



## Newsletter

# VIRGINIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY UPPER JAMES RIVER CHAPTER

*The counties of Allegheny, Amherst, Bath and Rockbridge  
and the cities of Lexington and Buena Vista*

## Fall – 2015

Additions, changes or corrections to the calendar will be sent to our email list, and phoned to members not on email.

### **Talking Native Plants Lunch**

**October 13th at 11:30.** Meet at Boxerwood (it is a quieter venue) and bring your lunch. Come tell us what is showing up on your property now or what grew in the summer - the good, bad, and ugly. 963 Ross Rd. [www.boxerwood.org/location.html](http://www.boxerwood.org/location.html)

### **Last for the Season Wildflower Walk- Brushy Hills October 17th!**

To reach Brushy Hills from Lexington, drive to the end of Ross Road (2.3 miles from city limits) and turn right on Union Run Road. Continue 0.6 miles to the Brushy Hills Trails sign and Town Spring on the right, with parking lot opposite. We will gather at 9:30 a.m. to start walking at 10:00. The walks will be a minimum of two hours; folks are welcome to return to their cars whenever they need to. Please dress for the weather that day (we'll go unless it is pouring rain) and bring water and snack for yourself. If you have questions, contact Peggy Dyson-Cobb at 464-3511 or Peggy Dyson-Cobb <[cobbking@rockbridge.net](mailto:cobbking@rockbridge.net)>

### **Annual Meeting - October 23rd at 11:00-1:00 Boxerwood. Bring your lunch.**

We will gather to discuss plans for the upcoming year - what do you want us to do as a chapter? View the work-in-progress native plant area and give us your thoughts on what to plant. And we will do the usual business related things like vote in officers. 963 Ross Rd. [www.boxerwood.org/location.html](http://www.boxerwood.org/location.html)

### **President's Column**

Three cheers for the Upper James River Chapter. Working with the Shenandoah Chapter, we pulled off a "Good time was had by all" annual meeting

for our statewide chapters. Our members deserving of applause are Peggy Dyson-Cobb, Phyllis Fevrier, Laura Neale, Alexia Smith, Jan Smith, Katherine Smith, Faith Vosburgh and Chris Wise. Grace and Joe Simcoe and Susan Gitlin also attended.

We also had assistance from non-members David Roscher, Lisa Tracy and Becky MacKenzie. Last, but not least, Friday evening's meal was provided by local caterer Mountain Mama (Mirabai McLeod) and was greeted with applause after dessert.

*Katherine Smith*

## ***Highlights of the annual meeting – personal views.***

*From Peggy Dyson-Cobb – leader of Brushy Hills field trip*

We had a group of a dozen or so who braved the dire storm forecasts to spend the day in three Rockbridge County areas, beginning with Brushy Hills. It has been a challenge in our past walks on the unmapped "Lower Trail Loop" to keep



a single-file group together so that everyone hears questions and answers – so our walk was built around several points on the path broad enough to circle up. Which worked for a while, but having Peggy in the lead, spotting and identifying, Alexia Smith in the middle particularly looking out for ferns, and David Rosher with lots of pointers and experience working on non-native invasives (as well as spotting and identifying), the group did finally get seriously strung out again. We found some lovely plants in leaf, flower, or seed – agrimony, white wood aster, two bellworts, upland boneset, bottlebrush grass, ebony spleenwort, putty root seedstalks, two ginseng (!), two goldenrod species, cut-leaf grape fern, and lots of tick trefoil, horsebalm, clearweed, jewelweed, and heavily fruiting spicebush. An excellent introduction to these regenerating woods!

Right afterwards, I boogied back up to Staunton to join Phyllis and Fred Fevrier for the fieldtrip touring the Crimora nursery from which many of us order field grown tree and shrub seedlings. That was amazing – a vast field divided into sections, some with full growing beds over 500-feet long by 3-4 feet wide. As we stopped by a bed, our guide would pause and mentally pull up the species (white oak) and say "we have about 78,000 in this row" - it was hard to imagine even standing there looking at the broad row of plants disappearing into the distance. Some sections were off-limits, having recently been chemically fumigated to rid the soil of any insects or diseases – many of these areas will be planted this fall with freshly gathered nuts and seeds (as many as possible from local sites). All the plants we saw (except several varieties of pine or spruce) will be harvested while dormant by next spring – last year the nursery sold 4 1/2 MILLION seedlings. Chemicals and specialized machinery make it possible to run the nursery with a small full-time staff, and a good number of seasonal 'contractors' during planting and harvesting times. Many of us were surprised to learn that the nursery,

though under the wing of the VA Forestry Dept., is self-supporting (no tax dollars go there) and sends seedlings all over the country, not just to Virginians. It is an impressive operation - well worth visiting and ordering from!

