

# POTOWMACK NEWS

Volume 18, No 6

Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

Nov/Dec1999

## **CRAIG TUFTS TO SPEAK ON BACKYARD HABITAT NOVEMBER 18**

On November 18<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 p.m., Potowmack Chapter will be honored to have as its program speaker the well-known conservationist Craig Tufts. In addition to discussing habitat gardening, Craig will address reasons why habitat is important if not essential for preservation purposes.

Since joining the staff of the National Wildlife Federation in 1976, Craig has overseen the development and expansion of the Backyard Wildlife Habitat program and is now the Federation's Chief Naturalist.

Craig authored a monthly, nationally distributed newspaper column on wildlife gardening that has been published as a book, *The Backyard Naturalist*. Craig's second book, *The National Wildlife Federation Guide to Gardening with Wildlife*, co-authored with Peter Loewer, was published in August 1995.

He has appeared on PBS's "The Victory Garden" as its wildlife specialist; hosted Home and Garden Television's 1997 Earth Day Special "The Living Garden;" currently co-hosts PBS's "Birdwatch" series; and has co-hosted back-to-back Turner Broadcasting specials on wildlife in NYC's Central Park and the pollination crisis.

Craig holds degrees in wildlife conservation and environmental education and natural resources management from Cornell University. He lives on nearly an acre of what was once just lawn near Middleburg, VA, and looks forward to nurturing at least 200 species of Piedmont Virginia native plants, a large vegetable garden, and perhaps a few chickens.

Reservations are not necessary, the public is invited, and members are welcome to bring friends or family members who might also be interested in hearing this prominent speaker. The meeting will be held at Green Spring Gardens Park, 4603 Green Spring Road off Rt. 236 in Alexandria. Refreshments will be served.

## **CHAPTER MEMBERS ENJOY ANNUAL MEETING**

The Potowmack Chapter's annual meeting was held at Huntley Meadows Park, one of the Chapter's registry sites, on October 17. Suzanne Malone, staff naturalist, treated attending members to a slide show of the wonders of the park. Norma Hoffman, of Friends of Huntley Meadows Park and Citizens Alliance to Save Huntley, was guest speaker. Norma outlined her fight as a conservationist dedicated to stopping the county from building a four-lane highway through the park. It was a very inspiring story and we owe Norma much gratitude for being such an ardent, hard-working supporter of Huntley Meadows.

During the short business meeting, the 1999/2000 budget was approved, as was the slate of officers. Anne Crocker gave propagation committee volunteers who had reached milestones of 100, 200, and 500 hours beautiful handmade certificates. Anne herself was given a wonderful testimonial by Liz Smith marking Anne's retirement from many years of chapter service. Laura Beaty sang the praises of Gerry and Dust Pratt as they are also retiring from active service at the propagation beds.

Joan Van Ryzin laid out a delicious spread of food, complimented by Billie Trump's spectacular arrangement of fall wildflowers (garden collected!). Members were invited to take a somewhat misty but atmospheric walk to the wetland at the conclusion of the meeting. It was a most enjoyable afternoon and we hope to see more members out next year.

**PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

November is the beginning of a new Chapter year. We have a new slate of officers, some new board members, and I'll be serving as president again this year. My intention will simply be to reinforce our VNPS goals: education about and conservation of native plants. As our area continues to grow, conserving what natural areas we can becomes more important than ever. And even in our own back yards, we could leave a little space for nature. I'd love to see hedgerows at the back of every suburban lot forming a wildlife corridor through neighborhoods. It's a dream, but in this issue of *Potowmack News*, we're focusing on creating habitats. And don't forget to come out to Green Spring on November 18 and learn what you can do in your own yard from Craig Tufts.

