

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

At last the days are lengthening, but where were winter's cold and snow? What have we accomplished recently, and where are we going as we wait for rain while spring bursts out all over? Here's a brief summary.

Meetings. Ann Messick came to our rescue with an excellent presentation about native plants of the Pacific Northwest when our January speaker suddenly had to cancel. Just as February's Backyard Bird Count was about to begin, BJ Norris gave a beautifully illustrated introduction to our winter birds.

Wildlife biologist Sandy Spencer's description of the management aims and habitats of the Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge (RRVNWR) elicited many questions in March.

Projects. Our own ideas, plus hints and suggestions from others (especially spouses), are plentiful, but your Board is restricting itself to projects that elicit promises of active support from the membership at large. I am happy to report that our annual planting of native perennials at Belle Isle State Park in Lancaster County, now in collaboration with the Friends of Belle Isle, has expanded to include native shrubs and trees provided by the state. Native plant surveys at the RRVNWR's Laurel Tract (Richmond County) are continuing on a regular basis, and preparing for September's plant sale already is well underway.

New projects include:

Bloomin' Plants! – email updates on first sightings of blooms in native and non-cultivated alien plants

Old Courthouse garden – beautifying Northumberland County's Old Courthouse in the center of Heathsville with a public demonstration garden of native trees, shrubs and perennials

Invasive plant removal – eradicating tree-of-heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*) at the Laurel Tract.

Outreach. Attendees at the Garden Club of the Northern Neck's annual *Conservation Symposium* in February took many copies of our native plant brochures, latest newsletters, and the state's *Invasive Alien Plant Species of Virginia* handouts.

Field Outings. Those who joined Ann Messick in January marveled at the skunk cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*) in bloom at Hickory Hollow's Cabin Swamp, but on a lovely March morning at the James tract (another Audubon site), we were unable to find any southern twayblade (*Listera australis*) either in or out of bloom for her.

Upcoming – Among this spring's outings there'll be some old, some new, and some on *Saturday afternoons* to better accommodate folks who work and our week-enders. Please carpool whenever possible. I will offer to locate fellow travelers when you register for outings. And if you have more than one motorized vehicle, whenever possible please help us all reduce our carbon emissions by driving whichever is the most fuel-efficient for the task at hand. Global warming already is a huge threat to our native plants, and to the animals that depend upon them for food and shelter.

Farewell. Alison and Hans Rilling, our talented newspaper editors, are relocating to higher ground (Lexington, VA). Alison also created the current version of our chapter's brochure, and raises plants for sale and Belle Isle. It's always sad to lose treasured members. To both y'all: fare well and fare forward.

Judy Lang

jandl@rivnet.net or (804) 453-6605

NEW EDITORIAL STAFF

A new editorial staff will be producing the next issue of our chapter's newsletter! Carol Hammer, who is taking on the Photo Page, will be working with Jackie Ferriter and Judy Lang to compile the Summer issue. They welcome help from anyone who is familiar with newsletters or with word processing.

Contact Judy at jandl@rivnet.net or (804) 453-6605.

In geological time, a plant is native somewhere only as an airplane's transient vapor trail is native to a

particular place in the atmosphere. William Cullina in **Native Trees, Shrubs, and Vines: A Guide to Using, Growing, and Propagating North American Woody Plants.** New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002

THE ANNUAL PLANT SALE

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 9 – 9:00 UNTIL IT’S OVER

Your plant sale committee is hard at work preparing for our big fund-raiser. This year we’ll be buying some of our plants from a wholesaler in the spring and raising them into sizable, healthy specimens for our big event. We hope to have a wide variety of flowers, shrubs and trees available, making this our best sale ever!

You can help too! Look over your natives and non-invasive aliens for those that would benefit from division and pot up a few for us. Or start some seedlings. Remember, this is a Ways & Means project in addition to an effort to spread the good news about native plants in the landscape, so share your wealth! Questions?? Sandy Blackwell at 453-9183 or Judy Burgess at 453-3933

Editors’ note: We’ve noticed a theme in this issue: the Northern Neck chapter, Virginia Native Plant Society, is partnering with several other groups this spring in exploring the Northern Neck and making it a more beautiful, wildlife- and people-friendly place to live. Below are reports on what’s going on with us and some of our friends.

