

# The Leaflet

**Pulling Garlic Mustard at the Thompson WMA** by Karen Hendershot

SUMMER 2023

(with Mary Keith Ruffner, Emily Southgate, and Sally Anderson) photos by Karen Hendershot

The forest understory at the Thompson Wildlife Management Area was aglow with Spicebushes (*Lindera benzoin*) in full bloom when we assembled on April 2 for the Piedmont Chapter's annual Garlic Mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*) pull along the Marjorie Arundel Trillium Trail. The excitement of the morning was heightened by many new faces who joined us, including families from as far as Springfield – all great additions to our effort.

While our sign says “removal of plant material is strictly prohibited,” the supervised pulling of the alien invasive mustard is designed to protect the wide array of native species in this rich hardwood forest. Sally Anderson explained that Garlic Mustard is allelopathic, meaning it emits chemicals which inhibit the growth of other plants.

We had enough people for a two-pronged attack. Sally led half along the Trillium Trail, while Emily Southgate took the rest down the fire road and then up the Appalachian Trail to meet Sally's group at the junction. The biennial mustard can reproduce itself many times over through rapid reseeding. The Trillium Trail, near the forest edge, is most endangered. Sally's group finished the day with giant garbage bags filled with mustard. I was with Emily's group. We were deeper in the woods, where fewer seeds have penetrated. We still filled several bags but my biggest catch was three beer bottles.

Emily explained how to distinguish Garlic Mustard, with its rosettes of purple stems and crinkly leaves, from similar plants with cordate (heart-shaped) leaves, such as those of emerging violets (*Viola* spp.). Included in our group was a young family with sisters who were six- and eight-years-old. What quick learners they were! They eagerly scampered the rocky hillside, finding mustard off-trail.

While we came to work, watching spring unfold in this beautiful spot is always a pleasure. The forest floor was alive with blossoming Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*), Slender Toothwort (*Cardamine angustata*) and sweet Rue-anemone (*Thalictrum thalictroides*). Yellow and Blue Violets and Star Chickweed (*Stellaria pubera*) were just starting. Mayapples (*Podophyllum peltatum*) were poking through the soil and early leaves of Wild Geraniums (*Geranium maculatum*) were abundant. “What's this?” asked a member of the group as we exited the Trillium Trail. He had found what looked like a tiny purple cauliflower with tender green leaves. His phone app identified it correctly as a budding Early Meadow Rue (*Thalictrum dioicum*). One more mystery of native plant life solved!

In 1990, the Trillium Slopes in Thompson WMA were designated the first “registry site” of the Virginia Native Plant Society, meaning that the VNPS agreed with the landowner (the Department of Wildlife Resources) to help protect the site. Its valuable array of wildflowers, especially Large-flowered Trillium (*Trillium grandiflorum*), makes it particularly precious. The Marjorie Arundel Trillium Trail honors the legacy of a passionate native plant advocate and mother of Piedmont Chapter founding member, Jocelyn Sladen.



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The Virginia Native Plant Society (VNPS), founded as the Virginia Wildflower Society in 1982, is a non-profit organization of people who share an interest in Virginia's wild plants and habitats and a concern for their protection.

The Piedmont Chapter is a sub-group of VNPS in the northern point of Virginia east of the Blue Ridge Mountains. It includes Loudoun, Fauquier, Culpeper, Rappahannock, Warren, Clarke, and Frederick counties.

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## Pulling Garlic Mustard at the Thompson WMA (continued)



## Shenandoah River State Park Walk text and photos by Richard Stromberg

Walking along a river in Virginia in April never disappoints. The Bluebell Trail has been moved uphill to avoid flooding, so the masses of Virginia Bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*) were somewhat distant from us towards the river as we started, but soon enough we were in the midst of masses of them. We also got to see river-side loving trees and bushes flowering: Pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*) and Bladdernut (*Staphylea trifolia*).

