



# Wild News

The Bi-monthly Newsletter of the Prince William Wildflower Society  
A Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

Number 2020-01

January - February 2020

## The Prince William Wildflower Society 2020 Winter Slideshow

Thursday, January 2  
7:30 pm, Bethel Evangelical Lutheran Church  
8712 Plantation Lane, Manassas

Please plan to join us for our annual members' winter slideshow. Come and bring a friend to enjoy the show, refreshments and door prizes!



*(In the bluebonnets of Texas, photo by Sherry Schellenger Parker)*

### From the President:

*Happy Holidays to you!*

We start the year 2020 with our annual member slide show on January 2. I'll be showing some photos from VNPS-sponsored spring field trips this past year. I had the pleasure of experiencing three springs in 2019, the first of which was in Texas Hill Country in late March. Texas Bluebonnets were the star attraction so you will see them in my slide show. My second spring was at home, and my third spring was in Canada's Bruce Peninsula in early June where orchids stole the show. If only our spring would stretch for months! If you

have some botanical or nature photos you would like to share at this meeting, please let me know in advance of the meeting, email [nvehrs1@yahoo.com](mailto:nvehrs1@yahoo.com).

*(Virginia Creeper in fall color, taken at the I-95 Rest Area in November, photo by Brigitte Hartke)*



Only three of us participated in the November planting at the I-95 rest area at Dale City, but we managed to put a lot of plugs in the ground. Thank you Brigitte Hartke and Ijaz Rana. We were unable to finish, however, so I have a number of plugs overwintering in my garden. We will pick a date in the spring and get the rest of these pollinator plants – Penstemon, Swamp Milkweed, Mountain Mint, and more – into the ground. Stay tuned.

February brings some big events. On February 8 Prince William County government and nonprofits such as the Prince William Conservation Alliance and the Prince William Wildflower Society will be hosting the **“Stop Mowing, Start Growing! Second Annual Native Plants Symposium for Beginners.”** This year we have a bigger venue at the Workforce Development Center on the Woodbridge Campus of Northern Virginia Community College. Native plant landscape designer John Magee is the keynote speaker, and we have a host of break-out sessions from which to choose. The content is intended for beginners so please encourage your neighbors, HOA board members, and friends to attend.

On February 23 we host native plant guru Doug Tallamy, pictured below, at the Manassas Park Community Center as part of our annual author event. Doug has a new book coming out at the beginning of February, *Nature's Best Hope*, and we will have copies for sale. This event is made possible by the generous contributions of our many co-sponsors: Prince William Master Gardeners and the Virginia Cooperative Extension, Audubon Society of Northern Virginia, Merrimac Farm Master Naturalists, Prince William Conservation Alliance, Magee Design, Native Plant Podcast, Native Plant Landscape Design Corp, and a private donor.

I am saddened by the recent resignation of Andrea Kinder as membership chair. She and her husband are leaving for Germany soon as he accepts a three-year assignment there. Thank you, Andrea, for your volunteer service, and please know that we will miss you. We wish you the best of luck and will look forward to your return in three years. In the meantime, we need a volunteer for the Membership Chair position as well as someone to assist Beverly Houston with refreshments.



Winter is here, but we can dream of spring.

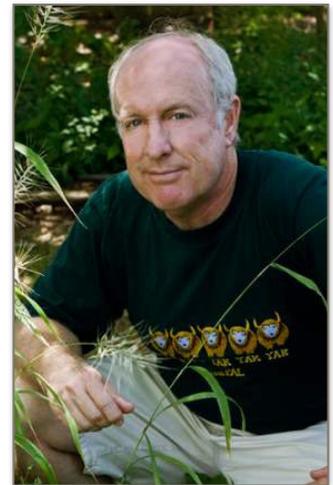
~ Nancy

## The Author: Doug Tallamy

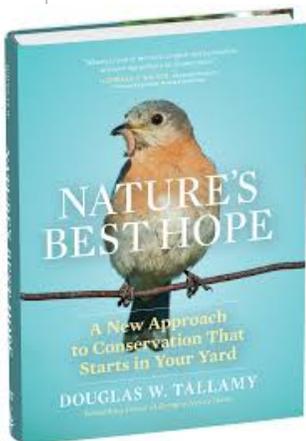
Photo: University of Delaware

**February's Author Lecture** this year will be given by renowned entomologist and ecologist Doug Tallamy. Dr. Tallamy will have his new book available for signing, *Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation that Starts in Your Yard*. (Timber Press, available February 4, 2020)

