

The *Leaflet*

Vernal Pool walk at BRCES—Sally Anderson

SUMMER 2017

On a chilly but lovely winter's day in January, Phil Daley led our group past several vernal pool sites on a trail at the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship in Loudoun County that. Phil is very active in leading walks for BRCES and is the husband of VNPS Piedmont Chapter board member, Ellie Daley. We were lucky to be joined by Mike Hayslett, a vernal pool expert who is also knowledgeable about trees, so our walk was also a tree study. Skunk Cabbage had been blooming for some time, but we still found a few of the spathes and saw the early leaves emerging. The property has some impressive trees, but, unfortunately, some are in trouble and some have already fallen. Emerald ash borer is impacting the various ash tree species in our state at this time.

Our first stop was a man-made pond, where we found many, many masses of Spotted Salamander eggs. These blobs, either milky white or more clear, are about the size of a baseball and are laid in spring as soon as conditions are right. This year, the weather was already favorable in January. Another location we checked was a natural low area in an old stream channel, where there were masses of Wood Frog eggs. These groups of eggs are laid close together forming larger masses, and are darker and closer to the surface than the salamanders. Some of these end up being damaged in freezing temperatures or in dry conditions. The winter was very dry, and many natural pools in the area were not wet enough to support amphibians, according to Phil and Mike.

Luckily, the weather warmed up as we walked, and we had a fine day in the woods.



Phil Daley points out wood frog eggs

Sally Anderson



Spotted Salamander eggs

Sally Anderson



Wood frog eggs

Sally Anderson



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 subgroup 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 on-line in color at www.vnps.org/piedmont

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Thompson WMA Invasives Removal—Robin Williams

The Marjorie Arundel Wildlife and Birding Trail in the Thompson Wildlife Management Area has been on the Virginia Native Plant Registry for 27 years. Together with the fire road that starts at the Trillium Trail Parking Lot on Virginia 638 and the Appalachian Trail, it provides a 1.2 mile loop through one of the most fantastic wildflower displays in Virginia. On April 1st, twelve members of the VNPS Piedmont Chapter met there to remove exotic invasive plant species from the areas of the trail and fire road.

We pulled and bagged Garlic Mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*), and took down Oriental Bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*) vines along with some huge roots of this tree strangling plant. While much of the Garlic Mustard has been removed from the Marjorie Arundel trail over the many years of repeated efforts, many areas of heavy alien plant invasion into nearby areas of the beautiful Large-flowered Trillium (*Trillium grandiflorum*) and other wildflowers remain. The huge invasion of Garlic Mustard endangers the future of so much of our native flora.



Calmes Neck Bluebell Walk—Karen Hendershot

Gorgeous weather accompanied Piedmont VNPS members on the April 9 Bluebell walk hosted by the homeowners of Calmes Neck in Clarke County. This unique site, known for its dolomite, limestone, and calcareous bluffs along the Shenandoah River, is home not only to a stunning display of Virginia Bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*) but to a diverse plant community.



Sally Anderson led the walk, starting along a deep ravine where we found lovely dark purple Dwarf Larkspurs (*Delphinium tricorne*), graced in the picture by pink Spring Beauty (*Claytonia virginica*). An early Trout Lily (*Erythronium americanum*) showed its bright yellow face, and examples of Toadshade (*Trillium sessile*) were also to be seen.



A wide variety of delicate white flowers emerge in the forest in the early spring. We found Star Chickweed (*Stellaria pubera*), Cutleaf Toothwort (*Cardamine concatenata*), Rue Anemone (*Thalictrum thalictroides*), Twinleaf (*Jeffersonia diphylla*), and Harbinger of Spring (*Erigenia bulbosa*). Two members of the *Dicentra* genus look similar and often grew side by side. Nonetheless, the pantaloony-shaped flowers of the well-named Dutchman's Breeches (*D. cucullaria*) distinguish it from Squirrel Corn (*D. canadensis*), which has heart-shaped blossoms. (continued on page 3)

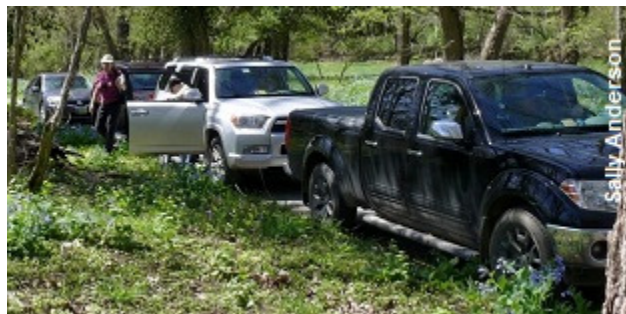


Calmes Neck Bluebell Walk (continued) As we traveled along the cliffs, we found a large population of Blue Cohosh (*Caulophyllum thalictroides*), not yet in bloom, and came upon a striking example of Walking Fern (*Asplenium rhizophyllum*) crossing a moss-covered rock. The remarkable Calmes Neck site also afforded views of Stonecrop (*Sedum ternatum*) and Wild Columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*), among other treasures.



