

The



Leaflet

Chapter Annual Meeting by Mary Keith Ruffner

WINTER 2016

The chapter annual meeting was held at the Cool Springs Campus of Shenandoah University. The property was part of the 1864 Battle of Cool Spring and most recently was a golf course. Shenandoah University acquired the property in 2013 and is transforming it into an outdoor classroom.

We had a wonderful group of about 40 people attend. This year for the first time we invited non-members. Gathering at noon for a potluck lunch, social hour, and native plant seed exchange, we enjoyed a wide variety of delicious food. The seed exchange was met with enthusiasm and lots of good discussion.



In front of
Cool Spring Lodge

A brief business meeting followed the potluck to elect the board for 2017. McNeill Mann and Karen Hendershot were elected as new members of the board.

Continuing to serve on the board: Sally Anderson (president), Robin Williams (vice president), Cathy Mayes (treasurer), Mary Keith Ruffner (secretary), Jocelyn Sladen, Carrie Blair, Blanca Vandervort, Richard Stromberg, Brenda Crawford, Cindy Blugerman, Emily Southgate, Lil Ledford, Edwin Tobias, Marie Majarov, Elly Daley, and Ron

Hughes. Thank you all for your continued willingness to serve. Kristin Zimet cycles off of the board after serving graciously for four years. Thank you Kristin for all of your work and dedication.

The board meeting was followed by a talk by Gene Lewis, the site manager for Cool Springs. Gene then led us on a lovely walk around the property. The weather was perfect and we enjoyed discussions about the native plants and the invasives and how to deal with them, admired the Oaks, especially the Bur Oaks (*Quercus macrocarpus*), and were fascinated by the Blue Heron rookery across the river.



Mary Keith Ruffner and
Richard Stromberg
examine a Red Oak



Bur Oak (*Quercus
macrocarpus*)
acorn cap



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.

The Leaflet is published quarterly by the Piedmont Chapter of VNPS. Permission is granted to reproduce material with credit to the source.

The Leaflet can be seen on-line in color at www.vnps.org/piedmont

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

OFFICERS

Sally Anderson, *President*
rccsca@comcast.net

Robin Williams, *Vice Pres.*
robinspony2@gmail.com

Mary Keith Ruffner, *Secretary*
cootehillfarm@aol.com

Cathy Mayes, *Treasurer*
mayesCD@aol.com

DIRECTORS

Carrie Blair
horseblanketcb@yahoo.com

Cindy Blugerman
ecokid.wv@gmail.com

Brenda Crawford
brendacrawford90@gmail.com

Ellie Daley, *pedaley@verizon.net*

Karen Hendershot
wyshfulthinking@gmail.com

Ron Hughes
ron.hughes@dgif.virginia.gov

Lil Ledford
ljledford@gmail.com

Marie Majarov
mariemilanmajarov@gmail.com

McNeill Mann
mcneill@earthvillageeducation.org

Jocelyn Sladen
jocelyn616@gmail.com

Emily Southgate
ewbsouthgate@gmail.com

Ed Tobias
edwintoo@hotmail.com

Blanca Vandervoort
blanca@nelsoncable.com

Piedmont Prairie Walk by Sally Anderson

For the 3rd year in a row we have paid a late season visit to a Piedmont prairie remnant in Culpeper County. Annual mowing or bush hogging the roadside and powerline right-of-way keeps woody vegetation from closing the canopy, mimicking disturbance by both naturally occurring and Native American set fires. These 'prairies' would probably not have been huge treeless areas, but instead more of a savannah or open woodland.

Geology and the resulting soil types also influence the plant community. The land is part of the Culpeper Triassic basin, a rift valley filled with sediment eroded from higher land. The soil is drought prone and forms fragipan, where a layer of poorly permeable clay subsoil limits tree root growth. Post Oak (*Quercus stellata*), Pignut Hickory (*Carya glabra*), Winged Elm (*Ulmus alata*), Red Cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) and Blackjack Oak (*Quercus marilandica*) are the dominant woody vegetation because they tolerate the soil, which alternately produces wet and dry conditions and shrinks and swells with the amount of water, causing cracks to form and breaking roots.

Still the soil is mafic, that is, a soil weathered from rocks containing magnesium and iron and may also be relatively rich in calcium ions. The calcium ions make it a rich soil, and the diversity of the site is great. To our previously compiled list of over 50 species, we added another dozen species of shrubs and herbaceous plants. We were all charmed by the Blue Curls (*Trichostema dichotomum*) that were blooming everywhere this year as well as abundant Grass-leaf Blazing Star (*Liatris pilosa*). However, we were probably most surprised to see a wetland plant, Southern Water-plantain (*Alisma subcordatum*), growing in a tire rut at the edge of the road.