Doug Tallamy is a professor in the Department of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Delaware, where he has authored 95 research publications and has taught insect related courses for 39 years. Chief among his research goals is to better understand the many ways insects interact with plants and how such interactions determine the diversity of animal communities. His book *Bringing Nature Home* was awarded the 2008 Silver Medal by the Garden Writers' Association. *The Living Landscape*, co-authored with Rick Darke, was published in 2014. Among his awards are the Garden Club of America Margaret Douglas Medal for Conservation, the Tom Dodd, Jr. Award of Excellence, and the 2018 AHS B.Y. Morrison Communication Award.



## The Book: "Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation that Starts in Your Yard"



Editor's comments: Property owners have long held to the idea that their yards were theirs to do with as they saw fit, and the idea has long persisted that their gardens were for them to create and manage, often in many wildlife-unfriendly ways. Nature — the natural world — existed "somewhere else", away from them. The increasing development of the land for mega-farming, housing, and commercial development has reduced wildlife habitats all over the world to such a great extent that bird, insect, and mammal populations in nature have been dropping precipitously.

In his latest book Dr. Tallamy explores the origins of our mistrust of wild places, the evolution of our interaction with the world around us and why it has led to the destruction of vast areas of habitat. Then he puts forward concrete steps we can all take to be sponsors and responsible hosts — in our gardens, communities, towns and cities — to support the wildlife that in many places is vanishing before our eyes — indeed, in some places has vanished. We must learn to live *with* nature, not away from it, if we all are to survive. Dr. Tallamy proposes ways that will give Nature, and us, a best hope.

**Prince William Wildflower Society  
Meeting Minutes  
Thursday, November 7, 2019, 7:30 p.m.  
Bethel Lutheran Church, Manassas**

President Nancy Vehrs called the meeting to order and thanked those who brought refreshments: Libby Pemberton, Beverly Houston, Peggy Martin, Karen Waltman.

Nancy recognized Brenda Hallam, who is stepping down as one of two refreshments coordinators (along with Beverly Houston). Nancy asked if anyone is willing to volunteer to be a refreshments co-coordinator to let her know.

Nancy V. reported that not all the plant plugs were used during the November 8 planting session at the Dale City/I-95 northbound car rest area. She will overwinter the extras and will schedule another planting day in the Spring.

The January 2 PWWS meeting will be the annual members' slide show. If you want to show pictures you've taken of native plants in your yard or on your travels, please let Nancy V. know. [Leave a message at (703) 368-2898.]

Treasurer Valerie Kenyon Gaffney reported a balance of \$3,596.33 in checking and \$1,194 in savings.

The winter author event will be February 23 and will be held at the Manassas Park Community Center. Doug Tallamy will be the speaker, and his books will be for sale.

Silver Lake Park – On August 23 there was a meeting with Brendon Hanafin, Parks and Recreation Deputy Director, also the manager of Silver Lake Park, Nancy Vehrs and others from local environmental groups. In June there had been a Tough Mudder event at the park, and there was concern of damage. A tree planting was held Nov. 2.

Brigitte Hartke was thanked for the November/December *Wild News* publication.

The 2019 fundraiser for the Virginia Native Plant Society will provide seed money for publishing guides for Plant VA Natives.

Program: "Digitized Herbaria Open a New Chapter for Native Plant Research and Education for Virginia." Nancy V. introduced the speaker, Dr. Andrea Weeks, an Associate Professor in George Mason University's Department of Biology. Dr. Weeks is also Director of the Ted R. Bradley Herbarium.

Dr. Weeks explained how GMU was the recipient of a collection of 20,000 plant specimens from Professor

Robert Simpson, curator of the Lord Fairfax Community College Herbarium (LFCCCH). In 2017, Professor Simpson retired after more than 40 years at LFCC. He was a botany teacher and conducted field work in a seven-county region of northwestern Virginia that led to the "most comprehensive floristic record of this rapidly-changing region of Virginia."

