

# POTOWMACK NEWS

*Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society*

VOLUME 32, No. 3, JUNE–AUG 2014

## MERRIMAC FARM WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA



BY CHARLES SMITH

One of the most important roles the Virginia Native Plant Society can play as a conservation organization is to participate in local conservation and education efforts. The Prince William Wildflower Society (PWWS) got an opportunity to do just that in 2007 when members of the Prince William Conservation Alliance (PWCA) asked if PWWS could help do an initial assessment of a property being purchased in western Prince William County to become a new state wildlife management area.

Merrimac Farm was a privately owned 300 acre property adjacent to Quantico Marine Corps Base. PWCA was working with the property owners, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) and the United States Marine Corps to purchase the land for public use and to buffer the Marine Corps base.

The property had not been a functional farm for many years, so there were no open crop fields or pastures. Instead, Merrimac Farm had meadow and old field habitat, upland forest and bottomland forest communities. Attention was quickly drawn to the bottomland forest along Cedar Run which has a large stand of Virginia bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*) along with floodplain tree species such as American elm (*Ulmus americana*) and swamp chestnut oak (*Quercus michauxii*) and has since become the focal point for spring wildflower walks.

## Upcoming Events

### June

#### Grass Bunch in Runnymede Park

*Saturday, Jun. 14, 9:30am-12:00pm*

The Potowmack Grass Bunch will lead a guided walk through the Sugarland Run floodplain at Runnymede Park. This walk, while focusing on grasses and sedges, will also highlight many of the other attractive native species in this rich bottomland forest. We may catch a fleeting glimpse of some Spring ephemerals and many early summer bloomers.

Rain date: *Sunday, Jun. 15, 1:00pm*

#### Walk & Weed at Fraser Preserve

*Saturday, Jun. 21, 9am-12:00pm*

Come see what's blooming at Fraser Preserve. In May, it's jack-in-the-pulpit, pawpaw, hooked crowfoot, puttyroot (if the deer don't eat them all) and clustered sanicle. In June? We'll see.

Then spend half an hour pulling wavy leaf basket grass. No tools needed, beyond the usual for a woody walk: water, insect repellent, long pants.

This is a somewhat strenuous walk, two miles down & up & down & up (but that way you get to see wetlands & hilltops!)

Limit: 12 participants

*All events are free and open to the public.*

## PROPAGATION COMMITTEE NEWS

### By Laura Beaty

Our Spring Plant Sale on May 17th was a great success thanks to the efforts of many volunteers who prepared the plants and staffed the sale. We appreciate all the members who donate plants, some of the special finds we are able to provide come through their good graces. Thanks to Julie Fiechter for her donations to the propagation beds. These local natives are a wonderful addition. Finally, a special thanks is extended to Elaine Squeri. For many years she has been preparing the seed packets for the sale; cleaning the seeds, preparing the packets and printing



*Rudbeckia fulgida* with Goldfinch Photo credit: L. Beaty

the information labels. This unseen effort is greatly appreciated. We are very grateful to all who came to the plant sale and made purchases and joined or renewed their memberships. If you missed the sale, no need to despair. You can still buy VNPS' native plants on the first Wednesday of each month, May through October, from 9:30 am till noon. Cash or check only, please.

And if you're itching to get your hands in the dirt and learn about native plants from seedlings to seed production, potting, and planting, you are welcome to join us in the propagation beds any Wednesday morning weather permitting, 9:30-on, April through October. We weed, water, divide, & pot up plants both from our beds and donations from our members. Good fun and lots to learn. After you've planted all your purchases, bring us your empty pots! We especially need 2 quart to 2 gallon sizes. Smaller pots are better recycled.

You may have noticed a new rock garden in the making. Potowmack Chapter President and rock garden specialist, Alan Ford, is building a second rock garden at our propagation beds. It will provide additional growing space for those native plants that need good drainage and prefer to thread their roots in between rocks. Be sure to stop by and see how it's done.

**Finally, mark your calendar, our big Fall Plant Sale will be at Green Spring on Saturday, September 13th.**

**Front: Spring Ephemerals in Cedar Run at Merrimack Farms WMA. Photo: C. Smith**



*Ruellia caroliniensis* Photo by M. Chatham

## Potowmack Chapter Board Officers

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

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## MERRIMAC FARM (CONTINUED)

High-quality shrub wetlands elevated just above the Cedar Run floodplain host buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*), arrowwood viburnum (*Viburnum dentatum*) and turtlehead (*Chelone glabra*).

The meadow area in the central part of the property has several good quality native warm season grass stands dominated by Indian grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*) and hosts many wildflowers including closed gentian (*Gentiana clausa*) and clammy cuphea (*Cuphea petiolata*).

