

POTOWMACK NEWS

Volume 21, No 3

Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

May/June 2003

NATIVE PLANT GARDEN TOURS: SUNDAY, APRIL 27, 11:00 AM – 3 PM (See insert.)

POTOWMACK CHAPTER PLANT SALE, GREEN SPRING GARDENS PARK, MAY 3, 9am-1pm

The Chapter's Native Plant Sale will be held at Green Spring Gardens on May 3 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Due to new road construction at the park, there will be no large Garden Day event, just a series of smaller Saturday Market Days. We won't have as many people at the event so we encourage you to come out and support the efforts of our propagation committee. We will be selling plants from our propagation area behind the horticultural center, a good chance for everyone to see our display beds. Ferns, shrubs and wildflowers for sun and shade will be plentiful as well as Yellow Trout-Lily (*Erythronium americanum*), VNPS Wildflower of the Year.

VNPS-MNPS "BIOBLITZ" PART II, FORT DUPONT PARK, WASHINGTON, D.C. MAY 4

Survey the significant mountain laurel-heath-chestnut oak area in one of the finest forests within fifty miles, led by Mary Pat Rowan, Lou Aronica, and Rod Simmons on Sunday, May 4 from 10:00 am – 3:00 pm. (For details, please see page 5.)

GREAT FALLS PARK, VA, MEMBER WALK, SATURDAY, MAY 10:

Botany Chair Cris Fleming will lead a walk at Great Falls Park on Saturday, May 10 from 9:00 to noon. We will walk upriver along the River Trail looking for late spring wildflowers such as spiderwort and wild geranium, and rarer ones including field chickweed, starry false solomon's-seal, and few-flowered valerian. We'll pop out to the bedrock terrace to search for veiny pea and hairy beardtongue and other species of that dry open habitat. If time permits, we may try to find a small population of starflower, a plant disjunct to the mountains and northern states, last seen here in 1994.

To register for the field trip, call Cris Fleming at 301-657-9289. Because of the sensitive habitats and rare species expected to be seen, this trip is limited to 16 people. Bring field guides, water, and binoculars (early May is prime bird migration time along the river). Trip is cancelled if there is heavy rain, but not for drizzle.

Directions: From the beltway, take exit 44, (Georgetown Pike, Route 193) toward Great Falls. After about four miles, turn right at the stoplight and sign for the park at Old Dominion Drive. Bring your National Park pass or pay a parking fee of \$4.00.

HOLMES RUN GORGE MEMBER WALK (MAY 31)

Led by Rod Simmons, this moderate walk, mostly on trails, will require hiking up a fairly steep grade, although close-by, lowland alternate routes can be taken. The walk will begin at the upper gorge just below the Lake Barcroft Dam near the site of the original Barcroft Mill and will follow Holmes Run downstream to the Alexandria border. This portion of Holmes Run flows through a very deep ravine with massive outcrops and cliffs, and some very old sections of forest. Frequent skirmishes occurred in this area during the Civil War, especially near the Columbia Turnpike. A war correspondent coming downhill "through dense forest" from the fortifications at Mason's Hill wrote: "*sometimes our bridle path turned abruptly round the edge of a steep precipice...we came suddenly on a gorge whose perpendicular and rocky sides made us hold our breath as our horses cautiously bore us down into the dark ravine, at whose base a turbulent little stream [Holmes Run] gurgled over its stony bed.*" (*A Virginia Village Goes To War: Falls Church During the Civil War*, Bradley Gernand 2002).

(Continued on page 5)

Barbara Kingsolver (from her book of essays entitled Small Wonder) on the subject of Bt corn pollen: "The populations of monarch butterflies, those bold little pilgrims who migrate all the way to Mexico and back on wings the consistency of pastry crust, are plummeting fast. While there are many reasons for this, no reasonable person can argue that dusting them with a stomach explosive is going to help matters. So, too, go other butterflies more obscure, and more endangered. And if that doesn't happen to break your heart, just wait awhile, because something that pollinates your food and builds the soil underneath it may also be slated for extinction."