BELLE ISLE BLOSSOMING

The Friends of Belle Isle have joined forces with VNPSNN to help beautify the park and provide cover and food for wildlife, by planting native wildflowers, shrubs and trees. In early March, volunteers planted a dozen flats with seeds of butterfly weed, liatris, and seashore mallow. Later this spring, volunteers will plant these and other perennial seedlings purchased by the state from Hyla Brook Farm nursery along the roadside, expanding the native wildflower areas planted in earlier years.

On a larger scale, several groups of, ahem, *younger* volunteers will be planting some larger native plants. In mid-March new VNPSNN member Daphne Montgomery, Friend Joe Hecht, and I worked with the first of these groups – university students from New Hampshire – helping Paul Billings and park personnel plant shrubs and trees throughout the new campground and near the park office.

We can use your help with the more than 1200 wildflower seedlings that will be ready to plant in late spring! Join us **Saturday, May 6, at 10:00 a.m.** Bring your favorite planting tools!

Nick Ferriter
804-462-6242

GEORGE WASHINGTON BIRD & NATURE WALK

The George Washington Birthplace Association is planning a bird and nature walk on the trails at the Birthplace on **April 15 at 9:30 am.** The walk isn’t sponsored by VNPSNN, but the walk leaders – Rick Skelton, Ann Messick, Marie Minor, Sandy Spencer, and Earline Walker – are all VNPSNN members! It is open to the public, and participants will provide the Birthplace with a list of birds and plants surveyed. Participants should meet at The Log House near the picnic area. There will be signs directing arrivals. The Birthplace is located on Route 204, 2 miles off of Route 3, 11 miles west of Montross. The contact person at the Birthplace Association is Susan Spage. 804-493-7483, susanspage@hotmail.com.

WHAT TO TAKE ON AN OUTING: magnifying glass, wildflower field guide, notebook and pen or pencil, water, camera, insect repellent

WHAT NOT TO TAKE ON AN OUTING: scissors, clippers, shovels

COMING EVENTS

April 15 – Bird and nature walk, George Washington Birthplace Association. 9:30 am. Route 204, 2 miles off of Route 3, 11 miles west of Montross.

April 28 – Natural Area Preserves bird walk at Dameron Marsh. Meet in the parking lot of Dameron Marsh. Wear appropriate clothes, bring binoculars, water, and all will learn from Jack Carroll from the Northern Virginia Audubon Society. Directions: Take Rt. 606, Shiloh School Road, East from SR 200. Turn left when you come to a T onto 605. Travel 0.8 miles and turn right onto Rt. 606 Cloverdale Rd. Proceed 0.4 miles and turn left onto a gravel road which leads to the entrance at 0.4 miles. Parking lot is 0.5 miles from the entrance. Watch for birds on both sides of the road.

May 6 – Wildflower planting, Belle Isle State Park, Lancaster County. 9:30 a.m. Bring your planting tools!

NORTHERN NECK AUDUBON SOCIETY BIRD WALKS

VNPSNN members are always welcome on NNAS bird walks, whether looking up at birds or down at plants. NNAS walks are on the second Monday of most months meeting in the Grace Episcopal Church parking lot. On Monday April 10 we are meeting at 8:00 am, most months it is 8:30 am. We travel together to the birding site.

As always, don't forget the binoculars and water-resistant footwear! For additional information, call Rick Skelton at 804- 580-9066 or Audrey Brainard at 804-580-5519 or Brainard@rivnet.net.

April 10 – Regent Point Marina, Middle Peninsula Meet at Grace Episcopal by 8:00 a.m. Check the newspapers the first week of April for further information.

May 8 – Laurel Grove. The Laurel Tract of the Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge is located on Farnham Creek in Lancaster County. Meet at Grace Episcopal Church by 8:00 a.m., or arrive at site by 8:20 a.m. *Driving directions from Kilmarnock:* Take Rt. 3 west to Rt. 608 (past Robley). Turn left on Rt. 608 and continue to Rt. 647 (Hales Point Rd.). Turn left on Hales Point Rd. At fork, keep to the right. At next fork, keep right again onto Laurel Grove Rd. Continue on Laurel Grove Rd. to white farmhouse on right.

June 12 – To Be Announced

FRIENDS OF THE RAPPAHANNOCK VALLEY WILDLIFE REFUGE

Hidden along the Northern Neck and its neighboring areas are plots of acreage that make up the Rappahannock Valley Wildlife Refuge System. Part of the national system of refuges, RVWR is not just a single location, but a multitude of tracts located in the Rappahannock River basin.

