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WILD NEWS

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

Number 2005-01

January-February 2005

JANUARY 17 MEETING

It's time for the annual member slide show program to get everyone yearning for spring as we enter the cold winter season. With slides going the way of LPs (remember those?), and the rapid growth of digital images, perhaps we need a more modern name for this program. Nevertheless, a slide projector will be available for anyone with actual slides, plus a computer with digital projector will be available for members to share their electronic images of the natural world.

Kathy and Don Ehrenberger plan to show photographs from their cross country trip this past year. Martha Slover will share pictures from Florida and Virginia, and Nicky Staunton will present photos from her wildflower treks in Virginia as well as Canada. Others may also contribute to the program.

The meeting, which is open to the general public, will be held on the usual third Monday of the month, January 17, 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 next regular membership meeting is scheduled for Monday, March 21, at 7:30 p.m. at Bethel Lutheran Church in Manassas with a possible program on bees. Contact President and Program Chair Charles Smith at 703-361-5125 for more information.

APPEAL FROM THE NEW EDUCATION CHAIR

Happy New Year to all! I don't know about you, but this unseasonably warm weather has me itching to dig.

Please help me to be a productive Education Chair for our chapter. I know there are members who are willing to give talks and are doing so now. I plan to prepare an inventory of sorts as to who likes to do presentations and on what particular topics. Also, I hope to track numbers and locations of the presentations because this type of documentation is useful when publicizing our group. It would also serve a purpose if we choose to apply for grant money to fund special projects.

The Prince William Wildflower Society will be listed in a resource guide being prepared for Prince William County Schools by a group I work with known as Local Environmental Education Partners (LEEP). Our Spring Garden Tour and Plant Sale will also be listed in the LEEP 2005 calendar which is distributed to the schools as well.

I am all ears for your suggestions! We have loads of talent among our members. What do you think about an e-mail group where we can ask questions or swap plants? Please contact me with feedback and suggestions at pawsitive.bfn@verizon.net or 703-361-7409.

- Bonnie Fulford-Nahas



From the President - Charles Smith

I hope that this message finds everyone well in the new year. Just as with each new year, we all look forward to a prosperous, healthy year in which fortune will smile on us and we will find new self-discipline but also enjoy life a bit more.

I don't think that when setting the modern calendar it was any accident that the new year was placed in the middle of winter. Placed at the end of the lunar cycle following the winter solstice (which coincided with the celebrations of Saturnalia and later Christmas), this is the time when humans more tied to the cycles of nature recognized that the days would be getting longer and the seeds of rebirth and new growth had been sown.

For me one of my resolutions for this new year is to make more time to be outside. I changed jobs in the last year, and it is ironic that although the new job is focused on natural resource management, I spend more time inside than I ever have before. I really became aware of this recently when I was emailing folks who are going to be monitoring certain bird species as indicators of environmental health. Knowledge of what these birds look like, how they sound, where they live, and how they act is all critical to really observing them and using those observations to draw any conclusions. But to get that knowledge, you need to put in what I call "dirt time"- time outside observing nature. It made me think of how perishable knowledge can be. In this case, absence makes the understanding decrease.

So I thought of one project to inflict upon my children that will help increase outdoor time and improve our knowledge. I was hiking on the Blue Trail near Bull Run Marina one morning in December when I startled a couple of squirrels in some hemlock trees. The squirrels just didn't act like gray squirrels, and they would not let themselves be observed. My suspicion is that they were red squirrels whose numbers have significantly decreased in our region. Red squirrels

require conifers to thrive, and the hemlocks are declining statewide due primarily to the woolly adelgid insect blight. So the light bulb went on: I will force my children to accompany me periodically to observe both the hemlocks and the potential red squirrels. That way we can all learn something new, and the kids will be able to complain justifiably that dad made them go - everyone will be happy.

I wish everyone as much luck in coming up with good resolutions for 2005. I hope to see you at the January meeting for our annual membership slide show.