**Marianne Mooney**

**VNPS-FUNDED INTERN SERVES GREEN SPRING GARDENS PARK**

This summer, thanks to the generous support of VNPS, Green Spring once again had the services of an enthusiastic and knowledgeable summer intern. Our intern this year, Cathy Stragar, continued the work begun last year recording phenological (period of bloom) information for plants in the Native Plant Trail. Cathy also significantly improved our plant record keeping by beginning a teaching herbarium, which will be housed in Green Spring's library. The herbarium will contain pressed and dried specimens of plants from our native plant trail as well as significant plants from the rest of the gardens. These specimens can be used to confirm identifications and teach classes on plant identification. They can also be loaned to other institutions interested in our plant collections. Green Spring would like to thank VNPS for its continuing support of the park through programs like the VNPS Internship.

**VNPS POTOWMACK CHAPTER E-MAIL LISTSERV**

The Potowmack Chapter now has nearly 40 subscribers to its e-mail listserv. This new e-mail list is a fast and efficient form of communication with members. If you have any announcements of meetings, events, and volunteer needs for the VNPS members, or would like to relay information about local native plant events and issues, you can write to [vnps-pot@onelist.com](mailto:vnps-pot@onelist.com) with these announcements.

If you would like to subscribe and receive these announcements, send an e-mail to Sylvia Orli at [stone.sylvia@nmnh.si.edu](mailto:stone.sylvia@nmnh.si.edu), and in the message section write the following: subscribe to vnps-pot, your e-mail address, and your full name. Or use this web address: (<http://www.onelist.com/subscribe.cgi/vnps-pot>) and follow directions to subscribe. Don't worry. The list will be monitored to keep spammers away.

**BOARD OFFICERS**

President	Marianne Mooney	534-8179
Vice President	John C. Magee	478-9428
Secretary	Mary Ann Lawler	684-8622
Treasurer	Bill Kreitz	620-4415

**COMMITTEE CHAIRS**

Botany	Cris Fleming	301-657-9289
Conservation	Kathleen Kust	836-5868
Hospitality	Joan Van Ryzin	799-4520
Membership/Recognition	Anne Crocker	437-0355
Newsletter	Sally Sieracki	978-5865
Labeling/Mailing	Markoff family	573-7121
P.O. Box Mail Distributor	Laura Beaty	534-8746
Programs	Shirley Gay	920-1913
Propagation/Plant Sales	Laura Beaty	534-8746
	Beth Smith	644-1760
Publications	Roberta Day	560-5528
Publicity	Sylvia Orli	979-3545
Site Registry	Rod Simmons	256-7671
Garden Tours	Billie Trump	960-1476
Immediate Past President	Norma Vermillion	451-0572

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

**WETLAND RESTORATION AT GREEN SPRING** by Chris Strand\*

Green Spring Gardens Park has begun a wetland restoration project thanks to a recent grant from the Virginia Environmental Endowment. For most of us, wetland restoration connotes mucking around in the mud in hip-waders but at Green Spring restoration has taken on a slightly different meaning. Our project involves restoration of the riparian buffers (riparian means associated with a stream) along Turkeycock Run. These buffers are the areas adjacent to our stream, usually within 100 feet of the stream channel, which directly affect the water quality in our watershed. To the casual observer these buffers would probably seem unrelated to our wetlands, but research is revealing them to be very important.

Riparian buffers are emerging as an important component of wetland restoration and enhancement. In 1983 the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency concluded that excess nutrients were a key problem in the Chesapeake Bay. Beginning in 1994 and continuing through today, the Chesapeake Executive Council has identified riparian buffers as an important management strategy for polluted and threatened waterways. The following is excerpted from *Riparian Forest Buffers* (Welsch, David J. *Riparian Forest Buffers: Function and Design for Protection and Enhancement of Water Resources*. USDA Forest Service, 1991):

*"Streamside forests are crucial to the protection and enhancement of the water resources of the Eastern United States. They are extremely complex ecosystems that help provide optimum food and habitat for stream communities as well as being useful in mitigating or controlling nonpoint source pollution. Used as a component of an integrated management system including nutrient management and sediment and erosion control practices, streamside forests can produce a number of beneficial effects on the quality of water resources. Streamside forests can be effective in removing excess nutrients and sediment from surface runoff and shallow groundwater and in shading streams to optimize light and temperature conditions for aquatic plants and animals. Streamside forests also ameliorate the effects of some pesticides and directly provide dissolved and particulate organic food needed to maintain high biological productivity and diversity in the adjoining stream."*

Our restoration project at Green Spring is simple in concept. We are removing invasive plants that have colonized the areas next to our streams and ponds. Then we are addressing any underlying grading or nutrient problems associated with the sites. For example, along the pond edge we will be restoring almost 4 inches of bank that has eroded over the last 20 years. Finally, we will be replanting with appropriate native plants.

