

# POTOWMACK NEWS

*Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society*

VOLUME 35, NO. 1, JAN-MAR 15, 2017

## Eighteen Years at Fraser Preserve ... and counting By Margaret Chatham



WOOD TURTLE, *CLEMMYS INSCULPTA*, THE REASON FOR FRASER PRESERVE. ALL PHOTOS BY MARGARET CHATHAM.

Fraser Preserve is a 220-acre Nature Conservancy property which stretches from the north end of Springvale Road to the Potomac River in Great Falls, Virginia. Mrs. George (Bernice) Fraser donated it to the Conservancy in 1975, with an inholding to Calvary Baptist Church. The Nature Conservancy accepted the property as a preserve to provide habitat for wood turtles (*Clemmys insculpta*), and of course everything else native to the land. Calvary Baptist Church used its portion as a camp and retreat location, currently managed by Living Classrooms DC.

I first visited Fraser in March of 1998, after answering a survey of Nature Conservancy donors. I said I'd like to volunteer, preferably not too far from home, during the week, & working with plants. Scott Boven, then volunteer coordinator for TNC in Virginia, had just the thing for me: updating the Fraser plant list from 1978.

That original plant list and accompanying maps showed the locations of a farm house (now just a foundation hole and a steel bedframe visible on the east side of the road) and a mill, with a very young forest covering former farm fields. Many areas were designated as "old field, pine" and "old field, hardwood," with some mature forest along the streams or on steep hillsides. When I first visited Fraser, it was still possible to see where these old field areas were, but even then the Virginia Pine (*Pinus virginiana*) were being overtopped by Tulip Trees (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) and dying out. By now, few Virginia Pines remain alive, though their decaying trunks can often be

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## Upcoming Events

### Charles Smith: Restoring Streams and Stream Valleys: Finding Balance in Altered Landscapes

Thur, Jan. 12, 2017. 7:30-9 pm

Arlington Central Library Auditorium

Charles Smith will talk about balancing stream valley restoration with sound natural resource management by applying principles of landscape ecology, enabling the system to help itself.

### Emily Ferguson: Basic Winter Tree ID

Sat, Jan. 28, 2017, 1-3 pm

Walk at Riverbend Park

Beginner winter tree walk, with easy tips to help identify native trees.

### Matt Bright: Earth Sangha's Schoolyard Native Garden Kits

Thur, Feb. 9, 2017. 7:30-9 pm

Green Spring Gardens Horticulture Center

How their lessons learned apply to your yard

### Margaret Chatham: Winter Greens

Sun, Feb. 12, 2017, 1-3 pm

Walk at Scotts Run

### Brent Steury: Finding New Species in the Nation's Capital

Thur, Mar. 9, 2017. 7:30-9 pm

Green Spring Gardens Horticulture Center

11 years of biodiversity inventory efforts

### Paul Kovenock & Susan Graham: Native Plant Garden Tour

Sat, Apr. 15, 2017.

Gardens in Arlington

All events are free and open to the public. Walks require preregistration. Join our listserve at

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/vnps-pot> to receive notices with walk registration links

## WHERE YOU CAN WHACK SOME INVASIVE EXOTIC PLANTS

### Falls Church Habitat Restoration Team

Help restore the local ecosystem in city parks. Remove invasives and plant natives that will 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 invasive species. For more information, contact Erin Stocksclaeder at 703-324-8681 or [Erin.Stocksclaeder@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Erin.Stocksclaeder@fairfaxcounty.gov)

### Fraser Preserve Barberry Removal

Help remove Japanese barberry and explore some of the off-trail parts of Fraser Preserve. We'll pick off & bag the red fruits, then get the plants out of the ground by hand-pulling the little stuff (wear heavy leather gloves!), using garden forks or weed wrenches on the big ones (bring your own tools if you have them), disturbing as little soil as possible. Bring water and dress for the weather. We can work with snow on the ground, but events will be cancelled if the ground is frozen or the weather is dangerous. Noon-3 pm to catch the warm part of the day Wednesdays: Dec. 28, Jan 4, Jan 18, Feb 8, Feb 22, Mar 8 and Saturdays: Jan 7, Jan 28, Feb 11, Mar 11. Meeting place will vary from the corner of Springvale and Allenwood Roads in Great Falls, to the camp at Fraser Preserve (end of the gravel road).