Dr. Weeks thanked the Virginia Native Plant Society and the Virginia Master Naturalists for sponsoring the transfer of the LFCC Herbarium to the herbarium of GMU, for digitization and long-term curatorial care. With the grant, Dr. Weeks was able to hire four graduation students to help with the transfer of 62, 18-inch X 12-inch X 12-inch boxes containing 20,000 specimens. A botany master's student, along with other duties, also helped with the move and managed specimen decontamination: sequential batches of boxes were frozen at -80 degrees Celsius for 10 days to destroy any potential insect pests.

When the LFCC specimens are finally posted to the online database, all taxonomic names will be fully updated. Four undergraduate students have been hired to assist with this process using VNPS funds, in part. They will be trained in herbarium curation over the coming year.

In her talk, Dr. Weeks included pictures of students moving metal cabinets filled with specimen sheets, samples of the specimen sheets, and students documenting information on the sheets, a major undertaking. When added to the GMU herbarium collection, there will be about 80,000 specimens located together.

Our thanks to Dr. Weeks for reporting on this process of acquiring the LFCC herbarium for GMU's herbarium. It will be an important research resource for students in Northern Virginia, and online.

The following were given as door prizes: Mountain mint, Purple coneflower, *A Seed Is Sleepy* children's book, paper art ornament, *The Good Land: Native American and Early Colonial Food*.

In Attendance: Carol Thompson, Sandy Jeter, Valerie Kenyon Gaffney, Nancy Vehrs, Harry Glasgow, Lois Montgomery, Joyce Andrew, Tom Andrew, Karen Waltman, Annette Doktor, Sharon Figueroa, Janet Wheatcraft, Janis Stone, Jeanne Endrikat, Cathy Hindman, Peggy Martin, Brenda Hallam, Rick Stafford, Brian McDougal, Libby Pemberton, Bev Houston, Brigitte Hartke, Linda Mallery, Elaine Haug.



Karen Waltman, Secretary

# Events

## Please note:

For events not scheduled at the time this issue went to press, please continue to visit the PWWS web page: [vnps.org/princewilliamwildflowersociety/](http://vnps.org/princewilliamwildflowersociety/)

## January

**Wednesday, January 1, 10 am - 12 pm. First Day Walk at Manassas National Battlefield Park**, 6511 Sudley Road, Manassas. Meeting in the New York Monuments parking lot off Rt. 29 east of Groveton Road. Learn about nature and history. They will explore rarely-visited areas along Young's Branch and Chinn Ridge, covering 2 miles in 2 hours. Free, all ages welcome. Hosted by Prince William Conservation Alliance. RSVP to [alliance@pwconserve.org](mailto:alliance@pwconserve.org)

**Thursday January 2, 2020, 7:30-9:00 pm**  
Bethel Lutheran Evangelical Church  
**PWWS Member Slide Show Meeting**  
Members share their nature- and plant-related photos.

**Saturday, January 11, 8 to 11 am. Birding Banshee.**  
Whether a beginner or an experienced birder, you'll enjoy this bird walk at Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve, a 695-acre treasure in the heart of Loudoun County. This is a regular outing that takes place every month. Contact: Joe Coleman, (540) 554-2542

**Saturday, January 11, 10 am - 2 pm, Native Plant Seed Propagation, sponsored by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy.** Start native plants outside this winter by sowing seeds in recycled plastic containers. You can exchange ideas and discuss tricks of winter sowing for cold stratification, which is required by many native plants for germination. Free and open to public. The Gatehouse at Morven Park, 17638 Old Waterford Road, Leesburg. Register: <https://loudounwildlife.org/event/native-plant-seed-propagation/>

**Saturday, January 11, 2 pm, Adventures with Raptors.** Join wildlife rehabilitation and educator with *Secret Garden Bees and Birds*, Liz Dennison and Belinda Burwell, veterinarians in Boyce, VA, for an informative Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy program about raptors and their place in the natural world. After the program, personally visit, interact with and take photos with their ambassador birds. All are welcome. Venue: 22850 Brambleton Plaza, Brambleton, VA.

