

POTOWMACK NEWS

Volume 13, No.2

Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

Spring 1995

CENTURY OLD WOODLAND WILD-FLOWER WANTS TO RETURN TO THE SUNNY MEADOW!

ATABLOID HEADLINE? NO, THE CONCLUSION OF DR. DOUGLAS E. GILL'S talk on the pink lady's slipper, *Cypripedium acaule*. For twenty years Gill, a zoology professor at the University of Maryland, has recorded the life cycles of hundreds of pink lady's slippers growing in two forest plots. His observations have led him to some remarkable conclusions: an absent orchid is not necessarily a dead one; a plant may or may not produce a flower each year; pink lady's slippers flower and set seed best when exposed to more sun.

Convinced that several of his tagged specimens were morgue statistics when they failed to appear year after year, Dr. Gill was startled to see them reappear, some after 14 years! Based on this discovery, Gill is prepared to suggest that many pink lady's slippers lie dormant (or survive on nutrients from the fungus on which they are parasites, not symbiotic partners) for decades.

When they choose to grow leaves, pink lady's slippers may or may not produce a flower. Even when they do, only 2.3% will be successfully pollinated. They don't seem to want to be pollinated. With no sugar treat inside, the showy slipper is a deceitful lure to hungry newly emerged queen bumblebees. So angry at being duped and having to struggle so hard to get out of the darn thing, most bees are smart enough never to try again. How to explain, then, the fact that a much higher percentage of plants set seed when their forest canopy was destroyed by gypsy moth caterpillars?! Gill speculates that the plants, happy to receive the extra sunlight, popped up more flowers and the bumblebees, drugged with the sweet takings from prolifically flowering neighboring blueberries, weren't quite so mad and tried more often to get something out of the luscious looking pink baskets.

With all of this new information, Dr. Gill boldly proposes that pink lady's slippers are really meadow plants trapped in a young forest. Before we learned to "manage" our natural resources, fire was an important ecological component, re-introducing openings to the forest floor. If they grew when the land was meadow, then, many of the pink lady's slippers in the remnant forest patches may be older than the trees surrounding them.

With so much gained from only twenty years of research, Dr. Gill must persevere and discover the significance of the pink lady's slipper's reluctance to grow as a propagated nursery offering. Yes, it does have a relationship with a specific fungus (as yet unidentified), but it does not seem to need it to grow, only to germinate. But does it need it to flower? Gill's ten year old flask-grown plants have yet to blossom. Even if they did, could he develop a strain of bee dumb enough to visit them repeatedly? ■

Spring 1995 Plant Sale

Saturday May 20, 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Green Spring Gardens Park

IN SPITE OF MANY OBSTACLES caused by the construction of a new and enlarged parking lot at Green Spring, the plant sale will proceed as scheduled.

Members of the propagation committee have had to put up with long hikes over rough terrain to reach the propagation beds. We are propelled by the knowledge that sometime in the near future, peace will be restored to Green Spring, the chipmunks and birds will return to serenade us. The improved parking facilities will have made it all worth while.

I want to thank all of our members who called me to donate plants for the sale. You are greatly appreciated! Thanks too to our faithful committee members who continue to donate their time in spite of busy schedules. We have lost some members and gained a few. We are sorely in need of helpers on the day of the sale: set-up people, sales personnel, and sales slip writers. If you can give us some time on May 20th between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m., please contact me at (703)323-1094.

See you at the sale...carpool and bring some friends! ■

Gerry Pratt



Native Plant Trail Work Days

AS IN PAST YEARS, VOLUNTEERS FROM THE POTOWMACK Chapter can assist with garden maintenance on the Native Plant Trail at Green Spring Gardens Park the second Saturday every month from March through December, weather permitting, from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm. A new feature this year will be a discussion of a choice native plant at the end of every workday; topics such as ornamental value, cultural requirements, and other interesting information about the plant will be explored. The work we do on these work days includes mulching, raking leaves, planting, weeding, watering, pruning, and removing exotic invasive plants, as well as lively conversation. This work is very vital to the maintenance of the garden and we would love your help. The work dates are March 11, April 8, May 13, June 10, July 8, August 12, September 9, October 14, November 11, and December 9. ■

Potowmack Chapter
 Virginia Native Plant Society
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Mail articles for the newsletter to:
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Deadline for next issue is: **August 1 !!!**

