

# POTOWMACK NEWS

*Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society*

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## My Time as a Virginia Native Plant Intern

By Kayla Morrison



KAYLA MORRISON WITH TRELLIS IN THE VIRGINIA NATIVE PLANT GARDEN. PHOTO BY MARGARET CHATHAM.

My name is Kayla Morrison and I'm studying environmental science at the University of Vermont located in Burlington, Vermont. As it says in the title, I had the amazing opportunity to work as the Virginia Native Plant intern at Green Spring Gardens in Alexandria, Virginia. I came across this internship by way of a friend from high school, who was also applying to be an intern at Green Spring. A lot of my childhood was spent at Green Spring; my mom used to work in children's education and my twin brother and I spent many days wandering through the gardens while our mom was teaching. My brother and I became proficient in the story of Earth on Turtles Back and the basics of plant biology; it is here that my love for plants blossomed. This interest in plants followed me through my schooling and eventually into college where I'm hoping to minor in plant biology.

My main job this summer was to work with Brenda Skarphol in the Virginia Native Plant Garden (VNPG), which included: watering, weeding, planting, plant removal, and invasive control. When I wasn't working in the VNPG, I was helping Brenda and her team in her other gardens around Green Spring. The VNPG at Green Spring has a

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## Upcoming Events

### VNPS-Potowmack Chapter 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.

### Trees of Fraser Preserve

Sat, Nov 18, 10 am-1 pm

Come crunch through fallen leaves and see if we can match them to the barks and shapes of nearly 50 species of trees at Fraser Preserve with Margaret Chatham. This will be a moderately strenuous walk, starting at the high end of the Preserve, going down over 100 feet to a stream valley, climbing back up almost as high, then down even lower to the Potomac River. After viewing the state champion American elm, we'll retrace our steps, climbing both hills again.

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.

## SUZANNE DINGWELL: THANKS, SUE!

by Alan Ford



It is with great appreciation and respect that we say goodbye to Sue Dingwell. She is following her heart to Boulder, Colorado to be close to family and already sending us pictures of the wildflowers on the high plains.

Sue joined VNPS shortly after moving up to our area from Florida, where she held leadership roles with the Florida Native Plant Society. No moss gathered on Sue as she jumped right into chapter and state activities,

and quickly became an essential, enthusiastic, and encouraging voice as we engaged more fully in the social media era. She adopted the Facebook pages for both state and the chapter and was instrumental in helping us move to a new web provider to host our webpage. She also helped us navigate the tricky waters of moving to an online membership system.

We recently successfully concluded the Tri-State Native Plant Society Conference held in Shepherdstown, WV at the Fish & Wildlife Service National Conservation Training Center. Sue was an integral member of the team of volunteers who did the hard work to make the event run so smoothly. I cannot count the number of tasks she ably undertook, being the primary contact with NCTC and helping resolve many, many issues small and large. It was a surprise that she would not be in attendance, having already made her cross-continent move. But her efforts were evident in the positive comments and enjoyment we all took from the conference.

I write this in thankfulness for the wonderful spirit and kindness Sue showed me in every task, at every event, and each meeting. Our best wishes to her and her family, and we encourage Boulder to appreciate the gem of a person who now calls there home.

PHOTO BY DONNA MURPHY

## 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)

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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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NATIVE PLANT INTERN CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

combination of natural and planned design; it has more of a wild sensation to it than the other gardens around the property. The garden is naturally divided into different areas: the upper rock wall area, the northeast slope, the stream valley, the ravine, and the old Magnolia bog. Each of these areas is unique, but many of the plants present can live in most of the areas, wherever their light and moisture needs are met. Working in the native plant garden taught me so much about the importance of native plant populations on the landscape and how many more should be incorporated in public gardens. I learned even more about plant biology, plant identification, impacts of geology/soil on growth, and so much more. These lessons are valuable for my future schooling and I'm thankful I was able to get a head start with this internship.

The main project I worked on was building natural trellises for the native plant garden with help from Brenda's two assistant gardeners Samantha Vo and Andrew Taylor. Brenda tasked us with creating more natural looking trellises for the native plant garden to replace old metal ones which didn't fit the design of the garden. We were provided with some articles outlining basic designs and we got to work; the designs we worked out were two teepee structures and one square structure. This project introduced me to landscape design, something I haven't yet studied at school. It was interesting to look at materials and see how they could be incorporated in the design and how the flow of the garden could be impacted. Overall, this project helped me learn about designing and building structures that could then be incorporated in a pre-existing design.