PRESIDENTS MESSAGE:

At this peak of the spring wildflower season, the Potowmack Chapter is in full bloom. Our first-ever Bioblitz at Glen Carlin Park on April 26 (see the March/April newsletter for details) is followed on the 27th by our popular Garden Tour. On May 3rd we'll really need your support for our Native Plant Sale at Green Spring, the Chapter's biggest fundraiser. May 4th is Bioblitz Part 2, with the Maryland Native Plant Society, followed by two wildflower walks later in the month. I encourage you all to participate in at least one Chapter event and to visit our registry sites and other natural areas where wildflowers bloom in profusion.

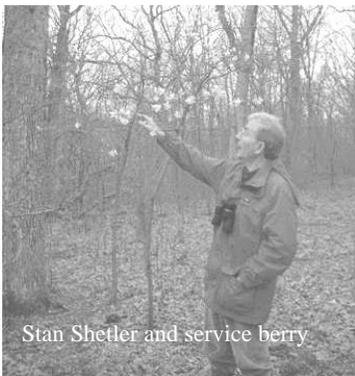
Marianne Mooney

BALL'S BLUFF NEEDS PROTECTION

Set on a high bluff along the Potomac River near Leesburg, Ball's Bluff Regional Park is a natural oasis in Loudoun County. Development is mushrooming around it. The site of a Civil War battle and a national cemetery, the park is managed by the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority.

On April 5 Dr. Stanwyn Shetler, Botanist Emeritus of the Smithsonian, led a group of Chapter members to see early spring wildflowers at Ball's Bluff. The woodland was bright with blooming serviceberry trees (*Amelanchier arborea*). We saw the 2003 Wildflower of the Year, the yellow trout lily (*Erythronium americanum*), but until the sun came out the trout lilies and the spring beauties (*Claytonia virginica*) were not fully open. It is possible to find white trout lily (rare in Virginia) at Ball's Bluff, but on this day they were elusive. The Virginia bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*) did not hide and will be blooming by mid-April.

A highlight of the walk was a beautiful stand of



twinleaf (*Jeffersonia diphylla*), which were at their peak. Some flowers were past their peak, the spice bush (*Lindera benzoin*) and Hepatica among them.

Ball's Bluff is also an excellent place to see outcrops of red Seneca sandstone (called Manassas Sandstone by geologists), which was used to build the Smithsonian "Castle." These rocks are more than 200 million years old and their erosion has given the soil in the area a reddish tone. A wall around the cemetery in the park is made of the red Seneca sandstone.

The Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority is currently developing a General Management Plan for Ball's Bluff. One of the long-term plans is to build a visitor center on site. They are currently removing the under-story of small trees and shrubs to recreate ten open acres to resemble the original battlefield site.

The Plan is currently before the NVRPA Board. A draft will be posted on its website www.nvrpa.org after April 25, 2003. The plan will be available for a public review period of 30 days at a local library and at NVRPA Headquarters at 5400 Ox Road, Fairfax Station, Virginia. The public will be able to comment on the draft plan at a meeting or by letter for 30 days following the public meeting, the date of which has not been set. Updates on the process will be posted on the NVRPA website. Because of our interest in preserving the natural area, we will be keeping you informed on the process and strongly encourage you to comment. The Regional Parks were created to protect woodlands and streams for the enjoyment of all the citizens of Arlington County, Fairfax County, Loudoun County, the City of Alexandria, the City of Falls Church and the City of Fairfax.

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(All numbers should include the 703 area code, unless otherwise noted.) *Potowmack News* is published 6 times per year, in Jan, Mar, May, Jul, Sep, and Nov. The deadline for submissions is the 15th day of the month prior to publication. Call Mary Ann Lawler for more information or e-mail her at malawler@aol.com.

THE ASTERACEAE

No wonder bees are attracted to Golden Ragwort (*Senecio aureus*), Brown-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia fulgida*), and New England aster (*Aster novae angliae*). They have so many flower heads full of nectar. These plants are all members of the Asteraceae also called the Compositae family. Think of daisies or sun-flowers to get an image. A composite is easily recognizable. It has an inflorescence that is a head--not one flower but many. The head is composed of disk flowers or ray flowers or most likely both, that clump together in one receptacle on which insects land to obtain nectar. Plants in this family are excellent for pollinator gardens.