**Saturday, January 18, 10:30 - 11:30 am, Tales from the Virginia Woods with Brian Smith, hosted by Wild Birds Unlimited, Gainesville.** Enjoy Brian's magnificent bird photography as he presents **A Photographic Narrative.**

**Sunday, January 26, 8 am. Bird and Nature Walk at Merrimac Farm**, last Sunday of every month. Join us! We will look for birds as we travel through the uplands to the edge of the floodplain, covering a variety of habitats, including open fields and woodland edges. Everyone is

welcome. We meet at Merrimac Farm, Stone House, 15014 Deepwood Lane, Nokesville. Dress for the weather, bring binoculars and cameras. Info and RSVP, (703) 499-4954 or [alliance@pwconserve.org](mailto:alliance@pwconserve.org)

## February

**Saturday, February 8, 9 am - 3 pm at Northern Virginia Community College, Workforce Center, 2675 College Drive, Woodbridge VA. 2nd Annual Native Plants for Beginners Symposium.** Join us to learn how to create a beautiful yard, habitat for birds and pollinators, save money on fertilizer and pesticides, improve water quality, and curb erosion. Sponsored by Prince William County Watershed Management Branch, PW Conservation Alliance, Va. Cooperative Extension, Virginia Native Plant Society, and Plant NOVA Natives. Questions? [alliance@pwconserve.org](mailto:alliance@pwconserve.org) (703) 499-4954

**Sunday, February 23, 3 - 5 pm Manassas Park Community Center. February's Author Lecture** this year will be given by renowned entomologist and ecologist **Doug Tallamy**. Dr. Tallamy will have his new book available for signing, **Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation that Starts in Your Yard**. (Timber Press, available February 4, 2020)

### KEEPING PWWS SHIPSHAPE

*The PWWS board members meet once every other month, and it's usually smooth sailing. We always have a good time at the meetings, and it's a worthwhile, fulfilling feeling to help make decisions that ensure that our club hosts meetings with excellent programs and refreshments, a newsletter with botany articles, notice of upcoming events, communications, and other exciting opportunities to learn.*

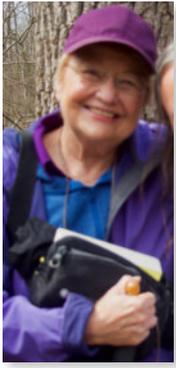
*Recently, the board has had to say goodbye to members who have been serving in various capacities but have found it necessary to resign; in the wake of their leaving and in order to stay the course in the PWWS, we really need some new energy infusion in the form of a few good volunteers to bring us up to full throttle. There are several chairmanship positions to fill so that we can function well and do all the things that make our organization such a good one.*



**Refreshments/Hospitality Chair:** *If you like to be in charge of refreshments, or if you can recruit and organize a group that can see that our refreshment table is well filled out at our meetings, welcome aboard!*

**Membership:** *If you can maintain membership lists and print out labels for the newsletter every other month. Don't miss the boat — welcome aboard!*

**Webmaster:** *Are you tech-savvy? Do you know how to maintain a website? By now you're getting our drift: We would love to welcome you on our board!*



## Skunk Cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*)

Reprinted from January-February 2014  
*Wild News* (Edited by Deanna High)

By Marion Lobstein, Botany Chair, Prince  
William Wildflower Society

The maroon and green hood of Skunk Cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*) is one of the first signs of early spring. In swamps, on stream banks, and in bogs along the East Coast, these leathery pointed cowls begin pushing through the snow or swamp "muck" as early as mid-February. If there is snow or ice present, you may notice melting patches as the sharp-pointed hoods begin to poke through the icy cover.

Skunk Cabbage, a perennial member of the Araceae or arum family, is found from Nova Scotia to Florida and west to Minnesota and Iowa. Jack-in-the-Pulpit, Green Dragon, Arrow Arum, and Golden Club are other members of this predominately tropical family native to our area. The scientific name of Skunk Cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*) is very appropriate: *Symplocarpus*, meaning compound fruit referring to the fruit structure; and *foetidus*, meaning fetid referring to the unpleasant smell of bruised or crushed plant parts. The smell has been described as a combination of skunk, putrid meat, and garlic odors. I

personally think the smell is reminiscent of rubber tires and is not that unpleasant.

