

# POTOWMACK NEWS

Volume 18, No 2

Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

Mar/Apr 2000

## **ROD SIMMONS TO BE SPEAKER AT PROGRAM MEETING MARCH 9**

Mr. Simmons will speak on **meadows and meadow ecology** and will focus on types of natural grassland communities in the east, especially successional meadows. He will introduce us to serpentine barrens, grass balds, scour communities (such as those along river and stream banks), and cedar glades.

Rod Simmons is a field ecologist, technically trained as a geologist and biologist, who has been studying the wilds of this region for the past two decades. He is the current president of Maryland Native Plant Society, a group that champions our native plants and their habitats.

The meeting will be held at **7:30 p.m.** at Green Spring Gardens Park, 4603 Green Spring Road, off Rt. 236 in Alexandria. Turn at the Salvation Army/Jerry's Ford intersection. Reservations are not necessary.

## **THREE CHAPTER-SPONSORED WALKS GUARANTEED TO BRING RELIEF FOR SPRING FEVER**

❖ Mark your calendars for **Sunday April 2 at 1:00 p.m.** when botany chair **Cris Fleming** will lead a chapter walk at **Turkey Run Park**. We'll look for harbinger-of-spring, twinleaf, and other early spring wildflowers. Come prepared for moderately rugged terrain and wet areas including a rocky stream crossing. Dress accordingly. Turkey Run Park is located off the section of George Washington Memorial Parkway between the Beltway and Rt. 123. Exits are well marked coming from either direction. Meet at parking lot C-1 at 1:00 p.m. for an afternoon walk. Participation is limited to 16. Registration is required. To register, call Cris at 301 657-9289. If leaving a message, be sure to leave your telephone number. The trip

will be cancelled if there is heavy rain but not for drizzle.

❖ On **Sunday April 16, from 2:30-4:30 p.m.**, celebrate spring with a walk at **Balls Bluff Regional Park** led by **Dr. Stanwyn Shetler**, VNPS State botany chair and botanist emeritus of the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History. We hope to see a good variety of spring ephemerals, including bird's-foot violet (*Viola pedata*); twinleaf (*Jeffersonia diphylla*); green violet (*Hybanthus concolor*); and shooting star (*Dodecatheon meadia*), an uncommon Piedmont species, perhaps already in flower this early. Directions: From the Capital Beltway (I-495), take VA Rt. 7 or the toll road west to Leesburg. Take US-15 (Leesburg by-pass) north (past the Outlet and Battlefield

malls) for about 1.5 miles. At a large housing development, turn right at the light onto Battlefield Parkway and then left shortly thereafter onto Ball's Bluff Road for 1 mile through the development and woods to the parking lot where we plan to meet. Allow 1 hour from the beltway. Space is limited. Call 703 920-1913 or 703 534-8179 to reserve. You may leave a message but include your phone number please. The walk will be cancelled in case of heavy rain.

❖ On **Saturday May 6, Rod Simmons** will lead a walk at **Hemlock Overlook Regional Park**. The park includes old growth eastern hemlock trees and interesting spring and summer flowering plants. Plan for this walk now, details will be available in the May/June issue of *Potowmack News*.

**PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

Woodcocks are displaying, bird songs are ringing through the woods, and swamp cabbage is emerging. Spring is not far off! And with spring come the wildflowers transforming the winter landscape with their ethereal beauty. It's the season to unabashedly marvel at nature's wonders. If you prefer a little learning with your dose of beauty, join us for a wildflower walk this spring. But head to your local parks and witness the unfolding of this ephemeral display.

**Marianne Mooney**

**THREATS TO POLLINATORS AFFECT NATIVE PLANTS**

In carrying out our education and conservation goals, it is important for us to remember the role of the pollinators in native plant ecology. The following are some valuable quotes from *The Forgotten Pollinators* by Stephen L. Buchmann and Gary Paul Nabhan.

“Habitat fragmentation is a major threat to pollinators. As habitat patches (“islands”) become smaller, they may become insufficient to support pollinators through the mix of plants they require. Fewer pollinators ultimately mean fewer plants. Where habitat fragmentation and pesticides have reduced the populations of pollinators, plants will eventually suffer low reproductive success. The pollination ecology of many plants has barely been studied, even though it may be critical to keeping some of these plants from extinction. We must earmark support for studying these interactions and for including pollinator nesting and foraging areas in critical habitat designations.

“Plants and pollinators both need protected habitats. The decline of certain plants has triggered the decline of pollinators that specialize on them. When necessary to keep them from extinction, critical habitat should be set aside for both plants and their pollinators.”

