

POTOWMACK NEWS

Volume 29, No. 6

Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

November/December 2011

FALL WALK AT HUNTLEY MEADOWS PARK Saturday, November 5, 9 to 11am

Join us on Saturday, November 5th for a walk through the Fall at Huntley Meadows, led by Park Manager Kevin Monroe. Our final event for the year on the Chesapeake Bay Watershed will be exploring a beautiful fresh water marsh ecosystem once dominated and maintained by beaver activity. With the recent reopening of the restored boardwalk this will be an exciting look at the flora and fauna of the marsh.

Kevin Monroe is an educator and a naturalist. Currently, Kevin is the Park Manager of Huntley Meadow Park. Previous to this he worked as the Program Coordinator and Staff Naturalist for the Audubon Society of Northern Virginia and is still actively involved in the Audubon Society.

PROMOTING NATIVE BEE ABUNDANCE AND DIVERSITY WITH NATIVE PLANTS Thursday, November 10 Green Spring Gardens 7:30 – 9:00 pm

Our program for November 10 at Green Spring Gardens will feature Maria Van Dyke. Her talk will draw on native plant research she has participated in through Rutgers University, the NRCS Plant Research Center in Cape May and Xerces Society. She is the Program Coordinator for Virginia Working Landscapes and is also the Secretariat for the Virginia Food System Council. She holds an MS in Ecology and Environment Sciences from UVA with work at Blandy Experimental Farm.



A BEE'S EYE VIEW OF NATIVE PLANTS Thursday, January 19 Green Spring Gardens 7:30 – 9:00 pm

Speaker: Sam Droege is a biologist with the USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center. He is currently working on several projects regarding native bees. In this talk Sam will reverse the lens and look at native plants from the perspective of a key slice of life that is tied to these plants...bees. Regionally, there are over 400 species of native bees and many are only found on the flowers of specific plants. Why 400? Why not just one kind of bee? The complexity of color, architecture, and phenology of native flowers is a clue to

that relationship. In his talk Sam will explore the plant-pollinator relationship from the bee point of view and will illustrate why what we plant has consequences for these fascinating creatures.

TREE ADVICE FROM OUR PROPAGATION CHAIR

Don't use the practice of piling mulch around the trunks/stems of your trees and shrubs as it will lead to a decline and the ultimate death of the plant. It will suffocate the old roots, and soften the tree bark, inviting in pests and disease. Please remind your neighbors not to mulch the trunks of their trees. This practice is perpetuated by unknowledgeable landscape companies, then emulated by unknowing homeowners, thinking they are doing the right thing. Protect your investments of time and money and insure that our area trees are protected from needless distress; **DON'T PRACTICE TRUNK-MULCHING!**

Laura Beaty



I am the Lorax. I speak for the trees. I speak for the trees, for the trees have no tongues.

Dr. Seuss

A MESSAGE FROM YOUR RETIRING NEWSLETTER EDITOR

Exactly ten years ago this month I produced my first *Potowmack News* as the new editor, following the eloquent Sally Sieracki. I have learned so much from all of you in the last ten years. I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the true champions of our local flora, Rod Simmons, Greg Zell, Charles Smith, and Cris Fleming with their uncompromising devotion to our natural resources. I deeply appreciate Virginia’s Natural Heritage Program—its people and its website are huge sources of information about Virginia’s flora and ecological communities. Huge hugs go to my faithful and eagle-eyed copy editor for years, my husband Neal Sigmon, who also sat on our sunroom floor with me as we put nearly 500 labels and stamps on the copies before VNPS was able to pay the printer to do it. A thousand thanks go to Alan Ford and to former President Marianne Mooney for their guidance and for giving me so much editorial license. Marianne once said that I used the newsletter as my personal bully pulpit.



