

POTOWMACK NEWS

Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

VOLUME 35, No. 4, SEPT-OCT, 2017

Ball's Bluff Battlefield Regional Park

By Marion Lobstein, Life Member of VNPS



EARLY SPRING AT BALL'S BLUFF. PHOTO BY GEORGE LOBSTEIN.

Ball's Bluff Battlefield Regional Park near Leesburg, VA, was the site of an early Civil War battle. This park contains the third smallest National Cemetery (76 acres) established in 1865 and 223 acres added in 1983 under the control of the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority. This site has it all: Civil War battlefield history on top of geology and topography that grow a premier native plant community. The name Ball's Bluff was derived from a former owner in the family of Mary Ball Washington, the mother of George Washington.

Ball's Bluff is located along the banks of the Potomac River, roughly 2 miles out of Leesburg. It can be reached off Rt. 15 by turning east into the Potomac Crossing housing development. This area, as is much of piedmont Northern Virginia, is in the Culpeper Basin, underlain by limestone deposits and topped by Ball's Bluff siltstone deposits that date back 308-345 million years. The brick-red siltstone bluffs are more than 100 feet high in places and parallel the floodplain on the banks of the Potomac. The basic to neutral pH of the soils from the siltstone parent rock provide a rich habitat for less common to rarer species of native plants such as twinleaf (*Jeffersonia diphylla*), blue cohosh (*Caulophyllum thalictroides*), green violet (*Hybanthus concolor*), white trout lily (*Erythronium albidum*), Eastern shooting star (*Primula meadia* formerly *Dodecatheon meadia*), and walking fern (*Asplenium rhizophyllum*). Masses of Virginia bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*) carpet the floodplain along with spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) and pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*).

Human use of the area goes back to Archaic Indian times. Archeologists have found evidence of small Indian villages and cultivation of corn, beans and squash. In the 18th century early European settlers

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

Upcoming Events

Wetland & Underwater Vegetation

Wed, Sept 13, 7:30-9 pm

Huntley Meadows Park Visitor Center
3701 Lockheed Blvd, Alexandria

Dr. Nancy Rybicki, aquatic plant biologist and hydrologist with the National Research Program of the U.S. Geological Survey Water Resources Division, will talk about native and non-native wetland and submerged plant trends, including species abundance when water quality improved in the Potomac River.

Native Plants in a Changing World

Thur, Oct 12, 7:30-9 pm

Green Spring Gardens Horticulture Center

Botanist Dr. Iara Lacher is a post-doc with Virginia Working Landscapes with several projects relating to biodiversity conservation in Virginia. She will speak about the positive contributions to conservation of a renewed love of native plants.

VNPS-Potowmack Annual Meeting

Sun, Nov 12, 12:30-3pm

Green Spring Gardens Horticulture Center

Dr. Ashley Egan of the Smithsonian Institution speaks on her research on two vines: invasive kudzu and the declining native wild thicket bean, a wild relative of the lima bean.

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

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

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

Fairfax County's Invasive Management Area (IMA) Program

Help remove invasive plants and learn about new invasive species. For more information, contact Leslie Gerhard at 703-324-8681 or leslie.gerhard@fairfaxcounty.gov

WHERE YOU CAN BUY NATIVE PLANTS THIS SEASON

Three VNPS Native Plant Sales

Wednesday, Sept 6, 10 am-1 pm

Saturday, Sept 9, 9 am-3 pm (Green Spring's Fall Garden Day, includes many vendors of plants, native & non-native)

Wednesday, Oct 4, 10 am-1 pm

All three at VNPS propagation beds, behind the Horticulture Center at Green Spring Gardens

Northern Alexandria Native Plant Sale

Saturday, September 23, 9 am-2 pm

The Church of St. Clement, 1701 N. Quaker Lane, Alex.

