

# WILD NEWS

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

Number 00-01

January-February, 2000

## JANUARY 17 MEETING

The next general membership meeting is Monday, January 17, 2000, at 7:30 p.m. at Bethel Lutheran Church in Manassas. Members are invited to bring slides of their nature-related travels to share with fellow members. Diane Flaherty may present slides from recent trips to Belize (see Sep-Oct 99 issue of *Wild News*) and Italy, Gina Yurkonis will share slides from her spring trip to Texas, and Warren Ryder and Nancy Vehrs plan to show slides of their August trip to Colorado and Wyoming. Call Program Chair Charles Smith at 703-361-5125 if you plan to present slides so he may coordinate the evening's program.

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

## NEXT MEETING

Mark your calendar for the March 20 membership meeting. Garden writer and native plant expert Cole Burrell will speak on gardening with native plants. Burrell, a founding member of the VNPS and a former curator of native plants at the National Arboretum, returned to Virginia after gardening for several years in Minnesota. He now resides near Charlottesville and is a sought-after speaker. Because of his popularity, PWWS may move the meeting to a larger room in another facility. Watch for meeting details in the next edition of *Wild News*.

## Gardening in Northern Virginia: an Ecological Framework

*[Editor's Note: The following article was originally printed in the Fall 1999 edition of Gardenline, the newsletter published jointly by Green Spring Gardens Park and Friends of Green Spring (FROGS), and is being reprinted by permission. Green Spring Gardens Park is administered by the Fairfax County Park Authority. The author is manager of the park.]*

Good gardens are rooted in their surroundings, literally and figuratively. Some are sympathetic to the local environment while others offer a bold counterpoint. Whichever garden you choose to create, the more you know about the local plant communities, climate, and physiography, the better equipped you will be to fashion a successful garden design, grow healthier plants, and reduce the time you spend maintaining your garden.

This article will briefly discuss succession and the role of herbaceous plants in colonizing open land. Succession is a process by which a series of plant communities compete with and replace one another until a natural stopping point is reached. This stopping point is called the climax community. The climax community is in a state of equilibrium with the larger environment and won't change unless there is some form of environmental disturbance.

Why is this process of interest to gardeners? First, a familiarity with succession will help you understand why we have unwanted plants invading our gardens. We call these colonizers "weeds" - ecologists call these colonizers "pioneers." Second, it will help you understand  
(continued on page four)



## From the President - Gina Yurkonis

Hello, I hope everyone had a wonderful holiday season and not one member gets the flu - or brings it to the meeting. I usually go semi-dormant in winter, but a rather disturbing event has come to my attention. Am I the only one disturbed?

I was amused the last time I was in our local DMV office by an entire wall covered with samples of the various license plate designs available. Some are rather artistic: the cardinal, the butterfly. Some tell of the driver's association or cause: firemen, university alumni, Humane Society. So, I was thrilled when I heard there would be a new license plate design out for Virginia - the "Wildflower" plate. That would sure make my old truck look snazzy. But, the design is out and (I'm crushed) the plate features a spray of bachelor's buttons, Queen Anne's lace, and plains coreopsis! With so many gorgeous, native wildflowers here in Virginia, why show introduced (some might say "weedy") species under the heading Virginia Wildflowers? The plate was designed by VDOT and Pat Brewster, Chair of the Virginia Federation of Garden Clubs. After the first 1,000 plates are purchased, \$15 of each \$25 fee will go to Operation Wildflower - VDOT's roadside planting program. We can only hope they don't invest it in the illustrated species.

Anyone interested in the plate, or maybe writing a nice letter, can contact VDOT Environmental Division, Wildflower Specialty License Plate, 1401 E. Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23219. Maybe we can convince them of a nice trillium, lady slipper, and bluebell design? See you in January - bring those slides.

- Gina



## Summer Internship Opportunities

Huntley Meadows Park in southeastern Fairfax County is offering two 11-week internships for college students and recent graduates. March 1 is the application deadline.

The naturalist internship position provides training in environmental education and nature center operation. The resource management internship provides experience in wildlife habitat enhancement and research. Call 703-768-2525 for details on how to apply.

**WILD NEWS** is published six times a year by the Prince William Wildflower Society, a Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society, P.O. Box 83, Manassas, VA 20108-0083. Permission is given to use material with credit to source. VNPS home page: <http://www.vnps.org>.

