



# Wild News

The Bi-monthly Newsletter of the Prince William Wildflower Society  
A Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

Number 2022 - 03

May - June 2022

## The Prince William Wildflower Society Membership Meeting, via Zoom

**Thursday, May 5, 7:30 pm, Social time 7 pm.  
Dr. Cindy Smith of George Mason University  
will be presenting a program on “Collectively  
Building Biodiversity”**

**Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZApf-qurDojH9zrqTKglamMCcsjawNN7NBk>**

An award-winning educator, environmental scientist, and long-time cicada fanatic, she has dedicated her 25+ year career to making knotty ecological problems easier to understand and fun to study. She leads K12 and Community outreach efforts at George Mason University's Potomac Environmental Research and Education Center, training students and teachers to translate complex research into eye-opening, engaging experiences. She says she thrives on connecting seemingly divergent public and private stakeholders to creatively craft policy, solve environmental problems and collaboratively improve landscapes. She shares that through her nature photography, wit, and occasional wisdom. Dr. Smith loves to connect people to nature and bring smiles to lives and online audiences.



Her recent book, “The Cicada Olympics”, is available on Amazon. (<https://www.amazon.com/Cicada-Olympics-Engaging-Insect-Activities/dp/1737093308>)

## President's Message

This is the time of year when there is *NO TIME!* The spring wildflowers are calling from parks and wild places, and I want to see them all before they disappear for the year. And the garden needs so much attention! Then there are festivals and plant sales and garden tours and so many volunteer opportunities. We all need to remember to relax, breathe, and just enjoy.

We were so happy to be back at the Bluebell Festival at Merrimac Farm this year. Attendance was estimated at 1200 people. The trails were wet and very muddy, but the slog was worth it to view those stunning Virginia Bluebells at the peak of their bloom. I led an unwieldy, but enthusiastic, crowd of 40-50 people on my 2 p.m. walk. We had lots of activity at our PWWS table where we sold some books, plant guides, and 44 Bluebells. I thank all of our volunteers: Dee Brown, Brigitte Hartke (and her family of helpers), Beverly Houston, Valerie Neitzey, and Karen Waltman. I also want to give a shout-out to Kim Hosen and Ashley Studholme of the Prince William Conservation Alliance without whom there would be no festival. And without Kim Hosen's efforts years ago, Merrimac Farm would not have been saved from development. (*Continued on next page*)

(Photo below: Pink and Blue Bluebells by Sherry Schellenger Parker, Merrimac Farm)



## President's Message, continued



Another event we resumed this year was Marion Lobstein's annual Stone Bridge Botanical Walk at Manassas National Battlefield Park on April 14. Unfortunately, Marion sustained an injury a few weeks back and was unable to walk very far. She greeted the group of more than 20 in the parking lot, distributed checklists, and delegated leadership duties to Janis Stone, Brigitte Hartke, and me. We started off by noting the differences between the nonnative weeds Purple Dead Nettle and Henbit that were abundant as we approached the bridge. I pointed out some Eastern Columbine that was growing on the cliff by the bridge, but it was not yet in bloom. The Spring Beauties were wide open on the floodplain on this warm, sunny day, and the Virginia Bluebells were still abundant and in fine form. Many of the Yellow Trout Lilies were past peak as were the Dutchman's Breeches, but we managed to find a few lush specimens. The two boys on our walk, Loki and Owen, enjoyed finding frogs, turtles, toads, a Great Blue Heron, and three rat snakes, and exploring an island in Bull Run. A Sassafras Tree was in full bloom along the trail, and Janis declared its flowers to be male. An immature Bald Eagle flew over the water, Pileated Woodpeckers worked on a tree across Bull Run, and American Goldfinches joined tropical returnees Blue-gray Gnatcatchers and Northern Parulas in song. Other highlights included a lovely Redbud tree, a blooming Serviceberry hanging over the water, and Bluets along the higher and drier part of the trail. Rue-anemone, Early Saxifrage, and even a late-blooming Hepatica were blooming up the hill, and the unusual Walking Fern grew on the cliff. What a lovely day for a wildflower walk!

