

# POTOWMACK NEWS

*Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society*

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## Marie Butler Leven Preserve

By Matt Bright



FROG EGGS IN VERNAL POOL AT MARIE BUTLER LEVEN PRESERVE  
MARCH 9, 2016. PHOTO BY MATT BRIGHT

Nestled amongst million-dollar houses and high-achieving schools in Mclean lies a small, unassuming park: the Marie Butler Leven Preserve. This modest 20-acre park is a mixture of mowed lawn, incipient meadow, moist woodlands, and a house, originally the property of the Leven family. I began my work on this park as a high school student, alongside other Earth Sangha volunteers, and with Alan Ford as our Invasive Management Area Site Leader. As I prepare to reside full-time in the preserve's house and turn over a new leaf on the preserve's management, I'm eager to look back at the history of the property, and the successes and challenges we've had here.

When I first started working at the preserve, there was no meadow, only lawn, and the forest edge was an unbroken curtain of porcelain berry, *Ampelopsis brevipedunculata*, and mile-a-minute, *Persicaria perfoliata*. Pushing beyond this unwelcoming border led to an interior of multiflora rose, *Rosa multiflora*, and Amur honeysuckle, *Lonicera maackii*. We've had substantial success removing these species with the simplest techniques of repeated manual removal.

Behind the old house, Chris Bright, Earth Sangha President and my father, and I cut back a dense stand of princess tree, *Paulownia tomentosa*. Throughout the park, we've depended on volunteer labor to control ongoing garlic mustard, *Alliaria petiolata*, infestations and invasive doublefile viburnum, *Viburnum plicatum*. Elsewhere in the park, we've relied on

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## Upcoming Events

### Purple Milkweed at Huntley Meadows

Saturday, June 3, 9 am-12 noon

Of course the purple milkweed isn't the only interesting plant you'll see at this park full of treasures.

### Registration Open: "Nature Knows No Boundaries"

### Tri-State Native Plant Society Conference, Sept 29-Oct 1

The combined Native Plant Societies of Virginia, Maryland, and West Virginia will hold their annual fall conferences together at the National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, WV. Evening programs Friday and Saturday will be both informative (talks by Wesley Knapp and Rodney Bartgis) and social (music and bonfire with marshmallows). Choose from many field trips and workshops during the days Saturday and Sunday. When you look at the lodging price, remember that it includes all meals: great food in the NCTC cafeteria. Actual registration is being handled by the Maryland Native Plant Society at [mdflora.org](http://mdflora.org); the complete listing of walks and workshops for you to choose among is on the Virginia Native Plant Society website [vnps.org](http://vnps.org).

All events **except the conference** are free and open to the public. Walks require preregistration. Join our listserv at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/vnps-pot> to receive notices with walk registration links

# HELP WANTED

The Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society is run by volunteers. Volunteers bring you this newsletter, the walks and programs you may enjoy, the neo-nicotinoid-free native plants we offer at our plant sales, the information and stories on the VNPS blog, speakers for a variety of groups, plant rescues, grass bunch explorations... What have I forgotten? All happens because interested members volunteer. While many levels of participation are always open (Join us at the propagation beds on Wednesday mornings! Help staff a table at a nature-friendly event! Lead a field trip to your favorite park!), our chapter foresees two important vacancies looming on our Board.

**Membership.** Bob Yacovissi wants to retire. He has been our Membership Chair since long before I joined the board as newsletter editor in 2013. He has just seen us through a change in system which makes the job of tracking our membership and producing up-to-date mailing lists much easier. He'll gladly help a new Membership Chair get started. Are you tech-comfortable? Could you help us out?

**Programs.** Donna Murphy has been doing it all, finding, scheduling & attending both our popular evening programs and our monthly field trips, but this job could easily be split and shared by two people – or more! Could you be a Programs Co-Chair, doing some portion of this fascinating enterprise?

To throw your hat into the ring, contact Alan Ford at [amford@acm.org](mailto:amford@acm.org)

## WORD OF THE MONTH

By Margaret Chatham

**Crenate:** having rounded teeth. In the photo below, the crenate leaf edge of the invasive Indian strawberry, *Potentilla indica*, on the left distinguishes it from the larger, more pointed leaves of our true strawberry, *Fragaria virginiana*, even when no flowers or fruit are present.



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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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Virginia Native Plant Society

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**MARIE BUTLER LEVEN PRESERVE CONT'D FROM PAGE 1**  
 Fairfax County Park Authority support to spray advancing  
 carpets of Japanese pachysandra, *\*Pachysandra terminalis*,  
 and creeping euonymus, *\*Euonymus fortunei*.



**ENGLISH IVY, *\*HEDERA HELIX*, BEFORE (PHOTO BY CHRIS BRIGHT) AND AFTER A VOLUNTEER CREW'S WORK (PHOTO BY LISA BRIGHT)**



That's not to say it's all bad news! When I led a tour of the preserve this spring for the Potowmack Chapter, I focused on the wooded valley in the center of the park. This area boasts an impressive array of trillium, probably second only to Meadowlark's own collection. At least four species are present, large-flowered trillium, *Trillium grandiflorum*, wake-robin, *T. erectum*, toadshade trillium, *T. sessile* and yellow toadshade trillium, *T. luteum*. A quick check of the *Flora of Virginia* suggests that none of these are genuinely native to this park. Instead, it is far more likely that these species, native elsewhere in Virginia, are a part of the botanical history of the preserve and may well have been planted by the Leven family before they bequeathed it to the Park Authority.



