POTOWMACK NEWS

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POTOWMACK CHAPTER OFFERS TWO EXCITING PROGRAMS TO HELP ILLUMINE THE DARK DAYS OF WINTER WITH THOUGHTS OF SPRING TO COME

On **January 11, 2001**, well-known botanist and author **Dr. Stanwyn Shetler** has agreed to share his expertise with us in a discussion titled Spring Birds and Wildflowers of the Potomac Valley, which he will illustrate with color slides and bird call imitations.

Dr. Shetler is curator of botany emeritus at the National Museum of Natural History, where he spent his professional career as a research scientist. His revision (with co-author and Potowmack Chapter publicity chair Sylvia Stone Orli) of a long outdated checklist of the plants of the area (*An Annotated Checklist of the Vascular Plants of the Washington-Baltimore Area. Part I)* was recently published and he is also the author of about 150 other titles, both scientific and popular. He is a long-time member of VNPS, currently serving as state botany chair. He is also the vice president of the board of directors of the Audubon Naturalist Society.

On **February 8, Don Hyatt** will speak on native azaleas with special emphasis on the species found in our eastern mountain ranges and some of the rare "hybrid swarms" that have been found there, such as on Gregory Bald in the Smokies. He will talk about the stress that expanding deer populations are placing on these beautiful plants and his talk will include a description of the 13-acre John C. and Margaret K.White Horticultural Park in Annandale, which was recently donated to Fairfax County

Mr. Hyatt's own McLean garden was featured on the Chapter's spring garden tour in 2000. He is the president of the Potomac Valley Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society, past president of the Azalea Society of America, and is a Potowmack Chapter member. After retiring from full-time teaching, he returned to teach computer science part time at the Thomas Jefferson High School for Math and Science. If you would like to have a preview of some of the information that Mr. Hyatt may be offering, check his website at www.tjhsst.edu/~dhyatt/gardencenter.html.

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Both programs will be held at the **Horticultural Center of Green Spring Gardens Park** and will begin at **7:30 p.m.** Green Spring is located at 4603 Green Spring Road, off Rt. 236 in Alexandria. Turn north at the Salvation Army/Jerry's Ford intersection. The programs are free and open to the public and reservations are not necessary.

OLWELL FASCINATES AUDIENCE AT NOVEMBER PROGRAM

November's Potowmack Chapter program featured Peggy Olwell, senior endangered species biologist for the Bureau of Land Management. Peggy enumerated how few biologists there are in the Federal government to manage millions of acres of invasive plant problems and endangered native flora. Endangered fauna is much more visible and hence, receives more attention and funding. In an attempt to compensate for the lack of plant "publicity" and funding, Peggy helped to form the Plant Conservation Alliance (www.nps.gov/plants), a consortium of non-profit and Federal agencies. Dedicated to providing information and help to those engaged in the preservation of our native flora, the Alliance gathers together diverse groups all over the country working for a common goal. It was inspiring to hear the various ways that people are working for our native plant heritage. A lively question and answer session followed Peggy's fascinating talk.

PRESIDENTS MESSAGE:

Happy New Year to all our members. In an area like ours where people have more demands on their lives and little time, allow me to help. I hope I won't seem presumptuous, but I have compiled a list of resolutions that you all are welcome to adopt as your own. They're enjoyable resolutions, nothing punitive about them:

- Resolve to come to the monthly programs we sponsor at Green Spring where you'll be enlightened and entertained by the top minds in the area.
- Resolve to sign up for one of our fabulous spring plant walks led by expert botanists.
- Resolve to visit our local natural areas and VNPS registry sites to enjoy the flora and fauna.
- And if you're looking for a more public-minded resolution, Resolve to become involved in the running of this chapter. We welcome all help.

Now I have to finish off the chocolate before the New Year.

Marianne Mooney

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All numbers should include the 703 area code unless otherwise noted.

GREAT FALLS RAMBLE

This past fall several VNPS members took part in a series of Audubon Naturalist Society botany walks at Great Falls National Park in Virginia.

Led by Cris Fleming, Potowmack Chapter botany chair, we met on three Friday mornings at 2-week intervals to experience the progression of Autumn through plants. While Great Falls is wonderful at any time of year, the variety of habitats and the returning made for a memorable fall.

