

LATE SUMMER

POTOWMACK NEWS

Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

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Low St. Andrew's Cross



By Donna Murphy, photo by Margaret Chatham

This plant was first noticed in 2019 at a long-running chapter plant rescue by Joan Gottlieb, the site leader. Once it bloomed, she identified it as St. Andrew's Cross, *Hypericum hypericoides*. I, too, rescued some of this *Hypericum* species and planted them next to my front porch. I watched to make sure it was surviving and growing, not because I found it particularly interesting. But it caught my interest this summer when I saw it growing in the wild elsewhere. A like-minded friend loved it at first sight, such a low, tidy shrub. I had forgotten how Joan had identified it two years ago, but someone else on the walk identified this specimen as *Hypericum stragulum* on iNaturalist.

Now I dug deeper. The *Flora of Virginia* lists Low St. Andrew's Cross as *Hypericum stragulum* with synonyms *Ascyrum hypericoides* (as it is named in Newcomb's and Peterson's wildflower books) and

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Upcoming

Grasses, Sedges, & Rushes at Dyke Marsh

Saturday, Aug. 28, 10 am-12 noon

VNPS Grass Bunch leads a walk to look at graminoids and more along Dyke Marsh's haul road. Meet at the Belle Haven Park south parking area. Limited to 20. To register, email info@fodm.org with "Plant Walk" in the subject line.

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

2021 VNPS Annual Meeting: Virginia is for Conservation Lovers

Fri & Sat, Sept 17 & 18, 6:30-9 pm by

Zoom. Register at <https://vnps.org/events/vnps-2021-annual-meeting-via-zoom/>

Rod Simmons:

Native Lawn Alternatives

Thursday, Oct 14, 7:30 pm

Environmentally friendly alternatives to traditional lawns, including preserving remnant canopy trees and other native vegetation, soil microorganisms, and insects and pollinators.

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

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

LOW ST. ANDREW'S CROSS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Hypericum hypericoides, ssp. *multicaule*, the name referenced by the online *Digital Atlas of Virginia Flora*. It has sometimes been lumped with St. Andrew's Cross, *H. hypericoides* ssp. *hypericoides* (also written as *H. hypericoides* s.s.) The two share the cruciform, four-petaled flower, while other *Hypericum* species have five-petaled flowers and are mostly called some variety of St. John's-wort.

The two St. Andrew's Cross species are distinguished by height and growth habit. *H. hypericoides* s.s. (St. Andrew's Cross) is an erect shrub measuring 4 to 39 inches, and *H. stragulum* (Low St. Andrew's Cross) is a matted, decumbent shrub, with multiple prostrate stems, measuring only half as tall. Despite its "matted" description, it forms a neat, decumbent, spreading ground layer, 4 to 20 inches high, although rarely that tall. It has light green leaves and delicate, yellow flowers. It has a respectable (not too slow, but respectful) rate of spread, which keeps it in bounds nicely. It is perfect for a rock garden (we have now planted one in the VNPS propagation beds' rock garden) or anywhere you have a small place for a hardy and low-growing groundcover—and it's evergreen! The flowers are attractive to pollinators and result in capsules containing black seeds up to a 1 mm in size.

According to NatureServe Explorer, the conservation status of Low St. Andrew's Cross is critically imperiled in Massachusetts and New York and imperiled in Pennsylvania. It is secure in North Carolina, Kentucky and Virginia. In fact, the *Digital Atlas of the Virginia Flora* describes it as common in the Mountains and Piedmont and frequent in the inner Coastal Plain, while the *Flora of Virginia* agrees that it is common in the Mountains and Piedmont but calls it infrequent in the Coastal Plain.

If we had recognized this plant's history and assets earlier, we would have been eager to collect more. Too late! The site it came from has now been cleared. But I'll be collecting seeds this year! It's never too early to conserve.