The best local gathering of area commercial native plant growers

More info: www.Northernalexandriannativeplantsale.org

Earth Sangha Fall Open House & Plant Sale

Sunday, September 24, 10 am-2 pm

North end of Cloud Drive, Franconia

Locally propagated plants from local seed collection.

For plant lists and more information see www.earthsangha.org

Potowmack Chapter Board Officers

President

Alan Ford 703-732-5291

Vice President

Lori Bowes

Secretary

Pat Salamone

Treasurer

Scott Knudsen

Committee Chairs

Botany

Cris Fleming

Conservation

Rod Simmons

Education

vacant

Membership

David Gorsline

Newsletter

Margaret Chatham

Programs

Donna Murphy

Propagation/Plant Sales

Laura Beaty

Publications

Roberta Day

Publicity

Michael Reinemer

Site Registry

Rod Simmons

Social Media

Sue Dingwell

Technology

Karoline Oldham

Member-at-Large

Marty Nielson

Submissions to *Potowmack News* may be sent to The Editor at vnps.pot@gmail.com

**Potowmack Chapter
Virginia Native Plant Society**

P.O. Box 5311

Arlington, VA 22205

<http://www.vnps.org/potowmack>

**If you cannot attend the annual meeting, please send in this ballot by November 5
to Potowmack Chapter VNPS, PO Box 5311, Arlington, VA 22205, or email your vote to
vnps-pot@gmail.com**

ELECTION OF OFFICERS FOR 2018

The board of the Potowmack Chapter VNPS presents the following slate of officers for the 2018 year, with terms beginning January 1. This slate will be voted on at the Annual Meeting on Sunday, November 12.

Contact Alan Ford for further information at amford@acm.org

SLATE OF OFFICERS

| | |
|--------------------------------|---------------|
| President: ___Alan Ford | Write-in_____ |
| Vice President: ___Lori Bowes | Write-in_____ |
| Secretary: ___Pat Salamone | Write-in_____ |
| Treasurer: ___Scott Knudsen | Write-in_____ |

FY2018 BUDGET APPROVAL

The Board of the Potowmack Chapter VNPS presents the following proposed budget for fiscal year 2018

INCOME

| | |
|---------------------|-----------------|
| Donations | \$800 |
| Member Dues | \$4,700 |
| Sales | \$9,300 |
| Total Income | \$14,800 |

EXPENSES

| | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Administrative | \$500 |
| Green Spring Room Fees | \$2,500 |
| Membership | \$200 |
| Programs | \$1,500 |
| Newsletter | \$3,200 |
| Internship at Green Spring Gardens | \$3,500 |
| Plant Sales (Fairfax County cut) | \$1,400 |
| Sales tax | \$500 |
| Printing/Publications | \$200 |
| Miscellaneous | \$300 |
| Special Board Action | \$1,000 |
| Total | \$14,800 |

BOARD APPROVED EXPENSES AGAINST SAVINGS

| | |
|--|----------------|
| Internship at Huntley Meadows | \$2,800 |
| Norway Maple Tree removal | \$1,000 |
| Plant NOVA Natives Guide | \$0 |
| Larry Morse Memorial Fund (donation to Nature Serve) | \$200 |
| Total | \$4,000 |

I approve_____ disapprove_____ the FY2018 budget.

BALL'S BLUFF CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

began to settle this area, establishing small farms and some larger plantations. Unfortunately, in keeping with the times, slavery was introduced early on. The Bluffs and inner apron of the flood plain were heavily wooded as were other areas that were dissected with deep erosional ravines. The 100-foot tall siltstone bluffs and less productive soils protected much of the area of Ball's Bluff Park from cultivation. Some flatter areas that were cleared and cultivated played a part in the Battle of Ball's Bluff. The wooded areas are primarily an Oak-Hickory forest with blackhaw viburnum (*Viburnum prunifolium*), redbud, flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*) and shadbush (*Amelanchier canadensis*) scattered in the higher forest elevations. Along the floodplain are pawpaw, spicebush, hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*), and sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*).