The first morning we explored along the river on the bedrock terrace, a dry, gravelly area that is host to several rare plants. Our next walk was along the Swamp Trail, a beautiful wet area bounded by some fantastic boulders draped with rock polypody fern. We saw three species of *lycopodium*,* several viburnums, and numerous fern species. And autumn became coalesced in the sun shining through a forest of pawpaws and tulip poplars. The last walk was again along the river where wetland plants like buttonbush, swamp dogwood, and rose mallow grow near the rocky shore. To experience the gradual progression of fall, watching birds migrate along the river and plants going to seed in the beauty of October, was an unforgettable pleasure. Cris has promised to do a spring version that will be held on Friday mornings, April 6 and 20, and May 4. To participate, call ANS at 301 652-9188 or visit their web site at www.audubonnaturalist.org.

* For more on *lycopodiums*, see p.5.

- WANT TO JOIN THE CHAPTER LISTSERV? Send an e-mail to Sylvia Orli at *stone.sylvia@nmnh.si.edu* and in the message section write subscribe to vnps-pot, your e-mail address, and your full name. Or visit *www.onelist.com/subscribe.cgi/vnps-pot.*

A SPIRANTHES SURPRISE by Laura Farron

Volunteer plant. Usually, it's a polite term gardeners apply to weeds, or perhaps to those overly vigorous plants that need to be thinned out every year. Rarely do the uninvited plants that appear in our flowerbeds turn out to be that wildflower we've been trying to establish without success, or that bush that seems so abundant in the park down the street. Birds, it would seem, find the berries of poison ivy and pokeweed much preferable to those of Solomon's plume and spicebush!

Recently, we have begun to turn our attention to the neglected edges of our typical suburban yard; for years, the shady fence line has hosted English ivy and our neighbors' large euonymous bushes. Not surprisingly, these invasive thugs have woven themselves into the chain link fence and sent mammoth roots into our yard. One weekend in mid-September, as we finished beating back the branches of one euonymous bush, we were astonished by what emerged--the delicate spirals of several nodding ladies' tresses (*Spiranthes cernua*), bravely competing and blooming in this rather gloomy corner.

As native orchid enthusiasts know, the majority of North America's orchids have a symbiotic relationship with hundreds of species of soil fungi known as mycorrhizae, making propagation difficult (although there have been a few recent success stories) and transplantation nearly impossible. How then did this small white gem appear in such an unlikely environment? According to *The New England Wild Flower Society Guide to Growing and Propagating Wildflowers* (Houghton Mifflin, New York, 2000), *Spiranthes* species appear to be less dependent upon mycorrhizae than many other orchids. Nevertheless, a suburban community built in the 1960's hardly seems like ideal orchid habitat.

We considered several possible scenarios. This area of the yard had been worked up 3 or 4 years ago before planting oat grass (*Chasmanthium latifolium*), so any orchids that might have existed in this spot unnoticed for years would probably not have survived this soil disturbance. If an animal is responsible for dispersing the seeds of ladies' tresses, could some seeds have been dropped in this area? No, in the slow-growing world of orchids, a few years are not nearly enough time for a small colony to form. Could some roots or seeds, dormant underneath the soil's surface, have been brought to the surface by our planting efforts? Again, it hardly seemed likely.

Several days after our exciting find, another *Spiranthes* was spotted blooming right in the heart of the *Chasmanthium*. Suddenly, the answer seemed clear. The oat grass was purchased from a standard nursery in large pots and planted with much extra soil still clinging to its roots. Many nursery grasses are grown in large outdoor fields, and one favorite habitat of ladies' tresses is...meadows.

While the future of this welcome volunteer is unknown, this much is certain--if it continues to thrive and bloom, we will feel like we have hit the plant-lovers' jackpot.

DID YOU KNOW?

Enormous American sycamores once graced the East and Midwest. These trees, which could measure up to 200 ft. tall and 45 ft. around, were so massive that early pioneers kept their livestock inside the hollow centers of the sycamores -- not just pigs and chickens but cows as well. The reason for the hollow centers is that American sycamores naturally start to become hollow after they reach about 100 years old. –eNature, reprinted in "Windstar Wildlife Garden Weekly," an e-mail newsletter.

❖ WANT TO JOIN VNPS? Call Linda Haller, Membership Chair, at 703 938-8504, and she will send you an application.

TREES IN PERIL by Mary Ann Lawler

Dr. Jay Stipes, Professor of Plant Pathology at Virginia Tech, has stated it in starkest terms: "We're living on a dying planet; humans are killing it." Dr. Stipes is renowned for his work on Dutch elm disease and knows well how invasive exotic organisms can affect the ecology of the forests. He's not the only one. In 1995 environmentalist Charles E. Little wrote "The Dying of the Trees," an alarming account of the effect on trees throughout the United States of not only invasive organisms but numerous other human-caused maladies. The chestnuts are all but gone from a deadly fungus brought here in trees from China. The dogwoods in the wild are dying from Discula anthracnose, which is also likely from China. The butternut is being extirpated as an exotic canker disease spreads into northern populations. The hemlocks are under serious threat from the Asian wooly adelgid-to name just a few of the more familiar ones.