- Charles

New Editor Sought

We're still seeking a new editor for *Wild News*. If you can volunteer your services, or if you would like to know more about what is involved, please contact Nancy Vehrs at 703-368-2898, an email nvehrs@attglobal.net.

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

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

November Meeting Minutes

The Prince William Wildflower Society (PWWS) met on November 15, 2004, at Bethel Lutheran Church, Manassas, Virginia. President Charles Smith welcomed everyone and introduced a special guest, VNPS President Sally Anderson. Sally took a few minutes to explain to the members the annual VNPS fundraising campaign and the specific project selected for this year's drive. VNPS will make a \$10,000 gift to the Center for Plant Conservation to sponsor a particular rare native plant. The plant is the *Ptilimnium nodosum* (Harpparella), very rare in Virginia, but found in Aquia Creek in Stafford County. Sally invited everyone to look at the poster describing the plant on display at the meeting. All VNPS members will receive a fundraising letter asking them to support this endeavor. Last year, the annual fundraising campaign yielded \$8000 from just 10% of the membership, so the VNPS Board is looking forward to a good response to this campaign.

The program for the evening was presented by PWWS Vice President, Martha Slover. Martha confessed that she has had a life-long passion for rocks and loves to share that passion with others. She teaches courses for George Mason University and relishes opportunities to give learners hands-on experiences to increase their knowledge of geology. During her presentation, Martha used many examples of rock types found in Virginia and explained that rocks give us a history of the earth and evidence of what was happening on earth when the rock was formed. She emphasized that the three basic assumptions to remember about geology are: no rock is accidental; processes today are similar to processes from the past; and the older rocks lie underneath younger rocks. Martha recommended three books for amateur geologists in this area: *Fossil Collecting in the Mid Atlantic States*, *Maryland's Geology*, and *Roadside Geology of Virginia*.

Following the presentation, Charles made several announcements. The PWWS Chapter donated \$1000 to the *Flora of Virginia* Project

and the check was presented to Flora enthusiasts Marion Lobstein and Nicky Staunton. The January membership meeting will include the annual members "slide" show. Charles will submit the chapter's annual report to VNPS. Look for an announcement in the mail regarding the VNPS Annual Workshop, February 26, 2005, in Richmond.

The members adjourned to enjoy refreshments and conversation and congratulated the door prize winners: Mary Sherman, Jeanne Endrikat, Nancy Vehrs, and Don Ehrenberger.

*Respectfully submitted,
Charlotte Cochard, Secretary*

Attendees: Sally Anderson, Nancy Arrington, Phyllis and Paul Boyd, Tiana Camfiord, Charlotte Cochard, Toni Crouch, Kathy and Don Ehrenberger, Jeanne Endrikat, Diane and Rick Flaherty, Jeanne Fowler, Amy Hamilton, Maggie Hart, Elaine Haug, Marion Lobstein, Wendy Pierce, Mary Sherman, Martha Slover, Charles Smith, Nicky Staunton, Nancy Vehrs, Helen Walter, Karen Waltman

Cyndi's Catalog of Gardening

This catalog is obviously the work of an enthusiast, it's very well-annotated, and seems to be ad-free. The address is <http://www.gardenlist.com/>. The front page has links to lists of catalogs in several categories, from Aquatic to Wildflowers. The front page also lists links to more general catalogs (ornamental, Canadian, outside North America, etc.) On the right of the front page are links to garden-relevant content, including links to information on specific plants, critter advice, and regional advice.

When you pick a category, you'll get a list of companies with their postal addresses (sometimes there are Web site links as well.) In addition to addresses and phone numbers, listings may contain information on pricing, quality, service, and variety.

There's a huge amount of information here, carefully organized and frequently updated. Nicely, nicely done.

- Diane Flaherty

Maymont Flower Show

The VNPS will have a booth at the Maymont Show. The dates are February 24-27 (Thursday-Sunday) 2005. The hours are Thursday-Saturday 9 a.m. - 8 p.m. and Sunday 9 a.m. - 6 p.m. There is also a Wednesday evening preview party 6:30-9:30 p.m.