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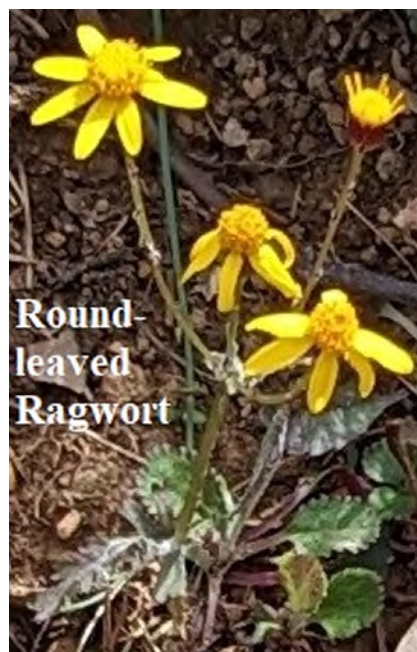


## Shenandoah River State Park Walk (continued)

A good-sized population of Twinleaf (*Jeffersonia diphylla*) cascaded down the hillside on the side of the trail away from the river, clearly showing the divided leaf that gives it its common name, but the flowers I had seen just four days before had faded.



At the end of the flat, one-mile Bluebell Trail, a few people turned back as we were about to climb up hill for another two miles. The drier terrain of the Campground Trail meant less lush vegetation, but we were still treated to spots of color with Wild Pinks (*Silene caroliniana*), Round-leaved Ragwort (*Packera obovata*), and others. After stopping at Culler's Overlook for the panoramic view of the river and mountain beyond, we continued on the Overlook Trail to the Visitor Center and then down Hemlock Hollow Trail to the cars.







## Ball's Bluff Walk by Joe Lowe; photos by Richard Stromberg

Ball's Bluff Regional Park sits on the Potomac River a few miles of north Leesburg. It was the site of the largest Civil War battle in Loudon County. Today, the quiet 268-acre park provides a wonderful respite from Leesburg's busy sprawl. It also offers a surprisingly impressive collection of local flora.

April 13 Emily Southgate helped a small group of hikers identify and enjoy these natural delights during a two-hour afternoon walk. Although the canopy was already beginning to leaf out, it was not early enough to provide shade from the sun and unusually hot weather.



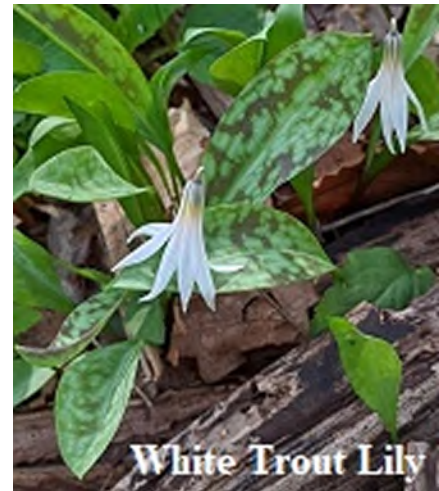
Rue Anemone

The heat, however, was forgotten as we entered the forest and quickly came upon hundreds of Spring Beauties (*Claytonia virginica*) carpeting the forest floor with a random sprinkling of Bluets (*Houstonia caerulea*). We followed a small trail down towards a shallow ravine, passing blooming Pawpaws (*Asimina triloba*), delicate Cut-leaved Toothworts (*Cardamine concatenata*), and Rue Anemone (*Thalictrum thalictroides*) with starry flowers shooting above their paw-shaped leaves.

At the bottom, we found a small stream anemically trickling down its course

— a reminder of the dry weather. But the surrounding hillsides were luxuriant, covered in glossy Yellow Trout Lily leaves (*Erythronium americanum*), emerging Christmas Fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*) fiddleheads, Wild Ginger (*Asarum canadense*), whose beautiful flowers were discretely hidden in leaf litter, and a few bright patches of Wild Blue Phlox (*Phlox divaricata*). While the Yellow Trout Lilies had finished flowering, we were fortunate, with Emily's help, to find a rare White Trout Lily (*Erythronium albidum*) that was still in gorgeous bloom.

