

FALL

POTOWMACK NEWS

Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

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Conway Robinson Memorial State Forest

By Margaret Chatham



GREAT SPANGLED FRITILLARY (SPEYERIA CYBELE) ON PURPLE MILKWEED (ASCLEPIAS PURPURASCENS) AT CONWAY ROBINSON MSF. ALL PHOTOS IN THIS ISSUE BY MARGARET CHATHAM.

In the before-times, we planned a walk at Conway Robinson Memorial State Forest, to be held on April 18, 2020, led by Charles Smith. Needless to say, it didn't happen. I was really looking forward to exploring a new-to-me place, and after things opened up a little, finally made it out there on June 12, and then again on Sept 21. I don't know where in the property Charles Smith would have taken us, or what we would have seen. There are rumors of lady's slippers. I didn't see any orchids, but found lots of plants different from those I normally see along the Potomac, in a relatively uninvaded setting.

Conway Robinson Memorial State Forest lies on the north side of US 29 between Manassas Battlefield and the intersection with I-66.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

Upcoming

Potowmack Chapter Annual Meeting

Sunday, Nov 15, 1-3 pm
Zoom Meeting. Register at <https://vnps.org/potowmack/events>.

Program:

Dr. Andrea Weeks: Recovering Native Plant Diversity in the Piedmont: Gilbert's Corner Habitat Restoration and Native Plant Demonstration Site

Dr. Andrea Weeks is an Associate Professor and Director of the Ted. R. Bradley Herbarium at George Mason University.

Dr. Weeks will be discussing her project, which is the recipient of the inaugural Mary Pockman memorial Research Grant from VNPS. The project aims to begin a long-term floristic study of Gilbert's Corner in Loudoun County to support ongoing habitat restoration at the site and to educate the public about the importance of conserving local biodiversity.

Walks:

Someday... Watch for announcements or check the website.

If you go out on your own and want help with plant identification, take a picture (show as much of the plant as you can: leaves as well as flower!) and post it to [iNaturalist.org](https://www.inaturalist.org) (free download) for assistance. Or send us all pictures of what you see.

All events are free and open to the public. Walks require preregistration. For email notices of upcoming events, subscribe to <https://vnps.groups.io/g/potowmack>. Or send a blank email to potowmack+subscribe@vnps.groups.io

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WORDS OF THE MONTH: THORNS, SPINES, AND PRICKLES

By Margaret Chatham

We tend to call anything on a plant that stabs us a thorn, but botanists have more particular definitions. For them, a **thorn** is a stiff, woody, modified stem with a sharp point. The most impressive thorns commonly found around here are on Honey Locust trees (*Gleditsia triacanthos*), but Hawthorns (*Crataegus* spp.) also grow true thorns.

A **spine** is defined as a stiff, slender, sharp-pointed modified leaf or stipule, arising from below the epidermis, as seen on Black Locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*) or Japanese Barberry (**Berberis thunbergii*).

A **prickle** is a small, sharp outgrowth of a plant's epidermis or bark. These are found on Roses (*Rosa* spp.), Blackberries (*Rubus* spp.), Greenbriers (*Smilax* spp.), and many others.

Photos: Hawthorn thorns above; Barberry spines lower left; Multiflora Rose prickles lower right.



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CONWAY ROBINSON CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

It is a working forest, with 5 miles of well-marked trails, a number of signs explaining forest management methods, and one on Conway Robinson and his contributions to Virginia history. If he had any connection to this particular site, I missed it.

In June, the trails were muddy in spots, so higher ground was more appealing. This mostly led through deciduous forest. Along the way, there were flowers: Thread-leaved Coreopsis (*Coreopsis verticillata*), Summer Bluets (*Houstonia purpurea* — why are they named “purple” when their flowers are so pale?), Yellow Star Grass (*Hypoxis hirsuta*), and Hairy Skullcap (*Scutellaria elliptica*), photo below.



Where the trail crossed the forest gap of a pipeline easement, the flowers changed. This is where the Purple Milkweed grew, along with Small Sundrops (*Oenothera perennis*) and Gray Beardtongue (*Penstemon canescens*).

In September, the trails were drier, so I took the first trail I had avoided in June, roughly paralleling the highway. This led to a Loblolly Pine (*Pinus taeda*) plantation, and then a raised embankment built for the Manassas Gap Railroad over low ground. (This portion of the railroad ran out of money before tracks were laid, so no trains ever ran through here.) Between the change in season & the difference in plant

communities, it felt like a whole new world. Along the highway approaching Conway Robinson, there were lots of bright DYCs — Darned Yellow Composites. A few of these also grew along the trails where they proved to be *Bidens aristosa*, Tickseed Sunflower, a showy species which may be native to Virginia or may have been introduced from the Midwest, photo below.