Calmes Neck Bluebell Drive—Brenda Crawford

On a pleasant spring day on a road beside the Shenandoah with the river bank is covered with blue flowers, a small group took a drive on Tilthammer Mill Road across the river from Calmes Neck. The caravan was put together by Sally Anderson, Kristin Zimet, Blanca Vandervoort, and Mary Keith Ruffner, who all had participated earlier on the Calmes Neck walk.



Bluebells on the banks of the Shenandoah



Visiting millions of glorious Bluebells bluebells is a springtime rite that never loses its appeal. Roadside banks become mounds of soft, pillowy blueness. In one corner of the road, nestled in the field of blue, we spotted a clump of white bells in the field of blue.

The first two stops of the trip were beside a waterfall, alongside the broad expanse of calm water. Fishermen in a little boat, a couple of blackbirds, and a few Double-crested Cormorants were the only other visitors on this stretch of the river. The water's edge is a few yards from the road with well-used paths and plenty of groundcovers and other greenery to examine. Sally

showed us, a new plant for me, a clump of Poison Hemlock (*Conium maculatum*). Who knew Poison Hemlock is pretty?

Near the end of the drive, at Kristin's request, we stopped to admire a nice little group of young Pawpaw trees (*Asimina triloba*), buds just about to open. This caused a few of us to find the words to "Pickin' up Pawpaws, Puttin' 'em in a Basket, and then we all headed for home.

What a great trip—a couple of hours in Virginia's natural beauty! Botany on Wheels works just fine.





Shenandoah National Park Wildflower Weekend, May 6-7

—**Mara Meisel** (the Park Ranger who organized the event). Weather was more like February than May, morning temperatures in the 30s and 40s, cold rain/sleet, high winds and waterlogged trails. Rain poured Saturday morning with showers in the afternoon. Sunday had sun, but stronger winds. Heavy rains Thursday night through Friday caused major "streaming" along some trails, and will mean extra repair work for trail maintainers.

Wildflower fans are die-hards, however, and we had a good turnout in spite of the adverse weather. About 300 visitors participated in programs and hikes on May 6 and 7. Wildflowers were at their peak, so hikers were treated to interesting discoveries such as Purple Clematis (*C. occidentalis*), Moss Phlox (*P. subulata*), Birdfoot Violet (*Viola pedata*), Yellow Lady's Slipper (*Cypripedium parviflorum*), Showy Orchis (*Galearis spectabilis*), Wild Geranium (*G. maculatum*), Yellow Pimpernel (*Taenidia integerrima*), Wood Anemone (*A. quinquefolia*) and lots of Large-Flowered Trillium (*T. grandiflorum*). Long-bracteate Frog Orchids (*Coeloglossum viride*) in the Crescent Rock Overlook parking lot were a highlight.



Long-bracteate Frog Orchid

Mara Meisel

—**Kristen Zimet** and Robin Williams let 24 enthusiastic people gathered despite the cold rain on Saturday morning to see the "Wonders of the Mill Prong". Our botany buffs came from ten different states and Japan, and two of them hiked several miles uphill to join us, taking off their boots to ford rushing creeks. Among a great many finds, our favorites this year were Rose Twisted-stalk (*Streptopus roseus*), Yellow Lady's-slipper, Herb Robert (*Geranium robertianum*), Round-leaved Orchid (*Platanthera orbiculata*), Showy Orchis (*Galearis spectabilis*), Bishop's Cap (*Mitella diphylla*), White Monkshood (*Aconitum reclinatum*), Turk's-cap Lily (*Lilium superbum*), Fly Poison (*Amianthium muscatoxicum*), and Leatherwood (*Dirca palustris*)--not all in bloom, but each with a distinctive presence and a story.



Showy Orchis
Galearis spectabilis

Richard Stromberg

—**Cathy Mayes** and Adele Baker led 10 adults and 4 young people, ages 3-11 and identified 25 species. The 4-Hers from Bath County were sooo smart, so interested, my fears disappear-

ed about no one caring for these beautiful places when our generation is gone. I showed the group the two Balsam Fir trees (*Abies balsamea*) on Stony Man South, and one of the smart-alec kids told me I must be wrong because there aren't any native firs in Virginia. I told him he might be right about the rest of Virginia, but there are two right here, and I am not going to cut them down so you can be right. They loved challenging themselves: Next person to find a Lousewort in bloom; next person to find a Trillium that's still white; etc. It made up for the cold, damp, gray day.