The big surprise came in the upland forest areas. Merrimac Farm has a good quality oak-hickory forest which displays good overall structure likely because of continued deer hunting in this rural part of the county. Plant species include not only common overstory trees, but fringe tree (*Chionanthus virginicus*) and shining clubmoss (*Lycopodium lucidulum*). One of the

most unique plant communities is upland depression swamp forest dominated by pin oak (*Quercus palustris*), winterberry holly (*Ilex verticillata*) and several sedges (*Carex* spp.). This unusual wetland community type exemplifies the great diversity of communities that sparked the initiative to make Merrimac Farm a VNPS registry site.



*Chelone glabra* (Turtlehead) Photo credit: C. Smith



Educational and research efforts continue at Merrimac Farm. Led by the PWCA in coordination with VDGIF, Merrimac Farm is the home of the Prince William Master Naturalists program. This year VNPS members will work with VDGIF staff to collect further data to catalog and map the site plant communities.

The description on the PWCA website states that Merrimac Farm contains “302 acres of floodplain wetlands, fields and hardwood forest permanently protected on January 16, 2008 and opened for public use on March 31, 2008 through a conservation partnership between Marine Corps Base Quantico, the Virginia Dept. of Game & Inland Fisheries and the Prince William Conservation Alliance.”

More information about Merrimac Farm can be found on the VDGIF website at:

<http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wmas/detail.asp?pid=37>

and the PWCA website at:

<http://www.pwconserve.org/merrimacfarm/> .

**Presentation of VNPS Registry Site plaque for Merrimac Farm Wildlife Management Area; Bob Duncan, Executive Director of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and VNPS President Sally Anderson. Photo credit: C. Smith**

By Karla Jamir

*Eleocharis* is a genus in the Sedge family, *Cyperaceae*. Although so many of the common sedges belong to the genus *Carex* that it sometimes seems that all sedges are *Carexes*, there are actually twenty other genera of sedges listed in the *Flora of Virginia*.

*Eleocharis* is differentiated from *Carex* by not having its achene (seed) enclosed in a “perigynium” (kind of a closed sac) – this characteristic is unique to *Carex*. In addition to this, the scales of the *Eleocharis* spikelet are spirally arranged, the flowers are perfect (having male and female parts together) and their achenes have a formation on the top called a “tubercle” which is formed from the base of the style.



*Eleocharis obtusa* (Blunt spikerush) Photo credit: G. Meyer

What is most distinctive about spikerushes however, is the leaves “consisting of bladeless sheathes” with “spikelets 1 per stem, terminal”. (FloraVA, p.1010). These plants look like just a green stem with a small brown inflorescence stuck on the top.

Although there are 28 *Eleocharis* species listed in the *Flora of Virginia*, according to the on-line Digital Atlas of Virginia Flora only about ten of these are recorded as occurring in Fairfax County. Furthermore, many of the ten listed are relatively rare, have a distinct appearance, or are said to occur mainly in particular habitats, such as saline, tidal, or rocky areas. Because of this, it should be relatively (!) easy to tell these species apart.

One of our commonest species often seen is *Eleocharis obtusa*, Blunt Spikerush. It is an annual species without rhizomes that grows in a wide range of wet habitats. Small characteristics of the sheath and achene technically distinguish it from others, such as the fact that the achene is roundish or two-sided rather than three-sided. Once seen, however, it has a distinct look -- it in fact has a “blunt” top of the spikelet, most of the time.

## ***Eleocharis tenuis* Slender Spikerush Cyperaceae**

A very tiny spikerush, sometimes called “hairgrass”, *E. tenuis* emerges and blooms in early spring, and continues to grow taller as it matures. Stems are purplish at base. They grow scattered or loosely clustered on creeping rhizomes. In the picture on the right, the short plant is from April 9th, and the larger from May 29th.

The Digital Atlas of Virginia Flora description: In a range of habitats, including bogs, fens, seeps, depression swamps and ponds, Piedmont hardpan forests, rocky river shores and bars, and riverside prairies; also in wet fields, pastures, clearings, and various other low, disturbed habitats. Locally frequent throughout the mountains and Piedmont; infrequent in the Coastal Plain; may be very numerous and form large colonies where found.

Spikelets are brownish red, and usually less than 5 mm long (FloraVA: up to 10 mm). Spikelets with mature achenes (seeds) are needed for identification.

Achenes are “trigonous” (three-sided) with rounded edges. The surface has finely honeycombed ridges but no longitudinal or transverse ribs or bands. The achenes are less than a millimeter long and olive or yellowish in color.