Our Spring Wildflower Garden Tour was back again this year, and we thank Nancy Arrington, Shirley and Tom Attanaro, and Janet Wheatcraft for opening their gardens to us. Two "old" favorites and one new offering make a great combination. If you think that you would like to be on a future tour, take some photos now so we can see what might be in bloom. I'm hoping that we may try a summer garden tour this year because we have some good possibilities among our members. Summer gardens are butterfly and pollinator gardens. Stay tuned for details.

Dr. Cindy Smith of George Mason University will be our speaker for our May 5 meeting. Always an engaging presenter, Cindy told me that her talk on biodiversity will include a bit about what goes on at Potomac Science Center, information on some of her current projects including one on invasive wetland plants, and even some insights from the turf and landscape industry.

We hope we can count on you to be at our annual plant sale on Saturday, May 7. The fun begins early in the morning, but the official sale runs from 10 a.m. – noon. We need plant contributions as well as helpers throughout the sale. This year we have purchased some plugs from a native plant nursery so we can offer larger quantities of some selections at a very reasonable cost. Nancy Arrington has led this effort for many years; its continued success cannot be assured without volunteers and loyal customers.

June will bring the Manassas Bee Festival on the 25<sup>th</sup>. Last year's inaugural celebration attracted 2500 participants. Please consider volunteering at our table. It's a fun, family event.

See you on Zoom!

*Nancy*





**Prince William Wildflower Society  
Membership Meeting Minutes  
Thursday, March 3, 2022, 7:30 p.m. On Zoom**

Nancy Vehrs, president of PWWS, called the meeting to order at 7:31 p.m. She provided information about the upcoming Bluebell Festival (Sun. April 10, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.), Garden Tour (Sun., April 24, noon to 5 p.m.) and Plant Sale (Sat., May 7, 10 a.m. to noon at Bethel Lutheran Church). Further information will be emailed to all members.

Nancy introduced the speaker, Mr. Ian Caton. He and his wife own the nursery, Wood Thrush Natives, and Ian designs and installs native plants for homeowners and businesses. The talk was entitled "Super Tough Native Plants for Difficult Situations." We were treated to helpful hints on growing attractive native plants, even in difficult situations.

Just some of Ian's hints:

- Use plants that can tolerate the situation. (Scarlet Beebalm likes more shade and moisture than people think.)
- Plant thickly and you won't need mulch.
- Mix early-blooming plants (bluebells) with summer flowers.
- Mix flowers with short roots with flowers that have long roots, then they don't have to compete for root space.
- Native plants don't need dead-heading, mulch, or watering. Exception – watering is needed when they are first planted.
- In a sunny area, use plants that reseed themselves, then you don't have to buy so many plants.

If your native plants are somewhat unattractive to others, Ian recommended that we try to please people and provide signs of care. Mow around the edges, provide structural elements (fencing, gazebo, etc.), put in a birdhouse, incorporate familiar plants (purple coneflower, etc. It will look like you are making a meadow.), and use colorful flowers (coreopsis, thread grass, etc.)

My favorite quote from Ian was, "We don't find mulch in the wild." He added that mulch suppresses spread of the plants, and it can rot the plants.

There was time for questions, and there were many. After all, we had a landscaper in our midst who was very knowledgeable and generous with his answers and explanations. Thank you to Mr. Ian Caton!



Karen Waltman, Secretary

## Sympathies

*Our condolences to PWWS member Judy Gallagher whose husband, Jimmy Gallagher, passed away earlier this year, on March 29. Many of us knew Jimmy as the artist who painted the large entrance kiosk at Merrimac Farm Wildlife Management Area, as well as his beautifully painted rain barrels which have been raffled off at the Merrimac Farm Bluebell Festival for the past thirteen years. There is more about Jimmy's interesting life on the website, <https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/name/james-gallagher-obituary?id=34088493>*



# Upcoming EVENTS

**Thursday, April 28, STEAM event at T. Clay Wood Elementary School.** Volunteers needed.

**Saturday, April 30, 9 am - 2 pm, Northern Alexandria Native Plant Sale,** Church of St. Clements Parking Lot, 1701 N. Quaker Lane. Ten vendors.  
<https://northernalexandriannativeplantsale.weebly.com/>

