

# The Leaflet

Piedmont Prairie Walk—Karen Hendershot

WINTER 2017



Tickseed Sunflower  
*Bidens aristosa*

Bountiful swaths of bright yellow Tickseed Sunflower (*Bidens aristosa*) beckoned us as we drove down the long gravel road to the home of Gale and Eloina Gibson, south of Culpeper. Sally Anderson led the September 10 tour of their property, a wonderful example of a flourishing Piedmont Prairie. Occasional mowing along the road and under a powerline had kept the surrounding oak and hickory forest at bay, facilitating a thriving community of grasses and other herbaceous plants characteristic of a prairie. This particular tour provided a bounty of late-season color, an eye-opener to anyone who may have thought such beauty was the exclusive province of spring and summer.



Slender False Foxglove  
*Agalinis tenuifolia*

Near the house, we saw a wide variety of grasses, including Purple Top (*Tridens flavus*)—also known as Grease Grass, for the oily feel of its purplish seeds. The frilly soft leaves and yellow flowers of Partridge Peas (*Chamaecrista fasciculata*) dotted the landscape. Further decorating the patch were Slender False Foxglove (*Agalinis tenuifolia*) and the delicate



Biennial  
Beeblossom  
*Oenothera  
gaura*

flowers of Biennial Beeblossom (*Oenothera gaura*).



Bluecurls  
*Trichostema  
dichotomum*

Along the roadside were delights both large and small. The flowerhead of Tall Thoroughwort (*Eupatorium altissimum*) nodded heavily, graced by a wasp harvesting its nectar. But sharp eyes and careful steps were required to avoid crushing some of the tinier treasures. Among them was the dainty Clammy Cuphea (*Cuphea viscosissima*), which gets its name from the sticky hairs on the plant, and the playful Bluecurls (*Trichostema dichotomum*), sporting long, curled stamens (shown here against a notepaper backdrop).



Clammy  
Cuphea  
*Cuphea  
viscosissima*

In the broad, sunny area under the powerlines, we found Shrubby St. John's Wort (*Hypericum prolificum*) and Gray and Sweet Goldenrod ((*Solidago nemoralis* and *odora*), as well as their lighter relative, Silverrod (*Solidago bicolor*). Seedpods were evident for earlier-blooming flowers: red rosehips of the Pasture Rose (*Rosa carolina*) and the skinny, paired, beanlike pods of Hemp Dogbane (*Apocynum cannabinum*). Particularly



Rose Pink  
*Sabatia  
angularis*

stunning was a large colony of Grass-leaved Blazing Star (*Liatris pilosa*). A Fowler's Toad (*Anaxyrus fowleri*), uncovered by Ron Hughes, and a nearby Yellow Garden Spider (*Argiope aurantia*) were quite content to make this luscious spot their home.



Grass-leaved  
Blazing  
Star  
*Liatris  
pilosa*

The fun was not over as we made our way to refreshments at the Gibson's home. The pale blue, powder-puff blooms of Mistflower (*Conoclinium coelestinum*) hugged the shady path. At the edge of the woods, we encountered a Wild Plum (*Prunus americana*), with a single fruit dangling from its branch. Then, in the open again, we found Rose Pink (*Sabatia angularis*) – a cheerful conclusion to a delightful day!

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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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**The Leaflet can be seen online in color at**

**[www.vnps.org/piedmont](http://www.vnps.org/piedmont)**

The Chapter's email address is [piedmontvnps@gmail.com](mailto:piedmontvnps@gmail.com)

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## The Leaflet

### Piedmont Chapter Annual Meeting—Robin Williams

The Piedmont Chapter's Annual Meeting was hosted on a lovely October 8th by Earth Village Education (EVE) in Marshall, Virginia. In the barn 27 native plant enthusiasts enjoyed a potluck lunch, a brief meeting, a native plant seed swap and some native plant door prizes which were donated by Morningside and Abernathy & Spence Nurseries and members of the chapter.