*Eleocharis tenuis* Photo credit: K. Jamir

## BOTANIC NAMES: THE LEAVES HAVE IT

### By Margaret Chatham

Many plants' specific epithets describe their leaves, ending in *folia* (leaf in Latin) or *phylla* (leaf in Greek).

We may immediately recognize the broad-leafedness of plants named "latifolia." *Typha latifolia* is common cattail; *Kalmia latifolia* is mountain laurel. But then there are plants named "angustifolia", usually translated as narrow-leafed: *Typha angustifolia* is the more salt-tolerant narrow-leaf cattail; *Kalmia angustifolia* is sheep laurel from the coastal plain. "Angustifolia" comes from the Latin *angere* to strangle, & is related to angst and anxious.

Then there are big leaves, as in *Magnolia grandifolia* or *Eurybia macrophylla* (big-leaf aster); splendid leaves as in *Physocarpus opulifolius* (ninebark); and another name for narrow leaves in *Pycnanthemum tenuifolium* (narrowleaved mountainmint). And after Kevin Heffernan's dance, who can forget *Oplismenus hirtellus ssp undulatifolius* – wavy leaf basket grass?

Other names compare the leaves of one plant to those of another that we are supposed to recognize, and sometimes we do! *Ambrosia artemisiifolium* (common ragweed with leaves like mugwort or wormwood); *Antennaria plantaginifolia* (plantain-leaved pussytoes); *Betula populifolia* (gray birch with leaves like eastern cottonwood, *Populus deltoides*); *Clethra alnifolia* (sweet pepperbush or summersweet with leaves like *Alnus* or alder); *Euthamia* (formerly *Solidago*) *graminifolia* (flat-topped goldenrod with leaves like grass); *Veronica hederifolia* (ivy-leaved speedwell: that invasive little annual that covers the forest floor along with the spring beauties); *Viburnum acerifolium* and *V. prunifolium* (maple-leaf viburnum and blackhaw, with leaves shaped like cherry leaves); and *Viola primulifolia* (primrose-leaved violet).

Some names count leaves or leaflets. Two: *Jeffersonia diphylla* (twinleaf) and *Cardamine* (formerly *Dentaria*) *diphylla* (crinkleroot or two-leaved toothwort). *C. diphylla* not only has two thin, three-parted leaves on its flowering stalk;

it is also two-leaved in the sense of having very different, broad, sometimes evergreen, three-parted basal leaves.

Three: *Arisaema triphyllum* (jack-in-the-pulpit); *Gillenia trifoliata* (Bowman's root); *Staphylea trifolia* (bladdernut, and here the "phyl" in the genus name does not refer to leaves: *staphyle* is Greek for a cluster of grapes, and refers to the fruit); *Ptelea trifoliata* (wafer ash); and *Panax trifolius* (dwarf ginseng).

And five: *Parthenocissus quinquefolia* (Virginia creeper, which hopes you'll count its five leaflets and not mistake it for poison ivy) and *Panax quinquefolius* (the real ginseng you were all waiting for).



*Physocarpus opulifolius* Photo credit: M. Chatham



*Arisaema triphyllum* Photo credit: L. Beaty

## POTOWMACK CHAPTER SUMMER WALKS AND MORE

June 14, 2014 9:30 am – 12:30 pm Runnymede Park, Herndon, VA

Sedges and Grasses of Runnymede with the Grass Bunch

Description on page one.

Space is limited. RSVP req'd: <https://vnps20140614.eventbrite.com>.

June 21, 2014 9 am to noon Fraser Preserve, Great Falls, VA

Walk and Weed at Fraser Preserve with Margaret Chatham

Description on page one.

Space is limited to 12 participants. RSVP req'd: <https://vnps20140621.eventbrite.com>.

June 22, 2014 Green Spring Gardens, Alexandria, VA

Fern ID Workshop with Paulette Royt

(This program is under development. Watch for announcement.)

July 5, 2014 Fraser Preserve, Great Falls, VA

Wavy Leaf Basketgrass: Train the Trainer led by Vanessa Beauchamp

Two sessions will be available: 9:30—noon and 1:00—3:30pm

(This program is under development. Watch for announcement.)

Aug. 23, 2014 9:00 am to 11:00 am Clark's Crossing Park, Vienna, VA

Summer Plants of Clark's Crossing Park Join VNPS Potowmack mem-

bers Marty Nielsen and Diana Carter at Clark's Crossing Park, where the old railroad right-of-way and powerlines have provided conditions

favorable to summer meadow wildflowers. Both wet and dry meadow species should be on show for this walk.