I guess that’s true, but only because I care deeply about the natural world and what we do as conservators of Virginia’s plants. So let me leave with my final “sermon” tips to Potowmack Chapter members:

- Don’t let a day go by without going outside to look closely at nature.
- Love old trees.
- Go on walks with the experts through all the seasons.
- Learn the relationships among geology, soils, plant communities, and individual native species.
- Learn and remember the importance of the interdependent web of creatures and plants that make an ecosystem work.
- Read E. O. Wilson, Aldo Leopold, and the great environmental thinkers.
- Advocate for the protection of biodiversity and the conservation of natural lands.
- Speak up for the wild things, which cannot speak for themselves.
- Recruit new members and volunteer with VNPS.
- Volunteer to remove invasive plants and to plant trees in your community.
- Create habitat in your yard and your community by replacing grass with a diversity of native canopy trees and an understory of small trees, shrubs and plants, plus open sunny areas for pollinators.
- Do **all** you can to reduce your CO2 emissions and prevent climate change.
- And most of all teach these values to your children and grandchildren.

With much affection for all of you, especially for Becky Super, who will be the new editor, **Mary Ann**

FREE iPhone APP WHICH IDENTIFIES TREES BY THEIR LEAFSHAPE

Columbia University, the University of Maryland, and the Smithsonian Institution are working on visual recognition software to help identify species from photographs. Leafsnap is the first in a series of electronic field guides being developed to demonstrate this new technology. This free mobile app helps identify tree species from photographs of their leaves and contains beautiful high-resolution images of their flowers, fruit, petiole, seeds, and bark.

Leafsnap currently includes the trees of New York City and Washington, D.C., and will soon grow to cover the trees of the entire continental United States. Leafsnap turns users into citizen scientists, automatically sharing images, species identifications, and geo-coded stamps of species locations with a community of scientists who will use the stream of data to map and monitor the ebb and flow of flora nationwide. Right now Leafsnap is only available for iPhones, but an android application will soon be available.

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TREES—MAGICAL, HISTORICAL, SACRED PLANTS (Narrative from Rod Simmons’ emails)

The oldest living individual plant specimens in the world are trees. And some of our local trees have been alive for more than two centuries.

On the right is a colossal **Swamp White Oak (*Quercus bicolor*)** along E. Glebe Rd. at Auburn Village in north Del Ray (near Potomac Yards), in City of Alexandria, Virginia. This tree was identified many years ago by City staff and associates as a regional, state, and City of Alexandria notable tree. It is the largest (and likely oldest) of its kind in the greater Washington, D.C. region. Moreover, in addition to being the City of Alexandria champion Swamp White Oak, it is the Virginia state co-champion – posted at: cnre.vt.edu/4h/bigtree/. It is also one of the last surviving relicts in Alexandria and Arlington of the historical, once-extensive Four Mile Run bottomland forest community. The tree’s age is estimated to be at least 200 years, and probably much closer to 250 or more. This species, like the White, Chestnut, Post, Chinquapin, and Overcup Oaks, is typically known to live for many centuries.



Photo by R.H. Simmons

This tree proves to be in fine condition, regardless of its age. Ironically and facing many old and large healthy trees in suburban areas throughout the greater region are pressures to preemptively remove them – despite being healthy and not exhibiting imminent hazards.

Below is an ancient **Willdenow’s Oak** – a natural hybrid between *Quercus falcata* and *Quercus velutina* – at the intersection of N. Nottingham St. and 27th St. N in North Arlington. At nearly 18’ in CBH (circumference at breast height – 54” from ground), it is one of the largest in Arlington. For its estimated age of centuries, it is in virtually pristine condition – perhaps the result of its being a hybrid derived from at least one long-lived species (*Q. falcata*). This oak is probably an old property boundary tree, dating from when the upland oak forest once extended down to the edge of what was likely a large braided seepage swamp and outflow swale on nearby land that is now John Marshall Drive. At nearly 18’ in circumference at breast height (CBH), the Willdenow’s Oak is larger in girth than the County champion Black Oak, but slightly smaller than the champion Southern Red Oak (the two parents of Willdenow’s Oak).



