



WILD NEWS

Prince William Wildflower Society, A Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

Number 2004-06

November-December 2004

NOV 15 MEETING

PWWS Vice-President Martha Slover will present *What's under your feet? The Geology of Virginia* at the November 15 general membership meeting.

The place we call Virginia has an ancient history going back at least 1.8 billion years. This history is written in the rocks: their type, their structure, and where they are found on the land. This presentation will help you read this history as you travel around the state.

The presentation will also cut through some of the jargon that pops up when geologists congregate. Just as non-botanists wonder what a superior or inferior ovary is, non-geologists hear "metagraywacke showing facies changes" and don't understand the excitement.

Some Virginia rock was once part of Europe, some part of Africa. The maps that you will see at the presentation illustrate the many similarities between those rocks and ours that support this idea. A major mountain range once existed right over our heads. Its evidence lies in part in the schist under our feet, the stuff that turns to orange clay in the soil. Come see samples and maps that show the extent of that mountain range. The serpentine and soapstone that forces road workers and excavators in parts of Fairfax County to wear breathing masks (protection against asbestos) is from remnants of an earlier "Atlantic" Ocean, now called the Tethys Sea (we don't know what the trilobites called it).

Rocks can tell us so much. Come learn more on Monday, November 15. You will not only see a slide presentation, but also get to handle samples of local rocks and fossils and locate your house on a geologic map of this area.

Martha has a life-long interest in geology. As a child she searched for Herkimer "diamonds" (quartz crystals with points at both ends) in the gravels of Northwest Branch in Maryland and sharks teeth at Calvert Cliffs. She followed this interest with a BS in geology/geophysics from Virginia Tech, where her first field geology professor (in 1980) told her class that they had been brainwashed in the modern theory of plate tectonics. Since then she has been teaching and learning about rocks and geology both formally and informally. Numerous field trips around the state and the country have led to an extensive rock collection, a small portion of which she will bring to the meeting to illustrate geologic principles.

The meeting, which is open to the general public, will be held on the usual third Monday of the month, November 15, at 7:30 p.m. at Bethel Lutheran Church, corner of Sudley Road/Rt. 234 and Plantation Lane in Manassas.

For more information, contact President Charles Smith at 703-361-5125.

LOOKING AHEAD

The annual member slide show is on tap for the next regular membership meeting on Monday, January 17, 2005, at 7:30 p.m. at Bethel Lutheran Church in Manassas. Members are encouraged to share slides or digital images of nature-related scenes from their travels or gardens. Contact President Charles Smith at 703-361-5125 if you can contribute to the program.



From the President - Charles Smith

Dryocopus pileatus, that is the scientific name for the pileated woodpecker. This is one of the most spectacular of our resident birds: crow-sized, mostly black with stripes of white in the head, neck, and wings and the impressive bright red crest. The pileated also has a call that has been compared to a lunatic laugh. The pileated woodpecker is usually encountered in flight or alighting on a tree trunk to peck away looking mostly for insects, other arthropods, slugs, berries, and maybe the occasional small lizard or snake. (Most animals refuse to be confined to a strict diet and will eat things that opportunity places in their path.) In mid-October I had the opportunity to have an incomplete view of a pileated woodpecker and it was very revealing.

I made my route take me through Manassas Battlefield, which is always a refreshing break from Northern Virginia traffic. I had about 20 minutes to stop and hike, so I entered a field system with a wooded stream corridor running down the middle. There was a flock of at least one thousand starlings moving from tree cluster to tree cluster. Cardinals, blue jays, cedar waxwings, song sparrows, and Carolina wrens were all very active. I was focused on a mixed flock of chickadees, titmice, yellow-rumped warblers, and ruby-crowned kinglets – especially the kinglets – when the pileated woodpecker flew in.

Instead of going to a trunk, which is typically more exposed, the woodpecker landed on the limb of an oak which was mostly obscured by leaves. It stayed on that limb for several minutes. I never saw the head, which is what most of us focus on – the fiery crest, massive bill, bright eye and stripes. I viewed the bird's lower half. I found that this bird was not so much black but dark gray with some small streaks of brown – maybe a young bird. I watched the woodpecker's powerful tail which it uses as a prop to brace it as it holds on or pushes off to move its feet. I saw flashes of the white stripes in the wings. And then there were the

legs and feet.

The woodpecker has powerful legs to grab onto a tree and propel it along the trunk. The part that fascinated me the most was the feet. As where most birds have three toes on the front of the foot and one opposing toe on the back, woodpeckers have two toes in the front and two in the back. The toes splay outward in an X pattern. This is what allows the woodpecker to grip the vertical and inclined surfaces while it pecks away looking for food and excavating cavities to raise young. The woodpecker I was watching had rough, gray lower legs and feet.

Woodpeckers have many specialized body parts: reinforced brain sack to absorb shock, heavy-duty muscles in the upper body to allow the pecking action, reinforced bones in the head, and a heavy bill with a long barbed tongue to slip into crevices and pull out food, the strong tail. But I identify most with those powerful, x-patterned feet.

I left my little encounter thankful for the obscured view. It prevented me from fixating on the impressive head of the pileated woodpecker, and made me focus on the equally impressive but less observed features of this wonderful bird.

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VNPS home page: <http://www.vnps.org>.

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Deadline for the November-December issue is January 1, 2005. Mail information to Nancy Vehrs at 8318 Highland St., Manassas, VA 20110-3671 or send email to nvehrs@attglobal.net.