Manage your VNPS Membership Online

1. Go to <https://vnps.org/myaccount>
2. Enter your VNPS member username. This is usually your email address.
3. If you don't know or have forgotten your password, click on "Forgot Password?"
4. Once logged in, you can manage your account and preferences by clicking on "What would you like to do?" in the upper right-hand corner.
5. Select "Update My Profile Information."
6. To request a paper newsletter, at the bottom of your Profile Information, set "Electronic Distribution" to "No."
7. Update any other profile information, then click "Submit."

Green Spring Fall Garden Day returns as Family Fall Festival, Saturday, September 25, 9am-3pm — including sale of VNPS native plants from our propagation beds.

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Virginia Native Plant Society
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<http://www.vnps.org/potowmack>

VNPS-Sponsored Interns



ANGELA PITSAKIS, PHOTO BY MARGARET CHATHAM

This summer I had the pleasure to spend every day at Green Spring Gardens as the Native Plant Intern under the direction of curatorial horticulturist Brenda Skarphol. We worked in over nine different gardens, spanning a diversity of style and design. In both formal and naturalized spaces, my days were spent completing common garden tasks such as planting, pruning, weeding, mulching, and watering. On other days, the focus was to remove invasive species from the Virginia Native Plant Garden as a form of habitat restoration. This familiarized me with many species of plants, native, ornamental non-native, and invasive. In addition, I saw first hand how the GSG employees make phenomenal things happen with the constraints of a limited budget and staff. Every Tuesday through Thursday, I was lucky to spend time with volunteers

who made the day's work pass quickly with their helping hands and conversation.

On Wednesdays, I spent time with the Virginia Native Plant Society's Potowmack Chapter. From their expertise I learned to better identify native plants, propagate new plants from seeds and cuttings, transplant seedlings, pot up plants from beds, and make potting soil. Going forward, I'm eager to share my knowledge of native plants and their importance in sustaining local ecosystems as I work towards building a career in horticulture. My experience with the VNPS has inspired me to one day work at a native plant nursery or design company, or maybe even start my own. After I relocate to New York State later this summer, I look forward to beginning my own native container garden - and joining the local native plant society!

VNPS-Sponsored Interns



EMERY POULSEN, PHOTO BY DAVE LAWLOR

Hi! My name is Emery Poulsen, and I am the Virginia Native Plant Society Intern at Huntley Meadows Park for the summer of 2021. I aim to graduate from Virginia Tech in the spring of 2023 with a degree in Environmental Informatics and a minor in Geographic Information Science. I have lived in Fairfax County,

Virginia my entire life and have always been interested in learning about the natural world. I am very grateful for the opportunity to work in Huntley Meadows for the summer, and I have both learned a ton and enjoyed my time immensely. I am especially grateful to the Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society for sponsoring my internship and providing me with opportunities to make valuable connections and to have experiences within this field.

My interest in plants began with a dendrology course I took through the College of Natural Resources and the Environment at Virginia Tech. I found the class both exciting and challenging. I felt that I had discovered an entirely new world that had been in front of my eyes the entire time, and all I had to do was pay attention. Even now, I'll learn a new plant and then begin to see it everywhere, and that's why I love learning about the plants around me. This internship provided me with many wonderful opportunities to learn about both natives and invasives of all shapes and sizes, from ankle-high Japanese Stiltgrass (**Microstegium vimineum*) up to towering Tree-of-Heaven (**Ailanthus altissima*), as well as how to manage these species in order to protect the native populations that they may affect.

During my time at Huntley Meadows, I had the privilege of meeting and learning from a number of incredible botanists. Early in the summer, I spent many hours in the woods with Karla Jamir and Judy Dority, two highly involved volunteers, searching through Coastal Plain Depression Swamps to find and map state-rare sedges. We mapped all confirmed populations of *Carex buxbaumii*, (conservation status of S2 in Virginia) and *Carex vestita* (S1). We also monitored the populations of *C. bullata* and *C. pellita* (both S3 and on the watchlist for population decline.) As the Virginia Native Plant Society Intern, I was given a Spectra Precision MobileMapper 10, a handheld GPS unit, for the duration of my internship. I used it in writing the Rare Sedge Survey Report for this year, to share the results of our surveys and compare them to past years, which then allows us to assess the population trends for these rare plants over time. Additionally, I used ArcMap to plot the locations of both rare plants and invasive plants for planning and management purposes.

