

New River News

July 2020

New River Chapter, VNPS

A word from the president

The first half of the year has been a difficult one and the rest of the year will be probably not be any better. But I hope you and your family are staying safe during the pandemic.

Everyone has had to adjust this year. We have not been able to have our group field trips but I hope everyone has been able to find some time to go on your own by yourself and/or with your family to enjoy nature and become less stressed out.

Some people are taking up gardening or enlarging their existing gardens during this time. Others are visiting local parks while social distancing. Whatever you can do to help out others is great too.

In April the chapter had to switch our monthly meetings to Zoom instead of in-person. Ian Canton's talk was well attended by over thirty people and we learned which native flowers do best in shade.

This fall and winter we will have to continue our monthly meetings via Zoom since Warm Heath and Virginia Tech are not allowing the public on their campuses. And it is not yet safe to have large groups of people gather together indoors.

Fall/Winter Programs

Please mark your calendars now. **ALL** of our meetings for fall/winter 2020 will be held on the 2nd Tuesday of each month and start at 7 pm. Keep in mind that we do not hold a meeting in January. All meetings will be conducted via Zoom and a password for them will be included in a post in our list-serve in googlegroups.

We welcome any suggestions or speakers for next spring. Please contact the president, Brenda Graff at graff_brenda@hotmail.com.

September 8 – How to prepare your garden for the winter (Debra Graff)

Debra will explain the best way to get your native garden ready for better survival of the plants and nearby wildlife (including beneficial insects) during the cold weather.

October 13 – Blue Ridge Prism invasive plants removal

The Blue Ridge Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management will give their history of their organization, need for more regional chapters and what native plants to plant after invasives have been removed.

November 10 – to be announced. We are waiting for a reply from one organization yet.

December 8 – Learning from Each other

Each December we invite members and non-members to take a few minutes to share something they think will be of interest to other plant lovers. It can be photos or slides from a trip, an interesting website or app, a new book, etc. There is no schedule. We just take turns.

Fall/Winter Outings

I know of only one outing so far which was set up before the pandemic started. We will have to see when it will be safe to hold other group outings during the pandemic.

Saturday, October 3, Edible plant walk at Hungry Mother state park, 1 pm

I will contact them a month ahead and see if it is still scheduled.

Volunteer projects and Outreach programs

Fall is for Planting Plant Sale - Many of the plants we have been growing since early June are rooted in and ready to find a new home in your yard. Due to the small number of plants we have available they will be offered first to the committee volunteers who have made this happen on July 18 and 20, the next week to our membership, and the following week to the Master Gardeners, Master Naturalists, and the public. In light of the pandemic, and because we are a state nonprofit and classified as a "farmer's market", we are selling by appointment only and asking everyone to wear a mask and social distance. We ask that payments be made by check. The sale will end July 31. Later in September, the remainder of the plants will be offered for sale. We hope to find another venue to hold the September plant sale.

Educational Grants - From the beginning the plan was to use the proceeds of the plant sale to fund educational grants to our youth, grades 1-12, within our chapter coverage area to start native plant gardens of their own which would be open to the public. Nicole Hersch and Carol Schwobel are working on revising an existing grant application and we plan to offer it to local youth groups for the fall of 2020. Grants would be in the range of \$250-\$500 each.

The Plant SWVA Natives Campaign - covers the Counties of Pulaski, Floyd, Montgomery, Giles, Craig, Roanoke, Bottetourt and the Cities of Radford, Salem and Roanoke, is making progress. The campaign assembled a plant selection committee and over the coming months will be deciding what species should be included in our regional guide. Additionally a very talented graphic artist is designing a logo for the campaign, which will highlight the eastern redbud and leaf cutter bee relationship. The campaign received a financial commitment from the Virginia Native Plant Society to support printing of the guides once they are developed and the New River Watershed Roundtable received funding from DEQ to assemble a special report on conservation landscaping in SWVA which will include a short native plant guide. The campaign will continue to seek grant funding to produce and print the guide over the coming years.

If you are interested in participating in the production of the guide or the campaign, please reach out to Nicole Hersch at nicole@nrvc.org or visit <https://www.plantvirginianatives.org/plantswvanatives>. To learn more about the New River Watershed Roundtable, visit www.newriverwatershed.org.

Nicole Hersch is also collecting nursery pots. Contact her by cell at 619-379-4354 or email nicolshersch@gmail.com. She lives in Blacksburg, but would be willing to pick up, too.

Hokie Bugfest - Our chapter has had a table there for the last several years. This year is their 10th anniversary and they plan to go virtual from October 7–17. Our exhibit can include links to websites, videos, information sheets, photo galleries, at-home activity instructions and anything else you can think of. Our exhibit content needs to be submitted by September 10. Please contact Brenda Graff at graff_brenda@hotmail.com if you would like to coordinate our virtual exhibit this year or have ideas of what to include in it.

Pollinator gardens need volunteers this summer. Social distancing is required and you get to go outside and commune with nature.