Founded in 2004, the Friends of the RVWR works to insure that these lands will never be developed and that future generations will be able to enjoy them just as we do today. The Friends of the RAVWR have four priorities: direct refuge support, community outreach, education, and advocacy.

Refuge support means helping the refuge carry out its mission of “...*administering a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and, where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and habitats...*” In the last year the Friends group has helped clean up the Hutchinson Unit in Essex County and participated in the Christmas Bird Count at the Wilna Unit in Richmond County. Coming up is development of a Wildflower Meadow and a Butterfly Garden.

One aspect of **Community Outreach** is making the Refuge more accessible to visitors. In many areas the roads are very poor, and there are no trails or signs. The Wilna Unit has been opened to the public, with a handicapped fishing pier, canoe, and small boat launch, handicapped-accessible restrooms, and trails and learning kiosks. The Friends group was instrumental in setting up the kiosks and coordinating with the Boy Scouts to clear the trails. They also helped out at the annual Kids' Fishing Tournament at the pond.

Other parts of the Refuge need similar help. Trails, boat ramps, and canoe launches will lead visitors to make the Refuge a destination stop, bringing new revenue into the area. The Friends' first major undertaking is a canoe launch at the Hutchinson Unit. The design has been drawn and the Friends

are working to raise funds for the project.

It is harder than we often realize to **educate** citizens on the role of the Refuge in their lives. As the refuge takes over properties that were formerly private, local residents may resent losing access to lands that they once farmed and used without restriction. The Friends perform our greatest service to the Refuge by helping people understand that these lands are now protecting our wildlife for our grandchildren and great-grandchildren. No high rise or housing development will be built here, no strip mall or factory. The inability to farm or camp here is a small sacrifice compared to the larger benefits of preserving open land.

Each refuge is a living laboratory that should be open to children of all ages and backgrounds. It is in their own native habitats that children learn the most about the animals, minerals, and vegetation that make up the refuge. With knowledgeable teachers, sometimes even funded by Friends groups, a refuge becomes a classroom where children from nearby schools learn not just science but mathematics and English as they observe and describe their surroundings. Through hands-on experiences in the outdoors, these children may grow up with a love of nature. And they may well become "friends" who support the Refuge in the future.

The role of **advocacy** is more important than many people realize. Federal employees cannot lobby Congress on their own behalf, so the Refuge depends on its Friends to lobby for it. The *National Wildlife Refuge Association* is an advocacy group that monitors Congress for upcoming legislation and lobbies on behalf of the entire Refuge system. Individual Friends groups can join the NWRA to gain additional support for local Refuge issues.

By staying focused on the objectives of Direct Refuge Support, Community Outreach, Education, and Advocacy, the Rappahannock Wildlife Refuge Friends are helping to insure the future of our Refuge and all refuges nationwide. Our refuges need constant vigilance and nurturing; the system cannot be taken for granted.

It is important that the RWRWF continue to grow in order to strengthen our environmental and political effectiveness. Our fledgling group is still small, but among its members are some of the most committed and dedicated advocates in the Northern Neck. Please join us in our quest to support the refuge! Visit us at www.rwrfriends.org or call 804/333-0434.

Ann Graziano, President, RVWRF

fgrazio@rivnet.net

GROW WILD AMERICAN BEAUTIES FOR THE BACKYARD

Spring's a season when many homeowners have planting on the brain. They trek to local garden centers in search of new flora, but are often left confused by all the choices: Is the plant I like good for wildlife? Does it grow naturally in my area? A groundbreaking program giving native plants their own brand name will help eliminate this guesswork.

NWF has partnered with North Creek Nurseries and Prides Corner Farms to create the American Beauties™ collection. Approximately 100 varieties of native plants and their cultivars, including trees, shrubs, perennials and grasses, will be included in the new line, which will be sold at garden centers from New England to the Mid-Atlantic beginning in March.

"The Federation encourages people to landscape with wildlife in mind, and incorporating natives is a big part of that," says Greg Griffith, NWF's director of cause-related marketing. "Native plants require less water, fertilizer and pest control than exotics, and they provide animals with food and shelter."

