

SUMMER

POTOWMACK NEWS

Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

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Treasure at Brandymore Castle

By Margaret Chatham



QUARTZ OUTCROPPING CALLED BRANDYMORE CASTLE IN ARLINGTON'S MADISON MANOR PARK. ALL PHOTOS IN THIS ISSUE BY MARGARET CHATHAM

“Brandymore Castle?” you ask. This is the name given in a document from 1724 for a quartz outcropping used as a landmark to help define early land grants. It is readily visible today from the south-facing windows of Metro cars as one travels the orange or silver line east of East Falls Church station. It is the high point of Madison Manor Park in Arlington. The park includes playing fields and amenities at its east end, but most of it is a natural area. For more on the history of Brandymore Castle, see <https://library.arlingtonva.us/2019/04/11/rediscover-brandymore-castle/>

“Treasure?” you ask. Rod Simmons went walking around Brandymore Castle in early May, looking for Japanese Jumpseed, *Persicaria filiformis* (also called “Painter’s Palette” which is NOT a selection from our native *Persicaria virginiana*, no matter what an on-line nursery may say or what VNPS sold ten years or more ago; that’s a whole different story.) He was happy not to find any Japanese

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Upcoming

Zoom presentations expand our program possibilities

In spite of having no Program Chair (would you like to take a spot at the heart of VNPS-Pot?), watch for additional programs during the summer

Glenn Tobin: Using Natural Ecological Communities Research

Thursday, Sept 9, 7:30 pm

Glenn Tobin translates the many studies of Virginia natural communities into practical guidance for ecological restoration and native planting. Delayed from May, but always relevant.

Zoom Meeting. See <https://vnps.org/potowmack/events/> for registration connection closer to the date

Walks:

They’re really coming, probably starting in mid/late June. Watch for announcements!

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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NATURAL SOIL DE-COMPACTORS

By Margaret Chatham



When we walk on the ground, we may not be "wearing down the earth" as Sally Brown feared, but we are compacting the soil, making it harder for roots to grow and all the life in the soil to breathe and move around. Above are two of the ways soil naturally gets loosened up again: ice heaves above, and cicada emergence holes below.

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BRANDYMORE CASTLE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Jumpseed there, and even happier to find a small American Chestnut, *Castanea dentata*, and a possible county co-champion Chinkapin, *Castanea pumila*. The American Chestnut is a sprout from the root collar of a tree that grew here before the chestnut blight hit. Leaf comparison: Chinkapin above, American Chestnut



below.

These were both growing in the upper elevations of the park, which retains its old oak-heath character. The canopy has plenty of Chestnut Oak (*Quercus montana*), Black Oak (*Q. Velutina*), and Hickories (*Carya spp.*) The shrub layer abounds in Pinxter (*Rhododendron periclymenoides*), Deerberry (*Vaccinium stamineum*), Lowbush and Black Highbush Blueberries (*V. pallidum* & *V. fuscum*) and prickly Devil's Walking Stick (*Aralia spinosa*). The forest floor grows good patches of Hayscented

(*Dennstaedtia punctilobula*) and New York (*Parathelypteris novaboracensis*) ferns and Trout Lilies (*Erythronium americanum*) and scattered Solomon's Plume (*Maianthemum racemosum*), Solomon's Seal (*Polygonatum biflorum*), Christmas Fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*) and Lady Fern (*Athyrium asplenoides*). At a lower elevation, there are even a couple of Turk's Cap Lilies (*Lilium superbum*) daring to come up.

Of course, a small park in the heart of suburbia has its problems. Park stewards Jo Allen and Amy Crumpton hold invasive removal events the last Wed of every month. In spite of their best efforts, English Ivy (*Hedera helix*), Amur Honeysuckle (*Lonicera maackii*) and many other common invasives persist, or are constantly re-introduced. To volunteer to help remove them, register at <https://environment.arlingtonva.us/trees/invasive-plants/>

Brandy more Castle's heights attract another destructive force: mountain bikers have laced the woods with unsanctioned new trails, destroying all vegetation on them, inviting erosion and more invasive plants. Mountain bikes are not supposed to be used in natural areas in Arlington or on unpaved trails, but bikers conveniently "don't see" the signs.

To visit Brandy more Castle, you can park at 1730 N Roosevelt St, along the street or on the circle by the ballfield.

In Memoriam: Pat Salamone

I cannot begin to write a proper appreciation of Pat. For me, she was a constant on the Board of the VNPS Potowmack Chapter. How many years did she serve as our Secretary? She attended every meeting, and kept us grounded in reality when some of our members were ready to indulge in flights of fancy. She was our contact with the Friends of Dyke Marsh, and helped arrange all the shared programs we jointly sponsored in many years of Septembers.

