

The



Leaflet

Smithsonian Naturalist Center Tour Offered—Marjorie Prochaska

WINTER 2009

You don't have to drive in to the District to visit the Smithsonian. We have a little bit of that venerable institution right here in Loudoun County. In the late nineties, when the Museum of Natural History was being renovated, the museum's Naturalist Center was moved to Leesburg. This was considered a temporary move at the time, and still is, which is why it is installed in leased space in an office park off Sycolin Road.

Curators in the various scientific disciplines envisioned the Naturalist Center as a place where the serious scholar could experience hands-on study of the collections. Curators from each discipline opened up their collections and selected specimens to share with the layman public: dazzling displays of fossils and corals, preserved invertebrates, exotic mounted mammals, and drawers of bird skins and mounted plants.

The herbarium in the Botany Department at the Smithsonian in DC is something to behold—two floors of floor-to-ceiling metal cases housing tens of thousands of dried plants, mounted and preserved for scientists to study. Curator emeritus Stanwyn Shetler personally selected a thousand specimens to make the trip to Leesburg. He selected a sampling of plants we are likely to encounter in the Washington/Baltimore area.

The Piedmont Chapter has scheduled a tour of the Naturalist Center for Friday, January 8, at 10:30am, in lieu of our "Second Sunday Walk", because the Naturalist Center is not open Sundays. If you are unfamiliar with dried plant specimens, here is your opportunity to see how instructive study of them can be. Plant mounting can be an art in itself, as the plant mounter decides how to position the plant on the page and carefully secure it with linen strips or a few stitches. I am hoping the Center will provide us a few dissecting scopes to use, but plan on bringing your own ocular or magnifying glass. What has always amazed me is how a plant maintains its integrity even pressed and dried. Think of which Washington-area plants (and this includes northern Virginia up to the Shenandoah) you might like to look up and to explore at close range and come prepared to botanize in a new way.

We'll have a tour of the Center first to look at the breadth of its collections. We will finish with the mini-herbarium and settle at tables and chairs for more in-depth study of plants. We can stay as long as we like, certainly until mid-afternoon, but I expect many of us will want to do lunch on our own in Leesburg.

Please call Marjorie Prochaska at 540-364-1029 if you plan to come on this trip so we can tell our guide how large a group we will be. The Center is located at 741 Miller Drive SE. I'll give you further directions when you call. In the event the weather does not cooperate, January 15 is our make-up date.

Emily Southgate Talks about Pollen as a Window into the Past—Kristin Zimet

After the Chapter's Annual Meeting on October 17 (election results reported in *The Presidents Corner* on page 3), Emily Southgate, historical ecologist, gave a fascinating program—*Pollen as a Window into the Past: How Ecologists Use Pollen to Reconstruct Past Vegetation*. She brought vertical core samples of mud containing ancient pollen and showed microscope slides of pollen grains extracted from such samples. For further exploration she recommended the North American Pollen Data Base, a good resource on line. Emily autographed her book, *People and the Land through Time: Linking Ecology and History*, and donated the profits from her sales at this meeting to the Chapter.



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 geographically defined 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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The Leaflet can be seen in color online at www.vnps.org/chapters/piedmont/

The Chapter's email address is piedmontvnps@gmail.com

The Leaflet Editor
Richard Stromberg

Remarkable and Historic Big Tree Tour—Carrie Blair

On October 29 Sally Anderson, Marjorie Prochaska and Carrie Blair joined members of Northern Neck Chapter for a full day tour of two Richmond hotspots for tree giants: Hollywood Cemetery and Maymont Park. Each is about 135 acres of rolling hills. They are practically side by side in the heart of Richmond on the James River. Sara Caskie and Hilda and Charlie Wilson organized the event, including a BYO lunch at the Byrd Park Nature Center next door, and served delicious desserts.

Now I know how early architects designed the foundations of great cathedrals, they copied the flared trunks of great trees, able to support the huge height, great weight, and massive superstructure that champion trees possess.

Nancy Ross Hugo, author of *Remarkable Trees of Virginia*, and Byron Carmean, champion tree expert, led us on a car tour through the cemetery, where we admired the view, landscape, monuments, and historic/big trees including Willow Oaks (*Quercus phellos*), White Oaks (*Q. alba*), Tulip Poplars (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), Sycamores (*Platanus occidentalis*), Hollies (*Ilex spp.*), and a blazing cherry-red Black Gum (*Nyssa sylvatica*).