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Deadline for the March-April issue is March 1, 2000. Mail information to Nancy Vehrs at 8318 Highland St., Manassas, VA 20110-3671 or e-mail to [nvehrs@attglobal.net](mailto:nvehrs@attglobal.net).

## Nearby Nature - Winter Woody Plant Identification

The Nearby Nature series offers the following two workshops on winter woody plant identification with William S. Sipple at the Accotink Bay Wildlife Refuge:

**Part One - Classroom Section, Jan. 30, 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.** This workshop involves an overview of recognizable plant morphological characteristics relating to buds, bud and bundle scars, stipule scars, twigs, pith, bark, armature and persistent fruits useful for winter identification of woody plants. Illustrations and live specimens will be used. A brief review of diagnostic plant keys is also included. Registration info below; fee \$30.

**Part Two - Field Section, Feb. 13, 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.** Participants have the opportunity to reinforce plant identification skills. Individual species/genera will be pointed out and discussed, along with specific habitat characteristics. Participants will key out or otherwise identify select species in small groups or individually. Registration information following; fee \$30.

Sign up now for either or both sections of this exciting workshop!

### Recommended Resources:

10x hand lens

*Fruit and Twig Key to Trees and Shrubs*, by William Harlow

*A Field Guide to Trees and Shrubs*, by George A. Petrides

*The Tree Identification Book*, by George W.D. Symonds

*The Shrub Identification Book*, by George W.D. Symonds

*Winter Botany*, by William Trelease

*A Guide to Nature in Winter*, by Donald W. Stokes

Registration required. Please send your name, address, telephone & email address with fee(s) to Nature's Wonder World, PO Box 6029, Woodbridge, VA 22195-6029. For further information, call 703-490-0455 or e-mail kim@natureswonderworld.org

Nearby Nature Workshops are sponsored by the Prince William Wildflower Society, Prince William Natural Resources Council, and Nature's Wonder World, with support from Wetland Studies and Solutions.

## Our Living Landscape Symposium

Hillscape Symposium 2000 presents "Our Living Landscape," a day devoted to environmental stewardship, on Saturday, March 4, 2000, 8:30 a.m. - 4 p.m., at the Hill School in Middleburg. The four speakers are:

- Janet Marinelli, Director of Publishing, Brooklyn Botanic Garden, and author, *Stalking the Wild Amaranth: Gardening in the Age of Extinction*
- John W. Fitzpatrick, Director, Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, and co-author, *Neotropical Birds: Ecology and Conservation*
- Angela Overy, Director, Denver Botanic Garden, and author, *Sex in Your Garden*
- C. Ritchie Bell, founding director of the North Carolina Botanic Garden and botany professor, University of North Carolina

Registration is \$65. A Kidscape 2000 is also being offered for \$35. For more information, call the Loudoun Tourism Council at 800-752-6118 or The Hill School at 540-687-6150.



(continued from cover page) that a garden is not a climax community. It is not in equilibrium with the environment and, in order to maintain it, you need to expend energy in the form of weed pulling, planting, fertilizing, and irrigating.

What does succession look like? Succession is taking place all around us. Walk through any abandoned field and you will see it in process. Highway embankments are an excellent place to see succession in action. In our area, it is safe to say that land is either forested or inexorably moving through the stages of succession that will result in its being reforested.

A cleared plot of land will be colonized in its first growing season by herbaceous plants. These herbaceous plants - grasses, asters, and other weeds - dominate the early stages of succession. The ascendant weeds (i.e. biggest and/or most abundant) would be plants such as crabgrass (*Digitaria sanguinalis*) and horseweed (*Erigeron canadensis*). Other weeds such as chickweed (*Stellaria media*), henbit (*Lamium amplexicaule*), and fescue (*Festuca* spp.) may be abundant if the land has been cultivated. In addition, a whole range of weeds - up to 30 different kinds - would probably be found on a typical plot. These would range from pokeweed (*Phytolacca americana*), a large perennial, to ragweed (*Ambrosia* spp.), an indicator of poor soil. Tucked among these weeds, waiting in the wings as it were, are the successors to this weed patch. It is common at this stage, for example, to see woody plants such as cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) and cherry (*Prunus serotina*) beginning to germinate. Broomsedge (*Andropogon* spp.) may also begin to grow at this stage, but will take a few growing seasons before it is noticeable.

