

# POTOWMACK NEWS

Volume 17, No 1

Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

Jan/Feb 1999

## MARK YOUR CALENDARS NOW POTOWMACK CHAPTER PROGRAMS FOR WINTER 1999

### C. Colston Burrell To Speak On Thursday, January 21

**Cole Burrell**, landscape designer, author of *A Gardener's Encyclopedia of Wildflowers*, charter member of VNPS, designer of Green Spring's Native Plant Trail, and former curator of the native plant collections at the National Arboretum will lecture at **Potowmack Chapter's January program meeting**. Home to six different geological regions, Virginia has richly diverse habitats and plant communities. After living in Minnesota for 10 years, Cole recently moved back to Virginia to enjoy the bounties of our climate and geology. His talk, titled "Return of the Native" will discuss some of his favorite plant communities and the habitats he missed most.

### Carol Allen Speaker For Thursday, February 11

Carol is vice president of the Maryland Native Plant Society and an expert on native orchids. She will tell us where to find our local native orchids and also share some of the latest happenings in the field of propagating terrestrial orchids.

### Thursday, March 18 Program Meeting To Feature Mark Garland

Mark, senior staff naturalist for the Audubon Naturalist Society, will discuss the relationships among native Virginia flora and fauna. A cheerleader for nature, Mark will help us appreciate the richness of life in the Mid-Atlantic region.

All three programs will be held at **7:30 pm at Green Spring Gardens Park**, which is located in Alexandria a block off of Little River Turnpike at 4603 Green Spring Road (turn north between Jerry's Ford and the Salvation Army thrift shop). Refreshments will be served. In case of inclement weather, call 642-5173 for cancellation information.

### WINTER IS NOT JUST FOR SLEEPING by John C. Magee

It seems that winter is upon us again. As I write this article in late November, the leaves of the trees have all fallen, and most of us have done our final clean-up. It's a time for reflection. A time to look back over the year and evaluate what plants did well, and which need to be moved before the next growing season is here. Most of all, it's a time to put things to sleep, a time to gather our acorns for the long cold season ahead, a time to move inside.

We are overlooking the winter landscape, that season often missed because of inclement weather, when we are more comfortable alongside a fire than working in our gardens, or walking the fields and parks that surround us. What interesting happenings are we missing in an otherwise drab season when the harsh winds blow from the Great White North?

As I drive down the toll road into work, I see our native sumacs lining the edges of fields, and I marvel at their skeletal grace, wondering all the while why the exotic Japanese maple is preferred in most gardens. In my own garden the asters and grasses have all turned a beautiful tan color while maintaining their graceful form. But most of all at this time of year, I look down near my feet. I push the leaves to the side under my dogwood tree, and there lies the nicest surprise of an otherwise dormant bed. There lies the crane-fly orchid (*Tipularia discolor*).

Most people who dream of orchids, picture the beautiful flowers of the lush tropical orchids. The *Cymbidiums*, or *Phalaenopsis*, so hybridized they no longer resemble their wild cousins. The crane-fly orchid is none of those. It creeps up in the fall, awakening from its summer (continued on p. 2)

**PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

Happy New Year to everyone. As your new president, I'm excited about our upcoming year. With the help of both our long-term and new board members, I hope to renew our society's focus on conservation and education. Already we have some outstanding programs lined up, beginning with a presentation by Cole Burrell on January 21. I'm also looking forward to our new seasonal plant walks--allowing our members to experience the world of native plants that serves as the inspiration for our society. We'll keep you updated about other happenings and conservation issues in our chapter newsletter. I hope you'll join us when you can in celebrating and learning more about our native plants.

**Marianne Mooney**

**(WINTER**, continued from p.1)

dormancy to tell us that not all plants will bow to the coldest of seasons. It is diminutive in stature, only rising 2 to 3 inches in its leaf form, then 8 to 10 when it flowers in late spring. Its green cordate leaf is speckled with purple spots, adding a bit of interest to an otherwise humble plant. But what I like most about the crane-fly is its refusal to follow the norm of growing seasons.