The Battle of Balls Bluff was fought on October 21, 1861, just three months after the First Battle of Manassas. Union troops were on the Maryland side of the Potomac River and on two-mile-long Harrison's Island. Due to misinformation from a scouting party, a small group of Union forces landed on the Virginia shore below the bluffs. Confederate forces were waiting for them. Reinforcements from both sides moved in until more than 1700 soldiers from each side fought through the day. The Union forces scaled the bluff to the cleared area of an abandoned farm field. When Union Colonel Edward Baker was killed in the afternoon, Union forces haphazardly retreated down the bluff. Some men were wounded or killed by the fall down the steep bluffs while others jumped into the river. The Union forces had only four boats available to cross the river and even some of those capsized. Many men were drowned. Bodies floated down the Potomac as far south as Mount Vernon for weeks after. The Union casualties numbered 49 killed, 158 wounded, and 714 missing and captured compared to 33 killed, 115 wounded, and one missing on the Confederate side.

Ball's Bluff National Cemetery was established in 1865 on donated land. The cemetery itself encompasses just over 2,000 square feet. There are 54 Union soldiers interred in 25 graves marked by marble headstones with only one known soldier, Private James Allen from Massachusetts. The other 24 graves hold the combined partial remains of 53 Union soldiers whose bodies were left on the battlefield exposed to scavenging animals and weather for some time before being buried. The 25 marble markers form a circle surrounded by a 48- by 48-foot brick-red sandstone wall with a wrought iron gate.

Two other markers stand outside the cemetery. A marble slab marks the purported spot where Colonel Edward D. Baker was killed by 4 shots at close range. Baker was a US Senator from Oregon and a close friend of President Lincoln. Supposedly, he had breakfast with the President the Sunday before the battle and said, "Mr. President, I will see you next Sunday or I will see you in

Hell." The other is a granite slab memorializing Confederate soldier Clinton Hatcher.

I first visited Ball's Bluff in April of 1975 when I joined a NVCC-Loudoun American history class at Ball's Bluff National Cemetery for a tour led by Gene Scheel, a Loudoun County historian and map maker. During the tour, I spotted wildflowers in a clearing in the wooded area near the cemetery. They called me to explore until I found the marble marker with the name of Colonel Edward Baker.

As I followed a path towards the bluffs and the Potomac River, there were more wildflowers. Just before the steeper part of the path into the wooded area, I began to see bluets (*Houstonia caerulea*), spring beauty (*Claytonia virginica*), early saxifrage (*Micranthes virginensis*, formerly *Saxafraga virginensis*), and giant chickweed (*Stellaria pubera*). This path may have been the one used by Union soldiers to climb from the flood plain up the bluffs, to the cleared field where much of the battle took place. As the path steepened, other wildflowers such as Dutchman's breeches (*Dicentra cucullaria*), squirrel corn (*D. canadensis*), and wild ginger (*Asarum canadensis*)



WHITE TROUTLILY., *ERYTHRONIUM ALBIDUM* PHOTO BY MARION LOBSTEIN.

appeared. The path then leveled out on the top of the bluff. There I found twinleaf, bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*), and more wild ginger and, as I continued, blue cohosh, Mayapple (*Podophyllum peltatum*), sessile trillium (*Trillium sessile*), green violet, harbinger of spring (*Erigenia bulbosa*), and more twinleaf as well as more Dutchman's breeches and squirrel corn, cutleaf toothwort (*Cardamine concatenata* formerly *Dentaria laciniata*), Jack-in-the-pulpit (*Arisaema triphylla*) and three different colored species of violet (blue/violet *Viola sorora*, formerly *V. papilionacea*; yellow *V. pennsylvanica*; and white *V. sriata*). The path then turned steeply to the river where there were carpets of Virginia bluebells, yellow (*Erythronium americanum*) and white trout lilies, and broadleaf waterleaf (*Hydrophyllum canadense*) as well as to the right of the path stinging nettles (*Urtica dioica*). To the left there was an accessible floodplain with spicebush, pawpaw, more blue cohosh. As I looked back from the River, I could see the steep 100-foot tall siltstone bluffs covered with wildflowers and walking fern. The basic to neutral pH of the soils from these siltstones allows less common species such as twin leaf, shooting star, white trout lily, and walking fern to thrive there on bluffs and highlands. From the riverbank I saw Harrison Island, where Union forces tried to take refuge after the battle.