I also surveyed Purple Milkweed (*Asclepias purpurascens*) populations and created maps to analyze its population growth over time. Purple Milkweed is native and ecologically important to monarch butterflies, among other pollinator species. I enjoyed surveying for Purple Milkweed because its gorgeous magenta heads and constant swarms of butterflies made it easy to locate in the woods. I also worked on a Huntley Meadows Park Fern Guide, which was a wonderful opportunity to learn about a wide variety of ferns that can be found in Huntley.

Regarding invasive plant management, I was trained on how to safely spray Japanese Stiltgrass (**Microstegium vimineum*) with glyphosate to keep it from spreading into a large population of *Carex vestita* that was confirmed within Huntley Meadows. I also worked with interns from Park Authority headquarters to conduct invasive plant surveys and score the park on its biodiversity and percentage of invasive coverage. Later in the summer, once the Purple Loosestrife (**Lythrum salicaria*) began to bloom, we gathered a team of volunteers to hike out to the powerline easement and pull up the invasive pest.

Additionally, I was given the opportunity to take a "grass walk" with Margaret Chatham and Alan Ford from the Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society, where I learned about grasses that are native to Fairfax County. Later in the summer, I was treated to a plant walk with Rod Simmons, the Natural Resource Manager and Plant Ecologist in the Natural Resources Division of the Department of Recreation, Parks, and Cultural

Activities for the City of Alexandria, from whom I learned a wealth of valuable information.

Another amazing connection I was able to make during my time as an intern was with Nancy Vehrs, the president of the Virginia Native Plant Society. Tori, who is the Natural Resource Management Intern this summer, encouraged me to join the informal bird walks that happen every Monday at 7 am on the boardwalk. As it turned out, Nancy is a woman of many talents and also leads the bird walks. After Tori and I were invited to go to Denny's with the rest of the birders after one of these walks, we got to sit and chat with Nancy and her partner for a while.

As many already know, Dave Lawlor (the former Natural Resource Manager at Huntley) earned a promotion and began to transition to a new job in the Herry Building at Fairfax County Park Authority Headquarters about halfway through my time as an intern. I am grateful to him for all that he taught me while we worked together, and for his sense of humor that made the Virginia heat a little more bearable.

While I am looking forward to returning to Virginia Tech in the fall, I will miss Huntley Meadows Park and all of the smiling faces in it. I will look back on the summer of 2021 fondly, and will be sure to come and visit Huntley whenever I have the chance. Over the next year, I will be sure to take advantage of my complementary membership in the Potowmack Chapter of VNPS, which is a wonderful added benefit of my internship. I have joined the Virginia Native Plant Society Group on Facebook, and will continue to enjoy the stimulating content that is shared there every day. I am thrilled to be a member of the native plant community, and plan to be highly involved for years to come.