“The loss of biological diversity means more than simply counting the declining number

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of species. It also implies the extinction of relationships or destruction of ecological processes, such as pollination, upon which we all depend. Additional habitat conservation, monitoring, research, and ecological restoration will be required to reverse these far-reaching global trends.”

*Contributed by Mary Ann Lawler*

**WANT TO JOIN VNPS? Call Anne Crocker, Membership Chair, at 703 437-0355, and she will send you an application.**

**FAIRFAX URBAN NATURALISTS: GREEN SPRING'S NEWEST VOLUNTEER INITIATIVE**

by Chris Strand, Manager

Green Spring Gardens Park is developing a new corps of volunteers whose mission will be to improve the environment through projects that educate and serve the community. Called Fairfax Urban Naturalists, or FUN, this program is the result of a renewed interest on the part of the public in volunteerism and environmental education and restoration. Surveys completed by our visitors and comments from our members and volunteers have convinced us that there is a thriving interest in the environment and in volunteering – in short, people want to learn how they can help improve the environment. FUN will try to satisfy this interest by providing educational opportunities and meaningful projects for participants. Three projects that we are working on right now are a Wildlife Habitat Garden at Hidden Pond Nature Center, a Schoolyard Habitat

Garden for Columbia Elementary, and a riparian buffer demonstration planting near the ponds at Green Spring.

The only prerequisite for participation in FUN is a willingness to get involved in projects that will benefit the community. All volunteers should make use of the opportunity to attend some training (at least 25 hours in 12 months) and they should also participate in service and education projects in the community (at least 50 hours in 12 months).

We have already scheduled training for those volunteers interested in Schoolyard Habitat Gardens. This training will take place in July and carries with it the added benefit of certification as a 'Habitat Steward' by the National Wildlife Federation. For more information call Cindy Brown at 703 642-5173.

**NEW HABITAT FOR WILDLIFE GARDEN AT GREEN SPRING** by Gerry Pratt

In preparation for the installation of a wildlife habitat demonstration garden at Green Spring Park, an area close to the town house gardens was tilled in the fall of 1998. In spring '99, horticulturist Cindy Brown, along with seasonal worker Donna Stecker and a core of volunteers, mulched and landscaped the area with rocks and gravel paths.

A large hole was dug for the installation of a preformed pond. Plants were purchased and installed to create a functional and beautiful new garden. The emphasis was on native woody plants and perennials, but a number of non-native wildlife friendly plants were used. The non-native plants were determined to be non-invasive and therefore not a threat to native plant populations.

The propagation beds of the Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society contributed a number of perennial natives to the garden. These included *Aster laevis*, *Aster novae-angliae*, *boltonia*, *Eupatorium purpureum*, *Physostegia virginiana*, *Echinacea purpurea* and *E. purpurea (tennessee)*, *Coreopsis auriculata*, *Penstemon digitalis*, *Zizia aurea*, *Iris virginica*, *Veronicastrum virginicum*, *Lobelia cardinalis*, sensitive fern, and Indian grass.

The habitat provides the four essential elements of food, water, cover, and nesting places necessary to meet the needs of the wildlife it is to attract. The garden is a project in progress. The plants selected are chosen to provide a progression of blooms from early spring to mid-fall to meet the needs of pollinators, birds, and butterflies.

Last October the garden was formally dedicated with a tour given by Cindy Brown, and Sherry Mitchell, author of *Creating Sanctuary*, presented a slide lecture and answered questions from the audience.

The garden will be very beautiful this spring. Come and visit it. Look for it among the other demonstration gardens at the back of the park near our chapter's propagation beds.