Photo by R.H. Simmons

I would estimate the Willdenow’s Oak at 18’ CBH to be in excess of 225 years old. Probably older than the champion Black Oak and about the same age or slightly younger than the champion Southern Red Oak at the Water Treatment Plant in S. Arlington. The Willdenow’s Oak was probably spared through the long years because it was likely a property boundary tree and/or shade tree for cattle when the seepage stream valley near it was cow

pasture. And when the neighborhood was developed in the 1950s it was way too big to chop down! Hence, it has grown in relatively good conditions, unlike some of the old but not-as-large-oaks of the high, weathered terraces and ridges uplands where growing conditions and soils are much tougher.

I would say that the oldest oak – and one of the largest trees - in Arlington is the state champion Post Oak (*Quercus stellata*) on N. 11 St. I think it’s also a property boundary tree and I’d estimate its age to be solidly 300 years and likely more. Post Oak and White Oak are probably the two longest-lived oaks in our region, along with Swamp White and Swamp Chestnut Oaks; Chinquapin Oak; and Chestnut Oak. Though Post Oak is the slowest growing and smallest of these. That’s why the Arlington Post Oak at 18’ CBH easily eclipsed the largest known Post Oak in Virginia. I don’t think any one of us will ever see a larger one!

[On the right]The Fairfax County champion Butternut –and largest one I’ve ever seen – is on the rich lower slope with *Juglans nigra* at edge of alluvial floodplain forest at junction of Popes Head Creek and Bull Run at Hemlock Overlook Park, one of the region’s nicest natural areas. It’s on the right side of main trail in this area after you’ve descended the stairs down the steep slope, just west of the old-growth Hemlock stand (RR tracks are along west side of Popes Head Creek beyond the Butternut). Cliff Fairweather and I led a winter’s field trip there for VNPS and ARMN on a cold day early last December. Time permitting, it’d be nice to repeat the walk in fall. Spring is also a great time to see the park as well, and especially along the floodplain of Bull Run in the vicinity of the Butternut to see *Phacelia covellei*, *Viola blanda*, *Diplazium pycnocarpon*, etc.

Greg Zell measuring Fairfax County champion Butternut (*Juglans cinerea*) at Hemlock Overlook Park.



Photo by R.H. Simmons

CHINQUAPIN (*CASTANEA PUMILA*) IN THE CITY OF ALEXANDRIA, VA

Chinquapin Park in the City of Alexandria, Virginia is presumably named for the Chinquapin (*Castanea pumila*), a native shrub in the Beech family (Fagaceae) related to American Chestnut (*Castanea dentata*), American Beech (*Fagus grandifolia*), and oaks (*Quercus* spp.). However, Chinquapin has not been noted at either Chinquapin Park or adjoining Forest Park, despite extensive vegetation surveys over the years. Nonetheless, the park’s ravine along Taylor Run (and possibly outside the park’s boundary to the southeast) was apparently referred to as “Chinkapin Hollow” in the late 1890s by Smithsonian botanist Lester Ward, who collected fossils of extinct plants, as well as a mussel shell (*Unio* sp.), from the exposed Potomac Formation along the stream. It is certainly possible that Chinquapin once grew on the forested upper slopes and terrace of the park. Today, Chinquapin is rare in Alexandria and is known from ten sites in the western section of the City, with no documented occurrences east of Alexandria Hospital. For further information on natural resource management in Alexandria and the City’s flora, natural communities, and geology, see <http://alexandriava.gov/48838> and <http://alexandriava.gov/22560>.



Photo by R.H. Simmons



Rod Simmons (left), Greg Zell (center standing), and Abby Reynolds (center in tree) and National Champion American Basswood (*Tilia americana*) in Shell-Marl Ravine Forest section of Chapman Forest North. March 23, 2010. Circumference: 20’3”; Crown spread: 96’ x 87”; Height: 150’; Score 416 points