Contact [Margaret.chatham@verizon.net](mailto:Margaret.chatham@verizon.net) to sign up and for information about a particular day's plans. Call 703-785-8175 after 11 am day-of to check on whether event is being held. (This number cannot take voicemail, but can receive text messages.)

### Roundtree Park

Margaret Chatham will also lead invasive removal events at Roundtree Park, 3311 Annandale Road, Falls Church. On Saturday, Jan. 14, noon-3 pm, we'll go after English ivy "broccoli" trees, so bring clippers, handsaws, and something like a large screwdriver to pry bits of vine away from trees. Bring water & dress for the weather. On Wednesday, Feb. 15, noon-3 pm, we'll work for an hour and a half, and do shrub ID the rest of the time. Contact as for Fraser Preserve above.

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### FRASER CONT'D FROM PAGE 1

found on the forest floor, and the difference between “old field, hardwood” and “mature forest” is more a matter of tree species than size (tulip versus oak-hickory).

For about two years, I ventured out to Fraser nearly every week during the growing season, exploring its hills and stream valleys, springs, wetlands and river floodplain, consulting Newcomb's and The Flora of West Virginia and any experts I could find, trying to catch plants I could not identify on one visit again later when they developed identifiable flowers or seeds. Where TNC requests that visitors stay on the trails, I reveled in wandering everywhere the trails weren't. I leaned pretty heavily on the existing plant lists to get me started on identifications, though there were a few cases where I concluded that the old lists contained mistakes. For example, the old lists claimed Hop-

hornbeam, *Ostrya virginiana*, was a common understory tree at Fraser, but did not list *Carpinus caroliniana*, Hornbeam or Musclemwood – as I prefer to call it—at all. I saw lots of Musclemwood, but have yet to locate any Hop-hornbeam at Fraser. I also never found the American Chestnut, *Castanea dentata*, the old lists claimed, though years later I did find one Chinese Chestnut tree, *Castanea mollis*.

From the beginning of my time at Fraser, there has been a split vision: wonderful native plants, and horrible infestations of invasive exotic plants.

There was ample evidence in 1998 that the flora of Fraser was changing not only due to succession, but also introduction of invasive plants and deer browse. At first I did not recognize the bare sticks sticking out of the hillside as a large patch of Mountain Laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*) just missing all their leaves. I made the mistake of clearing invasive weeds away from the only Garden Phlox (*Phlox paniculata*) I found, only to return the next week to find it eaten to the ground. I eventually submitted my updated plant list, and turned my attention to invasive removal, but even before that, I got permission to remove invasives where I could. In the early days, this meant pulling small Oriental Bittersweet, *Celastrus orbiculatus* and Mile-a-Minute vines, *Polygonum perfoliatum* then, now known as *Persicaria perfoliata*, but I soon graduated to lopping or sawing through large bittersweet vines, and girdling Princess trees,



*Paulownia tomentosa*. By 2002, I was helping to lead workdays at Fraser to reduce the stands of Japanese knotweed, then *Polygonum cuspidatum*, now *Fallopia japonica*, and seriously reduce the number of Oriental Bittersweet vines that made it up into trees and set fruit. (Deer will eat Oriental Bittersweet if it's within their reach.)

In spite of my efforts, I watched the Stilt Grass, *Microstegium vimineum*, spread from narrow infestations along the road and main trails to a sea that covers large portions of the preserve, sometimes to a depth of four feet. Ground Ivy, *Glechoma hederacea*, is becoming a serious groundcover. Garlic Mustard, formerly *Alliaria officinalis*, now *A. petiolata*, spreads wherever it's allowed. Once there was no English Ivy, *Hedera helix*; now one must keep an eye peeled for it and pull it while it's still small.

