

WILD NEWS

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

Number 98-06

November-December, 1998

NOVEMBER 16 MEETING AND CRAFT SALE

The next general membership meeting is Monday, November 16, 1998 at 7:30 p.m. at Bethel Lutheran Church in Manassas. Jennifer Kujawski from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Center at the National Plant Materials Center in Beltsville Maryland will present a program on "*Collecting and Growing Locally Gathered Native Plant Seed for Use in Site Restoration.*" She will use examples from federal park lands projects on which she has worked.

This meeting also features the annual PWWS craft sale. Members are encouraged to bring crafts to sell to fellow members at this meeting. This is a great opportunity to get a jump on holiday shopping; bring your checkbooks! Crafters, please come early to set up before the meeting.

For further information call President Gina Yurkonis at 540-347-1027 or Vice-President Nancy Arrington at 703-368-8431.

CONWAY ROBINSON MEMORIAL FOREST EDUCATIONAL CENTER

Planning for the new Forest Stewardship Education Center in Gainesville at Conway Robinson Memorial Forest (CRMF) has moved to the second stage of planning due to funds being made available by Virginia's legislators. The small educational facility will have an amphitheatre and enhanced existing trails through the 580 acre forest. CRMF is home for many native plants, one of which is on the Virginia list of rare plants. The rare Prickly Ash is the host tree for the Giant Swallowtail butterfly.

-Nicky Staunton

VISIT NEWEST REFUGE

The Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge on Dawson Beach Road in Woodbridge was dedicated recently and is open weekends. If you go for a two-mile hike there now, you will see birds, winter wetlands and the winter shoreline. Hours: Saturday noon-5 p.m., Sunday 7:30 a.m.-3:00 p.m.



From the President - Gina Yurkonis

Well Hello,

If we haven't met yet, I am the lucky person who's supposed to try to fill Helen Walter's presidential shoes. Or, at least show up in my own shoes and keep the dance going. I hope we will all see the Chapter grow in the next few years and get to know each other and our environment better. Helen will still be around and I am blessed with very experienced officers and board.

At our latest board meeting, Nicky Staunton officially announced the new home office of VNPS to be housed at Blandy Farm (also the Virginia State Arboretum, near Winchester). We will no longer be only a P.O. Box number, but will have a real room with real people using it. Some details are on page five. My husband, Tom, and I made a trip out there this past weekend. The Ginkgos were glorious as were the Maples and Sweet Gum. However, the Winged Euonymous also blazed hot pink as it popped up everywhere - between trees, along the road, under other shrubs. The dangers of invasive aliens is a relatively new concept to many people and Blandy needs volunteers for its native plant work days. Any skill level is appreciated. Call 540-837-1758 for more info.

As a resident of Fauquier County

(Piedmont Chapter), I originally joined the Virginia Native Plant Society with a joint membership in both chapters. The bookkeeping proved to be too much, but I did learn a lot and have made it a practice to keep up with other chapters and some other states' native plant societies over the internet. Having lived in Illinois and Pennsylvania, I left a part of me in each and find it interesting to see what is going on in the native plant fields there. (I even gave a California NPS membership to a friend as a housewarming gift.) If you are a transplant to
(continued on page three)

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Deadline for the Jan-Feb issue is Jan. 1, 1999. Mail information to Nancy Vehrs at 8318 Highland St., Manassas, VA 20110-3671 or e-mail to nvehrs@ibm.net.

(President's Column continued)

this area, I encourage you to also support the native plant society "back home," wherever that is. "Knowledge is never wasted" - I forget who said that.

And, although the soil is something like a layer of concrete covering talc right now, check out local nurseries. You know fall is an excellent time to plant in our area and wow, what sales you can find! (I recently saw a six foot *Franklinia alata* for \$12). If you have a place you can water, why not add a native tree or shrub bed this fall? If you can't, just drop in and mention to the owner or buyer how much you appreciate their carrying natives and hope they will get more in the spring. I look forward to seeing you all at the November meeting - don't forget the craft sale!

-Gina

HAVE FERNS?

Several members are searching for sources of ferns. If you own land with a variety of ferns and would be willing to supply a specimen set, please call Nicky Staunton at 703-368-9803. A second request is based on a request for two or three specimens of Bracken fern which is so common the nurseries do not carry it. Both are requested for use in home native plant gardens.