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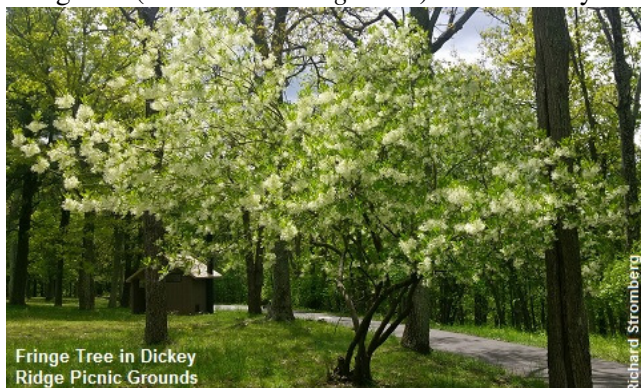
Cathy Mayes and Adele Baker

Mara Meisel



Shenandoah National Park Wildflower Weekend (continued)

—**Richard Stromberg** led a dozen people on the Snead Farm loop. Starting near the magnificent Fringetree (*Chionanthus virginicus*) in the Dickey Ridge Picnic Grounds. The three mile walk took three hours because of the many stops to admire and identify 100 species along the way, including five Violets and three Milkweeds. Highlight of the walk was the large population of Yellow Lady's-slippers scattered in the woods at the junction of Dickey Ridge and Snead Farm Trails. We were



Fringe Tree in Dickey Ridge Picnic Grounds

Richard Stromberg

surprised to see Pawpaws (*Asimina triloba*) blooming on Snead Farm Trail. Nearby we looked under the doubly-divided leaves of Wild Sarsaparilla (*Aralia nudicaulus*) to see each plant's ball of flowers arising from the ground with no leaves on the flower stem. Along Snead Farm Road we saw Miami Mist (*Phacelia purshii*), which is common in southwest Virginia but known north of Rockbridge County only in Arlington and this population.



Wild Sarsaparilla

Richard Stromberg

Edible, Medicinal and Utilitarian Uses of Plants—McNeill Mann

March 19 McNeill Mann, Administrative Director/Farm Coordinator of Earth Village Education in Marshall, shared one of her passions at a Winter Speakers Series lecture: Wild Edible and Medicinal Plants. She presented interesting historical uses and modern applications for several plants. Some plants make delicious food, some make effective medicine, and others are best left to the animals that rely on them for nutrients and habitat. After the talk she provided several "Wild Foods" for people to sample: Autumn Olive berry fruit leather, Acorn flour pancakes, and Spicebush chocolate. Each season brings new flavors and abundance. Some of the plants (native and not) that are at their prime, or about to be:



Common Greenbrier

Richard Stromberg

Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*) Even when the flowers are gone, Redbud keeps on giving. The seed pods are a tasty snack, or put a handful into a salad or stir fry—but they are only good before they get tough and stringy. The flowers and small young leaves are also edible, raw or cooked.

Greenbrier (*Smilax rotundifolia*) Get out there and compete with the deer for the succulent end growth of the greenbrier vines. Look for light green, flexible stems and shiny leaves—even the thorns will be soft—and you'll know you've found it in the right stage. These make a great "trail nibble," or they can be lightly steamed like green beans (and covered in butter, of course).

(continued on page 6)



Redbud

Richard Stromberg



Thursdays	June 1, 8 & 15	6-8pm	Woods and Wildflowers Class
Join Master Naturalist Carrie Blair for a series of walks to learn an incredible amount about our local flora. For more information and to register for the class, contact http://earthvillageeducation.org/ .			
Sunday	June 11	10am	Second Sunday Walk-Ice Mountain
Hampshire County, WV. Ice formed in the winter in the thick talus of Ice Mountain creates a refrigeration effect providing habitat for plant species usually found in sub-arctic regions. Join Kristin Zimet for a walk through these plants unusual for our region. To reserve a space, contact piedmontvnps@gmail.com .			
Sunday	July 9	10am	Second Sunday Drive-Reddish Knob
Augusta County, VA. Join us in a car caravan up one of the highest mountains in Virginia, stopping to see the myriads of flowers and get a 360 degree view at the top. For details, contact piedmontvnps@gmail.com .			
Sunday	August 13	10am	Second Sunday Drive-Skyline Drive
Warren & Page County, VA. Join us in a car caravan along Skyline Drive in Shenandoah National Park stopping to see flowers, geological formations and views. For details, contact piedmontvnps@gmail.com .			