Outgoing chapter president Sally Anderson reported on the very busy year's events, projects, and walks and plans for the coming year. She introduced our generous hosts of the EVE, McNeill Mann and Kevin MacDonald, who announced to a saddened group that the Earth Village was going to be closed at the end of the year. So unfortunately we will be losing a great resource for education about nature and plants.



WINTER 2017



Sally Anderson conducts the meeting

Nancy Vehrs

The board shown at the left was elected. At this point, 2018 will be without any officers except Cathy Mayes, who will continue as Treasurer and Karen Hendershot, who has agreed to be secretary.

Carrie Blair announced plans for a December 10<sup>th</sup> Second Sunday Walk at Hillwood Estate Museum and Gardens in the District of Columbia. Planning for 2018 Second Sunday Walks and the Winter Speaker Series are underway by the upcoming board.

A guest, Mark Pankau, an award winning teacher at Guilford Elementary in Sterling spoke about opportunities for encouraging students to participate in nature. He has involved his students in projects such as rain gardens, garden to table (will kids eat vegetables they grow?) composting, and recycling. These are new concepts for most of the children.

The meeting concluded with a walk about the farm and woods of the Earth Village led by McNeill Mann.





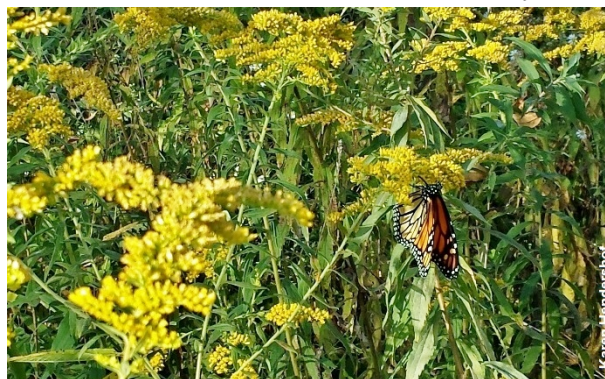
## Doug Tallamy Lecture: The Little Things That Run the World–Karen Hendershot

We members of the VNPS are among the converts, aren't we? But spending a couple of hours on September 24 listening to entomologist and native plant advocate University of Delaware Professor Doug Tallamy in Little Washington offered a spiritual revival. His topic was "The Little Things That Run the World", a phrase taken from biologist E. O. Wilson. The "little things" are insects, without which the food webs that support life would collapse. Tallamy described how energy from the sun is converted by plants into a useable form for the other creatures of the world, allowing us to "eat sunlight". But plants wouldn't exist without insects. They do everything: pollinate flowers, distribute seeds, help convert dead plant matter into useful soil, aerate soil, provide vital food for birds and other animals. Millions of acres of asphalt, cement, agricultural fields, and closely cut lawns full of non-native plants have degraded our ecosystem by 60 percent, removing much of insect life and greatly reducing biodiversity.

Professor Tallamy gave the sad results of a nest-monitoring project of one of his students. While many adult birds eat seeds, more than 95 percent of their young require caterpillars, which are soft, nutrient-dense, and easily digestible. A nest of dead chickadee babies (*Poecile atricapillus*) was found filled with sunflower seeds – a desperate attempt by the parents to feed their offspring, when their environment lacked the native plants to support caterpillars.

What to do? Provide food for the insects: pollen, nectar, wood, detritus (leaves, stalks, etc.), and, most of all, living plants. Prioritize planting the things that support the most wildlife, such as Oaks (*Quercus*), among the trees, and Goldenrods (*Solidago*), among herbaceous plants. You can type your zip code into the site [www.nwf.org/nativeplantfinder](http://www.nwf.org/nativeplantfinder) for plant recommendations based on the number of butterfly/moth species that uses them as hosts for their caterpillars.