One of my favorite duties during this internship was working with the Virginia Native Plant Society volunteers at Green Spring every Wednesday. I learned so much about plant names, identification, potting protocol, and how plants grow, but most importantly I learned about how gardening and horticulture bring people together. I saw many of the same volunteers every Wednesday and I began to see the community gardening created. It was a pleasure to be able to join this community, if only for a short while this summer.

I want to thank the Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society for this opportunity. I am sure that I will be using all of these lessons later in life, and my passion for horticulture and plants has only grown more.

## My VNPS Internship at Huntley Meadows

### By Tiffanie Pirault



TIFFANIE PIRAULT DRESSED TO STAY DRY AS SHE CHECKS WELL DATA AT HUNTLEY MEADOWS. PHOTO BY ALEX SCHIAVONI.

Hi! My name is Tiffanie Pirault and I was the Huntley Meadows Intern for the summer of 2017. I am a senior at Virginia Tech majoring in Wildlife Conservation and have lived in Northern Virginia my whole life. This internship gave me a new appreciation for every plant that thrives in this mesic habitat; from the tall champion swamp chestnut oak (*Quercus michauxii*) trees to the little path rush (*Juncus tenuis*) that covers the trails we walk on. It has opened my eyes to the amount of work, persistence, and passion that it takes to keep our native habitats healthy and happy. One would say it's quite the uphill battle to manage a disturbed forest with a strong deer presence!

Throughout my internship at Huntley, my main project was to map the purple milkweed throughout the park on a mobile mapper unit. This was crucial to

protect what purple milkweed (*Asclepias purpurascens*) we have on the powerline easement as Dominion Power just began construction – they will need to work around our flagged beauties! We have the largest population of purple milkweed in the state, with our biggest individual population totaling 1,465 stems behind our observation tower! If you are wondering, yes, it was a major feat for staff and me to count each individual stem in a population that big, but to see how much life there is bouncing from umbel to umbel makes it more than worth it. Whether it grew in the shade, more sun, *Microstegium*, or along a gravel trail, purple milkweed never ceased to brighten up Huntley's spirit.

Another big project we accomplished was ensuring our understory in the forest will have a future. We set up deer fencing, in various places along informal trails, around white oak (*Quercus alba*) saplings to give them a chance to grow. These white oak enclosures also included black oaks (*Quercus velutina*), hickories (*Carya spp.*), black gums (*Nyssa sylvatica*), and even some tulip poplars (*Liriodendron tulipifera*)! With deer fencing, staff and I also protected our small populations of Turk's-cap lilies (*Lilium superbum*), along with a couple fringetrees (*Chionanthus virginicus*).

As we all know, Huntley is threatened by invasives. One can lose hope very fast while standing in a forest searching for wavy leaf basket grass (*\*Oplismenus undulatifolius*) under the *\*Microstegium* as far as the eye can see. But! Our spirit never dwindled! Staff and I did a hardy amount

of invasive removal throughout this summer, tackling bittersweet (*\*Celastrus orbiculatus*), mile-a-minute (*\*Persicaria perfoliata*), wavy leaf basket grass, autumn olive (*\*Elaeagnus umbellata*), honeysuckle (*\*Lonicera japonica*), purple loosestrife (*\*Lythrum salicaria*), and barberry (*\*Berberis thunbergii*).

Pollinators fill every part of Huntley with life – even the times when you aren't looking for it and a tussock moth caterpillar lands on you from the trees! I helped kick start a butterfly survey here at Huntley Meadows to take inventory of the different species that pollinate our wonders. This will be vital information for our Natural Resource Management Plan that will begin to take effect next year. Pollinators often tell us what plants we have in the park before we actually see the plant itself. I also kept a caterpillar log of all our little friends we stumbled upon throughout our adventures!

This internship has been an experience that I will never forget. I would like to thank all of the wonderful naturalists from the Virginia Native Plant Society who have taught me knowledge that I could never read in any book. I'd like to thank the grass bunch for opening my eyes to the patience it takes to identify the plants under our feet that we can sometimes take for granted! I'm forever grateful to the Potowmack chapter for funding my internship and given me this opportunity to integrate my joys and passions into this wonderful park. Thank you to all the Huntley Meadows staff for taking me under your wing and making me feel at home! I hope this internship continues for future young caretakers of this Earth!

