



Shenandoah Chapter Virginia Native Plant Society November/December 2014

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.

Upcoming Chapter Events:

At present the chapter has no scheduled activities. However, we will most likely have a winter botany walk possibly in January and perhaps other activities as well. They will be in the next (January 2015) newsletter.

Other Activities

Friday October 31, 2014, JMU Arboretum *Private Greenhouse Close-out Shopping Appointments*, with an Arboretum Green House Manager. Call (540) 568-3194 to reserve a half-hour appointment to shop the growing season closeout plant, shrub, tree inventory at the arboretum greenhouse.

Saturday November 8, 2014 Water Monitor Training - Time: 9:15 am - 4:15 pm

Staunton Public Library 1 Churchville Ave., Staunton, VA 24401

Learn from Trout Unlimited (TU) how to monitor water quality throughout Marcellus Shale regions in Virginia's national forests.

Wild Virginia will host this one-day training for citizen volunteers to learn how to properly conduct water quality monitoring which includes how to conduct chemical monitoring on water samples, measure stream flow, test water temperatures and turbidity and conduct visual assessments. No prior experience necessary, but a serious commitment to ongoing monitoring once per month is expected. Pre-registration required. Find more information [here](#).

Saturday November 15 Sierra Club Outing: Dark Hollow & Rose River Falls

This Dark Hollow - Rose River Loop near Big Meadows passes two of the most scenic waterfalls in the Shenandoah National Park. The hike starts at the Big Meadows Visitor Center, from where we'll hike down to Dark Hollow Falls, along Rose River to Rose River Falls, back up to Fishers Gap Overlook, and then along the Big Meadows horse trail back to the Visitor Center.

Contact: Ralph Grove: ralph.grove@gmail.com or (540.478.3677)

Saturday November 15 Pipeline Hike. Appalachian Trail from Rockfish Gap to Humpback Rocks. The pipeline will cross the AT about midway. 6/5 mi. Meet at Rockfish Gap at old Howard Johnson restaurant at 9:00 a.m. Leader: David Bennick, (540) 337-5330, dbennick@verizon.net.

Monday November 17–December 5, 2014, *Festive Holiday Plants Online Sale*, Bring the beauty of fresh blooming holiday plants into your home or office for the Holidays. The EJC Arboretum offers locally-grown, high-quality plants. Visit www.jmu.edu/arboretum. Order pick up in the FPEC, 8:30-4:30 pm after December 9, 2014.

Sunday November 23 Pipeline Hike Dowell's Draft – White Oak Trail on Hankey Mountain 6.3 mi. Moderate.

The pipeline will follow Dowells Draft Road and Trail and cross the access road to White Oak Trail. Meet at Churchville TasteeFreez at 9:00 a.m. Leader: Stefanie Morris, stefka555@gmail.com, (540) 476-1231.

Saturday December 6 Pipeline Hike Ramsey's Draft to Braley Pond 5.7 mi. The proposed pipeline will cross Braley Pond access roads in two places. Leader Richard Hottel,

rbhottel@comcast.net, (540) 337-7346. Meet at Churchville TasteeFreez at 9:00 a.m.

Wednesday December 10, 2014, JMU Arboretum *Annual Festive Greens Workshop*, Noon to 1:30 pm, Create a versatile holiday décor piece that will beautify any holiday home or business with style and fragrance, under the guidance of a floral expert, Abby Long from Blakemore's Florist. Fee varies depending on supplies ordered when registering. Register at jmu.edu/arboretum. Held in the FPEC.

Saturday December 13, 2014, JMU Arboretum *Moonlight Holiday and Winter Commencement Carriage Rides*, 5:00 - 8:00 pm, reserve to enjoy a horse drawn holiday carriage moonlight or daytime ride. Horse teams are harnessed in jingle bells for this festive Holiday celebration. For the cost of a movie ticket, create a holiday memory of a lifetime! Browse arboretum website, late fall for information when posted. Carriages leave the FPEC on a 20 minute schedule.

Sunday December 14 Pipeline Hike. Shaw's Fork Shenandoah Mountain Highland County. 6/5 mi with shuttle. Begin at Shaw's Fork Horse Camp, hike up a well-graded trail on the west side of Shenandoah Mountain and then along the forest road to Rt. 250. Meet at Churchville TasteeFreez at 9:00 a.m. Leader: Jean Fraser, jeancfraser2@yahoo.com, (540) 490-0195.