We hope the project at Green Spring will demonstrate that the riparian buffer concept is a flexible strategy that can be used by neighborhoods to preserve the health of their streams while enhancing their aesthetic and functional roles in the community. If you are interested in learning more about the Green Spring project or would like to volunteer, please call us at 703 642-5173.

*\*Chris Strand is the Director of Green Spring Gardens Park.*

**END OF DROUGHT HELPS TO MAKE VNPS FALL PLANT SALE A SUCCESS** by Gerry Pratt

The drought broke before Garden Day, inspiring gardeners to come to the Fall Plant Sale with the undying optimism that only dedicated gardeners demonstrate.

The Chapter offered over 1,800 plants carefully nurtured during a dry summer that has become habitual in this area over the past decade. Many thanks to the members of the Propagation and Sales Committee who put in many additional hours watering our potted plants: Nancy Adamson, Vivian Attermeyer, Laura Beaty, Helen Biggs, Patti Burch, Margaret Chatham, Deborah Crabtree, Phyllis Friedemann, Eleanor Kask, Lori Markoff, Marianne Mooney, Louis Nichols, Dust Pratt, Sally Sieracki, Beth Smith, Elaine Squieri, and Billie Trump. (Continued on p. 4)

**(PLANT SALE, continued.)** In addition to the members of the committee, we are grateful for the help offered by the following VNPS members: Tiana Camfiord, Roberta Day, Mary Ann Lawler, Gabriel Markoff, and Joan Newicke.

Our treasurer Bill Krietz, assisted by Dust Pratt, acted as cashier throughout the sale day, and Anne Crocker demonstrated the advantages of VNPS membership through the display of newsletters and other VNPS publications.

Our sales depend on the continued generosity of members who freely share plants from their gardens to round out our sale offerings. Our donors this fall included Vivian Attermeyer, Laura Beaty, Margaret Chatham, Kathy Cochran, Anne Crocker, Joanne Krumviede, Lori Markoff, Ginny McNair, Andrew Pratt, Dust and Gerry Pratt, Sally Sieracki, Beth Smith, and Billie Trump.

By the time you receive this newsletter, the propagation beds will be closed down for the season. In the spring, they will be under the chairmanship of two very capable, long-time members of the committee: Laura Beaty (534-8746) and Beth Smith (644-1760). I urge you to give either one a call and offer your help next spring.

I am retiring after 10 years of "toiling in the field" and look back with fond memories on the experiences and relationships that I shared with other members of the Propagation and Sales Committee.