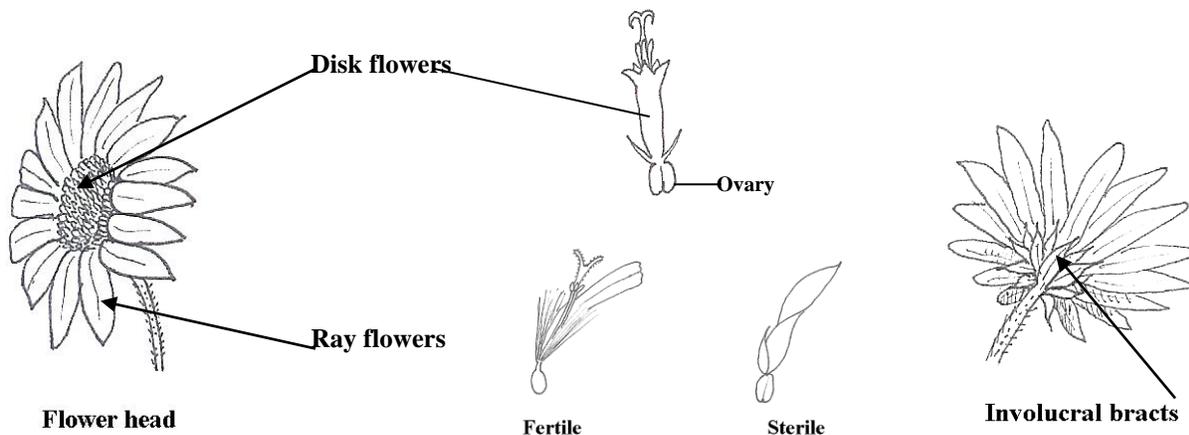
The flower heads of plants in the Asteraceae family are dense compositions. The tiny, radially-symmetrical central flowers make up the disk. Larger flowers around the edge, the “rays,” are strap shaped. Some flower heads can be all disk flowers, e.g., pussytoes (*Antennaria spp.*), bonesets (*Eupatorium spp.*), ironweed (*Vernonia spp.*), and thistles. Others can be all ray flowers. The receptacles of the flower heads have green bracts cupping the inflorescence in what is called an “involucre.” The arrangement and texture of the bracts can be important to identify plants in this family.

One would have to dissect the flower heads of the Asteraceae to examine the tiny individual flowers, using a hand lens. The corolla of the disk flower has five petals united into a tube and five stamens. These are all attached to the top of the ovary; hence the ovary is “inferior.” Ray flowers may be fertile or sterile. The calyx, which is made up of all the sepals of a flower, is absent from the Asteraceae or has been modified evolutionarily to become hairs, bristles, scales, or a crown, which often remain on top of the fruits. An example of a species with this feature is New York ironweed or a dandelion. Once the flowers go to seed the hairs help carry the seed away with the wind.

The composites are great seed producers and each seed, called an achene, has a hard shell. The most evident examples are the seeds produced by the sunflowers and coneflowers. The seeds of many of the composites provide food for seed-eating birds like the goldfinches, which is why Asteraceae species make good meadow habitat for both birds and pollinators.

The Asteraceae is one of the four largest families of plants with about 1,100 genera and 25,000 species. Obviously, the large group of flowers we call asters are part of this family. They may be shade-tolerant, like *Aster divaricatus L.*, the white wood aster, or sun-loving, like *Aster novae-angliae*, the New England aster. The goldenrods (*Solidago spp.*) are another large groups of the Asteraceae.

A good flora or wildflower guide will list the most common of the Asteraceae. This summer, while you’re out in a meadow or near a pollinator garden, see how many composites you can find and identify.



CONSERVING NATIVE POLLINATORS by Mary Ann Lawler

The conservation of flowering plant life requires that we protect the pollinators of plants. Bees, butterflies, flies, beetles and other insects pollinate nearly seventy percent of all flowering plants. While we think of bees and butterflies as the major pollinators, flies and beetles were the most prominent pollinators of the first flowering plants on earth. Flies, including flower flies, bee flies, dance flies, small-headed flies, and tangle-veined flies, still perform a major role in the pollination of over 1,000 species. Bees are important of course. The U.S. has over 5,000 species of native bees. And birds, butterflies, and moths, which pollinate more recently evolved plants, are also essential to plant conservation.