At Maymont the state champion Incense Cedar (*Calocedrus decurrens*), a Spanish Fir (*Abies pinsapo*), and other “foreign dignitaries” are beautifully showcased on Nancy’s “top honors” property. The Persian Ironwood (*Parrotia Persica*) embraced our group while a member read a childhood remembrance of her early tree experiences, which took us all back many decades. I collected the colorful *Hamamelidaceae* leaves, striped yellow, red, and orange.

We photographed the giant Tulip Poplar that is shown on the cover of *Remarkable Trees*, but getting the presence of a huge tree into your camera seemed impossible to us, but Robert Llewellyn did—get the book and see.

November Second Sunday Starred Native Grasses—Jocelyn Sladen

Sunday, November 8, 15 hikers gathered at Clifton Farmhouse, the Field Station for Environmental Studies on the Piedmont, near Warrenton, for a hike through fields dense with native grasses. Dr. Tom Wood, Director of ES and Jocelyn Sladen, the day’s field trip leader, greeted participants on the sunny porch with offerings of cider, great food, information and a few minutes of good conversation before striking out for the largest of Clifton’s old field habitats. Trails curved through acres of Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), Indian Grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*), and Purpletop (*Tridens flavus*), with the Bluestem particularly striking in its russet autumn color. We tested our acumen in telling Bluestem apart from Broomsedge (*Andropogon virginicus*), marveled at discovery of frothy patches of Purple Lovegrass (*Eragrostis spectabilis*). We watched Butterflyweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) seeds escape on shimmering filaments from their pods. Towering clumps of Smooth Sumac (*Rhus glabra*) emerged from the grasses with fat clusters of bright rusty-red drupes which we learned could be used for Indian “lemonade,” so we did a taste test. We compared its color with Shining Sumac (*Rhus copallinum*). Tom, the birder, stopped us now and then to hear a Yellow-breasted Chat (*Icteria virens*) or some other call, and spotted the remnants of turtle eggs. Environmental Studies offered more refreshments back on the porch and deserves our hearty thanks.



The President's Corner—Marjorie Prochaska

This issue marks my first as your president. I have big shoes to fill, but we intend to keep immediate past-president Carrie Blair engaged so that we enjoy the benefits of her knowledge and experience. Sally Anderson wears two hats as our State president and our chapter vice-president, as does Cathy Mayes, who serves as treasurer for both the State and the Piedmont Chapter. Kristin Zimet returns for a second year as our very capable secretary. John Fry and Nicky Staunton have rotated off the board. Nicky will continue to serve as liaison to the *Flora of Virginia* project.

We welcome three new directors: Carla Overbeck, Mary Keith Ruffner and Linda Thomas. I can already sense the new perspectives they bring to our group. Blanca Vandervoort returns, bringing us her links to other environmental causes. Ramona Morris, Jocelyn Sladen, Robin Williams and Richard Stromberg round out the board. Richard labors tirelessly in editing *The Leaflet* quarter after quarter. We are so grateful for his talents and abilities in this area. *The Leaflet* keeps us all informed. If you wish to contact any of us, email piedmontvnps@gmail.com. Richard will see that the email reaches whomever you wrote, and we pledge to get back to you in a timely manner. We want to hear from you.

Did you know that all of you are welcome to our board meetings? We are your board after all. We meet the second Tuesday of the month from 2 to 4pm. We generally meet in a member's home, rotating locations each month. This month, however, our meeting will be held at the State Arboretum at Blandy Farm on Hwy 50. Meet us in the dining room at 2pm on December 8 and see what we're about.

First on our agenda will be serious planning for the state annual meeting which our Chapter will be hosting next September 10-12 in Shenandoah National Park. We aim to make this the best annual meeting ever, and we intend to take full advantage of the many opportunities the Park offers. You can be involved in the Virginia Native Plant Society many ways. Helping to plan the annual meeting is a start. If you have talents in this area, please come. Surprise us on the 8th.

Piedmont Chapter 2010 Goals And Objectives—Marjorie Prochaska

Bylaw XI.7 of the Virginia Native Plant Society states, "Each chapter shall develop policies and programs that support and complement those of the Society". The Piedmont Chapter has certainly been doing this, but this fall we codified some specific goals which we share with you. If you have ways to help us achieve them, by all means let us hear from you. Our 2010 goals are

- To plan and host a dynamic 2010 Annual Meeting
- To continue donations to the *Flora of Virginia* project, with the aim of contributing another \$4000 by the end of 2011
- To increase member participation
- To host events throughout our seven-county range
- To market at least one of our trips to families with children
- To multiply the number of authors contributing articles to our newsletter *The Leaflet*
- To interact with members of other chapters
- To partner with like-minded environmental organizations as time permits

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Valentine's Day Tree Walk—Marjorie Prochaska

Last year, with an eye to not letting our plant ID skills get rusty over the winter and to attract a variety of members, the Board decided to plan at least one activity a month. We arrived at our "Second Sunday Walks", which have been scheduled fairly regularly and which seem to have a small but loyal following.

