

# POTOWMACK NEWS

Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

VOLUME 42, No. 3, JUNE-AUGUST, 2024

## Nature Journaling Outings



ONE PAGE FROM JENNIFER BROWN'S NATURE JOURNAL.

Chapter Secretary Jen Brown says, "Nature journaling is a fun and relaxing way to get to know our native plants better." Each month, she has scheduled a Tuesday outing for a small group to explore one of our parks, then settle in to draw and journal in the medium of your choice. Participants may want to bring a cushion or trail chair. Jen also leads botanical drawing programs for Nature Forward and has completed a certificate in botanical illustration. We may not all be able to catch nature on the page as well as she, but if you would like to try your hand at this, watch for registration announcements. Jen won't be able to lead an outing in September, so there's an opening for anyone else who'd like to lead a group then.

## Upcoming

### Newington Conservation Area Walks with Alan Ford

Sunday June 2, 4-7pm or  
 Saturday, June 8, 9:30 am-12:30 pm  
 Explore the Long Branch stream valley natural area. Space limited. Event & registration link below.

### Nature Journaling at Burke Lake Park with Jen Brown

Tuesday, June 11, 1-3:30 pm  
 Playground Parking Area  
 Space limited. Event & registration link below.

### Potowmack Chapter Quarterly Get-Together

Sunday, June 16 12:30-2:30 pm  
 Horticulture Center, Green Spring Gardens  
 Green Spring has a well-established native plant trail that many of us haven't visited in years, if ever. Everyone is welcome.

### Grasses etc. Walk at Riverbend's Meadow led by the Grass Bunch

Monday, July 1, 9 am-noon  
 Space limited. Event & registration link below.

### Nature Journaling at Huntley Meadows with Jen Brown

Tuesday, July 9, 10 am-12:30 pm  
 Meet at Visitors' Center  
 Walk on the boardwalk to get close to water plants. Space limited. Event & registration link below.

### Nature Journaling at Riverbend

Tuesday, August 6 10 am-12:30 pm  
 Meet at Nature Center  
 Explore the meadow, led by Jen Brown. Space limited. Event & registration link below.

View and register for events at <https://vnps.org/potowmack/events>.

## Manage your VNPS Membership Online

1. Go to <https://vnps.app.neoncrm.com/login>
2. If you don't know or have forgotten your password, click on "Having trouble logging in?" To receive a password reset email.
3. Once logged in, you can update your name, address, email, renew your membership, make a donation, etc.



Subscribe to our Potowmack Chapter email discussion group to receive and send email about native plants in our area including questions, answers, and discussions. You don't have to be a VNPS member and there are no ads. Over 350 members strong! Just send a blank email to [potowmack+subscribe@vnps.groups.io](mailto:potowmack+subscribe@vnps.groups.io). Visit <https://vnps.groups.io/g/potowmack> to look around.



Check out the Potowmack Chapter Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/vnpspot>.

## Congratulations, Scott Knudsen

On Sunday, April 21, the [City of Alexandria's Environmental Policy Commission \(EPC\)](#) and [AlexRenew](#), Alexandria's wastewater authority, presented the [2024 Ellen Pickering Environmental Excellence Award](#) to

Potowmack Chapter member and Treasurer Scott Knudsen and his wife Jennifer Pease. The two are known for co-managing their biannual native plant sale and grassroots efforts to educate their community about sustainable landscaping. The Northern Alexandria Native Plant Sale that Scott and Jennifer have been hosting in April and September since the fall of 2003 brings in native plant growers from around the mid-Atlantic region, to the benefit of us all.



## Potowmack Chapter Board Officers

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Submissions to *Potowmack News* may be sent to The Editor at [vnps.pot@gmail.com](mailto:vnps.pot@gmail.com)

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Virginia Native Plant Society  
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<http://www.vnps.org/potowmack>

## Needed: A comprehensive strategy to rescue our trees from invasive plants

By Margaret Fisher

Calling all community associations in Fairfax County: the newly-formed Fairfax Invasives Removal Alliance (FIRA) is inviting you to join a united effort to save our trees from invasive plant species.

A recent study found that 9 out of 11 parks in the DMV area are predicted to fail by the end of the century - meaning that the trees growing there now will be down and new ones will not have taken their place, because of a combination of invasive plants and deer browse. In Northern Virginia, volunteers have so far counted over eighty thousand trees at risk from invasive vines. A reasonable extrapolation from the data puts the total in Fairfax County alone at over a million trees. Efforts to control the vines so far have been scattered, just nibbling around the edge of the problem, with no hope of controlling it.