But our pollinators are in trouble. Twenty-two butterflies and twelve beetles are on the Federal endangered species list. The press has reported on the dramatic decline in populations of domesticated honeybees (which are not native) caused by mites. But it is pesticides, habitat fragmentation, and development, which take a toll on most pollinators.

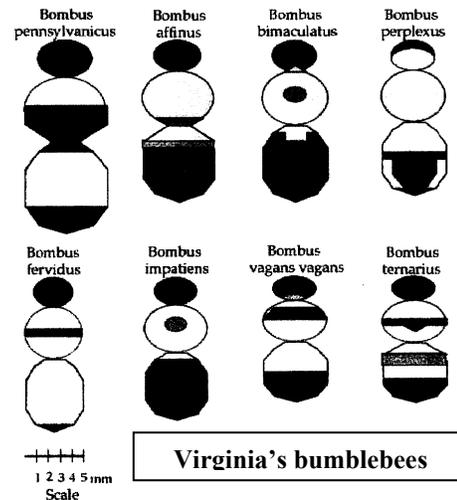
One example of a threatened species is the regal fritillary butterfly (*Speyeria idalia*). It is a “species of concern” for the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and is rapidly vanishing in much of its former range, which includes our area of northern Virginia. The caterpillar hosts for this butterfly include violets, like bird’s foot violet (*Viola pedata*). Adults obtain nectar from milkweeds, thistles, red clover, and mountain mint. (For information on the regal fritillary and a color photo see: <http://www.npwrc.usgs.gov/resource/distr/lepid/bflyusa/va/80.htm>)

While we do know the status of some pollinators, information on the status of native flies, bees, and beetles is scarce. In a presentation before the Botanical Society of Washington, Dr. Taj Holden of the University of Virginia said that baseline data from which to measure pollinator decline in Virginia and other places in the East is simply not available. Dramatic fluctuations in populations seem to occur naturally from year to year. More scientific research on plant/pollinator relationships is needed and should be funded.

We do know that humans can make a difference. First of all, know the pollinators. Buy some field guides and learn to identify flies, beetles, butterflies, and native bees. Keep an eye out for what attracts different insects to nectar flowers. It is amazing the variety and abundance of little bees and flies visiting a single plant of white snakeroot (*Eupatorium rugosum*) or of Golden ragwort (*Senecio aureus*). Also learn to identify and enjoy caterpillars and other larvae. They can grow up to be pollinators.

Secondly, support those organizations helping to protect pollinators. For example, the Xerces Society is a non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation of invertebrates. Visit its website at: <http://www.xerces.org/>. A local organization is the Washington Area Butterfly Club, whose website is <http://www.vais.net/~jmfarron>. And any organization that helps save habitat anywhere is important.

Thirdly, plant a pollinator garden on your property, and create habitat for both adult insects and their larvae, using native plants. Both the Xerxes Society and the Washington Area Butterfly Club websites have a wealth of information on pollinator gardening with lists of nectar plants and host plants for larvae. The VNPS Prince William Chapter has an excellent brochure on Butterfly Gardening with Native Plants. Pick up a copy at one of our programs.



Finally, and most importantly, let's try to get people to stop decimating our pollinators. Don't use pesticides. Try to buy organic food. And oppose the growing of crops genetically altered to kills insects. The earth is not one giant farm field for human use. It is an intricate and rich but delicate tapestry of millions of living things, all of which depend upon one another for life.

VNPS-MNPS "Bioblitz" Part II, Fort Dupont Park, Washington, D.C. May 4 (from page 1)

We will return to **Fort Dupont** as part of the MNPS-VNPS Plant Survey (See March/April Field Trip/exchange with the Virginia Native Plant Society). We will explore the upper area of Fort Dupont with significant mountain laurel-heath-chestnut oak portions and move in the direction of Ft. Davis Drive. It may be too early to see mountain laurel blossoms but *Rhododendron periclymenoides* and pink lady's slippers should be in full bloom. We will compare terrace gravel communities here and at Glencarlyn Park in Virginia in April. This forest rates among the best quality to be found anywhere within a fifty-mile radius of Washington, D.C. **Bring:** Lunch and water. **Note:** Easy to moderate walk. Drizzle is fine but canceled if rain is heavy. **Contact:** Mary Pat Rowan at blair-rowan@starpower.net or 202-526-8821.