Also, include plants for the specialists, the insects that must have a certain host plant for their young, such as Pawpaws (*Asimina*) for the Zebra Swallowtail (*Eurytides marcellus*). Don't be too neat. Pithy dead stalks of Hydrangea (*Hydrangea*), Elderberry (*Sambucus*), and Goldenrod make great nests for some bee species. Leaf litter, ground cover plants, and soft earth beneath your trees are needed for most tree caterpillars to pupate. Professor Tallamy signed a book with "Garden as if life depended on it" -- what a powerful idea.

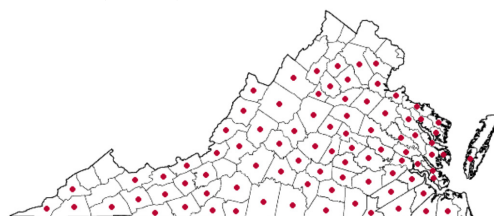


## Using the Flora of Virginia App–Richard Stromberg

I downloaded the app as soon as I could, while Flora editor Bland Crowder was still talking about it at the Tri-State Conference in September. So I have all 1,554 pages of the Flora plus a multichotomous key and the maps and photos from the Digital Atlas of the Virginia Flora on my phone.



Here's an example of how I have used it. I visited Cumberland Gap National Historical Park in October. Sugar Run was lined with the low-lying, variegated leaves shown at the left. In the app, I chose dicot and entered five keys describing the leaves: basal, simple, undivided, wide, and entire. That found 19 possibilities, and Virginia Heartleaf (*Hexastylis virginica*) fit. The range map shows why I wasn't familiar with it. It doesn't grow in my stomping grounds in the northern point of Virginia.





## SCBI Forest Monitoring Plot Walk—Richard Stromberg

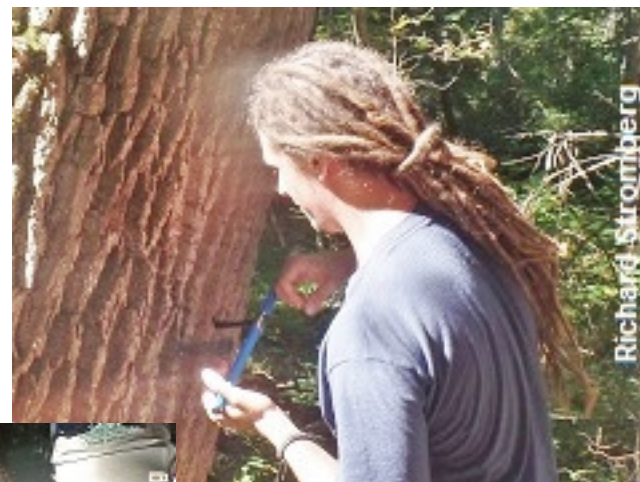
On September 23, 25 people were welcomed to the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute (SCBI) near Front Royal by forest ecologist Kristina Anderson-Teixeira before getting into vans to go to the SCBI Forest Monitoring Plot. They walked around the plot to see and hear about the tree mortality census, part of the Biotic Disturbances and Tree Mortality in Virginia's Blue Ridge Ecoregion project funded by a VNPS grant.

This project focused on the effects of insect pests and pathogens on forests of Virginia's Blue Ridge ecoregion. Insect pests and pathogens are a leading cause of mortality in the region and their impacts need to be quantified. Researchers conducted a tree mortality census at this plot and others throughout the region to quantify the impacts of biotic disturbances on forest mortality, biodiversity, productivity and biomass. This study will help improve general scientific understanding of the net impact of biotic disturbances on forest diversity, structure, and function.

Ryan Helcoski, who worked on the project at SCBI led us around the plot. He showed us the deer enclosure that has been in place in the plot for thirty years. The difference in vegetation inside the enclosure versus outside where deer freely roam was amazing. Outside the understory is dominated by invasive alien plants and has no tree seedlings, whereas inside had no invasive alien plants and lush undergrowth of shrubs and small trees.