**TRILLIUM GRANDIFLORUM ABOVE, *DICENTRA CANADENSIS* BELOW, PHOTOS BY MATT BRIGHT**

Between the teeming trilliums is a mélange of both native and non-native spring ephemerals. For every squirrel corn, *Dicentra canadensis*, dutchman's breeches, *D. cucullaria*, bloodroot, *Sanguinaria canadensis*, yellow trout lily, *Erythronium americanum*, and Virginia bluebell, *Mertensia virginica*, there seems to be an equal number of



winter aconites, *\*Eranthis hyemalis*, Siberian squills, *\*Scilla siberica*, lungworts, *\*Pulmonaria spp.* and daffodils, *\*Narcissus pseudonarcissus*. Beginning next winter, we plan on gently removing these to favor the already impressive diversity of

native spring flowers.

Downstream from the little creek is a vernal pool. During this year's dry winter, it scarcely filled up before draining back out, but last year nearly every inch was filled with wood frog egg masses. Uphill, back towards the house, we've planted a few groves: a stand of American chestnut, *Castanea dentata*, another of Butternut, *Juglans cinerea*, a thriving group of witch-hazels, *Hamamelis virginiana*, and a small stand of sweet crabapple, *Malus coronaria*.

In what used to be unbroken lawn, we've begun the restoration process to return this area to a native meadow. One section was planted and sown with a mix of native grasses and wildflowers and is already a promising start. For the remaining acre or so, we've been brainstorming with the Park Authority about how to approach a full-scale replanting.

As you may have gathered from the descriptions above, our mandate on this site isn't a strict ecological restoration plan, but rather to embrace the botanical idiosyncrasies already present, and curate a collection of native plant communities that can be enjoyed educationally and aesthetically. We're well on our way, and I hope that as we continue to make progress, I will have the privilege to write here again to share our results.

## Where I Went on Spring Vacation

By Margaret Chatham

The VNPS trip to Southwest Virginia led by Gary Fleming was a delight. He took us high (Natural Tunnel



State Park, Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, High Knob State Park, and Breaks Interstate Park) and low (stream valleys at Natural Tunnel and Breaks, and a sinkhole in The Cedars State Natural Area Preserve) and in between to show us more special plants than I can count.

At The Cedars, Fire Pink, *Silene virginica*,

outshone Perfoliate Bellwort, *Uvularia perfoliata*.

Piedmont Rhododendron, *Rhododendron minus*, peeked out of the clouds above Cumberland Gap



One Yellow Buckeye, *Aesculus flava*, deigned to bloom at eye level at Wilderness Road State Park.



The list goes on and on, but my space does not.

## 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)

Earth Sangha

Earth Sangha not only propagates locally native plants, they also hold workdays to remove invasives and plant natives in a variety of area sites. To get in on the fun, check out [www.earthsangha.org](http://www.earthsangha.org)

# Imposters!

## Non-native plants that have been sold as native

By Margaret Chatham

These are not plants that are native in other parts of the state, or nearby states, or even elsewhere in the US. These are true cases of mistaken identity. I am one of those who have been fooled by these plants. I print this so that perhaps you won't join the ranks of those so fooled.

**Green Dragon:** This is old news to some of us on the Potowmack Chapter Propagation Committee, but years later it's easy to forget the details. Our native Green Dragon is *Arisaema dracontium*. Its blooming stalk arises out of the side of the leaf stalk. The flower is a narrow green spathe with a long spadix sticking up out of the spathe. The whole flower is often lower than its leaf. Its leaf is divided into leaflets, with the smallest leaflets separated all the way to the stem. The number of leaflets varies with the size and age of the plant: small, non-blooming plants may have three or five; large plants may have many more.



The Green Dragon imposter is *Pinellia pedatisecta* from China. Its blooming stalk arises from the ground separately from its leaf stalk; its flower (similar to but perhaps stouter than our *A. dracontium*'s) is often held above the level of its leaf. Its leaf is also divided into leaflets, but the smallest leaflets often are fused at their bases, lacking a separate attachment to the stem, as seen in this photo of a plant donated for our plant sale (but offered for sale!) It also seems to be easier to propagate than our native, so if someone offers you Green Dragons from the multitude spreading in her yard, look that gift horse in the mouth!

**Labrador Violet:** *Viola labradorica*. In the nursery trade, this is a stemless violet with purplish leaves and dark violet flowers that hugs the ground and blooms very early in the spring. I was fooled into showing it in my calendar of supposed-to-be native plants, trusting the name and statement of the vender, and the fact that *Viola labradorica* is listed as a native in the *Flora of Virginia*. I should have looked more closely at the description: ours is a stemmed violet with lighter violet flowers with a short spur that blooms mid-spring, synonym *Viola conspersa*. The purple-leaved, stemless one should be called *Viola riviniana* Purpurea Group, Alpine Violet or Common Dog Violet, native to Europe.



\* *VIOLA RIVINIANA PURPUREA GROUP* ON THE LEFT; *VIOLA LABRADORICA* SYN *V. CONSPERSA* ON THE RIGHT. PHOTOS BY MARGARET CHATHAM

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P.O. Box 5311, Arlington, VA 22205



VIRGINIA NATIVE  
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## Summer Bloom in the Shade



### **Wild Petunia, *Ruellia caroliniensis***

By Margaret Chatham

*Ruellia caroliniensis* is one of those plants that seem invisible until they bloom. You never know where they may appear, since their seed pods explode when ripe and can shoot seeds yards away from the parent plant. If you had one last year, happy hunting this summer!

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)