American Beauties plants will come in sage green pots bearing the brand's logo and will be divided into four garden categories: bird, butterfly, dry shade and moist sun. A portion of the proceeds from each plant sold will help fund NWF's conservation and education work. www.abnativeplants.com

PROPAGATING WILD PLANTS

Propagation by Division

Many plants are easily divided, even when they aren't dormant. In general spring bloomers should be divided in the fall and fall bloomers should be divided in the spring. This gives the plants more time to recover before they bloom, but if you have to divide some other time anything works. You just may not see a strong bloom on these plants until they have a chance to re-establish.

Dig a mature plant with as much root as possible. Wash or gently shake the soil from the roots and examine the crown, or growing point, of the plant. On many plants you will see that it is made up of many smaller clumps all growing together. Pull or cut these smaller sections apart while trying to keep as much of the root attached as you can. For plants with woody stems or rhizomes, look for buds and cut them into sections that each have at least a few healthy buds.

Replant your new divisions as soon as possible and keep them well watered. Some plants that propagate well by division are: Penstemon, Rudbeckia, Sisyrinchium, Coreopsis, Senecio, Phlox, Salvia, Aster, Tradescantia, Echinacea, Boltonia, Solidago, Eupatorium, Helenium, Helianthus, Vernonia, Silphium, Oenothera, and Chrysogonum.

Propagation by Root Cuttings

The best time of year to take root cuttings is late fall through early spring. To take cuttings from a fleshy rooted plant such as Asclepias, dig a well established plant when it is dormant. If you don't want to dig the whole plant up you can dig around it and remove just the outer roots. Cut segments a couple of inches long and remember which end was up. Place the cuttings about ¼" deep in a container or flat of sand or loose, fast draining potting mix. Put the container in a warm sunny window – around 70 degrees is best. Water sparingly. You should see shoots forming within about six weeks.

The same method can be applied to fibrous rooted plants such as Rudbeckia. Instead of cutting single pieces of root you would cut "chunks" of well rooted soil about the size of an ice cube. Some plants that lend themselves to propagation by root cuttings are: Asclepias, Baptisia, Rudbeckia, Echinacea, Coreopsis, Phlox, Eupatorium.

Propagation by Seed

Many perennials can be started from seed indoors. Scattered over a seed starting mix, lightly covered, and kept moist and warm (60-75 degrees), they will germinate in 1-4 weeks. They can also be sown outside in the spring in a seed starting bed or where they're to grow. Plants in this group include Aster, Baptisia, Campanula, Coreopsis, Gaillardia, Gaura, Helianthus, Heliopsis, Heuchera, Liatris, Lobelia, Lupine, Mimulus, Oenothera, Polemonium, Rudbeckia, Salvia, Sedum, and Tiarella.

Moist-chilling Most perennial seed goes dormant under storage conditions and needs to be pre-treated (also called stratification) before planting to get them to germinate. To do this place them in a plastic baggie with some moist, not wet, potting soil or sphagnum moss and put them in the refrigerator for about 90 days. They should germinate a couple of weeks after being sown at 70 degrees. Some require less time to break dormancy so it's a good idea to check them for sprouting every once in a while. If you don't like to fool Mother Nature you can plant the seeds in flats and place them in a sheltered spot outside for the winter. Just be sure they're not going to be washed out by heavy rain or eaten by mice or birds and check them occasionally to make sure they don't dry out. Moist-chilling is the method needed for most perennial seed. Rather than make a list here, I'll just say if you don't see it on any other list it probably belongs here.

70-40-70 stratification Some perennial seeds go into a double dormancy, meaning they need a warm moist period (90 days @ 70 degrees) followed by a cold moist period (90 days @ 40 degrees) followed by another warm moist period in order to break dormancy and germinate. This is usually found in woodland species such as bloodroot that experience a dry dormant season in summer. You can use either the plastic bag trick above with an added time period on top of the refrigerator first or sow the seed into flats to go outside where the seasons are real. Not many species require this; some that do are

Asarum, Caltha, Cimicifuga, Claytonia, Dicentra, Erythronium, Lilium, Mertensia, and Sanguinaria.

Light A few perennial seeds need light in order to germinate. These should not be covered with soil when sown. They include Aruncus, Asclepias, Campanula, Chelone, Galax, Gentiana, Heuchera, Lobelia, Penstemon, Rhexia, Sedum, and Veronicastrum.