## May

**Thursday, May 1, 10 am - 12 pm, and 1 pm - 3 pm, Potowmack Chapter will host two walks at Ellick Woodlands Natural Area Preserve,** Centreville, VA  
<https://vnps.org/potowmack/events/walk-at-ellick-woodlands-natural-area-preserve/>

**Every first Wednesday of the month, May 4 to October 5, 10 am - 1 pm, Potowmack Chapter Native Plant Sale,** Green Spring Gardens, Alexandria, VA

**Thursday, May 5, 7:30 - 9 pm, 7:00 social time, PWWS General Meeting and Program: "Collectively Building Biodiversity" with Dr. Cindy Smith on Zoom** <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84411111111>

**Saturday, May 7, 10 am - 12 pm, Prince William Wildflower Society Annual Native Plant Sale,** Bethel Lutheran Church, Manassas, VA

**Saturday, May 14, 9 am - 12 pm, Master Gardeners of Prince William County Plant Sale,** the Teaching Garden at St. Benedict, Bristow, VA

**Saturday May 14, 10 am - 1 pm, Native Plants & Sustainability, Leesylvania State Park Visitor Center through Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation.** For any questions or enquiries, please contact the Visitor Center at (703) 583-6904 or via email at [leesylvaniavc@dcr.virginia.gov](mailto:leesylvaniavc@dcr.virginia.gov)  
<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10159412804251311&set=a.72341896310>

**Sunday, May 22, 10 am - 12 pm, Naturalist Walk: Ferns and Allies,** at Leopold's Preserve, 16290 Thoroughfare Road, Broad Run, VA. Join a professional naturalist and discover the flora and fauna on and around the Bull Run Mountains. These hikes will take place at Leopold's Preserve the first Thursday of each month. Register here:  
<https://www.leopoldspreserve.com/events-1/naturalist-walk-ferns-allies>

**Sunday, May 29, 8 am, Bird and Nature Walk at Merrimac Farm, last Sunday of every month.** Join us! We will look for birds as we travel through the uplands to the edge of the floodplain, covering a variety of habitats, including open fields and woodland edges. Everyone is welcome. We meet at Merrimac Farm, Stone House, 15014 Deepwood Lane, Nokesville. Dress for the weather, bring binoculars, insect repellent, and camera. Info and RSVP, (703) 499-4954 or [alliance@pwconserve.org](mailto:alliance@pwconserve.org) View the bird list for Merrimac farm here: <http://www.pwconserve.org/wildlife/birds/lists/merrimacfarm.htm>

## June

**Saturday, June 25, Manassas Bee Festival (details to be announced)**

## SAVE the DATES !

**Thursday, May 5 — PWWS General meeting. Dr. Cindy Smith will present "Collectively Building Biodiversity." 7:30 pm on Zoom:** <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84411111111> **Social time will be at 7 pm.**

**Saturday, May 7, 10 am - 12 noon — Prince William Wildflower Society's Annual Wildflower and Native Plant Sale.** To be held at Bethel Lutheran Church, Manassas, Virginia.

**Saturday, June 25 — Manassas Bee Festival** (details yet to be released; stay tuned for more information about this fun family fest, following on last year's first Manassas Bee Festival which was a great success.)

## DWARF CRESTED IRIS, *Iris cristata*

By Marion Lobstein,  
PWWS Botany Chair



One of the loveliest spring wildflowers found growing in rich woodlands and along streams is the delicate Dwarf Crested Iris, *Iris cristata*. This diminutive member of the iris family, Iridaceae, is the most common species of irises in northern Virginia. It ranges from Maryland west to Ohio and Indiana, and south to Tennessee, Georgia, and Missouri. It is primarily found in the piedmont and mountain areas in Virginia.

The genus name or epithet, *Iris*, is from the Greek word for "rainbow," referring to the range of colors of the various iris species and the species epithet *cristata* means "crested," and refers to the raised projections on the upper surface of the petaloid sepals. Other names for *Iris cristata* are Crested Iris and Dwarf Iris. In Virginia, this species is our only native crested iris.