After crossing the creek and climbing the opposite hill, we were treated to another fantastic sight: a small collection of Shooting stars (*Primula meadia*). From there, we descended toward the Potomac and found ourselves entering an open, riparian forest that was filled with a profusion of Virginia



White Trout Lily



Early Saxifrage

Bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*). Nearby, we found Squirrel Corn (*Dicentra canadensis*), Blue Cohosh (*Caulophyllum thalictroides*), and Harbinger of Spring (*Erigenia bulbosa*), none of them blooming.

Content with the spectacular natural showing, we turned back to the parking lot, stopping to admire Early Saxifrage (*Micranthes virginiana*). Those of us who knelt to take a closer look, were richly repaid. Their stout, slightly curving stems are vaguely reminiscent of Baobab trunks, and their thick, rubbery, basal leaves often hold a surprise, with surreal pink and rusty orange colors flaming across the underside.

As we approached the parking lot, we thanked Emily for her time, expert guidance, and, most of all, for providing us with a wonderful taste of early spring in Northern Virginia.



**Chapter Events:** Register at [piedmontvnps@gmail.com](mailto:piedmontvnps@gmail.com). Attendance is limited, so register early.

<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Jun 6</b>	<b>2-4pm</b>	<b>Piedmont Chapter Board Meeting</b>
<b>Clarke County.</b> Blandy Experimental Farm Library, 400 Blandy Ln - Boyce. All Chapter members are welcome to attend Board Meetings.			
<b>Saturday</b>	<b>Jun 10</b>	<b>10am</b>	<b>Riverside Preserve Walk</b>
<b>Fauquier County.</b> Come see this new 196-acre wooded park south of Marshall with almost a mile of Rappahannock River frontage and numerous wildflowers, birds, and butterflies. Director of Fauquier County Parks & Rec, Gary Rzepecki, will lead this walk to see the wonderful varieties of native plants that thrive on this former farmland. A kayak launch and some trails have already been installed with more being planned. You will see farmland to habitat transformation on a 200-acre scale.			
<b>Saturday</b>	<b>Jul 8</b>	<b>10am</b>	<b>Faire Meddow Walk</b>
<b>Fauquier County.</b> You will see an excellent example of an "in-process" transition of 10 acres of lawn to native flower meadows and wildlife habitat. The homeowners started by battling invasives, removing hundreds of Ailanthus and Bittersweet. Over 250 native baby trees were planted since last Spring (supplied free by WePlantTrees.org), including Serviceberry, Silky Dogwood, Redbuds, and many others. Two wildflower meadows were started from seed and the number of species is amazing!			
<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Aug 1</b>	<b>2-4pm</b>	<b>Piedmont Chapter Board Meeting</b>
<b>Clarke County.</b> Blandy Experimental Farm Library, 400 Blandy Ln - Boyce. All Chapter members are welcome to attend Board Meetings.			
<b>Saturday</b>	<b>Aug 12</b>	<b>10am</b>	<b>Wildcat Mountain Walk</b>
<b>Fauquier County.</b> This delightful, large property is a great example of a variety of land uses – from homestead to agriculture to protected natural area. We will spend most of our time in a remarkable old meadow, with many native species that found their way there with no planting.			
<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Sep 5</b>	<b>2-4pm</b>	<b>Piedmont Chapter Board Meeting</b>
<b>Clarke County.</b> Blandy Experimental Farm Library, 400 Blandy Ln - Boyce. All Chapter members are welcome to attend Board Meetings.			

### Calmes Neck Walk text and photos by Charlotte Lorick

As a first-time visitor to Calmes Neck, I was very excited to help lead the VNPS walk there April 15. After all, I had heard wonderful things about the floral diversity in that area and had seen the extensive plant list from years of plant walks and surveys. And it did not disappoint! Despite the chance of rain and storms in the forecast, over 20 people showed up for a fantastic walk.