The shifts are as follow: Thursday-Saturday 9 a.m.-noon, noon - 3 p.m., 3 - 5:30 p.m. and 5:30-8 p.m. Sunday shifts are: 9 a.m. - noon, noon - 3 p.m. and 3-5:30 p.m. Two workers are needed for each shift. Maymont requires that at least one person be present at the booth at all times.

Take down will begin at 6 p.m. on Sunday evening and anyone who wants to help is welcome. The same applies to set up, but we have not been assigned a time yet. If anyone is interested in helping with that, please contact me for the details.

All volunteers will receive a pass to the show (worth \$12 and which allows the worker free transportation from the Diamond, the lighted and, during the Maymont Show, secure parking lot at the Richmond Braves Baseball Diamond.) I have used this service for many years and it makes parking and getting to and from the show MUCH less expensive (free) than parking in the adjacent parking building and the busses run regularly at about 15-20 minute intervals. Without a pass, the bus costs \$3 round trip. Therefore, what I am offering the volunteer is free admission, parking, and round trip parking transport for three hours or less of VNPS dedicated time.

At this time, all shifts have at least one vacancy except the Friday 9 a.m.-12 noon and Friday noon-3 p.m. They are filled. Because I will have to mail out the passes and any relevant information to the volunteers after I receive it from the Maymont Foundation, I need mailing addresses and phone numbers (just in case). Please contact me 804-741-7838 or Daune@Poklis.org. For info about the show, see www.maymont.org/events/flower_show.asp.

-Daune Poklis, Pocahontas Chapter

VNPS Winter Workshop on Biodiversity February 26

Make it a weekend in Richmond and participate in the annual VNPS winter workshop in addition to the Maymont Flower Show. The workshop will be held at the University of Richmond, 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.. Speakers are: Kathryn Kennedy, Center for Plant Conservation; John L. Randall, North Carolina Botanical Garden; Jil M. Swearingen, National Park Service. Registration is \$30. VNPS members will receive a mailing with registration information in January. Information will also be posted on the VNPS website, www.vnps.org.

Participate in Citizen Lobby Day January 17

Funding to protect Virginia's natural resources still receives less than one percent of our state's budget, and Virginia ranks dead last in the nation for funding its natural resources. Join with conservation minded citizens in an effort to increase public spending to protect our natural resources. Participate in Citizens' Lobby Day sponsored by the Virginia Conservation Network on January 17 in Richmond. The goal is to convince our legislators of the need to increase public funding to protect our lands and to restore our waters. For more information or to sign up, go to www.virginiaforever.org.

PWWS Board Meeting February 21

The PWWS Board of Directors will meet on February 21 at 7:30 p.m. at Bethel Lutheran Church in Manassas. All members are welcome to attend. Contact President Charles Smith at 703-361-5125 for details.

GRASSES

A Most Unappreciated Family of Flowering Plants

The grass family (*Poaceae* or *Graminae*) is one of the largest flowering plant families with over 10,000 species in over 600 genera worldwide. In terms of economic importance as human food crop species, it is the most important flowering plant family. In Virginia we have almost 270 species in over 80 genera with just under 150 of these species in 50 genera found in Northern Virginia. Recognizing grasses as flowering plants is not very obvious to most people. Once you understand grass flower structure, grasses are a really interesting and beautiful family to recognize and enjoy.

The other two families that are often confused with grasses are the sedges (*Cyperaceae*) and rushes (*Juncacai*). The sedges generally have triangular edges (sedges have edges) and rushes are round with solid pith in the stem. Grasses have round stems, but the stems are hollow between the point of the leaves attaching. Also in grasses, unlike the rushes, the leaf base forms a sheath surrounding the stem before the blade of the leaf expands into the structure easily recognizable as a leaf. The stem of a grass plant that forms the flowers is called a culm. Roots of grass plants are fibrous, with particular species being either annuals or perennials. Grasses are herbaceous except for the bamboos, the only wood members of this family.