There were recognizable native grasses and sedges — frothy Autumn Bent Grass (*Agrostis perennans*), shiny Purpletop (*Tridens flavus*), sturdy Beaked Panic Grass (*Coleataenia anceps*), and Squarrose Sedge (*Carex squarrosa*) with its large, single spike. There were non-native grasses as well, but not in overwhelming quantities.

And there were flowers, more than make good reading, including at least four species of Goldenrod — five if you count Silverrod (*Solidago bicolor*) — perhaps a like number of Aster species, and three species of Tick-trefoils. Some not in bloom, like Virginia Snakeroot (*Endodeca serpentaria*), but it feels special to see their leaves — not to be confused with the great white floral arrays of White Snakeroot (*Ageratina altissima*, formerly *Eupatorium rugosum*). White Snakeroot grows on the railroad embankment. A few flowers lingered among the seedheads of Wild Basil (*Clinopodium vulgare*). I had to consult guidebooks to identify Slender Gerardia (*Agalinis tenuifolia*) and Blue Waxweed (*Cuphea vicosissima*).

Then there was Great Blue Lobelia (*Lobelia siphilitica*), so familiar from work in the VNPS propagation beds, but rarely seen in the wild, photo below.



Both of my visits to Conway Robinson Memorial State Forest took place on weekdays, when the 10 or so parking spaces were ample to accommodate visitors, and a vacant picnic table was easy to find at lunchtime. Expect more of a crowd on weekends. This is an enjoyable place to see native plants in more than just spring, but it's definitely on my list of places to try to visit next April.

How Vines Climb: Scramblers

By Margaret Chatham

Some vines don't really attach themselves to their means of support at all: no twining, no rootlets, no

tendrils. They grow upwards until they no longer support their own weight, then subside onto whatever is under them. They often have small hooks or prickles along their stems that keep them from sliding downwards once they have achieved some height within or on top of another plant.

Mile-a-minute Vine (*Persicaria perfoliata*) is pretty obvious in its scrambling habit over whatever grows nearby, photo below.



Perhaps less obvious is Multiflora Rose (*Rosa multiflora*), seen at left on/in a Boxelder (*Acer negundo*). It can grow as a bush, but sometimes its long, arching canes find support from tree branches, and it grows high up into a tree, producing flowers & seed out of sight to the casual observer. Often, these old, upright canes have patchy bark and look dead.

Great Oaks from Tiny Acorns Grow

What might grow from these? All local, not all native, each shown with a dime for size. Answers on page 6.

- 1 Japanese Maple (*Acer palmatum*)
- 2 Norway Maple (*Acer platanoides*)
- 3 Mimosa (*Albizia julibrissin*)
- 4 Mockernut Hickory (*Carya tomentosa*)
- 5 Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*)
- 6 American Beech (*Fagus grandifolia*)
- 7 Eastern Red Cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*)
- 8 Tulip Tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*)
- 9 Southern Magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*)
- 10 Austrian Pine (*Pinus nigra*)
- 11 White Pine (*Pinus strobus*)
- 12 White Oak (*Quercus alba*)
- 13 Pin Oak (*Quercus palustris*)
- 14 Red Oak (*Quercus rubra*)
- 15 American Basswood (*Tilia americana*)



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Falling Leaves



“To experience the idiosyncrasies of falling leaves on a visceral level, try catching them. ‘Every leaf you catch this month means a happy month next year,’ I once read, and I’ve made it my business to catch twelve leaves each fall ever since. It’s harder than you think, nabbing leaves from the air. Football coaches would do well to have their wide receivers practice leaf-catching, so unpredictable are airborne leaves in their flights.” — Nancy Ross Hugo, *Seeing Trees*, p 43.

— And when it’s too dark to catch leaves, it’s a fine time to read or re-read this lovely book. — M.C.

Answers to quiz on page 5: 1-M; 2-O (most local native maples drop their seeds earlier in the season); 3-H; 4-J; 5-F (Black Locust, *Robinia pseudoacacia*, seed is very similar, though its pods may show lobes) ; 6-K; 7-A; 8-G; 9-C (ripe, dangling fruits are begging birds to eat them and disperse the seed) ; 10-N; 11-E; 12-L; 13-D; 14-I; 15-B