We met the owners of part of this prairie, and they are excited about their property and were kind enough to provide parking and cold drinks for which we thank them. This is a place we hope to visit regularly.



Bluecurls
*Trichostema
dichotomum*

Richard Stromberg



Grass-leaved Blazing Star
Liatris pilosa

Richard Stromberg



A Major Contribution to Save Our Pollinators—Marie Majarov

September 22 dawned bright, clear and beautiful in Clarke County. Planning the planting of pollinator-friendly plants at the Virginia Department of Transportation’s (VDOT) Rt-50/17 Waterloo Park & Ride had been in the works for over a year. The time was now! Fifty High School Environmental Science students joined adult volunteers to plant 2,500 milkweed and nectar plants in just over two hours. The students, our future environmental stewards, were inspiring in their enthusiasm and careful, hard work.



Nicole Hamilton, executive director of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, speaks to volunteers.

The VDOT Staunton district partnered with Clarke County officials, the Virginia Native Plant Society (VNPS), Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy (LWC), Virginia Master Naturalists, Piedmont Environmental Council, the State Arboretum, and Northern Shenandoah Valley Master Gardeners. Clarke County resident and Loudoun Valley High School Environmental Science teacher Liam McGranaghan was the force behind the student volunteers and initiating the volunteer groups and Clarke County officials to come together with VDOT to work on behalf of saving roadside milkweed. (continued on page 4)



©Marie & Milan Majarov



A Major Contribution to Save Our Pollinators (continued)

Wildflower License Plate fees funded the plant plugs. VNPS's Sally Anderson and LWC's Nicole Hamilton helped VDOT's Staunton District Roadside Manager Scott Nye put together an impressive array of species: one-third of the plugs were Common and Swamp Milkweed, (*Asclepias syriaca* and *incarnata*) and two-thirds were nectar providers: Common Sneezeweed (*Helenium autumnale*), Beebalm (*Monarda didyma* "Jacob Cline"), Bluestem Goldenrod (*Solidago caesia*), New York Aster (*Symphotrichum novi-belgii*), False Blue Indigo (*Baptista australis*), Whorled Tickseed (*Coreopsis verticillata*), Ageratum (*Conoclinium coelestinum*), Smooth Oxeye (*Heliopsis helanthisoides*), Wild Bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*), Grass-leaved Goldenrod (*Euthamia graminifolia*), Wrinkle-leaf Goldenrod (*Solidago rugosa* "fireworks"), New York Ironweed (*Vernonia noveboracensis*), Spike Gayfeather (*Liatris spicata*), Foxglove Beardtongue (*Penstemon digitalis*), and Short-toothed Mountain Mint (*Pycnanthemum muticum*).

VDOT had plowed and mulched the 8,600 square foot planting area and will water it. They marked off sections and set out plants for each section. Adult volunteers led groups of students for each section, so planting went smoothly. Volunteers will keep the area weeded until the plants are well established.

Next spring an adjacent area of equal size will be planted with 2500+ additional plugs including spring blooming species that will nourish new queen bumblebees who must establish new colonies each year.

Rt-50/17 is well-traveled route with the Park and Ride encouraging car-pools. VDOT-installed signs will show the importance of native plant habitat as food sources for declining, critical pollinators, especially butterflies and native bees. Pathways through the habitat will invite visitors, including area teachers and students, to get an up-close view of pollinators throughout the growing season and in the fall to witness the migration of monarch butterflies.

This planting grew out of a committee of VDOT officials and the groups listed above meeting in Clarke County, throughout 2015-16. It focused on the planting native pollinators and environmentally friendly care, such as well-timed mowing, along our roadsides and public areas. VDOT said that "native habitat not only serves our threatened pollinators but also provides lower VDOT maintenance costs, reduces erosion and storm water runoff, provides sediment control and improves aesthetics."

Clarke County Natural Resource Planner, Allison Teeter, stated, "Clarke County is very excited about being selected for VDOT's first Pollinator Habitat project in the Shenandoah Valley...that VDOT has been incredible to work with and we hope that other communities will participate in this program to help educate the public about the importance of habitat for the monarch butterfly and other pollinators." VDOT's statewide Pollinator Habitat Program was first launched in 2014 and now includes numerous sites at Safety Rest Areas, Park & Ride Lots, roadsides, and medians.