Directions: *If you arrive on time, park at the parking lot at the Ft. Dupont Park activity center off Randle Circle and we will carpool to Ridge Road. Late arrivals proceed to Ridge Road directly. Randle Circle is on Minnesota Avenue SE at Massachusetts Ave. Access via East Capitol Street and go south on Minn. Ave SE to circle. Or, take I-295 from the Beltway north to Pennsylvania Ave SE and turn north on Minn. Ave to circle. If arriving late, follow Ft. Dupont Drive at Activity Center east (up the hill) to Ft. Davis Dr., turn left, proceed to Ridge Road, turn right and proceed 1-2 blocks on Ridge and park beyond G Street near church.*

HOLMES RUN GORGE MEMBER WALK (MAY 31) (from page 1)

We will see a variety of very old canopy trees, mostly oaks and hickories, and ancient groves of American Beech. The gorge also has a rich diversity of shrubs, ferns, and woodland wildflowers, as well as good exposures of different geological formations. Wear sturdy shoes and bring lunch and water. Walk cancelled for heavy rain, but not for drizzle.

Directions: *Take Columbia Pike east from Annandale towards Baileys Crossroads. (Columbia Pike's western end is at the intersection with Little River Turnpike (Rt. 236) in Annandale and its eastern end is the Pentagon in Arlington.) Heading east, Columbia Pike descends sharply downhill towards Holmes Run just after the Lake Barcroft entrance on left. Continue on Columbia Pike to bottom of hill and take first right into parking lot (opposite Lake Barcroft dam) after crossing Holmes Run. The parking lot can only be accessed from the eastbound lane of Columbia Pike.*

LOCAL EVENTS AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES:

Apr. 26 Alexandria Earth Day. This event includes a stream cleanup, exotic plant removal, nature walk, storm drain marking, and youth activities. Location Four Mile Run Park, Alexandria. Volunteers needed. Visit www.alexearthday.org.

Apr. 27 Bull Run Ramble 1-3 pm Wildflowers at Hemlock overlook park. Audubon Naturalist Society, Webb Sanctuary program. Call 703-803-8400 to register and for further information.

May 3 Bluebells and Birding 8am - 11am. Enjoy spring bird migrants and Virginia bluebells in bloom with a naturalist at Bull Run Park in Centreville. Meet at the pool parking lot towards the back of the park. Events may be cancelled or changed. Please check NVCT.ORG. For information call 703-354-5093 or email jmcperson@nvct.org

May 9 Spring Wildflowers of the Potomac Gorge (Bear Island) 10am to 12:30pm leader Cris Fleming Audubon Naturalist Society \$18 for non-members. For Information call: 301-652-9188 x16

May 10 Invasive Plant Removal, Mason Neck, VA Join the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust at one of its easement properties at 10800 Harley Rd. from 9am to 11:30am. They will unveil a new plant control method at 9am. Please bring loppers and gloves if you have them. For info, contact Jeannie McPherson at 703-354-5093 or jmcperson@nvct.org.

May 10 Piedmont Chapter Walk at the Thompson Wildlife Management Area. Start at parking lot 6 at 1:00.

June 12 & 14 Suitland Bog class and field trip. Thurs. 7:30-9:30pm; Sat. morning. See the best of the remaining coastal plain "magnolia bogs" with rare, endangered, and unusual plants. Leader Cris Fleming Audubon Naturalist Society \$42 for non-members. For Information call: 301-652-9188 x16

June 25 Wednesday Design Series: Wildlife Gardening 7-9pm. Green Spring Gardens Park. Registration and prepayment required. Call 703-642-5173

July 1 – Sept 1—Ferns and Fern Allies Identification USDA Graduate School: Woodend Sanctuary Bethesda. Classes plus two field trips: \$255. Call 202-314-3320 or register on line at www.grad.usda.gov

July 9 – Aug 13—Summer Wildflower Identification USDA Graduate School: Woodend Sanctuary Bethesda. Classes plus two field trips: \$195. Call 202-314-3320 or register on line at www.grad.usda.gov