Three VNPS-Potowmack members would like to change that. They are organizing an appeal to the Board of Supervisors, asking them to authorize staff to come up with a comprehensive plan to address the problem across the county, on all land types. Those include parks, other public lands, private residences, commercial properties, community association common land, rights of way, *etc.* A multi-pronged strategy is needed to educate and mobilize the community, develop the workforce to remove the invasives, and come up with creative funding sources. State legislation will also be needed.

Citizens in Loudoun County have pointed the way: the Loudoun Invasives Removal Alliance came into being last year and quickly signed up 30 HOAs. They brought their request to the Loudoun Board of Supervisors, which immediately authorized \$250,000 to study the situation, with the expectation that more funding will be made available in the future to help HOAs with invasives control.

Meanwhile, efforts are ongoing to encourage action on a statewide basis. Blue Ridge PRISM is spearheading that work, providing educational resources, facilitating collaborations between interested organizations, and advocating for needed legislation.

### How can you help?

1. If you belong to any kind of community association in Fairfax County – HOA, condo, apartment, citizens association, *etc.*, please ask them to [join FIRA](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1iXWG3LF6inO68q-2SUK7oLOCpk3jAEiTrxrSYAzG-k/edit?usp=drive_link). [https://docs.google.com/document/d/](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1iXWG3LF6inO68q-2SUK7oLOCpk3jAEiTrxrSYAzG-k/edit?usp=drive_link)

[1iXWG3LF6inO68q-2SUK7oLOCpk3jAEiTrxrSYAzG-k/edit?usp=drive\\_link](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1iXWG3LF6inO68q-2SUK7oLOCpk3jAEiTrxrSYAzG-k/edit?usp=drive_link) The FIRA website will be going live very soon: <https://firaadvocacy.com/>.

2. If you belong to a like-minded organization such as a Friends group, environmental non-profit, business, or town council, ask them to sign on as supporters of this effort. The Board of VNPS-Potowmack has already done so.
3. **Wherever in Virginia you live**, invite your state or local elected officials to photo ops of them rescuing trees from invasive vines, so they can alert their constituents to the need to take care of the trees on their properties. Please email Margaret Fisher so she can keep track of which officials have already done this. [1margaret.e.fisher@gmail.com](mailto:1margaret.e.fisher@gmail.com)
4. Fill out [Blue Ridge PRISM's questionnaire](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdShNDhbPPeFfgm3hJHx0sFzbGVFHF56f5dl5gpk34tVvyzEQ/viewform) about which invasives you are finding to be the most problematic. The survey includes an opportunity to sign up to help with a coordinated push for appropriate legislation. <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdShNDhbPPeFfgm3hJHx0sFzbGVFHF56f5dl5gpk34tVvyzEQ/viewform>

## The Grass Bunch: A Cure for “Grass Blindness”

By Jenny Meyer (photos, too)

You’ve no doubt heard of “plant blindness,” a common condition in our modern culture, but if you are reading this, you are unlikely to be suffering from it.

But consider “grass blindness.” Even the most committed native plant enthusiasts will often completely overlook the grasses and grass-like species – or at least I’ve often done that. And even someone curious about the graminoids is going to be frustrated after turning to popular field guides like *Newcomb's*.

But given that the genera *Carex* (sedges) and *Dichanthelium* (the rosette grasses) are two of the largest in Virginia by number of species, that’s a lot of species to overlook! Luckily, the VNPS Potowmack Chapter offers a cure for “grass blindness” — the Grass Bunch.

A group of (admittedly nerdy) amateur botanists, the Grass Bunch regularly visits natural areas of Northern Virginia for collaborative field studies focused on grasses, sedges, and rushes.

During the growing season, we go out several times a month, on Thursday mornings (in 2024). The natural areas visited are diverse and wide-ranging -- from Riverbend Park in the north to Old Colchester Park and Preserve in the far southeast of Fairfax County. Our target species are graminoid species currently in bloom. (Many of these species are difficult or impossible to identify when not in bloom, which is why the motto of the Grass Bunch is "We require an inflorescence.") We don't ignore the other, conspicuous flora along the way, but we spend the most time looking closely and carefully at the graminoids.