President's Message

By Nancy Luria

CHILDHOOD BECOMES EVER MORE MYSTICAL WITH maturity and the death of one's parents. I was a kid in Germantown, Maryland, a suburb which in those days was farmland and an endless drive away from Washington, D.C. where my father made five weekly pilgrimages to the Smithsonian. He was understandably reluctant to head that direction on weekends but, for science, at least three times he dutifully returned to introduce his daughters to a private sanctuary for wildflowers: Plummers Island. We all had wildflower collections to make for high school biology and that was his favorite spot to see them (the fact that you could only access the place by boat during high water made the expedition all the more exotic — stomach muscles tightened when he couldn't remember where the boat was hidden). One by one we collected and pressed the treasures: paw paw, Jack-in-the-pulpit, spring beauty, trillium — all amazing discoveries to farm girls more familiar with pasture grasses and lawn weeds. I confess I have no remorse for my murderous acts. At the time, all of the plants seemed so abundant and so willing to share their glory for my A+ collection. My heartfelt innocence was also inextricably tied to the experience of being in a forest with my father. Not an easy person to live with, he was transformed in the presence of great trees and small beautiful flowers. I realize now that I also collected his instinctive relationship with wild things during our visit. I hadn't thought of this until I found Plummers Island in Cris and Marion's book, *Finding Wildflowers in the Washington-Baltimore Area*. Not just a guide to places to see wildflowers, their book offers opportunities for us all to share that part of our "natures" that are at home only in natural places. At the same time we "collect" new species for our checklists or for our slide collections, we can restore essential relationships. I will not wait until they are in high school to take my children to Plummers Island. ■

THANKS GO OUT TO JOAN VAN RYZIN, NORMA Vermillion and Hidden Oaks Nature Center for helping to make our April program meeting a great success.

Suitland Bog

“SUITLAND BOG, A MOST unique habitat,” says the brochure about this small and special place. Indeed, it is hard to believe that this true bog is located inside the Capital Beltway just east of Washington near the town of Suitland.

The last of more than 30 bogs once found in the Beltsville-Suitland area, Suitland Bog was saved from destruction by encroaching development only by attention from concerned citizens. A 20-acre park surrounding the less than one-acre bog was established in 1975.

Although tiny, Suitland Bog is a perfect gem of a bog with a good growth of sphagnum moss, several carnivorous plants, beautiful orchids, and many rare species. The bog is located on a sandy hillside and is fed by groundwater seeps and a small meandering stream.

The bog and its surrounding woods and fields have been studied for many years. Over 200 plant species have been documented, including 20 species considered state-rare by the Maryland Natural Heritage Program. However, some of these rare species have not been seen at Suitland Bog recently. The short walk along the boardwalk through the bog displays many interesting plants. To study the place thoroughly means getting down on hands and knees to see some of the tiny bog species.

Like many other southern Coastal Plain bogs, Suitland Bog is surrounded by swamp magnolia (*Magnolia virginiana*) and so is called a “magnolia bog.” Other woody plants prominent in the bog include possum-haw (*Viburnum nudum*), swamp azalea (*Rhododendron viscosum*), maleberry (*Lyonia ligustrina*), high-bush blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*), and sheep laurel (*Kalmia angustifolia*), a northern species rare in Maryland.

*Although tiny,
Suitland Bog is
a perfect gem....*

Mid-june is a good time to visit the bog, for then many shrubs are flowering along with the beautiful bog orchid, rose pogonia (*Pogonia ophioglossoides*). Other species in bloom include swamp dewberry (*Rubus hispides*), and dwarf St. Johnswort (*Hypericum mutilum*). The pine woods surrounding the bog may have a few fading blossoms of pink lady's-slipper (*Cypripedium acaule*) and many nodding white flowers of spotted wintergreen (*Chimaphila maculata*).

Three species of carnivorous plants are found at Suitland Bog. The only naturally occurring one is spatulate-leaved sundew (*Drosera intermedia*). Round-leaved sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*) did occur but has not been seen for many years. In the 1930's, thread-leaved sundew (*Drosera filiformis*) and northern pitcher-plant (*Sarracenia*

purpurea) were planted in the bog, and they have thrived and multiplied. All three carnivorous plants flower in June, and the specialized leaves with adaptations for catching insects can be seen all summer.

Late June brings the blooming of other rare bog plants such as bunchflower (*Melanthium virginicum*), ten-angled pipewort (*Eriocaulon decangulare*), and red milkweed (*Asclepias rubra*). Late summer flowers include Virginia meadow beauty (*Rhexia virginica*), marsh St. Johnswort (*Hypericum virginicum*), and cross-leaved milkwort (*Polygala cruciata*).

