



Spring 2015 Events

New River Chapter

Virginia Native Plant Society

January, 2015

Outreach Program at Radford Library Saturday, March 7. 11 am to noon

Establishing a Native Plant Garden: This presentation by Carl Hansen will be concerned with the challenges of establishing a residential garden made up of plants native to this area. Once established, native plants require essentially no care. They compete very well with invasive plants, need minimal soil amendments, and tolerate drought. The main challenge is their tendency to be fussy regarding habitat and soil conditions. Thus, repeated attempts are necessary before they become established. Further, they do not present brilliant and dramatic colors as do many domestic species. The latter have been selectively bred for color whereas selection has focused on survival for the natives. He will show some slides of his garden that he has taken over the past several years.

Wong Park – an urban oasis for natives

Acquired by the Town of Blacksburg in 2001, Wong Park is a 9-acre parcel tucked behind Harding Avenue Elementary School in Blacksburg's Bennett Hill/Progress neighborhood. Despite its urban setting, only a block from downtown, the park supports a wide variety of native plants and animals in addition to providing recreational green space for neighborhood residents.

The main "natural" areas are two large detention ponds in the northern part of the park that were constructed to mitigate downstream flooding problems. These basins are being managed as meadows, mown about once per year. While these areas do contain a number of non-native and weedy species characteristic of disturbed fields, such as Spotted Knapweed (*Centaurea maculosa*) and Chinese Lespedeza (*Lespedeza cuneata*), many

native species have successfully colonized these depressions, including several species of goldenrods (*Solidago* spp.) and asters (*Symphyotrichum* spp.). Although the "ponds" contain water only after major storms, the bottom of the basins is wet enough to support a variety of sedges and other wetland plants. Except for a grove of trees in the western portion of the park, Wong Park mostly lacks wooded areas, though there are many mature trees, most of them native, scattered throughout.

This combination of open meadow with scattered trees and thickets makes Wong Park attractive to wildlife. Despite its urban setting, deer regularly visit the park, and in July 2007, a black bear wandered through. Among the avian denizens of the park are Northern Flickers, Downy- and Pileated Woodpeckers, Cooper's Hawks, Northern Juncos, Rufous-sided Towhees, Thrashers, and a number of smaller songbirds.

Because it is within easy walking distance of both Virginia Tech and Harding Avenue Elementary School, Wong Park offers a nearby venue for educators in a variety of disciplines. To highlight some of the biological resources of the park, our chapter will be partnering with the Town of Blacksburg's Parks and Recreation Department to construct an interpretive kiosk beside the main trail around the park.

Wong Park is easily accessible from the parking lot at 303 Wilson Ave., or on foot from Faculty or Turner Streets. In addition to the "natural" areas, there is a picnic shelter and a playground for those with young children.

State NPS News

Saturday, March 7, is the date for the spring workshop at the University of Richmond. The topic

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this year is Forest Floor Ecology. Watch for details in the next state newsletter.

Weekend of September 11-13, is the Annual Meeting, which is not a sit down assembly, but a chance to go on guided tours to see native plants in a different part of our state. For once it will be close to us--in Staunton.

Meetings

Except where noted, we meet at 7 pm in the Virginia Tech Greenhouse Classroom, located on the campus in the red-brick building just west of the traffic circle on Washington Street. Parking is available on the street or next to the green houses.

Tuesday, February 10: *Invasive Plants*. Dan Tekiela and Morgan Franke, graduate students in the Dept. of Plant Pathology, Physiology, and Weed Science will talk about the status of invasive plants in our area, and report on some of their current research.

Tuesday, March 10: *Gardening with Native Plants*. Suzie Leslie, Master Naturalist and Master Gardener, and a long time member of our group, will share her experiences in nurturing native plants in her home garden.

We are partnering with Enchanter's Garden Native Plant Nursery in Hinton, WV, to accept orders at our March meeting--for items available from that nursery. Items ordered may be picked up at our meeting of April 14. To order: visit the website enchantersgarden.com, and look on the far right for a vertical menu. Click on "spring 2015 availability" and choose the plants you want. Bring your written order to our March meeting. Be sure to have your name and contact information on your order, as well as the total cost. We will send all orders together to the nursery. There will be no shipping charge if you order this way.

Tuesday, April 14: *Native Plants and Native Plant Cultivars*. Ian Caton, owner of Enchanter's Garden Nursery, will be our speaker. His discussion will cover new and unusual native plants, native plant cultivars, as well as answering the following: What is a native plant cultivar? How was it produced?

Where did it come from? Is it okay to use? Plants ordered from his nursery at our March meeting will be ready for pickup.

Outings for Spring/Summer 2015

The following outings have been planned, and we will probably add more. Final details will have to be sent via email. If you want to volunteer to lead a walk, just contact the president (mrhoades@vt.edu).

Saturday, March 14: 10 am, *Lichens in Wildwood Park in Radford*. Meet at the entrance off Main St, near National Bank. Leader, Gary Coté, email: gcote@radford.edu.

Saturday, April 11: *New River Trail, Hiwassee*. Leader, Vicky Barden. From the Hiwassee Trestle north for approximately a mile and a half, the New River Trail is carpeted with wildflowers in early spring. Most notable is a hillside that is often covered in squirrel corn. This is a very easy, level hike along the New River. Meet at 9 am in the Blacksburg Middle School parking lot, near Price's Fork Road. Anyone coming from the Radford area can call 540 230 3314 to arrange a meeting place around 9:30 in the Fairlawn Walmart lot.

Sunday, April 12: 2 pm, *Wildflowers in Wildwood Park in Radford*. Meet at the entrance off Main St, near National Bank. Leaders, Gary Coté and David Darnell, email: gcote@radford.edu.

Saturday, April 18: *Mill Creek, Narrows*. Leader, David Darnell. This will be a hike sponsored by the Town of Blacksburg Parks and Recreation Department. A nominal fee for transportation is charged, call 961-1135 to sign up or register through the Town's website, www.blacksburg.gov. Gather at the Blacksburg Recreation Center at 9 AM.

Saturday, May 9: *Claytor Lake State Park*. Leader, Mary Rhoades, email: mrhoades@vt.edu. The highlight of this walk is a patch of pink lady's-slippers. Meet at the Water's Edge Meeting Facility at Claytor Lake State Park at 1 pm. There is a \$5 charge per car to enter the park. This will be an easy walk and should last about 1 1/2 hours.