Maybe it wishes not to compete with the showier plants of the spring and summer landscapes. Maybe it has simply found that to get a little bit of attention, it needed to set itself apart. Whatever the case, I thank the crane-fly orchid for giving me a reason to walk the woods near my house when it's cold outside. It gives me hope that not all is lost to winter. But most of all, it reminds me that humility is sometimes the greatest virtue and winter is not just for sleeping.

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**INVASIVE EXOTIC PLANT UPDATE**

Japanese silver grass (*Miscanthus sinensis*) is rapidly joining the ranks of some of our region's most troublesome weeds because of its invasiveness into natural areas and persistence once established. This large, coarse grass and its many cultivars are currently popular in the landscape trade and are often used to create a "natural" planting. Unfortunately, this species is quickly spreading outside of gardens to natural areas--especially moist sites, wetland edges, and ditches.

In areas where it is mowed it becomes especially dominant, such as along the W & OD Bike Trail in Herndon and Reston [and Holmes Run wetlands crossing Rt. 50 in Merrifield]. This problem will continue to escalate as nurseries and landscape designers recommend its use and tens of thousands of new plants are sold and planted each year throughout the region.

We can help by not planting this species and instead substituting regionally native grasses like switch grass (*Panicum virgatum*), Indian grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*), big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardi*), and eastern gamma grass (*Tripsacum dactyloides*), wherever planting large grasses is recommended. We can also inform the nurseries we patronize that *Miscanthus* grass is an invasive exotic plant that should not be used and request that attractive and appropriate native grasses be offered instead. --Reprinted from the Winter 1998 *Native News*, the newsletter of the Maryland Native Plant Society.

**WANT TO JOIN VNPS? Call Anne Crocker, Membership Chair, at 437-0355, and she will send you an application.**

**WILDFLOWER CLIPPINGS** compiled by Alonso Abugattas

- ☼ Congratulations to **Marion Cambel** for receiving special recognition from the Fairfax County Park Authority in the form of an Elly Doyle Park Service Award. Cambel worked on the master plan for the new Marie Butler Leven Preserve and helped organize public-private sector partnerships working to control invasives that threaten the 19.4-acre park. She has also led efforts to plant 400 new native trees/plants at the preserve. Cambel is the president of the Potomac Hills Citizens Association. (Fairfax County's *Park News*)
- ☼ Congratulations to **Chris Lamond**, Huntley Meadows Park Resource Manager, for being awarded \$11,775 in grant money for the park. The award came through the North American Wetlands Conservation Act and is to be used in invasive plant control efforts at Huntley. (Fairfax County's *Park News*)
- ☼ In a joint study published in April, the Smithsonian Institution, the World Wildlife Fund, and other groups reported that 29 percent of the plant species in the United States are on the verge of extinction. (*Audubon* magazine)
- ☼ The Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department has launched its Operation Wildflower program. This effort will attempt to increase the number of wildflowers on highway roadsides throughout that state. Individuals can donate seeds and money. Sponsors of 3 acres or more will see a sign near the site thanking them. (*Audubon* magazine)
- ☼ Cobb County, Georgia, leads the nation in school yard habitats certified by the National Wildlife Federation. This honor is due to efforts to provide food, shelter, water, and other aspects of appropriate habitat for native plants and animals. More than a third of the county's public schools have wildlife habitats. Georgia itself ranks first among states. So it probably should come as no surprise that the Cobb County Board of Education has adopted a policy to protect school yard habitats. Before any construction can be approved, 60-days notice must be posted on the details of the construction and its impact on the habitat. (*National Wildlife* magazine)
- ☼ The World Conservation Union (IUCN), in a joint effort with the National Museum of Natural History, the Nature Conservancy, and the New York Botanical Garden, has just completed a 20-year study assessing the global threats to vascular plants. The report, published in *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Plants*, concluded that one out of every eight plants is at risk of extinction. Two major threats cited are habitat loss and introduction of non-native species. More than 4,500 of these plants are from the United States alone. (*National Wildlife* magazine)

