

POTOWMACK NEWS

Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

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Ground Dwelling Bees

One of the many benefits of keeping some areas natural and not planting and mulching every square inch of your ground!

BY ALONSO ABUGATTAS

Bees: There are 20,000 species or so worldwide with 4,000 in North America. Of those, 70% are ground dwellers (and well-over 90% are solitary, although much of what we know about bees is about the introduced, social European honeybees which are but one of the thousands of bees and very much the exception). Many of these ground dwellers, like the ones in the photo, are in deep trouble due to man's activities: alteration of habitat, introduced species of both plants and organisms which compete, parasitize, or don't provide for their requirements, and even mulching or removing dead wood that destroy areas they may nest in. . Then there are our agricultural practices like tilling or plowing which destroys most nests,

mulching, use of pesticides or herbicides and such. Bare patches of soil or overturned tree roots from down trees are extremely important in providing nesting sites for many species, although we find them an eyesore and try to get rid of them.

Also, I should point out that many species CAN sting (and, again unlike honeybees, can sting multiple times) but just don't. Stingers on these types of critters are modified ovipositors (egglayers) so only females can sting, though many just break through our skin even if they tried to defend themselves. Males in most bee species, are excellent pollinators since they are solitary and have to fend for themselves, again unlike the European honeybee where

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Upcoming Events

April

Pollen as a Window into the Past

April 19, 7:30 - 9 pm, FREE

Green Spring Gardens

While we all know that living pollen is very cool looking, most of you may not know that fossil pollen can be used to help reconstruct past environments, back thousands, and even millions, of years. The chemical that makes up the outer layer of a pollen grain is very resistant to decay, as long as it is in an anaerobic environment, like the bottom of a lake. Pollen grains also have a tremendous variety of sculpturing which can be used to identify them to family, genus, or even species.

May

Viburnum ID Field Trip

May 8, 6:45 - 8:15 pm

Details Coming Soon. Check our Facebook page and website for more info.

May 17, 7:30pm

Regular Monthly Meeting at Green Spring Gardens.

Program: TBD

Check our Facebook page and website for more information.

A MESSAGE FROM THE PROPAGATION CHAIR

The Potowmack Chapter's Spring plant sale is scheduled for May 19, from 9 am to 3 pm. It will again be held at our propagation beds behind the horticulture center at Green Spring Gardens.

The chapter's programs this past year have been devoted to the subject of our native pollinators. Sadly, we've learned that many of them are in decline. A number of reasons are cited for this decline, including a lack of a continuous source of nectar and pollen during their active period from early spring through fall, loss of habitat and use of pesticides.

With the exception of the bumblebees and a few of the sweat bee species that are social in nature and live in colonies, the remainder are solitary bees, living and working separately. Nearly 70% of the native bees nationwide are ground nesters, and the other 30% tunnel in snags, stumps, woody plant stems and twigs. In addition, they also make homes in the hollow stems of elderberry, blackberry, cup plant, sumac and many others. Keep in mind, also, that our native pollinators, also include flies, beetles, butterflies, moths and hummingbirds. If you are interested in helping out our ground nesting bees, allow a sunny section of your yard or ditch to remain relatively plant-free. These bees prefer a sunny site with exposed sandy or loamy soil for their nests.

While we are not able to provide snags and stumps for bees at our sale, we can provide plants with season-long blooms to support the pollinators in your landscape. The best way to keep pollinators happy is to provide mass plantings of several species of flowers that will provide energy and protein (nectar and pollen) throughout the growing season. Pollinators, especially bees, are single-minded in their task of nectaring and collecting pollen. It's not only more efficient for them but also their preference to work on one flower specie, i.e. flower form at a time. The plants we are selling appeal to the needs of the large numbers of pollinators--approximately 400 different native pollinators--that live in the Northern Virginia region.

A variety of trees, shrubs, vines and perennials will be sold that easily span the critical flowering period between spring and late fall. In addition to providing blooms, some of our fall blooming perennials will also provide a place for some of the bees to over-winter in the spent stalks. It doesn't pay to be too tidy in the fall. Allow stalks to remain, so bees will have a home for the winter. If you must cut the old stalks down, do move them to a compost pile where the over-wintering bees can safely survive until they emerge in the spring.

If you have extra regionally native plants in your yard that you'd like to donate for the May sale, please bring them to our propagation beds at Green Springs Gardens at least two weeks prior to the sale. Please contact Laura Beaty with any questions about the sale or donation of plants: 703 534-8746, or laurabeaty@mac.com. We can make a difference for the pollinators in our region!