He then showed us stressed trees, particularly Ash trees that had been attacked by Emerald Ash Borers. He showed us several large, dead Ash trees and pointed out the D-shaped holes the borers made to exit the tree. He also demonstrated how to take a core sample from one of the dead Ashes.







## North Section of Bull Run Mountain Natural Area Preserve—Richard Stromberg

Potomac Appalachian Trail Club (PATC) Supervisor of Marketing Emeline Otey got permission from the Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF) for a small group to walk in the north section of the Bull Run Mountains Conservancy on September 22. Many of us are familiar with the public access facilities at the southern end of the Preserve just north of I-66 at the Prince William-Fauquier County line. The north section is several miles north of I-66 and not connected to the southern section. It can only be accessed by permission and with a guide. VOF maintains the property. It is also designated by the Virginia Department of Conservation & Recreation as the Bull Run Mountains Natural Area Preserve.

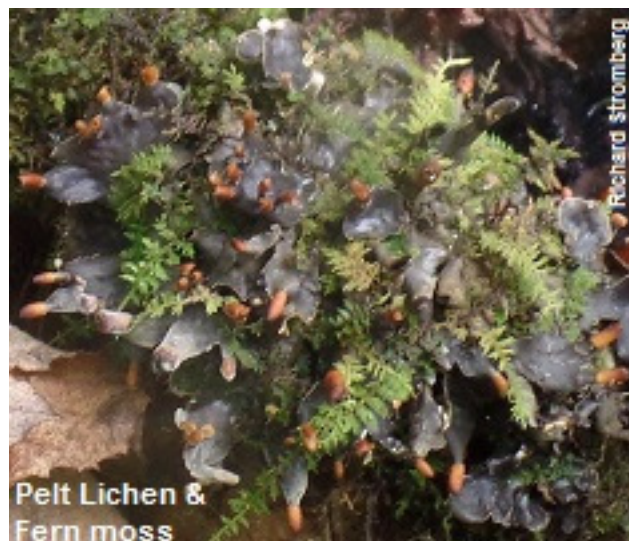
Our guide was PATC Greater Manassas and Bull Run Mountain Area District Manager Janis Stone, who designed and directed construction of the trails in the north section. Also joining us was VOF Preserve Ranger and Science Coordinator Joe Villari. VNPS Piedmont Chapter Board Members Sally Anderson, Carrie Blair, Richard Stromberg, and Kristin Zimet joined long-time PATC members William Needham, Jack Thorsen, and Dave Wilcox.

We identified 53 plants, mostly by leaves and fruits. Four were orchids: Autumn Coralroot (*Corallorhiza odontorhiza*), Small Green Wood Orchid (*Platanthera clavellata*), Pink Lady's-slipper (*Cypripedium acaule*), and Downy Rattlesnake-plantain (*Goodyera pubescens*). The red of parasitic Pinesap (*Monotropa hypopithys*) stems was an eye-catcher. Janis pointed out a large American Chestnut (*Castanea dentata*) with burs on it.



We identified nine ferns, a liverwort (*Pellia epiphylla*), and four mosses to the genus level. Janis told us what we thought was another liverwort was Pelt Lichen (*Peltigera* spp.).

Mycological Association of Washington president William Needham identified 25 fungus species.