ALONSO ABUGATTUS' TOP TEN TREES

1. Oaks – No other group of trees that I'm aware of provides more wildlife value than the genus *Quercus*. Over 600 different insect species for example (mostly small wasps) use them exclusively for host plants, unable to survive on anything else. It also hosts more Lepidopteran species (543) than any other plant studied so far. Since caterpillars, along with sawflies, are the main component in the food of most terrestrial nesting bird species, these are incredibly important plants, without even considering the multitude of other creatures that also feed on them or their acorns, if not exclusively (over a 100 vertebrate species throughout the USA are known to eat acorns). Since the myriad of oak species have evolved to grow in most of the existing habitats/growing conditions, it comes down to finding the right plant (assuming you have the space for these trees). Sawtooth is not native. A few to consider: White Oak (*Q. alba*) – Some salt tolerance but can be affected by soil compaction. Chestnut Oak (*Quercus prinus*; syn. *Quercus montana*): Dry, terrace gravel Pin Oak (*Quercus palustris*) Shorter than many other oaks, tolerant of compaction, some salt and even flooding.

2. Hackberries – The *Celtis* species are not anywhere near as important as the oaks, but they have a few specific, mostly butterfly species that makes them one of my favorites. In our region, the Hackberry Emperor, Tawny Emperor, and Snout butterflies are among the 43 species the genus is known to host. The trees also supply 'sugar berries' as food for birds (24 species being documented). *C. occidentalis* is our common tree species (*C. tenuifolia* is a shrub species also found around here). Hackberries tend to grow in riparian areas and can take some wet and salty conditions. Normally 30-50 feet tall but can get up to 100.

3. Hickories – *Carya spp.* supports 235 Lepidopteran species in addition to the nuts for which they are best known providing food for lots of other wildlife. Most can get to 100 feet tall or so. 4 species are local to the DC area: Sweet Pignut (*C. ovalis* also called False Shagbark or Red Hickory since real Shagbark is not local to the DC area.), Pignut Hickory (*C. glabra*), Mockernut Hickory (*C. tomentosa*) and Bitternut Hickory (*C. cordiformis*). Bitternuts prefer moist conditions, the others are much more general and adaptable except they do not like it wet.

4. Willows – The genus *Salix* supports 455 Lepidopteran species, including Mourning Cloaks, Viceroy, and Red-spotted Purple Butterflies (which then of course feed countless birds). Willows prefer moist locations and plenty of sun. Black Willow (*S. nigra*) can get to over 100 feet tall and grows quickly. Silky Willow (*S. sericea*) is really shrub and gets to about 12 feet or so. Weeping Willow is not native.

5. Sassafras – *Sassafras albidum* hosts 38 species of Lepidoptera, including being the preferred host plant for the Spicebush Swallowtail and a few silk moth species. Its berries also feed a variety of birds. Although not a major browse source, it is consumed by several mammals (including humans who use it as a spice in Cajun dishes in particular). Can grow to 60 feet, thriving in most soil conditions except for extremely wet areas and suckering abundantly.

6. Basswood/American Linden *Tilia americana* hosts 149 species of Lepidoptera. Its unusual seeds are eaten by a variety of creatures and it's considered a 'bee tree' because of the popularity of its blooms to honey bees. This fast growing tree is not picky of soil conditions, can get to over 100 feet tall and is well known for the deep shade it provides.

7. Black Gum/Tupelo – *Nyssa sylvatica* hosts 26 known species of Lepidoptera and has wonderful fall color. Various pollinators visit the flowers (Tupelo honey is delicious). Not all trees fruit equally but various animals make use of those trees that do provide this food source. This large shade tree is tolerant of various soil conditions as has beautiful fall color, growing to 80 feet at times.

8. Hollies – *Ilex*. The genus *Ilex* contains numerous shrub species like Winterberry and (South of us only) Inkberry known for their berries. The best known species though is the American Holly (*I. opaca*) which is a tree. The berries are by no means a favorite food for birds (which is why they can be enjoyed in the landscape throughout winter) but are a 'starvation food' waiting for returning migrants and sometimes being all there is to eat. Some 20 bird species rely on the berries for emergency winter food, some people claiming the freezing/thawing makes the berries more palatable for returning birds. American Holly is also evergreen and so provides good shelter for animals, especially in winter. The genus also hosts 39 known species of Lepidoptera. A drawback however is the need for both a male and female tree to be nearby and that only the female holly trees bear berries. American Holly can get to 50 feet or more and most hollies do better with some sun.