### **NWF BACKYARD HABITAT AT POHICK REGIONAL LIBRARY**

Pohick Regional Library is located at 6450 Sydenstricker Road, Burke, VA. It is the busiest of 19 branches in the Fairfax County library system, loaning more than 1,000,000 items each year. The 4-acre site is sandwiched between townhouses, an adjacent park, and busy roads. Yet in the midst of this congestion and concrete a garden has been created that is an oasis for birds and other wildlife. In 1994 the National Wildlife Federation designated the site as a backyard habitat. It meets the criteria of providing food, water, and shelter for wildlife, and thanks to VNPS there are plenty of native plants on the property. Beth Smith, the landscape volunteer coordinator at the library, has been working with Eagle and Girl Scouts over the past 6 years to convert a neglected site into a naturalistic, low-maintenance landscape that is friendly to wildlife and is a showpiece of native plants. Eagle Scouts installed a butterfly garden that includes both larval and nectar food sources and is now visited by numerous butterflies and beneficial insects. Some of the native plants in the butterfly garden are Joe Pye weed, swamp milkweed, golden alexander, New York ironweed, asters, goldenrod, butterfly weed, and purple coneflower. Other native plants installed on the property include eastern red cedar, fringe tree, serviceberry, witch-alder, summersweet, chokeberry, arrowwood, viburnum, trumpet honeysuckle vine, and Carolina jasmine. The Bluebird Society will monitor and install bluebird houses in the spring, since bluebirds are already on the site, along with resident mockingbirds, titmice, wrens, and of course house sparrows. If you would like a copy of the landscape plans of the butterfly garden, contact Beth at 644-1760 and she will send you a copy. If you are interested in volunteering for the gardening maintenance at Pohick Library, also call Beth. You can join her Weeders and Readers group, whose members meet once a week to discuss the latest books while doing gardening chores, listening to birds, and trying to identify butterflies and bugs.

### **VOLUNTEERS NEEDED AT HUNTLEY MEADOWS**

As we're all aware, the deer population in our area is booming and having a profound effect on native vegetation. In response, Huntley Meadows Park is engaged in a botanical survey designed to catalogue the effects of deer browse in the park. Three deer exclosures have been constructed. The project's purpose will be to evaluate forest regeneration and plant community dynamics within these exclosures. If you'd like to participate in this project as a surveyor or study coordinator, please contact Chris Lamond, Resource Manager, at 768-2525. The surveys will run from mid-April to mid-October and project training will be given.

**HABITAT IN YOUR BACKYARD** by Mary Ann Lawler

On October 28, 1492, Christopher Columbus wrote in his journal: "The Admiral says that he never beheld so fair a thing; trees all along the river, beautiful and green, and different from ours, with flowers and fruits each according to their kind, many birds and little birds which sing very sweetly." Nothing can bring back our land to what it was 500 years ago. But we can help create havens for the surviving birds and stem the decline of important pollinating insects, if enough of us enrich our residential landscapes with microhabitats using native plants.

Birds and other wildlife have evolved over millions of years along with native plants and their pollinators into diverse, interdependent ecosystems. They need each other to survive. To create a biologically diverse wildlife habitat in your yard, aim for variety, density, and complexity of structure. Choose native species that are especially beneficial to birds and pollinators throughout the year.

Start with your existing tall trees and add to them to create a canopy. For our area, plant oak (*Quercus spp.*), hickory (*Carya spp.*), tulip poplar (*Liriodenron tulipifera*), hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*), black walnut (*Juglans nigra*), or sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*). The meats of nuts and acorns are eaten by a numerous birds, including flickers, rufous-sided towhees, nuthatches, and bluejays. These trees also provide good nesting habitat and attract insects that birds will eat.

Then plant an understory of medium to small trees, shrubs, ground cover, and shade tolerant wildflowers, such as *Mertensia virginica*, *Aquilegia canadensis*, and *Dicentra spp.* Choose species that spread food sources throughout the year.

Plants that produce fruits from May through August can attract catbirds, robins, thrushes, waxwings, woodpeckers, orioles, cardinals, towhees, and grosbeaks. Summer-fruiting trees include cherries (*Prunus serotina*, *P. pensylvanica*), serviceberries (*Amelanchier spp.*), and red mulberry (*Morus rubra*). Shrubs and groundcover include blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*), elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*), chokeberry (*Pyrus arbutifolia*), partridgeberry (*Mitchella repens*), and brambles (*Rubus spp.*).

Fruits that are high in lipids help birds store fat, essential for fall migration. Trees and shrubs in this category include black gum (*Nyssa sylvatica*), dogwood (*Cornus spp.*), sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*), winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*), and spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*). Spicebush and sassafras are also excellent larval food for pollinators.