ASK THE MEMBERSHIP CHAIR

Question: I received a notice from the VNPS that my membership was expiring. Do I need to renew my membership by sending dues to both PWWS and VNPS? Answer: No, paying dues to either the VNPS or PWWS is an automatic renewal to both and entitles members to all benefits of membership including subscriptions to both the *VNPS Bulletin* and the *PWWS Wild News*. If you sent separate payments, your membership will be extended for two years instead of one.

Q: How are my dues distributed between the VNPS and PWWS? A: Currently 60% goes to the VNPS and 40% is retained by PWWS.

Q: Can I renew for more than one year? A: Certainly! Your expiration date will be extended accordingly; check your mailing label for the correct date.

Q: Can I belong to more than one chapter of the VNPS? A: Yes. You can have a primary membership in one chapter and a secondary membership in others. Secondary memberships cost \$5 each and the entire sum is forwarded to the secondary chapter by the VNPS.

Q: How many members are in PWWS? A: Including secondary memberships, there are currently 137 memberships, 22 of which are family memberships.

MANASSAS NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD PARK MEADOWS NEED HELP

Natural Resource Manager Brian Gorsira at Manassas Battlefield has been gathering natural resource data at the Park. PWWS members have the opportunity to help in the management of the plants in several ways.

An inventory of rare and threatened native plants reveals several species and a yearly visit to them will occur during their blooming season for the purpose of reporting on their status: number of plants, number of blooming plants, health of habitat, and other data.

The other plan would involve control of invasive alien plants. Japanese Stilt grass is the most important one on the Battlefield currently. If you would be willing to participate in a modest program attempting to bring it under control, your help would make a difference.

Some restoration of native plants along Young's Branch is planned and if you like to plant little trees or help with seeding native warm season grasses, you are needed.

Helen Walter (330-9614), Nicky Staunton (368-9803), and Kim Hosen (490-0455) will be designing a work plan to offer you in 1999. Meanwhile, if you have any questions, please call them.

-Nicky Staunton

SHOWCASE YOUR GARDEN

PWWS members with native plant gardens are being sought for the annual garden tours the last weekend in April, 1999. As you do your fall clean up and plantings, please consider offering your garden for these educational tours. Contact Marie Davis at 361-1626 for further information.

BUDGET APPROVED

At the annual PWWS meeting in September, the membership unanimously approved the budget for fiscal year 1999, November 1, 1998-October 31, 1999, as submitted by treasurer Marie Davis.

RECEIPTS:

Dues	\$	800
Plant Sale		1,700
Miscellaneous		300
TOTAL		\$2,800

DISBURSEMENTS:

Postage	\$	750
Printing		800
Gifts and Honoraria		250
Programs and Speakers		150
Plant Sale Expenses		150
Sales Tax		125
Education		475
Wildflower Week		100

TOTAL \$2,800

VNPS BLANDY OFFICE IS INITIATED

The VNPS state records are being moved gradually to storage at Blandy Experimental Farm in Boyce, Virginia. Mail is beginning to arrive there at:

Virginia Native Plant Society
Blandy Experimental Farm
Rt. 2, Box 214
Boyce, VA 22620

VNPS also has its own phone: 1-540-837-1600.

Until the next steps, setting up a workstation with computer and securing an internet carrier and part-time help, volunteers will handle the inquiries by phone and by mail. The Board of Directors named John Fry of the Piedmont Chapter to represent VNPS as necessary.

The facilities are also available for VNPS chapter and state functions if reservations are made with Judy Masi of Blandy.

The office space is a gift to VNPS by Blandy Experimental Farm through the director, Dr. Michael Bowers. Our own Marion Lobstein teaches botany classes at Blandy and is currently on their Board of Directors. The Virginia Native Plant Trail is sponsored by the Friends of the Arboretum and made possible by contributions added to the basic gift by Nancy Larrick Crosby. Many VNPS

members have been doing work on the trail and the trail is the home for trees honoring Mary Painter and John and Phoebe White. The two *Quercus bicolor* trees given by VNPS members for Nicky and Loren Staunton are located in another area of Blandy near a lake.

If you have not yet been to Blandy, put a visit at the top of your outings list and begin your visit using the kiosk at the parking lot; there will be a panel devoted to the Virginia Native Plant Society.

-Nicky Staunton
VNPS Conservation Chair

FREE EVENTS IN FAIRFAX

Fairfax County Parks offer the following free events, but reservations are required:

Nov. 15: "Sparrow Stalk," Huntley Meadows Visitors Center, 7:30-10:00 a.m., 703-768-2525.

Nov. 21: "How to Build a Rock Garden," Green Spring Gardens Park, 11:00-12:30 p.m., 703-642-5173.