Halberd-leaved Rose Mallow, *Hibiscus laevis*

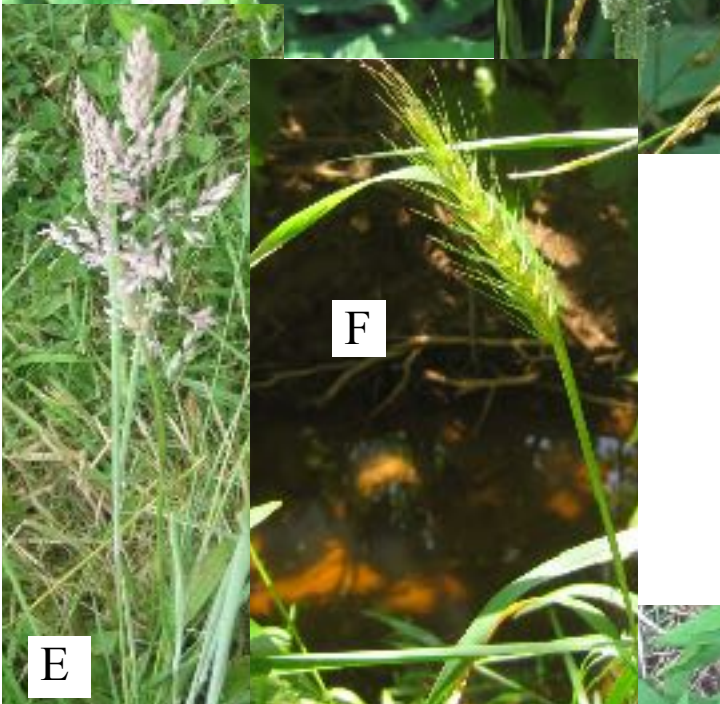
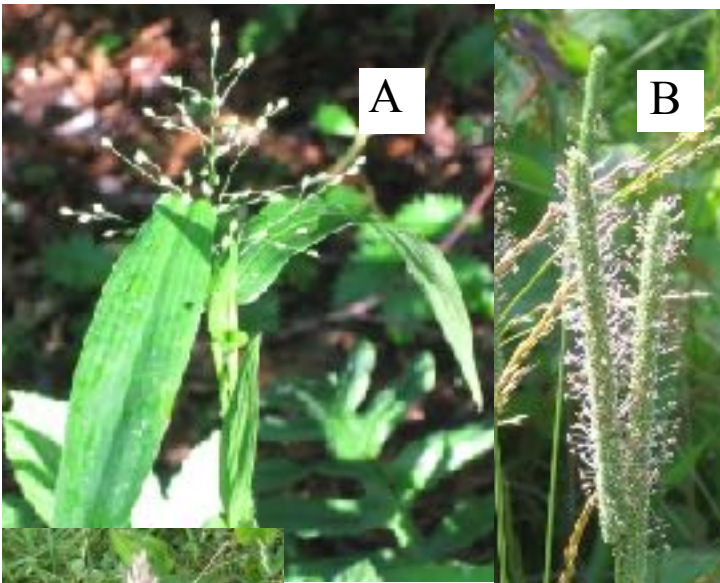
This is a plant Laura Beaty has been propagating for our VNPS native plant sales. The young plants are not blooming size yet (which makes them easier to plant), & someone asked me whether they bloom at all(!) Above is the flower in my own yard. You, too, can have one: we'll have another first Wed plant sale on Sept. 1, 10-1 (cash & checks only) and will also sell native plants during Green Spring's Family Fall Festival, Sat 9/25, 9-3.

Margaret Chatham

Summer Grasses

Grasses are supposed to be hard to ID, but I think photographing them can be even harder. Here are some of my more successful attempts. Answers p 6.

- 1 Wood Reed Grass, *Cinna arundinacea*, in August
- 2 Deertongue, *Dichanthelium clandestinum*, in June
- 3 Bottlebrush Grass, *Elymus hystrix*, in July
- 4 Virginia Wild Rye, *Elymus virginicus*, in July
- 5 Velvet Grass, *Holcus lanatis*, in July
- 6 Stilt Grass, *Microstegium vimineum*, in July
- 7 Timothy, *Phleum pratense*, in June
- 8 Purpletop, *Tridens flavus*, in August
- 9 Eastern Gama Grass, *Tripsacum dactyloides*, in August



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Virginia Native Plant Society
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Words of the Month: Anther and Stigma



The anther is the pollen-bearing portion of the stamen (male flower). The stigma is the pollen-receiving portion of the pistil (female flower). Eastern Gama Grass (*Tripsacum dactyloides*) shown at right is androgynous (remember words of the month from Sept. 2016?) with its male flowers above its female flowers. Many plants activate their anthers and stigmas at different times to avoid self-pollination.

**EASTERN GAMA GRASS (TRIPSACUM DACTYLOIDES).
PHOTO BY MARGARET CHATHAM.**

Answers to quiz on page 5: 1-G; 2-A, spring bloom, it will have a second “clandestine” bloom in the fall; 3-I; 4-F; 5-E; 6-H; 7-B, in bloom: the fuzz of anthers will fall away; 8-C, noted for greasy feel of the inflorescence; 9-D male flowers at the top of each “finger,” female flowers below.