**SELECTED COMMUNITY EVENTS OF INTEREST TO VNPS MEMBERS****Walks**

- ❖ **Saturday March 11. Spring Plant ID Walk.** 2-4:40 p.m. Adults. Join volunteer naturalist Melvin Little for an informative walk and learn about our native flowers, trees, and shrubs. Long Branch Nature Center, 228-6535. Reservations required. Free.
- ❖ **Saturday March 25. Walk with a Naturalist.** 10:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. Join the naturalist for a stroll through the Pohick Stream Valley in search of natural happenings. Hidden Pond Nature Center, 451-9588. Canceled in case of rain. Free.
- ❖ **Saturday April 8. Bluets and Buttercups.** 9-11 a.m. Adults. Hike the rocky trails of Scotts Run Nature Preserve to see and identify beautiful wild flowers. Call Riverbend Park, 759-9018, for reservations. Meet in the west parking lot. Canceled if rain. Free. **Spring Plant ID Walk.** 2-4:30 p.m. Adults. Walk with volunteer naturalist Melvin Little and learn about our native flowers, trees, and shrubs. Long Branch Nature Center, 228-6535. Reservations required. Free.
- ❖ **Friday April 14. Wildflower Wander.** 8:30 a.m.- 1:30 p.m. Adults. Enjoy a mid-morning stroll with a naturalist to view bluebells, spring beauties, trout lilies, and other native wildflowers in the floodplain of Bull Run and Cub Run in Centreville. Bring a bag lunch and dress for possible mud. Van will leave from Lubber Run Recreation Center, 300 N. Park Drive, Arlington. Long Branch Nature Center, 228-6535. Reservations required. \$10 fee.
- ❖ **Saturday April 15. Pohick Wildflower Walk.** 10:30 a.m.-12 p.m. Naturalist Jim Pomeroy will point out wildflowers and trees that are in bloom along with other natural happenings. Dress for the weather. Hidden Pond Nature Center, 451-9588. Reservations required. Canceled if rain. Free.
- ❖ **Sunday April 16. 30th Earth Day.** 2-3:30 p.m. Kick off the 30th anniversary of Earth Day. Join in activities that demonstrate how your neighborhood and park can be managed for wildlife. Activities include alien invasive plant removal, forest edge plantings, and stream monitoring. Ellanor C. Lawrence Park, Cabell's Mill, 631-0013. Reservations required. Free.
- ❖ **Tuesday April 25. Bluebell Bonanza.** 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Ages 12 and above. Go for a stroll along the Bull Run River Valley to see spring wildflowers. Hidden Oaks Nature Center, 941-1065. Bring a bag lunch and wear sturdy shoes. Reservations required by 4/14. Canceled if heavy rain. \$6.
- ❖ **Saturday April 29. Lilies and Bells.** 9-11 a.m. Adults. Search the riverside for a lovely display of trout lilies, bluebells, trilliums, and other jewels. Riverbend Visitor Center 759-9018. Reservations required. Canceled if rain. Free. **Lake Accotink Wildflower Walk.** 10-11:30 a.m. Join naturalist Clara Ailes for a walk in search of trout lilies, hepatica, wild ginger, and other wildflowers. Call Hidden Pond Nature Center, 451-9588, for information. Meet in the parking lot by the railroad bridge. Reservations required. Free.
- ❖ **Sunday April 30. Pink Lady's Slipper Walk.** 2:30-3:00 p.m. Stroll with a naturalist to see one of the area's largest displays of native orchids as well as the park's native wildflower garden. Hidden Oaks Nature Center, 941-1065. Reservations required by 4/25. Canceled if rain. Free.

- ❖ **Tuesday May 2. Trillium Trek.** 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Adults. Travel to Linden, VA, for the glorious display of trilliums and other spring wildflowers. Hidden Oaks Nature Center, 941-1065. Bring a bag lunch. Wear hiking shoes. Reservations required by 4/28. \$10.
- ❖ **Saturday May 6. Trillium Trek.** 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Adults. Travel to Linden, VA, to witness one of the largest and most impressive trillium displays in the East as well as many other wildflowers. Van will leave from Lubber Run Recreation Center, 300 N. Park Dr., Arlington. Call Long Branch Nature Center, 228-6535. Bring a bag lunch. \$15 fee. Reservations required.
- ❖ **Sunday May 7. Wetlands Awareness Day 2000.** 12-3 p.m. Celebrate 25 years of wetland protection. Bring friends and family to learn about beavers, wood ducks, and water quality. Enjoy an afternoon of wetland interpretation, wildlife presentations, and a fun fair for kids. Huntley Meadows Visitor Center, 768-2525. Free except for small fee for some activities.
- ❖ **Saturday May 13. Bluets and Buttercups.** 9-11 a.m. Adults. Wildflower walk, Scotts Run Nature Preserve (see 4/8). Call Riverbend Park, 759-9018. Reservations required. Canceled if rain. Free.

#### Slide Shows, Workshops, and Symposiums

- ❖ **Saturday March 11. 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Virginia's Wetland Treasures.** Topics include wetland types, values, functions, and issues; pocket wetlands in your backyard; and wetland restoration. Sponsored by VNPS and held at the University of Richmond's Gottwald Science Center. To register, refer to the postcard VNPS members received in the mail or call Blandy at 540 837-1600. Fee \$10 (nonmembers \$15). Bring a bag lunch. More information is available at [www.vnps.org](http://www.vnps.org).
- ❖ **Wednesday March 29. Introduction to Wildflowers.** 7:30-9:00 p.m. Learn how to identify spring wildflowers and the best places to find them in Northern Virginia through a slide show and discussion. Hidden Pond Nature Center, 451-9588. Reservations required. Free.
- ❖ **Friday May 12-Sunday May 14. 17th Annual Spring Wildflower Symposium at Trillium House, Wintergreen, VA.** A weekend of guided hikes, lectures, and workshops in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Central Virginia. Learn propagation skills; explore the rich ecology and diverse ecosystems of the mountains, coves, and peaks from some of the best field botanists and horticulturists in Virginia. Sponsored by the Wintergreen Nature Foundation and Wintergreen Resort. For Information, call Liz Salas at 804 325-8172, visit the website at [www.twmf.org](http://www.twmf.org), or send e-mail to [wtgfnf@aol.com](mailto:wtgfnf@aol.com). The symposium fee is \$95 and does not include accommodations.