Dec. 27, "Searching for Wildlife Clues," Eleanor C. Lawrence Park, 10:00-11:30 a.m., 703-631-0013.

Jan. 3, "Holiday Resolution Trail Hike", Eleanor C. Lawrence Park, 1:00-2:30 p.m., 703-631-0013.

Conservation of Christmas Plants: Handle with Care

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

(Note: This article is based on a reprint of a *Wild News* article by Marion Lobstein.)

Many of our native plants are traditionally used as Christmas decorations. Conservation and safety should be kept in mind when using these plants. Some have been over-collected such as species of clubmosses (ground pine and running cedar), Christmas fern, and holly. Other plants such as holly and mistletoe produce berries that are poisonous and may pose a health threat, especially to small children.

The clubmosses (*Lycopodium* spp.) are in a family (*Lycopodiaceae*) of non-flowering vascular plants. The spore-producing structures called strobili are finger-like structures which develop on top of the individual plants and may be mistaken for a flower. This time of year many species are releasing spores from these structures. Later, the spores will germinate to form the true reproductive stage of the plant. The strobili with spores were used for old-fashioned

powder-flash photography. This material, called lycopodium powder, ignites easily producing a brilliant flash. Both *Lycopodium obscurum*, called ground pine because it resembles miniature pine trees, and *L. Clayatum* known as running cedar (individual plants are connected by rhizomes) have been collected to the point these species may be locally rare. The Christmas fern (*Polystichium acrostichoides*), family *Polypodiaceae*, is another non-flowering plant that may be locally over-collected for Christmas decorating. This handsome fern is our most common fern. It derives its common name from the fact it is green at Christmas and also the leaflets of the compound leaf supposedly resemble a Christmas stocking or Santa in his sled with reindeer (use your imagination!). This plant is more common than clubmoss species but still should be collected only if locally abundant.

The hollies (*Ilex* spp.) are sometimes over-collected resulting in damage to the tree or shrub. The hollies are in the *Aquifoliaceae* family, a true flowering plant family. The small, inconspicuous green flowers bloom in summer and are usually separate male and female flowers borne on separate plants (a condition known as dioecious or two households). The fruit is the lovely red berry (actually a drupe) that is prized for Christmas decorating. The most popular native holly is the

American holly (*Ilex opaca*) with the shiny evergreen sharp-pointed leaves that are familiar to us all as a Christmas symbol. American holly grows to 90 feet tall with a straight trunk and lovely gray bark. In our area trees this size are seldom seen though the species does compete well in a mixed deciduous forest. Over-collecting of holly can be especially damaging to young trees. Of course, only female flower-bearing trees will have berries.

The other species of holly, less frequently used in Christmas decorating, is the colorful *Ilex verticillata*, a deciduous shrub known as winterberry or black alder. Its leafless branches with whorls of red berries make a colorful addition to Christmas arrangements. Again, over collecting may damage individual plants. Berries from holly species are eaten by birds which are important in dispersing seeds of these species. However, holly berries may be poisonous to humans, especially small children.

Mistletoe, the "kissing plant," so popular at Christmas has a better known reputation for toxic berries. The evergreen plant with thick, leathery green leaves and lovely white waxy berries can make small children very ill, or even be fatal if several berries are consumed by a small child. Mistletoe (*Phoradendron flavescens*) is a strange flowering plant that is parasitic (but still photosynthetic with green leaves) in the

upper limbs of deciduous trees. Birds eat the sticky berries, formed by small inconspicuous green flowers, and often disperse the seeds by wiping beaks on the bark of tree limbs to remove the sticky seeds. In the winter, it is easy to see a mass of mistletoe in the upper limbs of trees where birds have inadvertently planted the seeds.

As the title of this article suggests, our traditional Christmas plants should be "handled with care" by using them sparingly and by being aware of potentially dangerous leaves and fruits. If conservation and safety are kept in mind, plants can add much to a colorful Christmas.

Update from Marion: Since this basic article was published in *Wild News* over a dozen years ago, the conservation efforts of PWWS and other chapters of VNPS to inform nurserymen of the concerns over collecting of clubmoss species for Christmas decorations have been successful in raising awareness of this problem. Hopefully this conservation message will continue to make a difference in the survival of this special group of plants. If you would like a list of Northern Virginia ferns, visit my Web page: (<http://www.mnsinc.com/mblobst>) and look for the link to checklists, then to the fern checklist. Other checklists will be added in the future.

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 **Next Meeting: Monday, November 16, 1998, Bethel Lutheran Church in Manassas.**

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