Recent Activities

October 17 Friday Mike Smith reports: I was hiking with the Roanoke trail club this past Friday to Dragon Tooth and chanced upon the rare shrub Pirate Bush (*Buckleya distichophylla*) It is in the sandalwood family. It is parasitic on pine trees, other shrubs, and herbaceous plants. I found a few plants on the AT in a pine- mountain laurel heath. It is endemic to the southern Appalachians in southern Virginia, eastern Tennessee and western North Carolina. It is rare throughout its range. It is not understood why it is rare

Sunday October 19. Pipeline Hike. Led by chapter members Malcolm and Lynn Cameron about a dozen folks walked along the route of the proposed pipeline from Signal Knob along the Georgia Camp Trail. The proposed pipeline would involve slicing away at the mountainside with many large oaks and maples, and would obliterate the trail. Besides being botanically rich, this is prime habitat for the endemic Cow Knob and Shenandoah Mountain salamanders. We were unable to find either but saw many late blooming asters.

A major activity is planning the **September 2015 Annual Meeting**. Our Shenandoah Valley Chapter of the VNPS along with the Headwaters Chapter will host the annual state conference of the Virginia Native Plant Society next fall- September 11-13 2015 at the Frontier Cultural Museum Pavilion. More details will emerge in the coming months but we will be looking for volunteers help including leading or co-leading walks and tours.

Pipeline Threatens Habitats for Native Plants in Our Area

Dominion Virginia Power, Duke Energy and Piedmont Natural Gas, have decided to move forward with plans to build a 550-mile natural gas pipeline through Virginia. The company will ask the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission for approval, which Dominion hopes to secure by 2016.

The \$2 billion pipeline will carry fracked natural gas from West Virginia through Virginia to North Carolina. The pipeline route cuts through national forest lands traversing areas of outstanding ecological integrity here in Virginia, including Camp Ridge, Sulfur Springs Hollow, Signal Corps Knob, and Brushy Mountain. The proposed 42" natural gas pipeline through Highland, Augusta and Nelson counties will have enormous impact on some of our most pristine places for native plants.

This route crosses approximately 13 miles of Virginia's national forests. It cuts across Shenandoah Mountain just south of the Confederate Breastworks, passes through the Braley Pond recreation area, over Hankey Mountain and then across the Valley and over the Blue Ridge between I-64 and Humpbacks Rocks. (See the Pipeline hikes above). It also comes dangerously close to Staunton's drinking watershed. The connection to the possibility of fracking in the George Washington National Forest has not gone unnoticed.

The vast construction, access roads, the grading and leveling of mountainsides etc. is likely to change these areas forever with a serious impact on our native plants. The Virginia Native Plant Society mission is to protect these plants and the wild places where they grow. So we cannot ignore this threat. Most chapters of the VNPS have come out against this proposed route although our chapter has yet to take a stance.

The Virginia Native Plant Society has recently approved of the following resolutions:

Resolution #1: Virginia Native Plant Society, in accordance with its mission to protect the natural areas of Virginia, opposes the construction of the Atlantic Coast and Mountain Valley Pipelines.

Resolution #2 In opposing the construction of the Atlantic Coast and Mountain Valley Pipelines, the Virginia Native Plant Society resolves to join the Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance, a coalition of non-profit organizations concerned about the damage pipelines would cause.

Asters, Continued

The wildflowers are just about gone but a few asters linger. The previous newsletter mentioned the some of the members of the Astereae tribe found in our area, all members of the genus *Symphyotrichum*. Two other genera are also found. *Eurybia* includes *Eurybia divaricata* the White Wood Aster that is one of commonest fall flowers. It can be distinguished by the highly serrated heart-shape leaves and white flowers about 3/4 to 1 inch wide in flattish clusters. It is common in our woods and roadsides, especially in drier areas. *Eurybia macrophylla* Large-flowered Aster has larger broader leaves, also serrated and but with violet or lavender flowers. It is also common in drier woods. *Eurybia schrebeyi* Schreber's Aster is listed as infrequent in our area, has white flowers and heart shape leaves similar to Large-leaved Aster. The genus *Lonactis* is represented by the *Lonactis linarifolia* or Stiff Aster. This is a fairly easily identifiable common aster in our forest. It grows very erect with a stiff stem, violet flowers about 1 inch wide and has as its name suggests narrow lance-shaped "flax-like" leaves. It is frequently seen along forest trails usually growing alone.