Knowing that some of us are passionate about trees, we have scheduled a winter tree identification walk in the State Arboretum at Blandy for our February Second Sunday Walk on Valentine's Day. We will concentrate on conifers, especially on Blandy's wonderful conifer trail, although with the leaves off, this is an excellent time to study the bark, twigs, and branching patterns of the deciduous trees. We will see the two champion Table Mountain Pines (*Pinus pungens*) described in the Fall *Leaflet*. The Table Mountain Pine is not a huge tree, but its size, shape and habitat are unique.

Join us on Valentine's Day. From the main parking lot, walk straight ahead toward the main building. Walk around it and meet us in back at 2pm. Children are welcome on this hike. There are other options for families—a box wood garden, an herb garden, a wonderful Ginkgo grove, a native plant trail, wetlands—lots of hiking opportunities. We will conclude our walk with hot chocolate in the library.

Calendar of Events

Sunday	Dec 13	1pm	Second Sunday Walk at Ovoka
Clarke/Fauquier Counties. Richard Stromberg will lead a walk along the re-routed Appalachian Trail above Sky Meadows State Park. Contact Richard at risy@embarqmail.com or 540-631-0212.			
Friday	January 8	10:30am	Smithsonian Naturalist Center Field Trip
Leesburg. See article on page 1. We will begin with a tour and then are welcome to stay the day. Maximum attendance is 40 people. Snow date is January 15. For more information contact Marjorie Prochaska at 540-364-1029/ fujinewgrand@aol.com			
Sunday	February 14	2pm	Tree Lovers Walk
State Arboretum. See article on page 3. The focus will be on evergreens. After a 1 ½ hour walk, we will serve cocoa in the library. Contact Robin Williams 540 547 9752/ robinspony@verizon.net			
Sunday	March 14	2pm	Plant Mounting Workshop
State Arboretum. See article below. We have practice specimens from the Chestnut Foundation and from Rattlesnake Springs. Contact Cathy Mayes: MayesCD@aol.com or 540-364-4525			
Sunday	March 28	10am-1pm	Garlic Mustard Pull
Help eliminate invasive Garlic Mustard at Thompson Wildlife Management Area. Last year we got further down the trail than ever before, so we are making progress. Meet at the Trillium Trail Parking Lot. If you plan to spend the day, pack a lunch. Contact Richard Stromberg 540-631-0212/ risy@embarqmail.com			

Plant Mounting Workshop—Marjorie Prochaska

Some years ago I came across a corsage from a long-ago high school formal dance, pressed in a Bible my grandmother had given me. It brought back a flood of memories, not of the dance or the boy, but of my excitement and nervousness and the scent of carnations. I marveled at how a cluster of dried up flowers could evoke such memories. This was the extent of my plant pressing in my pre-botany days.

Much later I discovered herbaria, those repositories of floor-to-ceiling metal cases filled with sheet after sheet of carefully pressed, dried, and mounted plants. By its nature, an herbaceous plant withers and dies. To capture it in its fullness, the botanist digs it up or takes a cutting for a large plant. The collector makes certain that he has leaves, stalk and inflorescence. Roots are nice to include for the smaller plants, as they can tell a scientist a lot about their habits of growth. Large plants like trees have their leaves and twigs collected along with their fruit and male and female parts. Soft tissue plants are placed between sheets of newsprint separated by corrugated cardboard and pressed. The cardboard serves as a (continued on page 5)

Editor's Corner**Correction to previous issue:**

In the Fall *Leaflet* I added a note to the end of Cathy Mayes article about Wavy-leaved Basket Grass (*Oplismenus hirtellus* ssp. *undulatifolius*), "I hiked part of the Massanutten Trail yesterday where it goes along Forest Road 66 by the Strasburg Reservoir. Stilt grass filled both roadsides, but in the middle, between the tire ruts was Wavy-leaved Basketgrass."