July 10 Summer Wildflowers of Great Falls Park, VA 9:00 am to 2:00 pm. Leader Cris Fleming Audubon Naturalist Society \$28 for non-members. For Information call: 301-652-9188 x16

Aug 2 Summer Wildflowers of Clark's Crossing Park, VA along the W&OD Bike Trail near Vienna. 8:30 am to noon Leader Stanwyn Shetler Audubon Naturalist Society \$25 for non-members. For Information call: 301-652-9188 x16

Aug. 7 & 9 Ferns and Fern Allies (class and field trip). Thurs. 7:30-9:30pm; Sat. full day field trip. Field trip to Turkey Run Park with over 25 species of ferns and fern allies. Leader Cris Fleming Audubon Naturalist Society \$42 for non-members. For Information call: 301-652-9188 x16

ARLINGTON’S RIP PROJECT

April 26 Invasive removal PRCR Earth Week Event Benjamin Banneker Park, 1701 N. Van Buren St. Meet at the entrance to the bike trail of Benjamin Banneker Park, near Van Buren St., at 10 am. Come help out for an hour or two.

April 28 Restore Your Yard! Get rid of invasive plants, bring in the wildlife. Learn how to change your invasive plant haven into a certified backyard wildlife habitat. Will include information on removing invasives and the process of creation a National Wildlife Federation certified backyard wildlife habitat.. Participants will be invited to visit a local backyard wildlife habitat on the Sunday following the workshop. Free. 7 to 9 pm at Fairlington Community Center (3308 S. Stafford St.). Sponsored by RiP, Arlingtonians for a Clean Environment, the County Department of Parks, Recreation, and Community Resources, VA Cooperative Extension, and the Tree Stewards.

May 3 Invasive Removal Event. County property on Ohio St. at the northwest side of Hwy 66. Starts at 9am. Come help out for an hour or two. Some tools provided. Please bring gloves, clippers, loppers, or dull, flat screwdrivers if you have them. Wear long pants, long sleeves, hat, sunscreen, and sunglasses. Contact Jan McQueary 703-533-0959 or jmcqueary@juno.com for more information.

May 5th - Mapping as a Tool –note this date is new.

Learn how mapping can be used for planning and monitoring invasive plant control efforts and how you can help implement these techniques in your local park. 7-9 pm, Rm. 10, Fairlington Community Center, 3308 So. Stafford St., Arlington.

May 29 The Right Plant in the Right Place: Invasive Plants and the Nursery Industry 7:30 pm Arlington Central Library, featuring John Peter Thompson, Chairman of the Board of the Behnke Nurseries, member of the Maryland Invasive Special Council, Board of the Mid-Atlantic Exotic Pest Plant Council, and chair of the Maryland Nursery and Landscape Association’s Committee on Invasive Plants. Sponsored by Arlington/Alexandria Tree Stewards, Arlingtonians for a Clean Environment (ACE), Arlington RiP (Remove Invasive Plants), Master Gardeners of Northern Virginia, Northern Virginia Conservation Trust, and the Virginia Native Plant Society—Potowmack Chapter. For information, please contact Jan Ferrigan, Invasive Species Program Coordinator at 703 228 7636 or jferriga@vt.edu or Kasey Spriggs at 703 228 6401.

WANT TO JOIN THE CHAPTER LISTSERV? Send an e-mail to Mary Ann Lawler at malawler@aol.com and in the message section write subscribe to vnps-pot, your e-mail address, and your full name. Or visit <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/vnps-pot/join>

<p><u>Chapter Events Calendar</u></p> <p>Apr 26 Bioblitz Glen Carlyn</p> <p>Apr 27 Native plant garden tours 11 - 3</p> <p>May 3 Plant Sale Green Spring</p> <p>May 4 Bioblitz Ft. Dupont</p> <p>May 10 Chapter Walk Great Falls</p> <p>May 31 Chapter Walk Holmes Run</p>	<p>Potowmack Chapter Virginia Native Plant Society P.O. Box 5311 Arlington, VA 22205</p> <p><i>Please verify your address information and your renewal date on the mailing label.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Printed on recycled paper</i></p>
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