In its second growing season, a plot of land will come to be dominated by plants in the aster family. Fleabane (*Erigeron annuus*) and heath aster (*Aster pilosus*) are common dominants, but they may share the site with plants such as ambrosia and Queen Anne's lace (*Daucus carota*). Some of the so-called invasive species, such as multiflora rose (*Rosa multiflora*) and

honeysuckle (*Lonicera* spp.), might begin to appear. At this point, the plant community is ready for a transition. The woody plants, such as cedar and cherry, and grasses, such as broomsedge, are ready to wrest dominance from the asters and other weeds. This growing season will have allowed the broomsedge to produce a seed crop and will have given the woody plants an opportunity to establish themselves.

Asters do not seem to grow well in close proximity to broomsedge. Perhaps it is the competition for water. Regardless, in the third growing season, as broomsedge comes to dominate, a new group of plants called the goldenrods (*Solidago* spp.) make their appearance. Goldenrods clothe the sides of our highways and abandoned fields with their golden yellow color - they also herald the end of the herbaceous dominance of a plot of land. Broomsedge and goldenrods may engage in a tug of war with asters for many years depending on the growing conditions, but by the fifth year, meter-high woody plants will begin peeking out of the grasses.

Take the opportunity to look at some abandoned fields. You will see asters, goldenrods, broomsedge, cedars, and cherries all competing with one another in the tug-of-war we call succession. Think about how this process relates to your garden. It should give you a new appreciation for those weeds you battle with through the growing season. For additional information about succession and our local plant communities, there are two excellent books currently in print:

*Finding Wildflowers in the Washington-Baltimore Area* by Cristol Fleming, Marion Blois Lobstein, and Barbara Tufty. The Johns Hopkins University Press (1975).

*Field Guide to the Piedmont: The Natural Habitats of America's Most Lived-In Region, from New York City to Montgomery, Alabama* by Michael A. Godfrey. University of North Carolina Press (1997).

- Chris Strand

## November Meeting Minutes

PWWS President Gina Yurkonis opened the evening with an introduction of the speaker, Sharon Gorham-Roller, a clinical herbalist. Sharon recently moved to Virginia from Colorado and has opened an herbal health business in the area. She showed slides of various medicinal plants and explained how they can be used for health purposes. One of the plants she discussed was echinacea, familiar to many gardeners as purple coneflower. She gave instructions for creating a tincture of echinacea.

### To Prepare Tincture

Collect flowers or roots in the fall. If using the roots, clean off dirt and allow to dry. Chop the flowers or roots in a blender. Combine with vodka (at least 70% alcohol content), 1 ounce of root to 2 ounces of alcohol. Let sit for two weeks. Strain through muslin and squeeze hard for the last drops (contain the most concentrate). A dose is 20 to 25 drops every 2 hours at the onset of flu or cold.

During the refreshment break, members and friends browsed through the handicrafts available for sale. Also available were the new VNPS T-shirts, which are black with a large circle of native plants on the front. They are proving very popular and will be available for sale at the January general meeting.

The business meeting was short. A reminder was given of the work session Saturday, November 20, to put the Rose Garden at Ben Lomond Manor House to sleep for the winter, mulching being the major activity. Gina indicated that even though it is months away, we need to begin thinking about the May Plant Sale. Extra plant containers can be brought to Nancy Vehrs.

-Diane Flaherty, Secretary

## New Journal Covers Native Plant Conservation

Native Plants Journal provides a forum for dispersing practical information about planting and growing North American native plants for the purposes of conservation, restoration, reforestation, landscaping, highway corridors, etc.

The first year is free, and can be obtained at: <http://www.its.uidaho.edu/nativeplants/>.

## Audubon Naturalist Society Water Quality Workshops

Advanced Registration Required. To register, or for more information, call Cliff Fairweather at the ANS Webb Sanctuary in Clifton, Va. at 703-803-8400; e-mail

[Cliff@AudubonNaturalist.Org](mailto:Cliff@AudubonNaturalist.Org).

You'll receive a written confirmation with directions, what to bring, etc. about 1-2 weeks before the workshop. All workshops are free.

### Macroinvertebrate Identification I (order level)

Section 1: Sun., Feb. 13 (1:00-3:00 p.m.)

Classroom

Section 2: Sat., Mar. 11 (10:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.)