The lance-shaped leaves of the Dwarf Crested Iris are two-ranked, as in other irises, and are longer than the flowering stem, up to eight inches long. Below the leaves there is no stem above ground, but above the leaves the flowering stem or peduncle is terete or round. The underground storage structure is a slender, branched rhizome, a horizontal underground stem, with fibrous roots.

The flowers of Dwarf Crested Iris are small for an iris species - about 2½ to 3 inches wide.

One to two flowers are borne on each flowering stem which are one to three inches tall. The three blue to violet petaloid (petal-like) sepals are 1½ to 3 inches long which project downward with a prominent white to orange ridge forming a crest in the center of each sepal. The three petals are approximately the same length and the same color as the sepals but are narrower and stand upward. The three stamens arch under the three petaloid styles. The pistil, the female part of the flower, consist of the top three-parted stigma where pollen adheres

on the top of the style and the ovary is at the base of the pistil. As in all other members of the Iris Family, the ovary position is described as inferior – that is, the other flower parts attach above the ovary rather than under the ovary. The flowers have a slight scent and are pollinated primarily by bees, bumblebees, and perhaps even hummingbirds. The fruits are three-sided capsules that contain a number of yellowish-brown seeds, each 1/16 to ⅓ inch long, and each with an appendage called an aril or elaiosome. These seeds may be dispersed by ants that are attracted to this appendage that contains energy-rich fats.

The Dwarf Crested Iris blooms from April into May, with fruit set in the early summer. The habitat of this beautiful native iris is from woodlands to stream banks.

Even though *Iris cristata* is our most common native iris, there are six other species of irises found in our area, including four other native species and two non-native species. The native species are *Iris virginica* (Virginia Blue Flag), *Iris versicolor* (Larger Blue Flag), *Iris prismatica* (Narrow Blue Flag), and *Iris verna* (Dwarf Iris). All of these native species are blue to lavender in color, while one introduced species, *Iris pseudacorus* (Yellow Iris), is yellow. The second non-native species is *Iris domestica* (formerly the *Belamcanda chinensis*), the Blackberry Lily which is orange with red to purple spots. (In the next article of this issue of *Wild News*, learn about the taxonomy and history

of the Iris family including the reason for scientific name change of the Blackberry Lily.)

The rhizomes of all Irises contain the compound irisin and are poisonous. The rhizome and flower parts may cause skin irritation while the rhizomes may also cause diarrhea and vomiting when ingested. Like many "poisons," extracts or other preparations of the rhizomes of irises have been used to treat various ailments such as liver problems, ulcers, earache, toothache, colds, cholera, and as a laxative. American Indians

used iris rhizome in many of those ways as well as pulverized rhizomes to make a poultice to treat burns, wounds, and rheumatic joints.

The native Irises bloom in early spring until late April into May; the two non-native species into the summer. This spring, look for Dwarf Crested Iris in flower as well as other native wild Irises in the woods and wetlands – they are just as colorful as cultivated Iris species.





# *Iris* and Iridaceae Taxonomy Overview in Flora of Virginia App

Marion Lobstein, PWWs Botany Chair

Worldwide, Iridaceae, the Iris Family comprises 65 genera and approximately 6700-7170 species. The growth forms of this family range from herbs to shrubs with all of our native and naturalized species being herbaceous. The Iris Family or Iridaceae was named by A.L. de Jussieu in 1789. This family was first recognized by John Ray in 1703 as a separate group of flowering plants. The basis for Iridaceae is the genus *Iris*. Linnaeus is credited with naming this genus in 1753. The name "*Iris*" is derived from the Greek word for rainbow and is also the name of the Greek goddess of the rainbow. The color variation of iris flowers is like the colors of the rainbow.

References to members of the Iris family go back to antiquity with the Greeks such as Aristotle and Theophrastus and later in Roman times with Greek physician Dioscorides in his first-century *De Materia Medica* and the Roman author Pliny the Elder. *Iris pseudocorus*, Yellow Iris or Flag, was used as an emetic and purgative, and as a source of tannins to dye or tan leather, as well as to make a black ink. The ancient Egyptians revered the Iris and used orris root [derived primarily from two Old World *Iris*, *Iris germanica* (the Greek Iris) and *Iris pallida* (the Sweet Iris)] in ceremonies, perfumes, food preparation, and as symbols of life, victory and power. European herbalists such as Rembert Dodoens, John Gerald, and Nicholas Culpeper of the 16th century wrote about the medicinal uses of species of Irises.