The pollinator garden at Pandapas Pond is now open after the US forest service re-opened the national forests. Contact Barbara Walker at brwalker@earthlink.net or 540-577-9334.

We could use more volunteers at the Blacksburg Hale Community Garden Pollinator Project. Rosemary Hartman & I have been working on Wednesday mornings, but other times are open. Anyone interested in this can contact Polly Ashelman at pashelma@kean.edu to schedule the day & time.

Pollinator Week article in Roanoke Times - Kudos to Rosemarie Sawdon for getting a letter to the editor printed on Sunday June 28 in the Roanoke Times promoting Pollinator Week and planting native plants!

https://www.roanoke.com/opinion/letters/letter-national-pollinator-week/article_7b2c3bf3-a19f-5d50-b0eb-34c67d50c3b5.html

Just Around the Corner: Election of Officers

Terms for all four officers are up in October. Details will be posted via our list-serve in September.

Not Just All Noise: Cicadas at Claytor Lake state park by Mary Rhoades as of 6/19/20

The 17 year cicada outbreak at Claytor Lake State Park was heavy. Noise from cicadas started a little

before June 1. They were so loud that you had to shout when you tried to talk to someone. We all enjoyed getting closeup views and photos of them, but now we can see their damage. It is especially noticeable in the picnic area. Many trees, especially the oaks, have the terminal leaf clusters all brown (see photo “Leaves”). And the next step is that those clusters fall off (see photo “Ground”). Damage results when cicadas use their ovipositors to lay eggs in the smaller twigs, which causes the bark to split, and twigs to weaken (see photo “Twigs”; notice the slits in the bark). So you might want to start observing trees on your property. And places like Stadium Woods. People who have fruit trees should certainly be checking for damage. When will these insects be gone? Soon, we hope!





New District Ranger for the USDA Forest Service for the Eastern Divide Ranger District

Beth Christensen has begun her duties as the new district ranger for the USDA Forest Service's Eastern Divide Ranger District, headquartered in Blacksburg. As district ranger, Christensen will work with local communities, interest groups and members of the public to oversee nearly 400,000 acres of the Jefferson National Forest. The Eastern Divide Ranger District spans 11 counties in southwest Virginia including Montgomery.

Christensen officially reported to work on Monday, June 8, 2020, but she has been serving as the acting district ranger since March 29. As district ranger, Christensen oversees a staff of 27 who manage nearly 400 miles of trails (including 150 miles of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail), eight campgrounds and 500 miles of roads. They also work to enhance wildlife habitat through controlled fire and timber management. She has worked in nine ranger districts across California, Oregon, Kentucky, Arkansas and Virginia.

Christensen can be reached at the Eastern Divide District Office at (540) 552-4641.

New Video on how to use the Flora of Virginia Mobile App

A new video titled “Overview and How to on the Flora of Virginia Mobile App” presented by Marion Lobstein and Sally Anderson is available on the VNPS website at:
https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/play/tZcvcb_8pm43EtSc5gSDB_V9W47rKqKs0nUa-fIFzUbjASQGNVumNbdGZbMtUgiLcOWFyv7ul4mmQseT?startTime=1594649126000&x_zm_rtaid=iaBBSrPBQ1Gjhw8iUmc6jg.1595723291662.d8fdaaae824d29b18d2b9007459b5b40&x_zm_rhtaid=468 or go to the homepage of vnps.org website. It is just over an hour long so this would be a good way to while away those hot summer days.

Photos from members



Wild bergamont at Blacksburg high school

by Brenda Graff



Milkweed bug on swamp milkweed
by Rebekah Paulson



Spicebush caterpillar on spicebush
by Rebekah Paulson



Rattlesnake master in her garden

by Rebekah Paulson

Events for August thru December 2020

Many events have been cancelled due to the coronavirus or changed to virtual versions instead of in-person. Keep checking my monthly list of events in our list-serve or let me know what you have heard about.

August 24, Heritage Day sponsored by the Montgomery Museum, CANCELLED

Tuesday, September 8, monthly chapter meeting, 7 pm to 8:30 pm

There will be no annual picnic at Wong Park this year.

September 13-19, Sustainability Week in Blacksburg, exact date and time unknown yet

Our Fall is for Planting plant sale will be at the SEEDS center in Blacksburg

September 25-27, annual conference of the VNPS

I believe that the in-person portion has been cancelled but I am not sure if there will be a smaller Zoom version on September 25. Keep checking their website at <https://vnps.org/events/2020-vnps-annual-meeting-and-conference/> for more details.

Saturday, October 3, Edible plant walk at Hungry Mother state park, 1 pm

I will contact them a month ahead and see if it is still scheduled.

Tuesday, October 13, monthly chapter meeting, 7 pm to 8:30 pm

October 7-17, Hokie Bugfest, will be virtual this year.

For details see under “Volunteer projects and Outreach programs” section in this newsletter.

Tuesday, November 10, monthly chapter meeting, 7 pm to 8:30 pm

Tuesday, December 8, monthly chapter meeting, 7 pm to 8:30 pm