



WILD NEWS

Prince William Wildflower Society

A Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

Number 2010-04

July-August 2010

PRINCE WILLIAM WILDFLOWER SOCIETY Membership Meeting JULY 19, 2010, 7:30 p.m.

***Bull Run Unitarian Universalist Church,
9350 Main Street, Manassas***

"Nicky's Nature: Images of the Northern Piedmont" is a program of images in and near the foothills of the Blue Ridge, presented by PWWS past-president Nicky Staunton. Here is Nicky's description of the program: "My PWWS program of images from the past couple of years in and near the foothills of the Blue Ridge I hope will give pleasure and incite wonder. I plan to share a bit of knowledge sparked by a 1982 class with Marion Lobstein and recently refreshed by "The Power of Observation" by Rebecca Dolan, director of the Friesner Herbarium at Butler University. Marion's class marked the beginning of my particular wildflower and nature trail through life. Ms. Dolan describes "how" you can do the same. Most of all, I wish to share a collection of my images to give your eyes a treat, and to portray my view that plants do not exist without other species. Many of my favorite floral images contain an unexpected insect, all part of the web of life and a source of my joy with our Virginia flora and their supporting cast."

***Please note change of meeting place for this program:** Because of scheduling conflicts at Bethel Lutheran Church, our usual meeting place, the July 19 program and membership meeting will be held at the Bull Run Unitarian Universalist Church of Manassas, located on the corner of Main and Church Streets in old town Manassas. Meeting time is our usual 7:30 p.m. Parking is available in the public lot across from the church. The program is free; all are welcome. Refreshments will be served. If you need a ride



"The Guest" Photo: Nicky Staunton

to the meeting, please email PWWS President Helen Walter at Helenwalt43@verizon.net or call (703) 330-9614.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

This time I have several items of business to cover here. Number one is that we won't be having our July meeting at our usual location of Bethel Lutheran Church because they use the whole building for their summer Bible school that week. I've managed to find us a good alternate location for the July meeting, the Bull Run Unitarian Universalist Church in Old Town Manassas, the location of the First Thursday Speaker Series. Time to meet is the same, so we hope to see you all July 19 at 7:30 at the Unitarian Universalist Church for Nicky Staunton's beautiful pictures and commentary and to share some delicious refreshments. If you have any questions, call me at 703-330-9614. The next order of business is our board election in September. My two-year term as president ends this fall and the nominating committee will be looking for candidates this summer. I hope that you will give consideration to possibly

serving. I promise that you will have a strong team to back you up, so you won't be doing it alone. I've already committed to staying on to do programs and publicity.

Sometime this summer I plan to spend a day evaluating our Prince William registry sites at the Manassas National Battlefield Park, James Long Park, and our newest site at Merrimac Farm. I'll be looking for helpers at the July meeting, so if you're interested, let me know.

We've reserved the community park and picnic pavilion in Occoquan Forest for our annual meeting on Sunday afternoon, September 26. It has a boat ramp on the Occoquan River, so bring your canoe or kayak if you can.

Our wonderful past-president Nicky Staunton is our July speaker, so you don't want to miss this one. See you then,

Helen Walter, President

Prince William Wildflower Society Meeting Minutes Monday, May 17, 2010

Honeybees Live!

Helen introduced PWWS member Karen Waltman, who spoke on honeybees and beekeeping. Karen put together a complete bee



hive and showed the equipment needed to keep about 40,000 stinging insects in a hive. Gloves, a veil, and a smoker are very important. The smoker makes the bees think their house is on fire; they will start to eat honey in preparation for a flight to find a new home, and for a little

while they will leave alone the invading beekeeper.

Honeybees are related to wasps, hornets, and ants:

A large, bald-faced hornet's nest revealed the differences in nests. Wasps make their nests out of chewed plant material—the layers look made of shredded paper. Honeybees make their honeycomb out of wax produced from their abdomen,

and the worker bees form the wax into six-sided cells that hold stored food—honey and pollen—

as well as the eggs, larvae, and pupae of the developing bees.



Audience members viewed a frame containing live honeybees in a small glass observation hive. The frame of bees was removed from a hive at Ellanor C. Lawrence Park in Chantilly that afternoon in the rain. Since bees don't like to be chilled and rained on, Karen had not left the hive open any longer than necessary to look on other frames in the hive to find the queen. The bees were returned to their hive the next morning.