**WANTED, HOSPITALITY CHAIR**

After long service, **Joan Van Ryzin**, Potowmack Chapter's able hospitality chair would like to resign as soon as someone can be found to replace her. The duties of this position are providing drinks and snacks for program meetings several times a year and drinks and utensils for the chapter annual meeting and other special events as scheduled. All expenses are

reimbursed by the board. If you have an interest in food service (home cooked food is not required) and can set up and clean up after meetings, you are needed. For further information about the position, call Joan at 799-4520; to volunteer for the job call Marianne Mooney at 534-8179. If more than one person volunteers, the responsibility could be shared.

**MARION LOBSTEIN SPEAKER AT GREEN SPRING'S WINTER LECTURE SERIES**

On Sunday, February 28 from 2 to 3 pm, chapter member and biology professor Marion Lobstein will present a talk on the beauty and secrets of our natural wildflowers. Reservations are required; to reserve call Green Spring Gardens Park at 642-5173. Cost: \$5.00 by check made payable to Friends of Green Spring (FROGS).

**HOW MANY TREES HAVE WE LOST? WASHINGTON POST SAYS 69 PERCENT**

It's not easy to keep score on recent urban forest loss in Northern Virginia to sprawl growth. In the 1980s the USDA's Forest Service reported, 30 percent of Fairfax County's trees were destroyed. In the 1990s, despite what appears to onlookers to be accelerating devastation, some still question even whether there has been ANY net tree loss.

Journalist Dee Cohn, on page 16 of the *Washington Post Magazine* (9/18/98) reported that 69 percent of forest was converted to homes and businesses in Fairfax County between 1980 and 1995. That is, more than two-thirds of the landscape. By contrast, only 24 percent of Montgomery County, just across the Potomac River, was lost in this same period. Cohn says she based her statement on available aerial photos and acreage counting from NCRI, Arlington, VA.

Other statistics reported by Cohn:

- Number of farm and forest acres developed in greater Washington between 1980 and 1995: 251,000; number of total acres in Fairfax County: 260,000.
- Percentage increase in acreage of developed land in Loudoun County between 1980 and 1995: 127%.
- Percentage of available land in greater Washington now developed: 33.5%; percentage to be developed by 2020: 43.7%.

Fairfax County's Tree Preservation Task Force (Stuart Mendelsohn, Chairman, phone 356-0551) is reportedly working to develop new measures designed to save what's left of the county's landscape. Whatever the exact tree loss percentage, the Task Force has its work cut out for it and deserves the community's active encouragement.

-Fairfax ReLeaf-

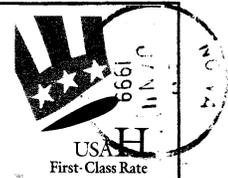
**ANYONE KNOWING OF THE WHEREABOUTS OF MISTLETOE** growing wild in the Northern Virginia region is asked to contact Alonso Abugattas. Mistletoe is the host plant for the sole North American representative of a tropical family of butterflies: the great purple hairstreak. A respected member of the Washington Area Butterfly Club and well-known expert, Harry Pavulaan, is trying to find a rumored local population of this species. This is a great opportunity for two great environmental organizations to assist each other and further show how plants and animals are interrelated. Contact Alonso at 228-6535 days or 528-8808 nights. Or e-mail [AlonsoLucy@aol.com](mailto:AlonsoLucy@aol.com).

**Chapter Events Calendar**

Jan	21	Board meeting 21 Program meeting: Cole Burrell speaks on geological regions and habitats of VA native plants
Feb	11	Board meeting and program meeting: Carol Allen speaks on native orchids
Mar	11 18	Board meeting Program meeting: Mark Garland speaks on plant relationships

**Potowmack Chapter  
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