John Clayton in the *Flora Virginica* (second edition 1762) listed species in the two Iris family genera, *Iris* and *Sisyrinchium*. Clayton listed *Iris verna*, Dwarf Crested Iris, *Iris virginica*, Virginia blue flag, and *Sisyrinchium bermudiana*, the Bermuda Blue-eyed Grass. There is some thought that his specimen of *Sisyrinchium bermudiana* may actually be *Sisyrinchium angustifolium*, the Narrow-leaf Blue-eyed Grass. Herbarium specimens of these species are in the John Clayton Herbarium at the British Museum of Natural History.

In the *Flora of Virginia*, first edition 2012, in this article referred to as the Manual, and now in the Flora of Virginia App (2020 update), referred to as the App, the treatment of Iridaceae includes two genera, *Iris* and *Sisyrinchium*, and 15 species with two varieties of one species. Worldwide, *Iris* has 282 species that are primarily native to the Northern Hemisphere. In the Manual and App, there are seven species with one species (*Iris verna*, Dwarf Iris) with two varieties treated in the genus *Iris*. All of these Iris species

except for *Iris pseudocorus*, the Yellow Iris or Yellow Flag, and *Iris domestica*, the Blackberry or Leopold Lily, are native and are found in our northern part of Virginia. Linnaeus assigned binomials to all of these *Iris* species in our area except *Iris cristata* (the Dwarf Crested Iris), *Iris verna* var. *smalliana* (the Upland Dwarf Iris), and *Iris domestica* (the Blackberry or Leopold Lily). *Iris cristata* was described and named by William Aiton in 1789 and was renamed briefly *Neubeckia cristata* by R. Alefani in 1863. In that same year, Alefani also proposed renaming *Iris verna* as *Neubeckia verna*. A list of the *Iris* species documented for our area is included in the article on Dwarf Crested Iris in this issue of *Wild News*.

In the Manual and the App, there are a limited number of taxonomic changes in this family's treatment in the floras from the late 19th-early 20th century. Based on DNA research, the primary taxonomic change is for *Belamcanda chinensis*, the Blackberry Lily, renamed *Iris domestica* in 2005 by P. Goldblatt and D. Mabberley. This Asian species has a varied taxonomic history. Linnaeus first assigned the binomial of *Epidendrum* (an orchid genus) *domestica* in 1753 based on an illustration by Engelbert Kaempfer which, in turn, was based on a collected specimen that was a combination of an orchid and a member of the Iris family. In 1914, W. Druce renamed Linnaeus' species *Vanilla domestica* (the genus *Vanilla* is also an orchid genus). To complicate this story, Linnaeus also assigned the binomial *Ixia chinense* to another specimen of the Blackberry Lily. Other common synonyms for this species are *Belamcanda chinensis* by A. de Candolle in 1807, *Belamcanda punctata* by C. Moesch in 1794, *Gemmingia chinensis* (L.) by C. Kountze in 1891, *Morea chinensis* by C. Thunberg in late 1700's, and *Pardanthus chinensis* by J. Ker Gawler in 1805).

In the Manual, in the section "Taxa Not Treated in Manual", two non-native *Iris* species are included as waifs: *Iris germanica*, the German Iris, and *Iris sibirica*, the Siberian Iris. Waifs are species that have been observed but are not yet established as naturalized species. Neither of these waifs has been yet documented in our area. In the App, as of the 2020 update, neither of these species were considered naturalized and are not included.

