



PRINCE WILLIAM WILDFLOWER SOCIETY, A Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

## JANUARY MEETING

### Members Slide Program

Monday, January 17, 1994, 7:30 p.m.

**Bethel Lutheran Church, Plantation Lane & Sudley Road, Manassas, Va.**

Once again our January membership meeting will feature members showing slides of their wildflower-related activities over the past year. Marion Lobstein will show slides of her trip to Yellowstone National Park, and Nicky Staunton will share her trip to the Bruce Peninsula with us via slides. Members who don't have slides are invited to talk about their trips, activities, garden projects, etc. illustrated with or without snapshots.

Please call program chair, Nancy Herwig, 703-754-2328, to arrange for time on the program.

### Gardening & Landscaping Courses

**Gardening for Wildlife:** This year VNPS will again cooperate with the Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden to sponsor this workshop on March 19 at the University of Richmond. Topics will deal with creating natural landscapes, wildlife in formal gardens, habitat restoration, and wetland gardening. Members will receive a mailing about this program.

**Native Plants Wild in the Garden:** The Lahr Symposium will be held at the U.S. National Arboretum on Saturday, February 26, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Topics include wetland restoration, designing with natives, little-known native treasures, designs inspired by nature, and concurrent sessions dealing with several specific subjects. Cost is \$60.00. For a brochure call the arboretum at 202-475-4857.

### February Board Meeting

The February Board meeting will be held on the usual third Monday, the 21st, 7:30 p.m. at Bethel Lutheran Church, Manassas. Meetings are open to all members.

### Prince William Natural Resources Council

The Prince William Natural Resources Council has been established by a group of citizens concerned about improving the quality of public planning and development as they affect the county's environment. The council seeks a healthy balance of development for real economic growth while preserving the county's essential natural resources. For membership information write to PWNRC Membership, 12823 Mill Brook Ct., Woodbridge, VA 22192 or call 703-497-0506.

### Next Meeting

Our chapter March membership meeting will be on the third Monday, March 21, 7:30 p.m. at Bethel Lutheran Church, Manassas. Details in the next newsletter.

## Seedlings for Sale

The Prince William Soil and Water Conservation District is offering a package of hardwood seedlings this year in addition to the usual packages of evergreens. Call 703-361-1710 for information; orders must be placed by February 25.

## First Registry Site

A portion of James Long Park near Haymarket is our chapter's first registry site. Plants found here include closed gentian, cardinal flower, stiff aster, and curly head clematis. Chapter members Claudia Thompson-Deahl and Marion Lobstein worked to get the site registered. They would like to thank Jim Merriman and Rick Arterian of the Prince William Park Authority for their support in this project. Jim was one of Marion's students and called this special area to her attention. Steps are being taken to register Deep Cut Meadow at the Manassas National Battlefield Park site of blue hearts (*Buchnera americana*) a rare member of the Snapdragon family.

## Thanks to Annual Meeting Committee

Our chapter-hosted VNPS annual meeting committee received rave reviews from attending members. The success is due to hard work and good organization by co-chairs Nancy Herwig and Martha Slover, chapter president Nancy Vehrs, and committee chairs Marie Davis, Jeanne Endrikat, Marion Lobstein, Nicky Staunton, and Claudia Thompson-Deahl. In addition, the following volunteers deserve recognition: Jeanne Fowler, Bonnie Fulford, Phil and Frances Fower, and Loren Staunton.



## From the President NANCY VEHRS

Disney's America...it's a biggie. Prince William County's development potential has been generating a lot of attention lately. Our newspapers have been full of articles concerning their prospects for coming here. An equestrian center is planned for western Prince William, and while Legoland may have chosen California for now, it may also come here sometime in the future. Prince William County continues to grow, whether we like it or not. As a native plant organization, we strive to "conserve wild flowers and wild places," but political leaders must strive to find the delicate balance between total preservation and economic viability.

I urge everyone to follow the news on these developments. Projects like Disney's America could change our little county forever, in good ways as well as bad. Regardless of where you currently stand on the development issues, have an open mind, become informed citizens, and let your elected representatives know how you feel and why. You may also consider membership in the newly formed Prince William Natural Resources Council which promotes environmentally responsible growth. Additional information on this group can be found in this newsletter.

I was pleased to see such a large member turn-out for Ken Bass's talk in November. It showed that our members are interested in the interrelationship between our feathered friends and our native plants. This month we'll be treated to the delightful slides from the travels of fellow members Marion Lobstein and Nicky Staunton. If you have a topic which you would like to have addressed at one of our future meetings, please call Nancy Herwig, Education Chair, at 703-754-2328.

## WILD NEWS

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President, Nancy Vehrs, 368-2898

Editor, Nancy Arrington, 368-8431

Artist, Nicky Staunton, 368-9803

Deadline for the March-April issue is March 1, 1994.

## Wildlife Art Show

Fairfax County Park Authority's annual Wildlife Art & Photography Show will be held Saturday and Sunday, March 12 and 13, 1994 from 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Wakefield Park, Annandale. Wildlife artists, photographers, carvers and other artisans will exhibit and sell their original wildlife-theme works of art.



