to the BCC, just enter through the front door, and ask someone at the desk where the Social Room is.

### **February 13. Report on Activities of The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF).**

Speaker: John Scrivani, current President of the Virginia Chapter of TACF.

John will report on what The American Chestnut Foundation, VA chapter, is doing to restore the American chestnut, as well as give us an update on the internship the organization is creating in Carl Absher's honor.

### **March 12. Freaky Ferns and Their Fantastic Features**

Speaker: Jordan Metzgar, Curator of the Massey Herbarium at Virginia Tech.

Jordan's talk will include ferns worldwide. He will bring some specimens from the Herbarium to illustrate his talk.

### **April 9. A Brief Overview of the North American Prairies**

Speaker: Carol Schwobel, long term member of our Chapter.

We will learn about the remaining prairies in North America's midsection and tour two of them. The Joseph H. Williams Tall Grass Prairie Preserve, OK, is a Nature Conservancy property of just under 40,000 acres and has never been ploughed. The Shaw Nature Reserve, a Missouri Botanical Garden property, is the combined area of

five contiguous farms totaling 2,400 acres and has been under restoration efforts for about 100 years.

Specific plant species in this ancient ecosystem will be covered but we will also learn a little about the fauna of these American prairies and how this ecosystem has influenced some artists today. If we have time we will enjoy some eye-candy at the Missouri Botanical Garden's main campus.

#### **May 14. Red Spruce Restoration in the Central Appalachians**

Speaker: Will Evans of the West Virginia Chapter, The Nature Conservancy

This will be a ZOOM ONLY presentation. The Nature Conservancy has spruce management areas in both SW Virginia, and West Virginia. More details about his talk later in spring.

#### **Membership Report** (Rosemarie Sawdon)

The New River Chapter has a total of 152 members, 31 of whom are listed as secondary New River members. We had a very successful year in recruiting 37 new members. Although our Chapter's official coverage takes in the counties of Bland, Giles, Montgomery, Floyd, Carroll, Pulaski, and Wythe, some of the new members live in areas farther afield, such as, Rural Retreat, Marion, Galax, Fancy Gap, Hillsville, Independence, and Bristol. The Chapter is delighted to have a wide distribution of members representing southwest counties. We welcome ALL new members and look forward to a successful and productive 2024. As a reminder our monthly meetings are always on Zoom.

#### **Plant Sales** (Ellen Bosman)

Many thanks to the volunteers who made the 2023 plant sales a success. In 2023 our Chapter netted \$7074 from plant sales for youth education, an increase of 17% over 2022, springboarding on the accomplishments of the 2019-2022 plant sales created and lead by Carol Schwobel.

## Outreach Events (Brenda Graff)

The mission, or purpose, of the Virginia Native Plant Society, as stated in its bylaws, is “Promoting the conservation of Virginia’s native plants and habitats.” One way to pursue this mission is through education. The New River Chapter has several different education projects. One of them is having a table at local events where our members explain to the public how to promote native plants in Virginia, such as how to create a native pollinator garden, how to get rid of invasive plants, and various other topics. They also display posters and give out handouts.

Both the chapter members and the public learn from each other. If you would like to help at one of these outreach events listed below, contact Brenda Graff at [graff\\_brenda@hotmail.com](mailto:graff_brenda@hotmail.com). Or just attend one or more of the events. Details of these events will be published in our monthly list of events on our list-serve, which Brenda will be glad to add you to if you are not already on it. There are always more events that may be added to this list.

April - SEEDS spring festival in Blacksburg

June - Our chapter native plant sale in Blacksburg

June 29 - National Forest Appreciation Day at Pandapas Pond

July – Peak Creek Family Fun Day in Pulaski

August 24 – Heritage Day in Christiansburg

October – Hokie Bugfest at Virginia Tech

October – Pawpaw Festival in Radford

## State VNPS March Workshop (Mary Rhoades)

The VNPS statewide educational March workshop which used to be “in person” has morphed to an all-Zoom event. This year the dates for the presentations are **Thursday, March 21**, and **Thursday, March 28**. **From 7 to 9 pm** each night. Joey Thompson is again in charge. The title this year is *Protecting Plants in Virginia Region by Region*. Members will receive an announcement directly from the state office about the workshop. There is no charge to participate.

## **Leaf Disease of Beech Trees Now in Virginia** (Jon Eisenback)

A new challenge to beech trees caused by a foliar nematode, *Litylenchus crenatae mcmanni*, reported in the US in 2012, has spread rapidly from Ohio to numerous states in the northeast and, now ten years later, into Virginia. **It has been found in four counties: Prince William, Loudoun, Fairfax, and Stafford.** Ongoing surveys are necessary to follow the spread of this nematode across the commonwealth, probably, to wherever beech trees grow. Generally, infected trees die after a few years, but for trees planted in the landscape, some chemicals may effectively control them, essentially eradicating nematodes from the tree. The most common symptoms of nematode infection are dark green, leathery bands randomly occurring between the large veins when the populations are low, to thick, wrinkled, and distorted leaves when the populations are high. **If you see beech trees with these symptoms, please report them to the Virginia Tech Nematode Assay Lab ([jon@vt.edu](mailto:jon@vt.edu) or 540-231-4650).**

## **Lethal Vascular Disease Affecting Native Lauraceae** (Mary Rhoades)

Laurel Wilt Disease is caused by the fungus *Raffaelea lauricola*. It is transmitted by the invasive red bay ambrosia beetle, *Xyleborus glabratus*. These beetles are very small and hard to detect if you peel off the bark of the tree. The disease was detected in Scott County in 2021. Native trees in our area that can be affected include spicebush and sassafras. An infection causes the leaves to wilt and turn brown, and then fall off. This disease kills trees quickly, and right now there is no treatment for an infected tree.