Following the talk, Betty Truax treated all to baklava and other delicious honey treats.

Announcements

--Nancy Vehrs reported on the May 8, 2010 plant sale. Twenty-seven people helped with potting plants in the weeks before the sale and/or during the morning of the sale, and their assistance was greatly appreciated.

--Nancy asked for ideas to improve the sale next year; she suggested that we have large pictures of the plants to show people how plants would look when they are blooming. She asked members to take pictures of blooming native plants during the year, and we can make the pictures into signs for the plant sale. Charles Smith suggested that we label signs with

the Genus label, and we can fill in the name of the species.

--Nancy asked members to divide plants, pot them and hold them for next year's sale. Let her know if you don't have space to store the plants.

--Helen reported that a man in Manassas had contacted the club and asked us if native seedlings in his yard could be potted and moved before the sale of his house. Nancy Vehrs was going to follow up with him as he lives close to her, and the potted plants could be sold at our 2011 plant sale.

Those in attendance included: Helen Walter, Betty Truax, Nancy Arrington, Diane Flaherty, Rick Flaherty, Mary Sherman, Deanna LaValle High, Jack High, Phil Louer, Frances Louer, Dee Brown, Glen Macdonald, Charles Smith, Mary Hepler, Jeanne Endrikat, Tiana Camfiord, Amy Mortensen, Charlotte Cochard, Karen Waltman.

Respectively submitted,
Karen Waltman, Secretary
Prince William Wildflower Society

PRINCE WILLIAM WILDFLOWER SOCIETY

P.O. Box 83, Manassas, Virginia 20108-0083

Chartered January 10, 1983

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Registry: VACANT

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NEWS FROM ALL OVER

U.S. Clears Test of Bioengineered Trees (from the *New York Times*, May 27, 2010) The U.S. Agriculture Department issued an environmental assessment approving a proposal by biotechnology company ArborGen to conduct a large field test of genetically engineered trees in seven states stretching from Florida to Texas. The field trial could involve more than 200,000 genetically altered, alien eucalyptus trees on 28 sites covering about 300 acres. This is the first instance of genetically altered forest trees receiving regulatory clearance for commercial planting in the U.S. Two genetically altered fruit trees—papaya and plum trees—are already approved for planting. The foreign gene is meant to help the eucalyptus—native to tropical climates—withstand cold weather; the company hopes that the trees could become a new source of wood for pulp, paper, and biofuels in the Southern timber belt.

As the article notes, “genetically engineered trees have the potential to arouse even more controversy than genetically modified crops like corn or soybeans, which are made using the same techniques...because people have an emotional attachment to forests that they do not have to cornfields.” One specific danger is

because trees live longer than annual crops and can spread their pollen farther, unintended environmental effects may spread and persist longer in a woodland environment than in crop fields. The USDA received 12,462 comments from people and organizations opposing the field trial, and only 45 in support of it. “...but a vast majority of the opposing comments were nearly identical form letters,” according to the USDA. [Editor's note: *Why does that make them invalid?*]

Critics of the trial noted that eucalyptus trees, even without foreign genes, may become invasive, are heavy users of water, and could spread fires faster and harbor a fungus that sickens people. The USDA admitted that the species of eucalyptus for the trial has difficulty establishing without human intervention, even in warmer climates such as Florida. ArborGen, based in South Carolina, is owned by three large forest product corporations: International Paper, MeadWestvaco, and New Zealand's Rubicon.

From Prince William and Beyond **SOME MIDSUMMER'S MUSINGS**

*By Nancy Vehrs, Betty Truax, Nicky Staunton,
and Deanna High*

On a recent walk by the Battlefield's Stone Bridge, I was reminded of how different the seasons are there. Gone is any trace of the sweeps of bluebells and spring beauty that carpet the ground in April. Wildflowers are scarce there this time of year, but further along the trail I spied the light purple of some hairy ruellia, our wild petunia. The plants I have of it in my garden are at least a foot high, but these truly wild ones were short and dainty at only a few inches tall.

If berries are ripe anywhere near where I'm walking, I will spot and devour them. You don't have to visit the mountains to pick blueberries, but maybe the yield would be better. I've encountered some sparse pickings in the Battlefield, but the scarce little fruits were tasty. There are a number of lowbush berries on the wooded path behind my office, and I have done my best to keep them picked clean. Right now I'm waiting for some green ones to ripen, but birds may harvest them first.