Those trees, shrubs, and ground covers whose fruits remain attached through winter help keep birds alive during frigid weather. These include magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*), possum haw (*Ilex decidua*), hawthorn (*Crataegus crus-galli*), eastern wahoo (*Euonymus atropurpureus*), wintergreen (*Gaultheria procumbens*), and Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*). Catbirds, bluebirds, thrushes, and nearly 30 other birds eat the fruit clusters of sumac (*Rhus spp.*) and the over-wintering insects that hide in them. Viburnums (*Virburnum dentatum*, *V. prunifolium*, *V. trilobum*) not only provide fruits eaten by birds in winter, but they are also excellent for pollinators in spring and for both nest sites and shelter in summer. Put feeders out to supplement these sources.

For year-round shelter, nest sites, seeds, and fruits, plant clumps of mixed sizes of evergreens. Examples are eastern red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*), favorite of cedar waxwings and over 50 other birds; white and other pine (*Pinus spp.*); eastern hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*); holly (*Ilex opaca*); and low growing juniper (*Juniperus communis*).

Don't be afraid to be untidy. Leave the leaf litter in which the rufous-sided towhees, thrushes, white-throated sparrows, and other birds can forage. Stack up fallen branches into a brush pile for over-wintering butterflies and shelter for wrens and other small birds. Allow the stalks and seed-heads of perennials to remain through the winter to provide seeds for birds and shelter for insects. Leave dead trees and limbs standing for cavity-nesting birds. Try letting a tangle of Virginia creeper, native honeysuckle, or greenbrier grow up a pole to create other nest sites and food. Plant a persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*); it may be messy, but it will attract numerous birds and pollinators. (Continued on p.6)

Live lightly on your land. Create narrow pathways so that you don't compact the soil around plants and disrupt beetles, mites, and nematodes. They help control insect pests, pollinate flowers, recycle nutrients, aerate the soil, and break down detritus.

Don't forget to provide water. A pond is wonderful, but a plain old birdbath will be fine.

Finally, save a sunny, protected area for clumps of native grasses and a pollinator garden. Plant perennials in it that bloom through every season: *Phlox spp*, *Monarda fistulosa*, *Liatris squarrosa*, *Coreopsis spp.*, *Heliopsis helianthoides*, *Helianthus spp.*, *Lobelia cardinalis*, *Vernonia noveboracensis*, *Eupatorium spp.*, *Asclepias spp.*, *Solidago spp.*, and lots of *Aster spp*.

And, if you listen carefully, you'll hear more birds "sing very sweetly" in gratitude.

**MORE LATIN NAMES MADE A LITTLE LESS MYSTERIOUS** by Margaret Chatham

Last November I wrote about Latin names that denote the plant's habitat. Here are some names that denote geographic area, perhaps the source of the first specimen:

- *Mertensia virginica* (Virginia bluebells), named for German botanist Franz Karl Mertens, 1764-1831.
- *Claytonia virginiana* (spring beauty), named for John Clayton, 1693-1773, American botanist.
- *Carpinus caroliniana* (American hornbeam). "Carpinus" is the classical Latin name for the hornbeam family, and this is the species from Carolina.
- *Quercus marilandica* (blackjack oak). Quercus is the Latin name for the oak family. Maryland also may be "mariana" as in *Coreopsis mariana* (Maryland golden aster).
- *Fraxinus pennsylvanica* (green ash). "Fraxinus" is the classical Latin name for the ash tree. Most plants named for Pennsylvania only use one "n" and some change the "y" to "i."
- *Aster novae-angliae* (New England aster). Aster is Greek for star.
- *Maianthemum canadense* (Canada mayflower). Mai equals May; anthemum means flower.
- *Lonicera japonica* (Japanese honeysuckle), named for Adam Lonitzer, a 16<sup>th</sup> C. German herbalist.
- *Prunus persica* (peach). Literally, plum from Persia.
- *Hibiscus syriacus* (rose of sharon). Mallow from Syria.
- *Oxalis europaea* (European yellow wood sorrel).

**Chapter Events**  
**Calendar**

- Nov 11 Board Meeting  
7pm
- Nov 18 Craig Tufts speaks  
on backyard habitat  
7:30pm



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**Virginia Native Plant Society**  
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