As Cathy instructed, I sent a picture of the grass I had seen to Kevin Heffernan, Staff Biologist at the Division of Natural Heritage. He forwarded it to others in DNH, who informed me that it was not Wavy-leaved Basketgrass. Gary Fleming, DNH Vegetation Ecologist, wrote, "The plant in your photo is joint-headed arthraxon (*Arthraxon hispidus*), not wavy-leaved basketgrass. The strongly ciliate leaf margins, deeply clasping leaf bases, and the way the uppermost leaves unfurl in a circular pattern are all diagnostic characters that are absent in the basketgrass. Don't feel bad - WLBG and *Arthraxon* are very similar in appearance. In my opinion, way too much emphasis has been put on distinguishing the basket grass from *Microstegium* [*Stilt Grass*], when it is far more likely to be confused with *Arthraxon*." Johnny Townsend, DNH Staff Botanist, concurred, "This looks like *Arthraxon hispidus*, not *Oplismenus*. The leaves of Wavy-leaf basket grass should have waves perpendicular to and all the way across the leaf and the leaves would not be as clasping at the base as *Arthraxon*." Later Gary added, "By the way, *Arthraxon* is also a nasty invasive, although much less tolerant of shade than either *Microstegium* or basket grass."

– Richard Stromberg

Plant Mounting Workshop (continued from page 4)

conduit for the evaporating moisture. Ideally they are stored in a cool dry place until thoroughly dry, sometimes several weeks. The collector labels the plant immediately, citing date and place of collection, longitude, latitude, elevation, and name of collector. He or she may do an immediate ID, but with new species, classification and naming come much later. Once dry, the cardboard is removed to be used again. The plant can remain stored flat in its newsprint for years, but it is fragile and can slide out of its folder, and parts can be lost unless it is mounted.

Plant mounting has developed over the years. Each scientific institution has its own guidelines. The Smithsonian uses thin linen strips, cut and glued to hold a plant flat on the page. Stitches with linen thread can secure a thick stem. Seeds can be stored in an envelope glued to the archival sheet. Other institutions might glue the entire plant to the sheet. Linen strips can be snipped, and the entire plant removed for study under a microscope. Dried plants can be somewhat flexible, and a plant mounter is accorded a certain amount of discretion in arranging them on the page. There are general guidelines to follow, but mounters are encouraged to arrange the plant so that all the salient features are visible to the scholar. At least one leaf is turned over so that its underside is revealed. The work of the best plant mounters are beautiful, as he or she captures the nature of the plant's growth habit on the page.

Following up on the trip to see herbarium specimens at the Smithsonian Naturalist Center in January (see article on page 1), we are scheduling a plant mounting workshop at Blandy as our March Second Sunday event (March 14, 2pm). We will mount the plants several of our members gathered and dried from the Rattlesnake Springs area at Blandy earlier this fall. We might also have some pressed American Chestnut (*Castanea dentata*) cuttings to mount. We hope to have a plant mounting expert from the Smithsonian to demonstrate proper technique. If you like using your hands, if you think you might enjoy making choices as to how to place a plant on paper, if you do not mind the tedium of the linen strips and glue and stitches, then come and join us and see how it is done. If you like quilting, you will probably love plant mounting.

PlantWise, An Amazing Website—Jocelyn Sladen

A bumper sticker alerted me to a remarkable website about invasive plant species: www.beplantwise.org. Although gardeners are its primary target, the 'Resources' link leads to extensive information on a broad range of topics. Links to regional information are particularly useful. *Plantwise* gives gardeners tips on how to manage their garden to preserve the unique qualities of neighboring wildlands. It is a partnership between the National Park Service, the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, The Garden Club of America, National Invasive Species Council, Student Conservation Association and many others aiming to reduce invasive plants in the urban landscape.



Joint-headed Arthraxon
Arthraxon hispidus



Richard Stromberg



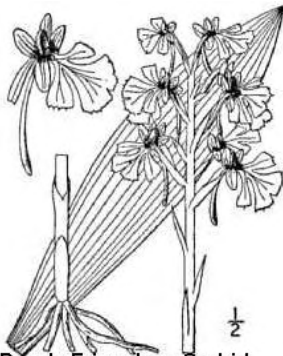
Gary Fleming, VDCR Natural Heritage

Wavy-leaved
Basketgrass
Oplismenus hirtellus
ssp. *undulatifolius*

Please check the date at the bottom of your mailing label below. It is your VNPS membership expiration date. If your membership has expired, please contact VNPS at 540-837-1600.

The Leaflet

**PIEDMONT CHAPTER
VIRGINIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY
P.O. BOX 336
THE PLAINS, VA 20198**



Purple Fringeless Orchid
Platanthera peramoena
USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database / Britton,
N.L., and A. Brown. 1913. Illustrated flora of
the northern states and Canada. Vol. 1: 559.