This has been a big year for common milkweed in my garden. My best friend called mine "nuclear" in years past because they were so tall, but now they are also multiplying exponentially. I know that I need to control them because they are spreading by runners as well as by seed, but "my" bees love them. And do you know that the scent of them en masse is heavenly? The wafts of fragrance perfume the night air near my deck.

Cat birds have also been prolific in my garden this year. Nesting season has been most productive! For the last couple of years, I have been contemplating the removal of the overgrown photinia bushes next to the house, but the catbirds establish their nests in it before I can ever take action. As a cat lover, I had always enjoyed hearing the catbird's "meow," but this year their near constant non-melodic songs are wearing thin on Harry and me. We keep suet up all year long, and they certainly are enjoying it

in addition to cherries, mahonia berries, and service berries. –Nancy Vehrs



Early in June I decided to kill two birds with one stone. I wanted to spend time with a wonderful friend who I don't see nearly enough. I also wanted to go to Blandy, a place I never visited but had wanted to for a long time. My friend quickly agreed to make the trip with me. We slowly strolled around the grounds of Blandy talking about the plants and our experiences growing them as well as catching up on each other's lives. We saw some lovely iris, lupines, pines, columbine, geraniums, and hydrangeas to mention just a few. As we were getting ready to leave, we decided to take a quick stroll through the herb garden where we

found various thymes, flax, and other delightful (and often aromatic plants). We also saw a lovely white rose where we found a real treat: a very large beetle with the longest antenna I had ever seen. When I got home I couldn't wait to get online to figure out what we had seen... and



Photo: Betty Truax

discovered it is in the Family *Cerambycidae*—Long Horned Beetles—but but not the invasive Asian Longhorn Beetle (is missing the white stripes on this antenna). After doing some reading, I think it might be a Pine Sawyer (which according to one article attacks only weakened pines) but I am by no means an expert so please don't hold me to that. It was a super day, great gardens, good friend, and a National Geographic Bug moment. Take a moment to pick up the phone and call an old friend...and make plans to visit someplace you'd both enjoy. You won't regret it and you might even find a delightful surprise in between the flowers. —Betty Truax

Observe or Participate? A blend. My *Culpeper Star-Exponent* newspaper box had been empty for months after I stopped my subscription. It was bolted to the metal shelf for mailboxes and such, so had not been retrieved by the publisher. Several weeks ago, I



Photo: Nicky Staunton

saw twigs at the back and two small, fanlike turkey feathers and a piece of shed snakeskin showing a decorator's touch to the nest. Curiosity!

Monday, I noted a bird fly from the box, robin size, but tan with no features revealed in flight. It seemed to exit from the nest in the box.

Tuesday, there was a different bird on the nearby Washington Post box. It displayed a crest and was gray, light breast, next size down from thrush family. Maybe, a Phoebe? I shared a photo with Bland Crowder, who sent word that the "Phoebe" I photographed is actually the Great Crested Flycatcher. Now, I knew who was nesting in my newspaper box. Pausing to look in the box, I saw brand new nestlings, eyes closed, mouths open, nearly naked nestlings.

Wednesday, I was eager to see them and found the sun beating down on the Hades-like orange/red paper box and little baby birds trying to exit. One was an inch from the edge and a drop to gravel! What to do? I put it back in the nest, noting how hot it was inside. Little mouths were open. Gasping? Hungry? Distressed?



Photo: Nicky Staunton

I taped some white plastic bags from the car to the back of the box, but when I returned later, one baby was out and on the gravel and a parent on the *Washington Post* box, hesitant to leave as I approached. It did and I picked up the baby, returned it to its nest and came home to research: what to do? Who to call? *Virginia Wildlife* had a list of local animal rescue volunteers nearby and Mrs. Dooley returned my call.

Advice? I could shade the box. An umbrella? As long as the parents were tending, I could trust nature to take care

of the babies. If they were abandoned, call again.

Solution, I left the white reflecting bags and added a pseudo hip roof of heavy cardboard. Air circulated through. Heavy rain did not melt it. Reaching in the box today, it was cooler. No need to adapt a metallic reflecting window sunscreen. Good. I left a little more-feathered nestling about 4 inches from the edge this time and tonight, all little birds were back in the nest.