Field

Sec. 1 - Webb Sanctuary

Sec. 2 - Manassas National Battlefield Park

### Macroinvertebrate Identification II (family level)

1:00-3:30 p.m., all sections

Experienced Monitors or by Permission of Instructor Only

Mayflies, Sun. Jan. 23

Caddisflies, Sun., Feb. 6

Beetles & True Flies, Sun., Feb. 27

Manassas National Battlefield Park

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## Water Quality Workshops (Continued from previous page)

### Introduction to Water Quality Monitoring

Wed., Jan. 19 (7:00 - 8:30 p.m.)

Through a slide show and discussion, this workshop will explore stream ecology and how you can help check the health of our local streams. Participants will also take a look at some live critters used as indicators of water quality. Bull Run Unitarian Universalist Church, 9400 Main St., Manassas

### Protocol Practicum

Sun., April 16 (1:00-3:00 p.m.)

Webb Sanctuary

### Introduction to Habitat Assessment

Sun., April 2 (1-4 p.m.)

Webb Sanctuary and nearby stream sites

### Macroinvertebrate ID Review & Quiz

Section 1: Sun., Mar. 26 (1:00-3:30 p.m.)

Section 2: Thurs., Apr. 6 (6:30-9:00 p.m.)

Sec. 1 Location in Centreville-Manassas area to be announced

Sec. 2 Clifton

## Volunteer at Blandy

The newsletter of the Friends of the State Arboretum at Blandy, *Arbor Vitae*, announces that there is Volunteer Orientation on January 22, 29, and February 5 from 9 a.m. - noon. All dates are Saturdays. The orientation gives the history of the State Arboretum of Virginia and Blandy Experimental Farm, the operation of the facility by staff and volunteers, and the arrangement of the plant collections.

Volunteers share planning events like the Garden Fair, Arbor-Fest and Holiday Workshops. They work with staff to plan and maintain plant collections, assist with events and programs, manage and work in Our Shop. They volunteer as

docents for group tours. Other instruction will be given to volunteers at later dates. Docents will lead tours for adults and children. Docent training is six consecutive sessions beginning March 30, a Thursday, from 9 a.m. to noon.

To volunteer or for more information, call Mary Olien at 540-837-1758, ext.21 or e-mail: meo9r@virginia.edu

## November Day

Travelling along I-66 west from Manassas, the autumn foliage was dazzling, brilliant jewel colored leaves of amber, carnelian, amethyst, and emerald were holding on. Overhead, the sky was clear blue with a variety of clouds hovering over the mountain skyline before slowly moving on. Following two weekend days nursing a "cough and sneeze malady," the trip to our [VNPS] office at Blandy was exhilarating.

There was more to enjoy that day, however. After delivering mail to Jennifer from the VNPS Annandale post office box and on my way to the car, I mixed in with children from Fauquier County who were on a field trip to their State Arboretum. The elementary grade classes were in groups of four or five children with one adult.

Each had a page in their hands and in groups were visiting different areas of the Arboretum. A small group in front of one of the planting areas was working on locating specific plants and as I passed, a student was musing, "Virginia sweetspire," and looking around, "Hmmm - this plant fits the description." I wondered if this was a botanical scavenger hunt by truly inspired students.

The gifts of the day were so many, the next moment found me wondering when the next set of classes for volunteers would be scheduled. Virginia's countryside was breathtakingly beautiful, the children were eager and the Arboretum has an educational program. Maybe there would be a way to make room in my schedule to be a volunteer.

-Nicky Staunton



# HEPATICA

**Marion Lobstein**

**Associate Professor of Biology  
Northern Virginia Community  
College-Manassas Campus**

Hepatica (*Hepatica americana*) is one of the earliest signs of spring. Only skunk cabbage, harbinger-of-spring, and a few undramatic mustards or speedwells bloom before hepatica. In protected areas, hepatica's lovely white, pink, or lavender flowers may begin unfurling from fuzzy buds in late February while other stands may continue blooming into April. Hepatica's habitat is dry deciduous woods and its range is from southeastern Canada down to northern Florida and west to Iowa and Missouri. This delicate perennial member of the buttercup or crowfoot family Ranunculaceae is often found in protected areas sheltered by a tree trunk or a rock on a sunny hillside. *H. americana*, round-lobed hepatica, is the more common species in our area and it can withstand fairly acid soil conditions whereas the less common *H. acutiloba*, sharp-lobed hepatica, prefers less acid soil. Sharp-lobed hepatica is more common in counties to the west of Prince William County.