White Wood Aster



Stiff Aster

Invasive Plant of the Month: Japanese Stiltgrass

Fewer invasives are more pervasive in our area than *Microstegium vimineum*, commonly known as **Japanese Stiltgrass**. It is also said to be known as Nepalese Browntop, although I never heard anyone call it that. It is sometimes just called *Microstegium* after the genus which has about 15 species native to subtropical Asia and Africa. It is common in a wide variety of habitats and is well adapted to low light levels.

The plant was accidentally introduced into the U.S. state of Tennessee around 1919 due to its use as a packing material used to ship porcelain from China. It has spread throughout the Southeastern U.S. and is now found throughout the U.S. east of the Mississippi except for uppermost New England and Michigan as well as in Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana and parts of Texas. It is found in all parts of Virginia and unfortunately is very common in our area. The *Flora of Virginia* describes it as "aggressively invasive." It covers floodplains, small stream bottoms and

upland woodlands whenever there is some opening and moisture. Mostly it is found in disturbed habitats. But it will grow in undisturbed habitats as well, penetrating deep into some of our wild places. It forms a monocultural carpet eliminating most other herbal species. Sometimes hiking in the George Washington National Forest or the Shenandoah National Park the edging of the trail will be completely covered by the *Microstegium* replacing the rich variety of native flowers that once treated the hiker.

Japanese Stiltgrass flowers August to October. It typically grows to heights between 40 and 100 cm (1.3 and 3.3 ft) and is capable of rooting at each node. The plant flowers in late summer and produces its seeds in the form of achenes shortly thereafter. Whitetail deer, which do not browse the grass, may facilitate spread by browsing on native species and thereby reducing competition for the exotic plant. Invasion of *Microstegium* can reduce growth and flowering of native species, suppress native plant communities, alter and suppress insect communities, slow plant succession and alter nutrient cycling.

Getting rid of it is a challenge. *Microstegium vimineum* is a warm season grass which can be controlled with pre-emergent herbicides targeted for crabgrass. Post emergent controls can also be successful, such as Calcium acid methanearsonate 8.4% Ortho "Weed-b-Gon" Crabgrass killer for lawns, which contains 2,4-D, and Acclaim Extra as well. Unless noted, surfactants should be added to herbicides for better control. If you are reluctant to use herbicides, and for many of us their use is a desperate last resort, hand weeding and mowing are among the most successful methods of removal. Because it is shallow-rooted, stiltgrass may be pulled by hand at any time. In order to be effective, this is best done before the plants go to seed. The area will need constant monitoring to pull up new plants.

Don't confuse it with the common native Virginia cutgrass (Leersia virginica). Japanese Stiltgrass is quite similar to and often grows along with the North American grass *Leersia virginica*, but *L. virginica* lacks the distinctive silver stripe on the center of the leaf that is present on Japanese stiltgrass (see illustrations below) and also flowers one to two months earlier. The leaves of Japanese stiltgrass are also more asymmetrical. *Leersia virginica*, commonly known as whitegrass, white cutgrass, or most often in our area as Virginian Cutgrass, is a perennial grass that is native to eastern North America, typically found in partially shaded low-lying wet areas. It is very common in our area. It likes shady clearings in forests, forest floodplains and river and pond shores but in our mountains it is very common in drier forest floors. It has the same range as Japanese Stiltgrass except it grows further north. A member of the Leersia, a genus of 17 of 18 mostly species of tropical and warm-temperate grasses, Virginia Cutgrass is one of commonest forest grasses. A perennial it blooms in August to October.



Microstegium vimineum with its diagnosti silver mid vein



Virginia cutgrass (Leersia virginica)

Sources: <http://plants.usda.gov/core/profile?symbol=MIVI>; *Flora of Virginia*; www.dcr.virginia.gov/.../vaisc/species/japanese-stilt-grass.htm

Please send any articles or announcements to Elaine Smith, antigone16@comcast.net.