Laura Beaty
Propagation Chair

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Submissions to *Potowmack*
News should be sent to
Becky Super at
hrrsuper@gmail.com

Potowmack Chapter
Virginia Native Plant Society
P.O. Box 5311
Arlington, VA 22205
www.vnps-pot.org

Spring Wildflower Walks

WALKS ARE FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC



Early Spring Wildflowers Ball's Bluff above the Potomac River Saturday, April 7 10 am

The Potomac floodplain in early spring is an ephemeral garden. Enriched by botanical migrants from the western highlands, Balls Bluff Battlefield Park represents a preserved "hot spot" for native flora in our area.

Join well-known local naturalist and teacher John DeMary on an early spring visit to Ball's Bluff Battlefield Regional Park in Leesburg, VA. This is a unique site and should not be missed.

Directions: From the Capital Beltway (I-495), take VA-7 west to Leesburg. Take US-15 north (Leesburg by-pass) for about one and one half miles. At a large housing development, turn right on Battlefield Parkway and then left on Ball's Bluff Road for one mile to the parking lot. Reliance on GPS for directions is *not* advised. We will start the walk from the parking lot.

RSVP and information:
Diana Carter at 703 620-2724
dcarter1776@yahoo.com or
Blanca Vandervoort at
540-837-1637
cvanderv@nelsoncable.com

Co-sponsored by the Potowmack and Piedmont Chapter.

Weeknight Wildflower Walk at Wakefield Park April 11 6-7:30 pm

Join John Dodge for a weeknight wildflower walk. We will see what we can find in the meadows and woods. Weeds included!

Meet at the kiosk near the tennis courts.

Wakefield Park is located at 8100 Braddock Rd in Annandale, VA.

Directions: From 495 take Exit 54A which is Braddock Road west for one quarter mile to the park entrance on the right.

RSVP and information:
Diana Carter at 703 620-2724
dcarter1776@yahoo.com

Spring Wildflower Walk at Turkey Run Park Saturday, April 21 9 am – 1 pm

Join chapter Botany Chair Cris Fleming for a walk through one of our area's best spring wildflower displays. Famous for the spectacular show of Virginia bluebells along the Potomac River, Turkey Run Park also harbors other early spring flowers such as dwarf ginseng, swamp buttercup, wild geranium, sessile trillium, perfoliate bellwort and many others. Participants need to be able to walk the zig-zag trail down the steep hillside and to cross the creek on rocks (there will be helping hands).

Cris is a past member and Education Chair of the VNPS state board and recent President of the Maryland Native Plant Society. She is a former field ecologist for the Maryland Natural Heritage Program and Education Director of the Audubon Naturalist Society (ANS). Recently retired as long-time instructor of Plant Identification courses for the ANS/Graduate School Natural History Field Studies Program, Cris continues doing short programs for ANS, MNPS, VNPS and other groups. She is the main author of the book, [Finding Wildflowers in the Washington-Baltimore Area](#) (cover picture by Hal Horwitz of bluebells at Turkey Run Park).

Turkey Run Park is located just off the George Washington Parkway about a mile downriver of the Beltway. It is the first exit going downriver and the last exit before the beltway going upriver. We will meet at parking area C-1, the first parking area off of the entrance road. In case of severe weather and/or flooding, the trip will be postponed.

RSVP and information:
Diana Carter at 703 620-2724
dcarter1776@yahoo.com

Ground Dwelling Bees Continued

From Cover

male drones do not pollinate. Solitary bees are very unlikely to sting because they are not social. If they die defending their nest (since the mother bee is the mom, queen, and worker altogether), then their nest and young will die as well, so they would rather just abandon their nest or avoid confrontation altogether. Social bees like honeybees (and a few bumblebees and wasps like yellowjackets or hornets) have a different mindset. They are all sisters who do not reproduce individually but rather have their queens do so. Their own lives matter little since there will be others to take care of the nest. All their reproductive success is tied into making sure the nest survives. They are more than willing to die defending it (or defending their sisters). So the solitary bees just avoid a fight and are very unlikely to sting unless under dire circumstances. Solitary bees are great pollinators of plants and in many cases are better than introduced species. After all, they evolved together with native plants and are

closely tied to them and have been pollinating them well before any introduced species.

