

WILD NEWS

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

Number 98-03

May-June, 1998

May Meeting

The next general membership meeting on Monday, May 18, 1998 at 7:30 p.m. at Bethel Lutheran Church will feature a program by Dr. Gabriela Chavarria, an entomologist and Assistant Director of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation on "Bee Biodiversity: The Forgotten Pollinators." The business meeting will follow the program. For further information call President Helen Walter at 703-330-9614.

Update on Nearby Nature

It has been a joy to see the Nearby Nature Workshops and Wildflower Walks off to such a terrific start! Longtime PWWS members are joining new friends through our mutual interest in exploring nature. Half the participants currently registered for workshops are members of VNPS. We welcome our new member through Nearby Nature, Kathleen Allen!

Marion Lobstein's Spring Wildflower Workshop gave everyone terminology and guidance in identifying spring wildflowers. The abundance of wildflowers at Manassas National

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Reminder: PWWS Plant Sale May 9

The 16th Annual Wildflower Plant sale will take place Saturday, May 9, 1998 from 9 a.m. - 12 noon in the parking lot of Bethel Lutheran Church, Plantation Lane and Sudley Road. This event serves as the major fundraiser for our Chapter. Support the Chapter and enhance your garden at the same time by buying plants at the sale.

It's not too late to volunteer to help at the sale either. Come to the church by 7:30 a.m. the morning of the sale and we'll find a job for you! For further information, please call Nancy Arrington at 703-368-8431 or Marie Davis at 703-361-1626.



From the President -
Helen Walter

We had spectacular weather Friday April 24 for the dedication of Nicky and Loren's trees at the Virginia State Arboretum. The Blandy Foundation and staff did a wonderful job setting it up and making it special. Old friends of the Staunton's came from all over the state, a wonderful gathering. So, next time you go to Blandy, be sure to visit the two *Quercus bicolors* with Nicky and Loren's names on them, located beside the ephemeral pond.

The perfect weather continued through the weekend for our garden tour, and thanks to *Washington Post* gardening editor Adrian Higgins' featuring it in that week's Home Section, we had the best turnout ever, with people actually coming from Maryland and D.C. Our gardens this year were well worth the trip. Special thanks to the Chiaritos, Jones, and Teels for opening their beautiful gardens to us and to all the volunteers who kept things running smoothly.

Our Nearby Nature workshops and walks are up and running, and some of them still have space available. Marion took her spring wildflower identification class to the Battlefield and taught them how to use Newcome's (Guide) to key out plants. Our wildflower of the year, columbine, was in glorious bloom for Nicky's walk.

We had a terrific program on Prince William Forest at our March meeting, for

those of you who missed it. It would take days to explore all the trails there, and when you're there, it's hard to believe that you're so close to I-95 and surrounded by development. It feels good just knowing it's there, so nearby, an oasis to all of us.

Helen

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Deadline for the July-August issue is July 1, 1998. Mail information to Nancy Vehrs at 8318 Highland St., Manassas, VA 20110-3671 or e-mail to nvehrs@ibm.net.

Garden Tours

Big thank you's to the hosts of this year's spring garden tours: the Teels, Chiaritos, Joneses. The gardens were gorgeous and the weather cooperated to bring out big crowds for the event.

If you know of a garden that would be a good candidate for next year's tour, or you would like to volunteer your own garden, please contact Marie Davis at 703-361-1626.

Green Spring Garden Day Plant Sale

Exciting plants and ideas for planting are plentiful at Green Spring's most popular annual event on May 16 from 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Vendors include the Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society with plenty of wildflowers. Designers and horticulturalists will answer questions and give advice. The historic manor house will be full of art and garden gifts. Fairfax County's Green Spring Gardens Park is located at 4603 Green Spring Road, Alexandria. For more information, call the special projects coordinator at 703-642-5173.

Plant Label Recycling Tip

Conservation Chair Gina Yurkonis shares this recycling tip: cut up used vinyl mini-blinds for use as plant labels. Simply cut

one end on an angle for easy insertion in the ground. For those of you who noticed the labels in the Chiarito garden, you saw that recycled plastic picnic knives also make good labels.

Plants Red List

The World Conservation Union (IUCN) recently released the *1997 IUCN Red List of Threatened Plants*, the first global analysis of the conservation status of the world's plants. The volume lists 33,798 species as globally threatened, comprising more than 12.5% of the world's 270,000 species. The New York Botanical Garden (718-817-8700) is distributing the IUCN Red List. For additional information contact Larry Morse at 703-841-5361 or lmorse@tnc.org or Shirley Keel at 703-841-2714 or at skeel@tnc.org.