*Sisyrinchium*, blue-eyed grasses, has 80 species native only to the New World. This genus is described in the Manual as "a difficult genus, with a number of taxonomic questions remaining in our area." The Manual included seven species of *Sisyrinchium* with three species documented in our area of northern Virginia. All seven of these species are native species. *Sisyrinchium* was named by Linnaeus in 1753 with the species *Sisyrinchium bermudiana*, the Bermuda Blue-eyed Grass. This genus name is based on the Latin *sūs* "pig" and Greek *rhynchos* "nose", based on pigs observed grubbing for the rhizomes of a European Iris, *Iris sisyrinchium*. The name "*Sisyrinchium*" was used by Pliny and Theophrastus for this species of Iris. Linnaeus' choice of this genus name *Sisyrinchium* by for this New World genus apparently was arbitrary.







Continued from page 6: Of the seven blue-eyed grass species treated in the Manual and the App, only two species *Sisyrinchium angustifolium*, Narrow-leaf Blue-eyed Grass, and *Sisyrinchium mucronatum*, Needle-tipped Blue-eyed Grass, are common in our part of northern Virginia. *Sisyrinchium fuscatum*, Coastal Plain Blue-eyed Grass, has been documented in Fairfax County. *Sisyrinchium angustifolium* was named by P. Miller in 1768, *Sisyrinchium mucronatum* by A. Michaux in 1803, and

*Sisyrinchium fuscatum* by E. Bicknell in 1899. It is interesting that Linnaeus used two examples of *Sisyrinchium bermudiana*, an alpha and a beta specimen, to assign the *Sisyrinchium bermudiana* binomium. Linnaeus used the alpha specimen as the basis to describe this species and he indicated it was “of Virginia,” but the beta specimen was a specimen collected in Bermuda. The specimen he described as “of Virginia” was possibly *Sisyrinchium angustifolium*. End



## 2022 Prince William Wildflower Society Spring Wildflower Garden Tour

Thanks to all the volunteer greeters who helped work the tables and direct visitors around the three gardens that were featured on this year’s Garden Tour. Many thanks to Janet Wheatcraft, Shirley and Tom Attanaro, and Nancy Arrington for opening their gardens to the public on a warm, sunny, Sunday afternoon.

Nancy Arrington thanks the following members who helped get her garden ready for the tour and helped during the tour: Kathy Dawson (new member), Deanna and Jack High, Lois Montgomery and Val Neitzey. Other greeters on the day were Nancy Vehrs, Valerie Kenyon Gaffney, Beverly Houston and Joyce Andrews. Thank you all! We couldn’t do it without you!

Photos: Nancy Vehrs and Valerie Kenyon Gaffney)

### The Attanaro Garden (66 visitors)



### The Wheatcraft Garden

### The Arrington Garden (75 visitors)



# Prince William Wildflower Society

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



Next Meeting: Thursday, May 5, 7 - 9 pm, via Zoom  
"Collectively Building Biodiversity" with Dr. Cindy Smith

PWWS Plant Sale, Saturday, May 7, 10 a.m. - Noon  
Bethel Evangelical Lutheran Church, Plantation Lane, Manassas

## PWWS Annual Native Plant Sale, May 7, 10:00 a.m. - Noon

Please note the time is the same as last year, 10:00 a.m. to noon, for our PWWS Plant Sale on the grounds of Bethel Lutheran Church, 8712 Plantation Lane, Manassas.

Members have been busy potting sun- and shade-loving perennials, ferns, grasses, shrubs and small trees. Most plants have been propagated by members or shared from their gardens; none have been collected from the wild. Some lower-cost nursery-propagated plugs will also be available this year.

We need lots of volunteers to make our sale the successful event it has become over the years. Help will be needed to transport plants to the sale by 7:00 a.m., to set up the sales area and help with pricing, to unload plants and put them in the sales area, to serve as ticket writers and cashiers, to help customers with their plant selections and getting their plants to their cars, and to clean up afterward.



Please wear a mask if social distancing cannot be maintained. VNPS members receive a 10% discount on plant purchases. Checks are preferred and credit cards will be accepted. If you can help and haven't already volunteered, please contact Nancy Arrington, [narrington1@verizon.net](mailto:narrington1@verizon.net), 703-408-7446 or Nancy Vehrs, [nvehrs1@yahoo.com](mailto:nvehrs1@yahoo.com), 703-368-2898. Hope to see everyone at the sale – either as a helper or a customer or both!