Now comes disturbing news about oaks in California. Recent articles in the *New York Times* and the *Chicago Tribune* report on a "mysterious and fast-moving disease called sudden oak death that has struck thousands of trees near the Northern California coast." It has spread from the tanoak to the coast live oak to the black oak. And scientists are concerned that it could spread beyond California, much like Dutch elm disease, to affect trees in the red oak family in the Midwest and the East. The cause of the disease is a previously unknown fungus, which could be exotic or may have been created by two different pathogens merging. According to the Tribune, experts attribute the increase in exotic pests and fungi in forests "to an increase in global trading and environmental changes are linked to human activity."

Global commerce also brought the Asian long-horned beetle to New York and Chicago where over 6,000 trees have had to be destroyed. The beetle affects trees in the maple family, and Forest Service entomologists are worried about what will happen if the beetle gets into natural hardwood stands, where 20 to 30 percent of the trees are maples. The maples, oaks, and other native trees have no resistance to organisms brought in from somewhere else.

If human activity, including global trade, is the cause of forest decline, what can humans do to reverse the trend? The problems are overwhelming. To address them will take a concerted effort of scientists, governments, and all sectors of society. In the meantime, what can individuals do? Charles Little says: "Plant trees? Yes, of course, plant billions." But not just any trees--native trees suitable to the ecosystems in which they evolved. That's where we come in. Dr. Stipes, who is a member of VNPS, says: "The Virginia Native Plant Society does a great job in getting this message out." We in VNPS can continue to speak up, educate, advocate, and try to affect public policy at all levels of government--good goals for the millennium.

A REMINDER: VIRGINIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY STAKEHOLDERS RETREAT

During the weekend of February 24-25, 2001, the state organization of the Virginia Native Plant Society will be sponsoring a retreat for the purpose of setting new goals for the society. The retreat will be held at Pocahontas State Park in Chester, Virginia. All members of VNPS are invited to participate. Chris Ludwig, editor in chief of the Flora of Virginia Project and chief biologist of the VA Department of Conservation and Recreation Natural Heritage Program, will be the main speaker. Lunch and refreshments will be provided and there is no charge to attend. Registration and lodging information as well as preparatory information regarding the collaborative/discussion process will be forwarded to members by mid to late January.

OUR LOCAL LYCOPODIUMS by Cris Fleming

Lycopodiums are low, creeping, evergreen plants with very small or scale-like leaves. Reproduction is by spores found in terminal stroboli or in the axils of leaves. *Lycopodium* is one of only two genera in the *Lycopodiaceae* family (the other genus is found in Australia!). Related to ferns, *lycopodiums* as well as horsetails, quillworts, and spikemosses, are often called "fern allies."

The common names of various *lycopodiums* can be very confusing. Some are given the common name of club moss because the low, dense growth pattern resembles that of moss. Another common name is ground-pine as some upright species look like young pine trees. Of course the likeness is only superficial since *lycopodiums* are not related to either mosses or pines.

Once widely collected to make Christmas wreaths and other holiday decorations, lycopodiums have become rarer in recent years. VNPS discourages the picking of *lycopodiums* and the purchase of decorations made of these attractive native plants.

Thirteen species of *lycopodiums* grow in Virginia; however, only seven are found in Fairfax and/or Arlington County. Several kinds of club moss occur in mature deciduous woodlands, but some rare species have unique habitats, such as *Lycopdium inundatum*, which is found in cold northern or mountain bogs or *L. porophilum*, which may grow on rocky cliffs or ledges.

Despite the small number of species, lycopodiums are not always easy to identify. Some species are similar in appearance at first glance, and close observation is often needed to make a definite identification. As in other families, the nomenclature of *Lycopodiaceae* has recently been revised, with some authorities splitting the *Lycopodium* genus into other genera such as *Huperzia, Diphasium*, and *Lycopodiella.*

Following are brief descriptions of the more common *lycopodiums* in our area. *Lycopodium digatatum*, (formerly *L. flabelliforme*), called crow's foot or ground-cedar, is the most plentiful and widespread club moss in Virginia. The scale-like, appressed leaves tightly hug the flat, drooping branches that are arranged like fingers on a hand. The stroboli occur on long, almost leafless stalks. L. digatatum occurs in dry upland woods, sometimes covering several acres.