By the way, we also get calls later in the year about ground nesting solitary wasps which people confuse for bees. Many of these in are Sand Digger Wasps. The most common ones here are stinkbug specialists. They sting and paralyze stinkbugs which they drag down their burrow to provide nourishment for the developing wasp larvae. I suspect that with the increase in the introduced Brown Marmorated Stinkbug, these wasps have also increased in number. I believe they will help keep the numbers more in control once their own populations catch up with them. We'll see. I just wanted to point out a few things about bees since I think they're such an important part of our natural world, and so little is known about the majority of them.



Steep bank of loamy Potomac Formation "Golden Sand" (Tony Fleming, geologist) extensively colonized by hundreds of Solitary Bees. The site is the southwest-facing corner of Immanuel Lutheran Church and School at corner of Belleaire Road and Russell Road in Alexandria, Va. "[Solitary Bee]...stings are unable to penetrate human flesh, and they do excellent pollination work on early fruit... Unfortunately, some members of the public still think that they are dangerous pests - so if beekeepers get a call to 'deal with' swarms of bees living in holes in the ground, this is a great opportunity to do a little education." (<http://www.kilty.demon.co.uk/beekeeping/solitarybees.htm>). More information at:

www.earthlife.net/insects/solbees.html Our local experts include: Alonso Abugattas, LB Nature Center Director; Cliff Fairweather, Environmental Education Director and Naturalist at Audubon Society; John Walsh, City of Alexandria Horticulturist; Mark Kelly, Ford Nature Center Director; Sam Droege at USDA; and others. *Photo by R.H. Simmons, March 22, 2011.*

Help Us Reach Our 200 Friends Goal!

**Find us on Facebook at
Potowmack Chapter - Virginia Native Plant Society**

Where Can You See Wildflowers In the Northern Virginia Area?



Virginia has many good sites. Almost anywhere that you can gain access to the banks of the Potomac River is likely to be rewarding.

Along the Potomac Palisades

(Virginia shore of the Potomac above Washington)

Potomac Overlook Regional Park, Arlington

Gulf Branch Park, Arlington

Turkey Run

Scotts Run Nature Preserve, McLean

Great Falls Park, Great Falls

Riverbend Park, Great Falls

Fraser Preserve, Great Falls

Central and Western Fairfax County

Clarks Crossing Park, Vienna (meadows in summer)

Reston Wildflower Trail, Reston

Hidden Pond Nature Center, Springfield

Hidden Oaks Nature Center, Annandale (A special site for pink lady's slipper)

Ellanor C. Lawrence Park, Chantilly

Balls Bluff Regional Park, Leesburg

Hemlock Overlook Regional Park, Clifton

Bull Run Regional Park, Centreville Gardens and

Planted Trails

Green Spring Gardens, Annandale

Meadowlark Gardens, Vienna

The National Arboretum, Washington DC

Bon Air Park, Arlington (Quarry Garden)

Long Branch Nature Center, Arlington

PROPAGATING NATIVE PLANTS

Saturday, April 14

1-4 pm

The Potowmack Chapter is offering an opportunity to learn various methods of increasing the number of native plants in your landscape. Our propagation chair will demonstrate techniques for propagating plants. The session will take place at the chapter's propagation beds behind the Horticulture Center at Green Spring Gardens. Reservations are required as space is limited. A fee of \$5 will be charged for materials when you arrive. RSVP to Laura Beaty at laurabeaty@mac.com or call 703 534-8746

How You Can Help?

Falls Church Habitat Restoration Team

Join the Falls Church Habitat Restoration Team in restoring the local ecosystem in city parks. Remove invasives and plant natives that will then benefit local birds and butterflies.

For more information contact Melissa Teates, 703-538-6961 or melanite@verizon.net

Arlington County RiP Program

Help rescue Arlington parks from alien plant invaders! Bring your own tools.

For more information contact sarcher@arlingtonva.us or 703-228-1862. www.arlingtonva.us/invasiveplants

Fairfax County's Invasive Management Area (IMA) Program

Remove invasive plants and learn about new species.

For more information contact erin.stockschlaeder@fairfaxcounty.gov or call 703-324-8681



SPRING PLANT SALE

Saturday, May 19

9 am - 3 pm

Spring is the perfect time to plant!

Green Spring Gardens

4603 Green Spring Road

Alexandria, Virginia

703-642-5173

www.vnps.org

The Potowmack Chapter will be offering a variety of small trees, shrubs, perennials, and ferns. Get advice on the best plants for your garden. See a demonstration on how to plant your new trees and shrubs. Learn how to attract butterflies, birds and other beneficial wildlife to your garden with native plants.

POTOWMACK NEWS

Virginia Native Plant Society

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