The bog contains other interesting plants, including several rare sedges, an unusual clubmoss, and many wetland ferns.

The surrounding terrain has been degraded by nearby sand and gravel operations and by housing developments right on the border of the protected area. However, even the open fields around the bog are worth exploring. In mid-June, you can find flowers that flourish in nutrient-poor, sandy soil, such as wild yellow flax (*Linum virginianum*), cut-leaved evening-primrose (*Oenothera laciniata*), hyssop skullcap (*Scutellaria integrifolia*), blue toadflax (*Linaria canadensis*), bracted plantain (*Plantago aristata*), Venus' looking-glass (*Triodanis perfoliata*), cat's-ear (*Hypochoeris radicata*), and whorled coreopsis (*Coreopsis verticillata*).

Suitland bog is managed by the

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BOG

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Maryland National Capital Parks and Planning Commission. In order to protect the bog, the park is barred by a locked gate at the entrance. To obtain information on walks or to arrange a visit to the bog, contact Clearwater Nature Center, 11000 Thrift Road, Clinton, MD 20735; telephone (301)297-4575.

Directions: From Capital Beltway (I-495), take Allentown Road toward Andrews Air Force Base. At the entrance to the base, turn the opposite way onto Suitland Road. Go for a little more than one mile, go under Suitland Parkway, and look for a sign on the right. The parking area is closed unless the gate is open for a scheduled walk.

(Reprinted from Finding Wildflowers in the Washington-Baltimore Area, by Cristol Fleming, Marion Blois Lobstein and Barbara Tufty. 1995, Johns Hopkins University Press.) ■

COME JOIN US ON A PLANT WALK at Suitland Bog on Saturday, June 10 from 2-4 p.m., lead by botany chair Cris Fleming. See sundews and northern pitcher plants as well as other wonderful bog plants, including rose pogonia, swamp magnolia, swamp azalea and others. Space is limited, so call Alonso (703)759-3211 for reservations. We'll carpool if there is enough interest. ■



Pot Luck Picnic, Tour of the Virginia Native Plant Trail and Book Signing

Horticulture Center
Green Spring Gardens Park
Sunday, June 25
5 to 7 pm

Bring a dish to share (beverages, plates, and utensils will be provided) and have your copy of *Finding Wildflowers in the Washington-Baltimore Area* signed by chapter members and authors Cris Fleming and Marion Lobstein (books will be available to purchase, also). Join Potowmack Chapter intern, Michele Doll, for a tour of Green Spring's native plant trail. Michele will focus on good native shrubs for the home landscape. Tour is from 5:15 to 6 pm. Picnic and book signing from 6 to 7. Rain or shine. RSVP by June 20 to Nancy Luria, 528-3612. Green Spring Gardens Park is off route 236 (Little River Turnpike) on Green Spring Road (call the park for more directions, 642-5173). ■

ASPECIAL "THANK YOU" GOES out to Dr. Douglas E. Gill for letting us hear his theories on pink lady's slippers and fire cycles at our April program meeting Thank you very much! ■

Nature Books Wanted

Riverbend Park is renovating its Nature Center and will have a new library. If you have any nature titles you'd like to donate, please call Marty or Alonso (703)759-3211. ■

MANY SPECIAL THANKS TO Barry Remer for taking us out fossil hunting on April 23 and helping us learn about what we found (and we found a LOT). Thanks, Barry! ■

Butterfly Society of Virginia Sponsors New License Plate

THE BUTTERFLY SOCIETY IS SPONSORING a new license plate featuring a Tiger Swallowtail, the State Insect, and must pre-sell 150 plates before production may begin. To order, send a check for \$10.00 made out to The Butterfly Society of Virginia, Inc. along with a completed Division of Motor Vehicles communiplate application form available at all DMV offices to: Butterfly Society of Virginia Treasurer, 276 S. Parliament Drive, Virginia Beach, VA 23462. When the Society has collected 150 orders it will send one check and the applications to DMV. DMV will cancel your old plate and mail you your new butterfly plate along with a set of month and year decals duplicating those of your old plate. If your current plate expires before the butterfly plates become available, renew it as usual. If you have any questions you may call (804)423-1682. Any one interested in joining the Society should contact Ruth Burch (804)499-0333 for more information. ■

ON SATURDAY, MAY 27, 8:30 - 10:30 a.m., naturalist Geof Lane will take a group of us on a pontoon boat ride into Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens at high tide. We will pass by the Arboretum as we travel along the Anacostia River. Space is very limited, so call Alonso (703)759-3211 to register. The boat leaves historic Bladensburg marina in Anacostia Waterfront Park. We will carpool if there is enough interest. ■

Calendar of Events:

MAY

Tuesday, May 16 8:00 p.m.