By giving a little help for the nestlings, I could stop fretting about the Great Crested Flycatchers' parenting skills. I admire their selection of neighborhood, if not dwelling for the nest. Plants near the boxes: Native Black-eyed Susan, a blooming non-native Common Mullein with a grocery store of insects and a lovely treed backdrop that unfortunately gives no shade.

To "help" or to trust nature is a difficult choice for humans who love all creation and somehow feel obligated to decide whether to "help" or not. A bit of each might give us three more Great Crested Flycatchers in our "hood."

—Nicky Staunton

Since my experiment last year to shape my seasonal gardening efforts around attracting and feeding butterflies, I've been running across and collecting "factoids" on milkweeds. Of interest to PWS members, I've found that the Digital Atlas of Virginia database shows all but 5 of the 16 different species of milkweed listed in Virginia are found in Prince William County. And one can't help but wonder about *Asclepias exaltata*—perhaps it is here but not yet documented. The following is a list of the species for the state, with those not found in PWC in brackets: *Asclepias amplexicaulis* J.E.Smith, [*Asclepias exaltata* L.], *Asclepias incarnata* L., [*Asclepias incarnata* L. ssp. *Incarnata*], *Asclepias incarnata* L. ssp. *pulchra* (Ehrh. ex Willd.) Woods., [*Asclepias lanceolata* Walt.], [*Asclepias longifolia* Michx.], *Asclepias purpurascens* L., *Asclepias quadrifolia* Jacq., *Asclepias rubra* L., *Asclepias syriaca* L., [*Asclepias tuberosa* L. ssp. *rolfsii* (Britt. ex Vail) Woodson], *Asclepias tuberosa* L. ssp. *tuberosa*, *Asclepias variegata* L., *Asclepias verticillata* L., and *Asclepias viridiflora* Raf.

From various other sources come more mundane, yet still intriguing tidbits of milkweed lore. Historically, milkweed seedpod silk (perhaps the softest, lightest substance imaginable) was used in WWII as flottant in life vests. I've yet to discover where the factories were that harvested and processed such an ephemeral substance, but it is sure to turn up one of these days. The silk is said to be "5 or 6 times more buoyant than cork...warmer than wool and 6 times lighter. A few pounds of silky floss stuffed into a jacket could float a 150 lb. pilot if he crashed into the sea and keep him warm as well." (*Wildflowers of Tennessee, the Ohio Valley, and Appalachian Mountains*, p. 227.) American Indians used the soft down as diaper material to absorb wastes in papooses (a mystery solved, there), and gold finches still use the silk to line their nests.

A fellow named Sam Thayer, director of the Wild Food Institute in Wisconsin, advocates eating almost all parts of common milkweed: young shoots in the spring (flavor between asparagus and green beans, but distinct), flower buds in stir fries and casseroles, and immature seedpods, silk

included, much like okra. Mr. Thayer claims that common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) is his favorite for eating, as it is not bitter, as

are some of the other milkweed species.

Hmm...I think I'll save mine for the butterflies and monarch caterpillars. Last summer, I saw that even one or two Monarch caterpillars could munch a wide swath of milkweed leaves and pods in a day or two. That, plus its lovely fragrance (as Nancy pointed out) and its beauty are enough for me.



The same source (*Countryside and Small Stock Journal: Magazine of Modern Homesteading*, www.countrysidemag.com) says that a Nebraska company called Ogallalla Down is stuffing jackets, comforters, and pillows with milkweed pod silk. On a whim, I checked Ogallalla Down's Web site, where I found that the company uses "Hypodown" for stuffing their comforters and duvets. Hypodown, obviously a brand name, is a combination of four parts white goose down and one part "Syriaca clusters." Perhaps my dream of a supersoft "Syriaca" sweater is not so farfetched. I've always found the "Syriaca" part to be somewhat a mystery, but a handy botanist cleared it up for me: Linnaeus simply made an error in naming common milkweed "from Syria."

Other sources shed light on historical uses of milkweed. ("Web of Species: Biodiversity at Wellesley College and in New England," www.wellesley.edu/biology) In 1790, Italian voyager Luigi Castiglioni wrote that "the mountaineers of Virginia made cloth from the outer covering of the stalks..." and during the 1860s, Salem, Massachusetts was a hub for the milkweed industry, having long finished, presumably, with the messier endeavor of adjudicating and punishing witches. Silk was used to stuff pillows, cushions, mattresses, and other parts of the plant were used for thread, purses, netting, and socks.