Lycopodium tristachyum, slender ground-cedar, is much like *L. digitatum* but with slender, upright branches and a thin, wiry stalk. The leaves are even more tightly appressed. This club moss is found mainly in the mountains but also in other regions along major rivers, such as the Potomac, York, and James.

Lycopodium obscurum var. dendroideum (var. isophyllum of some authors), or tree club moss, does resemble a small spruce or fir tree. The short needle-like leaves occur all around the upright branches, giving them a bottlebrush appearance. The stroboli rise above the leafy branches. This club moss grows in somewhat acidic soil in moist deciduous woods.

Shining club moss, *Lycopodium lucidulum* or *Huperzia lucidula*, looks quite different than the other club mosses. The upright stalks are unbranched and the soft leaves of different lengths have a silky sheen. This species does not have terminal stroboli; the sporangia occur in the leaf axils. Shining club moss is found in cool, shady, moist woods.

Lycopodium appressum, southern bog club moss, is a tall, slender club moss with very small, tightly appressed leaves and a small, narrow terminal stroboli on each stalk. Leafy sterile branches creep along the ground surface. As its common name suggests, *L. appressum* is found in acid soil of bogs and shores, mostly on the Coastal Plain.

Similar in appearance is *Lycopodium alopecuroides* or foxtail club moss. In this species, the leaves of the stalk are more open, not appressed to the stalk, and the leaves of the terminal stroboli are widely spreading and somewhat bushy. Habitat for foxtail club moss is wet, sandy bogs. In Virginia, it occurs mostly in the southeastern counties but has been reported for Arlington County. (Continued next page)

Winter is an excellent time to look at *lycopodiums* as there are few distractions on the forest floor. Local parks have a good variety of club mosses. Walk the swamp trail at Great Falls Park or the upland trails at Turkey Run Park to find *Lycopodium digitatum, L. obscurum var. dendroideum*, and *L. lucidulum. Lycopodium appressum* can be seen at Suitland Bog near Suitland, Maryland, and is recorded for both Fairfax and Arlington Counties.

Books useful for identifying club mosses include Brown and Brown, *Herbaceous Plants of Maryland;* Strausbaugh and Core, *Flora of West Virginia*; Mickel, *How to Know the Ferns and Fern-allies*; and Lellinger, *Ferns and Fern Allies of the United States and Canada.*

Eds. note: This article was reprinted from the Fall 1994 issue of *Potowmack News*.

POTOWMAC CHAPTER WELCOMES THE FOLLOWING NEW MEMBERS:

Tom Barnes, Falls Church; Barbara Bush, Fairfax; Athena Caul and Brian Bayless, Gainesville, VA; Phillip Church, Falls Church; Ann Covalt, Arlington; Michael Dyas, Springfield; Michael Caudell Feagan, Arlington; Natalie Firnhaber, Alexandria; Tom Gause, Annandale; Cecile Gonzales, Arlington; Simon Habel, Reston; Jeff Herndon, Arlington; Patricia Hopson, Alexandria; Caroline Kennedy, Fairfax; Thomas Key, Sterling; Chris King, Alexandria; Jeff and Adrienne Krashin, Fairfax; Judy Long, Alexandria; Ken and Caroline Lopez, Alexandria; Joy Rowe, Arlington; Barry Stahl, DC; Keith Tomlinson, Vienna; Moira Wait, Herndon; Regina Yurkonis, Warrenton; Howard and Nan Zimmerman, Alexandria.

GREEN SPRING OFFERS LECTURES OF INTEREST

- Jan 28, 2-3 p.m. **Plants of the Southeastern Pinelands**. Bill McLaughlin, U.S. Botanic Garden horticulturist, will discuss the plants of the one of the most diverse and threatened plant communities in the world and examine their adaptations to the environment and their potential in the garden.
- Feb 4, 2-3 p.m. **The Evolution of a Naturalistic Garden**. Rick Lewandowski, director of Mt. Cuba Center for the Study of Piedmont Flora, discusses the plants and work of the center.

Reservations necessary, call Green Spring at 703 642-5173. $5 fee.

Chapter Events Calendar

Jan	11	Pgm. mtg., Stan Shetler on spring birds and flowers, 7:30 p.m., Green Spring Park
Jan	18	Board meeting 7:30 p.m. , Green Spring Park
Feb	8	Board mtg., 6:45; pgm. mtg., Don Hyatt on native azaleas, 7:30 p.m., Green Spring Park
Mar	8	Board mtg., 6:45; pgm mtg., 7:30 p.m., Green Spring Park.

Potowmack Chapter
Virginia Native Plant Society
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