Was it in 2005 that Mary Travaglini started the Potomac Gorge Weed Warriors, drawing many of us to work at Turkey Run? Certainly by late 2005, I had my own area to work on there, which naturally reduced the amount of time I spent at Fraser. Jennifer Rich (now Jennifer Dalke: not only the plants can change their names!) as the new volunteer coordinator for TNC-Virginia called a meeting in late October, 2008, to set up a Fraser Preserve Visitation Committee, and it was on that rainy walk around the trail after the meeting that I first noted Wavy Leaf Basket Grass, *Oplismenus undulatifolius*. It was new enough to all of us then that it didn't even have a settled botanic name. Mary Travaglini, Jamie Weaver, Alan Ford and I had a go at pulling some of it and surveying how horribly far it spread the next week. Horror! In 2009-2011, TNC-Virginia put substantial efforts into spraying Wavy Leaf, and many of us local volunteers did our bit. But in 2012, the Wavy Leaf was still at Fraser, while the money and staff to fight it weren't there. Since that time, I have done what I can with the help of many volunteers to keep the Wavy Leaf off the trails and away from places where people walk (and potentially spread it) and remove any new infestations I come across.

Also in 2009, I had my brush with Lyme disease, picked up along with over 100 ticks from a Japanese Barberry, *Berberis thunbergii*, infestation (not at Fraser). This, along with the increasing size of the Barberry patches, gave me more resolve to reduce Fraser's Barberry load. My pattern now is to work on Barberry in the winter, when the ticks aren't out, Wavy Leaf in the summer, before it develops its sticky seeds, and (drat!) Lesser Celandine, *Ficaria verna*, in the spring.

Fraser was blissfully clear of Lesser Celandine until 2013. I conclude that flooding in 2012 brought it downstream from some unlucky place, along with some nice natives: Slender Toothwort, *Cardamine angustata*, formerly *Dentaria heterophylla*, and Violet Woodsorrel, *Oxalis violacea*.

On the native side, Fraser has always had exceptional numbers of Spring Beauties, *Claytonia virginica*. Its Spicebush, *Lindera benzoin*, population has ebbed under the pressure of deer herbivory, but is recovering now after the 2012 *de recho* knocked down a lot of Tulip Trees and let in

some more light, and perhaps deer hunting on the neighboring Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority land has reduced the pressure. Virginia bluebells, *Mertensia virginica*, and Ramps, *Allium tricoccum*, have steadily increased their coverage of Fraser's hills. Cranefly Orchids, *Tipularia discolor*, grow all over the place.



Yellow Star Grass, *Hypoxis hirsuta*, appears to be secure at Fraser, though well away from its trails.

Purple Fringeless Orchid, formerly *Habenaria peramoena* now *Platanthera peramoena*, has been on Fraser's plant list from the beginning. It is a spectacular but elusive plant. I have seen it bloom four different years, in four different places, always on the upper edge of the river floodplain, near the sewer road. I have yet to spot any non-blooming plants or a second appearance of a previously seen plant.

The 2012 de recho required some new bits of trail to go around major downed trees. One of these new bits cut through a long-standing patch of Pawpaw, *Asimina triloba*. Deer don't care much for Pawpaw (its leaves stink, up close), which is one reason it is an expanding species in our woods. This new opening revealed wildflowers that had been protected by the Pawpaw, including Spotted Wintergreen, *Chimaphila maculata*, Star Chickweed, *Stellaria pubera*, and Solomon's Plume, *Maianthemum racemosum*, formerly *Smilacina raemosa*.

In 2014, the offer to work with a few high school interns for the month of May resulted in the realization of a long-held dream: to establish some small deer exclosures at Fraser. Alan Ford and I kicked in money to cover supplies, and with the extra hands to help, we put 6- or 8-foot fences around four plots. A determined deer could get in, but we tried to make the exclosures unappealing, off the beaten track and without a clear landing spot inside. The exclosures do require periodic visits to ensure that branches that fall cross the fencelines are removed and damage repaired.

1: Marsh Marigold Spring exclosure: this is the largest exclosure, an instance of "save the best." The spring rises out of a hillside covered with Mountain Laurel, and flows down maybe only 100 feet into Nichols Run, the main

stream at Fraser. The deer have nibbled at the edges of this stand of Mountain Laurel, but its center is largely intact. The grove also includes Pinxter, *Rhododendron periclymenoides*, and Highbush Blueberry, *Vaccinium fuscatum*, both rare at Fraser. Under the Mountain Laurel, Indian Cucumber-root, *Medeola virginiana*, now produces blooms instead of being deer dinner. Marsh Marigolds, *Caltha palustris*, bloomed on this small stream for years, but our fence may have come too late to save the last of them. However, a clump of White Turtleheads, *Chelone glabra*, bloomed there in 2016 for the first time I've seen and the False Hellebore, *Veratrum viride*, is spreading.