"Butterflies of Northern Virginia", a talk by Nathaniel Irwin from the Smithsonian Institution's Insect Zoo. Preceded at 7:00 by a butterfly photography workshop taught by William B. Folsom. National Wildlife Federation. Call Peter Stangel (703)281-3256 for more information.

Saturday, May 20, 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Potowmack Chapter Spring Plant Sale at Green Spring Gardens Park.

Monday, May 22, 8:00 p.m.

Butterfly conservation program by Robert Michael Pyle, award-winning author and acclaimed lepidopterist. National Wildlife Federation. There is a fee. Call Peter Stangel (703)281-3256 for more information.

Thursday, May 25, 7:00 p.m.

Potowmack Chapter **BOARD MEETING** at Green Spring.

Saturday, May 27, 8:30 - 10:30 a.m.

Pontoon Boat trip at Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens. Space is very limited, so call Alonso to register. (703)759-3211

JUNE:

Tuesday, June 6 7-8:30 p.m.

First meeting of the newly formed Maryland Butterfly Society at Cosca Regional Park in Clinton, Maryland. Call Lisa Bierer (301)297-4575 for more information.

Saturday, June 10, 2-4 p.m.

Cris Fleming will lead a walk at Suitland Bog. Space is limited, so call Alonso to register. (703)759-3211

Tuesday, June 20, 8:00 p.m.

"Dragons of the Air", a talk on dragonflies by Richard Orr, Senior Entomologist with the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture. National Wildlife Federation. Call Peter Stangel (703)281-3256 for more information.

Sunday, June 25, 5-7 p.m.

Pot Luck Picnic at Green Spring Gardens Park. There will be a short **BOARD MEETING**.

JULY:

No Board meeting this month.

Tuesday, July 11, 8-10 a.m.

Wildflower walk at Clarks Crossing. Call Alonso (703)759-3211

AUGUST:

No board meeting this month.

Saturday, August 5, 10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Rod Simmons of the Maryland Native Plant Society will lead a walk at Runnymede Park in Herndon, Virginia. This event is jointly sponsored by MNPS and our Chapter. Bring a bag lunch, and call Nancy Luria (703)528-3612 for reservations and directions. The park features diabase rock formations, marsh and woodland habitats, and an Indian Grass meadow.

Thursday, August 24, 7:00 p.m.

Potowmack Chapter **BOARD MEETING** at Green Spring.

Local Butterfly Counts

THIS WILL MARK THE 21ST YEAR of the national butterfly census! Every one, no matter what their level of butterfly knowledge, is encouraged to participate and there are several counts in our area which will welcome volunteers. Contact the person in charge of the count for more information. (The butterflyers would REALLY appreciate help with some of the plants they encounter!) Plan to spend the better part of the day out walking.

Saturday, June 24:

Western Montgomery County, Maryland. Contact Mark Garland at Audubon Naturalist (301)652-9188 ext. 3031.

Saturday, July 1

Manassas National Battlefield Count. Contact Peter Stangel (703)281-3256.

Saturday, July 15

Prince George's County, Maryland. Contact Jean Tierney (301)627-6074.

Saturday, July 15

Riverbend Park, Virginia. Contact Alonso Abugattas (703)759-3211.

Saturday, July 22

Bath County, Virginia. Contact Mark Garland at Audubon Naturalist (301)652-9188 ext. 3031.

Potowmack Chapter
Virginia Native Plant Society
Membership/Renewal Form

Name (s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (home) _____ (work) _____

Individual \$15 Family \$25 Student \$10
 Patron \$50 Sustaining \$100 Life \$400
 Associate (group) \$40: delegate _____

To give a gift membership: Enclose dues, name and address.

I wish to make an additional contribution to Potowmack Chapter
in the amount of \$10 \$25 \$50 \$100 \$ _____

Check here if you do not wish your name
to be exchanged with similar organizations. Check here if you do not wish
to be listed in a chapter directory

Make check payable to VNPS and mail to:
VNPS Membership Chair, 3924 Cobbler Mountain Road, Delaplane, VA 22025



Potowmack Chapter
Virginia Native Plant Society
P.O. Box 161
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