#### WELCOME...

The Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant society welcomes the following new members:

Pricilla Adams, McLean; Barbara W. Alsip, Annandale; Mary T. Bates, Falls Church; Natalie Becker, Falls Church; Nicole Behrens, Springfield; Lucy Winfield Berkebile, McLean; Jim and Sue Buchanan, Springfield; Wendy L. Campbell, Alexandria; Stephen Constantellos, Alexandria; William Y. Epling, Annandale; Liz Fagot, Alexandria; Vicki Funk, Falls Church; Lynn P. Harr, Clifton; Jennifer Harr, Manhattan Beach, CA; Victoria Hook, Vienna; Meg Howard, McLean; Liz Howard, Arlington; Beth A. Johnson, Washington, D.C.; Alma Kasulaitis, Falls Church; Peter Kelsey, Fairfax; Kurt Kratz, Burke; Chris Lea, Berlin, MD; Robert Leggett, Great Falls; Larry Morse, Washington, D.C.; Kenneth Novak, Reston; Kathleen O'Rourke, Takoma Park, MD; Nora Palmatier, Arlington; Richard Pelham, Arlington; Jeanette Stewart and family, Falls Church; Carolyn Strobridge, Springfield; Jil M. Swearingen, Cheverly, MD; Lorna Totman, Annandale; Christopher Tracey, Reston; Marjorie White, Annandale; John Wilson, Oak Hill; Rebecca B. Wright, Fairfax; and Elizabeth Zimmer, Alexandria.

**MAKE A NOTE!**

**Our chapter's spring garden tour will be held on Sunday May 7th this year. Details will be available in the May/June issue of *Potowmack News*.**

**SONGBIRD DECLINE MAY BE LINKED TO NON-NATIVE SHRUBS**

New evidence suggests that the decline of songbirds is linked to the rise of non-native plants. Birds that nest in non-native plants lose more eggs to raccoons and other predators, according to research presented in the December issue of *Conservation Biology*.

"Here is an ecological trap if there ever was one!" says Christopher Whelan of the Illinois Natural History Survey in Wilmington, Illinois, who co-authored the study with Kenneth Schmidt of the Department of Biology at the University of Memphis.

Non-native shrubs are widespread throughout the Midwest and East Coast. "Introduced honeysuckle and buckthorn can dominate the understories of forest preserves, particularly small, fragmented preserves surrounded by urban sprawl," says Schmidt.

Schmidt and Whelan studied nest predation of American robins and wood thrushes in a 500-acre deciduous woodland preserve near Chicago for 6 years. There, non-native shrubs have largely replaced the native shrubs where the songbirds once nested: honeysuckle has replaced arrowwood and buckthorn has replaced hawthorn.

Schmidt and Whelan found that predation of both robin and thrush nests was higher in the non-native shrubs than in the native. The researchers suggest that this increase is partly due to physical differences between the native and non-native shrubs. Buckthorn lacks hawthorn's sharp thorns, which could deter mammalian predators. Honeysuckle has sturdier branches, which could both help predators climb higher and support nests closer to the ground, where they are more accessible to predators.

Wood thrushes built about half their nests in exotic shrubs. During the study period, the number of robins nesting in honeysuckle increased six-fold (from 5% to more than 30%). The researchers suggest that honeysuckle is an attractive nesting site because it sometimes leafs out before the native shrubs.

The good news is that solving the non-native shrub problem could also help solve the songbird problem. The bad news is that removing exotic shrubs and restoring natives will be a big job. But the longer we wait, the worse the problem will grow.

**Chapter Events**  
**Calendar**

Mar	9	Board Mtg 6:45 pm; Rod Simmons speaker, 7:30 at Green Spring
Apr	2	Cris Fleming walk at Turkey Run Park, 1 p.m.
Apr	13	Board Mtg; 7:00 pm Green Spring
Apr	16	Stan Shetler walk at Balls Bluff, 2:30 pm
May	6	Rod Simmons walk; Hemlock Overlook Reg. Park
May	7	Spring Garden Tours
May	20	Plant Sale, Green Spring Park
Jun	2-4	State Annual Mtg.

**Potowmack Chapter**  
**Virginia Native Plant Society**  
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