2: Mountain Laurel exclosure: a small fence around a clump of Mountain Laurel with leaves above deer-browse level, but with all lower branches nipped off. The hope here is that the Mountain Laurel can recover, and that some interesting things may show up on the ground.

3: Autumn Olive exclosure: mid-sized exclosure in an area where we're battling Autumn Olive, *Elaeagnus umbellata*, on a hilltop near an oldfield-pine area that used to have very interesting groundcovers. The larger area of Autumn Olive was cut in 2011 or so. Some work has been done on resprouts since then. Inside the exclosure, I've been working on all invasive exotic plants. I am cheered that it now hosts five kinds of ferns (Christmas, *Polystichum acrostichoides*; Ebony Spleenwort, *Asplenium platyneuron*; Sensitive, *Onoclea sensibilis*; Lady, *Athyrium asplenoides*, formerly *A. filix-femina*; and Rattlesnake, *Botrypus virginianus*, formerly *Botrychium virginianum*), and even better, a Hearts-a-Burstin Bush, *Euonymus americanus*, that may have a chance to grow up and seed.

4: Puttyroot exclosure: This is the smallest exclosure, and the only one that can be seen from the road, if you look the right direction & the leaves aren't too thick. In the spring of 2014, I got excited about the prospect of seeing Puttyroot, *Aplectrum hyemale*, bloom. While pulling barberry in January, I'd noted a bunch of Puttyroot leaves and one dry seed stalk. I visited the patch often in early May, and saw two flowering stalks coming up.



Then there was only one. Then none. So this exclosure is there to give it a chance to bloom. Conditions weren't to its liking in either 2015 or 2016, and no more flowering stalks

have arisen, but hope springs eternal, and as the smallest enclosure, it is the easiest one to weed.

Another cause for hope is the club of bow hunters working at Fraser this winter to reduce the deer population. And then there are all those volunteers who keep at invasive removal. If you're willing to be one of them, see the section on *Fraser Preserve Barberry Removal* on page 2 and join in the fun of winter weeding. More about Fraser: <http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/virginia/placesweprotect/fraser-preserve.xml>

## Botanic Names: It's About Time

By Margaret Chatham

Some plants' botanic names note activity at an unexpected time. So our Black Cherries that bloom and fruit later than cultivated cherries are named *Prunus serotina* (Prunus: Latin for plum; serotina: late) while the early-blooming Shooting Star is *Primula meadia* (prim: first, meadia: in honor of English physician Richard Mead, 1673-1754, formerly in the genus Dodecatheon, which means twelve gods, who were supposed to have primroses in their care.)

Winter: The pleated leaves of Puttyroot, *Aplectrum hyemale* are visible on the forest floor all winter long (A: without; plectrum: spurs on the flowers; hyemale: of winter), though the flowers don't appear until late May, when the leaves are dying back for the summer. Ticklegrass or Winter Bentgrass, *Agrostis hyemalis*, is also green in the winter, blooms in the spring and goes dormant during summer heat. (Agrostis: Greek name of some grass, from agro: field.)