BIRD'S-FOOT VIOLET, *VIOLA PEDATA* PHOTO BY MARION LOBSTEIN.

To the right of the main path, a narrow path led over to a deep ravine and I could see other paths leading up to a higher area. The banks of this ravine were covered in wildflowers I would later come to explore. During subsequent visits I explored this steeper area or plateau and found more white trout lilies, false mermaid-weed

(*Floerkea proserpinacoides*), and carpets of Virginia bluebells in a variety of colors from white to pink to blue. Climbing higher, I have found shooting stars, smooth rockcress (*Arabis laevigata*), more bluets and plantain-leaved pussytoes (*Antennaria plantaginifolia*). On top of this plateau, there is a steep drop to the Potomac River.

Until the last few years, I have visited Ball's Bluff every spring to revel in these lovely wildflowers, often taking many friends and groups there to share the beauty of these spring ephemerals. For many years I led morning wildflower walks at Great Falls Park, VA, on third Sundays of most months and after the April walk, a number of us would visit Ball's Bluff in the afternoon. It has almost been like a pilgrimage for many and for me each spring to visit Ball's Bluff. The arrangement for parking and the way to enter the park has changed over the years.

Now, there is a housing development you must drive through to a road leading to parking to visit Ball's Bluff Battlefield Park. At the parking area to the right there are many interesting wildflowers such as bird's-foot violet (*Viola pedata*), plantain-leaved pussytoes, and early saxifrage. The variety of wildflowers you will find around the parking area and along the road to the cemetery and then paths into the wooded area down to the River is amazing. Flowering trees such as redbud, dogwood, shadbush, sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*) add color to the woods. Only a green haze of new leaves will be visible in the hardwood canopy in April.

In the park there are 7 miles of trails to explore and each has its own wildflower treasures. But I will always remember my first introduction to this area as it began almost a 40-year love affair with this area. Since my retirement to Warrenton, VA, my husband and I (and our black cat) travel in a motor home five or more months a year and this has kept me from visiting Ball's Bluff the past few years. I still plan to continue these visits in future years.

I can send you a checklist of some of the wildflowers and showy shrubs and trees blooming in mid-April I have compiled over the years if you send a request to mlobstein@earthlink.net. Please check out the wildflower show next spring. The summer and autumn plant life have their own interest and beauty. I regret that I will miss Laura Beaty's walk at Ball's Bluff for the Tri-State Conference; I will be traveling in the west. This is such a lovely and peaceful site now. It was a scene of horror and carnage on that fateful day of October 21, 1861, but that day's legacy has led to the preservation of this special area.

**Coming next issue: reports from
this year's VNPS-Potowmack
summer interns.**

POTOWMACK NEWS

Virginia Native Plant Society

P.O. Box 5311, Arlington, VA 22205



Please verify your address and your renewal date on the mailing label

Printed on recycled paper

Words of the Month: **Determinate/Indeterminate**



Describing flowers that bloom in a bunch, **determinate** bloomers start at the tip of the spike or twig, and progressively open more flowers lower on the spike (as *Liatris spicata*, Dense Blazing Star, on the left) or on side branches (as *Rudbeckia hirta*, Black-eyed Susan, or *Cephalanthus occidentalis*, Buttonbush): the end of the stalk is already determined when the first flower opens.

Indeterminate bloomers open from the bottom up or from the outside in (as *Lobelia cardinalis*, Cardinal Flower, on the right): it isn't obvious how long the stalk will become when the first flower opens.

Photos by Margaret Chatham

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