Asclepias tuberosa (pleurisy root) is said to be the most poisonous for animals and livestock, but was widely used by Native Americans and European settlers to relieve inflammation of the lining of the lungs and other bronchial infections. Other medicinal uses for milkweed species included: as a salve for "scrofulous swelling," as a diarrhea medicine, to induce milk in mothers, as medicine for snow

blindness, for relief of sore throat, swelling, and rashes (chewed root), expelling of tapeworms, treatment of colic, as a contraceptive (the silk, again), and to cure snakebite. The root of *A. tuberosa* was listed in the U.S.A. Pharmacopoeia from 1820 to 1905, and in subsequent standard medical reference books until the 1930s.



Milkweed species contain cardiac glycosides that are poisonous both to humans and to livestock—which, Mr. Thayer notwithstanding, makes one wonder about the wisdom of eating them—but are most useful as a chemical defense for Monarchs and similarly patterned Queen and Viceroy butterflies. The chemicals make them taste really bad to most predators.

A Plant Guide from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service notes

that management of milkweed includes burning in the fall to eliminate dead stalks and stimulate new growth. Burning results in taller, straighter stems on new growth and stimulates flower and seed production. I don't think I need taller milkweed, but more flowers and seeds sound like a good thing. —*Deanna High*

EVENTS of NOTE

JULY

Monday, July 19. 7:30 p.m. Prince William Wildflower meeting, Bull Run Unitarian Universalist Church, Manassas

Saturday, July 10. 9am—1:30pm. Wildlife Mapping at Merrimac Farm, \$25 fee. Prince William Conservation Alliance, www.pwconserve.org

Sunday, July 11 and Sunday, July 25, 8:00am—11:00am. Bird Walks at Merrimac Farm. Free. For more info, call 703-499-4954 or email alliance@pwconserve.org



Sunday, July 11 at 1:00 p.m. Join **Kristin Zimet** as she explores the scenic Dark Hollow Falls trail on Skyline Drive at the 50.7 mile post. The walk is moderate. To

RSVP and for directions, contact Kristin at 540-869-0046 or kristinzimet@yahoo.com.

AUGUST

Sunday, August 8 at 1:00 p.m. Join VNPS President **Sally Anderson** for a walk through the 30 acre meadow at the State Arboretum of Virginia near Boyce. Bring friends and family and a picnic. The walk will follow the picnic. To RSVP and for more details, please contact Sally at rccsca@comcast.net.

SEPTEMBER

Thursday, September 2, 7:30 pm, The Chestnut Story, 1st Thursdays speaker series, Prince William Conservation Alliance. Bull Run Unitarian Universalist Church, Manassas.

Friday—Sunday, September 10-12. VNPS Annual Meeting, Shenandoah National Park. See www.vnps for more information.

Thursday and Friday, September 16-17. Conference: "Good Green, Bad Green: Invasive Plant Control for Habitat Restoration," Northern Va. 4H Center and Smithsonian Conservation Ecology Center, Front Royal, Va.

Saturday, September 18. Featherstone National Wildlife Refuge Tour, 8:00am-10:30am. Prince William Conservation Alliance. Meet at the Rippon

SAVE THE DATE
Sunday, September 26, Prince
William Wildflower Society Annual
Meeting Occoquan Forest Pavilion
Noon—3 p.m. and beyond

VRE main parking lot. To register, email alliance@pwconserve.org or call 703-499-4954.

Photos and pictures: Asclepias tuberosa (butterfly-weed), William P.C. Barton, 1786-1856, artist. In Vegetable Materia Medica of the United States, (1818-1825) NYPL Digital Gallery, <http://digitalgallery.nypl.org>; Monarch on A. tuberosa and Milkweed seedpod, Deanna High (2009); Milkweed flower postcard, Image ID: 79268, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Illinois (NYPL Digital Gallery)



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A Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society
P.O. Box 83, Manassas, Virginia, 20108-0083

NEXT MEETING: Monday, July 19, 7:30 pm
Bull Run Unitarian Universalist Church, Manassas
Nicky Staunton presents "Nicky's Nature: Images of the Northern Piedmont"