The presence of crystals of calcium oxalate in the vegetative parts of Skunk Cabbage is typical of members of the arum family. These crystals cause a burning, peppery sensation if plant parts are eaten raw. This characteristic and the cabbage- or tobacco-like leaves and showy hood have given rise to other common names such as Stinking Cabbage, Swamp Cabbage, Parson-in-the-Pillory, and Polecat Weed. Thoreau referred to skunk cabbage as "Hermits of the Bog." Actual Skunk Cabbage flowers are numerous, small, and inconspicuous. They are imbedded in the spadix, a brownish-yellow oval structure surrounded by the leathery cowl-like pointed hood, the spathe. This spathe is the most visible part of the flower, correctly referred to as the inflorescence. The flowers on a single spadix are either male or female at any given time. Even though this family is a monocot one, the flower parts occur in 4s rather than the usual 3s. Both male and female flowers lack petals but do have fused sepals forming a calyx. Male flowers have four stamens; female flowers have a single ovary semi-buried in the spadix. The spathe or hood surrounding the spadix is formed from two fused leaves. Aerobic respiration, the same process by which we breakdown our food to obtain energy and maintain our body temperature, is the source of heat from the hood. The metabolic level of this process in Skunk Cabbage is comparable to that of a small shrew or hummingbird. Heat and other chemical processes, such as fermentation, which also occurs in the hood, result in the release of malodorous organic compounds such as amines, indoles, and skatole that mimic the smell of dung or carrion. The combination of heat and smell attracts thrips, carrion flies, and beetles that serve as the primary pollinators. The heat generated may be as high as 36 to 39oF above the surrounding air temperature. A constant temperature range of 70 to 72oF can be maintained inside the hood for two weeks or longer.



Long, close and middle views of Skunk Cabbage, credits — VNPS and Brigitte Hartke



*(Skunk Cabbage, continued)* The arum family of plants is the only one known to turn on an "internal furnace" to release disagreeable (to some human noses!) odors that attract pollinators. This phenomenon was recorded as early as the late 1700s by the French naturalist Lamarck. Insects attracted to a hooded inflorescence fly into a heated chamber with very slippery walls that will send them sliding to the area of the small flowers to either pick up pollen if male flowers are mature, or transfer pollen if the female flowers are receptive. Insects such as bees, though not potential pollinators, have been seen entering skunk cabbage hoods—perhaps to warm up on a chilly day! The buds of Skunk Cabbage inflorescences are formed in autumn—and may be visible then—but most appear in mid-February and continue to be visible through April. The fruit, resembling a dirty tennis ball, is a spongy mass up to five inches in diameter in which spherical seeds are imbedded. It develops after pollination and fertilization and is visible by autumn. Most of these seeds will germinate near the parent plant, but squirrels and other rodents acting as seed dispersers may gather and store seeds.



Large, cabbage-like leaves begin to appear like fat fingers by late spring, and persist through late spring and summer. They may reach one foot in width and are borne on 2 to 4-foot tall petioles. Unlike other monocots, the veins of the leaves are in a netted pattern rather than parallel. The vast rhizome and root system needed to secure the plant in the soft swamp muck makes transplanting very difficult. After the leaves disappear in late summer, the roots contract, drawing the rhizomes and shoot

buds under the ground or muck. When a seed germinates, its developing roots will pull the young plant deep underground, so that it may be 5 to 7 years before a first inflorescence is produced above ground. Once established, however, skunk cabbage is long-lived, with colonies surviving for up to a thousand years.

This early portent of spring historically has had a number of medicinal and edible uses. Extracts from the rhizomes and roots have purported diuretic, emetic, narcotic, stimulant, and antispasmodic properties. Various preparations have been used by various Indian tribes and/or herbalists to treat asthma and other respiratory ailments, epilepsy, tetanus, cramps, and spasms. An ointment made from dried powdered root has been used to treat ringworm, rheumatism, and skin irritations. Various Indian tribes used roots and leaves as a poultice to treat sores and swelling as well as to draw out thorns and stickers. The odor of crushed plant parts supposedly can be inhaled to relieve headaches. Young leaves have been parboiled with several water changes and eaten as greens as well as the rhizomes dried and eaten (this drying may take up to 6 to 7 months). False Hellebore

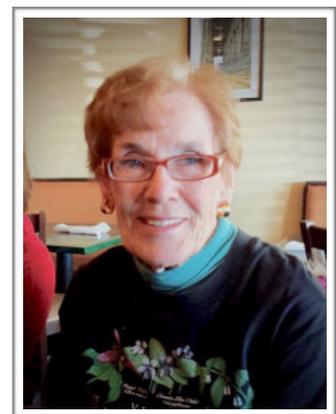
*(Veratrum viride)* often grows in the same swampy setting, vaguely resembles skunk cabbage, and if eaten may cause violent poisoning. In February, keep your eyes and nose open for this strange sign of the coming of spring. Take time to become acquainted with and enjoy one of the most unusual and fascinating early spring wildflowers! *(Photo: Recent rains have washed soil and leaves away from the roots of this skunk cabbage, allowing for a view of its root structure.)*

### Remembering Charter Member Helen Marie Hazlett Rawls

Helen, who recently turned 100 years of age, passed away on Friday, November 29, 2019 at Fox Trail Senior Living. She had been living in Front Royal.