Cliff Balderson, VDOT Edinburg Residency Administrator offered a lovely sentiment, "This is a beautiful part of Virginia...and we're proud to partner with our neighbors to create this site, and we're looking forward to watching it grow and mature."





Habitat Game by Emily Southgate

Nine enthusiastic VNPS Piedmont Chapter volunteers gathered at Powhatan School in Millwood on October 27 to play again our “Habitat Game” with Clarke County’s 4th graders. The Clarke County Conservation Fair is an annual event designed to increase environmental awareness among the 4th graders, who have been studying the environment in their classes. This is the third year that we have featured the Habitat Game (read about previous years in Winter Leaflets for 2014 and 2015) and it was again a big hit with students and teachers alike.



VNPS volunteers Brenda Crawford, Sally Anderson, Kristen Zimet, Emily Southgate, Mary Keith Ruffner, Robin Williams, and Ron Hughes (missing from picture: Ed Tobias and Blanca Vandervoort)

We had been a bit concerned in past years that some of the children made decisions based on whether a plant was native or not and how many tokens (poker chips) each species got, without concentrating on the actual benefits and drawbacks of the species. To eliminate this problem, we made new species cards that did not indicate whether a species was native or not or how many tokens each species earned. This was a very successful improvement. After a group chose their species, they read the names out loud and got the appropriate number of tokens. There was great excitement about high token species. Mary-Keith Ruffner added a new twist – if they had chosen a plant that had a very low token total, they had the option of changing their minds and replacing it with a plant they had discarded into the “compost pile”. This also helped them think about their choices.

The game proved to be great fun again for all of us. We even found that it could be quickly and efficiently disassembled and reassembled indoors, as it began to rain before the last group had cycled through. We worked (almost) as well as a team as the 4th graders did.



We started thinking, why are there so few tokens for plant/plant interactions? No good answers to that yet, except that plants, of course, compete with each other for resources, while they are at the base of the food webs for all animals.



Sunday	Dec 11	1pm	State Arboretum Sunday Walk
Clarke County. Walk at the State Arboretum at Blandy Experimental Farm is being planned. For more information, email piedmontvnps@gmail.com .			
Sunday	Jan 8	9am-3pm	President Lincoln's Cottage Sunday Walk
Carrie Blair will lead a walk at President Lincoln's Cottage at the Soldiers' Home National Monument and Rock Creek Cemetery, 140 Rock Creek Church Road, NW, Washington, DC 20011. Both locations are between New Hampshire Ave & North Capitol St. Carpools will leave Marshall off Route 66 exit 28. We will arrange a parking lot or use the Chestnut office. Leave 9:00 a.m. Arrive 10:30 when the gates open. House tour at 11:00, \$15.00. RSVP to Carrie Blair is required plus prepayment of \$15 by December 8. A deposit is required to hold our tour slot. 540-364-1232 or horseblanketcb@yahoo.com			
Sunday	February 12	1-3pm	Notes from Nature - Plants of Virginia Workshop
George Mason professor of botany Andrea Weeks will train people how to enter label data for the herbaria images that have been digitized. This is part of community outreach for National Science Foundation-funded research. The goals of the workshop include an introduction the rationale for digitization of natural history specimens and the goals of herbarium digitization in the southeastern US, which is the focus of the NSF-funded research. Before the program Kyle Richards and Erika Gonzales will lead a walk to the demonstration gardens on Racetrack Hill, starting time and location TBA. Limit 24 participants. Register with Catherine Mayes, MayesCD@aol.com .			

VNPS Piedmont Chapter Winter Speaker Series

We are planning once again to have talks in January, February, and March on Sunday afternoons. We will send out details as the plans are completed. For information, email piedmontvnps@gmail.com.

Clifton Farms Walk by Brenda Crawford and Karen Hendershot

The Second Sunday Walk on November 13 was at Clifton Farm, home of Environmental Studies on the Piedmont, near Warrenton on a beautiful, sunny, light-jacket day, the kind of autumn day you should take a walk outdoors. The late-Fall walk provided an opportunity to identify plants by trunks, stems, dried leaves, seed pods, and buds forming for next year.

After greetings from Jocelyn Sladen and Tom Wood, Director of Environmental Studies, and a quick lunch the group split in two parts: a long walk led by Carrie Blair and Sally Anderson and a shorter walk led by Jocelyn Sladen and Emily Southgate.