Hepatica, also known as liverwort or liverleaf, gets both its genus epithet *Hepatica*, derived from the Greek word for liver, and its common names from the liver-like shape of its trilobed leaves. *Americana* means American and *acutiloba* sharp-lobed.

The 1/2 to 3/4" solitary flowers develop from four to six inch-tall scapes or flowering stems. The five to twelve (usually five or six) variously colored "petals" are not what they seem at first glance. These "petals" are actually a calyx of petaloid sepals; there are no petals! To further confuse the wildflower enthusiast, the three small green appendages behind the colored calyx are not sepals, but are bracts or reduced leaves. The stamens are quite numerous as are the separate

pistils or carpels. Both stamens and carpels are arranged in a spiral pattern characteristic of the buttercup family. The variation in calyx color is probably due to a combination of genetic variations and soil acidity differences.

Individual hepatica flowers may or may not have a delicate fragrance reminiscent of sweet violets. Flowers of genus do not produce nectar but may be pollinated by various wild bees or fly species attracted by the fragrance, the disk-like shape of the flowers (that resemble other nectar producers such as spring beauty), and by being one of the first species to bloom. If pollination does not occur after four to six days, self-fertilization may take place. Following fertilization, each carpel develops into a slender fruit called an achene. Attached to each seed is a fat-saturated body called an elaiosome. Ants are attracted to these elaiosomes and serve as the seed dispersers (see May 97 article on myrmecochory). This explains a solitary clump of hepaticas growing in a notch of an old tree trunk or in the crevice of a rock.



Unlike most other deciduous woods spring wildflowers, the leaves of hepatica persist throughout the year. They become thicker and more mottled (or even solid reddish-purple) over the course of the year. These older leaves, admittedly a bit bedraggled after a rough winter, are present at blooming time, but wither away as new leaves appear. The plant hairs or "fuzz" that cover the unfurling young leaves as well as the stems and flower buds are found only on the undersides of the mature leaf. In a very

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picturesque description, Neltie Blanchan, in her 1923 book *Wildflowers Worth Knowing*, wrote "... even under the snow itself bravely blooms the delicate hepatica, wrapped in fuzzy furs as if to protect its stems and nodding buds from cold." Individual plants have rhizomes with a fibrous root system that allows hepatica to thrive on shallow soils and to withstand summer droughts.

In Europe other species of this genus were used to treat liver ailments based on the idea known as the "doctrine of signatures" which was proposed by herbalists in the 1500's. According to this idea, plant parts resembling an afflicted human part or organ could be used to treat that ailment. A tannin extract of the liver-shaped leaves was used to treat liver ailments. Such treatment persisted in Europe and in America into the last century.

While hepatica is no longer used to treat liver ailments, however, the first sighting of its exquisitely delicate flowers is an excellent "spring tonic" for the winter blahs and an assurance that spring cannot be far away!

#### February Board Meeting

The PWWS Board will hold its spring planning meeting on February 21 at 7:30 p.m. at Bethel Lutheran Church in Manassas. For more info, call Gina Yurkonis at 540-347-1027.

## Prince William Forest Park Ranger Programs

Prince William Forest Park offers ranger programs on Saturdays and Sundays. One of particular interest to PWWS members is entitled *Plants and Animals in Winter*, scheduled for Sunday, January 23, from 1:30-4:30 at the Visitor Center. Programs are free, but there is a park entrance fee of \$4. For further information call 703-221-7181.

## "Gardening . . . American Style" at the Maymont Flower and Garden Show

Celebrate a new century of "Gardening . . . American Style" at the Maymont Flower and Garden Show at the Richmond Centre February 17-20. Garden exhibits, a garden marketplace, and expert speakers combine for an inspiring garden event in the middle of winter. The VNPS's Pocahontas Chapter will offer a booth. Admission is \$10 in advance, \$12 at the door, and \$18 for a 2-day superpass. Call the Maymont Foundation at 804-358-7166 for a free brochure or for further information. Visit the Maymont website at [www.maymont.org](http://www.maymont.org).

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A Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society  
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exp. 10/00



**January Meeting: 7:30 p.m., Monday, Jan. 17, Bethel Lutheran Church  
"Member Slide Show"**

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