**CAREX NIGROMARGINATA,  
BLACK-EDGED SEDGE**

While the grasses and grass-like species can seem inconspicuous and cryptic at first, many are not too difficult to learn after a little focused attention. And they are well worth the trouble! Graminoids have their own kind of charm and personality, and their role in the native plant

landscape is as essential as better-known charismatic megafauna.



**CAREX HIRSUTELLA,  
FUZZY SEDGE**



The sedges are my particular favorite, because of their dazzling variety and their sturdy, unfussy nature. Sedges put on a show all year, with the earliest sedges blooming as early as March (as with *Carex nigromarginata*, Black-edged Sedge)

and others continuing until October (as with *Cyperus strigosus*, Straw-colored Flatsedge, or *Cyperus polystachyos*, Many-spike Flatsedge). There are always new blooming sedges to seek out, and they are not just wetland plants, but also thrive happily in dry woodlands (*Carex blanda*, Eastern Woodland Sedge) and full sun (*Carex hirsutella*, Fuzzy Sedge).

Unlike a guided plant walk, a Grass Bunch outing is an open-ended exploration – we never know for sure what we will find, and some plants resist our efforts to identify them. There will always be new species to



**CYPERUS STRIGOSUS,  
STRAW-COLORED FLATSEDGE**

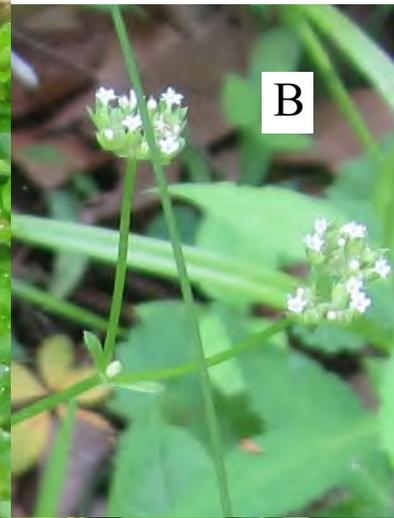
learn and new places to survey. If you are graminoid-curious and want to find out more, consider joining us on a Grass Bunch outing. The Grass Bunch has a discussion board/ mailing list (contact Alan Ford, [amford@acm.org](mailto:amford@acm.org), to be added to the list) which announces upcoming Grass Bunch events. I'm also happy to answer any questions at [meyerjen@gmail.com](mailto:meyerjen@gmail.com).

"Grass blindness" is completely curable.

## Small Flowers

Sometimes you have to look closely to appreciate our wildflowers. Some of these grow in groups that are visible from a distance, others simply require us to search like a small bee. How many do you recognize? Photos by Margaret Chatham.

- 1 *Caulophyllum thalictroides*, Blue Cohosh
- 2 *Chrysosplenium virginianum*, Golden Saxifrage
- 3 *Collinsonia canadensis*, Canada Horsebalm
- 4 *Galium aparine*, Cleavers
- 5 *Goodyera pubescens*, Rattlesnake Plantain
- 6 *Lindera benzoin*, Spicebush, female flowers
- 7 *Orontium aquaticum*, Golden Club
- 8 *Penthorum sedoides*, Ditch Stonecrop
- 9 *Phacelia covillei*, Coville's Phacelia
- 10 *Sanicula odorata*, Clustered Snakeroot
- 11 *Teucrium canadense*, Germander
- 12 *Vaccinium macrocarpon*, Cranberry
- 13 *Valerianella radiata*, Beaked Cornsalad



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## Word of the Month: Graminoid



*The Flora of Virginia* defines a graminoid as “a grass or a grasslike plant (i.e., a grass, sedge or rush)” Remember the mnemonic: sedges have edges, rushes are round, grasses have joints that go down to the ground. Sedges are full of triangles: culms that are palpably if not visibly triangular, and leaves that come out in threes, looking down from the top. Left to right: *Carex blanda*, Eastern Woodland Sedge with triangular culm and w-pleated leaves; *Juncus effusus*, Soft Rush with round stems; and *Dichanthelium clandestinum*, Deertongue Grass with joints/nodes and flat leaves.

PHOTOS BY MARGARET CHATHAM

Answers to the puzzle on page 5: 1-E; 2-A; 3-D; 4-K; 5-G; 6-J; 7-I; 8-F; 9-M; 10-C; 11-L; 12-H; 13-B.