<b>Sunday</b>	<b>Dec 10</b>	<b>8:30am</b>	<b>Hillwood Estate Sunday Walk</b>
<b>DC.</b> Carrie Blair will lead a walk in Hillwood Estate, Museum, & Gardens, 4155 Linnean Av., Washington, DC, starting at 10am. If you would like to carpool, meet in Marshall at 8:30am. Walk through 13 acres of gardens and enjoy the Russian Winter Festival: theater, dance and folk music (info at <a href="http://www.hillwoodmuseum.org">www.hillwoodmuseum.org</a> ). Limited lunch options at Hillwood Café or bring your own food. VNPS Group Rate \$12/person. Meet at Marshall Food Lion, left hand row facing Tractor Supply. If you plan to attend, RSVP to Carrie at 540-364-1232 or <a href="mailto:carrie@treeloversschool.com">carrie@treeloversschool.com</a> .			
<b>Sunday</b>	<b>Jan 14</b>	<b>1pm</b>	<b>Sunday Walk: Ferry Hill</b>
Rod Simmons, Alexandria Natural Resource Manager and Plant Ecologist, will lead a walk at Ferry Hill, an old age forest on limestone bedrock above the Potomac and C&O Canal in Maryland. We will see many large trees and ferns. For more information, email <a href="mailto:piedmontvnps@gmail.com">piedmontvnps@gmail.com</a> .			
<b>Sunday</b>	<b>Jan 21</b>	<b>2pm</b>	<b>Winter Speaker Series: Virginia Working Landscapes (VWL)</b>
<b>Fauquier County.</b> Emmanuel Episcopal Church Parish Hall, 9668 Maidstone Rd., Delaplane. The speaker is VWL Program Director Amy Johnson. VWL is a program of the <a href="http://www.smithsonianconservationbiologyinstitute.org">Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute</a> that promotes the conservation of native biodiversity and sustainable land-use through research, education and community engagement, with a network of NGOs, agencies, regional landowners and citizen scientists. Free, refreshments provided. For more information, email <a href="mailto:piedmontvnps@gmail.com">piedmontvnps@gmail.com</a> .			
<b>Sunday</b>	<b>Feb 11</b>	<b>1pm</b>	<b>Sunday Walk: Rady Park Arboretum in Warrenton</b>
<b>Fauquier County.</b> Join tree expert Carrie Blair for a tour of the seven-acre site developed in 1999 by Master Gardeners to help inform Fauquier County residents about successful tree and shrub combinations, including many natives. The Park has level terrain and easy walking paths. Meet in picnic shelter for introduction to tree scavenger hunt game among the dozens of carefully chosen, maintained and labeled native woody specimens. If you plan to attend, RSVP to Carrie at 540-364-1232 or <a href="mailto:carrie@treeloversschool.com">carrie@treeloversschool.com</a> .			
<b>Sunday</b>	<b>Feb 18</b>	<b>2pm</b>	<b>Winter Speaker Series: Controlling Stiltgrass &amp; other invasives</b>
<b>Fauquier County.</b> Emmanuel Episcopal Church Parish Hall, 9668 Maidstone Rd., Delaplane. The speaker will be Jim Hurley. Jim is an Area Steward for the Blue Ridge Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISM) ( <a href="http://blueridgeprism.org/">http://blueridgeprism.org/</a> ). He has extensive experience leading volunteers and contractors to combat invasive plants. Free, refreshments provided. For more information, email <a href="mailto:piedmontvnps@gmail.com">piedmontvnps@gmail.com</a> .			
<b>Sunday</b>	<b>Mar 11</b>	<b>1pm</b>	<b>Sunday Walk: Thompson Wildlife Management Area</b>
VDGIF employee Ron Hughes will lead a walk to the seep beside the Appalachian Trail to see Skunk Cabbage and other early bloomers. For more information, email <a href="mailto:piedmontvnps@gmail.com">piedmontvnps@gmail.com</a> .			
<b>Sunday</b>	<b>Mar 18</b>	<b>2pm</b>	<b>Winter Speaker Series</b>
<b>Fauquier County.</b> Emmanuel Episcopal Church Parish Hall, 9668 Maidstone Rd., Delaplane. Being planned. Free, refreshments provided. For more information, email <a href="mailto:piedmontvnps@gmail.com">piedmontvnps@gmail.com</a> .			