Scarification Some seeds have a very hard seed coat and water can't easily soak in to begin the germination process. They can be helped along by pouring boiling water over them and allowing them to soak overnight or by nicking the seed coat with a nail file or rubbing them between 2 pieces of sand paper. This helps with seeds of Hibiscus, Kosteletskya, Lupinus, Baptisia, Amsonia, and Senna.

Always use a good light seed starting mix, not garden soil, to start your seeds. Commercial mixes are sterile, reducing the chances of damping off and other diseases, and they retain moisture more evenly without forming a hard crust. As soon as your plants are up make sure they receive plenty of light, they shouldn't get leggy or do too much bending. When they get their first set of true leaves (not the seed leaves that come up first) they are ready to transplant. Don't forget to gradually acclimate seedlings to their new outdoor climate to avoid shocking them - this they do take personally. Good luck, happy gardening.

Denise Greene in *Claytonia*, newsletter of the John Clayton Chapter of VNPS, 2006;22(2) March

EDITOR'S FAREWELL

I have never managed to incorporate much formality into my life. If you come to my house for dinner you're likely to be asked to help move the table into another room and then set it with mismatched china. My wedding? I wore jeans. Hans and I hiked six miles around a little island off the coast of Maine to find the justice of the peace, who was picking blueberries. She sent her son off on his bike to fetch a witness, but he came back and reported that Grandma was busy trying to catch the cow and couldn't come just then. So the JP married us with the boy, his sister, and the family dog as witnesses. We're pretty sure it's legal, at least in the state of Maine.

My gardening predilections are in the same vein. I may carefully plan the arrangement of perennials – tall in back, short in front – but within minutes of planting them I plonk a new tall red one in among the pink shorts. Then a neighbor gives me a clump of her discards and to make room for them I have to dig up yet another patch of lawn. As for trees and shrubs, I like the woodland effect: tall trees and a scramble of shrubs, with ferns and flowers and vines underneath – sort of the way nature arranges things when left to herself.

When we moved to the Northern Neck I was appalled by the yard of the house we'd purchased. Though the builders had left a handful of wild cherry, oak, sweetgum and sycamore trees – and three loblolly pines – it was otherwise clean as a whistle. No shrubs. No flowers. Wait, I take it back – on two acres of lawn, one rhododendron and one hosta, both within three feet of the back door. And strangely enough, even though the property is at the edge of a lovely not-very-developed stretch of Lancaster Creek, there was very little bird life in the yard – deeply disturbing to former Audubon Society officers!

We soon fixed it. We bought the biggest trees and shrubs we could and turned large swathes of lawn into garden. In three years we have planted more than 200 species of trees, shrubs, perennials and vines, *most* of them natives. Now when we sit outside for our evening happy hour, it is a *very* happy hour – loud with mockingbirds, crows, titmice, wrens, goldfinches, robins, blackbirds... (I could go on; in or near our yard we have identified more than 75 species of birds, from the bald eagles who nest just around a bend in the creek to the ruby-throated hummingbirds who zip from columbine to sugar water to cardinal flower.) I consider my gardening strategy a success.

And our informal (none dare call it lazy) yard care method has reaped surprises. Former owners had mowed the lawn right smack to the water, but we left a fifteen-foot-deep border along the creek edge unmowed. Now after only three summers it bursts with critter-friendly plants. Groundsel-bush, wax myrtle, asters, goldenrod and grasses provide shelter for sparrows, snakes, toads and mice. Raccoons and woodchucks (and golden retrievers) find plenty to eat (and roll in) there. Wild turkeys, deer, muskrats and the occasional fox venture along the shore; butterflies and praying mantises are legion.

And last summer, without warning, both rose mallow and seashore mallow bloomed among the grasses. A successful garden indeed!

Later this spring Hans and I are moving to Lexington, Virginia. We're looking forward to being in the mountains again, and, for the first time in twenty years, closer to the amenities of town – restaurants, coffee shops, organic food stores, and not just a public library but *two* college libraries. I'm sorry I won't see my garden on Lancaster Creek reach maturity. But on a hillside in Lexington there's an expanse of green lawn planted with six green meatballs and an English yew that's crying out for transformation. I can see its future – serviceberry, winterberry, elderberry, ninebark, milkweed, rudbeckia... And whatever surprises the coming years may bring.

Alison Rilling