Native Plants in the Landscape

The seventh annual "Native Plants in the Landscape" seminar at Millersville University near Lancaster, Pennsylvania is scheduled for June 11-13, 1998. Field trips, excellent speakers, an extensive plant sale, workshops, good food, and social gatherings are all included in the cost which ranges from \$125-\$245 depending on housing options. Contact the Department of Continuing Education at 717-872-3030.

Lorton Prison Grounds Walks

Want to spend a few hours behind the security fence at the D.C. Department of Corrections Facility in Lorton known as Lorton Reformatory? Elaine Haug reports that Kathleen Kust of the Potowmack Chapter will be leading walk and surveys on the grounds on weekends during the month of May. With the impending closure of the prison, this vast area, tentatively renamed "Laurel Hill," will be available for development. While there is talk of having the federal government transfer the land to Fairfax County for use as parkland, that may be an unrealistic dream. Nevertheless, VNPS members are inventorying the plants to determine what is on the property prior to any development.

Meet at the security building with the blue roof on Silverbrook Road at 10 a.m. on May 10, 17, 24, and 30. Walks continue until 2:00 p.m. Come and enjoy it while it's still wild. Members and guests are welcome. For directions or further information, contact Kathleen at 703-836-5868.



Wildflower Memories

As I pedaled my bicycle along the path near the creek I suddenly came upon a sea of blue, Virginia bluebells, as I later learned! Those blue flowers were a most enchanting sight for me; I had never seen anything like it. Only about 12 years old at the time, I was on one of my adventures, exploring the trails along Bull Run and Flat Branch one fine April day, alone and without my mother's permission.

I was anxious to share my special find with my younger sister, but because of weather or other circumstances, I couldn't take her there for a couple of weeks. I was excited to return to the scene, but I couldn't find it. "They must be around this bend," I knowingly told my sister, but they were not there. "It hadn't been a dream; they were real!" I said to myself. Alas, there were no bluebells and we had to return home defeated in our quest.

Years later I learned about Virginia bluebells and their ephemeral nature. I love the progression of spring with its succession of bloom periods, but I always mourn the passing of the enchanting bluebells.

-Nancy Vehrs

(Editor's Note: Please consider contributing a wildflower memory for an upcoming issue of the Wild News.)

Registry News

Elaine Haug, Registry Chair, reports that the staff of the Virginia Heritage have discovered more areas in the Manassas National Battlefield Park that have noteworthy habitats and plants. They will be working with her to add to our six registered locations. We'll keep you posted on the progress.

Blandy News

The State Arboretum, also known as "Blandy" will hold its 9th Annual Garden Fair on both Saturday and Sunday, May 9 and 10. This huge plant and garden supply sale will also feature workshops, live entertainment, games for children, and more. Check out Blandy's web site at: <http://minerva.acc.virginia.edu~blandy>.

As noted in the last issue of the *Wild News*, a work day on the Arboretum's native plant trail is planned for Saturday, May 23 from 9 a.m. until 2 p.m. PWWS members are cordially invited to help; tools will be available, or you can bring your own favorites. Beverages will be provided and a simple picnic lunch will be served. For more information, contact Mary Pockman at 703-356-7425, 7301 Hooking Rd., McLean, VA 22101, e-mail: pockman@alumni.princeton.edu.

Marion Lobstein will teach a three week Field Botany course (three credit hours through the University of Virginia) at

Blandy. Dates are June 22-26, June 29-July 2, and July 6-9. This course will cover basic principles of botany with emphasis on the classification, identification, and evolution of flowering plants. The course will integrate lecture and laboratory with an emphasis on field trip experience concentrating on identification and ecology of flowering plants of the Mid-Atlantic region. For additional information call 540-837-1758, x21, or Marion at 703-536-7150.

Directions to Blandy: From Manassas, take Route 66 west to north on Route 17. Turn left at the light to go west on Route 50. Blandy is four miles west of the Shenandoah River and is on the left side of the highway.

PEC Family Fair

The seventh annual Piedmont Environmental Council's Family Fair will be held at the Airlie Conference Center near Warrenton on July 5 from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. Contact the PEC at 540-347-1300 for further information.

Great Falls Wildflower Walk

Marion Lobstein will lead a wildflower walk at Great Falls Park, Virginia on May 17 from 10 a.m. until 12:30 p.m. Call her at 703-536-7150 for reservations.

(Nearby Nature from page one continued)

Battlefield Park provided plenty of choices for practicing our new skills in identifying family characteristic and using a key. The bluebells were at their peak, along with Dutchman's breeches and a carpet of spring beauties. We all had a wonderful time together.