The flowers of grasses are wind pollinated and therefore do not have petals or sepals. The basic flower has three stamens and an ovary with two styles that can be quite showy. At the base of the ovary are two small structures called the lodicule that are modified perianth (combined petal and sepal) tissue. There are also other modifications that make grass flowers a bit different. Enclosing each flower is a pair of modified leaves or bracts called the lemma and palea (the lemma is closer to the flower than the palea). This combination of a flower enclosed by the lemma and palea is called a floret. The florets are further arranged in

structures called spikelets. A spikelet consists of one or more florets with two modified leaves called the first and second glumes beneath the floret or florets. The spikelets are then arranged in inflorescences of spikes, or racemes, or panicles. Once you can visualize these modified structures of spikelets and florets, identifying the grasses becomes possible. Additionally, the veins in the lemmas and glumes may be elongated to form bristle-like structures called awns and are important in identification. The fruit of grasses is the caryopsis or grain.

Many taxonomists divide grass genera into tribes. The *Flora of West Virginia* has good diagrams of the structure of grasses and good identification keys to tribes, genera, and species of grasses. It places grasses into eleven tribes with a separate identification key to these tribes, then another key to the genera within each tribe, and then each genus will have a key to species. *Grasses: an Identification Guide* by Lauren Brown is also another good book with which to begin to enjoy the grasses.

The grasses, as mentioned before, are the most important family economically to humans with major grain crops such as corn, wheat, rice, barley, rye, oats, sorghum, and millet. Countless other animals rely on grasses for their food sources. Bamboo is used as building material in many parts of the world. More and more grasses are being used for ornamental purposes. Of course, we are all familiar with the use of grasses for lawns.

Our native grasses are especially beautiful in the late summer and falls. Deep Cut and other sites in Manassas National Battlefield Park are particularly good sites for Indian grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*) and little blue stem (*Andropogon scoparius*) in the fall.

- Marion Lobstein
Associate Professor of Biology
Northern Virginia Community College

(Ed. Note: The preceding article originally appeared in the Jan-Feb 1996 edition of Wild News.)

Other Events of Interest

Thursday, January 13: Potowmack Chapter Meeting, Green Spring Gardens Park, 7:30 p.m. Program on the Potomac Gorge Habitat Restoration presented by Stephanie Flack and Mary Travaglini.

Saturday, January 15: 10 a.m. until noon. Discover nature's winter bounty on a hike with a naturalist at Riverbend Nature Center in Great Falls. Look for winter berries and seeds that sustain local wildlife during the cold winter months. Reservations are required, but the program is free and appropriate for adults and teens. Call 703-759-9018.

Saturday, January 22: Prince William Conservation Alliance Green Plate Breakfast with special guest Mark Aveni, Virginia's Potomac Watershed Manager, who will share information on Virginia's new Potomac River goals to reduce

pollution and sedimentation in the Potomac Watershed, 8:30 a.m., Old Country Buffet on Prince William Parkway. For more info, see www.pwconserve.org/events/index.html#greenplate.

Thursday February 10: Potowmack Chapter meeting, Green Spring Gardens Park, 7:30 p.m.. Program on *A Field of Dreams: Restoring the Original Grassland of the Eastern Shore* presented by Dr. Doug Gill of the University of Maryland.

Saturday, April 23: Annual "Spring Fling" sponsored by the Prince William Cooperative Extension Office, Prince William County Fairgrounds. Details to be announced.

Sunday, April 24: Annual Spring Garden Tour, 12 noon - 5 p.m. Gardens to be announced.

Saturday, May 7: Annual Wildflower Plant Sale, 9 a.m. - noon. Grounds of Bethel Lutheran Church, Manassas. Contact Nancy Arrington at 703-368-8431 for information.



PRINCE WILLIAM WILDFLOWER SOCIETY

A Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society
PO Box 83, Manassas, VA 20108-0083



Nancy Arrington exp. 10/05
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Next Meeting: 7:30 p.m., Monday, January 17, Bethel Lutheran Church, Manassas Annual Member "Slide" Show

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