Spring: We expect plants to grow and bloom in the spring, but "verna" as a specific epithet usually means that the plant gets going especially early. So the European *Draba verna*, Whitlow-grass, is sometimes called a winter annual, blooming in February-March. (Draba: acrid, ancient name of some cress.) The Early Winter-cress (also from Europe), *Barbarea verna*, can bloom in February. (Barbarea: herb of St. Barbara) We're all too familiar with the very invasive exotic Lesser Celandine, *Ficaria verna*, that starts blooming in March. (Ficaria: fig, for the tuberous roots.) Yes, there are some native plants named "verna" as well: *Iris verna*, Dwarf Coastal Plain Iris (Iris: Greek rainbow, though most of ours are blue or purple); *Myosotis verna*, Early Forget-me-not (myos: mouse; otis: ear, for the short, soft leaves of some species); Spring Avens, *Geum vernum*, lost its position as the earliest-blooming *Geum* species when Barren Strawberry, formerly *Waldsteinia fragarioides*, was renamed *Geum fragarioides* (Geum: ancient name of some plant; fragarioides: like fragaria, the strawberry). Then there are Spring Ladies-tresses, *Spiranthes vernalis*, (Spir: spirally twisting, anthes: flowers; most *Spiranthes* species bloom late in the summer) and Blue-eyed Mary, *Collinsia verna*, from Virginia's southern mountains (Collinsia: for Philadelphia botanist Zaccheus Collins, 1764-1831.)

Summer: here the specific epithet is "aestivalis." Summer Grape, *Vitis aestivalis*, fruits in September-October, like most of our other grapes. Summer Sedge, *Carex*

*aestivalis*, blooms when summer comes to its mountain heights: in May-June according to *Flora of Virginia*, or maybe June-August as *Flora of West Virginia* says.

Autumn: The only familiar native plant with autumn in its botanic name is Common or Yellow Sneezeweed, *Helenium autumnale* (Helenium for Helen of Troy). It is the last of its genus to bloom. Explore farther, and you find Slender Fimbry, *Fimbristylis autumnalis*, an annual sedge that also has the latest bloom time of its genus (Fimbri: fringed; stylis: style: hand lens at least needed here!), and Slender Rattlesnake-root *Nabalus autumnalis* blooming September-November in the Coastal Plain, mostly south of the James River (Nabalus: possibly related to a Phoenician harp, *nablium* in Latin? I need someone to explain the connection to me. Formerly *Prenanthes*: Greek *prenes*: drooping; *anthe*: flower: now, drooping flowers I can see.)

Other, more particular times get some mention: \*Yellow Star Thistle is *Centaurea solstitialis* (associated with Chiron, the centaur, and the summer solstice). \*Dame's Rocket is *Hesperis matronalis* (mother of evening, for its fragrance that is released then; Hesperus was the west wind.) \*Night-flowering Catchfly is *Silene noctiflora* (Silene being a mythical character covered in foam, referring to the mucus that catches flies.) And Nyctelea or Waterpod is *Ellisia nyctelea* (Ellisia in honor of English naturalist John Ellis, 1710-1776, nyctelea: nocturnal.)

## WORD OF THE MONTH

By Margaret Chatham

**DEXTRORSE:** Twining by the right hand rule: a vine that



twines in the direction your right hand fingers curl while growing in the direction your right thumb points.

**SINISTRORSE:** same idea using your left hand. This young Beech tree (*Fagus grandifolia*) at Fraser Preserve has been shaped by a dextrorse twining \*Japanese Honeysuckle vine (*Lonicera japonica*). This distinction can be diagnostic.

\*Chinese Wisteria (*Wisteria sinensis*) is dextrorse, while \*Japanese Wisteria

(*Wisteria floribunda*) is sinistrorse. Native Wild Yam (*Dioscorea villosa*) is sinistrorse, while \*Chinese Yam (*Dioscorea polystachya*) is dextrorse.

## POTOWMACK NEWS

Virginia Native Plant Society

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## Spring Is Coming!



### Smooth Alder, *Alnus serrulata*

By Margaret Chatham

Some of the earliest flowers to bloom don't look much like what we think of as flowers. Smooth alder is a case in point. Its catkins can be seen all winter long, closed up and waiting. Here it is as it looked on March 27, 2014, in "full, riotous bloom," with its staminate (male) catkins dangling and open to spread pollen, and its pistillate (female) catkins held upright in hopes of catching pollen from some other smooth alder. The only other alder species listed in *The Flora of Virginia* is the Speckled Alder, *Alnus incana*. It is only found high in the Blue Ridge Mountains, and can be distinguished from the Smooth Alder by its downward-pointing pistillate catkins.

Photo by Margaret Chatham

**If you would like to receive this newsletter (in full color!) electronically, contact Alan Ford at: [amford@acm.org](mailto:amford@acm.org)**