Space is limited. RSVP req'd: <https://vnps20140823.eventbrite.com>.



*Asclepias syriaca* Milkweed Photo credit: M. Chatham

## POTOWMACK CHAPTER RECOGNIZES:

### By Alan Ford

I would like to express my gratitude to **Marty Nielsen** for his long association and engagement with the chapter. He has served on the Board for many years providing his thoughtful input to our decision making. Marty also developed and maintained our chapter website entirely on his own and provided us with a consistent presence on



the web. With the development of the new State website that particular project is ending, but he remains engaged with our web development. Marty is also serving on the Programs Committee and is currently helping with many aspects of their work. Finally, last year he began organizing bicycle tours for our members through and to places of native plant interest. On June 1st he led another tour, this time looking for Arlington's Champion Trees. This effort has been greatly enjoyed by all who participate and is deeply appreciated.

For all you have done and continue to do, Marty, we thank you.

### Word of the Month: Myrmecochory

Seed dispersal by ants. Plants such as bloodroot, trilliums, and wild ginger grow a fatty attachment to their seeds called an elaiosome. Ants carry home the seeds, eat the elaiosomes, then discard the seeds in places well apart from the parent plant. This is why spring beauties may need your help to cross a road.

## POTOWMACK CHAPTER NEEDS SOME HELP

### From the Desk of The President

As with most volunteer non-profit organizations our chapter is always looking for members willing and able to provide a few hours a week helping with the many tasks which provide the support and content for our outreach, stewardship, and development efforts. Please contact me or any Board Member and get involved.

**Propagation:** Earlier, Laura Beaty wrote about all the valuable work and fun available at the propagation beds each Wednesday morning. Any willing hands are welcome, no experience necessary.

**Programs:** Diana Carter has coordinated our many walks and talks for several years. She is ably assisted by Marty Nielsen, Isabelle D'Achille, Sue Dingwell, and others. They welcome and appreciate new ideas for meetings or walks and would be glad to hear from you.

**Education and Outreach:** Scott Knudsen tracks the many events and opportunities we have to spread our message by staffing a table and talking to the public about our organization and activities. We will be able to participate in more events with a few more folks willing to help a few times a year.

**Web Presence:** Jenn Truong and Sue Dingwell have been working many long hours to transition the VNPS.ORG website to a new host with many added features. We can use some help with updating web pages and other development work using Wordpress. If you have some experience with web development tools we could use a hand. We are also working on our online catalog of images and could use some help in organizing and labeling them.

If you would like to receive this newsletter electronically and see it in color please contact Alan Ford at: [amford@acm.org](mailto:amford@acm.org)

Visit our website: [vnps.org/potowmack](http://vnps.org/potowmack)

Join our listserve at: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/vnps-pot>

And follow us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/vnpspot](http://www.facebook.com/vnpspot)

## HOW YOU CAN HELP IN THE COMMUNITY

### Falls Church Habitat Restoration Team

Help restore the local ecosystem in city parks. Remove invasives and plant natives that will then benefit local birds and butterflies.



For more information contact: Melissa Teates at 703-538-6961 or [melanite@verizon.net](mailto:melanite@verizon.net)

### Arlington County's Remove Invasive Plants (RiP) Program



Help rescue Arlington parks from alien plant invaders! Please bring your own tools.

For more information contact: Sarah Archer at 703-228-1862 or [sarcher@arlingtonva.us](mailto:sarcher@arlingtonva.us)

### Reston Association's Habitat Heroes Program

Help restore local wildlife habitat through invasive plant removal and replanting with native plants.



For more information contact: Ha Brock at 703-435-7986 or [ha@reston.org](mailto:ha@reston.org)

### Fairfax County's Invasive Management Area (IMA) Program

Help remove invasive plants and learn about new species.



For more information contact: Erin Stocksclaeder at 703-324-8681 or [erin.stocksclaeder@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:erin.stocksclaeder@fairfaxcounty.gov)



## SUMMER WARMTH TAKE A WALK AND SEE

Spring ephemerals have come and gone, and summer settles in with warm and sunny days. Watch now for the razzle-dazzle of *Spigelia marilandica* or *Asclepias syriaca* or the quieter treasures of *Hydrangea arborescens* or *Cyperus ovularis*.



Photos credit: M. Chatham

ALL CHAPTER PROGRAMS AND WALKS ARE FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC.

PLEASE CHECK OUR FACEBOOK PAGE AND YAHOO LIST SERVE FOR THE MOST UP-TO-DATE INFORMATION ABOUT ALL PROGRAMS.

### POTOWMACK NEWS *Virginia Native Plant Society*

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