Jim Waggener's Beyond Backyard Birds Workshop on May 2 was a welcome outing between periods of rain! Participants in this fully-attended workshop visited many different habitats at the Occoquan Bay Wildlife Refuge, making observations about the species of birds that frequent particular ecosystems. We observed greater yellowlegs along with a multitude of red-winged blackbirds in the wetlands. Its song identified the first yellow-breasted chat of the season, along with yellow-rumped, yellowthroat, and just plain yellow warblers! We were treated to the sight of a bald eagle, sighted in the upland meadow, who impressed all with its majestic flight. The appearance of a red fox trotting toward us in the upland meadow and seeing beavers lounging near their lodge extended our nature experience.

Nicky Staunton's Bluebells are Blooming Walk on April 18 missed the bluebells which were very early this year. Here, as in Marion's workshop, we found that the unusual weather had everything on an accelerated schedule. In attendance,

however, was the Wildflower of the year, *Aquilegia canadensis* - the charming wild columbine! We traveled up Bull Run through a variety of terrains, which made for a rich variety of wildflowers, including wild ginger. An increased amount of the invasive garlic mustard made everyone shudder. Debris in the shrubbery showed how recent storms had flooded the trail, an impressive sight. We were surprised to realize that in some places we would have been under water just a few weeks earlier.

Jim Waggener shared the observation that these workshops are a fine way of providing doorways into the integrated world of Nearby Nature. Our programs are exciting opportunities for a variety of curious people! Upcoming workshops include a discovery of the mysterious world of galls, leaf miners, and oak trees in Plant and Insect Relationships, led by Cliff Fairweather. The Grasses Workshop, led by Dr. Paul McCawley, will take a closer look at the diagnostic characteristics of the most common tribes of grasses in our area. The inclusion of both host and nectar plants make Butterfly and Plant Relationships, led by Alonso Abugattas, a good choice for both gardeners and naturalists . . . and all of us who are both! Call me at 490-0455 for information on these and other workshops. We look forward to seeing you!

- Kim Hosen
Education Chair

Spring Wildflowers - Seed and Fruit Dispersal

Marion Lobstein
Associate Professor of Biology,
Northern Virginia Community
College, Manassas Campus

Seed and fruit dispersal is another challenge faced by spring wildflowers of the deciduous woods. Many of these spring-blooming species have their fruits and/or seeds dispersed by animals as well as by wind or mechanical means. Many of the species that retain their leaves through the summer and have fleshy fruits that mature over the summer have those fruits eaten by animals and the seeds dispersed in the scats of these animals. Solomon's seal, false Solomon's seal, Jack-in-the-pulpit, and Mayapple are examples of the "summer-green" species whose fruits are eaten and seed dispersed in the scats of various mammals, birds, and even box turtles in the case of Mayapple. The seeds of species dispersed by these animals may be dispersed away from parent plant populations and also receive nutrients from the scats in which they are deposited.

However, up to 30% of the spring-blooming wildflowers in the deciduous forest have their seeds dispersed

by ants, a phenomenon known as myrmecochory. Many of the spring blooming species (including hepatica, bloodroot, twinleaf, Dutchman's breeches, squirrel corn, wild ginger, trilliums, troutlilies, the violets, spring beauty) are ant-dispersed. This phenomenon of myrmecochory was first recognized in the literature in 1897 by Charles Robertson. Scientific literature searches this author has done as well as her personal observations reveal that there are more than 90 species in 25 families in the Northern Virginia area that employ this method of seed dispersal.

The seeds of ant-dispersed species have an elaiosome, a fleshy fat-filled body or structure on the seed surface. The seed coat is usually very hard in these species. The ants are thought to be attracted to the volatile diglycerides and triglycerides (forms of lipids or fats) given off by the elaiosomes. Ants then carry the seeds back towards their nest where they either chew off the elaiosome themselves or they may take it inside the nest to provide food for the emerging larvae.

Many seeds do not make it back to the nest, but may be taken far enough away from the parent plant to avoid competition for limited resources (the "parents" sending the "kids" away from home), and/or to minimize the chances of the whole seed being eaten and destroyed by rodents or

other seed eaters. (When animals eat fleshy fruits, the seeds usually pass whole through the animal's digestive tract rather than individual seeds being chewed up.) Seeds taken to ant nests perhaps also benefit from the higher levels of nitrogen, phosphorus, and other nutrients that may have accumulated there. Some researchers have hypothesized that the removal of the elaiosome may stimulate germination and limited research done by this author and

Dr. Larry Rockwood at George Mason University support this idea for at least one species (bloodroot) that was tested.

In our area, most of the ant-dispersed species are spring-blooming deciduous forest species, but cultivated species such as daffodils, snowdrops, grape hyacinths, pansies, and even some rushes, sedges, and grasses have ant-dispersed seeds.

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exp. 10/98

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☛ May Meeting: Monday, May 18, 1998, Bethel Lutheran Church, Manassas