As we gathered at the beginning of the walk, our gracious host, Blanca Vandevoort, made us feel right at home. It was a great group: VNPS members, new faces, and many residents of the neighborhood. Within just the first few steps of our walk, we were greeted with carpets of Spring Beauty (*Claytonia virginica*). We also noted several Spring Beauty Miner Bees (*Andrena erigenidae*), specialists that feed exclusively on the pollen and nectar of spring beauty. Above the Spring Beauties, the Pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*) flowers were at their peak of perfection and filled the midstory canopy with abundant maroon flowers. Several Zebra Swallowtails butterflies (*Eurytides marcellus*) were fluttering among the trees, a perfect display of another specialist relationship. Pawpaw is the larval host plant for these butterflies.



As we walked, I admit I began to trail behind a little because there were so many delightful plants to photograph! Some were firsts for me to see in full bloom in the wild, such as both purple and white/pale lavender Dwarf Larkspur (*Delphinium tricorne*). It was interspersed with

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## Calmes Neck Walk (continued)



Dwarf Larkspur

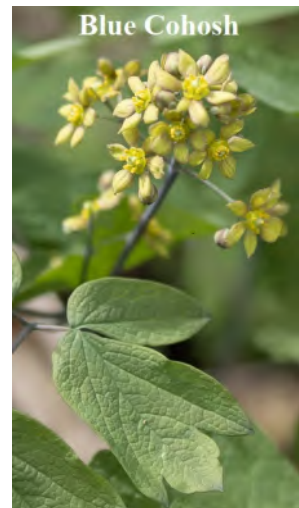
(*Trillium sessile*) and large patches of Twinleaf (*Jeffersonia diphylla*), which was already setting seed.

We began to make our way down slope toward the Shenandoah River, and, as one would expect, we began to observe a transition to a new habitat type and community of plants. We walked by plenty of Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*) and Cutleaf Toothwort (*Cardamine concatenata*) that were all past bloom but a good reminder that just a week or so earlier the forest floor would have looked quite different.

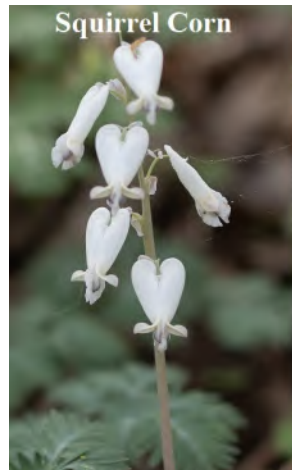
We stopped to see the relatively rare Harbinger-of-spring (*Erigenia bulbosa*). It is only found in a handful of counties in Virginia. It is a small plant and may not excite the average hiker but was a delight to this group of plant enthusiasts!

The path opened to a vast expanse of Virginia Bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*) in full bloom along the bank of the Shenandoah. We walked just far enough through the Bluebell patch to visit a Blue Cohosh (*Caulophyllum thalictroides*), also in full bloom. Along the way *Dicentras* were putting on a nice display up the slope. It was a treat to see two species intermixed, a helpful way to compare, contrast, and share ID tips

with the group. Squirrel Corn (*D. canadensis*) and Dutchman's Breeches (*D. cucullaria*) were blooming side by side. One fun ID tidbit: I had remembered reading in the Flora of Virginia that *D. canadensis* flowers have a sweet fragrance like Hyacinths whereas *D. cucullaria* has no fragrance. Sure enough! It is one thing to read about it but much more fun to experience it for yourself!



Blue Cohosh



Squirrel Corn



Dutchman's Breeches

The final stretch of the walk brought us to yet another habitat type and community of plants along rock outcrops. We climbed to the top where we met with the generous landowners for refreshments at the end of the walk. Along the cliffs we found Wild Columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*), Rocktwist (*Draba ramosissima*), Early Saxifrage (*Micranthes virginianensis*), Broad-leaved Sedge (*Carex platyphylla*), Pussytoes (*Antennaria* spp.), Cliff Stonecrop (*Sedum glaucophyllum*), and more. A rare find was Walking Fern (*Asplenium rhizophyllum*). It was dry and brittle, a reminder about how much we needed rain (which came right AFTER the walk).