## Invasive Images

By Margaret Chatham

This newsletter usually focuses on native plants (Duh!) but we need to be able to identify the invasive exotics as well. Here is a sampling of locally invasive grasses as they look in the fall, once their distinctive seedheads have developed.

To the right is *\*Pennisetum alopecuroides*, Chinese Fountain Grass or Pearl Millet, native to Asia and Australia. It comes in a variety of colors, but always with the densely-seeded spikes seen here. As more landscapers plant it, it is showing up on sunny roadsides and gravel stream banks. While it is perennial, it is relatively easy to pull. Just take care in disposing of all those seeds!

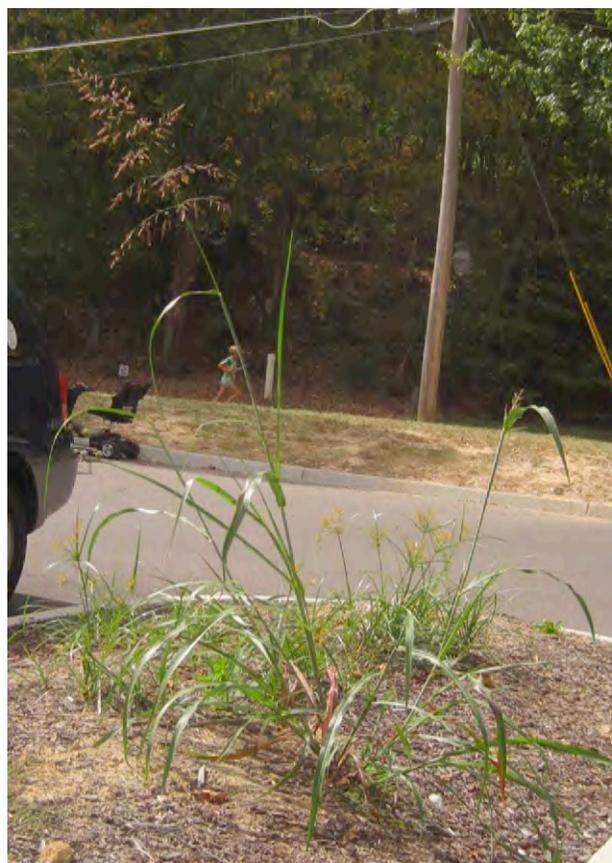
*\*Miscanthus sinensis*, Chinese Silvergrass, Eulalia, or Maiden grass is shown in two views at the top of page 5. Widely planted for its stately clumps and showy plumes (ready to throw seeds to the winds all winter long), it has escaped into many a roadside and powerline easement where it can avoid frequent mowing. A much larger grass than *Pennisetum* (usually in the 4- to 7-foot range), it is correspondingly more challenging to remove manually. Those clumps require serious digging!





We all know what stilt grass (*Microstegium vimineum* to the left) looks like – or do we? At the end of the season, especially in the sun, it can grow to waist height or more, with bright red culms. If you look closely enough, you can still see the silvery stripe down the center of each leaf, but that feature doesn't draw your attention in October the way it did in May or July.

Last one to squeeze into these pages is Johnson Grass (*Sorghum halepense* lower right). It is a large, sweet Mediterranean grass with a prominent white rib on each leaf. It was brought in



as forage, and is still sold in Texas. In *Wildflowers of Tennessee, the Ohio Valley, and the Southern Appalachians*, Dennis Horn and Tavia Cathcart say of it, "A single mature plant may produce over 80,000 seeds and 200 feet of rhizomes. The seed can remain viable in the soil for up to 25 years and begins producing lateral rhizomes 6-9 weeks after germination." No wonder it's on Early Detection/Rapid Response watch lists!

PHOTOS BY MARGARET CHATHAM

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## Word of the Month: Follicle



**Follicle:** a dry, one-celled, many-seeded fruit that opens on one side, like a milkweed (*Asclepias* spp.) or dogbane (*Apocynum* spp.) pod. At left are two follicles of *Asclepias tuberosa* (Butterflyweed), one fully open with seeds dispersed, the other just starting to crack open. *Delphinium tricorne* (Dwarf Larkspur) gets its specific epithet (second word of its botanic name) from having (two or) three pistils that give rise to diverging follicles that suggest three horns. Our Columbine, *Aquilegia canadense*, also bears its seeds in follicles, but it grows five together.

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)