Helen was a charter member of the Prince William Wild Flower Society, a certified Prince William Master Gardener, and had also been a member of the Bull Run Mountain Conservancy.

The photo of Helen was taken by Nancy Vehrs in 2015, while the board was attending a dinner before one of our general meetings. Good friend, Marion Lobstein recently helped her celebrate her 100th at a party given in her honor. As she has said, "Helen was a special person." She will be much missed.





## “Tired of Forever Mulching? The Word Among the Pros is Sedge”

by Brigitte Hartke

Over the summer of 2019 I had the occasion to visit Mt. Cuba Garden in Delaware, particularly their research areas. There, researchers are studying and experimenting with many kinds of native sedges and grasses. One of my goals on the trip was to see what the sedges looked like, and to find out whether they are good alternatives to mulch, flower beds or lawns. I read that George Coombes, a research horticulturist at Mt. Cuba has been putting some 80 species and varieties of sedges through a methodical three-year trial to determine their value for home gardeners. Coombes says, “There is a sedge out there for whatever issues you need to address.”

Coombes pointed out that you have to keep applying mulch, whereas with sedge, you plant it once and it's good to go. His study will try to identify varieties that can be used as a substitutes for lawns that struggle in the shade. These would need to be cut only once a year.

In a 2017 article in *The Washington Post* entitled “Sick of buying mulch for the garden? The pros have a different idea,” gardening writer Adrian Higgins reported on the fast-growing use of sedges as alternatives to mulch. “Sedges are grasslike plants that are green and tufty,” and Higgins says that they have become the hottest perennials on the market.

Sedges are generally used for shadier gardens, though there are varieties that will grow in full sun if watered properly. If you have a hot, dry spot, ornamental grasses will give a similar effect. Higgins wrote that sedges are good alternatives to ubiquitous and overused ground covers such as lirioppe, vinca, pachysandra and English ivy.

Higgins points out that there is another significant difference with sedges, making them better ecological choices — many provide sustenance to caterpillars, butterflies and other pollinators. For example, Pennsylvania sedge feeds as many as three dozen species of caterpillars. There are more than 180 species of sedges in Virginia alone. For constantly dry soil and in areas where tree roots abound, he recommended Appalachian sedge, bristle-bristle-leaves sedge, blue sedge or Texas sedge.

“If you are planting a multitude of sedges as a ground cover, living mulch or shade lawn, it pays to buy small plug plants, space them widely and let them grow together over two or three growing seasons.” (photo: In the bluebells of Cub Run)

### “Plants are Social Creatures”

Authors Thomas Rainer and Claudia West, in their book, *Planting in a Post-Wild World*, point out that ‘plants are the mulch’. They tell us that plants are gregarious and like to be crowded together, not separated as growing islands in an expanse of mulch. West says, “I think every gardener intuitively knows that plants should be the mulch, because we gardeners and landscape professionals are inspired by natural plant communities that we may see on a hike in a natural area. Very rarely do we see bare soil anywhere in natural, wild ecosystems.”

Thomas Rainer says to “ditch the mulch and use plants instead.” Bemoaning the American love affair with mulch, he says it is far better to cover bare garden soil with plants. Perennial ground covers discourage weeds better than mulch, and, once they become established, will require far less work than mulch, which breaks down and must be replenished or replaced. *Pictured, Thomas Rainer's garden in*



# Prince William Wildflower Society

A Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society  
P.O. Box 83, Manassas, Virginia 20108-0083



**Next Meeting: Thursday, January 2, 7:30 - 9:00 pm**  
**Annual Members' Slide Show**  
**Bethel Lutheran Church, Plantation Lane, Manassas, Virginia 20110**

## Prince William Wildflower Society Board of Directors

P.O. Box 83 - Manassas, VA 20108-0083

Chartered: January 10, 1983

Logo: *Mertensia virginica* - Virginia Bluebells

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