The first stop on the shorter walk was to say hello to the swans in the pond as Boy Scouts built a dock. Then we moved on to the grassy path with the water's edge on one side and hedgerows with a stone fence on the other. All along the way we saw alders and sycamores, grasses and sedges. Not much was in bloom, but the seeds and seed dispersal methods of the autumn plant life are beautiful and fascinating.

(continued on page 7)



Jocelyn Sladen (left) tells about the small fenced area that was originally full of native plants and a small pond but now is dry



Clifton Farms Walk (continued)

Emily and Jocelyn were quick to find interesting examples and then discuss the anatomical features of propagation. Jocelyn filled in the history of some of the plantings such as a few Cardinal Flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*) plants, the remainder of what was once a large and colorful planting.

Multiflora Roses (*Rosa multiflora*) and Coralberries (*Symphoricarpos orbiculatus*) were plentiful and took us to a discussion of how and why the invasive plants had come to be here. We also saw natives: Seedbox (*Ludwigia alternifolia*), Stick-tights (*Hackelia virginiana*) and Indian Grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*) and other grasses and sedges.

On the far side of the pond we noted a decorative tulip tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), looking like a birthday cake, with seed pods as candles and. The path led to the road, where we found a small enclosure that was a small wetland display of dried up native plants. It was now obviously in use as a tree-chewing place by nearby beavers. Along the road was a dam across the small ditch. We found a never-say-die goldenrod in bloom, one tiny flower still hanging on.

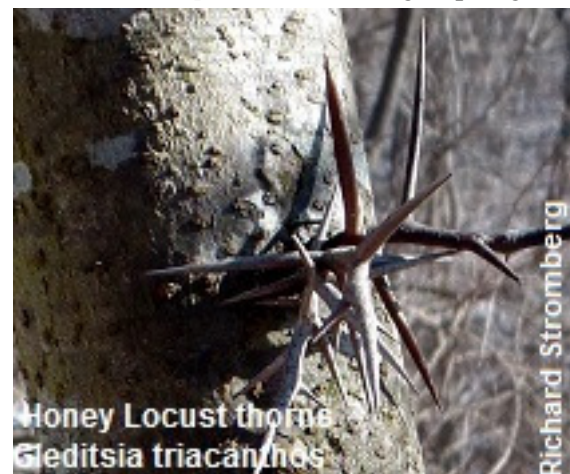


On the longer walk Carrie pointed out keys to identifying species such as the sand-papery feel of the leaves of Slippery Elm (*Ulmus rubra*) trees enjoying the dampness of the pond edges. The name slippery is derived from the mucilaginous inner bark. Other examples of wetland-loving trees were a member of the Alder (*Alnus*) genus, which contain male and female catkins on the same tree, the native Black Willow (*Salix nigra*) with its thin, dark leaves still on the branch, and Bitternut Hickory (*Carya cordiformis*), displaying its sulfur-yellow leaf buds. The Black Walnut (*Juglans nigra*) was identified by its deeply ridged bark and gray, fuzzy leaf buds. Finally, the flowering herb, Culver's Root (*Veronicastrum virginicum*), was also visible along the pond rim, with leaf whorls around its stem and candelabra-like, spikey seedpods.

As we walked past the hedgerows, we noted the deep red leaves and dark blue berries of the Blackhaw Viburnum (*Viburnum prunifolium*), highly prized as a winter food source for birds. Thickets of Common Greenbrier (*Smilax rotundifolia*) still had their shiny, heart-shaped leaves but could also be identified by their thorny, persistently green branches. Yellow seed pods were forming on the golden-flowered Wingstem (*Verbesina alternifolia*). A colony Wild Senna (*Senna hebecarpa*) looked like a group of giant black sparklers because of their dark pods dangling over the buff field of grass.

A huge Honey Locust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*) was spectacular. Large clusters of thorns reaching 4 inches in length instantly give away its identity.

Among edible fruit-bearing trees, we saw Paw Paw (*Asimina triloba*), distinguished by leaf buds resembling a black paint brush, and Common Persimmon trees (*Diospyros virginiana*), recognizable by gray, chunky bark resembling an ice-cube tray. We sampled the orange, but not-quite-ripe, fruit of one heavily-laden Persimmon tree. The sweet starting flavor deceived, as the finish was still mouth-puckering.



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



Curlyheads (*Clematis ochroleuca*)

page 8

The Leaflet



WINTER 2016



Blanca Vandervoort

Clifton Pond



Blanca Vandervoort

Clifton Persimmon tree