# Closed Gentian

(*Gentiana clausa*)

MARION LOBSTEIN

Associate Professor, Biology, NVCC

*Gentiana clausa*, commonly called the closed gentian, is a perennial member of the Gentianaceae or gentian family. This showy plant, found primarily in the piedmont and mountains of Virginia grows in wet meadows, by stream banks, and in rich woods. It can be seen in our area at James Long Park in the wet meadow area that is part of our chapter's first VNPS registry site. Along with many of the other gentian species, the closed gentian begins blooming in late summer and blooms well into October. The range of this species is from Maine to Maryland and Ohio and south into Virginia and the mountains of Tennessee and the Carolinas. The genus name *Gentiana* is for the King of Ilyria named Gentius who purportedly discovered the medicinal uses of Old World gentian species. The species *clausa* means "closed" and refers to the corolla of the flower being almost closed at the time of blooming. Other names for the closed gentian are blind gentian and bottle gentian. Other gentian species found in our area are the striped gentian (*G. villosa*) and the soapwort gentian (*G. saponaria*).

The blue to blue-violet flowers of closed gentian are one to one and a half inches in size with 4-5 sepals fused to form a green calyx, 4-5 petals fused to form a pleated corolla, 4-5 stamens (the same number as number of sepals and petals) attached to the corolla lobes in an alternating position, and a pistil with two styles. The flowers are borne in tight terminal clusters or in the axils of the opposite leaves and each group of flowers is subtended by a whorl of 4-6 leaves that form an involucre. The flowers have essentially no fragrance, but attract insect pollinators, primarily bumblebees that are strong enough to force their way into the virtually closed corolla. The bumblebee goes in head first, then must back out of the tightly pleated corolla. (I got to observe this amusing sight James Long Park when one of my wild-flower class students Jim Merriman, who works for Prince William Park Authority, first showed me the closed gentian population at this site.) The fruit that develops is a ovoid capsule with numerous small seeds each with a wing-like projection that assists in dispersal. The dried corolla remains around the maturing capsule seeds.

Each closed gentian plant ranges in size from one to two feet tall with opposite sessile leaves with entire margins. Each leaf is one to five inches long. Roots of these plants are thick and fleshy.

The medicinal uses of the closed gentian and other gentian species by American Indian tribes as well as in folk or herbal medicine are numerous. These medicinal uses (mainly of the root) included treating digestive system problems, stimulating appetite, increasing bile flow, treating rheumatism and gout, dealing with nervous diseases, breaking fevers, relieving menstrual distress, and even eliminating intestinal worms. At higher doses, vomiting may be induced.

The 1993 PWWS annual meeting was held at James Long Park and a walk through this new registry area featured the lovely closed gentian. If you were not able to be at the meeting and participate in the walk, next October visit the area and enjoy this beautiful species.

*Dear Friends,*

*You have no idea how good it felt to drive myself to the polls this year, considering that a year ago I had to vote an absentee ballot and needed help just to get to the bathroom. It's been quite a year, learning to walk again, then a summer of rehab to learn to use a brain that's not the one I was issued. I expect that for the rest of my life, I will classify events as "before the accident" or "after the accident." But in spite of a bionic hip that sets off security alarms (Do I look like somebody that would pack a side arm?) and epilepsy (not as scary as it sounds), I look and feel like me again. I was supposed to be a brain damaged cripple, and that may have turned out to be the case without the care and support of so many friends.*

*Thanks to everybody for all of your cards, calls, and prayers over this past year.*

*With love,  
Helen Walter*

## NATIVES FOR THE GARDEN

NANCY ARRINGTON  
Propagation Chairman



### Bottle Gentian

(*Gentiana andrewsii*)

Like most gentians, the closed gentian (*Gentiana clausa*) found at James Long Park in western Prince William County is difficult to cultivate. However, a similar species, the beautiful bottle gentian, (*G. andrewsii*), also called closed gentian, is easy to grow and is the species most commonly offered by nurseries.

Gentians are named for a second century B.C. king, Gentius, credited with discovery of the plants' medicinal properties, and *andrewsii* honors Henry C. Andrews, an early nineteenth century English botanical artist and engraver.

Bottle gentian's native range is Canada south through New England into the mountains of North Carolina. Although it is not listed in the current edition of the *Atlas of World Flora* it was documented in Augusta County in the second edition.

This hardy perennial forms a clump of leafy stems that are twelve to eighteen inches tall. Dark green two- to

three-inch long lanceolate leaves appear in whorls along the length of the stem. Clusters of inch-long, slender blue flowers that never open appear in the upper leaf axils in late August. A mature clump, two feet across and covered with hundreds of flowers that Hal Bruce called a "deep, true, soul-satisfying blue," is a very showy accent in the late summer garden during the lull before fall's burst of color.

In the wild bottle gentian grows in wet, sunny meadows and thickets, and along woodland streams. It is adaptable under cultivation and will grow well in neutral to slightly acid humus-rich soil that doesn't dry out. It will need two to four hours of sun to bloom well, and can take more sun as long as the soil stays moist. Marie Sperka recommends dividing and transplanting in the fall and says plants should never be moved after spring growth is a few inches tall.

Good garden companions include cardinal flower, turtlehead, culver's root (*Veronicastrum virginicum*) and, if the soil is wet enough, cinnamon and royal ferns. In my garden, a large clump of bottle gentian blooms with sweet autumn clematis and Japanese anemones — a beautiful combination in late August and early September.

Gentian seed needs a 90-day moist cold period for germination and can be sown in pots or flats and left outdoors through the winter.

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**Closed Gentian**  
(*Gentiana clausa*)

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