Edible, Medicinal and Utilitarian Uses of Plants (continued)

Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) The tender young leaves can be added to salads, but be warned, they have a strong flavor. At the first sign of a cold, make a strong yarrow tea with the flowers and some leaves (a handful of fresh plant in a quart of hot water). Drink the quart of tea over the course of the day to prevent the cold from taking hold. Yarrow has many different medicinal actions, including being antiseptic, decongestant, and diaphoretic (induces sweating—used for fevers). Do not use during pregnancy.



Lamb's-quarters (*Chenopodium album*) This weed is at its best stage in spring—young, tender, and prolific. Give lambs-quarters a haircut every few days, and when you go back you can barely tell where you harvested before. It is fine mixed into a salad, but it shines as a cooked green—think of a slightly hardier spinach. You can

use it in quiche, lasagna, stir fry, etc. This plant stays tender and tasty as it grows, so you can harvest it throughout the summer.

Start your foraging with the common weeds found in disturbed areas. Many tasty or medicinally-potent plants making appearances in your garden or yard right now! Use a field guide and always be sure you have properly identified the plant before you eat it, and never harvest rare or threatened plants. Foraging opens up a whole new way of relating to the natural world!



Spicebush Chocolate—McNeill Mann

Ingredients:

1/2 cup heavy cream 1 cup dark chocolate chips 10-15 ripe or dried spicebush berries

- Grind the berries in a food processor or spice grinder
- Add the berries to the cream and bring to a gentle simmer for 3–5 minutes, being careful not to burn the cream. The longer you cook the berries and cream, the stronger the flavor.
- Strain the cream to remove the berries
- Add the chocolate chips to the cream and mix. If the heat of the cream doesn't melt the chocolate, use a double boiler to heat the mixture, and keep mixing
- When cream and chocolate are incorporated, spread the mixture on wax paper and refrigerate



Using iNaturalist on a trip to the Southern California Desert—Richard Stromberg

In March I hiked with a group of friends in the southern California desert: Joshua Tree National Park and Anza-Borrego State Park. I found a new tool to help me identify plants, iNaturalist.

iNaturalist is a web site for reporting observations of species. You take a picture and load it with the latitude and longitude where the picture was taken. You can enter an identification. I have seen identifications ranging from “Plant” to “Flowering Plant” to “Family”, to “Genus” to “Species”. Other participants can review the entries to complete the identification or agree or disagree it. Once three people have agreed on the species with no dissenters, the entry is classified as “Research Grade”.

On the iNaturalist home page you can choose a place, and it will show you all the observations for that location. It shows you thumbnail pictures of the species, and you can choose one and get more and larger pictures. You can also search by type (mammal, insect, plant, etc.) family, genus or species and color.

Before I went, I looked at each of the parks and got a head start on what I would be seeing. A subscription sent an email every day with thumbnail pictures of observations entered the previous day.

We spent the first three days above 3,000 feet in the Mojave Desert part of Joshua Tree National Park. The Joshua Tree (*Yucca brevifolia*) is endemic to the Mojave. It has the typical Yucca rosette of sword-shaped leaves, but they grow at the tips of the plant. Joshua Trees grow to 50 feet. They branch after flowering. The name was applied by early settlers, who thought the trees looked like Joshua raising his arms to keep the sun from setting. They were flowering while we were there. The inflorescences looked like white cabbages up in the air.

Joshua Tree NP also has vistas across barren terrain to snow-capped mountains and unusual rock formations, some given names because of what they look like, such as Face Rock and Elephant Rock.

When we went to the lower elevation of the Colorado/Sonora Desert in Anza Borrego State Park, I hit the jackpot. I have been to the southwest deserts several times and have always seen flowers, even in January, but this is the first time I got there after major rainfall. The flowers were exploding. While you were back here enjoying the snow, we were cutting hikes short because temperatures were in the nineties.

The flowers were bursting in the State Park: Chuparosa (*Justicia californica*) mounds topped with bright red, tubular flowers and Brittlebush (*Encelia actonii*) mounds topped with yellow, Desert Poppies (*Eschscholzia glyptosperma*) flowing over rocks. Just as fascinating were individual plants popping out of the dry sand. Several Cactus species had started to flower as well.

Looking at iNaturalist observations gave me a big head start in identifying my pictures. And I used the “Calflora” website to further my searches or corroborate iNaturalist identifications. I was able to identify all the *Asteraceae*, even the yellow ones.



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