### Phelps Wildlife Management Area Walk—Ron Hughes

The November 12 was a beautiful afternoon for a walk at the C. F. Phelps Wildlife Management Area in Fauquier County, led by Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) employee Ron Hughes, so we were able to get behind closed gates on a 30-acre complex of two shallow-water impoundments bounded by a series of dykes. The impoundments were created 20 years ago to generate seasonal shallow-water and moist-soil wetlands, allowing nearby land to flood to benefit waterfowl and other birds during spring and fall migrations as well as a myriad of other wildlife and a diversity of plants throughout the year. VDGIF has used fire and herbicides in a controlled manner to hold back ecological succession and control undesirable plant species to foster a healthy, diverse, vigorous native plant community. (continued on page 7)







## Phelps Wildlife Management Area Walk (continued)

We enjoyed the beauty of the season and the many remnant skeletons and seeds left by diverse plants. Yellows, golds, reds, oranges, greens browns, and tans were just some of the many colors the plants presented to us. Starting out, we enjoyed the brown, crunchy stalks of hollow Joe-pye Weed (*Eutrochium fistulosum*) and Giant Sunflower (*Helianthus giganteus*) and fuzzy tan heads and stalks of Indian Grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*) on the drier, more upland segment of the complex. Walking down to the trail that circumscribed the wetter sections of the complex we saw stalks of Rabbit Tobacco (*Pseudognaphalium obtusifolium*), various grasses, forbs, and vines. One lone stalk and seed head from American Wild Senna (*Senna hebecarpa*) stood out among the neighboring tangle of dried plants. Several long, narrow corridors of River Birches (*Betula nigra*) showing creamy white and pinkish, flaky bark and American Sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*) with camouflage-patterned bark were striking



The bulk of the walk was along the low dykes that impound water, forming seasonal shallow open water and emergent wetlands, which at the time were devoid of water due to the dry summer and fall. Moving along we were drawn to the plants that grew at and along the transition zones at the wetland's edge. Linear thickets of a tall smartweed, thought to be Dotted Smartweed (*Persicaria punctata*) wilted and melted into the complex of other plants. One sedge species found along the transition zone displaying a handsome seed head drew our attention, later identified by Sally Anderson as Hope Sedge, (*Carex lupulina*). On the drier slopes of the dykes we found a bluestem that didn't seem to fit the looks of Broomstraw (*Andropogon virginicus*) or Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*). Sally later identified it as Elliott's Bluestem (*Andropogon gyrans*).

Making up to drier ground, we walked along the edge of an adjacent upland Oak-Hickory forest containing a significant component of American Beech (*Fagus grandifolia*). Ron talked about the beneficial effects of fire in Oak-Hickory forests and how the lack of fire in such forests has resulted in "mesophication". Mesophication is cycle whereby cool, damp, and shaded conditions increase over time fostering shade-tolerant, fire-intolerant, mesophytic plants. Mesophytic and mesic mean moderate or well-balanced water supply, neither particularly dry nor particularly wet. The mesophication cycle significantly changes the species composition of drier, fire-tolerant forest communities from Oaks to mesophytic species (like Beech) and reduces species diversity. Ron pointed out the fire effects (top-kill) on Beech and other fire-intolerant tree species that markedly changed the forest understory structure by allowing more sunlight enabling seedlings of Oak, Hickory, and other fire-tolerant species to develop.



Once back to the vehicles we explored the roadsides a little more and observed a few specimens of Southern Grape Fern (*Sceptridium bitermatum*) with its beautiful bronze sporophore (the stalk supporting spore producing structures), Crane-fly Orchids (*Tipularia discolor*) complete with a few remnant dried seed stalks, and a nice specimen of Heart's-a-bustin' (*Euonymus americanus*) in fruit. The walk wound down with snacks and relaxed fellowship round the vehicles where stories and memories were shared.

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VIRGINIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY  
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WINTER 2017



Nancy Vehrs

**Phelps Wildlife Management Area**