*From Phyllis Fevrier - Bobby Whitescarver's Farm: A Middle River Watershed Field Trip Adventure*

Riparian buffer, acres of native grasses, and native oak stands are an important part of Jeannie and Bobby Whitescarver's working cattle ranch. The native tree buffer along the creek is not only a lush habitat for pollinators and birds, but it is a proven workhorse in allowing the healthy stream ecology to rebalance the natural nutrient cycle. The creek water is tested for E-coli as it enters the property and again as it exits. Upstream of the property, unhealthy levels of manure from more traditional farming practices allow the initial E-coli test levels to soar. Exiting water test levels show a large reduction of E-coli, thanks in part, to this riparian tree buffer. The cows are fenced out of the stream, given shade, and clean water away from the creek. A win-win situation with healthy cows, and healthy water.

We saw native trees like sycamore, black locust, many oak species, and sumac along with other understory shrubs, protecting the banks of the creek. Joe-Pye weed, milkweed and ironweed were in the adjacent field. Native trees are an important food, shelter, and shade source for the vital aquatic population. According to the Stroud Water Research Center healthy aquatic ecosystems are capable of processing 2-8 times more pollution flowing through a native forest buffer than a non-native buffer.

We also saw native grasses like Indiangrass, Switchgrass, Big and Little Bluestem growing in fields that will be used for grazing. The grasses also provide cover for quail, recently introduced and welcomed to stay.

This field trip was an eye-opening and heart-warming visit to the Whitescarver's progressive cattle ranch that has also been, for centuries, their much loved homestead

*From Katherine Smith - Hiking the Chessie Trail*

Our chapter provided leadership for two, the first on Saturday afternoon and the second on Sunday morning. While the Trail and the river are showing the effects of draught just now, our dozen or more native plant enthusiasts for each walk were eager participants. I emphasized the changing ecologies along the way as we searched for seed surprises. The first of these was the bladdernut (*Staphylea triloba*) and the last was black cohosh (*Actaea*). Fall color standouts we found included goldenrods (*Solidago* spp), great blue lobelia (*Lobelia siphilitica*), thoroughwort (*Eupatorium album*), and brown-eyed susan (*rudbeckia triloba*).

Most exclamations came from the plants nestled in the cliffs. We see them in spring as providers of color. Now their varying textures and shapes seem to beg to be touched. Possibly there are among them grasses, sedges and mosses we have yet to identify.

*From Jan Smith - Cowbane Natural Area Preserve*

First my back seat mate on the drive to Cowbane Natural Area Preserve impressed me. This suburban woman and her husband spent years educating themselves

about nature, and then found what they thought were really neat flowers on their 300-acre mountain. They knew enough to call in experts and they were right. Their acreage is now Naked Mountain Natural Area Preserve. Well, I have interesting weeds.

We arrived at Cowbane to be greeted by our DCR guide who had a British accent. VA attracts all sorts! Cowbane is comprised of an upland meadow area that is being converted to native warm season grasses. The lower part along the South River is a marsh fen. Our guide is a fire ecologist and we learned that fire is an important management tool in both meadow and forest restoration and maintenance. Fire was used extensively and regularly by Native Americans (1491 is a fascinating book). There are hot and cool fires and they are used to achieve different goals. There were 3 meadow test plots, one that looked like something I would do. A heavy hand seeding Big Bluestem created a thick wall of grass that no game bird could get through! Lightly seeding by hand is the way to go with natives. And I learned there is a white goldenrod.



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**Virginia Native Plant Society Upper James River Chapter**

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We welcome new members and guests. For more information, contact a board member.

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