



Shenandoah Chapter *Virginia Native Plant Society* *November 2012*

Mission Statement:

We are a conservation organization dedicated to conserve Virginia's native plants and their ecosystems through education, advocacy and activities that promote appreciation, stewardship and appropriate use.

Next Meeting: No Meeting Scheduled for November.

Members will be notified if any chapter activities take place in November.

Upcoming Events

Northern Saw-whet Owl Banding Event

Friday evening, November 9, 2012, 7:00 pm till midnight

It's not about native plants but members might be interested in this event. Contact Michael Seth if interested in attending. sethmj@jmu.edu

Learn Saw-Whet Owl banding from professionals in this hands-on experience. With Dr. A. Clair Mellinger, Eastern Mennonite University biology professor emeriti, attend and learn a skill that supports necessary research of species migration. At a banding station in northwest Rockingham County, Virginia (with directions to be provided to registered participants) be treated to up-close-and-personal experiences with these Robin-sized owls.

With a wealth of knowledge and experience and an educator's heart, Dr. A. Clair Mellinger introduces enthusiasts, experts to novices, to the skills of handling and banding these tiny, beautiful and amazing nocturnal creatures. This Saw-Whet banding event begins at 7:00 pm and continues until around midnight. But attendees can leave when they wish. Advance registration is needed, transportation to banding station is not provided. Dress for the weather, banding takes place rain or clear skies.

Festive Greens An Annual Workshop

Wednesday December 5th Noon to 1:30 in the Frances Plecker Education Center

\$30 bring your own pot, or \$35 all supplies provided!

For those who enjoy creating personalized seasonal fresh, fragrant, evergreen holiday décor, an exciting annual EJC Arboretum workshop is offered. Led by Abby Long, owner and highly-regarded designer for Blakemore's Florist, this workshop teaches creating a holiday décor piece unique and personal that is fine-tuned under the guidance of a floral expert. The Holiday Topiary is made with fragrant and long lasting evergreens chosen for beauty. Attendees will learn about evergreens and gain a skill of creating topiaries that will stay with them for a lifetime! Each year, build a different décor piece, including wreathes, table centerpieces, swags and garlands, kissing balls, and now topiaries.

Your registration fee varies, allowing attendees to select either to bring their own pot that matches a personal color scheme, or pay for everything needed for a creation to be included in the fee! Register soon, space is limited!

Recent Activities:

Meeting: Thursday October 11 7:30 at Blue Ridge Community College. Guest Speakers Jon Monroe JMU biology professor gave a presentation on the plants of Jardin Georges Delaselle.

At the October 2012 meeting, Jon Monroe took us arm chair traveling to a special garden, Jardin Georges Delaselle, found on a small island off the coast of France. Due to its unique position, the Island of Batz has a Mediterranean climate making it the perfect place for a host of plants. The garden was started in 1897. Delaselle gathered plants from around the world in particular from the southern hemisphere. After Delaselle's death, the garden sold several times and fell into neglect. It was revived in 1987 and is vibrant today. Seeing a collection of plants that look totally different yet retain characteristics of families that we are familiar with from our own local flora made for a very fine evening.

Saturday October 20 Remarkable Trees of Virginia Field Trip with JMU Arboretum Director Jan Sievers.

Jan Sievers reports: All of us enjoyed learning about Elkton and the historic site where the Bur Oak is still standing and noting the damage from the past two years there from the Halloween early snow storm of 2011 and the derecho of summer, 2012.

The Chinquapin Oak along the Shenandoah River is absolutely beautiful and probably our favorite for the day because of its majesty there along the bend in the scenic Shenandoah River. A spot that we wanted to linger in and enjoy and return to.

We had two good tour guides for the stops in Fredericksburg and the head of grounds, Joni Wilson, at University of Mary Washington did a great job sharing several areas of the grounds there at the President's home. Many beautiful trees to see there besides the Brompton Oak. Of most interest to me was the "tree surgery" that was done in the late 1800's that the tree suffers from still today. We saw records of all the "hardware" that was used to save the tree over a hundred years ago. They bled the tree of water and filled its core with concrete and today it suffers from a root rot that it needs annual treatment for and much expense and labor goes into keeping that tree alive. I love how those old trees lower their branches to the ground when they get that old and heavy.

The Catalpas at Chatham Hall were beautifully gnarly, twisted and hollow and had lost all but the bases of the trees (the most beautiful parts), and so much history had happened on their watch at both of these sites. It was a beautiful autumn day & we had a lovely picnic lunch under the trees at Chatham Hall (a good assortment there to be seen too). You may be able to get a quote from Eleanor Baker (from SVNPS). We had two master naturalists, two arborists, and native plant enthusiasts with us so it was an informed group with much love of trees between us.

The last wildflowers. Several folks including Mike Seth hiked up from Reddish Knob to Little Bald Knob on Saturday October 20 measuring the trails as part of the Great Eastern Trail project. They were treated large numbers of closed gentians. In fact, there were patches of closed gentians and a good variety of late asters along most of the four miles along FDR85 to Little Bald Knob- a bit rough for a vehicle but a pleasant and easy walk. Possible field trip for next fall? Coming back only a week later to finish our work most of the gentians were gone. The only one else we saw up there was a bow hunter looking for a bear he wounded.

Tallest Tree in the State, September 2012

Photos by Christina Woodson

This article from the Wild Virginia newsletter is about there September 23 trip to Ramsey's Draft in search of the Tallest Tree in Virginia and is reprinted with permission

One could not have asked for a more beautiful day on the second day of fall to hike into Ramsey's Draft Wilderness of George Washington National Forest on a quest to find the tallest tree in Virginia. This giant white pine, *Pinus strobus*, is documented in Virginia Tech's Big Tree Database as standing 166 feet in height with a circumference of 139 inches.

Master Naturalist John Holden led this group of 15 people along the crystal clear waters of Ramsey's Draft to the spot where this tree is located. Before starting the hike, John spoke about how much the area had changed in the 30 years he had been coming out to Ramsey's Draft.

The going was fairly easy, but wet, with 6 crossings of Ramsey's Draft each way. After just a few crossings, everyone seemed to enjoy walking through the water, though. Wet feet seemed a small price to pay for such a tall reward and beautiful day.



As we neared the location, John challenged everyone in the group to point out what they thought might be the tallest tree. There were some good candidates, but we weren't there yet. When we stopped in a clearing after the sixth water crossing, John looked a bit dismayed as he looked across and up from the forest floor. Where the tallest tree should have been was a fallen tree that had snapped a few feet up from the base of its trunk. It lay across the forest floor with its crown strewn about and its top reaching down the eastern bank of Ramsey's Draft. The still green needles that formed a once lofty crown indicated that not much time had passed since the tree yielded to the forces of nature.

While John hiked ahead to confirm his location, the group spent some time viewing the fallen giant and estimating its length along the forest floor. An estimate of 170 feet and John's return confirmed that the once tallest tree in Virginia had fallen. It was a discovery, but it was a disappointing, and perhaps sad one, to report.

Needless to say, it was a bittersweet walk back to the trailhead knowing we missed seeing the tallest tree standing, but we were still immersed a very rich and deep forest experience.