9. Tulip Tree - *Liriodendron tulipifera* 21 species of Lepidoptera have been documented as using this tree as a host plant. They grow very fast (one of the tallest growing and widest on the East coast) so have softer wood for carving using the stone and burning tools of the time and also have very straight trunks that often shed the lower branches so despite rotting fairly easily, were ideal for this use. John Smith reported that some canoes could hold 40 warriors at a time. I saw some in the Smokies that were so huge that my whole family could stand in front of the trunk for a picture. Honeybees use it quite a bit when it is in bloom and so it makes up a bulk of the honey produced where it is plentiful. The flowers are also sugary snacks for lots of critters (I've seen orioles 'nectaring' on them and raccoons raiding them also). The helicopter-like (samara) seeds themselves are consumed by various critters, including squirrels, but are not a favorite really of any. The leaves though make it a preferred host plant for Eastern Tiger Swallowtail butterflies and our largest inchworm species, the Tulip Tree Beauty moth, as well as Tulip-tree Silkmoths. It is a very common tree and often makes up a good portion of the trees in stands of young woods (since it is usually not preferred browsed of deer). It is the state tree of Indiana and Tennessee.

10. Black Locust – (*Robinia pseudoacacia*) Although considered by some to be a weed tree, it is quite beautiful and fragrant in bloom. The blooms are also quite edible and sweet as I know from experience. Just take care not to step on any of the thorns (as I learned during my misspent youth from experience). Rarely gets to 80 feet tall and some 72 species of Lepidoptera use it as a host plant.



Consulting ecologist Jeff Wolinski leads a meadow walk at Wakefield Park following the annual meeting on October 9. (Thanks to Laura Beaty for the photos!)



FALLS CHURCH HABITAT RESTORATION TEAM Upcoming Events:

Please join the Falls Church Habitat Restoration Team in restoring the local ecosystem in city parks. We will be removing damaging invasive plants as well as planting natives that benefit our local birds and butterflies.

November 19, 2011 - Hamlett/Rees Track - 10am-Noon

*Hamlett/Rees Track – From West Street head east on Broad Street/Rt. 7. Turn right onto South Virginia Avenue then right again to stay on South Virginia Avenue. Then a right onto Rollins, the street dead-ends at the Park. Enter from the end of Rollins Street. *More parking is available at TJ Elementary School.*

To request a reasonable accommodation for any type of disability call 703-248-5016 (TTY 711) For more information: contact Melissa Teates, 703-538-6961 or melanite@verizon.net.

ARLINGTON COUNTY RiP PROGRAM. Free. For ages 9 to adult. Come and help rescue our parks from the alien plant invaders! We meet monthly at the locations listed below. If you have your own garden gloves and tools, please bring them along. Some supplies will be provided. Be sure to come dressed for work, wear sturdy shoes, long pants, long sleeves, and perhaps a hat. You may want to bring along a reusable water bottle. Please register by email or calling to assure that you have the most up-to-date information.

First Saturdays @ Haley Park-OakRidge –Gunston 9 am to 11am (meet at Haley Park)
Second Saturdays @ Lacey Woods, 10 am to noon **Second Sundays @ Gulf Branch Nature Center, 2 to 5pm,**
Third Saturdays @ Tuckahoe Park, 10 am to noon **Third Sundays @ Long Branch Nature Center, 2 to 5pm,**
4th Saturdays @ Benj. Banneker Park 10am -noon **Fourth Saturdays @ Barcroft Park, 9:30 – noon**

Register at Sarcher@arlingtonva.us or 702-228-1862. Check the website for details on location.
www.arlingtonva.us/invasiveplants

FAIRFAX COUNTY'S INVASIVE MANAGEMENT AREA (IMA) PROGRAM

The IMA program is a volunteer-based project working towards habitat restoration. Help us remove invasive plants, learn new species of invasive plants, and work outdoors during the following workdays:

Every Wednesday 12:30-3:30 **Lake Accotink** (2nd Wednesday of each month @ **Americana**)
 November 19, 10:00 – 12:00 **Pohick StreamValley** workday

For more information contact: Erin.Stockschlaeder@fairfaxcounty.gov or call 703 324 8681. Check out the IMA schedule of events and activities at: www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/resources/nrp-ima.htm.