September Meeting Minutes

Members and guests of the Prince William Wildflower Society (PWWS) met on September 26, 2004, at James Long Park, Haymarket, Virginia for the annual potluck picnic followed by the annual meeting. It was a pleasant afternoon to enjoy all the delicious dishes, in a beautiful setting, and to welcome the youngest PWWSer, 10-month-old Thomas Yurkonis.

President Charles Smith called the annual meeting to order at 2:30 p.m. The first order of business was the election of officers. Leo Stoltz moved to accept the slate of officers as presented by the nominating committee. Bonnie Fulford-Nahas seconded the motion. By unanimous voice vote, the following slate was approved: President – Charles Smith, Vice-President-Martha Slover, Treasurer- Diane Flaherty, Secretary-Charlotte Cochard.

The next order of business was the 2005 budget. Martha Slover moved to accept the budget as proposed by Treasurer Diane Flaherty and published in the September-October 2004 issue of *Wild News*. Linda Stoltz seconded the motion. During the discussion, Tiana Camfiord proposed that the chapter consider sending the newsletter via email as a cost-saving measure. Nancy Vehrs, newsletter editor, reminded the members that the newsletter is posted to the VNPS website. The consensus of those present was that members still enjoy receiving the newsletter via the mail. Charles clarified that the interest income from maturing CDs (the matching fund from an anonymous donor) is being reinvested and is not reflected as revenue in the annual operating budget. That fund must remain invested for another five years. A plan for its use will be developed in the future. The motion to accept the 2005 budget was accepted on a voice vote.

Charles reminded the members that the VNPS Annual Meeting is October 2 in Charlottesville, VA. Several PWWS members plan to attend.

Charles announced that Bonnie Fulford-Nahas volunteered to fill the Education Chair position

and introduced Bonnie. She is currently the Acting Director of the Prince William Clean Community Council and sees many ways to merge her interests.

Vice President Martha Slover reported that she will attend the next VNPS Board meeting on October 3, 2004.

Membership Chair Nancy Vehrs reported the current roster has approximately 115 members. Nancy also announced that after many years as the *Wild News* editor, she is ready to turn over the newsletter to a new editor. Charles reminded members how important the positions of newsletter editor and program chair are to the chapter and asked the members to consider thoughtfully if they can serve in one of these positions.

Marion Lobstein announced that the *Flora of Virginia* Project is progressing well with over 400 illustrations now completed. During her sabbatical, Marion completed over 100 species descriptions. 2010 is the scheduled publication date. Marion also announced that she was honored to be interviewed for an article in the March 2005 issue of *Southern Living* (Mid-Atlantic edition). Another of Marion's projects, the NOVA –Manassas campus wildflower garden, is in need of attention. She encourages student volunteers to work in the garden, but all are invited to help.

Charles announced that the county gardens at Ben Lomond and at Rippon Lodge need volunteers to improve those gardens.

Tiana announced that Windy Hill Plant Farm has a large inventory of native plants left this season. Windy Hill is open through October.

The November meeting program will be presented by Martha Slover. The topic is Virginia geology. Program ideas for future meetings are needed. One suggestion was: identifying and controlling invasives.

Leo Stoltz moved to adjourn the meeting, and Linda Stoltz seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 3 p.m.

Attractive door prizes obtained from the

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National Wildlife Federation by Joann Krumviede were won by Tiana Camfiord, Helen Walter, Amy Hamilton, and Linda Stoltz.

A small group of hardy souls started on a short walk to the VNPS Registry site to spot the closed gentian (*Gentiana clausa*) and wound up enjoying a bit longer jaunt along a bridle path and trail through the park's wooded areas.

*Respectfully submitted,
Charlotte Cochard, Secretary*

Attendees: Tiana Camfiord, Charlotte Cochard, Jeanne Endrikat, Jeanne and Stan Fowler, Bonnie Fulford-Nahas, Amy Hamilton, William Hendrickson, Marion Lobstein, Wendy Pierce, Helen Rawls, Martha Slover, Charles, Effie, and Harry Smith, Leo Stoltz, Linda Stoltz, Nancy Vehrs, Helen Walter, Gina Yurkonis

New Editor Sought

Though I found my tenure rewarding, after serving as your editor for seven years, I would like to step down. PWWS needs some new faces to support the officers and board. I hope to make for a smooth transition. If you would like to know more about what is involved, please give me a call at 703-368-2898 or send an email to me at nvehrs@attglobal.net.

- Nancy Vehrs



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
Presentation Available

Marianne Mooney of the Potowmack Chapter recently reported that a PDF version of the Virginia Natural Heritage Program (VANHP) Powerpoint presentation entitled Vegetation Ecology of the Potomac Gorge is now available for online viewing or downloading at: <http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/dnh/nchome.htm>.

This presentation is a detailed and lavishly illustrated treatment of the natural communities and unusual environmental gradients on the Virginia side of the Potomac River west of Washington, D.C. The current version was presented by VANHP ecologist Gary Fleming at the Oct 5 meeting of the Botanical Society of Washington. A previous version was presented at the Virginia Native Plant Society's (VNPS) 2004 Biodiversity Workshop at the Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden in Richmond, and at the April 8 meeting of the Potowmack Chapter of VNPS. PLEASE NOTE : The presentation is large and will take approximately 1.5 hours to download on a typical 56k phone line connection. Cable modems will be much faster.

Potowmack Chapter Meeting

November 11: Green Spring Gardens Park, 7:30 p.m. Program on Oak Hybridization presented by Alan Whittemore.

 **Next Meeting: 7:30 p.m., Monday, November 15, Bethel Lutheran Church, Manassas**
"What's Under Your Feet -- The Geology of Virginia"

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