It was only when I read her obituary that I learned of her love of needlework and art; or that she wrote "Meet the Plants" articles for the Friends of Dyke Marsh newsletter, *The Marsh Wren*.

Thank you, Pat. You will be missed.

Black Cherry

By Margaret Chatham



PRUNUS SEROTINA IN BLOOM MAY 13, 2011.

Doug Tallamy has told us that our native oaks host more species of Lepidoptera than any other genus of trees, and we've all listened, and celebrated our oaks. But let's give a little recognition to the second genus

of trees on his list: native cherries, primarily represented in Northern Virginia by the Black or Wild Cherry, *Prunus serotina*.

"Serotina" means "late." This specific epithet is often given to plants that bloom later than most others in their genus. So while the famed Tidal Basin cherry trees draw rave reviews in late March or early April, and most fruiting cherry trees bloom shortly thereafter, our Black Cherries wait another month or more to bloom. Fruiting times are similarly later. Look for local sweet or sour cherries at the farmers' market in June, but our Black Cherries fruit in July to August.

Black Cherries are sun-loving pioneer trees. They can reach heights of over 80 feet (tallest one measured 134 feet, in the Smoky Mountains) and ages over 400 years, producing cherished furniture and cabinet wood. This last characteristic works to their disadvantage, for the biggest, oldest Black Cherry trees are the first ones cut for veneer. Is this the origin of the term "cherry-picking" for taking the best & leaving the rest? Where sun is lacking, Black Cherries may hang on in the seed bank or in the shrub layer for decades, waiting for a break.

Black Cherries are considered thin-barked trees. Below see three ages of Black Cherry bark, from smooth and shiny to "chocolate Wheaties." Their above-ground portions are easily killed by fire, though



roots may survive to resprout. Like many other trees, they may blow down where not sheltered or supported by neighboring trees, so it takes some good luck and proper siting for them to live really long lives.

Black Cherry suffers from an image problem: it is frequently called a “weed tree.” Some people confuse it with Chokecherry, *Prunus virginiana*, a short-lived, much smaller tree that only grows to around 30’ tall. Chokecherry is not native here. It grows farther north and west, though it has been introduced to Fairfax and Arlington Counties.

Some people object to the Eastern Tent Caterpillars (*Malacosoma americanum*) it hosts. They can certainly be unsightly, but if your Black Cherry is small, you can check for shiny, dark egg masses on the twigs during the winter like little leg-warmers and break them off. If your tree is too tall for you to do this, it should be able to handle even a heavy infestation. If the caterpillars do strip it of leaves, the tree will put out a second growth so heavily laced with inhibiting chemicals that the Tent Caterpillars won’t be able to digest them for years to come. And during an infestation, maybe a Yellow-Billed Cuckoo will drop by for a feast of its own.

Some people might point to the finger-like leaf galls that sometimes grow on Black Cherry. These are



caused by microscopic Eryophyid mites. Galls, mites and all in turn may be eaten by Cherry Gall Azure (*Celastrina serotina*) caterpillars. This newly-described butterfly is hard to tell from Spring and Summer Azures except perhaps by flight time.

Some people just get tired of pulling all the Black Cherry seedlings out of their gardens. By that measure, any energetically seeding trees, even oaks (*Quercus* spp.) in their mast years, could be called weed trees, too.

Against all this, consider Black Cherry’s value to wildlife. The aforementioned mites and caterpillars are only the tip of the iceberg. Its flowers offer nectar and pollen to honeybees, bumblebees, Halictid and Andrenid bees, Syrphid flies, blowflies, and miscellaneous others. It has extra-floral nectaries that feed ants, which in turn may protect its leaves from some leaf-chewing insects.

Among the hundreds of Lepidoptera that depend on Black Cherry as a larval host are the Red-Spotted



Purple (*Limenitis arthemis astyanax*), Coral Hairstreak (*Strymon titus*), Eastern Tiger Swallowtail (*Papilio glaucus*), and more moths than I can name.

Black Cherry’s fruit is an important food source for a wide variety of game and songbirds, as well as mammals from Black Bears and Foxes to Chipmunks and White Mice.

So yes, if you can only plant one tree, make it an oak. But if you have room for two, you could do worse than to make the second one a Black Cherry.

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Word of the Month: Cotyledon



“Seed leaf” or primary leaf of a flowering plant. Monocots (mostly plants with 3 or 6 petals, like graminoids, lilies, & orchids) have just one cotyledon. Dicots (pretty much everybody else) have two.

**TULIP TREE (LIRIODENDRON TULIPIFERA)
TWO COTYLEDONS WITH ONE TRUE LEAF
BETWEEN THEM. PHOTO BY MARGARET
CHATHAM.**

Do you want to know the current status of River Farm? See <https://www.saveriverfarm.com>