LOCAL EVENTS AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Sun. Oct. 30 Fall Tree ID for Birders (2-4 pm) Leader Stephanie Mason. With trees ablaze in fall colors and their fruits hanging high, we'll learn the identifying characteristics visible through binoculars of the most common species of trees and shrubs along the C&O Canal towpath upstream of Carderock. **Free, but registration required.** . For information or to register call: 301-652-9188 x16 or visit: <http://www.audubonnaturalist.org/> for registration form.

Sat. Nov. 5 Missing Links in the Web of Life. 2 pm Green Spring Gardens. Missing Lions, Marauding Deer, and Environmental Chaos. These are strange days in Northern Virginia. Biologists tell us our native wildflowers are disappearing, our songbirds are under attack, our forests are slowly dying. Gardeners are fortifying themselves behind fences, sharpshooters are patrolling our parks at night. We drive gripped with fears of something suddenly bounding into the headlights. And each of these unsettling developments seems to trace inevitably back to the excesses of one rather unlikely culprit. Who would have thought that the beloved white-tailed deer would come to vie for public enemy number one? If the missing wolves and cougars that once roamed the wilds of Northern Virginia could speak, they might have warned us. As it is, we are learning the lesson late, from a burgeoning cadre of concerned naturalists, park managers, master gardeners, and everyday citizens, who are coming to realize that so much of the recent chaos stems in part from a vital missing link at the top of the food chain. . Book sales and signing following presentation. Fee: \$12 (in county) or \$14. To register go to : <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/gsgp/ed-adult.htm>

Sat. Dec. 10 Winter Weed Walk 1-4:30pm 7-9:15 pm at Woodend Nature Center. Instructor: Stephanie Mason. Not all herbaceous plants disappear in the winter. Many persist as dried stalks and seed clusters, with a beauty to match the season. Join ANS Senior Naturalist Stephanie Mason for an introduction to winter weed and wildflower identification at our Woodend Sanctuary. We'll also investigate seed dispersal strategies and examine plant skeletons for signs of summer insect activity, such as insect galls, chrysalids, cocoons, and egg cases. Free, but registrations required. or to register call: 301-652-9188 x16 or visit: <http://www.audubonnaturalist.org/> for registration form.

**NOTECARDS WITH NATIVE PLANTS
AND BIRDS**

In time for the holidays the Potowmack Chapter is delighted to be able to offer note cards with B.J. Opfer’s beautiful watercolor paintings of native birds with native plants. The cards are available in sets of four (4) cards with envelopes with one of each type. We are asking \$15 per set. Cards will be available at all chapter sponsored events during the next year including our upcoming walk on Nov. 5th and talk on Nov.10th. Cards will also be available through the VNPS.ORG website.

Limited edition prints of any of the four are available by contacting the artist.

For more information or questions please contact Alan Ford at 703.732.5291 or amford@acm.org.

Virginia Native Plant Society
Native birds need native plants to thrive.
www.vnps.org



Eastern Bluebird
Common Winterberry



Northern Cardinal
Flowering Dogwood



Red-Winged Blackbird
Broadleaf Cattail



Ruby Throated Hummingbird
Red Columbine

5x7 Notecards with envelopes
Limited Edition Giclée Prints Available
Paintings © B. J. Opfer

Chapter Events Calendar



- Nov 3 Board Meeting 7:00pm
Green Spring
- Nov 5 Huntley Meadows Walk
9am to 11am
- Nov 10 Program on Native Bee
Diversity
7:30pm Green Spring
- Dec. 8 Board Meeting 7:00pm
Green Spring
- Jan. 19 Program on Bees and
Native Plants
7:30pm Green Spring

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