The plants I listed here were just a handful of highlights as there was no way to list everything we saw. I mean it when I say I would have spent all day there if I could have – so much to see! We want to thank all the hosts for inviting and allowing us to visit their beautiful backyards. Perhaps the best part of the walk was that so many of the property owners in the neighborhood joined the walk to explore the plants on their land. Many were familiar with these spectacular plant communities and many were enjoying them for the first time through the enthusiastic lens of the VNPS. I was so happy to be a part of the day and share in the learning. Looking forward to the next walk!





## An Accidental Forest text and photos by Karen Hendershot

In April 2023, the Piedmont Chapter published a new brochure titled *Your Yard Wants To Be A Forest*. It may be picked up for free at Piedmont Chapter event tables or downloaded at <https://vnps.org/vnps-brochures/>. The brochure was produced under the leadership of our past President and Ph.D. ecologist Emily Southgate, who urges land restoration to the true nature of Virginia, most of which is forest, not meadow. Collaborating with her were graphic designer Mara Seaforest, artist Elena Borkland, Master Naturalist Kristin Zimet, and Karen Hendershot.

As the brochure was being developed, Karen realized that she had an accidental experiment in woodland creation happening on her 5-acre property. She and husband David had inadvertently followed one of the restoration recommendations, “Don’t mow.” Fearing that David would topple over bushhogging a steep hill, Karen said “Let it go.” They ignored the quarter-acre area for six years. Last year, they saw that it was full of young trees battling the onslaught of invasives common on the former farm pasture. During the winter, David attacked the invasives to liberate a dense young forest of ten-to-twenty-foot trees.

The result was delightful! The trees in the new woodland are nearly as diverse as the adjacent forest. Many are White Ash (*Fraxinus americana*), recognized by the trident-shaped branch tips created by their uplifted opposite branching. Yes, they will ultimately be attacked by the Emerald Ash Borer (*Agilus planipennis*) but they are lovely trees, and we hope that nature may find an equilibrium in which the borer becomes less deadly. At least one study suggests that woodpeckers are already on the job.

Spicebushes (*Lindera benzoin*) provide a rich understory in our new woods. A gorgeous Sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*) with colorful blossoms stands sentinel to the center path. A tall Mockernut Hickory (*Carya tomentosa*) unfurled its first leaves by mid-April and the Black Locusts (*Robinia pseudoacacia*) were in bud by early May, promising their sweet scent soon. Other trees were typical of the property: Black Walnut (*Juglans nigra*), Slippery Elm (*Ulmus rubra*), Bitternut Hickory (*Carya cordiformis*), and some trees not yet identified. A wonderful new tree appeared, a native Red Mulberry (*Morus rubra*), likely a gift from avian friends.



Just as exciting are the spring ephemerals that have come from the adjacent forest. Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*) appeared in March, followed by Jack-in-the-Pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum*), Mayapple (*Podophyllum peltatum*), Wild Geranium (*Geranium maculatum*), Solomon’s-seal (*Polygonatum biflorum*), Perfoliate Bellwort (*Uvularia perfoliata*), Blue and Yellow Violets (*Viola spp.*), Sweet Cicely (*Osmorhiza claytonii*), a couple of ferns, Black Cohosh (*Actaea racemosa*), and Moonseed (*Menispermum canadense*). The borders contain remnants of the old field: Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) and the fascinating Carrion Flower (*Smilax herbacea*).



The lesson of a few years of not mowing is that my yard does indeed want to be a forest! We will still have a lot of work to do to keep the invasives at bay, but that is the task done willingly by all of us who love our land and strive to protect and encourage the natives on it.

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