Visit the Virginia Department of Forestry website for more information about both of these diseases.

## Report from the Massey Herbarium, Virginia Tech (Jordan Metzgar)

Winter can be a lonely time for plant lovers, especially after this recent snow and cold. Here in Virginia Tech's Massey Herbarium, we have been keeping busy with plants past, present, and future. We received a gift from the Natural History Museum in London of specimens collected in the southeastern USA in the 1840s! These artifacts of the past will be some of our oldest specimens and have been an exciting addition to our collection.

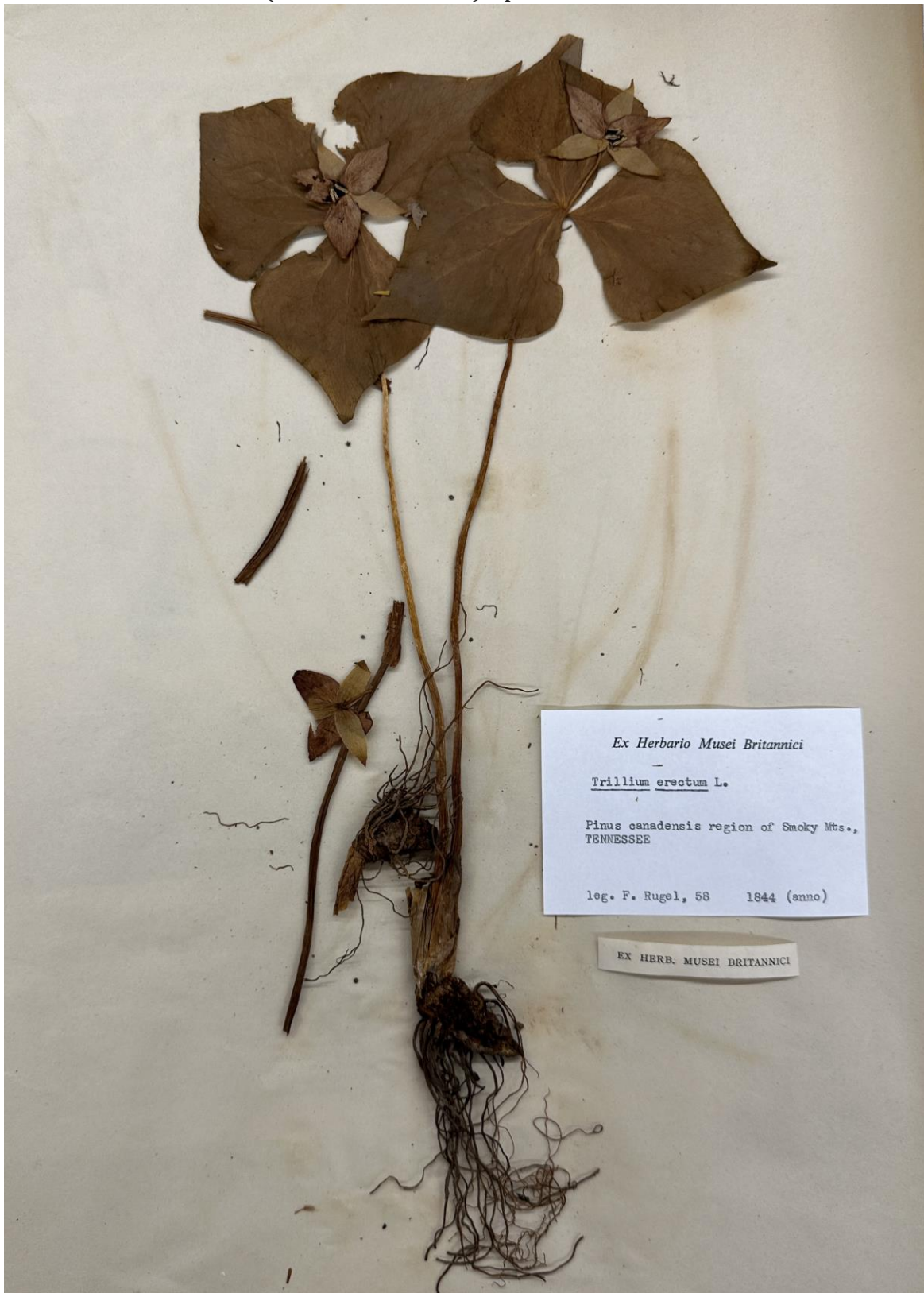
In the present, we enjoyed visiting a local prickly pear cactus population after a recent snowfall. The eastern prickly pear (*Opuntia humifusa*) is one of three native cactus species in Virginia. Their year-round survival here is often a surprise to people. We were excited to photograph this population on a snowy 15°F-day as visual "proof" of their cold-hardiness!

We're also looking to the future and preparing our collecting schedule for the spring and summer. Many of these destinations are opportunities to observe jack in the pulpit species. A recent scientific paper used morphology (=the plant's appearance) to suggest that Virginia has four native species of jack in the pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum* complex)! Three of these are uncommon to rare in Virginia so the common jack in the pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum*) is still by far the most frequently encountered species. We are hoping to observe all 4 species extensively and then share photos and ID tips with the club.

Images (see attached files): Red trillium (*Trillium erectum*) specimen collected in 1844; eastern prickly pear (*Opuntia humifusa*) under snow covering in Christiansburg, Virginia; bog jack in the pulpit (*Arisaema stewardsonii*) from Giles County, Virginia.

[Images on following pages]

Red trillium (*Trillium erectum*) specimen collected in 1844.



Eastern prickly pear (*Opuntia humifusa*) under snow covering in Christiansburg, Virginia.



Bog jack in the pulpit (*Arisaema stewardsonii*) from Giles County, Virginia.

